



The Rise of Art Exhibitions and Their Value for Social Aesthetic Education in the Republic of China

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Abstract. In China, art exhibitions in the modern sense began to flourish in the late Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China. The publicized and socialized nature of such art exhibitions broke the phenomenon of Chinese Traditional Fine Arts being s among the upper classes. It allowed ordinary people to enjoy the opportunity to appreciate works of art. This art-culture trend was the precursor of social, aesthetic education, and public aesthetic education in the Republic of China. Taking the folk art exhibition activities of the Republic of China between 1912 and 1937 as an object, this paper the developing context of art exhibition activities and mechanisms during this period and divides them into four periods in light of the purpose and nature of the exhibitions: 1912-1918—the period when displays came into the public life; 1919-1928—the period of development of collections; and 1929-1937—maturity period marked by the emergence of the exhibition mechanism; and 1937-1949—innovation stage of "saving the country with art exhibitions." On this basis, it attempted to explore the social and aesthetic value generated by art exhibitions in different periods of the Republic of China in a social and cultural context.

Keywords: in the Republic of China; art exhibitions; social, aesthetic education

1 Introduction

The Republic of China was the period of the origin and development of Chinese art exhibitions. The emergence of art exhibitions made Chinese art appear in a new posture on the historical stage, forcing us to enter in-depth research. Ancient traditional Chinese paintings are usually limited to private space communication and are only for ancient literati, rather than public display. As an art communication medium introduced in the West, art exhibitions have changed traditional Chinese visual experience and painting appreciation habits, and subverted the special values and expressions of Chinese painting. Moreover, the public and social nature of the art exhibition itself enables art to meet the general public, popularizes the aesthetic education of the public, and improves the national aesthetic ability, so as to achieve the purpose of cultivating sentiment and beautifying society. This article sorts out the

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development of art exhibitions from 1906 to 1949 and sorts them out in stages to clarify the factors that promoted the development of art exhibitions during the Republic of China. And what is the value of art exhibitions in the Republic of China period? Two aspects are carried out.

2 Background of the Rise of Art Exhibitions in the Republic of China

To consolidate its feudal status, the late Qing government, after encountering painful pressures from the Western powers, began to change its laws and strive for strength by learning advanced Western technologies, establishing new military industries, and promoting the development of national initiatives to achieve the goal of "seeking wealth." After the launch of the Westernization Movement, many intellectuals went abroad to study advanced Western culture. It was against this background that China introduced Art exhibitions in the modern sense to China. In 1876, Wang Tao traveled to the Louvre in France and the British Museum in England. In his Recording and Traveling, he recorded the organization of the "painting fair" at the British Museum. In Chinese art and cultural life, art exhibitions first appeared in the public eye through the term "painting fair" [1].

The Republican of China era was a period of transition from feudal society to modern society in China, a painful period of childbirth from the ancient old China to the new China. In this challenging quest for social transformation, people with lofty ideals constantly searched for a way to save China. China has gone through a gradual process of change from "objects" to "systems" to cultural awareness. In the absorption and learning of art culture, the literati also experienced the conceptual shift from "material salvation" to "artistic salvation" and then to "aesthetic education for national salvation." Along with this historical process of continuous exploration, the organization and dissemination of art exhibitions and cultural activities also emerged, developed, and gradually improved, becoming one of the most critical ways to disseminate art information, popularize art education, and realize the salvation and strengthening of the country.

Art exhibitions, in the modern sense, are a form of public cultural activity with a strong social character. The emergence of this form has changed the way of appreciation of traditional Chinese artworks and broke the art of the upper class to master the cultural privileges so that paintings from the literati study to society, to the public, and realize the social value of artistic creation[2]. As a product of the specific social, historical, and cultural background of the Republic of China, art exhibitions are rich in social, historical, cultural, and artistic connotations. The rise of art exhibitions in the Republic of China made the Chinese art culture from closed to open, endowed with the role of enlightenment, and thus had the function of aesthetic education for the public and integration of society, which is of great significance in the history of Chinese art.

