AN INSIDER’S EXPERIENCE OF A CROSS-CULTURAL EXHIBITION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON THE PROCESS OF THE PAVILION OF MARITAL HARMONY

by

SOPHIE P. WIRTH BRENTINI


A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Curriculum Studies)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 2004

© Sophie P. Wirth Brentini
Library Authorization

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Sophie Wirth Brentini 16/07/2004
Name of Author (please print) Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

Title of Thesis: An insider's experience of a cross-cultural exhibition: an autoethnography on the process of "The Caution of Herbal Harmony"

Degree: Master of Arts Year: 2004

Department of Curriculum Studies
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC Canada
This case study examines the process of mounting a collaborative exhibition of a collection of Chinese art in a European private “museum”. The context and the cross-cultural process of this art exhibition, entitled *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*, made it an unusual event and place this research at the cross-roads of art history, education, anthropology and museum studies. The mounting of the exhibition is examined through the literature related to cross-cultural questions, post-colonialism, and representations of other cultures. The specific commitments required by collaborations with people whose culture is being represented are tackled. In the case examined here, several factors made the collaboration between the guest curator (and author of this thesis), the Baur Collection’s curator and the Chinese collection’s lender very difficult. In order to understand them, the process of the exhibition is analysed from the genesis of its idea to the exhibition closure through methodologies such as autoethnography, narrative inquiry and action research. These methods are particularly adapted to this subject in which the producer, the process and the product are intertwined and never extracted from their context. They lead the author on the path of a reflexive process of understanding, on a thorough but personal examination and introspection into a single event produced by a particular group of people. The author’s narrative is put in perspective through other voices: this work would not have been complete without the points of view of the two other “collaborators”, and without the public’s reactions to the exhibition. The author’s intent is to share with the reader a personal experience, open to multiple voices that can be read through several lenses.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ...................................................................................... iii
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................................................. vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................. vii
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 1
  Research problem / purpose of the study ..................................................... 1
  The questions ............................................................................................... 3
  Methodology and procedure ....................................................................... 4
  Significance of the study ............................................................................. 9

Part 1: Context

CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE .................................................. 12
  Orientalism .................................................................................................... 13
    Said’s Orientalism and China .................................................................... 13
    Beyond orientalism .................................................................................... 14
  Western perception of China and its art ..................................................... 14
    China is the “other” ................................................................................ 15
    Chinese art history, the state and stakes .................................................. 15
  Cultural differences, cross-cultural experiences ..................................... 16
  Speaking for the “other” ............................................................................ 18
    Definition of the “other” ....................................................................... 19
    Speaking for the “other” ....................................................................... 19
  Cultural representation and exhibiting other cultures ......................... 20
    Is the great divide trembling? ................................................................. 21
  Communities consultation ....................................................................... 22
  Behind the scenes studies ....................................................................... 27

CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH SETTING OR WHEN A CHINESE COLLECTION MEETS A
SWISS COLLECTION OF CHINESE ART ................................................. 30
  Introduction: Geneva, its communities, its cultural life ......................... 30
  History of the Baur Collection .................................................................. 32
    Physical settings .................................................................................... 36
  The Pavilion of Marital Harmony or The Xiehanglou Collection ........ 39
    The collectors ....................................................................................... 39
    The Collection ...................................................................................... 43
  The protagonists ...................................................................................... 46
    Mr. Frank Dunand ................................................................................ 46
    Mr. Chunglu Tsen ................................................................................ 47
    Mrs Sophie Wirth Brentini ..................................................................... 48
  Conclusion .................................................................................................. 50
# Part 2: A Narrative

## CHAPTER 3 GENESIS OF A PROJECT
- May 1998 .......................................................... 53
- June 1998 .......................................................... 53
- November 2003 ................................................ 54
- Boston, September 1998 .................................... 57
- February 1999 ................................................... 59
- June 1999 .......................................................... 62
- September 1999 ................................................ 63

## CHAPTER 4 EVOLUTION OF A PROJECT
- Spring 2000: signing the contract .......................... 67
- Leaving Geneva? ............................................... 69
- Selection of Madame Fan Tchunpi's paintings ............... 70
- Selection of Dr. Tsen's collection artworks .................. 71
- Summer 2000 ..................................................... 79

## CHAPTER 5 CREATION
- Project of catalogue and writing of captions ............... 83
- In Geneva ........................................................ 92
- Autumn 2001 ..................................................... 99

## CHAPTER 6 PUBLICATION
- Editing ............................................................. 103
- Postcard and video production ............................... 109
- The installation ............................................... 112
- Advertising ..................................................... 118

# Part 3: Other Narratives

## CHAPTER 7 THREE NARRATIVES
- Expectations ................................................. 122
- Particularities ............................................... 123
- Difficulties .................................................... 124
- Discoveries .................................................. 127
- Analysis ....................................................... 131

## CHAPTER 8 VISITORS' VOICES: RESPONSES TO THE PAVILION OF MARITAL HARMONY
- Introduction .................................................. 139
- Methods ......................................................... 139
- Children at the Baur Collection? ............................ 140
- Observations .................................................. 141
- Onsite observations ........................................ 141
- Touring the exhibition ..................................... 143
- Visitors' voices ............................................... 145
- Survey participants ........................................ 145
- Participants' conception of museums' roles ............... 145
- Awareness of Chinese art, history and culture .......... 146
LIST OF FIGURES

Fig.1 The Baur Collection (El-Wakil, 1998) ................................................................. 172
Fig.2 Room of the second floor. (El-Wakil, 1998) ............................................................. 172
Fig.3 Temporary exhibition room C. (El-Wakil, 1998) ...................................................... 173
Fig.4 Temporary exhibition room D. (El-Wakil, 1998) ...................................................... 173
Fig.5 Tsen Tsonming and Fan Tchunpi at the time of their wedding in 1922 ....................... 174
Fig.6 Fan Tchunpi (1898-1986), Portrait of Tsen Tsonming, 1930. (Dunand, 2002) ......... 174
Fig.7 Personal belongings showcase .............................................................................. 175
Fig.8 Qiu Ying (ca. 1492-1552), Tasting tea, ink on paper. (Dunand, 2002) ....................... 175
Fig.9 Objects for the scholar’s desk ............................................................................... 176
Fig.10 Room B ................................................................................................................. 176
Fig.11 Room A ............................................................................................................... 177
Fig.12 Room C ................................................................................................................ 177
Fig.13 Room C: showcase ............................................................................................... 178
Fig.14 Room D ................................................................................................................ 178
Fig.15 Room D: opposite view ....................................................................................... 179
Fig.16 Newspaper add ................................................................................................... 179
Fig.17 Deng Fen (1894-1964), Xishi. (Dunand, 2002) ..................................................... 179
Fig.18 Gao Qifeng (1889-1933), The Roaring tiger, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002). 180
Fig.19 Gao Jianfu (1879-1951), Carp and wisteria, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002) . 180
Fig.20 Fan Tchunpi (1898-1986), Autumn moon over Pidan, ink on paper, 1966. (Dunand, 2002) ................................................................. 181
Fig.21 Qi Baishi (1864-1957), Twin geese, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002) .......... 181
Fig.22 Marcelle Ladeuil (1895-after 1984), Portrait of Madame Fan Tchunpi, oil on canvas. (Dunand, 2002) ................................................................. 182
Fig.23 Fan Tchunpi (1898-1986), The Flute player, oil on canvas, 1924. (Dunand, 2002) ... 182
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Dunand and to Mr. Tsen, the editor and the co-curator of *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*, which is examined in this thesis. They offered me the opportunity to work on an ambitious project which, despite difficulties, was very successful. As my first professional experience, this exhibition will always remain a special event, which has been tremendously rich in learning. I want to thank both of them for their patience in supporting me and also for tolerating the annoyances I may have provoked. I do not wish this thesis being understood solely as an angry narrative but as an enriching professional introspection to fully take advantage of our common adventure. I believe I conclude this thesis on a positive note, and I hope it will be appreciated as such.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and contribution of my thesis committee: Dr. Graeme Chalmers, and Dr. Elizabeth Johnson. Without their constant encouragements and suggestions this thesis, engaged on the steep paths of distance and motherhood could have got lost! Both knew how to keep me working and brought key elements to my research, with supportive guidance.

Arriving in Vancouver from Geneva, Switzerland, in September 2000, I experienced an ‘educational cultural shock’. I remember a phone call I had with my former advisor Dr. Anna Kindler, as I was all ready to give up the recently undertaken studies. She helped me understand what I was going through and invited me to persevere… advice I obviously followed! A special thank you to Anna.

Two other professors helped me to survive my first term at UBC: Dr. Ruth Phillips, in Fine Arts and Anthropology, whose comprehension and encouragement were a great support without forgetting her intensive course in anthropology which has been a source of information for the whole duration of my studies. Dr. Linda Peterat’s class has also been of great help in my settling in a new culture of education.

In Art Education I was led through such an interesting introspective experience which opened new creative and reflexive paths to follow. I rediscovered art, that I believed was locked in an
ivory tower... I am most indebted to the professors of art education who reminded me that art is life and that we can live in art. And in particular, to Dr. Rita Irwin whose warm encouragements greatly helped me to creatively get back to work after giving birth to my daughter, I am grateful. And lastly but not the least, all my heart felt thanks go to my family, in particular to Dr. Ariane Isler who faithfully read all the drafts of any term papers and of this thesis at any hour of the day. Thank you so much Tante Ariane for the encouragement and confidence you gave me during my studies at UBC, and above all for your great heart! Thanks to you, Canada became a second home for us where we found a new grand mother! And of course an enormous thank you to my dear husband Gilles who endured all kinds of moods I went through during four extremely rich years. My mother greatly contributed to this thesis through her constant support and believing in me and for all the hours she (as well as my mother-in-law) spent looking after my daughter Illia, to provide me with working as well as with some pause time! Many many thanks to both of you! Without you all, this thesis would not have been possible!!!
**INTRODUCTION**

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text – all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf. (Edward W. Said, 1979, p.20)

Even though museums may aim to be cross-cultural in scope and to challenge ethnocentrism, they are also arenas in which one culture displays another. The power to display another, as 'other', is considerable. (R. Grimes quoted in Simpson, 2001, p.35)

**Research problem / purpose of the study**

In Europe, art museums have been, and many of them still are, institutions both reflecting and serving a cultural elite. Storing the nation’s treasures, the museum has long been the mirror of the views and attitudes of dominant cultures and the material evidence of their colonial achievements. Museums’ elitist and colonialist origins remain an influence on today’s institutions and their public’s perception. In the light of recent scholarship, art museums and exhibitions have been viewed increasingly as more than aesthetic arenas; they have come to be seen as well as powerful ideological and political tools.

The highly culturally diverse society which Europe became as a post-colonial society raised numerous issues in relation to museums: display and interpretation, cultural bias in representing other cultures, lack of representation of cultural diversity in local history collections, amongst others. This plurality forced museums to change their function, philosophies, and their relationships with the culturally diverse communities in adapting their activities. Today museums tend to move towards a more inclusive approach, less intimidating and authoritative, more lively while still being scholarly and educational.

To ultimately realize their potential as dynamic agents in a changing world, museums must be willing to visualize the position of the curator, relinquish their steadfast
devotion to material culture, objects and increasingly obsolete collections, and cede power and authority in the representation of cultural diversity. (Haas, 1996, p. S12)

This move also concerned curators’ role which has already significantly changed since Jonathan Haas’s (1996) recommendations, at least in North America, where curators began to reconsider their position as specialists to include in it notions of mediation and facilitation.

This thesis examines the process of an exhibition of non-Western art in a Western collection. In 1999, just finishing my bachelor’s thesis, I had the privilege to be solicited as a guest curator for a temporary exhibition in a private collection of Asian art: the renowned Baur Collection in Geneva (Switzerland). The Baur Collection would temporarily exhibit a Chinese private collection of art, named Xiehanglou (the pavilion of marital harmony), gathered during the 1930’s by Dr. Tsen Tsonming (Zeng Zhongming, 1896-1939)¹, and the paintings of his wife Madame Fan Tchunpi (Fang Junbi, 1898-1986). As they were closely involved with Chinese Nationalist Government affairs during the 1930’s, the art exhibition would have to focus as well on the socio-cultural and historical context of Republican China; an extremely complex and exciting historical period, unfortunately rather unknown for most visitors. We were, then, to exhibit a 20th century literatus’² collection of art, and the artwork of a Chinese artist who was trained in the French tradition. The collection being exhibited is that of the Tsen family who, never loosing its Chinese roots, lived in France between 1912 and 1925, and, after Dr. Tsen’s death in 1939, in France and in the United States from 1949 to 1986.

The project was accepted in February 2000, for the exhibition to be held for a two-month period in 2002. A catalogue had to be written. The Baur Collection’s Curator would be the

¹ Chinese transcription used in this thesis is pinyin, except for certain personal names whose spelling was chosen by their owner.
² Literati defines Chinese erudite men and connoisseurs, who had taken Chinese imperial examinations before their abolition in 1905. A literati usually mastered the arts of poetry, calligraphy, painting and music. Many of them were art collectors as well. This appellation also refers to a style in Chinese art.
editor, and the texts would be written by several collaborators. The lender of the collection, Mr. Tsen (Dr. Tsen’s son), would have an active role in the realisation of this project.

This project’s subject and context revealed themselves to be intense cross-cultural experiences, shedding light on diverse epistemological issues evolving with time. The Baur Collection, where the exhibition would take place, was funded by Alfred Baur, a Swiss collector, who built his Asian art collection between 1906 and 1951. Over almost a century, the Tsen family lived among three different cultures. At last, the present exhibition was realised and prepared thanks to a close association among the Baur Collection’s curator, a member of the Tsen family, and myself. The thesis is thus situated at the crossroads of Anthropology, Museum Studies, Art History, and Education: I retrospectively examine and analyze two men and a woman’s interactions to reach a common aim, the mounting in a museum of an exhibition of Chinese art and its visitors’ responses.

The questions

During our exhibition’s realisation process and our transcultural association there appeared some organisational, curatorial and cultural concerns, which made me reflect on several questions:

- What were the successes and drawbacks of a transcultural exhibition team collaborating on *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*?
- What are the different experiences lived by the European curators and the Chinese collector during the preparation of *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*?
- What were my concerns, as a European curator, during the process of an exhibition of Chinese art?
Introduction

- What were the exhibition's characteristics?
- What were the expectations of each colleague in preparing such an exhibition?
- How was the exhibition received by the Baur Collection's visitors?
- Did the exhibition have an impact on the public's perception of China? Did it reinforce an already held traditional image of China or did it invite visitors to understand another reality?
- How did the public understand the cross-cultural encounters occurring in this exhibition?

Methodology and procedure

This thesis will be a case study of an exhibition's realisation process in a specific site. Grounded in qualitative methodologies, my aim is not a generalization but a thorough and personal examination, and an introspection into a single event produced by a particular group of people. I analyze the physical context in which the events took place as it certainly influenced deeply the nature of the events. In this case study, I will focus on this specific exhibition to describe and phenomenologically analyze its process and the collaboration of a team of three people who worked toward its realization. To do so, I will use ethnography as a particularly well suited research method to study culture, applying techniques such as participant observation, research journaling, interviews and questionnaires.

I will thus look at the preparation process of The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. A "behind the scenes exploration" made possible thanks to a journal kept during the whole realisation process and studying the archives of the exhibition (i.e. correspondence, writing, mounting).
also consider this part as a broader professional introspection: I look at my work through the lens of theoretical works I encountered as a graduate student.

Drawing upon postmodernist and poststructuralist theoreticians, I believe that the researcher is not as neutral as implied by traditional social science research. Thus, I also look into my personal background to define and understand my biases and my decisions and reactions as a curator, a colleague and a writer, following the techniques of autoethnography, action research, and narrative inquiry.

This work is thus situated at the crossroads of action research, autoethnography, ethnography, and narrative inquiry. I precisely adhere to Richardson’s (2000, p.931) definition of autoethnography in which she describes autoethnographies as highly personalized texts telling stories about their authors’ own lived experiences. Zooming backward and forward, inward and outward; displaying multiple layers of consciousness, they connect the personal to the cultural (Ellis and Bochner (2000), p.739; Richardson (2000), p.931). As a Swiss curator of an exhibition of Chinese art, I was confronted by the problem of speaking for others. But during my introspection, I am released to speak for the “other” as I, for a while, am the “other”. “[S]elf-reflexivity brings to consciousness some of the complex political/ideological agendas hidden in our writing” (Richardson, 2000, p.936). Conscious of the scope of each of my movements, my thoughts, my words, I act. Acting, I learn. “Inquiry that may be called action research or autoethnography is well suited to the borderlands because it includes any form of inquiry that attempts to confront complexity among human relations within their temporal, spatial, cultural and historical contexts” (Irwin, in press, p.5). These methodologies allow me to locate myself vis-à-vis Asia, as represented by the exhibition materials and their familial representative, Mr. Tsen.
This introspection belongs to action research as it creates a situation where knowledge and understanding were produced through the process of inquiry (Carson and Sumara quoted in Irwin, in press, p.5). Knowledge that is produced through action research is always about one's self and one's relations to particular communities. I actually study myself and my colleagues preparing an exhibition. However, I only indirectly act for social change although participants (colleagues and visitors) are invited to express their points of view about our experiences, and consequently to inform my own reflexive process.

Action research practices are deeply hermeneutic and postmodern practices, for not only do they acknowledge the importance of self and collective interpretation, but they deeply understand that these interpretations are always in a state of becoming and can never be fixed into predetermined and static categories. (Carson and Sumara quoted in Irwin, in press, p.5)

Motion and evolution are also characterizing narrative inquiry, or what Richardson (2000, p.929) calls Creative Analytic Practices (CAP Ethnography). CAP ethnographies move away from traditional scientific writing to come closer to creative writing such as poetry, drama, conversations, and so on. The producer, the process and the product are intertwined and never extracted from their context. Not aiming at generalization nor at an immovable truth, I value the process rather than a definitive representation. My intent is to share with the reader a personal experience, open to multiple voices that can be read through multiple lenses. Unlike quantitative research in which readers can make use of statistics and numbers, I invite the reader to participate in the reflection and to find a resonance. Learning occurs when something resonates for the reader. Reading will be a moment to relive the events emotionally, with the

---

3 Interestingly, Michael Ames (quoted in Phillips, 2003, p.160) sees a parallel between collaborative exhibition projects and Participatory Action Research (PAR) process: “In essence, PAR addresses the perceived and felt needs in a community to reclaim knowledge, power, and decision making from the colonizers and/or oppressors, and the desire to have local knowledge accepted as equally valid and scientific as western knowledge” (Robinson quoted in Phillips, 2003, p.160).
Introduction

writer. Narrative inquiry is for me a way to be more passionate, more engaged with my subject versus the coldness of classical social sciences text, in which I would have to be more remote.

Trying out evocative forms, we relate differently to our material; we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties. (Richardson, 2000, p.931)

Denzin, quoted in Barone and Eisner (2000), argues that the story format is best suited to promoting *epiphanic moments*, or major "transactional moments that disrupt the ordinary flow of life by questioning the usual definitions of important facets of one's world" (p.83-84).

Regarding the question of multiple lenses and voices, my personal experience will be put in perspective with my colleagues' points of view: Mr. Dunand's (Curator of the Baur Collection), who is from a different generation, background and experience, and Mr. Tsen's. I asked the collector to criticize the exhibition, which he helped to prepare, in the light of his culture and what he was expecting. He was asked to answer a questionnaire about the preparation of this exhibition and the Western inconsistencies towards the particularities of Chinese art and what should have been done. Our European points of view will thus be put in perspective.

Yet, an exhibition would not be complete without its viewers: it is essential to understand how the European visitors to such an exhibition receive its message: does *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony* have an impact on the latter's image of China? How were the visitors to this exhibition moved by their visit? How did they react to what we presented them? To obtain answers to these questions, I studied the public visiting *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony* doing on-site observations and asking visitors to reflect on these issues through a questionnaire. Furthermore, a poster was hung in order to offer visitors a space where they
Introduction

could express their point of view. These procedures allowed me to move toward an understanding of a European group of visitors' reactions to the contact of our exhibition of Chinese art.

Having presented the theme, questions and methodology of the study, I briefly outline the content of the remainder of the thesis document, which is divided in three parts: context, a narrative and other narratives. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical perspectives and literature which inspired my work. Chapter 2 addresses the physical and historical context where the exhibition and my research took place. I briefly discuss the museums, the cultural life and the immigration politics of multicultural Geneva. The Baur Collection, likewise, is presented in terms of location in the city, its architecture and its history. This gives a sense of its policies towards the art and to the public. Thirdly, the distinctive characteristics of the private collection that was exhibited, the Tsen Collection, are described so that the reader is able to understand what questions, themes and issues arose when "a Chinese collection meets a Swiss collection of Asian art". At last, the three colleagues are presented in order to understand and clarify professional and personal relationships, reactions, and decisions.

In the second part, I narrate the history of the exhibition's realization from its idea's genesis (chapter 3) to its opening (chapter 6) after an examination of its evolution (chapter 4) and its creation (chapter 5). This history, and the themes emerging from it, are examined through the lens of the body of literature providing an explanation of the decisions made during the preparation of the exhibition and the perceived reasons for those decisions. Conscious of the existence of different sets of beliefs and concerned to give them a voice, I then invite my colleagues, in chapter 7, to tell their own narratives of our common experience through a questionnaire and at a feedback meeting held following the opening of The Pavilion of Marital
Harmony. The next section (chapter 8) gives a sense of the scope and the reception of our exhibition by the public and analyzes the visitors’ data. Finally, to conclude this research, I review its themes and limitations, and I give some future perspectives.

Significance of the study

What happens “behind the scenes” when an exhibition is prepared, what do curators do? What discrepancies occur? What organizational issues are encountered? The context and the cross-cultural collaboration of The Pavilion of Marital Harmony raises several issues which can impact the presentation of similar cross-cultural and shared projects focused on the arts. I read numerous visitors’ studies and post-exhibition analyses, but few were concerned with the process of an exhibition (O’Hanlon (1993), Bouquet (1998), Knutson (2002), Macdonald (2002), Conaty and Carter (unpublished paper)), which nevertheless has consequences both for museum visitors and for museum teams. I did observe and study the visitors to our exhibition to give this perspective to my work, but essentially I tell an insider’s story.

I started to work as a curator just before beginning my Master of Arts degree in art education, and began this exhibition’s preparation with a set of beliefs which drastically evolved with time: it started when I had not yet the theoretical knowledge I gained through my studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC). During the first two years I constantly had the impression of losing ground, of needing to un-learn everything I had laboriously learned, and of being overwhelmed by the intensity and number of new ideas, concepts and people I encountered as a graduate student. More recently I gave birth to a wonderful little girl named Illia who definitely changes my life, and how I look at it. The last three years pushed me to look retrospectively at who I am as a whole. I started to work on The Pavilion of Marital Harmony with

---

4 For a chronology of the events: see appendix I.
the energy and the pride of a recently graduated student, and evolved through this contract with a growing urge to look critically at museum practice. I appreciate the image, proposed by Irwin, Mastri and Robertson (2000) of a *pause to reflect* in between a flow of events and a future professional and personal life, a pause nurturing a *circulation* of knowledge and action (p.43) and present this thesis in that light.
Part 1: Context
CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Some countries act as drugs. Such is the case with China which has the surprising power to make everyone who went there pretentious — even those who talk about it. (...) Snobbism does not explain everything. Fantasy is enormous and invincible. (Nothomb, 1993, p. 7-8, translation Sophie Wirth Brentini)

Are there still naïve enough minds to imagine that theories exist to be believed? Theories exist to irritate Philistines, to seduce aesthetes and to make others laugh. (Nothomb, 1993, p. 25, translation Sophie Wirth Brentini)

As the curator of an exhibition of Chinese art, my main concern was knowledge transmission about Asian art to a Western public. During my studies at the University of British Columbia, I gained the tools to try and avoid prejudices and stereotypes through multicultural art education and post-colonial theories which I did not have when The Pavilion of Marital Harmony project started. Because of the exhibition’s context and my themes of interest, I am situated in a postmodern pluridisciplinary area, which is located in between and among Anthropology, Art History, Education and Museum Studies. By critically exploring an exhibition, I am interested in critical studies, and by being part of a transcultural team working on Chinese art, I found inspiration in cross-cultural theories and post-colonial research.

Numerous studies address the ways exhibitions put into practice postmodern theories. Many of them deal with the interface between the museum and its visitors and the meanings the latter take home; many semiotically examine exhibitions through the lens of postmodernism. However fewer tackle the process of a collaborative exhibition’s realization.

The studies I read were mainly qualitative, encompassing phenomenology, case study, ethnography, historical research and surveys. In my readings, I selected the themes that were of greater importance to my subject and purpose. Overall, the politics of representation and that of display were of particular interest to me for we mounted, in partnership with a Chinese person,
an exhibition of Chinese art representing his parents' life work. Part of this project was, for me, contributing to demythologizing China.

Orientalism

I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the “other”. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles. (Said, 1979, p.1-2)

Said’s Orientalism and China

Although Said focuses on literary criticism, the response to his study has been multidisciplinary and is still very lively. For Clunas (1999, p.135), Said’s Orientalism is less influential when China is used as the referent. Said sought to explain the way in which much non-European art had been constructed as the art of inferior subject peoples. Chinese art has in part escaped this interpretation and most Chinese scholars today do not see themselves as heirs to colonial subjects (1999, p.135). Arif Dirlik (1996), however, agreeing thus with Zhang Longxi (1988, p.114), argues that Orientalism’s “larger significance rests on Said’s relentless demonstration of the intersection of historical interpretation, culture, and politics in Euro-American studies of Asia” (p.96). According to Dirlik, “the questions raised by this intersection are still very much relevant to problems of historical interpretation of Asia in general, and China in particular” (ibid.). Zhang (1988) explains Said’s relevance for China when looking at it “as the paradigm and locale of the “other” with its own history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary” (p.114).
Orientalism as a discourse divides the globe unambiguously into Occident and Orient; the latter is essentially strange, exotic and mysterious, but also sensual, irrational and potentially dangerous. This oriental strangeness can only be grasped by the gifted specialist in oriental cultures and in particular by those with skills in philology, language and literature. The task of orientalism was to reduce the bewildering complexity of oriental societies and oriental culture to some manageable, comprehensive level. (Turner quoted in Lin, 2001, p.60)

**Beyond orientalism**

During the 1990s, several critics started to ask for a further step. Zeynep Çelik (1996) regrets that while looking at colonialism critically, the West still examines only itself and argues that the time has come to actually hear the voice of the “other” who is not a passive receptacle of European imperialism. On the same tack, Dirlik (1996) proposes that

rather than view orientalism as an autochthonous product of a European modernity, therefore, it makes some sense to view it as a product of those “contact zones” in which Europeans encountered non-Europeans, where a European modernity produced and was also challenged by alternative modernities as the Others in their turn entered the discourse on modernity. (p.112)

**Western perception of China and its art**

Now the question we may ask is how the politics of display and of representation deal with Chinese art and culture. China has always been accorded a special place in the West. Westerners have been attracted by this culture, perceived as highly exotic, which was elevated over the simple lost paradise paradigm, due to its reputation of refinery and erudition. China’s image in the West has varied throughout centuries from a very negative to a highly positive representation.

China never formed the direct colonial possession of any single European power, even if it was the object of all sorts of indirect political and economical domination (Clunas, 1999, p.135). Furthermore, Westerners recognize Chinese scholarship which is, in the case of Chinese art theory and history, going back to the 4th century (CE). Thus between the West and China
there is a subordination tradition tainted, however, by jealousy and emulation. Both have their pride in their artistic achievements, both tend to see the “other”’s art as inferior: the first European comments on Chinese painting, in the 17th century, stress its lack of proper perspective; the first Chinese comments on European painting dating from about the same period, see it as an interesting optical trick, but lacking in real artistic value (Clunas, 1999, p.130).

China is the “other”

The issue of the Western perception of China is addressed through diverse approaches. Zhang (1988) and Lin (2001) look at the way China is perceived as the perpetual “other”. The former explains it in the light of history and colonialism and the latter analyses the perpetuation of prejudices about China in our contemporary global context through popular culture. Both advocate an avoidance of enshrining China in the past, both call for the questioning of the misconceptions. Demythologizing China, “the real differences between China and the West [and their beauty] will be clearly recognized” (Zhang, 1988, p.131).

Chinese art history, the state and stakes

Wen C. Fong (2003) and Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan (2001) for example examine the state and stakes of Chinese and Japanese art history. Fong “cling[s] — as does Oleg Grabar — to a ‘universal approach to the history of art’ that says that the true value of Chinese painting lies in its own special visual language and its unique form of expressivity” (p.259). He concludes his article by stating that “traditional [Chinese art historiography] does not appear to fit modern Chinese discourse, which sees Western history as a universal model” and asks: “Having lost the use of the traditional narrative, how is the modern Chinese artist to express himself?”. Hall Yiengpruksawan argues for a questioning of the concepts such as the reliance on the Japanese

5 Unfortunately Fong’s definition of universality is not clear.
academy, and of the presumption of a national “aesthetic” in diverse cultures’ art (p.118). Craig Clunas (1999) looks at Chinese art cross-culturally, examining “the place of ‘Chinese art history’ in the broad field of study today, while looking at how Chinese art has been written about by Europeans and Americans in recent times” (p.121).

Authors Zhu Qi (1999) and David Clarke (2002) regret the persistence of preconceived ideas, manifest in some art criticism of Chinese contemporary art and Clarke (2002) after an intelligent analysis of Western prejudices about Chinese art, the author not only argues for

(...) a more extensive coverage in the art historical literature of previously marginalized Asian modern and contemporary art, but [for] the opening up of new perspectives on the whole of art history which work to de-centre the existing hegemony. Only when a multiplicity of such perspectives exist, in dialogue but with none granted in advance any particular priority, can we talk of art history as having become globalised as a discipline. Globalisation requires an insight into the local nature of meaning which rules out the possibility of a panoptic mastering viewpoint. (Clarke, 2002, p.241)

Cultural differences, cross-cultural experiences

Cultural differences and cross-cultural experiences are looked at from several levels. At a theoretical level, at the end of the 1980’s, a number of influential post-colonial critics, particularly Hall and Bhabha, argued for the concept of seeing multiculturalism in terms of hybridity taking place in a third space (Bhabha, 1994). A third space was interpreted as a “contact zone” by Mary Louise Pratt (quoted in Dirlik, 1996, p.96) and as the development of a border consciousness through a holistic learning about other cultures for Garber (1995).

exhibitions of Japanese art in the United States. Hart (1991) compares central criteria of Western aesthetics to non-Western art systems to conclude with a recommendation for a pluralist approach to aesthetics.

At a national level, museums and other artistic and educational institutions began to reconsider their attitudes towards their increasingly diversifying audiences. A corpus of theoreticians (Fusco (1995), Bharucha (1999), Berger (2001), Bowles (2001), Fernandez Sacco (2001), Oguibe (2001), Piper (2001), Stevenson (2001)) denounced whiteness as a norm and the white canon imposed upon non-white cultures by the academy and society, methodically impoverishing the heritage of the “other” (Oguibe, 2001, p.46).

Departing from a “happy multiculturalism” (Fusco, 1995, p.39), Chalmers (2001) asks that we “embrace various ways of knowing the art/artifacts/visual culture of many art worlds” a task based on anthropological fieldwork’s model for “how outsiders can begin to become insiders” (p.2). jagodzinski searches for an artistic pedagogy of intervention (1999, p.31), denounces political correctedness and puts into question the Western art world predetermined by Enlightenment discourse (p.309). He calls for a “transformative emancipatory praxis” supporting a “critical multiculturalism” and a “polycentric multiculturalism” where questions of power relationships are continually forwarded (p.316).

Taking a broad “zooming out” step, Cohn-Bendit (1997) criticizes the discussion of universal values and themes taking place mainly among a small minority of privileged Eurocentric scholars (p.77) (also Zizek quoted in Bharucha 1999,p.14). He would like the debate to be brought back to the people who effectively need it and to see the immigration countries actually recognize that immigration changes “its life, its culture and its way of being” (p.84). Exa...
crossroads' of cultural exchange are often substituted by the ‘inroads’ of institutionalised interculturalism, whereby the South-South cultural exchange is unavoidably mediated by the North” (p.11). He invites artists and cultural workers to nurture “cultures of struggles” (p.20) to deepen intercultural dialogue beyond an “exchange of existing cultural practices” towards critical debates shared across different locations (p.21).

