

Everyone Curates: From Global Avant-garde to Local Reality

Contemporary Chinese art since the 1990s has evolved across multiple geopolitical, economic, and cultural spheres. The interactions of different individuals, including artists, curators, critics, collectors, dealers, news reporters, officials and policy makers, in these spheres add to the complexity of the art. This essay focuses on curators as the object of investigation because of the significant contribution they have made in the development of contemporary art in China. In the past two decades, the accumulative efforts of curators from disparate backgrounds and motivations have contributed to the rapidly growing landscape of contemporary Chinese art and its visibility in the global art world. These individuals, together with the institutions they have collaborated with, have defined scopes, shaped meanings, and formulated theoretical frameworks for contemporary art from China that we now consider as a serious academic subject.

In his effort to identify effective methodologies for researching contemporary art from China, art historian Wu Hung proposes three of the most important spheres that condition the nature, characteristics, and meaning of this art: China's domestic art spaces; the global network of multinational contemporary art; and individualized links between these two spheres created by artists and curators.¹ These overlapping but functionally distinct spheres generate different standards, structures, and significance in contemporary art making, and each could serve as a useful framework for art historical narratives. In this text, I focus mainly on the processes, relationships, and phenomena that take place within China's domestic art spaces. However, considering that the idea of the curator as a new arbitrator of the contemporary art world is itself an imported concept grown out of the global network of contemporary art and that individualized connections have played a determinative role in the world of Chinese curators, it is necessary to consider these two spheres as well.

From Global Avant-garde to Local Authority

The term "curator" is not of contemporary invention; it has existed for many years, referring to individuals working in a broad range of fields such as museums, libraries, zoos, or other places of exhibition. Museum directors could be referred as curators; librarians responsible for organizing slides, films, and other visual materials could also be referred as curators. The independent curator, who came to the fore in art circuits as an avant-garde figure at the global level, however, is a phenomenon of the 1990s, when the rapid globalization prompted new ways of thinking about, making, and viewing art. These independent curators are not only the by-product of this

transformation, but also active participants in and contributors to it, as well as keen promoters of a new global art system.

Many have pointed out that a major development in the field of contemporary global art since the 1990s is the proliferation of large-scale international art exhibitions, often in the formats of biennials or triennials. These exhibitions, which can take place in any part of the world, have often been conceived by individual curators possessed of an avant-garde idealism who endeavour to break old boundaries and systems, promote the most cutting-edge artistic practices, and foster new relationships between art and society.² In the eyes of these curators, international biennials or triennials serve as transnational platforms where new artistic discourses can be fostered, new critical theories can be explored, and new structures and institutions of the art world can be built. Many nations and cities have come to see these international exhibitions as an important apparatus through which they mark their local names on the map of global culture. As a result, many more of these exhibitions have appeared, which has further enhanced the scope of influence of these curators.

It is thus appropriate that the American critic Michael Brenson used “the era of the curator” to refer to the 1990s, when independent curators became increasingly influential in the global avant-garde art world.³ In comparison with earlier curators affiliated with various cultural institutions, this small group of curators enjoyed a much higher level of independence as well as social influence. They no longer operate invisibly behind the artworks; instead, they have become the “central player in the broader stage of global cultural politics.”⁴ They now maintain contact with numerous locations across the globe, stand at the forefront of various exhibitions, giving meaning, raising issues, interpreting artworks, and defining the nature of contemporary art. Drawing upon multiple cultural backgrounds and transnational experiences (which is actually a natural thing to do since several leading curators, such as Hou Hanru and Okwui Enwezor, are themselves emigrants), these curators have contributed to a rising global curatorial discourse.⁵ But this discourse is by nature not limited within a particular country or location; thus “international curators” has become another term referring to these individuals who travel constantly around the world and work with global networks. International curators have been respected as new cultural elites whose intellectual engagements possess the quality of avant-gardism and are imperative for the progress of contemporary art.

