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Sustainable Development of Private Art Museums in China: A Narrative Inquiry Study

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Sustainable Development of Private Art Museums in China:

A Narrative Inquiry Study

A Dissertation by

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Chapman University

Orange, CA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a Leadership Studies Emphasis

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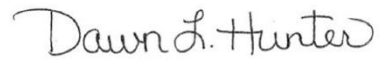
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ABSTRACT

Sustainable Development of Private Art Museums in China: A Narrative Inquiry Study

by Chaoran Li

Private art museums are a relatively new phenomenon in China, having first appeared in the 20th century. This brief timeline in the larger history of art museums, coupled with the fact most Chinese private art museums close after just a few years of operation, has led many to question how to promote the sustainability of these institutions. These questions became even more pronounced with the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which brought a greater sense of uncertainty to the museum industry and society at large. This dissertation inquires similarly, asking how sustainability is conceptualized by Chinese private art museum professionals and factors that affect sustainable development of this subset of museums. To respond to such questions, this study adopted a three-pronged framework that examined the cultural, economic, and social factors impacting museum sustainability (adapted from Stylianou-Lambert et al.'s (2014) study), which was then applied to interviews conducted with 10 museum professionals from private art museums throughout China. The interviewees often spoke of a Western museum model being applied to private art museum operations in China, with both positive and negative effects. Moreover, they presented sustainability as a multifaceted concept, one predicated on multiple factors or concerns. Some of the factors influencing the sustainability of private art museums that were explored include (a) desire for greater government support but more curatorial autonomy and less censorship, (b) desire to cater to changing audience preferences while maintaining the integrity of exhibits, and (c) desire to become more financially self-sufficient without being influenced by the whims of the individuals privately funding museum

operations. These tensions were examined in depth to provide recommendations for increasing the visibility of Chinese private art museums, thereby promoting their long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Private art museums, China, sustainability, narrative inquiry, new museology

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
BOAM	Bund One Art Museum
ICOM	The International Council of Museums
MoMA	The Museum of Modern Art
RAM	Rockbound Art Museum
UCCA	The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art
UCLA	The University of California Los Angeles
UN	United Nations
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Museums have become a hallmark of contemporary society. It seems that no matter the size of the city, it is usually able to boast at least one museum. The prevalence of museums is perhaps attributable to the social function they serve. As a cultural institution open to the public, the art museum has multiple functions. For example, art museums operate as outlets for exhibiting artists' work, conducting research, engaging in educational activities, and communicating with the public on various social issues (Zhang, 2015). Lilla (1985) stated the museum is an empowering institution, and other scholars have described the museum as a building to house collections of objects for inspection, study, and enjoyment (Harrison, 2005).

As time passes, the shape museums assume and intrinsic meaning attached to them changes, resulting in differing perspectives on the needs museums serve. Yet, researchers like Lu (2014) pointed out that museums should be stable institutions and not cultural symbols with transient meanings. The International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2023), the only international organization representing museums and museum professionals, offered a comprehensive definition of museums, which is careful to revise previous notions of the museum as sites of knowledge transmission to present them today as platforms for social change. The definition is as follows:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that research, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of

communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing. (International Council of Museums, 2022, para. 3)

The role of the modern-day museum has come to be seen as an homage to more progressive values like collective memory, intangible heritage, and addressing social issues (Habjanič & Perko, 2018). Therefore, museums are integral to discussions of cultural identity formation, but questions regarding their place in society inevitably arise when one considers the greater cultural context: Are the development of museums specific to the society or culture in which they find themselves? Or, have museums, like so many other cultural events or places today, become a globalized phenomenon? Furthermore, another point of consideration pertains to how museums, as symbols of the past, can be integrated with present-day concerns for the future in the form of sustainability initiatives.

Such reflections are what ultimately gave rise to this study. However, my research specifically examined only art museums. When compared to other types of museums (e.g., history museums, science museums), art museums draw from a wide pool of visitors, attracting 67 million visitors worldwide (Association of Art Museum Directors, 2018). For the purposes of this study, art museums are distinguished from commercial art galleries, as the latter refers to for-profit exhibition spaces that sell and auction works of art.

The larger category of art museums may further be refined into the subcategory of private art museums. In the past, private art museums referred exclusively to those museums that were founded by private owners (Kolbe et al., 2022). For example, the earlier private art museums in Shanghai (e.g., Long Art Museum, Zhengda Art Museum and MoMA) were all founded by private owners (Lisa, 2012). In countries with extensive international financial networks, such as China, private art museums have typically been established by both domestic and foreign

collectors, large multinational conglomerates seeking investment opportunities, and a complex mix of privately and publicly held organizations (De Nigris, 2016; Lisa, 2012).

Because private art museums are uniquely situated in the sociopolitical and cultural context of China, this study will explore relevant and timely information about the current status of these museums. China has seen a preponderance of private art museums, in particular, cropping up in the past few decades. In fact, private owners in China are responsible for founding 26 different private contemporary art museums within the country, ranking it the country with the fourth-highest number of privately owned modern art museums in the world (Larry's List, 2016).

Here, the term private art museum refers to art museums founded by private owners or private companies. This delineation is an important distinction to make, given this subset of museums does not enjoy the same cultural support in the form of government financial allocations as state-owned museums. Therefore, the precarious existence of private museums invites questions of how to ensure their continued development—questions this dissertation sought to address.

Introduction to the Study

Sustainability is an encompassing term often explored in organizations from a development and management direction. The concept of sustainability since the 1980s has been primarily understood in relation to environmental issues (Brophy & Wylie, 2013). However, the thinking around museum sustainability and its implications for museums only emerged more clearly at the beginning of the 21st century. Scholars have proposed that sustainability in museums is about cultural organizational management approaches, in relation to the operations of the institution (Sutter, 2006), and have emphasized the interdependence of culture, economy,

society, and sustainability (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014). Long-term sustainability is a primary concern for virtually any organization, and museums are no exception. According to Wickham and Lehman (2015), understanding sustainable development policies and practices in the field of museum studies is central to ensuring the well-being of the communities the museums in question serve. Practices and initiatives rooted in sustainability can provide museums with opportunities to provide innovative approaches to heritage and collection conservations and foster public engagement (Merriman, 2008).

Despite the promise of sustainability for fostering the longevity of museums, it remains difficult to accomplish. Despite the rapid development of museums in China, the main challenges facing museums in China is the balance between quantity and quality of museums, management systems, talent development, and uniqueness and diversity of museum ecology (An, 2020; Guan, 2020). Due to stable government financial support, funding is not the main challenge for state-owned museums in China, but rather the government's control over the cultural aspects of museums, with fewer opportunities for museum practitioners to express their individual identities and personal creativity (Ho, 2019).

Mintrom and O'Connor (2020) pointed out the Chinese government is using the growing cultural market and industry to infiltrate its own political image. However, private art museums do not seem to be the subject of much government interference. Despite the rapid development of private art museums, compared to state-owned art museums, private art museums' special status makes them face greater challenges and a series of problems (Ge, 2013; J. Zhang, 2017).

For example, Chinese private museums get various forms of indirect assistance from the government, which contributes to their sustainable development, including tax exemptions and provision of real estate or land free of charge (Frey & Meier, 2002; Kiowski, 2017; Kolbe et al.,

2022). However, China's donation and tax exemption system is quite complex and difficult to operate (ARTDBL, 2023a; De Nigris, 2018; Hi Art, 2023; L. K. Zhao et al., 2020). Lack of a reliable legal framework and clear tax incentives has led many private museums in China to close after a few years of operation (Hi Art, 2023; Kolbe et al., 2022; Zennaro, 2017). Other concerns lie with the difficulty in continuing to adhere to international art museum standards that, first and foremost, emphasize academic research (S. Zhao, 2013).

Studies have shown sustainability is a challenging topic for museum directors and administrators (Chitima, 2015; International Council of Museums, 2020; Swarbrooke, 2015). As the International Council of Museums (2020) noted, sustainability can be difficult to achieve because museums must attempt to balance concerns for the people they serve, the planet and its environmental footprint, profitability and financial health, integrity of its programs, and adherence to its mission. In China, development of museums has been rapid, but despite much growth in this sector in recent years, sustainability nonetheless remains a challenge for many of the aforementioned reasons (De Nigris, 2018).

Further complicating matters is the fact only about 2% of China's museums are contemporary art museums, and majority of those museums dedicated to presenting contemporary art are private art museums (J. Johnson, 2013). What this means is if private museums dedicated to exhibiting and housing art collections fail, the artwork they promote and preserve may suffer or be lost altogether. In China, this specific museum niche is especially important in terms of cultural preservation. Private art museums have a close relationship with China's society, economy, and politics (Lu, 2014). But, as Hu (2020) underscored, challenges and difficulties associated with private art museums in China represent a long-standing problem. According to ARTDBL (2023a), the mainstream cultural system in the West pays limited

attention to Chinese art museums, making private art museums invaluable to China. Without them to display contemporary art, it would be difficult for China to enter a dialog with the world on matters of art.

Achieving sustainability becomes even more difficult when one considers the role unprecedented global events have on museums' staying power. The COVID-19 global pandemic is a prime example. The pandemic has had a significant negative impact on cultural institutions worldwide (Ozili & Arun, 2023; Travkina & Sacco, 2020). Due to COVID-19, different types of public cultural venues have been closed to a certain extent, which has also resulted in a significant reduction in the number of visitors (Silberman, 2020). Under the COVID-19 restriction policy, Chinese museums held more than 29,000 exhibitions in 2020, receiving 540 million in-person visitors, a year-to-year decrease of 56% (UNESCO, 2020). These impacts have led to a financial crisis for cultural institutions that rely on cultural tourism and cultural activities for their survival by reducing their revenues (Silberman, 2020). In addition, the pandemic has forced the downsizing of programs and forced cultural workers out of work, with nearly a third of museums being forced to reduce their staff by nearly a third (Cobley et al., 2020; Network of European Museum Organizations, 2020). The sudden onset of COVID-19 pushed private art museums to a more peripheral social space, thus increasing the uncertainty of art museums' place in society and highlighting their tenuous existence.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Given the challenges to sustainability and importance it holds for Chinese private art museums and conducting the literature review, I found most existing methodologies for conducting empirical research on the sustainable development of museums were focused primarily on quantitative analyses or case studies. Not only are there very few empirical studies

on the sustainable development of private art museums in China, but very few qualitative studies on this subject. Therefore, this study adopted a narrative-based inquiry approach to better understand how these art museums are developing with long-term success in mind. This study explored the experiences of Chinese private art museums with sustainability, examined museum professionals' understanding of the concept of sustainability itself, and adjustments they made to their practice to realize their goals under this complex and ever-changing environment.

Another goal of this study was to identify factors that promote sustainable development amid the backdrop of Chinese art and cultural landscape. Moreover, this study aimed to assist private and non-state-owned cultural institutions in coping with challenges to sustainability as they arise and anticipate such challenges in the future.

Practical takeaways from this study include providing guidance on how the Chinese government and cultural institutions can support the sustainable development of Chinese private art museums in the future. By soliciting input of professionals working in private art museums, this research contributed to ongoing conversations about sustainability in museum studies. It aimed to fill a gap in the literature on this topic while simultaneously laying the foundation for further research in this area. More specifically, objectives of this study include: (a) facilitating the further development of existing private art museums, in addition to establishing the conditions for new institutions to emerge; (b) aiding cultural institutions both in China and abroad to gain a more nuanced understanding of the role and purpose of the private art museum; and (c) encouraging the development of policies and practices that promote the sustainable development of Chinese private art museums.

In summary, the importance of private art museums and the challenges they face have prompted questions regarding the future of art museums in China. Yet, despite the pressing

nature of this issue, it remains underaddressed by way of empirical research (Kolbe et al., 2022) that might provide guidance to these museums. Therefore, this narrative-based inquiry study addressed this relative gap in the literature and providing actions museums may wish to consider for the sustainable development of such institutions. The next section presents the research questions guiding this study.

Research Questions

This study explored two main research questions. The research questions are as follows:

1. In a complex and changing social environment, how do art museum professionals view the sustainable development of private art museums in China?
2. What factors affect the sustainable development of China's private art museums?

Before examining these research questions, it is important to understand more about the background of this topic. Therefore, in the next chapter, context and history of how museums in China developed will be described along with scholarly literature discussing the sustainable development of museums.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To fully understand sustainability goals, challenges, and methods for implementation as they relate to private art museums in China, these topics must be grounded in the extant literature. Therefore, this literature review provides a synthesis of key concepts and empirical studies on the sustainable development of private art museums in China. The literature review begins by tracing the history of museums in China, detailing their development in society throughout the ages. Next, it proceeds to establish the disciplinary context of the research, which outlines new museology in the West and new museum studies in China. In this part of the discussion, concepts pertaining to sustainability development are explored at both the level of the individual museum and global art scene.

The next section presents three dimensions of museums' sustainable development, categorized by economic, social, and cultural considerations. Adopting such a comprehensive approach to analyzing sustainability among this specific class of museums thus aligns the discussion with the prevailing theoretical models of museum sustainability by engaging with the issue in a more systemic and holistic fashion. This literature review concludes by introducing emerging perspectives on various factors affecting museums' sustainable development, and uses this discussion as a means for identifying gaps in knowledge this study aims to fill.

Museum Development in China

Although museums are considered modern Western inventions, in recent history, Chinese museums have undergone various significant changes, including a move toward localization. The subsequent section examines the development of museums in China in greater depth and is divided into four periods: (a) origin of the museum, (b) early development of museums in China,

(c) Chinese museums after the economic reform and cultural exchange prompted by the Open Door policy of the late 1970s, and (d) expansion and global recognition of Chinese museums around and after 2010. By analyzing the historical context and key developments, this section aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of museum culture in China. With greater knowledge of their historical context, we can thus gain insight into the important role these institutions played in the Chinese cultural landscape, and place of private art museums in today's world.

Origins of the Museum

According to Su (1995), the origin of museums is inextricably linked to culture itself. Museums began as collections of beloved treasures, and when collections amassed a certain amount of treasure, a primitive museum was formed. The etymology of the word museum is attributable to the Greek *mouseion*, meaning a shrine to the muses (University College London, 2003). One of the earliest examples of the museum is the Mouseion at Alexandria, which was established in an attempt to preserve Greek culture and citizens' Hellenistic identity (Maehler, 2004).

Although the museum at Alexandria may have been one of the earliest examples of museums in the West, its counterpart in the East could be considered to be the Temple of Confucius (551 B.C. – 479 B.C.), the earliest recorded primitive museum in China (Su, 1995). Following his death, Confucius's followers converted his former residence into a temple to honor him. His followers displayed artifacts of his life, including pieces of clothing, hats, musical instruments, and even wheelbarrows. However, with the museum at Alexandria and Temple of Confucius, the social function of the museum did not extend much beyond collection and preservation.

Su (1995) pointed out that museums of antiquity departed from museums in the present day. The latter, the present-day museum is a product of industrial civilization, and it performed three primary social functions: collection, scientific research, and education. However, museums in China gradually assumed all three functions as Chinese society was reduced to a semicolonial and semifeudal form of social organization from the 1840s until the end of the 19th century, when the conditions for the creation of modern museums slowly emerged.