The third and last level I address here is international and tackles issues related to the globalization of the arts. Central to the reflection are the biennials and the internationalisation of artists. Brenson (1998)\(^6\) stresses the issues of legitimation often related to geopolitical conditions, of the relation between the curators and their audiences and lastly the issue of quality: “[p]eople have to write and lecture about art in ways that leave them exposed (...) to think in terms of issues and words that could cross cultures” to help develop a poetics for contemporary art (p.27).

**Speaking for the “other”**

Post-colonial theory, or theory about the legacy of European colonialism, studies how, at the end of the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century, new disciplines were institutionalized in order to study colonized societies (Zhang (1988), Coombes (1994), Pearce (1997), Egerer (2001), among many others). A vocabulary was created that “served to entrench Western ideas of ‘otherness’ and its equation with inferiority” (King, 1999, p.8). This vocabulary persists, often “unconsciously, so deeply embedded is it into shared consciousness” in the minds of the colonizers’ descendants in general, and museum curators in particular. This Eurocentric concept of ‘otherness’ assumes furthermore the existence of ‘pure’ cultures — “that people can be identified in a stereotypical way as representative of their specific cultures historically” (Coxall, 1997, p.102).

Definition of the “other”.

Zhang (1988) defines the “other”, drawing upon Spinoza, de Saussure and Platon, as invariably correlated with the Self, and over which the Self can identify itself (p.113-114). Coxall (1997) defines the term ‘other’ as indicating “a fixed perspective on cultures, that is, it implies that any culture that is not the speaker/writer’s own is classified simply according to its difference” (p.101). Culture is interpreted here in its broadest sense possible, the “other” being a female for a male, a poor person for a rich person, a person without privilege for a privileged one, a dominated person for the one who is in a dominant position... this enumeration being inclusive of geographic locations but of course not exhaustive.

Speaking for the “other”

In her article, Linda Alcoff (1991) stresses the social responsibility of speaking for Others, a problematic raised out of our postmodern epoch arguing that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one’s location and that “certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous” (p.7). For her, “the discursive context is a political arena” (p.15) and if the location of the speaker is relevant for the problematic, it cannot be “a singular power of determination” (p.17): inappropriately used, it would have the sole effect of an avoidance of responsibility and accountability. It is the very structure of discursive practice that needs alteration (p.23), and she invites the reader who speaks for others to “only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved” (p.24).

Illustrating her argument through her work as language advisor, Coxall (1997), as Bal (1996), who makes a discursive analysis of the museum and the art galleries, considers the “effort to acquaint [oneself] with the way language speaks [one’s] own voice [a path] to be able to speak other voices too” (p.114).
Chapter 1 – Theoretical Perspective

The problematic of speaking for the “other” directly involves “the entire edifice of the “crisis of representation”” (Alcoff, 1991, p.9) since, while speaking for others, we engage in an act of representation, interpretation, and creation. “Showing, if it refrains from telling its own story, becomes showing off” (Bal, 1996, p.53).

Cultural representation and exhibiting other cultures

Since the 1980’s, the politics of representation have become central for museums and for all students of culture and the traditional museum privilege is being challenged as well. Susan Pearce (1997) studies the notions which structured modernity, now rejected by the postmodern world, and which “still cast their shadow over ways of thought, the making of meaning and the operation of institutions, museums among them” (p.15).

Anthropology represents the “other”, attempting “to make others less strange” (Ames, 1992, p.139). In doing so however, it ironically “makes those others strangers to themselves” (p.139). In Cannibal tours and glass boxes, Michael Ames (1992) examines the role and responsibility of museums and anthropology in the contemporary world and argues that museums and anthropologists must contextualize and critique themselves and the social, political and economic systems in which they work. Museums and their glass boxes freeze other cultures in an ‘ethnographic present’ (p.139). The “other”’s art has always been kept in museums of anthropology or humankind, and talked about through scientific terms and not through aesthetic ones: one talks about ‘artefacts’ and about ‘material culture’ made by a ‘craftsworker’. These terms are associated with lack of imagination and manual repetitiveness (King, 1999, p.8).
Is the great divide trembling?

Today, the Western canon of art is being challenged (Steiner, 1996), and as a consequence, the great divide between the museum and the art gallery is being put into question. On the subject, Mieke Bal (1996) sees two major issues central to ethnographic-type museums — the politics of ownership and authenticity. She examines them under their discursive aspects as two historically specific terms (p.64). For her, moral imperialism equates with cultural imperialism and that logical collapse has consequences for the separation between the two kinds of museums and the illusion that they each have their own problems and issues (p.73). Bal argues that the semiotic difference, and the interests it serves, between artefacts and works of art are unclear. "The difference between the artifact (...) and the common idea of art is that the former takes for granted what the latter represses: the possibility of cultural difference" (p.78).

The separation of visual culture between art galleries and anthropology museums is also being challenged by non-Western contemporary art which is slowly recognized as valuable and is more and more present, for example in biennial exhibitions (addressing this issue are Desai (1995), Zhu Qi (1999), Clarke (2002), Kasfir (2002), Araeen (2003)). I interpret these biennials as a third space (Bhabha, 1994) of art works: the questions remain to know by which criteria are biennial artists selected and which place is granted for non-Western contemporary art outside of these biennials? 7

The above mentioned issues started to appear at the effective level in policy making (Lavrijsen, 1997) and in 1988 in a conference published and edited in two volumes by Karp and Lavine (1991) and by Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (1992). Multiple case studies (Kuo Wei Tchen

7 An excellent survey was done by Sidney L. Kasfir (2002) to try and answer this question.

**Communities consultation**

Since the late 80’s the way North American museums manage relations with communities began to be examined and to change, following the 1960’s and 1970’s civil rights and war protest movements during which every institution — educational, cultural, and governmental — that was seen to hold power was put into question. The reflection about community consultation intensified at the end of the 1980’s when major exhibitions were criticized and raised violent controversies in North America as well as in Europe. Even though unsuccessful, they were going to have a major impact on practice.

Two Canadian exhibitions were taken hostage by political movements and museums “found themselves to be the foci of political issues” (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper). *Into the Heart of Africa*\(^8\) exhibited a portion of the African collection of the Royal Ontario Museum and showed the objects in their historical context of collection. Intending to be critical towards missions and military expedition in Africa, in part through irony, this exhibition was interpreted as racist by a portion of its visitors (Ottenberg (1991), Riegel (1996)). Another exhibition, *The Spirit Sings*\(^9\) was targeted for a protest and a boycott by First Nations communities as treaty negotiations with the federal government did not progress (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper).

---

'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art\textsuperscript{10} in New York, Images of Africa\textsuperscript{11} in London, and Les Magiciens de la Terre\textsuperscript{12} in Paris, all roughly contemporary, were three other major exhibitions of African art which were criticized for their modernist approaches, their failure to acknowledge the colonialist context in which the objects on show had been brought to Europe, and their omission to address 'the politics of the present' (Delisse quoted in Court (1999)). The curators of these five shows did not find necessary to consult local African, or respectively First Nations, communities, or if they did, the consultation occurred late in the exhibition process.

Following these events, more and more authors insisted upon the importance of a close collaboration with members of cultural communities being represented in exhibitions (Kuo Wei Tchen (1992), Lavine (1992), Dimech (1994), Coxall (1997), Hooper-Greenhill (1997, 1998), Simpson (2001)). In Canada, taking into consideration the fact that cultural representatives remained only occasionally consulted advisors, a task force\textsuperscript{13} was struck which presented guidelines recommending a full partnership between First Nations and museums (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper). At the same moment two major Smithsonian conferences were organized on the Poetics and Politics of Representation (1988) and two years later on Museums and Communities upon which proceedings were published in two very important and encouraging volumes (Karp et al. 1991,1992) emphasizing interesting initiatives such as The Chinatown History Museum Experiment (Kuo Wei Tchen,1992), a community-based history project.

The book edited by Simpson (2001) explores the complex issues of cross-cultural interpretation within the context of museums and the impact of increasing collaboration

\textsuperscript{10} Museum Of Modern Art, New York, 1984.
\textsuperscript{12} Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1989.
\textsuperscript{13} "Task Force on First Peoples and Museums" founded by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association.
between museums and communities. She argues that “the traditional role of the museum must change (...) from that of an institution primarily concerned with artefacts and specimens to one which focuses upon people as creators and users of the artefacts in their collections” (p.265).

In her article, Mary Dimech (1994) explores some of the ways institutions might engage with ethnic minorities’ artists and communities and describes the various forms that consultation can take. “Consultation is a process for enabling participation in decision making” (p.167). Alcoff goes even further: “[s]peaking constitutes a subject that challenges and subverts the opposition between the knowing agent and the object of knowledge, an opposition that is key in the reproduction of imperialist modes of discourse” (Alcoff, 1991, p.23). Dimech discusses the difficulties that might be encountered throughout a consultation process and the importance of “clarity of purpose and commitment to the agreed processes” (p.179).

Thus, community consultation allows usually unheard voices to speak through the process and the production of exhibition. For Malik and Tawardos (1996), “[r]eal reciprocity cannot be achieved unless the powers of selection, critical appraisal, contextualization and ownership are at least shared between the so-called centre and periphery” (p.119).

More than ten years after the controversies mentioned above, community consultation and contribution to exhibitions shyly begins to be more widely practiced, as can be stated by the increasing number of post-collaborative exhibition analyses published (Court (1999), Arnoldi, Mullen Kreamer, and Mason (2001), Vitali and Secord (2001), Conaty and Carter (unpublished paper)). An important book (Peers and Brown, 2003) was recently published about museums relationships with source communities, can be considered as a matching piece, ten years after, of Karp et al.’s (1992) Museum communities. The next three examples show that the reflection is also taking place when permanent exhibits are created in major museums, institutions not
always reputed to be the most innovative (Lavine, 1992, p.138). In their case study, Vitali and Secord (2001) present their experience at the Royal Ontario Museum. The museum was asked to reorganize some of its galleries by communities who wanted to be represented in the museum through their culture’s art. The latter were consulted on cultural and conceptual questions as well as were given the opportunity to give their opinion on the catalogue and on the advertisement processes.

Our story in our words (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper) is an account of the collaborative process of a permanent First Nations exhibit at the Glenbow Museum. For the first time representatives of First Nations communities were included as full partners in the development of an exhibit in this museum. This paper examines how the two cultures encountered, found a consensus and challenged as well as redefined goals, process and content of the exhibition in project together in the respect of these communities’ spirituality.

In Washington (D.C.), another exhibition was successful, African Voices\(^\text{14}\) which title is emblematic of the philosophy behind its creation: “Developed with substantial community involvement, this exhibition expresses a broad consensus about how to represent Africa and the African Diaspora to Americans” (Arnoldi, Mullen Kreamer, and Mason, 2001, p.16).

Peers and Brown (2003) show that “[i]n order to address the challenges raised by critics, many museums, especially in North America and the Pacific, have generated institutional documents and policies that encapsulate the guidelines of (...) national strategy documents [such as the task force mentioned above] and recognise indigenous interests” (p.12-13). They not only reduce the possibilities for misunderstandings and ensure museums’ engagement to respect the wishes of the community involved (ibid.) In Europe the debate is also taking place, (particularly

\(^\text{14}\) Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, permanent exhibit opened in 1999.
examined in Great Britain, Hooper-Greenhill (1997), Peirson Jones (1992)) but more sparsely, on very different grounds than in North America, and where curators still have the primary role. Post-colonial Europe is multicultural and museums, as reflections of the societies which create them, should be representative of these societies’ multiple communities. Peter Mark (2000) gives his impressions in an article about the new section at the Louvre that is devoted to African, Oceanic, and Native American art: “In short, this is an elegant exhibition that presents objects mostly of very high quality, using a purely aesthetic approach” (p.8) but there is no mention of communities consultation. Peers and Brown (2003) remark that “(...) while there has been a long tradition of social history curators developing consultation procedures with diaspora communities [in the United Kingdom], curatorial authority and institutional procedures have not shifted much at all as far as overseas communities are concerned” (p.4). I wish to be optimist for our Swiss Museums of Ethnography (Geneva and Neuchâtel in particular) which initiated promising projects for themselves as forums of cultures (Aubert, 2000).

Compared with these examples of cooperative exhibition developments with cultural communities, the case of *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony* occupies a particular position. First, the reflection taking place in this thesis started only once the exhibition project was launched and the roles distributed. Secondly, the setting welcoming this exhibition, rather conservative regarding the different issues discussed in this chapter, is a private collection of Chinese art. Whereas all the examples cited were concerned with post-colonial situations, China was not colonized by European countries. It was nevertheless subjected to their imperialism, a situation to a certain extent similar to colonization which explains the mentioned literature’s relevance for this case. And thirdly, the exhibition was not meant to be representative of a Chinese

15 In 2001, a “Musée des Cultures” which should have replaced the actual “Musée d’Ethnographie” was refused by vote by Geneva’s citizen, a project judged as too expensive.
community, but to present to a Western public the art of the collection lender’s family.
Moreover, the latter contributed to the process without having been explicitly acknowledged at first as a co-curator.

Behind the scenes studies

The expression “behind the scenes” was manifested to me by Sharon J. Macdonald (2002)’s *Behind the scenes at the Science Museum*. Moreover, she kindly indicated to me O’Hanlon (1993) and Bouquet’s (1998) works. Several other articles and books present the process of an exhibition’s realization. They are conducted in Science museums (Bouquet (1998), Macdonald (2002)), in a Botanic Garden (Roberts, 1997) or in museums of anthropology (Veron and Levasseur (1983), O’Hanlon (1993), Fusco (1995), Conaty and Carter (unpublished paper)), and in an art museum (Knutson, 2002).

Three of these research studies were conducted in anthropology museums. However, Veron and Levasseur (1983), doing a semiotic analysis of an exhibition about French holidays and its reception by the audience, did not look at the creation of this exhibition. Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s (Fusco, 1995) article presenting the theoretical foundations of their project, does introduce their personal experience during its preparation, as well as its reception by audiences but the exhibit in itself was created as a critique of Western concepts and was intended to shake taken for granted assumptions about the museum. Michael O’Hanlon’s (1993) work is a reference for studies of the exhibition process: he realized in 1993 an exhibition whose catalogue comprised a record of its creation with all the cross-cultural particularities the author

---

16 Research mentioned earlier and described to some extent on p.25.
17 Intended to create a satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic primitive Other, they built a travelling live exhibit in which they performed the role of noble savages locked in a cage.
encountered while collecting Wahgi material culture. Nevertheless, his observations were limited to the period of time preceding the opening.

As mentioned above, other studies took place in a science museum (Macdonald (2002)), in a natural history museum (Bouquet, 1998) and in a botanical garden (Roberts, 1997). Lisa Roberts (1997) did an ethnography of the creation of a single exhibit in order to explore the assumptions and the debates about education and its role in museums. Mary Bouquet (1998), as a guest curator in Netherlands, presents in her article the difficulties she met during the realization of an exhibition, as an invitee presenting new ideas in a host institution, and the resistance she encountered by the local team. However, since she did not interview her colleagues, the reader gets a one-sided point of view. Furthermore, she did not study visitors’ reactions.

Two of the most recent research studies are Macdonald’s (2002) and Knutson’s (2002) work. In the thorough Behind the scenes at the Science Museum (Macdonald, 2002), Macdonald does an ethnography of a particular exhibition, from the project stage to visitors’ response. Macdonald was not part of the curators’ team, she was introduced in the museum as an ethnographer. Karen Knutson did the same type of research as she was involved as a researcher in the preparation of an exhibition in an art museum. She examined the mounting of the exhibition when work on the catalogue was ending. “With this study, I am interested in exploring more closely how art museum professionals deal with the tension between providing a challenging curatorial message and inviting and accommodating diverse audiences” (Knutson, 2002, p.8), a problematic which does not directly touch science museums as their goal is explicitly educational while “[a]rt curators are active and central participants in the academic discipline” (ibid.). During thirteen months, she attended meetings, conducted semi-structured
interviews and made observations, gathering all sorts of artefacts related to the exhibition (i.e. catalogue, memos, media releases, layout plans, etc.).

In this thesis, my work differs from the research mentioned above in several ways. First and foremost, the scope of my research spreads from the origin of the exhibition idea to its closure, including curators, authors, designers, security attendants and visitors. And at last, as an insider to the exhibition project, I do an autoethnography.
CHAPTER 2 RESEARCH SETTING OR WHEN A CHINESE COLLECTION MEETS A SWISS COLLECTION OF CHINESE ART

(...) all authoritative collections, whether made in the name of art or science, are historically contingent and subject to local reappropriation. (James Clifford, 1988, p.10)

Introduction: Geneva, its communities, its cultural life

Thanks to immigrants coming from other parts of Switzerland, from Europe and from the rest of the world, Geneva is an international and multicultural city. Immigration is almost a tradition for Geneva. After welcoming the Reformation's protestant refugees in the 16th century, the city saw the arrival of several other immigrants waves. The number of foreigners reached 43% of Geneva's population in 1913 (Necker, 1995, p.21).

Furthermore, immigration plays an essential role for Geneva's demography. In 1950, Geneva counted 200,000 inhabitants, today its population is over 400,000, and according to the most recent official records, 37.6% of its residents hold foreign passports. Unofficially however, this proportion is over 50% if recently naturalized people, people holding dual nationalities, and clandestine immigrants are taken into account (Necker, 2000, p.12).

According to Necker (1995, p.24), diversity increased after the Second World War for two reasons: the first is the establishment of many of the most pre-eminent international organisations (governmental and non-governmental). Today, United Nations, International Labour Organisation, International Trade Centre - UNCTAD/GATT, World Trade Organisation, World Health Organisation, International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nation's Higher Committee for Refugees, European Centre for Nuclear Research, among others, have their head office in Geneva. Their presence in the city stimulated the installation of
international private societies and multinational companies. These organisations employ 35,000 foreigners. The second reason is the post-war economic growth that occurred in Western Europe and in Geneva in particular, coupled with the multiplication of conflicts and the impoverishment of numerous other countries.

Several field studies (cited in Necker, 1995, 2000) show that this diversity is particularly well accepted by Geneva’s inhabitants. The city’s history, the percentage of foreign passport holders, and the wide socio-economic diversity of its residents (ranking from higher officials in the international organisations to refugees) created a real cross-cultural tolerance. Furthermore, the absence of ghettos, due to the city’s size, allows a faster assimilation in the dominant Genevan culture. Communication issues between these diverse cultures are solved, according to Necker (1995), thanks to diverse institutions (such as community centres and cultural associations) encouraging cross-cultural relationships and offering an opportunity for each to live within and develop their traditions.

Not the least is Geneva’s Museum of Ethnography, whose former Director is precisely Louis Necker, from whom I draw my information. Through its objects, books, pictures, films, and recordings, the Museum of Ethnography is the repository of the past’s memory and of the richness and creativity of the world’s peoples. The Museum

(...) is a place where cross-cultural communication occurs at a more profound level than the merely daily contacts, that is, at the level of the basic conceptions, religions, symbols, and arts. It is a place where men and women with multiple roots can rediscover their cultures, find their identity, gain pride in their identity and at the same time better understand others. (Necker, 1995, p.154-155, transl. Sophie Wirth Brentini)

The richness of the Museum of Ethnography’s collections taken as evidence, Geneva is the chest of numerous treasures coming from its relationships with the world. Through its traders and diplomats in charge of high posts in the management of French, English or
Chapter 2 – Research Setting

Netherlandish colonies; through its explorers and protestant missioners, Geneva has an abundance of collections whether in galleries, museums or in private collections. Many of these collections remain unknown; some are donated to local museums and only rarely shown to the public, while others are disseminated, as they did not find a warm welcome by Geneva’s institutions.

Paradoxically, non-Western cultures are only seldom shown in Geneva’s other main museums. Over the last three years, for example, two exhibitions were about ancient Egypt, two others about Japanese theatre costumes and ikebana, and two about Chinese contemporary art (ceramics and painting)¹⁸. They are more often given a voice through alternative organisations, such as private galleries and cultural associations interested in contemporary art.

History of the Baur Collection¹⁹

The Baur Collection was gathered thanks to a Swiss trader coming from Andelfingen (Zurich), who married Eugénie Duret from Geneva. He established his home in his wife’s hometown after more than twenty years spent abroad. This collection is thus a good representation of Geneva’s cultural diversity as presented by Necker (1995).

Switzerland has always been a country of emigration. It is especially true for the period spreading from 19th century to the First World War, when numerous Swiss left their homeland to find a career abroad. Some went to close countries, others further. They founded colonial trading posts, created model plantations and other industries.

Alfred Baur (1865-1951) was among the pioneers. After having completed studies in economics in Switzerland and in England, he was sent in 1884 by the Swiss company Volkart to

¹⁸ See “archives” on http://mah.ville-ge.ch/
¹⁹ For this section, I draw upon Reverdin & Schneeberger (1989) and upon El-Wakil (1998).
its Colombo trading post (Sri Lanka, named at the time Ceylon). Eleven years later, he was hired there as a “mercantile assistant” (Reverdin & Schneeberger, 1989, p.14) by the Marinitsch Company, where he was associated with tea production and exportation. Owner for several years of a coconut palm plantation, he developed an organic manure which he commercialized under the appellation “Baur’s Special Coconut Manure” (p.8). The success of his enterprise incited him, in 1897, to start a manure company called “A. Baur, The Ceylon Manure Works”. Nine years later, he decided to go back to Switzerland, from where he continued to direct his company. Until the Second World War, his commercial activities continued to grow. With the war slowing down world trade, he devoted more and more time to his Chinese and Japanese art collection.

With a specialist’s help, he classified it, and began to show it to his close friends and temporarily in an exhibition open to the Genevan public. Just before his death, he donated his collection to the Alfred and Eugénie Baur-Duret Collections’ Foundation and acquired a beautiful mansion in Geneva: “his wish was not to create a museum but to receive art-lovers in a private residence, both during his lifetime and after his death” (Reverdin & Schneeberger, 1989, p.14).

In order to reconstitute the collection’s history Reverdin and Schneeberger (1989) draw upon Alfred Baur’s correspondence with his art dealers and discoverers. Alfred Baur worked principally with two connoisseurs. During the early years, the objects were mostly purchased through T.B. Blow. This collector and art dealer, then established in Japan, played a preponderant role in the formation of Baur’s collection until 1924 (p.22). At first Baur bought small Japanese artefacts such as netsuke, sword-guards, Satsuma ceramics, lacquer boxes, some
prints as well as Chinese snuff bottles and jades. These “curios” were very fashionable and highly representative of contemporary taste.

In 1924, Blow introduced Baur to the Japanese dealer-expert Kumasaku Tomita, who had already worked for some of the most renowned European collectors. Baur met him in Japan. Relying on Tomita’s advice A. Baur brought back about 700 objects. Tomita wrote to him later: “you have accepted my judgment on all these objects (...) The dealers and experts have complimented you on your exceptional taste” (p.71). This was the beginning of a 25-year collaboration.

After the interruption of the War, the collection continued to grow. Baur seemed to have chosen, well from the beginning, to limit himself to small-sized objects which would not take too much room in his Tournay mansion (near Geneva). This wish was also expressed when, a little later, he started his Chinese ceramics collection, fixing at once the dimensions not to be exceeded for pieces entering the collection. Between 1924 and 1928, Tomita stayed several times in Geneva to catalogue Baur’s collection. The acquisitions came from Japan but were also bought from European dealers. Tomita endeavoured to warn Baur about them: “[they] have a poor knowledge of oriental art” (p. 72). Some dealers in turn attacked Tomita’s “special Japanese taste” (ibid.). Tomita often criticized these “English collectors who create the taste” and these “experts who consider themselves authorities (...) Chinese experts know better their ceramics than European experts” (p.29).

1928 marks an important turn for the Baur collection. Alfred Baur found a new interest in Chinese ceramics which rapidly became his major preoccupation. It was only with Chinese ceramics that Tomita and Baur decided to collect a coherent set of pieces which would show the most varied aspects of this art from the Tang to the Qing dynasties (p.73).
The following decade was the most rewarding for all types of objects Baur chose to collect. From an aesthetic point of view, Baur was certainly appreciative of beautiful craftsmanship, preferring technical perfection to the more archaic styles. He liked the simplicity and the purity of monochrome ceramics, avoiding over-decorated pieces (Reverdin & Schneeberger, 1989, p.28).

As the Baur Collection was beginning to open up a little to the public, the international situation was deteriorating both politically and economically. More and more preoccupied by his business, Baur announced that he would stop collecting for six months, but added that there might be exceptions: after the success of his exhibition of Japanese prints in Zurich, he purchased some more, until 1939, when acquisitions stopped completely. Communications and finances were altered until 1947. Since the 'thirties, the relationship between the collector and the art dealer became more and more intimate. They came to congratulate themselves comparing their collection to English collections. According to Tomita, Baur’s collection was one of the best in the world’s Japanese art collections and one of the best in Europe for Chinese ceramics. Both Tomita and Baur hoped to constitute a perfect collection which one day would be appreciated as such and presented to the Genevan public. Thus, in 1944, Alfred Baur decided to constitute a foundation. Its deed stipulates that no piece is allowed to be sold or exchanged, and that only K. Tomita is entitled to propose new acquisitions (p.31). “A catalogue will be published after my death,” Baur wrote to Tomita, “based on the model of your catalogue of the great exhibition of Japanese art in London in 1915, but with colour illustrations... Your name will of course be displayed prominently in it” (p.31-32). In a letter to him, the Japanese art dealer expressed his enthusiasm and gratitude.
At the end of the forties, the major preoccupation of the collector was to find a setting that would suit the exhibition of his collection; a project that may appear in contradiction with his conviction that the finest objets d’art lose something of their spirit when shown in a museum (p.34). His concern was to find a place providing enough intimacy to fully appreciate them. F. Schneeberger (Reverdin & Schneeberger, 1989) was to learn later that Baur did not want it to be called a museum\(^2\) (p.35). His wish was to give a personal touch to each artefact, to make it live in an environment that would help the visitor to appreciate it more (p.35).

**Physical settings**

The mansion which houses the Baur Collection (fig.1) was built in 1898 for Madam Marie Micheli-Ador in a district of Geneva called “Les Tranchées”. Started in 1858, it is an urban residential project developed on the former fortifications surrounding the south side of the city, allowing it to grow out of its own limits. “Les Tranchées”’ rectilinear plan is animated by green squares and treed streets forming quadrilateral blocks of different sizes.

The residence, part of a four-residence block, was originally conceived to welcome an affluent family and its numerous domestic staff during the winter, while they spent the summers at the “Château du Crest” in Jussy (Geneva). After Marie Micheli-Ador’s death, the house was rented, first to accommodate a consulate, then some of the Red Cross offices, to be finally acquired by Alfred Baur.

Micheli-Ador’s was the largest and the most elaborate residence of the block. With an angle tower and a decorated veranda, it featured two separate entrances, one for the host, the other, on the side of the house, for trade’s people. Its architecture is typical of its epoch, inspired

\(^2\) Mrs. Krick, the incoming Curator at the Baur Collection, engaged procedures and fulfilled to rename the Baur Collection as: Baur Collection, Museum of Far East Arts. The possible changes that could ensue of this new name are yet to be witnessed.
by Mansart style and bearing touches of Louis XVI vocabulary. On the whole, the edifice is rather eclectic. Volumes and plastic effects are animated in order to endow it with power and character. In these days, mouldings and projections meant splendour (El-Wakil, 1998, p.23). Inside, the ceremonial stairs developed at its centre, in a Louis XV style, following the epoch’s taste and the financial capacities of Marie Micheli-Ador (p.30).

Its refined architecture and its dimensions were perfectly adapted to its future role as a setting for Baur’s objects. Its private character would allow an exhibition space where visitors would feel at home. Furthermore, the area was and is still today the home of several of Geneva’s museums and art galleries. Today, almost nothing remains of its original inner décor, largely simplified or replaced during the ‘sixties.

The first transformation of the Micheli-Ador residence into a museum was entrusted to the Genevan architects Pierre-Louis Tréand father and son, as early as 1951. After having studied European museological practices the Tréands planned only light transformations. The first floor consisted of five exhibition rooms, the second floor (fig.2), three plus two offices, and the third floor, three exhibition rooms and two terraces. Chinese art would be exhibited on the first two floors, as for Japanese art, it would occupy the third. To gain space the original stair from the second to the third floor was replaced by a red Japanese style stair and the central cupola was replaced by a light diffuser.

However, the Baur Foundation delayed the transformation for about ten years. Only after Eugénie Baur’s death did the project begin. However, in ten years things evolve in museology. Schneeberger, newly installed as a curator, travelled around Europe to visit Asian art collections. In February 1963, he visited, accompanied by the art historian and designer Christoph Bernoulli, the Cernuschi, Carnavalet and Guimet museums. Very well informed
about recent museologic realizations, they influenced the Baur Foundation council toward a more modern aesthetic, without having recourse to the “clinical” conceptions of the epoch’s museums (El-Wakil, 1998, p.45). Their aim was that “one could see, one day, these objects as one discovers a collection in its owner’s home” (p.48). To create precious salons, an orientalist and velvety atmosphere (avoiding nevertheless the chinoiserie cabinet style of 18th century), and to contextualize the art objects appeared as the antidote to the museum as mausoleum or to the “shiny clinic” rejected by Schneeberger. Their process matched the international movement of “period rooms” (p.48). A contrast was created between the Chinese art floors and the one devoted to Japan.

Soon after its inauguration in 1964, however, the need for an extension was already felt: Alfred Baur’s wish to leave his collection such as it was, considering it as an achieved work, would lead the museum to a sclerosis. The Foundation council decided to accept donations (identified as such when exhibited) and temporary exhibitions. A solution had to be found as the façades of the building could not be touched. The only possibility was excavation. The work started only in 1995: a new oblong room was created under the garden and two new levels under it became the “compactus” (storage stacks). At its reopening in 1997, the museum counted in its new basement a class room, and four temporary exhibition rooms (fig.3,4). They were covered with sumptuous materials: the floors were paved in pale Simplon marble with a purple border, wall panelling was of dark cherry and pale maple. Showcases and lighting were ordered from renowned European specialist companies. These rooms, made accessible by a staircase and a lift, welcomed The Pavilion of Marital Harmony in May 2002.21

---

21 See appendix V for a floor plan.
The Pavilion of Marital Harmony or The Xiehanglou Collection

The Xiehanglou collection, the private collection that was temporarily lent to the Baur Collection for The Pavilion of Marital Harmony exhibition, had so far remained hidden in a chest. Heir of his parents’ important collection of Chinese art, the lender wished to live amongst its treasures, in a way like Chinese literati (gentleman connoisseurs) traditionally did. Thus, contrary to a European collection which is supposed to be exhibited and shown, hung on walls or exhibited in glass boxes, the pieces where carefully stored/hidden, and shown only to a small privileged group of the owner’s intimates. This collection continued therefore to live and evolve in the family who gathered it.

The collectors

Tsen Tsonming (Zeng Zhongming, 1896-1939) and Fan Tchunpi (Fang Junbi, 1898-1986) were born in Fuzhou (Fujian) at the end of 19th century. The wealthy Fan family of tea traders, and the humbler Tsen family were two traditional extended families, in which several generations lived together following Confucian values. The two families were already related by the wedding of Fan Tchunpi’s older brother and Tsen Tsonming’s older sister. Their elder sisters and brothers were part of the progressive youth engaged in the revolutionary movement that would provoke the Qing dynasty’s (1644-1911) fall, while their own parents were important conservative personalities of Fuzhou. This engagement brought the siblings first to Japan (as from 1903), where they could meet Western culture (seen then as the only remedy to China’s backwardness) and where they joined Sun Yatsen’s Republican movement.

At the time, China was under the rule of the Manchu dynasty of the Qing Empire. After two and a half centuries, the empire was in decline and exploited for almost a century by Western powers. China desperately attempted to recreate an identity for itself. Even though the
Qing imperial government started reforming education, administration, army and economy (following the example of Japan's 1868 Meiji Restoration), it was unable to counter Western imperialism. Western powers' intrusion and their economic control rapidly increased. Popular agitation grew and resulted in an organized opposition to the imperial government as soon as 1910.

Unfortunately, the Republican system put in place after the Qing dynasty's fall in 1911 did not bring peace to China. Japanese imperialism had progressed since the end of 19th century, resulting in multiple internal conflicts and ending up in an armed conflict (1937-1945). In China, power and greed between warlords grew and drained the country. Political dissensions broke the Nationalist Party (Guomindang) in two parts. And at last, tired with Guomindang's discord, more and more people entered the Communist Party which won power in 1949 after years of civil war. These few lines are hardly sufficient to explain in its whole an extremely complex historical situation, nevertheless they suffice to help the reader understand Tsen Tsonming and Fan Tchunpi's experience.

