

**A Sociological Exploration of Cultural Distinction in
Chinese Contemporary Art Museums and Galleries:
Contemporary art and its visitors**

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Abstract

Cultural consumption studies, which have mainly been established in the West, often develop conceptual frameworks that give the impression of being universal and hence applicable to diverse parts of the world but largely neglect cultural differences with other parts of the world. This might be due to the tendency of considering cultural difference as a non-significant variable in consumption of symbolic products. Theories developed so far in this area have favoured a class-based approach that might not be as relevant in Eastern parts of the world, even though many areas of cultural consumption, including the art world that I will focus on, have become quite internationalised and possibly standardised (Li 2003). This reveals the importance of studying Chinese visitors at art museums and galleries in the country to explore the role of cultural context in cultural consumption.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the analyses is that a negotiation has been taking place between cultural forces that represent different cultural and aesthetic ideologies at the borders of the PRC's social and cultural context. By making compromises with the political interests of the Communist Party of China (CPC) mentioned above, the avant-garde characteristics of the public museum-based contemporary artworks have become increasingly blurred (for instance, by taking a less aggressive stance towards the established traditional aesthetic principles). One of the drawbacks of this compromise lies in its negative influence on the development of the public museum-based contemporary Chinese art. The evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that in comparison to their western counterparts, the public museum-based contemporary Chinese artworks were less attractive for both art professionals and the 'lay' visitors. Thus, the PRC's cultural policies, which aim to preserve the national characteristics of contemporary Chinese art, ended up running counter to its stated goal.

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Authors Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself alone from the result of my own research and any work that is not my own has been clearly referenced. It has not been submitted for award at this or any other institution.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In the internationally influential drama film of 1993, *Farewell My Concubine* (霸王别姬), Director Chen Kaige (陈凯歌) illustrates the influence of political movements and social change on the transformation of the social and cultural lives of Chinese people in the mid-twentieth century. This film showcased the tension that arose within a nationally characterised hierarchy of cultural genres and the struggle of individuals to imbibe a Westernised cultural form into their cultural repertoires. These two previously stated factors furnish a starting point for understanding the potential difficulties the visitors of the observed contemporary art museums and galleries in this project might have experienced during their visit to the exhibitions.

In one scene in the film, Cheng Dieyi (a representative of the conservative actors of the traditional Beijing Opera) fiercely criticises the revolutionary measures adopted by the Revolutionary Opera¹ for modifying traditional Chinese operatic forms. Cheng faces opposition from his son and apprentice (a proponent of the Revolutionary Model Opera/modern Beijing Opera, or 样板戏) in the form of doubts about the rationality of modernising traditional elements of the Beijing Opera – musical and thematic features, scenery and costume – in the context of radical social change. In contrast, Cheng believes that even if the revolutionary actors maintain the traditional skill of singing, it is inappropriate to christen the Modern Opera as ‘Beijing Opera’ when other traditional

¹ Revolutionary Opera refers to the modern opera that was popularised during the cultural revolution (1966-1976) in the PRC. Revolutionary Opera was modern due to the revolutionarily Western features (e.g. using symphony as background music) it appropriated to modernise the traditional Beijing Opera.

components are replaced by modern theatrical elements. The film illustrates Cheng's insistence on protecting the integrative form of the Beijing Opera and his efforts in defending its dominant position in the hierarchical field of cultural production and consumption. However, his efforts fail to stop the decline of the traditional opera.

In 1967, Mao Zedong, the President of China, launched a political movement, which was named China's Cultural Revolution (1967-1977). The goal of this movement was to 'prevent China from embracing capitalism' (Lu 2004: 5). During the movement, the Beijing Opera, considered a typical case of "The Four Olds" (Old Ideology, Old Culture, Old Habits, Old Customs), was banned by the authorities for years (Lu 2004: 4). The modern Beijing Opera became the only theatrical entertainment available to the entire Chinese population, functioning as propaganda for the Government in this period (Ibid: 115). The film *Farewell My Concubine* highlights the struggles of actors from two different generations to uphold both the integrity of traditional cultural forms and the 'Western-plus-Soviet' culture that had emerged (Lee and Yang 2007: 231).

Referring to Bourdieu's theoretical perspective, I argue that the symbolic struggles that transpire between positions within stratified cultural fields (Bourdieu et al. 1997: 233) and class-based social space (Bourdieu 1982: 56) are exemplified in this film. Indeed, the tragic life trajectory of Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell My Concubine* thoroughly reflects the influence of Chinese social and political upheavals on structural changes in the field of cultural productions and consumption. However, the point of great interest in this

film is the presentation of the unique content of an individual's interpretations and perceptions towards the Westernised/modernised art and art genres, which are forged in and affected by complex social spaces and specific time periods. In this case, this current research illuminates how the individuals from various social backgrounds cope with the international flow of cultural genre. In this context, one might wonder whether contemporary art museums and galleries in China, facing the current dilemma of choice between international standardisation and local cultural norms, can be deemed as institutions that foster social relationships in terms of gender, class, and generation or whether they impose a hierarchy of visitor groups and tastes. With this in mind, the thesis intends to look at whether the research findings of investigations conducted in Western societies (e.g. Bourdieu et al. 1997, Bennett et al. 2009, Bellavance 2011, Hanquinet 2013) are generally applicable to Chinese cultural and social context.

This thesis will also attempt to provide a sociological perspective on contemporary Chinese art studies in the area relating to the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art. In the field of contemporary Chinese art studies, many scholars (e.g. Gao 2008) demonstrate that contemporary Chinese art is different from their Western counterparts in terms of developmental histories, developmental stages, and developmental orientation (contemporaneity). In this regard, this thesis investigates whether visitors interpret and engage with the contemporary Chinese and Western art in different ways.

Accordingly, the proliferation of contemporary art in China, as well as its accessibility

at host institutions, offers an opportunity for those who are interested in exploring whether Chinese people interpret and perceive contemporary art and contemporary art museums in the same way as their Western counterparts. The goal for this chapter, therefore, is to introduce the broad aims, content of chapters, and the research findings of this current research.

1.1 Broad aims of the research

The main goals of this current study that I will assess are as follows:

- 1) Whether different cultural profiles can be identified among the visitors based on their culturally driven tastes towards literary and music genres from different regions and countries and their aesthetic knowledge about contemporary art theories.
- 2) If it is the case, to what extent the independent variables such as age, class, and gender contribute to the distinction between the members of those identified groups.
- 3) How visitors from different interpretive groups (if applicable) perceive and interpret contemporary artworks from both China and outside.
- 4) How to understand the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art from a sociological perspective.

Specifically, one of the main aims of this study is to explore and chart a map of the

visitors' cultural preferences within the three contemporary art museums and galleries (National Art Museum of China, Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, and Shengzhi Space). Accordingly, how the cultural map could reveal the differentiation of the visitors' cultural profiles² (Hanquinet 2015) or interpretive communities³ (Fish 1980; Hooper-Greenhill 2000), and whether it does, is the main concern of this research stage. Using quantitative data collected from the three exhibiting institutions as a data-source, cluster analysis will be conducted to classify the visitors based on their literary and music tastes. Essentially, the solution of this cluster analysis will provide the basic analytic framework for the core part of this research.

A further point of interest in this research concerns the extent to which the identified patterns of cultural taste (Popular culture lovers who preferred popular cultural genres such as rock and heavy metal music, legitimate culture lovers who liked legitimate forms of art such as opera, distants who claimed that they have no intrest towards the listed music and literatures and tolerants who had tastes for all the listed music and literatures) are related to various indicators of social stratification (e.g. education, class, age, gender, and parents' education). In this way, the relationships between the visitors' cultural preferences and their social positions will be examined. Once this relationship has been assessed, this research will continue to examine the social and cultural value

² For Hanquinet, cultural profile refers to 'a more indication of a more general lifestyle beyond socio-demographic characteristics' (2015: 17). The individual who share similar cultural profile tend to have similar cultural taste, life styles and relationship with culture, art, and museum.

³ According to Fish, 'Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions' (1980: 219).

of contemporary art in the national hierarchy of cultural genres. The results of this analytic phase will also be used to explore whether the results from the existing literature on cultural consumption (e.g. the homology argument, the omnivore versus univore hypothesis, and the individualisation argument) are sufficient to understand the identified differentiation of the visitors' cultural preferences in the PRC.

The third aim of this research is to understand how the visitors interpret their relationship with contemporary art. Benefiting from the nature of this current study (as a mixed methods research), qualitative data are simultaneously used to measure the validation of the clustering solutions and to understand the differentiation of the visitors' cultural preferences. The qualitative research phase of this thesis will also concentrate on addressing the identified issues that could not be addressed through analysing and interpreting quantitative data. Accordingly, the findings of the existing qualitative research in this area will be utilised to understand and examine the 'specificity' of the mechanism of cultural consumption in the PRC. For instance, when analysing the data collected from surveys based on in-depth interviews, many scholars (e.g. Bellavance 2008; Falk 2009) highlight the individuals' daily dynamics of cultural consumption under the homologous socioeconomic characteristics (e.g. class and education) they might share in social space.

Finally, I will focus particularly on how the visitors engage with the contemporary artworks that share various national/regional characteristics. In this way, the current

research will provide more empirical evidence to support the understanding of the theoretical debates about contemporaneity (historical presence) of contemporary Chinese art in the field of contemporary Chinese art studies. The empirical analysis will also be linked to the related theoretical issues of the possible predominance of American and European cultures, for instance, Bennett et al.'s (2009) suggestion that the younger generation is likely to appreciate the American culture more than national cultural referents due to the influence of America's powerful cultural industries internationally.

1.2 Overview of Chapters

Chapter two contextualises this research in the PRC's cultural, political, and social environment. This chapter discusses how Western cultures have influenced the work of contemporary Chinese artists and the curatorial arrangements of contemporary art exhibitions in the PRC. The chapter then moves on to highlight how contemporary artists and curators have adjusted their strategies in displaying the artistic concepts and the criteria for selecting and introducing contemporary artworks in the exhibition spaces based on the national and political interests of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The chapter also introduces how the scholars belonging to the field of contemporary Chinese art studies have conceptualised the national specificity ('contemporaneity') of contemporary Chinese art.

Chapter three includes five sections. It concentrates on the subject-related literature in the field of socio-cultural studies. First, it briefly introduces the visitor studies that have already been conducted in the PRC (Section 3.1). Second, it systematically introduces Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical mechanism of cultural distinction. This section also introduces the definition of some key conceptual themes in the homology argument. The succeeding part of this chapter will outline two additional important theories about cultural consumption, namely the omnivore versus univore hypothesis (Section 3.2) and the individualisation argument (Section 3.3). Finally, the chapter (Section 3.4) introduces Laurie Hanquinet's (2015) analytical model – Cultural Profiles and the related empirical studies that were conducted in different countries.

Chapter Four describes the specific methodological arrangement adopted by this research. In order to effectively address the research questions, this project employs mixed research methods, including cluster analysis, external validation analysis, and thematic analysis. It divides the data collection process into a qualitative phase and quantitative phase, within the domain of which questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted at the three selected contemporary art museums and galleries. The chapter also introduces the benefit of adopting the mixed research method and reflects upon the limitations of this approach. The last part of this chapter presents the reasons for employing specific kinds of methodological arrangements for recruiting the survey participants in the two research phases and selecting the exhibiting institutions, data analysis tools, and interview and questionnaire questions.

Chapter five will analyse and interpret the collected quantitative data. Cluster analysis was applied to the data collected (2376 respondents from the questionnaire survey) and the results highlight the formulation of the four visitor clusters: *Distants*, Popular Cultural Lovers (*PCLs*), Legitimate Cultural Lovers (*LCLs*) and *Tolerants*. The members of these different interpretive groups appreciated different types of cultural genres. For instance, the *PCLs* had a preference for Western popular music and literature genres, the *LCLs* preferred Chinese legitimate cultural forms, the *Tolerants* liked almost all kinds of listed cultural genre, and the *Distants* had taste for nothing in the list. Further analysis also suggests that the members of the *PCL* category were more likely to have sophisticated knowledge about contemporary art theories than the others. While the members of the *Tolerants* and the *LCL* categories all tend to show a selective disagreement towards parts of the listed conservative aesthetic claims, the *Distants* demonstrated their lack of knowledge about the contemporary art theories and claims. This chapter also indicates that the survey participants' cultural preferences showed a tendency to be related to their gender, mother's highest educational level, and age rather than their occupational classes, education, and father's highest educational level. In this context, the identified distinctions are characterised by oppositions between engagement and disengagement in cultural consumption, by legitimate taste versus three alternative types of taste, and by avant-garde taste rather than conservative taste.

Chapter Six presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the qualitative data (11

interviewees) gathered from the interviews. First, the findings confirm the validity and stability of the clustering solutions provided in Chapter 5 by highlighting the diverse strategies the visitors used for interpreting contemporary art exhibitions and artworks. Second, differing from the individuals' symbolic struggle for intellectual inclusion in the traditional version of class-based homology arguments, the tension between the four types of visitors were characterised by their defence of the legitimacy of their perception and interpretation of the social and cultural value and definition of contemporary art. The visitors in different identified categories valued and deciphered the exhibited contemporary artworks in diverse ways. They were all inclined to distinguish their understandings of contemporary art from the others based on their different aesthetic predispositions and expectations from it. Third, Chapter 6 re-examines and further inspects how the visitors' gender, age, and mother's education contribute to the distinction among the visitors in terms of cultural tastes at a detailed level.

Chapter Seven merges all the findings from this thesis. This chapter illuminates how to understand the ambiguity in the contemporary art in China, how the cultural policies of the PRC influence it, and the reaction of the visitors to this ambiguity. Based on the findings discussed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, this chapter suggests that this research area has not been fully explored, and there opportunities remain to fully explore the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art in ways that have been neglected thus far. This chapter conceptualizes the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art as defined by uncertainty, where the future of contemporary Chinese art depends upon the

ongoing process of legitimation.

1.3 The Main Findings of the Thesis

The main findings of this current research are as follows. Within the three observed contemporary art museums and galleries in China (National Art Museum of China, Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, and Shengzhi Space), this research identifies a range of regionally and nationally characterised patterns of cultural consumption in a globalised context. My results suggest that the meaning of contemporary art has changed in the Chinese context since its configuration into a distinctively national formation. The specificity of cultural consumption is underpinned, to a large extent, by the prevalence of the definitional ambiguity in the imported Western(ised) cultural forms (e.g. contemporary art) that have been internationally legitimated. Mediated and sanctioned by the cultural policies in China, this type of ambiguity in the multiple characteristics of the Western(ised) cultural referents enable or encourage the visitors to perceive and receive contemporary art with diverse strategies. In this way, the associations between the visitors and the contemporary artworks are more complex and multidimensional than a distinction between a sense of inclusivity and exclusivity. For instance, the four types of the visitors that are identified within the exhibitions (*Tolerants*, *Popular Culture Lovers*, *Legitimate Culture Lovers* and *Distants*) expressed their positive impression towards their visit (although not in a uniform way).

Thus, the decisive explanatory power of the single-dimensional class-based homology argument within cultural sociology (e.g. the homology argument; omnivore-univore hypothesis and individualisation argument) is insufficient in grasping the differentiation of the visitors' cultural preferences. For instance, the findings partially support the class-based homology argument that while class and education are indeed relevant, the primary determinants of the cultural variation are age, gender, and mother's education. Accordingly, the gender, age and mother's education oriented distinctions are characterised by the opposition between degrees of acceptance towards applying a Kantian disposition of disinterestedness, establishment of legitimate taste and three ways to reject this taste (to develop a taste for popular culture; a wide range of cultural genres or nothing), and engagement versus disengagement. All the above-mentioned patterns of cultural taste imply a mechanism of cultural consumption that is more complex than a mere distinction between high and popular culture.

The identification of the definitional ambiguity in contemporary art in China also provides a solution to understand another interesting finding of this research – the visitors' negative impressions toward the public museum-based contemporary Chinese artworks. As indigenous 'avant-garde' art (for the 'lay' visitors) contradictorily bears the stamp of political correctness, the public museum-based contemporary Chinese art has a more explicit definition in contrast to their Western counterparts that are imported and displayed in the public spaces of the PRC. In this regard, contemporary Chinese art has become less attractive than their Western counterparts. More specifically, compared

to the Western art form, the public museum-based contemporary Chinese artworks are more likely to provoke and exasperate not only the 'lay' visitors (due to its aggressive attitude towards a limited range of established aesthetic and moral principles) but also the art experts (due to its compromise to political regulations).

Thus, this finding provides an alternative way to understand the different meanings between contemporary Chinese arts and contemporary Western arts in the fields of both cultural sociology and contemporary Chinese art studies. Regarding the arguments in the former, the findings cast doubt on the claims of some scholars who consider the relationship between local/national and international cultural tastes as an 'emerging' form of distinction that is recharging the sociology of social stratification (e.g. Hanerz 1990; Bennett et al. 2009; Calhoun 2002; Savage et al. 2010; Lgarashi and Saito 2014). Although this new formation of class-based cultural distinction sounds plausible, the identified multidimensionality of the observed contemporary art consumption defies such simple hierarchical organisation. To be more specific, my findings indicate that the visitors' cosmopolitan taste for contemporary Western art cannot guarantee their cultural competence (measured by their sophisticated knowledge of contemporary art theories and their ability to demonstrate a Kantian disposition of disinterestedness on the artworks) in the exhibitions.

By the same parameter, the visitors' distaste for the public museum-based contemporary Chinese art does not necessarily demonstrate that Westernised cultural repertoires are

prevalent. For instance, the *LCLs* prefer nationally legitimated cultural genres. Due to the government's restrictions on showing experimental and radical forms of artworks in the public space, the *LCLs* interpret the contemporary art in China in a conservative and nostalgic way. For them, contemporary arts are nothing but the works of the artists who intend on representing the nationally established aesthetic criteria through new visual and expressive strategies that have been internationally legitimated. In contrast to the *LCLs*, the *PCLs* distance themselves from the public museum-based contemporary Chinese art because they are not satisfied with the restricted themes and contents of the artworks that have been legitimated by the exhibiting institutions. Thus, the results of this current study indicate that the visitors do not use a uniform way to interpret and engage with the following art forms – public museum-based contemporary Chinese art, museum-based contemporary Chinese art, radical and experimental contemporary Western art, and the 'underground' Chinese artworks.

Thus, it is suggested that the flow of a Western cultural genre (the legitimacy of this cultural referent has been internationally sanctioned) between countries (at least in the observed exhibitions), which frequently is orientated by European and North American culture, does not necessarily contribute to the establishment/prevalence of a hegemonic and internationally universalistic cultural force that favours a Eurocentric model of cosmopolitanism. In this regard, one of the most important findings, which emerged from the analysis, is that a negotiation between different regional characterised cultural genres that are underpinned by various social, political, and cultural ideologies, at least

for this research, take place at the borders of a country, cultural context, or national hierarchy of cultural consumption.

Within the three observed exhibitions, a compromise has been achieved between the national/political interest of the PRC (People's Republic of China) and the Western(ised) aesthetic ideology by sacrificing or muting the aggressive characteristics of contemporary artworks towards the PRC's established traditional aesthetics and moral principles. Although the compromise enhances the 'inclusiveness' of the exhibitions for the visitors with various cultural tastes and predispositions, it comes with a price. Compared to the imported contemporary Western artworks, the localised art forms (public museum-based contemporary Chinese arts) become less attractive (for the majority of the observed visitors in this current research) due to their avoidance of critically engaging with the national and traditional political, social, and aesthetic issues.

More systematic arguments about the restrictions that the Chinese contemporary artists face to produce their works can also be identified in the field of contemporary Chinese art studies (although those scholars tend to interpret those restrictions as the national specificity of contemporary Chinese art). Accordingly, many scholars who work in the field are dedicated to conceptualising the progress of the contemporary art's localisation and its developmental orientation through defining the contemporaneity of this art form (e.g. Gao 2008; Smith 2008; Gao 2009; Gladston 2011). The three main arguments in the field are as follows: Gao's (2008) total modernity; Gao's (2009) dismantling and

re-construction of bentu ('This Land' or 'Native Land') and Smith's (2008) double modernity (see Chapter 2.4). Scholars in this field, in line with the three above-mentioned arguments, tend to distinguish the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art from that of the contemporary Western art. Like the PRC governmental attempts at protecting the national identity of contemporary Chinese art, scholars in the field of contemporary Chinese art studies have attempted to conceptualise the boundaries between contemporary Chinese art and the incoming contemporary Western art, with the goal of identifying the differences between art from different contexts. However, these attempts often failed to capture the importance of the visitors' negative reaction to public museum-based contemporary Chinese art. Compared to those of their Western counterparts, the identified national 'traits' of contemporary Chinese art's contemporaneity in the three arguments – namely to serve the development of socialist modernisation (total modernity), to re-construct indigenous culture that is destined to become lost or marginalised in the age of globalisation (the dismantling and re-construction of bentu), and to become a hybrid cultural entity that cannot be reduced to either Chinese culture or Western ideology – restrict the autonomous development of contemporary Chinese art and then reduce the attractiveness of it for the visitors, and especially for the art experts. To position this current research, the following chapter move on to introduce the development of art museums and galleries, and cultural policies in the PRC.

Chapter 2 Setting the context: Art museums and galleries in the PRC

The primary role of Chapter 2 is to position this current research by placing it within the social, political, and cultural context of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In this way, this chapter introduces the development of contemporary art in China and the extent to which imported and localised contemporary art bears the stamps of both Western aesthetic ideologies – representing the complex relations between aesthetics, ethics, and politics in specific contemporary Western countries – and the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s political interests – to display the achievements of the PRC's Reform and Open-up Policy through showing the governments' tolerance toward 'world cultures'; and to preserve traditional Chinese cultures. Accordingly, in the field of contemporary art studies, a considerable literature has grown up around the efforts to conceptualise this type of ideological negotiation at the borders of the PRC and its consequences as the national specificity of contemporary Chinese art. Aiming to provide a better theoretical preparation for interpreting the further data analysis of this thesis, all the above-mentioned factors will be discussed in the following part of this chapter.

Specifically, Section 2.1 introduces the development of contemporary art in present day China. The section also highlights the issues of the studies related to contemporary art in China (e.g. the absence of visitor studies). Section 2.2 focuses on the common characteristics shared by Chinese and Western contemporary art. This section has two

parts: the first part (Section 2.2.1) introduces the possible common knowledge backgrounds shared by both contemporary Chinese and Western artists. The following part of this section (Section 2.2.2) describes the similar curatorial strategies and exhibiting environment used towards contemporary Chinese and Western artwork. Section 2.3 provides an overview of the differences between Chinese and Western art. This section provides an introduction to three milestones in the development of contemporary Chinese art and how the changing political environment and cultural policies result in a series of transformations of artistic styles and contents. After this, the following section (Section 2.4) provides an account of the distinct traits of the Chinese version of contemporaneity in terms of art in comparison to that of contemporary Western art. The last section of this chapter (Section 2.5) draws together the above-mentioned information about the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western contemporary art.

2.1 The popularisation of contemporary art exhibitions in the PRC

At its opening on 24 September 2016, the 798 Art Festival became an art event that attracted massive attention from not only artists and professionals, but also art lovers and tourists from both inside and outside of China. Approaching the end of the festival, the 798 Art District—the largest and most influential art district in China—had received more than one million visitors within the month (China News 2016; 798 Art District

2016). The 2010 Shanghai Biennale, another influential contemporary art event, took place at the Power Station of Art (formerly the Shanghai Contemporary Art Museum). The event proved its ability to professionally run, curate, promote, and manage an international contemporary art exhibition. The Biennale successfully attracted around 250,000 visitors at the time (24/10/2010–28/02/2011), which was more than half of the total number of visitors to the 55th International Art Exhibition – one of the most important contemporary art exhibitions organised by La Biennale di Venezia – in 2011 (PSA 2014). The tremendous successes achieved by the 798 Art Festival and the Shanghai Biennale highlight the popularity of contemporary art and the flourishing of the cultural market in China. Interestingly, not only the public but also Chinese government officials showed their interest and support to this type of art gathering which might previously have led to social and cultural controversy. For instance, among the seven organising institutions of the 798 festival, four are branches of, or are strongly related to, the Chinese government, including the Foundation of Beijing Cultural Development, Creative Cultural Development Centre of Chaoyang District, Beijing; Managing Committee of the 798 Art District, Beijing; and Cultural Centre of Chaoyang District, Beijing.

A critical issue regarding the commercial success of contemporary art exhibitions in China, however, lies in the absence of knowledge about the visitors of those exhibitions. Few studies have taken place to explore who these visitors are (i.e., their demographics, such as age, gender, and occupational class) and how they experience and interpret

contemporary art. One might argue that scholars have little interest in systematically examining the level of inclusiveness of these exhibitions, possibly because the standard curatorial strategies adopted by Chinese exhibitions have been internationally sanctioned and well-studied in many Western countries. Indeed, in China, one frequently encounters contemporary artworks displayed in the now-standard 'white cube' and 'black box' exhibition spaces (e.g. O'Doherty 1999). The popularity of such curatorial arrangements and the capacity of those exhibitions to attract visitors might discourage managers, curators, or directors of galleries and museums from funding and supporting studies which explore the socially and culturally exclusive or inclusive character of their exhibitions.

Due to a lack of empirical evidence and an over-reliance on previous studies conducted abroad, scholars might find it difficult to adjust their theoretical arguments on contemporary art-related questions in China. For instance, without sufficient empirical evidence, possible bias might spring from the uncritical use of findings of established studies in this research arena. Specifically, those familiar with Bourdieu's theoretical framework of stratified tastes (Bourdieu et al. 1997; 1979) might directly label contemporary artworks as a 'high' or 'legitimate' cultural genre, as Bourdieu did in his studies (more discussion of Bourdieu's cultural distinction in Chapter 2.2). Their analysis and findings could, therefore, be easily challenged by Eurocentric and post colonialist critics for overlooking the influence of the specific Chinese political, cultural, and social settings on patterns of cultural consumption in China.

An example of this is the study carried out by Savage and Gayo-Cal (2009), in which they cast doubt on the methodological rationality of many scholars who support the omnivore-univore hypothesis in their studies (e.g., Peterson and Simkus 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Chan and Goldthorpe 2005, 2007). According to Savage and Gayo-Cal, although the finding of cultural omnivores' hybrid tastes (a broad range of cultural genres, from the 'highbrow' to popular culture items) sounds plausible, this claim nevertheless has its weakness. The primary problem with the omnivore-univore hypothesis is that the arguments (at least made by Peterson and Simkus 1992) are based on an uncritical use of the established social and cultural values of culture genres that were identified in different social and cultural contexts (2009 UK and 1960s France). These labels were then used uncritically to analyse and understand the individuals' cultural reproduction of social inequalities. To adjust that argument, Savage and Gayo-Cal (2010) highlight the different cultural and social values that the culture genres had in the UK in 2009 and in 1960s France. For instance, according to Savage and Gayo-Cal, light classical music can struggle to be deemed as a form of high culture in the UK due to its popularity.

The lack of empirical studies of art museum attendance in China might also lead one to overlook the influence of the visitors' territorially bounded cultural repertoires on the organisation of the national field of cultural consumption. For instance, contemporary Western art and contemporary Chinese art might share different positions in the

stratified hierarchy of cultural consumption in the PRC. The multiple interpretive strategies the visitors used to engage with the contemporary Chinese and Western arts might be downplayed as a consequence. For instance, the numbers of works in the field of contemporary Chinese art studies suggest differences between contemporary Chinese and Western art in terms of the conditions of the historical present (contemporaneity) that the 'two art forms' have. For example, on the one hand, some scholars (e.g. Gao 2009; Gao 2011; Hung 2009; Yu 2012) hold an essentialist or cultural separatist view on the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art. For them, the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art is categorically and ideologically unique or historically particular from that of other national forms. Other scholars (e.g. Gladston 2009; 2014; 2016; Smith 2008) support postmodernist concerns about the concept of contemporaneity. To be more specific, Gladston, for instance, considers the diverse social, political, cultural and economic experience/outlook of modernity between countries as an instance of 'postmodernist/deconstructivist uncertainty' (2016: 42). In this regard, this type of argument casts doubt on 'all metaphysical conceptions of absolute totality and difference' (Ibid).

Accordingly, the difference between contemporary Chinese and Western art has been highlighted by the scholars who stand on the same side with either cultural essentialist or poststructuralist-postmodernist viewpoints. However, no effort has been made to empirically examine whether the individuals in the PRC receive and interpret contemporary artworks from both domestic and international (i.e. from outside the PRC)

sources in different manners. Thus, even though the research aim of this current research is not to conceptualise the nature of contemporaneity in the exhibitions, familiarity with the debates is useful in understanding whether the visitors have developed regionalised tastes for cultural genres.

Given the potential difference between the values of genres in different cultural contexts and between the conceptions of contemporary Chinese and Western art's contemporaneity, the need for empirical evidence for understanding visitors' perceptions of contemporary art in China becomes clear. Thus, the primary goal of the current research is to answer the following questions: first, who visits contemporary art exhibitions in China? Similarly, can 'cultural profiles' (Hanquinet 2013) be established among the visitors based on their cultural preferences and demographic figures? In other words, can this explorative approach enable the present researcher to have a better understanding of the multidimensionality and the complexity of the exhibitions? If so, what contributes to this cultural differentiation/distinction? How do visitors in different interpretive groups perceive and receive contemporary art?

To have a better understanding of contemporary art and contemporary art exhibitions in China, the following sections (Section 2.2 and Section 2.3) contextualise both contemporary art and its exhibitions in the historical and political context of the PRC. The sections focus on how contemporary art and the 'standard' curatorial strategies (e.g.

to provide very few introductory materials about the exhibits except for the works and artist's name, materials, etc.) were introduced to China and the progress of their official legitimisation and institutionalisation.

2.2 Shared theoretical approaches and curatorial strategies used by contemporary Chinese and Western art

2.2.1 The localisation of Western cultures in the PRC

Western aesthetics, as well as literary and philosophical studies and theories, had a significant influence on the development of contemporary artistic production in China, especially during the 1980s. In China, a shared scholarly viewpoint exists that the 'modernisation' of Chinese art began between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of 1980s (Gao 2006; Lu 2013 ; Lv 2013). This period was characterised by the passion of students, young artists, and scholars who held positive attitudes towards Western cultures. These young scholars believed that learning from the West was a practical and efficient way to achieve reform and modernisation in Chinese society (Lu 2013). Specifically, two years after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Communist Party of China (CPC) criticised some of the polarising policies of the Cultural Revolution

(such as the personality cult⁴) and shifted the primary task of the CPC from class conflict to economic, cultural, and social reforms (China Daily 1978). In this historical and political context, Chinese society temporarily encountered the ‘most tolerant cultural policies’ of the party since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Li 1993). During that time, a significant amount of Western literature that had been banned during the Cultural Revolution was translated and introduced into China. In line with the guiding ideology of the movement, namely the ‘emancipated mind’ and ‘seek[ing] truth from facts’, a society-wide cultural debate took place in the 1980s (China Daily 1978). Some scholars have described this trend as a ‘Great Cultural Discussion’, ‘Cultural Fever’, and the ‘most contextual factor for China’s avant-garde art’ (Zhou 2015: 11; see also Li 1993). At that time, it was common for Chinese avant-garde artists to challenge the social and aesthetic orthodoxies and monotonous authority-sanctioned art forms (socialist realism) through their works, which were based on Western aesthetic, philosophical and literary theories and methods of art production, more often than not (Lu 2013 ; Lv 2013). The two representative art events, or movements, of this period are the First Stars Exhibition (1979) and the beginning of the ‘85 New Wave’ movement.

⁴ In the Third Plenary Session of Eleventh Central Committee (1978), the plenum critically discusses the ‘two whatevers’ statement (namely as ‘we will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave’) and put forward the ‘Seeking truth from fact’ principle, which refers to pragmatism.

Many scholars consider the first Stars Exhibition⁵ to be the starting point of the ‘progressive liberalisation of visual art within the PRC’ (Gladston 2014: 36). As Lu (2013) notes, the exhibition exerted a profound influence on the development of contemporary Chinese art due to its avant-garde nature. For Lu, the artists involved in the exhibition represented a revolutionary determination to pursue ‘freely and independently artistic expression’ by extricating themselves from the restrictions of the ideology of the CPC (Ibid: 43). According to figures released by the *People’s Daily* (1979), the exhibition received more than 8000 visitors on its last exhibiting day.

Although the exhibition, as the first officially approved contemporary Chinese art exhibition, attracted considerable public attention, it did not alter the dominant conventional art forms and aesthetic principles (i.e., the appreciation of beauty in traditional forms) in the exhibiting spaces. The legitimated art form (socialist realism⁶) and the conservative aesthetic and moral values (e.g. artwork should have educational values) were still dominating the public spaces (Lu 2013: 43).

Facing social instability – the youth political movement in the early 1980s – caused by the cultural conflict between domestic and western cultural and social ideologies (e.g.

⁵ The first Stars exhibition was held in 1979. The curators of the exhibition (Ma Desheng and Huang Rui) invited 23 artists (including Ai Weiwei, Wang Keping, Qu Leilei and others) to display their works at the gates of the park next to the National Art Museum of China. The exhibition represented the artists’ aspiration to challenge the established ideology and to autonomously and independently express their artistic concepts (Lu 2013).

⁶ Socialist realism: a form of realism that was originally developed in the Soviet Union from 1920s to 1960s (Sayer 2012). After May 2000, many young artists who experienced the Cultural Revolution started to shift their attention from portraying an ‘optimistic view of society’ and ‘politic aesthetic’ to a critical review of the miserable life of the young intellectuals during the movement. Called scar art and rural realism, the Chinese artists who followed these two art trends tended to create artworks in a realist style.

socialism versus democracy), the CPC temporarily adjusted its attitude towards Western cultures. In 1981, the CPC triggered a campaign of 'anti-bourgeois liberalism'. In the resolution (Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China) of the 6th Plenary Session of 11th CPC Central Committee (People 2016), the party criticised the trend of bourgeois liberalism. According to Deng (1981), head of the central military commission of the PRC from 1981 to 1989, even the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system needed to be improved; however, it should not be achieved through political liberation and anarchism. In 1983, another political campaign (the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign) entered the scene abruptly. Deng subsequently published another article 'The Party's Urgent Tasks on the Organisational and Ideological Fronts' (1983), which shed light on the negative influence of corruption on the public's trust in CPC leadership. This campaign was reassessed by the members of the Secretariat of the Central Committee and ended at the close of 1983. These official responses demonstrated a limited tolerance for socially critical aspects of the imported western artistic approach that was influencing Chinese artists at this time.

Another milestone in the development of Chinese contemporary art in the 1980s was the launch of the '85 New Wave' movement, from 1985 to 1989. After the campaign of 'anti-bourgeois liberalism', the development of contemporary Chinese art recovered and reached its peak in the middle of the 1980s. Lu believes that the opening of the International Youth Art Exhibition was the beginning of the '85 New Wave' and marked

a turning point for Chinese artistic production. Organised by the Committee of International Youth, the exhibition opened in 1985. The exhibition exhibited 572 pieces of contemporary artworks. Due to the high degree of freedom the artists were granted to create and display their works, they challenged the established aesthetic norms and art forms through adopting a wide array of westernised artistic skills and concepts. Zhang similarly refers to the opening of the Exhibition as the ‘flagship’ and ‘benchmark’ of contemporary Chinese art’s modernisation (1988: 26). Xin (1986) also highlights the importance of the ‘85 New Wave’ in her article ‘85 New Crisis’. For her, the ‘85 New Wave’ significantly promoted the development of contemporary art in the PRC.

Lv believes that the selection of conservative artworks and curatorial arrangements for the 6th National Exhibition of Fine Arts enraged contemporary Chinese artists and, thus, indirectly promoted the launch of the International Youth Art Exhibition. Within the exhibition, artists adopted an aggressive attitude towards the ‘depressed atmosphere’ of Chinese traditional art exhibition, where the legitimated art form and curatorial strategies were prevalent. Due to the artists’ support for adopting personalised aesthetic skills and learning from the ‘vocabulary’ of modern Western art, the exhibition transcended the homologous model represented in the 6th National Exhibition of Fine Arts. Even so, this exhibition also received significant critical attention. Many critics consider the artwork produced during the ‘85 New Wave’ as nothing more than vulgar imitations of Western modern and contemporary art (e.g., Yi 1990; Wang 2012). Shao (2011) also believes that some artists involved in the movement were lacking the

necessary theoretical knowledge about contemporary art.

This historical detour highlights some of the influence that western aesthetic principles, shared by some contemporary Western artists, had on contemporary Chinese artists in the 1980s. The two events (the launch of the International Youth Art Exhibition and the 6th National Exhibition of Fine Arts) are good illustrations of this argument. Within the exhibitions, the artists presented strong interests in cosmopolitanism and sought inspiration from Western modernist and post-modernist art and theories.

2.2.2 The prevalence of internationally sanctioned curatorial arrangement

The previous section discussed the influence of western aesthetic criteria on Chinese artistic production in the 1980s, which was the first significant attempt by Chinese artists to apply western aesthetic theories and principals to their own work. This section will now discuss the possible existence of a common curatorial/displaying environment, shared by the two art forms in China. Similar to their Western peers, it is not uncommon for the curators to apply internationally standard exhibiting arrangements to the contemporary art exhibitions in China. This section will examine the main three factors – lack of experience in curating contemporary exhibitions, lack of experts, limited time for development – that might contribute to this institutionalised approach to curatorial strategy.

First, due to a lack of experience in developing and managing contemporary art exhibitions, institutions in the PRC tend to mimic, rather than localise or alter, the modern museological practices of their Western peers. The reason might be due to the three mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change, highlighted by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) highlight: coercive isomorphism (due to political influences and legitimate pressures), mimetic isomorphism (organisations become standardised in responding to uncertainty) and normative isomorphism (related to professionalisation). For them, the reasons why non-Western exhibiting institutions model themselves on their Western counterparts are as follows: 1) the ambitious goals and the environment generate symbolic uncertainty for the organisations, 2) indigenous cultural and political constraints and pre-existing orthodox ideological boundaries lead to a lack of options and 3) organisations aim to achieve more legitimate status in the field (Ibid:150). In this respect, rather than enthusiastically developing their own cultural character, one might argue that Chinese contemporary art museums and galleries tend to achieve status as internationalised institutions, which in turn results in an internationalised curatorial approach. Meyer et al. (1997) refer to institutions' international standardisation as one of the consequences of the diffusion of rationalistic 'world culture'. Following the exogenously driven construction, it is believed that the Chinese exhibiting institutions' adoption or appropriation of internationally standard structures enabled those institutions to gain competitive advantages over those institutions that refused to follow this isomorphic development. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), the

internationally acceptable account of organisational activities provides the former institutions more opportunity to acquire legitimacy, stability, and resources that allow them to survive than the latter institutions.

Further to this, there were also policy decisions made by the Chinese museums that reinforced an internationalised curatorial strategy rather than encouraging the development of their own model. For Zhang (2005), four main steps were widely taken among Chinese museums after the thirteenth national congress of the CPC in 1978 in order to secure the 'up-to-date' process of internationalisation and standardisation: 1) enhancing international collaboration with exhibiting institutions abroad, which includes positively promoting international collection exchange programmes and cross-country exhibitions; 2) introducing 'innovative' and 'advanced' curatorial strategies by arranging international standardised exhibitions; 3) organising international academic activities such as conferences and workshops; and 4) actively participating in the activities arranged by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). According to Zhang, the aims of these steps are as follows: 1) enhancing the role Chinese museums can play in the international scope of the field for promoting Chinese culture abroad, 2) improving contact with different cultures and people around the world culturally, and 3) enhancing the 'professional skills and dispositions' of the museum staff (Ibid:5). Lu agrees with Zhang and contends that Chinese museums 'have been influenced by ideas and practices from the West since the 1980s' (2014:207). In support of this claim, one might argue that the reason Lu considers the start of the Westernisation of Chinese

museums to be the early 1980s is because of the political movement that took place at the time and that significantly changed Chinese society as a whole. According to Zigeng and Yi, two events – the implementation of the Chinese economic reform (the Reform and Opening Up-Policy) in 1978 and the government’s decision to constitute the principle of developing China’s modern art museums (2009:120) – have greatly stimulated the growth and institutional Westernisation of museums in China. These decisions influenced the development of an internationalised curatorial strategy.

Second, the confused managing system of the exhibiting institutions and their lower administrative status among the Chinese civil servants determines that art museums and galleries can hardly attract management and research professionals. To be specific, the definitions of art museums and galleries are extremely vague due to the fact that, in China, art museums have been divided into five categories according to their sources of financial income. First are government funded institutions, which include the National Art Museum and some province-owned exhibiting agencies such as the Shanghai Art Museum and Guangzhou Art Museum. The issue that these types of museums have is that they are being managed by different government departments, such as ‘the Municipal Administration of Culture, Radio/Film and TV; Civil Affairs Bureau; Press and Publication Bureau; Universities; Department of Artistic Affairs; China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, etc.’ (Zhang and Luo, 2002:29). The subordinate level that art museums hold in these government systems means that these institutions have to face two main issues: being guided and managed by unprofessional

higher-authorities and the availability of limited financial resources (Ibid, 2002:30).

One might argue that this could explain why art museums and galleries in China tend to adopt/borrow universal international exhibiting strategies without making any effort to localise these curatorial policies and strategies: there is a lack of expertise and funding.

Third, the curators have had a very limited time to develop a localised version of curatorial arrangement. In 1905, based on his visiting experience in the Empire Museum in Japan (Xi 2008:53), Zhang Jian established the first ‘domestically conceived, managed and developed’ western model of a museum in China: The Nantong Museum (Claypool 2005: 565). The development process of China’s museums experienced a brief period of growth after the 1911 revolution; however, this development was soon suspended due to the invasion of Japan and the occurrence of China’s civil war after the anti-Japanese national revolutionary war (1937-1945). The establishment of China’s new government had a positive impact on the development process of China’s museums. During the period, the Chinese museums were mainly established and managed based on museological practices that were introduced from the Soviet Union and the eastern European countries (Zhang 2006 :2). However, the effect was also brief because the museum development process was disrupted by the continual deterioration of the national economic situation, natural disasters, the split between China and the Soviet Union (1959), and a series of ‘improper’ political

movements, such as the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976⁷ and the Great Leap Forward of 1958-1960⁸ (Chen 2001:3).

The development of Chinese art museums and galleries gradually recovered after the three years of China's Cultural Revolution. Two events, namely the implementation of the Chinese economic reform (Reform and Opening up policy) in 1978 and the government's decision to constitute the principle of developing China's modern art museums (Zigeng and Yi, 2009:120), have greatly stimulated the growth of Chinese art museums and galleries. The number of art museums in China thus reached more than 100 by 2004 (Xin, 2008:209). Given the disruption that the development of Chinese art museums and galleries have experienced throughout this period, there have been only relatively short periods of consistency in which a localised curatorial approach could develop. This has not been long enough for such an approach to develop organically.

This section looked at the three main factors that resulted in an internationalised curatorial approach being adopted by the Chinese art museums rather than a localised approach. Firstly, a lack of experience encouraged the mimicking of western curatorial strategies. Secondly, the low status and limited financial resources of the Chinese art museums resulted in a lack of the managerial expertise necessary to formulate a

⁷ The Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and ended in 1976. Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the CPC set the socio-political movement in motion. The goals of this movement were to prevent the restoration of capitalism, to maintain the purity of the party and seek the developmental model of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

⁸ The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960): within the 2nd Plenary Session of 8th CPC Central Committee, the Committee adopted the General Line of Socialist Construction. The campaign was aimed at transforming the country from an agrarian economy into a socialist society in a short time.

localised museological strategy. Thirdly, there have been few periods without significant disruption in the lifetime of Chinese art museums during which a consistent localised curatorial strategy could form.

2.3 The changing political interests of the CPC in contemporary art

The previous section stressed the influence of the cross-boundary flowing of ‘world culture’ (Meyer 1997) on the development and the institutionalisation of both contemporary Chinese art and the contemporary exhibitions in the PRC. Despite this, it does not necessarily mean that this exogenously driven development of art has no localised features. The appropriation of the Western art form in the PRC did generate a series of inconsistencies and contradictions within the indigenous cultural code and values and the political interest of the CPC. Those conflicts, then, have motivated the CPC to restrict some of the social and aesthetic concerns of contemporary artists through releasing more related cultural policies. For contemporary Chinese artists in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, the alteration of mainstream aesthetically expressive techniques and social and/or cultural interests was often associated with the changing political environment and the Communist Party of China’s (CPC) cultural policies.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the diffusion of Western culture (mainly referring to European and American cultures) had been strictly limited by the CPC. More

specifically, at the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee in 1962, the chairman of the CPC, Mao Zedong, asserted that 'we must never forget class struggle'. This slogan soon became a specific, direct policy order for the China Artists Association (Lv 2013: 119). In response to Mao's political ideology, an intellectual debate started among these artists on the question of 'how art could meet the needs of five hundred million peasants' (Lv 2013: 119). This was followed by policies that encouraged the artists to criticise an unquestioning use of foreign aesthetic techniques (Qian 1964) and an 'inappropriate' tendency to distinguish between artwork that pleased mainstream tastes and art that satisfied political sensitivities (China Artists Association: 1966). During this period, Maoist 'revolutionary realism' became the standard and a symbol of political idealism (Li 1993: 3). Thus, during this time, the artists' works (Cultural Revolution Art 1966-1976) were primarily characterised by highly politicised and antibourgeois and/or anti-elitist tendencies.

After the Cultural Revolution, the party (CPC) started to self-examine the mistakes and the social damages that the 'extremely left wing thoughts' caused in the political movement. Since then, demographic-oriented social reform temporarily became the focus of the CPC's work. Within the same period, the CPC lifted the ban on the diffusion of Western cultures. One of the consequences of this was that it stimulated the prevalence of Western cultures and thoughts in the PRC. The first generation of post-Cultural Revolution artists, then, shifted their attention from entertaining and

servicing the masses to social criticism and humanism in the 1980s. Benefiting from the authorities' relatively tolerant cultural policies, these artists – in particular those labelled '85 New Wave' – tried to express their artistic concepts by drawing lessons from the techniques of western modernist painting (Lu 2013), as discussed before. These efforts were based on learning about and practising Western aesthetic, literary and philosophical thought, and artistic techniques. Although almost all Western aesthetic vocabularies were used during the 1980s (e.g. pop, Dada, Cubism, and performance and installation art), the most popular technique was a form that combined the aesthetic traits of surrealism with socialist realism (e.g. Zhang Qun and Meng Luding's oil painting of 1985, *The Inspiration of Adam and Eve*). In this regard, the '85 New Wave' movement successfully challenged the hegemony of monotonous and politicised aesthetic ideologies that were dominating the public exhibiting spaces during the Cultural Revolution and the early 1980s.

Thus, Chinese art in the 1980s was still significantly influenced by the CPC's political attitudes and cultural policies. In particular, aesthetic movements of the time echoed the CPC's decision and ongoing tendency to conduct social and democratic reform. In this regard, these artists' 'call for artistic freedom' can arguably be deemed a positive response to the CPC's Reform and Opening-up Policy initiated in 1978. Further evidence validating this hypothesis can be found in the government's support of, and permission to hold, the first International Youth Art Exhibition in 1985, in the National Art Museum of China, the most important art exhibition institution in China.

Despite the 'harmonious' relationship shared by the artists and the officials during the 1980s, the artists soon lost governmental support due to the destabilising impact of the youth movement and its links to the artistic movements during this period. The artistic movements of the time inherited, in part, the forms and traditions of the Cultural Revolution's mass movements. These artists tended to express their social, cultural, and political criticism, and show their works through 'communal movements' (*qunti yundong*) that occupied public spaces (Gao 2010: 38). Due to the initial relationship between artists' work and 1980s cultural policies, the '85 New Wave's development inevitably came to an end when the youth movements of the time clashed with the government, resulting in social instability at the end of the 1980s (i.e. the public protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989).

The government's tolerance of contemporary Chinese art then came to an end. After the Tiananmen Square incident, artists in the 1990s experienced a difficult period in the development of contemporary Chinese art. Artists could only rarely exhibit their works in public spaces until the late 1990s. Given these changes in the political atmosphere, Chinese contemporary artists altered the orientation of their artistic creations. Four traits were common in art during the 1990s. The first was political pop and cynical realism, which concentrated on situations in the artist's personal life and replaced socialist realism-surrealism as the most important art style. Second, the artists were forced out of necessity to display their artwork in unofficial exhibition spaces, such as

their apartments and garages, and in the countryside, where artists could avoid official censure and regulations. Third, the artists started to engage in international affairs and discourses. Lastly, artists' villages appeared, such as Fuyuan and Guajia, in which the artists could communicate and collaborate with other artists.

Through these four strategies, artists gradually distanced themselves from the social criticism and cultural and political idealism that characterised the '85 New Wave' and its public engagement in domestic political issues. The post-1990s contemporary Chinese art artists' lack of interest in political and social issues had two consequences. First, Chinese contemporary art in the 1990s was becoming increasingly experimental, anti-idealistic, and irreverently radical. Second, due to the popularity of contemporary Chinese art in the international art market, some Chinese artists' creative efforts were inevitably bound up in the interests of Western art dealers and lovers.

Given these two consequences, the argument can be made that contemporary Chinese art finally achieved independence from government censorship in the 1990s. As a result, Chinese contemporary art developed aesthetic characteristics similar to those found in Western contemporary art during this period. Li (1992) concurs with this assessment, considering the post-1989 stage of Chinese art to be 'art criticism' in contrast to the stage of 'cultural criticism' of the mid-1980s. According to him, the 1990s art represented 'a first step in being able to forcefully and innovatively wield the

language of Western modernist and avant-garde art to penetrate social and cultural realities' (Li 1992: 13). Even though Li's argument sounds plausible, this assessment is problematic for the following reasons. First, no evidence has been found to suggest that these artists autonomously engaged in social, cultural and aesthetic discourses. Instead, artists made insignificant progress in promoting the prevalence of a localised and/or nationalised form of postmodernist art theories and vocabularies among the public. Second, international buyers were interested in a restricted range of Chinese contemporary art themes and styles (Yu 2012) and mostly avoided the domestic contemporary art market (Lv 2013; Gao 2006). Therefore, the extent to which Chinese artists dedicated themselves to fully engaging with social and cultural realities remains questionable.

Following this shift to a more Western aesthetic style, the CPC began to take more interest in collaborating (and indeed controlling) contemporary Chinese art. Specifically, the 'anarchical situation' mentioned above only lasted for less than six years (1990-1996). In 1996, the opening of an officially supported contemporary art exhibition – Shanghai Biennale in Shanghai Museum – indicated an initial reconciliation of the relationship between the artists and the government. Since the early 2000s, China stepped into an era of art museums (Gao 2009). The main characteristics of the museum era are 1) with the accelerated economic development, a large number of art museums and galleries opened to the public, and 2) the officials expressed their understanding of contemporary art in a more tolerant way. The artists were supported

by the government to show their works not only in the domestic exhibiting spaces (e.g. Shanghai Biennale in 2000, 2002, and 2004) but also on the international stage (e.g. the curators recommended by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC curated the exhibition in the China Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in 2003).

For the officials of the PRC, contemporary Chinese art exhibitions with international standards and scale are a good opportunity to express the 'comprehensive national strength' (Jiang 1997) and the 'soft power' of the PRC (Hu 2007). At the 15th National Congress of the CPC (1997), president Jiang Zemin highlighted the strategic significance and urgency of cultural development for meeting the challenges raised by the fierce international competition in the realm of economics and comprehensive national powers. President Hu Jintao also pointed out that 'culture has become an increasingly important source of national cohesion and creativity and a crucial factor of growing significance in the competition in comprehensive national strength' (China Daily 2007). Hu encouraged the development of cultural diversity. He also indicated that the national strategic goal of cultural development should be embodied in the practical development of the cultural industry. This is a similar tendency that can be seen across the world, but it is notable here that the CPC focuses on the commercial and creative potential of contemporary art rather than the aesthetic or the social criticism aspects of it⁹. Hu goes on to suggest that only in this way can the CPC guarantee the basic cultural needs of the public and thus maintain the vitality of the

⁹ According to the National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC (2004), cultural industry refers to the activities and the related activities that provide cultural and entertainment productions and services to the public in the PRC

Chinese art world.

Now, a profound reformation has occurred in Chinese society, which has led to vast changes in people's lifestyles, as well as their moral sentiments. Specifically, people's ideological values have transformed, due to the power of the reformation, and they must reflect on themselves, reclaim, and even re-examine what they previously regarded as unalterable principles. Meanwhile, they must also make some choice and criticism from the world after reforming and opening. This kind of social consciousness, prevailing in Chinese society, is reflected in (emerging from) art, the most active and most positive representation of society (Hu 2007).

Even though the artists and their artworks have been supported and legitimated by the government in the 'era of museums', nevertheless, the political collaboration comes with a price. In order to gain publicity for their work, Chinese contemporary artists needed to make a sacrifice. Many critics believe that the proliferation of public art museums and recurring exhibitions is not necessarily equivalent to the liberation of visual art in the PRC (e.g. Gao 2009; 2011; Gladston 2014). They indicate that, through publishing the related cultural policies, the government have enhanced the efficiency of its political authority in restricting the artists' direct criticism of social, cultural, and political controversies, rather than weakened it. Gao terms the compromise of the artists to those political interventions and regulations as the 'trampoline effect' (2009: 31). As he mentioned, facing fierce competition in the domestic art market and keeping a high

level of 'exposure rate' in the public view is the only way that the artists can keep their popularity in the art world.

'If an artist keeps absenting from the important exhibitions for continuously few months, he could be gone forever in the public view' (Gao 2009: 31). In this regard, the artists need to sacrifice part of their 'avant-garde characteristics' (e.g. works involving pornography or extreme acts of violence) to benefit from the exhibiting resources, such as public exhibiting space, or curatorial and financial support, that are directly (for the official exhibiting institutions) or indirectly (through private art museums and galleries' self-censorship) censored by the CPC. Although this trend might also be identified in Western countries, nevertheless, what contributes to the specificity of the public museum-based contemporary artworks in the PRC lies in the preservation of traditional Chinese aesthetic and moral norms beneath the outlook of avant-garde art. Two notable examples of the interventions are, first, the publication of the Cultural Ministry's notice which outlawed pornography and extreme forms of bodily violence in the name of art in 2001. In the 1990s, facing the shrinking domestic contemporary art market and strict political censorship, contemporary Chinese artists realised that 'they have nothing other than their own body' (Gao 173). Thus, their body became the only media through which they could freely express their artistic concepts. In these circumstances, violently self-abusive and self-injuring performance art became popular among the artists. The CPC showed a very limited tolerance towards this art trend, and released a notice condemning these types of artistic performances (e.g. showing human and animal

corpses, or self-harm or animal abuse in public spaces) as ugly behaviour violating national law, disturbing public order, challenging moral principles, and damaging the public's physical and mental well-being. Second, contemporary artist Ai Weiwei withdrew his works from the exhibition 'Hans van Dijk: 5000 Names' in the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in 2004. Ai accused UCCA of self-censorship for removing his name from the published artist list in the exhibition (Nelson 2014).

The two examples shed light on the limited cultural tolerance of the government towards the 'degenerated and improper' aspect of art creation. Specifically, according to the report of the 18th Congress Meeting of the CPC (2012), the development of culture should follow the criteria of the Core Socialist Values. According to the report, the values can be summarised into twelve terms: 'Prosperity, Democracy, Civility, Harmony, Freedom, Equality, Justice, Rule of Law, Patriotism, Dedication, Integrity, and Friendship' (Wu 2013). In this regard, some characteristics of contemporary artworks are inconsistent with the Core Socialist Values and thus will not be supported by the government.

In summary, the CPC's cultural polices have had a significant influence on the development of Chinese contemporary art in the post-Cultural Revolution China. In this regard, it does not necessarily mean that the primary difference between contemporary Chinese and Western artists lies in whether they are free from the influence of political context and market-centred commercialism. Rather, the most

important point is that like artists in any society, Chinese artists need to engage with a range of national cultural, political, and social specificities, and this may have an impact upon the public museum-based works they produce and the visitors' reception of those works. Recently, scholars (e.g. Gao 2009, 2011, 2014; Gao 2008; Gladston 2009, 2014; 2016, Smith 2008) have shown an increased interest in conceptualising the PRC's national and regional specificity of contemporary Chinese art in a global context. The following section discusses the main arguments relating to the nationally distinctive features of contemporary Chinese art.

2.4 Contemporaneity in the PRC

The previous section examines the influence of the Chinese government's cultural policies on the development of contemporary Chinese art. This next section concentrates on the scholarly arguments concerning the regional distinction of contemporary Chinese art (contemporaneity) in comparison to that of Western contemporary art.

Following the prevailing flow of cross-boundary international cultures, scholars, especially those who have an interest in contemporary Chinese art, have developed an academic attention to the differences between the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese and Western art. In doing so, they tend to highlight the historical significance

and the national identity of contemporary Chinese art through exploring its 'distinctive' and nationally developmental orientations and the 'historical now' of the art form. According to Gao (2009), the term of contemporaneity refers to 'a kind of ideology and an internally developmental power of an era and a cultural zone' rather than a linear and temporal concept (Gao 2009: 5).