Early Development of Museums in China: From Pre-1949 to 1976

According to Lu (2014), in the 1860s and 1870s, China launched a movement to learn from the West, and thereby initiated a process of social modernization. As part of these efforts, China sent Chinese scholars abroad, to serve as cultural ambassadors and learn from Western ways of life. The idea was these intellectuals would bring home insights that could be implemented in Chinese society. Early development of museums in China was closely related to travels and activities of this group of scholars. After visiting museums throughout Europe in the 1840s, the scholars returned home to China and suggested the government should erect museums the same way Europe has, and incorporate museology into school curricula (Lu, 2014).

It is worth noting not only Chinese scholars traveled abroad; citizens of the West also ventured to China, with French, English and other foreign missionaries ultimately establishing early modern museums in the country (Lu, 2014). In 1905, a time when China was in the early stages of the fall of the Qing dynasty and overthrow of the feudal imperial system, Zhangjian, a Chinese patriotic intellectual, founded China's first museum, the Nantong Museum. It is widely considered to be the first museum in China in the modern sense of the word because it was founded by the Chinese people—independent of assistance from Western visitors—and because it ushered in the era of China's modern museum business (Nantong Museum, 2023; Su, 1995).

The Nantong museum displayed historical artifacts, natural specimens, and works of art, and was tied to much-needed patriotic causes during this tumultuous period of China's history (Lu, 2014).

China's first national museums served to promote patriotic ideals. As Lu (2014) noted, China's national museums were born after the Qing dynasty and series of events previously mentioned. One particularly well-known example is the National Palace Museum. The museum was built in 1925, at a time when the Chinese government sought to strengthen its focus on cultural preservation, and officials looked to museums as one mechanism for preservation.

Museums were seen as inextricably linked to preservation of cultural relics and tangible symbols of the emperor's power. More than just being seen as instruments of preserving cultural heritage, museums were regarded as vehicles for promoting art deemed patriotic and dissemination of ideas. The Chinese government recognized the importance of cultural institutions, like museums, in shaping the ideology of the masses, promoting a sense of national identity, and instilling certain values in its people.

Another turning point in the evolution of museums in Chinese society occurred in 1935, when the Chinese Museum Association was first established. As a direct result of the formation of such an organization, the quality and diversity of China's museums flourished (Lu, 2014). Although during this time art museums specifically had not yet emerged, establishment of these museums nonetheless paved the way for their later entry as a comparable public cultural institution (Ho, 2019).

Conceptually speaking, the art museum may be considered as a type or subset of museum. In China, the history of art museums dates back to the early 20th century after the formation of the Chinese Museum Association. Only a year later, in 1936, the Jiangsu Provincial Art Museum was established in Nanjing, making it the first of its kind (De Nigris, 2018). Not only was this

museum the first national art museum in modern China, but founding of the museum marked the beginning of China's art museum industry (Jiangsu Art Museum, 2023).

After the founding of New China in 1949 (Kraus, 2004), the state became the primary patron and financial backer of the arts. Therefore, China was in a position to regulate artistic production through different cultural organizations, including artists' associations, research institutes, publishing houses, art schools, museums, and countless other national, provincial, municipal, and local cultural bureaus (DeBevoise, 2014). In fact, the heavy government involvement in the arts is what allowed for one of China's most notable art museums, the National Art Museum of China, to open its doors to the public in 1963. Since that time, the National Art Museum of China has become a national landmark and enduring cultural symbol (National Art Museum of China, 2023).

Government initiatives supporting the arts and museums dedicated to the arts continued to appear in subsequent decades. During the Great Leap Forward from 1957–1965 (i.e., Socialist Construction Tide), the Chinese government required each county to have a museum. This meant over a 1-year period spanning 1957–1958, the number of museums in China increased dramatically—from 72 to 360 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018).

However, as Ho (2019) points out, such progress would come to a halt as the Cultural Revolution between 1966–1976 got underway and resulted in a tumultuous period in China's history. During this period, the country witnessed a period of profound social and cultural change that affected development of art museums in immeasurable and unforeseen ways. Although the Cultural Revolution led to the widespread destruction of cultural infrastructure and closure of numerous museums, the end of the revolution in 1976 paved the way for the revival of Chinese art and subsequent rise of art museums.

Chinese Museums After the Cultural Revolution: From 1977 to 2000

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese museums went through a process of restoration and reconstruction and, in 1977, the National Museum Association was renamed to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. As one of the first orders of duty, this newly rebranded organization held a meeting to discuss the development and role of Chinese museums after the Cultural Revolution. Their discussions would undoubtedly be influenced by Deng Xiaoping's ascension to lead the nation in 1978, and economic reforms he put into place shortly after taking office.

Referred by the Chinese people as the country's opening up to the rest of the world, Xiaoping's Open Door policy sought to open the nation's figurative doors to those countries wishing to do business in China. As influx of new enterprises and ideas poured in, China saw museums' status less as entities controlled by the state and their gravitation toward more entrepreneurial spaces, where alternative conceptualizations of artistic work could emerge (DeBevoise, 2014; Kraus, 2004). This newfound freedom is what encouraged the growing number of different types of museums in China to focus on specific themes (Song, 2019).

Growth of museums of all types was supported by rapid urbanization and cultural transformation that was characteristic of the period (Ho, 2019). Around this time, the country saw a boom in the construction of art museums. According to Ho (2019), in 1984, local governing bodies proposed construction of Guangdong Art Museum, and in 1986, Shanghai Art Museum was also founded. Less than a decade later, in 1997, Guan Shanyue Art Museum in Shenzhen would also be established.

The sudden and seemingly widespread appearance of art museums across China coincided with the national economic policies of the 1980s. Ho (2019) noted in 1980s, the state

supported export of handicrafts and artwork as a form of foreign exchange, which, in turn, promoted marketization of art. Other factors that allowed art museums in China to assume a more visible place in society include China's cultural environment at the time was relatively relaxed.

Amid such conditions, development of the museum business became re-institutionalized and more diversified, with a return to privatization. Such diversification was due, in part, to Xiaoping's cultural policy that placed greater emphasis on commercialization of art products, and thereby led to a greater diversity of art products (Kraus, 2004). Furthermore, because the system of institutionalized support for the arts shifted and the state was no longer the sole patron, this led to the redevelopment of museums as both publicly and privately held entities, making the answer to the question of whether museums are essentially public or private even more variable (Ho, 2019).

In addition, DeBevoise (2014) pointed out art museums themselves actively played a role in diversifying their sources of financial support by renting display spaces, establishing for-profit galleries, and organizing exhibitions to sell artwork, among other sources of income, to compensate for the decentralization and reduction of state support. These efforts were further aided by the 1982 Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, which regulated acquisition and sale of cultural relics, legalized private ownership of works of art, and allowed for establishment of nongovernmental art collections. This law laid the foundation for development of private museums in China.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Museum Association resumed operations in 1982, followed by establishment of the Chinese Museum Society in 1983, successor of the Chinese Museum Association, which promoted professionalization of the museum field in China (Song, 2019).

This same year, China also joined the International Council of Museums, thus facilitating integration of Chinese museums in the global art industry (Song, 2019). In short, by this time, Chinese museums had gradually recovered from impacts of the Cultural Revolution.

Private Art Museums in China: From the 1990s to the Early 2000s

Even though the number of museums was now significantly higher than previous decades, majority of art museums in China could still be classified according to two institutional types: private- or state-owned. The category an individual museum falls into has a great bearing on the way it operates (Frey & Meier, 2006). State-owned art museums are art museums funded by the state treasury, and can provide their employees with benefits that accompany a governmental position (e.g., job security). State-owned art museums are owned and managed by the Chinese government, but ownership of private art museums is not quite as straightforward (De Nigris, 2016; S. Liu, 2019).

To better understand the issue of art museum ownership, it may be helpful to examine the timeline of art museums' emergence in both the East and the West. Art museums founded by private owners emerged in the West in the early 1960s, whereas museums in China did not appear until the mid-to-late 1990s (Kolbe et al., 2022). According to scholars like Lin (2021), rapid development of most modern and contemporary private art museums is inseparable from interventions of museums with substantial private capital holdings. These investors have diverse backgrounds, representing industries spanning finance, medicine, cultural and art industry investment, and real estate. Yet, it is investors with a real estate background that comprise majority of individuals responsible for founding private art museums in China (S. Wang, 2017).

The 1990s directly benefitted from the economic and cultural reform of the previous two decades. According to Ho (2019), during this time, rapid development of the market economy

was accompanied by budding development of museums founded by private owners in China. Also at this same time, the state began to allow individuals to run their own businesses, and with a predictable uptick in self-employment, Chinese entrepreneurs swiftly accumulated assets that would allow them to become the mainstay of the museum boom.

Not only did these museums now have the financial strength to amass their own art collections, but they also maintained relatively close connections with the government—a strategic advantage that earned the museums’ entrepreneurial-minded owners implicit government approval to establish their own art museums. Museums of the 1990s were therefore concentrated in the private sector, with Yanhuang Art Museum, a private modern art museum in Beijing, founded in 1991, Shanghe Art Museum and TEDA Contemporary Art Museum in 1998, and Dongyu Art Museum in Shenyang in 1999. However, these private museums, all founded by real estate entrepreneurs, survived for only a few years before closing (Kiowski, 2017; J. Zhang, 2017), a fact which prompts further investigation into the politics of museum ownership.

As previously alluded to, ascent of private art museums in the 1990s was closely related to emerging urban developers and was driven by real estate companies (De Nigris, 2016; Lin, 2021). Unlike state-owned art museums, early private art museums were driven more by the demand for private assets rather than making provision for established, grounded cultural institutions (Lin, 2021). In sum, rapid economic construction and full development of urbanization in the late 1990s led to social transformation, which involved real estate companies in art, led to changes in human values and worldviews, and paved the way for the second wave of private art museum construction fever (Javier & Gail, 2020).

Chinese Museums After the Millennium

Upon entering the 21st century, China, which had become a member of the World Trade Organization in 2000, was now an important player in the globalized world. It had undergone dramatic changes, characterized by an accelerating art market, rapidly growing museums, and proliferation of private galleries (Ho, 2019). Such growth has only continued over the past 25 years. From 2011–2020, the Chinese government planned to develop one museum for every 250,000 residents, with the end goal to attract 1 billion visitors by the end of the time period specified. The government may have been close to achieving such a goal, as the number of museums in China has grown from about 1,400 at the turn of the century to over 5,000 today (Gail, 2020).

Still, when compared to the United States, China's museum per capita ratio falls short. There are currently 27,843 residents in China to one museum, which proportionally translates to 9,346.5 residents to one museum in a U.S. context. Therefore, it makes sense when the population of museum owners is compared to the total population, China lags behind the United States, but it is worth pointing out these figures are only one metric of success.

China's museums are still growing very fast (Guerzoni, 2015). China's economic boom and increased number of global connections have also greatly contributed to growth of Chinese museums. Number and size of Chinese museums has grown exponentially since 2010. For example, Today Art Museum in Beijing in 2002, Shanghai World Expo in 2010, and Long Museum, founded by collectors Liu Yiqian and Wang Wei, were all founded after 2000. In addition to more art museums opening across the country, Chinese art museums have also experienced rapid growth and diversification (Ho, 2019). One example of such diversification is

many Chinese art museums now showcase Chinese and international art in response to both public and private efforts to bridge the gap between local and global art scenes.

Indeed, globalization has created a positive environment for museums to develop a more diverse range of domestic and international exhibitions, and target a more diverse audience and raise funds through different channels (A. Li & Chen, 2014). Chinese museums have introduced more services and activities designed to improve their financial status, such as offering guests dining options, opportunities for gift shopping, and paid educational activities (A. Li & Chen, 2014). As landmarks of urban development (Lin, 2021), museums have grown alongside people's cultural consumption, both material and immaterial. Just as more people are now visiting museums, more are purchasing museum-related cultural products (A. Li & Chen, 2014).

Given museums' economic stimulation, they are increasingly being seen as beneficial to the local economy and spurring tourism activities in their surrounding area (Lord, 2002). Moreover, globalization has facilitated their extended financial reach, with museums beginning to host more and more overseas exhibitions, engage in exchanges with overseas cultural institutions, and adopt the use of social media to create virtual exhibitions (Lu, 2014). Their increasing global presence and scope of the financial impact they exert is what prompted cultural institutions across China beginning in 2011 to create boards of trustees to ensure professionalism in institutional governance (An, 2020). Today, 75% of state-owned museums have boards of trustees (An, 2020). These trustees are composed of both private citizens and state actors, who have played a key role in guiding museum development (Guan, 2020).

As Chinese society becomes more developed and different agencies and organizations acquire more disposable income, Chinese state-owned enterprises have started to use their own funds to found art museums. But this blending of financial resources—which technically belong

to the individual organization even though the organization itself is funded by the public—makes this category of art museums neither state-owned nor private. Until April 15, 2023, when Shanghai Art Museum Management Measures were formally implemented, such museums gained a clear definition, category, and guidelines for operational management (Shanghai Municipal People’s Government, 2023).

As the art market expanded, contemporary art in China came to transform the art museum scene (Stallabrass, 2020). Although existing contemporary art museums are exerting a considerable impact, they are still just beginning to appear in China. As contemporary art museums have a relatively brief history in the country, they currently account for only 2% of Chinese museums overall (Jeffrey, 2013).

Despite the understated presence indicated by these numbers, China has used contemporary art to demonstrate the country’s *soft power* and construct a global identity at home and abroad (Ho, 2019). Soft power, as the term is used here, refers to the ability to influence culture, values, ideology, and public opinion. Thus, recognizing the potential of contemporary art museums in their ability to exert a form of national soft power, this specific type of museum proliferated in the 2000s.

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing was established in 2007, and the first state-owned contemporary art museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, was established in 2012, a few years later. Contemporary art museums tend to concentrate in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Chengdu (Jeffrey, 2013). The creation of contemporary art museums reflects a growing interest in modern and contemporary art forms and provides a platform for Chinese art production to explore new modes of artistic expression and engage in global artistic dialogue. Many public museums, in an effort to become more

competitive and attractive to visitors, have begun to fund and support contemporary art programs (Ho, 2019). In short, museums play an important role in exerting a form of soft power on local communities and have become a hallmark of public cultural life.

Second Stage of Development of Private Art Museums in China—After the Millennium

As described previously, over the past 30 years in China, the museum sector has witnessed a major development with a pronounced proliferation of art museums, which grew rapidly in the post-2000 era (Bai, 2021; Ge, 2013; Lin, 2021). There are 317 private contemporary art museums founded by private collectors around the world, and more than 70% of these were established after 2000 (AMMA, 2020; Larry's List & AMMA, 2016). Private collectors from China have contributed greatly to such figures, having collectively founded 26 private contemporary art museums, making China the nation with fourth-highest total number of contemporary art museums in the world (Larry's List & AMMA, 2016).

The progress illustrated by these numbers is especially impressive when one considers development of Chinese private art museums started relatively late. But, according to a survey by the Chinese State Administration of Cultural Relics, from 2008–2013, the number of private museums grew by 154.2%, a rate that was 5 times more than the increase in the total number of museums in the country (Kiowski, 2017). Furthermore, according to the 2017 Shanghai Art Museum Business Development Report released by Shanghai Municipal Culture and Radio Broadcasting, as of December 2017, there were 82 art museums in Shanghai, including 18 state-owned art museums and 64 private ones, meaning 78% of art museums in Shanghai are under private ownership (L. K. Zhao et al., 2020).