After the Qing dynasty's fall in 1911, the new President Yuan Shikai, anxious to get rid of potentially troublesome revolutionaries, allocated them generous scholarships to study abroad. Along with Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) and his wife Chen Bijun (1891-1959), former revolutionary comrades, Tsen Tsonming and Fan Tchunpi's elder sisters Fan Tchunying and Tsen Sing decided to go to France. The scholarships being generous, the students could each afford to be accompanied by a younger sibling. When the small group left China in 1912, Tsen Tsonming and Fan Tchunpi were respectively 16 and 14 years old.

They settled in Montargis, near Paris, joining the anarchist Li Shizeng and the eminent educator Cai Yuanpei. Fan Tchunpi and Tsen Tsonming enrolled at a French high school. In
parallel, they were taught Chinese history and classics from Wang Jingwei and Cai Yuanpei. Thus, they not only managed to retain their fluency in Chinese but also to acquire the two essential accomplishments of the literati tradition: “to express one’s mood in a classical poem and to write it down with a fine hand of calligraphy” (Tsen, 2002, p.18).

At the end of 1916, Fan Tchunpi decided not to finish high school and went to Paris by herself, in the middle of the war, to enter the Académie Julian to learn painting. There, she found the proper preparation for the Fine Arts School. Three months later, the situation in Paris having deteriorated, Fan Tchunpi returned to Bordeaux, where, the following fall, she was admitted directly into the upper classes of its Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Having received her diploma from Bordeaux in 1920, she was admitted the same year to the class of Ferdinand Humbert (1842-1934) at the prestigious Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (Wirth Brentini, 2002, p.51).

As for Tsen Tsonming, he had received a degree in chemistry from the University of Bordeaux. He enrolled in the Institut Pasteur of Paris as a research fellow in 1920. He soon realized, however, that “literature was closer to his heart and more suited to his temperament” (Tsen, 2002, p.20). He chose the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lyon to do his doctoral thesis on classical Chinese poetry (completed in 1924). In parallel, he also was hired in 1921 as the secretary general of the Institut Franco-chinois, an overseas extension of the University of Guangdong newly established in Lyon. Engaged since 1917, Fan Tchunpi and Tsen Tsonming married near Annecy on September 4th, 1922 (fig.5).

In 1925, like many of their compatriots studying abroad, both were offered and accepted teaching appointments in Guangzhou. While one year later Tsen Tsonming entered politics in the national government, Fan Tchunpi decided to return to Paris to pursue her career as an
artist. There, she rented a studio and became a member of the circle of Albert Besnard (1849-1934). She also exhibited some of her works for a few years in the Salons of Paris. In 1930, she gave up her artist’s life in Paris to settle in China near Tsen Tsonming. Once back home, she gave Tsen Tsonming three sons in three years. He decided to build a “modern house with horizontal lines in Shanghai” (Tsen, 2002, p.25). He also started a collection of art. As for Fan Tchunpi, her art saw an interesting turn: she began to work with Chinese brush, ink and paper.

At the time, Tsen Tsonming was involved in Wang Jingwei’s coalition against Chiang Kaishek. In 1927, the Guomindang had split into two factional governments – one under Wang Jingwei in Hankou, one under Chiang Kaishek in Nanjing. Until his tragic death, Tsen Tsonming occupied several distinguished positions, following and seconding all of Wang Jingwei’s acts.

Their life during the thirties was as troubled as China’s history: the growing conflicts with Japan, with the Communists and inside the Nationalist government itself, forced the family to move several times, following the government’s displacements. In 1939 a drama occurred. For two years China had been at war with Japan and no resolution to the conflict was in sight. Wang Jingwei, in despair, tried to negotiate a peace with the Japanese enemy, in order to save China. With his wife Chen Bijun, the Tsens, and a small retinue, he clandestinely flew from Chongqing to Hanoi. Several weeks after their arrival, to impeach this negotiation, an assassination squad was sent probably to murder Wang Jingwei, but mortally wounded Tsen Tsonming.

Mother of three boys, Fan Tchunpi, 41, became a widow. Settled in Nanjing, she continued to paint. She started to exhibit her art audaciously when most of their friends and colleagues were imprisoned for treason.
In 1949, she left China for Paris and from then on frequently exhibited in Europe, and all over the world. Her travels were a rich inspirational source. She returned to Asia several times during the fifties and sixties. In 1957, she left Europe for Boston where she settled with her eldest son.

Before her health deteriorated, she returned to China on several occasions, as soon as it "rejoined the world" (Tsen, 2002, p.34) in 1972. From 1983 on, Fan Tchunpi’s health declined. She held one last exhibition at the Musée Cernuschi in Paris in 1984, yet she was no longer able to live alone. She spent her last years with her son in Geneva, where she particularly appreciated spending some time at the Baur Collection, a place, according to her, where East meets West.

Tsen Tsonming and Fan Tchunpi are a beautiful example of their epoch. While they were open to the world and working to create a modern China, they were also the last generation to have their roots in classical Chinese civilization.

The Collection

As was traditional in China, Tsen Tsonming chose a name for his collection. "He took from the Book of Odes the image of a pair of birds flying xiehang - in tandem - and called his collection Xiehanglou, the Pavilion of Marital Harmony" (Tsen, 2002, p.26).

In Europe he had already started to manifest his interest in ancient and fine artefacts. He was then drawn to ancient books, Gallé and Lalique vases along with other luxury goods, trusting what pleased his eyes. Back in China, however, he had a scheme and went for advice to his friend the artist and collector Wu Hufan (1894-1968). "[He] passed to Tsonming a simple dictum: don’t collect according to your taste; cultivate your taste through collecting" (Tsen, 2002, p.26).
Beside politics, Tsen Tsonming had been and remained principally a literary man: writer, poet, and translator, his work was published several times. It included a history of Chinese poetry, an essay on French romanticism, and another one on arts and sciences, among others. He was thus naturally drawn to follow Wu Hufan’s advice: to avoid Western collections’ approaches to Chinese art (generally focused on bronzes and porcelains, c.f. Baur’s collection), and to draw upon the classical way of the literati, who made calligraphy and painting the core of their collections. Calligraphy surpassed painting, and ancient was greater than modern. Because of their accessibility, modern artworks outnumber the ancients in Xiehanglou, yet with time, Tsen Tsonming came upon some very fine ancient calligraphies and paintings. He worked with art dealers and directly with the artists; regrettably, there is a lack of documentation and acquisitions details and chronology remain mostly obscure.

Literati collections were not limited to calligraphy and painting: these arts of the brush would then lead to other treasures of the scholar’s studio, such as seals, ink stones, ink sticks, brush pots, wrist rests, censers, fans and other curios. Among these, carved seals were Tsen’s favourites. He had seals carved by masters on rare stones for himself, for Fan Tchunpi and for the collection: in China, paintings and calligraphies were stamped with their author’s seal, but also with their successive owners.

In time, Tsonming came to appreciate what Wu Hufan had said: the taste of a connoisseur comes from much contemplation, poring over and physical stroking of an art object in the privacy of one’s study. His collection began to take on a kind of airy elegance quite detached from wealth. (Tsen, 2002, p.26)

Unfortunately, when Tsen Tsonming began his collection, barely ten years were left for him before his assassination in Hanoi in 1939. In ten years though he had been able to acquire quite a fine collection: ten ancient calligraphies and paintings, nineteen modern calligraphies
and paintings, and twenty-one objects for the scholar’s desk were published in our catalogue (Fan Tchunpi’s works aside). However, we did not publish the whole collection.

After his death, Fan Tchunpi did not follow his path, she did nevertheless acquire and receive artworks on occasions, when she met colleague artists. Fan Tchunpi and Tsen Tsonming moved in the *milieu* of artists, writers, thinkers and politicians which made up the bourgeoisie of the new Republic. Many of their friends were famous artists, for example the Gao brothers of the Lingnan school, Sun Fuxi, Zhang Daqian, Zhao Shao’ang, Zao Wou-ki, and Munakata Shiko. She painted their portraits, and they presented their paintings to her.

She was thus active and integrated in the Chinese artistic *milieu*. Yet, until her husband’s death, she did not hold any exhibition: she absolutely refused to take advantage of her husband’s official position to gain personal reputation.

While in France, she was active in her own way: eager to learn she went to renowned teachers and schools, and took part in Parisian artistic life, presenting some of her works in the Salons. These institutions however, were at the time severely criticized by the avant-garde. Though Fan Tchunpi did not avoid the company of artists, in China as well as in France, she kept aloof from contemporary art movements.

In France, she was immersed in the great Western pictorial tradition grounded on anatomy, perspective, drawing and oil painting, in other words: a tired academism. Back in China she learned Chinese pictorial techniques with the masters of Lingnan school (Guangzhou), the Gao brothers. However, she neither abandoned Western realism, nor oil painting, and never painted after the Chinese classical masters’ model. From this dual experience, Fan Tchunpi developed her style outside the mainstream, yet somehow managing to incorporate the spirit of two very different traditions. Approached in a superficial way, her art
appears to some of us as outdated, déjà vu, missing the sharpness of contemporary Western art. As for traditionalists, they will certainly judge her art as non Chinese, lacking in the classic rules of Chinese art. Non-conforming, Fan Tchunpi gives us an opportunity to reflect on the canons of art.

The protagonists

**Mr. Frank Dunand**

Coming from one of Geneva’s elite families, Mr. Dunand has something of the “good Calvinist protestant” about him. First a cellist in the regional orchestra, he came to art history later in his life when he was a family man: he obtained two bachelor’s degrees from the University of Geneva, one in Japanese Literature and Civilisation, the other in Art History. Thus, he became the Baur Collection’s curator as a second career. Today retired, he was responsible for curating the collection and its library, and offered Chinese and Japanese art courses at the University of Geneva.

Mr. Dunand’s course “Introduction to Chinese Art” (given alternately with an “Introduction to Japanese Art”) was a lecture-only class. The course was chronologically organized, to introduce the students to Chinese aesthetics through iconographic tools and an armada of slides. The main concern of the teacher was to transmit factually correct information. He was successful in presenting a corpus of Chinese artwork and the rudiments of Chinese art reading. However, few classes were dedicated to post Ming art. Nineteenth and twentieth

---

22 NB The three portraits presented in the following paragraphs are based on personal and professional relationships and represent the author’s perspective and reflection.
century art were simply omitted, there was no open reflection on Eurocentrism, and no, or few, introductions to Chinese epistemologies of art history.\textsuperscript{23}

Mr. Dunand retired at the end of 2002. In 2000, when the exhibition was voted for, Mr. Dunand knew that the two other exhibitions in 2002 would be travelling exhibits. Thus, \textit{The Pavilion of Marital Harmony} was going to be his last major exhibition. He wholeheartedly welcomed the project. His role would be that of the editor, responsible for his writers. As an experienced curator, he was more professionally than emotionally involved in the project.

\textbf{Mr. Chunglu Tsen}

Mr. Tsen grew up in China in an erudite family of the Republican elite.\textsuperscript{24} He lost his father at a young age and was raised by his strong-tempered mother. In 1949, his family fled from China and settled in Paris. He later studied in the United States and taught higher education courses. Once China reopened its walls, he found a teaching position in Beijing. He has lived in Geneva with his wife for the last two decades, and is now retired from a United Nations position as interpreter.

Chinese culture and arts were transmitted to him by his mother and her cultivated milieu, who taught him the traditional basis of Chinese scholarship. Mr. Tsen's approach to art history is an empiricism tinted with spirituality and lyricism.

Mr. Tsen is thus a cosmopolitan humanist, very curious about diverse fields and about people of interest to him. As his mother's\textsuperscript{23} son, Mr. Tsen's identity oscillates between China, North America and Europe and can be interpreted in terms of hybridity or crossover, where difference is "to be used strategically by incorporating other influences" (jagodzinski, 1999, \textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Whereas central in anthropology, these reflections are only seldom addressed in art history.
\textsuperscript{24} See Chapter 2, p.39 and fol.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Chapte r 2 – Research Setting

p.311). As had his mother, he has had the “freedom to move across borders and boundaries so as to pursue new senses of the self and Other” (Jagodziński, 1999, p.312). As such, he speaks three languages\textsuperscript{26}, he understands diverse epistemologies, he has a sensibility to what might represent a misunderstanding to the European public, and knows what is or is not correct to say regarding China and Chinese. At times, his artistic epistemology made him doubt our European practice. He was curious about our connoisseurship but tested us as well; however, as an insider, he also had precise ideas that we could not always fulfil as outsiders. At first the lender of the collection, Mr. Tsen got more and more involved in the project to the point where he would be responsible for the main text in the catalogue. Showing his family and his parents’ oeuvre for the first time, the project took a strong emotional value for Mr. Tsen.

Mrs Sophie Wirth Brentini

I was born in Geneva of a Genevan occupational therapist mother and a Belgian musician father. On my mother’s side we come from two privileged Swiss families who, at the turn of last century, had experiences abroad (Egypt and Greece) and participated in colonial trade. On my father’s side, family secrecy erased most of our past. This Belgian family, traumatised by the Second World War, had also an indirect link to colonialism: my grandfather worked for a Belgian company trading African uranium. The existence of diverse cultures was thus something obvious and was often tinged with exploration dreams in my family.

Having understood, through my background, that erudition was the key to paradise, I entered the University of Geneva to study art history, Chinese and photography. Well anchored in positivism and empiricism, the Art History Department’s curriculum is based on connoisseurship, an approach going back to Vasari and to Winckelmann (amongst others), and

\textsuperscript{26} Cantonese (which is his mother tongue), English (he studied in English) and French (he lived in France and lives in Geneva).
we were taught in this tradition. Apart from Mr. Dunand’s Chinese and Japanese art classes there were no introduction to non-Western arts, and no introduction to critical theory. We were trained to obliterate ourselves, to silence our own voices (Richardson, 2000, p.925) in order to do our research in a most unbiased and rigorous way.

As minor branch I chose Chinese, in which three-year curriculum\textsuperscript{27} included modern and classical Chinese, history and culture of China, a choice that allowed me to spend two months in China in 1994. The Department of Chinese initiated me to another culture and to cross-cultural questions. The department’s professors were passionate and deeply involved in Chinese culture. Seven on eight of my professors were European, and all of them had spent several years in China during their career.

After my bachelor’s degree (1999), Mr. Dunand and Mr. Tsen hired me as a guest curator on \textit{The Pavilion of Marital Harmony}. The exhibition being planned two years ahead\textsuperscript{28}, we decided with my husband to spend one year abroad in the meantime. We left Geneva in August 2000 for Vancouver on a search for new experiences. I enrolled in a Master of Art in Art Education program at UBC. In Vancouver, I discovered different research methodologies which led me toward a reconsideration of my work as a Chinese art historian and to start to find answers to haunting questions I had in the back of my mind for several years: “What allows me as a European to speak in another culture’s name, what can I bring to Chinese art historiography?”. It led me to a “border consciousness” (Gomez-Peña quoted in Garber, 1995, p.223) and to a self positioning.

\textsuperscript{27} A bachelor’s degree in Switzerland lasts four years completed by a thesis and is composed of a major branch (4 years) and of two minor branches (2 and 3 years).

\textsuperscript{28} The project was voted for in February 2000 (see Chapter 3) and was planned for March 2002.
Thus, I led the two projects in parallel, but when I began to work on the exhibition project I had not the benefit of the theoretical knowledge that I gained through my studies at UBC. As my first professional experience, this exhibition project had a primordial importance for me, I dedicated to it all my enthusiasm and energy. The Pavilion of Marital Harmony will remain a particular adventure, even more so that I completed this edifying experience through an introspection.

Conclusion

As shown in this chapter, the context of our subject is a blend and an overlapping of epochs and cultures, of generations and personalities. An exhibition of a Chinese collection of Chinese art was mounted through a transcultural collaboration in a particular place created by a Swiss collector of Asian art.

The Baur Collection being a private collection of Asian art, its goals and processes are not those of an art gallery nor of an anthropological museum or collection. Gathered by Alfred Baur for the sake of its artistic value, this collection’s curriculum is dedicated to research and beauty appreciation by an erudite and enlightened public, more than to a larger public and its learning. Thus, fundamentally, the Baur Collection is not related to questions of community representation, and the debate occurring during the past two decades in museum studies about communities consultation and the representation of non-Western cultures takes particular colours in the context examined in this thesis.

The Swiss and the Chinese collections of art meet in their collectors’ love of beauty as well as in the fact that they both belonged to an elite who considered art as proper to erudite elites. They met through the unusual collaboration between the Baur Collection’s curator, a guest curator and Mr. Tsen, lender of the Chinese collection and Dr. Tsen and Madame Fan’s
son. Chinese and Swiss cultures met to mount a temporary exhibition, an experience which revealed itself enriching and edifying.
Part 2: A Narrative
CHAPTER 3 GENESIS OF A PROJECT

He will take home a couple of such eighty-cent treasures, full of insect holes, smudgy, smeared, and crinkled up like an old woman’s face. Only at night, after locking the door to his room, will he savor the pleasures of his modest purchases, handling them over and over again. After numbering them, he will carefully press his seal on them, then put them in a large cedar chest. This bit of exertion will send him to bed, happily weary and satisfied. Even his world of dreams will be quaintly ancient. (Lao She; Attachment, quoted in Chow, 2001, p.291-292)

After a winter spent working on a tentative comparison between Renaissance humanist artists and Chinese literati, I had been forced to admit that this subject would lead me into dangerous and very difficult research areas: it meant the perfect connoisseurship of the two worlds studied and the research of a possible relationship between them (i.e. through commerce). I chose another topic of interest: Republican China. This historical period had occupied my time for three courses the year before, and I had become somewhat addicted to it. I was fascinated with its agitation, with its cross-cultural issues and with the social and cultural changes which occurred at the beginning of last century. I had however one major issue: defining a possible topic and research question that would be manageable as a bachelor rather than as a doctoral thesis.

May 1998

Let’s go to the library. Thrilled to discover interesting titles. Spending hours looking for books ... and reproductions to actually see the art. Absolutely frustrated when the library catalogue sent back a negative answer.

Looking for advice, I went to see my ... advisor (then Mr. Dunand):

Mr. Dunand (running around his office, replacing a book on its shelf, answering the telephone): How are you? Good? How can I help you?
Sophie: Well, I am still looking for a thesis subject... I am interested in Republican China's painting; I found some documents about several artists and I thought I could do something with Lin Fengmian or Xu Beihong, yet I need a purpose... I would also be interested in studying a woman painter, but I found like ... nothing ... Except the citation of one or two women painters' names.

Mr. Dunand (replacing files): I see, I see... a purpose ... Well, mmmm, oh it just comes up to my mind: a Chinese woman painter lived in Geneva... Do you know her? What was her name? Anyway, her son lives in Geneva; if you were interested, I could contact him. However, if I remember well, the artwork is not in Geneva.

Sophie (not believing what she hears, not daring to be confident in what she believes she hears): Am I Interested! This would just be perfect!

June 1998

I met Mr. Tsen for the first time in a tea room in Champel. Later I would learn that Madame Fan Tchunpi spent many tea times there. Champel is a particular district of Geneva. There, high Genevan society, international companies employees, along with an important Jewish community mingle. The feelings I have, related to this area of Geneva, are as diverse as its communities. They are a blend of desire, rejection, emotions and remembrances. Attraction to money and fine things, but a parallel rejection of it; emotions and remembrances, for my grandmother lives nearby and during my childhood I spent much time with her; and, when I was at school, I often went to play in Champel's "Parc Bertrand".

Facing Mr. Tsen I was embarrassed and impressed, but at the same time relieved to meet somebody human, appearing to be much simpler and more casual than I had imagined. I had
my interview sheet and a mini recorder ready to operate, yet totally unaware of what I was about to hear. Today, looking back at my interview sheet, I find it trifling and light. But the conversation we had became the basis, I realize, for Fan Tchunpi’s biography.

I had studied Republican China for a literature course, for a “mini-thesis” (a forty-five page term paper) translating Chinese texts about 1930’s Chinese photography, and for an exam about Republican China’s woodcuts. I bathed in the subject for several months and I had the impression of being in control, and of knowing: books were the reference. Facing Mr. Tsen, I was facing reality, or a reality. I was meeting a direct descendant of the epoch, and not the least. His family had been a direct protagonist of the times. When I raised themes fashionable in history books, it just seemed irrelevant to him: theory. Impatient, I wanted to build a history, to link his family with theory. I saw at once in his glance that I was out of line. I did not realize until recently that my attitude could not match his. I was a young ethnocentrist student basing myself on books ... And probably very self-confident in European rigour.

Back on the street after our meeting, I was in total exhilaration. I would have flown if I had been able to. In my hands lay a historical treasure... An untouched land where everything remained to be done.

I did not mean that nothing scholarly existed in China or that “one shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature [of China]” (T. Babington quoted in Egerer, 2001, p.15). Rather, I felt the excitement of the task to be realized and the opportunities the historical field’s vastness offered; also, I can relate this feeling with Egerer’s

---

29 I chose to write my undergraduate thesis on the portraits of Fan Tchunpi, that were replaced in a historical and biographical context.
30 The exhibition narrative spreading from Chapter 3 to Chapter 6 is punctuated with theoretical comments. These are signaled by the use of “Tahoma” typeface in order to clarify the difference between the two levels of narrative. Furthermore, the narrative is punctuated with direct extracts from the author’s journal (signaled by the use of “Bradley Hand TC” typeface), and with epistolary exchanges such as faxes (reproduced in brackets in “Times New Roman”), and emails (reproduced in brackets in “Arial”).
(2001) concept of exoticism: "[a] motivation of discovering the lost terrestrial paradise [which] provided a further incentive to the promise of treasures of gold" (p.17), gold being interpreted here as a metaphor for historical material. Paradise’s location generally referred both to a distant past (Garden of Eden, in the present case Republican China) and a distant future (a utopian other world, here a thesis to be written) (Rennie quoted in Egerer, 2001, p.17).

This did not preclude, however, the possibility of an earthly Paradise, located somewhere in the distant present. This conflation of the distant past/distant future with geographical distance in the present, some place at the outer rims of the known world, is a feature of the exotic expressed in texts from all ages. (Egerer, 2001, p.17)

Even though my reaction had a lot to do with passion, I realize that my reflexes reflected as well an old European arrogance (p.15). This arrogance, originating in ethnocentrism and tainting Europe’s colonial past, is transmitted, hidden throughout the curricular texts of schooling institutions and popular culture, and continues to influence today’s approaches to other cultures. Ethnocentrism has become

[a] familiar word most generally understood, in parallel with “egocentrism”, as an attitude or outlook in which values derived from one’s own cultural background are applied to other cultural contexts where different values are operative. In the most naïve form of ethnocentrism, (...), a person unreflectively takes his own culture’s values as objective reality and automatically uses them as the context within which [to judge] less familiar objects and events (...). At a more complex level is the ethnocentric attitude or outlook that takes account of multiple points of view but regards those of other cultures as incorrect, inferior or immoral. (Le Vine and Campbell quoted in Chalmers, 1996, p.15)

The issue lay here: looking at another culture through a thoughtful lens, trying to forget our cultural expectations, “governed and interpreted by our frame of knowledge” in order to navigate on disrupting and destabilising seas (Egerer, 2001, p.25).
November 2003

Sophie (pouring tea): You know Mum, I think that with Dunand and Tsen, I really built an emotional relationship. Both ended up in being more than advisors, colleagues and employers for me.

Penny (her spoon full of Forêt Noire cake): Sure you did.

Sophie: But, in a way, I think that if I hadn’t, the experience would not have gone as far as it did.

Penny: Dunand being your professor and Tsen being the son of his mother, it could not have gone somewhere else. The whole story is based on ties.

Boston, September 1998.

The house is lost in a countryside village of four to six houses. It is a beautiful mansion on a field spreading into acres. A woodland starting to wear autumnal colours. Suzan, Mr. Tsen’s sister in law, came out from the house to welcome us, Mr. Tsen and I. We had just driven through Massachusetts, during which time Mr. Tsen had shown himself to be very interested in getting to know me through my family background.

At the time we arrived, the Tsens were also welcoming a Californian couple of friends, and could not, thus, offer us the usual friends’ rooms. Suzan showed us where we would sleep, in two separate but communicating rooms: my way out was through his room. I was feeling rather tense to be put in such intimacy with people who, I have to say, impressed me.

Suzan (turning back while leaving the room): Well Sophie, I hope you will feel at home. We have breakfast at 7.30, lunch at noon and dinner at 7 p.m. My husband, Mengchi, does all the cooking.
"Thank you very much" I said, "I'll come down in a minute". At the moment, I could not even think of eating a cookie out of nervousness. After dinner, having coffee, we heard Mengchi in the kitchen, busy washing the dishes, loudly singing German traditional tunes.

My task as an art historian student was clear. I had planned everything: photographic material and its lighting to take pictures of each painting and drawing; memo files to catalogue each of them, indicating known information such as date, title, medium, approximate size and other observations. In the end, the pictures came out as bad as I had expected, but they were still "readable". The artwork was stored in a former garage. It had been turned into a cold and humid studio. On shelves, stacks, and other filing cabinets were scattered diverse papers, paintings and sculptures, artefacts and other souvenirs. Many of the paintings were covered with mildew, cats' urine and scratches coming from old nails. I spent there, along with Mr. Tsen, four entire days working from nine a.m. to six p.m. with a single lunch pause. He helped me date the work and told me more of the family history. At night I could not sleep out of excitement.

On the second day a first confrontation occurred with Mr. Tsen. He looked attentively at my work and became somewhat irritated by it. I photographed everything that came under my camera: the best and the worst, the finished and the unfinished paintings. Mr. Tsen was disturbed by my systematic process (I hoped exhaustive) and by the fact that somebody looked into his mother's art without any discretion: I felt that I was acting rigorously, with impatience and urge. I had four days to photograph most of her art (hundreds of paintings); after that I would have to go back home and base my thesis on this four-day work period. Mr. Tsen interrupted me, asking what I was doing and why. My answers led us to an animated discussion. I had to explain to him my position as art historian and the mission I had as a
Chapter 3 – Genesis of a Project

positivist scientist. I did not move from one inch of this position. Mr. Tsen was upset to imagine me exposing his mother and her art at their advantage but showing as well their weaknesses. He left the room. I was exhausted, a little in shock, not unhappy with what I had managed to say. I think he finally understood my position. But he had put me on the grill: it is one of his techniques I have met several times since. A shocking technique, very intense but in a sense very creative. Once the data were collected, it took me several months to write my thesis and I would not be able to defend it until June 1999.

February 1999

On the train going to a conference in which one of my friends took part, presenting a part of her thesis, I met the new teaching assistant in Medieval art. I did not know her very well, but I always had a good feeling about her. I proudly showed her Fan Tchunpi’s art — the pictures taken in Boston. I did it with the impression of showing her a treasure.

Brigitte (lightly embarrassed): This is rather conventional, can we talk about anything else than academism...?

I got the same reaction from other friends: they found it heavy and not really interesting. Each time I heard such critiques, I almost took it personally. I felt so disappointed and even began to put my taste into question. Each time I had to convince myself of Fan Tchunpi’s value. Clearly, she was not understood. Each time I needed to justify myself, explaining to the critics how historically important she and her husband were and the role they played.

The unease which Fan Tchunpi’s work provokes for the Westerner comes from the fact that it neither fits the traditional Chinese canon of painting, nor the West’s. Her art reflects what she experienced as a young immigrant in France. She was located in a third space (Bhabha, 1994), growing up in France yet wearing her otherness on her face, appropriating new
traditions yet living in a Chinese group of people faithful to their culture. She went back to China with a European background, having spent more than half of her life in France. Her search for identity oscillated between China and France, enacting what Leela Gandhi terms the ‘logic of inappropriate appropriation’ (quoted in Egerer, 2001, p. 16) and putting into question traditional forms of knowledge and authority. Likewise, her art inhabits Bhabha’s indeterminate position of ‘not quite/not white’ (1994, p.120). Superficially approached, Fan Tchunpi’s art will appear to some of us outdated, or the traditionalists among us will judge it as non-fitting to the Chinese classical precepts.

However, her art gives us an opportunity to reflect on the canon of art, at least from a European perspective. For a definition, Christopher B. Steiner (1996b) proposes: “[t]he canon of art history, like the caste system in India, is a rigid hierarchical system which excludes ‘impure’ categories of art and reduces certain classes of objects to the status of untouchable” (p.213). According to him,

[if the canon of art history is a highly routinized hierarchical system in which most non-Western arts have been relegated to the lowest status, each subfield within the canon is itself a structured system which embraces certain categories of objects while rejecting many others. (p.214)

Thus, not only a hierarchical system is imposed on world cultures: in the West, some are seen as better than others and “there has been a tendency to equate great art with the complexity of a culture” (Chalmers, 1996, p.15), which explains the usual admiration for Chinese traditional art, and the fact that Chinese art (as well as Japanese art) is more often exhibited in Art Galleries than other cultures’ arts which are usually anthropology museums’ domain.

Furthermore, the West implicitly imposes a canon within each culture: in Chinese art history for instance, a preference will be given to technical performances and to literati art: the professor teaching the unique Chinese art course of the University of Geneva spent entire terms
on Chinese bronzes\(^3\) and ceramics, while painting and "the rest" were relegated to the last term. As for Chinese painting, how many times do we read that after the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) it did not renew itself (for example Lee, 1988, quoted in Clarke, 2002, p.240, and Gombrich, 1990, p. 112), and on a more personal tack, how many times did I hear, amongst young Chinese art historians and professors, people say "Well anyway, you know, twentieth century Chinese art... uhuh...apart from Communist art which is mere propaganda, there is nothing, nothing!"...

Works made for the export trade or those representing foreign influence and inspiration have been rejected out of hand as impure or corrupt art forms. In short, any acknowledgment that "authentic" [China] and [Chinese] might coexist with the West in the twentieth century has been frowned upon as a challenge to the canonicity of genuine [Chinese art]. (Steiner, 1996b, p.214-215)

(...) marginal, non-white/non-Western group relations to 'modernism' (and to the canon of modern art) is an ambiguous procedure. They are constantly entering 'modernism', but this means that their difference is then interpreted as moving out of their tradition and entering the new by yielding to or resisting modernism, but never producing it. The production end is already occupied by the advanced avant-garde capitalist West. (jagodzinski, 1999, p.307)

The key criterion used to define canonical art has always been based on a standard of cultural or ethnic purity, that is, an object untainted by outside influence.

While North American and European artists are allowed to investigate other cultures and enrich their own work and perspective, it is expected that the artist from another culture only works with the background and artistic traditions connected to his or her place of origin. (jagodzinski, 1999, p.308)

Thus, for Western critics, Fan Tchunpi's art is a mere mimicry of European academism, or at best, she unfortunately did not choose the right school to be inspired from:

(...) those artists who attempt to critique the traditionalism/modernist dialectic are unable to do so because they find themselves being either not "authentic enough" or, if they are not conforming to the separation of premodern/modern, their art is criticized for being inauthentically "Westernized". Put simply, they are accused of imitating or being copyists. There is no dialogue between cultures but only

---

\(^3\) In Gombrich's (1990) chronological tables the only artistic entry for China (included in "the Orient") is "beginning of ancient bronzes in China" (p.520).
appropriation by artists of color. The universal is “ours” the local is “yours”(...).
(jagodzinski, 1999, p.309)

It is now time to think about the true issues at stake and wonder why, at the beginning of twentieth century, Chinese students were most interested in realism offered by European academies? Answering this question means disaffiliation (jagodzinski, 1999, p.319) with Eurocentric narratives of artistic modernity: “early 20th-century Chinese modernism for instance had no need for Cubism since [in Chinese art history] there had not been the several hundred year dominance of illusionistic realism that European art was attempting to throw off” (Clarke, 2002, p.241).

June 1999

Mr. Tsen and his wife came to the defence of my thesis entitled Between Republican China and the West: the Portraits of Fang Junbi (1898-1986), as well as one of my best friends who was about to write her thesis on 1930s Chinese advertising. Everybody was supportive and there were minor critiques. The Tsens were happy with the work I did, they took a picture of me with my supervisor and my committee member. I was a bit embarrassed but I still look at it sometimes, smiling and laughing at the situation and at my state of mind.

Mr. Dunand (turning toward the Tsens): Well, I think that this thesis might lead to a nice exhibition, don’t you think? We might even imagine to select some artwork from your father’s collection, might we?