There are three different ways to conceptualise the PRC's contemporaneity in a global era. First, Gao (2009) proposes a conception of 'total modernity'. For him, the Chinese conception of contemporaneity is categorically different from that of contemporary Western art. The spatially bound indigenous cultural practices forge the geographic distinctiveness of contemporary Chinese art in a global context. Accordingly, the PRC's geographically bound modernity challenges the universalising version (universal applicability) of the values of Western modernity. In other words, the Western conceptions of contemporaneity struggle to represent the PRC's modernity. Second, through critically reviewing the standpoints of post-colonial studies, Gao (2014) points out that, compared with the works of some scholars who exclusively concentrate on the identity crisis, or inferior position, of the PRC's national traditional culture in the colonialist-colonised relationship of dominance, it is more practical for one to focus on the dismantling and re-constructing of traditional Chinese culture itself in an era of globalisation. Lastly, in contrast to the above-mentioned scholars, many scholars from Western countries (e.g. Gladston 2014; Smith 2008) tend to interpret the geographically disparate conditions of modernity through drawing inspiration from postmodernist and

poststructuralist perspectives. The following part of this section introduces those arguments in sequence.

Gao (2009) claims that three factors contribute to the ‘totality’ of a Chinese concept of contemporaneity, which distinguish the geographically characterised modernity of contemporary Chinese art from that of contemporary Western art. First, Gao argues that in the PRC, the domains of human practices in relation to not only art but also morality and science need to serve a prioritised goal: ‘to achieve a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and to transcend Westernisation’ (Gao 2009: 18). In this respect, compared with their Western counterparts who are able to express their artistic concepts in a relatively autonomous cultural-artistic sphere¹⁰, Chinese artists need to undertake more social and cultural responsibilities (e.g. to protect traditional culture). Second, Gao argues that, because of the social instabilities and massive poverty caused by the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal wars, and civil wars before the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Chinese people tend to pursue a cultural and ideological break with the past (pre-1948). Accordingly, for Gao, one might find it difficult to understand the Chinese concept of modernity through tracing its ‘sequential logic’ of historical development like that of its Western counterparts. Finally, in line with the above argument, Gao continuously argues that a strong sense of belonging to a new nationalist country orients Chinese people against traditional cultural stereotypes on the one hand and to resist

¹⁰ Gao views Western contemporaneity as characterised by the conflict between a sociological avant-garde (exclusively concerned with politics and ideology) and artistic-cultural avant-garde (art for art’s sake). For him, what contributes to this division is the European Enlightenment’s instituting of science, morality, and art as autonomous domains of human activity.

western(ised) cultural colonialism on the other hand. All the above-mentioned three factors encourage the formation of a geographically bound conceptualisation of modernity in the PRC. Accordingly, within Gao's understanding of contemporaneity, Chinese artists:

- 1) need to take more social and historical responsibilities due to the intimate relationship between the domains of art, politics, and history in the PRC; and
- 2) are likely to face difficulties in communicating with those who are outside the ideological comfort zone (e.g. foreign media's misunderstanding of Fang Lijun's work¹¹).

The second view of Chinese contemporaneity is that Gao (2014) and Smith (2008)'s versions of contemporaneity share some common grounds. They both tend to explore an alternative solution besides the cultural exceptionalism. Specifically, Gao is keen to define the modernity of the PRC's society and culture as an uncertain one that is characterised by a internationalised local culture. For him, the political correctness of the restricted and institutionalised version of post-colonialist discourses (e.g. freedom versus autarchy; local versus international) can provide no practical solution to address the identity crisis of Chinese culture in an international context. According to him, the simplified definition of the term 'return' as a postcolonial subject's seeking for his or

11 The New York Times magazine used Fang's painting as its title page and added a subtitle: 'This HOWL Can Free China' (19 December 1993). Fang, the artist of the painting, disagrees with this politically radicalised interpretation. As Lu states in his work, Fang's works primarily represent the artist's disappointment towards the efforts made by artists from the preceding generation who aimed to save Chinese culture through appropriating western cultures (Lu 2013:327).

her history and tradition concealed the complex and uncertain characteristics of cultural identity. In this regard, Gao believes that the reconstruction of Bentu (native land) does not mean that one must go back to history, rather, it refers to a process of resignification or gaining a part of history that is ‘continuously transiting, frittering and developing’ (2011: 111):

A new modern culture should be established based on the layers of ordinary local life; the resignification should be a hybrid creation that is between international capital and indigenous memories, between cultural consumption and cultural experiments (Ibid).

In contrast to Gao, Smith does not consider the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art as a universally uncertain one. He suggests a postmodernist perspective of modernity that is diversified to both Chinese exceptionalism (a geographically disparate concept of Chinese modernity in a global context) and the totalising views of modernist arguments (the prevalence of internationalisation worldwide). In line with this argument, Smith demonstrates that Chinese contemporary art ‘can be said to be doubly modern in the sense that it derives from not one but two genealogies or, better, narratives of modernity’ (2008: 116). Accordingly, Chinese modernity reflects the current state of Chinese society and culture while at the same time is associated with a Western concept of contemporaneity. Goldthorpe (2005) agrees with Smith. According to him, a postmodernist-poststructuralist perspective provides a very flexible and practical way to engage with contemporary art in China. To be more specific, for

Goldthorpe, the model enables scholars to benefit from not only ‘performative conceptions of signified meaning (that conceive of identity as a ‘shifting, uncertainly bounded and internally fractured construct against the grain of the starkly asymmetrical essentialist relations of dominance underpinning modernist discourses’) but also its ‘embraced conceptions of strategic essentialism where shared cultural identity is upheld as a locus of resistance to continuing colonialist-imperialist relations of dominance’ (2015: 46). A discussion on this perspective is also exemplified in the work of Du Bois (1903). Within his *The Soul of Black Folk*, Bois identifies the identity crisis of African Americans as double consciousness. In this way, Bois’ theoretical position allowed him to consider the collective identity of the African Americans as a shared construction of cultural meanings and discourses. Thus, if it is true that the Chinese visitors experienced a similar identity crisis, how and to what extent they interpret and engage with the imported Western culture deserves further attention.

This section introduces three ways of understanding the regional specificity of contemporary Chinese art. All three arguments reach a consensus that the concept of contemporaneity is underpinned by diverse ways of seeing and valuing the same world. The differences among the three arguments lie in whether one should interpret the regional specificities of the concept of modernity through cultural separatist, deconstructive, or postmodernist-poststructuralist perspectives. All three arguments have their own issues that might restrict their explanatory power in understanding the regional ‘distinctiveness’ of contemporary Chinese art’s contemporaneity. For instance,

Gao's 'total modernity' sheds light on how the Chinese artists' artistic expressions are associated with the political and national interests of the PRC. In this regard, the primary issue facing Gao's model of total modernity lies in its extremely vague and contradictory definition of the relationship between the artists and the traditional indigenous culture. For instance, Gao stresses the gap between total modernity and the past while at the same time imbuing the artists with more social responsibilities based on traditional social and moral codes. He does not reconcile this contradiction between breaking from the past while relying on traditional aesthetic and moral values. The latter two arguments, despite the flexibility of the analytic model they provide, denied every chance that Chinese contemporary artists had to independently forge their artistic creations while at the same time contradictorily stressing the importance of Western artistic thoughts and practices.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, there are few related empirical studies that have been conducted to support any type of the above-mentioned arguments on defining the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art. Aiming to address this issue, a sociological understanding of the Chinese concept of contemporaneity will be given as a result of this research, based on the visitors' interpretations toward both domestic and foreign contemporary artworks.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, the previous sections position contemporary Chinese art in the cultural, political, and historical context of the PRC's society. The discussions suggest the following. First, Western cultures have a significant influence on the development of Chinese art. Second, the evidence is also sufficient to identify an intimate relationship between the contemporary artists' artistic production and the PRC's cultural policies. Within the 'era of museums', the avant-garde characteristics of the public museum-based contemporary Chinese art, namely the social and aesthetic criticism aspects of contemporary art, have been restricted and commercialised by the CPC in the name of preserving traditional cultures and of developing cultural industries. The last part of the previous section also introduces three primary ways by which scholars attempt to understand the differences between the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese and Western art. The following chapter sheds light on the main concerns of the scholars who work in the field of cultural sociology relating to cultural consumption.

Chapter 3 Taste and social stratification

The previous chapter (Chapter two) demonstrates that the proliferation of contemporary art in China, as well as its accessibility at host institutions, offers an opportunity for scholars to understand the patterns of cultural consumption in the PRC. The primary goal for this chapter, then, is to review the available literature in the field of social and cultural studies. Here, this chapter explores whether, and to what extent, existing studies can be utilised to understand the cultural tastes of the visitors in the observed exhibitions. This chapter has been divided into three parts. Section 3.1 concentrates on the literature on visitor studies in the People's Republic of China (PRC); Section 3.2 introduces Bourdieu et al.'s theoretical mechanism of *cultural distinction*. The works of scholars whose arguments are in line with the omnivore-univore argument will be introduced in Section 3.3; Section 3.4 introduces the individualisation argument and; the last section of this chapter will introduce studies related to cultural sociology that have been conducted in different countries.

3.1: Starting from the Love of Art in the PRC

Since China's first museum opened in 1905 (Claypool 2005: 565), museums and art galleries (especially contemporary art galleries) have never stopped pursuing international, predominantly Western, standardised museological practices (Zhang 2006: 1). Even though the contemporary institutions' adoption of internationally sanctioned curatorial and management strategies has led to an impressive success in attracting visitors in the PRC (NBSC 2014), few efforts were made by scholars to understand Chinese visitors and their visiting motivations until the 1980s. At that time, thanks to the Chinese economic reform and 'opening up' policies, an upsurge in visitor studies took place in the PRC, which motivated many scholars to shift their attentions from museological practices to the visitors (e.g. Wu 1987, Wang 2005, Yan 2008). In this section, the discussion starts by looking at studies into Chinese museum visitors. This chapter will then go on to introduce the weaknesses in the visitor studies and how to address those issues in this current research.

Some findings in the literatures illustrate that the Chinese visitors are stamped with strong regionally distinctive characteristics in a global context. In this way, those findings partly distinguish the understanding of the visitors from that of the traditionally class-based homology argument. Specifically, within the theoretical framework of the homology argument, there is an initial relationship between the hierarchical field of cultural consumption and stratified social space. For instance, the socio-economic

profiles of museum visitors have been highlighted by many Western social researchers as being a key factor that restricts museum visiting – in particular, those on low incomes have limited access (e.g. Prior 2003: 58, Kotler et al. 2008: 160). Within the mechanism of cultural reproduction of social inequalities, individuals in the upper classes have an exclusive taste for ‘high’ status or ‘elite’ cultural genres and activities, such as listening to classical music and visiting museums. Their working-class counterparts are, more often than not, excluded from those elite cultural practices and lifestyles due to their lack of ‘professional’ decoding methods and cultural predispositions (Bourdieu et al. 1997).

The identification of the geographical specificity of the Chinese visitors’ demographic characteristics is exemplified in the works undertaken by Wu (1987), Jilin University (1996; 1999), and Pan (2004). To be more specific, Wu’s *Museum Visitor Study in Beijing and Tianjin* (1987) has gained broad attention and become an exemplified example of research into museum visitors using scientific research methods. By analysing data (from 820 participants) collected from thirty-three institutions (e.g. schools, factories, the Government and companies) in Beijing and Tianjing, Wu pinpoints seven obstacles that exclude people from museums: geographic distance (59.78%), education (47.1%), age (33.8%), occupation (27.6%), limited leisure time (25.92%), income (17.88%) and dissatisfaction regarding the services provided by museums (10.98%) (Ibid: 43).

In Wu's observation, the economic barrier 'would not always be the case' in the Chinese social and cultural contexts (Ibid: 37) since there are strong associations between the museum visits and all income categories. In line with Wu's comment, Pan contends that museums in Beijing and Tianjin are more attractive for individuals who have lower incomes than for those in middle- or high-income categories (2004: 32). In this regard, the results of both Wu's and Pan's studies suggest a decline of traditional cultural guidelines (financial incomes) and thus partly echo the findings of scholars who question the impact of economic cultural capital on determining lifestyles (e.g., Eijck and Bargeman 2004; Toivonen 2006; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007; Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Yaish and Katz-Gerro 2010; Roose and van der Stichele, 2010).

Another regional characteristic of the visitors reflects a different trend in museum participation. According to Wu, there is no statistically significant difference between the average attendance rate of male and female visitors to the museums. Similarly, the gender difference among the visitors to the National Palace Museum (NPM) in Taiwan is also not significant. In this regard, gender inequality fails to become a marker of a stereotyped model of gender-difference oriented cultural consumption (NPM 2012). Specifically, according to the result of the visitor survey, despite the fact that the number of female visitors is higher than that of male visitors and, the gap between the sizes of the two groups is less significant (47% and 52% respectively) (2012: 214). In other visitor studies, the gender of the visitors is predominantly male. For example, the percentages for males visiting Liaoning Museum (63.18%) (Jilin University 1999) and

Zhili Zongdushu Museum (68.88%) (Jilin University 1996) are much lower than those of female visitors (36.82% and 31.12% respectively). Although the difference between the proportion for male and female visitors at Henan Museum (59.8% and 40.2%) and the Palace Museum (57.2% and 42.33%) is probably not high enough to be deemed significant, the number of male visitors is still higher than that of females. The above-mentioned findings thus cast doubts on the expectations of some scholars who believe that women are more likely to consume high-status cultural genres than their male counterparts (e.g., Bourdieu et al. 1997; DiMaggio 1982; Bihagen and Katz-Gerro 2000; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2005).

Researcher/ museums	Age (%)		Gender (%)		Education (%)		Occupation (%)		Income (%)	
Pan Shouyong	0-20:	7.22	M	63.18	High school	23.47	Student	12.27	-2000 (¥)	33.57
Number of participants: 98	20-30	21.66	F	36.82	Diploma	29.24	Fulltime job	62.45	2000-3000 (¥)	23.83
	30-40	36.46			Bachelor	36.82	Part time job	4.69	3000-4000 (¥)	17.69
	40-50	15.53			Master	7.94	Retired	25.16	4000-5000 (¥)	9.75
	50+	19.13			PhD	2.53	Unemployment	3.26	5000-(¥)	15.16

Table 1 Visitor profiles in Liaoning Museum research (Pan 2004)

Researcher/ museums	Age (%)		Gender (%)		Education (%)		Occupation (%)	
Wang Juan	0-18:	4.6	M	59.8	Primary school	2.3	Student	34.5
Number of participants: 88	18-30	63.2	F	40.2	High school	6.9	Teacher	8.0
	30-45	25.3			Bachelor and Diploma	82	Doctors	3.4
	45+	3.4			Master and above	10.3	Civil servant	8.0
					others		Others	29.9

Table 2 Visitor profiles in Henan Museum (Wang 2005)

Researcher/ museums	Age (%)		Gender (%)		Education (%)		Occupation (%)	
Jilin University Number of participants: 96	0-20:	7.77	M	68.88	High school	16.66	Student	45
	20-30	65.55	F	31	Diploma	23.33	Cadre	18
	30-40	16.66			Bachelor	28.88	Industrial worker	16
	40+	16.66			Master	1.11	solider	12
							Others	32

Table 3 Visitor profiles in Zhili Zongdushu Museum(Jilin University 1999)

Researcher/ museums	Age (%)		Gender (%)		Education (%)		Occupation (%)	
NPM Number of participants: 944	0-20:	5.72	M	47.24	Middle school and below	2.33	Student	15.99
	20-30	29.23	F	52.75	High school	14.33	Business	34.32
	30-40	24.36			Diploma	11.12	Industrial worker	9.42
	40-50	19.17			Bachelor	56.03	Retired	15.67
	50+	21.5			Master and above	16.2	Civil servant	7.62

Table 4 Visitor profiles in National Palace Museum(NPM 2012)

Researcher/ museums	Age (%)		Gender (%)		Education (%)	
NPM Number of participants: 944	0-20:	7.9	M	57.4	Middle school and below	13.70
	20-30	44.5	F	42.33	High school	32.1
	30-40	26			Diploma and Bachelor	49.2
	40-50	11.3			Master and above	10.3
	50+	9.2				

Table 5 visitor profiles in Palace Museum(Yan 2008)

Although the findings of these studies highlight the regionally distinctive features of the Chinese visitors, it does not necessarily mean that the exhibitions were universally inclusive and accessible for members of all social classes. The general absence of the members of the working class and those who held low educational backgrounds in the exhibitions clearly illustrate the exclusivity of the exhibitions. Specifically, as illustrated by the statistics in Table 1-5, the majority of the museum visitors are more likely to be those who hold a relatively higher level of institutional cultural capital (e.g., bachelor's degree) and those who share specific kinds of occupations and occupational status (e.g., student, business owner). For instance, the visitors with university diplomas or degrees constitute the main visitor groups at the five museums (Liaoning Museum: 67.06% of the visitors, Henan Museum: 82% of the visitors, Zhili Zongdushu Museum: 62.21% of the visitors, National Palace Museum: 59.5% of the visitors and the Palace Museum: 81.3% of the visitors). The members of the working classes were also marginalized within the exhibitions. This is evident in the cases of Zhili Zongdushu Museum and the National Palace Museum. The proportion of visitors who are industrial workers remains very low in both museums (16% and 9.42% respectively).

In summary, the six visitor studies mentioned above provide a general view of the demographic characteristics of the museum visitors in the PRC. The findings of those studies highlight a close relationship between social stratification and the visitors' who visit the exhibitions. In other words, class matters for understanding the exclusivity of museums. The studies also shed light on two interesting tendencies among the visitors that might be attributed to the PRC's regional specificity of cultural consumption: the identification of a higher proportion of male visitors than their female counterparts (Wu 1987; and Pan 2004), and the diminishing barriers of the exhibitions toward visitors

with lower levels of financial income (The NPM 2012; and Jilin University 1996; 1999). Despite this, those studies might be more useful in supporting those arguments if the scholars had provided an in-depth analysis on the data through employing advanced tools of data analysis.

The frequencies method of data analysis that the scholars used (e.g. The NPM 2012; and Jilin University 1996; 1999) can only provide a very superficial understanding of the distribution of the visitors in the social hierarchical system. The solutions provided by the frequencies analysis can hardly justify whether the differentiation among the visitors regarding their demographic backgrounds is statistically significant. Wu's work used advanced data analysis techniques, but his work is rather dated like the others.

The issue of timeliness is something that challenges the relevance of most of the above-mentioned studies. Most of these studies were conducted in the early 1980s, which means that they are rather dated by this point. The extent to which those findings can be used to understand the patterns of cultural consumption demonstrated by visitors observed in this current study is uncertain due to the duration of time that has passed since they were conducted.

The generalisability of those findings is also questionable. As Shi has noted, despite the fact that visitor studies as a field has received attention from Chinese scholars, only fifteen visitor studies in total had been published in 1999 (2000: 1). This number only accounts for less than 1% of the total number of museums in China at the time (2000 museums). Due to this lack of supporting data, it is problematic to generalise the results of the above-mentioned studies beyond those specific institutions.

Due to the limited number of variables the above-mentioned studies employed, the claims that the scholars drew from their research can be seen as somewhat exaggerated. For instance, without examining the visitors' knowledge and cultural predisposition towards the exhibits, it is hard to foresee how they will engage with and interpret contemporary art. In this respect, I argue that the limited variables used in the six studies examined above hinder a fruitful understanding of the individual as an entity involved in complex power relationships. As Rouanet et al. suggest in their work, in order to have a 'full multidimensional display of individuals', an extensive set of relevant variables must be examined in order to construct the 'fundamental social space' (2000: 18). Maton in line with Rouanet et al.'s comment and warns that there is a 'danger' of falling into 'circularity and ad hoc explanation' if one neglects the internal structures of the habitus and only focuses on the practices generated by the habitus (2012:60). In order to engage with the complexity of the social space and the multiple, intersectional forces to which an individual is subjected, this section suggests that the systematic and careful design of a theoretical and methodological framework in visitor studies is necessary. As a classic account in the field of social research, Bourdieu's framework can be deemed a suitable example.

3.2 Understanding Bourdieu's mechanism of cultural distinction

In the field of cultural sociology, the homology argument stresses the close relationship between social and cultural stratification systems. Individuals who belong to a higher social class are those who have exclusive taste for 'high' or 'legitimate' culture such as opera and classical music. Their counterparts in lower social strata prefer 'mainstream' or 'popular' culture. In other words, individuals tend to reproduce their class-based social positions through models of cultural consumption. This section introduces Bourdieu's contribution to the development of this argument, which is still influential in the area of cultural sociology.

Bourdieu divides the field of culture¹² into three class-based categories, which include 'legitimate' taste – 'highbrow' taste that relates to the appreciation of legitimate works; 'middlebrow' taste, including the tendency to approach minor works of dominant art forms; and 'popular taste' – namely, what Bourdieu called 'lowbrow' taste, which includes a small amount of devalued classical art forms and some other popular art genres, such as comic books, light music, and so on (1979). Bourdieu uses a systematic method to understand how people become assigned to the different categories of cultural taste. Specifically, he utilises the concept of capital to interpret the complex

¹² In Bourdieu's analytical model of cultural production, the artistic and literary fields are encompassed by the field of power (the main struggles in social space) and the field of class relationships. There are four common features of these three fields. First, all three kinds of field are constituted by a hierarchical set of positions. Second, the principles of hierarchy in all three fields are determined by the distribution of certain forms of capital in the system. According to Bourdieu, there are two factors contributing to the position an agent can achieve in a specific field: 'the overall volume of the different kinds of capital they possess' and the 'relative weight of the different kinds of capital, economic and cultural, in the total volume of their capital' (1994: 7) (e.g. the positions outside the field of cultural production are largely determined by the amount of political and economic capital that individuals possess). Third, all the fields are relatively distinct from each other even while all the fields are influenced by the fields around them (being homologous with other fields); the degree of effect will depend on how much autonomy the encompassed field possesses. Fourth, the struggles between different positions within the hierarchy for the authority of legitimation/ domination are permanently at stake in every field, which is also the reason the specificity of the field is defined by its temporal and unstable structures and infiltrated boundaries.

processes that are used to distinguish particular forms of cultural consumption. There are three main forms of capital: social capital¹³, cultural capital¹⁴, and economic capital¹⁵. The volume of overall capital and the specific organisation of these different capitals determine an individual's cultural taste. There are also symbolic boundaries¹⁶ between the groups of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow cultural tastes, which enforces an aggressive attitude in the form of symbolic violence between each group. For Bourdieu, highbrow cultural taste is the most privileged form of cultural consumption, which results in both cultural inequality and a feeling of competition between the groups in their attempts to feel comfortable in a particular cultural space.

For Bourdieu, to win the competition in art museums is never an easy task. Individuals required specific strategies to decode the high artworks, which were the preserve of the very privileged. Specifically, in order to appreciate high cultural productions, individuals are expected to apply a classification method that is exclusively operated by privileged social classes. Bourdieu believes that what distinguishes members of a privileged class from others is one's ability to correctly decode legitimate cultural productions and to win the competition in the cultural field-aesthetic disposition. Bourdieu echoes Panofsky's account about the 'intention' that an individual has to achieve in order to distinguish the 'always uncertain and historically changing frontier'

¹³ Bourdieu considers social capital as a kind of 'membership in a group' (1986: 242), which includes the collective knowledge and experience that an agent shares with other agents in various institutionalised relationships (e.g. family and marriage).

¹⁴ According to Bourdieu, cultural capital has three forms. First, the embodied state, as a disposition which is inscribed in an agent's mind and body through a long-lasting temporal accumulation process. Second, the objective state, which includes all kinds of objective cultural goods that one can use to formulate their theoretical knowledge system. Thirdly, the institutionalised state, namely as academic rewards that one can acquire through legitimate/educational institutions such as educational qualifications. Cultural capital can be transmitted and acquired over a durable period, in order to reproduce social inequality; the process of capital acquisition is normally quite disguised and hard to be noticed by others

¹⁵ For Bourdieu, economic capital mainly refers to the capital which can be straightforwardly converted into money and can be transferred from different kind of capitals in certain circumstance. Bourdieu believes that economic capital is the 'root' of other types of capitals (1986: 249).

¹⁶ Lamont refers to symbolic boundary as 'the types of lines that individuals draw when they categorise people-and high-status signals- the key to our evaluative distinctions' (1992:2).

between simple technical objects and works of art (1984: 29). This kind of 'intention' is an aesthetic capacity by which one could employ a pure gaze in front of juxtaposed works of art in the art museum or gallery, swapping their attention from the function and theme of the works of objects to the form and technique of ordinary objects (2012: 46). Only in this way can visitors adopt a 'pure aesthetic disposition' to decipher works of art in the autonomous field of exhibiting space and to gain the 'naive gaze', which will merely reflect the 'nature of the object represented' (Ibid). More specifically, by endowing a 'Kantian disinterestedness' and 'pure' disposition – namely to 'distance' oneself from the ordinary norms of 'agreeableness and morality' or the taste of 'necessity' – an individual can be guaranteed a kind of aesthetic quality of contemplation (2010: 41). This is in opposition to the 'popular aesthetic', which is always pursuing a 'facile' participation and 'vulgar' pleasure towards the functional aspect of cultural activities and works of art. This kind of privileged decoding method is not natural, but closely linked with the academic and cultural capital that one possesses or inherits from their family, education system and the position that one occupies within the social hierarchical system.

As shown in Bourdieu's theoretical mechanism, social elites start to accumulate cultural capital and build cultural competence in their childhood and in school. Thus, an agent's cultural taste is associated with his or her family milieu and educational achievements.

Bourdieu notes that this is because the system of habitus¹⁷ starts to construct itself as early as childhood and tends to reproduce its history through ‘a generative principle of regulated importations’ (ibid). Based on the visitor surveys he conducted in France (1979) and other European countries (1969), Bourdieu explicitly presented how the education system works to consecrate legitimate cultural forms and practices while at the same time sanctioning and legitimatising existing cultural inequalities through disguising the ‘cultural inequalities that they cannot in reality reduce’ (1969: 103). Pearson agrees with Bourdieu and claims that schooling can be deemed as a ‘hard’ approach that the state utilised in intervening in art and culture (1982: 35), with the purpose of inculcating knowledge and taste into ‘captive’ audiences (ibid). Bourdieu partly in line with this argument on the role school played in sanctioning ‘legitimate’ art forms; however, for him, the school’s primary function is never the distribution of uniform knowledge.

According to Bourdieu et al, once an individual acquires a higher level of cultural

¹⁷ For Bourdieu, habitus can be regarded as ‘second nature’ for an agent (Bourdieu 1977: 37), acting as an essential medium between the field and the agent’s practices. The system of habitus starts to construct itself as early as childhood and the habitus tends to reproduce the history of it through ‘a generative principle of regulated importations’ (Ibid). Habitus has five features. First, the durable continuity of habitus enables itself to assert an influence on an individual’s practical decision-making process, sometimes throughout an entire lifetime. Second, the main difference between habitus and habit is that the former can guide an agent’s practice in an unfamiliar situation/field whereas the latter is more often than not understood as ‘a mechanical assembly or preformed programme’ (Bourdieu 1977: 218, note 48) or an established discipline based on an individual’s repetitive labour. Habitus can provide the agent with a kind of intuition or what Bourdieu calls a ‘feel for a game’ in certain circumstances where the individual cannot get practical guidance from accumulated experiences and knowledge (Bourdieu 1990:66). This aspect contributes to the third trait of habitus, namely, its transposability, which can enable an agent to select a set of homogeneous productions and practices in different structured fields without making a conscious effort or needing an explicit reason. More specifically, despite the various principles that dominate the different hierarchical fields, the system of habitus can automatically transform the total amount of acquired capitals and their structures into a measure by which an agent can identify his or her position within the hierarchy of the field. Fourth, Bourdieu defines habitus as ‘structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures’ (Bourdieu 1977: 1845). The reason for this is that habitus does not arise in a vacuum; it is a mental system based on the ‘product of an internalisation of the structures of the social world’ (an individual can forge his or her habitus from not only personal experience but also from collectives such as family milieu, class, etc., without any conscious effort) and it will not cease to generate practices and reinforce itself across different occasions/fields (Bourdieu 1990: 130). Fifth, the system of habitus always tends to prevent itself from being acknowledged by the agent because the durable process of inculcation has made it ‘inveterate’ in the agent’s mental system (Bourdieu 1997:2025). Thus, habitus can unconsciously generate and regulate the agent’s practices in society.

capital than others from their formative education, the education system will strengthen it through its 'democratic and equitable' training strategies and helps the members of privileged classes to win the competition in the cultural field. Bourdieu et al. (1969) believe that in terms of forging the necessary cultural disposition to engage with works of higher culture, even underprivileged individuals who learn about art in school cannot compensate for the disadvantage of not having a chance to get familiar with works of art in his or her family environment. This is because the simplistic and superficial aesthetic information and categories (e.g. dates, schools and periods of artwork) that teachers inculcate in schools are not sufficient enough for one to master works of high culture. In other words, the basic aesthetic curriculum provided by the education system enforces and improves cultural competency for students with pre-existing cultural knowledge from their families and specific aesthetic training (e.g. presupposed methodical training, aesthetic value, intensive and standardised pedagogic communication towards works of high culture, etc.). For underprivileged pupils, this information can do nothing but shape a superficial feeling of 'belonging to a cultivated world' (Ibid: 36). For Bourdieu et al., this is the reason that privileged students tend to apply their cultural dispositions on revolutionary painters of preceding generations or more innovative contemporary artists, while the students from the lower social classes exclusively engage with 'older painters devalued through habituation and false familiarity' (1997: 62). Foucault presents a similar understanding of the education system; he considers school to be a 'discipline institution' (1995:156). In his book, *Discipline and Punish* (1995), school students are ranked according to their ages, performance and behaviour. By segmenting students into different 'compartments', the school and classroom are 'making a hierarchy of knowledge or ability', and the 'distribution of values or merits' functions as a mechanism for 'supervising,

hierarchizing, and rewarding' (Ibid.:147).

Here, we see that through his work Bourdieu highlights the effectiveness of his theoretical mechanism in revealing class cultures. However, I argue that it remains doubtful whether one can directly replicate Bourdieu's methodological and theoretical framework in China. I believe that what Bourdieu's social mechanism needs to face in today's China, forty-six years after its publication, are the changes that have occurred inside and outside of China's contemporary art museums. Given this factor, Bourdieu's methodological framework is thus become less practical in directly measuring cultural inequalities in China.

First, the adoption of international standardised museological practices and a visitor service system in China's contemporary art museums might result in different demographic groupings and methods of engagement from visitors than those identified in Bourdieusian studies. For instance, all three of the museums where this current research took place have implemented modern curatorial strategies of displacing and interpreting contemporary artworks. Specifically, the curators of those museums tend to display artworks in an international modelled 'white box' (a global trend of contemporary museums designed by Efrat and Kowalsky [Harris 2011: 32]) and tend to provide their visitors with a tombstone panel providing basic information about the artist and artworks (Whitehead 2012: 33). Regarding those changes, one troubling aspect of Bourdieu's mechanism is the application of negative and conservative attention toward curators and their curatorial strategies in present society, particularly because this may cause one to overlook the innovative and developmental aspects of today. The political pressures faced by curators to improve accessibility and

inclusiveness within the exhibitions, and the status of contemporary art as an imported art form, are neglected by Bourdieusian understandings of cultural distinction. Further to this, factors including the changing role of curators (see Rendell 2007; Chaelesworth 2007), the development of curatorial strategies and exhibition interpretive methods (see Fyfe 2000; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Whitehead 2012), and the changing status of museums (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Carrier 2009; McClellan 2003), might affect the visitors' perception of contemporary artworks and exhibitions, and are not taken into account by Bourdieu's studies.

Second, the question of whether Bourdieu's conceptual framework works as effectively in China as it did in France remains vague. Bourdieu's social theory is deemed as a form of cultural determinism, since there is no sufficient empirical evidence in his research that can prove the reliability of the cultural distinction he identifies outside of the French cultural boundary. Many research studies have been conducted to examine this point of view; for instance, the findings of Bennett et al (2000) in the UK and Falk's (2010) research in the US (2010) suggest that museum visitors' tastes and cultural preference are very different from those Bourdieu found in France. Peterson and Kern's cultural omnivorous (1996) theory greatly challenged the status of Bourdieu's social distinction in terms of cultural studies. Increasingly, a number of social scientists tend to believe that rigorous cultural boundaries between social classes have eroded; individuals tend to appreciate a variety of broader cultural products rather than unitary kinds of symbolic goods (See Peterson and Kern 1996; Wilensky 2009; Hanquinet 2013). Bryson (1996) even suggests that the concept of the cultural omnivore is another form of cultural distinction, which means that the higher the social position and/or prestige one has, the wider arrange of cultural products one would consume. In this

regard, it is necessary to update Bourdieu's theories of cultural distinction for them to be applicable outside of their specific geographic context.

Third, one might argue that, in China, earning higher educational achievements might fail to present itself as a vital indicator of a frequent museum visitor for specific groups of Chinese visitors. Chinese universities were shut down for ten years during China's Cultural Revolution¹⁸ (Zhang 2014: 97), and during the same period both China's museums and art education symbolised a break with the past and became political propaganda tools (Xi 2008: 78; Chen 2006: 237). Individuals who experienced the political movement might have faced difficulties in achieving higher qualifications, especially those at normal school-attending age during the ten-year shut down. In addition, Bourdieu makes strong claims about the influence of educational qualifications as a predictor of cultural taste in France which may not apply to a Chinese context. According to data collected by Bourdieu et al., the largest proportion of museum visitors were between 15-24 years old and he suggests that two factors contributed to their motivation for spending leisure time in the museum: 1) the sense of belonging to the cultivated world introduced through university, and 2) strong encouragement by one's peer group (Ibid: 62). However, one might argue that overly concentrating on the relationship between an agent's age and their educational qualifications might lead one to ignore multiple forces that could influence cultural choices. For example, the members of the museum visitor group were ages 15-24 and belonged to the generation born around or after the end of World War II. Along with their educational status, museum-going activities might be stimulated by the post-war social structural changes that included the establishment of an increased number of

¹⁸ The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966–1967

museums, changing lifestyles, status of genders, work styles, increasing incomes and more (Hudson, 1998). The changes that are described above are specific to the French context, and thus would not apply to China during the same period. Where-as Bourdieu identifies this younger age group as being drawn to museums as a result of the social change they experienced, in China significant periods of social change such as the social reform following the Cultural Revolution saw more middle-aged people visiting museums. In order to examine this issue, this current research will look more closely at demographic patterns of cultural taste, and to what extent any differentiation is linked to age.

Fourth, the question of whether Chinese contemporary art museum visitors, as subjected to intersectional power forces (e.g. gender, cultural norms, class, internationalisation, commercialism, post-colonialism), will interpret contemporary artworks and contemporary art museums in a culturally specific way requires further investigation. Specifically, this research will look at whether contemporary art museum visitors consume the contemporary art exhibits in geographically distinctive ways, or whether they demonstrate the same patterns of cultural consumption that have been already identified in Western contexts. Bourdieu argues that different countries have their own specific systems of cultural consumption, but his explanations of these claims has been criticised, as will be explored below.

Bourdieu realises that his theoretical model might face issues in different countries, however, he insists that these are ‘false differences’ – by doing so he means the dynamic power relationships and symbolic struggles in producing ‘common sense’ within different social spaces. One can still probably discover/reveal gaps between those who

have remote positions in a hierarchical social system and their corresponding homogenous perceptions and reactions towards symbolic productions underlying these differences. In his book, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (1998), he notes that distinctive class-based social reproductive systems can be found in every social space. Within this, a homogenous set of symbolic goods and practices are closely linked to a set of corresponding social positions (Ibid: 4) and can be significantly influenced by the various 'national cultural capitals' that different countries have (Bourdieu et al. 1991:36).

Thus, for him, sociologists who tend to conduct comparative research among different societies or successive periods in the same society might risk falling into a 'substantialist mode of thought' (Bourdieu 1998:4). This is a problematic point of view that tends to ignore the structural differences between different societies by treating 'the activities and preferences specific to certain individuals or groups in a society at a certain moment as if they were substantial properties' or 'inscribed once and for all in a sort of biological or cultural essence' (Ibid). Bourdieu used the following example to support his argument. He introduced how the individuals in Japan and France render the similar phenomena with different social meanings ('apathy associated with dispassion of the means of production of political options'). In this way, he highlights the infinite variety of ways that hierarchical sets of goods and practices can be observed and detected in different countries.

Bourdieu claims that there is no solid rule that can be used to predict an individual's trajectory (1990:21). However, the unitary relationship between the objective social position and family origin of the agent and the generational habitus identified by

Bourdieu has received a wide range of criticisms from sociologists. For example, Bennett notes that Bourdieu's claim related to the relationship between the habitus and cultural capital neglects the 'autonomous force of cultural trainings related to gender, ethnicity and religion, and provides little scope for the capacity of trans-national cultural flows to dismantle habitus that are defined in terms of their relations to classes within a purely national conception of the social' (2012:27). Macdonald and Fyfe also acknowledge the importance of considering museums as a 'site for the distinction and taste' and suggest that 'this surely does not exhaust their possible roles in consumption' (1996:4). Prior echoes MacDonald and Fyfe and notes that rather than 'the perceived quality of the object or the policies of the institution itself', there are more factors bringing visitors to the art exhibition (2001:518). Much research exists that aims to update and to extend Bourdieu's research findings, such as Bennett et al.'s research (2009) identifying the strong relationship between age, gender, and an individual's cultural consumption. Trienekens (2002) highlights the function of an agent's ethnicity in consuming highbrow culture, which is even stronger than conventional class indicators of distinction in choosing cultural products (the level of education, age, etc.).

Last, in facing up to the challenge from the cultural omnivore and individualisation arguments, can Bourdieu's cultural mechanism prove its value in China due to the 'renewed class struggle' caused by China's disparity between rich and poor (So 2013: 4)? As many scholars note, one of the principle contributions of Bourdieu's social theory is that it can work by 'drawing significant attention and offering a way of thinking about it', which means that researchers can use this theoretical model to analyse a wide range of social issues, specific disciplines and power relations across various fields (Karl 2012: 60; Thomson 2012:79). However, there are many sociologists,

such as Bennett et al., who also suggests that Bourdieu's cultural distinctions are 'dated and inappropriate in commercialised, consumerist, neo-liberal times' (2009:18) and need to be updated and supplemented (See Prior 2009:518; Bennett et al. 2009; Hanquinet 2013, Hanquinet et al. 2014). According to Bennett et al.'s research, in Britain, even if homogenous cultural tastes argument is still relevant, the significance of these varies from field to field (2009: 251). Peterson and Kern's cultural omnivore (1996) theory (high-status individual tend to be open to a wide range of cultural genres, from high to low [Peterson and Kern 1996: 4]) also challenged the status of Bourdieu's social distinction in terms of cultural sociology. More specifically, increasingly, a number of social scientists suggest that rigorous cultural boundaries between social classes have eroded; individuals tend to appreciate a variety of broader cultural products rather than unitary kinds of symbolic goods (Peterson and Kern 1996; Wilensky 2009; Hanquinet 2013). Specifically, the importance of cultural genres as signals of cultural distinction have weakened. Bryson (1996) also suggests that the concept of the cultural omnivore is another form of cultural distinction, which means that the higher the social position and/or prestige one has, the wider the range of cultural products (between high and low cultural status) one would consume.

Even though Bourdieu did not apply his field model to financially developing countries like China to prove his hypothesis, he does encourage researchers to focus on the structural differences of social and symbolic spaces between different countries (1998: 13). Through this focus, according to him, researchers can deconstruct and analyse objective differentiation in 'particular cases of the possible', to identify and understand the distinctive mechanisms of social reproductive systems found in different countries (Ibid: 13). Accordingly, this research provides an opportunity to explore the validity of

Bourdieu's mechanism of cultural distinction within the PRC.

3.3 The Omnivore-univore argument

While the primary purpose of this study is to examine the applicability of Bourdieu's cultural mechanism in China, it might be argued that it is necessary to have a better understanding of alternative patterns of cultural distinction (omnivore taste). The reason for this is that such an effort can assist the researcher in interpreting the statistical data in this current research if the figures do not fit in Bourdieu's framework. To be more specific, in comparison to Bourdieu's rigorous symbolic boundaries between social elites and members of the working class in the field of cultural consumption, many researchers have identified a new form of cultural struggle for distinctiveness – the omnivore versus univore phenomena (e.g., Peterson 1992; Bryson 1996; Peterson and Kern 1997). In Peterson's mechanism (1992), social elites have gradually transformed their pattern of cultural tastes from a very restricted mode of snobbish taste to inclusive omnivorousness. Thus, the upper classes have become keen on broadening their cultural tastes towards the 'non-elite' cultural productions in Bourdieu's framework. In contrast, the lower classes who have very limited preferences for popular and especially commercial cultural genres, remain at the bottom of the 'new' cultural system as lowbrow univores and can hardly benefit from it (Peterson 2005: 262). In other words, the omnivores gain their status through knowing about and participating in a broad range of forms rather than by exclusively consuming legitimate or high-brow cultural genres and activities. On the other hand, the elite univores are more likely to defend their highbrow tastes against persons who favour low-status music genres (Peterson and Simkus 1992: 170). Warde et al. further specify the cultural preferences of omnivores as a 'middle way' between expressing the homology between positions in hierarchised social and cultural spaces and a force that denies the class-based cultural inequalities

(2000: 5). In this respect, the omnivore–univore argument suggests that relying on models of cultural distinction that are characterized by a division between ‘high’ and ‘lows’ would be less effective for gaining insights into cultural inequalities in societies where cultural omnivorosity is prevalent.

Many research findings partly support these claims. For instance, individuals with a wide range of cultural knowledge and cultural activities have been observed in several Western countries, such as the US (Lamont 1992; Peterson 1992; Peterson and Simkus 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Holt 1997; DiMaggio and Useem 1978), the UK (Warde et al. 2005; Roux et al. 2008; Tampubolon 2008), Spain (Sintas and Alvarez 2002) and Belgium (Vander Stichele and Laermans 2005). Even so, there are significant differences among the findings. Specifically, despite the popularisation of the new sociological perspective of cultural distinction (omnivoreism), it does not necessarily mean that a scholar can find universal characteristics and incidences of omnivorosity in different countries.

For instance, Peterson and Simkus perceive omnivorosity as a cultural tendency to appreciate ‘all distinctive leisure activities and creative forms along with the appreciation of the classic fine art’ (1992: 252). In their later work, Peterson and Kern define the omnivorous taste as a kind of ‘conditioned’ tolerance; ‘it does not signify that the omnivore likes everything indiscriminately. Rather, it implies an openness to appreciating everything’ (1996: 904). For them, omnivorosity should be deemed a dominant class rebellion against ‘snobbishness’. While it was initially seen as a sign of ‘greater tolerance and democratisation’ (Ibid: 2), omnivorosity came to be seen as yet another form of distinction. Although this type of argument is plausible, it should

be noted that the existence of omnivorousness remains controversial in the realm of sociological studies. The issue of understanding the theoretical concept and definition of the elite omnivore-to-univore hypothesis is also a focus of discussion.

First, several scholars have found difficulty in confirming unified social characteristics of omnivores in different countries (e.g., Warde et al. 2005; Bennett et al. 2009). For instance, Peterson (1992) claims that the middle classes are transforming themselves into cultural omnivores. In this respect, Warde et al. (2005) do not agree with Peterson, based on their findings in the UK. They identify that the demographic figures of the omnivores are different from those in Peterson's 1992 account. For them, having a broad range of interests in cultural genres and activities is 'quite a wide-spread phenomenon' which is 'concentrated in but not limited to the relatively privileged middle-classes' (Warde et al. 2005: 18). These authors thus shift their focus from the structural effect of social classes to the influence of a university education on omnivores' broadened cultural preferences. They suggest that a university degree probably enables individuals to feel more confident in engaging with varied cultural experiences by exposing them to the 'awareness of the contestability of judgements about taste' (Ibid: 20). In line with Warde et al.'s argument, Bennett et al. believe that 'hardly anyone in the UK now denies that openness is a virtue' (2009: 254). López-Sintas and Alvarez's study in Spain (2002) and Stichele and Laermans' study in Flanders (2005) show similar findings. All of these studies indicate that groups of individuals who share similar characteristics with Peterson's omnivores can be identified in the UK, Spain and Flanders; The samples sizes are rather small, however (López-Sintas and Alvarez 2002: 363; Stichele and Laermans 2005: 60; Bennett et al. 2009: 254).

Second, there are various types of omnivorous tastes (Bennett et al. 2009: 254). According to Peterson's description (1992), omnivores tend to be from socially privileged positions and embrace every cultural activity and genre in their cultural repertoires, crossing the boundaries from high to low. Nonetheless, compared to 'low-brow univores' who have elective and conditioned cultural tolerance, the 'high-brow omnivores' only account for a minority of the respondents in many scholars' works (e.g., Bryson 1996; Sintas and Alvarez 1999; Bennett et al. 2009). For example, in her study, Bryson finds that the individuals with a better educational background do not have indiscriminate tolerance (1996: 895). Based on the evidence, the tolerant participants in the survey exclude from their cultural repertoire those genres (e.g., heavy metal) that are most preferred by people with the lowest level of education. Stichele and Laermans observe similar struggles, stating that the 'omnivore participants belong to a fixed group of people who distinguish themselves univocally from all the other cultural participants' (2006: 59). They explain that omnivorousness 'can manifest itself in different ways and various gradations' (Ibid). For example, these authors believe that the omnivore group can be monitored, but their size is rather small. They describe the larger group in their studies as 'omnivore incidental art participants'¹⁹, whose characteristics are similar to those of the 'low-brow omnivores' in Peterson's account (2005: 262). Compared to omnivores who frequently participate not only in high-class but also in low-class cultural activities, the low-brow omnivores spend more time on consuming popular cultural genres while having 'very limited interest in the fine arts' (2006: 54). In their work, Warde and Gayo-Cal identify two types of omnivores in the UK. Their analysis uncovers one type of omnivores who prefer cultural genres that 'span the boundaries between the legitimate, the common and the unauthorised' (2009: 143). Another type

¹⁹ Stichele and Laermans 2006

of omnivores are the most omnivorous section of the population who are members of the highest social class, who prefer a high volume of legitimate cultural genres but low number of unauthorised items. Accordingly, the omnivores like to distinguish their tastes by volume rather than by composition.

A range of factors are believed to contribute to one's hybrid taste for a wide range of cultural genres between the high and low. For instance, some members of the social elite group might pursue traditional non-elite genres to enjoy the pleasures gained from applying their analytical capacity in handling multidimensional and complex information (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007:11). Peterson and Kern (1995) also suggest that social elites critically embrace popular cultural items into their cultural repertoire based on their knowledge of the genres that cross the boundary between legitimate and popular. Peterson (2005) in his work lists six reasons to explain the prevalence of omnivore tastes. First, the development of status-group policies promotes the evolution of cultural distinction from highbrow snobbery to cosmopolitan omnivorousness. Peterson suggests that, compared to highbrow snobbery, omnivorous inclusion enables the members of the dominant class to adapt to an increasingly international culture through showing respect for the cultures of others. Second, the rapid increase of social mobility also contributes to the popularity of omnivore taste. The individuals who experienced movement from a low to a high social level are more likely to juxtapose high status tastes with the popular tastes they forged in their young age. Third, the individuals are more likely to develop an exotically hybrid taste in an era of globalisation. The flow of cultures across the national boundaries influences the taste patterns in an entire country. Fourth, social elites tend to distinguish themselves by showing their capacity to communicate with members of different classes, allowing

them to intentionally encounter a broader range of cultural tastes. Fifth, some factors, including enhanced socio-economic quality of life, broadening educational chances and the fast development of social media, reduce the exclusiveness of elite cultures and makes them more available to wider segments of the population. Sixth, the rise of popular culture oriented entertainment industry results in direct competition between high and pop culture for attracting the attention of social elites.

For those who do not side with the proponents of cultural omnivorousness, omnivores' cultural tolerance is nothing more than scholars' hypothesis. As Lizardo and Skiles showed in their study, one's cultural openness for both high and mass cultures is simply based on his or her 'misunderstanding' of the status of specific popular art genres (Lizardo and Skiles 2013). Atkinson (2011) believes that acknowledging the symbolic boundaries between high and popular cultural genres is still practical in understanding the cultural exclusiveness in present society. As Atkinson points out, the diverse trajectories among members of the upper echelons of social space may mislead researchers to identify a 'fake' form of omnivorousness. For example, Atkinson demonstrates how personal experience might guide the individual to 'betray' his or her class-related cultural preference (e.g. an interviewee with an elite family background tends to reject everything his violent father enjoys, social elites might be passively influenced by their children who are attracted by popular art genres, etc.). Similar to Atkinson, Lahire (2003) values the importance of a person's family background and experience in forging one's cultural consumption patterns, but he tends to understand omnivorousness in a different way. He believes that individuals are bearers of multiple dispositions, and that the individual (s) 'turn(s) on or switch(es) off' specific dispositions according to the occasion. This is the reason why he believes that society

‘cannot be reduced to what is collective or general, but that it is contained in the most singular aspects of every individual’ (Ibid: 352). Concerning the viewpoint of Atkinson and Lahire, I argue that they are plausible, as the specific kind of problematic methodological strategy that the researcher uses might generate interpretive bias, which could also enable him or her to exaggerate privileged individual’s tolerance towards popular art genres. However, the researchers might over-concentrate on a distinctive character or identity, and, thus, ignore collective identity, which is as important as individual identity (Jenkins 2008). In this regard, the next part of this section focuses on how studies use different methods and interpretive approaches to either support or oppose omnivorousness.

Within many kinds of literature in the field of cultural sociology, the reasonability of the specific research method the scholars used to explore and interpret the omnivore-univore hypothesis has been questioned. For instance, quantitative research was considered a data method of data analysis that is less efficient in uncovering and understanding the multidimensional ‘truth’ and unstable forces beneath the statistics (Atkinson 2011). He continually warns that researchers should be aware that the omnivore-univore argument might only be one of the ‘methodological decisions’ scholars conduct to interpret this cultural phenomenon (2011:169). More specifically, the researchers who rely on quantitative methods of data analysis might experience difficulties in presenting detailed and in-depth information regarding one’s cultural choices, which might mislead researchers to over-interpret respondents’ cultural tastes, and suggest actions that they would never actually take in reality. For instance, it is not difficult to understand that interviewees might hide their real exclusive attitude towards various cultural productions, especially when they have the underlying pressures of

social morality. As Bourdieu noticed, once interviewees realize that they are in a 'legitimacy-imposing situation set up by a cultural questionnaire', the agent is very likely to distinguish themselves from other respondents by choosing the options that they do not appreciate but that are closest to the definition of legitimate culture (Bourdieu 1984: 318). In this case, what Bourdieu wants to distinguish regarding people's reaction towards legitimate cultural consumption is the gap between one's knowledge and recognition. DiMaggio and Useem (1978) also believe that some members of the upper middle classes who have higher prestigious occupations but lower incomes might tend to secure their social power and value by participating in the 'solidarity ritual of the arts occasion'. Imitation, according to Turner (1984), is one of the strategies that individuals and groups might use to improve their unsatisfied social identities.

In addition, despite the advantages of qualitative research (e.g. enabling the researcher to conduct in-depth analysis or examination of specific cultural and social phenomenon, to explore the factors that have not aroused attention in previous studies, etc.), it has been critiqued by many scholars as a research method that cannot justify the generality of the findings. In other words, due to the typically smaller sample size of qualitative research, one might argue that this approach could result in researchers applying great importance to relatively isolated findings, where larger scale research could have helped avoid such misinterpretations based on small data points (Bellavance 2008; Atkinson 2011). For example, through conducting a qualitative study of six social elites, Bellavance (2008) challenges Chan and Goldthorpe's point of view, which claims that one's cultural taste is closely tied to one's social status (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007). Within this account, he separates six different types of cultural eclecticism among those

who share a high status in the social space, which includes ‘omnivorous neo-philanthropist’, ‘creative entrepreneur’, agents from a ‘higher technical world’, ‘a neoclassical from above’ and ‘a neoclassical from below’ (Ibid). In this respect, it is arguable that the massive and abundant qualitative data might mislead researchers to concentrate on the detailed differences that interviewees express, but not the similarities. For instance, taking the view of one survey participant as an example in Bellavance’s study: the first interviewee presented a high degree of openness and positive attitude towards a typical non-elite art form, urban graffiti. The emotional words such as ‘strongest curiosity’ and ‘greatest admiration’ that the interviewee expressed to describe his feelings on the art genre would probably perfectly confirm the existence of unique forms of omnivorousness. However, it is also not difficult to notice that the interviewee was very sensitive towards the symbolic boundary between legitimate artworks and popular artworks and the hierarchized cultural field. As a result, his reaction might also be interpreted as a kind of upside-down cultural goodwill due to the pressures from an increasingly democratic social environment, or an effort to cover acknowledgement of social inequality. Such a contradiction is a possible interpretation that can also be found among the other five consumption categories, which would thus disrupt Bellavance’s finding to some extent. The issues mentioned above are the reasons I would like to pursue a mixed research method within this research (see chapter 3). Due to the clear strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, an approach that combines the generalizability of the former and the insight of the latter will allow me to identify, and then verify, typologies of cultural tastes.

In summary, according to the studies mentioned above, the possibility of identifying an individual’s broadened taste across the symbolic boundaries between high and popular

cultures has been confirmed. Even so, there are questions still unanswered regarding the theoretical definition and firm socio-demographic characteristics of omnivores, which remain extremely vague and fluctuating. While there is evidence to suggest that omnivores are typically found within social elites, we have little other evidence by which we can identify this tendency. As such, though we can hypothesize an opposition between narrow and broad ranges of tastes, there is no firm evidence as to what this actually means for the concept of distinction.

Although the validation of the omnivore/univore hypothesis and the prevalence of cases exemplifying it have been widely questioned, this argument sheds light on the complex and various interpretive strategies underlying the consumption of popular cultural genres. Holt (1997), in his account, also notices the ‘openness’ of social elites towards low-status cultural referents; however, he attributes the proliferation of the upper social class’s cultural ‘tolerance’ in terms of the decline of ‘the symbolic potency of objectified cultural capital’ (e.g. familiarity with legitimate cultural genres, such as classic art). As Holt (1997: 104) notes, class difference is ‘no longer easily identified with the goods consumed, [and] distinction is more and more a matter of practice’. He thus highlights the transition of cultural distinctiveness from consciously knowing and consuming the ‘appropriate goods’ to one’s consumptive manner as distinguished from those with less cultural capital. Many scholars (E.g. Savage et al. 2010; Friedman and Kuipers 2013) side with Holt in illustrating how members of the upper social class distinguish their tastes by approaching and interpreting the most ‘vulgar’ cultural forms (E.g. ‘Crap TV’ [Savage et al. 2010]; Comedy [Friedman and Kuipers 2013]) without classifying the items in derogatory ways.

These arguments provide alternative and distinct ways of understanding individuals' cultural tastes. Even so, one might still argue that such class-based arguments fail to capture cultural consumption in a postmodern society where hierarchical social structures have been challenged by new social orders and cultural trends. With this in mind, the following section will focus on the literature concerning the theoretical mechanism of individualisation.

3.3 The individualisation argument

This section focuses on the possible influence of late-modern society on an individual's social life. Unlike the omnivorous pattern of cultural consumption, which is still bound to a class-based society, the 'late' modern model of consumption completely emancipates itself from previous class boundaries and tends to pursue a kind of rational and reflexive consideration of life choices (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Clark and Lipset, 1991; Toivonen 1991; Bauman 2002). Understanding self-reflexive late-modernity and individualisation is vital for this study, as the self-reflexive consumption pattern can provide alternative ways of thinking about social and cultural phenomena in contemporary China. More specifically, there are three main reasons to focus on literature concerning the argument of individualisation.

First, the post-Maoism reform in China resulted in not only a series of profound social changes but also 'a partial individualisation of Chinese society' (Yan 2010). According to Yan, Chinese society only witnessed an incomplete process of individualisation because of the following two factors. On the one hand, the cross-boundary influence of the globalised market economy and the ideology of consumerism thoroughly challenge the established social structures and the traditional criteria of the market system in China. All those changes enabled the individuals in China to confront a relatively more 'fluid labour market, flexible employment, increasing risks, a culture of intimacy and self-expression, and a greater emphasis on individual responsibility and self-reliance' (2010: 510). On the other hand, 'the management of party-state and the absence of cultural democracy, the absence of a welfare state regime, and the absence of classic individualism and politics' delay the developmental process of individualisation in

China. Beck (2001) acknowledges the unequal developmental phases of modernisation that different countries might possess. In this regard, Beck (2001) suggests that different class categories should be established in different countries according to the specific local social and cultural characteristics. To this point, one might argue that whether and how the Chinese model of individualisation impacts on the cultural lifestyles of the Chinese visitors deserves further attention.

The second reason is that, following Beck's argument above, the form of individualisation in China might also be culturally specific. As Beck stressed, within a risk society, even if all pre-established criteria and norms have been challenged, it does not mean that one could 'free' himself or herself from a collective life (which is underlined by different structural grounding (s) rather than hierarchised social stratification). Toivonen (2006), in line with Beck's comment, conducted a comparative study that examined fifteen European member countries. He highlights how different traditions between Catholic countries (e.g. Belgium and Mediterranean countries such as Italy) and Protestant Nordic and Anglican countries (e.g. Sweden and United Kingdom) impact the various levels of reading propensity between the regions, demonstrating that if individualisation is occurring then it must be regionally specific. In this regard, Beck suggests that one should expect to identify diverse forms of culturalised individualisation in different societies and different reactions to it (2001: 207). Thus, exploring the effects of individualisation in the Chinese cultural context in the field of cultural consumption (if applicable) is one of the goals of this current study.