Wealthy collectors, real estate owners, and other commercial enterprises worked together to drive the second wave of private art museum development in China. According to Ho (2019),

since 2002, more than a dozen private art museums have been established in China, including Today Art Museum in Beijing, Zhengda Museum of Modern Art in Shanghai, and Sifang Art Museum in Nanjing. In 2007, the first foreign-owned private contemporary art museum, UCCA, was established in Beijing. It was followed by Iberia Center for Contemporary Art in 2008 and Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai in 2010. In 2014, the bank-founded Minsheng Art Museum and Yu Deyao Art Museum, and largest private art museum, Long Museum, were established in Shanghai.

At that time, the Chinese government recognized the economy needed to develop in tandem with culture, so local governments actively promoted urban renewal through construction of landmark cultural buildings, driving the development of real estate and providing the backdrop for the second wave of private art museum development (Lin, 2021). For example, the construction of the Guangdong Times Art Museum on the city's outskirts, funded by Times Real Estate, was initially designed to attract people to the suburbs, enticing them through the cultural value afforded by the museum, which served to drive real estate sale prices upwards (S. Wang, 2017). Between these museums being owned by real estate conglomerates and considering the impact they had on the local real estate market, intermingling of both art and real estate investment was a common occurrence and key component in the growth of private art museums in China at the time (Lin, 2021).

This example shows the emergence and development of private art museums in China is a matter closely related to both the economy and international relations. Contemporary art as a discipline and industry is believed to have originated in New York around 1940 (Fineberg, 2000). However, it was not until 1985, China would experience a new art movement of its own. This was a time when the first recorded first contemporary art movement to originate in China was

recorded, and following this landmark milestone, contemporary art was gradually localized in China. Therefore, development of contemporary art museums is not only linked to globalization, but advancement of a neoliberal economy (Stallabrass, 2020). Contemporary art has made notable gains in countries that are deeply involved in the global economic division of labor (G. H. Li, 2023). De Nigris (2018) added to the discussion of the interrelated nature of art museums and economies, noting the importance of private art museums in supporting young contemporary artists and promoting the art ecosystem.

Because of the important economic role they play, many museums have been granted the status of nonprofits, though this status has been a somewhat recent movement in the art museum sector. For instance, Today Art Museum was the first private contemporary art museum in China (established in 2002), yet it was not officially registered as a private nonprofit organization until 2006 (Gao, 2020b). Prior to this time, most private art museums were registered in the Trade and Industry Bureau as cultural limited liability companies, primarily because the Chinese government did not have relevant policies to confirm the legal nonprofit status of art museums.

According to the Law of the People's Republic of China on Donations for Public Welfare (中华人民共和国公益事业捐赠法) of 1999 and the Company Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国公司法) of 1993, public welfare social organizations and public welfare nonprofit establishments can accept donations, and shareholders of such companies are permitted to receive dividends. Although these protections for nonprofits were in place by the mid-1990s, it was not until 2006 that the Chinese government granted legal status to private nonprofit art museums (Gao, 2020b). This delay may stem from the fact that the definition of a private art museum is somewhat ambiguous and may include a variety of different entities.

That said, current definitions of private nonprofit art institutions imply a legal identity that is generally accepted throughout China and has been since the extraordinary development of nonprofit art museums over the past 20 years (Gao, 2020b). According to a 2000 report entitled “Interim Measures for the Review of the Registration of Nonprofit Units of Culture,” private nonprofit cultural institutions refer to social entities organized by enterprises, institutions, and social groups engaged in nonprofit cultural service-related activities. To formalize their legal status, private nonprofit art museums must furthermore register with the Civil Affairs Bureau (民政局), a unit of the Chinese government in charge of social security, grassroots organizations, and social management.

It is telling private art museums would be grouped with such organizations, as at least in the eyes of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China (2023) and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2023). The purpose of these institutions should be for art collection, exhibition, and exchange. However, Salamon (2010) argued purpose alone should not define a nonprofit’s identity.

Rather, nonprofit identity should be based on three principles: (a) organization should not be operated for profit, (b) organization’s income should not be used for profit distribution, and (c) institution’s assets should not be converted into private assets. Nonprofit does not mean “no profit-making,” but on the contrary, any profits incurred must be returned to the museum. Some museums registered with the Bureau of Industry and Commerce, such as Shanghai’s How Art Museum and UCCA Edge, are also included in the list of Shanghai’s art museums to be published in 2023 by the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism. However, in a series of documents on the selection process for projects geared toward supporting young curators, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China emphasized private art museums must

provide proof of their qualifications as private nonprofits to participate in these government support programs.

In addition, An (2020) noted as economic contexts became more favorable, the government developed its cultural policies to encourage growth of private art museums. For instance, in 2010, the government implemented a highly coordinated interagency policy designed to support private art museums by pulling resources from eight different ministries, including those in charge of overseeing national heritage matters, marking the first time a trans-institutional peer support program was created. This policy is truly comprehensive as it covers the implementation and enforcement of a series of regulations in 16 distinct areas. This way, the Chinese government has played a significant role in supporting the cultural industry and has moreover created inroads for private capital to enter private art museums (Bai, 2021). For example, the government has introduced a policy that offers free real estate or land as a means of supporting private art museums. The 798 Art District in Beijing and the West Bund Cultural Corridor in Shanghai were developed under these policies (Kiowski, 2017).

At the same time, China's art market has continued to flourish, experiencing a nearly 1,000-fold expansion in volume in 2010 (AMMA, 2012), and in 2011, China overtook the United States as the world's largest art market (Art Basel & the Union Bank of Switzerland, 2018). A substantial part of this market consists of galleries. In fact, Art Basel and the Union Bank of Switzerland (2018) stated galleries, as the primary market for art transactions, are one of the most important links in the art industry chain, with sales exceeding \$19.5 billion. Art galleries figured heavily in China's sustained and enduring economic growth after the millennium, which created a boom in the cultural art market at large (AMMA, 2017). But art galleries and private sales avenues for artwork remain just one part of a larger picture; the second

stage of rapid growth among private art museums in China is the combined product of the economic system, cultural policies, and interest from collectors as well (Larry's List & AMMA, 2016).

Since 2004, China's museums have been redesigned on a number of fronts, with special attention being paid to their education departments and visitor experiences (Lu, 2014). Private art museums as a branch of the museum system are developing in more varied directions as museums diversify their offerings (Bai, 2021; Tate, 2015). Chinese private art museums have also been trying to diversify their exhibitions. Art museums now host exhibitions branded according to curatorial themes, adopt creative exhibition formats, and rely on new and unexpected forms of exhibition media. Academic group exhibitions, international art solo exhibitions, and young artists' support exhibitions have all become popular in recent years.

Moreover, rise of social media and technology in the past 15 years has led art museums to use digital methods in their collection and documentation, diversify the representation and forms of museum exhibitions, and attract more audiences to visit (Tate, 2015). Outside of exhibition content and delivery, operations also have changed. Operations now are aimed at the art museum carrying out a variety of activities and events for targeted audiences, to increase popularity and promote museum programs. Examples of such operations include public education activities, art lectures, and widely disseminated publications.

These changes have been created by changing audience demographics and visitor preferences for engagement. In recent decades, young visitors have become more involved, and museums are now paying more attention to a broader range of audiences (Kotler & Kotler, 2004; Lin, 2021). To attract a more diverse visitor pool, art museums are transforming into a public space for open dialogue, promoting new art forms, embracing and rewarding creativity, and

strategically thinking through art events and communications (Ge, 2013; Museum of Glass, 2012).

Over the past 10 years, the number of visitors to art museums has increased significantly, and private art museums, in particular, have seen a significant uptick in attendance (Lin, 2021; Nuo, 2013). According to AMMA (2020), the number of visitors to private contemporary art museums in China continued to rise in 2018, with 54% of art museums seeing 20,000 or more visitors per year. This is despite the fact empirical research and audience surveys show private art museums presenting contemporary art have the most segmented audiences and least access to the broader public (Sifakakis, 2007).

Shanghai Museum's 2023 exhibition, showcasing a collection of European paintings from the Renaissance period to the 19th century, received 27,000 visitors in the first 4 days of the exhibition's debut (Zhou, 2023). However, the problem with contemporary art is exhibitions are often misunderstood and difficult for audiences to relate to. Many people lack an understanding of the contemporary art production process and mechanisms for communicating with creators—two obstacles that could potentially be overcome with greater public education initiatives (Gao, 2020a).

These museums are also undergoing transformation as a result of unprecedented technological change and cultural consumption. Now, the public identity of private art museums is constantly in flux and ever-evolving (Nuo, 2013). Many private art museums in China, are trying to take control of the personalized identity construction and thus attribute more value to public perception (Nuo, 2013).

Other challenges lie in attempting to balance the quantity and quality of museums, individual management systems, talent development efforts, and increasingly unique and diverse

museum ecology (An, 2020; Guan, 2020). Interestingly, due to stable government financial support, funding is not the primary challenge for state-owned museums in China, but rather the government's control over the cultural aspects of museums. This close government oversight translates to fewer opportunities for museum practitioners to express their individual identities and personal creativity (Ho, 2019). Some believe this involvement is less than benign, such as Mintrom and O'Connor (2020), who contend the Chinese government is using the growing cultural market and industry to prop up its own political image. However, private art museums do not seem to be subject to as much government interference as other museums. Yet, although government control may not be a large concern, compared to state-owned art museums, private art museums' special status comes with its own set of unique challenges (Ge, 2013; J. Zhang, 2017).

In sum, museums in China have gone through various stages of development and have transformed in response to changes in China's social and economic environment. These changes can be divided into three distinct phases: (1) period beginning with founding of New China to end of the Cultural Revolution, (2) economic policy reform and subsequent "opening up" until the millennium, and (3) postmillennium period. To varying degrees, development of Chinese museums has also aided in the social and economic development of China at these various distinct stages.

Prior to the founding of New China, the genre of museums in China expanded to include the arts, with private art museums, at least initially, representing a niche type of museum. Growth of this genre expanded exponentially as it experienced two construction booms in the country in the 1990s and post-2000s. The first was related to urban renewal and private capital, and second was related to the globalization of China and development of contemporary art. From

the development of Chinese museums, we can understand how these cultural institutions have evolved and adapted to the changing sociopolitical environment, and also locate the historical trajectory and position of private art museums in China.

Disciplinary Context of Museum Sustainable Development

In China, new museology in Western and New Museum Studies has spurred different lines of inquiry with respect to museums in both the West and China. Museology has examined new directions for integrating theory with practice for sustainable development of museums and art museums in particular. The following is a broad introduction to these two different types of research, which will provide greater context for the subsequent literature review on sustainable development.

New Museology in the West

New museology is a school of thought and movement in museology in the West. New museology evolved from perceived failings of traditional museology and refers to the innovative approach to museum practice that emerged in the late 1980s (Vergo, 1989). According to Vollgraaff (2018), new museology reflects a greater awareness of the social and political role of museums and is the product of a series of discussions that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, dominating contemporary museum discourse in the West. The commonly accepted and propagated notion of new museology in China is it is centered on focusing on community education and needs of different groups of human beings, rather than collection-centeredness of the past history of museums (Zheng, 2020).

Around this time, practitioners and scholars alike found themselves defending claims museums were elitist and obsolete (Hudson, 1977) as collections-centered museum models (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010) and curatorial authority began to be challenged (McCall & Gray,

2013). Therefore, new museology focuses on the academic and practical activities that led to such criticism of the classic model and elite characteristics of the old museum paradigm, and instead, shifts the focus from collections to an emphasis on ideas, language, and education (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010). The fundamental premise of this revolution of thought in museum studies is the role of museums in society needs to be changed. The goal of the movement is to change the way people think about museums, alter the social role that museums fulfill, and take humanistic care as the starting point to integrate museums into the public (Vergo, 1997).

New museology reconsidered the purpose of the museum, a change in the understanding of the function of the museum and activities carried out by the museum. As Weil (1999) noted, under this new conceptual framework, museums were understood not as a storage facility for knowledge, but as a site for communal exchange. As the title of his article suggested, “From Being About Something to Being for Somebody,” museums that adhered to tenets of new museology became expressly community oriented. In this way, new museology revolves around the social role of museums, which encourages new ways of communication and new forms of expression, thus contributing to the democratization of society, which is in stark contrast to the traditional museum model that sees itself as a repository of knowledge (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010).

In this shift away from knowledge collection toward knowledge construction, visitors assume a more active role as participants rather than viewers (Kreps, 2009). New museology redefines the relationship of museums to people and their communities, thereby promoting museum access for a wider variety of groups (Stam, 1993) and demonstrating an inclusivity that works to address social discrimination and inequality (Sandell, 2007). Amid this emphasis on

social responsibility and awareness (Heijnen, 2010), common new museum-related topics included cultural empowerment, social redefinition, and dialogue (Harrison, 2004).

However, philosophies of new museology were not confined to academic circles and eventually infiltrated sector bodies, such as American Alliance of Museums, Museums Association, and International Council of Museums. For example, the latter of these organizations adopts a mission statement that highlights conservation of knowledge and artifacts, but also emphasizes research, communication of world heritages, and an eye to the future via sustainability efforts. Philosophies of governing bodies such as these inevitably trickle down to affect individual museums' operation and management, which has shifted from an identity rooted in a controlling and legislating role to a facilitator of interpretation characterized by a more visitor-oriented ethos (Ross, 2004). Stam (1993) asserted against the backdrop of new museology, a series of changes related to organizational structure, staffing, management, business practices, and institutional operations have been ushered in.

In short, new museology set the proverbial stage for the development of Western museums as we know it today. New Art Museum Studies, which will be introduced next, is also based on theories of Western museums that have been slowly formed and developed.

New Art Museum Studies in China

In the past, new art museum studies in China were strictly regarded as a topic housed in the larger discipline of museum studies (i.e., borrowing its research, approaches to management, and overarching theories). However, more recently, art museums and museums more broadly conceived are treated as conceptually close in nature but belong to two separate areas of study and practice. Wang first proposed treating new art museum studies as distinct from museum studies in general in 2018.

H. S. Wang and Shen (2018) pointed out new art museum studies may be distinguished from museum studies according to three defining features: (1) in new art museum studies, it is human beings who are the subject under observation; (2) the museum itself is considered a multidirectional public space; and (3) artwork is not just for aesthetic appreciation, but for institutional critique and reflections on prevailing power structures. As these qualities suggest, what sets new art museum studies apart is a desire to move beyond traditional museum studies to garner a more interdisciplinary perspective. Doing so requires a degree of reflexivity in that proponents of new art museum studies must examine not only the changes that have taken place in traditional art museums, but also the series of problems that have occurred during the development of contemporary art museums.

Studies pursuing these lines of inquiry are already underway, with several institutions and scholars in China having carried out work under the heading of new art museum studies. For example, Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts established the New Art Museum Studies Research Center in 2019. China Art Palace (formerly Shanghai Art Museum) and Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts were cofounded by the Shanghai Art Museum Studies Research Center. While new art museum studies have attracted the interests of practitioners, it has also become a topic of scholarly discussion, with an entire book being written on the subject (H. S. Wang & Shen, 2021) and forum dedicated to new art museum studies, held in August 2023 at A4 Art Museum in Chengdu.

These examples point to new art museums studies as a budding area of interest in China. The traction it has gained so far may be explained by the fact that even though new art museum studies remain a relatively young topic of analysis, it is nonetheless in tune with the problems arising from development of art museums in the current Chinese cultural context. The

contemporary sociopolitical and economic milieu in the country stipulates higher requirements for today's art museums rather than a space just to display exhibits. Given this is a young field, the full impact new art museum studies will exert on the development of Chinese art museums may not be ascertainable for some time, but there are a few key areas where its influences can be seen, foremost with respect to the theoretical framework adopted in studies of private museums, because it determines the perspective and lens of this study.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a term with multiple meanings (Dugarova & Lavers, 2014; Sakarya et al., 2012). Reviewing the literature, this very broad concept can be refined along two lines. The first way sustainability is employed in the literature is from a more macro perspective, where sustainable development is perceived in a global context and closely related to the idea cultural organizations can and must contribute to sustainable development.