Mr. Tsen reacted with simplicity and discretion... But this information did not pass unnoticed!
Chapter 3 – Genesis of a Project

September 1999

Just about to get married, Gilles and I received the unexpected visit of Mr. and Mrs Tsen. They were carrying a huge present: obviously a suitcase. A beautiful yellow suitcase.

Mrs Tsen: This, we hope, will take part to all your future travels!

This suitcase did indeed travel since then: carrying several times between Geneva and Vancouver all the books and binders related to the Tsens’ history and art...

At the end of their visit Mr. Tsen turned to me and asked “how about you, what are you going to do now? Did you ask Dunand about the exhibition?” No, I had not. In fact I was waiting to hear some more about it from one side or the other. I must admit, furthermore, that my wedding was the only thing I cared about at the time...

During the following fall, Mr. Tsen, Mr. Dunand, and I met several times to discuss the project and to write proposals, in order to present it to the next meeting of the Foundation’s council taking place in October. It was favourably received and a vote had to take place in their next meeting in February 2000.

Dunand, Tsen and I chose several related themes. The exhibition would be dedicated to the couple Tsen Tsonming and Fan Tchunpi, who were creators and collectors, had a European experience and had rediscovered China during the thirties. The period of time would, then, spread between two revolutions: 1912 and 1949. We agreed upon the publishing of a catalogue with the help of several authors, and upon the creation of a video tape showing the historical context in which the couple lived32. In order to help the visitor understand 1930s Chinese

32 This idea evolved to a fifteen-minute biographic documentary based on a film by Mr. Tsen. See Chapter 6, p.109.
painting aesthetics, everybody felt it necessary to clearly put this family in their historical background which gave its importance to their creations and collections.

I understand this insistence upon history as a need of a justification for our exhibition. Furthermore, we were planning to actually present two exhibitions in one, the collection and Fan's paintings, which had no obvious aesthetic ties together, and history would be the blender. This justification would probably not have been needed had Fan Tchunpi painted exclusively in a Chinese medium bending towards abstraction for example, or had the collection's value already been acknowledged. The necessity came from the fact that she painted in oil in a rather positivistic aesthetic and that Mr. Dunand and I had decided not to address the issue of authenticity for the collection.

It seems axiomatic that it is not possible to exhibit objects without putting a construction upon them. Long before the stage of verbal exposition by label or catalogue, exhibition embodies ordering propositions. To select and put forward any item for display, as something worth looking at, as interesting, is a statement not only about the object but about the culture it comes from. To put three objects in a vitrine involves additional implications of relation. There is no exhibition without construction and therefore – in an extended sense – appropriation. (Baxandall, 1991, p.34)

We made a first selection of paintings. Mr. Tsen quickly showed us a large sample of the collection, manipulating the art pieces with ease and relative care. Mr. Dunand, on the other hand, was quite nervous, moving away a glass full of orange juice, dangerously standing 20 cm from the scrolls. Mr. Tsen had lived with them since his childhood, while Mr. Dunand was the museum curator who was about to be in charge of the paintings, manipulating them as treasures. For my part, I was in between them, slowly becoming aware of my possible future role, recalling for myself at the same time the way Mr. Tsen and I had handled Madame Fan's paintings.

33 Meeting minute, October 13th, 1999.
The object as commodity, as artefact, as specimen, as art, as someone else's heirloom, treasured cultural heritage, or sacred emblem: these are different ways of seeing the same thing. They are all properties or values of the object, all phases in its life. Values may be imposed by those wishing to possess or appropriate the object, and others asserted by those claiming moral jurisdiction. These transformations of meaning and use during the objects' careers could be better represented in museum interpretations. (...) Objects are, along with everything else, expressions of power relationships. Reconstruction involves repowering the object, investing it with the authority and privilege of those currently possessing it, who then impose upon it (and upon those whom it represents) their own histories. (Ames, 1992, p.144)

Mr. Dunand (seated at Mr. Tsen's dining room table after the selection, speaking to me): You would be the curator. Which means that you would be responsible for the selection and the installation of the art, as well as for several of the catalogue's articles. Anything concerning paper work, for example transport, insurance and editing would fall under the Baur Collection's responsibility. Of course, we can't speak about a salary but about a contract. Or we could imagine you to enter these internship programs offered by the unemployment office, so you could obtain a "salary"...

At the time, I was very upset about the financial situation: no fixed job, internships and at best contracts. Upset also about the museums using unemployment benefits to pay their interns. This irritation showed on my face. I made myself rather clear.

Once Mr. Dunand had left, Mr. Tsen, afraid to see me refuse the whole project for financial reasons, told me: "So what do you think? Will you accept his proposal?" "Well, I don't know yet" I replied, knowing already that the answer was a loud "yes", too happy to see this opportunity take place. "I suppose yes" I added, "this project is beautiful and a great opportunity for my career..."

Mr. Tsen: You have to do it, you have to do it... Let's say I double your contract!

Sophie (dumb founded): Pardon me?

Mr. Tsen: Yes, yes, my intention is to pay you the same amount as the Baur collection will!
On my way home, tremendously happy, I was also a bit embarrassed: I felt like being part of the monetary exchange. I felt like Mr. Tsen bought me, or made sure I had no other choice than to participate in the project. Yet, I was more than happy, and very touched by his interest in me. I soon came to realize that he was, rightly, terribly concerned to have an input in the project. However, this fact was only implicitly considered. There were no open discussions about the implications of Mr. Tsen's financial support to the exhibition, whereas a more thorough reflection should have taken place, at least on my side, in order to understand what this support meant in terms of practical collaboration: Mr. Tsen was about to become the co-curator of *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*.

Some of the core dynamics of new approaches pose great challenges which are often not realized by museum staff until well into a project. For many source communities, collaboration means full and equal partnership in all stages of a project; it is a recognition of their expertise and their attachment to objects that are central to their culture, and their participation will often be based upon expectations of community benefit. Furthermore, the more a community invests in a project, the greater their expectations for continued involvement will be. (Peers and Brown, 2003, p.9)

The project was definitively accepted by the council in February 2000. Its decision opened the way to an extraordinary adventure.
CHAPTER 4 EVOLUTION OF A PROJECT

There are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the "dominant ideology"; but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text ... The text needs its shadow ... subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro. (Roland Barthes, quoted in Kasfir, 1992, p.40)

The good translation gets you far enough into the other world to begin to see what you are missing. You take your translation device ... and you watch it run out of meaning. You watch it fall apart. That's my notion of cultural translation. (Clifford quoted in Cruikshank, 1995, p.25)

Spring 2000: signing the contract

The scene takes place in Mr. Dunand's office. Two members of the Foundation's council, Mr. Dunand, and I, the mandatary quorum, are present. We are here to sign the contract I wrote. I felt as if I had artificially created this situation. Once the contract is signed, Mr. Dunand leaves the room to pick up a copy of Fan Tchunpi's Paris exhibition catalogue (Musée Cernuschi, 1984).

Mr Dunand (once back, handing out the thin book): There are not many publications about Fan Tchunpi. But you will find a good sample of her art in here.

Mr. Accountant (flipping through it, concerned about what he was about to see): Ah! We have here something to look at. This will please... With this, the public will come... Because with the last exhibition... What was this artist's name...?

The exhibition that has just closed was about a Chinese Canadian painter living in Ottawa, Chan Ky-Yut (1940-), doing beautiful abstract work highly colourful, fusing traditional Chinese painting practice with Western aesthetics. The curator was an intern who was successful in exhibiting the paintings and artist books, in a way that did not hinder in the least, the viewers' aesthetic experiences.

34 I was surprised to hear that usually, the Baur Collection only make tacit agreements in place of contracts. This is the reason Mr. Dunand asked me to create a contract if I needed one.
Mr. Accountant (continuing): Anyway... a disaster, nobody came!

After the contract’s signing there followed regular meetings, between Mr. Dunand and I, Mr. Tsen and I, and the three of us together. Each time on my way there, I felt nervous and excited, impatient to get a better sense of what we were doing and where we were going. I arrived with my list of precise questions that would lead us to making decisions and help me pursue my work. What I realize now is that I was asking a lot in advance – about things that Mr. Dunand used to do only months or weeks before the exhibition. This was my only professional commitment at the moment, while usually curators have many other projects at the same time managing first the more urgent task. As for Mr. Tsen, he acknowledged our remarks or questions without clear marks of agreement or disagreement, and proceeded by idea association. The result therefore was that I was enquiring about issues from someone who was not ready to hear them and we were discussing it with another person whose mother tongue was not French and whose sets of beliefs were not the same as ours. Could we not call this situation a *dialogue de sourds*? In our meetings there were thus at least three types of discrepancies: coordinative, communicative, and cultural.

(...) it becomes more viable to accept that while the human desire for creative interaction can serve as the minimal ‘universal’ base for intercultural encounters, this desire is fraught with tensions, compulsions, hidden agendas and funding realities. (...) The ‘universal minimum’ that can be said to initiate any intercultural exchange is extremely fragile, based more on intuition and good faith than on any real cognisance of the Other. (Rustom Bharucha, 1999, p.15)

Taking up Pratt’s “contact zone” notion defined as “a space of colonial encounters (...) involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict” but as well as “a zone of exchange, even if unequal”, Arif Dirlik (1996) notes that the dominant or the metropolitan culture, “in the process of the very effort to communicate with the dominated, (...) goes through

---

35 French expression describing two (or more) people who do not listen to each other’s argument.
a language change, if to a lesser extent than the dominated” (p.112). The contact zone does not abolish the structures of power “to which it serves as a zone of mediation” and “implies a distance from the society of the Self, as well as of the Other” (p.113). For Dirlik, this distancing facilitates the “metonymic cultural representations (...) —whether by the orientalist, or by the self-orientalizing ‘oriental’” (ibid.).

Also inspired by Pratt’s work, James Clifford (1997) perceives museums as contact zones when they make possible the “(...) spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt quoted in Clifford, 1997, p.192). However, “[c]ontact work in a museum (...) goes beyond consultation and sensitivity (...). It becomes active collaboration and a sharing of authority” (Clifford, 1997, p.210).

From the standpoint of museum professionals, it is one thing to call on one’s “native informant” and quite another to work with a co-curator. In matters of minority or tribal art, collaboration entails complex processes that Charlotte Townsend-Gault has described in terms of culturally and politically limited translation work and the tactical negotiation of boundaries. (Ibid., p.211)

Leaving Geneva?

Before the exhibition’s theme and budget was voted for by the Baur Council, I had decided, with my husband Gilles, to leave Geneva for a year abroad. This idea required us to plan ahead and, the exhibition being scheduled for 2002, it appeared as the perfect thing to do in the interval. When I spoke about Vancouver to Mr. Dunand and to Mr. Tsen, they received my plans relatively enthusiastically. Both had backgrounds in North America, thus, both could relate to my future experience. “Very good very good!”, said Mr. Dunand, “However, Mrs Wirth Brentini, I tell you right away: I don’t write emails. I don’t know how and I won’t learn for you!”. As for Mr. Tsen and his wife, both being American immigrants, communication
overseas did not worry them. They were more concerned about the subject of my future studies and which of Vancouver's universities I had chosen.

**Selection of Madame Fan Tchunpi's paintings**

In April 2000, I had to meet Mr. Tsen, at his house, to select about twenty-five of Fan Tchunpi's paintings. Therefore, I went back to my thesis material. In 1984, Fan Tchunpi had exhibited sixty of her best works at the Cernuschi Museum in Paris in an exhibition entitled *Fan Tchun-pi, contemporaneous Chinese artist, sixty paintings or sixty years of painting* (Musée Cernuschi, 1984). This catalogue had represented everything for my undergraduate thesis: I took it with me everywhere, I tried to find secrets in between its lines, looking and looking again at the reproductions of the only paintings of Fan Tchunpi I then knew.

I flipped through it once more, this time having in mind to make a selection of paintings I would exhibit. I chose to distance myself from Cernuschi's selection so as to publish other paintings and to make available for the public a bigger number of her works. I opened my Boston pictures binder and selected about seventy artworks among which Mr. Tsen and I would pick out our twenty-five.

We sat once more at his dining room table and I started to show him my list of works, conscientiously and probably boringly showing him the pictures of my binder. After I had showed him about fifteen of the possibilities, Mr. Tsen, impatient, stood up and grabbed his Cernuschi catalogue. He started to show me his idea of a selection. Maybe he was not sufficiently confident in my taste to let me offer unpublished paintings to the public.

---

*For the detailed selection of works of art see appendix II.*

*Title translated by the author from the French: Fan Tchun-pi, artiste chinoise contemporaine, soixante tableaux ou soixante ans de peinture.*
Regrettably, at that moment, I did not ask him who had made the Cernuschi selection. Was it Fan Tchunpi? Cernuschi’s curator? A collaboration? It would have been interesting in order to understand Mr. Tsen’s insistence. Was it out of respect for his mother’s choice or was it because he was more confident in an experienced curator’s taste than in a young art historian’s? We ended up with a first choice containing a majority of paintings that had already been published. Looking forward to show certain artworks and somewhat confident in what I knew about Fan Tchunpi, I was rather upset, but I was forced to admit that the lender had to have the last word. Nevertheless, I tried and insisted on several unpublished paintings I particularly appreciated. Unfortunately, they never made it to Geneva! However, he had two other paintings sent that delighted me: both watercolours painted during her stays in Japan, both unpublished. Finally among twenty six paintings, we exhibited eight previously unpublished paintings.

Selection of Dr. Tsen’s collection artworks

Defining The Pavilion of Marital Harmony as a collection following in the literati tradition was not obvious at first sight. We opted for this interpretation after a discussion with Mr. Tsen who explained to us how his father had started his collection following Wu Hufan’s guidance (an eminent connoisseur following in the literati tradition). The idea had first appeared plausible when we looked at Fan Tchunpi and Tsen Tsonming’s familial backgrounds: both came from great families from the ancient regime, and both were taught later, in France, in

---

38 During our evaluation meeting after the opening of the exhibition, Mr. Tsen made explicit the importance of ancestor worship and filial piety for him in realizing The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. See Chapter 7.
39 For a detailed selection of the works of art see appendix III.
40 This definition is still questionable if we consider literati’s taste for monochrome painting and for a calligraphic art of the brush in painting.
41 See Chapter 2, p.43 for a history of Dr. Tsen’s collection.

This short paragraph is however not representative of the conceptualisation of the literati idea and of the duration of our decision process\(^\text{42}\). This idea came slowly. Furthermore, the collectors' origins would not be enough to make this a collection following in literati tradition: it had to have this type of collection's characteristics.

Underlying this question there is a classification issue: "[t]he most powerful of the classificatory interventions are the words 'traditional' and 'authentic', which become shorthand designations for 'good', and their negations 'nontraditional' and 'inauthentic', which become synonymous with 'bad'" (Kasfir, 1992, p.42). "While classificatory principles may be necessary to organize a large body of material, they obscure certain correspondences as well as illuminate others" (p.42). Imagining Xiehanglou as a collection following in literati tradition even though it did not have all the required characteristics, we somewhat accepted that time change's impact on culture and Chinese culture's evolution, thus not fictionalised as static over centuries and not locked up in the fictional ethnographic present (p.41). It was recognizing the existence and acceptability of external impacts on Chinese culture, and the refusal to consider it as a "contamination" (p.40) provoking the decay of an authentic traditional and timeless culture, vowed to death following the old biological model (p.41). To some extent, we recognized Xiehanglou as a modern inheritance of past traditions. But, by interpreting it as a collection drawing upon literati tradition, did we not reinvent it? Did we not project our own Eurocentric ideal of Chinese art?

When I presented Mr. Tsen with our idea, his reaction was at first rejection. "No no no, we can't speak about Tsen Tsonning and Fan Tchunpi like this, literati attitude is a whole

\(^{42}\) During the exhibition process, final decisions usually rested upon Mr. Dunand.
dedication, a way of life. This is not because you studied Buddhism that you are a Buddhist! Furthermore, my mother was somebody of the eye, and she was not a good calligrapher… Are you serious?”. Mr. Tsen was nevertheless seduced by this idea and the smile I saw appear on his face was a blend of surprise, doubt and pride.

Was Mr. Tsen’s reaction (rejection then acceptance and in the end a gratefulness towards our find) not similar to Dirlik’s (1996) notion of “self-orientalization”?

How Euro-American images of Asia may have been incorporated into the self-images of Asians in the process may in the end be inseparable from the impact of “Western” ideas per se. One fundamental consequence of recognizing this possibility is to call into question the notion of Asian “traditions” which may turn out, upon closer examination, to be “invented traditions”, the products rather than the preconditions of contact between Asians and Europeans, that may owe more to orientalist perceptions of Asia than the self-perceptions of Asians at the point of contact. (p. 104)

But the question of literati culture is also to be considered along identity politics occurring in Dr. Tsen’s act of collecting (fig.6):

At the juncture between the love for the inanimate as such and the demands of group identity, what might the act of collecting signify? What might an intimacy with inanimate objects do to one’s sense of communal belonging, of being part of, say, a national community? (Chow, 2001, p.286).

Ownership “is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in [the collector]; it is he who lives in them” (Benjamin quoted in Chow, 2001, p.288). For Walter Benjamin, collecting is an intellectual practice allowing us to stay in contact with the past. The one who collects does not gather only objects, but memories as well (ibid.). In Attachment (Lian), first published in 1943, Lao She (Chow’s case study, 2001) makes a portrait of a collector, as a member of the new middle class in early twentieth-century urban China: “In terms of profession, these people are perhaps government employees, or perhaps

---

43 See Chapter 7.
middle school teachers. Sometimes we also find lawyers or doctors” (Lao She quoted in Chow, 2001, p.291).

But in terms of the enjoyment of leisure, these people are members of an older society in which culture still means something pleasurable, something to be enjoyed or possessed for itself. Their behavior toward objects, the scraps and ruins of bygone years, contains an indulgent, lingering quality that is fast becoming out of step with their times. (Ibid.)

Lao She's protagonist, Zhuang Yiya seems to be a parallel portrait of Dr. Tsen. They both came from the same social background and both collected the same kind of artefacts, having to wait for acquiring their chef d'oeuvres. During 1937's Japanese invasion, Tsen Tsonming and Zhuang Yiya, had to face loyalty issues towards their country**, dilemmas “akin to the Confucian teaching of she sheng qu yi, to surrender one's physical life for moral righteousness” (p.295). Thus to Benjamin's themes of ownership and remembrance, putting in evidence the collector's relationship with the past, is added the theme of fidelity** (p.293).

However, despite the collection's literati character, we renounced putting too strong an emphasis on calligraphies, taking into consideration our exhibition's accessibility for a lay public. It is furthermore important to keep in mind that our collectors and their belongings having overcome many historical and personal tragedies, Xiehanglou is not complete today. Mr. Dunand, Mr. Tsen and I chose six ancient and five modern calligraphies, five ancient and fifteen modern paintings. We also selected a series of objects for a scholar's desk (typical of gentlemen connoisseurs' collections) such as seals, ink stones, ink sticks as well as other curios. Mr. Tsen proposed as well a group of Western artefacts such as personal belongings and Art Deco and Art Nouveau objects.

---

44 See Tsen (2002).
45 This issue is made obvious in Tsen's caption on Shen Zhou's (1427-1509) Chrysanthemums, and in this painting's colophons (Dunand, 2002, p. 87-88).
46 One of the few considerations we had for our visitors. It can be interpreted as condescending, and was furthermore not justified: participants to my visitors study (Chapter 8) often expressed their interest in calligraphy.
A literati collection viewed by a lay public in a museum is in itself an inconsistency since Chinese gentlemen connoisseurs were evolving in erudite milieus dedicated to beauty, generally closed to the vulgarity of non-connoisseurship. Artworks were rarely hung onto a wall (following precise rules), and most of them were only occasionally unrolled when all conditions where gathered to study them in an atmosphere of contemplation, bringing about a spiritual bond between the one who appreciates and the one who created in forgetting all that is appearance, material and corruptible.

(...) in Switzerland space is used differently than in China: in the literati studio there is no space, it is crumpled, dense, things are spread everywhere and after a while we find a work of art to look at. Here there is an empty space, this is extraordinary, a sort of minimalism. In the Chinese pavilion this is not at all the case (...) boxes and scrolls are everywhere. There is furthermore a notion of secrecy, a bit like Ali Baba’s cavern. (Mr. Tsen, feedback meeting, trans.)

At first, I was responsible for the research on the entire collection. During the earliest months of our project however, I was discharged by Mr. Dunand of the calligraphies: this kind of work asks for a particular connoisseurship I had not been trained in (classical Chinese and its calligraphies). This task would be entrusted to Ambroise Fontanet, an independent Sinologist and art historian working on contract for the Baur Collection. Later on (autumn 2001) he also inherited the task of writing the captions on ancient paintings. After a year (spring 2001), Mr. Dunand decided to put the seals captions into the hands of Mr. Tsen (March 2nd, 2001 meeting minute) which he did in a very intimate way, explaining to the lay reader the origins and main principles of seals’ art. I was thus responsible, along with the texts relating to Fan Tchunpi, for the research and captions about modern paintings and the objects for the scholar’s desk.

FAX N° 011.41.22.789.18.45
ATTN TO: MR. FRANK DUNAND


Dear Mr. Dunand,

(...).

Regarding our selection, when you will be ready to photograph three-dimensional objects, could you keep me informed? I put into question the number of seals chosen and the selection of Western objects, namely the Lalique vase and frame, the Czechoslovakian Art Deco bowl and vase, a statuette signed Demane and Tsen Tsonming's Rolex watch (...).

I wonder if these Western artefacts' presence is justified in our exhibition as they are in such a small number and that we cannot, consequently, consider them as a collection of Western artefacts.

Concerning the seals, I wonder if we did not decide on too many of them proportionally to the rest of the selection. I am concerned, besides reproduction costs, with display issues caused by these artefacts. Will the lay viewer have interest for such an amount of small objects? In the case of a scaling down of our selection, I would ask Mr. Tsen to provide us with a new selection.

I am looking forward to receive your point of view. I will ask the same questions to Vancouver's specialists that I will have the opportunity to meet. This way, one can hope to make an informed decision...!

Thank you to keep these objects aside to avoid their inutile reproduction. However, I hope that we will be able to decide before mid-June.

Kind regards,

Sophie Wirth Brentini

If I did not receive any answer to this fax, Mr. Dunand and Mr. Tsen decided later to exhibit seals in grouping them according to their authors' importance and to the quality of their stones. In order to present the couple in a contemporary context, the group of personal belongings (such as Art Nouveau vases, a Rolex watch, cufflinks, cigarettes box, and Fan's jade jewellery) would be displayed along with some of Dr. Tsen's publications and family photographs. However, they were not reproduced in the catalogue (fig.7).

The exhibition of personal belongings seem today totally appropriate. Fan Tchunpi and Tsen Tsonming lived amongst these objects, wore some of them and, leaving out the usual issues of authenticity and quality, these artefacts help the viewer to represent the couple in their
historical and cultural context as modern human beings in the least stereotyped way. In an article, the radical and critical artist/curator Fred Wilson (1996) tells an example of a conversation he heard viewers have about a display he had created:

In the display case which could be titled 'The Gold of Africa' (all African art exhibitions include a display of African gold these days, it seems) I included a gold Rolex watch. One museum visitor was overheard saying to his friend, 'Is that an ancient sundial that they wear on their wrists?' ... Somehow the museum transforms even the most pedestrian of objects into something exotic. (Wilson, 1996)

If what we tried to do was not given as much reflection and was not as powerful as Wilson's radical approach, I hope it nevertheless gave a tangible nature to the couple's life.

The question of the collection's history and the conditions of its acquisition was of course raised early. Mr. Tsen did not know a lot about how the artworks had entered the collection. He showed me a letter from a Chinese art dealer confirming his possession of a precise work of art, and told me about the relationships of his parents with other artists and collectors. Of course no official certificates exist and nowhere could I verify each artefact's history. These concerns are directly related to the issues of authenticity and forgeries which occupies a particular place in Chinese history of art.

I expressed my concerns to Mr. Dunand, conscious that I would be limited in my research for reasons of language, location and erudition. The latter found a quite convenient solution: "We will simply mention clearly in the catalogue that our present task is not to research these issues but to present to the public a couple and their collection of art who deserve to be known for their artistic achievements, their taste and for the role they played in 1930's China".

One precise painting, signed by Qiu Ying (fig.8), is at the heart of this problem: the reliable Wu Hufan (1894-1968), a great connoisseur and specialist of Qiu Ying certified its
authenticity. Complicating the situation, one of the painting’s colophons, stating its authenticity, is signed by the great painter and faker Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). This single example would merit a thesis of its own! Twentieth-century Chinese painting is also concerned with this issue even though it is less critical in our case since many paintings and calligraphies were acquired by Dr. Tsen and Madame Fan directly from the artists.

"Who defines what is authentic? For whom? And for what purpose?" (Desai, 2000, p.122). In our case, Mr. Dunand and I decided to overlook the question of authenticity but our reasons were more practical than conceptual. The main reason was that we had not the resources to prove the authenticity of several artworks, moreover such a process would have given our exhibition theme a different orientation. I realize today that this decision is in keeping with the post-colonial readings in which I have been immersed. We indirectly refused to stress authenticity and uniqueness’ importance, two concepts playing a major role in the West’s grand narrative of art history but they do not bear the same connotation in China. Fong (2003) takes as an example the eminent Wang Xizhi (303-361) to illustrate "how traditional China operated as a culture of copies and replicas" (p.261). Artworks were indexes of the social personae of their creators and became historical relics. Looking at them, "the viewer experienced shenhui, a response to and meeting of his spirit with that of the artist. Artworks as "material 'trace[s]’" were preserved through copies and their disseminations. "Through shenhui, or “spiritual response", the original act was re-created”. According to Fong, it explains the artistic process of replication in Chinese art and culture which "parallels the anthropological concept of genealogy" (p.261)\textsuperscript{49}.

\textsuperscript{48} Nationhood and the artist as “hero” also participate of this grand narrative (jagodzinski, 1999, p.307-308).
\textsuperscript{49} In 1996, Fong also mentioned “the belief in the creative transformation of the self” as the core of “Chinese practice of imitating archaic models” (p.35).
Summer 2000

Knowing that Gilles and I would leave Geneva by the 20th of August, I started at the end of June to assiduously work on the collection. I had the immense honour to be invited by the Tsens to come and work at their house: thus I would have easier access to the artwork, more room and privacy.

Working at Mr. Tsen’s alone with the collection, I was free to work at my own pace, to go back to some paintings or objects to verify some information without being concerned to bother anybody by my presence. I could explore each artwork, touching it, feeling its texture, its quality, I could smell it if needed, dive into its colour and explore each stone vein, each painting’s scratches and state of conservation. Gilles had created a made-to-measure database for me to be able to catalogue each artefact in its minutest details. Concerned to have everything at hand to work at a distance, I measured them, photographed them (Mr. Tsen had lent me a macro lens), putting particular attention on the colophons, inscriptions, signatures and seals.

Living with the collection, the objects became alive for me and they became things I could relate to. I was experiencing these objects outside the museum’s showcases which “by presenting objects as signifiers within an artificially created institutional frame, (...) underline their irretrievable otherness, their separation from the world of lived experience” (Sherman and Rogoff, 1994, p.xii). At Mr. Tsen’s I had the chance to witness the objects in the world of lived experience.

It is a grandiose attempt to transcend the totally irrational quality of a mere being-there through integration into a new specifically created historical system—the collection. And for the true collector every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the age, of the landscape, the industry, the owner from which it derives.... Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, now becomes the socle, the frame, the pedestal and the seal of his ownership.... Collecting is a form of practical memory and among the profane manifestations of
"proximity" the most convincing one. (Walter Benjamin quoted in Sherman and Rogoff, 1994, p.xiv)

Artwork from Dr. Tsen’s collection had been removed from their “mere being-there” quality for a long time and probably had all been created to enter a collection. But exhibiting them at the Baur collection, we “re-collection”ed them (Benjamin quoted in Sherman and Rogoff, 1994, p.xiv). At Mr. Tsen’s, I was engaging in the process of retrieving/appropriating. In my hands artefacts entered a transitional phase, a transformative phase. Entering the museum, to be re-presented the object would undergo an interpretation, including a codification and a redefinition (Ames, 1992, p.58), once more taken out from its milieu to be given a new layer of meaning that would become a multiplicity of meanings once the exhibition would open its doors. They would pass from a family’s intimate life to specimen --entering the “big picture” as representative of a past culture and ideology.

This stage of my work for the exhibition remains one of the dearest memories of my experience. I got to know these objects and somewhat affectively made them mine. I lived through them for several weeks. For each category of artworks, Mr. Tsen and I spent a couple of hours together, taking out the artefacts from their case, unrolling the scrolls and discussing them. Calligraphies, paintings, seals, inkstones, inksticks and other delightful objects were presented in many evening sessions. It gave me an appreciation of Mr. Tsen’s perspective on the entire collection.

I spent quite a long time manipulating and appreciating the seals I carefully catalogued, printing each of them on a special Chinese paper (xuan) and writing down each side inscription. I was excited by the systematic task it represented, and by the reading of the characters which contains a hint of detective work. I was never sure of my reading and apart from reading the

---

50 See Mr. Tsen’s narrative on his father’s collection’s meaning in Chapter 7.
date and the name of its author, I had no idea of any possible translation of their poetry. I
would thus need the help of a connoisseur able to read seal script. In the end, rather than
consult specialists and write the texts, Mr. Tsen was entrusted with the writing of the seals’
captions. “On the other hand, seals (but for the ones created by renowned artists) and stones are
rather toys that have to be interpreted in groups, with a certain lightness” (Mr. Tsen, fax, May
14th, 2001).

Students in Asian art confront many difficulties, studying the art of a very different
culture and language, a whole new set of references has to be mastered. As a student of
Chinese art, I always felt evolving on unstable grounds and never ceased putting into question
my beliefs, sometimes to the point where doubts become uncreative. We have for sure
important issues to overcome during our studies: our knowledge of Chinese culture is often
second-hand.

Most curators, even in anthropology, spend at most a few years in the cultural milieu
of their ‘specialty’. In fact, they have the cultural credibility and often linguistic
competence of a four- year-old child from that culture ... They have never been
cultural participants and will never have the credibility of ‘the real thing’. (MacDonald
quoted in Ames, 1992, p.159)

With a sickly smile, I can only agree with the severe quote mentioned above, whereas I
regret that it is not really inviting to the study of diverse cultures. Shimizu (2001) studies the
Japanese canon of art and shows how it creates an impassable border. I believe his account
suits also the domain of Chinese art and cross-cultural issues. What he calls the “ethnic divide”
(p.132) is unfortunately maintained through a language divide. A very small group of Western
experts on Chinese art can partake of the latest Chinese studies on Chinese art since it is
published in Chinese. Thus, non specialists have only access to Western publications.
Furthermore, this very literature remains sadly unread by Chinese scholars. “There are clear
signs of complacency among the [Chinese] scholars toward the Western-language publications
Chapter 4 – Evolution of a Project

on [Chinese] art, which, by being dismissed by the [Chinese] scholarly community, fail to bridge the gap between [Chinese] art and the Western world” (ibid.). Along with our Eurocentric point of view on research, this language border is a major hindrance to "a truly global discourse on [Chinese] art"’s creation (ibid.). Therefore, “China in Western museums” as a theme prompts the questions “Which China?” and "Whose China?” (ibid.).
CHAPTER 5 CREATION

Project of catalogue and writing of captions

At first, we had agreed on the publication of a catalogue, the format of which would be that of the Baur Collection Bulletin, a publication issued once or twice a year. Dunand proposed to finance two sixty-page volumes, one enclosing the introductory texts, the second the artwork reproductions and captions. This solution allowed us to reproduce each artwork without a monograph catalogue's costs.

Chunglu Tsen is ready to contribute to the costs engendered by the publication of a bigger size catalogue than that of the Baur Collection Bulletin.

Project: One 120-page volume of square size. Three columns of text. Colour illustrations. Possibility to publish an English version. (extract of minute from May 11th, 2000 meeting)

Mr. Tsen was concerned to produce something of quality that could be distributed abroad in case this exhibition would be travelling. At the time I just took note as a witness, but waited to see the actual decision to be made. I did not dare to hope I would actually contribute to such a monograph.

For the first volume of the catalogue, six chapters were foreseen: a historical context; a social and cultural context; a biography of Tsen and Fan; a fourth chapter would address the theme of modern times literati; a fifth one would be written by Mr. Tsen who had still to choose his subject; and lastly, Dr. Billeter (the former Chinese Department's head at the University of
Geneva) was invited to propose an article. The second volume would be organized by types of artefact, each artefact’s reproduction would be accompanied by its technical data and a caption.