The emergence of independent curators in the 1990s and the “curator fever” phenomenon in the past couple years in China have to be understood in this context where international exhibitions and their curators have become the principal arbitrators of the global art world. The term, independent curator, together with its newly gained significance, was imported to China partially as a byproduct of the rise of contemporary Chinese art in the international art world, which itself is a perfect case testifying the scope of influence of international exhibitions and individual curators. The story is well known now, so I will only give a brief account here. In 1993, at the Venice Biennale, the curator Achille Bonito Oliva, working with Francesca

dal Lago and Li Xianting, exhibited an impressive number of contemporary Chinese artists. The debut of contemporary Chinese art in this highly profiled international exhibition marked the beginning of a “Chinese fever” in the global contemporary art world. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Chinese artists had become omnipresent in major international exhibitions of contemporary art, including the long-established Venice Biennale, documenta, and the Sao Paulo Bienal, as well as the more recent Havana Bienal, Manifesta, Johannesburg Biennale, Kwangju Biennale, and many others.

Simultaneously, as Chinese art saw itself circulating in the international art world, art professionals in China started to encounter the idea of the curator as a central figure in contemporary art circuits. These encounters were the result of multiple flows of people and ideas, such as international curators visiting China seeking new artistic trends, Chinese artists anticipating a role in the international art world, and art professionals aiming to build up a supportive system for contemporary art in China. Fundamentally, the concept of curator was introduced into China as a new global trend and the avant-garde art world greeted it with great enthusiasm. Independent curators appeared in the second half of the 1990s, consciously bearing the title of curator when they organized exhibitions. By the turn of the new century, the idea of curator acting as an avant-garde figure pushing forward contemporary art was firmly established in the Chinese art world.

Many pointed to the third Shanghai Biennale in 2000 as the watershed for the formal establishment of the curator system in China. The Shanghai Biennale was the first government-sponsored exhibition that employed, among others, two independent curators (Hou Hanru and Toshio Shimizu) from abroad. After that, the significance of the curator became widely agreed upon, and many people started claiming the identity of curator, regardless of what titles they might have carried previously. Beijing, as the long-claimed cultural centre and now headquarters of contemporary art in China, is where the majority of curators congregated. Media reports and art magazines started to celebrate famous independent or international Chinese curators.

The 2000 Shanghai Biennale was also the exhibition in which the legal status of contemporary art was first acknowledged in China, for the exhibition included contemporary media such as photography, video and installation, along with conventional art forms such as painting and sculpture. After that, governmental and private support poured in to initiate contemporary art projects. As the primary promoter of contemporary Chinese art, the influence of independent curators grew dramatically along with the rising international and national interest in contemporary art.

In practice, the establishment of the curator system created a new power structure in the Chinese art world. Art critic and curator Jia Fangzhou pointed out in 2003 that the current system of curatorial practice involved “power criticism,”⁶ in which curators compete for available resources and for establishing the authority to define what accounts for the most cutting-edge artistic practice and the most valuable works. In an interview, the famous independent curator Gu Zhenqing states:

Curators are very well respected in the cultural and art circles. The identity of curator gives the individual a sacred halo, making him/her the central figure who possesses all the resources. Artists who have good relationships with curators can certainly participate in their exhibitions and become famous.⁷

He even asserts: “curators are the most dictatorial individuals in the art circles and the curator system is itself dictatorial.”⁸ Gu’s view actually represents a common understanding of the authority curators have acquired in the Chinese art world and reveals an inherent problem of the curator system as it is practiced in China, where personal politics might overshadow academic integrity.

This understanding of the centrality of the curator explains the rapidly growing number of curators in China. All of a sudden, every exhibition needs a curator. Some artists have developed the habit of first asking who the curator is before they consider participating in any exhibition. Newly built museums and galleries fight to get famous curators for their shows, often paying high fees. So many exhibitions are mainly known by the names of curators rather than by the artists or even the art itself.⁹ As such, curators have been steering the direction of contemporary Chinese art practice for the past decade. The interest of leading curators has largely determined or influenced many artists’ thinking about the content and style of art. Initiated as a representation of a global avant-garde concept that aims to break established boundaries, institutions, and authorities, independent curators have grown into a new authority for the contemporary Chinese art world.