A prime example of sustainability being interpreted is in the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. Of the 17 goals listed, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions is introduced, which presents institutions like museums as central to achieving global sustainability. The second, and much less represented, interpretation of sustainable development is applied to museums explicitly. However, focusing on the micro context of museums does not neglect more macro concepts relating to different aspects of culture, economy, and society. In referring to Curating Tomorrow's sustainable development goals—an application of the UN's goals specifically to museum contexts—one can see how the goals of museums are intended to align with larger globally oriented ones. For instance, top three goals listed by this organization, are to protect world heritages, provide learning opportunities on sustainability, and encourage inclusive cultural participation (McGhie, 2019).

Sustainable Development in a Global Context

The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA, 2023) defined sustainability as the integration of environmental health, social equity, and economic vitality to create thriving, healthy, diverse, and resilient communities. In this definition, the environment is foregrounded; however, the concept has evolved beyond environmental studies to become a multidisciplinary one (Shao et al., 2011). For advocates of a more inclusive definition, sustainability means planning for the future and rejecting practices that threaten the lives and well-being of future generations (Jabareen, 2008). Many environmentalists, academics, and governments agree sustainable development can be achieved through a balance between social, environmental, and economic objectives (Berke & Kartez, 1995; Healey & Shaw, 1993; Meadows et al., 1992; Robinson & Tinker, 1998).

Sustainable development first emerged as an explicitly environmental ideal in the late 1970s and 1980s (Kidd, 1992). After 1980, there was an explosion of books and literature on sustainability, and not long after, a quick Google search for sustainability would yield approximately 150 million results (Caradonna, 2014). In 1987, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), issued a report entitled “Our Common Future,” which provided a definition of sustainable development that has since become widely recognized and cited: “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Caradonna, 2014, p. 148).

By the 1990s, it became a familiar term among policymakers across social sectors (Dhanani, 2022). When the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held in 1993, and World Summit on Sustainable Development almost 10 years later, held in

Johannesburg in 2002, these two important meetings have led to a certain consensus on exactly what the concept means. In both instances, individuals from around the world gathered to discuss a number of global initiatives on sustainable development and thus contributed to the globalization of the concept of sustainable development.

In many of its current definitions, sustainable development has an undertone of presenting a vision of a new society (Caradonna, 2014; Jabareen, 2008). De Geus (1999) noted sustainable development is a call to draw upon the inspirational and creative power of utopian ecological imagination. But for others, like Dryzek (1998), sustainable development is more of a debate than a specific model, system or idea. Today, the concept of sustainable development has gone from a relatively obscure concept to a top priority for governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations alike (Caradonna, 2014).

Even though sustainability has come to be seen as a multidisciplinary concept traversing several different sectors of society, its component parts may be grouped into three pillars: society, environment, and economy. If any one of these pillars is weak, sustainability it upholds would crumble (Dugarova & Lavers, 2014; Loach et al., 2017; Sakarya et al., 2012). Culture was first introduced as a possible fourth pillar at the Mauritius International Meeting for Small Island Developing States in 2005 (Nurse, 2006). Culture is now often seen as a fourth pillar, on a par with social, economic, and environmental issues for sustainable development (Hawkes, 2001).

Furthermore, one of the more significant frameworks of cultural sustainability comes from the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005). This convention emphasized the importance of cultural diversity, creativity, and free flow of cultural goods and services in achieving cultural sustainability. Scholars agree museums, as cultural institutions in the cultural pillar, not only contribute to cultural

sustainability, but also to the economic, social, and environmental goals of sustainable development (Ernst et al., 2016; Gustafsson & Ijla, 2017; Pop & Borza, 2015).

However, in China, sustainable development is clearly linked to the sociopolitical landscape of the country and museum's individual genes—that is, their institutional origins and legacy. The few references to genes in a museum context that are present in the literature describe the “genealogy” of museums in very abstract terms. For instance, Lord (2006) adopted a Foucauldian standpoint to argue “The role of the ‘genealogical’ museum would be to record the history of the emergence of different interpretations” (p. 11). Similarly, Meringolo (2012) adopted an equally macro perspective in his book, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History*. In Western literature, literature often accounts for the institutional history of certain museums (see Coman & Casey, 2020). Through the literature review, I found such examinations of the genes of private art museums in China remain underrepresented.

Sustainable Development in Museum Contexts According to Three Dimensions

Although sustainable development has become a globally accepted concept, it is rarely clearly defined in the museum field (Brown, 2019). After conducting a thorough literature review, sustainable development in the museum field can be summarized according to three main perspectives: cultural, economic, and social (Pop & Borza, 2016a). To present the sustainable development of museums as the complex and multifaceted concept it is, in this section, cultural, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development in museums will be illustrated via the relevant literature.

Cultural Dimension

Culture has been described as “a set of learned ideas, plans, rules, and behaviors by members of society” (Geertz, 1973, p. 44). In the context of museums specifically, culture has become embedded in a larger discourse on sustainability. Soini and Birkeland (2014) argued cultural sustainability is an interdisciplinary and evolving concept that organizes itself through seven dimensions: heritage, cultural vitality, economic vitality, diversity, locality, ecocultural resilience, and ecocultural civilization. Scholars have pointed out sustainable development of museums is designed to protect museum collections, cultural artifacts, and global heritages (Ernst et al., 2016; Logan & Sutter, 2012; Pop & Borza, 2016a). Culture in museum studies and practices thus refers to knowledge and skills necessary to maintain tangible and intangible aspects of a community or people’s heritage, which can occur at the citizen, community, or national level (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014).

According to Stylianou-Lambert et al. (2014), sustainable development necessarily involves not only the preservation of heritage and collective memory or identity, but artistic vitality and desire for attracting new audiences and fostering greater inclusion (Misiura, 2006). Others expand upon the definition of cultural sustainability, asserting cultural diversity (Bennett, 2005), intercultural dialogue (Bennett, 2005), creativity and innovation (Rentschler, 2001), and knowledge autonomy (Pop & Borza, 2016b) are all integral elements in cultural sustainable development. For museums to achieve true sustainability, all—or at least most of—these elements must be present. That is why Stylianou-Lambert et al. (2014) advise cultural policies of different governments and museums should also be organized around these elements to fulfill their sustainable development initiatives.

Heritage preservation, in particular, is seen as a valuable tool for cultural sustainability of museums. By collecting, preserving, and presenting tangible and intangible aspects of a community's heritage, museums pass on knowledge and skills to future generations while simultaneously constructing and advocating personal, local, and national identities (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014). These efforts also work in the interest of creating and maintaining the collective memory (Ernst et al., 2016). However, the collection, care, and management of heritage-related artifacts has become both a challenge for museums globally and point of contention in discussions of sustainable development (Brown, 2019). Some, like Merriman (2008), have even suggested managing expansive heritage collections increases the burden placed on future generations entrusted with overseeing such matters, and can be a hindrance to cultural sustainability in the long-term.

Even if this is the case, museum exhibitions and other artistic content are still seen as tools for achieving sustainable innovation by stimulating different ideas (Ernst et al., 2016), encouraging awareness that can lead to sustainable development (Sutter, 2008), and systematically allowing the entire field of museum studies to rethink and rebuild the cultural foundations of our society (Worts, 2016). Put simply, as Pop and Borza (2014b) argued, increasing the quality of cultural content, services, and experiences in museums is critical to sustainability.

However, museums' cultural sustainability efforts face several challenges, in addition to the notion of creating a stewardship burden for future generations previously mentioned. Some of these challenges include ensuring public comprehension of cultural content and seeking to increase cultural capital (Pencarelli et al., 2016). Corporate and government sponsorship of popular exhibitions can lead to a conflict of interest (Alexander, 1996). Administrative personnel

of nonprofit organizations deviate from nonprofit standards, resulting in a shift away from the organization's mission (Toepler, 2006).

Furthermore, cultural offerings of privately founded museums are considered to be more market-oriented (Frey & Meier, 2002) or even largely dominated by collectors' tastes in art (Kolbe et al., 2022). Some studies underscored private art museums are more concerned with spectacular buildings of star architects (Frey & Meier, 2002; Zennaro, 2017), and ignore equally worthy content as a result. Therefore, this has led to a trend where private art museums are associated with superficial spectacles, fast-paced entertainment, and pop-up exhibitions, rather than their curatorial or conservation functions (McPherson, 2006; Quemin, 2020). Other scholars have argued differently, suggesting private museums, because of their independence from public policy and funding agencies, are able to engage in a broader discussion of art and can be more experimental than public institutions (Kolbe et al., 2022).

International museum associations, such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM), continue to present sustainability as grounded in the mission, tradition, and role of museums in society. ICOM encouraged the development of museum projects oriented toward sustainable development at its conference in Paris in June 2011 (International Council of Museums, 2011). Adding to their interpretations of what sustainability is and what its purpose should be, ICOM (2011) expressed the view sustainability is dynamic and to achieve it, museums should be placing more value on preserving cultural heritages and collective memory.

In this way, sustainability has become a prominent theme for ICOM, which detailed the value of sustainability and established a sustainability working group in 2018 (ICOM, 2018). In 2022, ICOM revised the definition of museums for the ninth time to advise museums, among other things, to promote diversity and sustainability (ICOM, 2022). The theme for International

Museum Day 2023 was "Museums, Sustainability and Well-being" (ICOM, 2023). As recently as November 2023, ICOM created a new international committee called SUSTAIN, dedicated to fostering sustainable development.

Economic Dimension

The second perspective of sustainability seen as complimentary, is an issue of economics and primarily concerned with sustainable maintenance of the museum's financial assets (Brown, 2019). Sustainability is the ability of a museum to continue to thrive, even with limited resources or amid economic downturns, by using its resources in the most efficient and rational way possible (Pop & Borza, 2014a; Pop & Sabou, 2013). It is important to note most museums receive some sort of government subsidy; however, it is up to the individual institution to manage those funds wisely.

According to Stylianou-Lambert et al. (2014), financial sustainability of museums is of paramount importance. Fundraising, cultural employment, and economic revitalization of the local community are all elements that are regarded as essential to museums' financial sustainability goals. The trouble with realizing these goals is that museums' interests often compete.

For instance, a large part of museums' financial campaigns and budgets are determined by revenues generated by local cultural tourism (Gustafsson & Ijla, 2017; Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014). However, at the same time, museums desire financial autonomy and do not want to be beholden to demands of tourists (Pop & Borza, 2016a). In the end, though, there must be a rational allocation of the budget (Půček et al., 2021) based on empirical data, such as evidence of financial need is necessary to apply and compete for limited public funds and coveted private donations (Gustafsson & Ijla, 2017; P. Johnson & Thomas, 1998). Historically, superstar

museums and special exhibitions (Frey, 1998; Frey & Meier, 2006) have received a great proportion of these funds, leaving little opportunity for exploratory exhibitions and exerting a significant economic impact on smaller or niche museums.

Structure and results of financial management can have a significant impact on museum activities also (Lindqvist, 2012; Půček et al., 2021; Skinner et al., 2009). In the United States, most museums have a variety of sources of financial income, which includes earned income (e.g., ticket sales, retail and catering, and sponsorship), grants from private foundations and individual donations, and government subsidies (ARTDBL, 2023b; Skinner et al., 2009; Yang, 2020). In the United States, private donations remain the primary source of funding for most museums (Půček et al., 2021), although this is admittedly not the case in Europe. Despite diversity of Western museums' revenue streams, these sources of funding are still considered unstable (Lindqvist, 2012; Skinner et al., 2009). According to Lindqvist (2012), to achieve financial stability, museums must manage long-term financial stakeholder relationships, with stakeholders referring to anything from corporations to community members, to government agencies.

Despite such robust discussions about museums' sustainable cultural initiatives and community engagement, the international cultural sector still faces significant challenges (Silberman, 2020). As financial health of museums is both directly and indirectly affected by economic recessions and crises (Lindqvist, 2012; Pop & Borza, 2016a; Silberman, 2020), insufficient financial support from the government is a perennial concern (Gustafsson & Ijla, 2017). In times of economic growth, the museum's financial revenue grows with such prosperity, as more and more nonprofit activities will take place in the museum or elsewhere (P. Johnson & Thomas, 1998).

But, in instances where the economic climate has led to a reduction in funding for museum operations, it is just as common for museums to close in many countries (Pop & Sabou, 2013; Skinner et al., 2009). In this context, sustainable development is increasingly becoming a necessity for museums (Genoways & Ireland, 2003). Given the influences of the external environment, it is necessary for museums to adopt new means of adapting, by drawing upon their global impact and developing a sense of entrepreneurship by using innovative management and marketing strategies (Pop & Sabou, 2013).

According to Pop and Borza (2014b) the strategy of international expansion can help museums to increase revenue and thereby make them more sustainable in the long run. Also aiding in the museums' long-term sustainability are their relationships with the private art market. Pop and Borza's (2014b) study found managing interactions with the market, galleries, collectors, and other art institutions can play a role in the survival of the museum by increasing their overall visibility (see also Kolbe et al., 2022).

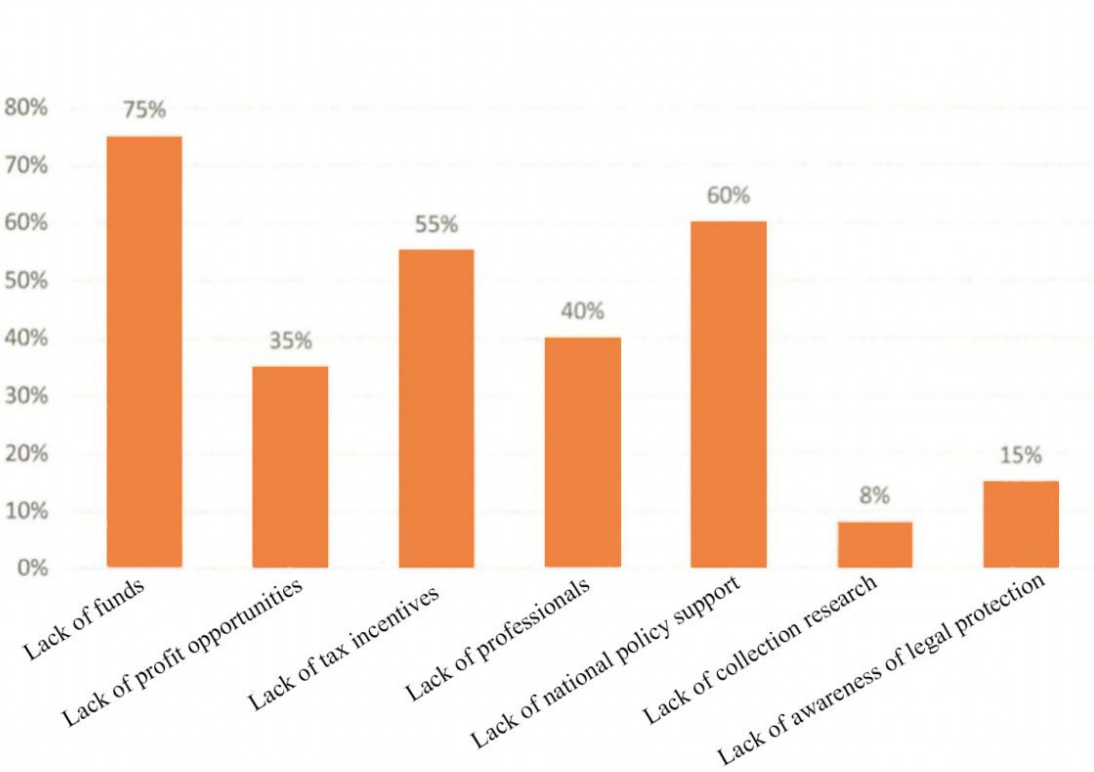
China's art museums are in a unique financial situation as they have a single source of funding; most of the private art museums in China receive their initial start-up funds and annual running costs from their founders (De Nigris, 2018; Hi Art, 2023; Larry's List & AMMA., 2016; L. K. Zhao et al., 2020). As outlined in Chapter 1, private art museums in China have close ties to private enterprises and real estate. Many of these industries were dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected survival of private art museums.