Soon however it appeared logical to the European curators to let Mr. Tsen write his parents’ biography. Slightly frustrated with this news and seeing a portion of my responsibility disappear, I was however looking forward to see Mr. Tsen writing on the subject he would be best able to present.

As Mr. Tsen was a translator, the translation of the catalogue’s texts, originally written in French, into their English version was, somewhat naturally, incumbent on him. Mr. Tsen would also be responsible for the translation from Chinese to English of the inscriptions, signatures, seals, and colophons present on the artworks. There was no doubt that Mr. Tsen would have an input in the project: he was responsible for many and diverse tasks.

Concerned to get to work, I asked Mr. Dunand for some indications about format. Following the example of a recently published catalogue of the renowned collection of the Ashmolean Museum, we agreed on a four reproductions per page format which meant that the captions would be at maximum eighty words long that is to say mere descriptions. Other guidelines were to leave out any subjective judgement, to be descriptive, and to adapt the length of my texts to each case. Happy to receive precise indications that would lead my work, I was free to start writing.

It took me however several months to begin these captions: I had first to catalogue the collection, to prepare for my departure to Vancouver, and to start my studies at UBC. In November 2000 I was back at work and two months later a first series was ready to be sent to

---

51 He spontaneously proposed an article about cross-cultural questions in art, an idea he abandoned later in the favour of our catalogue’s foreword, in which these questions are nevertheless shortly addressed.
Mr. Dunand. After six months of absence from Geneva, a visit home appeared wise in order to meet my colleagues and assess the situation.

From: Baur Collection
Sent: Monday, January 15th, 2001 12:20
To: Sophie Wirth Brentini
Subject: Re: Sophie

Dear Sophie,
Thank you very much for the “small” file dated from January the 3rd.
I believe that it takes a promising turn, the captions appear interesting, even if one still can improve them for detail issues.
Please continue on this track, despite your overload of work.
I am looking forward to seeing you at the end of February.
Kindly,
Frank Dunand

In February, we met several times, all together and separately. We clarified our tasks, listing missing translations, captions, photographs, talked about the possibility (and rejected its absolute necessity) to go to Boston to prepare Fan’s paintings for travel. I gave my colleagues a work schedule and committed to finish the captions for which I was responsible before June and to write the catalogue’s historical introductions the following summer. Dunand gave me the impression that he was looking at my January series of captions for the first time and I did not obtain further critiques other than those of the email reproduced above. Both men seemed disengaged with my projects and never gave any definite answers.

As they would be directly touched by it, another concern I had had to be presented to Mr. Tsen and to Mr. Dunand: we had decided with Gilles to postpone our return home for several months. Mr. Dunand did not show any anxiety, which was not the case of Mr. Tsen: “What? No, no. It is impossible! How and when would you be able to work on the exhibition? Gilles can stay in Vancouver, but you have to come back here to work with me!”
Confident in the possibility that a curator could work from away, I decided to take into account Mr. Dunand’s reaction, who moreover had already worked with guest scholars and curators based abroad. I promised to come back to work in Geneva for at least four weeks in September. For the rest of my February sojourn, I completed some detail information on the collection, such as characters to verify and other measures to complete.

Things got more complicated in April 2001 when Mr. Tsen sent me his first captions on ancient artworks. For some time (dating back to before my departure for Vancouver), I had felt that Mr. Tsen was wavering on the agreement of what I would write. Our misunderstanding was about to reach a stage where the only solution seeming possible for him was that I would be responsible for the French texts while he would be for those published in the English catalogue. Since this had never been agreed on clearly, I kept refusing his solution that appeared in addition incongruous to me. As obstinate as I was, he sent me his captions on calligraphies, on ancient paintings (for which I was still responsible), and on modern paintings. Although I recognised the quality of his texts, I feared to see my own captions disappear.

At this point, dichotomies in artistic sets of beliefs between Mr. Tsen and I started to become rather critical, particularly in terms of Mr. Dunand’s watchwords:

I would like us to present the collection more in a literati than in a technician spirit. That is to say, let us put an accent on the personal and on appreciation. Above all, above all let us avoid any gross pedantry. (Mr. Tsen, email, April the 3rd, 2001)

There followed a series of faxes and emails in which we discussed our approach to our tasks. I have to admit that, in staying the most polite, discreet and open to the discussion possible, my reaction was defensive: I did not reject his point of view but after all I was the one who wrote and who had been trained to!

53 But also power relations started to shift and became more complex, this question is developed in Chapter 6, p.105 and fol.
Museums have their own traditions of knowledge about the items in their collections, their own professional culture, their own ways of caring for and classifying artefacts, and their own goals of education and entertainment that they wish to realise from their collections in their work with the public. By and large, these differ dramatically from the perspectives and goals of source communities. Involving and sharing power with source community members means that staff must unlearn much of what they know, or think they know, about collections and museums, and begin to see these from very different perspectives. (Peers and Brown, 2003, p.7)

English and French versions of the catalogue will cause trouble, which was predictable since the beginning. I did a great effort to translate titles, texts, seals, colophons, even a box. For most of them, a translation is done only for you and for Frank, for I realize that you are right: it is not possible to discuss an artwork with conviction without understanding its content.

My comments, of course, are my own appreciation. I am convinced that they are very well written, and could lead towards a new Chinese art criticism. In New York, we had the opportunity to visit the exhibition of 19th and 20th century Chinese artists at the Metropolitan Museum, a lot of them are present as well in the Xiehanglou collection. It seems to me that the comments there are less interesting, less perceiving than mine.

It is really a shame that you are not here beside me, since we could very well work together. Nevertheless Sophie, if you require an harmonisation, would it be possible to rather base the French version on the English one? If not, too bad, we are going to have two different versions, which would not be a disaster.

I wish you good work for your term, kisses.

Chunglu
—Let us be macro. Let us talk about centuries as if they were yesterday and of ancients as if they were our friends. Context, always the rich context of China.

—Let us be personal. Let us say 'tu' to Tsonming, Tchunpi, Wang Jingwei, Wu Hufan and to Zhao Mengfu, Dong Qichang etc.

—Let us never address the artworks as equals. Calligraphy and paintings are primary, more important than the artefacts, deserving thus elegant and precise texts. (…)

—Let us keep away from technicity and pedantry.

For me, the exhibition’s preparation is a discovery adventure, a travel in a China which does not exist anymore. Through these artworks, embodying an exquisite and coherent taste, I meet again my lost father. I ask you not to insist on your interpretative role. I ask you above all not to receive my captions reluctantly — which are not bad at all.

Come into the spirit of the game in doing as if this is theatre: Frank is the producer, you are the director, I am the scriptwriter. The director, of course, has always the possibility to modify the script.

You are young Sophie, and this exhibition’s preparation is an outstanding experience. So be conscious that your collaboration with Billeter, Frank and I will be richer than any Chinese art graduate course.

Kind regards,

Chunglu

cc. Frank at 3.30 pm.

Apart from a clear mention of superiority of Chinese perception of Chinese art over the Western’s, Mr. Tsen put an emphasis on clear dichotomies between Chinese and Western aesthetics. During the time I was working in his apartment, he had offered me introductions to the principles of Chinese art. While I enjoyed these private classes and exchanges of ideas occurring in a relaxed and creative atmosphere, I also felt that I would have anyway to verify any information in Chinese art literature. I took notes but did not realize that what Mr. Tsen offered me was as much a clear presentation of his artistic conception as simple classes about Chinese art. At the time though, as a proud graduate, my attention was more on rigour and on my professional ability than on different epistemologies of art. I was conscious of the issue, but despite my lack of self-confidence, I knew what I had to do.

See Chapter 4, p.80.
If in Europe genre and history painting are valued as the summit of art's pantheon, in China landscape is privileged over any other subjects (it had nevertheless a lower status than calligraphy). Moreover, a painting is not simply an attempt to re-present something existing beyond the picture and the painter is not so much interested in scientific perspective and truthful representations of nature. For Chinese artists, what takes place in the act of painting is a spiritual communication between the painter and his subject. For instance, a mountain is, in itself, the artist's master and not the passive recipient of his "realistic" gaze (Clunas, 1999, p.126-130).

Because calligraphy and painting as graphic signs derive their signifying power from the artist as the sign maker, Chinese art theory links the signifying practice, or understanding, of an image not to the systematic language of the sign but to the body and psychological state of the artist. When the fifth-century critic [Xie He] first used the term breath-resonance-life-motion [qi yun sheng dong] to define the first principle of painting, he was describing both the painter and the painting. (Fong, 1996, p.28)

In a more recent article, Fong (2003) semiotically furthers his explanation: the image (calligraphy and painting), as sign originating in the image maker, has "at once a representational and presentational function" whereas Western aesthetic theory considers art more from the point of view of the viewer than from that of the artist (p.259). Actually, I believe that this is the key issue in our misunderstanding. I was looking at a painting looking for clues, trying to situate it in the painter's career, in the broadest context possible. Mr. Tsen wanted me to project myself in the artists' life.

Dear Chunglu,

(...).Regarding English and French versions of the catalogue, I think that it would be wise to join Frank Dunand to our discussion. It seems to me in effect
that it is necessary to define well our tasks since it appears that we work following two different directions. (...)

What I understand in your fax dated May 11th, is that you think about writing your own complete version of the catalogue, that could inspire me, or that I could translate. As it does not seem appropriate to have two different versions of the catalogue for one same exhibition, my work would then only be to translate your texts.

In my sense, I do not “require an harmonisation”, but I do everything to provide a professional work. If I look for a harmony, it encompasses poetry, literati spirit and emotions, as rich as they are in Chinese culture. I understand and hear your position facing your father’s collection that you meet once again in our project. This will bring an outstanding dimension and intensity to our exhibition. However, this message will have to be brought to a lay public, in the Genevan context of the Baur Collection.

I think that a curator is working to transmit a subject matter to a public. It seems to me particularly interesting to let appear the artist-collector couple’s context and literati spirit. Furthermore, if I recall well, this characteristic appeared early in our project’s definition. Nevertheless, a professional work demands, according to me, a technical aspect. We will work in order to reduce its forbidding character for the reader. (...)

I hope to work in a mutual and fruitful spirit, thanks to different approaches. (...) It is necessary to precisely redefine or reaffirm everybody’s role and tasks so as to begin an efficient collaboration and avoid any useless work. (...) I can assure you, in spite of geographic distance, that my engagement in this project remains faithful and enthusiastic.

Kind regards,

Sophie

c. Frank Dunand.

Clifford (1997) mentions the difficulty to reconcile museological context and constraints with the demands and needs of source communities (p.191). Looking at a museum in a contact perspective, “[c]enters become borders crossed by objects and makers. Such crossings are never “free” and indeed are routinely blocked by budgets and curatorial control, by restrictive definitions of art and culture, by community hostility and miscomprehension” (p.204).
Dear Sophie,

(...). Let us talk about art criticism. More and more, I realize the dichotomy between the Western critical mind and that of traditional China. Considering Chinese art, the Westerner, in his rationalism tries and put an accent on history and on form. A Chinese literati is more subjective, even impressionist. He talks about breath, force, harmony. For him, painting or calligraphy are physical exercises — as is taqi.

As for me, I am located in between both. I understand well from where both come from, thus I try and find the balance, which is not always an easy task.

Concerning your introductory article in the catalogue, may I suggest that you take also a subjective perspective? That is, rather than write on Chinese historical context, you might honestly and frankly talk about your personal appreciation of the collection and of the protagonists as a young European. Carried by your enthusiasm, the reader could thus find a way in the artwork. I say personal, since I seriously doubt that writing with sensitivity and authenticity about a culture with which one is not fully intimate might be possible.

I meet Frank this afternoon, we will further talk about it.

Chunglu

From: Baur Collection
Sent: Friday, May 18th, 2001 09:13
To: Sophie Wirth Brentini
Subject: Moods

Dear Sophie,

Thank you for your fax enclosing a copy of your correspondence with Chunglu. He, himself, had come on Monday to quickly see me and appeared rather troubled by the vagueness with which everybody’s tasks and catalogue responsibilities have been attributed.... I will meet Chunglu next week at more length and hope to reach to an agreement between you two.

Please note that I will always take into account your point of view; moreover it is essential that Chunglu feels at ease in this common work. I believe that the most part of “misunderstandings” comes from a lack of permanent contact. I believe that we will be able to overcome our difficulties. Concretely, it is out of the question to produce two different versions (French and English) but to integrate in one whole elements of aesthetic analysis, the position paintings occupy in a historical continuum and the role they play in this collection, where the emotional side occupies a very important (and justified) place.

I hope, by next week, to give you some news of my progresses as a go-between/editor responsible for his different authors.

Kindly,
Frank Dunand

---

55 When I received this fax, I had not yet gained the theoretical tools that would have allowed me to understand the innovative aspect of Mr. Tsen’s idea for the field of art history.
Dear Sophie,

Thank you for your message. I saw Chunglu about two weeks ago and we discussed different "issues". (...) I believe there is right now a certain floating concerning the captions, which should be the result of your collaboration and not of a "parallel" work. Chunglu has a more "emotional" vision than ours, and this is an element I would not like to see lost. (...) but you have of course to progress according to your own point of view.

Kindly,

Frank Dunand

Meanwhile, I wrote my captions, following my own point of view but, taking as well into account Mr. Tsen’s advice: I tried to be as lyrical as I could, developing some of the artists’ life elements, of course in the limits of a catalogue’s caption as well as trying to limit the pure aesthetic descriptions. I sent the whole series to my colleagues and did not hear any more from them until the month of August. Mr. Dunand left on summer holiday without looking at my new series of captions. As for Mr. Tsen, he kept sending me his own texts, “tiptoeing through the tulips”.

In Geneva

During July and August I worked on the historical context article, preparing for my stay in Geneva. I was happy to benefit from the university’s library resources as it provided me with books I would not have had access to in Geneva. On the 6th of August I received Mr. Tsen’s biography. This text could only fill me with enthusiasm: it was personal, intimate, tender and fascinating. His thirty-five page biography, an article length that nobody else would have dared to propose, largely covered the historical and cultural context. I decided to further my current

---

research and to reorient the theme of my article: as Dr. Tsen was his secretary and counsellor, I would bring to the fore the figure of Wang Jingwei and the history of his government, usually neglected to the advantage of Chiang Kaishek's.

When I arrived in Geneva, I could only hand to Mr. Dunand a first draft of my article.

We met on September 3rd, with Mr. Tsen at the Baur Collection.

Concerning our conflict, Tsen seems to have calmed down a bit.

Historical context and biography: clear difference of culture in the two texts. Two different orientations. Tsen’s is very lively, insider’s vision. Me: clarity and objectivity concern. Idea of contextual frame.

Are we going to leave the texts as such or are we going to try and avoid redundancies/repetitions?

Catalogue captions: coordination issue, some are irreconcilable. Dunand proposes to publish both texts for each artefact. This is a new idea! Thus, we would have an insider and an outsider’s point of view united. Presence of both cultures in a catalogue, clear choice.

Problem: space is limited

Meeting Mr. Tsen at his house two days later in the afternoon, I found him far from being serene. The conflict was thus far from being over... His rejection of my texts was so strong that the sole solution possible for him was the publication of two different versions of our catalogue (he was less concerned about the French version as the English catalogue would be more widely distributed). I expressed my doubts and Dunand’s refusal. Appearing to capitulate, he proposed then to work the three together, to rewrite everything together. How could he imagine working us three together with such a messy communication? Furthermore, whereas I was ready to listen to advice and to demands, I had never agreed to write my texts

57 Despite of Wang Jingwei’s sincere commitment to his country, his collaboration with the Japanese enemy to try and save China was not forgiven to him.
with anybody else. We were then in September 2001, I had completed three quarters of my task, and actually nothing was definite. Everything was in question even though I started to work extremely early to, precisely, avoid this kind of situation.

I inform Tsen on my work’s progress. "What is it? All that text? This is way too much, in a catalogue there are few texts and a lot of reproductions. Think about the room and the costs....!"

I make myself rather clear: I had presented to them in June 2000 a detailed plan of the catalogue, which moreover respected Dr. Billeter’s advice, that is to say, that it would highlight the historical context. In short I was quite upset, but I tried to stay calm and polite...

Is that it? Everything is questioned but his huge biography and his captions? I have then to struggle to make him hear and understand my article on literati’s plan. It is of course criticized but in the end he appears happy with it.

Conclusion: I am exhausted and unmotivated. During the meeting though, we have a break: he tells me an episode of Madame Fan’s childhood, followed with one of her late years. I understand that behind all this sensitivity there is a huge emotional issue for Mr. Tsen. Enormous issue of trust as well.

Personal resolutions: 1. do not let myself be destabilized, after all, I did not invent what I write. 2. do not meet him at his house, it is not neutral enough. I will meet him only at the Baur Collection. 3. Let’s write my article as planned.

The next time I met Mr. Dunand, we determined a common plan of action: we would meet everyday in the museum’s safe to debate the artworks. The paintings of Fan Tchunpi were on their way from the United States but had been delayed by the September 11th tragedy. He proposed his idea about our conflict: I am in charge of the objective and descriptive aspect of the work that would then be completed with a more personal comment written by Mr. Tsen. That

Conaty and Carter (unpublished paper) also mentioned the importance, when working in collaboration on the preparation of an exhibition, of finding a neutral place of meeting with the community whose culture is being represented. Whereas Phillips (2003) notes that “[i]n many collaborative exhibition projects the museum serves as a useful ‘neutral space’ (...)”(p. 160), for Conaty and Carter’s (unpublished paper) collaborative process, the Glenbow Museum was not neutral enough. In the present case, the solution I proposed, the Baur Collection, was not neutral either...
meant that my captions would stay intact, I would sign them, and a personal comment would be added and signed by Mr. Tsen.

Who do we try to satisfy with our rigorous attitude? Is that the public or our academic world? Maybe the public would like a change!? 

In *Double exposures*, Mieke Bal (1996) interprets the scientific and scholarly discourses as forms of “truth-speak”. According to her, they compete for the conquest of “constative authority and demonstrative persuasiveness” (p.50). Even though in this type of processes the hand of the maker obscures itself and the words informing the visual image make their speakers invisible, this is not a neutral discourse (ibid.). It is, again, an issue of power/knowledge (p.49).

For Fourmille and Marrie (cited in Simpson, 2001, p.1) museums and anthropologists still function in a state of “scientific colonialism”, a form of cultural colonialism, continuing to control the representation of the “other”. “(...) [A]rt history seems hard pressed to renounce its positivistic basis as if it feared to lose its scholarly status altogether in the bargain” (Bal, 1994, p.140).

Concerning my historical introduction, Mr. Dunand did not, at first, wish to give it up. We would probably have to shorten it a bit, but the period of history of concern to us was sufficiently complex not to fear repetition.

The telephone rings: Mr. Tsen is calling. Mr. Dunand is very clear on the contentious issues. He explains him our plan: Mr. Dunand and I will at first work together on the artwork, alone. He also explains that a rational and descriptive part is important from a professional point of view. In flattering Mr. Tsen about his biography, he defends my own article’s importance. At the end of the phone call, Mr. Tsen asks to talk to me and asks me how we will proceed! What can I say!

From then on, Mr. Dunand started to assume his responsibilities: he organized our work, as I had tried to but failed, totally unheard. Dunand explained his strategy to me: “We won’t put his text into question, it is very good. However, we won’t bother him during the writing
and we won't ask him to adapt to our discourse since it would signify a collaboration made
difficult by emotions and culture". We had furthermore professional responsibilities to
consider. After one year and a half of work, I finally got feedback from my editor, finally he was
thinking of our project in a constructive way.

I spent the remaining weeks of my stay working with Mr. Dunand in the Baur
Collection’s safe, brainstorming on each artwork, on each artefact. What came out from these
work sessions is that I should have ignored the example of the catalogue given by Mr. Dunand
in spring 2000: convinced of a lack of space, I had limited myself to aesthetic descriptions and
had not researched enough. The catalogue’s format change would henceforth allow fuller
contextual comments. Often rather tense, because of my lack of research and of self-confidence,
these sessions were the basis on which I rewrote my captions.

First meeting with Wang Fei who comes to help us to read the seals printed on several
modern paintings and read the side inscriptions of the collection’s seals. He is a
connoisseur and will help us for the captions. We address then the question of the
literati. For him, a literati artist has his mind oriented above all towards literature
and sees things from a calligraphic point of view. A professional painter sees things
visually, pictorially.

Mr Tsen: How do you, Westerners, work? What do you do when you write a caption?

We started to describe our tasks to them: we take out each work and we describe it, we
verify interpretations, cultural references, trying and be the most objective possible.

Mr Tsen: Don’t you do any estimation? A judgement on the artwork’s quality?

Dunand: Not really, this is done when we choose the artefacts that will be exhibited.
Chinese reaction is apparently opposite: Wang Fei when opening an artwork critic it
at once.

Mr Tsen: But why don’t you do this?
Dunand: We could not for we are not Chinese, we did not grow up in your culture, it would be artificial. This is why we are interested to have your presence in this project. It would be uninteresting and stupid to try and reunite both cultures in one.

What is a reference for us (for example Metropolitan’s catalogues)? Is not for Mr. Tsen and Wang Fei: too rigorous, no heart, no soul.

The key to Chinese painting lies in its calligraphic brushwork and its potential to express the individuality of the artist. Calligraphic expression as a subject of art history —how it works in Chinese painting and the belief that painting and calligraphy are the same — is not, however, easily understood by the Western viewer. The problem is that it appears not to meet the analytic requirement to situate art-historical phenomena within a material and socio-economic context. But in fact, calligraphic expression is very much a product of time, place, and social conditions; the artist, through constant interaction with his historical situation and by projecting himself into his art, produces meaning beyond mimetic representation. Nevertheless, the definition of expression as a subject of art history precludes the notion of a developmental sequence (...) [thus] what is needed is a new structure to address the expressive. (Fong, 1996, p.28)

We finished our work sessions with Fan Tchunpi’s paintings, when they finally arrived from Boston. It went faster for Mr. Dunand who was more confident in my point of view and both of us were clearly more at ease with her art. Her aesthetic language referred to a common basis. Through my own confidence my associations of ideas were freer and more spontaneous, more creative. Stored for decades, these paintings, especially the oil on canvas, needed to be cleaned, stretched and some of them needed frames. I contacted a private conservator and we decided all together on the work to be done.

I left Geneva for Vancouver at the beginning of October, extremely impatient to leave my home city and everything contentious. I left Geneva with one more of my texts cut: exit my historical context. My new task was to realize a detailed chronology covering a period of about a

---

59 See Fax dated May 11th, 2001, p.87.
Chapter 5 – Creation

century. An interesting task in itself and even if it was criticized by some
I considered it as a frame of reference for the lay reader.

A chronology was for me an opportunity to simultaneously present distant histories. My intention was to put several contexts close to each other in order to offer a horizontal reading of world history, instead of presenting Chinese history and European history as two parallel histories. At school, regrettably, History is rarely approached globally. I was taught European History and French History and I discovered Chinese History only when I started my studies at the University of Geneva. Consequently, rather than to have a global view of world history, I had a set of knowledge about European History and another one concerning China. Creating this chronology I realized the contemporary nature of several geographically distant events I had insofar considered as belonging to different histories not to say to different worlds. This naïve statement probably belongs more to an intimate feeling than to an objective reality. An intimacy in itself pertaining to the domain of inherited cultural reflexes.

To write this chronology, I drew upon history source books, but for Tsen and Fan families’ chronologies I mainly depended upon Mr. Tsen’s knowledge and information. Nevertheless, I felt the need to find another source of information to confirm the facts Mr. Tsen had graciously shared with me. A feeling I had had before, especially during the work sessions Mr. Tsen and I had spent discussing the collection before my departure for Vancouver, and that was yet going to occur later in our exhibition process. Whereas these episodes should have been foundational for our exhibition, I doubted. In their paper, Conaty and Carter

60 “Billeter judges your chronology “overloaded”. Frank however, concerned about the serious effort you made, decided not to change it. I also wonder if the catalogue won’t contain too much documentation. Bibliographical references, for me, won’t add to the catalogue” (extract from Mr. Tsen’s fax dated November 7th, 2001). “Jean-François is not enthusiastic at all about our (my) decision to establish this chronology. As it is dear to my heart, I will keep it” (extract from Mr. Dunand’s letter dated November 1st, 2001).
61 See Chapter 4, p.80. And also Mr. Dunand’s remark about Mr. Tsen’s translations in Chapter 6, p.103.
62 This reactivity occurred at the occasion of several of Mr. Tsen’s suggestions.
(unpublished paper) show very well how giving primacy to the member of the community being represented in an exhibition asks from museum teams to reconsider certain priorities:

(...) our values and assumptions in the museum community give priority to scientific process and to the knowledge that follows from that process. We rely on historical documents and scholarly discourse for our information and it is not easy to give equal value to traditional knowledge. (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper, n.p.)

Autumn 2001

Back to Vancouver, I wrote, wrote, wrote, and ran after the delays, continuing to correspond with Geneva through faxes and emails. In the meantime, the chronology was reviewed and re-reviewed. It reached its definitive form at the end of the month of November. It was shortened by about two pages. Translating it, Mr. Tsen added some useful (and some lyrical) information.

When I received the reviewed chronology, I collated successive versions of the text between them and stated that some of the suppressed information concerned European imperialism. Information was eliminated if it was judged as superfluous or as an obstacle to the reader’s comprehension, however, about fifty percent concerned European, and Japanese annexations, obtained concessions, and European attitudes after the Second Opium War. Nevertheless, I asked for and obtained the restoration of some important information of this kind.

“Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter” (African proverb quoted in Coxall, 1997, p.99). In her article, Helen Coxall (1997) shows how language is specifically located in culture and communities, and how it often denotes power relations and ideologies; “there is no such thing as ‘common sense’” (p.100). It is thus "vitally important that curators are aware of the significance of what they choose to say and what they choose to leave out, and of the implications in the words they use to tell other people's stories
Language is a site for the negotiation and renegotiation of meanings by readers/visitors ... A language thoroughly considered, an awareness of politically sensitive areas, a clear definition of historical contexts, are factors having direct implications "on opportunities for the articulation — or conversely — for the suppression of voices in an exhibition" (Coxall, 1997, p.105).

Yesterday, Ann brought me back from her office about forty pages of texts on modern paintings as well as your chronology she received by email. This time the captions are a lot better, more professional than before. For sure, the long sessions with Frank Dunand during the month of September were fruitful. (...) Good job Sophie, I am proud of you. (Mr. Tsen, extract from November 7th, 2001 fax)

Frank Dunand just called me. He finished revising your captions on modern painters. After such an amount of work, to avoid risking duplications, I will maybe suppress my own captions on the subject. (...) Things progress bits by bits. (Mr. Tsen, extract from November 16th, 2001 fax)

Thank you for the articles about Fan Tchunpi (...). I am inundated with readings and translations. This is clear that you worked a lot and conscientiously on the texts. With a curious destiny, you are now Fan Tchunpi's specialist. (...) There are however some wrong notes, some aspect lacking authenticity. (Mr. Tsen, extract from November 27th, 2001 fax)

I saw Dunand and Ambroise at Baur this afternoon. Ambroise is writing his captions about the calligraphies, on which we discussed a lot together. You write like a Swiss, his writes like a Chinese, interesting. Frank is a bit frantic. (Mr. Tsen, extract from December 14th, 2001 fax)

Please describe me the Chinese and the Swiss way of writing. I am looking forward to reading Ambroise's texts to see the difference. (Sophie Wirth Brentini, extract from December 19th, 2001 fax)

Ambroise is rather subjective in his texts. As ancient times Chinese, he tells about airiness, breath, view grandeur etc... As for you, you stay objective. Nothing that is not provable. Two sensibilities, two mentalities — which fascinates me, by the way. (Mr. Tsen, extract from December 19th, 2001 fax)

Son of a Genevan antiquarian specializing in Chinese art, Ambroise had left Geneva to study Chinese art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. He lived there several years and

100
came back home married. Thus, he has been, in spite of his Western origin immersed in Chinese culture for years. Tsen’s statement is rather interesting even if I felt rather helpless. For Mr. Tsen wanted me to change somewhat. I did not want however to pretend: I write what I feel.

Do we have to express ourselves in a particular language when writing on other cultures or can we have a different point of view? Is there a right and wrong approach?

"[Ambroise] is more Chinese than the Chinese themselves!" (Mr. Tsen, feedback meeting). To grasp the alien culture, orientalists have to make a "sympathetic identification" with it. They have to orientalize themselves in order to get closer to the "other", since specialists not only speak about but also for the "other". Whereas Westernized Chinese are the subject of much attention, Sinified Westerners are not, even though examples abound from the origins of orientalism to the present (Dirlik, 1996, p.102).

Their "orientalization" was what qualified the orientalists to speak for the Orient. To the extent that they were "orientalized", however, they themselves assumed some of the exoticism of the orient, which on occasion marginalized them, and even rendered them ideologically suspect at home. (ibid.)

Having the intention to criticize Eurocentrism, Cohen and Schrecker (quoted in Dirlik, ibid.) proposed the notion of a "China-centered history". Nevertheless, "in drawing a clear methodological line between Chinese and other histories, and arguing that Chinese history may be understood only in terms that are internal to it", this idea is in conformity with orientalist epistemologies (ibid.). It also put Chinese culture appreciation in an elitist system, only accessible to privileged knowledgeable people, rather good gatekeepers themselves, for the amount of work dedicated to their task, and remain the only ones sufficiently initiated to understand it.

After I handed in my due texts, they had to be translated by Mr. Tsen. In Geneva, they had started to think about and decided to postpone the exhibition for three months: nobody had
handed in their texts but me. All these changes started to have an impact on my studies. I could not take the last courses I had to in order to complete my course work at UBC.
Editing

In January, three more of my texts for the catalogue were cut out: they were introductory texts to the three schools of Chinese modern painting (Lingnan, Shanghai, Beijing). The reasons mentioned were of course a lack of space in the catalogue and budgetary issues. Mr. Tsen informed me about it ... my editor should have done it. I will not extend myself on the only too predictable state of mind this piece of news put me in...

Having written the most text and having started to work the earliest, I was the one who lost the biggest amount of text. I felt bereaved. I can only relate to Mary Bouquet’s (1998) feeling of traumatism: “[t]he experience of moving from concept to object was a traumatic one for me” (p.168). My absence from Geneva, my lack of experience, my outsider’s stance, my interest in modern Chinese art (vs. ancient art), my editor’s unavailability made me feel as the fifth wheel of the wagon.

An important task had been to translate into French and English some of the calligraphies and paintings’ colophons, as well as some of the seals’ inscriptions. Mr. Tsen had been charged with it. When I had received his translations, I had become even more fascinated by our collection, its beauty and its poetry. In September 2001, however, Mr. Dunand was not satisfied with Mr. Tsen’s translations: although he found them truly poetic and delicate, they did not correspond to our European way of translating.

——

From: Chunglu Tsen
Sent: Thursday, January 24th, 2002 10:35
To: Sophie Wirth Brentini
Subject: Chunglu’s letter
Dear Sophie,
Long time no write. (...) Since New Year I dived in the translation of your texts. (...) Progress is slow because I translate very conscientiously, a lot more than I did professionally at the UN.
I am really impressed with the research you did. You are an exceptional researcher. (...) What you wrote on FTP and on Lingnan school is very very good. Your conclusion on FTP is especially right. It seems to me, by the way, that you identify yourself a bit with the young FTP who left for Paris in the middle of the war to follow Julian Academy courses. Unfortunately, your style is weighed down with too many repetitions and too many qualifiers. The most difficult for me translating is to make stylistic detours in order to find more varied expressions, more compact.
You know, in the art of writing, as for Chinese painting, the unsaid is often more eloquent than the over-said.
Having already exceeded of 30'000 francs his budget, Frank would like to limit the catalogue to 120 pages. To spare room, he asked me to condense as much as I can. For style's beauty thus, to give up banalities, and sometimes to make concrete and to personalize the story, I made major changes that I put in yellow. The French version could as well be adapted, either by you or by Frank.
Waiting your reaction with curiosity, I wish you and Gilles a Happy New Year. When do you plan to come back?
Chunglu

This fax and the attached files were the origin of a new conflict. I had sent him my texts in November 2001 and he asked me two months later, a few days before publication, to actually adapt them to his translations whereas I regarded them as ready for publication. In his translations, he had cut out whole sentences, and he had rewritten others, adding new information judged more important by him.

February, 8th.