Third, an individual's rational and reflexive thinking pattern with regards to cultural

choices could be applicable in China, since Chinese visitors might engage with artwork without noticing its original position in the hierarchised cultural field of Western society. In other words, there is a high possibility that when faced with contemporary artwork, Chinese visitors (especially lay visitors) would still experience a culturally specific response to contemporary artwork, even if the cultural repertoire required to interpret the artwork does not fall within their traditional structure of cultural distinction. If the results of the data gathering phase of this current research cannot be interpreted within the framework of the homology argument, then this individualisation approach could be an alternative. This chapter will now introduce the definition of individualisation.

The individualisation argument challenges the notion of homology between social class and cultural consumption through highlighting the dissolving structures of the advanced industrial society and class-bound individual/collective identities.

In his book *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992), Beck claims that economically advanced societies of the present day are gradually stepping into a risk society. Significant social structural changes not only indicate the outdated traditional forms of the percipient model of thinking and class-based social categories inherent in the previous society (e.g. occupational classes), but have also broken the boundaries of every class-based unit in the industrial society (e.g. family, nation, organisation, etc.). Beck argues that modernity has thus terminated the absolute controlling authority that 'the logic of wealth production' held over the 'the logic of risk production' and to a large extent reversed the situation (Ibid: 12). In other words, what Beck is inclined to claim is that in present society, the modernised social and political dynamics have gradually delimited the determinative role of established boundaries in forging social

lifestyles. Bauman presents a similar attitude towards the ‘fragile and ineffective inter human bonds in the liquid society’ in the face of the irresistible trend of cultural globalisation and individualisation (2002:177).

Meanwhile, many scholars (e.g. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992) stress that the progress of modernisation has also asserted profound effects upon agents’ lifestyles. For Beck, due to the structural changes that have taken place in the current social space, agents have gradually been liberated from the rigorous and monotonous class-based social relationships and structures represented by the status-based class orders, the notion of ‘traditional housewives’, rigorous working hours and the centralisation of work sites (Ibid: 129). Anthony Giddens sides with Beck regarding reflexive modernity and continually specifies the process of individualisation into two steps. According to Giddens (1991), agents must have obtained their own freedom in the early stages of the modern era. During this time, not only science and technology but also the social lives of the individuals were gradually freed from pre-established constraints, which contributed to the popularity of the dynamic development of modern institutions. Since then, the human lifespan has become increasingly autonomous from various traditional ties in terms of the cycle of generations, geographic locations, relations to other individuals and groups and ritual patterns. The achievement of modernity in this phase, Giddens asserts, is the formation of what he calls ‘the internally referential systems of modernity’ (Ibid: 162). These systems refer to a crucial part of emancipatory politics and are greatly responsible for freeing individuals from previously structured lifestyles. However, these politics did not achieve continual development after early modernity. In late modernity, the emancipatory politics had been gradually substituted by ‘life politics’, or what Giddens named ‘the politics of lifestyle’ (Ibid: 214). These acted as a

political choice made by individuals in order to positively/morally self-actualize in a postmodern 'reflexively ordered environment' (Ibid). The factor that contributes most to this transition is the struggle and the paradoxical decisions one must make when they face the unavoidable external issues that exist beyond the boundary of the self-referential system of modernity. Thus, in order to deal with life-political issues, it is important to reintroduce the 'institutionally repressed' and move towards remoralising life.

In summary, what individuals face in the era of modernity are the plausible and unreliable established social and scientific discourses, loosened social structural constraints, and unclear futures. In this context, individuals can do nothing other than conduct a rational and reflexive consideration of life choices and choose an alternative 'right way' to spend their lifetimes in the risk society. Within the following part of this chapter, the literature related to the individualisation argument will be the main concentration and subject of analysis. Analysing the issues surrounding the individualisation argument enables the researcher of this current study to have a better theoretical preparation for interpreting the data collected from the exhibitions.

First, the 'death' of all established social theories and structured social values in the current cosmopolitan society is the 'core' foundation of the individualisation argument (e.g. Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; 1999; 2002; Bauman 2002). Even so, it is arguable that due to the absence of data support from empirical studies, some scholars claim might seem exaggerated and skeptical, especially in the realm of cultural studies, where many studies that focus on social research have identified a strong relationship between social class and patterns of cultural consumption in the current society (e.g. Kraaykamp and

Nieuwbeerta 2000; DiMaggio and Mukhtar 2004; Bennett et al. 2008; Le Roux et al. 2008). For instance, according to the results of their studies conducted in five Eastern European countries, Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta (2000) highlight a strong correlation between the high cultural participant and parental political, socioeconomic and cultural resources. In the five countries, social class still matters for an understanding of the social reproduction of inequality in the field of cultural consumption since the individuals from the upper social class are more likely to inherit and benefit from the high level of what Bourdieu calls the 'total volume of capital' (e.g., economic capital, cultural capital) held by their parents. The transmission of inequalities over generations guarantees the advanced cultural dispositions and competence of the members of the upper social class. As DiMaggio and Mukhtar state, the 'meltdown scenario' (as the decline of the distinctiveness of high culture) is only insufficiently supported by the surveys towards the public participation in art from 1982 to 2002 (2004: 169). Bennett et al.'s study (2008) also witnesses a link between cultural tastes and social cleavage in the UK (although the division of class-based tastes is not necessarily unified and uniform). In another study in the UK, Le Roux et al. (2008) similarly identify the importance of socio-demographic variables as markers of differentiation among the individuals in what they call the 'space of lifestyles' (the graphic presentation of the results of geometric data analysis).

Even if Beck could use his 'zombie categories' to defend his beliefs regarding these issues, namely the outmoded institutions and categories inherited from the previous society without noticing its expired validity in the new age (e.g. class, family, working style etc.) (1999:204), it is arguable that the extent to which these changes actually free individuals from class-based social structures still remains ambiguous in the current

society. For example, Jenkins does not believe that the changing social structures will make daily life more diverse. For him, significant historical changes have been witnessed in different countries throughout human history and not all of these changes brought a more diverse lifestyle to the citizens (2008:33). Wilson (2011) in line with Jenkins' comment, notes that because of the loosening of formerly institutionalised racism and the higher incomes, educational level and social prestige that African Americans can attain today, boundaries between blacks and whites in American society should no longer determine the opportunities of black peoples in terms of occupation and job promotions as seen in the past. According to him, however, there is no evidence that indicates the elimination of the socioeconomic gap between black and white in American society. Kraaykamp and Nieuwebeerta sides with Wilson and state that the profound social change in the former socialist countries (the breakdown of socialism) does not eliminate or even weaken social class-based cultural inequalities. For Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992), class still remains a vital influence on core social issues (e.g. social mobility, educational chances and voting tendencies) of modern society. Atkinson also believes that Beck's approach to conducting class analysis on the 'existence of conjunctural households'; the 'anachronistic vision of a territorially-defined nation' is problematic because it does not yield accurate results (2007:359).

In addition, many proponents of the individualisation argument contend that the theoretical concepts and definitions of traditional social class has gradually lost their analytical power amongst the modern social inequalities and transformational categories (e.g. Beck 2007). One clear example of this issue is that although educational qualifications used to be deemed a crucial figure for measuring social class, its homologous social position can no longer work as such. This is because of the fact that

the modern education system broadens the educational attainment for all and enables more members of the lower social classes to continue further in school to acquire higher educational qualifications, blurring this delineation between social classes (Beck 2007; Clark and Lipset 1991). Although this argument seems plausible, some scholars also demonstrate that educational expansion and reform have little effect on the stability of social mobility (e.g. Goldthorpe 2016). According to Goldthorpe (2016), when the educational system is more accessible for the members of lower classes, the parents in more advanced class positions can still keep their offspring's competence in not only the education systems but also in the labor markets through using their superior economic, cultural, and social resources. Another issue concerns the question of how much of an effect these changes might have on an individual's social life.

First, even if the relationship between one's social origin and educational attainment might weaken, the extent to which the increasing educational attendance rate contributes to cultural democracy deserves further attention. For example, in Bourdieu's social mechanism, other than the institutional cultural capitals (e.g. educational certification) that one possesses, the volume of embodied cultural capital (e.g. cultural capital that has been inherited from family milieu and acquired through socialisation) and objectified cultural capital (e.g. physical artworks that one owned) also plays a significant role in determining the agent's location within the structured social system. This means that to exclusively acquire a certain level of academic achievement does not necessarily guarantee the success of an individual in cultural space.

Second, even with the opportunities that are available, poor students might face other

issues. For example, according to Duncan and Brooks-Gun, family economic conditions in early childhood asserts greater impact on an individual's learning ability and their potential for achievement than the conditions in late childhood (2001:61). Kalmijn in his account also highlights the important influence of the mother's socioeconomic status towards their next generation's accumulation of educational advantages or disadvantages (1994). In China, this issue might be more obvious, especially when the development of the Chinese economic system is still aimed for an 'industrial upgrade' from labour-intensive industries; as a result, as a financially developing country, it is uncertain to what extent China's government and market can provide a sufficient number of decent jobs for those who have achieved high academic awards. As a result, the examples that Beck presents are not sufficient to assure the complete elimination of class boundaries in Chinese society.

Third, similar to the factor mentioned above, some scholars tend to exclusively focus on some social changes that have taken place in specific aspects of late-modern society rather than others that might also provoke analytical issues. For instance, Marshall considers Beck's argument as less relevant either in sociological or historical research because he demonstrates 'a communitarian and solidaristic proletariat of some bygone heyday of class antagonism' against 'the atomised and customer-oriented working class of today' (1988:206), especially when the supporters of individualisation cannot provide 'cohort analyses or longitudinal or penal studies of the kind' to empirically support their claim (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992:387).

Last but not least, in 'radical versions' of the individualisation argument, the individuals tend to 'freely' construct their lifestyles though detaching themselves from social

collectivities and established social disciplines and norms (e.g. Bauman 1990; 1991; Warde 1997). For Jenkins, who stands on the other side of the fragmentation, he believes that too much focus on the differences in the social space might lead to neglect of the links and similarities that lie beneath the surface (Ibid). Following Jenkins, it is possible to argue that Bauman concentrates too much on the diverse, unpredictable and autonomous identity of the agent but meanwhile neglects the heteronomous and predictable characters of the agent's identity, which namely functions as their collective identity. Beck presents similar attitudes towards a radical version of individualisation. For him, when facing the 'transnational actors changing the social and political landscapes', 'winners and losers' can always be found in the developmental process of reflexive modernisation (2010: 208). In this respect, although the importance of social class as an indicator of cultural preferences has declined, it does not necessarily mean that fewer inequalities exist. As Beck states, it only means that 'we cannot predict by one predictor what kind of life they lead and what kind of consciousness is going to develop out of this condition'. The following section of this chapter will look at Jenkins' theory of individualisation in more depth.

Within his theoretical framework, Jenkins believes that identity is generated and shaped from the process of internal-external dialectic, which is both 'individual and intrinsically interactional'. Instead of relying exclusively on internal or environmental/interactive factors, for Jenkins, the formatting of identity is the result of three independent 'orders': 'individual orders, interactive orders and institutional orders' (2008:39). More specifically, what Jenkins contends is that each individual acquires a primary identity through learning in early childhood or infancy, and that this primary identity is continually shaped and modified over the person's lifetime through

interactions with others and through new experiences. Furthermore, the 'institutional order' or what Jenkins called 'established-ways-of-doing-things' is another vital influential factor in the collective identity-shaping phase. For him, these three orders are entangled and function simultaneously after the agent steps into the social space where they interaction with others (Ibid: 40).

Groups or organisations encourage agents to adjust their practices according to the 'organised and task-oriented collectivities' and guarantee consistent practical similarities between the members of the group(s) in which they are registered (Jenkins 2008:45). Jenkins believes that a double-faceted key factor contributes to a consistent behaviour in a group: the social construction of 'conformity and conformism' (2008:148). More specifically, two motivations encourage an individual to generate conformist behaviour: 'the desire to be correct and the desire to remain in the good grace of others'. In other words, the decisions, and expectations of the individual towards belonging combined with learning motivates them to rationally consciously or unconsciously adjust their behaviour according to the specific situation. Through the system of stereotyping and attribution, conformism provides the agent a routinised lifestyle, which saves time and energy for engaging in uncertain situations and to consider all possible consequence of their practices in advance.

Following Barth (1969), Jenkins also notes that, as long as the boundaries between groups are still perceptible, social complexity will not exhaust the possibility that behaviour can be predictable (it does not mean that members of a group must meet a consensus, but a degree of 'consistency' is necessary) (2008:148). For him, every human group has their own organisational criteria, which contributes to the routinised

practices of their members (to forge mutually acceptable practices, beliefs, etc.) while at the same time alienating individuals who devote themselves to different principles of practical membership. The reason boundaries are crucial for agent behavioural prediction is that the construction of the map of everyday life for members of specific groups requires a long temporal process of knowledge from a lifetime of learning and rationalised consideration.

One might thus argue that the ignorance of the distinctive collective principles of specific routinised practices and perceptible categories would at same time cause one's neglect towards cultural differences. For instance, one might fail to acknowledge the 'relatively stable' and 'continuity' of misunderstanding and prejudices between different social groups, which namely as something 'new' that are 'creatively' invented based on misunderstanding and misinterpreting signs or messages; these invented 'beliefs' might not be entirely the same as the information delivered/received by both sides of the groups/individuals involved in an interaction, which tend to exist as 'stable' for a period. This kind of 'invention' can thus be accepted by diverse groups at the same time in a different way. For example, evidence of this kind of cultural 'misunderstanding/ prejudice/modified information' can be found on a large scale in Said's account, 'Orientalism' (1978). Said believes that Orientalists have always trapped themselves within a contradictory discipline: they tend to pursue greater variety in terms of understanding the Orient on one level, while at the same time, they insist on restricting variety to the 'radical terminal of the generality', namely, to treat Orientals as a whole species category and form a hegemonic and ontogenetic explanation for every member of this group (Ibid: 32). Orientalists tend to rely on the available literature and their own perspectives on what the Orient should be like to understand

Orientalists as 'monumentalised objects' rather than actual people (Ibid: 96). Orientalists create their version of the Orient, which is not real but has profound influences and has become a proliferated 'cultural currency' in the Western world. Another example can be found in the different attitudes that different countries have towards specific artistic genres. Katz-Gerro (2002) conducted research in five European countries (Italy, Israel, Western Germany, Sweden and the United States) and noted that highbrow culture has different meanings in different countries. In his research, indicators of cultural status change significantly between different countries (indicators that are considered as a part of highbrow culture in some countries are viewed as part of popular culture in other national contexts). According to Parekh, Western culture cannot be appreciated by non-Western countries without modifications (2000: 164). More specifically, because of the fact that agents tend to approach and engage with their own culture and to distance the one they are not familiar with (Giddens 1991; Jenkins 2008). Thus, in order to avoid the confusion and disorder that the elements of foreign culture might raise towards local residents, the imported western cultural productions need to be either 'suitably modified in the light of what in their producers' views the non-western world appreciates or customarily associates with the west'; or avoided; or selectively assimilated through reinterpreted local indigenous cultures (Parekh 2000:165).

In summary, this section focuses on the individualisation argument and the theoretical and practical issues of the related studies. A literature review of these studies provides an alternative view of how individuals forge their identities through the consumption of cultural goods when the legitimate and explanatory power of social class and social stratification decreases. Through their studies, scholars who support the individualisation argument highlight the difficulties of unravelling the decisive force(s)

and principle(s) beneath the new form of cultural inequality in post-modern societies. These studies also shed light on complicity and multidimensionality in the individual's cultural identity in the post-class era. These challenges question the efficacy of traditional class-based and single-dimensioned theoretical frameworks in coping with the new version of cultural exclusiveness. This argument is vital for this current research since it provides a specific way to investigate how Chinese museum visitors engage with the cultural products that they are not familiar with; namely, internationally sanctioned legitimate artforms and imported foreign products. How visitors navigate between the two definitions and react to this type of artwork might imply a further way of understanding the individualisation argument. In this regard, the next section introduces a new theoretical framework that enables the researcher of the current study to practically explore the complexity of cultural inequality in present-day China through 'cultural profiles' (Hanquinet 2013).

3.4 Cultural profiles and related visitor studies in different countries

The previous sections of this chapter introduce the findings of visitor surveys in China and the main theoretical and conceptual mechanisms of sociological studies in the field of cultural production and consumption (the homology, omnivore-univore and individualisation arguments). The previous sections also describe the challenges of employing these mutually contradictory analytical frameworks in understanding Chinese visitors to the observed exhibitions. Based on the literature review, there is no sufficient evidence of the reliability and efficiency of these theoretical frameworks in understanding Chinese visitors' perceptions of the contemporary artworks in these exhibitions. Thus, in order to prevent the bias of over-reliance on a single theoretical solution to understand 'the multifaceted and multi-layered nature of cultural identities' of the visitors, the current study will prioritise exploring 'cultural profiles' (Hanquinet 2013: 14) among the visitors, based on their cultural preferences and aesthetic knowledge. Many scholars have acknowledged the efficiency and the flexibility of this strategy for understanding the complexity and the multidimensionality of individuals' cultural tastes in different countries (e.g. Bennett et al. 2009; Hanquinet 2013; Falk 2001). The three sets of research that I have identified are those produced by Falk in the USA, by Bennett in the United Kingdom, and by Hanquinet in Belgium. All three researchers identify that the explanatory power of class-driven boundaries has declined in the field of cultural consumption in their respective countries. Thus, the following sections introduce the three studies and the theoretical and methodological issues that threaten the validity of their findings.

3.4.1 A critical review of Falk's research

Unlike many sociologists and social researchers who believe that the museum going activities of exhibition participants are highly related to one's social status in terms of education, income, family milieu, etc. (Bourdieu 1999; Bennett 2001), John H. Falk (1995) claims that variables such as 'community, marital status, age, education, income and church' could impact the decision-making process of individual to go to museums, but, what he notices is that no single factor listed above could 'reliably predict' the presence of targeting community members. For instance, Falk also notices that even the visitor's race/ethnicity can influence the spectator's museum going decision making process, but it provides a 'poor explanation for museum-going' like other demographic figures (2009:29).

In his later book, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (2012), Falk suggests that we should stop thinking about visitors in terms of 'some permanent quality or attribute such as age or race/ethnicity', but rather consider each museum participant 'a unique individual', an individual who can generate various distinguishable and changeable visiting experiences. For example, based on visitors' 'current identity-related visit motivations', which refer to short-term personal, identity-related needs and interests, exhibition participants can even generate significantly different meanings toward the same exhibition or exhibit (2001:497).

Within Falk's account, there are two separate forms of identity: the '*big I identity*' (the

demographic qualities of individuals, namely gender, nationality, religion and racial/ethnic identity), and the '*little I identity*' – the reaction that an individual has toward 'the needs and realities of the specific moment and situation'. Compared to the big I identity, Falk believes that the little I Identity of visitors is more effective at revealing the internal detective factors that drive exhibition participants' everyday activities and thoughts, and which perform better in understanding museum attendees' visiting motivations, attitudes, reactions and perceptions toward exhibitions or exhibits (Falk 2001:298).

What makes Falk's claim problematic is that when he writes about everyday practices and thoughts, he tends to simplify all kinds of requirements that an agent has in a simple and unitary form, rather than distinguishing them in terms of one's intrinsic requirements and cultural needs (which could be highly symbolised). Hence, one might also argue that the ignorance of the multiple characters of the agent's need might lead to one failing to notice the cultural exclusivity of cultural institutions and cultural works (Bourdieu 1994), and the power relationship between the cultural field and society (Foucault 1995; Bennett 2001; Bourdieu 2001; Fyfe 2000). The relationship between unequal cultural competencies and cultural dispositions that individuals have towards the perception of cultural goods, and the importance of the long-term familiarity process with the art works (Bennett 1993; Bourdieu 2001) objectively exist in our social space and imply the 'level of satisfaction' that one can achieve (Maslow 1994). For example, Falk might underestimate the impact that the feeling of frustration has on visitors. Once museum visitors feel frustrated within the exhibiting space, they may stop trying to engage with the art works (Hooper-Greenhill 1999). Bourdieu believes that if the

information conveyed by the art work is found to be too ‘overwhelming’, the visitor who failed to decipher it will consider the art work as a ‘medley without rhyme or reason, or a completely unnecessary set of sounds or colours’ (2001:51). They may, at times, even feel ‘a sort of panic mingled with revolt’ (2001:60). As a result, without considering exhibition participants’ demographic characters, which are closely related to the matters mentioned above, the question of how researchers can catalogue, measure and predict the activities of museum visitors may remain unsolved.

Second, Falk believes that the unstable relationship between museum visitors and their host institutions is based on a kind of coincidence or what Falk calls ‘the current identity-related visitor motivations’, which are ‘a reflection and reaction to both the social and physical world we consciously perceive in the moment’ (1999:5). One might argue that the analysis model used by Falk is a sort of constructionist stance. In order to explain the definition of constructionism in the field of museology, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill in her article, ‘Museum Learners as Active Postmodernists: Contextualizing Constructivism’, notes that constructionists tend to treat museum visitors as individuals with ‘their own particular needs, preferred learning styles and social and cultural agendas’, rather than a ‘passive, homogeneous mass of people’ (1999:27). Hein agrees with Hooper-Greenhill and submits that ‘we need to focus on the visitor, not the content of the museum’ (1999:78). However, even though the constructionist theories of communication and learning are becoming increasingly popular in the field of museum studies and welcomed by museologists (Hooper-Greenhill 1999:67), one might claim that the weaknesses of constructionism still exist and threaten its reliability. The reason for this argument is that if the visitor’s museum going is exclusively determined by the identity-related motivation/little I identity, identifying the factors that

construct/formulate the identity-related motivations/little I identity might pose an issue for researchers. If an individual's cultural and social status/profile contribute to these individual characteristics or personalities, one can also argue that the big I identities of museum visitors decide the motivations, perceptions, and reactions of visitors toward museums; thus, the argument will, paradoxically, fall into an infinite theoretic loop. My research will try to disentangle motivations and social attributes (e.g. age, gender, education and occupational class) of the contemporary art museum visitors.

Third, in the field of cultural studies, due to the constructionist model that Falk pursues, the simplistic relationship between agent and cultural activities might lead to biased research. Even Falk does not deny the impact of one's cultural background, particularly race/ethnicity, towards a visitor's museum going behaviour, but he insists that this difference cannot sufficiently explain the different cultural tendencies among the residents of a host country and the ethnic minority community members. The main example that Falk uses to support this point of view is that, as the data reveals in his research conducted in America, the attitude of African-Americans toward leisure activities is similar to that of European-Americans, while at the same time, the 'tremendous differences' can be found within and across the African communities' (2001:378). What might make Falk's claim problematic is that he tends to fit all visitors who have different cultural backgrounds into a single formula. In her article, Ainisa (1994) highlights the multiple meanings that the term 'ethnicity' contains, and also notes that the tendency of cultural institutions to adopt an understanding for all visitors with different cultural backgrounds using a 'formulation' (such as ethnic minority) will generate 'much more devastating effects' on the developing of their inclusive policies. Without noticing the changeable, flexible and fuzzy nature of cultural differences, one

might be risking ‘caging individuals into involuntary associations’ (Ibid: 2). In addition, Falk’s research methods and results might mislead readers by overly focusing on race/ethnicity as identities in their own right, rather than the shared cultural or collective identities of members of ethnic minorities. In Falk’s 1999 article, he refuses to admit the profound influence that ethnicity has on his research, which can also mean that he denied the strong relationship between minority community members’ cultural backgrounds and their museum going motivations. Bennett notes that the thicker historic frame one nation has, the more difficult it will be for its members to engage and overcome these cultural boundaries (1992:31). Bourdieu (1999) also believes that the process of breaking up the old means of art perception and establishing new art decoding mechanisms is significantly slow. In order to ‘uproot’ a type of art competence which is ‘deeply implanted in habits and memories’ and replace it with a new one, individuals need to experience a long and difficult familiarisation process with the new coding schemes of the recently established/engaged art forms. As a result, I argue that the focus in the field of empirical museum visitor research should be the influences of the participants’ various cultural differences toward their perceptions and reception of art works, museums, art galleries and exhibitions, which has not been fully explored by social researchers. In this respect, one might argue that Falk’s constructionist model of analysis can be deemed as an effective tool in revealing the intersectional forces to which museum visitors are subjected.

Finally, the issue of Falk’s research finding is similar to that achieved by Bennett et al. (2009). First, the question of how to measure the duration of the contact that the member of the ethnic minority community has with the local ‘legitimate culture’ or ‘mainstream culture’ is not addressed in his research. In addition, if Falk considers African-American

people as native residents (who probably know American culture as well as European-Americans), but not immigrants (who come from a region with extremely divergent cultures and religions), the effectiveness of this analysis model will be challenged since the cultural differences and the cultural boundaries objectively exist among different societies, especially between Western and Eastern countries. This might mislead readers to explore an issue that actually does not exist – namely, the physical and mental differences between races.

3.4.2 Bennett's social research

Bennett et al. (2009) creatively extend Bourdieu's cultural framework in their research in Britain. In terms of the relationship between culture and ethnicity (I am focusing on the national culture that one bears in a transnational context as a member of an ethnic group and the effects of this on his or her cultural practices), they highlight the strong relationship between cultural capital and the sense of belonging of social members, and the complex way that ethnicity is connected with cultural activities. However, Bennett et al. also admitted that they failed to establish a strong relationship between migrant communities (cultural differences) and the organisations of the host country's cultural lifestyles (2009:237). There are several factors that make their research problematic. In the first place, Bennett et al. simplify the profile complexity of the ethnic group member components into a series of paired groups, in terms of born in Britain/born in other countries, white English/white other, and white/non-white. In their research, they neglected the duration that immigrants/ethnic community members have been in the United Kingdom. As per the close relationship between cultural competence and the familiarity process mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the efficiency of an agent's

capability to decipher certain kinds of works of art is largely determined by the frequency of contact with the works (Bourdieu 2012). Thus, the attitude that immigrants have towards the consumption of cultural works might be misunderstood. Therefore, the research findings may be biased due to the insufficiently comparative research data collected.

Second, in Bennett et al.'s research, immigrant group members are being challenged by the knowledge of western cultural productions (literary items, music items, visual art items, etc.) (2009:246). Interviewees who participate in the research may feel confused due to the fact that they are being asked to make a choice based on their knowledge of marginal/ foreign/unfamiliar cultures (compared to their indigenous culture). As a result, they may refuse/resist/feel embarrassed to present their real considerations, which may also reduce the reliability of the research findings, especially when the research could not measure the duration that the interviewees have lived in the western countries. Laurie Hanquinet's research method (2013) could effectively solve this issue by reorganising visitors through various visitor cultural profiles, which will be analysed later.

Lastly, Bennett et al. believe that the reason why younger immigrant interviewees, especially those who received higher education, can 'display considerable sophistication and reflexivity in their handling of cultural categories and genres' is because 'their experiences as minority group members have, to some degree, forced them to reflect on processes of categorisation and classification, thus developing cultural capacities that allow them to navigate between cultural referents with considerable subtlety' (Ibid:250). One might argue that, in order to get involved with

local society and to structure their own social networks with local inhabitants, young immigrants might force themselves to engage with indigenous cultures. However, this claim might similarly need to take the risk of being critiqued as a kind of determinism or cultural relativism, since there are many other factors that might contribute to this phenomena, such as young immigrants' stronger study abilities due to their young age; they may be less formed and institutionalised by the legitimate cultural environment where they or their parents came from; and they may have been more influenced by globalisation compared to their older generations, so they present less resistance towards western culture.

3.4.3 Hanquinet's research in Belgium

For Hanquinet, the class-based and highly homogeneous visitor groups in Bourdieu et al.'s *The Love of Art* will significantly restrict one in fully acknowledging visitors' dynamic forms of engagement with art and culture and their life trajectories (2013:14). By highlighting how 'a more general lifestyle beyond socio-demographic characteristics' or what Hanquinet called 'cultural profile' can be used to 'interpret the ways visitors of art museums define their relationship to art and to culture and, consequently, to the art museum', Hanquinet suggests that visiting a museum should be considered as a 'particular life choice' which 'cannot be grasped through solely the Bourdieusian cultural legitimacy framework' (2013:17). More specifically in her article, *Mondrian as Kitchen Tiles? Artistic and Cultural Conceptions of Art Museum Visitors in Belgium* (2013), Hanquinet identifies six different kinds of cultural profiles from the visitors she monitored within the research: the classically cultured visitors (highly educated visitors who prefer highbrow culture and do not like most forms of avant-

garde art and popular art); the cultured progressists (namely, younger visitors who resist classical art forms and tend to engage with less legitimate works of art); the *Distants* (less educated visitors who prefer operettas, but not contemporary art forms and highbrow culture); the passive cultured visitors (less interested by ordinary cultural activities and legitimate cultural activities, with more than half possessing a bachelor degree); the hedonists (most visitors in this group have higher educational certifications, are rare museum visitors and do not like either classical art or contemporary art); the art lovers (referring to visitors who like all art forms, 44-64 years old and who have received artistic training).

Hanquinet provides a more efficient research framework for decoding the complexity of a continually developing modern culture. However, as Hanquinet argues, the research results might be restricted by the limited number of interviews per group (Ibid: 27). In addition, this research framework may need to be applied in different cultural contexts where the efficiency of cultural profiles could be tested. More specifically, during the research survey the present researcher will explore whether Hanquinet's social framework is more effective than the one Bourdieu et al. utilised in understanding Chinese contemporary art museum visitors.

In summary, based on the available literature, the present researcher explored whether Chinese visitors, as subjects of intersecting social (age, gender, class, generation) and cultural forces (local and international cultural norms), will utilise different interpretive strategies to engage with institutions and cultural norms dominated by Western ideology (as Bourdieu et al. expected). This chapter also discussed whether 'cultural profiles' will be effective in understanding the cultural distinction in present-day China.

Based on Hanquinet's research findings, which highlight the close relationship between an individual's personal life and his or her understanding of art, culture and museums, the researcher also introduced the possible influences of dramatic cultural changes towards Chinese contemporary art visitors' culturally contextualised perception and reception of contemporary artworks and their host institutions - museums.

Based on the previous analysis of Falk, Bennett, and Hanquinet's research, I have identified that a mixed-methods approach to visitor research will best suit my research objectives in China. Hanquinet's use of cluster analysis in particular seems effective in identifying integrated cultural taste, whilst Falk's use of interviews provides a way to gain more in-depth personal details about class and cultural identity from the visitors themselves. Chapter 4 will discuss the methodological framework of this research.

Chapter 4 Methodology

The main aim of the chapter is to outline the reasons why a mixed-method approach was adopted for the data collection and analysis. This chapter has four subsections: the discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Chapter 4.1), an introduction to mixed-method research (Chapter 4.2), the statistical analytical methods adopted for this current research (Chapter 4.3), and a description of the specific ways of applying the method in a practical perspective (Chapter 4.4). Drawing on studies using specific statistical technique(s) within the field of cultural sociology, this chapter also discusses how the objectives of the current research can be met through the use of the chosen techniques of data analysis.

4.1 Quantitative research methods versus qualitative research methods

4.1.1 A General review of quantitative research methods

In the field of social research, quantitative research has made an impressive contribution towards understanding the complexity of individuals' cultural preferences in relation to cultural and social inequalities (e.g. Newman 1998: 12). For instance, many scholars (e.g. Bourdieu 1979; 1984; Bennett et al. 2009) have presented rigorous statistical evidence that identified a homologous relationship between stratified social space and the field of cultural consumption. An example can be clearly seen in the case of Bourdieu et al.'s work (1969). By analysing empirical data collected through closed-ended questionnaires from art museums in five European countries, Bourdieu and his

colleagues highlighted how an individual transformed his or her inherited embodied cultural capital, accumulated in family and educational milieus, into institutional successes (measured by educational credentials) and cultural competence (ability to appreciate and consume high cultural productions that are intellectually and emotionally inaccessible to others) in art museums and galleries (See Section 1.2). More recent examples of empirical studies in the same field are the questionnaire survey-based studies carried out by scholars such as Hanquinet (2013) and Hanquinet et al. (2014; 2016). Hanquinet et al. (2014) found the similar Bourdieusian opposition between popular and high aesthetics in Belgium, while also suggesting that the content of highbrow taste has changed. They argue that the social elites are more likely to develop a taste for ‘postmodernist’ genres and for socially reflexive art, rather than ‘modernist’ works and ‘a detachment of art from social preoccupations’ (Hanquinet et al. 2014: 111).

The findings of those empirical studies illustrate not only the methodological advantages of quantitative surveys in understanding the dynamics of cultural consumption in different social contexts, but also the generalisability, reliability, and theoretically critical nature of the research findings. These factors all contribute to the decision of this current research to perform a substantial quantitative research phase. In the section that follows, the above-mentioned advantages of quantitative methods will be introduced in further detail.

First, the deductive nature of quantitative surveys (Newman 1998: 12; Creswell 2009: 4) enables the current study to critically benefit from the richness of empirical findings in the field of socio-cultural studies. For instance, namely to concentrate on an

‘argument from general to particular or an emphasis on a priori hypotheses (or theories)’, Teddlie and Tashakkori believe that quantitative research enables researchers to establish experimental procedures from which research hypotheses and theories are derived (2009: 93). Kerlinger also refers to quantitative research as ‘hypothesis-testing research’ (1960). In line with Kerlinger, Creswell defines the quantitative survey as ‘an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationships among variables’ (2009: 4). Newman specifies the exploratory procedure of quantitative research as a process in which ‘the variables in question (dependent variables) are measured while controlling for the effects of selected independent variables’ (1998: 19). Even so, due to the explorative nature of this current research, the quantitative method of data analysis will be used in an inductive way. In this way, the study can still benefit from the deductive nature of these other studies by using them to ground the findings of this current research.

This specific way of using quantitative methods exemplified in the works has been undertaken by many scholars. To be more specific, the methodological characteristic of quantitative research mentioned above means that other researchers can replicate the results of a quantitative survey, and determine the probability of the same results occurred in different contexts (Rubin and Babbie 2010: 36; Vanderstoep and Johnson 2009: 7). For instance, many studies in various countries and different time periods (e.g., Bennett et al. 2009; Hanquinet 2013; 2014) have used methods that are similar to those used by Bourdieu (1979; 1984). Within these studies, Bourdieu’s theoretical mechanism has been reconsidered, developed, and complemented or even challenged in various cultural and social contexts by the usage of a wider array of relevant variables. An example can be seen from the study carried out by Bennett et al (2009). In their

study, they expanded on Bourdieu's original selection of variables by including some domestic activities such as watching television shows and films, and reading newspapers. By doing so, they make Bourdieu's mechanism of cultural distinction more adaptable to different cultural contexts and time periods by updating and complementing Bourdieu's theoretical framework of cultural consumption. Thus, even though the primary goal of the current study is not to simply replicate the established socio-cultural studies, in China, the theoretical and methodological mechanism of those studies can still be drawn on to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the museum and gallery visitors from a richer multidimensional angle or even as subjects of intersectional forces.

In addition, three factors contribute to the generalisability and reliability of quantitative research results: 1) the larger sample sizes of quantitative surveys versus those of qualitative surveys, 2) the rigorous statistical data measurement that quantitative data allows for, and 3) random selection of subjects (Rubin and Babbie 2010: 36; Silverman 2006: 37; Newman 1998: 19; Creswell 2009: 4). First, compared to qualitative researchers, increasing sample size is one of the most common strategies quantitative researchers use to guarantee the accuracy of their findings (Madrigal and McClain 2012: 1; Rubin and Babbie 2012: 1). This strategy enables quantitative researchers to avoid the non-sampling error, which is caused by 'coverage (data units either accidentally omitted or failing to respond) or content (falsification, misunderstanding or incompetence on the part of either respondent or enumerator)' to a large extent (Carvalho and White 1997: 11). Second, by using tight statistical measurement, quantitative researchers can control alternative explanations for their findings (Creswell 2009: 4; Rubin and Babbie 2010: 36). Last, Bamberger (2000) considers random

selection of subjects as an essential characteristic of quantitative research. Based on the principle of randomisation, each subject has ‘an equal or known probability of selection’ (2000: 10). In this regard, this makes it possible to understand the total population based on the sample.

Despite the advantages of quantitative research for understanding individuals’ cultural tastes, this approach also receives a wide range of criticisms. For instance, it remains unclear whether the methods are adequate to fully understand the relationship between one’s cultural preferences and his or her social status. The primary reason is that the selection of a restricted number of variables may lead to loss of information. According to some scholars (e.g., Silverman 2006: 37; Rubin and Babbie 2010: 36), quantitative research might be less effective in exploring specific kinds of research questions. Specifically, although the quantitative method is effective in guaranteeing generalised, precise, hypothesis-oriented research findings, the method might be less practical in achieving a deeper, context-sensitive understanding of some subjects (Rubin and Bible 2011: 36; Sale et al. 2002: 44). According to Vanderstoep and Johnson, the primary disadvantage of the quantitative survey is that the quantitative method can provide only a ‘superficial understanding of participants’ thoughts and feelings’ (2009: 9). Quantitative research might over-concentrate on ‘quantifiable information’, so what is neglected is the complexity and multidimensionality of phenomena that lie beneath the information they discarded as unimportant (Carvalho and White 1997: 11). Atkinson shares similar concerns with the scholars mentioned above. He believes that researchers should be aware that a quantitative finding supported by a series of empirical evidence might only be the result of his or her ‘methodological decisions’ (2011:169). One might over-interpret respondents’ intentions and suggest actions that they would never

actually take. Vanderstoep and Johnson have acknowledged the issue, and they cast doubt on the ability of quantitative researchers to address this problem. For them, the scholars would be overwhelmed with too much information to fully analyse the data set if they attempted to include all the variables that are missed (2009: 9).

In summary, this section has attempted to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the quantitative research method. This section has also tried to present a justification for why quantitative methods form an important part of this research. The chapter that follows introduces qualitative methods and the extent to which the strengths of qualitative research can compensate for the shortcomings of a quantitative survey. The disadvantages of qualitative data analysis, which are equally important, will also be highlighted.

4.1.2 A General review of qualitative research methods

Just as quantitative research has been defined variously depending on the facet of research that the scholars focus on (Thomas 2003: 2; Guest 2013: 2; Potter 1996: 24), qualitative research also is defined in diverse ways. For instance, focusing on the research purpose, Creswell notes that ‘qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem’ (2009: 5). Denzin and Lincoln, by concentrating on the context of the survey, note that

‘Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos

to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (2000: 3).

Still others, such as Taylor and Bogdan, try to define qualitative surveys from an epistemological point of view. They define qualitative research as an approach to 'phenomenological understanding', which rejects the theoretical perspective of quantitative research: positivism (1998: 259).

To understand the cultural inequalities in China, one might argue that this current research can also benefit from the advantages of a qualitative research method in 'focus(ing) on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation' (Creswell 2009:4). Indeed, like quantitative research, qualitative research has its own advantages for addressing the specific kinds of questions of this current research. For example:

1) Qualitative approaches enable researchers to explore details about human behaviour, emotion, personal characteristics, and a variety of other types of information that are closely related to the person's real life (Madrigal and McClain 2012: 1). This is important for this research since the main aim is to understand how the visitors interpret and receive contemporary art and exhibitions.

2) Qualitative research has a high level of contextual sensibility. For instance, according to Caralho and White, the quantitative approach is particularly suitable for exploring and understanding the 'identifications' that are shared by a specific range of individuals

(1997: 13). Roller and Javarakas agree with Caralho and White, and believe that through providing 'a sensibility and depth of understanding of the contextual, emotional and social factors that define meaning within a group and for (an) individual', the sensibility will enable the researcher to gain 'a complex view that can reveal patterns in behaviour and stimulate new sights' (2005: 183). This contextual sensibility will enable the present researcher to explore key issues around the visitors' social contexts.

3) Qualitative research enables its users to enhance the quality of their interviews. For example, within the open-ended or semi-structured interviews or focus groups, the face-to-face contact with the interviewee allows researchers to obtain 'more accurate and detailed information' by asking follow-up questions and probing for responses (Caralho and White 1997: 32). In addition, this research method also gives researchers an opportunity to observe or record a respondent's non-verbal responses, such as pauses and overlaps or body movements (Silverman 2006: 45). This characteristic of the qualitative survey allows the researcher to obtain an extra dimension of depth that this research aims to acquire.

Despite the advantages described above, qualitative research also has its weaknesses. Firstly, researchers might encounter difficulties in avoiding the potential biases introduced by data collecting and interpreting methods. Specifically, within qualitative surveys such as interviews or focus groups, the interviewer's personal contact with interviewees might assert emotional pressures on the interviewees and thus affect his or her responses. In addition, the researcher's own 'preconceptions, attitudes and expectations' might also negatively influence their observation-gathering and interpretation (Roller and Lavrakas 2005: 184).

Secondly, another potential risk of using qualitative research methods is that the method cannot always generate findings that reach the same level of generalisability and predictability as quantitative research (Rubin and Babbie 2010: 36). In the qualitative survey, the amount of qualitative data that is generated by the different content and circumstances of interviews are often restricted by the sample size of the research. Even though the 'open-ended' nature of qualitative research can produce large amounts of data, it can lead to analytical difficulties for the researchers; such research can provide an accurate picture of 'the prevalence of a phenomenon but not necessarily of its extent or pervasiveness' (Carvalho and White 1997: 14); 3). There are two types of bias that might relate to this issue. One is what Keats called 'self-serving bias of distortion', which reflects an interviewee's inclination to 'portray the speaker in a favourable light' (2000: 61). Another one can stem from the cues about desirable answers that the interviewer may have inadvertently provided during the survey, which will lead to a higher possibility of creating biased results than is found with quantitative research (Carvalho and White 1997: 14).

For instance, despite the advantages of the qualitative research (e.g. enabling the researcher to conduct in-depth analysis or examination of specific cultural and social phenomenon, or to explore the factors that have not aroused attention in previous studies), the qualitative approach is critiqued as a research method that cannot justify the generality of the findings. In other words, due to the time consuming qualitative research process, one might argue that this approach might be prone to research based on special or occasional cases (Bellavance 2008: Aktingson 2011). For example, through conducting a qualitative study of six social elites, Bellavance (2011) challenges

Chan and Goldthorpe's argument that one's cultural taste is closely tied to their social status (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007). Within this account, he separates six different types of cultural eclecticism among those who share a high social status, which includes 'omnivorous neo-philanthropist', 'creative entrepreneur', agents from a 'higher technical world', 'a neoclassical from above' and 'a neoclassical from below' (Ibid). However, it is arguable that the massive and abundant qualitative data might mislead researchers to concentrate on the detailed differences that interviewees express while neglecting the similarities.

This is evident in Bellavance's research (2008). For him, no matter how distinctively those interviewees understand or participate within non-elite art genres or practice, all the six elites in the survey did share some common identities with the conservative patterns of cultural choice. Take the view of one survey participant as an example: 'we are not far from the day when we will go to see it in museums' (Ibid: 198). The first interviewee presented a high degree of openness and positive attitude towards a typical non-elite art form, urban graffiti. The emotional words such as 'strongest curiosity' and 'greatest admiration' that the interviewee expressed to describe his feelings on the art genre would probably perfectly confirm for Bellavance the existence of unique forms of omnivorousness. However, it is also easy to notice that the interviewee was very sensitive towards the boundary between legitimate artwork and popular artwork and the hierarchised cultural field. As a result, his reaction might also be interpreted as a kind of upside-down cultural goodwill due to the pressures from an increasingly democratic social environment or an effort to cover acknowledgement of social inequality. Such a contradiction is a possible interpretation that can also be found among the other five consumption categories, which would thus disrupt Bellavance's findings to some extent.

Thus far, the previous sections have shown that both quantitative and qualitative methods have their own strengths and weaknesses. This is the reason for which this research adopts a mixed method approach. Specifically, given the limitations of both quantitative and qualitative research, it is not difficult to understand why researchers who exclusively devote themselves to one method are commonly critiqued by those who prefer the alternative method. In this respect, one might suggest solving the methodological issues through applying mixed method research. For instance, Johnson and Turner suggest that ‘method should be mixed in a way that has complementary strengths and no overlapping weakness’ (2003: 299). For those who align with this argument, the quantitative element to the research can provide a strong generalisable base from which to draw statistically verifiable conclusions, and the qualitative element can provide more detailed insights into the visitors’ perception towards survey questions. To test this argument, the next section concentrates on whether mixed method research enables the researcher of this current study to have a better understanding of the visitors’ cultural preferences and their interpretation of contemporary art.

4.2 The rationale for adopting a mixed method research

The section above introduces the methodological advantages and the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The debate between the two approaches for the status of the superior research model has been called the ‘quantitative-qualitative debate’ (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998: 3) or ‘paradigm wars’ (Reichardt and Rallis

1994). Though one might tend to resolve this conflict by promoting mixed method research (MMR), the validation and reliability of MMR have been questioned by many scholars. For instance, during the 'war', Lincoln and Guba (1985) claimed that the quantitative and qualitative approaches should not be combined in any way. Despite the prevalence of the doubt towards the compatibility of the qualitative and quantitative paradigms, the compelling success that mixed method research (MMR) has achieved promotes the popularity of MMR in the academic world (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998: 5).

For instance, in the realm of sociological studies, the combination of the quantitative-qualitative methods is a popular approach that researchers tend to adopt for exploring the relationship between various kinds of capitals, structured forces, powers, and individual consumption patterns of cultural products (Hanquinet 2013; Bennett et al 2009). This is evident in Hanquinet's work (2013). For her, the adoption of mixed methods research enables her to locate the accounts of modern visitors through not only statistical data but also a necessary qualitative supplement. In line with Hanquinet's comment, Deacon also believes that the mixed method research approach can produce not only the 'checks and balances to the excess of each', but that it can also provide an opportunity for exploring more creative possibilities in the social space (2011:101). In this regard, the efficiency of MMR for addressing specific kinds of research questions is probably the reason Tashakkori and Teddlie suggest that the continued debate for the single best research method is 'no longer useful' (1998: 5).

According to Creswell, MMR emerged as a popular research method in the 1980s, and

can be described as the approach of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The MMR integrates the two forms and uses distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks (2009: 4). Tashakkori and Teddlie in line with Creswell's argument, and for them MMR is a kind of 'methodological eclecticism' (2010: 483). Through 'selecting and then synergistically integrating' appropriate techniques from the domains of quantitative and qualitative research methods, MMR enables its supporters to take advantage of both qualitative and quantitative methods (ibid). Having defined MMR, this section will move on to understand the paradigm through its philosophical logics (e.g. ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology).

One of the paradigms underlying MMR is the pragmatic assumption (Creswell 2009: 4). Many scholars (e.g. Creswell 2009) have defined the pragmatic paradigm. To be more specific: 1) methodologically, the paradigm encourages researchers to freely choose research methods, techniques and research procedures according to the objective of their research; 2) pragmatists do not consider the world have a single and absolute nature, and instead, tend to consider the social space as a multi-dimensional one, and so, in a similar way, they keep an open attitude toward both quantitative and qualitative data; 3) in terms of epistemology, it is unnecessary for pragmatists to seriously consider whether the reality is dependent on or independent from the human mind, which means they can apply different research methods within a single research project; 4) pragmatists include both inductive and deductive logics in the same study, which allows researchers to pursue the research inferences (prediction) and research results (a finding based on research data) at the same time; 5) the use of the two different research methods allows pragmatists to achieve a generalised and context-sensitive

research finding.

An explanatory sequential mixed method approach has been selected as the primary analytic method of this current research. Creswell defines this research method as ‘one in which the researcher first conducts quantitative research, analyses the results and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail with qualitative research’ (2002: 15). Many reasons contributed to this decision. First, the objective of this current research is not only to explore whether the intersectional power-related cultural preferences can be identified in China, but also to identify the specific kind of experience, motivation, expectation, cultural norms, and social issues that constructed the detected behaviour of Chinese contemporary art visitors. Regarding the nature of this current study, what the researcher needs is a context-sensitive approach that can provide a deeper and broader understanding of generalised quantitative data. In this respect, MMR was selected to gain a detailed understanding of the visitors’ cultural tastes. As Carvalho and White suggested, by utilising MMR, researchers can explore research questions that cannot be addressed by unitarily relying on quantitative or qualitative approaches. The sequential combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods provides the researcher an opportunity to ‘identify issues or obtain information on variables not obtained by quantitative surveys’ (Carvalho and White 1997: 21). As mentioned early in section 2.2, the methodological and paradigmatic nature of qualitative research can sufficiently fulfil the objective of enriching the quantitative findings.

Second, MMR allows researchers to be more confident in their findings. Johnson and Turner agree on this point and claim that the mixing of quantitative and qualitative

research methods will result in the most accurate and complete description of the phenomena under investigation (2003: 299). Indeed, the degree of coherence between the findings of the two analytic phases helps the researcher to justify the validation and reliability of his or her findings. Even when the qualitative research includes data that does not support the quantitative research-based results, the qualitative data can still be used to: 1) broaden the interviewer's understanding of the research findings; or 2) generate new research questions and experimental expectations (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998: 13).

Lastly, although MMR provides a more flexible way for helping researchers to address research questions, scholars still have concerns regarding the rationality of employing the two-method approach in aiming to understand the same aspect of phenomena or individual situations. For instance, Seale et al. (2002) believe that even when quantitative and qualitative research methods are often used in understanding phenomena, they might not be the best way to describe those phenomena. In offering a solution for this dilemma, Seale et al. also suggest that because 'the approaches are incommensurate does not mean that multiple methods cannot be combined in a single study if it is done for a complementary purpose' (ibid). To avoid this issue, a qualitative approach has been chosen in order to gain complementary insights into the findings of the quantitative analysis.

In summary, this section has shown the strengths of MMR. All those advantages make MMR a suitable analytical approach for investigating the mechanism of cultural consumption in the PRC. By adopting this method, a subsequent qualitative analysis can provide further and richer information to not only support but also explain the

quantitative findings. This section has also highlighted the weaknesses of MMR (paradigmatic incompetence), aiming to avoid this issue and to apply a more systematic and rigorous analysis. The following section introduces the analytic tools and the analytic processes in both the quantitative and qualitative phases.

4.3 Choosing appropriate analytic tools

4.3.1 A introduction to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Two-Step Cluster Analysis (STCA)

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, one of the primary objectives of this current research is to explore how the field of cultural consumption in China is socially structured and to what extent the cultural hierarchy (if applicable) correlates to the social structures through an analysis of art museum visitors. To fulfil this research purpose, the primary tasks of the quantitative phase of this current study are to explore whether the visitors' cultural tastes follow certain patterns and what factors contribute to the distinction among the visitors who do not belong to the same 'interpretive community' (Fish 1980; Hooper-Greenhill 2000) or have various 'cultural profiles' (Hanquinet 2015). In the field of cultural sociology, the use of cluster analysis is a well-established approach in separating survey participants based on their cultural preferences (e.g. Savage and Gayo 2011; Everitt et al. 2011: 9). Many scholars have defined this analytic approach in their works. For instance, according to Henning and Meila, the aim of adopting cluster analysis is to 'divide data into groups (clusters) that are meaningful, useful, or both' (2016: 6). Leese et al. are in line with and define cluster analysis as a method of providing 'objective and stable classifications' (2011: 1).

Gordon gives a detailed introduction to the term ‘clusters’. For him (1999), clusters represent the relationship between internal factors and external factors, coherence and insulation, and homogeneity and separation.

Although the analytical method has been considered ‘the most basic method of estimating similarities’ (Romesburg 2004: 8), it does not necessarily mean that the scholars who apply this technique need to sacrifice the complexity and richness of their research aims for a less sophisticated analytical instrument. This is exemplified in the work of many scholars in the realm of socio-cultural studies. Those sociologists have agreed that cluster analysis is a practical and efficient approach to understanding cultural tastes and activities (e.g., Savage and Gayo 2009, 2011; Van Eijck 2011; Hanquinet 2013). For instance, in Van Eijck’s (2011) study on social differentiation in music taste categories, the findings of the factor and cluster analysis suggest that the music taste genres in the Netherlands can be categorised into three hierarchical groups (highbrow, pop, and folk). In his research, Van Eijck also identifies an omnivore taste among the members of the ‘new middle class’ who have preferences for a broad range of cultural goods. Savage and Gayo’s (2011) account is another example of studies that successfully obtain results by applying cluster analysis. In their account, Savage and Gayo challenge the popularisation of the omnivore–univore hypothesis by highlighting the ‘subtle’ differences underlying the integration of the individuals’ claimed tastes for classic and pop genres. For them, the explanatory power of the omnivore model is limited to understanding the criteria and the disciplines that separate their survey participants into six clusters. In her account, Hanquinet (2013) also uses cluster analysis as the primary approach for setting up different types of individual cultural profiles. In doing so, Hanquinet illustrates the multidimensionality and the complexity of

individual cultural preferences.

There are also some additional advantages to using STCA. For instance, first, in comparison to the traditional cluster analytical methods (e.g., hierarchy and k-means clustering analysis), STCA is well-known for its effectiveness in working with a large-scale database (Garson 2009; Altas et al. 2013; Rousseeuw 1987; Shih et al. 2010; Everitt et al. 2011; Norušis 2012; Chorianopoulos 2015: 318). In this respect, considering the large number of survey participants involved in this present study, STCA was chosen as the way to conduct further data mining. Second, STCA can work, simultaneously, with both continuous and categorical variables. The procedure can also generate many clusters automatically after the calculation (Trpkova and Tevdovski 2009: 89). Third, STCA offers graphic solutions for displaying tables and charts, such as significant output, or important predictions for each of the variables. This feature enables researchers to easily determine and interpret the composition of the clusters and identify the importance of specific variables that contribute to the module. Finally, STCA enables researchers to apply Outlier Treatment (OT) to their data, which controls the negative impact of the cases that are different from other cases. According to Norušis, such an issue is directly linked to an increasing overall number of clusters and fewer homologous clusters (2010: 384). Zhang et al. (1996: 107) consider these kinds of cases as the outliers that are separated from the fine sub-clusters. In this regard, STCA detects and separates the atypical value (outliers) during the calculation and tries to either fit these atypical values into the sub-clusters without increasing the cluster size or build another cluster for the cases.

The above section illustrates the efficiency of cluster analysis in identifying communitive groups in a database. However, cluster analysis has its weakness. The stability and the validation of the results of the clustering process are difficult to measure and to guarantee. To be more specific, researchers must subjectively ‘decide [on] the optimal number of clusters that fits a data set’ (Halkidi et al. 2010). A bias may be introduced when there is a lack of theoretical guidelines for measuring the quality (goodness-of-fit index) of the cluster assignments (Cheong and Lee 2008). To avoid this methodological shortcoming, this current research adopted two measures: the Silhouette Measure of Cohesion and Separation in two-step cluster analysis, and a stability and validation test. The section that follows will introduce the two approaches.

First, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Two-Step Cluster Analysis (STCA) was chosen to explore the potential clusters in the database. In this type of analysis, two phases of statistical calculation are used in the algorithm. Specifically, similar to the balanced iterative reducing and clustering using the hierarchies (BIRCH) algorithm, designed by Zhang et al. (1996), the first, or pre-clustering, step of clustering in STCA explores the dense regions by rejecting the outliers (clusters with few cases). In the second step, pre-clustered features are distributed into numbers of clusters based on the distance measures of the likelihoods that are calculated for the continuous and categorical variables (Everitt et al. 2011: 97). After the analyses, STCA provides an evaluation of the cohesion and the separation of the analysis output (the silhouette measure of cohesion and separation). To be more specific, STCA measures the quality of clustering by displaying a graphic snapshot based on the silhouette scores introduced by Rousseeuw (1987) (as cited in Kaufman and Rousseeuw 1990: 41). In the STCA output, a good result refers to an average silhouette coefficient higher than 0.5, which

indicates strong evidence of the cluster structure, while a coefficient less than 0.2 represents a poor solution (Chorianopoulos 2015: 130). The two above-mentioned values were used as a referential value to determine the number of clusters, the aim of which is to avoid the bias caused by subjectivity.

The secondary measures that are taken to test the stability and the validation of the resulting cluster partitions are as follows: replication analysis, supplementary analysis, and interviews. Firstly, by following Milligan and Hirtle's (2012) suggestion, replication analysis is introduced in the quantitative phase to measure the stability of the clustering solution. For Milligan and Hirtle, if the clustering result is stable, a researcher should be able to obtain similar results from applying cluster analysis to the second sample from the same source and set of variables. Within the quantitative data analysis phase of this current research, the case-split module in the SPSS is used to separate the sample into two random halves. Next, Cohen's kappa coefficient is calculated to measure the agreement between the two equivalent clustering solutions. Second, in aiming to measure the validity of the clustering solution, the quality of the final clustering result is also assessed with supplementary analysis (bivariate analysis). According to Skinner (1981), an attempt to establish external validity should be involved in the process of developing a classification system. Specifically, if the clusters show a correlation with variables that are associated with existing theoretical frameworks, then this supports the classification. Eight variables related to conservative aesthetic claims are tested and cross-tabulated with the 'cultural profiles' of the visitors. The design of the variables is based on the theoretical framework within which the volume of embodied cultural capital held by an individual determines his or her position

in the hierarchy of cultural consumption (e.g., Bourdieu 1979). This test's result provides an assessment of the validation of the clustering solution while enriching the characteristics of the visitor categories. The third approach is that, by the same token, the information obtained in the qualitative analysis can also be used to measure the validation of the segments. In exploring whether and how the visitors in different categories distance themselves from one another by expressing their characterised cultural tastes and interpretations of contemporary art, the findings of the qualitative study phase can also be used to assess the differentiation in tastes among the visitors sharing different memberships in the categories.