3 The staging of art exhibitions in the Republic of China

3.1 The period when displays came into public life (1912-1918)

The "painting fair" is the earliest art exhibition record in China. The defeat of the Sino-Japanese War set off a climax of learning from Japan, "Art" "fair" is translated from Japanese books and newspapers, and the rise of the fair contributed to the emergence of China's modern art exhibitions. In 1905 China's first museum, the Tongzhou Museum, was founded. On June 5, 1910, a nationwide competition called the Nanyang Industry Promotion Association was held in Nanjing, aiming to promote the development of industry and commerce and the development of practical art in China. It also established an art museum to showcase four types of artworks: craft, casting, handicraft, and carving. On the other hand, the art display in the Nanyang Commodity Exposition was an early form of art exhibition in China. Although it intended to promote the development of industry and commerce, it allowed the general public in China to appreciate works of art. It brought Chinese art from the hands of the literati to the people. Since then, China has begun to document the rapid development of national art exhibitions officially.

The formation of modern Chinese art exhibitions is mainly based on the forms of Japanese and French art exhibitions. The Imperial Art Exhibition in Japan and the Salon des Beaux-Arts in France were the primary references for modern Chinese art exhibitions. With increased number of Chinese scholars studying in Japan, China gradually introduced Japanese art exhibitions. For example, after visiting the 1919 Imperial Exhibition, Liu Haisu and Wang Yazhen systematically described the origins of the Japanese Imperial Exhibition, its founding, reforms, exhibition mechanism, and commendation system in their "Japan's Imperial Exhibition." They were overwhelmed by the prosperity of the art exhibition business in Japan[3]. These exhibitions not only allow us to learn from the advanced painting styles of foreign countries but also to get in touch with how foreign countries organize art exhibitions, which provides reference value for China to hold exhibitions.

3.2 Period of exhibition development (1919-1928)

"The development of the May 4 Movement" brought scientific and revolutionary changes. The introduction of Western culture brought a significant impact on traditional Chinese painting. At that time, to protect the status of traditional Chinese paintings, China created art societies focusing on traditional Chinese paintings. In 1920, with the aim of "studying ancient methods and acquiring new knowledge", they founded the "Chinese Painting Research Institute". They cooperated with Japan in organizing "Sino-Japanese Painting Exhibitions" many times[4]. In 1918, Cai Yuanpei of Peking University organized and initiated the "Peking University Painting Research Association," which displayed the research results of traditional Chinese painting and consolidated the position of traditional Chinese painting in modern Chinese art through the Painting Research Students' Entertainment Conference and the exhibition of achievements of the Chinese Painting Display Society. The

showcase, communication, and exploration of these painting club exhibitions have promoted the development and transformation of Chinese painting. Art societies of the nature of Western painting were one of the mainstays of art exhibitions in the Republic of China, promoting the spread of Western painting in China through art exhibitions. For example, the "Oriental Painting Research Institute" was established in Shanghai in 1915, which aimed to gather a few enthusiasts of Western paintings to study together to promote regular Western painting research opportunities. The Tianma Club, founded in September 1919, attempted to improve Chinese painting through Western painting methods, thus promoting the development of Western painting as a discipline in modern Chinese art. Arts groups promote the reform and development of Chinese painting and the spread of Western painting through art exhibitions, achieving the functions of artistic exchange and popularization of public thought and making art exhibitions the primary means of realizing social, aesthetic education.