From Art Criticism to Art Curating and to Curator Fever

The evolution of the curator as the central figure in contemporary Chinese art production and circulation, however, is not entirely an internationally prompted phenomenon. In the late 1980s, and particularly in the 1990s, many individuals were working like independent curators in the art world, proposing ideas, contacting artists, finding sponsorship, locating exhibition spaces, setting up artworks, etc. The China/Avant-garde exhibition, organized by critics Gao Minglu, Li Xianting, and others in 1989, was the first example. Many more of this kind of exhibition, in which critics played a crucial organizational role, appeared in the early 1990s. Beijing West Third Ring Art Research Documentation, by Wang Lin, in 1991, 1992 and 1994; Guangzhou First 1990s’ Biennial Art Fair, by Lu Peng, in 1992; China’s New Art, Post-1989, by Li Xianting in collaboration with Chang Tzong-zung, in 1993; and The Feminist Approach in Chinese Contemporary Art, by Liao Wen, in 1995, are but a few early examples. All these individuals were critics who called themselves secretary general, coordinator, convener, or organizer when they were working on these exhibitions. The exhibitions organized by these critics in the 1990s actually responded to the changing condition for the practice of art criticism in China and provided much-needed support for contemporary Chinese art.

In the 1980s, writing on art was the major method through which Chinese art critics engaged in art criticism. It was through their writing that they defined, interpreted, and promoted Chinese avant-garde art practice. This

method worked because many critics were editors of the then-leading art magazines and newspapers such as *Meishu Sichao*, *Zhongguo Meishu Bao* (Fine Arts in China), *Meishu* (Fine Arts), and *Art Monthly*.¹⁰ Their official position as editors provided great advantages as well as opportunities to disseminate their critical writing, to publish avant-garde artworks and reviews of them, and to gain attention from various art circles. A nationwide readership allowed their critical voices to be heard broadly. Many of these critics maintained direct contact with artists and stood at the forefront of Chinese avant-garde art, interpreting, explaining, and theorizing about the art. Their writing and publishing greatly shaped the discourse of contemporary Chinese art history.



In the aftermath of 1989's Tian'anmen, many editors were removed from their positions or even lost their official jobs. Among these were the two most well-known names, Li Xianting and Gao Minglu, who then embarked on totally different career paths as unofficial figures. The above-mentioned magazines and newspapers were forced to either change their attitudes towards avant-garde art or be suspended. *Meishu* even became the major voice in which contemporary art was condemned in the 1990s. Writing and publishing as a form of engagement with the avant-garde world was no longer efficient or even possible. In other words, many critics lost venues in which to vocalize and practice art criticism. As an alternative, some of them turned to working on exhibitions, which became a new platform for critics to introduce new art, raise issues, and discuss problems. For them, curating exhibitions served as an extension and transformation of critical writing and was also an efficient way of engaging in the contemporary art world.¹¹ It was also through catalogues and other exhibition-related publications that critics could continue to disseminate their thinking.

Zhongguo Meishu Bao
(Fine Arts in China), issue
no. 21, 1986.

The rapid transformation of Chinese society since the 1990s has created a fertile environment for the growth and practice of curators. To facilitate economic development, the government has largely relaxed its control over individual employment and mobility. As a result of the market reform, the work unit system, in which the state assigns individual jobs and thus determines everyone's career and residence, is no longer the only way for one to seek career success in China. Other types of employment, such as those in private and foreign invested sectors or self-employment, have provided Chinese people with more freedom in pursuing personal career and in choosing places of residence. Many new occupations and professions emerged when China's society opened up and globalization speeded up economic development, and one of the new jobs that emerged at that time was that of the curator. In the meantime, many domestic entrepreneurs accumulated great wealth and started to invest in art and culture. Some built the first private art museums, such as the Dongyu Art Museum in Shenyang, the Taida Art Museum in Tianjin, and the Shanghe Art Museum in Chengdu, all in 1998, while others opened art galleries. Together with museums and galleries supported by overseas investment, these structures created an increasing need for curators who were hired to organize exhibitions and to promote the institutions. These curators thus became mediators between the new rich and the still-struggling artists, acting as important resources for both.