In summary, this section has illustrated the methodological strengths and weaknesses of STCA. This section has also illustrated how the disadvantages of this analysis tool can be avoided by adopting more statistical measurements. A more detailed introduction to the primary analytical tool (thematic analysis) in the qualitative phase of this study is given in the following section.

4.3.2 A introduction to thematic analysis

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, the qualitative phase of this current research is designed to fill the knowledge gap in the quantitative data analysis and provide further evidence of the validation of the clustering solution. To fulfil the two above-mentioned research purposes, thematic analysis has been chosen as the primary analytical technique. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (2006: 6). Guest et

al. (2012) also tend to incorporate thematic analysis based on its practicality. For them, the thematic approach is ‘a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible’ (2012: 20). Two main reasons contribute to this methodological selection. First, the research aims and the methodological arrangement (using the mixed-research method and the method of recruiting survey participants) of this current research determine that the analytical method in the qualitative phase should employ an inductive approach (data-driven method) rather than a theoretical or a deductive one (the analysis is oriented by the pre-existing theoretical framework or the researcher’s analytical preconceptions). The reason is that, similar to the rationality of choosing cluster analysis as the primary technique in the quantitative phase, maintaining independence from the existing theoretical framework in socio-cultural studies is also vital for understanding the visitors at the qualitative stage. An exploratory and theoretically value-free approach provides a solution to avoid the biases caused by pre-labelling the value of the cultural genres and pre-determining the social meaning of the detected patterns of cultural consumption (if applicable). In this way, the researcher can focus on the influences of Chinese historical, cultural and social contexts on the visitors’ cultural consumption and how these contribute to the understanding of the cultural divisions that are identified in the quantitative phase. Thus, the theoretical nature of thematic analysis as an inductive approach determines its high degree of appropriateness for this current research.

Additionally, thematic analysis shares many methodological advantages with a range of essential qualitative analytical methods while enabling the researchers to avoid issues caused by theoretical and epistemological constraints (e.g., Boyatzis 1998; Braun and

Clarke 2006; Guest et al. 2012; Sparkes and Smith 2013). For instance, both thematic analysis and grounded theory aim to develop knowledge. However, thematic analysis is different from grounded theory in two important respects: unlike grounded theory analysis, the flexibility of thematic analysis enables its users to avoid making an ‘implicit’ theoretical commitment (Braun and Clarke 2006: 85) and being restricted by a set of rigorous data collection and analysis procedures (e.g. theoretical sampling, open coding and axial coding). To be more specific, the grounded theory method is designed to construct a theory based on a systematic, inductive and comparative approach. Aiming to develop a theory by exhausting the explanatory possibilities of their empirical data, the researchers need to start analysing the data at a very early stage of their sampling procedure (e.g., theoretical sampling). At the end of the data analysis, a novel theory is expected to be developed, through which the theoretical categories emerging from the data set can be explained. In contrast to grounded theory, thematic analysis summarises the data into themes, based on the similarities and the differences across the data set, and then seeks to interpret it in a ‘deep, freewheeling, aesthetically’ pleasing way (Sparkes and Smith 2013: 123). Regarding the supplementary characteristic of the qualitative phase of this current research and the limited data collection period (three months), it might be argued that thematic analysis should be deemed as a more suitable, practical and efficient analytical method for this situation. Indeed, the reason is that the primary task of the qualitative phase in this current research was to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the empirical findings of the quantitative data analysis. In this regard, the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to conduct a qualitative data analysis that was sensitive to the previous quantitative findings. It does not necessarily mean that the quantitative findings completely orient the analysis.

Despite the advantages of thematic analysis, this analytical approach has its weaknesses. First, researchers might build biased arguments based on an unfounded analysis: that is, the interpretations are not backed up by or are even contradicted by the data. Many scholars have noticed the issue in their accounts (e.g., Jones et al. 2000; King and Horrocks 2010; Guest et al. 2012; Sparks and Smith 2013). To assess the quality of thematic analysis, correspondent feedback (member validation) is applied to the findings of thematic analysis based on King and Horrocks' (2010) suggestion. In other words, all the participants in the interviews are invited to re-examine whether and how well the researchers' interpretations match their intentional meanings. Additionally, the degree of coherence between the findings of the quantitative and qualitative phases can provide further evidence of the validation of the qualitative findings.

Second, the flexibility of thematic analysis might have a negative influence on the validation and the reliability of the qualitative findings. As a flexible analytical method, thematic analysis is widely used yet 'poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 77). In this regard, one might question the quality of the findings of the thematic analysis due to the unsystematic procedures of data analysis and inexplicit methodological arrangements (e.g., a decision to give a rich description of the data set or its particular aspects) that are adopted or chosen by the researcher. To introduce a more systematic and rigorous method of data analysis, the following section answers some core questions that relate to the design of thematic analysis in this current research (e.g. the procedure of analysis and how the 'themes' were detected and selected).

Firstly, considering the nature of this analytical approach (as part of this explorative,

sequential and mixed-method current research), the analysis is social constructionist rather than essentialist or realist. According to Braun and Clarke, the terms essentialist and realist refer to the researcher's epistemological tendency to 'theorise motivations, experience, and meaning in a straightforward way' by assuming a unidirectional relationship between meaning, language and experience (2006: 14). In contrast, Braun and Clarke go on to argue that constructionist-oriented researchers are inclined to unravel social structures which shape individuals' practices. Regarding the characteristics of the two approaches, I argue that the latter method is a more practical way to present the socio-cultural meaning of the visitors' cultural tastes, and therefore should be applied when conducting further data analysis.

Lastly, the criteria of determining the themes were not based on the prevalence of the themes in the data, but how they could be used to understand the visitors' cultural preferences and interpretations. Braun and Clarke in their article define the term 'theme' as follows: 'A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (2006: 10). For Braun and Clarke, a qualified theme should achieve a certain level of prevalence/frequency within each data item as well as prevalence across the entire data set. They also believe that there are many ways to define the term prevalence rather than exclusively considering it as a quantifiable measure. In this current research, prevalence is primarily determined by how efficiently a pattern can represent the visitors' interpretation of the contemporary artwork rather than the frequency in which it emerges across the whole data set. The main reason for adopting this criterion was as follows: the aims of this research phase were to explore the specific forms of interpretive pattern that the visitors utilised to engage with the cultural forms,

and how the visitors forged their cultural tastes within China's socio-cultural context and structural conditions. The characteristics of the current study determine that, if the visitors tended to differentiate their cultural profiles by preferring a specific set of cultural goods in relation to the homology of their categorical identities, some key themes may be less likely to be the most prevalent across the data set. For instance, a tendency to interpret contemporary artwork as 'advanced' cultural forms may only represent the attitude of a limited number of the visitors. In this respect, how practically and efficiently the theme could be used to understand the visitors was more important than the prevalence of the theme in the data.

In summary, the above section has introduced the definition, advantages, and weaknesses of the two primary analytic tools and to what extent those two methods can be deemed as satisfactory methods in this current research. The following part of this chapter engages with the practical aspects of the methodological arrangements of this current research. Specifically, Section 4.4 introduces the principles of survey participants' recruitment and research ethics, questionnaire and interview question design, and museums and galleries selection.

4.4 Survey participants' recruitment and research ethics, questionnaire and interview question design, museums and galleries selection

This subsection includes three parts. The beginning part of this subsection introduces the criteria for recruiting survey participants in the quantitative and qualitative part of this current research. This section is also concerned with the research ethics in this current research. The following part analyses the rationality of questionnaire and

interview question design. The last part of this chapter section introduces the three contemporary art museums and galleries where this current research took place.

4.4.1 Survey participants' recruitment and research ethics

The field works of this current research was conducted at three contemporary art museums and galleries (National Art Museum of China; Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art and Shengzhi Space) in Beijing between May and August 2015. The process of data collection included two phases: a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews. The questionnaire survey took place at all the three selected art museums and galleries at specific times from the 8th of May to the 17th of July. (A more detailed time frame of the questionnaire survey will be in the following section of this chapter: Quantitative survey). Due to the methodological nature of the qualitative survey in this current research (as a follow-up and a complementary survey), the visitors who completed the questionnaire were randomly invited to participate in the interviews before the end of the field work (before the 31st of July). The second part of this chapter (Qualitative survey) presents a systematic introduction about the specific arrangement of this qualitative research phase for recruiting the interviewees. The criteria of research ethics are also introduced within the abovementioned two sections of this chapter.

Quantitative survey

In order to avoid bias and random sampling error, self-administered questionnaires were delivered in person at the front door of each selected art museum or gallery at specific times: mornings (9:00am to 12:00pm) and afternoons (2:00pm to 5:00pm) for three to

four non-consecutive weeks (see table 6).

Timetable:	
Week 1 (8 th -15 th May), week 4 (1 st -7 th May) and week 7 (24 th – 1 st Jul)	three-star contemporary art institution: the NAMoC
Week 2 (16 th -23 rd May), week 5 (8 th -15 th Jun) and week 8 (2 nd -9 th Jul)	two-star contemporary art gallery or art museum: the UCCA
Week 3 (24 th -31 st May), week 6 (16 th -23 rd Jun) and week 9 (10 th -17 th Jul)	one-star contemporary art gallery or art museum: the SS

Table 6 Timetable for questionnaire delivery and collection (specific times were determined according to the duration of the exhibitions)

Within the three months of the fieldwork, the researcher of this current study collected data from 2376 visitors in the observed exhibitions (1231 visitors in the NAMoC, 686 in the UCCA and 459 visitors in the SS). The reason for choosing this number is that, since all the monitored contemporary art institutions in China refuse to release their visitor data²⁰ (e.g. the annual number of visitors), the design of this current research could only draw inspiration from pre-existing studies in the field of socio-cultural research (e.g. Bourdieu et al. 1969). To be more specific, Bourdieu et al.'s cross-country survey was based on a total number of 9226 respondents in 21 museums across several European countries (Greece, Holland, Poland, and France; 1969:117). Due to the unique qualities of each institution (determined by the size of their exhibition area, annual visitor numbers, annual exhibition numbers and their rank in tourist guidebooks), the number of expected respondents in each museum will vary. The anticipated number

²⁰ All the three contemporary art museums and galleries do not release the annual visitor numbers on their website.

of respondents for each museum (three contemporary art galleries in total) was: 600 for the National Art Museum of China (NAMoC); 500 for the Ullens Centre of Contemporary Art (UCCA); and 300 for the Shengzhi Space (SS). Similar to the data collection strategy mentioned above, the participants for the interviews were randomly selected at the same time as the quantitative survey took place.

The principles of research ethics were carefully designed and were strictly followed. All the questionnaires were delivered by the researcher of this current research in person. Before the start of the questionnaire survey, the researcher guaranteed that all the survey participants were informed about the purpose of this study; the related information about the researcher of this current research; the participants' rights; and how the data will be protected with confidentiality and anonymity. There was also a written introduction about those information at the beginning part of the questionnaires (See Annexes 1). The visitors were told that they have their right to refuse the questionnaire survey. Due to the nature of this research, the researcher also informed the visitors that the study only focuses on a specific type of visitors (the participants needed to be Chinese visitors over 18 years old).

The above-part of this section has discussed the rationality of selecting the number of survey participants; the procedures of questionnaire delivery and the criteria of research ethics. The key strengths of the measurements were that these approaches enabled the researcher to avoid bias introduced by sampling error, and to ensure the rationality, generality, and reliability of the research findings in the quantitative data analysis stage. The following part of this section introduces the data collecting methods in the qualitative survey.

Qualitative interviews

Within the qualitative analysis phase of this current research, a face-to-face structured interview (30 minutes inside the gallery or 60 minutes outside the gallery) took place (see Table 7), the aim of which was to establish a deep understanding of cultural preferences, taste, and habits of different types of visitors. Three to four interviewees were randomly selected from the visitors who have completed the questionnaire at each venue (according to the size of visitors of the target museum or gallery). There are three main reasons to choose this number of interviewees at the three exhibiting venues. First, the complementary characteristic of the qualitative survey in this current mixed methods research determines that the present researcher can only recruit a limited number of participants. In this current research, the primary purpose of the interviews was to explore the possible definition of cultural tastes rather than the prevalence and the stability of the interpretive boundaries between potential visitor groups. In this regard, collecting qualitative data from a large number of participants in interviews was not necessarily the priority of the qualitative survey. Second, the use of small sample size in qualitative studies does not necessarily mean that the researcher of this current research needed to sacrifice the quality of their research findings. This argument is reasonable since there are no guidelines for determining standard simple sizes in qualitative research (e.g. Morse 1994; Patton 1990; Guest et al. 2006; Vogt et al. 2012). Lee et al (2002) would in line with this argument too since they believe that few participants are required for studies that use more than one method. Last, considering the limitation of time, the present researcher could only recruit a limited number of interviewees. Patterns (1990) aware the objective factors that might determine sample

size in qualitative researches. For him, the factors including the time allowed, resources available and research aims are more important for determining qualitative sample size. Within this current research, the current researcher needed to collect a large quantity of questionnaires to support the validity and the stability of the findings in the quantitative stage. To achieve this research aim in three months, it's reasonable to keep the number of the interviews at a practical level.

During this time, the researcher invited the visitors who had completed the quantitative survey and had illustrated their interest for participating the follow-up interviews (at the end of the questionnaire [see annexes 1], the researcher asked the participants of the quantitative survey whether they like to participate interview) to attend the interviews. As shown in Table 7, not all the interviews were taking places within the three exhibiting venues since some of the interviewees preferred to talk in some more private spaces such as coffee and tea rooms. The visitors who accepted an interview outside the exhibiting venue were contacted using the information (through email or contact number) they left on the questionnaire. In total, 11 in-depth interviews that were randomly conducted between May and August 2015. 3 of 11 interviewees (Fan, Ziyang and Feng) accepted the interviews outside the three selected art museums and galleries.

Participant	Location	Gender	Age
Monai	National Art Museum of China (NAMoC)	Female	24
Qing	NAMoC	Male	49
Fan	Starbuds, Dongzhimenwai Street	Female	42
Mingxi	NAMoC	Female	21
Yu	NAMoC	Female	29

Xin	Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA)	Female	23
Ziyan	At Café, 798 Art District	Female	25
Lu	UCCA	Male	25
Xunni	UCCA	Female	36
Feng	SPR Coffee, Wusi Street	Male	75
Dong	SS	Male	36

Table 7 Interviews at the three monitored contemporary art galleries and museums (to protect the personal information of the interviewees, the names in the table are pseudonyms)

Regarding the plan to recruit interviewees, one might point out the weakness of this arrangement: the participants in the interview might fail to represent all the visitor groups illustrated by the quantitative data analysis. To address this issue, this researcher prepared a back-up plan before the start of the interviews: if more qualitative data were required, the researcher planned to conduct further telephone interviews with the visitors who provided contact information on the questionnaire and agreed to attend an interview. The present research did not contain this back-up plan since the collected qualitative data were sufficient to understand the meanings of the visitors' cultural preferences.

The following of research ethics was also vital in this study stage. Before starting the face-to-face interview, the information sheet and consent form were given to the participants. The participants were given time to read the information leaflet and consent form (see Annexes 2) and to ask related questions before they signed the form or made an oral agreement to participate in the survey (recorded by digital audio recorder). The research guaranteed that all the interview respondents were aware of their rights, risks, and benefits of participation before the interviews took place. All the interviewees were also informed that their personal data acquired will be treated confidentially. The researcher ensured that no personal identifiable data were used

directly without having been anonymised by using pseudonyms for the participants. All pseudonyms and participants' identities were typed into digital documents and stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer. The researcher of this current research then transcribed the semantic content of interviews that I digitally recorded. The qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 11 was used both to transcribe and analyse the interviews. During the procedure, every interview was transcribed, saved, and sorted separately into chronological order. To avoid any kind of data leaking, all transcriptions were encrypted.

To conclude this section, the literature identifies the key criteria and arrangements of survey participant selection and research ethics. Approaches were adopted to guarantee the random selection of survey participants in two study stages and the rights of the interviewees. The section that follows introduces the design of questions in both quantitative and qualitative surveys.

4.4.2 Questionnaire and interview question design

The questionnaire (see Annexes 1) included two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, visitors were asked to answer some basic questions related to their demographic status. The design of these questions aimed to collect data that would be helpful in understanding the characteristics of the identified visitor groups (if applicable). The second section of the questionnaire explored the visitors' tastes toward the listed music and literature genres and their knowledge of contemporary art theories and art history. Specifically, the primary aim of this phase was to identify cultural consumption patterns on the basis of ten types of music genres with fifty geographical

and cultural featured music options, ten types of books with fifty geographical and cultural featured literary options, eight conservative aesthetic claims and the names of eight selected artists. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 22 statistical software.

The design of the questions created for this research partly followed the general contours of Bourdieu's approach, which was employed in his account *The Love of Art* (1977). It is important to keep in mind the possible influence of the omnivorousness, individualisation, the changing content of the aesthetics, the development of the cultural field and other variables such as gender, age etc. that can have an impact on the formulation of an individual's cultural practices and preferences. In this regard, the design of the questions does not exclusively focus on the 'pedagogic expectations of the public' (Ibid: 5) as Bourdieu did in *The Love of Art*. Instead, the analysis is also sensitive to various forces (e.g. the influences of gender, local cultural policies, and age) within the multidimensional cultural context.

An additional strategy for question design that this current research draws from is Bennett et al.'s inspired development of Bennett et al.'s questionnaire design approach in the UK (2009:36-39). They use a wide range of cultural genres among different fields of cultural consumption (e.g. music genres, TV programmes) as variables to explore the visitors' patterned lifestyles and cultural preferences. However, due to the availability of unique features and purposes of this research, the design of the questions differs from their approaches in several significant aspects. First, following the approach of Bennett et al (2009), the analysis tests the influence of many demographic indicators such as class, gender, and age on constructing the variations of cultural tastes.

However, the effort they made to involve an ethnic sample in the survey will not be considered in the questionnaire design and administration process of this study. The reason for this exclusion is that this current study primarily concentrates on the exploration of how an individual's national identity rather than their ethnicity or race influences various cultural preferences. Rather than ignoring the matter of ethnicity, the possible findings regarding the relationship between national identity and specific cultural tendencies might provide another chance to figure out the puzzle that Bennett et al (2009) faced in measuring the significance of cross-boundary flow of cultures in shaping cultural consumption patterns. Third, due to the limitation of time available for conducting this research, this study will only examine the participants' relations to the fields of literature, music and art rather than a whole set of cultural activities and tastes as in Bennett et al.'s study. Finally, the questions will include Chinese traditional music and literature genres in order to explore the locations of specific Chinese traditional art forms in the cultural field. The selection of music and literature genres was based on a series of discussions with a group of professionals who work as artists or in an occupation related to contemporary art and sociological studies. Specifically, the team includes four members: Zhang Liping, the head of fine art department in Xiamen University; Qin Jian, the leader of multimedia studies in the fine art department of Xiamen University; Zhang Kuo, contemporary artist who works in the Songzhuang Art Zone; and Cui Xiao, doctoral student in the sociology department of the Beijing Normal University. Discussions were arranged twice before the start of the fieldwork, and each conference call lasted for at least an hour. The purpose of the first meeting was to select music and literature that can be representative of highbrow, middlebrow, and popular cultural categories. The discussion was based on the analysis of the related materials and information that was collected from various types of resources such as magazines,

social media, and newspapers. The second meeting refined and confirmed the content of the three patterns of tastes.

There were six questions designed for a 40-minute face-to-face structured interview, which aimed to establish a deep understanding of the cultural preferences, tastes, and habits of different types of visitors. Specifically, questions 1 and 2 were designed to explore visitors' perception and reaction towards the specific exhibition and the contemporary art museums or galleries they attended. The detailed information from interviewees would give the researcher opportunities to trace and explore the multifaceted and complex forces and powers that motivate agents' cultural practices and preferences, as well as identify any unnoticed variables beneath the yes/no answers on the questionnaire. Questions 3 and 4 mainly concentrate on interviewees' specific artistic and cultural knowledge of contemporary art and other artistic genres such as music. Their purpose is to measure how well the interviewees understand the artistic genres they choose on the questionnaire. These questions can also separate an individual's 'cultural good will' from their actual mastery of art forms. Question 5's goal is to understand if the respondent understands the difference between domestic and western art forms. The final, sixth, question explores the possible homologous cultural practices among different visitors.

Thus far, this section introduces whether and how the survey questions were selected and designed. As the last part of this chapter, the next section introduces the selected contemporary art museums, their location, the criteria for their selection, and finally describes them briefly. The beginning part of the following section introduces the study's host city of Beijing, the home of six exhibiting venues, and describes why it

was chosen as a research area. The second part details the criteria of case study venue selection, and the last part of this subchapter presents some basic information on the six participating art museums and galleries.

4.4.3 Choosing art museums and galleries

As mentioned earlier, Beijing was selected to conduct the fieldwork of this current research. Beijing is the capital city of People's Republic of China. As the political and cultural centre of China, Beijing covers a geographic area of 16410 km² and has population of approximately 21 million in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China 2014). As the city with the second largest number of museums in the world (CNN 2014), one can also find a large number of contemporary art museums and galleries in the city. For example, there are 70 contemporary art galleries in the 798 Art Zone which located at north part of Beijing (798 Organisation 2014).

This current research was conducted at three contemporary art museums and galleries. There were three principles to selecting the field work institutions: in the first place, the museums or galleries should be in the same city. There are two reasons to set these criteria: first, traveling between cities can be extremely time consuming and expensive. Second, it can provide a relatively flexible time schedule for both interviewer and interviewee to arrange interviews. Third, the selected museums and galleries should adopt similar curatorial strategies. Many scholars have argued that different curatorial strategies have influence on the visitors' experience of the exhibitions. This measure can generally eliminate the different effects that different interpreting arrangements

have towards visitors. Fourth, there should not be a lengthy time gap between different exhibitions in the museum during the data collecting procedure. Fifth, the location of the selected contemporary art museums or galleries should not be in a same district or street. This approach enables me to engage with a wider range of visitors since different museums attract diverse audiences (Falk and Dierking 1992: 23); Lastly, I will select three types of museums according to their locations, number of annual exhibitions, sizes of exhibition spaces, and annual visitor numbers. The aim of this approach is also to collect generalizable and valuable visitor data. More specifically, the formula for calculating the levels of contemporary museums and galleries for this study will be:

$A \times B \times C = \text{the level of the venue.}$

Where A = annual number of exhibitions, B = annual number of visitors, and C = size of the exhibiting space.

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, museums that can be rated as three-star, or belonging to the highest level, are the National Art Museum of China (NAMoC) and Art Museum of China Central Academy of Fine Arts (cafa). The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) and Today's Art Museum (TAM) can be considered as two-star museums. Art museums listed on the lowest level are Shengzhi Space (SS) and White Box gallery (WB).

Based on the selective principles mentioned above, the NAMoC, UCCA and SS are more suitable place to conduct this current research. The following section introduces the locations, number of annual exhibitions, sizes of exhibition spaces, and annual visitor numbers of the six selected Chinese contemporary art museums and galleries, as well as whether admission is free or requires a ticket. This background information not

only presents some basic information about the condition and environment of the places the visitors engage with, but also provides readers a more detailed account of the city and the exhibition venues to follow them through their websites or established art literature.

National Art Museum of China (NAMoC)

The National Art Museum of China is located in Beijing, the capital city of China. The art museum has a very large-scale exhibiting area (8300 m²) and has the ability to arrange more than 25 exhibitions a year (around five to ten international temporal exhibitions annually). Annually, there are around one million visitors who attend the exhibitions hosted at this site. NAMoC has more than ten thousand collections (most of the collections at NAMoC are modern Chinese art work that have been created since the late nineteenth century). Most exhibitions at NAMoC are free except for some special exhibitions. The reason NAMoC is on the three-star museum list not only because of the number of exhibitions and collections it has, but also because of the fact that it is situated in the centre part of Beijing. In 2015, the NAMoC arranges 1428 exhibitions for not only traditional/modernist/contemporary Chinese art but also classic, modernist and contemporary western artworks from all over the world (NAMoC 2016)

Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA)

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art is the biggest private owned contemporary art gallery in China. The UCCA has 8000 m² exhibition space, which can hold around 20 exhibitions annually. In the year of 2012, UCCA received eighty thousand visitors.as

one of well-known contemporary galleries in China, the UCCA provides opportunities for worldwide contemporary artists to show their artworks. In 2014, there were ten contemporary exhibitions opened at the UCCA (UCCA 2016).

Shengzhi Space (SS)

Shengzhi Space is located in 798 Art Zone, Beijing. Like the NAMoC, Shengzhi Space also has official background. The gallery was co-invested and established by Hunan Publishing Investment Holding Group Group and Hunan Art Publishing service. In the gallery, artists can use around 300 m² exhibiting spaces to present their works of art. There are around 10 exhibitions organized by Shengzhi Space every year, which can attract around twenty thousand visitors annually (SS 2016). Shengzhi gallery has a strong interest in showing contemporary artworks, especially Chinese contemporary artists' works.

In conclusion, this chapter introduced different methodological arrangements of this current research. Based on the discussion, mixed method research has been chosen as the primary method of data analysis. Within the two-analysis phase, cluster analysis, external validation test, multinomial logistic regression, and thematic analysis are used to analysis the quantitative and qualitative data that collected from the NAMoC, UCCA and SS. The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents the analytic process and findings of the quantitative analysis.

Chapter 5 Identifying the types of visitors in the PRC

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 addresses whether and how the visitors to the three contemporary art museums and galleries reproduce social inequality in cultural fields by demonstrating their preferences for specific cultural goods, such as music and books. More specifically, in analysing the visitors' patterns of cultural consumption, Chapter 5 examines the various complex strategies that visitors utilised to engage with both local and cross-border cultural productions and goods. In this way, the chapter aims to explore whether and how the visitors are inclined to retain their distinct social positions or identities by consuming specific types of related cultural goods in present-day China.

To explore the visitors' patterned cultural consumption preferences and the criteria underpinning their divided tastes (if applicable), this chapter is divided into four sections. In each section I will examine a particular aspect of the collected quantitative data and perform my analysis, drawing conclusions about the meaning behind the collected data. Specifically, Section 5.2 introduces the basic demographic information of the visitors who completed the questionnaire survey at the three Chinese contemporary art museums and galleries. Based on a further data analysis, Section 5.3 seeks to introduce the variables that were used to explore the visitors' cultural profiles. Section 5.4 aims to provide a better understanding of the visitors through measuring their embodied cultural capital (cultural disposition) and objectified cultural capital (cultural taste). To be more specific, according to the characteristics of cluster analysis (CA) introduced in Chapter 3, CA has been selected to group and profile the visitors.

Once the CA solutions have been generated and confirmed, multinomial logistic regression analysis will be used to explore the demographic figures of the identified visitor groups. Section 5.5 summarises the findings of this chapter and highlights the issues that need to be addressed in the qualitative data analysis phase (Chapter 6).

5.2 The socio-demographic characteristics of the visitors

The main research aim of this section is to explore the question of whether the visitors' patterns of cultural consumption can be grounded in the three main arguments – homology arguments, omnivore-univore arguments, and individualism –in the field of cultural sociology studies on cultural consumption. Before conducting further data analysis, the primary aim of this section is to position this current study through analysis and discussion of the demographic characteristics of the main visitors to the three observed exhibiting institutions (the UCCA, the NMoC, and the Shengzhi Space). It is important to note that the findings of this preliminary exploration of the data will then be qualified by the in-depth results of this current research. The initial demographic finding, which shall then be disputed in the following sections, is that education plays a crucial role in determining one's tastes for elite cultures. In particular, the educational level of the visitors' parents and the specific jobs that the visitors have were initially seen as significant indicators of foreseeing one's taste for high status cultures. In line with the findings of many scholars, age and gender were seen as less important variables in understanding the differentiation of models of cultural consumption. However, upon conducting further in-depth analysis of the data in sections 5.3 and 5.4, we can see that education and job status are not as significant as the data initially indicated, and that age and gender in fact play a more significant role in understanding how the visitors engage with the exhibits.

In this section, many demographic markers of the visitors, such as education, occupation, gender, and age, are used to differentiate different types of visitors. In this way, this section explores the levels of inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the exhibitions.

The first part of this section illustrates the unequal size of the visitor groups that contributed to the separation between the visitors who held relatively higher educational certifications and those who did not. This part of the section thus demonstrates the importance of cultural capital, especially institutional cultural capital, in shaping the inclusivity and exclusivity of the contemporary art exhibitions. After commenting on the generally higher educational backgrounds of the visitors' parents, the second part of this section explores the boundary between visitor groups based on the volumes of embodied cultural capital that the visitors inherited from their family milieu. In the third part, the visitors' occupations are coded and analysed in order to concentrate on the correlation between specific occupational classes and the visitors' engagement or disengagement with the exhibitions. In the last two parts of this section, according to the results of the data analysis, evidence suggests that knowing a visitor's gender, occupation, and age does not provide any extra information to indicate whether they are a part of the main visitor group, but their educational level can. This will be explained in further detail in the following section.

The educational level of the visitors

The over-representation of well-educated visitors (referring to those who obtain bachelor's degrees or higher) provides evidence for a relationship between educational stratification and participation in contemporary art exhibitions. Among the total number of visitors who completed the questionnaire survey, the proportion of well-educated visitors was overwhelmingly higher than that of visitors who held relatively lower educational credentials. As shown in the Figure 1, the visitors' attendance increased significantly with the level of education. Among the observed visitors, 82.8% of them

were either approaching or had already completed a bachelor's degree or higher certification. This percentage is around eight times higher than those who are studying or who have studied up to the same educational level in the total population of China (9%) (TSNPC 2010). Consequently, it is not surprising that visitors who hold lower-level degrees (e.g. study certifications from primary school, junior secondary school, and social vocational school) or do not have any form of qualification are minority groups in the exhibitions.

To be more specific, according to Figure 1, as the largest visitor group, the visitors who hold a bachelor's degree account for 63.3% of the visitors to the exhibitions. 17.4% of the visitors had achieved a master's degree. The group sizes of undergraduate adult, doctoral, junior college, and secondary general school degree holders were much smaller than that of the bachelor and master degree holder groups, which constitute 1.8%, 2.1%, 8.0% and 5.2% of the total number of visitors. The proportions of the visitors who have no diploma and certifications of primary school, junior secondary school, and social vocational school only represented 1.3% of the population. The distribution of educational levels among the visitors is the opposite of that found in the whole population. As shown in Figure 2, the visitors who hold general secondary school degrees only account for 5% of visitors to the exhibitions, which was less than the share they have in the total population (14%). The proportion of visitors who, as their highest qualification, hold primary studies certificates (0.5%), junior secondary school studies qualifications (0.1%), and no educational certifications (0.7%) were at least less than five times their percentage in the total population (26%, 38%, and 4% respectively) (TSNPC 2010).

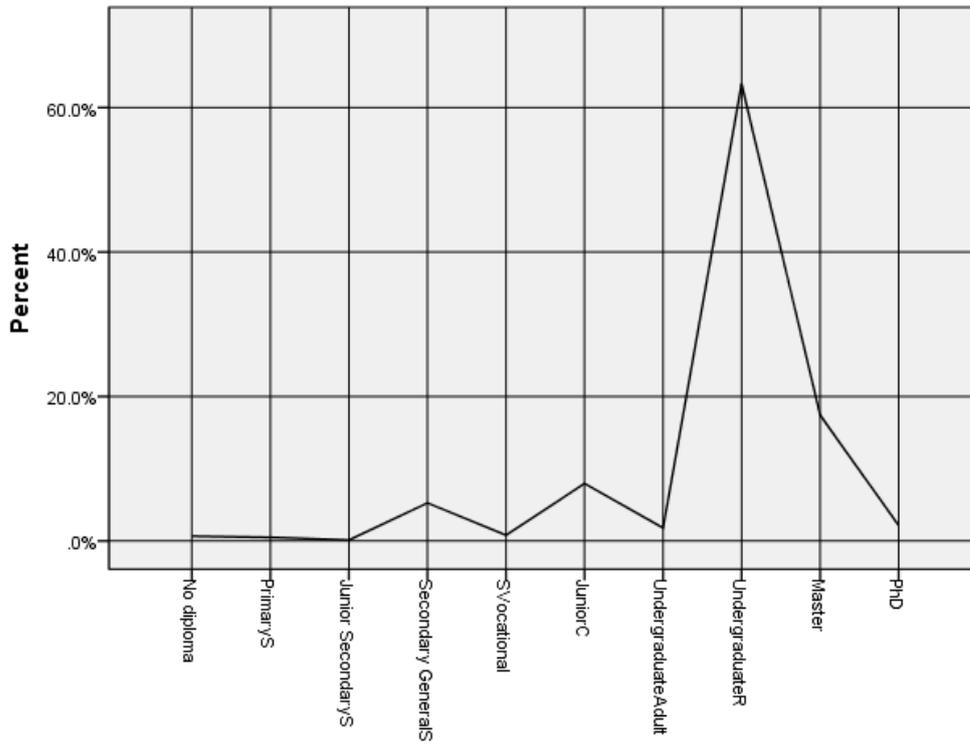


Figure 1 Educational levels of the visitors in the observed contemporary art museums and galleries

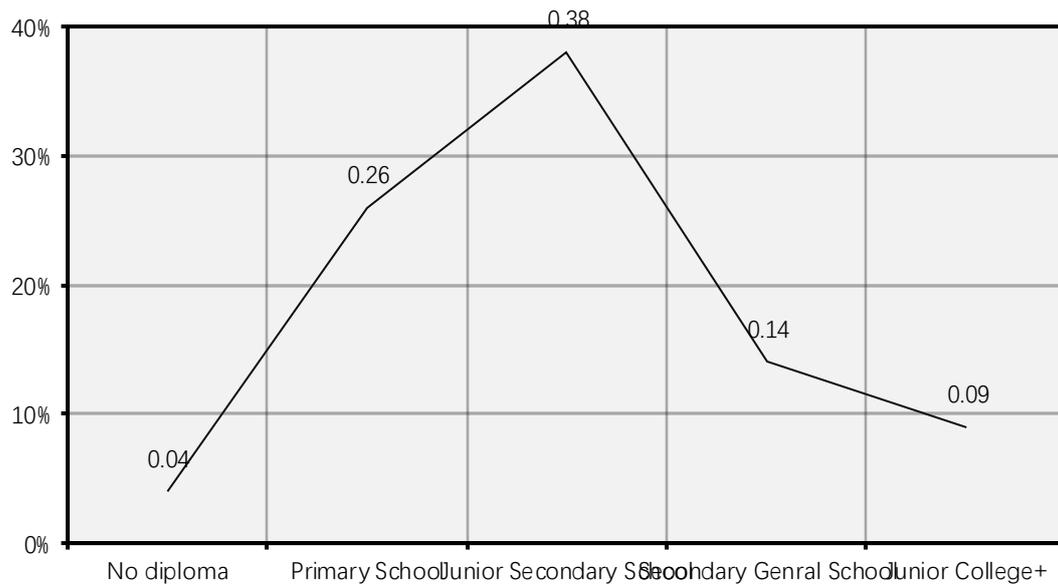


Figure 2 Educational levels of the population in China (TSNPC 2010)

This data initially indicates that educational level plays an important role in understanding visitors' engagement with the contemporary art exhibitions. However, looking more closely at the data, we can see that this interpretation would be misleading. Section 5.3 of this chapter will discuss why this is the case.

Primary cultural capital

In contradiction to the findings of many scholars (Bourdieu et al. 1969; Bourdieu 1977; DiMaggio 1982; Sullivan 2002; Christin 2010; Willekens et al. 2014), who argue that the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital contributes to the maintenance of social status and cultural dispositions between generations, the educational levels of the visitors' parents were less homologous than those of the visitors. This does not mean, however, that the parents had lower educational levels than the visitors. What this does mean, though, is that even when the parents appeared to have a lower educational level than their offspring, they were still educated to a relatively high level within their own generation.

As shown in Figure 3, compared to the significant gap between the percentages of highly educated (82.8%) and less educated (17.2%) visitors, the differences between the visitors' parents who had different educational experiences were less striking. In contrast to their highly-educated children, parents who held intermediate educational certifications (high school and junior college degrees) were more likely to be identified during the data analysis. Specifically, the proportions of visitors' parents with high school studies certifications (27% of the fathers and 26% of the mothers) and junior

college or equivalent degrees (26% of the fathers and 28% of the mothers) were generally larger than the other groups of parents who had lower or higher educational levels. In fact, only around 20% of the parents had received university and above educations, which is around four times lower than that of their children, but the proportions of those holding bachelor academic credentials are still greater than their distributions – 9% – in the whole population. At the same time, the number of parents who had only received a lower education was relatively small. For instance, 16.6% and 17.1% of the visitors’ mothers and fathers had middle school and equivalent certifications, the proportions of which are slightly lower than their percentages in the larger population (19% and 22%, respectively). As the smallest group, parents with no education and those who only finished primary schooling accounted for a mere 9% (mothers) and 12% (fathers) of the samples, numbers which are also lower than their counterparts in the larger population (19% and 15%, respectively).

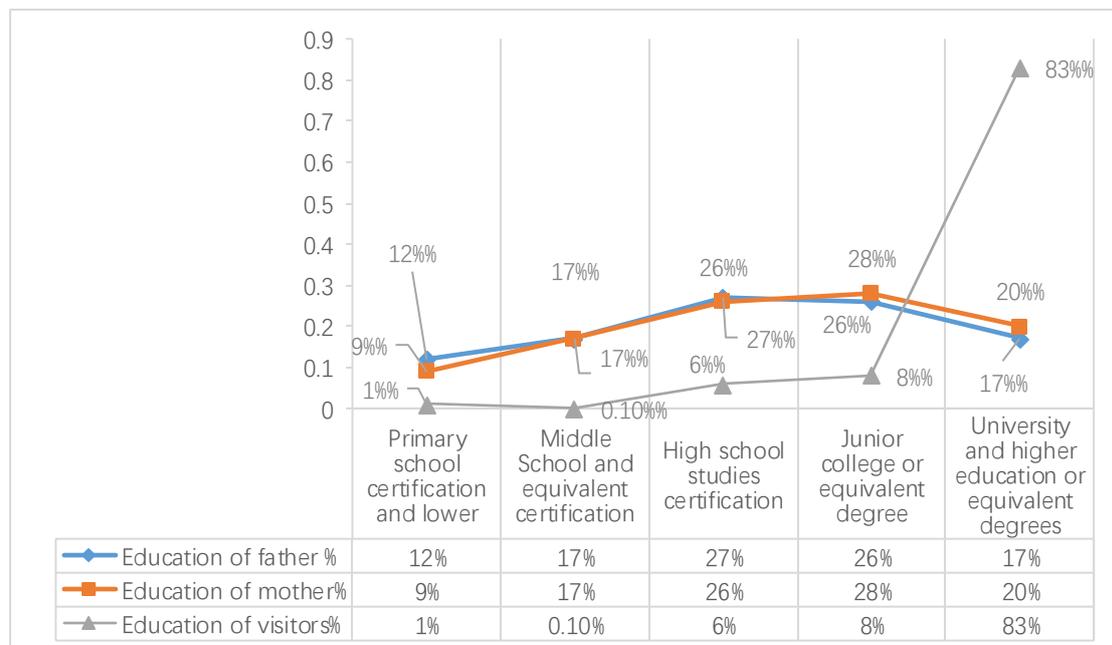


Figure 1 The proportions of the educational credentials hold by the visitors and their parents

The result of a further statistic hypothesis test also supports the weak influence of the parents' educational achievements upon their children's patterns of cultural tendencies. Specifically, the chi-square test was conducted to explore the relationship between the academic levels of the visitors and their parents.

According to the computed result, Pearson's chi-square test statistic identifies a statistically significant association between the visitors' educational levels and their parents' educational qualifications (test=157.78; $p < .005$). However, the low significant values of Cramer's V (0.12, $p < .005$) suggests that the strength of the association between the variables is rather weak.

Regarding this finding, one might argue that the methodological strategy that many sociologists have adopted, namely to measure one's cultural capital based on one's parents' educational experience (e.g., Bourdieu 1977: 49), failed to show how upper-class privilege transformed between generations in this current study. They might be plausible, nevertheless; it is not necessary to entirely reject the role the parents have in contributing to the visitors' primary accumulation process of cultural capital. The reasons for this argument are that no sufficient evidence shows that the well-educated visitors did not benefit from their parents' academic achievements. Specifically, for particular historical reasons (e.g., the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution movement from 1966-1976), the average educational level of older generations is relatively low compared to that of younger generations. According to the statistics published by the Central People's Government (Figure 4), the opportunity to attain a university education was rare before 2000. Specifically, despite the fact that the number of the

students who enrolled in college in 1990 (610,000) is almost four times that in 1965 (160,000), the proportion of first-year college students accounts for only 0.05 per cent of their share of the whole population in 1990 (CPG 2016). In this respect, it is difficult to define whether the parents belonged to educated classes, when the average educational rate among the population was extremely low decades ago. Accordingly, the visitors might also have inherited the educational and the ‘dominant’ class privilege from their parents (e.g., through parental encouragement of cultural and educational participation or through other material resources), even if the parents did not attain college-level and above certifications. In this regard, one might argue that a biased conclusion might be drawn if one failed to catalogue the parents into educated classes only because they were reported to have lower educational credentials (e.g., junior college certifications).

What can be concluded, therefore, is that even though the visitors’ parents had lower educational levels than their offspring, they can still be considered as having high educational levels within their own generation. This is confirmed by the graph below.

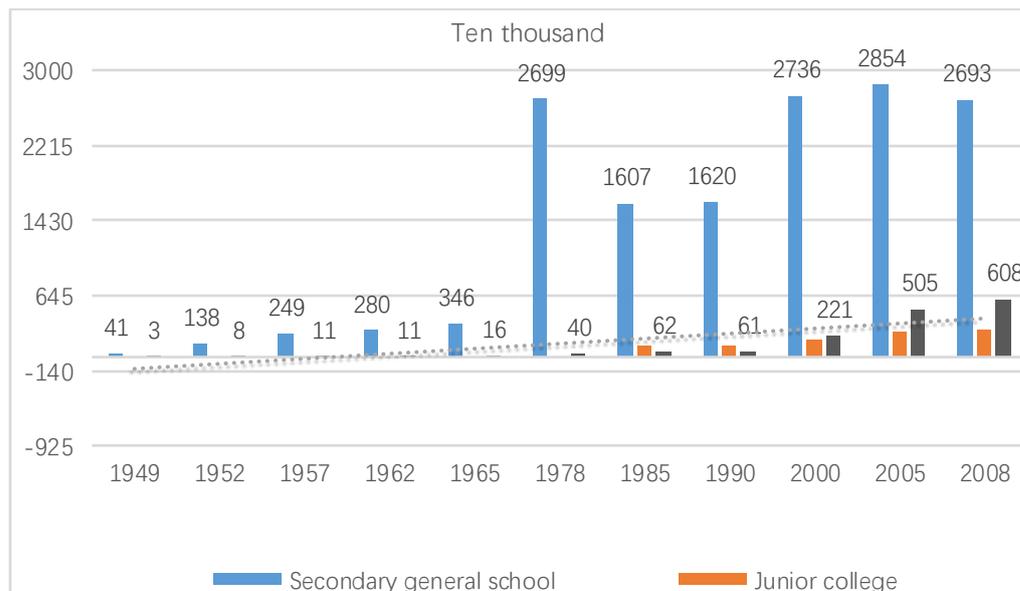


Figure 4 Number of students enrolled in educational programmes from 1949-2008 (CPG 2016)

Socio-economic factors

The common characteristics of the visitors were: 1) having full-time jobs; 2) working in the service sector rather than in the industrial or primary sectors; 3) holding a higher volume of cultural capital and a relatively lower level of economic capital. The three above-mentioned factors induce three main findings in this section: 1) students are overrepresented in the exhibitions; this indicates that holding a high volume of institutional, cultural capital matters for the majority of the student-visitors' attending the exhibitions; 2) the majority of the visitors who have full-time jobs hold culture-related positions. The overrepresentation of specific occupational choices (e.g. office clerk and artists) suggests that the influence of education is stronger for those who are rich in cultural capital or who have more time and chances to visit the exhibitions. 3) most visitors belong to the fraction of the higher class that is richest in cultural capital but not necessarily richest in economic capital. This trend suggests that holding a certain volume of economic capital is necessary for most of the visitors' contemporary art exhibition visits, but its importance is less than that of cultural capital. All of these factors will be introduced and analysed in the following sections.

As the largest socio-economic identity-based visitor group, students account for 42% of the total visitors. Their percentage of visitors was about twenty-six times greater than their fraction of the population of China (2%). The overrepresentation of students indicates that the exhibitions were very popular with college students.

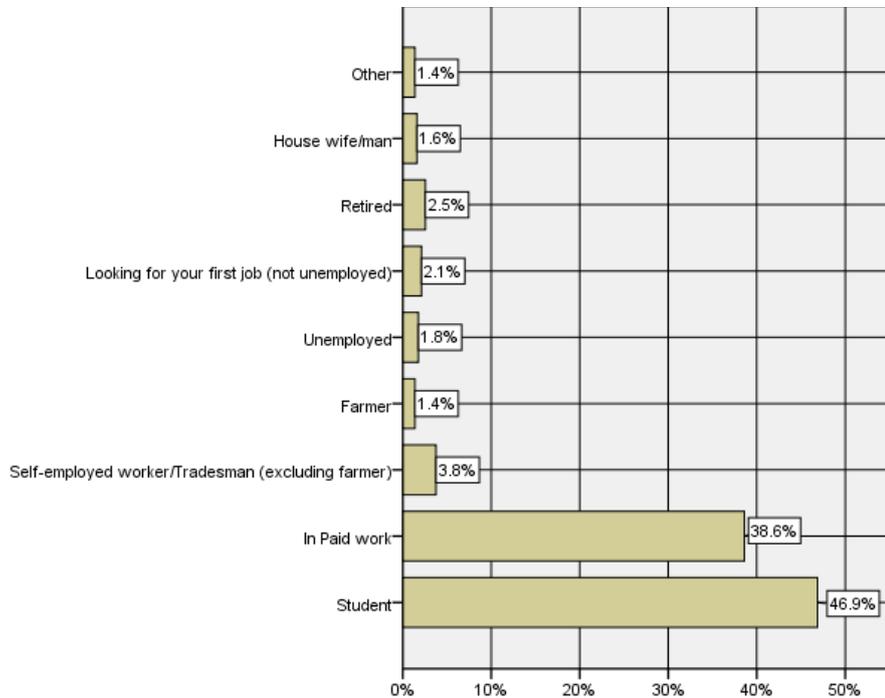


Figure 5 Occupational status of the visitors

The number of students accounts for 46.9% of the visitor population. The proportion of visitors who have paid work (38.6%) is also very high. Compared to the number of visitors who share the two types of above-mentioned occupational status, the sizes of the visitors in the other categories of occupational status are all very small. For instance, the number of farmers, retired visitors, unemployed visitors, and house wife/husband only consist of 1.4%, 2.5%, 1.8%, and 1.6% of the total number of the visitors respectively.

Except for students, the majority of visitors who had full-time jobs (83%) were working in the 'service sector' rather than in the industrial and primary sectors (as shown in table 5). My data shows that the majority of visitors were those who worked in the third industry (service industry) and those who shared upper-class status. The percentage of visitors who work in the service industry accounts for 84.6% of all visitors, while only 13.3% and 2.1% of the visitors work in the primary and secondary industries. According to the data previously mentioned, the distribution of visitors who work in different industrial sectors is more unbalanced than the general Chinese population. There are three main industrial sectors in China: the primary industry, which includes

agriculture, husbandry, forestry, and fishery industries; the secondary industry, which consists of mining, energy, construction, and manufacturing industries; and the third, service, industry, which includes cultural, sport, and entertainment services, public services organisations, and the financial industry. These three sectors constitute 36.7%, 27.7%, and 34.6% of the employed population respectively. Based on these statistics, the percentage of the visitors who have jobs in service industries is more than twice their proportion in the whole population of China. It can be argued that the overrepresentation of visitors who work in the service industry implies that the lower occupational social classes (e.g. farmers and blue-collar workers) were less likely to visit contemporary art museums and galleries in large numbers. This finding once again highlights the influence of the visitors' life trajectory (measured by the characteristics of the visitors' jobs) for motivating their attendance at the exhibitions.

According to Figure 6, the majority of contemporary art museum visitors were those who had jobs (or who had previously had jobs) in government, cultural, sport, or entertainment service, or education service. The three categories of the visitors account for 23%, 7%, and 8% of the total number of visitors, respectively. The proportions of the visitors who had other types of work experience were, nevertheless, rather low (equivalent to or less than 3%). According to the data mentioned above, not all of the employers or employees in the service sector were interested in the exhibitions. Rather, a very limited range of the visitors who worked in limited types of jobs in the service sector were more likely to go to the museums and galleries. One might argue that the three types of occupations mentioned above share a relatively higher level of entry requirement for cultural capital, especially for educational credentials. For instance, in China, only those individuals who hold bachelor's degrees or above have the

opportunity to take a highly competitive job application exam for working in the government or related institutions as a civil servant (CSE 2016). The relationship between visiting the exhibition and occupation appears to be another expression of the relationship between education and visiting. However, the relatively low attendance rate of first class visitors who are employed outside of cultural industries (7.6%) cannot be exclusively explained in the arena of occupational class analysis. I will analyse this issue in further detail in the second part of this section.

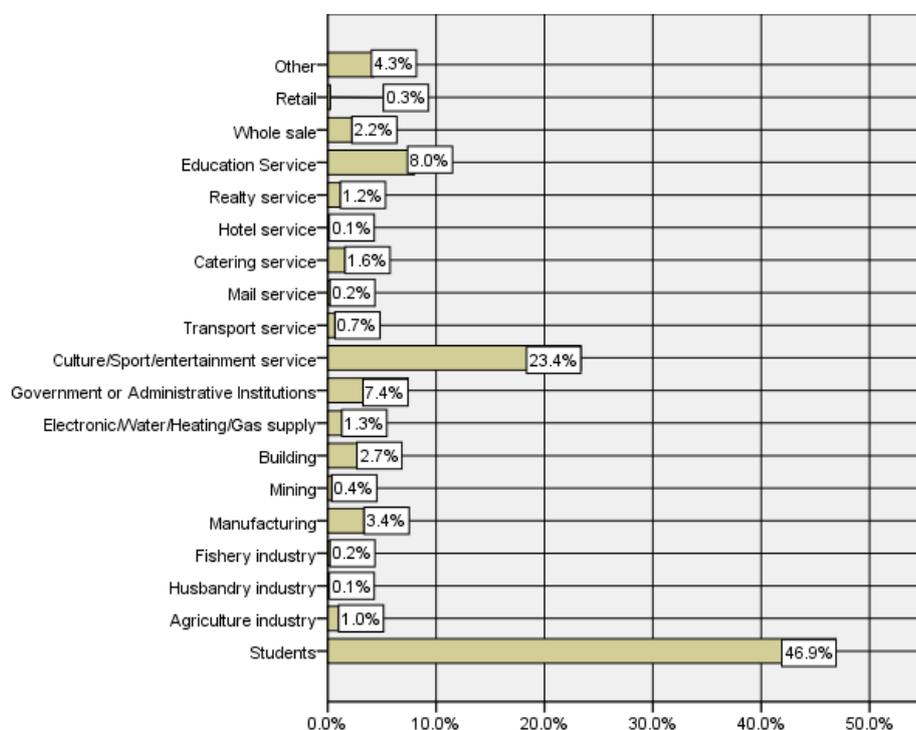


Figure 6 Proportions of the visitor in nineteen types of organisations or incorporations
 As the largest visitor group, the number of student visitors accounts for 46.9% of the observed visitors. The proportion of the visitors who have jobs in relation to cultural/sport/entertainment is 23.4%. The third largest visitor groups involve the visitors who work in educational services (8%), and government and administrative institutions (7.9%). Each number of the visitors who have the other types of work (e.g. agriculture industry, fishery industry, and manufacturing) constitutes less than 4.5% of the population.

As the second-largest socio-economic category, the full-time employed visitors constitute 39% of the total number of visitors. There exists a positive relationship

between the visitors who shared relatively stable and independent routes of material capital accumulation and their interest in the exhibitions. On the contrary, the economically dependent and marginalised social groups were less likely to visit the exhibitions. Their proportions were either equivalent to or lower than 4%. Accordingly, the socially marginalised social groups (e.g. long-term unemployed individuals) were also being marginalised in the exhibitions in terms of their small numbers. Even retired individuals could have quite stable financial incomes; however, their absence from the exhibitions was probably due to their preference for more established art forms.

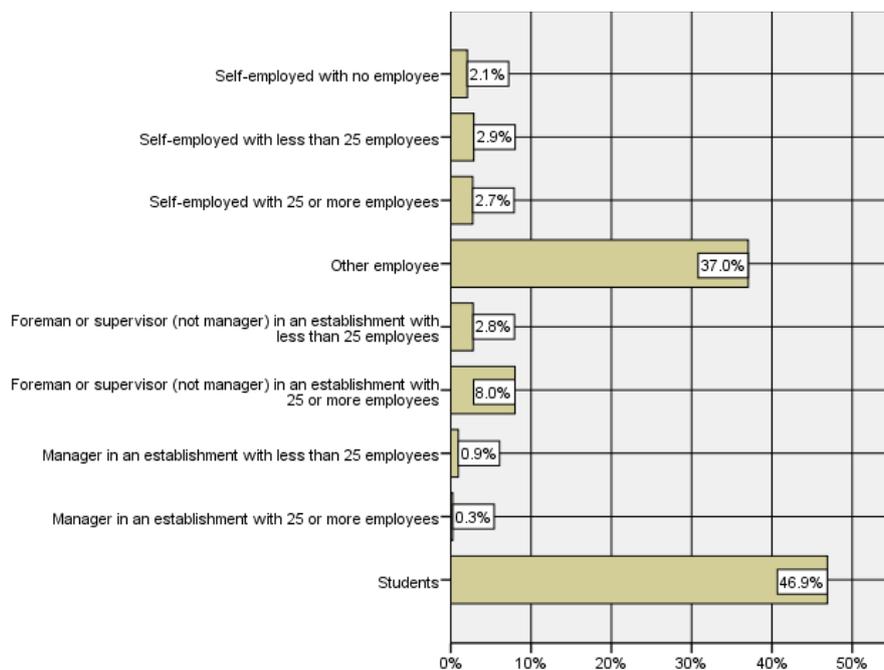


Figure 7 Occupational status of the visitors

The number of student-visitors contributes to 46.9% of the population. As the second largest visitor group, the proportion of other employees is 37%. The percentage of managers in an establishment with less than 25 employees (8%) is higher than that of the visitors with other types of occupational status, such as self-employed with no employees (2.1%), self-employed with less than 25 employees (2.9%), and self-employed with 25 or more employees (2.7%).

According to Figure 7, 91.9% of the visitors (students, other employees, and foremen or supervisors in an establishment with 25 or less employees) belonged to the higher occupational classes. To be more specific, in order to have a better understanding of the visitors in terms of their socio-economic identities, the visitors to the Chinese contemporary art exhibition were coded into and analysed by a five-class system based on the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC, 2010).

There are two reasons to adopt the standard UK system of occupational classification in this current research: in the first place, the NS-SEC has been widely applied in not only academic research but also official statistics and surveys (NS-SEC 2010). The fruitful findings based on this analytic model in the field of socio-cultural studies identify the reliability and efficiency of the NS-SEC. In China, although the development of studies on social stratification has grown quickly since 1979, very few models can be used to understand Chinese social stratification in an integrated way (Li 2013). The available analytic models of socio-economic classification are too vague to systematically understand the occupational status of those who belong to an atypical sub-category, such as teachers, interior decorators, or book sellers, who own a higher volume of cultural capital but a lower level of economic capital (e.g. Li 2005a; Li 2005b ; Lu 2002; Li 2013c). They are also too outdated to understand the emerging occupations (e.g. curators) in the present society of China (e.g. Li 2004d). For instance, within Li's map of social stratification (Li 2005 a: 390), all types of office clerks and technical occupations are being categorised as members of the white-collar, or intermedia, class. It is difficult to distinguish those who have higher than average levels of education (e.g. teachers) from their peers in the category (e.g. printers). The NS-SEC, on the other hand, offers a solution to this issue through classifying the occupations based on a model of

sociological classification. For example, the NS-SEC offers employees who work in modern professional jobs (e.g. office clerk) a higher status than those employees who work in technical occupations. Second, the use of an international standard model of class analysis can give the researcher of this current study a chance to understand the visitors based on the findings of related studies in western countries.