3.3 The emergence of the exhibition mechanism marks the mature period. (1929-1937)

As one of the most important ways to realize social and aesthetic education, China's artistic community has often proposed holding national art exhibitions, but it has yet to be formally implemented. Finally, on April 10, 1929, the first national art exhibition was officially opened in Shanghai; it was the first national art exhibition in the modern sense in the history of China, not only a national display of artworks but also, more importantly, a national summary and display of the transformation of Chinese art from a phenomenon that only spread to the upper class to a modernization. This is an epoch-making art activity in the history of Chinese art exhibitions. During the first national art exhibition on "how to view realistic and modernist paintings," Xu Zhimo and Xu Beihong produced the famous "The Disputes of Xus," a critique of modern artists. Still, the debate was ostensibly a criticism of contemporary artists but essentially an argument between two forms of artistic expression. The "Disputes of Xus" continued into the Second National Art Exhibition. Based on the success of the First National Art Exhibition, the organization and operation mode of the Second National Art Exhibition have followed its successful experience, which had already formed a particular operation mechanism. However, the Second National Art Exhibition still made refinements and improvements to the mechanism of the exhibition. Moreover, at this time, Chinese art exhibitions also went abroad, such as the first large-scale Chinese art exhibition held in France in 1933 [5] and the Chinese Art exhibition held in London in November 1935 [6]. It also laid a foundation for improving the mechanism of art exhibition.

After the introduction of art exhibitions from the period of the Westernization Movement to the successful holding of the First National Art Exhibition in 1929, art exhibitions have undergone decades of development and have already formed a specific mode of organization, though not mature enough, laid a particular foundation for the First National Art Exhibition in 1929. After the First National Art Exhibition and the Second National Art Exhibition, the organization of art exhibitions had

already formed a particular exhibition mechanism, laying the foundation for subsequent art exhibitions.

3.4 The turning point of "saving the country with Art exhibitions" (1937-1949)

When the development of art exhibitions was in full swing, the Anti-Japanese War broke out in 1937. This unique period was a significant turning point for art exhibitions. In the context of the crisis of the survival of the Chinese nation and the war, due to the needs of the times, art exhibitions presented a unique appearance in this period.

After the Lugouqiao Incident on July 7, 1937, the Fine Arts Exhibition underwent a significant change in the torrent of war. According to the data compiled by the author, in 1937, before the Lugouqiao Incident, art exhibitions were dramatically changed by the flood of war. According to the author's collated data, in 1937, before the Lugouqiao Incident, there were only two painting and calligraphy exhibitions to assist Sui. However, after that, there were 10 Anti-Japanese War Rescue Art Exhibition. Art exhibitions to publicize the war of resistance, military relief, and refugee relief became a significant feature of art exhibitions at the time. During this particular period, art workers consciously united and took action to establish anti-Japanese salvation and progressive groups, such as the All-China Artists' Association Against the Enemy, the All-China Woodcutting Association Against the Enemy, the All-China Comic Writers' Association Against the Enemy, and the Comic Propaganda Corps for Salvation[7]. Through the innovative form of art exhibition, the artists expose the Japanese imperialist aggression in front of people from all walks of life, promote the spirit of the heroic resistance of the Chinese nation, stimulate the patriotic passion of the people, and inspire the fighting spirit of the whole country to resist the Japanese invasion.

4 Factors Driving the Development of Art Exhibitions in the Republican of China Period

4.1 Cultural factors in the formulation of the idea of aesthetic education

Art exhibitions as a strategy for promoting art education and improving the nation's quality is closely related to Cai Yuanpei's concept of aesthetic education. As early as during the first year of the Republic of China, Cai Yuanpei included aesthetic education in the "Opinions on Educational Policies" as one of the aims of education and also put forward the famous "aesthetic education instead of religion"[8]. Cai Yuanpei drew on Western Kantian aesthetics to advocate the use of "beauty" to cultivate temperament, cultivate a noble and pure personality, and achieve a balance between emotion and knowledge, which will work together in a person's life in a modern society with rapid development of science and gradual transformation of institutions. In the early years of the Republic of China, under the ideology of

aesthetic education, "art exhibitions" were gradually promoted as one of the essential ways to realize aesthetic education in society. The establishment of art schools and clubs, museums and galleries, in particular school art exhibitions and national painting clubs' exhibition days, is on the rise.