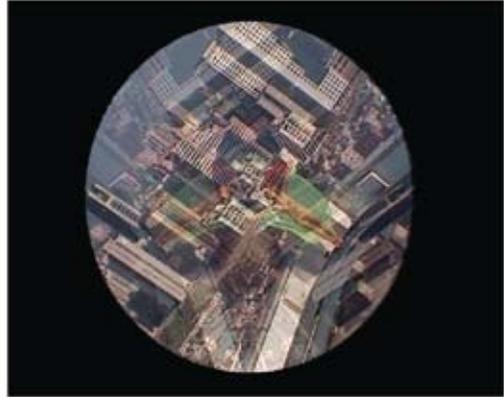
Xu Zhen, *Rainbow*, 1998, single-channel video, 3 mins. 23 secs. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery, Shanghai.



The exhibitions organized by critics-turned-curators provided many contemporary artists with spaces and opportunities to survive outside the official art system and to continue their avant-garde art practices in China. Moreover, these curators contributed to connecting

domestic avant-garde art with that of the rest of the world through various personal networks they built through their activities. Both were particularly meaningful in the context of the 1990s, when contemporary art was not allowed to enter the public space in China. The work of curators opened up alternative spaces for artists to exchange ideas with fellow artists and viewers, to receive theoretical support from art critics, and to be exposed to the international art system and market. It was in these exhibitions that many now internationally acclaimed contemporary Chinese artists made their first impressions: Fang Lijun and Yue Minjun in the 1993 Venice Biennale; Sun Yuan, Weng Fen, and Yang Fudong in the 1999 *Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion* in Beijing; and Xu Zhen in the 1999 *Ideas and Concepts* in Shanghai are a few examples.

If serious art criticism was a major motivation behind many contemporary art exhibitions in China during the 1990s, this is no longer necessarily true. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, exhibitions of contemporary art have been conceived for various purposes including art criticism as well as commercial, political, or personal gains. In recent years, caught in the excitement of a rising international reputation and skyrocketing sale prices of contemporary Chinese art, many more young hopefuls eagerly joined the



army of contemporary art making as professional artists. Accompanying the growing number of artists, curators have also seen their numbers multiply. The joke that “there are more curators than artists in Beijing” that circulated at a symposium in Beijing a couple of years ago may be an exaggeration, but “curator” has indeed become a title that many people are interested in bearing. The rapid personal success of wealth and reputation that a few early critics-turned-curators have achieved made curating exhibitions a seemingly rewarding career; thus “curator fever” appeared. Victoria Lu, the Taiwan scholar who in the 1980s translated the word curator into Chinese as *cezhanren*, once admitted to being extremely surprised that the profession of curator would become so trendy in the Chinese art world.¹²

Weng Fen, *Untitled*, 1999, video installation. Courtesy of the artist.

There is no single set of categories that differentiates types of curators in China. In one case, where there is a focus on the scope and network of curators’ operations, they may be referred to as domestic or international curators. A second case applies to the idea of affiliation, so that there are freelance curators, museum curators, gallery curators, official curators and such. The third considers the intensity of involvement, as found in temporary curators, part-time curators, or professional curators. The fourth defines the position of curators according to the content and potential viewers of their shows, producing Chinese card players (curators who exhibit artworks that carry stereotypical Chinese symbols or ideas), curators who combine a global perspective with Chinese content, and curators who primarily draw their inspiration and materials from the Chinese reality. From a methodological perspective, there are curators who see exhibitions as a tool to define existing artistic trends and to theorize about their significance, curators who seek the possibility of starting new trends and



Sun Yuan, *Honey* (detail), 1999, two cadaver specimens, bed frame, ice. Courtesy of the artist.

practices and opening up new artistic directions, curators who attempt to verify the art establishment and authority in their exhibitions, curators who explore in exhibitions their views about art and its place in society, and curators who simply see exhibitions as a prelude for selling art or for building up personal fame.

The nature of curators is also under dramatic reconfiguration. Beside critics, many emerging curators could be at the same time artists, gallery owners, governmental officials, museum or gallery staff, writers, film directors, or any other kind of professionals, which has greatly complicated the condition of the contemporary Chinese art because of the various backgrounds and motivations behind individuals who choose to bear the title of curator. As the number of curators increases, the world of the curator itself becomes a society of complexity.