There is also a risk of adopting this analytic model in China due to social structural differences. For instance, the members of the cadre class who own a higher volume of political capital and economic capital can hardly find their proper position in the NS-SEC. Although this risk deserves attention, however, the finding of very limited occupational types among the visitors to a large extent compensates for the negative effects of using the NS-SEC. Specifically, 82% of the non-student visitors are employees who work in educational services, cultural related jobs, and government and administrative institutions. The number of cadre class members only accounts for less than 0.5% of the population. In this regard, the application of the NS-SEC to this current research can bring more detailed information about the influence of the visitors' socio-economic status, with a limited risk raised by structural differences between the societies of China and the UK.

class one	Higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations	e.g. artist, finance manager, and chief executive in large organisations
class two	intermediate occupations	other employees such as secretary, personal assistant, clerical worker, office clerk

class three	Small employers and own account workers	e.g. Senior managers in an establishment with less than 25 employees, administrators
class four	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	e.g. motor mechanic, fitter, inspector, plumber, and printer
class five	Semi-routine and routine occupations	e.g. postal worker, machine operative, and security guard

Table 8 The categories of the five classes in the NS-SEC (2010)

According to Table 6 and Figure 7, employees who worked in clerical and intermediate positions constituted class two in this current research study. Class one mainly featured artists, teachers, students, and employees with culture-related jobs. As shown in the data, another interesting finding is that the individuals who have the financial capability of actually appropriating artworks (e.g. managers of large and small organisations, employers of large and small organisations, supervisors, and government cadres) were generally absent from the exhibitions. It seems that owning a relatively higher volume of cultural capital and a certain level of economic capital was necessary for the observed class-one visitors in the exhibitions. Based on these analyses, the members of the lower classes are more often than not absent from contemporary art exhibitions. Classes three, four, and five, which are comprised of ‘small employers and own account workers’, ‘lower supervisory and technical occupations’ (e.g., printer, electrician), and ‘semi-routine and routine occupations’ (e.g., driver, postal worker, security guard, farm worker) only take up 3.1%, 1.7%, and 1.3% of the visitors respectively (NSoC 2011). The majority of the visitors were those who work in ‘intermediate occupations’ (27 percent) and ‘higher managerial, administrative, and professional occupations’ (66.9 percent).

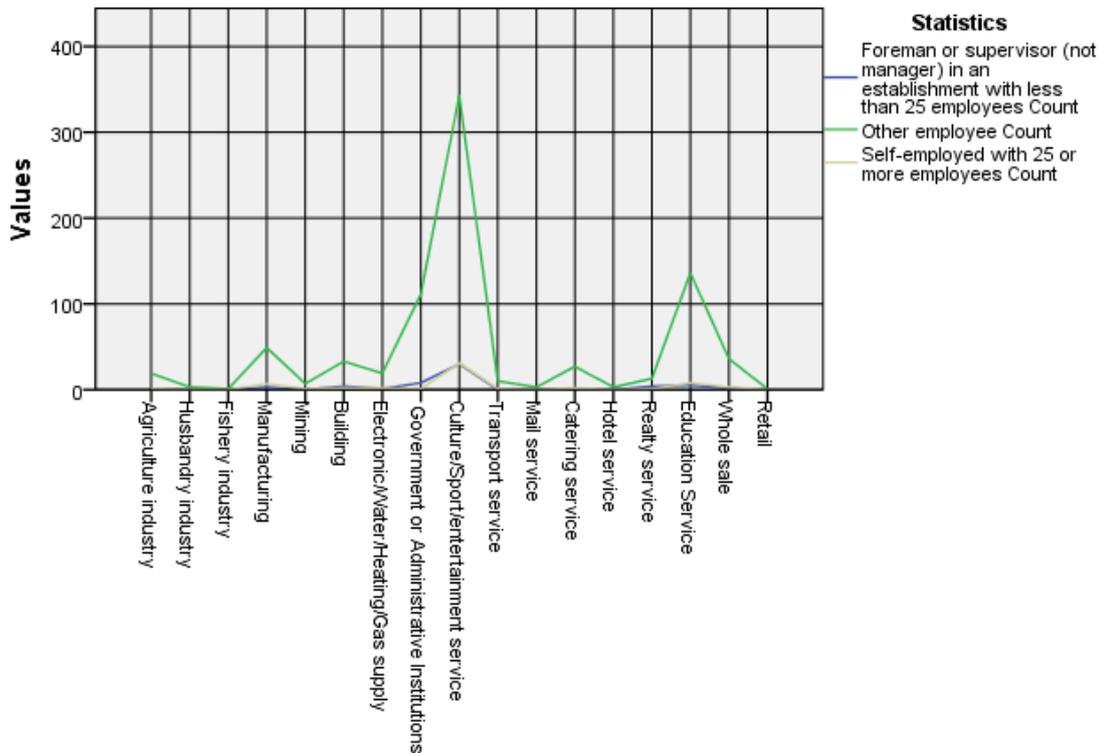


Figure 8 Distribution of three types of occupational status in seventeen types of department Among the non-student visitors, the number of other employees is higher than the number of ‘foreman or supervisor in an establishment with 25 or fewer employees’, and ‘self-employed manager in a company with 25 or less employees’ is in a different category of occupational status. Most of the visitors who share occupational status as ‘other employee’ work in culture/sport/entertainment service (n=336), education service (n=130) and government or administrative institutions (n=108). The numbers of the other observed employees in different occupational categories are very low (less than 50). Most of the visitors who qualified as foreman or supervisor work in an establishment with 25 or fewer employees, and self-employed managers in a company with 25 or fewer employees work in culture/sport/entertainment service too, but the numbers are rather small (less than 30).

Based on the analysis discussed above, one might argue that the class-based homology argument seems promising for understanding the socio-economic characteristics of the visitors to exhibitions. However, further analysis conducted in the following section (Section 5.3) will indicate that this initial interpretation is incorrect, and that the class-based homology argument lacks the explanatory power to fully understand contemporary art consumption among the visitors. The next subsection goes further, to

explore whether the visitors' gender and age can provide extra information for understanding their consumption patterns.

Gender

As shown in Figure 9, visitors were more likely to be women. The number of female visitors (1456) significantly exceeds that of male visitors (830). The proportion of female visitors (65.1%) in the museums and galleries is also much higher than that of females in the Chinese population (49%). The overrepresentation of female visitors in the three contemporary art institutions sheds light on the difference between sexes on consuming contemporary artwork.

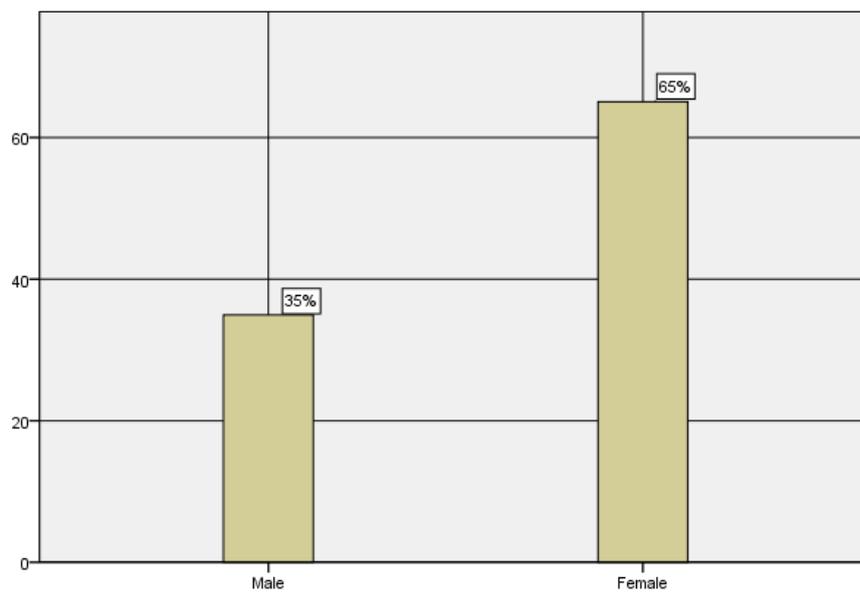


Figure 9 Proportions of male and female visitors among the visitors
The number of female visitors accounts for 65% of the visitor population, which is around two times higher than that of the male visitors 35%.

Age

The overrepresentation of younger visitors (18-29 years old: 64.6 %) makes the generational difference a vital characteristic of Chinese contemporary art exhibition visitors, as shown in Figure 10. This is probably due to the fact that, compared with the older generation, young people might be more likely to be disadvantaged within the established field of restricted production because they can hardly acquire a similar amount of capital to the older generations (Bourdieu 1990: 143). The youth might show their rebellion against the prevailing order by approaching less ‘established’ art forms such as avant-garde art.

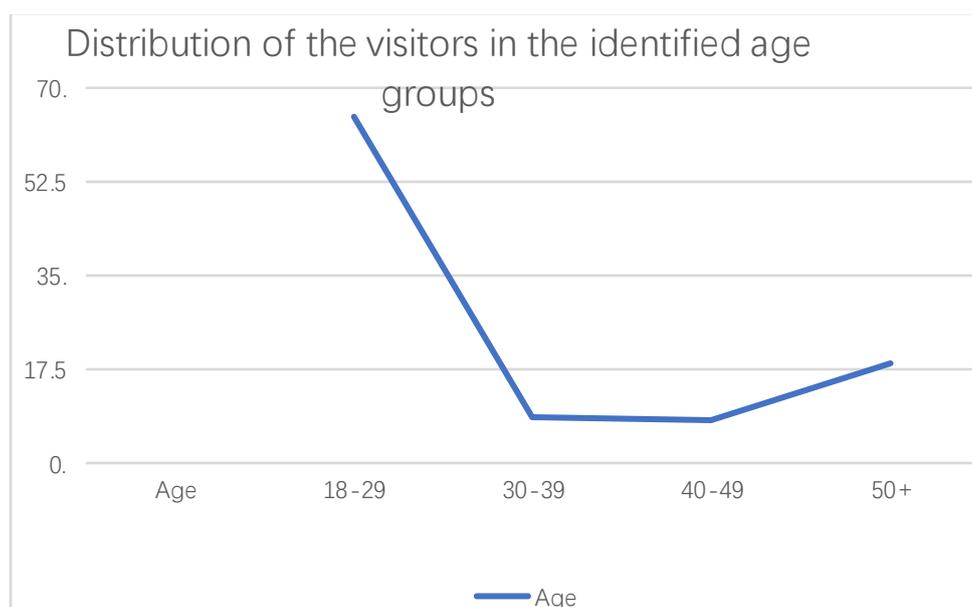


Figure 10 Distribution of the visitors in the five types of age groups

On initial analysis, this data concerning age and gender differentiation seems unhelpful when trying to understand identified patterns of cultural consumption among the visitors. This is because these findings only confirm the already established consensus in the field of cultural sociology, namely that the secondary characteristics of age and

gender when looking at consumers of contemporary art are typically young and female. However, further analysis demonstrates that these two variables are more important in understanding the divide in cultural preferences than initially thought. This finding will be fully explored in the following section.

A summary of this chapter

In summary, this section demonstrates that, regarding the importance of cultural capital in encouraging the visitors to attend the observed art museums and galleries, the exhibitions exclude those with a lower educational status, particularly working class, female, and older people, as well as those whose parents were also of low educational status. The findings of this chapter shed light on how the visitors accumulate a higher volume of cultural capital from their family milieus, which is then reinforced through their educational experiences. This can also be demonstrated through the occupations of the visitors who attended the observed exhibitions. The majority of the visitors had government jobs, jobs in the educational system, or jobs in the culture industry, which reflects a relatively high volume of cultural capital possessed by these visitors.

This is in line with other researchers' comment on unequal access to high-status cultural participation (e.g. theatre, concert, and art museum visiting) in many western countries (e.g. Bourdieu et al. 1969; DiMaggio et al. 1977; DiMaggio & Useem 1978; DiMaggio 1996; Bennett et al. 2009; Purhonen et al. 2011; Hanquinet 2013). In this regard, compared to their peer institutions in western countries, the specificity of cultural and social contexts of Chinese society did not alter the exclusiveness of the three Chinese

contemporary art museums and galleries. Thus, there is little evidence to dispute the claim that educational level is ‘the best net predictor of art museum attendance’ in this current research (DiMaggio 1996: 162). For Neill (2008), this kind of inequality could be interpreted through ‘the political view of museums’, within which art museums reinforce ‘the existing power structure’ through excluding the members of the lower social classes who have less chance to attend high education than the members of the higher social classes. Similarly, and as discussed earlier, for Bourdieu et al. (1969) the educational system plays a key role in promoting the individuals’ cultural reproduction of social inequalities. To be more specific, Bourdieu conceptualises a person’s educational achievements and experiences as institutionalised cultural capital. Together with two other forms of cultural capital – embodied (e.g. conscious or passive self-improvement/socialisation) and objectified (e.g. a collection of paintings) – the overall volume of the three types of cultural capital determines a person’s cultural competence in the field of highbrow cultural consumption (e.g. classical music, opera, and conceptual artwork). For instance, higher educational institutions offer cultivated knowledge about the value of legitimate cultures and a ‘proper’ way of engaging with those ‘highbrow’ genres that cannot be easily accessed by working class people. This finding can be identified in many scholars’ works, within which the school is a place where individuals shape and reinforce their sense of belonging to elite cultures (e.g., Bourdieu 1979; DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Sullivan 2002; van de Werfhorst and Hofstede 2007; Jaeger 2010).

Further evidence that demonstrates the association between educational level and social inequality has been identified by many Chinese scholars. Several studies that have been conducted in China have confirmed the positive relationship between social

stratification and educational achievements and attainment. For instance, Zhong and Shen (2009) believe that class-based educational inequality has become a very serious social issue in China, as the offspring of the members of the socially advanced classes more often than not monopolise the qualified educational resources (e.g. the opportunity to go to the top-ranked universities). Zhang and Liu (2005) agree with Zhong and Shen and claim that those whose parents belong to the cadre class in China are eighteen times more likely than the children of farmers to attain high educations. Similar findings were also put forth by Su and Zhan (2010), Ye and Ding (2015), and Hong and Qian (2008).

The parents' education is also very important in determining the visitors' decision to visit the observed exhibitions. However, while the initial findings of this current research supports the importance of both the visitors' educational level and that of their parents in determining whether they choose to visit the museum, this does not contradict the claims of many scholars who challenge the value of the parents' level of education as an effective and deterministic indicator for predicting their offspring's cultural tastes (e.g., DiMaggio 1984; Jaeger 2003). For instance, Beck (1992; 1999) claims that combined with other social structural changes, such as a higher standard of living, expanding educational opportunities have offered more self-reflective life choices to individuals in an '[at-]risk society'. According to DiMaggio (1984), the correlation between parental education and cultural capital is weak since children from high-class families can only partly inherit cultural capital from their well-educated parents. In their study, teenage girls are more likely to engage in cultural activities than adolescent boys. Jaeger (2003) similarly casts doubt on the stability of using a father's educational achievement (as a variable) as an indicator of the theoretical conception of

inherited cultural capital. Jaeger explains that compared to the father's social class, the influence of his level of education on his offspring's educational attainment is more likely to be negatively affected by the random effect. This will be examined in greater detail in the next section.

As previously mentioned, there is evidence to suggest that knowing the visitors' occupation is significant in aiding our understanding of their organisation of overall cultural capital. In particular, it suggests that for most of the visitors, cultural capital, especially for the institutional cultural capital, is more important than economic capital. Nonetheless, holding a certain volume of economic capital is still necessary for the majority of the visitors to keep their membership in the first class. Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates that one's position in a specific field is determined by not only the volume but also the structures of one's capital. For Bourdieu, one can accumulate different forms of capital in a social space, which include economic capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, etc. (1986). Those who own a high volume of educational capital while at the same time suffering from financial constraints, just like the majority of the observed visitors in this current research study, tend to consume avant-garde art (Bourdieu 1986: 287). As Bourdieu noted, visiting a museum is definitely one of the most economic ways of valuing the young bourgeoisie and lower status professionals' tastes when they are relatively the richest in educational capital, but within the dominant group find themselves vulnerable and possessing the least amount of power. As an alternative way of pursuing exclusiveness or cultural distinction, this approach enables the individuals to regain the advanced positions and privileges they were promised in the education system but lost in the social space.

Finally, Bourdieu predicted in his 'The Love of Art' that women are more likely to dominate a cultural space than men. The findings of this current research so far do not seem to contradict this gender stereotype. In the same work, Bourdieu claims that young people, especially students, are more likely to go to museums due to the declining influence of the educational system. At face value, the findings of this current research do not seem to contradict this either. However, in both cases, further in-depth analysis demonstrates that these claims can be challenged by the findings of this current research. This will be discussed further in the next section.

5.3 Cultural Genres

Using crosstabs and frequency analysis, section 5.1 provided an introduction to visitors' reactions and attitudes towards cultural genres in different cultural fields. The aim was twofold: to explore whether there are general tendencies surrounding visitors' opinions about musical genres, literary works, cultural activities, and leisure activities, and to determine how to understand any emerging trends. The results of the data analyses provided the necessary foundation to apply additional analytical methods (cluster analysis and multinomial logistic analysis). A total of twenty questions and 120 categories were used to test visitors' cultural tastes and preferences. They were based on ten musical genres and ten literary works (see Chapter 3). Within the musical and literary genres, there were low response rates for the supplementary questions concerning 'other music' (4.9%) and 'other literature' (2.8%); therefore, those results were not analysed. The findings concerning the twenty cultural products (Figure 11)

indicated that visitors to the three contemporary art museums and galleries generally enjoyed an extremely limited range of musical and literary genres from very specific regions.

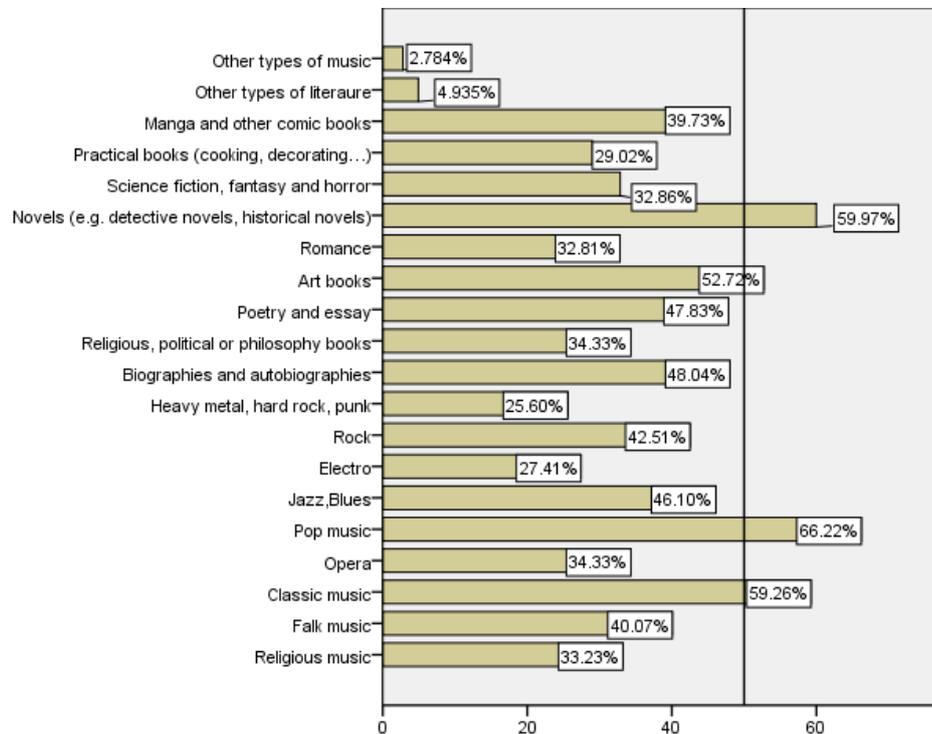


Figure 11 Proportions of the book and music genres liked by the visitors

In general, visitors expressed their appreciation for a limited range of music genres. Specifically, among the ten musical genres listed in the questionnaire (as shown in Figure 11), only pop music and classical music (66.1% and 59.1%, respectively) were popular with the majority of respondents. In other words, the majority of the visitors had no affinity for most forms of music, including religious music, folk music, opera, jazz/blues, electronic music, rock, heavy metal/hard rock/punk, and the other forms of music. An interesting finding is that when asked whether they had geographic preferences for their preferred musical and literary genres, most survey participants responded positively. Concerning the art genres listed in the questionnaire, the majority of visitors had specific geographical preferences for their preferred musical and literary

works (i.e. more than 68%). This means that few visitors uncritically accepted art forms from different regions or countries. In some cases, the proportion of regionally or culturally favoured musical and literary types reached over 80% of the total population of individuals who enjoyed those cultural forms (as shown in table 5.3-2): 86.3% for folk music, 90.6% for classical music, 88.87% for opera, 85.23% for pop music, 90.1% for jazz, 85.6% for electronic music, 85.7% for rock, 87.5% for heavy metal, 80.8% for science fiction, 81.4 for fantasy and horror, and 86.5% for manga.

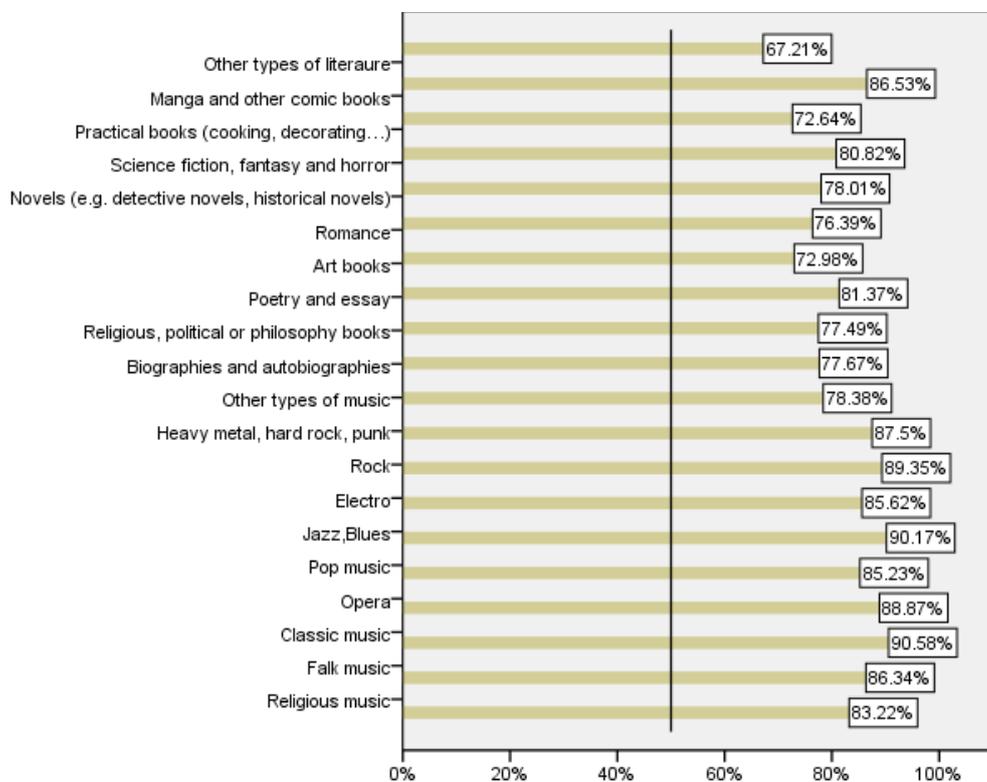


Figure 12 Proportions of the visitors who prefer art genres from specific geographic regions for question 24: could you tell us whether you like music from specific geographic regions?

Another interesting finding (as shown in Figure 12) is that for those who favoured regionally or culturally characterised art genres, work from mainland China and Europe/America were much more popular than work from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, or Japan. Of the visitors who exclusively favoured music from certain geographic zones, only classical music, rock music, and pop music fans announced that they

simultaneously liked musical genres from both mainland China (61.1%, 51.2%, and 61.6%, respectively) and Europe/America (71.7%, 75.1%, and 69.9%, respectively). For those who preferred the other musical genres, European/American music was more popular than music from other regions or countries with rates of 83.7%, 67.9%, and 77.3% for jazz, electronic music, and heavy metal, respectively. A large proportion of folk and religious music fans exclusively preferred music from mainland China (81.4% and 60.5%, respectively). The above-mentioned figures indicate that North American and European musical cultures demonstrated a strong influence on the visitors' cultural choices.

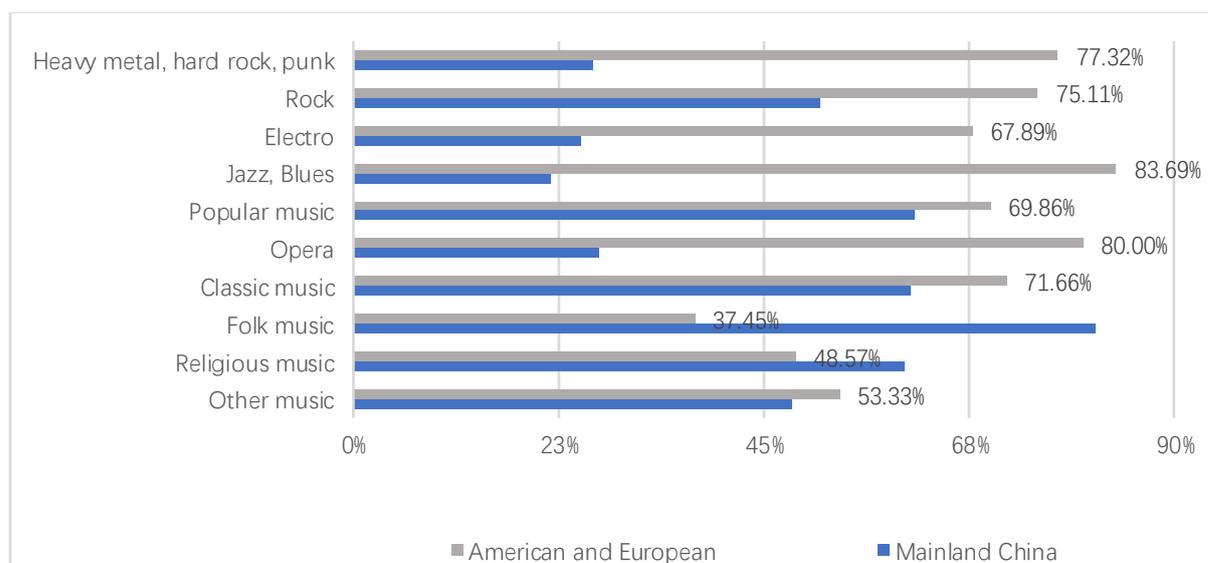


Figure 13 Proportions of the visitors who like music genres from mainland China and America/Europe

Evidence of limited ranges of interest also existed within the literary section of the questionnaire (see Figure 13). In comparing the lower ranges of support (below 50%) for the other eight literary genres, novels and art-themed books were the preferred literary genres for 59.8% and 52.6% of the total number of visitors, respectively.

Visitors had no interest in literary genres from regions or countries beyond mainland China and Europe/America, with the exception of Manga. However, unlike their musical preferences, survey participants did not express preferences for a wide range of book genres that were solely from Europe/America. Fans of both Chinese and European/American books were highly represented among the visitors who liked five out of eight types of books. Of the total number of visitors who confirmed that they had a preference for books from specific countries or regions, 76.2% preferred biographies and autobiographies from mainland China and 60.1% preferred those from Europe/America; 62.9% preferred religious, political or philosophical books from mainland China and 63.9% preferred those from Europe/America; 60.7% preferred art-themed books from mainland China and 71.2% preferred those from Europe/America; 62% preferred romance books from mainland China and 55.4% preferred those from Europe/America; and 64.4% preferred novels from mainland China and 56.6% preferred those from Europe/America. Most readers who enjoyed practical books (65.3%) only liked books by Chinese authors. 68.4% of visitors who had geographic preferences for their science fiction books preferred science fiction from Europe and America than that from other regions or countries. Looking at Manga and other comic books in connection with geographical or regional preferences, only books from Japan yielded a preference rate above 50% (74.7%).

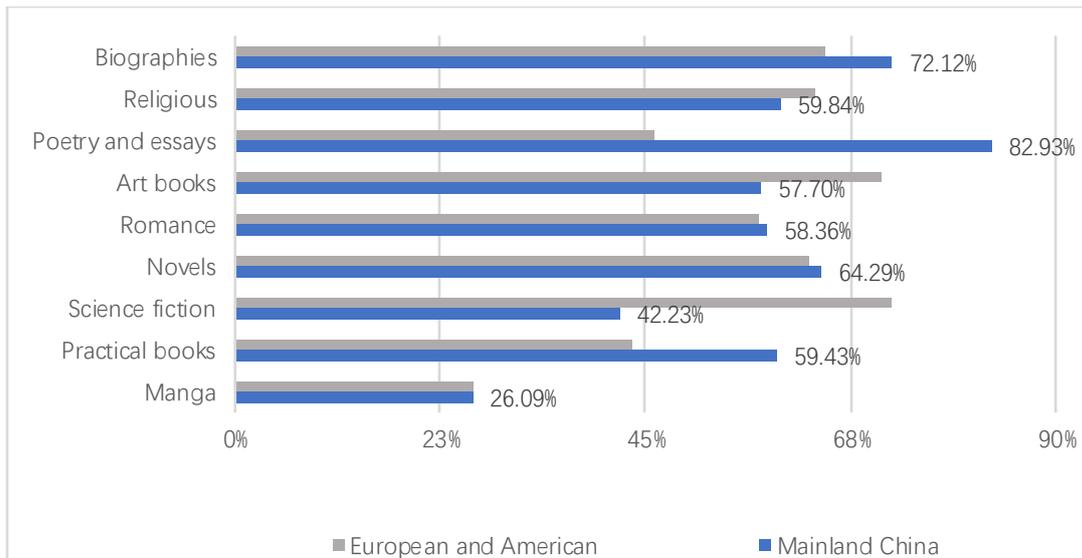


Figure 14 Proportions of the visitors who like literary genres from specific areas (mainland China and America/Europe)

Seeking more detailed and reliable statistical analysis, twenty-seven variables were designed to better understand cultural preferences in China (see Figure 14). Even though it seeks to understand different aspects of the visitors' preferences based on an analysis of a wide range of cultural genres, not all of the variables were tested in the final clustering. This is because some of the variables and categories contribute to 'bad' quality analytical outcomes. To be more specific, based on the general data description mentioned in the last section, some of the variables did not contribute to any of the clustering results due to the low response rate associated with those variables. A typical example of this type of category is the 'other' option for the question: Do you like music/literary genres from specific geographic regions or countries? The response rate to that question only accounts for 0.3% of the total number of visitors. There is another type of problematic variable: rather than having an extremely low response rate, this type of variable has a very unbalanced response rate. Taking pop music as an example, while 66.1% of the visitors had a taste for this music genre, only 33.9% of the visitors did not select it. This kind of variable is an issue because, more often than not, the different music scores were not evenly spread among the clusters. All of these kinds of

variables contributed to a low silhouette score. According to Shih et al., ‘data are meaningful only when one can extract the hidden information inside them’ (2010: 11). Thus, in order to achieve a more meaningful partitioning, some variables were excluded from the clustering phrase (see Table 9).

Music:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Religious music 2. Chinese Religious music 3. Folk music 4. Chinese folk music 5. Opera 6. European and American opera 7. Jazz, Blues 8. European and American Jazz and Blues 9. Electro 10. European and American Electro 11. Rock 12. Chinese Rock 13. European and American Rock 14. Heavy metal, hard rock, and punk 15. European and American Heavy metal, hard rock, and punk
Books:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biographies and Autobiographies 2. Religious, political, or philosophy books 3. Chinese Religious, political, or philosophy books 4. Chinese biographies and autobiographies 5. European and American biographies and autobiographies 6. Poetry and Essays 7. Art books 8. Chinese Art books 9. Chinese poetry and essays 10. Science, fiction, fantasy, and horror 11. European and American science, fiction, fantasy and horror 12. European and American Romance

Table 9 Variables which were used in the model

5.4 Data analysis: Cluster analysis and other External Validation Test

At the end of the previous section, the main findings were that the visitors’ educational level, and that of their parents, were useful in identifying whether the visitors attended

the observed exhibitions, but questions remained regarding these variables' usefulness in determining cultural taste. Equally, age and gender were found not to add any extra information when determining whether a visitor would attend the observed exhibitions, but may in fact provide a useful insight into the cultivation of cultural taste.

The primary finding of this section is that the visitors can be separated into four types of interpretive groups based on their musical and literary tastes. The differentiation was not determined by class or education, as Bourdieu would have predicted, but was determined by age, gender, and specifically the education of the visitors' mothers. In this way, this section highlights the multi-dimensionality of observed models of cultural consumption which cannot be simply understood by a class difference-oriented, one-dimensional mechanism of distinction.

Accordingly, in order to answer the research questions mentioned above, Section 5.4 consists of two parts: Section 5.4.1 introduces the findings of the cluster analysis, while Section 5.4.2 describes the validation, stability, and reliability of the research findings acquired in Section 5.4.1. Based on the additional information provided by the external validation, this section also enriches the findings of its predecessor.

5.4.1 Choosing cluster numbers and validation analysis

This section introduces the procedures for choosing proper formulation of cluster analysis results. As mentioned in Chapter 4, based on the selected measuring criteria, the Sciences Two Step Cluster Analysis (STCA) is capable of automatically generating

optimal numbers of clusters. With this in mind, I decided to pursue a relatively idealistic solution in the initial phase of data analysis. I used the long-likelihood criteria as a distance measure due to the fact that all the variables are categorical (Trpkova and Tevdovski 2009: 307; Norusis 2010: 380). The Sciences Two Steps Analysis (STCA) offers two types of clustering criteria for auto-calculation: The Schwarz Bayesian Criterion (BIC) and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). The two criteria have their own advantages and disadvantages in terms of forging clusters. Specifically, the AIC tends to overestimate the result by overfitting models, while the BIC performs ineffectively when ‘the sample size is limited and the components are not well separated’ (Yang and Yang 2007 as cited in Trpkova and Tevdovski 2009: 161). Based on the issue mentioned above, both criteria were tested in the calculation in order to find the best solution. After the calculation, the BIC- and AIC-based analytical methods generated two types of clusters with no significant differences between them. The proportions of the clusters both accounted for 22.4% and 77.6% (as shown in table 5.4-2). According to the components of the clusters, the solutions could be described as *Tolerants* and *Distants*. Visitors to the former cluster indiscriminately like every genre of culture, while their counterparts have no taste for cultural products of any kind. The scores of both types of clusters were fairly high in the Silhouette test, which confirms the quality of the solutions.

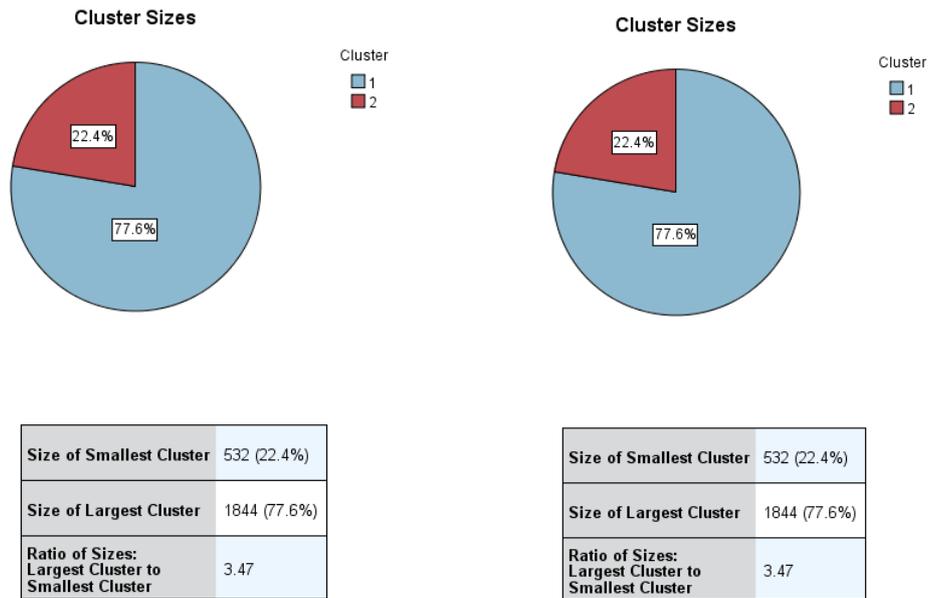


Figure 15 Clustering solutions based on two types of clustering criteria for auto-calculation: the Schwarz Bayesian Criterion (BIC) and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC).

The solutions were considered the most reasonable output by the STCA; however, the significantly limited information generated by the restricted number of clusters made the result less practicable for conducting further analysis. In this regard, more detailed information is required, which can be gained by enhancing the complexity of the clusters. Zhang et al. (1996) encouraged researchers to increase the precision of their method by increasing the number of sub-clusters. Many researchers (e.g. Trpkova and Tevdovski 2009; Norusis 2010) followed Zhang et al. in believing that the number of clusters should be controlled by researchers rather than the software. One might argue, however, that a self-determined number of clusters may cause a risk of bias due to subjectivity. I agree with this argument and, accordingly, decided to control the issue by employing two criteria for selecting the final clustering fragments: 1) the score of the final solution should exceed at least 0.2 in the Silhouette Measure; and 2) the final

solution should be made based on the dendrogram provided by hierarchical analysis (see Figure 16).

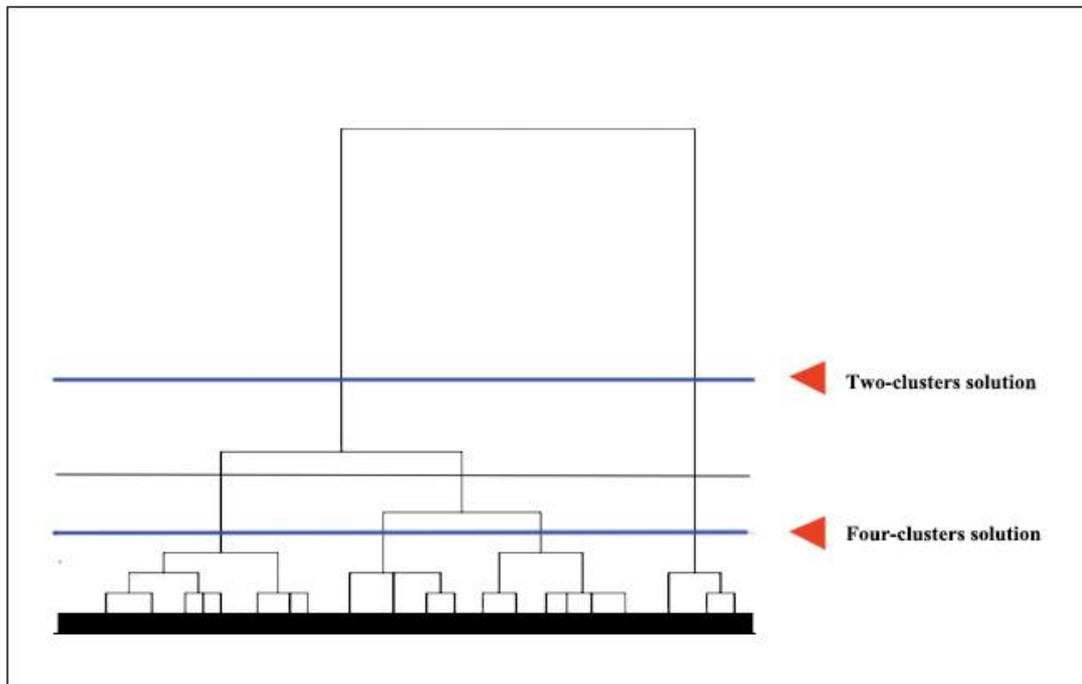


Figure 16 Dendrogram of hierarchical cluster analysis

In line with the criteria mentioned above, the hierarchical culture analysis was initially conducted to determine the most suitable number of segments. Thanks to the visualisation provided by this method, the solutions, ranging from three to five, appeared promising. Among the three outcomes, only the solution with four clusters fulfilled all the requirements of the three criteria. Specifically, the five-cluster solution did not pass the cohesion and separation test and suggested a poorly evidenced result, while the three-cluster solution separated visitors into three very uneven clusters. Therefore, a four-segment case was chosen to conduct further analysis. The average silhouette score of the four-segment solution was above 0.3, suggesting a fair level of clustering output.

Art Distant (n=652, size=27.4%)

The visitors in this category tend to distance themselves from all the listed cultural genres.

Legitimate art lovers (n=638, size= 26.9%)

Like:

Music:

Chinese Religious music
Chinese folk music
European and American opera

Literature:

Chinese Religious, political or philosophy books
Chinese biographies and autobiographies
European and American biographies and autobiographies
Chinese Art books
Chinese poetry and essays

Dislike:

Music:

European and American Jazz and Blues
European and American Electro
Chinese Rock
European and American Rock
European and American Heavy metal, hard rock and punk

Literature:

European and American science, fiction, fantasy and horror
European and American Romance

Tolerants (n=461, size= 19.4%)

The visitors in this category tend to present their tastes for all the listed cultural genres.

Popular culture lovers (n=625, size= 26.3%)

Like:

Music:

European and American Jazz and Blues
European and American Electro
Chinese Rock
European and American Rock
European and American Heavy metal, hard rock and punk

Literature:

European and American science, fiction, fantasy and horror
European and American Romance

Dislike:

Music:

Chinese Religious music
Chinese folk music
European and American opera

Literature:

Chinese Religious, political or philosophy books
Chinese biographies and autobiographies
European and American biographies and autobiographies
Chinese Art books
Chinese poetry and essays

Table 10 Four visitor profiles

As shown in Table 3, the proportions of the four clusters were 27.4%, 19.4%, 26.9%, and 26.3%. As the third largest cluster, cluster 1 can be described as comprising culture *Distant*s. The reason why this group is named as such is due to the fact that the members

of this group tended to distance themselves from all kinds of cultural genres. They claimed that they do not like to listen to music or read books in their leisure time. Unlike the culture *Distants*, the visitors in the *Tolerants* category had a totally opposite form of cultural preference. They accept various genres indiscriminately. As the smallest visitor group, the proportion of this type of visitors accounts for only 19.4% of the visitors. As the second largest visitor group, the legitimate culture lovers prefer high-profile cultural genres (e.g. biographies and autobiographies and opera) and tend to display special preferences for cultural goods from mainland China. To be specific, as shown in the Table 10, they like almost all kinds of ‘high-brow’ cultural forms from mainland China. The counterparts of the legitimate art lovers, the *popular culture lovers* only present their preference toward American and European popular art genres (e.g. American and European heavy metal, hard rock, and punk music) or the works of art that are under the process of legitimation (e.g. blues and jazz).

The above section showed a very interesting juxtaposition of four types of tastes. In the following section, multinomial logistic regression will be applied to the data in order to establish cultural profiles for the clusters and to explore the relationship between these consumption patterns and visitors’ demographic figures.

5.4.2 Validation, stability, and reliability of the clustering solution

In comparison to other statistical methods, it is more difficult to assess the quality of the results or the model fit of the solutions generated by the CA. For Halkidi et al. (2001: 596), this is due to the fact that there is no ‘true class information’ to draw upon when

researchers attempt to evaluate the accuracy of their clustering results. The primary reason for this issue is that, as an explorative approach, the cluster partitions provided by the CA could be extremely sensitive to any changes that might occur in the computing or calculating procedure. This CA characteristic means that researchers who use this method always risk obtaining unreliable, unstable, or invalid results, or even ‘artificially partition data that are not meaningful clustered’ (Halkidi et al. 2001: 596). To be more specific, confronted with the many available clustering approaches and various partitions that each algorithm might generate, researchers normally have no choice but to determine and evaluate the ‘proper’ result and cluster structure subjectively based on his or her preparatory research. Thus, the very nature of the CA puts the researcher at risk of selecting a poor quality and random clustering solution (Leisch and Grün 2006: 637). In order to pursue a more objective clustering solution, many researchers have highlighted the importance of validating the cluster before interpreting the cluster solution (e.g., Mooi and Sarstedt 2011: 260).

As an approach to measure the quality of clustering solutions, Milligan suggests that the validity test should be divided into two analytical steps: an internal criterion analysis and an external criterion analysis (Milligan 1996: 367). According to Milligan (*ibid*), an internal criterion analysis measures the quality of the clustering based on the information and the variables that were obtained from or used in the clustering. On the other hand, external criterion analysis utilises the variables that are not involved in the cluster analysis. Both analytical methods will be separately introduced and applied to this present study’s data set in the following section. To be more specific, due to the fact that the quality of the four-clustering solution in this research achieved a ‘fair’ level in the test (the Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation), which was provided by

the two-step cluster module in the SPSS, Section 5.4.3 will concentrate on testing the stability of the Chinese visitor categories. As a cross-validation procedure, replication analysis was employed to assess the stability of the four Chinese clusters. Based on the external variables that are not involved in the clustering procedure, Section 5.4.3 subsequently measures the validity of the partition by applying contingency (cross-tabulation) analysis.

5.4.3 Replication analysis

Stability is measured by applying the same clustering procedures to two subsets that were randomly and evenly split from the same data set. Therefore, the strength of stability is determined by how strongly the results are related to each other. According to Milligan and Hirtle (2003:180), 'if an underlying clustering exists in the data set, then one should be able to replicate these results in a second sample from the same source and set of variables'. In this present study, the analysis procedure I applied to the database was similar to the one that Milligan and Hirtle (2003) recommended. More specifically, first, the data set was randomly split into two halves using the case split module in the SPSS; second, the two-step cluster analytical method was applied to the first subset. After identifying the four partitions, the cluster centroids were computed from the first portion of the halved data set. Third, the elements of the second data set were assigned to the nearest centroid calculated from the first sample using the K-means cluster method. This step aimed to generate a clustering sample based on the cluster characteristics of the first sample. Fourth, the second portion of the halved data set was

also clustered using the two-step cluster analysis method. In the final step, the partition agreement between the two partitions of the second half of the data set was computed.

Milligan and Hirtle (2003) believe that Cohen's kappa (k) coefficient is a qualified method that can be used to measure the agreement between the subsets. In analysing the measurement of agreement between the two subsets via the SPSS, k was 0.66 ($p < 0.005$). According to the guideline offered by Landis and Koch (1977: 165), a k of 0.66 represents a substantial strength of agreement between the two clustering sets. The p value also indicates that the k coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero. Therefore, the four-clustering solution passed the replication test, thereby proving its stability within the data set. The validity of the partitioning solution (external criterion analysis) will be discussed in Section 5.4.4.

5.4.4 External criterion analysis

As mentioned in Section 5.4.4, in order to test the goodness of fit of the resulting cluster partitions, it is also important for researchers to explore whether or not significant differences exist between external variables in the clusters. The logic behind an external criterion analysis is that if the clusters truly exist within the data set then they should also be 'to some extent homologous' in relation to the features of the external variables (Mooi and Sarstedt 2011: 725). In this regard, external criterion analysis serves two purposes. First, the approach assesses the external validity of the clustering outputs; second, it works as a supplemental approach by introducing more external information into the interpretative pattern of the partitions.

Aiming to assess whether or not the four clustering solutions can effectively split the external information into four distinct and meaningful subgroups, a set of conservative aesthetic claims (the variables that were used in the cluster analysis) were included in the test. As seen in Table 4, most of the variables passed the Pearson’s chi-square test in the SPSS, and this suggests a statistically significant association between the four visitor categories and the artists and the aesthetic claims ($p < .05$). The variables that did not pass the test were Wang Shimin (a Chinese traditional artist), ‘Artwork should be easy to understand’ and ‘Artwork should contain abstract figures’ ($p > .05$). In this regard, the four clustering solutions could be classified as having satisfied the external information. This result also provided an insight into how the groups vary in their knowledge of and attitude towards artistic history and art theories. Based on these test results, the profiles of the four visitor categories are summarised in the following section.

The visitors’ Attitude towards the Aesthetic Claims

	<i>Distants</i>	<i>PCLs</i>	<i>LCLs</i>	<i>Tolerants</i>	Total
Total	27.4	26.3	26.9	19.4	100
Number	652	625	638	461	2376
Sophisticated technical skills (%)**					
I do not agree	13.7	11.8	13.8	10.4	12.6
Neutral	37.4	45.6	40.3	39.0	40.7
I agree	48.9	42.6	45.9	50.5	46.8
Easy to understand (%)					
I do not agree	25.5	28.6	24.6	26.2	26.2

Neutral	50.9	49.8	50.6	47.3	49.8
I agree	23.6	21.6	24.8	26.5	23.9
Represent moral value (%)***					
I do not agree	67.6	72.6	67.7	67.9	69.0
Neutral	26.7	21.3	25.7	20.2	23.7
I agree (n=172)	5.7	6.1	6.6	11.9	7.2
Beautiful (%)***					
I do not agree	18.7	29.3	21.5	24.9	23.4
Neutral	37.1	35.4	37.9	35.8	36.6
I agree	44.2	35.4	40.6	39.3	39.9
Original (%)***					
I do not agree	20.9	24.8	17.2	22.3	21.2
Neutral	38.2	36.5	39.3	37.3	37.9
I agree	41.0	38.7	43.4	40.3	40.9
Abstract figures (%)					
I do not agree (n=260)	9.4	11.7	10.8	12.4	10.9
Neutral	25.0	26.7	28.1	24.9	26.3
I agree	65.6	61.6	61.1	62.7	62.8
Education (%)***					
I do not agree	21.2	29.1	23.7	22.8	24.2
Neutral	47.5	45.8	49.7	46.0	47.3
I agree	31.3	25.1	26.6	21.3	31.2
Feel comfortable and ease (%)**					
I do not agree	18.4	25.4	21.3	19.5	21.3
Neutral	42.6	41.4	41.8	39.5	41.5
I agree	39.0	33.1	36.8	41.0	37.2

The Visitors' Attitude towards the Artists

Wang Shimin

I do not like	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.5
Neutral	14.9	14.6	15.2	18.7	15.6
I like	12.4	11.8	13.3	15.8	13.2
I do not know	71.2	72.2	70.1	63.8	69.7
Li Keran ***					
I do not like	1.5	1.8	1.1	1.3	1.4
Neutral	16.4	20.2	16.3	17.8	17.6
I like	25.6	25.1	39.0	41.0	32.1
I do not know	56.4	53.0	43.6	39.9	48.9
Jin Shangyi ***					
I do not like	2.3	4.0	2.0	2.2	2.7
Neutral	14.1	15.7	13.2	17.1	14.9
I like	21.6	19.4	30.9	34.3	26.0
I do not know	62.0	61.0	53.9	46.4	56.5
Huang Yongping					
I do not like	1.2	1.1	0.9	2.2	1.3
Neutral	14.7	13.3	14.7	15.2	14.4
I like	14.4	15.8	16.9	19.7	16.5
I do not know	69.6	69.8	67.4	62.9	67.8
Edouard Manet ***					
I do not like	0.9	2.2	1.7	1.7	1.6
Neutral	12.6	13.3	13.8	11.7	12.9
I like	37.3	41.4	44.5	51.0	43.0
I do not know	49.2	43.0	40.0	35.6	42.5
Georges Braque ***					
I do not like	0.8	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.2
Neutral	14.0	16.3	13.5	18.4	15.3
I like	35.5	42.1	35.9	36.1	37.4
I do not know	49.7	40.2	49.2	44.2	46.0
Richard Hamilton ***					

I do not like	1.5	0.8	1.3	1.7	1.3
Neutral	14.1	14.9	16.0	15.8	15.2
I like	32.3	38.7	34.1	36.1	35.3
I do not know	52.1	45.6	48.6	46.4	48.2
Jeff Koons ***					
I do not like	1.2	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.3
Neutral	13.5	12.0	13.0	16.1	13.5
I like	42.6	42.6	29.4	38.2	38.2
I do not know	42.7	42.4	54.6	43.7	46.0

The visitors' demographic indicators

Gender ***

Male	30.5	38.2	31.8	41.0	34.9
Female	69.5	61.8	68.2	59.0	65.1

Age ***

18-19 years old	67.9	73.5	54.6	61.4	64.6
30-39 years old	16.4	14.6	16.0	20.8	16.7
40-49 years old	15.7	11.9	29.4	17.8	18.7

Mother's education ***

No Diploma and Primary School	27.0	20.6	28.4	25.8	25.4
Middle School	29.8	26.9	24.9	22.6	26.2
High School	27.1	30.2	27.4	27.5	28.1
Junior College or Above Degree	16.1	22.2	19.7	24.1	20.2

Notes: * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001

Table 6 The visitors' Attitude towards the Aesthetic Claims

According to the results of external validation analysis (EVA), 'Distant' and 'LCLs' clusters contains a high proportion of female visitors. Compared with the *Distant* and the *LCLs*, the *PCLs* and the *Tolerant* are more likely to be male. Both the *Distant* and

the *PCLs* are more likely than average to be young adults 18-19 years old. The *LCLs* have a higher chance to be 40-49 years old on average than the members of the other three identified groups. The *Tolerants* contains a higher proportion of the middle age visitors (30-39 years old) than average. The *PCLs* and the *Tolerants* are likely to have a high-educated mother who holds junior and above qualifications on average than the individuals in the *Distant*s and the *LCLs* categories. The proportion of *Distant*s and the *LCLs*' mothers who have no degree or primary school degree are higher than average. The '*PCL*' cluster also has the highest percentage of the visitors who have knowledge about the listed Western contemporary artists in the questionnaire. The *PCL* cluster also had a higher than average number of visitors who disagreed with most of the eight claims made in the questionnaire.

The *PCLs* are more likely to be art experts who have a higher chance to achieve a comfortable level of understanding within contemporary art exhibitions. The results of the MLR demonstrates that the *PCLs* are more likely than the average person to disagree with the established aesthetic norms (measured by variables in relation to the eight listed conservative aesthetic claims). They present their disagreement towards five of six²¹ established aesthetic claims. Their cultural disposition (measured by their knowledge and attitude about or towards the artists listed in the questionnaire of this current research) demonstrates further evidence to support this argument. As shown in the findings of the MLR analysis, compared to the other visitors, the *PCLs* showed a preference for the listed Western contemporary artists.

²¹ The association between the four visitor groups and the two of eight variables ('artwork should be easy understand' and 'artwork should be abstract') is too strong to pass the Chi-Square test for independence.

The *Distants* account for the most conservative visitors in the exhibitions. They showed their agreement towards four of the six established aesthetic claims, which is a higher than average positive response to the claims. More evidence to support this finding is that the *Distants* are more likely than the average to admit that they possess no knowledge of the listed artists. Out of the seven artists listed, the *Distants* admitted to having no knowledge of six of them.

The findings demonstrate that the LCL group has a higher than average neutral attitude towards five out of the six conservative aesthetic claims listed in the questionnaire. As the second highest proportion of visitors who approve of these conservative claims, they agree with two out of the six claims. Regarding their knowledge of the listed artists, they have knowledge of four out of the seven established classic artists, which is consistent with their taste for legitimate culture. The *LCLs* also admit that they have no knowledge of all three Western contemporary artists listed in the questionnaire.

The *Tolerants*, like the *LCLs*, also agree with two of the six aesthetic claims listed in the questionnaire. They also present a higher than average interest towards all the listed established classic artists, but not the contemporary artists. They should also be considered as conservative visitors due to their lack of interest towards the avant-garde aesthetic claims.

The following part of this section examines to what extent the visitors' demographics can be used to understand the relationship between the identified visitor groups. This

will be done by using multinomial logistic regression (MLR) to look at the visitors' age, gender, and mothers' education.

5.4.5 Multinomial logistic regression

Table 7 Logistic model for culture *Distants*

	Popular Culture Lovers			Legitimate Culture Lovers			<i>Tolerants</i>		
	Wald	Sig	OR EXP(B)	Wald	Sig	OR EXP(B)	Wald	Sig	OR EXP(B)
Gender									
Men	10.886	0.001***	1.484	-0.07	0.000***	0.952	0.427	0.001**	1.190
Women (=ref.)									
Education of mother									
Level 1 Low	-.584	0.001***	0.558	-.270	0.117	0.763	-.580	0.002**	0.390
Level 2	-.426	0.001***	0.653	-.429	0.013*	0.651	-.757	0.000***	0.327
Level 3	-0.202	0.227	0.817	-.241	0.160	0.786	-.456	0.012*	0.445
Level 4 High (=ref.)									
Age									
Level 1 Low	.531	0.057	1.701	-1.143	0.000***	0.319	-.757	0.001**	0.298
Level 2	.369	0.227	1.447	-1.010	0.000***	0.364	-.456	0.165	0.418
Level 3 High (=ref.)									
Education of the visitors									
Level 1 Low	-0.136	0.509	0.873	.048	0.818	1.049	-.202	0.317	0.817
Level 2	-.111	0.489	1.118	.191	0.242	1.210	.008	0.959	1.008
Level 3 High (=ref.)									
Constant		0.016*			0.000***			0.023*	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.103 *								

Notes: Dependent variable: *Distants* (0= no; 1= yes) * p< 0.05, ** p< 0.01, *** p< 0.001

Table 8 Variables used in the multinomial logistic regression analysis

Variable	Response Category
Gender	1=male; n=830 (34.9%) 2=female; n=1546 (65.1%)
Education of Mother	1=no diploma, primary school, and middle school diploma n=604 (25.4%) 2= high school diploma n=623 (26.2%) 3 = Junior college or equivalent degree n=668 (28.1%) 4= University or higher education or equivalent degree n=481 (20.2%)
Age	1=18-29 years old visitors n=1773 (74.6%) 2=29-39 years old visitors n=396 (16.7%) 3= 40+ years old visitors n=207 (8.7%)
Visitors' Education	1= no diploma and primary school, middle school and high school diploma n= 407 (14.1%) 2= Junior college or University degree n=1504 (63.3%) 3= higher education or equivalent degree n=465 (19.6%)

The findings of the multinomial logistic regression analysis are as follows (see Table 12). First, compared to the influence of class and education, the visitors' gender, age, and mother's education are the most likely variables to separate the visitors into different visitor groups. The effects of those independent variables are independent to that of class²² and education. As shown in Table 12, once the other variables were controlled for, there is not a strong enough relationship between the variables (education and class) and the memberships of the four visitors' groups. Second, compared to their female peers, male visitors were 1.484 and 1.495 time more likely to be *PCLs* or *Tolerants* than cultural *Distants* respectively. In this regard, gender differences shed light on the variation between degrees of openness to Western and American popular and emerging cultural genres, and both conservative tastes and a sense of disinterest when it comes to Chinese cultural genres. Third, a mother's low level of educational training – no further than high school credentials – was the most important characteristic involved in enhancing the odds of a visitor being a distant rather than being a *PCL*, *LCL*, or tolerant ($p < .0005$). Specifically, compared with those who held university or above certifications, a mother's lower level of education (i.e. no higher than a middle school degree) decreases the likelihood of her child being a *PCL*, *LCL*, and tolerant by a multiplicative factor of 0.558, 0.763 and 0.56. In other words, they were 1.79, 1.31, and 1.78 times less likely to become a member of the *PCL*, *LCL*, or tolerant categories respectively. Fourth, the older generation (40+ years old) were inclined to develop an exclusive taste for legitimate art forms whilst the young adults

²² The 'class' variable was not involved in the analysis as it did not improve the 'fitness' of the analytical model.