For Chinese private art museums, survival is the most pressing issue, as lack of funding would be fatal to them (Ge, 2013). As Figure 1 shows, 75% of Chinese private art museums believe funding is an important factor restricting the development of art museums as a whole (AMMA, 2020). Compared with state-run art museums, private art museums are smaller in scale

and have fewer sources of funding, so they are more vulnerable to financial and economic influences (F. Zhang & Courty, 2021). C. Y. Yan and Gao (2015) pointed out, even some private art museums in China host galleries in more of a private art market fashion, but under the name of an art museum, to ensure their operations. Such activities not only lead to confusion about the purpose of the institution, but seriously undermine the quality and academic status of art museums in general.

Figure 1

Factors Restricting the Development of Private Art Museums in China, from January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2018



Note. This figure has been translated from Chinese and was adapted from a chapter in AMMA (2020). Specific number of participants was not disclosed in the report.

Some studies show private art museums lack stability (S. Zhao, 2013), with several private museums in China closing after just a few years (Kiowski, 2017; J. Zhang, 2017). One of China's oldest and most revered private art museums, the Guangdong Times Museum, is no exception. In 2022, it announced an indefinite closure due to China's economic downturn caused by the country's strict COVID-19-related regulations (Lisa, 2022). Similarly, Overseas Chinese Town Contemporary Art Terminal, a cluster of private museums with venues in Shanghai, Xi'an, Beijing, and Shenzhen, announced closure of the Shanghai venue in 2023. Now, only the Shenzhen venue is in operation, with just half of its original staff (Xie, 2023). Silberman (2020) pointed out the implications of these museum closures, noting these events not only mark the end of their existence as independent cultural institutions, but disappearance of their unique identity and cultural mission.

Museums all over the world are facing financial difficulties and are forced to generate various types of revenue (including admission fees) to fund museum activities (Frey & Meier, 2006; Luksetich & Partridge, 1997; Pusa & Uusitalo, 2014). Because of their precarious financial state, private art museums have become more involved in commercial services, beyond just exhibitions, and frequently participate in commercial project investment to obtain more sources of income (Kolbe et al., 2022). Of these, tourism is an important source of funding (P. Johnson & Thomas, 1998).

According to P. Johnson and Thomas (1998), controversy exists regarding the relationship between museum admission fees and visitation, as concerns for admission revenue may work against equitable access. For instance, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City charges \$30 per adult for admission (The Met, 2024) and the Louvre in Paris charges 22 euros per adult ticket (Louvre, 2024). Such entrance fees may be inaccessible for those without

sufficient disposable income, leading many to question if museums are equitable institutions (see Bevan & Ramos, 2021). Incorporating more volunteer staff may help to reduce these costs, but doing so raises questions about the integrity or quality of the experience offered. Continuing the discussion of profitability and social equity, in the case of private art museums, there is an enduring controversy centered around whether individually founded museums are focused more on the rights and interests of the elite class at the expense of the public and minority groups (Kolbe et al., 2022; Zennaro, 2017).

Furthermore, to achieve their economic goals, museums are adopting a clear market orientation and undergoing commercialization (Ekström, 2019; Pop & Borza, 2016a; Toepler & Dewees, 2005). According to Ekström (2019), marketization refers to museums' exposure to the marketplace and their adoption of marketing tools. With Ekström's (2019) point in mind, one can see how marketization is occurring, with museums now selling an aura of fashion to a wider audience through retail outlets, temporary exhibitions, and exhibitions of private collections.

Museums may find appeal in marketization, as it invites corporatization of museums, which can help reduce financial pressures (DesRoches, 2015; Pop & Borza, 2016a). Amid this culture of marketization, China's private art museums may have a lot of room to grow because they are constrained by government policies, but capital funds and are rarely independent in a true sense of the word. Other concerns lie with difficulty in continuing to adhere to international art museum standards, first and foremost, emphasize academic research (S. Zhao, 2013).

Social Dimension

The third perspective addresses the concept of sustainability in museums through a social lens. Museum sustainability means responding to actual needs of society and the real world (De Nigris, 2018). A museum is sustainable if it continues to serve its audience and community,

creating long-term value for stakeholders and generations to come (Brown, 2019; Hudson, 1998; Lord et al., 2012; Pencarelli et al., 2016). Museums can be agents and catalysts for community aspirations and social change (Brown, 2019; Logan & Sutter, 2012). Sustainable development moreover entails aiming to serve all; therefore, a greater focus on inclusivity in museums is consistent with the principles and practices of sustainable development (Logan & Sutter, 2012).

Museums hold a unique position in the public's mind, and their value to society increases as museums take on a mission more geared toward civic engagement (Gustafsson & Ijla, 2017). The extant literature on the topic of sustainability reveals there are several elements that have a positive impact on the sustainability of museums at a societal level (Pencarelli et al., 2016). The first is wellbeing, which relates to citizens' physical and mental health (Falk, 2021; Lawler & Tissot, 2021); the second is educational well-being (Fenton, 2013), which refers to knowledge production; the final element relates to citizens' cultural identity, sense of belonging, and emotional and spiritual well-being (Lawler & Tissot, 2021).

When discussing sustainability and museums, research has found museums should be answerable to society (Brown, 2019; Pencarelli et al., 2016; Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014). Museums have a moral obligation to be agents of social cohesion and supporters of social development (Brown, 2019; Gustafsson & Ijla, 2017), and to promote social change (Pencarelli et al., 2016). Though there are some who question the scope of a museum's obligations and duties, proponents of museums as a force for social good also point out sustainability of a region and sustainability of a museum are closely related (Zennaro, 2017). Therefore, the local community and the museum itself may be seen as mutually dependent. However, with multiple museums in nearby proximity to one another, competition between museums can negatively affect sustainability, so this mutual dependency is not exclusively positive (Swarbrooke, 2015).

In addition, promoting active citizenship, fostering participant engagement, creating a sense of belonging (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014), and granting attention to marginalized issues and populations (Logan & Sutter, 2012; Pencarelli et al., 2016) all have a positive impact on the museum. As Misiura (2006) reminded, museums are public spaces that belong to citizens; therefore, it is important to remain cognizant of their availability and accessibility to the community. The social side of sustainability also underscores the importance of attracting a broader and more diverse audience (Pencarelli et al., 2016). Museums must seek to achieve social sustainability by grappling with questions of public access, but also by keeping up with public expectations, which in recent years, has meant using technology to augment the visitor experience (Camarero et al., 2011; Walker, 2019).

Existing government and museum-related legislation and policies may limit the extent museums can fulfill these obligations (Kolbe et al., 2022; Pop & Borza, 2015). Various forms of indirect assistance provided by local and federal governments to private museums have contributed greatly to their sustainable development. Common forms of assistance include tax exemptions and provision of real estate or land free of charge to museums (Frey & Meier, 2002; Kiowski, 2017; Kolbe et al., 2022). For example, private art museums in the West have relatively sound donation policies, and donors can get national tax-free benefits through donations to art museums (Gao, 2020b). However, according to ARTDBL (2023b), different social contexts in China and the West have resulted in a different model of development for China's private art museums. Because China does not have the same social power, government support, and market-oriented revenue balance as the West, measures that could aid sustainability in the West may not be applicable to an Eastern context.

Additionally, a lack of comprehensive legislation and policies, imperfect domestic art museum foundations, absent or insufficient patrons, and donation systems have likewise hindered development of private art museums in a more professional and sustainable direction (Gao, 2020b; Ge, 2013). China's donation and tax exemption system in particular is quite complex and difficult to operate (ARTDBL, 2023a; De Nigris, 2018; Hi Art, 2023; L. K. Zhao et al., 2020). Lack of a reliable legal framework and clear tax incentives has led many private museums in China to close after a few years of operation (Hi Art, 2023; Kolbe et al., 2022; Zennaro, 2017).

According to a survey conducted by Larry's List and AMMA (2016) of museums founded by private individuals in China, 85% of the museums surveyed believed primary obstacles to museum development are a lack of relevant support policies; 70% believed the trouble lies with problematic tax policies; and 15% attribute barriers to unreasonable legal status. Therefore, improvement of policies and systems is necessary to guarantee healthy and sustainable development of private art museums (J. Zhang, 2020). In addition, the funding system and legal structure adopted by the museum and legal structure of the funding (e.g., foundation, charitable trust, association, or nonprofit private corporation) will determine financial and nonfinancial benefits incurred by the museum (ARTDBL, 2023a; Frey & Meier, 2002; Kolbe et al., 2022). In the West, absence of such a legal structure means museums are only privately owned, which in many countries, means giving up tax benefits, thus posing a risk to the sustainability of the museum when the founder dies (Kolbe et al., 2022).

Outside of policy, scholars and museum directors alike have pointed out development of private art museums in China tends to be short-lived and lacks systematic theories and mature experiences to learn from (ARTDBL, 2023b; J. Zhang, 2020). It becomes imperative for art

museums to develop their own mature and sustainable models—something this study aimed to do (J. Zhang, 2017; S. Zhao, 2013). In addition to factors related to government oversight, sustainable development of museums is also dependent on effective museum management and adept use of marketing strategies (Alcaraz et al., 2009; Pop & Borza, 2014a, 2016a).

According to Pop and Borza (2016a), all across the world, an increasing number of museums are using source corporatization management and marketing strategies to better achieve their development goals, through specific avenues like product and service diversification, partnership and strategic alliance building, and expansion and internationalization. Museum staff have sought to capitalize on the longstanding four-pronged marketing strategy of product, price, place, and promotion. There has been evidence this corporatization of museums helps to increase the efficiency and self-sustainability of nonprofit organization operations (Toepler & Dewees, 2005).

However, Sheppard (2010) argued top-down hierarchies, mass production, and mass marketing, are not appropriate for today's complex social milieu, and museums need more open, individual-centered, and collaboratively operated structures. Some claim corporatization of museums is at odds with museums' mission to encourage social equity, inclusiveness, and community engagement (DesRoches, 2015; Palumbo et al., 2022). Meanwhile, corporatization of museums may have unintended negative consequences (Pop & Borza, 2016b; Toepler & Dewees, 2005). Additional hindrances to professional and sustainable development include a lack of specialized human resources (Pop & Borza, 2015), and professional management experience among those overseeing the operations of Chinese private art museums (Gao, 2020b; Ge, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

In the past, research on private museums centered around the theoretical frameworks of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (see Prior, 2003; Zolberg, 2004), art historian Claire Bishop (*Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge*, 2023) or neo-institutional concepts like isomorphism, where the existing structures, of museums, in this case, are simply carried over during the construction of new institutions (Zennaro, 2017). Many of these scholars and concepts have encouraged use of interdisciplinary approaches to understand private art museums as a global phenomenon. They have also been used to argue the utility of theory-driven empirical research to uncover how perspectives on private art museums diverge according to discipline and examine their roles in broader social, economic, and spatial relations (Kolbe et al., 2022).

I examined new museums in China according to three dimensions: cultural impact, economic considerations, and social sustainability initiatives—all key concepts that have received international attention in the museum field, and Chinese art community, specifically (L. Yin, 2020). Emphasis on sustainability has become of international concern, with the International Council of Museums (ICOM) announcing the name of Museum Day in 2015 as “Museums for a sustainable society” on International Museum Day. Acknowledging the widespread focus on sustainability, I decided to examine the topic of this research through the distinct lens of sustainable development of museums, using Stylianou-Lambert et al.’s (2014) framework as a guide. This model was informed by several different scholars working with new art museum studies and sought to offer a Western museum sustainability perspective to assess the combined impact of social, cultural and economic factors on China’s private contemporary art museum sustainability. Admittedly, although applying a Western framework to a decidedly

Eastern context is not without its own set of limitations, fresh intercultural insights can nonetheless be gained.

These four areas of concern—social, environmental, cultural, and economic factors—are illustrated in Figure 2. Each element is represented as a circle, which encompasses other subtopics or related concepts. Circles intentionally intersect, indicating overlapping parameters that may be common to other circle's areas of concern. The intersection of the four circles suggests that sustainable development is achieved when there is a balance among them. In essence, these circles are mutually dependent; but often, an increase in performance in one circle has a direct impact on another circle.

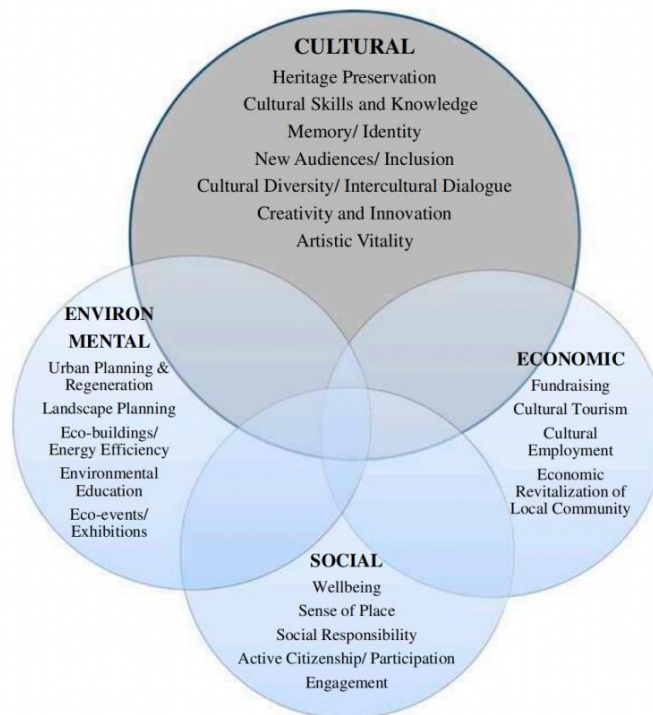
Admittedly, analyzing all four categories of factors influencing new art museums studies and practices would be an ambitious undertaking. To provide a comprehensive analysis, I limited the scope of my investigations to three factors I considered most germane to museum studies—the circles of culture, economy, and society. Although the remaining environmental circle was undoubtedly important to the field of art museum studies, I made this strategic choice in response to studies like those by Pop et al. (2019) and Orea-Giner et al. (2021), which have presented sustainability as more greatly influenced by social and economic forces.

In the case of Pop et al.'s (2019) study of 86 Romanian museums, the authors reasoned individuals surveyed did not rank environmental issues as a primary concern for museum development because natural hazards do not affect this country as much as others. Moreover, China's history is characterized by economic growth at the expense of environmental protection (Economy, 2007), so China does not have a solid foundation in environmental dimensions. Furthermore, private art museums have a very short history; their buildings and landscapes plannings were built during the economic boom, and they are far from talking about

environmental problems like energy efficient policies (Ascione et al., 2009; Madan, 2011; Papadopoulos et al., 2003), eco-building, and energy efficient practices (Tétreault, 2011).