Official and Market Turn

The authority and influence of independent curators reached the highest level in China at the beginning of the twenty-first century. To a large degree, most of what they had been fighting for in the 1990s, such as achieving a legal status for contemporary art, building up a financially supportive structure, and challenging the established art system, were materialized. First, in 2003, with the establishment of the Beijing Biennale and then the founding of the Chinese Pavilion for the Venice Biennale, many curators and contemporary artists cheered at the full-scale victory of contemporary art in China. On the one hand, the international biennial as an exhibition format was embraced by the art establishment as seen in the Beijing Biennale;¹³ on the other hand, the Chinese government changed its long



A corner of the gallery complex at the Caochangdi Art District. Photo: Meiqin Wang.



Sunshine International Museum at the Song Zhuang Artist Village. Photo: Meiqin Wang.



Opposite top left: A studio and living complex at the Song Zhuang Artist Village. Photo: Meiqin Wang.

Opposite top right: Entrance to the Suojiacun Art District. Photo: Meiqin Wang.

Opposite middle left: Artist Zhong Biao's studio in the Heiqiao Art District. Photo: Meiqin Wang.

Opposite middle right: The archway over the street leading to the Song Zhuang Artist Village. Photo: Meiqin Wang.

Opposite bottom: A studio complex, Caochangdi Art District. Photo: Meiqin Wang.

hostile-attitude toward contemporary art and formally incorporated it into the overall national cultural project, as seen in the Chinese Pavilion.¹⁴ Second, contemporary Chinese art has achieved wide spread market success, and many artists have been able to greatly improve their living and working conditions. Many contemporary art districts and villages have appeared, where local governments or private developers built massive studios and living quarters for artists to rent. Private museums, art spaces, and art galleries have opened one after another to house the work of contemporary artists. Third, contemporary art has left behind its previous marginalized status and entered into the mainstream art system. As if to compensate for its underground past in the 1990s, when there were rare opportunities for contemporary art to be exhibited or published within China, in the past couple years new exhibitions and art magazines are predominantly about contemporary art. Many of these exhibitions were held in state-run or subsidized museums. Also, at the moment one can easily find more than thirty different magazines in circulation, all concerning contemporary art in one way or another.¹⁵ The majority of them only appeared two or three years ago.¹⁶



A few examples of mainland Chinese contemporary art magazines.

The emergence of “curator fever” in the early 2000s is certainly evidence that signifies the success of contemporary art in China. Censorship of contemporary art has not totally disappeared and occasionally one may still see the hand of the state authorities intervening in exhibitions of contemporary art; however, it is not as constant and severe

as it was before. It would be reasonable to argue that the ideal carried by many independent curators in the 1990s has been largely realized. Ironically, the double results of this success, the “official turn” and “commercial turn,” also tarnished the prestige of being a curator. The challenges, including political, institutional, and financial, that contemporary art once encountered gave meaning and significance to the work of independent curators. Now that many of these challenges have been overcome, contemporary art is enjoying the support from government, various institutions, and the art market. “Curator” is less a title associated with avant-garde ideals in the mindset of many contemporary Chinese artists, and the cultural significance of the curator as an avant-garde figure has diminished. This change, however, does not automatically mean the decline of the importance and influence of curators in the Chinese art world. On the contrary, the position of curators, especially the established ones, as an arbitrator in the power structure of the art world remains strong. In fact, many curators have now become part of the new art establishment in China. Artists still want to affiliate themselves with certain curators and the number of curators continues to grow.

Many curators have indeed become part of the system that values personal gain more than art itself. They select artists for exhibitions from their own personal circles, or artists from galleries they work for, or artists who pay them personally. Some even charge artists directly for writing about their art.¹⁷ Because of the greatly commercialized operations that many curators have introduced in their exhibitions, many artists have lost their faith in curators. The now-contaminated reputation of curators reached its height during 2007 and 2008, a period when the market seemed to be the only driving force for contemporary Chinese art. A widespread debate exacerbated the situation. It began when Zhu Qi, a leading critic and curator of contemporary art, published in his blog a series of texts exposing how the price of contemporary Chinese art had gone abnormally high and detailing the collusion of artists, dealers, collectors, art critics, auction houses, media, exhibitions, and others in making contemporary art purely a profitable commodity.¹⁸ As an insider and beneficiary of the success of contemporary Chinese art, his texts in May 2008 came as a surprise and generated fervent debates within contemporary art circuits, resulting in a few active critics and curators making vehement accusations against each other. The whole scenario had two major effects: first, Zhu Qi’s texts brought to public attention some of the problems lurking behind the seemingly successful marketing of contemporary Chinese art; second, the mutual accusations also contributed to the declining respect from artists toward these leading figures and their exhibitions.