(18-39 years old) were very likely to have a more diverse and varied set of tastes and tendencies. Specifically, as shown in Table 12, being an 18-29 or 30-39-year-old visitor increased the odds of being classified as a distant ($p < .001$, 3, and 2.7 times more likely to become a distant than a LCL); PCL ($p < .005$, 5.3, and 4 times more likely to become a member of the PCLs category than the LCLs category) and tolerant ($p < .05$, 1.5, and 1.9 times more likely to be Tolerant than a LCL). Thus, the age differences among the visitors highlight the opposition between exclusively legitimate cultural taste and degree of diverse cultural preferences (to gain membership in either the distant, PCLs, or tolerant category).

Accordingly, the identified distinction (defined by age, gender, and mothers' education) was characterised by the opposition between degrees of cultural engagement and disengagement, legitimate cultural taste and more diverse cultural preferences, and sympathy for Kant's gaze of disinterestedness against aggressive responses to disinterested approaches to decoding contemporary artworks. Thus, although a distinction between high or low cultures can still be identified in the exhibitions, nevertheless, the solution provided by Multinomial Logistic Regression demonstrated more complex and multidimensional patterns of cultural consumption. The following section concentrates on the discussion of the findings of the quantitative data analysis.

5.5 Discussion

5.5.1 The competition between the imported and the established culture

This section describes the findings of the CA, MLR and EVT as presented in the previous section. The primary finding of this section is that, despite the relatively homogenous demographic characteristics of the visitors, the evidence is sufficient to show the multidimensionality and complexity of the visitors' cultural preferences. In this regard, the findings echo the individualisation argument, with the evidence showing that the visitors used different methods to incorporate the contemporary art into their cultural repertoires. When faced with the uncertainty caused by encountering the unfamiliar form of art that was underpinned by Western ideology, the visitors reflexively forged regionally specific ways of engaging with the artwork. This engagement cannot be grounded in the traditional mechanisms of cultural consumption and distinction, such as the distinction characterised by opposition between high and low, omnivore and univore taste, and international versus local. Accordingly, in this setting, education and class were less significant in the separation of the visitor groups and in identifying cultural distinctions than age, gender, and mothers' education. The main contribution of this section is to explore the new organisation of cultural inequality within this specific Chinese context.

The first part of this section highlights the extent to which the above-mentioned forms of distinction characterised by opposition can still be identified within this current research. While they still may have some small part to play, their role in explaining the form of cultural distinction identified within the observed exhibitions is marginalised. The second part of this section discusses how, and in what way, age, gender, and mothers' education orient the mechanism of cultural distinction identified within the observed exhibitions. Accordingly, this part of the section sheds light on the idea that cultural inequalities continue to exist, but in a more subtle and complex way.

The distinction between high and low can still be identified within the observed exhibitions, but in a form specific to this Chinese context. For instance, the *PCLs* have exclusive taste for Western popular cultural genres, whereas their counterparts (the *LCLs*) have an exclusive taste for Chinese legitimate culture. This section will look at the specific form that the mechanism of distinction takes, and discuss why it maintains only a marginal role in the formation of cultural distinction.

Both the *PCLs* and *LCLs* have their own localised outlook in the PRC. The forms of music and literature that the *LCLs* and the *PCLs* either prefer or avoid are similar to the class-specific patterns of taste (highbrow and popular taste) in the homology argument. However, what identifies the importance of understanding the socio-cultural specificity of the cultural tastes lies in the findings of the external validation analysis and the restricted prevalence of those two patterns of taste among the visitors. Specifically,

Bourdieu highlights the symbolic boundaries that the cultural elites draw on to distance themselves from the working classes. Within his class-based symbolic hierarchy, Bourdieu deems ‘highbrow’ tastes (e.g. for opera and classical music) and Kantian aesthetics as ‘weapons’ used by the members of the high class to dominate cultural spaces, such as museums and theatres. As he states, highbrow taste is privileged because it requires a relatively high volume of cultural capital and decoding method that very few people can achieve, especially those from working-class backgrounds (see also Chapter 2, Section 2.3). In the observed contemporary art exhibitions, although some visitors (the *PCLs* and the *LCLs*) have exclusive tastes for a range of cultural genres that share a high or a low status, it does not mean that the legitimate culture lovers are the ‘happy few’ in the exhibitions (Zolberg 2007: 97). Specifically, in contrast to the *LCLs*, the *PCLs* are more likely to feel at home in the three contemporary art galleries due to their sympathy for avant-garde theories and claims. This is illustrated in their negative attitude towards most of the listed conservative aesthetic principles. Among all the established aesthetic claims, they show a positive attitude only towards the ‘Artworks should be easy to understand’ option (their correspondence with this positive claim does not approach an acceptable level of statistical significance, $p > 0.05$).

In this regard, what motivates the *PCLs* to juxtapose contemporary artwork with the other emerging cultural genres is less likely the popularisation of contemporary art as a devalued form of legitimate culture or their failure to recognise the ‘legitimacy’ of the

elements of popular culture in contemporary artworks. On the contrary, by detaching themselves from ‘economic necessities’, the *PCLs* present a high level of familiarity with what Bourdieu calls the ‘proper tool’ or the ‘pure gaze’ for decoding contemporary artworks. More evidence for this argument can be found earlier in this chapter (section 5.2), where the findings of the MLR show that *PCLs* have a sophisticated knowledge of avant-garde theories and art history. This point will continue to be explored in the next chapter, where qualitative findings will be used to validate the claims elicited from the quantitative data.

In this way, the finding supports the argument of some sociologists who cast doubt on the efficiency of using ‘standard’ categorical labels of genres as indicators of the boundaries between classes and the symbolic status of cultural goods (e.g., Holt 1997; Hennion 2001; Savage et al. 2009). Probably due to Bourdieu’s and Bourdieusian scholars’ impressive success in measuring cultural inequalities, many sociologists directly and confidently use the ‘formal’ labels of genres as consensus class markers in their analytical and interpretive mechanisms. Holt has a critical attitude towards the uncritical usage of categories of consumption objects in those empirical studies. As Holt states, those ‘standard’ labels are no longer reliable since many factors, such as historical changes, technological advances, and ‘mass production of commodity-signs’ have ‘drained the symbolic potency of objectified cultural capital’ (1997: 103). Savage et al. (2009: 5) also critically identify the methodological issue in Peterson’s interpretation of the omnivore–univore argument as over-relying on the ‘face value’ of

the genres. They highlight the fact that the symbolic boundaries of musical genres in the UK are different from the criteria of genre classification that Peterson introduces in his survey (2005). In this regard, a person's taste for both popular and classical art should be interpreted as a univorous taste, which is underpinned by the popularity of classical music, rather than an omnivorous taste. All the above-mentioned sociologists shed light on the importance of measuring embodied capital (a person's taste and consumption practices) in the related empirical studies. Those arguments thus provide an alternative way of decoding the complex patterns of the visitors' tastes in this current research, and to explore whether the classification problem that is caused by the changing socio-cultural status and the categorical meaning of cultural genres conceals the social stratification of cultural consumption.

On the other hand, their counterparts, the *LCLs*, have limited tolerance for the listed claims of avant-garde art. The *LCLs* agree with most of the listed aesthetic claims but present a neutral attitude towards the 'Art should enable its visitors to feel comfortable and at ease' option. The identification of the *LCLs*' conservatively aesthetic attitude indicates that they are less likely to successfully take cognitive comfort in the exhibitions due to their lack of decoding methods to appreciate the 'value' of the contemporary artworks. Based on the two above-mentioned factors, compared to the visitors who have a taste for the legitimate cultural referents, the emerging culture lovers are more likely to gain benefits from visiting the exhibitions. In this respect, the traditional opposition that underlies the homology argument between the legitimate

aesthetic orientation of distinctiveness and the lower-class culture of the necessary loses its defining power of marking the symbolic boundaries within the exhibitions (Bennett et al. 2009: 56). Among the visitors, the symbolic struggle between the dominant (the *PCLs*) and the dominated (the *LCLs*) has thus been replaced and is characterised by a new opposition between emerging cultural and established tastes. Nonetheless, the visitors' consumption patterns involving the cultural genres still cannot easily be reduced to such a single-dimensional distinction. For instance, the primary division between the *Tolerants* and the *Distants* is not shaped by the tension between high- and low-level cultures, but rather engagement and disengagement.

Two factors can be shown to support the claim that the high – low mechanism of cultural distinction is marginalised within this specific context. First, although the *PCLs* are experts, within the MLR test their tastes cannot be distinguished from those of the other visitors. This suggests that the high – low mechanism of cultural distinction is not as significant when considering the age, gender, and mothers' education variables, which have already been shown to be the most significant in determining cultural taste within this context, especially when education and class contribute little to the identification of patterns of cultural distinction. Another issue faced by the homology argument is that not all the visitors share the oppositional patterns of cultural preferences between highbrow and popular cultures. The visitors with tastes for the legitimate and the popular cultural genres only account for 26.9% and 26.3% of the survey participants, respectively. On the other hand, 46.8% of the visitors' (the

Tolerants and the *Distants*) cultural tastes can hardly be directly categorised as ‘highbrow snob’, ‘middlebrow’, or ‘lowbrow’ cultural preferences with standard general labels (e.g. considering opera and classical music as elite cultures).

Thus, the weak predictive power of the two independent variables (class and education) should be interpreted as the fact that owning cultural capital is only one of the prerequisites enabling the visitors to spend their leisure time in the exhibitions. The class-based social and educational inequalities do not deterministically shape the differentiations among the visitors’ tastes as they do in Bourdieusian studies (e.g., Bourdieu et al. 1969). The following part of this section discusses the extent to which the omnivore-univore argument is relevant, but less important, for understanding this new organisation of cultural distinction.

Likewise, the finding only partly supports the omnivore–univore argument. Specifically, compared with Bourdieu’s rigid cultural exclusion, the omnivore-univore hypothesis (see Peterson 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996; Peterson and Simkus 1992) is more focused on another form of cultural exclusiveness, which relies on a mixed taste and cultural tolerance. Peterson and Kern claimed that interpretation of Bourdieu’s highbrow tastes have changed since the late twentieth century. For them, elite classes (omnivores) tend to distinguish their lifestyle by displaying tolerance and openness by crossing the boundaries between high-class and popular culture (1996: 904). In contrast, their counterparts—a less advanced social class—have a limited range of popular tastes due to their lack of competence to ‘win the game’ in the field of restricted cultural

consumption. According to the findings of the CA, the visitors with hybrid cultural tastes from high to low can also be identified in the exhibitions. The *Tolerants* showed their taste for all the listed literature and music genres, which included both high and low cultural items. However, there is no concrete evidence to demonstrate that they are dominating the exhibition space. The reasons for this lack of evidence to support that claim are as follows.

First, although they have a broad range of cultural tastes, it does not necessarily mean that the visitors who fall under the *Tolerants* category utilise the same position-taking and ‘winning the game’ strategies (to achieve cognitive comfort) in these fields as the *PCLs* do. There is no sufficient evidence to show that the *Tolerants*’ taste for contemporary art is based on their advanced ‘information-processing capacity’ (Peterson and Simkus 1992) or critical understanding of contemporary artwork (Peterson and Kern 1996: 906). As shown in the results of the external validation analysis, similar to the *Distants* and the *LCLs*, the *Tolerants* are also likely to make their judgement on contemporary art through referring it to the norms of morality and agreeability. To be more specific, within the external validation test the proportion of the visitors in the *Tolerants* category with a higher than average disagreement with the conservative claims was the second highest among all the groups. They also showed their taste for established art forms at a level higher than the average. Their ethics-based aestheticism thus renders the *Tolerants* in a very vulnerable position in the exhibitions. Sharing similar conservative aesthetics, the *Tolerants*’ interpretation of contemporary

artwork has no significant difference from that of the *LCLs* and the *Distants*. In this regard, no sufficient evidence has been found to support the claim that the hybrid pattern of cultural consumption is replacing the highbrow pattern.

Second, as with the distinction between high and low, the omnivore-uni-vore mechanism of cultural distinction cannot be used to understand the cultural tastes demonstrated by the *Distants*. The findings of the MLR test also show that omnivores cannot be distinguished from the other visitors within the data. In the following section of this chapter, the influence of the three key independent variables (age, gender, and mothers' education) will be examined.

5.5.2 The influence of mothers' education on the visitors' cultural preferences

As shown in the multinomial regression analysis phase, the educational levels of the visitors' mothers are significant in predicting cultural distinction. If the correlation between the visitors' early socialisation (that is controlled by their mothers' education) and the four types of cultural profiles are based on the unequal distribution of cultural capital (that the visitors inherited from their mothers), the *Distants* should be deemed as the most unprivileged. The visitors whose mothers are college-degree holders, not the non-degrees and primary degrees, are more likely to become *LCLs*, *PCLs* or

Tolerants rather than *Distants*. The finding thus identifies three main influences of the mothers' highly institutionalised cultural capital (educational achievement) on the visitors' cultural tendencies. First, the relatively higher/lower volume of embodied cultural capital (cultural taste) that the visitors might inherit from their highly/poorly educated mothers does not necessarily generate a bourgeois/popular aesthetic orientation. In contrast to the related finding in Bourdieu's theoretical mechanism of cultural reproduction and the accounts of the scholars who stress the importance of intergenerational transmission of cultural capital for structuring cultural consumptions (Bourdieu et al. 1969; Bourdieu 1977; DiMaggio 1982; Sullivan 2002; Christin 2010; Willekens et al. 2014), the influences of the mothers' different educational levels on the divisions of the visitors' cultural choices are not characterised by the opposition between 'highbrow' and 'popular' cultures but are based on 'cultural engagement' and 'cultural avoidance'. For instance, the visitors with a lower volume of inherited cultural capital tend to distance themselves from not only the legitimate forms of music and books but also the popular genres. At the same time, among their counterparts whose mothers have high educational attainment, only a segment of the visitors (the *LCLs*) have a taste for high-status music and books.

In this regard, the findings suggest that the educational levels of the mother have an influence on the music and literature tastes of their children. The identification of the important role of women in educating their offspring is coherent with the findings of many scholars (e.g. Collins 1988; Katz-Gerro 2000). For Collins, women often manage

the 'status work' in the family. Katz-Gerro in line with Collins' comment; they state that within a family milieu, women are expected to take the responsibility of 'cultivating cultural capital and representing the household' (2000: 345). The traditional interpretation of this gender socialisation argument suggests that women are more likely to consume highbrow cultures.

The findings of the Multinomial Logistic Regression demonstrate that the mother's influence on their offspring's level of sophisticated cultural understanding is limited to the *PCL* visitors. Even so, the mothers' institutional, cultural capital (her credentials) presents little explanatory power to understand the variety of the tastes among the visitors who had a better chance to accept direct or indirect parenting from their higher-educated mothers. The identification of the limited role the mothers' education background has for predicting the legitimate taste thus questions the effectiveness of adopting the analytic model of cultural reproduction (e.g. Bourdieu et al 1969; Bourdieu 1973) in this current research. Within many social stratification studies, the individuals who grow up in high-status families can keep the benefit from their early socialisation in highbrow cultures, but the influence of this is very restricted. In other words, the findings of this current research challenge the previously held notion of the traditional gender socialisation argument that highly educated mothers pass on highbrow symbolic capital to their offspring, and less educated mothers pass on tastes for popular culture. This current research agrees that the visitors' mothers' education shapes their engagement with cultural genres, but in a different way. The findings of this current

research show instead that highly educated mothers pass on a sense of general cultural engagement to their offspring, and less educated mothers pass on a sense of disengagement from culture altogether.

5.5.3 The influence of age and gender on the visitors' tastes

According to the data analysis mentioned in previous sections, the visitors' gender and age play a vital role in cataloguing them into the four visitor groups, the effects of which are independent to that of class and education. In traditional cultural sociology studies, for example, the subordinate role that gender and age has in Bourdieu's theoretical framework offers very limited space for understanding the visitors' cultural profiles in this current study. Specifically, knowing the dominated role of women in a masculine society provides little information that helps us to understand why male visitors (especially for the *PCLs*) were more likely to benefit from the exhibitions where women were used to 'leading positions'. By the same token, the visitors' age plays a less deterministic role for isolating avant-garde culture lovers from those who had taste for legitimate cultural forms. The following section introduces the identified cultural distinctions that are underpinned by gender- and age-oriented differences respectively.

Specifically, within this work, Bourdieu considers one's gender and age to be 'secondary principles' of social division, and so are other demographics, such as ethnicity and geographical origin. For Bourdieu, secondary characteristics such as gender, age, and geographic origins can only forge sub-class fractions within different classes (e.g. a gendered tendency for choosing a different kind of educational capital to those who hold similar initial capital). The reason for Bourdieu to rank gender as a secondary criterion is that, for him, gender division is, 'a real principle of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated' (1984: 102). More specifically, nominal categories, such as occupation, gender, and age have a powerful and 'real' influence towards an individual's 'choice' within a specific class, but are not powerful enough to determine one's position within both social and cultural space. However, in this current research, gender and age difference do not simply imply the new winners within a cultural context that is characterised by new cultural orders (e.g. Bihagen and Katz-Gerro 2000; Chan and Goldthorpe 2005, 2007; Bennett et al. 2009; Christin 2010).

Within those works, the gendered distribution of cultural consumption still dominates the social space. However, it does not mean that the gendered division of cultural consumption needs to follow the traditional forms of femininity and masculinity. Many scholars have challenged this gender stereotype within the cultural consumption model. Within Chan and Goldthorpe's (2007) work, women are more likely to be omnivores than males are in the domains of cinema, dance, and theatre. In this respect, cultural consumption should still be deemed as a well-defined traditional femininity. For those

scholars, omnivorous cultural tastes account for a new form of cultural distinction. Bihagen and Katz-Gerro (2000) investigate the issues related to gender differences in Sweden. They state that, although gender difference is stable, they identified a weak relationship between highbrow tastes and women who are 'skilled manual workers, outside the labour market and married/cohabiting respondents' (2000: 344). Katz-Gerro attributes the changing forms of gender differences in consumption to the following factor: the intersectional effects of gender, class, and other variables upon the individuals' consumption of culture.

Even those explanations for the changing forms of gender difference-oriented cultural preferences are plausible. Nevertheless, the solutions generated by the Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR) cast doubts on the validity of applying those findings in the monitored exhibitions. Accordingly, the findings of the MLR shed light on the precarious position that female visitors find themselves in, where they are less likely to feel intellectual and emotional comfort at the exhibitions. In the exhibitions, acknowledging the visitors' gender can only roughly predict that the male visitors were more likely to win the game (to become the *PCLs* and *Tolerants* rather than the *Distants* and *LCLs*) within the exhibitions.

The specific way of making sense of this gender difference is that the male visitors, especially those who were students or were working in cultural sectors and departments

of civil service, were more likely to distance themselves from applying traditional femininity (appreciating classic art and the aesthetic and moral values which underpinned it). In this regard, being less constrained by the traditional femininity-characterised aesthetic disposition (e.g. to dominate the internal space such as art museums and galleries), the male visitors more easily accepted the avant-garde aesthetic claims and norms of contemporary artworks.

Similarly, the association between age differences and cultural consumption was also striking when considering how it is at odds with the findings of previous related studies. For many scholars, age should be considered a less important indicator of cultural distinction. For them, the age differences related to cultural consumption should be better understood as a consequence of changing cultural orders between generations. This is exemplified in work undertaken by Bennett et al. (2009) in the UK. For them, the American cultures are very important for the members of younger age groups. In contrast to this youth trend, among the older age group, knowing and appreciating European cultural genres is a primary way to establish cultural privilege. Another example of this is the study carried out by Christin (2000). She identifies an intersectional effect of age and gender on the individuals' cultural preferences. For her, young women are more likely to benefit from their early socialisation by developing interest in high cultural consumption. Compared to females in the same age group, the oldest male respondents who hold high educational credentials are more willing to

participate in art events. According to Christin, broad transformations in the educational system have contributed to the changing gendered patterns of participation in the arts.

As shown in the findings of the MLR, the age difference-oriented distinction lies in the opposition between legitimate taste and the other three ways to rebel against this taste. Compared to the older visitors (40+ years old), the younger visitors (18-39 years old) were less likely to become the *LCLs* rather than the *Distants*, *PCLs*, and *Tolerants*. In this way, the findings of this current research challenge the traditional view that age is less important when considering cultural taste. The findings of this research instead support an argument that age differences can bring more complex, multidimensional patterns of cultural consumption.

5.6 Conclusion

The main findings of this chapter are as follows. First, four types of visitors were identified based on their musical and literary tastes: *Tolerants*, Popular Culture Lovers, Legitimate Culture Lovers, and *Distants*. Second, based on the external validation test, the members of these different visitor groups have different levels of knowledge about contemporary art theories and art history. This finding further indicates that the uncritical application of the established labels of cultural genres when attempting to understand the visitors in the Chinese context might risk misinterpretation and

questions of validity. Third, the multinomial logistic regression test identified three types of distinction that are characterised by opposition between a) engagement and disengagement, b) conservative tastes and three ways of challenging it, and c) degrees of acceptance towards Kant's pure gaze of disinterestedness. These three types of distinction are oriented by the visitors' age, gender, and mothers' education. Fourth, the findings of this current research suggest a degree of multidimensionality and complexity regarding the visitors' cultural consumption, with visitors developing regionally specific responses to the uncertainty caused by unfamiliar contemporary artworks. The remainder of this chapter will summarise these findings in more detail and highlight the questions that remain to be answered. These questions will be explored in the following qualitative chapter.

First, the result of the external validation test (EVT) demonstrates that the visitors' tastes can be systematically patterned into four categories: *Tolerants*, Popular Culture Lovers (PLCs), Legitimate Culture Lovers (*LCLs*), and *Distants*. Those interpretive groups simultaneously exist across the fields of literature and music consumption. The visitors within different visitor categories presented distinctively homologous tastes across the fields of cultural consumption. For instance, the visitors who had a taste for Western heavy metal and punk music also liked Western science fiction. The visitors who did not like Western emerging cultures tended to highlight their interest in 'legitimate' Chinese cultural forms like Chinese bibliography and folk music. Although some types of genres were popular for all the visitor groups, it does not eliminate the

cultural cleavage between those groups. Some very popular genres such as popular music, classical music, novels, and art books were excluded from the process of cluster analysis due to their negative effect on the quality of modelling/clustering solution, as measured by the Silhouette Measure of Cohesion and Separation (see further discussion of those genres in Section 5.3). Specifically, as shown in Section 5.4.1, the members of the Distant category showed no taste for either the music genres or the literary forms being tested. In contrast, the visitors in the Tolerant group had tastes for all forms of music and books. The *PCLs* presented exclusive preference for the American and European popular cultural genres such as blues and jazz, heavy metal, and punk music, as well as science fiction, fantasy and horror literature. The *LCLs* distinguish themselves from the others by consuming Chinese ‘high’ cultures such as Chinese folk music, Chinese religious music, and Chinese poetry and essays.

Second, the external test demonstrates that the well-defined social labels of cultural genres (namely highbrow, middlebrow, and popular culture) should no longer be viewed as a powerful indicator of one’s sophisticated aesthetic knowledge and cultural competence. In the current research, it is inappropriate to consider individuals as socially and culturally dominated and exploited purely because they have a taste for the ‘vulgar’ or ‘working-class’ cultures such as heavy metal and punk music and science fiction. On the contrary, the *PCLs* are those who are more likely to qualify as what Zolberg called the ‘happy few’ within the exhibitions (2007: 97) – in other words, the visitors who are more likely to achieve artistic pleasures based on their sophisticated

understanding of artwork. Specifically, the *PCLs* presented a strong tendency to reject established aesthetic norms, due to their familiarity with the theories and claims of contemporary art and artists. In this regard, the members of the *PCL* category are less likely to feel offended and confused in front of contemporary artworks that might provoke social, cultural, and aesthetic controversies, while for those with sophisticated knowledge of legitimate Chinese artists (the *LCLs*), unexpectedly, contemporary art is acceptable to some extent. Rather than denying it in a complete sense, the *LCLs* selectively rejected (based on an argument about sophisticated skills) or maintained a neutral attitude (based on an argument about moral standards and aesthetic harmoniousness) towards part of the conservative aesthetic claims. According to the analysis, the *Tolerants*' broad musical and literary tastes should be deemed as 'cultural goodwill', as would be expected in Bourdieusian interpretations (namely, one's ability to identify legitimate cultural forms, their value, and his or her lack of a necessary decoding method for an engagement at a cognitive level). Accordingly, although they shared a similar culturally tolerant attitude with cultural omnivores (e.g. Peterson 2005) towards a wide range of cultural genres across the boundaries between highbrow, middlebrow, and popular cultures, there is no evidence to indicate that their taste for the contemporary art exhibits was based on their advanced analytical capacity in handling multidimensional and complex information (Chan and Goldthorpe 2007:11) or a critical engagement with those works of art (Peterson and Kern 1995). One example of this argument is that they expressed their aesthetic conservatism through confirming seven of eight established aesthetic claims in the questionnaire. Differing from the three

abovementioned aesthetic tendencies, the members of the *Distants* category frankly admitted their lack of knowledge of aesthetic theories and artists and their lack of interest in the tested musical and literary genres.

Third, according to the analysis, the notion of class habitus in the homology argument plays a very small role in explaining the differences between the four types of cultural consumption. To be more specific, the results of the multinomial logistic analysis demonstrate that the educational and occupational class-based inequalities contribute nothing to the divide of the cultural preferences. On the contrary, the other independent variables (gender, age, and mother's education) have a statistically significant association with the visitors' cultural tastes. Rather than asserting a highly-unified effect on the cultural preferences, the independent variables shaped the difference between some visitor groups and the others. For instance, male visitors were more likely to become the *PCLs* and *Tolerants* rather than the *LCLs* and *Distants*. The visitors whose mothers have relatively low educational backgrounds were more likely to join the Distant category rather than the other three categories. Compared to the young (18–29 years old) and middle-aged (30–39 years old) visitors, the 40-and-older visitors were more likely to be in the LCL category. There was no significant age difference between the members of *PCLs* and *Distants*, although they were more likely to be younger than the *LCLs* and *Tolerants*. Thus, the hegemonic and reductant effect of class habitus on the differentiation of taste is not applicable in the PRC.

Fourth, based on the above-mentioned factors, the visitors' gender, age and mother's education play a vital role in separating the visitors into different patterns of cultural tastes (engagement and disengagement, conservative tastes and three ways of challenging it, and degrees of acceptance towards Kant's pure gaze of disinterestedness). Even though education and class have no contribution towards the fitness of the analytical model in the MLR, it does not mean that class has no influence on the visitors' cultural choices. Indeed, since the majority of the visitors had high educational achievements and upper-class backgrounds, one would risk offering a biased interpretation if these key variables were not considered. Thus, perhaps it is more useful to consider the cultural divisions as symptomatic of the multidimensionality of the visitors' cultural preferences. An example of this lies in the visitors' different reactions toward class-based gendered stereotypes. The male visitors, who were more likely to be identified as *PCLs* and *Tolerants*, tended to either defend their masculinity by differentiating themselves from traditional norms of female tastes (e.g. legitimate art forms such as Chinese folk music and bibliographies) or by developing an openness to the stereotyped femininity. The female visitors, in contrast, tended to either appreciate the gendered tastes or reject them through a denial of engagement. By the same token, for the older generation, who were more likely to be categorised as *LCLs* and *Tolerants*, exclusively following a dominant taste (e.g. Chinese poetry) is only one of the options. Some of those in this age group tended to challenge the generational 'routine' by expending their taste on not only the high-status genres but also the popular genres. The

younger generation, who were more often categorised as *Distants* and *PCLs*, could develop a preference for the ‘mainstream’ cultures or refuse to engage with them. This multidimensionality results from the uncertainty that arises in the visitors when faced with contemporary art that has been both internationally sanctioned as legitimate artwork and imported as a foreign product. When the visitors were unable to decode the artworks based on their prior cultural disposition, they reflexively responded to the artworks in regionally specific ways. Though this seems like a very promising line of enquiry, the data collected does not provide enough robust support for this hypothesis in its own right, and so I do not examine this in more detail in the qualitative chapter. However, this potential finding will be discussed further in the final chapter, where it will be considered as a future line of enquiry.

The above section described the main findings of this chapter. Despite these findings, some questions remained unaddressed due to the restricted explanatory power of quantitative research methods when exploring specific types of research questions. For instance, how do the members of the four visitor categories interpret contemporary art and the exhibitions? What contributes to the division in cultural consumption that is introduced by gender, age, and mothers’ educational differences? What encourages the younger visitors who were more likely to become a *Distant*, *PCL* or *Tolerant* to adopt varied patterns of cultural consumption? All those questions will be explored in the following qualitative data analysis chapter (Chapter 6).

Chapter 6 Investigating the visitors' understanding about contemporary artworks

6.1 Introduction

In his account, Falk (2009) sheds light on the strategies he used to reveal the diversity of museum visitors' motivations, expectations and perceptions (see Chapter 3.4). Through examination of what he calls 'self-aspect', or one's identity-related perception and image of museums, Falk introduces his hypothesis regarding the complex relationship between visitors' 'internal categorisation or conventionalisation of self' (2009: 78) and the exhibiting institutions. The use of such a semi-individualistic view was disputed in the previous chapter based on the identification of a measurable and homologous link between each visitor's demographic characteristics (age, gender and mother's education) and his or her musical and literary tastes. However, Falk highlights an alternative and inspiring way of understanding museum visitors' experiences outside the 'box' of the museum (2009: 34). Specifically, within Falk's framework, individuals' levels of satisfaction with their museum visits are jointly determined by numerous factors, such as their social arrangement and the objective environment of a specific exhibition. These factors cannot simply be reduced to a range of class-based demographic indicators (e.g. education, occupation). In this regard, even Falk's model would fail to explain the cultural divisions within the three Chinese contemporary art museums and galleries (especially for the effect of social arrangement or what he would call 'small-i identity'). Nevertheless, his framework highlights the necessity of understanding visitors in a space where multiple forces and power relations are

interacting. In addition, by including new variables in the analytic model, Falk's account also sheds light on practical ways to amend and complement the established theoretical mechanisms in sociology and museology for coping with and decoding emerging cultural trends and phenomena.

In this regard, one might argue that Falk's (2009) model of the museum visitor experience and the role of identity-related visit motivations can be utilised to address the contradiction between demographic figure-based visitor studies and the 'power complexity' which challenges the monospecific and hegemonic power relationship in exhibiting spaces (Macdonald, 1996: 4). However, Falk's overly complex theoretical mechanism of identity-related museum visiting cannot explain why patterns of cultural taste and clear links with sociodemographic variables are visible among visitors. In this respect, this chapter has been designed to explore the systematic method of interpreting and understanding the diversity of visitors' cultural preferences, as Hanquinet (2015) suggested at the end of her thesis.



Figure 2. Falk's module of identity related visit motivations

In the following section, a new working model will be introduced for systematically exploring how visitors' demographics (e.g. gender, age, and mothers' education) assert an intersectional influence on the division of the four cultural profiles in this current study. Compared to Falk's model, this framework provides a more simplified, accurate and effective approach to understand visitors' cultural preferences. More specifically, the findings of the qualitative data analysis confirm the complex and diverse factors that motivated the visitors' contemporary art exhibitions visit, which cannot be simply and totally reduced to relationships between the typology of tastes and social structures and the distribution of resources. For instance, the three interviewees who claimed that they came to the exhibitions accidentally illustrated three distinctively personal reasons

for their visit. Even so, this does not necessarily mean that their diverse motivations induced random identity-oriented visiting experiences that cannot be systematically grasped, as Falk would have expected. On the contrary, as discussed in this chapter, visitors with the same cultural profiles interpreted the exhibitions and the artworks in the same way. Although the two findings seem contradictory, the involvement of the new variable (curatorial strategies) in the module finally addressed this problem. For instance, as members of the *PCL* (popular culture lover) category, Monai and Lu attended two of the three exhibitions investigated in this current study, where they forged a distinguished form of impression, memory and interpretation within each exhibition (see Section 6.3). Further evidence showing the key role of curatorial strategies in this analytic model lies in the fact that the two interpretive patterns that Kuo used in the exhibitions were, respectively, coherent with those of other *Distants* in the same exhibition they attended. In other words, the *Distants* did not forge similar visiting experiences in every exhibition, and their cultural profiles determined the specific content of their interpretations of the artworks. This factor explains why the *Distants* attended the exhibitions while simultaneously isolating themselves from appropriating other listed cultural genres. Based on the findings of a qualitative data analysis, as shown in Figure 18, the visitors came to the exhibitions with specific expectations determined by their volume and composition of capital as well as their identity-related visit motivations (e.g. the needs and realities of the specific moment and situation). The curatorial strategies (e.g. arrangement and selection of artworks) in which they engaged in the exhibitions contributed to the levels of satisfaction they felt.

The impressions, memories and interpretations the visitors forge in the exhibiting space thus reinforce or reshape the interpretation of contemporary artworks and exhibiting spaces (cultural profiles).

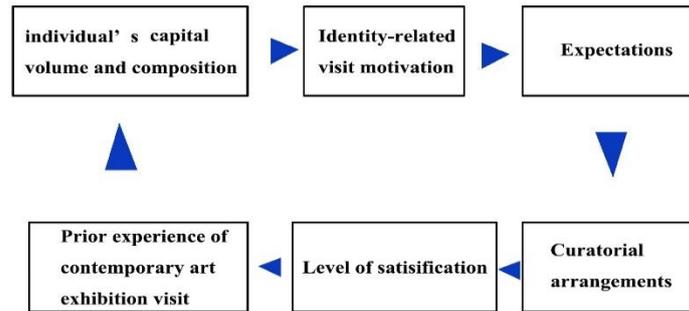


Figure 3. Working model of visiting experience

6.2 Different interpretive strategies that the visitors used to engage with the contemporary art exhibits and exhibitions

Based on the qualitative data analysis, several themes emerged from the text (interview transcript). One of the key themes is the visitors' diverse reactions and impressions regarding a term that has been widely used to identify frequent visitors or lovers of contemporary art museums and galleries in the PRC: 'wenyi youth' (文艺青年) or 'wenyi fan' (文艺范). Whether the visitors accept the term to describe themselves to a large extent determines the specific way they affirm their privileged position within the exhibitions. Thus, this section will be organised based on the visitors' degrees of acceptance towards categorising themselves as wenyi youth. Specifically, Section 6.2.1 introduces the definition of the wenyi fan in related studies. The following three

sections (Sections 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3) examine how the four identified types of visitor define their relationships with the term ‘wenyi fan’ and contemporary art. The last section summarises the main findings. Within this section, the association between the three independent variables (gender, age and mother’s education) and the visitors’ cultural consumption will also be analysed.

Due to the methodological limitation of this current research (where N interview participants = 11), the aim of this chapter is not to predict or explore the main cultural consumption trends of the members of each visitor category. Rather, this chapter has been designed to examine the possible interpretive strategies the visitors used to engage with the exhibits and the exhibitions.

6.2.1 Wenyi youth and wenyi fans

According to the definition given by the Modern Chinese-English Dictionary (2010: 113), ‘wenyi’ literally means literature and art. Investigating the historical development and evolution of the term ‘wenyi’, Nie (2014: 84) and Zhang (2012: 5) confirm that ‘wenyi’ should be understood as a word group referring to all kinds of literature and artworks in the current Chinese social context. ‘Wenyi fan’ therefore denotes fans of literature and art, or individuals who have an artistic temperament (Liao & Cai, 2014: 19). Many writers and researchers believe that the term ‘wenyi fan’ gained popularity at the beginning of the 2000s and has been widely accepted by the Chinese public (e.g. Dawson, 2015: 27; Liao & Cai, 2014: 19). Generally, those individuals known as ‘wenyi fans’ have the following characteristics: alongside their well-educated

background and their preferences towards literature and art works, they are also known for their 1) sensitivity of emerging cultural trends; 2) hostile attitude towards mainstream cultures and counterculture pursues; 3) depoliticisation; 4) wealthy family background; and 5) enthusiasm for producing/consuming sentimental internet literature or ‘critically acclaimed works in any genre’ (Dawson, 2015: 27; Liao & Cai, 2014: 19; Zhan, 2015: 44). Even so, the definition of ‘wenyi fan’ remains vague (Dawson, 2015: 27) due to the fact that this cultural trend has not drawn interest from scholars and has not yet been empirically studied at an academic level.

One might argue that there are few factors encouraging scholars to simplify ‘wenyi fan’ to a temporary youth lifestyle/subculture or a consumption fashion, and hence the possible value of revealing the power complex and the localised cultural distinction of Chinese society is neglected. Specifically, firstly, wenyi fans’ countercultural spirit and claims are hardly representative of the whole population due to their minority group status in Chinese society. Researchers might consider ‘wenyi fan’ as nothing more than a Chinese expression of the middle class’s ‘cultural goodwill’, which has been widely studied. Different from their predecessors—the literary youth (文学青年) who were well-known for their political claims, outrage, idealisation and their sponsorship of the failed 1970s’ youth movement (Liu, 1998: 723)—wenyi youth challenge the established social norm and customs by adopting less aggressive cultural strategies. Specifically, wenyi youth reject mainstream cultures by illustrating their enthusiasm for exploring emerging cultural trends and seeking personal experience (Zhan, 2015: 44) rather than patriotic and radical concerns for political and social issues (Dawson, 2015: 27). Within

the field of cultural production, post-1990s' artists have also turned their concentration away from the historical background of realistic society to 'self-reflection and trivial personal affairs' (Qing, 2013: 1). In this regard, one might argue that researchers who are familiar with Bourdieu's theoretical framework might simplify the phenomenon of wenyi fans as a typical reaction of the oppressed towards class-based symbolic violence within the field. This is probably the reason that wenyi fans, especially its subcategories (wenyi youth, wenyi female youth and *xiao qingxin*), have received extensive public criticism for their lack of sophisticated aesthetic disposition and being overly sentimental (He, 2015: 23; Liao & Cai, 2014: 19). This sounds plausible; however, this interpretation might overly rely on established Western social theories and being deterministic.

Secondly, many researchers, such as Liao and Cai (2014), negatively portray the consumptive cultural pattern of wenyi fans as an emerging cultural issue brought about by social changes. For them, such a problematic sociocultural phenomenon should be deemed a temporary trend of subculture which can be 'addressed' at a political level (Liao & Cai, 2014: 19). Liao and Cai echo Tian's social atomic theories and believe that the collapse of the Danwei system (the system of nationally-owned institutions) has not only resulted in alienation between individuals, but also in their atomised relationship with mainstream culture (Liao & Cai, 2014: 21). Tian (2009: 75) believes that the negative effects caused by social atomisation can be addressed through insistently improving socio-organisational policies and services. One might argue that Tian is partly right from the institutional perspective; however, he failed to

acknowledge the complexity of this cultural phenomenon and the dilemma the Chinese public has to face: the dual statuses of contemporary art as both a non-mainstream domestic art form and an internationally sanctioned art genre. Tian might thus underestimate the influence and the potential development of contemporary art in China (the possibility of becoming mainstream culture in the future) and how Chinese people interpret and perceive contemporary artworks.

Thirdly, like hipsters in Western countries, very few wenyi fans are willing to embrace the label due to the negative implications the title may entail (Dawson, 2015: 27). This issue may cause difficulties for researchers seeking to locate survey participants. In this regard, I argue that this research provides a good opportunity to understand wenyi fans and to exam whether wenyi fans exist or if it is just an ironic term for describing pretended art lovers.

In order to have a better understanding about wenyi fans, the following sections concentrate on how the interviewees engaged with contemporary artworks. The table below presents the demographic characteristics of the eleven interviewees who attended the interviews of this current research.

Table 9. The eleven interviewees' demographic characteristics

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Cultural Profile
Xin	23	Female	Manager	PCL
Monai	24	Female	Postgraduate Student	PCL
Lu	25	Male	Designer	PCL
Yu	29	Female	Civil Service	LCL
Fan	42	Female	Senior Manager	LCL

Qing	49	Male	Retired Editor	LCL
Dong	36	Male	Designer	LCL
Mingxi	21	Female	College Student	Distant
Ziyan	25	Female	Master's Student	Distant
Xunni	36	Female	Unemployed	Distant
Feng	75	Male	Retired Cadre	Tolerant

6.2.2 *PCLs'* self-orientation as wenyi youths

This section concentrates on the specific ways the *PCLs* distinguished themselves within the exhibitions. The first part of the analysis demonstrates that a sense of cultural superiority is identifiable among the three interviewed *PCLs*. They clearly expressed their hostility and symbolic violence towards non-*PCL* visitors. The following explores the specific strategies they utilised to forge their cultural condescension. The evidence is sufficient to indicate that the three *PCLs* had an ability to decode and appreciate the artistic concepts beneath the elements of popular culture that the artists conceptualised in their artworks. Thus, the result of the qualitative analysis is consistent with the findings of Chapter 4. The *PCLs* who were more likely to gain cognitive comfort within the exhibitions were not themselves attached to the cultural genres that mark legitimate culture. Although the *PCLs* presented their capacity to apply a detached gaze to the exhibits, the third part of this section nevertheless demonstrates that their tolerance and reading abilities were conditioned. Even though gender differences contributed to the *PCLs'* degrees of acceptance of experimental and radical forms of contemporary art, the three *PCLs* all tended to express their distaste for the 'routinized' contemporary Chinese artworks. Specifically, the two female *PCLs* had difficulties accepting both the

radical forms of contemporary art (e.g. avant-garde art related to bodily violence and pornographic/sexually explicit work) and any form of contemporary Chinese art. Their male counterparts presented their sympathy for radical forms of contemporary art but showed no interest in consuming the ‘routinized’ contemporary Chinese art (both public museums and gallery-based, and experimental contemporary Chinese art). The section highlights the possible solutions for understanding the *PCLs*’ contradictory tastes for different types of contemporary artwork (their ability to decode contemporary artworks without drawing on everyday experiences versus their negative reaction towards contemporary Chinese artworks). As shown in the penultimate part of this section, cultural polices in China contributed to the gender-oriented cultural consumption. The last part of this section summarises the main findings of Section 6.2.

The *PCL*’s expression of cultural distinction

According to the interviews, all three interviewees in the popular culture lover (*PCL*) category perceived and classified themselves as wenyi youths. Surprisingly, none of the three shied away from expressing cultural distinctiveness, exclusiveness or a sense of superiority in their self-identified status as cultural elites. There is little evidence to support the hypothesis that the trend of sensitivity towards popular cultures among the professional classes in Western countries, and their rejection of cultural snobbishness (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009: 172; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005, 2007; Lareau & Weininger, 2003: 579), have become dominant in the exhibition spaces in China. The *PCLs* used two ways to distinguish their position within the exhibiting spaces. Firstly, they rejected the superficial reading of contemporary artworks. Secondly, they tried to defend the

legitimacy of their taste by challenging the established aesthetic norms. They used two methods to express their cultural superiority and competence.

Firstly, all three *PCLs* described visitors they perceived as belonging to other interpretive categories in derogatory ways. Specifically, the terms that the three interviewees used to describe non-*PCL* visitors included 'typical tourists' (Xin, female manager, 23 years old), 'bystanders' (Monai, female postgraduate student, 24 years old) and 'laymen' (Lu, male designer, 25 years old). Through using such dismissive terms, Xin, Monai and Lu all refused to accept the possibility that the non-*PCL* visitors could receive any aesthetic pleasure from the exhibitions. In this regard, consistent with the findings from the quantitative data analysis, the interviewees rejected the idea that the *PCLs*' juxtaposition of popular cultural genres with contemporary art indicated a decline in 'snobbishness' (Peterson & Kern, 1996).

This type of cultural elitism can also be identified through the interviewees' negative attitudes towards 'cultural equality' in the space of the museums and galleries (see ICOM, 2007). All three *PCL* interviewees claimed that aesthetic appreciation is culturally privileged. Through this assertion, the *PCLs* sought to emphasise and secure their own cultural competence, and the benefits they feel they get from viewing exhibitions, through naturalising the lengthy aesthetic apprenticeship they have received or cultivated. For instance, Xin believed that exhibiting institutions should not 'undertake the task of pleasing and teaching people' because '(the curators) do not have the capacity and the power' to do so successfully. Her confidence was based on her

persistent portrayal of exhibition spaces as a stable and permanent hierarchy: '(the curators) have no choice—I mean, there are ranks and grades between people's tastes'.

'They at least need to make an effort' (Monai)

In addition to their tendency to render popular expressions of taste unappealing, the three *PCL* interviewees were also inclined to view or legitimate their taste and strategies of deciphering contemporary artworks as the best, or only, standard for aesthetic appreciation and appropriation (and as the standard of legitimate taste). In this regard, they refused to accept any form of pleasure or knowledge induced just by superficial engagement with the artworks or by receiving curatorial aids (e.g. tours, educational programmes). In this way, they tended to naturalise their cultural competence and dispositions as talent rather than as a product of their investment of time and money in the apprenticeship of aesthetic appreciation. For example, Xin tried to defend the authenticity of her strategy of decoding artwork: '(other visitors) may think, like, "oh, it's wonderful and amazing" after being taught in the museums, but what they have been educated (on) is probably not real art'. Similarly, the phrases 'impossible' (Monai) and 'it's totally not necessary' (Lu) were used by the other two *PCLs* when responding to the question of whether curators should explain the works of art for their visitors. In the interviews with Monai and Lu, their distrust of curatorial strategies of inclusiveness were more often than not expressed as anxieties about whether the information the curators could provide was 'correct': 'I do not think curator(s) can help (them), because different people can have different ways of understanding the abstract things

(artworks)—you cannot force them to follow (the) curator’s way’ (Monai). Lu agreed with Monai, and stressed that individuals should seek solutions for the aesthetic puzzle from ‘their personal experience(s) outside the (exhibit) building rather than inside it’.

For the three *PCL* interviewees, the worthiness and sophistication of contemporary artworks were thus mainly determined by the artworks’ intellectually challenging nature. Based on the factors mentioned above, the *PCL* interviews showed that their cultural tastes bear the stamp of their awareness of cultural inequality in the structured field of cultural consumption, and their ambitions to dominate that field. Specifically, despite the fact that the *PCLs* refused the ‘freely’ beautiful (immediately recognisable beauty) of the artworks, this does not mean that the *PCLs* could apply this referencing strategy to all kinds of ‘commercialised’ cultures. Responding to the question about what kind of cultural productions they do not like, the *PCLs* still tended to set up a hierarchized category of preferences based on the level of popularity or rarity of cultural genres. For instance, the *PCLs* treated many mainstream cultural items (e.g. Chinese popular music, Chinese novels, Chinese heavy metal) as either not worthy of investigating (‘It’s all about love, love, love—very boring!’ [Xin]) or as mainstream cultural forms that ‘you can hardly avoid’ in specific casual occasions, such as ‘in some restaurants’ (Lu) and ‘karaoke bars’ (Monai).

Secondly, all three *PCLs* had no taste for and sophisticated understanding of legitimate art forms (e.g. opera). For instance, although the two female *PCLs* expressed sympathy towards established art forms, their taste for legitimate art should be understood as a

kind of ‘cultural goodwill’ (i.e. holding an awareness of the distinctiveness of elite culture but lacking the tools with which to appreciate it at a cognitive level). Specifically, Xin and Monai thought that classical art can ‘provide spiritual enjoyment’ (Xin) and ‘stimulate your imagination’ (Monai). Despite their positive impressions regarding classical art appreciation, their knowledge about classical artists was very limited. Xin could only name one classical artist (Qi Baishi), whose works have been devalued as a lower genre (popular culture) due to their popularity, while Monai could not recall a favourite classical artist whom she admired: ‘Sorry, I could not recall the name of that artist I really liked, I will let you know once I get it’. Their reluctance to visit classical art museums and galleries also confirmed their distaste for classical cultural items.

Lu, the male *PCL*, directly expressed his lack of interest in appreciating legitimate culture. In the interview, Lu often used the term ‘we’ to legitimate and distance his taste from the established cultural referents. For example, Lu asserted that established artists have ‘every right’ to display their perception of the term ‘beauty’, but ‘we are different; for me, ugliness is another form of beauty’.

I really like this concept behind the artworks (Xin)

In Bourdieu’s (1969) accounts, this kind of cultural hegemony is often accompanied by cultural elites’ distinctively systematic strategies of aesthetic engagement and judgement (what Kant called disinterestedness, or what Bourdieu referred to as the ‘pure gaze’ on artwork). Even in many recent studies (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009), this

'legitimate consumption of legitimate works' (Bourdieu, 1979) has been marginalised in many Western countries (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009). However, no sufficient evidence has been found to precisely support this argument at this stage of the analysis. For the *PCLs*, a sense of cultural superiority is noble. According to the interviewees, the tendency towards refusing immediate pleasure through initial perception (of contemporary artworks) still characterised the three *PCLs*' consumptive model of contemporary art appreciation. All three *PCL* interviewees' perceptions of their favourite artworks echoed this aesthetic deciphering strategy.

The *PCLs*' decoding strategies

The three *PCLs* emphasised the sophisticated nature of their understanding of the artworks by referring to 'legitimate' knowledge, such as the philosophy and history of the artist who created a given work, rather than to moral norms or the function of the artwork. For example, the *PCLs* all demonstrated a high level of familiarity with background information on the artists they most preferred, their artistic concepts and the representative techniques that characterised their artwork. Xin identified William Kentridge's *Shadow Procession* (1999) as her favourite art piece in the UCCA exhibition. She interpreted the artwork through references to the 'identity crisis' the artist had experienced: 'I mean, through this work, you can see his struggles to reconfirm his identity in South Africa as a white Jewish man'. Xin then detailed the struggles Kentridge experienced as a result of his abhorrence of the colonial policies of racial segregation in South Africa, and his awareness of how he benefited from those racist

policies as a white man. Based on her knowledge of Kentridge's works, Xin also easily interpret the concept of *Shadow Procession* as based on Plato's philosophy:

You know the story, based on Plato's Allegory of the Cave? The last survivor is the Philosopher King. He questions himself in several ways, like, do I need to save my companies? Also, do I have the qualification to tell them the truth? The following question is then on whether the truth I am seeing is real. It is just like Kentridge's self-doubt. He doubts if he is the right person to criticise (colonialism). I really like this concept.

Monai's favourite work in the UCCA is Kentridge's animation *Tide Table* (2003). She could easily identify the artistic concept beneath the pictorial elements of the work: 'He connected the (images of) cattle and seabirds by using sea waves. It is such an attractive way of interpreting time.' Lu also presented his knowledge about the distinctive technique Kentridge uses to explain his ideas: 'Kentridge likes to use very special (methods) to create his work, like repeatedly drawing and modifying on one sheet of paper through additions and erasures.'

Further evidence that highlights the *PCLs*' sophisticated understanding of contemporary art theories (compared to that of the visitors in other visitor groups) is that they all demonstrated a degree of openness towards contemporary artists' aggressive intention of challenging the established aesthetic norms and practices. What

makes this finding more interesting is the following. Firstly, for two of the three *PCLs*, their tolerance of contemporary artists' radical and experimental artistic practices was conditioned. Secondly, the *PCLs*' levels of tolerance were associated with gender difference. Thirdly, the gender difference-oriented openness among the *PCLs* did not alter the three *PCLs*' distaste for contemporary Chinese art in general. Lastly, the evidence demonstrates that the cultural policies in China contribute to their contradictory reactions (the *PCLs*' sophisticated understanding of the artworks, their distaste for contemporary Chinese art and their levels of gender-related aesthetic openness to avant-garde art). These factors need to be discussed in further detail.

Firstly, not all the *PCLs* had an unconditioned tolerance of different types of radical and experimental artistic practices. The differences among the female and male *PCLs*' perceptions, however, were due to their relative tolerance of the controversy the artworks may provoke. The two female interviewees in the *PCL* category presented very limited patience regarding the 'pointless extreme behaviours' of some contemporary artists (Xin). The adverbial phrase of condition, 'but' or 'as long as', was utilised by both Xin and Monai to describe their selective acceptance of avant-garde aggressiveness and controversialism. For instance, as Xin said, she could accept something like nudity in video art and installation art but 'definitely' not in performance art. Even Xin was aware of the rebellious nature of the avant-garde in challenging the established paradigmatic concept of beauty, or what Banquet called 'difficult beauties' (1963: 48): 'I do not want to pass a moral judgement over this type of artwork (performance)'; nevertheless, she still could not find works like Kubota's *Vagina*

Painting (1965) attractive. In this regard, Xin expressed anxiety and struggled to engage with artworks that challenge stereotypical femininity by exposing female sexual organs. The content of the only performance artwork Xin preferred once again underlined her conservative aesthetic standard. Specifically, Xin asserted that she only liked one performance work because it is 'sweet and violent': 'Oh, yes . . . I did like one performance, but that was the only one. In the exhibition, the artist provided different kinds of material such as a pair of scissors, rope, and lipstick, and then gave the visitors permission to do whatever they wanted to, on her body, using those items' (Xin). According to Xin's response, her perception of bodily beauty was still characterised by masculine norms—the seductive beauty of the female body.

Monai presented a similar selective and conditional taste for avant-garde art to Xin: 'I like all kinds of contemporary art form as long as the artists do not cross my bottom line: insulting women and attacking my favourite artists'. Similar to the finding in Section 5.3, Monai displayed a capacity to achieve artistic contemplation by engaging with a limited array of contemporary artworks. For example, according to Monai, an appreciation of ugliness is 'totally acceptable and fascinating'. Even so, Monai's defensive response indicated that she could not universally apply her 'detached gaze' to every artwork she encounters. In response to artwork that challenges ethical norms of femininity and the status of her favourite artist, Monai tended to judge it based on morality or agreeableness (a popular expression of taste) rather than distance herself from ethical bias (a legitimate expression of taste): 'they are simply not imaginative'.

As per the data shown above, Xin and Monai stressed that they are ‘open-minded’ people who can accept contemporary art; nevertheless, their ‘openness’ was restricted. Thus, the interviews with the two female *PCLs* shed light on the extent to which their judgements were still bound by conventional moral standards in relation to gender stereotypes (e.g. they viewed negatively extreme forms of bodily violence, pornography, and contemporary artworks characterised by emotionally and intellectually provoking features). Their male peer, Lu, on the other hand, displayed his tolerance of radical forms of contemporary artwork. Lu stated: ‘Violence? Blood? Corpses? I do not believe that those contents of artworks are problematic.’ For him, the artistic concept is the ‘foremost feature’ of a contemporary artwork that determines the aesthetic quality of it. The specific strategy or materials the artists have used to realise his or her artistic goals are, on the other hand, less important and should not be restricted. When he was asked by the interviewer to give an example of a radical form of the artworks he appreciated, Lu selected Damien Hirst’s *Away from the Flock* (1994)²³ as one of his favourite artworks. Lu considered Hirst’s representation of death in his work as exemplifying the ‘visual power’ and ‘humanistic concerns’ of contemporary art. He said that ‘I know it’s controversial to use animals’ corpses in such a cruel manner, but does not it successfully attract our attention and lead us to reflexively examine our disciplined social life?’ According to Lu’s understanding of contemporary artworks, he showed his willingness to appreciate and engage with the socially controversial features of contemporary

²³ Within his work *Away from the Flock* (1994), dead animals (e.g. lamb and shark) are preserved, sometimes having been dissected, in a glass-walled tank with formaldehyde solution. The dead animals are fixed in the tank so that they appear to be alive and caught in movement.

artworks. Compared to his female peers, Lu is more prepared to watch radical and experimental art forms.

Even though the three *PCLs* had a degree of openness towards contemporary art, when talking about Chinese contemporary artworks, the *PCLs* responded in disparaging ways. They defensively claimed that Chinese contemporary art could not be legitimately appreciated ('it is not art' (Xin)), or is something that 'deserves no serious attention' (Monai). Xin and Monai's avoidance of applying the 'detached gaze' to Chinese artworks was mainly due to their negative impressions of what they deemed to be the monotonously political and socio-critical characteristics of Chinese avant-garde art. In other words, they expressed their antipathy to contemporary art due to the artists' obsession with the limited and hypocritical 'sell points' of contemporary Chinese art in the international art market. Specifically, Xin attributed what she saw as the decline of Chinese contemporary art to the popularisation of its 'hypocrisy' and 'always the same' political and social claims:

It was just too much; all the artists were trying to criticise the Cultural Revolution and the government, and to seek democracy. All the sculptures were trying to show how ugly and degenerate the image of the Chinese people is, and Chinese customs could be. The figures were always bent (Chen Wenling's works). That was all; nothing else. This was exactly the kind of thing that bothered me all the time. It made me feel sick. Did they not feel tired of it? I am done with it anyway.