Figure 2

Theoretical Model for the Sustainable Development of Museums



Note. Reprinted from “Museums and Cultural Sustainability: Stakeholders, Forces, and Cultural Policies,” by T. Stylianos-Lambert, N. Boukas, and M. Christodoulou-Yerali, 2014, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20(5), p. 567.

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Furthermore, I began this research during the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has weakened the economy and amplified social uncertainty and cultural fragility. This has made

the environmental dimension, which was already undervalued in China, even more irrelevant. Therefore, under such a national foundation and social context, I wanted to prioritize research on the economic, social, and cultural dimensions. With the ability to explore fewer topics in greater depth, the more targeted approach implemented here can help museums identify weaknesses or gaps in their current practices and assist them in planning for more sustainable development in the future (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Sustainable development of museums is a complex concept and a multifaceted issue. It has been studied at the cultural, economic, and social levels, resulting in rich discussions and reflections on the sustainability of museums and factors that influence such sustainability. Uncertain social environments (e.g., those brought on by COVID-19) have highlighted the need for and importance of sustainable development of museums. Although a growing body of literature is addressing this topic, not much has been written specifically on the sustainable development of private art museums, let alone in a Chinese context. There remains an especially noticeable gap in terms of how social uncertainty affects sustainable development of private art museums in China.

In addition, by conducting this literature review, I found most of the existing methodologies for conducting empirical research on the sustainable development of museums focused primarily on quantitative analyses or case studies. Not only were there very few empirical studies on the sustainable development of private art museums in China, but very few qualitative studies on this subject as well. What information does exist regarding the sustainable development of private art museums in China was in news reports for the general public and online media. I could not find another narrative inquiry study on the topic, despite the fact

narrative inquiry as a methodological tool has been used in a variety of settings (e.g., schools, corporate environments).

Therefore, drawing on these other contexts where narrative inquiry was applied, my methodological approach used narrative inquiry to examine the sustainable development of private art museums in China. Addressing the gap in knowledge and methodology on sustainable development of private art museums enables me to contribute to an ever-expanding knowledge base. Through this research study, I made a substantive contribution to the current state of the sustainable development of private art museums in China amid an uncertain social environment. In the next Chapter, I discuss the research methodology and methods of this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative narrative inquiry study regarding the sustainable development of 10 private art museums in China. The chapter begins with an introduction identifying the research questions of the study and then is organized into the following sections: (a) methodology choice, (b) data collection methods, (c) museum site and participants, (d) data analysis procedures, (e) creditability and trustworthiness, (f) research ethics, and (g) summary.

Private art museums have a close relationship with China's society, economy, and politics (Lu, 2014). According to Hu (2020), challenges and difficulties of private art museums are a long-standing problem. The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased uncertainty throughout Chinese society—an uncertainty mirrored in private art museums. Such unforeseen changes to the social landscape pushed private art museums to a more peripheral space and prompted questions regarding the future of art museums in China. Research questions guiding this study were:

1. In a complex and changing social environment, how do art museum professionals view the sustainable development of private art museums in China?
2. What factors affect the sustainable development of China's private art museums?

Answering these questions aimed to help understand sustainable development of Chinese private art museums and assist private and non-state-owned cultural institutions in coping with the complex environment experienced in the present and anticipated in the future. This research provides guidance on how the Chinese government and social institutions might support the sustainable development of Chinese private art museums in the future. Although

there is much discussion about distribution of wealth, social inequality, and cultural policy in private museums, there is little empirical research on these topics (Kolbe et al., 2022). This study aimed to provide empirical information to (a) facilitate further development of existing private art museums, (b) help cultural institutions both in China and abroad to increase understanding of Chinese private art museums, and (c) encourage policies and practices that promote sustainable development of Chinese private art museums.

Methodology Choice

Qualitative research focuses on listening to, interpreting, and retelling participants' narration in a meaningful way, rather than gathering evidence through numbers (Crotty, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Glesne, 2011). According to Kolbe et al. (2022), the case study approach has been the dominant approach to studying private museums, but this approach can limit our understanding of museums because case studies are limited in the number of cases a researcher explores. As a result, diverse methods should be used to study private museums to gain a broader understanding of the object of study.

To hear the voices of professionals working in private art museums, I used a qualitative narrative inquiry research approach in this study. Narrative inquiry study is generally conducted with close collaboration between the researcher and participants, includes the reflection of the researcher, and often uses interviews, and a variety of other methods of data collection (Haydon et al., 2017). Consequently, this research relied on multiple data sources, including documents retrieved from museum websites, interviews, and researcher reflection notes.

Interviewing, listening, and interpreting meaningful experiences and perceptions allowed the researcher to gain insight into understanding the practices of sustainability in private art museums in China. These data sources were required to communicate perceptions and

worldviews of the private art museum experts. Data were gathered using a systematic approach that identified, selected, carefully examined, and synthesized the data collected, which also allowed for these data to be triangulated.

Overview of Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Narrative inquiry methodology is a form of qualitative research, and frequently used in social science research as it is interdisciplinary in nature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Esin et al., 2014). Early narrative theorists noted narrative inquiry was a way of organizing knowledge through language and believed narrative inquiry and knowledge were related (McQuillan, 2000; Punday, 2003). Polkinghorne (1988) argued the advantage of applying a narrative way of thinking is it focuses on describing and interpreting experience.

Studying narratives or narratology not only focuses on the content itself, but on the language in which the content is expressed (Clandinin, 2022). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) proposed four points of the narrative turn and acknowledged there are multiple ways of knowing or viewing the world and how people interact with each other. The four points of the narrative turn in narrative inquiry are (a) closer relationship between researcher and participant, (b) shift from numbers to words as data, (c) shift in focus from the general to the specific, and (d) recognition of multiple ways of knowing. In short, narrative research usually reflects these four characteristics, and research of Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) can help strengthen the role of narrative inquiry in qualitative research.

Furthermore, the goal of narrative inquiry study is to discover the meaning of participant experiences and perceptions through the participant's perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In narrative inquiry, participants describe their experience and their role in the experience (Bruner, 1990). Narrative inquiry methodology has a degree of flexibility that allows freedom to adopt a

variety of systematic approaches to gather evidence (Fontana & Frey, 2008). Narrative inquiry methodology adopts a constructivist perspective, emphasizing coconstruction in historical, discursive, institutional, and other contexts (Riessman, 2008). It also explores layers of meaning of different narratives which allows dialogue between these narratives.

Narrative Inquiry Defined

Narrative inquiry research is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary (2021) as a particular way of understanding events. Narrative inquiry research emphasizes a person's emotions, values, and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meanwhile, it is a research approach both with individuals and organizations or a field of practice that can be understood by others (Czarniawska, 1997b; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001).

Clandinin and Huber (2010) described narrative inquiry as “a relatively new qualitative methodology, is the study of experience understood narratively. . . and it shapes new theoretical understandings of people's experiences” (p. 436). It can also be viewed as “discussions on the relationships between self, the other, community, personal identity, social, and cultural, political, and historical dynamics” (Bryda, 2020, p. 121). Narrative inquiry research is a way to explore personal and subjective human interpretations of the world to understand real-life experiences, and these valuable insights and understandings may have implications beyond the level of the self (Espedal & Synnes, 2022). Nelson (1989) argued it is not the researcher who discovers meaning of the narration but instead participates in creating narrative inquiry. At the same time, narrative inquiry research can be seen as a way of thinking and a structure for organizing knowledge (Bruner, 1996).

Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry methodology possesses the following three characteristics. First, narrative inquiry methodology allows researchers to present the complexity and richness of experience (Bell, 2002). Researchers must integrate experience into a meaningful narrative to highlight the larger social, cultural, and political context in which they take place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Riessman, 2008). Second, narrative inquiry methodology provides an opportunity for marginalized groups to have a voice, bridging the gap where elite scholarly discourse dominates (Caine et al., 2013; Canagarajah, 1996). Third, narrative inquiry methodology is constructed through three elements: temporality, sociality, and spatiality, which an individual's or organization's narratives unfold over time, in different social contexts and locations, and are coconstructed in relationships (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Limitations of Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Any research methodology has its limitations, as does narrative inquiry methodology. First, narrative inquiry methodology includes subjectivity of the researcher (Bell, 2002; Peshkin, 1988). Both participants and researchers may bring their own biases, perspectives, and interpretations to the data collection and analysis process, which may influence the results and compromise objectivity (Peshkin, 1988). Second, narrative inquiry methodology has limited generalizability because unique experiences captured in narrative inquiry research may not be representative of the wider population or applicable to different contexts (Kim, 2015; Trahar, 2009). Furthermore, according to Bell (2002), time commitment required by narrative inquiry methodology makes it more suitable for working with a small number rather than a large number

of participants. Third, because narrative inquiry methodology requires close collaboration with participants, it is particularly important to build trust with them and protect their privacy.

In conclusion, narrative inquiry methodology is an effective research methodology that can be used to examine a variety of complex phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, according to limitations of narrative inquiry methodology, the researcher cannot simply stop at the stage of subjective storytelling (Bell, 2002). Rather, potential insights articulated by the narration should be analyzed in a more complete sense. By recalling and relearning individual experiences and valuable insights, people create knowledge of real life and deepen the understanding of society and the world (Bell, 1997, 2002; Conle, 1992).

Narrative Inquiry Methodology in This Study

Narrative inquiry was chosen as a research method for several reasons. Czarniawska (1997a) pointed out narrative inquiry is often described as a way to gain insights into what develops, changes, or sustains organizations. Narrative inquiry can provide a structure that connects the past, present, and future and can be instrumental in helping organizations identify the process of development or identity under temporality (Linde, 2001).

As I began to see the impact that COVID-19 was having on so many organizations and institutions, my curiosity grew about sustainable development of China's private art museums. Cultural institutions in this kind of social environment can be filled with uncertainty. Therefore, I wanted to listen to narratives of the art museum professionals first so I could better understand the connections, if any, between organizational systems, intentions, values, and practices as museums transitioned to a new way of being following COVID-19. Using a narrative inquiry approach allowed me to hear stories of these museums about COVID-19 and sustainable development.

Moreover, according to Espedal and Synnes (2022), narrative inquiry methodology may be a helpful way to identify knowledge and experiences that are not easily identifiable in an organization. The organization's story is often opposed to or aligned with the larger social and cultural story. Understanding the meaning of larger systems through narrative inquiry methodology is also part of this approach and can help explore the narrative truths organized beneath the grand narrative. Therefore, narrative inquiry methodology can delve more into the story of the organization itself and help give the organization a voice. Through semistructured interviews, private art museum professionals had the opportunity to speak about their understanding, practices, and challenges of sustainable development, allowing further exploration of stories behind the content posted by private museums on their websites and via social media. This narrative inquiry approach allowed a pathway to interpret private museums' understanding and practice of sustainable development and how these private museums made sense of their experiences rather than trying to draw generalized conclusions from other media sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 2009).

Statement of My Positionality

The most important reason why I am interested in this research is I feel I have grown up with art museums. When I was a high school student, there were very few private art museums in China. As a visitor to these museums, I was exposed to enlightenment of contemporary art in the private art museums in Shanghai. Although I did not understand the works on display in the museum at that time, the experience planted a seed in my mind, which led me to choose a major direction and research interest related to contemporary art during my university years.

As an art student who likes to view exhibitions and has been following art museums for a long time, I have witnessed the boom of private art museums that have sprung up in big cities,

and I have also witnessed the closure of some museums I used to frequent visit in the past. As an audience of art museums and even an old friend who has been following them for a long time, I can feel the drastic changes of private art museums in the past decade. Such observation made me have a more objective perspective.

In addition, I have collaborated with art museums since I started my career, and this experience has given me a certain amount of common knowledge with the staff of art museums. However, I have not been working in this system for a long time, and when I delved into the topic of sustainable development, everything art museum professionals talked about was new to me, which made me continue to maintain a certain degree of sensitivity and freshness to this topic. In conclusion, based on my previous observation related to private art museums, education, and work experience, it is my personal position in the study that determined my perspective and way I collect and analyze data.

Data Collection Methods

Narrative inquiry allows for collection of data from a variety of sources, and looking at the data as stories that are relevant to narrative inquiry (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). For narrative inquiry methodology, various types of on-site texts can be used, such as letters, documents, and photographs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) regarded data collection as a series of interrelated activities to provide enough information to answer the research question, which goes beyond simply conducting interviews.

Therefore, my narrative inquiry research was conducted by combining different techniques, including document analysis, interviews, and reflective notes (see Table 1). Interviews were necessary for explanation building and theme development. These data sources worked together to develop an explanation of the understandings, practices, and challenges of

sustainable development of private art museums in China. A brief description of the data sources (i.e., semistructured interviews, museum document collection, and researcher reflection memos) used in this study is provided in the following sections.

Table 1

Data Collection Methods

Method	Source documents
Museums' document collection	Museum website, news reports about the museums and museums' director, deputy director, founder or chief executive' speeches relate to the research.
Semistructured interviews	Online interviews with director, deputy director, founder, chief executive, or curator of 10 private museums in China.
Reflection memos	Reflect on my thinking during the process of collecting and analyzing data.

Museum Document Collection

Collecting and reviewing publicly available documents helped me understand the public narratives of 10 private art museums. Before the semistructured interviews, I gathered multiple sources of evidence through a comprehensive document collection process. Museum documents like journal articles, news reports, and museums' director, deputy director, founder, chief executive, or curators' speeches related to the research were also included. First, I searched for these documents by the name of these 10 museums through databases, museums' websites, and public social media accounts when this study began. Then, I used the terms mission, development, economic, audience, and art across all 10 museums to ensure consistency in locating relevant documents. These documents helped me to build initial impressions of art museums, their histories, missions, and practices on a cultural, social, and economic level and helped me to ask and listen to targeted questions from the interview guide.

Semistructured Interviews

Interviews are a critical component of this narrative inquiry research. Interviews, according to Fontanna and Frey (2000), are a potent tool for understanding people. Semistructured interviews are open-ended interviews that allow the researcher to further explore participants' interests (Galletta, 2013). During the semistructured interviews, researchers can adjust the way they ask different interviewees questions. Researchers may ask additional questions to uncover more information about the responses and processes provided or to ask interviewee to provide examples (Galletta, 2013). It is also necessary to record the interview and take notes on interviewees' responses which will help maintain accuracy for the analysis process.

For my study, interview questions were divided into three parts. First section focused on understanding sustainable development of art museums and changes made during the pandemic. Second part addressed the museum's practice, influencing factors, and challenges. Third section focused on museums' future sustainable development plans.

I constructed an original interview guide that allowed for a more conversational style of data collection, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). I used these guidelines to interview directors, deputy directors, founders, chief executives, and curators from 10 private art museums. These interviews lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Due to the meeting restrictions impact of the postpandemic era, interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom.

Reflective Memos

Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out reflective memos can be helpful during the data analysis process. Maintaining meticulous records during research is critical as it supports the integrity and rigor of research and discovery (R. K. Yin, 2014). Writing reflective notes allowed me to clarify research questions and integrate responses to interview questions. I wrote reflection

memos while collecting and analyzing data and throughout the interview process. Reflective memos can also be used as a data collection source and were included in the analysis and coding. A detailed description of the museum sites and sample of participants interviewed in this study is presented in the follow section.