As a matter of fact, some curators themselves have lost faith in exhibitions as an efficient way to engage with avant-garde art, and a few once-influential curators such as Li Xianting and Pi Li have become suspicious about the function of curators in China. In their eyes, the majority of curators are no longer at the forefront working with avant-garde artists to challenge the art establishment; rather they are now part of the new establishment and they work to maintain a system that positions them at the centre. As one of the earliest and most influential curators, Li Xianting has expressed his disappointment at the commercialization of contemporary art in many interviews, and he rarely curates new exhibitions.¹⁹ Pi Li, once celebrated as the youngest critic and independent curator in China, says that he is now ashamed to be associated with the term “curator” because so many curators are morally flawed.²⁰ In 2005 he co-founded UniversalStudios-Beijing, a non-profit experimental “space”²¹ for exhibitions, and in 2007 he stopped curating exhibitions for other institutions. Since then, Universalstudios-Beijing has been transformed into a commercial gallery called Boers-Li Gallery. Interestingly, he argues that the gallery provides a better place for him to carry out his ideas about contemporary art, thus defending himself against the accusation that he finally gave up his idealistic pursuits in art and resorted to a commercial gallery.²² Several other well-known curators have also founded their own exhibition institutions, often referred to as a “curator’s space,” where they continue to hold serious exhibitions. For example, Gu Zhenqing established Li Space in 2008. It is in this space that he continues critical engagement with contemporary art, and his curator’s space provides serious young artists with opportunities to carry out their artistic projects.²³ He admits, however, that he sometimes still curates for galleries or museums in the name of an independent curator in order to bring in money to support the viability of his space.²⁴

Entrance to the Li Space,
Caochangdi Art District. Photo:
Meiqin Wang.



In the end, the practice of independent curators, who were once thought to be culturally advanced and part of the artistic avant-garde, has greatly lost its significance in today’s thriving contemporary Chinese art scene. Discussing the condition of art criticism in China, Pauline J. Yao states: “Let’s be clear about this: contemporary art in China is run by the art market. Independence from it exists only in shades of grey.”²⁵ Similarly, as wealth becomes the primary goal for so many art professionals, the work of curatorship shows no escape from the rampant commercialization of the art

world. It is a sad but realistic turn as China has transformed into a society that empowers wealth over other things, as argued by David Goodman in his recent edited volume on the new rich of China.²⁶ That is where the “official turn” and “market turn” of contemporary art meet.