4.2 Educational factors in new-style specialized schools

In the early years of the Republic of China, with the promulgation of the "Renyin School System" and "Gui-mao School System," various new-style schools were established in different places. To check the results of the emerging education, education associations around the world held exhibitions of art achievements to test and exchange, and the school art achievement exhibitions became a significant staple of art exhibitions during the Republic of China period, which gradually drew people's attention to the arts and pushed the art education forward. With several changes in the academic system and educational objectives in the early Republic of China, art exhibitions took a new step forward. For example, since 1913, the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts has held one or two collections of works by teachers and students every year. In addition to the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, specialized art academies worldwide have developed a tradition of organizing art exhibitions. The development of new educational undertakings set off a wave of art exhibitions, which gradually became a pervasive form of art display, providing venues for the collection of artworks. The organization of these art exhibitions not only promoted the idea of art but also promoted the popularization and development of social and aesthetic education, laying a sure foundation for the development of modern art in China.

4.3 Social factors of changing times

Around the time of the May 4 Movement, the "Art Revolution" banner was set up, and the ideas and concepts of painting in China showed a diversified trend. New groups of painters continued to emerge and became a powerful social force. These painting societies publicize their artistic aims and expand their influence by organizing exhibitions and creating journals. Art societies have become the leading curatorial group for art exhibitions, and there will be art exhibitions wherever there are art societies. For example, the first Western painting group in modern Chinese art history was the Oriental Painting Society, founded in 1915 in Shanghai, and in September 1919, the Tianma Society was formally established. Art exhibitions provided a platform for artists to exchange ideas and learn from each other, promoting creative collisions and improving artistic skills. These numerous exhibitions promoted the diversification of painting genres in China at the time, and the works of art on display also served the functions of transmitting a particular message, transforming public perceptions, enlightening ideas, and educating the public.

5 The Social and Aesthetic Education Value of Art Exhibitions in the Republic of China Period

5.1 The Educational Role of Enlightenment Ideas

China was divided during the Republican period, and building art museums and organizing art exhibitions was more difficult than in other countries because China's artwork had long circulated only among the upper classes, the bad habit that persisted even when the first national art exhibition called for entries in 1929. To eliminate the shortcomings left behind by these 1,000 years, many intellectuals at that time wanted to use the first national art exhibition to realize art enlightenment to the public to make art familiar to people and make art popular so that people could know, feel and appreciate beauty and get out of the period of art ignorance, so the first national art exhibition played a significant role in the art enlightenment of the Chinese public. Article 1 of the Ministry of Education's National Fine Arts Exhibition Organization Outline states: "The purpose of this Association is to bring together works of art from all over the country, to exhibit them regularly, and to arouse the attention of the people of the country to the fine arts"[9]. Through artworks, art exhibitions transmit art information, popularize art knowledge, and achieve the educational function of art exchange and enlightenment of the public. For example, the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts held the results of the human body work in the exhibition; a girls' school principal together with his wife and daughter visited; the principal is also a painter, but the human body results of the showroom, look very shocked, loudly rebuked to the "Liu Haisu is an art traitor, but also pests in the field of education, the blatant display of nude paintings, a great deal of indecent exposure, must be punished "[10]. This art exhibition, which breaks the boundaries and confinement of feudal ethics and morality, is a popularization of the idea of aesthetic education of a hurdle, and ultimately, through the continuous propaganda in the exhibition of art, this "nude art" in the gradual recognition of the public, the liberation of the people's minds. Professional art school achievement exhibitions can spread new art ideas and genres and enlighten people's thinking.