Reading Tsen’s translation which he sent me on January the 24th, (...) I struggle to concentrate, overwhelmed with a flood of dissatisfaction, thinking once again to his denigrating words, I lost confidence in myself and can only reject his translation. What I note is that some elements of my text disappearing in his translation are often difficult to translate. I have the impression that my text is not mine anymore. Is a translation not supposed to be faithful? Each line irritates me, each word upsets me.

February 9th.

---

63 Mr. Tsen was in charge of translating the catalogue’s texts into English.
64 See appendix IV.
Tsen continues to send me translations which are not literal. He makes suggestions, written in yellow, sometimes the whole caption has been rewritten. It means that once again he tries to make me write what he already wanted me to do last June: “more personal, less rational”. What I had tried to do without any success since Tsen and Dunand, unsatisfied, made me rewrite these texts. Now it is just too late. What am I supposed to do? Accept his corrections? What was my mistake? Doesn’t he have enough room already to express his point of view?

February 11th.

I calmed down since my last emotions. I correct his translation, verifying phrase after phrase, one word after the other, to check the fidelity of his corrections and “suggestions”. Often his corrections are really precise, a comma, a majuscule to be added, but elsewhere, my sentences were misunderstood, or entire portions of my text surreptitiously disappear, to be replaced by his own words. What does he try to do, to control my work? To print his seal on my text?

---

From: Baur Collection
Sent: Thursday, February 14th, 2001 09:35
To: Sophie Wirth Brentini
Subject: Thank you

Dear Sophie,
Thank you for your revised [files]. It was under no circumstances foreseen to modify (...) your text. We will thus restore your original. The fact that Mr. Tsen does not limit himself to translate (for which I am very grateful, the work is enormous) up sets our own work of revision and setting tune (...).
I regret that the “cross-cultural collaboration” between Chunglu and yourself functions as badly. This terribly complicates our work.
Kindly, your Frank Dunand

---

In his email dated January, 24th, Mr. Tsen clearly holds me responsible for his task’s difficulty. After praising my work (“You are an exceptional researcher”), Mr. Tsen reminds me how “debutant” I am and in his last paragraph, he justifies his corrections as the only solution to make the catalogue possible (helping Mr. Dunand to limit expenses). What is interesting in this instance and what explains most probably my sharp reaction is that Mr. Tsen’s attitude put me in the role of somebody who is spoken for. The paradox in the present case is nevertheless that
I was myself speaking about/for Mr. Tsen's culture. Mr. Tsen struggled to gain power and I struggled against my loss of power. The issue at stake here is that even before the reception of my text by readers — at the point where the meanings made out of my texts are not in my hand anymore — I felt I was losing some portion of my control over the meaning and truth of my utterance (Alcoff, 1991, p. 15). However, I did not feel less responsible for what would be published and signed under my name. "Clearly, the problematic of speaking for has at its centre a concern with accountability and responsibility" (p.16): "a partial loss of control does not entail a complete loss of accountability" (ibid.).

In this project we had the opportunity to examine "how the insider and outsider perspectives might interact and build upon one another in the process of truth-seeking and understanding" (Ames, 1992, p.56). What I noticed is that we evolved on rather unstable ground and that we, the protagonists, had a world of difference between each other. "[T]here is no one insider perspective, no one orthodoxy" (ibid.) and definitions of insiders and outsiders are multiple. The line separating insiders from outsiders is always moving and the role attributed to each changing; it is moreover closely related to issues of domination.

All of us (the three protagonists) occupy ambiguous positions. Mr. Tsen is, as an immigrant, an outsider (as well as in regards to the Baur Collection), but a cultural insider of our exhibition's subject. In being a foreigner, Mr. Tsen is in a position of inferiority with reference to our profession and practices, but his experience and culture position him as dominant. As far as I am concerned, I am culturally an insider of Geneva's dominant culture, and my profession allows me to speak for another culture's art a museum has appropriated, even though I am an outsider of the culture I study. Having researched about this art, I felt as if I was in possession of the artwork, as if I was an insider of the art I had in hand. I felt professionally dominant (because of my responsibilities), but personally dominated: as a young woman facing two
cultivated and privileged aging men, I was in the situation of the dominated to whom one does not hesitate to ask for justifications (Alcoff p.13). As for Mr. Dunand, he occupied a dominant position from a local and generational point of view while he was an outsider of Chinese culture. Thus everybody's status was relative and in constant change.

One always fares with at least four simultaneous gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while persisting in one's difference; and that of insisting "I am different" while unsettling all definitions and practices of otherness arrived at. This is where inappropriate(d)ness takes form. Because when you talk about difference, there are many ways to receive it; if one simply understands it as a division between culture, between people, between entities, one can't go very far with it. But when that difference between entities is being worked out as a difference also within, things start opening up. Inside and outside are both expanded. Within each entity, there is a vast field and within each self is a multiplicity. (Minh-ha in Grzinic, 1998, non paginated html file)

This project of exhibition had put us in a state of transition. We were all three navigating in unknown waters “fraught with anxieties, tensions, compulsions and hidden agendas” (Bharucha, 1999, p.15). Minh-ha’s (in Grzinic, 1998) concept of “self-in-displacement” or “self-in-creation” is very relevant here. Through both these notions “changes and discontinuities are accounted for in the making and unmaking of identity” (non paginated html file) and this takes a particular depth when we consider our change of perception towards the Xiehanglou collection within the realization of the exhibition. In our case boundaries between differences were not blurred or made invisible, but they shifted and became mobile (ibid.).

This is rather a delicate approach, for we swim so securely in the waters of our own culture that it is hard to see. (...) What we need is a mechanism for estranging ourselves from ourselves in order to see ourselves, to pierce the veil of comfort and necessity within which cultural activities perforce seem right and proper. We need to become the anthropologists of ourselves. But perhaps that is too grandiose. We can,

---

65 This remark works for our selves as places of personal introspections but it applies as well to our ‘professional selves’, as curators. Mr. Tsen’s presence put our roles in transition: we were incited to somewhat abandon our specialist stances in favour of a facilitator’s one translating Mr. Tsen’s knowledge into an exhibit (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper, p.7). “If active exchanges with communities are to become part of an institution’s work, it will not happen by adding these activities at the margins, but by fundamentally reorganizing [it]” (Lavine, 1992, p.151). However, the non-explicit nature of this transition hindered our taking advantage of its possibilities and richness.
however, learn to see something of how we reflect ourselves in the exhibits we invent about others (...). (Halpin quoted in Ames, 1992, p.45)

Finally, the Baur Collection sent my texts to a professional translator, accompanied with Mr. Tsen’s translations to make them correspond. “His comments are interesting but he does not make a translation!” Mr. Dunand’s assistant exclaimed during a personal conversation. Apparently the contention was not as heated with texts other than mine. He was less harassing towards my captions on modern paintings than on those about Fan Tchunpi.

From then on, everybody was stressed. We were three weeks away from publication deadlines and Mr. Dunand, under pressure, put everybody on the grill. Of course my absence from Geneva did not make things easy for them, as well as for me since I was not always consulted when it came to decision making. Nonetheless, the rewarding stage was just about to happen. It started when the Baur Collection sent me the press proofs. After two years, our work was concrete. The catalogue unfortunately would not be ready for the opening, it would be delivered about a week later. But before that date, a French sample was made available for the press conference and an English one was ready for Mr. Tsen’s private opening. This magnificent 158-page catalogue consisted of one foreword, one introduction, one biography, one chronological table, of one introduction to Fan’s paintings, and of one caption per artefact: in total ninety-four colour reproductions, one painting or calligraphy per page, two artefacts per page. We chose Shen Zhou’s chrysanthemums as a cover since, as a symbol of literati culture, and having transcended war turmoil, it represents well The Pavilion of Marital Harmony collection’s spirit.

In Geneva:

May 1st, 2002.
Chapter 6 – Publication

The dices are thrown. The atmosphere is slowly cooling down. While in his office, I grab a sample catalogue I discover on his table. Nobody came to inform me that they had arrived ... This catalogue is simply magnificent. I tell it to Mr. Dunand. We exchange a big hug. "If we were to ruin ourselves, why not have something beautiful and at the Baur Collection's standards".

Reading my journals again, I realize that Tsen had already an exhibition planned in his mind. I found, written down in my earliest notes, the idea he had about the catalogue's table of contents “Why not only one essay as an historical context that I would write”. This was not a bad idea, but my catalogue plan had just been agreed upon by Mr. Dunand and I had trouble to let go of my introductory pages...

Postcard and video production

The production of a video had been agreed upon at the signature of our contract already: "A video film, as an introduction to the exhibition, will be realised with the help of Mr. Tsen. This film will be realised by a studio experienced in such activity, in collaboration with Mrs. Wirth Brentini" (agency contract of The Pavilion of Marital Harmony, p.1).


Dear Sophie,

Your beautiful postcards from Vancouver are received with a lot of pleasure. It surprises me to read once again this so well known writing, in which the ‘ou’ is written as an ‘a’. This is curious to imagine you on the Pacific Ocean coast under the rain. Here I sit in a coffee shop with my pen and postcards. Young women ride their bikes. A misty sun announces the beginning of winter. We met Frank Dunand at the Victoria Hall attending to a concert one evening. Geneva stays Geneva without you.

How about your studies at the university? Are they all right? Is it possible to learn photography? And the art of video film? And twentieth century Chinese history? You know, you could prepare to undertake yourself the exhibition’s audiovisual projects. I count on you.

Christmas holidays are already here. I wonder if you and Gilles would take advantage of your return flights to come to Geneva. Waiting for a surprise, I kiss you,

Chunglu
Since the spring, Mr. Tsen had the idea to make me the exhibition's photographer. He would get the cameras and other necessary accessories and I would be responsible for the photographs. His idea came from my undergraduate thesis for which I had made reproductions of Fan Tchunpi's paintings. Furthermore he was aware of my interest in photography and my minor in this Fine-Arts branch. I was of course interested in this task and I went to consult my photography professor while Mr. Tsen looked into the material costs. Soon I was to realize that to obtain a result of quality, the novice not only had a complicated task but also the costs of the operation would not necessarily be more advantageous for Mr. Tsen than to employ a professional. Having done a little research, we consulted with Mr. Dunand. “Concerning three-dimensional artefacts, this is simply out of the question! Why not try out your solution for the paintings and calligraphies if you are sure of your business...”. After a while though Mr. Dunand reviewed his decision. “We cannot put the Baur Collection’s reputation at risk, what is published here is at high costs but for the best quality as well. All the photographic work will be done as usual by the Baur Collection’s photographer”.

It had been decided at our March 2, 2001 meeting that Mr. Tsen would be responsible for the video production, and I did not hear about the video film anymore until our return to Geneva in April 2002, three weeks before the opening. Our first idea had been to propose a ten to fifteen minute film as a context to the exhibition that would include family photographs, a video in which Fan Tchunpi, filmed by her son, tells her autobiography, and documentary films broadcast on television⁶⁶. On my first day back at the Baur Collection in April 2002, as on numerous Monday mornings, Mr. Dunand was not himself. He was extremely stressed and

---

⁶⁶ We could not obtain copy rights for these documentary films: we had to give up this information source.
anxious not to have everything under control. There is however one thing he is very clear upon: I must propose my help to Mr. Tsen to realize the video! "How could I help him, the scenario has been written, and I do not know anything about video techniques" I exclaimed. "Sophie, you are now his assistant on this project!" he replied.

On the same afternoon, during our meeting with Mr. Tsen, Dunand had forgotten his morning idea and appeared surprised when I proposed my help to Mr. Tsen. He nevertheless found my idea very good. Two days later I went to Mr. Tsen’s to discuss the video and what help he might need. He showed me the camera he had just bought and studied the manual.

April 17th, 2002.

(...) "This is easy, we only need to copy one video film on another video tape and to add the sound on it." At this point I just have a huge critical reaction: the sequences won’t match the French text that will be read by an actress! He simply wants to choose short extracts, and to cut his mother’s voice to cover it with the scenario. Right now there are neither selections nor sequences. The photographs that will punctuate the film are still negatives, thus are not yet filmable.

I try and understand what remains to be done, that is, EVERYTHING, and to organize our tasks...

"It will take one day max. If everything works fine, two hours!" he tells me. I snigger in myself and think "yes, right". I am totally unmotivated. Since March 2001 I clearly had said that I would not participate in this video project.

On the table lies an accumulation of pictures, negatives, documents, cameras, their accessories ... and their manuals.

I proposed to read the scenario aloud and to time it. At least he would have a basis to select sequences. I filmed the photographs, Gilles helped to try and edit and sound edit the film and gave up. A couple of days later, I was charged to record the actress reading the text. She was playing Madame Fan recalling her past on a scenario written by Mr. Tsen. We did not hear any more of this project until one month after the opening when Mr. Tsen brought a complete
version of the film. A deliciously refined and touching document. He finally had hired a professional to finish up our editing attempt. The video was shown in a video space located on the museum’s first floor, at the top of the stairs leading to the temporary exhibition rooms situated in the building’s basement.

The installation

At Mr. Tsen’s, September 2001.

Mr. Tsen (flipping through a pile of papers, then handing out a postcard reproducing a Japanese painter’s carp): Look at this! I think this is the origin of Gao Jianfu’s Carp!

Sophie: How beautiful!

Mr. Tsen: I had an idea: we could reproduce it and put it on the label of Gao Jianfu.

Sophie (at once doubtful): Oh.

Mr. Tsen: You could research to find others of such sources to reproduce them on the labels of other artists...

Sophie (nevertheless seduced by this didactic idea): Well this is a rather good idea, but I think it raises some issues here. First of all, we should reproduce it at a large enough size to allow viewers to actually make sense of what we show them. We don’t want them to just see a fish. Furthermore, if we engage in such an aesthetic in installing the artwork, we will have to find something for each and every artwork exhibited, which won’t be easy.

Mr. Tsen: Ah, but you can do it! You will do it!

---

67 In September 2001, I was almost through my coursework at UBC and had just started my research for this thesis. The reflection was thus engaged, but yet too recent to have a concrete impact on my practice. I had furthermore to adapt it to the setting of the Baur Collection.
Sophie: And can you imagine the cost of such an operation? It means that we will have to photograph each and every picture ... and there will be probably copyrights issues as well.

Mr. Tsen: No no no, but we will make colour photocopies of them: this is not expensive!

Sophie: Can you only imagine Mr. Dunand’s reaction if we provide him colour photocopies to be hung onto the Baur Collection’s walls?

Mr. Tsen: This is your work, you have to convince him of our good idea.

Insofar I had always been open to other cultures and I was persuaded to act in accordance. However, at that point I had to hear another point of view and to change my practice in keeping with it. I had to listen to an “other”的 demand and to act upon it.

Instead of approaching the art of China with preconceived ideas based on stereotypes, perhaps we in the West should be asking what Chinese artists see in their work and derive from it, as well as listening to how Chinese art historians wish to interpret it. It may be time to lay aside our European expectations and be open to the answers we receive. (Craig Clunas, 1999 p.141)

I obviously aspired to let Mr. Tsen’s point of view be heard, his needs expressed and let them have an impact on my work. But how was another question. I had to forget my own conceptions for a while. Moreover, I was confronted by a dichotomy between his demands and refusals and my professional tasks and responsibilities. I had trouble, probably lacking tools, to find creative solutions for both of our needs and expectations.

Through such collaborations, nevertheless, “museums [would] have the opportunity to gain strength by giving up power” (Haas, 1996, p.56). Giving up power in letting Mr. Tsen, as a representative of Chinese culture and owner of the collection, make decisions about the way the Baur Collection would use and make the Xiehanglou collection accessible to the public. “[The museums would] become stronger through the support and insights of the people represented
in their collections and exhibits (...). An opportunity to begin erasing the black line that has persisted for so long separating “us” from “them” (p.S6-S7).

Throughout the preparation, Mr. Tsen and I had diverse ideas about the installation, such as labels’ content and graphics. Mr. Tsen had the idea to install a scholar’s desk where the visitor could sit and practice calligraphy on an exercise board. As for me, I would have liked to install a table at which the viewer could sit and flip through reference books about our exhibition’s themes and historical epochs. I insisted on the presence of text panels such as a historical chronology, a familial chronology, an introduction to Fan Tchunpi’s art, to modern painting and to calligraphy. I also would have liked to see reproduced on the walls Chinese art literature quotes representative of the different types of artefacts exhibited in our temporary galleries.

Later I had the idea, so as to increase the lender’s presence in the exhibition rooms, to put at the visitor’s disposal a binder enclosing an interview with Mr. Tsen as an intimate introduction to his parents’ collection, followed by the captions he wrote on each artwork of the collection. As the son of Dr. Tsen and Madame Fan, Mr. Tsen would thus share his insider stance with the reader. My idea however did not interest the principal involved, Mr. Tsen: “One MORE text?!”. He preferred to establish a dialogue with the viewer by being present in the galleries. This materialized in the form of exhibition tours Mr. Tsen gave.

April 17th, 2002

[Mr.Tsen] would like to put calligraphies’ texts in the exhibition rooms. “Everything is already on Ambroise’s computer! This is easy!” he said. In fact not all texts are completely translated and Mr. Tsen has difficulty to provide a clear and complete list.

68 My idea would have been in keeping with a collaborative exhibition model defined by Phillips (2003, p.163) as “multivocal exhibit”, it would have been a way “(...) to find a space of coexistence for multiple perspectives” (p.164). Fortunately, the presence of Mr. Tsen in the exhibition rooms when he gave tours was a step in that direction.
of the desired translations. Once more he sends me to pass the message to the Baur Collection. "We want to please the collector" said Dunand. Ambroise: "Well it is a waste of energy". Once more I run as the go-between. This is ridiculous and this is the last time.

When I arrived in Geneva three weeks before the exhibition opening, Tsen expressed his wish to translate several other inscriptions and colophons on paintings (than those already translated in the catalogue), and in particular other calligraphies. He wanted them edited and printed as brochures as study support for the viewer. This idea is part of the concept of studying Chinese art in the Chinese way: to dive into the work of art to grasp the deep meanings of the art and of its author, to spiritually establish a bond with the artist. But practically, the initiate and non-initiate would have had access to research material. In the end, because of a shortage of resources, Mr. Dunand decided not to further Mr. Tsen’s request. All the leads mentioned above were finally not realized for diverse reasons, such as feasibility, time and cost constraints, and lack of motivation.

I had started early to work on installation plans, pushed forward because of my worry that we may not have enough room to exhibit our selection. It was rather difficult for me to imagine the artworks placed in the exhibition rooms and to know if all would fit in the space we had at our disposition. Even though it theoretically seemed possible, I was not completely reassured: I knew only too well that the installation would not consist in juxtaposing paintings alongside one another.

The temporary exhibition rooms\(^{69}\) consist of about 150 square meters divided in four rooms. Three out of the four have one wall covered with large showcases, in the fourth one (room B) there are two removable showcases. For this exhibition, we had two major constraints.

---

\(^{69}\) See appendix V.
First we had an issue of space accentuated by the fact that we would exhibit mainly two-dimensional artworks that would not necessarily fit in showcases (for example oil on canvas and hanging scrolls) and that would not be easy to juxtapose. Moreover, we had a number of seals and other miniature artefacts that would be challenging to exhibit aesthetically and in their finest details.

In December 2000, I thought about two possibilities. The first, which would rapidly be abandoned for space and readability, presented on the one hand the couple of collectors, and Fan’s career on the other. What seduced me was to present Fan’s career as a whole. The second possibility, which would be finally chosen, used room B (fig.10) as the heart of the exhibition. In exhibiting the couple’s personal belongings in a showcase in the middle of Fan Tchunpi’s artwork, I intended to represent the couple’s context of life through Fan’s landscapes and portraits. This main room opened to three smaller rooms in which we would exhibit the Xiehanglou collection. The core of a gentleman connoisseur’s collection (ancient and modern calligraphies along with ancient paintings) would be hung in room C (fig.12,13); modern paintings in room D (fig.14,15); and the objects for the scholar’s desk in room A (fig.11). If Fan’s work was, in a certain measure, put in a role of illustration of the couple’s context, it nevertheless put her art at the heart and presented the couple and their art as a unity. Unfortunately, a small drawback to this project was the access to the exhibition: Baur Collection’s temporary exhibitions are entered through room A where we would display the objects for the scholar’s desk (fig.9), the type of object exhibited that came last in importance in a collection following in the literati tradition.

I sent along my proposal for installation during the spring of 2001, but I did not hear about installation any more before the month of September during which I met for the first time.
Nicole, the designer. We discussed my project, and agreed to go defend it before Mr. Dunand, after which I again did not hear anything until the actual installation took place ten days before the opening in May 2002. When I arrived in Geneva mid-April, Nicole introduced me to the graphic designer with whom she had worked. For the title labels, they chose to reproduce the catalogue’s motif, Shen Zhou’s chrysanthemum, that would allow a certain unity to take place, more than if we had chosen (as I intended at first) one precise motif for each room (fig.11).

As for the installation, she had worked further on our ideas: we were going to lack for room, thus she proposed two consecutive installations. At the beginning of the month of July a dozen paintings and calligraphies would be replaced by a dozen others. However her work had remained theoretical, for Mr. Dunand had not authorized her to actually see and work with the works of art, even though they were stored at the Baur Collection since the month of September. This had upset her and put her in a stressful situation.

April 15th, 2002

I spent the day with Nicole to do the first on-site testing with the artworks. Some changes are necessary. Working in pair is positive and creative. How beautiful do the artworks look once hung on the walls! Visual interplays, series, asymmetry, symmetry, static and dynamic... Balance.

In need of space for Fan’s paintings, Nicole chose to hang a portrait of Fan Tchunpi painted by Marcelle Ladeuil (fig.22) and Fan Tchunpi’s portrait of Dr. Tsen Tsonming (fig.6) in the hall (room A, fig.11) as well as Fan’s Flute player (fig.23). The viewer was thus first introduced to the couple inviting them to appreciate their collection which solved somewhat our entrance issue. Except for the themes given to each room, the visitor was not invited to follow a particular route to visit our exhibition.
At this stage, the objects had been removed from their usual context to enter the museum. They were though not yet displayed but at the stage preceding the “glass box”. During installation steps, Nicole and I still had a different relationship with the artefacts. At Mr. Tsen’s house I had had a physical contact with each of them individually to understand and feel the depths of their history and spirituality. At the Baur Collection, Nicole and I had to handle them but our process and relationship to them were more materialistic and superficial. We manipulated them with a precise aim: preserving them and installing them in their museological reinterpretation. We carried them as groups and individually but always in relation to other artefacts and to room and/or showcase space, which is another inconsistency concerning *literati* art collections in a museum\(^7\). Our aim was to aesthetically present our subject and the objects became mere tools. It is important to note that Mr. Tsen was not consulted about the installation: it actually did not cross our minds to invite him to contribute to the installation process. Rather, we wanted to surprise him. Despite all our good intentions, this gentle exclusion probably would not have happened in North America where it would be unconceivable, today, not to include the people whose culture are represented into the whole exhibition process.

Advertising

We also started to reflect early on the choice of a poster. The first idea I had was a photographic portrait of the Tsen couple. I liked this idea because it would present a modern and actual image of China. This lead was rejected by the Baur Collection for it caused aesthetic issues: our exhibition was not a photography exhibition. The reproduction of one of Xiehanglou’s seal prints was more conceivable. For me, however, the poster format for a seal print is too far away from its original size which renders this image inconsistent. Two paintings

\(^7\) See Chapter 4, p.75.
would have been particularly representative of the *Xiehanglou* collection: Shen Zhou’s Chrysanthemums, in addition to being the catalogue cover, could as well have been chosen as a poster; and the Bamboo and Lotus painted by Wu Hufan\(^7\) and his wife Pan Jingshu was another option for its metaphor of *literati* culture and feminity, both painted in a rather naturalist way during the 1930’s. The decision was made by Mr. Dunand and Mr. Tsen in my absence and the communication of it did not reach me, even though I was reachable through email, fax and telephone.

A detail of Deng Fen’s *Xishi* (1932) (fig.17), a refined feminine figure, classical in its technique and theme, and an example of Chinese painting of the 1930’s seeking to extend the orthodoxy of the 17th century through the use of a refined technique and references to classical themes, was chosen as the large format poster to advertise our exhibition. I did not ask what criteria led my colleagues to their choice. If a renaissance of the 17th century’s orthodoxy in the twentieth-century could be representative of our connoisseurs between tradition and modernity, it also probably appeals to a Western perception of Chinese art, while 1930’s oil paintings would not. A similar choice, classical in nature, was made for the advertising made in the newspapers. The advertisements put in the newspapers (fig.16) reproduced a detail of Fan Tchunpi’s *Looking at Jingshan*, reproducing the top pavilion of the Coal Hill (Jingshan) North of the Forbidden City. The subject of the detail chosen is evident for any Western mind as a stereotypical representation of China.

Due to the fact that the typical museum display despite its good intentions, freezes African and other Third World cultures in a distant past, devoid of the complexity which comes with contacts with outsiders, some museum visitors are unable to make the leap when presented with a more complex picture. Somehow, through the magic of museums, what museum professionals think is an educational or at least enlightening experience turns out to be a conformation of stereotypes. (...) the interest of the Western museums in Africa and the Third World is only in ‘difference’ (the exotic) and

\(^7\) Gentleman connoisseur whose advice guided Dr. Tsen in his collection, see Chapter 2, p.43 and fol.
what it can offer as a way of seeing in stark relief the Western self. To understand
oneself by what you’re not. Museums it seems, are highly narcissistic institutions.
They either feel most comfortable when mirroring their own values, ideas and aesthetic
through Western art, or when casting other cultures as dramatically different. This
difference becomes a useful tool to be appropriated and consumed, rather than as an
approach to a real understanding of the complexity of another’s society for mutual
benefit. (Wilson, 1996, non paginated html file)

The image offered to the large public, except for the press files (which contained two
paintings of Fan out of which an ink portrait of Dame Chen), was of the most traditional China
possible. This choice would for sure offer the most accessible image of Chinese art to the
viewers, who would not be scared by the most unexpected: oil paintings. As “modernists and
ethnographers of the early twentieth century [who] projected coded perceptions of the black
body – as imbued with vitalism, rhythm, magic, and erotic power ...(Clifford quoted in Fusco,
1995, p.45), we offered, in our advertising campaign at least, an image in keeping with classical
Western perception of China: refined and delicate, mysterious and exotic.

May 1st, 2002

This afternoon, Mr. Dunand vacuumed the exhibition rooms, looking at any little
final details. The room is calm waiting for the visitors. Artworks are dressed to the
nines.
Part 3: Other Narratives
CHAPTER 7  THREE NARRATIVES

Well, it's fascinating. You're looking at me like someone in a zoo, but why don't you watch yourself in a mirror and look at yourselves? One day I'll come around, get my camera and start studying you people. (Ephraim Bani, quoted in Shelton (2001), p.142)

My aim in this chapter and the following one is to present points of view on this exhibition other than mine, diversifying my own narrative with other interpretations. In this chapter, the reader will "hear" my two colleagues voices. Whereas I was telling my own narration of the events in the previous chapters, my role in the following pages is that of a narrator of two other stories. Mr. Tsen's and Mr. Dunand's accounts were gathered through a questionnaire\textsuperscript{72} and a feedback meeting which took place one month after the exhibition's opening on the 6\textsuperscript{th} of June\textsuperscript{73}, lasted two hours and was recorded. It gave us the opportunity to do a project evaluation and to explore together issues encountered along the exhibition's realization.

Nevertheless, there are limitations to this process. The main one is that I edit my colleagues' narratives. It would have been interesting to have Mr. Dunand's and Mr. Tsen's own written accounts on the whole project. Had my thesis calendar developed differently, a solution could have been to invite my two colleagues to read my account and to let them express themselves on my process and interpretation.

Several themes were raised in my colleagues' questionnaires and in our discussion. These themes relate to four different questions: What expectations did each of us have in undertaking such a project? What difficulties did we encounter along its realization? What

---

\textsuperscript{72} See appendices VI and VII. Mr. Tsen answered the questionnaire in English. Mr. Dunand did it in French and his answers were translated by the author.

\textsuperscript{73} The conversation was held in French and the extracts cited in the present chapter were translated by the author.
particularities characterized the exhibition? And what did we personally discover in participating in such an adventure? After bringing out several questions and issues through the examination of our statements and reflections, they are analysed in the last pages of this chapter.

Expectations

Mr. Dunand

"Concerns and hopes of a curator while organizing an exhibition or while exposing a travelling exhibition are multiple. The first relates to the aesthetic quality of the artefacts that will be exhibited (which we will have authenticated first) and to the consistency of their choice. An exhibition primarily being a "show", a particular attention will be brought to their presentation (installation or the rhythm created by the artefacts' disposal, lighting, etc.) But a show is a temporary event. The question of the catalogue is thus essential for the museum's renown. Again, aesthetic criteria accompany research quality requirements, for the texts as much as for the captions." (Dunand's answer to questionnaire question number 2)

Mr. Dunand’s expectations appear to have been the same for any other exhibition under his responsibility. Nevertheless, The Pavilion of Marital Harmony had a further importance for Mr. Dunand: this creation would be the last of his career. During a personal conversation at the beginning of the adventure Mr. Dunand considered this project as a closure to his career and expected for this reason the full support from the Baur Foundation's council.

74 Almost all the citations of this chapter are directly taken out from my two colleagues’ questionnaires and from the transcript of our feedback meeting. They are edited the same way than my own narrative in order to avoid a hierarchical organization between my narrative and theirs.

75 Mr. Dunand retired in December 2002.
**Mr. Tsen**

“My expectations had a lot to do with
— ancestor worship and
— filial piety” (Tsen’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 2).

**Sophie Wirth Brentini**

Mr. Tsen’s emotional involvement with the artworks exhibited revealed itself to be stronger than I had expected. I wanted to be professional and to satisfy the lender but primarily I wanted to be at the level of the Baur Collection’s standards. I was about to live my first professional experience that, I hoped, would open doors to me. Thus, this project took an important emotional connotation for me. I devoted my entire energy to it and I was passionate toward its subject.

**Particularities**

**Mr. Dunand**

Our project’s particularities, “(...) were essentially related to this exhibition’s variety of aspects. These sides, four in total, were very naturally distributed between Mrs Sophie Wirth Brentini (Fan Tchunpi’s artworks, modern Chinese paintings, and a part of scholar’s desk objects) and Mr. Ambroise Fontanet (ancient paintings and calligraphies). Mr. Tsen, one of the collectors’ sons and principal lender, played a fundamental role, even though less visible, in the catalogue where he traces his parents’ biography”. (Dunand’s answer to questionnaire question number 4)

According to Mr. Dunand, this exhibition was one of the first temporary exhibitions being organized and created at Baur in which the exhibited artefacts were not necessarily in the
primary areas of the museum's competence. "I believe that we created, with what we had in hands and with the time we spent on it, an exhibition of quality, which has a reality and which allows, particularly, everyone to understand and to see things a bit differently (...)" (feedback meeting). It was also the first time that the lender/collector was as much involved in the exhibition's realization.

Mr. Tsen

"The most important aspect, I have found, has been the interaction between China and Switzerland — in the larger sense, between East and West

- The Chinese mind sees ancients and moderns as contemporaries
- The Chinese are conscious of historical contexts careless about dates
- The Chinese set valuations on art — the Chinese eye notes good and bad brushwork.

The Swiss tend to be more neutral

- The Swiss mistrust exaggerated imagination
- The Swiss do much more careful research
- The Swiss pay much more attention to technical detail
- The Chinese go for expansion, the Swiss for perfection
- The Chinese have a feeling for inner space; the Swiss are fantastically good at ordering outer space. Both the catalogue and the exhibition are elegant in their use of emptiness

- The Swiss respect other cultures, thereby winning their respect in return". (Tsen's answer to questionnaire question number 1)

76 More usually, the Baur Collection exhibits ceramics, lacquers, Japanese prints, textiles, etc.
Mr. Tsen: What I want to say is that for me, this is not a cross-cultural experience but an experience between two civilisations, that is to say China and Switzerland and that is very very interesting because China is so big and has a kind of cultural arrogance for example whereas Switzerland has its own mentality and I learned a lot in working with Baur and both of you. (…) This has been an East-West dialogue (…). Slowly Switzerland defined China for me … before that I understood China … there is identity and all about that but it was not truly …

Mr. Tsen: In China we often talk about mama huhu which means horses and tigers, that is to say we do not distinguish so much … and as my mother always said: “If you want to paint a dog and there is no dog, you take a cat and pretend this is a dog” and the Chinese mind is like that, and I like this ambiguity very much which leaves things a bit in the clouds … A bit like in painting it is a bit vague … But the Swiss are precise! You are precise (pointing at me) and Frank is precise too, then in working I am forced to clarify my thoughts. This is Swiss identity which is never told, a discretion, a professionalism, a responsibility but above all a precision which force the Chinese to define themselves with precision.