Notes

- ¹ Wu Hung, “A Case of Being Contemporary: Conditions, Spheres, and Narratives of Contemporary Chinese Art,” *Wu Hung on Contemporary Chinese Art* (Guangzhou: Lingnan Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005), 23–46.
- ² Tim Griffin, “Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition,” *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (November 2003), 152–67.
- ³ Michael Brenson, “The Curator’s Moment,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (winter 1998), 16.
- ⁴ Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Brokering Identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Presentation,” in Reesa Greenberg et al., eds., *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 21–22.
- ⁵ A good case in point is Hou Hanru, an international curator who emigrated from China to France in 1990. He sees himself as a globalist curator who promotes an entirely new type of art that can transcend all established boundaries and become multidisciplinary and multitranscultural. Hou and other international curators such as Francesco Bonami, Okwui Enwezor, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist are leading a global curatorial discourse that has exerted considerable influence on the reformation of the global art world today. For Hou Hanru’s main ideas about global art, see the anthology *Hou Hanru: On the Mid-Ground*, ed. Yu Hsiao-hwei (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Limited, 2002). Other curators’ remarks can be seen in Griffin’s “Global Tendencies.”
- ⁶ Jia Fangzhou, ed., *Era of Criticism: Selected Works of Chinese Art Critics at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Nanning: Guangxi Fine Arts Publishing House, 2003), 8.
- ⁷ Xiao Chunlei and Ruan Meiling, “Curator System and Others—Interviewing Gu Zhenqing,” *Xiamen Evening*, January 13, 2007.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ The following are just a few examples: the Second Hand Reality and To Each His Own, by Gu Zhenqing, in 2003 and 2006, respectively; The Wall: Reshaping Chinese Contemporary Art, curated by Gao Minglu, in 2005; Archaeology of the Future: The Second Triennial of Chinese Art, curated by Qiu Zhijie, in 2005; Painting-Unrealism, curated by Huang Du, in 2005; Under the Sky above Beijing, curated by Gao Ling, in 2005; Self-Made Generation: A Retrospective of New Chinese Painting, curated by Zhu Qi, in 2006; Fragmentation, by Feng Boyi, in 2007; The 2nd Documentary Exhibition of Fine Arts: Forms of Concepts, curated by Pi Li, in 2007.
- ¹⁰ Jia Fangzhou, ed., *Era of Criticism*, 6–9.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Lu Yuan, “How Can Chinese Curators Become ‘International’?” *Art Observation* no. 3 (2007), 92–96.
- ¹³ For detailed discussion of the first Beijing Biennale, see Meiqin Wang, “The Beijing Biennale: The Politics of Chinese Characteristics,” *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 7, no. 4 (2008), 20–31.
- ¹⁴ For detailed discussion of the first Chinese Pavilion for the Venice Biennale, see Meiqin Wang, “Officializing the Unofficial: Presenting New Chinese Art,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 21, no. 1 (spring 2009), 102–140.
- ¹⁵ Most of these publications are promotional rather than critical, in which artists often have to pay both the magazine and the writer to be published in them, and the writers are paid to write a positive, promotional text.
- ¹⁶ Based on my personal research.
- ¹⁷ Based on my research findings in summer 2009. As these kinds of practices have now become the norms in the Chinese art world, it may be unfair to single out curators in these cases. For instance, artists also pay university academics to write about their work in order to have an academic stamp of approval. These cases signify the ethos of the era of an unbridled market economy that has reshaped the relationship between artists and scholars who write about them.
- ¹⁸ The series of texts that Zhu Qi published in his blog in May 2008 is titled “‘Faking Sky-high Price’ at Contemporary Art Auctions and the Games of High Profit.” The text was later published in an art magazine, and many reporters from major media interviewed Zhu Qi, who claimed to receive many death threat messages because of it. See his original text at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_487f2fc601008zvu.html (accessed July 15, 2009).
- ¹⁹ Li Jiang and Li Yan, “It is Difficult for Chinese to Make Curator a Profession,” *Beijing Business Today*, July 24, 2008; Wu Youming, “Li Xianting Interview: We Have What Kind of Art Here,” <http://bbs.artintern.net/frame.php?frameon=yes&referer=http%3A//bbs.artintern.net/viewthread.php%3Ftid%3D4693> (accessed March 21, 2009).
- ²⁰ My interview with Pi Li, July 24, 2009.
- ²¹ “Space,” or *Kongjian* in Chinese, has been used to describe a new type of exhibition institution emerging in recent years. It is different from a museum in that it provides only for temporary exhibitions; it is also different from a gallery in that its primary goal is not to make financial profit, but to provide a space for the display of new art of an experimental nature. Because of its less profit-oriented and more new-art-oriented implication, “space” has become a term that many newly established art institutions across China have adopted.
- ²² My interview with Pi Li.
- ²³ My interview with Gu Zhenqing, August 12, 2009.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Pauline J. Yao, “Critical Horizons—On art criticism in China,” *Asia Art Archive PERSPECTIVES*, December 2008, http://www.aaa.org.hk/newsletter_detail.aspx?newsletter_id=592&newslettertype=archive (accessed June 21, 2009).
- ²⁶ David S. G. Goodman, ed., *The New Rich in China: Future Rulers, Present Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–2.