Monai had a similar reaction to Chinese contemporary art. Her first judgement was also to denigrate the sensorial, perceivable forms of the artwork, which she considered ‘unnecessarily too hateful’ and outdated: ‘They are miserable and angry all the time. Are we still living in the time of the Cultural Revolution or the Great Leap Forward?’

Similar to his female peers, the male *PCL* (Lu) demonstrated his desire to consume something ‘new and rare’ in China: ‘I like and am prepared to be shocked by the newest artworks’. To be more specific, Lu depicted Western artists as those who are ‘creating art history in our age’, whereas ‘the others, like most Chinese artists’, are conservatives who are still following the ‘routine’, which has been categorised as ‘part of history’. This tendency is exemplified when Lu talked about He Xiangyu’s works (another exhibition that was running in the UCCA concurrently). Lu said that he visited a different He Xiangyu exhibition a few years ago, and this current exhibition does not alter Lu’s negative impression of the artist and his work. ‘It’s just like that, they (He and the other public museum-based contemporary Chinese art artist) would not be able to jump out from that circle (the specific artistic concept and concerns) ... it’s the reason I like the artworks that are more experimental and cutting edge.’

The strong opposition between local and cosmopolitan tastes thus characterises the three *PCLs*’ perception and desire for the exotic. All three *PCLs* presented negative reactions towards Chinese contemporary art. Echoing many scholars’ findings of the strong relationship between one’s ‘memorable’ memories and his or her museum experience, such as ‘the quality of exhibits and the opportunity to make personal

connections' (e.g. Anderson et al., 2006; Falk & Storksdieck, 2005), the two *PCLs* Monai and Lu showed their selective memories about the exhibits in the two galleries (the UCCA and Shengzhi Space) they visited on the same day. To be more specific, Monai and Lu could not recall any works they liked or disliked in Shengzhi Space (25 pieces of contemporary Chinese artwork were displayed), where they took the questionnaire survey for this current study. As they demonstrated, they visited Shengzhi Space simply because the gallery was geographically close to the UCCA: 'I accidentally stopped at Shengzhi Space for quite a short time after my visit to the UCCA' (Lu) and, 'I had no plan to visit it (Shengzhi Space) but why not? They are not far from each other anyway' (Monai). The factor that motivated the respondents to visit Shengzhi Space did not alter their negative impressions of Chinese contemporary artwork. For instance, Lu said that he only spent 'a very short while' in the gallery and that he 'could not remember anything of it'. Monai also showed her reluctance to talk about the Guo Feng exhibition because she found the exhibition 'not very interesting'.

This section has discussed the strategies used by the *PCLs* to distance themselves from contemporary Chinese art. The following section will explore how the levels of the interviewees' mothers' education influence their cultural aesthetic tastes.

The *PCLs*' mother's education

To explore whether the *PCLs*' artistic attention is associated with their mother's education, all three *PCLs* were asked whether their mothers had a positive influence on

the forging of their taste for contemporary art. All three *PCLs*' mothers held relatively high educational credentials. Xin's mother was an editor who holds a Bachelor's degree. Monai's mother (she holds a Master's degree) is a lecturer who works in a university in Beijing. Lu's parents are musicians who have Bachelor's degrees.

According to the interviews, the female *PCLs*' conditional taste for contemporary art had an initial connection to their home socialisation. During the interviews, the two *PCLs* introduced how they inherited cultural capital from their mothers, who motivated them to read classical literature, listen to classical music, watch Western cartoons (Xin) and attend art-training classes (Monai). The male *PCL*, however, identified the role of parenting as less important in him forging a habit of visiting contemporary art museums and galleries: 'I do not think they (his taste for contemporary artworks and his family background) are relevant: my parents never impacted me in such kinds of ways (to get familiar with high-status cultural goods in his family milieu).' Lu continued, 'She did not stop me from choosing an art-related subject at university; I think this (her positive attitude) could be considered as an influence that she had on my taste'. Based on the factors mentioned above, the female *PCLs* did not benefit from their family socialisation in developing a thoroughly 'open' attitude towards avant-garde art as did the male *PCL*. In contrast to the two female *PCLs*, the male *PCL*'s aesthetic tolerance shed light on the importance of socialisation (his mother's tolerant attitude of his career selection) for one to forge this type of openness.

Before conducting further analysis of the influence of the mother's education on the

visitors' cultural preferences, a conclusion can be drawn that the *PCLs*' preferences for the contemporary artworks had a relationship with their mother's education. Even so, this does not mean that they benefit from the high-volume of cultural capital their mother holds in a uniform way. This is probably because the mothers have different parenting strategies for cultivating their male and female offspring. The transformation of cultural capital between generations is only one means of enhancing the cultural competence of children who have highly educated mothers. While the female *PCLs* are more likely to inherit cultural capital from their mothers, their tastes are also more likely to be restricted by the gender stereotype (to have a low level of tolerance of those artworks that thoroughly challenge the established social and moral norms). The male *PCL*'s sympathy towards avant-garde art provides further evidence for this argument.

In conclusion, this section introduces four main findings that are inconsistent with the cultural trends identified in the previous chapter. In the first place, the three *PCLs* enacted 'symbolic violence'-based cultural distinctiveness (Bourdieu, 1984: 160). By detaching themselves from relating artworks to their experience of life's necessities and economic urgencies, all three participants presented their capacity and advanced cultural competence through justifying their rewards (e.g. the legitimacy of their taste) in the exhibitions. In this regard, although the demographic figures such as education and occupational class lost their decisive role in separating *PCLs* from others, the three *PCLs* still tried to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and the visitors they perceived as belonging to the other interpretive categories. In other words, for the *PCLs*, the boundary between different genres of art (high and popular art forms) did not blur

as DiMaggio (1987) had identified in the United States. The *PCLs* expressed their explicit and simultaneous lack of tolerance for vulgar culture and established cultural patterns. Thus, evidence shows that the *PCLs* valued the unfairness of a cultural hierarchy.

Accordingly, in this current research, no concrete evidence has been found to support the description of wenyi youth as ‘followers of fashion’ and ‘arties’ (He, 2015: 23; Liao & Cai, 2014: 19). On the contrary, all three *PCLs* showed their distinctive aptitudes and tendencies to decode artworks at a sophisticated cognitive level. In this respect, one might claim that this finding echoes what Holt (1997: 103) would call ‘the distinctiveness of consumption practices’. In his account, Holt believes that there is a tendency for cultural elites to concentrate on exclusionary consumption practices rather than on ‘the cultural contents to which they are applied’ (Holt, 1997: 103). In relation to the interviews, Holt’s conclusion may partly be valid: the *PCLs* did present an ability to consecrate the popular cultural elements/contents (e.g. animation) in the artworks. Nevertheless, Holt’s description of the distinctiveness of mass consumption cannot directly explain why the *PCLs*’ cultural preferences were conditioned or limited.

Secondly, as shown in the previous sections, identifying the embodied cultural capital matters to understand the cultural exclusivity of the *PCLs*’ taste for contemporary artwork. Though the *PCLs* had no taste for legitimated ‘high’ culture, it does not necessarily mean that cultural capital differences in contemporary art engagement did not have classificatory power. According to the interviews, the evidence is sufficient to

support the viewpoint that the *PCLs* should be deemed the ‘happy few’ who can achieve cognitive comfort in the exhibitions by applying a decoding method that is inaccessible to those with less field-specific cultural capital (e.g. a clear idea of what constitutes contemporary art). In this way, the finding once again partly echoes many scholars’ arguments regarding the ‘invalidation’ of the hierarchized characteristics that high status cultural garners and that popular culture referents have as marks of social reproduction (i.e. Huyssen, 1986). For instance, Huyssen uses the popular cultural objects in pop art as an example to illustrate how pop ‘seemed to break through the confines of the iron tower in which art had been going around in circles’ (1986: 142). In agreement with Huyssen’s comment, many scholars (e.g. Friedman & Kuipers, 2013; Holt, 1997; Prieur et al., 2008; Savage et al., 2010) question the effectiveness of traditional sociological research methods that use objective cultural capital (elite objects such as classical music) as dependent variables. According to Holt (1997: 103), when ‘popular cultural objects become aestheticized and as elite objects become popularised’, ‘distinction is more and more a matter of practice’. Friedman and Kuipers (2013), Prieur et al. (2008) and Savage et al. (2010) agree with Holt and highlight how members of different social classes ‘draw strong boundaries’ on the basis of ‘vague’ cultural products, such as ‘crap TV’ and comedy (Friedman & Kuipers, 2013: 179). They might be right, as the three *PCLs* could capture the sophisticated signifier of the exhibits without categorising the exhibits ironically. However, the *PCLs*’ ‘openness’ towards ‘coarse’ cultures were extremely limited. For instance, they had no taste for popular music or novels, either domestic or from abroad, or for the local culture, such

as Chinese Blue (Monai) and Chinese heavy metal (Xin). In other words, the *PCLs* had a tendency to consume emerging cultural items that have been internationally sanctioned as legitimate cultures or those cultural genres that are still in the process of legitimation.

Thirdly, for the three *PCLs*, establishing distance from national culture is a practical way for young people to achieve distinction. This tendency echoes the findings of some scholars who claim that a new tension, namely a local and cosmopolitan distinction, has been found among individuals with high cultural capital resources and those with low cultural capital resources (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009; Hanerz, 1990; Heikkila & Rahkonen, 2011; Holt, 1997, 1998; Prieur et al., 2008). In this current study, all three *PCLs* oriented their taste for contemporary artworks internationally (exclusively for American and European cultures); however, they did not perceive the principle of boundaries between local and international contemporary artworks as highly unified and uniform. For instance, rather than generally and vaguely regarding the relationship of cosmopolitan cultures and local cultural forms as oppositions between ‘expensive’ and ‘cheap’ (Holt, 1997: 112), ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ (Kahma & Toikka 2007: 113; Karadag 2009: 549) or ‘sophisticated’/‘refined’ and ‘light’/‘coarse’ (Gole, 1997: 85), the interviews with the *PCLs* shed light on the explicit way in which gender difference contributes to the *PCLs*’ different perceptions of American- and European-oriented and locally characterised taste for contemporary artworks. For the female *PCLs*, numerous factors, including their cultural separatist rebellion against Chinese contemporary artists’ neglect of the domestic market (the Chinese artists’ exclusive focus on the ivory-

towered ‘selling point’ of Chinese contemporary art) and their aspirations after the historical authenticity of cultural trends, promoted their distaste for Chinese contemporary artworks. The male *PCL*, unlike his female peers, portrayed the relationship as an opposition between ‘locally routinised’ and ‘internationally creative’. They held a negative attitude towards contemporary Chinese art because of the limited artistic themes, techniques and concepts of the museum-based contemporary Chinese art.

Fourthly, gender, as identified in Chapter 4, plays a key role in isolating the *PCLs* from the *Tolerants* and *LCLs*. The findings of the qualitative data analysis support this argument. The male *PCL* demonstrated high-level openness towards radical or experimental forms of contemporary art. Although they could detach themselves from everyday aesthetic experiences, the female *PCLs* failed to accept both experimental contemporary artworks and contemporary Chinese artworks. In other words, the female *PCLs* were still relatively characterised by stereotypes of traditional feminine identity, such as emotional ‘sensibility’ (Bourdieu, 1979: 32). Even so, the female *PCLs* did not feel excluded within the exhibitions. What contributes to their satisfaction will be examined in the concluding section of this chapter (Section 6.3).

Finally, consistent with the analytical result of the multinomial logistic regression (MLR) test, all three *PCLs*’ mothers have a relatively high-level educational background. The interviewed *PCLs* believe that their mother asserted a positive influence on their preference for consuming cultural goods.

6.2.3 The LCL's self-orientation as wenyi youth

Different to the *PCLs*, the *LCLs* demonstrated very conservative aesthetic views. The identification of the *LCLs*' cultural preference towards established aesthetic values and artworks is consistent with the findings of the quantitative data analysis in Chapter 4. The evidence suggests that their taste for the contemporary exhibits was not derived from their tolerance of avant-garde art; rather, what motivated the *LCLs*' visit to the exhibitions lies in the ambiguity of the public museum-based exhibitions and exhibits regarding the levels of social and aesthetic criticisms they could explicitly represent. The first part of this section highlights the tendencies of the *LCLs* to dominate the exhibiting spaces through legitimating their interpretation of the exhibits. After this subsection, the following section introduces how the *LCLs* engage and decode the contemporary artworks. In the exhibitions, due to their lack of appropriate/efficient decoding methods, the *LCLs* still tried to explore the rarity of the contemporary artworks based on the deciphering strategies and experiences they shaped and accumulated within the traditional exhibitions (e.g. Western classical art and traditional/modern Chinese art exhibitions). This tendency explains why the *LCLs* tended to hold sophisticated knowledge about the listed established artists but possessed little understanding of the avant-garde artists' claims. The third part of this section stresses the distinctive characteristic of the *LCLs* that separate the members of this visitor category from the other three visitor groups (age difference). Specifically, although not all the surveyed *LCLs* were over 39 years old, they demonstrated conservative and resistant attitudes towards the emerging and youth aesthetics: 'typical

wenyi youth from the 1990s' (Yu). Compared to the openness to Western popular culture shown by the *PCLs*, all the *LCLs* demonstrated their willingness to distance themselves from the aesthetic value and the related decoding/engaging strategies of the *PCLs*. They had very limited tolerance towards contemporary artworks that challenged the established moral and aesthetic norms. This explains why the multinomial logistic regression test separated the *LCLs* from the *PCLs* (see Chapter 4.3). The last part of this section introduces the main findings of Section 6.1.3.

The LPLs' expression of cultural superiority

All four *LPCs* who accepted the interview invitation hold Bachelor's degrees or higher. Yu (29 years old) works in the central government of China in Beijing. She got the job after she passed China's national examination for admission to the civil service. She completed her Master's in geology. Fan (42 years old) is a senior manager in an auction company. She graduated from the fine art department of a university in Beijing. Qing (49 years old) is a retired editor who used to work for a newspaper publishing company. He visits the NAMoC regularly due to his enthusiasm for classic Chinese art. Dong (36 years old) is an employee of a design company. His major was in graphic design in the university where he did a four year degree.

According to the interviews, the *LCLs* shared two common characteristics with the *PCLs* with regard to their self-perception. For example, three of the four *LCLs* called themselves *wenyi youth*. Secondly, comparable with the *PCLs*, the *LCLs* were dedicated to separating their cultural taste from that of others by violently degrading the remote

patterns of cultural consumption as inferior choices. To be more specific, three of the four interviewees (Yu, Fan and Dong) from the *LCL* category considered themselves *wenyi youth*. Qing did not explicitly call himself such; however, he shared a similarly negative attitude towards members of other visitor categories. Like the *PCLs*, the *LCLs* ironically referred to other types of taste. Specifically, the *LCLs* deemed those visitors who do not belong to their interpretive group, especially young people, ‘typical wenyi youth from the 90s’²⁴ (Yu), ‘ordinary people’ (Fan), ‘tourists’ (Qing) and ‘general visitors’ (in contrast to ‘real’ art lovers) (Dong). Describing members of other interpretive groups in a contemptuous way, the *LCLs*’ responses highlighted their strong will to categorise the otherness and illustrated their superior taste in the field of cultural consumption. In the following part of this section, the specific ways in which the *LCLs* expressed the exclusiveness of their taste will be introduced.

Specifically, Yu stressed the importance of holding a relatively high volume of economic and cultural capital for one to appreciate artworks. For her, the value of an artwork is determined by its rarity—namely, its rigid requirements for high-level intellectual and economic competencies. For her, the ‘the transcendent characteristics of Polish art’ are something which should not be considered by individuals without such a disposition. Yu went on to say that only in this way can artwork make sense to the society: otherwise ‘the upside-down world can never be understood.’

In the meantime, such efforts to neutralise the symbolic struggles between the highbrow

²⁴ The phrase ‘wenyi youth’ is used sarcastically here. When the *LCLs* use this term to describe young people who visit the museums, or themselves, they use the term seriously.

affluence and lowbrow economic restrictions characterise Fan's perception of cultural consumption. Fan held that this is exactly the reason why the 'wenyi youth of the 90s' (young visitors who were born in the 1990s) ought to be excluded from artistic appreciation: 'they do not have enough life experience to properly get the idea the artist wants to deliver.' Portraying one's lengthy efforts to accumulate cultural capital as the richness of life experiences that a young adult cannot achieve, Fan (39 years old) defended the legitimacy and distinctiveness of her taste against the challenges of avant-garde and its supporters. For Fan, the wenyi youth like her are more likely to appreciate the artwork they encounter through a self-reflective way of understanding, while the 'wenyi youth in the 90s', in contrast, rely heavily on their intuition.

It's just like if you see me and a little girl from the '90s have emotional feelings towards one piece of artwork together, I am more likely to be moved by the things beneath the surface of artworks. The girl is more likely to be impressed by the artwork itself. It's different. The more mature you get, the more reasonable you will be (Fan).

In terms of expressing symbolic violence and cultural distinction, there is not much difference between Qing, Dong and the two *LCLs* mentioned above. Specifically, Qing insisted that one needs talent to appreciate art and thus those who are being excluded from the exhibitions need to make an effort to learn 'how to read it properly'. The 'goal of achieving equal/universal access to the exhibitions' was also deemed an unnecessary and problematic curatorial objective for Dong. In particular, he articulated the curatorial

aids (e.g. providing introductory information about an artwork and exhibition) as typical commercial strategies, which are a threat to the aesthetic quality of displays. As Dong discussed, such market-oriented arrangements should only be seen in commercial galleries where selling artworks is the managers' priority: 'If you want to sell artworks, you need to let your customer understand what they are buying.' For him, art museums do not have the responsibility to educate their visitors: 'they (the museums) could have this service, but without it, it would be a serious issue.'

The *LCL*'s reading strategies

According to the interviews with Yu, Fan, Qing and Dong, all the interviewees have shown their nationalist-separationist cultural enthusiasm and nostalgic tastes (resistance to a transnational vision of globalisation and cultural hybridity) for Chinese classical literature, Chinese classical music, Chinese national art and related exhibitions. Through illustrating their preference for established local cultures, the *LCLs* aimed to transform their advantage of holding relatively high volumes of cultural capital into cultural competence. Thus, compared to the *PCLs*' desire for the exotic, the *LCLs* regarded the taste for classical national culture as sophisticated. Within the exhibitions, they showed their selective taste in those exhibits that shared common features with classical Western or Chinese art. Although they could not develop a sophisticated understanding about the artistic concept of the artworks like that of the *PCLs*, the *LCLs* used alternative strategies to engage with the exhibits.

For the female *LCLs*, the refined art forms should have a long-lasting developmental and evolutionary history. According to them, the rarity of such artworks was largely determined by the historical and artistic quality of the work, their underpinnings being their lengthy self-perfecting and refining process. From this viewpoint, the female *LCLs* considered knowing the social and cultural background of an artist and his or her works as the foremost prerequisite for aesthetic appreciation. Accordingly, the female *LCLs*' specialist knowledge about the details, features, history and aesthetic theories of this type of historical and state-sanctioned culture was more often than not the primary weapon they drew on to pursue cognitive comforts. This habit also explains why the female *LCLs* were feeling secure and confident in consuming Chinese classical cultural genres.

For instance, Yu seemed to exemplify the female *LCLs*' taste which straddles the classical/emerging culture trend divide. Specifically, Yu had sophisticated knowledge of classical literature, especially of books published during the time of the Chinese May Fourth Movement (a Chinese youth anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and political movement during 1915–1921). She could easily name the writers of this type, like Liang Qichao (litterateur, historian, ideologist and philosopher, 1873–1929), Hu Shi (litterateur and philosopher, 1891–1962) and Feng Youlan (philosopher, 1895–1990). She displayed her admiration towards these litterateurs by terming them 'the real literary masters'. On the other hand, Yu did not have a taste for emerging cultural referents. As she said, 'such writers (that she called the masters) have disappeared since then (before the establishment of the People's Republic of China); the modern writers

have long lost such a kind of cultural transcendence’.

Although Yu claimed that she has no taste for emerging cultures, it does not necessarily mean that she felt excluded within the exhibitions. She could appreciate a specific range of contemporary artworks. Within the two exhibitions she visited (The State of Life in the NAMoC and Notes toward A Modern Opera in the UCCA), Yu listed William Kentridge’s work *Shadow Procession* (1999) and Monika Zawadzki’s work *Black Bread* (2003)²⁵ as her most and least favourite exhibits. She liked *Shadow Procession* because this work ‘perfectly illustrated social conflict through a dramatic form’. ‘You can see his (Kentridge’s) excellent capacity of mastering the artistic language of dramatic stage performance in his work’. For Yu, the theatrical atmosphere and the arrangement of the exhibiting space where the artwork was displayed illustrates Kentridge’s ‘strict aspiration for making and displaying his work in a systematic and logical way’. Accordingly, Yu tried to understand and evaluate the exhibits by drawing on her experience of watching drama in theatres. The stage effects shared by Kentridge’s work and the legitimate forms of stage performing art gave Yu an opportunity to transfer her cultural competence between the two cultural spaces. Further evidence that exemplifies Yu’s conditioned taste lies in the fact that she could not understand the artworks that thoroughly violated the established aesthetic and artistic principles. For instance, facing Monika Zawadzki’s surrealist work *Black Bread* (2003) that challenges legitimate aesthetic criteria in terms of visual effects, artistic techniques

²⁵ Monika Zawadzki (2013), *Black Bread*, Sculpture, 50 x 35 x 15 cm. Material: Epoxy resin, acrylic plastic coating and cotton T-shirt

and display methods, Yu failed to apply the decoding strategies that she had developed through lengthy familiarity with legitimate cultures. She asserts that she could not accept this type of art. For her, the primary characteristic of a masterpiece is that 'it will give its visitors an immediately emotional touch when they see it... if an artwork fails to achieve this effect, it's an unqualified one'. In this regard, Yu tried to naturalise her cultural predisposition as a type of artistic instinct that only responds to 'great art'.

Likewise, Fan admitted that she has very conservative tastes in paintings and exhibitions. In this regard, she took the works of Wu Guanzhong (a Chinese artist who aims to modernise Chinese national art: Guo Hua) and Mongolian Chang Diao (Mongolian folk music) as examples to highlight the specific way to appreciate the 'spirit' of the cultural works: familiarity with the historical and cultural significance and the context of artists and artworks.

Mongolian Chang Diao has been characterised by the centuries-old grassland cultures and histories. The people who lived outside such a cultural context would never be able to master it (Fan).

Within the interview, she presented her sophisticated knowledge about the social and historical background of the exhibits but seldom engaged with the other aspects of those exhibits, such as artistic concepts. For instance, she liked Włodzimierz Pawlak's oil painting work *Nostalgia* (1986).²⁶ Fan tried to understand the importance of the

²⁶ Włodzimierz Pawlak (1986) *Nostalgia*. 150cm x 180cm. Oil painting on canvas.

artwork through the historical and social background it represents. She acknowledged that this work was created in the 1980s when the social unrest caused by social reforms threatened the stability of Polish society. She confidently introduced the artistic technique and consideration the artist used to balance the colour and content visually in his work: ‘you can see that he segments the canvas by using a large area of red and white colour; the visual weight of red colour is higher than that of white, so you would not feel unbalanced when he adds a figure of swimmer in the red coloured area.’ According to Fan, the reason she likes this painting is that that she felt more ‘secure’ engaging with oil paintings. She also struggled to appreciate the installation art in the exhibition: ‘they are too abstract to get a close look; they are too ... you know ... too commercialised. I would not spend my time on those installations and structures.’ Like Yu, Fan expressed her anger and escapism when she could not intellectually access the exhibits. Thus, in the exhibition, compared to the installations and video art, she selectively engaged with the exhibits that were less aesthetically and visually provoking for a legitimate art lover.

The two male *LCLs*, Qing and Dong, likewise showed their sophisticated knowledge of established Chinese artists by listing a series of relatively not-so-well-known artists’ names. For instance, Qing liked Xu Beihong (1895–1953), Huang Binhong (1865–1955) and Wu Changshuo (1844–1927), while Dong listed Jin Shangyi (1934–), Chen Danqing (1953–) and Luo Zhongli (1948–) as his favourite artists. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the two male *LCLs* did not value the quality of artworks in the same way their female peers did. Like their female peers, the male *LCLs* were likely

to evaluate artworks through the artistic language (skills and artistic interpretation), visual effects and artistic forms that the artists use to represent their artistic concepts. A very interesting finding is that, like Lu in the *PCL* category, Qing also claimed that he likes artworks that can ‘shock’ him. However, Qing did not define the term ‘shock’ like Lu did. Lu perceived the relationship between Western and Chinese contemporary art as the opposition between conservative and creative; within his interviews, Qing explicated the term as a powerful visual impact of artwork, which was contributed to by artists’ sophisticated skills of expression and ‘extraordinary’ artistic concepts. Dong said that he also likes ‘artwork which can draw (his) attention and interests in a short time.’ In this regard, unlike Yu’s reaction, Dong continued to explain frankly the ‘instinct’ he draws upon to evaluate artworks that is based on his long-term engagement with legitimate artworks, rather than superficial and immediate perception.

In summary, all the four *LCLs* were capable of selectively applying a ‘detached gaze’ on the ‘conservative’ artworks that share common features with legitimate art forms.

The *LCLs*’ conditioned tastes

The interviews with the *LCLs* detected that, compared with the *PCLs*, the different decoding methods adopted by the *LCLs* did entail consequences of divided strategies to value Chinese contemporary artworks and Western classic artworks. Specifically, all the interviewed *LCLs* had very limited tolerance of contemporary Chinese art.

The female *LCLs*’ decoding method towards legitimate art forms (see section 5.2.1)

determined that they found it difficult to transform their cultural capital into competence in a Chinese contemporary art exhibition. The reason for this is that they could not locate in their knowledge about the evolutionary development of Chinese art theories and history the significance of Chinese contemporary art as an emerging cultural trend which has initial relationships with Western visual culture and Eurocentric ideology. In this regard, the interviews revealed that the two female *LCLs* were inclined to translate their conscious or unconscious feeling of being excluded into the desire to devalue Chinese contemporary artists and their works. As a contrast to their resistance towards local contemporary art, they presented a sympathy (more like a cultural goodwill) towards both Western classical art and Western contemporary art due to the art forms' 'traceable' position in the 'gradual and fruitful' development of Western art history (Yu).

Specifically, Yu frankly admitted that she does not like Chinese contemporary art at all. According to her, 'the artistic foundations of Chinese contemporary art are rather small (vulnerable)' since 'there is a gap between traditional Chinese art and the contemporary one'. Yu believed that without the 'backup' of pre-existing aesthetic knowledge and theories, Chinese contemporary art is less likely to succeed: 'you should not expect to see qualified contemporary artworks from these contemporary artists.' This suggests that, for this group, Chinese products need to be socially and culturally established to become a defining basis of cultural taste.

Yu related a negative attitude towards Chinese contemporary artists' works. For her, the

Chinese artworks' absence of 'historical profundity' caused it severe issues. One of the problems, Yu said, is that 'the artists have no idea of how to represent humanistic solicitude' through their works: 'most of them are just blindly following the trend and the popularity of Western contemporary art forms'. Yu also tended to consider the Chinese contemporary artworks' absence of 'historical profundity' as a kind of 'lack of authenticity'. She continues, 'it's just like the difference between looking at the original masterpiece of Willem van Gogh's famous *Starry Night* in person and browsing the photocopy of the work in magazines ... I can totally understand and sympathise with those who could not get the point of why Van Gogh's works are so fascinating and tempting because they have not seen the original work themselves.'

Both Yu and Fan attributed the 'failure' of Chinese contemporary art to the Chinese artists' lack of cultural roots, authenticity and originality, compared to the artworks of their Western peers. Qing and Dong, however, did not pay much attention to the identity struggles; rather, they expressed their preference towards Chinese contemporary artworks rather than classical Western art and a limited range of Western contemporary artworks.

Restrictions, including language skills, knowledge about the cultural and social background of the Western artworks, etc., are the main reason why the male *LCLs* did not like the Western culture. For the *LCLs*, those factors limited their opportunity to enjoy the foreign artworks on a cognitive level. For instance, Qing mentioned that he watched a Western opera in the National Centre of Performing Arts a few years ago and

the show 'exhausted' him: 'The show was too long and my English is bad. I could not understand anything of it until the Chinese subtitles were projected on the wall.' Dong agreed with Qing and mentioned that 'it's just like listening to foreign music: if you can understand the lyrics, you do not need to make a judgement on it exclusively based on the melody.' This is probably one of the factors that prompted the male *LCLs*' tolerant attitude towards contemporary Chinese art, as they are less likely to worry about these engagement obstacles. For instance, Dong claimed that he does not consider the Chinese contemporary artists' identity struggle an issue; rather, as he said, 'most Chinese contemporary artists have been trained in traditional models, so the contemporary art is just a tool or an alternative way for them to show their indigenous identity and cultures.'

Within the two male *LCLs*' interviews, they showed relatively high openness to consuming Chinese contemporary art than their female peers; however, their tolerance was limited. They still could not accept the avant-garde which is 'too ugly' (Qing) and 'immoral' (Dong). The two *LCLs* also could not master the contemporary art decoding method like the *PCLs* did. For instance, Dong found himself experiencing difficulties in understanding the contemporary artworks 'immediately' when he 'sees them from time to time'. This once again highlights the difficulties they experienced in transforming the cultural capital they had accumulated in legitimate art exhibitions into cultural competence in the contemporary art exhibitions.

Compared with their peers in the same generation, all four *LCLs*' mothers held

relatively high educational qualifications. Specifically, Yu, Qing and Dong's mothers were graduates from junior college. Fan's mother (52 years old), who was around ten years younger than Yu, Qing and Dong's mothers (65, 62 and 71 years old respectively), held a Bachelor's degree. All four *LCLs* also confirmed the positive role their mothers played in encouraging the development of their tastes toward legitimate cultures. Specifically, Fan's mother was a high school teacher. According to Fan, she started to read her mother's collections of classical literature when she was very young. The relatively high volume of objectified cultural capital she inherited from her mother stimulated her interest to consume high status cultures. Yu and Qing demonstrated that their mother paid great attention to cultivating their cultural interests. They all attended different kinds of training sessions (e.g. art or music classes) at an early age. When he was young, Dong's mother often brought him to the local Cultural Palace for Youth and Children at the weekend, where he attended different kinds of exhibition and cultural contest.

In summary, the interviews revealed that the members of the *LCL* category tried to distance themselves from specific forms of contemporary artwork. In this respect, this section brings out three main findings. Firstly, without a 'proper' decoding strategy and predisposition, the *LCLs* were not excluded from the contemporary art exhibitions. Rather than distancing themselves from or expressing negative feelings towards the exhibits, they were still inclined to defend the dominant and privileged position they held in the contemporary art exhibitions through depreciating and devaluing other forms of artistic engagement. Secondly, the evidence indicates that they had little

sympathy towards the avant-garde characteristics of contemporary art. Within the exhibitions, they tried to consider the ‘qualified’ contemporary art exhibits as merely a developed form of the established cultural and aesthetic values. Examples of this argument are that all the four *LCLs* tried to understand the exhibits based on the knowledge and reading tools they had forged and accumulated in the established art form exhibitions (e.g. classical Western art exhibitions). The *LCLs* could detach themselves from the ‘superficial’ reading of the specific types of exhibit to some extent; nevertheless, they could not universally apply this reading to every exhibit they encountered within the exhibition. For them, the ‘appreciable’ exhibits should have specific traits (e.g. should represent visual attractiveness and sophisticated artistic techniques). They were more likely to feel confusion and exclusion towards an exhibit that contained few elements of the established culture. The specific way that the *LCL* engaged with the exhibits partly explains the third finding of this section: why the *LCLs* held an aggressive attitude towards contemporary Chinese artworks. For the *LCLs*, the characteristic of contemporary Chinese art as a ‘rootless’ or appropriated Western art form reduced the historical significance of the Chinese art form. For the two female *LCLs*, the popularisation of contemporary Chinese art was not based on the development of the ‘sequential logic’ of Chinese art history, and they argued that the majority of contemporary Chinese artists’ works are nothing more than duplicated forms of their Western peers’ thoughts and works. The male *LCLs* showed their inability to apply a detached gaze to contemporary Chinese art that radically challenged the established moral and aesthetic values. All the *LCLs* demonstrated that their mothers

had influence on the development of their cultural preferences.

6.2.4 The *Distants* and *Tolerants*

This section aims to understand the specific strategies the *Distants* and *Tolerants* used to engage with the contemporary art exhibits and exhibitions. This section includes four parts. The first part introduces the demographic figures for the four survey participants in the *Distant* and *Tolerant* categories and the strategies they used to distinguish themselves within the exhibitions. Unlike the invisible members of the most exploited or dominated visitor groups (e.g. members of working class) in some class-based homology arguments (e.g. Bourdieu et al., 1997), the *Distants* and *Tolerants* all tried to distinguish themselves by negatively portraying the ‘otherness’ of the visitors in the other identified visitor groups. The following part of the section examines the common characteristics shared by the *Distants* and *Tolerants*. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that both the *Distants* and the *Tolerants* failed to capture the artistic concepts of the exhibits due to their lack of knowledge and tools for decoding the artworks. After this subsection, the last part of this section focuses on how the members of the two interpretive groups distinguish themselves from others. Specifically, compared with the visitors with a highly educated mother (Bachelor’s degree and above), the visitors’ mothers who have low educational levels (non-diploma and primary school degree) were more likely to become *Distants*. The relatively low volume of cultural capital the *Distants* inherited from their mother limited their taste for the listed cultural genres.

They were more culturally inactivate compared to the members of the other three visitor groups. Compared with the influence of the mothers' educational levels, gender difference plays a more crucial role in dividing the *Tolerants* from the *Distants* and *PCLs*. To be more specific, compared with the conservative aesthetic values shared by the members of those two groups, the *Tolerants* showed their 'cultural goodwill' or acceptance towards the contemporary art works that confused them in the exhibitions.

Mingxi is a 21 year old college student majoring in English language studies. She was born in Beijing and has been studying in one of China's top 20 universities in Beijing for three years. Mingxi rarely visits art museums and galleries in her spare time, though she mentioned that she likes to look at paintings and design works (especially for graphic design). The reason she participated in the exhibition (The State of Life: Polish Contemporary Art Exhibition in Beijing, The National Art Museum of China) was that she attracted by an activity jointly organised by her Department and the Embassy of Poland in the NAMoC. Mingxi considered this event an opportunity to practise her English and social skills rather than being driven by aesthetic desires. She attributed her lack of interest in visiting contemporary art museums and galleries to the geographic distance from her residential place to the exhibiting institutions and her mother's disinterest towards artworks. Based on her position in the visitor clusters, Mingxi is a member of the *Distant* category.

Ziyan (25 years old) is a second year Master's student at the University of Beijing (one of the best universities in China). Ziyan, as a *Distant*, presented a preference and

tolerance towards a wide range of cultural genres. Ziyan did not plan to visit the UCCA on the day she accepted the request to be interviewed in this current study. According to Ziyan, she initially planned to visit her friend who lives near to the 798 Art District where the UCCA was located. She decided to visit the exhibition because of the poster, which was ‘very attractive and appealing’. Xunni (36 years old, female) is a frequent visitor to the UCCA. She said she visits the art centre whenever a new exhibition opens to the public. Compared to other interviewees, Xunni has relatively low educational achievement and income. She started to work after her high school studies and has been unemployed for a while when she participated in an interview for this current study.

Although the four interviewees under discussion belong to different interpretive categories (*Distants* and *Tolerants*), consistent with the findings of the external validation test (see Chapter 5.3), they all struggled with decoding the exhibits ‘properly’. To be more specific, facing the segments of mass culture that the artists metaphorically transfigure in their works, the *Distants* and the *Tolerants* could not shift their gaze from the formalistic traits of the exhibits to the artistic meanings or concepts underlying those material characteristics. Even so, it does not necessarily mean that the *Tolerants* and the *Distants* generated very negative impressions of the exhibitions due to their conscious or unconscious awareness of being excluded. Rather, according to the interviews, the *Tolerants* and the *Distants* pursued the distinctiveness of their tastes by showing their (financial, aesthetic or linguistic) abilities and openness to an intimate and practical approach to an authentic visiting experience in the context of the emerging culture (here, a contemporary art exhibition). In this regard, similar to the *PCLs* and the *LCLs*, the

Distants and the *Tolerants* also had ironic perceptions about the visitors whom they regard as belonging to other taste categories.

All the four interviewees used specific ways to portray ‘otherness’ in the exhibitions. Specifically, they did not consider ‘wenyi youth’ the right term to identify themselves. According to Mingxi, the term was a ‘sarcastic phrase’ that describes those who have ‘unrealistic’ perspectives on their lives. Ziyan agrees, calling those whom they perceived as ‘other visitors’ ‘矫情的’ (Jiao Qing de). According to the Cihai Dictionary (2016: 210), ‘矫情’ refers to a person’s tendency to distinguish him or herself from others by pretentiously adopting activities that violate common sense. Likewise, Xunni could not understand why the ‘other visitors’ invest ‘so much energy’ in the details of the exhibits, saying, ‘They made me feel nervous’. For Feng, the term was inappropriate and too ‘new’ to describe the cultural tendencies of his generation. ‘I am too old to be called wenyi youth’. To understand the distinctive tastes of the *Distants* and the *Tolerants*, the following sections shed light on the four interviewees’ similarities and differences in their perceptions of the exhibits. The following section introduces the similarities between the tastes of the *Distants* and the *Tolerants*. The last section describes how the *Tolerant* individual distinguishes him or herself from the visitors in the other three visitor groups.

Although the four interviewees belong to different interpretive categories, they shared particular ways of perceiving and interpreting the contemporary artworks. First, they could not make every artwork they encountered in the exhibition meaningful for

themselves, especially the displays that lacked aesthetic value, as commonly agreed. In other words, faced with the avant-garde, all four interviewees experienced difficulties in detaching their aesthetic judgement and expression from ‘every perception of everyday existence’ or ‘barbarism par excellence from the standpoint of the pure aesthetic’ (Bourdieu, 1979: 44). For instance, in He Xiangyu’s *Oral Project* exhibition in the UCCA (2015), the artist was inclined to centralise the role of visual representation in the communication process through ‘supplanting the oral and aural’ (UCCA, 2016). Specifically, He ‘translat[ed] into images the ridges, bumps, and grooves of his palate through perceptions felt with his tongue’ (ibid.). Encountering He’s works, Mingxi claimed to be attracted by this exhibition, but her perceptual model did not motivate her to fully explore the artistic conceptions and meanings of He’s works. On the contrary, Mingxi selectively focused on the elements of the exhibition that she could easily engage with based on her everyday experience—the titles of the paintings and the specific curatorial arrangement of the exhibition space.

Mingxi: I still remember the title of his exhibition; it was so attractive to me. Yeah, it was something like ‘Everything we create is not yourself’, was it not? It was writing on a white wall, and I love this kind of arrangement.

Q: Why?

Mingxi: I do not really get the point (of why He wrote those words); I

mean, there must be some kind of relationship between this phrase and his works. Ah, whatever, it did not bother me very much (to explore the relationships). I like this phrase since it gives me a chance for self-reflection on my own life, like from what have we been created? Why have we been created? Who owns those things then?

Mingxi's sense of confusion about He's works did not result in a sense of refusal; rather, she satisfied her curiosity and expectation about her visit through her 'populist' scheme of perception. More specifically, although Mingxi failed to decipher He's works and did not realise that the phrase she mentions is actually the title of his works rather than the theme of the exhibition (*Oral Project*), she resisted the boundaries of 'intellectual illusion' that the exhibits put in place by applying her personalised decoding strategies (opposed to the 'disinterested' or 'legitimate' way of reading). According to the interview, this kind of interpretation (misunderstanding) and strategy (to engage with the intellectually accessible part of the exhibition such as the 'uncommon way' of displaying artworks) enabled Mingxi 'not to be bothered' by the frustration caused by her failure to address the intellectual challenges posed by the artworks. In this regard, if the *PCLs* could be deemed the 'winners' in the exhibition due to their ability to decode the artworks in a more systematic, disinterested and relatively persistent way, then the *Distants* and the *Tolerants* lost in the competition, since their self-reflections are randomly oriented and conditioned.

The other three interviewees shared similar strategies to engage with the exhibits.

Choosing Zbigniew Rogalski's *Death of Partisan* as her preferred artwork in the State of Life exhibition (NAMoC), Ziyang did not pay attention to the artist's effort to share/represent the very moment when the partisan dies, depicted through the lurid contours of reality and the edge of consciousness. The pictorial effect and the details of the painting are the elements that attract her most. 'I really like a painting in the exhibition, the white one that is not far from the entrance.' (She could not recall the name of the work and the artist.) 'It gives you the feeling that it portrays in-depth meaning. You can find nothing when you see it the first time, but if you pay enough attention, you can find the subtle figures on it.' Ziyang explained her taste for Rogalski's work by admiring his artistic creativity. 'Not so many artists can do this; I mean, you cannot see such kind of painting everywhere'.

Similar to Mingxi's preference, Ziyang's curiosity-oriented taste was also conditioned. Ziyang could not intellectually access most of the displays in the State of Life exhibition. Encountering the artworks she could not understand, Ziyang turned her puzzlement into emotional expressions of refusal and selectivity, saying, 'I would not step forward (to approach artworks) if artworks could not draw my attention in the first place'. Ziyang specified the traits of what she considered an attractive artwork. 'My ideal type of contemporary artwork would be a framed painting rather than other types of art like installation art. It should be of a smaller size rather than a bigger size; it should contain a group of paintings rather than a single piece'. In this regard, Ziyang felt more secure in front of contemporary artworks that she could visually and intellectually control through her limited knowledge and tolerance of the avant-garde. In other words, Ziyang

expected to satisfy her aesthetic curiosity by approaching the modernised themes and contents with the criteria of legitimate art forms based on common sense rather than challenging established principles. This is probably because the modern themes and elements were able to offer Ziyang more chances to appreciate the exclusive legitimate artworks by drawing from her life experience/knowledge about current social discourses. She said, 'I like the traditional versions of contemporary artworks'.

The other two attributes that she mentions can be deemed further evidence of her expectation of reducing the levels of intellectual challenge or exclusivity of the artworks. Specifically, the smaller size of the artworks provides her with more opportunities to 'get their point'. 'It's just like the artwork in the centre of the exhibition room; it was too big and too abstract to know what the artist wants to say in a short time'. For Ziyang, it was easier to trace the themes or narratives of a series of paintings compared to a single painting. 'Yes, it's easier to understand it (a series of paintings); you can always find common things among those [individual] paintings'.

Like her peers (Mingxi and Ziyang), Xunni shifted her focus from the artistic concept of Korakrit Arunanondchai's work (*Painting with History in a Room Filled with People with Funny Names 2*) to the whole effect of the exhibition arrangement. 'I really like the combination of the colours, the text on the wall, the materials (that the artist uses) and the smell of burning in his (Arunanondchai's) exhibition.' Feng considered Leon Tarasewicz's work *No Title* (1987) as his favourite in the State of Life exhibition. He said that he does not understand the work, but 'the figures in the artwork are very

interesting; it's just like the brush strokes in a Chinese national's painting (Guo Hua).'

The four interviewees had very complex relationships with and expectations about contemporary artworks, which cannot be simply reduced to class-based and single-dimensional struggles in the field of cultural consumption. Specifically, according to the analysis of the *Distants'* and *Tolerants'* preferences in the exhibits, it might be argued that the four interviewees' reactions to contemporary art were no different from those of the most economically and culturally deprived in Bourdieusian studies (e.g. Bourdieu, 1979; Holt, 1997; Savage et al., 2010). Indeed, all the four interviewees had very conservative tastes in contemporary artwork. As revealed in the interviews, they cited those exhibits that pose a 'thorough' challenge of the criteria of aesthetic and ethical discourses as their most disliked works (they have sympathy for the 'conservative' forms of contemporary art). Specifically, they considered the avant-garde 'fake art' (Mingxi), 'unacceptable forms' (Ziyan and Xunni) and 'non-art' (Feng). Confronting those avant-garde works (especially those relating to the aesthetics of anti-beauty and violence), the four interviewees also rarely made an explicitly aesthetic judgement other than expressing more or less negative impressions based on ethical complicity and populist sentimentality. However, their lack of cultural predisposition and competition in the exhibitions still cannot explain their taste for and curiosity about the 'traditional version of contemporary artworks' (Ziyan). As shown in the following section, the four interviewees' inability to persistently direct their gaze away from 'popular consciousness' or 'the charming of the senses' (Bourdieu, 1979: 42) in the exhibitions is only one of the reasons. The cultural policies in China simultaneously

contribute to the *Distant*'s and the *Tolerant*'s conditional love of contemporary artworks.

Despite all four interviewees' claim to keep an open mind about the development of avant-garde works, they showed their sensibilities when talking about critical art and controversial exhibitions in relation to religious issues (Mingxi), classical forms of beauty (Ziyan and Feng) and bodily and sexual violence (Xunni). For instance, Ziyan considered Zbigniew Libera's *The Doll You Love to Undress* (1998) as her least favourite piece in the *State of Life* exhibition. Libera's work depicts two blue-eyed dolls with splayed stomachs. The provocative strategies used by Libera to challenge the normative display of beauty and cuteness exceeded Ziyan's tolerance. 'I do not understand; I mean, I could understand that this is what some contemporary artists do, but I could not accept such kind of art. It disgusts me and makes me (feel) very sick.' Sharing a similar opinion of the avant-garde, Feng could not accept any form of self-mutilation in artworks. She associated her resistance to such kinds of work with a feeling of fear based on her feminine sensibility. 'From my perspective as a female visitor, I always experience fear and anxiety when seeing artists who hurt themselves. I appreciate their efforts, and I guess I could get their point as a kind of self-sacrificing activity, but I am just afraid of watching it.' In the interviews with Xunni and Feng, they presented similar hostility and limited tolerance towards controversial religious themes and emerging forms of artistic genre, such as installation art and performance art separately. Xunni believed that the artists should 'at least respect other people's religious beliefs' because 'it is not about beauty and ugliness; it's a basic moral question'. During his visit, Feng ignored the exhibits that he did not like. He says, 'I

could not even recall the titles and contents of most of the artworks in that exhibition because I did not pay enough attention to those works. Those works went too far in terms of the [controversial] topics they (the artists) wanted to [portray] and the related forms and contents'. In this regard, Feng attributed his negative judgement to a kind of neo-liberalism perspective or educational role-oriented museology: the exhibits lack 'educational and aesthetic value'.

Based on the factors mentioned above, it is clear that the four interviewees, although they held different cultural profiles, shared interpretive and decoding strategies with the members of the working class ('popular tastes') in Bourdieu's *La Distinction* (1979). This does not mean that the four interviewees were more economically and culturally deprived than other visitors to the exhibition. Consistent with the findings from the qualitative phase, the relatively low occupational class and educational background of Xunni did not separate her from the other interviewees regarding their aggressive attitude and confusion towards avant-garde art. Specifically, Xunni had a lower volume of both economic and cultural capital than the other respondents. She did not continue her studies after she graduated from secondary school in her hometown, and she was unemployed at the time of her interview. In comparison, though, the stable income and rich exhibition visiting experiences of Feng and the higher educational level of Ziyan did not guarantee superior artistic competence or disposition towards the exhibitions. Thus, in the following section, further evidence will be given to understand the motivations, expectations and perceptions of the members of the *Distant* and *Tolerant* categories.

A very interesting finding from the interviews is the suggestion that what contributed to the division of taste between the interviewees was their perception and interpretation of contemporary art in relation to cultural consumption in China. All four interviewees showed a complex understanding of contemporary art. However, rather than solely identifying contemporary artworks as emerging legitimate art that are still in the process of legitimisation (Bourdieu, 1979), some interviewees (Mingxi, Ziyan and Xunni) also considered what they deemed ‘qualified’ exhibits to be high level design works that followed current international trends in popular culture, while others deemed them internationally accepted and established art forms such as abstract painting (Feng). This finding contributes to the explanation of why the *Distant* and the *Tolerant* had different cultural profiles and selective tastes for particular kinds of artwork in the exhibitions.

According to the interviews, there are three reasons why the three *Distants* perceived the ‘conservative’ version of avant-garde in commercial designs. The first two relate to their individual (lack of) knowledge: they were considered to have little or no sophisticated knowledge about either Chinese or Western legitimate art (including both classical and avant-garde art), since they could not name more than three artists they liked (except the most popular classic artists such as Vincent van Gogh), and they lacked the ability to decipher the code of the exhibits. The third reason is the influence of cultural policies in China.

Specifically, as shown above, the availability of consecrated popular culture in the exhibitions greatly calmed the *Distants*’ feelings of panic, confusion and exclusion by

providing them with an alternative way of engaging with the exhibitions (since they could not recognise the ‘worth’ and ‘legitimacy’ of such conceptualised elements of popular culture). According to the interviews, the *Distants*’ ‘misunderstanding’ or ‘misreading’ of the exhibits was only part of the reason that they were attracted to the exhibitions. The collected evidence also shows that the *Distants* did not exclusively perceive the contemporary art exhibitions and contemporary artworks as legitimate cultural products and ‘high status’ cultural referents. Rather, the *Distants* referred to the exhibitions as a combination of legitimate activities and entertainment zones or world exhibitions (expositions) where they could satisfy their curiosity about exotic trends in popular culture, cultural spectacles and commercial creativities. Based on analyses of qualitative data, this is the reason for the easing of tension between cultural institutions and lay visitors.

For instance, Mingxi equated the exhibits to design works and curiosities: ‘I’m interested in seeing things I haven’t seen before and this is probably the very reason I came here ... those design works, I mean, like what I said, I don’t understand them but that’s the point of learning, isn’t it?’ She specifically used the term ‘learning’ in the interview, which shows that she did not perceive the UCCA as a purely educational or disciplined institution in the style of the nineteenth century (Bennett, 2004: 165), but neither did she make an effort or feel obliged to ‘learn’ about the exhibits while visiting the exhibition.

It’s fun to be [in the UCCA], [but] I’m probably quite different from the

other visitors. I like some of the exhibits [just] because of their forms, rather the meaning of those works. I wouldn't bother spending too much time on one work if I couldn't understand it, since I'm a very easy-going person (Mingxi).

Even though Mingxi considered her attitude towards the contemporary artworks to be unique, a similar attitude can be identified in the interviews with the other two *Distants*. Specifically, Xunni and Feng distinguished their exotic taste from other culturally disadvantaged visitors by showing their intimacy with Western popular culture (not necessarily on a cognitive level) and their mastery of the English language. In other words, the *Distants* appreciated the rarity of contemporary artworks based mainly on their characteristics of foreign cultures or internationally sanctioned popular culture rather than any artistic legitimacy.

I have a very open mind for contemporary artwork, because I want to know [about] foreign cultures. It's similar to my interest in American music—I like it because I think it's a very good way to learn English. Speaking for myself, once you understand the lyrics [of foreign songs] well, you'll probably find out how meaningless and boring they are, just like most Chinese pop music. I wouldn't waste my time on such music, no matter where it's from (Xunni).

Xunni also showed the relationship between her taste for contemporary art and her

language skills: 'I've been visiting contemporary art exhibitions regularly for many years. This is probably because of [the influence of] my prior work experience as an assistant for a foreign artist.' As she said, her language skills helped her to get the job, and enabled her to feel 'not very strange' facing American and European contemporary artworks. Even so, she still tried to understand the artworks by drawing on her everyday life experiences: 'Arunanondchai's design for the space was very beautiful and inspirational for me ... I even drew a sketch based on the idea I got during my visit.'

Based on the factors mentioned above, one might argue that the *Distants'* perception of contemporary art as exotic and high quality popular cultural goods reflects the powerful influence of cultural policies, and the developmental and commercial model the 798 Contemporary Art Zone adopts. Indeed, according to the introductory information on the web site of the 798 Contemporary Art Zone's Managing Committee (2016), it has devoted itself to leading the development of the Art Zone to become a world class 'creative industrial zone'.

Under the guidance of the developmental plan, the Art Zone attracts not only 'pure' and non-business artistic institutions such as contemporary art galleries and museums, but also businesses from other types of creative industry such as mass media publication, design and consulting, internet cultures and entertainment. These profit-oriented cultural organisations and companies significantly contribute to the commercialisation of the Art Zone. For instance, more than a hundred new product release conferences, fashion shows, movie festivals and concerts take place in the 798 Contemporary Art

Zone every year (Managing Committee, 2016). In this respect, the prevalence of commercial activities in the Art Zone partially explains why the *Distants* treated contemporary artwork as popular culture rather than high culture. This finding echoes Heinrich's argument that 'simply putting everything together in the same place' will not 'allow people to consume "culture" in general, with all hierarchies abolished' (1988: 210). The *Distants*, no matter how well they felt their expectations of the exhibitions were satisfied, did not share the same kind of cognitive comfort with the 'happy few' (the visitors who can achieve cognitive comfort) in the exhibitions (Zolberg, 2007: 97). In other words, like in many countries (Zolberg, 2007: 98), democratisation of culture in exhibitions remains elusive.

As shown in the survey, if the *Distants'* Western taste can be deemed an entertainment-dominated educative leisure orientation, the *Tolerants'* taste for contemporary artwork was primarily constructed by 'cultural goodwill', characterised by its educative purposes. For example, Feng has very sophisticated knowledge of Chinese classical art. He easily listed numerous classical artists and works that he likes. In particular, he mentioned Huang Binhong's (1865–1955) *Fu Chun Jiang Tu* (date unknown), Wu Changshuo's (1844–1927) *Hua Hui Si Ping* (1922) and Pan Tianshou's (1897–1971) *Lu Qi* (1958). He was also familiar with the traits of the artists' works, such as how Huang Binhong's works changed across the various periods of his life: 'when [Huang] was young, his paintings were very succinct, but later, they became increasingly dark and complicated.' Although Feng's rich experience and knowledge of Chinese classical art did not help him with deciphering the works he viewed during his visit to the

contemporary art exhibition, he did not distance himself from the exhibits as the *Distants* did; rather, he demonstrated a strong desire and motivation for learning how to decode the exhibits. In the exhibition, by using the camera on his smartphone, he carefully photographed the artworks and their introductory panels for study purposes: ‘I couldn’t understand them so I took pictures so I could search for further information online when I get home.’ According to him, his preference for the contemporary artworks was based on his respect for and trust in the expertise of the curators of the NAMoC, and his awareness of the fact that contemporary artwork is a legitimate art form which has been internationally sanctioned.

There must be a reason for the curators and the art museum to introduce this exhibition, since not every artist has the chance to show their works in such an important institution in China. They must be very famous artists in Poland or globally (Feng).

The influence of the mother’s education

All the *Distants* claim that their mothers had limited influence in forging their cultural tastes. This finding is consistent with the result of the MRA test in Chapter 4. According to the finding of the test, compared to the visitors whose mothers held a Bachelor’s degree or above, the children of low educated mothers (non-degree or primary degree) were more likely to become *Distants* than members of the other visitor categories. The finding thus highlights the important role of women in transferring cultural capital to their next generation in a family. As shown in the section above, the *Distants*’ lack of

cultural interest was associated with their mothers' low educational achievements (non-degree or primary degree). Specifically, Xunni's mother was a farmer who held a high school degree. According to Xunni, her mother rarely encouraged her to attend cultural events or to consume cultural goods. As Xunni said, the lack of cultural resources and institutions like libraries, museums and galleries in the village where she grew up was another reason she had no interest in visiting those institutions. Ziyang's parents also did not hold high educational qualifications. Her parents did not continue their studies after they graduated from high school. Similar to Xunni's childhood experience, Ziyang did not receive encouragement from her mother to get involved in cultural events or culture-related training sessions. Ziyang believed that the influence of her friends who work in the 798 Art District was a significant reason why she became a contemporary art lover. As a *Distant*, Mingxi's mother had a relatively high educational background than the mothers of Xunni and Ziyang. However, she did not believe that she developed her interest in consuming cultural goods in her family milieu. Mingxi said that her parents were rather busy when she was young, and she was raised by her grandparents during that time. As a *Tolerant*, Feng's mother's educational level (university degree) was relatively high. According to him, his mother tried to encourage him to read classic Chinese literature at a young age.

Thus, the results above show that if there is an association between mothers' education and the cultural preferences of their offspring, the *Distants* were likely to be the most disadvantaged. Even so, mothers' educational level should not be considered a decisive indicator that can be used to predict the specific types of cultural item that the visitor

will prefer. This is because the visitors in the other three categories whose mothers tended to have higher educational achievements demonstrated a preference for a range of different cultural items.

In summary, although the *Distants* and the *Tolerants* had difficulties understanding the exhibits at a cognitive level, they did not consider their inability to read the exhibit a sign of cultural inferiority. Specifically, the *Distants*' visits to the exhibition were more entertainment-oriented. For them, contemporary art should be seen as an internationally sanctioned form of Western(ised) popular culture. Thus, they refused to explore the artistic meaning of the exhibit beneath the surface of the exhibits. Rather, they distinguished their visits through showing their economic and linguistic capacity for consuming overseas cultures. Different from the *Distants*, the *Tolerants*' visits were characterised by a strong learning purpose. For them, the exhibited contemporary artworks were an internationally sanctioned form of Western(ised) legitimate culture, which should be respected and deserved to be studied. Even the *Tolerant* could not understand the exhibits; he carefully recoded the titles and the artists' names of the exhibits in his notes so he could try to understand the works by exploring on the internet information related to the works. The reactions of the *Distants* and *Tolerants* similarly echo the findings of the multinomial regression analysis in Chapter 4. The interviewed members of the *Distants* category were more likely to become culturally inactive than their peers in the exhibitions, while the *Tolerants* showed higher levels of tolerance towards the exhibits than the *Distants* and *LCLs*.

