

PREMIO MIGLIOR TESI DI LAUREA

Comparative study of the selection criteria of contemporary chinese art in the Venice Art Biennale and Shanghai Biennale

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The development of contemporary Chinese art has had a bumpy and tortuous journey from experimental art to avant-garde art to the art we see today. It was not until the 1990s, when China's economy began to take off, that contemporary Chinese art gradually took its rightful place on the world stage. Art institutions, artists and the artworks themselves are heavily influenced by the government and monetary considerations, both of which sometimes act as shackles and sometimes as engines. The Venice Biennale (Chinese Pavilion) and the Shanghai Biennale, as representatives of the highest art standards in China, are the beacons of contemporary Chinese art. Both represent China's official attitude towards contemporary art both in China and globally, and the standard of artists in those two events is the highest in the industry. These events also receive more attention from the domestic and international media than any other event involving Chinese art.

The main purpose of this study is to compare the organization and selection criteria of the Shanghai Biennale and the Venice Biennale (Chinese Pavilion), analyzing the impact of these criteria; what and how they have played a role in the development of contemporary Chinese art; what critical reaction to the exhibitions has been as a result (both domestically and internationally) and how they influence the art market and artists in China.

The main methods of this study are to examine the historical archives of the Venice Biennale and Shanghai Biennale (including published journals, academic seminars reports, videos, and officially published interviews), relevant reviews published by art critics, documents, and public statements of critics, as well as to conduct personal, first-hand interviews with artists, exhibition curators, and critics.

In both the exhibitions, the curators' independence in selection, decision-making, and coordination is officially constrained, and the artists have very little control over these processes. The artworks and artists in both exhibitions are normally chosen by the curator, who is selected or recommended by the exhibition committee. The committee in the Shanghai Biennale is made up of governors, art experts and state-owned art museum or gallery managers, and sometimes passes on the government's ideas and intervenes in the selection process. Given that the different backgrounds and preferences of the curators and other factors (such as the notions of art, budget of the exhibitions, and censorship), the art presented by the two exhibitions can be distinct. The curator of the national pavilion in the Venice Biennale must be Chinese, whereas that of the Shanghai Biennale can be international. As a result of this, contemporary art is not well represented in the Chinese Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, while the Shanghai Biennale contains more avant-garde and innovative works, as the majority of the artists are from overseas, and are selected by the non-Chinese curator. The Chinese Pavilion most often receives negative reviews from Chinese critics, while these same critics tend to respond more favorably towards the Shanghai Biennale.

This research can be a useful resource to understand contemporary Chinese art in the international spotlight. It also raises considerations that could affect the critical reaction to contemporary Chinese art exhibited in these two exhibitions.