Museum Sites and Participants

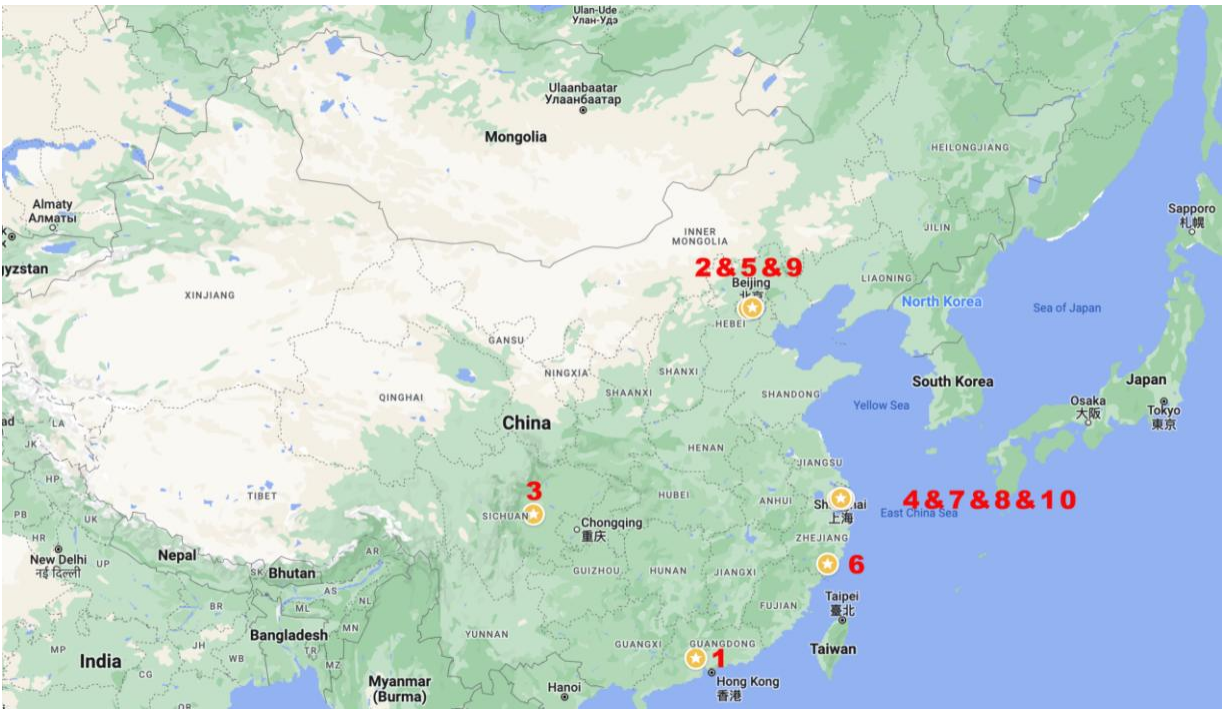
The sample size for narrative research is consistent with qualitative research methodology, which depends on the research purpose of the study (Butina, 2015). The sample size can be one or more as there is no required sample size in narrative inquiry because it seeks an in-depth understanding of the individual's experiences (Beaudry & Miller, 2016; Lewis & Adeney, 2014). Therefore, I chose 10 private art museums in China as samples for this study (see Figure 3), located in large cities in China. In addition, a director, deputy director, founder, chief executive, or curator at each museum was chosen as my interviewees. Context for identifying museum sites for this study is described in the following sections.

Participant Context

According to Martella et al. (2013), purposeful sampling is particularly well suited to in-depth qualitative research. The benefit of purposive sampling is information-rich cases can be selected for study, resulting in insightful and in-depth understanding of the research questions (Suri, 2011). Therefore, in this study, I selected 10 private art museums in China using a purposive sampling method that met my criteria and who were willing to share and communicate with me using the purposeful sampling method (Merriam, 2002). These ten participants provided a diversity of narratives and allowed for a deep understanding of sustainable development.

Figure 3

Location of 10 Private Art Museums in China



Note. This figure links these numbers with museums of similar characteristics.

Private art museums in China are divided into distinct types, such as memorial museums, celebrity museums, and private art museums displaying traditional art or contemporary art. In this study, purposeful sampling allowed me to select private art museums that displayed modern and contemporary art and are located in different major cities in China. As outlined in Chapter 1, prior to 2010, between 2010–2020, and after 2020 represent three important stages of private art museum development in China. The museums I chose met the three separate periods for their establishment which helped me have a more comprehensive understanding of museums at different stages.

However, their size, footprint, funding source, or mission were not included in the criteria for purposeful sampling. Figure 3 shows the location of these 10 private art museums in China, indicated by numbers representing the names of these participants for a clearer presentation on the map (see Table 2). However, one point worth noting is due to lack of empirical research on private art museums in China, the data of the participants is limited, such as number of annual visitors, fiscal revenues and expenditures, and other contextual data. Each of these 10 museums is briefly described in the following sections.

Guangdong Times Museum

According to Guangdong Times Museum website (Guangdong Times Museum, 2022), as Figure 4 shows, the museum is located in a residential building in the urban–rural fringe area of Guangzhou. Regarding physical space, it has an exhibition area, museum archive storage area, bookstore, public reading, and resting spaces. It is a private nonenterprise social organization funded by private sectors, and the company Times China as been the core funder since inauguration of the Museum.

The reasoning behind the Museum’s founding was the parent company felt that a museum in their company’s residential neighborhood would be a good fit with their marketing campaigns (Xiao, 2012). However, the parent company is primarily responsible for financial support, and decisions regarding the planning and operation of the Museum are primarily made by Museum staff (Xiao, 2012). Guangdong Times Museum aims to promote the local, public, and interdisciplinary artistic practice of cultural production and provide opportunities and dialogues for audiences to understand the current state of contemporary art and culture (Gao, 2020a).

Table 2*Overview of Participating Art Museums*

Museum name	Year open	Main sources of funding	Location	Nature of registration	Status
1. Guangdong Times Museum	2003	Single real estate company	Guangzhou	Private nonenterprise social organizations	Ceased operations in 2022 to present
2. UCCA Center for Contemporary	2007	Multiple investment companies	Beijing	Registered as a company	normal operation
3. A4 Art Museum	2008	Single investment companies	Chengdu	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation
4. Rockbund Art Museum	2010	Single investment companies	Shanghai	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation
5. Inside-Out Art Museum	2011	Single investment companies	Beijing	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation
6. How Art Museum	2013	Single investment companies	Wenzhou	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation
7. Bund One Art Museum	2019	Two investment companies	Shanghai	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation
8. JinChen YFM Art Gallery	2021	Single investment companies	Shanghai	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation
9. Macalline Art Center	2022	Single investment companies	Beijing	Registered as a company	normal operation
10. 3723 Art Museum	2023	From Council members	Shanghai	Private nonenterprise social organizations	normal operation

Note. Of these 10 art museums, two have branches, one is UCCA Center for Contemporary, and another is How Art Museum.

Interviewees had experience working in these different venues, were familiar with the museums as a whole, and talked about the museums that included branches in their interviews. However, in this table, I have only listed the first established branch of these two museums.

Furthermore, Guangdong Times Museum has tried mechanisms for parallel operation of the Board of Trustees and Academic Council to explore operational and academic sustainability, which protects independence of academic departments from financial and other decisions (Gao, 2020a). In October 2022, Guangdong Times Museum announced it would close due to the economics of its parent company (Lisa, 2022).

Figure 4

Guangdong Times Museum in a Community



Note. Reprinted from Guangdong Times Museum, n.d., (<https://www.timesmuseum.org/en>).

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UCCA Center for Contemporary

As shown in Figure 5, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) was founded by collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens and funded by the Ullens Foundation from 2007–2017 (Y. Yan, 2020). However, in 2017, it transitioned to the stewardship of a dedicated group of new

Chinese and international patrons and trustees. UCCA evolved from a single organization housing a wide range of functions into the UCCA Group (Y. Yan, 2020). On its website, UCCA described its mission as “bringing the best in art to a wider audience, drawing China into the global cultural conversation through art” (UCCA, 2023 , front page). UCCA attracts millions of visitors each year and upholds the idea art can reach out to life and cross boundaries (Y. Yan, 2020).

According to Y. Yan (2020), since 2017, UCCA’s biggest shift is reflected in the transformation of its operating model and operational ideas, adopting the separation of commercial and public welfare. Based on the more purely operational strategy, the commercial segment of UCCA includes UCCA Store, UCCA Kids, and UCCA Lab. It is hoped positive operational results will ultimately support the sustainable operation of the museum for a long time. Today UCCA has developed into a private art museum with three branches in Beijing, Beidaihe, and Shanghai.

In addition, UCCA incorporated a nonprofit arts foundation that used its name in 2018. UCCA Foundation for Art and Education was also established to support research and outreach initiatives and is accredited by the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs. UCCA has increased the number of staff specializing in academic research and added a department in charge of marketing, which is related to audience interaction and brand impact.

Figure 5

UCCA in 798 Art District, Beijing



Note. Reprinted from “About” by the UCCA website (<https://ucca.org.cn/en/about/>). Copyright 2024 by UCCA. Reprinted with permission.

A4 Art Museum

A4 Art Museum is a private nonenterprise social organization founded by the Chengdu Wanhua Investment Group (A4 Art Museum, 2023). The museum was created to expand the cultural attributes of the parent company and become a highlight of the city in conjunction with the surrounding artistic community (Chang, 2020).

A4 Art Museum describes its development philosophy on its website (A4 Art Museum, 2023,) “to connecting people with art and activating creativity” (About us section). According to Chang (2020), between 2008–2020, A4 Art Museum has organized 55 exhibitions and more than 1,000 public events. The academic position of A4 Art Museum is more concerned with the continuity and professionalism of exhibitions and emphasizes research. In addition, the iSTART Children’s Art Festival is an important annual public program, featuring public participation in art creation.

According to A4 Art Museum website (A4 Art Museum, 2023), A4 Art Museum hopes to proactively connect more families, schools, and communities, and jointly build a platform of openness, publicity, and society. A4 Art Museum is also the first museum that has a children's art museum in Southwest China. In addition to the exhibition space, the museum also has a number of ancillary spaces to connect with audiences, including a library, children's gallery, art store, theater, and cafe shop.

Moreover, 2023 marked an important milestone for A4 Art Museum. It became a private art museum with two venues in Chengdu and renewed the direction of the museum, positioning itself as a practitioner of New Art Museum Studies (A4 Art Museum, 2023). It also expanded its museum brand into a cultural cluster about art museums, children's art museums, art residencies, and cross-border creativity center, named A4 Art Museum, A4 Kids, A4 Residency, and A4X respectively (A4 Art Museum, 2023).

Rockbund Art Museum

According to the Rockbund Art Museum (RAM) website (RAM, 2023), this museum is a private nonenterprise social organization located in the center of Shanghai and was founded in 2010 by investor Lynn and Thomas Ou. Rockbund Art Museum received its funding from two companies, ROCKBUND and Ping An. The museum was founded as an opportunity to add cultural leverage to the marketing of real estate (Gao, 2020c). Although the museum has access to relatively adequate financial support from its parent company, it still seeks strategic cooperation with high-level commercial brands. Since 2013, the museum has set up Hugo Boss Asian Art to support emerging contemporary artists, encourage diversity of ideas and cultures in Asian emerging art, and support artistic practice and reflection (Gao, 2020c).

Rockbund Art Museum is a museum with an experimental and innovative spirit and international outlook (Gao, 2020c). RAM described its aims on their website as mainly focusing on contemporary art from Asia (RAM, 2023):

RAM aims to explore the importance of “archipelago thinking”: connecting to artistic culture across Asia and beyond to gain richer perspectives on today’s challenges, imaginations, practices, and networks in contemporary artistic practices. We wish to build constructive, creative relationships between multiple localities in Asia and different cultures globally to create a hub for working with a broad range of artists, researchers, and scholars. (About RAM section)

Figure 6

RAM in a Heritage Building



Note. Reprinted from “Rockbund Art Museum” by e-flux, n.d., (<https://www.e-flux.com/directory/6557/rockbund-art-museum/>). Copyright 2024 by e-flux. Reprinted with permission.

Inside-Out Art Museum

Inside-Out Art Museum is located in northwest Beijing (see Figure 7). According to its official website (Inside-Out Art Museum, 2022), the museum was founded in 2008 and became a private nonenterprise social organization in 2011. Inside-Out Art Museum has not only the professional exhibition space and dedicated staff team of a professional museum, but also studios for artist residency programs (OCULA, 2023).

Moreover, with its strong research and curatorial capabilities, Inside-Out Art Museum has continued to explore contemporary art from both a practical and theoretical perspective in recent years (OCULA, 2023). According to Inside-Out Art Museum's website, the museum focuses on supporting noncommercial art practice and thinking and emphasizes active curatorial experiments. It introduces cutting-edge curatorial ideas and promotes the understanding and development of curatorial work in the field of Chinese contemporary art.

With strong ability in research and curation, the museum has been carrying out exploration of contemporary art through practice and theory in recent years. The work of Inside-Out Art Museum is to keep returning to the scene of Chinese art and thought in the second half of the 20th century, recognize and sort out the historical process of Chinese contemporary art, and make sustained efforts for the construction of a discipline for the study of Chinese contemporary art history.

Figure 7



Inside-Out Art Museum

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How Art Museum

According to Gao and Xu (2020), How Art Museum was founded by a collector Zheng Hao and is financially supported by companies associated with the founder. How Art Museum consists of two locations in Shanghai and Wenzhou. These two branches need more than 30 million yuan a year to operate which is a lot of funding for the museum. Since the opening of How Art Museum in Shanghai, it received nearly 400,000 visitors in that year.

How Art Museum is a private art museum with a systematic collection of contemporary art, and since 2017–2019, it has had more than 2,000 artworks in its collection. Furthermore, its operation model and brand features the integration of resources from art stores, museums, and

hotels which are all belong to the parent company. However, in terms of operation, the exhibition and commerce sector are run independently by two teams. How Art Museum aims to extend the impact of its exhibitions beyond the physical space of the museum to reach a wider audience (How Art Museum, 2023). From 2017–2023, the museum held more than 550 public events and attracted more than 1,000,000 visitors(How Art Museum, 2023).

Bund One Art Museum

According to the official website of Bund One Art Museum (BOAM, 2023), it is a private nonenterprise social organization located in the center of Shanghai, was jointly launched in October 2019 by a cultural industry named Shanghai Xinhua Publishing Group Co. and a company curating and organizing international art exhibitions named Shanghai Tianxie Culture Development Co. BOAM described its position and mission as:

The museum seeks to promote cultural exchanges between Shanghai and the rest of the world, encourage and foster public interest and appreciation for the arts, and engage in art history education. In keeping with its mission of blending art and life and bringing art to the public, the BOAM organizes classical art exhibitions to bridge the gap between great traditions and modern/contemporary art at home and abroad, enriching the general public's cultural life. (BOAM, 2023, About BOAM section)

BOAM organizes classic exhibitions of foreign masters in Shanghai based on its position and mission, and also brings different public education programs to the public. BOAM is a young art museum that was only founded in 2021 and there is limited information available on the internet.