5.2 Art exhibition to save the country from realizing the value of patriotism education

During the Republican period, the social and political situation was turbulent, with internal and external problems and frequent changes of rulers, which made the people suffer from the war. After the New Culture Movement, people had a new understanding of art exhibitions, which could not only popularize social aesthetics but also donate to the frontline soldiers and inspire people's patriotism through art exhibitions, so art exhibitions were also endowed with the educational value of patriotism. In 1937, the Chinese nation was plunged into a desperate situation of survival, which aroused the artists' patriotism and sense of historical responsibility. From the height of the country's survival and the nation's righteousness, the artists began to create a series of realist themes, mostly anti-war propaganda. The art

exhibitions at this time combined the tasks of propaganda art and anti-Japanese national salvation to save the country through art exhibitions, setting off a wave of national salvation art exhibitions. During the War of Resistance against Japan, a large number of patriotic painters organized various art exhibitions, not only to promote the War of Resistance but also to raise funds for the War of Resistance. For example, the Hushe Painting Society in Beijing held many art exhibitions supporting the anti-Japanese volunteers in the Northeast. Not only were painting societies contributing to the war effort, but individual painters also began to organize national salvation exhibitions, such as Chen Tianxiao's national tragedy exhibition on December 17, 1932, held at the Ningbo Fellowship Association[11]. These are the national salvation exhibitions that were being held in China, and at the same time, many painters went abroad to have art exhibitions for national salvation. For example, in March 1939, Zhang Shanzi, a famous Chinese painter, held an art exhibition in France to save the country, and his intense patriotism and noble national spirit moved French President Leblanc to visit him and praised him as "the representative of modern art in the East". Zhang Shanzi held more than one hundred exhibitions abroad, and his donations to support the war effort amounted to more than 200,000 US dollars. Zhang Shanzi, Xu Beihong, and Liu Haisu organized art exhibitions to save the country. These art exhibitions inspired patriotism everywhere and promoted patriotic education among the general public. Various national salvation organizations, art associations, and individual painters held art exhibitions with patriotic sentiments, through which they displayed works promoting the war of resistance, attracted the attention and assistance of people from all walks of life, and stimulated the patriotic spirit of the people through flexible and innovative forms of art exhibitions while achieving aesthetic education, thus completing the value of patriotic education in the salvation of the country through art exhibitions.

5.3 Universalization of the development of aesthetic education in society

Aesthetic education, also known as an appreciation of the beauty education or sense of education, plays a vital role in the overall development of human beings and is divided into three types: family, society, and school. Social, aesthetic education pays more attention to the social nature of aesthetic education activities, for example, through visiting museums, art galleries, concert halls, and other activities to improve the aesthetic and cultural values of the public. In 1919, Cai Yuanpei emphasized in "Cultural Movement Do not Forget Aesthetic Education" that "there should be a combination of professional art schools and universities for school aesthetic education, as well as public art museums or museums for the popularization of society, and public art facilities and activities such as exhibitions". Cai Yuanpei's idea of social and aesthetic education was the cornerstone of the development of art exhibitions in the Republic of China period, which promoted the development of the art exhibition business, and the two complemented each other. In the early period of the Republic of China, the popularization of social and aesthetic education was an essential task for the achievement exhibitions of various professional art academies and various community exhibitions, individual painting exhibitions, joint exhibitions,

etc. The function of art exhibitions was to show artworks to the outside world, to make art meet the general public, to popularize the aesthetic education of the people, to improve the aesthetic ability of the nation, and to achieve the purpose of cultivating the sentiments and beautifying the society. Art exhibitions were vigorously promoted in the early Republic of China as an essential way to promote social and aesthetic education.

6 Conclusion

By analyzing the periodization and development of the history of art exhibitions, the factors that drove the development of art exhibitions in this period were mainly the cultural factors of the ideology of aesthetic education, the opening of new professional art schools, and the characteristics of social and cultural reform trends. To a certain extent, art exhibitions have changed the public's understanding of the value of art, which not only has the value of enlightening ideas, arousing the attention of the people to art, making art meet with the general public, popularizing the public's social, aesthetic education, and achieving aesthetic education, but also inspires the people's patriotism in the form of flexible and innovative art exhibitions, and achieves the value of patriotism education that the show can save the country. After the May 4 Movement, under the impact of Western culture, which made Chinese art from closed to open, art exhibitions inspired more people to participate in art creation and appreciation, which promoted art education and popularized social and aesthetic education at that time. In short, art exhibitions in the Republic of China period significantly promoted art, art education, and cultural inheritance.

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