Sophie Wirth Brentini: But for you it is Swiss identity, this is not Western art history?

Mr. Tsen: Not really … yes well, we could say in general this is Western … but I worked with Americans … this is not like this at all! They are democrats whereas Swiss people … they force you to clarify yourself and this is very interesting for me. (…) The exhibition is really a synthesis of Swiss and Chinese spirit.

Sophie Wirth Brentini

I can see three particularities to The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. A first one which at times unstabilized me was that I was paid by two entities, one institution and a private collector/lender. It meant that I had to refer to two hierarchical superiors and try and satisfy
both of them. Both having very different roles in the exhibition’s realization, I had to bring
closer very different points of view. Another particularity was Mr. Tsen’ involvement in the
exhibition’s conceptualisation and its catalogue’s realization. And the third one relates to the
collection itself which is representative of a couple’s very particular journey, spreading between
Europe and China, and between tradition and modernity. I hoped that these personalities
would represent for our public an image of China as little stereotyped as possible.

Difficulties

Mr. Dunand

"Difficulties or particularities met along the realization of the exhibition The Pavilion of
Marital Harmony are as usual. (...) Inasmuch as every author had a precise role to play and
his/her own area to tackle, one can consider that the catalogue’s realization did not meet
particular difficulties. The very initial project, which was to write, for the description, articles
where Mrs. Wirth Brentini and Mr. Tsen’s contributions would have created a whole, had to be
however given up. This abandonment is essentially due to distance problems (Geneva-
Vancouver) which impeded communication, and thus the close collaboration indispensable to
the success of such a project.” (Dunand’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 4)

Mr. Tsen

"The biggest advantage has been my living within 5 minutes of the Baur with easy access
to Frank Dunand’s office. The biggest disadvantage was Sophie’s being away in Vancouver. I
regret very much our not having collaborated on the writing of the “notices”. Once they were
written, Sophie did not budge.” (Tsen’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 3)

77 Even though the issue of my absence from Geneva is not primarily related to cross-cultural questions, the
proportion given to it in this thesis is justified by the impact it had on our team’s work. It reflected in my colleagues’
answers to the questionnaires and in our feedback discussion.
During this meeting, both Mr. Dunand and Mr. Tsen repeatedly expressed the difficulty they had had to communicate with me being away. Mr. Tsen felt we worked in parallel whereas it had been possible, despite confrontations, to concur with Mr. Dunand. Both did not use email, and faxes revealed themselves inadequate to engage in a creative reciprocity. Mr. Tsen added the importance of constant exchange and dialogue before writing, which had been possible with Ambroise Fontanet. Mr. Dunand remarked however that “Ambroise never gave up, he has his own personality as Sophie, he is very polite but extremely obstinate”. There I took the opportunity to remind Mr. Tsen of our introductory sessions to Chinese art: I considered them as a dialogue that had allowed me to get a sense of his point of view. But unfortunately it had been too early for him. He wished we had done it in October or November 2001 when things were getting concrete.

We finally got to the subject of my decision to leave Geneva: I felt I had consulted them before making it. But at this point I understood where the misunderstanding was: I had sought my employers’ advice to know if they considered it possible to realize an exhibition from a distance, or if they judged that my idea would put our contract at risk.

**Mr. Dunand:** I never considered that an exhibition, as important as this one may be for us all, was a sufficient excuse to ask you to change your career plans. I never thought about it, I never thought: Sophie you come back at once and you are at my service to work eight hours a day because you were designated. No, I believe you are an adult even if you lack experience, if you want to dive and you believe you can do the work then you do it ... But surely there is a loss.

**Sophie Wirth Brentini**

I tried to convince them, without much success, of the positive side of my Vancouver sojourn, such as the access to bibliographical references I would not have in Geneva, the
closeness of specialists I consulted who gave me their point of view on our project, and the beginning of a reflection on cross-cultural relationships that would not have occurred in Geneva.

The difficulties were for me to work in a time lag. I was completely involved in the project as from the signature of the contract whereas my colleagues had difficulty to focus on a project two years in advance. Thus I provided a lot of work and organized a lot without receiving any definitive answers and reactions until very late.

**Mr. Dunand:** Everybody has, not you Sophie, but Chunglu and I, to do our *mea culpa* concerning the evolution in time. We started too late, I started too late and realized very late that this project was becoming very important. We knew we wanted something more than one or two bulletins ... the race started at this point and we lacked time to calmly bring closer the different points of view to make a synthesis.

At some point during the feedback meeting I raised communication issues: “Due to what?” asked Mr. Dunand. “Due to generational difference...” I answered. “No empty discourse, you weren’t here! This is that simple...” Mr. Dunand became impatient.

**Sophie Wirth Brentini:** Let’s say that I am young and without experience and that I probably also have affirmation issues, you have experience, and we know the way you talk [when you are under stress] ...

**Mr. Dunand:** Yes, all right.

---

87 The question of time appears in Conaty and Carter (unpublished paper) as a characteristic of community-museum collaborations: “Most Glenbow exhibits require about two years for completion. *Nitsitapiisinni* took nearly four years. We are glad we built in lots of time as we found that our concepts of goals, process, and content were continually challenged and reshaped by the Blackfoot members of the team” (p.12). Ames, Shelton, Herle, Moser, Tapsell agree with Conaty and Carter but they also stress that “(...) the added investment of time allows the project to become a much more effective site for research, education, and innovation” (cited in Phillips, 2003, p.161).

89 The *Baur Collection Bulletin* was the catalogue format proposed at first, see Chapter 5, p.83.
Sophie Wirth Brentini: ... and Mr. Tsen was from a different mother tongue than ours and he was differently touched by the problem than we were.

Mr. Dunand: Then, it is maybe not a generational issue... It happens that we are not from the same generation, all right this is a reality, but it is not a generation issue. If I were 35 years old, I would have the same personality and the same way to proceed.

Sophie Wirth Brentini: Yes but if I had your age and more experience ...

Mr. Dunand: You had not.

Sophie Wirth Brentini: ... It would have changed things.

Mr. Dunand: Let’s go back to... If you are too general, one does not understand what you want to say,... I don’t agree with “generation”, this is not a question of generation. Maybe for you the fact that you owe us a certain respect ... that we did not have to demand too much from you, this is the only difference concerning generation.

I gave up and Mr. Dunand calmed down. In his answer to my questionnaire, Mr. Tsen agreed with Mr. Dunand: “Generational difference does not matter that much” (Tsen’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 1).

Mr. Dunand: This is maybe not the correct word. Experience maybe, and affective involvement, this is really important. This is the most difficult situation [when mounting] an exhibition: to work with a person, the collector himself or his son or daughter, who has a different relation [to the artworks]. This rarely happens, even more with an exhibition centred as much on the people than on the artefacts. Generation is ... No but develop your idea, if you feel it is important, because generational differences are a fact, [but for me] it does not relate to the exhibition.
As self-criticism, I recognize that I had a lot of trouble to stay clear and well defined in such a tense atmosphere, but the general tone of voice, and the fact that I "owed" them a "certain respect" are indeed illustrations of generational discrepancies.

Discoveries

Mr. Dunand

For Mr. Dunand, this exhibition was also a new experience, for he was not the author but the editor, "a position I expected easier but which proved to be rather difficult". In our discussion, he also described as a novelty the lender's emotional involvement in the project.

Mr. Tsen

"After 25 years living in Switzerland, for the first time I got to know the Swiss from the inside. I learned, from close proximity, about the Swiss

— Their precision
— Their sense of responsibility and professionalism
— Their discretion
— Their hiding complex mechanism under a casual elegant exterior
— Their deep respect for their co-workers
— Their decision making that comes with a touch of art
— Their stress and relaxation
— Their willingness to gamble". (Tsen’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 4)

"My experience, which surprised me, has been learning from the Baur. The Baur works as a team, with fanatical attention to detail. But when it comes to presentation, it is relaxed, discreet, minimalist. To have produced such a beautiful catalogue in two versions and such an
elegant exhibition, also in two versions, without showing much worry about expenses, is absolutely astonishing”. (Ts’en’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 2)

But most importantly, “Personally, putting on the exhibition has enabled me to
— discover my father whom I never knew
— see the coherence in the lives of my parents (...).” (Ts’en’s answer to questionnaire’s question number 2)

Mr. Ts’en (addressing to Mr. Dunand): How did you come to this literati conception [of my parents’ collection]?

Mr. Dunand: The presence of objects for the scholar’s desk, how we call them, in particular a collection of seals, of several ink stones, of ... objects that are directly related to literati spirit (...)
and the choice of Xiehanglou, a common title for your mother and your father (...) did not reflect their modernist spirit but their attachment to a tradition ...

Sophie Wirth Brentini: In effect, this theme came by itself in studying the collection, I understood this couple as following in the literati also because of the teaching of Wang Jingwei (calligraphy and classic Chinese) (...). But what became clearer and clearer was that even though their context was modern through their political engagement and their French experience, a tradition remained very present in 20th century China, without to say that Fan and Ts’en were literati in the traditional sense of the word.

Mr. Dunand: No but it was an ideal, if your father had survived it would maybe have become more precise ... He would have entered deeper in this world and identified to it even more, he was also a calligrapher...
Mr. Tsen: Yes but at the time I considered the artefacts as artefacts, that is to say individually, later I began to understand, above all through the theme of literati ... I had never thought about literati, I never imagined my father as a literatus ... (...) It touches me [to see them exhibited] but what is really interesting is as I told you, when I was young, it was not a collection, even at my mother’s house they were only objects ... To see them presented as a whole ... not only for me but for my brothers too! (...) I regret very much that my parents, my mother is not here to see that.

Sophie Wirth Brentini

The discoveries I made along the realization of The Pavilion of Marital Harmony are situated at a personal as much at a professional level. These two domains overlapped more and more during the process and while writing my thesis. I discovered the internal structures of the creative process of an exhibition, of human relationships working in a team and of particularities when working in multicultural teams. Overall, I learned a lot about myself.

Analysis

Several major misunderstandings that occurred during the realization of The Pavilion of Marital Harmony could have been avoided had we not omitted a first stage which appears to me, today, as essential to any cross-cultural collaboration. This first stage is insisted upon in several articles concerned with communities consultation (in particular Dimech (1994), Stuhr, Krug & Scott (1995), Vitali and Secord (2001), Moser et al. (2003), p.214).

Launching the project, and throughout our process, we should have made, and repeated, an important work of consultation and definition in order to be sure to work on the same
terms\textsuperscript{80}: for instance, definitions of our concepts of collaboration, art, museum, curatorship, exhibition, public, and translation (among others). Theoretically, it was evident for everybody that Mr. Tsen would have a word to say about our processes and decisions, but practically, what room were we ready to allocate him? Interestingly, to define our roles Mr. Tsen proposed to take theatre as a metaphor\textsuperscript{81} whereas I did not understand roles’ distribution the same way. Editor, curator and lender are three positions that can take diverse forms in accordance with the personalities, and the sets of beliefs of the people in charge of these tasks. We agreed early on my responsibilities but Mr. Dunand’s and Mr. Tsen’s were only implied while they should have been explicit.

I understood my position as a curator being in charge of the exhibition’s conceptualisation and realization, and responsible for several of the catalogue’s texts. I had to refer to Mr. Dunand for any museological and art historical question and to regularly present my work to Mr. Tsen to make sure he agreed on the orientation the exhibition took as it was going to publicly represent his family. However, retrospectively analysing Mr. Tsen’s attitude towards my work and myself, I believe today that he foresaw our relationship as one of mentorship\textsuperscript{82}. In China, traditionally art education went further than a simple practice training based on pictorial techniques. Artistic practice was an engagement that encompassed a particular way of life, and the master was more than a simple teacher to his student. The latter even lived sometimes with his master’s family during the years of a full personal engagement in a hard labour\textsuperscript{83}. Had I accepted to be his student, he would have been an excellent mentor.

\textsuperscript{80} Conaty and Carter (unpublished paper), writing on their collaborative exhibition process, showed that sets of beliefs about exhibition goals, process and content were continually challenged to finally reach a consensus, I understand that information as a confirmation of the need of a concepts definition.  
\textsuperscript{81} See fax dated May 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2001 in Chapter 5, p.87.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.  
Unfortunately at the time I had not understood Mr. Tsen’s point of view and, probably for a lack of confidence in both of us, I was primarily preoccupied by my first professional experience. But in effect this particular mentorship could not have been fruitful from a distance.

My obtuseness and his obstinacy blurred processes, decisions, communication: we did not exchange and act at the same level of involvement. My feeling of being a go-between was thus probably founded since if he considered me as his protégée, I should have followed his leadership as well as I should have had to present and to defend his ideas at the Baur Collection. The idea of our supposed collaboration on my texts’ writing probably originated in this misunderstanding as well.

I regret that we only considered in our discussion Mr. Tsen’s rejection of my texts through a question of bad timing, because another interesting explanation could probably be his emotional involvement due to his hope of honouring filial piety and ancestor worshiping: I had to write something that was the most representative and closest to his mother’s art. He was probably terribly preoccupied with the way I undertook my task and with the respect I showed his ancestors. Texts lacking refinement and sensibility would be disrespectful towards the forebears.

Overall, interdependence was an important characteristic of our collaboration. I depended on Mr. Dunand for his experience and professional knowledge, and I depended on Mr. Tsen for his collection and cultural knowledge. However, both depended on me for energy and structure: each time I met them I had precise questions to ask, plans and agendas to present84 and I was passionately involved in our project. Until Mr. Dunand was fully engaged in his work as catalogue editor, I was a motor. In leaving for Vancouver, my error had been to

84 See Chapter 4, p.68.
Chapter 7 – Three Narratives

underestimate the importance of human contact, of human presence in the concretisation of a project. Emails and faxes were not enough to cover the complex task we had in our hands unless a perfect timing and task coordination had been previously realized. To completely represent and imagine the project in our minds so as to be able to concretise it, human presence revealed itself essential. To illustrate this idea I believe the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle works well: as long as a piece is missing we struggle to understand which shape will appear on the board.

Many of the misunderstandings that occurred were built on unstated evidences that cross cultures only with difficulty. The work of definition mentioned above would have helped us, in particular, to acknowledge or to become aware of cross-cultural questions such as representations, opinions, references or other assumptions which were taken for granted by us. What happens in cross-cultural relationships is that two or more people cross-looking at each other, have an outsider’s stance on the set of references with which each other works. Each “other” has to realize a work of self-definition/determination so as to represent it for the “other”. Even though an outsider’s stance has to be carefully welcomed (for issues of prejudices, stereotypes and generalizations), it can be very interesting and revealing for the culture observed.

According to Mr. Tsen’s account, the definition process he went through revealed itself positive and creative even though he felt we “forced” him in (Tsen, feedback meeting). And his own definition of Swiss culture is very interesting. Let us hope that we will be able to take advantage of his position on our culture as well. He offered us a reverse process than what any Eurocentrist is used to do. Through his eyes, we were offered a mirror in which we can experience the effect of being looked at. Even though Mr. Tsen generalized his experience
working in a Swiss cultural institution with three Swiss colleagues to the Swiss people, his
definition of our culture invited us to a reflection that would not have taken place without his
goals an the inside’s description.

The case studies analyzed by Ruth B. Phillips (2003) reflect, among other themes, “(...) on
the value of collaborative processes in terms of mutual learning and educating, sometimes as the
result of initially difficult encounters” (p.162). When collaborative exhibition projects are
successful, the benefits of these experiences are reciprocal: “(...) both museum and community
partners come to new understandings through mutually respectful dialogue and exchange”
(p.163).

In that sense, Phillips sees a possible comparison with the radical pedagogy advocated
by Paolo Freire: “His anti-authoritarian, democratic practice insists on the recognition that both
teachers and students have important knowledge and that, for education to occur, their different
subject positions have to be respected and rendered mutually intelligible” (ibid.). She considers
the educational qualities of collaborative exhibits as being even more egalitarian and bi-
directional. While we were far from working in the ideal conditions (distance and
unacknowledged roles) that would make ours a real collaboration, each protagonist was positive
when reflecting about the discoveries and learning potential of our experience.

Sophie Wirth Brentini: What if we had to re-do this experience, would you do it again?

Mr. Tsen: A bit earlier maybe, less pressure, I don’t know... collaboration... no, there is not
much to change (...).

Mr. Dunand (laughing): Ha! I would do it at once, but even better ... I would demand even more
from my authors!

Here I am, just coming out from our feedback meeting with Tsen and Dunand. It has been as beneficial for my thesis than for our collaboration.

They both handed in very interesting answers to the questionnaire and were in the appropriate frame of mind for our meeting which lasted two hours.

They had understood that we met about a successful project. Each of us made his/her self-criticism, regretted some elements, insisted on the positive side of the experience.

Tsen is satisfied with the exhibition, he felt heard and believe he learned a lot. He discovered his collection under a new light.

I am happy to have made this feedback meeting, good closure, statement of difficulties but success for us, despite the tempest, we all learned something new. I am thus not the only one to have accomplished a new experience: it has been a life enriching experience for each of us.

All of us are ready to renew the experience. I feel better.

This experience will remain very important for me. Two people offered me their trust for my first professional experience.

THANK YOU
CHAPTER 8 VISITORS’ VOICES: RESPONSES TO THE

PAVILION OF MARITAL HARMONY

A reception aesthetics is always relational. The spectator of art, film, popular culture etc. is a shifting realm of ramifying differences and contradictions. (jagodzinski, 1999, p.318)

Introduction

The Pavilion of Marital Harmony was announced in several local, Swiss and international newspapers and in the specialized press. Two regional newspapers and a local newspaper published an article, and two radio stations dedicated a cultural program to our exhibition. The intimacy of a Chinese couple, their collection of ancient and modern art, and the artistic and personal development of a woman made this exhibition attractive for visitors and art critics, who were seduced by the exhibition and its catalogue, in particular by Mr. Tsen’s biography.

At its closure on the 15th of September 2002, the exhibition (opened 3rd of May) had been visited by 4,132 people. 206 catalogues (134 in French and 72 in English) and 1,502 postcards had been sold. Globally, the public’s attendance places it amongst the Baur Collection’s best attended exhibitions.

Methods

This chapter provides and discusses a sample of visitors’ reactions to The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. The data were collected through journal notes, on-site observations, a poster and a questionnaire. As this was the first visitor study conducted at the Baur Collection; and as in Switzerland little research of this type is conducted, museums visitors are less used to these

85 Up to this day I am not aware of any scholarly review of our exhibition.
techniques than in North America. I was thus satisfied with the number of responses I received: the main source of information was a questionnaire\textsuperscript{86} filled in by 68 participants.

This questionnaire was conceived to inform me about visitor’s backgrounds, their image(s) of museums (question 1), their familiarity with Chinese art, history and culture (questions 2 and 3), their reactions to cross-cultural experiences and how much and by what they had been moved (questions 5 and 6). This questionnaire also gave an idea of respondents’ appreciation of our exhibition.

In order to reach other visitors, I hung up a poster at the top of the stairs leading to the exit of the museum, inviting them to answer two questions\textsuperscript{87} on post-it stickers. It stayed there for the whole duration of our exhibition and 41 messages were posted. These messages addressed the subject of our temporary exhibition and the Baur Collection’s permanent show. The poster was also used by some as a visitors’ book and appeared to be well adapted to children’s spontaneity: they expressed their impressions verbally and through drawings. Overall, the types of answers that were posted are in keeping with those of the questionnaire.

My intention was to get an idea of our participant’s reactions to our exhibition and to provide them with a space to have their voices heard, as an implicit comment on my own and my two colleagues’ narratives.

**Children at the Baur Collection?**

When starting my research, I intended to offer school tours in order to gather children’s reactions and impressions about Chinese art. I wanted to observe how the teachers introduced children to the exhibition prior to their visit and observe the students’ behaviour during the

\textsuperscript{86} See appendix VIII; the large majority of the questionnaire’s answers were written in French and were translated by the author.

\textsuperscript{87} Namely my questionnaire’s questions 5 and 6.
visit. In a post-visit class I would have been particularly interested in observing their
discussions with their teachers on what they saw, what they learned, and what they thought
about cultural differences or similarities between China and Europe, and thus how they would
have understood the meaning of our exhibition.

At the beginning of May 2002, I contacted an independent museum educator, who
conducts occasional tours of the Baur Collection, and one of my school teacher friends. Both
were rather sceptical about school attendance at this period of the year. In May and June,
teachers are more concerned about their reports, grading and camps than about visiting an
exhibition. In her excellent research, Knutson (2002) mentioned this problematic addressed by a
museum’s education team: it had put only little emphasis “on developing school programs,
because school would be in session for only part of the run of the show” (p.25).

Nevertheless, the final decision was made when I was informed by Mr. Dunand that
school classes would not be allowed in our temporary exhibition rooms. The reason invoked
was that in *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*, more than ten scrolls (ink on paper) were exhibited
unprotected. Although perfectly reasonable for security reasons, this reflects a certain elitism.

**Observations**

**Onsite observations**

During the month of June 2002, I spent four two hour periods, either on week days or on
weekends, sitting in the exhibition rooms, moving from one room to another, following at some
distance particular visitors. I observed the pace of their visit, their interests, their remarks and
sometimes their interactions with the museum security attendants. Some of the visitors
discussed with me my research and the exhibition. However, apart from these rare
conversations, these observations gave me only limited information about cross-cultural
relationships. Consequently I will not make a detailed report on my observations. The reader will find below some analysis that can help define a profile of visitors, in total I observed 27 people or groups of people. I noted on a protocol their approximate age, and the time they spent visiting the exhibition. I observed the order in which they visited each room of the exhibition, if they looked at the catalogue that was put at their disposal, what type of interactions they had and with whom.

The age groups are proportional to that of the questionnaire’s respondents. 13 visitors were more than 50 years old. The visitors spent an average of 15 minutes in our exhibition. Two exceptions spent more than 75 minutes. The visitors aged more than 60 years old spent two to three times more time in the exhibition rooms than the ten minutes average of younger people and families allocated an average of ten minutes to our exhibition. The catalogues were often consulted. Serrell (1997) found that visitors typically spent less than 20 minutes in an exhibition regardless of its topic or size, and that the majority of visitors did not stop at more than half of the available elements in an exhibit.

I also understood that the museum’s security attendants do much more than the mere safeguarding of the artworks. Officially in charge of the museum’s daily opening and closure, as well as of its security, they are above all the institution’s representatives. They must be discreet but vigilant, and of course be kind and respectful to clients. During my observations, they had many contacts with the visitors, the latter spontaneously went to them or it was the security attendants who entered into contact with visitors. This staff proved to be good informants on Chinese culture and art, even if they do not receive training on the temporary exhibitions: they inform themselves through Baur Collections’ publications and exhibition tours.

---

88 See appendix IX.
89 See in this chapter p.145.
"This is usually the security attendants who inform the museum team about visitors’ reception of exhibitions. However, they are not museum guides: their function is primarily securing the artworks" (personal communication with Mrs. Barbey, responsible for the museum’s security attendants’ management). Each of them had his/her own manner, and some of them even did a little museum education. One of them told me that he often asks visitors to tell him which artwork they would like to take home: in our exhibition, Gao Qifeng’s Roaring tiger (fig.18) had a lot of success as well as Deng Fen’s Xishi (fig.28), Gao Jianfu’s Carp and wisteria (fig.19), Qi Baishi’s Twin geese (fig.21) and Fan Tchunpi’s Autumn moon over Pidan (fig.20), all rather traditional for their subjects. The attendant also informed me about the presence of Asian visitors: he often saw bi-cultural families coming to discover a side of China at the Baur Collection, but of course during summer Asian tourists had an impact on Baur’s multicultural attendance average. “This afternoon an honourable citizen of the Middle Kingdom stayed a long time in the treasure room (room C)90 reading the calligraphies” the attendant explained to me91.

Touring the exhibition

Each tour I gave counted between eight and 20 participants, each group had a different atmosphere: some were enthusiastic and warm, others were shy and cold. I felt carried by the enthusiastic groups but lost energy when the groups seemed unreceptive. Participants asked more contextual questions on China than specific ones about the couple or the artists themselves. Visitors needed to situate our precise case in a larger context, addressing subjects such as the place of women in Chinese society, or Chinese artistic techniques and Chinese

90 The room in which we exhibited ancient paintings and modern and ancient calligraphies of the collection.
91 This casual remark, devoid of any denigrating character, informs us about the survival of a vocabulary participating to the maintaining of Chinese culture in a “fictional ethnographic present” (Kasfir, 1992, p.41).
history. Seals and calligraphies' aesthetics interested many visitors, an interest expressed as well in several of the questionnaires, to the museum receptionist, and in the media.

Mr. Tsen also offered tours, he took one public visit a month and offered private tours to acquaintances, friends and relatives. I had the chance to follow one of the tours he gave in private and I noted my impressions on the spot in a journal:

August 10th, 2002.

He is less organized and less static than I am. He takes the same route as I but he builds his discourse from the particular to the general whereas I build mine from the general to the particular. He narrates the exhibition as a story, blending nicely artistic, historical, and familial themes. An interesting combination between very general and very precise information. A group of visitors joins us. At some point in the visit, he was thinking about a possible translation of a Chinese character and a European visitor proposed her translation to him.

On the whole, both our discourses join. But he establishes links I am not able to do: of course his interpretation is more personal. His reading of Ren Bonian's painting meets J. Haye's by which I was inspired for my caption. Finally, he does not speak so much of the general context, but talks about his parents and their milieu through the artworks.

The questionnaires and post-it stickers (four in total) offered me feedback from visitors who were without exception absolutely enthusiastic about his performance. Following his feelings and imagination he offers a very broad and lively image of China. If I represented the museum as an institution, Mr. Tsen represented China. Without any doubt, he offered his visitors an exceptional museum experience.

---

Visitors’ voices

Survey participants

The first part of the questionnaire informed me of the respondent’s culture, age and gender. Unfortunately my questions did not provide for any information about their social status. Two questionnaires were filled by couples. 39 questionnaires were filled in by women and 15 by men. 16 people did not wish to inform me about their gender and five of them did not answer any of the questions pertaining to personal characteristics. An immense majority of the participants were more than 50 years old and non-Chinese. They mentioned on their questionnaire that they had always lived in Europe, except for four of them who do not live in Europe. The only visitor who identified as Chinese also had always lived in Europe.

Participants’ conception of museums’ roles

One or more of the roles proposed on the questionnaire could be chosen by respondents. In total, education was mentioned in 47 questionnaires, curatorship in 41, conservation was chosen by 19 participants and 16 of them considered entertainment as one of the museum’s roles. Museums were considered as places of curatorship, entertainment, and conservation by 18 respondents and 16 of them chose all of the roles proposed on the questionnaire.

29 visitors who answered the questionnaire wished to precise their conception of the museum under the heading entitled “Other” where museums were described most often in the following terms: places of memory, love of the best, roots, of opening, and places opening on the artistic world, discoveries, pleasure, cultural exchanges, places of meeting, places where new

---

93 I had thus 70 participants but 68 questionnaires.
94 20 participants were more than 50 years old, 24 were more than 60 years old.
95 Curation, education, conservation, entertainment.
ideas and views are presented, where profound knowledge is stored, research, beauty
preservation, interest building, touch the visitor in his/her essence, and to make the past
relive96.

**Awareness of Chinese art, history and culture**

Among my intentions was to search for information relating to visitors’ awareness of the
culture we presented and to cross-cultural issues. As the Baur Collection is a museum of Asian
art only, its visitors’ natural interest in Chinese art, history and culture was expected to be
evident. The answers to my questionnaire showed that the participants had an awareness to
Chinese culture and some of their answers were particularly reflective and developed. 44 of
them acknowledged a difference between European and Chinese collections of art (question2)
and respondents without any knowledge of our subject’s historical period prior to their visit (21)
were slightly outnumbered by those who were previously informed about it (29).

“Were you aware of the historical period named Republican China?” (question3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Yes’s</strong></th>
<th><strong>No’s</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Yes especially because of a sojourn in Taiwan” (questionnaire n°50, trans.)</td>
<td>“No, none. Very basic knowledge of China” (questionnaire n°41, trans.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yes, I took a course of Chinese history covering 1911-1976, and a course on Victor Segalen, Yuan Shikai’s private doctor” (questionnaire n°35, trans.)</td>
<td>“No and I am not sure that I know a lot more on this period [now that I have seen this exhibition]” (questionnaire n°21, trans.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yes, my father was personally involved during that period” (questionnaire n°8, trans.)</td>
<td>“Thank you for talking about it, it was instructive (because I did not know about it)” (questionnaire n°1, trans.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Yes, through books and personal acquaintances, but this historical period is of particular interest to me because it puts in question this China that we want immutable and eternal” (questionnaire n°42, trans.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

96 On this subject, see Vaughan (2001).
Through this questionnaire I also hoped to be informed on how much our exhibition was a learning experience for participants. The questionnaire’s last two questions which read “In your opinion, is what you see in this exhibition representative of your image of China? Why?” (question 5) and “What did you discover visiting this exhibition?” (question 6) provided me with the necessary information. Overall, it appears that 27 respondents had their images of China moved in seeing our exhibition and 29 participants still see China as traditional and/or ancient. Because *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony* is an exhibition both of a collection of traditional art and of a group of Republican Era paintings, the way I formulated question 5 did not elicit straightforward answers.

In writing about their discoveries (question 6), respondents also took advantage of this opportunity to express their appreciation for our exhibition. Their answers were particularly diversified: participants expressed themselves on the museum, the exhibition, what they liked, disliked and understood. For example, two visitors did not understand the title of the exhibition. Many (six post-it stickers and four questionnaires) expressed their need for more explanations about historical and cultural contexts and about the artists exhibited. Some (one post-it sticker and three questionnaires) also expressed the pleasure they had during our tours, especially with Mr. Tsen, and wrote that the tours were necessary to fully understand the exhibition. This underlines the educational importance of tours especially when there are few other sources of information. Otherwise, the large majority faithfully answered my question and had been made aware of Dr. Tsen and Madame Fan, of Fan Tchunpi in particular, of their collection, and of 20th century artists, regretting their rare representation in museums. Others provided more details and cited the artworks which touched them the most.
Respondents had diverse reactions when reflecting on another culture’s art. Twenty-one participants stated that their discoveries in this exhibition related to cross-cultural exchanges: “Movement, daring, cross-cultural relations, life. Explanations of techniques, a universe less impenetrable [than I thought] that I would like to integrate to mine” (questionnaire n°24, trans.).

“The strangeness to see Chinese motifs and landscapes painted in the Western manner” (questionnaire n°8, trans.).

“An “art de vivre” and an expression differing from mine” (questionnaire n°45, trans.).

“The ambiguous relationships of successive Chinese authorities with “foreigners”, which gives me a key for reading present political and economical orientations” (questionnaire n°20, trans.).

Some participants showed that they were aware and/or critical of cross-cultural issues. For instance, a respondent writing about a possible difference between Chinese and European collections (question 2): “(...) the European collector of Chinese art will have the tendency to choose objects relating to his “dreamed” vision or which were poetically perceived during his cultural approach of this art. His unintentionally “European” vision will generally relate to his own sensibility (taste for playful change) rather than to that of the Chinese which in general he does not grasp; neither does he share the Chinese respect for imminence in creation” (questionnaire n°61, trans.).

This idea of “dreamed vision” is also present in another participant’s answer when asked to compare two oil on canvas portraits (question 4) (fig22,23): “[Describing Marcelle Ladeuil’s painting] Painted after the image that a Westerner can have of the Far-East” (questionnaire n°54, trans.).
Questionnaire’s limitations

Some limitations of my questionnaire were mentioned by respondents and provoked a reflection on its conceptualisation. The questions two and five ("What is shown is a Chinese collection of Chinese art. Does it differ from a European collection of Chinese art? How?"; "In your opinion, is what you see in this exhibition representative of your image of China? Why?") were judged as too general or inappropriate for our exhibition theme. And a third one (question 4: "Which one is the most Chinese or the most European? Why?") was judged by some participants as incongruous. A small minority of respondents expressed their embarrassment in answering my questionnaire and did not feel expert enough to answer.

I have to express reservations on the way I wrote question 3: it did not bring me as much information as it should have about participants’ knowledge of Chinese history since a lot of the answers were limited to a yes or a no. A solution would have been to formulate the question as “Were you aware of the historical period named Republican China? If no, which period of Chinese history were you most familiar with?”