6.3 Findings

The findings of the qualitative phase of this study are consistent with the quantitative analysis presented in the previous chapter. The visitors' demographic figures, such as occupational class and education, which are utilised by 'almost every museum' to 'sort and count' their visitors (Falk, 2009: 30), failed to prove their deterministic and indicative roles in predicting and picturing the characteristics of the core visitor groups and their visiting motivations. As shown in Section 5.2.4, some of the interviewees' decisions about visiting the exhibitions were initially related to their small 'I' identity—namely, the identity that responds to the 'needs and reality of the specific moment or situation', as Falk would describe it (2009: 73). The survey findings thus partly echo Falk's module of identity-related motivation by highlighting the complex and multiple factors that may trigger the visitors' changing and fluid decisions to spend their leisure time in exhibiting institutions. Even so, it does not mean that the influence was prevalent among the interviewed visitors. As shown, the visitors could flexibly generate trajectories for their visits based on their personal identity-related motivations and thus eliminated distinctions. In this regard, the typology of 'interpretive communities' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) can still be identified: this is, once again, consistent with the findings of the previous chapter. According to the qualitative data analysis, the members of each interpretive community also shared homologous images, perceptions and interpretations of the exhibits and the contemporary art museums and galleries (see Chapter 4).

The findings of this chapter also suggest that although the visitors' expressions of the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow cultures were still identifiable, a struggle to feel at home or a sense of high status exclusiveness was no longer a source of tension (emotional and intellectual inclusion versus exclusion) dominating the exhibiting space; rather, that tension was replaced by the struggle of members of the visitor categories to justify and defend the symbolic distinction and rationality of their perception and reception of the exhibits. The eleven interviewees featured in this study had different cultural profiles, but rarely presented negative impressions or passivity towards the exhibits and the exhibitions. Some of them did not engage with the artworks using the 'proper' motivations and decoding strategies: for instance, the *Distants* were inclined to consider their visit to the exhibition a fashionable practice. They were also likely to be impressed by those artworks containing popular or commercial cultural elements, such as devalued classical music (due to its popularity) and animation (see Section 5.2.4). In this regard, based on the qualitative evidence found in this chapter, what contributed to the 'inclusiveness' of the exhibitions was the joint influence of the following segments.

1) *Political influence and galleries' and museums' self-censorshi* For instance, the central government encourages cultural institutions in China to promote core socialist values (CCP, 2013). Being influenced by these policies, the museums and galleries are less likely to introduce artworks that change society's social, political and moral sensibilities. Specifically, the central government tends to regulate cultural institutions by promoting postcolonial-oriented cultural policies. For instance, according to a notice

published by the Ministry of Culture in 2001, the exhibition of pornography and extreme forms of bodily violence in the name of artistic performance and display is illegal and strictly prohibited (CCMN, 2001). Two years later, the General Office of the Central Committee published *Core Socialist Values* (CCP, 2003), which provides regulations for cultural institutions in China. The article stresses that all kinds of cultural products, services and activities should promote core socialist values, encourage positive life goals, put forth a respectable ideology and champion healthy lifestyles. In this respect, the curators of the monitored museums and galleries are less likely to introduce controversial and provocative artworks by Western artists into their exhibitions. In the meantime, Chinese contemporary artworks still keep a part of their controversy and hostility in relation to resistance of Western-centralised modernism and cultural hegemony, but not the current mainstream policies of the CCP (Gao, 2008). However, cultural-separatist claims have proved even themes that might be outdated and homologous to be a ‘significant selling point for contemporary Chinese art on the international art market’ (Gladston, 2014). For Gladston, such an international marketing trend has also attracted an ‘increasing governmental interest in contemporary art as a progressive manifestation of Chinese modernity both internationally and within the PRC’ (Gladston, 2014). In addition, local government is inclined to locate and develop the 798 Art District (the most famous contemporary art centre in Beijing, China) as the main tourist attraction and creative zone. These fragments have improved and broadened the accessibility of the exhibiting space for visitors who have different social backgrounds and cultural profiles.

2) *The proliferation of popular culture in the exhibiting venues and the field of cultural consumption and production* (e.g. ‘blockbuster’ shows and the use of popular cultural objects in the artists’ works, such as popular music, movies and pictorial materials).

3) *The exhibitions’ curators’ pursuit of a high level of exhibition aesthetic quality* (e.g. efforts to provide very limited introductory text for the exhibits and the exhibitions).

According to the evidence, such curatorial strategies, ironically, made the exhibitions more attractive to a wide range of visitors who would normally be separated and excluded. This is mainly due to the fact that, with the absence of intellectually challenging guidance such as introductory information about the exhibitions and the exhibits, the visitors were less likely to be frustrated and excluded by applying Bourdieu’s popular aesthetic or the working class’ taste of the necessary (namely, interpreting artworks based on his or her direct sense or ethical standards) to the observed exhibitions, as they would have encountered in the late 1960s European art museums (Bourdieu et al, 1997).

Thus, the factors mentioned above demonstrate the ‘success’ of the contemporary art exhibiting institutions’ current visitor services and exhibiting policies to promote democratic access and inclusiveness of the exhibitions at a certain level. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, interviewees who belonged to different visitor categories did not forge a unified image and perception of the observed exhibits. In this regard, the findings echo Heinrich’s negative attitude towards the ‘Beaubourg effect’ (namely, the de-sacralisation of art): for her, ‘the mere act of bringing together

socially heterogeneous groups of people who would normally be separated does not produce a unified audience that is somehow magically homogenised in a common celebration of the cult of culture' (Heinich, 1988: 210). To be more specific, the interviews highlighted a gap between those who could 'really' benefit from their visit by interpreting the popular cultural elements by means of subjecting the popular cultural signifiers to distinctive and exclusive modes of appropriation or a detached gaze (the *PCLs*) and those who could not. In this regard, one may argue that the *PCLs*' taste should be considered as an emerging form of legitimate preference rather than the other way around (popular taste for mass culture). Indeed, the interviews with members of the *PCL* group revealed their ability to grasp the rarity of contemporary art taste, which 'defines itself less by the sacristy of its objects than the limited time of their relevance' (Fraser, 2001: 148). The findings of this research thus question the argument concerning 'individualisation', claiming that cultural capital and symbolic boundaries have ceased to be a central issue in museums and galleries (DiMaggio, 1987).

The interviews revealed that members of all the identified visitor categories tried to distance themselves from Chinese contemporary artworks. Their disengagement was related to what was perceived as an 'outmoded, monotonous, commercialised, lack of historical significance and lack of authenticity' impression of the Chinese artworks they have seen before and within the exhibitions. In this regard, this section brings out three main findings. Firstly, although most of the visitors referenced a distaste for Chinese contemporary artworks, differences can still be identified among their perceptions of the artworks. For instance, compared to the *LCLs* who attribute their culturally

essentialist distaste for contemporary Chinese art to the ‘rootless’ characteristics of an appropriated/imported Western cultural form, the *PCLs* expressed their negative impression of public museum-based contemporary Chinese artworks based on their dissatisfaction with the restricted social, cultural and aesthetic concerns of the Chinese artists. The *Tolerants* tended to ‘learn’ contemporary art exclusively from those artists’ works that are important in Western art histories. The *Distants* distanced themselves from contemporary Chinese art to distinguish their exotic tastes for luxury and fashionable cultural productions. The interviewees’ diverse interpretations of contemporary Chinese art once again highlight how the ‘ambiguity’ of public museum-based contemporary art in China ‘harmonises’ the relationship between the exhibitions and their visitors by meeting the needs of such diverse groups.

Secondly, consistent with the finding of gender-, age- and mother’s educational difference-oriented cultural preferences in the quantitative analysis chapter, the findings of the interviews highlight the association between these independent variables and the patterns of visitors’ cultural consumption. The data analysis in this phase sheds light on the influences of age, gender and mother’s education on the survey participants’ cultural tastes, the effects of which are independent of class and educational division. For instance, even though they have different educational backgrounds (Master’s and high school degree) and occupational statuses (current student and temporarily unemployed), Xunni and Ziyang had similar intellectual and emotional responses towards the contemporary art and exhibitions. Specifically, according to Xunni and Ziyang, familiarity with specific kinds of symbolically significant cultural genres and reading

methods (e.g. disinterestedness) is less important for claiming cultural distinction. For them, the financial and linguistic capacities to consume internationally sanctioned cultures are alternative routes to personal distinction.

The visitors' early socialisation in the arts, which was associated with their mother's educational levels, accounts for the variations between levels of cultural engagement and disengagement. As shown in the MRA test, compared with the visitors whose mother had higher educational achievements (Bachelor's degree and above), the lower educated mother's children were more likely to become *Distants* than *PCLs*, *LCLs* and *Tolerants*. The *Distants* did not marginalise their position within the exhibition because of their lack of enthusiasm for understanding the contemporary artworks on a cognitive level; on the contrary, they used their linguistic or financial advantages or previous socialisation to compensate for their lack of cultural predisposition and competency caused by the low volume of parental capital they inherited from their lower educated mothers. In this regard, the characteristics of contemporary art as an imported foreign cultural form, the sense of luxury and entertainment the artworks embodied, and the brand effect of the artists and the exhibiting institutions (e.g. blockbuster show) all attributed to the construction of the *Distants*' personal distinction. Their counterparts, the culturally engaged visitors (the *PCLs*, *LCLs* and *Tolerants*), all tended to value the legitimacy and disinterestedness of contemporary art (though this does not mean that they engaged with the exhibits in a uniform way).

Consistent with the findings of the MLR test, gender differences separate the *PCLs* and

the *Tolerants* from the *LCLs* and the *Distants*. The difference between the two pairs of visitor groups lies in the visitors' degree of acceptance towards the operation of a Kantian disposition of disinterestedness within the exhibitions where elements of popular culture were prevalent. In this regard, the findings cast doubt on the claims of some scholars regarding the sociology of cultural consumption (Bourdieu, 1979, 1990), that women play a central role in the family in transmuting economic capital to symbolic capital. For instance, among the interviewees in this current research, only some of the visitors, the *LCLs*, had a tendency to express their feminine taste through consuming items and genres of legitimate culture. The *Distants* could articulate feminine identity through replacing femininity with an identity of disengagement. The male visitors, who were more likely to become members of the *PCL* and *Tolerant* categories, developed their own masculine taste to contest the traditionally well defined form of feminine taste (a taste for legitimate cultures). They showed their respect for avant-garde art and theories that violated the established artistic decoding methods and aesthetic principles. Although this does not mean that gendered division of cultural consumption has disappeared in China, these findings demonstrate how to understand visitors' tendencies to follow or challenge the stereotypes of traditional gender roles in contemporary art exhibitions.

In contrast to the secondary role that age plays in the classic class-based homology argument for indicating cultural orders between generations (e.g. Bourdieu et al., 1997), the findings of this section, in line with recent research in cultural sociology (Bennett et al., 2009), confirm that age is associated with the patterns of the visitors' cultural

consumption and that the effects of it are independent of class and education. Identification of age-oriented cultural consumption among the visitors is consistent with the result of the MRL test conducted in Chapter 4. As the result of the MRL test indicates, older visitors (49+ years) had a greater chance of becoming members of the *LCLs* category than their younger peers (18–29 years). According to the interviews, what distinguished the *LCLs* from the *Distants*, the *Tolerants* and the *PCLs* was their relatively monotonous taste for and sophisticated understanding of classical Chinese culture. For the members of the other three visitor categories, their tastes were more varied and versatile than those of *LCLs*. Accordingly, the age differences were characterised by a distinction between homologous national taste and diverse cultural orientations. Thus, the finding of this pattern of age difference opposition questions the possibility of locating Bennett et al.'s (2009) generational effect of cultural imagery among the visitors. In their work, the older generation in the UK asserts its cultural power through knowing and appreciating European genres. Among younger age groups in the UK, American culture forms are more vital. Bennett et al. attribute the popularity of American genres that are sweeping the UK youth to the international influence of the powerful American cultural industry. In this current research, the young people groups (the *PCLs*, the *Distants* and the *Tolerants*) demonstrated their varied, complex and contested tastes for the cultural references that bear the stamp not only of national culture but also of European and American cultures.

In summary, the findings of this current research study partly support Bourdieu's mechanism of cultural production by identifying patterned and differentiated cultural

preferences and homologies between fields in exhibitions in China. At the same time, the findings of the research study challenge the reliability of Bourdieu et al.'s class-based mechanism of cultural consumption for understanding the cultural tastes of the surveyed visitors in China. The central and deterministic role that the education system plays in the love of art is insufficient to reveal the diversity and complexity of visitors' cultural preferences. The research findings thus echo the viewpoints of Hanquinet (2015) and Bennett et al. (2009) regarding the importance and efficiency of exploring and observing participants' cultural or taste profiles rather than their demographic figures to avoid oversimplifying patterns of cultural consumption and cultural relativism (see Chapter 1.5). Even so, it does not mean that the research findings of Hanquinet and Bennett et al. can be directly applied to this current research study: their findings cannot adequately explain the division of the four taste categories in this current research. For instance, as part of their findings, the associations between the taste categories and social structures identified in both Hanquinet's (2015: 27) and Bennett et al.'s (2009: 56) work cannot sufficiently characterise the opposition and conflicts among the four taste categories in this current study. In addition, the characteristics and contents of the cultural profiles are different from those in the studies by Hanquinet and Bennett et al. In Hanquinet's account, generational difference can distinguish some cultural profiles (e.g. youth culture versus classicism) but not others (e.g. transgressive orientations versus conservative orientations). However, as shown in the previous chapter (Section 5.3), age can be considered quite a reliable indicator to distinguish *LCLs* from members of the other cultural profiles. The two pairs of cultural

profiles that Hanquinet (2015) highlighted also cannot be precisely identified in this current research study. Similarly, as mentioned in Sections 6.2.1, 6.2.3 and 6.2.4, no sufficient evidence exists to support Peterson and Kern's findings about omnivorousness among the visitors in China, which Bennett et al. (2009: 57) considered to be one of the most important components of their 'cloud of individuals'.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The research cast new light on the necessity of exploring regionally specific forms of cultural consumption. If the individualisation argument highlights that the way in which people deal with uncertainty is like a walk in the dark, then this research highlights the regionally specific organisation of cultural distinction. Unlike the prevalent sociological concerns about the distinctiveness of cultural orders in a specific social context (e.g. Erickson 1996; Holt 1997; Bihagen and Kata-Gerro 2000; Lamont 1992; Bennett et al. 2009), this research illustrates how the visitors engage with the symbolic value of a global cultural form (contemporary art) in the present-day People's Republic of China (PRC). To investigate whether contemporary art in China is an indicator of a legitimate culture that individuals use to organise cultural distinction and symbolic boundaries, this research was conducted by collecting and analysing data on how the visitors of the three observed contemporary art exhibitions engaged in, valued, and interpreted contemporary art. A major finding of the data analysis in both the quantitative (the visitors' demographics, tastes for literary and music genres, and knowledge about contemporary art discourses and art histories) and qualitative (their interpretation of contemporary art) phases of this research is that acknowledging the one-dimensional (or its over-simplified version) hierarchy of cultural tastes in the

classic class-based homology argument²⁷ is insufficient (but still relevant) for understanding the complex and multidimensional aspects of contemporary art in China.

As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, sufficient evidence demonstrates that the symbolic status and definition of contemporary art are blurred in Chinese social and cultural contexts. The contemporary artworks simultaneously occupy two positions in the PRC's hierarchy of cultural consumption preferences (as imported luxury cultural goods that are economically affordable for the young social elites and as legitimate cultural forms that have been internationally sanctioned). The ambiguity in the cultural and social definition of contemporary artworks allows the visitors to selectively engage with any specific aspect of the dual characteristics of contemporary art. Although the exhibitions seemed *inclusive*²⁸, it did not necessarily mean that the visitors could *freely* interpret contemporary artworks by navigating between the two positions.

Among the four patterned cultural preferences (the *Distants*, the popular culture lovers [*PCLs*], the legitimate culture lovers [*LCLs*], and the *Tolerants*) that were identified within the exhibitions, some of the visitors' sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. gender, age, and mother's education) played a key role in orienting the cultural differentiation. Accordingly, the multinomial logistic regression (MLR) test (Chapter 4) identified three patterns of cultural distinction. The first involves the opposition

²⁷ e.g. Bourdieu's hierarchised mechanism of tastes: highbrow, middlebrow, and popular tastes

²⁸ 'Inclusive' here takes into account the volumes of capital possessed by the museum visitors. While their cultural capital was higher than their economic capital, their economic capital was still significant. While not extremely wealthy, the visitors were financially deprived.

between the established legitimate taste and three ways to reject this taste. The second concerns the degree of acceptance towards applying a Kantian disposition of disinterestedness. The third pertains to disengagement versus three types of engagement (*PCLs*, *LCLs* and *Tolerants*). The identified patterns of cultural tastes correspond to the differences in the visitors' age, gender, and mother's education. Interestingly, the simple distinction between highbrow and lowbrow cultures fails to underpin the differentiation in the cultural tastes. In other words, the cultural patterns could not reveal the social structures and the unequal distribution of resources between the classes in the PRC unlike the claim of the classic class-based homology argument (e.g. Bourdieu et al. 1997). When the association between the social cleavage (class differences) and the identified cultural divides is weak, even the art professionals and experts could not stand out among the lay visitors or dilettantes by legitimating their capacity to detach themselves from ordinary or vulgar aesthetics. In short, the operation of Kantian disinterestedness does not play a central role in reproducing social inequalities in the exhibitions.

In this regard, the ambiguity of contemporary art caused by its dual characteristics implies a game where everyone feels that they are dominating and winning. Within the exhibitions, members of all four visitor categories tend to defend the legitimacy of their interpretation and decoding strategies towards contemporary artworks. Thus, the *inclusiveness* of the exhibitions allows the visitors with different cultural preferences to feel comfortable there. The evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that the PRC's cultural

policies mediate the relationship between the visitors and the exhibitions. The PRC's cultural policies contribute to the *harmony* of the exhibitions by restricting the radical and experimental contemporary artists from publicly displaying their works in the name of preserving traditional Chinese moral, cultural, and aesthetic norms and identities. In this way, compared with the radical and experimental exhibitions, the public museum based contemporary artworks are less emotionally and intellectually provoking for amateurs with different cultural tastes and predispositions.

Accordingly, it might be argued that the prevalence of political censorship in Western countries casts doubt on the uniqueness of the political correctness that characterises the public museum-based contemporary art in the PRC. This argument is partly valid – the struggles between government censorship and the autonomy of the art world exist in 'every society and at every age' (Chiang and Posner 2006: 309). Even so, the PRC's postcolonialism-oriented cultural policies, which censor the social and, in particular, the aesthetic criticism on traditional Chinese aesthetic, cultural, and moral principles, do generate a series of region-specific consequences that have not been well documented and studied yet. For example, all the interviewed visitors had negative impressions about the limited themes and content of contemporary Chinese art that are sanctioned and legitimated by the PRC's government. As an important finding of this research, the influence of cultural policies on the visitors' cultural preferences provides an alternative means of understanding the regional variations in systems of cultural consumption in an international context. For instance, Kane attributes young Asian

elites' acknowledgement of highbrow culture's symbolic power and their decreased likelihood of participating in this culture themselves as a partial result of the 'Marxist cultural initiatives in Asia' (2003: 419). The finding of this research illuminates an alternative way to understand this phenomenon. As shown in the MLR test, age differences are associated with the differences in visitors' cultural tastes. The younger groups (the *PCLs*, the *Distant*s and the *Tolerant*s) are more likely to express their distaste for established high cultures.

Additionally, a few countries (especially European countries and the USA), through explicit public notices or legal rules, criminalise contemporary artists' tendency to display radical artistic practices and works in the public space. For instance, according to a notice published by the China's Ministry of Culture in 2001, the exhibition of pornography and extreme forms of physical violence in the name of artistic performance is illegal and strictly prohibited (MCPRC 2001). Two years later, the General Office of the Central Committee published 'Core Socialist Values' (CCP 2003), which provides suggested regulations for cultural institutions in China. The article stresses that all kinds of cultural products, services, and activities should promote core Socialist values, encourage positive life goals, put forth a respectable ideology, and champion healthy lifestyles. The public orders might encourage the contemporary art museums and galleries to conduct a higher level of self-censorship than their Western peer institutions. In this respect, those public orders might contribute to the prevalence of the models of contemporary art exhibitions that are politically correct with Chinese

characteristics.

Aligned with the finding on the regional effects of the PRC's cultural policies, the evidence is sufficient to highlight the visitors' different attitudes towards contemporary Chinese art, public museum-based contemporary artworks, and radical contemporary Western art. In this respect, identifying the distinctive strategies that the visitors use to interact with the three forms of contemporary art provides an opportunity to understand and examine the contemporaneity of present day Chinese art from the perspectives of sociocultural studies.

Specifically, three types of arguments in studies about this topic give rise to a heated debate on defining the contemporaneity of Chinese art. The first argument represents the uncertainty-oriented poststructuralist and postmodern viewpoints (Smith 2008; Gladston 2014, 2015). The scholars in support of this argument are inclined to understand the contemporaneity of present-day Chinese art which lies between the schools of cultural separatist and postmodernist thought. The second argument involves the specious cultural essentialist claims of the total modernity of contemporary Chinese art (Gao 2009). The third concerns the pessimistic metaphor of treating Chinese cultural traditions and identities as comprising a kind of 'hometown [that] one can never return [to]', which needs to be 'disassembled and reconstructed' (Gao 2011: 11). These arguments have limitations in decoding the complexity of the patterned and geographically characterised cultural preferences of the visitors studied in this

research.

All three arguments have issues in understanding present-day Chinese art's contemporaneity. Gao's (2009) 'total modernity' of China is appropriate for understanding the 'political collectiveness of the museum-based contemporary Chinese artworks. However, the contemporary artworks that share this characteristic (the contemporary Chinese artists' restricted opportunities to engage in social and aesthetic criticisms) have been devalued by their popularisation. The visitors' negative impression of it provides evidence to support this argument. For instance, the *PCLs* experience difficulty in transmitting their cultural predispositions into competencies within contemporary Chinese art exhibitions. For them, the 'routine' and 'not shocking enough' artworks have lost their status as an indicator of privilege, which denies intellectual and emotional access to the amateurs.

Comparing the findings of the sociocultural studies conducted in Western countries, the following section focuses on the specificity of the Chinese visitors, their interpretation of contemporary artworks and the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art in a global context. In this regard, the discussion in the following sections aims to furnish more detailed evidence to identify the distinctive regional characteristics of the cultural consumption patterns in the exhibitions. At the end of this chapter, the limitations of the study and the importance of conducting further empirical research in the PRC are highlighted.

7.2 Class: a relative influence in shaping the visitors' cultural preferences

The major finding of this research is the disjuncture between the visitors' sociodemographic background and their homologous music and literary tastes, aesthetic predispositions, and interpretation of contemporary artworks. In other words, the homologous positions that the individuals occupied in both social and cultural spaces did not associate with the same position in the space of cultural consumption unlike the findings of the class-based homology argument (e.g. Bourdieu 1979; 1984). In this respect, a very interesting finding is that the dual characteristics of contemporary art in China (namely both internationally sanctioned legitimate culture and imported foreign cultural products) underpin the variations in the identified cultural tastes. Further evidence also demonstrates that the PRC's cultural policies contribute to the formation of this cultural divide. Aiming to support this argument, the following section sheds light on the specificity of the Chinese cultural consumption model by utilising the explanatory power of the main and influential frameworks of socio-cultural studies on this phenomenon.

The evidence demonstrates that Bourdieu's theoretical mechanism of class-habitus oriented cultural consumption provides a relevant but not sufficient solution to understand the complexity of the monitored cultural preferences. Echoing the result of

the Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR) test, the findings demonstrate that, while class²⁹ and education are relevant to it, the key determinants of cultural differentiation are age, gender, and mother's education. Specifically, there are some characteristics shared by the monitored Chinese visitors and their peers in France (Bourdieu 1979) and other European countries (Bourdieu et al. 1969). First, the role of social class is still important for understanding the social and cultural exclusivity of the contemporary art exhibitions. In other words, like their western peers from 1979 France, many of the Chinese visitors were the members of professional-executive (e.g. Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations like artists) and intermediate (e.g. other employees such as secretary; personal assistant; clerical worker; office clerk) classes. The relatively homologous social identity of the visitors unveils the social and cultural exclusivity of the contemporary art exhibitions. In this regard, tracking the lines of social cleavage and the unequal distribution of cultural resources between classes, those who held a low volume of cultural capital (e.g. small employers and own account workers) were absent from the exhibitions. The identification of the social and cultural exclusivity of the exhibitions also echoes the findings of some scholars who confirm the essential role of class in symbolic boundary formation, temporally and spatially, beyond the national boundary (as was found, for example, in 1960s France).

Second, the visitors' parents have relatively high educational achievements in their

²⁹ Class was not used in the MLR test due to its relatively minor contribution to the analytical model's fitness, and the influence of it on the model was not statistically significant.

respective generations (in contrast to their peers). Within Bourdieu's mechanism of cultural consumption, the parents' educational levels are effective indicators for predicting their offspring's cultural disposition and competence within cultural spaces. For him, compared to their peers, those parents equipped with high volume of cultural capital can give their offspring more chances to become familiar with high cultures at a young age (when the class habitus developing). The children are then predisposed to feel confident and comfortable in art exhibitions. In this way, the relatively highly educated parents guarantee the transmission of social and cultural privileges between generations.

Finally, the visitors' contemporary art exhibition visits were strongly associated to educational achievement. The visitors who possess high-level educational credentials (bachelor's degree and above) were over-represented within the exhibitions. This finding is also in line with the homology argument. The close association between education and cultural consumption has been pointed out by many scholars in different countries (e.g. Kata-Gerro 1999; Bennett et al. 2009). For Bourdieu, education systems play a key role in sanctioning and reinforcing social and cultural inequalities. The high representation of the members of cultivated classes stresses the vitality of holding a relatively higher volume of cultural capital in the visitors' reproduction of social inequality in the exhibitions. Even so, the two core components of Bourdieu's account of the mechanism of cultural domination, namely a privileged taste for high culture and

a capacity of applying ‘pure gaze’³⁰, did not play a central role in structuring the cultural differentiation (the three identified patterns of cultural preferences). The exhibitions display considerable diversity that cannot be reduced to a monotonous logic. In the first place, within the contemporary art exhibitions, the importance of highbrow taste decreased in comparison with France in the 1960s. The symbolic struggle between legitimate and popular culture could only reveal one of multiple aspects or part of the identified cultural tendencies in this research. No evidence has been found that the Legitimate Culture Lovers (*LCLs*) could dominate the exhibiting spaces by either showing their sophisticated knowledge about contemporary art aesthetics or mastering a technique which enables them to exclusively achieve pleasures at a cognitive level. According to the result of the External Validation Test (EVT) and the qualitative analysis, the *LCLs* had very restricted knowledge about the discourses of contemporary art and they could only selectively appreciate the contemporary artworks in relatively conservative modes (e.g. paintings rather than installation art).

In addition, it is also implausible to demonstrate that operation of a Kantian

³⁰ To apply Kantian disposition of disinterestedness.

disposition of disinterestedness accounts for a hegemonic and exclusive way that enables the visitors to feel emotionally and intellectually secured and included within the exhibitions. Disinterestedness is not prevalent within the exhibitions. As shown in the EVT and the data analysis in the qualitative chapter, distinction is achieved by the *PCLs* from establishing a distance from a ‘superficial reading’ of the artworks³¹. In this respect, compared to their peers in the other visitor categories (the *Distants*, *LCLs* and *Tolerants* categories), the *PCLs* have a higher chance to achieve cognitive satisfactions in the exhibition. However, disinterestedness plays an insignificant part in the cultural divide. Among all three identified patterns of cultural consumption - those characterised by the opposition between engagement and disengagement in cultural consumption, by legitimate taste versus three alternative types of taste, and by avant-garde taste rather than conservative taste - the *PCLs* could not isolate themselves from the others who had little knowledge about contemporary art. For instance, the *PCLs* failed at distinguishing themselves from the *Tolerants* in the gender oriented cultural divide even though the *PCLs* were more likely to feel at home in the exhibitions. Accordingly, compared to their sophisticated knowledge about contemporary art, their masculine tendency to resist the well-defined traditional femininity (e.g. established aesthetic and moral norms) is more important in shaping the boundary.

In summary, this section highlights the complexity and multidimensionality of the visitors’ pattern of cultural consumption that is independent of Bourdieu’s one-

³¹ To understand artworks without drawing experience from ordinary life or vulgar and mainstream aesthetics.

dimensional cultural distinction between high and low cultures. This finding is not new in the field of socio-cultural studies. Many scholars have also identified the insufficient explanatory power of Bourdieu's mechanism of cultural legitimacy and distinction for grasping in-country or cross-countries variation in the perception of cultural consumption practices (e.g. Lamont 1992, 2001; Holt 1997; Erickson 1996; Katz-Gerro 1999; Kane 2003; Bellavance 2008; Bennett et al. 2009; Hanquinet 2015). The main arguments can be summarised as follows. First, as Lamont indicates, symbolic boundaries between high and low cultural genres are more important for French social and cultural scientist than their American peers. In other words, cultural context matters for forging specific range of cultural habitus. Lamont attributes the American intellectuals' sympathy for mainstream cultures as the 'stronger' American working class and 'weaker' public sectors as compared to their French counterparts (1992: 172). Kane (2003) makes a similar argument to Lamont; for him, the egalitarian ideology decreases the importance of symbolic boundaries in the US. This kind of 'weakening' symbolic violence can also be identified in Bennett et al.'s work. They assert that, for the middle class in the UK, an 'openness to diversity' is noble (2009: 252). The cultural, political, and social context of the society will shape the regional specificity of cultural consumption.

Second, some scholars questioned this finding, as they consider this type of cultural openness as a new form of elitist culture that draws symbolic boundaries. For instance, Holt suggests that the content of cultural genres or the objectified cultural capital plays

a less important role for identifying cultural privileges. Cultural distinction is often characterised by the individuals' sophisticated practices of cultural engagement. Savage et al. (2010) are in agreement with Holt. In their study, they identify that the young elites tend to define their tastes through consuming popular culture (e.g. 'crap' TV and comedy) without categorising those genres in derogatory manners. To achieve this purpose, the young elites in the UK tended to consume lowbrow cultures based on their acknowledgment of the low position those cultures occupied in the hierarchy of cultural consumption. In this way, they demonstrate 'the sophistication of their cultural palettes whilst disavowing forms of snobbery' (2010: 21).

Accordingly, many scholars (Peterson 1992; Chan and Goldthorpe 2007: 11) attribute the new form of social elitist culture as omnivorous taste. The hybrid taste enables the omnivores to derive pleasure from showing their abilities of mastering multidimensional and complex information. Erickson (1996) holds a similar attitude. Within his work, he replaces Bourdieu's high-status commanded cultural distinction with his 'cultural variety'. For him, one's ability to communicate with people holding a wide variety of social positions is a privilege. To achieve this goal, one needs to be familiar with 'high-status culture, field-specific forms of dominating and coordinating culture, and cultural variety' (1996: 248).

Finally, as compared to those scholars who focus on the association between the elimination of symbolic boundaries and the cultural interest of specific countries, many

other scholars shed light on the multidimensionality of cultural consumption practices within a country. For example, Hanquinet highlights that ‘a diversity of cultural profiles hides behind the same structure (social position)’ (2015: 27). In line with this argument, Bellavance (2008) introduces how the individuals who share similar social positions develop diverse cultural interests that are associated with his or her occupations.

Thus, although the solutions that those scholars offered seem promising to understand the observed cultural preferences of the visitors, the findings of this research provide an alternative way to interpret the variation of the visitors’ cultural tastes. The following section focuses on the socio-cultural particularity of Chinese contemporary art exhibition visitors and their cultural consumption practices in an international context. In this way, the primary aim of the following section lies in providing more evidence supporting the studies of the variation of cultural distinction worldwide.

7.3 The particularity of the visitors’ cultural consumption

The specificity of the Chinese visitors and their cultural tastes can be understood in the following ways. First, although many visitors did not attach themselves to repertoires of high status cultural referents that represent symbolic significance (e.g. classic art, opera), there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the detachment is justified by the prevalence of the visitors’ cultural openness and tolerance towards diversity. As shown

in Chapter 5, members of all four visitor categories displayed a sense of cultural superiority by distinguishing their cultural taste from populist and vulgar preferences (e.g. popular music and novels). Accordingly, for the visitors, drawing symbolic boundaries and expressing symbolic violence is still the dominant way to define their own cultures (though it does not mean that the visitors had uniform cultural preferences). In some studies (e.g. Bennett et al. 2009), ideology that is bound by notions of morality or egalitarianism can challenge the symbolic struggles that individuals experience. However, this was not the case with this research. Bourdieu's symbolic violence can still be identified in the exhibitions, however, in a regionally specific form.

Second, there was no obvious finding to emerge from the analysis that suggests that the visitors were omnivores who have hybrid cultural tastes for a wide range of both highbrow and lowbrow cultural genres. The identified evidence is also insufficient to confirm whether the visitors tended to show off their knowledge about the mechanism of hierarchised cultural tastes by 'intentionally' consuming 'vulgar' cultures. For instance, the *PCLs* have a deep understanding of the exhibits and the theoretical and artistic intentions of the artists. During the interviews, which included four *PCLs* demonstrated their antipathy towards the other visitors' superficial reading of contemporary artworks and treating those works of art as 'popular' cultural forms. Taking the *PCLs* aggressive attitude towards popular culture into consideration, the evidence is insufficient to consider the members of the *PCLs*' category as cultural omnivores. Similarly, the members of the other visitor categories (the *Distants*, *LCLs*,

and *Tolerants*) demonstrated a very restricted openness towards indicators of popular culture.

Last, like the study that Hanquinet (2015) conducted in Belgium, this research also identifies that the visitors who shared similar social backgrounds used multiple ways to engage with contemporary artworks. The primary difference between Hanquinet's findings and that of this research lies in the different content of the identified 'cultural maps'. In her work, the visitors were separated into six visitor groups: the classically cultured visitors, the cultured progressists, the hedonists, the passive cultured visitors, the *Distants* and the art lovers. Within this research, the four types of the visitors (the *Distants*, the *PCLs*, the *LCLs*, and the *Tolerants*) constitute the cultural map of the exhibitions. The four groups identified by this research not only represent different typological groupings of cultural engagement from those identified in Hanquinet's study, but also concern different forms of cultural engagement.

In summary, there is a significant body of research that attempts to understand the differentiation of cultural tastes within Western contexts. However, none of the above-mentioned studies sufficiently explain the divide of cultural preferences identified within the Chinese exhibitions. This research was a first step in attempting to address this absence in the existing literature. Further efforts in this area can go further still, by going beyond particular exhibitions and museum visitors to involve the wider population.

7.4 The dual characteristics of the contemporary art in China

As one of the most important findings of this research, all evidence collected in the exhibitions demonstrates that the multiple characteristics of the contemporary art in China contribute to the marginalisation of distinction between high and low culture. Accordingly, one unanticipated finding was that, in the exhibitions, legitimacy and disinterestedness were still important for forming symbolic boundaries between art experts and amateurs. However, the definitional ambiguity of the contemporary art in the PRC (due to the multiple characteristics it has) challenge the symbolic power of the single-dimensional distinction between the high and low cultures. The simultaneous multiple characteristics of contemporary artworks allowed the visitors to distance themselves from the non-elites through the use of multiple channels (e.g. to distinguish their linguistic ability through consuming foreign cultural products). For instance, unlike the *PCLs* who focus on the artistic concepts and narratives of the contemporary artworks, the *LCLs* value the artworks through the decoding method they forged in classical art exhibitions. They separated their interpretive strategies from that of the others by concentrating on the cultural, historical, and social background of the artists and their works. The Tolerant's cultural tolerance is based on his knowledge of famous artists and their artworks. For him, the contemporary artworks only represented a form of advanced legitimate culture that has been internationally sanctioned. Thus, the Tolerants' visits were primarily driven by their learning purpose. The *Distants'*

preference for the contemporary artworks was also influenced by the ambiguity of those works of art. Without acknowledging the necessary aesthetic deciphering method that one can only gain from long and frequent contact with contemporary art, the *Distants* were attracted to the characteristic of the artworks as imported foreign cultural referents. For them, the contemporary artworks were internationally sanctioned art forms. The following section will provide more evidence to support this argument.

First, the tastes of the members of the four visitor categories (*Distants*, *PCLs*, *LCLs* and *Tolerants*) for the contemporary art in the PRC are conditioned at different levels. The visitors' conditioned understandings of the definition of contemporary art further uphold the idea that the contemporary art has multiple characteristics. To be more specific, first, all the visitors displayed their distaste for contemporary Chinese art (at least for the public museum based contemporary Chinese art). In this regard, an expectation to engage with Western or Westernised cultures³² is one of the primary reasons that incites visitors to attend the exhibitions. Second, the visitors in all four visitor categories had limited taste³³ for popular cultures such as popular music and novels. Their negative impression of populist culture, once again, suggests that the symbolic boundary between high and low cultures still matters in the exhibitions. Third, most of the visitors (except male visitors in the *PCL* category) could not accept contemporary artworks in extremely radical or experimental forms (e.g. showing

³² Compared to the visitors in the other three visitor categories, the *PCLs* (especially for the male *PCLs*) have sympathy for the non-public museum based contemporary Chinese arts. For them, those artworks are more Westernised than the public museum based arts due to the aggressive attitude those 'underground' artworks share towards the established aesthetic principles.

³³ With very few exceptions e.g. the *PCLs* displayed a taste for hard rock.

human and animal corpses, or self-harm or animal abuse in public spaces). The general conservative tastes among many of the visitors indicate that the visitors had taste for contemporary artworks that are less aesthetically, emotionally, and intellectually provoking than the works of their western counterparts. Finally, all the visitors felt included within the exhibition. Although the four types of the visitors have their individual ways of engaging and interpreting contemporary artworks, they had confidence on the 'correctness' of their understanding of contemporary art. Thus, this finding indicates that the 'inclusiveness' of the exhibitions was underpinned by the definitional ambiguity of the contemporary arts.

All of this indicates that the visitors had very limited tolerance for the contemporary artworks that share specific kinds of characteristics. Thus, the visitors deemed the contemporary artworks as foreign cultural items, highbrow cultural genres, and a non-aggressive form of avant-garde art. Additional evidence also suggests the visitors selectively engage with certain characteristics of the contemporary art in China based on the constructional organisation of their own particular structure of capitals (social, cultural, economic, and so on). For example, the *Distants* (who have less educated mothers and, thus, have a lower inherited cultural capital) tended to consider the contemporary art as imported foreign products. In contrast, the *PCLs*, *LCLs*, and *Tolerants* (who had relatively highly educated mothers and thus a higher inherited embodied cultural capital) tended to consider the contemporary art as symbolic indicators.

Second, the findings also suggest a close association between the definitional ambiguity of the contemporary artworks and the PRC's cultural policies. The PRC's central government legitimates this ambiguity by releasing related cultural policies. The evidence of this argument is that the government restricts the radical and experimental contemporary artists from displaying their works in public spaces. Accordingly, the visitors with different cultural profiles are less likely to be emotionally and intellectually offended by those artworks that aim to aggressively challenge the established aesthetic and moral principles.

As introduced in Chapter 1, the changing political environment of China's society has significantly influenced the development of contemporary Chinese art. In the 'era of museums' (since 2000), contemporary artists and their works have regained the political support and trust from the CCP (Gao: 2009: 61). In response to the CCP's initiative to develop a cultural industry (market oriented cultural production) and cultural undertakings (public service oriented cultural production), and promote the cultural reforms stated in the government report that was passed at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth CPC Central Committee (Xinhua Net 2011), contemporary art exhibitions in China have become the platform for showcasing the country's 'soft power' and achievements from the reform and opening-up policy to the world. Despite this, the political collaboration comes with a price. The CCP has extended its political authority by limiting the range of the themes and contents of contemporary art in the

name of promoting the development of ‘core socialist values’ and the modernisation of traditional Chinese culture (Ibid). Due to the CCP’s strong political influence on the management of both public and private art museums and galleries in China, experimental or radical forms of contemporary Chinese art characterised by aesthetic and social criticism can rarely be selected and displayed by the curators in public exhibiting spaces. In other words, it is reasonable to believe that, at least, in the 798 Art District and the National Art Museum of China, the vagueness of the contemporary art has been legitimated by the CCP and those exhibiting institutions.

In summary, the homology-based argument of Bourdieu that distinguishes between low and high cultures still has some relevance in the exhibitions. However, its significance has been diminished by the hesitation caused by the definitional ambiguity of the contemporary art in China. This ambiguity, caused by the multiple characteristics of the contemporary art in China, is specific to the Chinese cultural context, and so it raises issues identified by studying the exhibition visitors that were not addressed by homology-based argument.

Rereferring to chapter 5, a potential finding was identified – whereby the visitors, in response to the uncertainty of facing artworks that were both internationally sanctioned legitimate pieces and imported foreign products, appeared to reflexively produce regionally specific structures of cultural consumption. While the evidence within this research does not provide a firm enough basis to generalise such a finding, this potential

influence of the individualisation argument deserves further investigation. If future studies could demonstrate similar patterns and tendencies of cultural consumption, it could provide a greater understanding of the regional variances in cultural distinction and provide a welcome addition to the study of geographically diverse cultures.

7.5 Defining the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art

Although this research demonstrates that the definitional ambiguity of contemporary art has brought a more diverse audience into the art exhibitions, there has also been a consequence. This ambiguity has also reduced the strength and range of contemporary Chinese art compared to that of the West due to the very limited aesthetic themes and content that this ambiguity allows. The art professionals (the *PCLs*) had no taste for the Chinese contemporary art due to its devaluation caused by the popularity of Chinese contemporary artworks in the PRC. The members of the other three visitor categories also expressed negative impressions about contemporary Chinese art. For them, the rigorous status and definition of contemporary Chinese art (as avant-garde art) leaves little space for them to ‘misinterpret’ the artworks and to ‘feel at home’ in the contemporary art exhibitions. In this regard, the above-mentioned finding matches those observed in earlier studies. The visitors did not interpret contemporary Chinese art in the same way as they understand the contemporary Western art in the PRC (Gao 2006, 2009; Smith 2008; Gao 2011; Huang 2009; Yu 2012; Gladston 2009; 2014; 2016).

An interesting finding is that the visitors' diverse attitudes towards contemporary Chinese and Western arts provide an alternative way of thinking about the challenge of global culture overtaking local cultures. This is because, in this case, both local Chinese policy and the specific Chinese social and historical context continue to assert a negative influence on the development and the popularity of contemporary Chinese artworks in the PRC.

Thus, returning to the previously-mentioned debates on the contemporaneity of contemporary Chinese art in Chapter 1, the findings of this research provide an alternative understanding of the term. The three main arguments concerning contemporality have their individual issues. First, Gao uses the term 'total modernity' to understand contemporary Chinese art (CCA)'s contemporaneity. Resisting the hegemonically totalising perspective of internationalised aesthetic norms, Gao's (2009) 'total modernity' stresses the importance of developing a cultural separationist logic of aesthetic expression and thinking that was exclusively inherited and developed from Chinese aesthetic and theories, moral traditions and social responsibilities. Gao claims that, as against their western counterparts, Chinese contemporary artists bear more social responsibilities to preserve those traditional norms and must devote themselves to the development and modernisation of Chinese society. Gao's argument sounds plausible since the public museum-based Chinese contemporary artists' works are restricted to those that promote 'core socialist values'. However, the problem with this position is that, as identified in this research, the visitors to the exhibitions rarely

expressed any positive sentiments towards this legitimated contemporary Chinese art. They viewed it as 'routine' and 'outdated', and demonstrating a 'lack of creativity' and as 'lacking in cultural authenticity'. Given this negative perception of the legitimate public museum based contemporary Chinese art, there is a questionable extent to which this form of art could represent the contemporaneity of CCA.

Other scholars keep a sceptical view towards Gao's cultural separationist claim (Gao suggests that the contemporaneity of contemporary art is different with that of contemporary art). For them, the distinctive trait of contemporary Chinese art should be conceptualised through a poststructuralist postmodernism perspective as against that of western(ised) contemporaneity. This argument provides a more plausible and flexible method of understanding Contemporary Chinese art. However, the scholars (e.g. Smith 2008; Gladston 2009; 2011) who support this argument reject the possibility that Chinese contemporaneity has to do with engaging the modernisation of its own aesthetic norms and traditions more than it has to do with connecting to the theoretical and aesthetic thinking of western contemporary artists, critics, and theorists. Even though this argument provides more flexibility in understanding contemporaneity of CCA compared to Gao's argument, the findings of this research demonstrate that the visitors were very sensitive to any restrictions to the autonomy of the artists. Thus, the suggestion that Chinese contemporary artists be denied a specifically Chinese aesthetic grammar for producing contemporary art could be interpreted as a restriction on the autonomy of those artists, which in turn could decrease the attractiveness of CCA to the

visitors. As a form of contemporaneity, therefore, the poststructuralist postmodernism perspective faces its own challenges.

Thus, if contemporaneity means that the core values and futures of contemporary Chinese art are in a legitimated form, then the contemporaneity is to be found in the uncertainty of this art rather than any explicit form of interpretation. The reason for this argument is that the experimental and autonomous form of contemporary Chinese art is still marginalised compared to the public museum based contemporary arts. Whether this underground form of contemporary Chinese art that attempts to establish a particularly Chinese aesthetic and artistic grammar could be accepted by the public and offer an alternative to the legitimate CCA remains uncertain.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Dear visitors:

This questionnaire has been designed by Dawei Lu, a trained researcher at the University of York, for his PhD project under the supervision of Prof Sharon Macdonald and Dr Laurie Hanquinet. Through this study, we would like to better understand the visitors in the contemporary art museum and gallery. This study has been designed to explore Chinese visitors' cultural tastes towards contemporary art works in China. It will take you around 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire at the end of your visit. All information you provided will be strictly protected with confidentiality and anonymity. Your participation is important!

By answering this questionnaire, you understand that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time

Please note that this questionnaire should only be completed by Chinese nationals who are aged 18 or above.

1. Is your visit part of your touristic journey?

Yes No

2. Who were you with during your museum visit? (You can tick multiple boxes)

Alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	friend(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
My partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	My school	<input type="checkbox"/>
My children	<input type="checkbox"/>	My colleague(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other family members	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organised Group	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>		

3. Why did you choose to visit this museum? (You can tick multiple boxes)

<input type="checkbox"/>	To see particular artwork. Which one(s): _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	To see particular exhibition(s). Which one(s): _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	To see the museum in its entirety.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Friends' recommendation/media promotion/museum or exhibition's advertisement
<input type="checkbox"/>	To take part in a particular activity organized by the museum/gallery. Which one(s): _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	To browse in the museum shop.
<input type="checkbox"/>	To eat/drink in the museum coffee shop/restaurant.
<input type="checkbox"/>	To use the museum library.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____

4. Rate the importance of reasons for a museum visit. (You can tick multiple boxes)

	Not important	Neither agree or disagree	important
Relieve stress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get inspired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoy the museum environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learn things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being with my family/ friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meet others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Did you use any of the following sources of information during your visit? (You can tick multiple boxes)

<input type="checkbox"/>	The introductory texts in the exhibiting space (on walls, panels)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brochures or leaflets
<input type="checkbox"/>	Guided Tour
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audio guide
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lecture, artist/curator talk
<input type="checkbox"/>	Video guide/introduction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Inquiry to museum staff

6. In the exhibitions, how sufficient was the information on the works, artists and exhibition as a whole? (You can tick only one box for each)

	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
Artworks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exhibition as an entirety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

We would ask you some questions about you in the following section

7. Please list your date of birth?

.....

8. You are: Female Male

9. Which city are you from?

.....

10. What is your highest level of education you have completed? if you are current student, please choose the current level of your studies. (You can tick only one box)

<input type="checkbox"/>	No diploma/ certification	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate in adult HEIs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Junior college
<input type="checkbox"/>	Junior secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate in Regular HEIs
<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary general school	<input type="checkbox"/>	University education-Master

<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary Vocational school	<input type="checkbox"/>	University education- PhD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary Vocational school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Post graduate in adult HEIs

11. What is your highest educational degree, be it in the humanities or in science and technology (select only one)? Humanities Science and Technology

12. What is the highest diploma or certification your mother and father have obtained? (You can tick only one box for each of your parents)

	Mother	Father
No diploma		
Primary		
Middle school		
High school		
Junior college or equivalent degree		
University and higher education or equivalent degree		
Other: Father: _____ Mother: _____		

13. Please select what defines best your current employment status. (You can tick only one box)

student	<input type="checkbox"/>	In Paid work (including army)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-employed worker/tradesman (excluding farmer)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>
unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Looking for your first job (not unemployed)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retired	<input type="checkbox"/>	House wife/man	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>		

14 Have you ever had an occupation?

Yes

No → go to question 18

15. Please select what describes best the type of place you work/worked. If you are not currently employed, please indicate the place of your last employment. (You can only tick one box)

Primary industry	Agriculture industry <input type="checkbox"/>	Forestry industry <input type="checkbox"/>	Husbandry industry <input type="checkbox"/>	Fishery industry <input type="checkbox"/>
Secondary industry	Manufacturing <input type="checkbox"/> Main product:	Mining <input type="checkbox"/> Main product:	Building <input type="checkbox"/>	Electronic/Water/Heating/Gas supply <input type="checkbox"/>
Tertiary industry (service industry)	Government or Administrative Institutions <input type="checkbox"/>	Culture/Sport/entertainment service <input type="checkbox"/>	Transport service <input type="checkbox"/>	Storage service <input type="checkbox"/>
	Mail service	Catering	Hotel service	Realty service

<input type="checkbox"/>	service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education Service	Whole sale	Retail	Insurance service	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other:				

16. Is the firm/organisation you work (worked) for belong to government or administrative Institutions (Government or Administrative Institutions subordinate enterprise)?

Yes No

17. What is your (last) occupation?

.....

18. Please select the option which best describes your (last) job. (You can only tick multiple boxes if you are/were taking part-time jobs)

Other employee	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manager in an establishment with 25 or more employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manager in an establishment with less than 25 employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreman or supervisor(not manager) in an establishment with 25 or more employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreman or supervisor(not manager) in an establishment with less than 25 employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-employed with 25 or more employees	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-employed with less than 25 employees	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. Please indicate whether you have a close friend or relative who has any of these jobs? (You can tick multiple boxes)

Director of a division in national or local government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Department manager of enterprise	<input type="checkbox"/>
University or college lecture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doctor	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bus or coach driver	<input type="checkbox"/>	Factory worker	<input type="checkbox"/>
Migrant worker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Farmer	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. On the scale below, rate how difficult or comfortable you feel your life is. (You can only tick one box)

Very difficult						Very Comfortable
1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	7 <input type="checkbox"/>

21. How much do the following features contribute to a qualified artwork? (You can only tick one box per line)

	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Important
Artwork should present the sophisticated technical skills of	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

the artist			
Artwork should be easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork should represent a moral value/Art work should be ethical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork should be beautiful (use of colour or visual appeal)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork should be original rather than reproduced	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork should not contain abstract figures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork should have educational significance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artwork should enable its spectators to feel comfortable and at ease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

22. How much do you like the artists listed below? Please do not hesitate to choose the 'I do not know' option if you are not familiar with the artist and his or her works. (You can tick one box for each statement)

	I do not like	Neither like or dislike	I like	I do not know
Wang Shimin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Li Keran	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jin Shangyi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Huang Yongping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Édouard Manet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Georges Braque	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Richard Hamilton	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jeff Koons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. How often have you been to ... over the last 12 months (you can tick only one box per line)

	never	1-3 times	More than three times	monthly
The theatre	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The live concert of western classical music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The live concert of Chinese classical music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The contemporary art museum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The performance/ ballet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The art show/ fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

24. Please select the types of music you like from the following music genres. (You can tick multiple boxes)

If you like a specific genre, please tell us whether you favour music from specific geographical areas.

↓ Music genres		
----------------	--	--

Religious music →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Folk music →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
World music →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Classic music (e.g. musical) →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Opera →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Pop Music →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Jazz, Blues →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Electro →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Rock →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Heavy metal, hard rock, punk →	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Other: → _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>

25. Please choose your preferred the type(s) of literature that are listed in the table below. (You can tick multiple boxes)

If you like a specific genre, please tell us whether you favour music from specific geographical areas.

↓ Literature genres	
Religious, political or philosophy books →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Biographies and autobiographies →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry and essay →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Art books →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Scientific and technology books →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Romance →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Novels (e.g. detective novels, historical novels) →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Science fiction, fantasy and horror →	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>

		<input type="checkbox"/>
Practical books (cooking, decorating...)	→	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Manga and other comic books	→	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>
Other : _____	→	<input type="checkbox"/> If yes, where from? (You can tick multiple boxes) Chinese mainland <input type="checkbox"/> European/American <input type="checkbox"/> Hong Kong/Taiwan <input type="checkbox"/> Korean/Japanese <input type="checkbox"/> I do not mind <input type="checkbox"/>

26. Please select the type(s) of activity(s) you like to do every two weeks. (You can tick multiple boxes)

Going to cinema	<input type="checkbox"/>	Watching sport	<input type="checkbox"/>
Going to karaoke	<input type="checkbox"/>	Eating out	<input type="checkbox"/>
Playing video games	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doing sport	<input type="checkbox"/>

27. Last, answer the following short answer questions in the space provided.

What does contemporary art represent to you?

In your opinion, should contemporary art museums or galleries change the way they display artworks (e.g. to exhibit artworks in an empty and white space; to provide limited text related to artworks and artists)? Why or why not?

Thank you very much for your time and attention!

As a follow-up to this questionnaire survey, we would like to arrange an interview with some visitors of the contemporary art museum. Would you like to participate in a follow-up interview and to speak with a researcher about your experience of the contemporary art museum? If your answer is yes then please leave your phone number in the space provided below.

Your contact number:(optional)

Email address:(optional)

Wechat number:(optional)

QQ number:(optional)

Appendix 2: Information leaflet

Information Leaflet 1

Who is the researcher?

Dawei Lu, a trained researcher into social issues, is conducting the investigation for a PhD project. You can find out more about Dawei by visiting his university webpage: <http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/our-staff/students/dawei-lu/>

Dawei is working closely with Prof Sharon Macdonald and Dr Laurie Hanquinet at the University of York to ensure the project is conducted in an ethical and sensitive manner that does not impinge on participants or their families. You can find out more about Sharon on her webpage, <http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/our-staff/academic/sharon-macdonald/> or more about Laurie on her webpage, www.york.ac.uk/sociology/ourstaff/academic/laurie-hanquinet/.

For more information

If you would like more information about the project, or wish to take part in the project, please contact Dawei by phone on **077 077 99663**, by email at d1700@york.ac.uk, or by sending the Response Form included.

You can also email either Prof Sharon Macdonald (sharon.macdonald@york.ac.uk) or Dr Laurie Hanquinet (laurie.hanquinet@york.ac.uk) if you have any questions or require further information.

Information Leaflet 2

Research title: A Sociological Exploration of Cultural Distinction in Chinese Contemporary Art Museums and Galleries: Contemporary art and its visitors

Can you help us?

We are carrying out a project to find out about the experiences of people who have visited the contemporary art galleries in China.

We would like to invite you to take part in this project by talking to a researcher about your own story, of using your contemporary art exhibition visit experience, so that we can understand a little better the experiences people have, and help towards improving the exhibiting services for the future.

What is the project about?

This study has been designed to explore Chinese visitors' cultural tastes towards contemporary art works in China. More specifically, the main purpose of this study is to identify how to develop a more inclusive exhibiting and visitor policies and how to understand the cultural practices of Chinese visitors.

Why have I been asked to take part?

It is important for us to include the views of visitors who have visited contemporary art gallery currently, so I am approaching you to see if you would like to take part.

What is involved?

If you agree to take part, the researcher will ask you some questions about your experiences of contemporary art gallery visit. It is your own unique story that we are interested in.

You will also be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview. The interview is likely to last around 1 and a half hours, but could be finished sooner.

If you agree, our conversation will be audio-recorded and transcribed in order for it to be used as part of the project.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time. You do not need to give a reason.

Will you tell anyone else what I say?

Only the researcher will know your personal views. All identifying information will be removed from interview records.

Your name will NOT be mentioned to others or published in any of our reports, and great care will be taken to ensure your views are not identifiable.

How will the information I provide be used?

The findings will be used for the completion of a PhD project. This will include anonymised information provided by everyone who agrees to take part in the project.

A summary of the project will be sent to you through email if you request it.

How do I know this project is professional and safe?

The project has been scrutinised by the University of York's Ethics Committee, who have accepted that the research has been designed with a minimal risk of physical or emotional harm to either the researcher or participant. If you would like more information please contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee, by

emailing elmps-ethics-group@york.ac.uk.

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