The question on images of China (question 5) was difficult to answer for participants as the exhibition is situated between tradition and modernity. What would have been interesting and informing would have been to ask respondents what had attracted them to visit our exhibition and what they expected to see in The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. It would have been informing about participants’ preferences and interests in Chinese art.

Conclusions

I have sought to present the reception of our exhibition by visitors and to portray their reactions to an exhibition of Chinese art. I did not wish to make generalizations about visitors but rather allow the public a voice in this research. Several themes oriented this study: I wanted
to get information on who the respondents were, what their conception of museums were, on their familiarity with Chinese culture and how much and by what they had been moved, while visiting *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony*.

A number of participants explicitly reflected on cross-cultural experiences, and others showed their awareness to issues of stereotypes. Responses showed that respondents had images of ancient China and/or Communist and modern China, and that an important number of them did not know Republican China at all. However, answers to how much their representations were moved by our exhibition and their responses' analysis were hindered by the two aspects of our exhibition (Madame Fan's art, the collection of Dr. Tsen) that was a source of confusion, since it presented two different images of Chinese art.

The absence of contextualisation was felt as a lack by several visitors even though information was available in the exhibition rooms' catalogues. Observations showed that these were accessible and largely used by visitors, but of course this source of information could not have been successful for all types of learners. This insufficiency of support for visitors reflected the fact that public reception was taken for granted and that during the exhibition's preparation an emphasis was put essentially on factual reliability and aesthetics. In this sense, it appears that if we accept that "[t]he decisions made during the creation of exhibitions reflect foundational beliefs about what it means to educate and what it means to know" (Knutson, 2002, p.6), then the Baur Collection is not a place of education (personal conversation with Mr. Dunand, September 2001). It would be unfair to overlook the good intentions we had at the beginning of the project and the real concern I had as a curator about our visitors' experiences.97

97 Its importance became more and more obvious for me along my studies at UBC.
Unfortunately, issues of motivation, time and budget constraints took precedence over them.

Our experience is however perfectly explained by Karen Knutson (2002):

Art curators are active and central participants in the academic discipline. Temporary exhibitions are a valued way in which knowledge is generated for the field of art history. And so, although the educational role of art museums is vitally important, curators must also speak to a scholarly audience. This fact, coupled with the historic elitism of museums as preserves for the enlightenment of the upper middle classes (...), can result in exhibitions that speak primarily to an educated audience, while those without the relevant background knowledge are left feeling excluded and alienated by the experience (...). (p.8)

Numerous respondents were explicit about their need for information and some of them (five) even felt they were "(...) not expert enough in oriental art to make any comment on this subject" (questionnaire n°63, trans.). Maybe these are "traces and echoes of (...) curatorial conversations" (Knutson, 2002, p.6)... And minorities' feeling and regret of the white-only perspective of museums' view of history (Hooper-Greenhill, 1998, non paginated html file) is an explanation for the absence of members of less privileged multiethnic Geneva at The Pavilion of Marital Harmony98.

98 As mentioned in Chapter 2, in Geneva, immigration is stratified by income and education level due to the broad diversity of immigrants (from the status of refugee to that of international organizations' employee).
OVERVIEW / CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

We may need to develop (...) a respect for imperfection in our shaping and viewing of inter/multicultural collaborations, which should not be equated with a valorisation of half-knowledge that so often passes as 'expertise' by the aficionados of 'other' cultures. Without engaging sufficiently with the difficulties involved in perceiving inter/multicultural practices — from whose eyes, and from which perspective do we observe the 'inter'? on what frames of reference can we draw to encompass the 'multi'? through which criteria? whose criteria? — it becomes somewhat premature to settle for a “fusion of horizons”(Hans-Georg Gadamer). (...) Besides, do we need a 'fusion' in order to meet through differences? Surely an intersection or collision or ellipsis of horizons is more likely to resist the risks of cultural homogenisation. (Bharucha, 1999, p.18-19)

Unless you know the road you have come down, you cannot know where you are going. (Temne proverb (Sierra Leone) quoted in Arnoldi, Mullen Kreamer & Mason, 2001, p.16)

This research studies the process of a transcultural exhibition of Chinese art, which took place in Geneva, to which the author contributed. The exhibition was unusual for several reasons. Its theme was in itself challenging: two very diversified bodies of artworks were exhibited representing the life work of a couple who lived during a complex historical, social and cultural epoch. Furthermore, its catalogue became an important monograph, an unusual format for the host museum’s temporary exhibitions, on which three very different characters collaborated, who were in diverse ways emotionally involved in the project. This special conjuncture resulted in one of the Baur Collection’s most attended exhibitions (its sole opening attracted twice more visitors than usual).

In order to clarify the stakes and complexities of our exhibition project and of our collaboration, the exhibition and the protagonists were situated in their geographical, physical and historical contexts (Chapter 2) and my discourse was located in a theoretical context (Chapter 1), which oriented my narrative perspective. This narrative addressed in detail the developments of our exhibition project which spread over three years (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6).
As the main narrator, I felt it necessary to let my colleagues’ and our public’s voices be heard, as different and enriching stories and as answers to my narrative (Chapter 7 and 8).

Most of this thesis’ chapters are introduced by quotes extracted from diverse theoretical and literary sources I began to be familiar with during my research. They enlightened my research path and illuminated my narration in the beam of light of this theoretical knowledge I recently gained. These quotes are used as colours tinting my chapters and orient the reader through my narration. They situate my concepts of museums, of theories, of Western perceptions of other cultures, of art collections, etc. The quotes introducing this concluding chapter represent my beliefs concerning the necessary introspection and reflection upon who I am as a curator, a woman, and a mother. Bharucha’s words are an invitation to stay humble, respectful and opened, I consider the quotes introducing this thesis’ introduction\textsuperscript{99} as “garde-fous”: I do not consider myself as having the right to speak on Asian people’s behalf and I do not want to contribute to “arenas in which one culture displays one other”; nevertheless, museums and “orientalists” were that powerful at some point in history, and we can still observe this era’s ghosts wandering in contemporary institutions and societies.

Until museums do more than consult (…), until they bring a wider range of historical experiences and political agendas into the actual planning of exhibits and the control of museum collections, they will be perceived as merely paternalistic by people whose contact history with museums has been one of exclusion and condescension. (…) Clearly there is no easy solution to these problems, no formula based on unassailable principle. Neither community “experience” nor curatorial “authority” has an automatic right to the contextualization of collections or to the narration of contact histories. The solution is inevitably contingent and political: a matter of mobilized power, of negotiation, of representation constrained by specific audiences. (Clifford, 1997, p.207-208)

Visual culture within the museum is a technology of power. This power can be used to further democratic possibilities, or it can be used to uphold exclusionary values. Once this is acknowledged, and the museum is understood as a form of cultural politics, the

post-museum will develop its identity. (Hooper-Greenhill quoted in Phillips, 2003, p.155)

Findings

Doing an autoethnography through a narrative inquiry not only led me into an understanding of our process’ drawbacks and successes, but also into a professional introspection. Reading anew my journals, my articles and captions, as well as emails and faxes, made me dive once again into this past experience, reliving its emotions, anger and doubts. My narrative reflects the feelings I had while working on the The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. However, examining this experience a posteriori, through an informing theoretical lens I came to a better understanding of my reactivity and of the difficulties the museum team encountered. For example, if at the time of the exhibition I somewhat refused to acknowledge the problems my absence from Geneva may have provoked, I understand today that it made an interesting collaboration impossible. Looking back now on the exhibition process, and in the light of the recent literature I read on the importance of face to face contact in collaborative exhibitions, I am today aware of the lightness with which I made the decision to leave Geneva. However, I can only think to the paradoxical nature of this thesis’ concluding remark and smile at the irony when I think about the yellow suitcase that was offered to me by the person who directly opposed himself to my absence and suffered because of it.

Although the end results of this collaboration (the exhibition and the catalogue) were successful, our transcultural collaboration met several other difficulties originating in power interplay, different cultural references, emotions and expectations. What is argued in this thesis is that to successfully collaborate on an exhibition with a person from the culture represented asks for some prior considerations. In particular, an early disclosure of positions and values would have given us some tools to understand and act upon the different emotional stakes the
exhibition represented for each protagonist and to expose cultural discrepancies about the understanding of art, exhibitions, museums, visitors, amongst others.

Thus through an early and clear definition of our concepts of collaboration and of each colleague’s role we would have avoided major misunderstandings. Whereas I foresaw that Mr. Tsen would be entitled to look at our work, and that we, European curators, would have a duty to respect his demands, he had, from the beginning, a different point of view. He did not want to be a mere advisor but wanted to be given primacy and to fully contribute to the selection of our exhibition theme and of its artefacts, and to be one of the contributors to the catalogue. These claims are more current in North America where communities are consulted on all aspects of the exhibition not only as advisors but also as full team members, and where the role of the curator started to evolve. As interesting and enlightening as it is, this type of collaborative processes requires from the curators a shift of “power” and responsibilities, giving up their role of specialist to gain that of facilitators. “Curators are trained both to be authorities and to exercise authority, and sometimes find it hard to move away from these positions when they find themselves working on unfamiliar terrain” (Peirson Jones, 1992). I understand today that the fact that this shift entailed for me a certain loss of the control I was struggling to gain, made me overlook what was really at stake and was probably an important cause of my reactivity.

Gender, age and culture also led us in a complex interplay of power relations in which each colleague’s position shifted at time from dominant to dominated and vice versa. This shows how much situations are not necessarily polarized between dominant and dominated. Overall, while different authors “emphasize the importance of strong leadership and a focused vision to the success of history exhibitions” (Ames, Franco and Frye quoted in Knutson, 2002, p.41), our collaboration engaged on tortuous paths in their absence.
These paths were even steeper because *The Pavilion of Marital Harmony* was a particular event for all the protagonists. It would be Mr. Dunand’s last major exhibition before his retirement, it was my first professional experience as curator and for Mr. Tsen it was going to publicly represent the life work of his parents, an important aspect in Chinese culture closely related to filial piety and ancestor worship. The extreme sensitivity that, at times, took over common sense probably originated in that emotional side of the project. This was a situation that would have required constant human contacts, intense exchanges and opportunities of communications, aspects qualified as essential in the literature addressing collaborative exhibition processes (Conaty and Carter, unpublished paper).

“I believe that all museum exhibits must be considered political, as the museums that generate them are political and tend to represent specific populations and interests. Curating an exhibition is a political act” (Ottenberg, 1991, p.82). Because a consistent work of definition did not take place, no attention was given to our exhibit’s possible hidden agendas, but we also came to overlook them because it was not considered our main concern in an exhibition that had first to be aesthetically and factually sound. Effectively, the diversity of our participants’ answers and appreciations shows that there was no “manipulated” message. However, if the definition of a clear message can be ideological and manipulative, the absence of a reflection leaves a gap open precisely to uncontrolled assumptions, possibly carrying over misrepresentations of China. Bringing this reflection to the fore could have appeared in the exhibition rooms and invited visitors to participate in the reflection.

“(…) [T]he consideration of “learning” remains for the most part an implicit construct, institutionally, and occupationally defined” (Knutson, 2002, p.42). The absence of an educational reflection at the level of the institution, combined with our difficulties in
collaboration, hindered educational possibilities. Visitors’ experiences were taken for granted without considering their learning impact. Even though this exhibition did not differ much from others at the Baur Collection in its design, and was appreciated as such by many participants in my research, I believe that we had in our hands a theme that could have had much more impact on our visitors’ learning had we explicitly reflected on the question and developed real support tools for our public. The Pavilion of Marital Harmony offered an opportunity to reflect on cross-cultural experiences, on cultural evolution, on prejudices and assumptions, on cultural representations. Gathered at a specific point in time, by a couple having a particular point of view on Chinese art, this collection could have been an opportunity to present a side of China rarely shown in museums: a transitional China rapidly evolving, and engaged in intense and complex cross-cultural experiences, far from the stereotyped uniform andunchanging China.

Limitations

Coming from Geneva, I did not write this thesis in my mother tongue: after spending almost two years studying at UBC and working on The Pavilion of Marital Harmony from a distance, I wrote this thesis in Geneva after a year of parental leave. I depended upon Dr. Graeme Chalmers, my supervisor and upon Dr. Ariane Isler, my great aunt for the revision of my English and their corrections have been extraordinarily edifying for me. If working in English is a limitation, surprisingly, it provided me with a certain freedom. Working from away in a foreign language, and the period of time over which this research spread, allowed me to take a step backward and to relativize the facts of interest to me and to clarify the origins and implications of our exhibition process’ issues. This facilitated my analysis: looking at events
with a certain distance, I believe it freed my reflection, and opened a path to the core of my subject.

Three aspects of this research could have been developed further. This research being an exploration of my professional practice and a personal account of a transcultural collaboration on an exhibition project, the emphasis was put on how I experienced this unusual event whereas it would have been interesting to provide a larger space for my colleagues’ reactions and accounts. In that case the two questionnaires and our evaluation meeting should have been completed by a fuller account, such as, for example, their reaction to my own narrative.

It would also have been interesting to develop the subject of different epistemologies on art addressed to some extent in my narrative (Chinese art historiography, Chinese collection of art, the exhibition of Chinese art, art fakes and copies perception). Through adequate reflections, our collaboration could have been an interesting data source, completed with the points of view of the other art historians contributing to the project, for example Mr. Wang and Mr. Fontanet, both erudite men having strong cross-cultural experiences who contributed to the catalogue at different levels of involvement.

And lastly, it would have been interesting to address in more details visitors’ assumptions about China and the possible expectations they had when they arrived at The Pavilion of Marital Harmony. As mentioned in Chapter 8, this would have been possible had I added in the questionnaire one or two more questions that would have been more straightforward for the visitor and would have brought me more descriptive vocabulary.
Future perspectives

More research on collaborative exhibitions’ processes should be developed in
anthropology but especially in art museums:

By bringing the exhibition design process to light, museum professionals might begin
the process of examining, and perhaps, reconciling, sometimes conflicting notions of
their audience, as museum researchers consider a broader range of factors that were
designed to influence visitor experiences in museums. (Knutson, 2002, p.43)

“The process of listening in and tracing the conversations of museum professionals
during the design of an art exhibition sheds an interesting light on how museums function as
learning environments” (Knutson, 2002, p.6). If Karen Knutson rightly points to the fact that
studies of exhibition processes is informing about museums as learning environments, I would
like to emphasize how informing it is about curators’ and exhibition teams’ professional
development and improvement: my point of view on the role of curator evolved tremendously
through this research. This invites me to consider collaborative action research as a possible
path for future studies. This method demands an engagement from all collaborators together in
a professional/personal introspective research, an aim probably difficult to reach but that would
be very enlightening for the setting where it would take place, for this field of study, for cultural
empowerment and for professional improvement.

Much of the research and theory I consulted show and analyze the Western systems of
representation of non-Western cultures and the continuity of misrepresentations. Regarding
Asian cultures, cross-cultural relationships are made even more complex through
communication. Both the West and the East have extremely valuable scholarship on cultural
questions, but as mentioned by several authors in the field of art history (Clunas (1999), Hall
Yiengpruksawan (2001), Shimizu (2001)) there are little exchanges between Asian and Western
communities of researchers. If I was lucky enough to find research written by Asian as well as
Western scholars, the fact that they were written by English speakers biases our point of view. It means that real exchanges take place in few congresses, among a small community of bilingual scholars. It is more than ever necessary to see communities of researchers communicate. This problem of communication is not only due to diverse languages but also to different thinking modes and sets of beliefs that probably originate in very different linguistic systems. It would probably be worth looking at these semiotic issues when working on Asian arts: other semiotic analyses are necessary to continue to work on messages hidden in between the narrative/text lines, as many uncontrolled subtexts sustaining the continuation of ethnocentric discourses.

Regarding visitors’ studies, it would be interesting to explore further visitors’ reaction when visiting the arts of other cultures and to answer questions such as: is China understood beyond the exotic “other” representation? What meaning does the viewer make out of an encounter with a foreign art? Does the viewer integrate Chinese art into the more global context of artistic creativity?

The body of theory I gathered along this research is a drop in an ever growing ocean, that can be read and re-read differently according to depth levels, yet enclosing treasures to be discovered. Theory is the motor of beliefs’ evolution and enrichment. If theory without practice can be as dry as practice without theory can be static, theory into practice is a motor of change and improvement.

(...) every act of criticism is a reconstruction. The reconstruction takes the form of an argued narrative, supported by evidence that is never incontestable; there will always be alternative interpretations of the “same” play, as the history of criticism so eloquently attests. (Eisner, 1991, p.86)

100 Fortunately, a body of literature was recently added to my references. I was made aware of its existence thanks to Dr. Elizabeth L. Johnson, when I was about to overlook it. These are mainly anthropological articles examining collaborative exhibition process with source communities and African and First Nations art exhibitions, whereas I was looking for European papers about Chinese art exhibitions...
Retrospectively looking at the past four years, I realize that perceptions and interpretations are in perpetual evolution, that there are different ways of seeing the same experience, all phases in its life (Ames, 1992, p.144). Layers of meaning and of understanding, motions and evolutions were uncovered through a narrative inquiry. This methodology allowed me, displaying multiple layers of consciousness, to zoom backward and forward, inward and outward; in a research that reunited a professional and an exploratory process and connected the personal to the cultural (Ellis and Bochner (2000), p.739; Richardson (2000), p.931).

This experience provoked a reflection that is still developing and that will still evolve in the future. This work has been incredibly edifying and enlightening and engaged me in the development of a professional reflection and in beliefs definition which will hopefully continue to illuminate my path.

These last four years have been extremely rich in learning, whether on a professional, a personal or an educational level. I worked at my first professional experience, and in parallel I was initiated, in the Department of Curriculum Studies and through museum studies, to theoretical sources providing me with tools to reflect on my practice. I arrived in Vancouver with separate elements in hands and discovered along my studies that they were closely connected together. In particular, I engaged in a reflection on the practical implications of cross-cultural relationships, and discovered that my profession can be practised with art and through art. I am about to leave Vancouver with a deep feeling of connection between my personal life, my professional life and my research interests.
REFERENCES


Reference list


Reference list


Malik, Rohini, & Gilane Tawadros. (1996). (Mis)representations: The curator, the gallery & the artwork. In L. Dawtrey, T. Jackson, M. Masterton, & P. Meecham (Eds.). *Critical studies and modern art* (pp.113-121). New Haven: Yale University Press.


FIGURES

Fig. 1 The Baur Collection (El-Wakil, 1998)

Fig. 2 Room of the second floor. (El-Wakil, 1998)
Fig. 3 Temporary exhibition room C. (El-Wakil, 1998)

Fig. 4 Temporary exhibition room D. (El-Wakil, 1998)
Fig. 5  Tsen Tsorming and Fan Tchunpi at the time of their wedding in 1922.

Fig. 6  Fan Tchunpi (1898–1986), Portrait of Tsen Tsorming, 1930. (Dunand, 2002)
Fig. 7 Personal belongings showcase.

Fig. 8 Qiu Ying (ca. 1492-1552), Tasting tea, ink on paper. (Dunand, 2002)
Fig. 9 Objects for the scholar's desk.

Fig. 10 Room B.
Figures

Fig. 11  Room A.

Fig. 12  Room C.
Fig. 13 Room C: showcase.

Fig. 14 Room D.
Fig. 15 Room D: opposite view.

Fig. 16 Newspaper add.

Fig. 17 Deng Fen (1894-1964), Xishi. (Dunand, 2002)
Fig. 18  Gao Qifeng (1889-1933), *The Roaring tiger*, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002)

Fig. 19  Gao Jianfu (1879-1951), *Carp and wisteria*, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002)
Fig. 11 Qi Baishi (1864-1957), *Twin geese*, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002)

Fig. 20 Fan Tchunpi (1898-1986), *Autumn moon over Pidan*, ink on paper, 1966. (Dunand, 2002)

Fig. 21 Qi Baishi (1864-1957), *Twin geese*, ink and colours on paper. (Dunand, 2002)
Fig. 22. Marcelle Ladeuil (1895-after 1984), Portrait of Madame Fan Tchunpi, oil on canvas. (Dunand, 2002)

Fig. 23. Fan Tchunpi (1898-1986), The Flute player, oil on canvas, 1924. (Dunand, 2002)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sélection des œuvres de Fan Tchunpi

France


Retour en Chine


L’exil

Appendices


20. *Une barrière dans la neige*, encre et couleurs sur papier, H : 37.3 cm. L : 54.5 cm.


**Redécouverte de la Chine**


Sélection d’œuvres de la collection Xiehanglou

LA CALLIGRAPHIE :

Zhao Mengfu, *La biographie de Shen Donglao*, 1307, album, H : 29.3 cm. L : 30.6 cm.

Dong Qichang, *Sur l’étang*, non daté, rouleau horizontal, H : 26 cm. L : 169.5 cm.


Dong Qichang, *L’ode aux immortels*, non daté, rouleau horizontal, H : 30.6 cm. L : 266.6 cm.

Zuo Zhongtang, *De la personnalité des hommes et de leur calligraphie*, Qing, non daté, rouleau horizontal, H : 39.2 cm. L : 262 cm.

Li Jian, *Au cœur de la lande*, rouleau vertical, non daté, H : 132 cm. L : 38.7 cm.

Yu Youren, *Un vieux poème de 1927*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 180.1 cm. L : 36.5 cm.

Shen Yinmo, *Quatre poèmes de Tsen Tsonming*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 125 cm. L : 59.4 cm.

Tsen Tsonming, *Un matin de printemps*, rouleau vertical, H : 84.7 cm. L : 32 cm.

Hu Hanmin, *Couplet parallèle*, 2 rouleaux verticaux, non daté, H : 136 cm. L : 33.8 cm.


LES PEINTURES ANCIENNES :

Zhao Chunfu, *Bambous*, 17e s., rouleau horizontal, H : 35 cm. L : 227 cm.

Qiu Ying, *Le repos du lettré*, non daté, rouleau horizontal, H : 27.4 cm. L : 56 cm.

Shen Zhou, *Chrysanthèmes*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 160 cm. L : 42 cm.

Chen Zhuan, *Album de fleurs, plantes et arbustes*, 1737, album, H : 30.7 cm. L : 27.9 cm.

Wu Dachang, *Paysage*, encre et couleurs sur soie, 1863, H : 32.9 cm. L : 58.5 cm.

L’ECOLE LINGNAN (ECOLE DU SUD) :


Gao Jianfu, *Carpe à la Glycine*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 245 cm. L : 64 cm.
Appendices


Chen Shuren, *Kakis*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 230 cm. L : 45.5 cm.

Zhao Shao’ang, *Cigales*, 1933, rouleau vertical, H : 179 cm. L : 45 cm.


**L’ECOLE DE SHANGHAI :**


Zhang Daqian, *Su Dongpo à la falaise rouge*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 233 cm. L : 52.5 cm.


**L’ECOLE DU NORD :**

Qi Baishi, *Album de fleurs, d’herbes et d’insectes*, non daté, album, H : 42.5 cm. L : 57 cm.

Qi Baishi, 4 rouleaux de *fleurs et oiseaux*, non datés, rouleau vertical, H : 156 cm. L : 36.5 cm.

Qi Baishi, *Deux oies pour Junbi*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 209 cm. L : 51.6 cm.

Qi Baishi, *Glycine*, non daté, rouleau vertical, H : 136.1 cm. L : 33.6 cm.

**LES OBJETS DU LETTRE :**

**SCEAUX :**

Dix sceaux par des maîtres anciens.

Neuf sceaux, *tianhuang*, paysages.

Trois sceaux, *baifurong*, dragons.

Trois sceaux, *tianhuang*, divers.

Trois sceaux, *tianbai*, sages.

Paire de sceaux, *jixue*, poissons.
PIERRES A ENCRE :
Pierre à encre calligraphiée par Wang Jingwei, non datée, 22X15 cm.
Pierre à encre en forme de chat, pierre duan, signée renheyang, non datée, 10.5X7.5 cm.
Pierre à encre, motif de chien ou de qilin (licorne), non datée, 17.3X10.3cm.
Pierre à encre, motif de pécheur, non datée, 9.2X7.5 cm.

BATONS D’ENCRE :
Bâtons d’encre impériale, non daté, écrin : 14.6X12.3 cm.

JADES :
Brûle parfum, d’époque Qianlong, jade, D : 27.3 cm., H : 14 cm.
Médaillon de jade, jade, D : 4.8 cm.

IVOIRES :
Poussins en ivoire, ivoire, 6.2X3.5 cm.
Repose poignet décoré d’un motif d’abeilles, ivoire, H : 25 cm. L : 5.5 cm.
Repose poignet décoré d’un immortel, ivoire, non daté, 11.3 cm.X 4.1 cm.

AUTRES :
Petites tasses aux moineaux, porcelaine d’époque Kangxi, D : 6.3 cm, H :5.3 cm.
Objet galant, stéatite, non daté, 6X6.2 cm.
Porte encens et son support, racine de huangyang, non daté, 13.X9.6 cm.
Brûle parfum, bambou, non daté, H : 19.8cm. D : 4.9 cm.
Deux rouleaux de trompe l’œil, encre et couleurs sur soie, rouleaux verticaux, H : 126cm. L : 24.2 cm.
Pierre microcosme, quartz de type huanlga.
En 1943, Fan Tchunpi rencontra le célèbre peintre Qi Baishi, alors âgé de soixante-dix-neuf ans, dont plus d'une dizaine d'œuvres font partie de la collection Xiehang Lou (cat.). Ce portrait fut exécuté en une séance de pose, dans le style de Fan typique des années quarante. Au contraire de ses portraits à l'huile, elle représente son sujet sorti de tout contexte, se détachant sur un arrière plan laissé vide pour porter un soin tout particulier au visage, comme nous l'avons noté dans son Portrait de la vieille Dame Chen (cat.). Fan Tchunpi a particulièrement bien réussi à capter le regard vif du vieux maître qui reflète sa forte personnalité.

FIRST ENGLISH VERSION

In 1943 in Beijing, Fan Tchunpi met the painter Qi Baishi, then 79 years old. Already the Xiehanglou Collection had acquired more than a dozen works by him. So they were hardly unknown to each other. Immediately following The Dumb Beggar, this was only the second Chinese portrait painting by Fan Tchunpi. It says something about her lack of discrimination that she would look at a famous artist and a beggar with the same painterly eye. Completing her work in one sitting, she succeeded very well in capturing the impish personality of the old man as reflected in his lively eyes. Qi Baishi was so pleased with the result that he dedicated his Twin Duck (cat.) to Fan Tchunpi and agreed to carve her personal seal for her (cat.), which would become her favorite signature seal.

DEFINITIVE ENGLISH VERSION

In 1943 Fan Tchunpi met the famous painter Qi Baishi, then 79 years old. More than ten of his works are now in the Xiehanglou collection. This portrait was completed in a single sitting, in Fan Tchunpi's typical style of the 1940s. In contrast to her oil portraits, here the artist depicts her subject out of context, standing against an empty background so as to focus special attention on the face, as we have noted in the Portrait of Old Lady Chen (Cat. No.8). Fan Tchunpi succeeded particularly well in capturing the old master’s lively look, which reflects his strong personality.
APPENDIX V

Floor plan of Baur Collection’s temporary exhibition rooms.
APPENDIX VI

Mr. Tsen's questionnaire:
You are still welcome to visit the exhibition. However, if your questionnaire is completed and returned, it will be assumed that consent to include your voice in this project has been given.

Sophie Wirth Brentini est à la disposition de toute personne désirant obtenir de l’information concernant son travail et/ou l’utilisation des données rassemblées. Une copie de la thèse résultant de cette étude sera mise à disposition de tout participant qui serait intéressé à la lire. (Sophie P. Wirth Brentini will stay available to whomever would like to obtain information concerning her work and/or usage of the data. A copy of the paper resulting from this study will be available to any of the participants in the study.)

Genève, le ________________ . X ________________ .
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Plusieurs personnes de générations différentes et ayant des origines culturelles diverses ont travaillé ensemble à ce projet, décrivez les différentes approches du sujet que vous avez remarquées (Several generations and cultures met working on this project. Describe some of the different approaches that you noticed while working on the subject)
2. Quelles étaient vos attentes en préparant une telle exposition?
(What were your expectations preparing such an exhibition? (Personal experience, result etc...))
3. Quelles difficultés avez-vous rencontrées en préparant et en visitant cette exposition? (What difficulties did you meet preparing and viewing this exhibition?)
4. Qu’avez vous découvert en participant à un tel projet, en avez-vous appris plus à propos de la culture européenne? (What did you discover by participating in such a project, did you learn something more about European culture?)
Appendices

APPENDIX VII

Mr. Dunand’s questionnaire:
1. Quelle est la politique des Collections Baur? (what are the politics of the Baur Collection?)
2. Quels sont vos soucis lors de la préparation d’une exposition (éthique, authenticité, reconnaissance scientifique p.ex) (What are your concerns while preparing any exhibition)?
3. En tant que conservateur européen, quelles difficultés ou particularités rencontrez-vous en exposant et en commentant de l’art asiatique (As a European curator, what difficulties or particularities do you encounter while exhibiting and writing about Asian art)?
4. Quelles difficultés ou particularités avez-vous rencontré lors de la réalisation du projet Le pavillon de l’harmonie conjugale
(What difficulties or particularities did you encounter while working on the realization of the project «The Pavillon of Marital Harmony»)?
APPENDIX VIII

Visitors’ questionnaire:
Ce questionnaire prendra approximativement 15 à 30 minutes de votre temps. (The questionnaire will require approximately 15 to 30 minutes to complete.)

Votre participation est entièrement volontaire. Vous pouvez refuser d’y participer ou vous retirer à tout moment. Cependant, si votre questionnaire est complété et rendu, il sera considéré que vous consentez à participer à ce projet. (Your participation to this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. You are still welcome to visit the exhibition. However, if your questionnaire is completed and returned, it will be assumed that consent to include your anonymous voice in this project has been given.)

Sophie Wirth Brentini est à la disposition de toute personne désirant obtenir de l’information concernant son travail et / ou l’utilisation des données réunies. Une copie de la thèse résultant de cette étude sera mise à disposition à tout participant au projet qui serait intéressé à la lire. (Sophie P. Wirth Brentini will stay available to whomever would like to obtain information concerning her work and/or usage of the data. A copy of the paper resulting from this study will be available to any of the participants in the study.)
QUESTIONNAIRE

Merci de souligner la réponse appropriée :

Homme / Femme

Age: moins que 20; 20-30; 30-40; 40-50; 50-60; plus que 60.

Je suis : Chinois(e) / non Chinois(e)

Je vis en Europe : oui / non Depuis combien de temps ?

1. Quel est le rôle d’un musée ? (cochez une ou plusieurs des réponses ci-dessous) (What is the role of a museum? Please, circle one or several of the following answers) :
   - Conservation (Curatorship) □
   - Restauration (Conservation) □
   - Education □
   - Divertissement (Entertainment) □
   - Autre (other) :

2. Ce qui vous est présenté est une collection chinoise d’art chinois. Est-ce différent d’une collection européenne d’art chinois? Comment? (What is shown is a Chinese collection of Chinese art. Does it differ from a European collection of Chinese art? How?)

3. Aviez-vous connaissance de la période historique nommée Chine Républicaine? (Were you aware of the historical period named Republican China?)
4. Des deux tableaux intitulés « Jeune fille jouant de la flûte » de Fan Tchunpi et « Portrait de Fan Tchunpi » peint par Marcelle Ladeuil, lequel est le plus chinois ou le plus européen ? *Pourquoi ?* *(Which one is the most Chinese or the most European? Why?)*

![Fan Tchunpi](image1)

**Fan Tchunpi**

*Jeune fille jouant de la flûte, 1924.*

![Marcelle Ladeuil](image2)

**Marcelle Ladeuil**

*Portrait de Fan Tchunpi.*

5. Est-ce que l’image de la Chine présentée dans notre exposition correspond à celle que vous avez ? *Pourquoi ?* *(In your opinion, is what you see in this exhibition representative of your image of China? Why?)*

6. Qu’avez-vous découvert en visitant cette exposition ? *(What did you discover visiting this exhibition?)*
APPENDIX IX

Observation protocol:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parcours</th>
<th>Quand</th>
<th>Temps</th>
<th>Quoi : tout / téléphone / devant quoi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hall A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyvalente B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trésor C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gare D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Utilisation du catalogue : Oui/Non
Facilité / Recherche d'info.

Interaction avec ami / autre usiter / gardien / moi
兰 Demande d'info / Remarques

Diagramme:

```
  D
 / 
 B C
 / 
 A
```