JinChen YFM Art Gallery

JinChen YFM Art Gallery (see Figure 8) is located in Shanghai Hongqiao International Central Business District, and was founded and funded by the JinChen Group (JinChen YFM Art Gallery, 2022). JinChen YFM Art Gallery became a private nonenterprise social organization in 2021 (Dynamics of Chinese Social Organizations, 2023). As a young museum, the exhibition Young Chen Yifei - The Javelin Thrower was successfully selected in 2021 as one of the outstanding exhibition programs in Shanghai Art Museum (JinChen YFM Art Gallery, 2022, para. 1).

Figure 8

JinChen YFM Art Gallery



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The mission was described by JinChen YFM Art Gallery as: “It aims to explore artists with potential, promote modern and contemporary art with pictorial nature, and create a Chinese and foreign art exchange platform with social influence” (JinChen YFM Art Gallery, 2022, introduction section). Therefore, most of the exhibitions of JinChen YFM Art Gallery focus on national and international contemporary paintings and drawings. As this art museum has very limited online documentation and no official website, I became curious about this art museum and wanted to conduct further interviews.

Macalline Art Center

Macalline Art Center is located in Beijing’s 798 Art District, and officially opened to the public on January 15, 2022. Although it is a private art museum owned by a private company, it dedicated itself to become a nonprofit. Macalline Art Center is supported by the private sector named Red Star Macalline Holding Group Co., Ltd. and was founded by art patron Che Xuanqiao. Macalline Art Center related its mission as:

Macalline Center of Art is a practice-oriented site focused on contemporary visual inventions. The Center engages with artists and art groups by building physical and online communities through events and research. The Center is guided by the working processes of artists, constantly re-defining and testing itself and renewing perceptual and cognitive systems in contemporary situations and contexts. (Macalline Art Center, 2023, About us section)

As Macalline Art Center is a young private art museum and there is limited data and information on the internet. But the museum still insists its avant-garde academic positioning even under the pressure of COVID-19, which made me curious about the sustainability of this art museum (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Macalline Art Center



Note. Reprinted from e-flux, n.d., (<https://www.e-flux.com/directory/504533/macalline-center-of-art/>). Copyright 2024 by e-flux. Reprinted with permission.

3723 Art Museum

3723 Art Museum is a private nonenterprise social organization that opened to the public in 2023 (3723 Art Museum, 2023). It is located in a shopping mall in Shanghai, and contains two independent exhibition halls, creative center, art living room, art salon, art store and other functional service spaces. 3723 Art Museum explained its position as:

We are contemporary, trendy, cross-border, youth power, multi-cultural. Starting from the fields of aesthetic education, cultural creation and IP expansion, it is committed to building a diversified, comprehensive and cross-border development of the art platform.

And it aims to providing art lovers and audience of different age groups with a highly dynamic art space with both cultural content output and talent viewing experience (3723 Art Museum, 2023, About us section).

Like several previous art museums, it was established in 2023 and does not yet have an official website, therefore, online documentation is very limited. Because this art museum is relatively new, I was curious about how this museum planned for sustainable development.

Interviewee Recruitment and Selection

A director, deputy director, founder, or chief executive at each museum was identified as a potential person to interview for this study because these professionals could represent the museum, and they were the most knowledgeable in terms of the development situation and strategic direction of the museums. Of the 10 participants I interviewed, 70% of them had worked in the art museum industry for over 10 years. In total, 10 people in core positions at 10 art museums were interviewed for my study.

Using the selection criteria for participants described in the previous section, I used purposive sampling to target 28 eligible private art museums. I obtained contact information of these professionals from 21 private museums through official emails from their websites or through personal contacts. Once I obtained the contact information, I used phone calls, WeChat messages, and emails to get in touch with the potential interviewees from each of these private museums. Once initial contact was made, screening occurred via a one-to-one telephone conversation prior to obtaining informed consent. The screening process verified the interviewee was a formal staff member who had one of the core positions (i.e., director, founder, or chief executive) at the museum and they would be willing to participate in a Zoom online interview for

this study. In the end, only 10 private art museums were willing to participate and be interviewed for this study.

For the Zoom interviews, after the recruitment and the screening, I provided potential participants the electronic consent form and interview protocol to read and sign prior to beginning the interview. I provided the participants the interview protocol so they would know what I was going to ask them. Interviewees had 3 days to decide whether they wanted to be involved in the study and provide their consent. If the potential interviewees had questions, I answered them prior to them signing the consent form which asked if all interviewees were adults aged 18 years or older, and professionally trained museum staff, so it was assumed they understood the contents of the consent form and interview protocol (see Appendices A & B). The interview guide for this study can be found in Appendices C and D.

Data Analysis Procedures

A variety of data analysis procedures were used to interpret results of the data collected for this study. These procedures included document analysis, translation and transcription of the interviews, interview data coding, and interpretation of my reflective memos. Each of these procedures are described in the following sections.

Document Analysis

Data analysis for narrative inquiry research is a critical component of qualitative data. Analysis of qualitative data focuses primarily on understanding of the data, and data are selected based on the research objectives and interview questions (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, document analysis methods in qualitative research require document data to be examined and interpreted to gain understanding and derive meaning (Bowen, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Document

analysis is a method suitable for studies that require rich descriptions of individual phenomena, events, organizations or processes (Bowen, 2009; Stake, 1995).

Document analysis is also often used as a complementary method to enhance triangulation (Bowen, 2009). According to Flick (2018), four factors should be considered when deciding what documents deserve to be analyzed: (a) authenticity, (b) credibility, (c) representativeness, and (d) meaning. Documents used in this study included museum website, news reports about the museums, and speeches from the museums' director, deputy director, founder or chief executive related to the research.

First, I selected documents by reading and checking each of these documents one by one with the issuing organization to assure authenticity and credibility. Then I read through these documents to select those documents by targeted internet search that were relevant to my research purpose and research questions and planned to analyze for further coding. I describe in detail the data included in the documents coded in the following sections.

Coding of Documents and Interviews

For the semistructured interviews, I used a Chinese software named IFLYREC to translate interview audio recordings into transcripts. This software allowed me to create a comprehensive set of interview transcripts for each museum. Although this technology was useful in providing transcripts of the interviews, it still required me to listen to the audio recording repeatedly and manually correct some technical transcription errors to make sure the transcription was correct. This process not only ensured accuracy of the transcripts, but also allowed me to become more familiar with the data that emerged from the semistructured interviews, which facilitated the next stage of coding.

After I obtained accurate transcripts through the previously-mentioned transcription process, my coding analysis process was divided into five stages (see Table 3): (a) original quote, (b) initial code, (c) focused code, (d) categories, and (e) theme. The first step was data immersion to maintain basic familiarity with transcripts, and I read transcripts line-by-line to make the initial code. Then I translated the original quote into an initial coding which was close to the content of data. Next, I used focused coding to group initial codes based on their commonalities and frequency. Finally, as displayed in Table 4, I analyzed these focused codes to merge a smaller set of categories and reorganized these categories into a more significant theme (Pope et al., 2000). I used the same coding analysis process for documents.

Table 0

Overview of Coding

Initial codes	Focused codes	Categories	Themes
670	37	13	3

Table 4

Process of Coding

Original transcription	Initial code	Focused code	Category	Theme
“Spending levels of audience may be a bit conservative in the postpandemic era, the audience don’t go out as easily as they used to buy a RMB200 (\$28) exhibition ticket, and the impact is obvious for exhibition ticket sales and gift shop products, which is our main income.”	Exhibition tickets, which are the main source of income of art museums, are affected by the decline in audience consumption levels.	Economic downturn	Economic environment and financial background	Influential factor to private art museums
Memo: Did such private art museum have financial pressures after their main business had been affected under the crisis? I would think further about what kind of steps such a private museum has taken in light of the economic impact. Are there any differences between them and other private art museums that have a single source of funding or more diverse sources of funding?				

I used MAXQDA 2020 to store my interview transcripts and for my document codes so I could store all the data in one place which also allowed me to search based on these codes. Analysis started simultaneously as data was being collected and using MAXQDA software to encode keywords. During the coding process, writing reflective memos promoted and generated insights for further data analysis (see Table 5).

Table 5

Reflective Memos Written After Initial Coding

Reflective memos	Codes
<p>What caught my attention when I first encountered these data was the complexity of participants’ attitudes toward the self-supporting function. A participant felt that the self-supporting function was under pressure from outside the museums and from the industry (1. “all institutions face the problem of self-financing”), while on the other hand he felt that it was an issue that the museums should try to solve on their own. Although a participant mentioned trying various approaches to the self-supporting function (2. “Then we switched to online to support digital, online auction, online software selling, IP licensing, group exhibition plan. . .), he felt that 3. “the self-financing function is a paradox that contradicts the fact that the museum is a nonprofit social organization. “Does this suggest that the museum’s attitude toward the self-supporting function is ambivalent, and that the self-supporting function is bounded? Does this mean that not all the way of self-supporting functions are adoptable?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facing the demands of self-financing function 2. Switching to online ways to explore self-financing function 3. Contradiction between self-financing function and museums as a nonenterprise social organization

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Polkinghorne (2007) pointed out the need to pay attention to issues of validity and reliability in narrative inquiry. Interviewing participants to reliably tell and record credible stories is the cornerstone of narrative research validity and reliability. Using a pilot study to test the methodology and interview guide can increase the credibility and reliability of the study, and

interview questions should be put forward to a pilot group and revised effectively with adequate sampling (Malmqvist et al., 2019). To collect valid interview responses (i.e., be certain of participants' consent and whether their thoughts are properly represented), participants should be asked if they have correctly understood every interview questions and background of the research during the interview (Glesne, 2015).

I conducted a pilot test with two interviewees in core positions from state-owned museums to see whether they could understand the interview questions and collect their feedback. I avoided asking suggestive questions so as not to undermine interviewees' credibility (Altrichter & Holly, 2005). Based on the pilot group's feedback, I adjusted the order of interview questions and moved the question about understanding sustainable development to the beginning, so interviewees would start with simpler and more open-ended questions. I also modified the way one interview question was worded, specifically "what influences the culture/society/economics development of your museum" to "what factors restrict the sustainable development of your private art museums?" This modification made the issue more clear, open-ended, and not limited to the cultural, social and economic dimensions. In brief, as a result of making these suggested changes from the pilot test group, the interview process flowed more logically and smoothly, and the questions were easier for the interviewees to understand.

Translation Process and Member Checking

As my interviewees' first language is Chinese, interviews were conducted in Chinese. Hence, a translation process to report the research results in English was required. To ensure accurate translation of the interviews and avoid personal bias, a professional English major joined in the translation process. This translator verified the original expression and context of the interview data were translated accurately.

I established credibility of the data and analysis results through member checking, a method that also maintains quality in the qualitative research tradition (Beaudry & Miller, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After the interview and the translation process, I did member checking and interviewees were provided with a copy of their transcript. Each participant was asked to check the accuracy of the narrative transcript, and it allowed me to ensure the authenticity of the interview narrative. I conducted further interviews with two interviewees via the phone and WeChat when the data were not sufficiently understood and when additional follow-up questions were needed. The follow-up interview data were processed using the same method of coding as the previously described.

Additionally, retaining the voice of the researcher when analyzing data and reporting findings ensured I could retain and monitor my own ongoing reflections process in the research process and added credibility to the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, I used reflective memos to document personal values and biases as they related to the research process and data analysis. Reflective memos helped me to code and report my data with enough rigor and reflective depth to produce insightful perspectives about the research questions.

Research Ethics

The ethical framework relevant to narrative inquiry methodology is presented next. Research ethics are critical to building trust and protecting participants from harm.

Ethics Framework

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ethical considerations are particularly important to research design, especially respect and reciprocity. Martella et al. (2013) noted protection of participants in research is also one of the ethical considerations that should be taken into account in research. The study should be conducted ethically to ensure validity and reliability in

qualitative research (Leavy, 2017). This study was conducted after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Chapman University reviewed and approved the study protocol.. This research was conducted in strict accordance with the contents of the documents submitted to the IRB. Furthermore, interviewees were told this research posed no physical or mental risk to them as indicated in the informed consent they signed.

Regarding respect in the research process, the only potential risk was a potential breach in confidentiality from the respondents' personal information. After obtaining the permission from the ten museums to use the names of the museums in the research, I omitted the position the interviewees held in the museum in order to provide an additional level of privacy. Data were backed up and stored on the Chapman University cloud storage server, and an access password was created. In accordance with IRB standards, no one but the researchers could access these data. Once the dissertation is submitted, these data will be destroyed.

Interviewees were not paid for participating in the study and were informed participation was voluntary. As Harrison et al. (2001) pointed out, explaining personal background and interest in the field of study helps researchers' bond with participants, and can be used to gain participants' trust. Prior to the beginning of the study, I sent my curriculum vitae to each of the museum professionals I would be interviewing and introduced myself and my research interests, which built their understanding and trust in me and thus gained their support. I showed respect for the participants' time and contributions by providing gratitude and reciprocity. Therefore, after the interview, I also expressed my gratitude to my participants and told them research results would be shared with them and may help to improve their museums' sustainable development.

Summary

Narrative inquiry methodology was chosen in the qualitative paradigm to explore sustainable development of 10 private art museums in China. This research methodology was suitable for capturing subjective experiences that occur under temporal, social, and spatial conditions, such as the sustainable development of private art museums that experienced COVID-19 in China's characteristic social environment. In addition, narrative inquiry methodology provided an opportunity for a group that does not have a lot of opportunity to express their opinions. Private art museums, in particular, in China do not have much of a voice compared to government run museums. Data for this study were collected through purposeful sampling to recruit participants for the study, examine Museum document collection, conduct semi-structured interviews, and write reflective memos. Data collection and analysis followed ethical considerations and credibility to ensure the quality of this study. This Chapter provided a detailed overview of the methodology, and through a rigorous approach I believe I can present a representative set of perspectives on the sustainable development of the private art museum sector in China, which can help answer the research questions of this study. In the next Chapter, I will report the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As outlined in Chapter 2's discussion of the history of museums in China, private art museums have a close relationship with Chinese society, economy, and politics. According to Hu (2020), challenges and difficulties associated with sustainability of private art museums represent a long-standing problem. Hu (2020), writing at the time of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which the pandemic increased uncertainty throughout Chinese society for years—an uncertainty mirrored in private art museums.

Such unforeseen changes to the social landscape pushed private art museums to a more peripheral space and have prompted questions regarding the future of art museums in China. Therefore, a principal question of my research asks how private art museums should develop with long-term sustainability in mind. To respond to such a question, I interviewed 10 professionals from different private art museums in China. From the semistructured interviews I conducted with these respondents; four main themes related to sustainable development emerged:

1. Each participant had their own unique understanding or perspective on sustainable development in private art museums.
2. Sustainability is viewed as a complex combination of the internal and external environment of private art museums.
3. Sustainability is framed with regard to concerns for marketization.
4. Sustainability exists in a larger social context.

These themes are addressed in separate sections and explored in detail next. These sections present the views of the museum professionals, but also extrapolate from individual insights to

form a broader critical analysis of the concept of sustainable development in private art museums in China.

Sustainable Development From the Perspective of Private Art Museum Professionals

This section examines how museum professionals understand the notion of sustainable development. The purpose here was to gauge how comprehensive knowledge of this term is in the Chinese context, and how the term is being applied in practice. Findings demonstrated that all the individuals interviewed had heard of the term sustainable development, but each conceptualized it differently. Although answers to the question of what sustainability meant varied across participants, their responses nonetheless coalesced around certain recurring topics. Therefore, these topics can be considered subthemes and are as follows: (a) sustainability necessitates art museums rethinking their definitions and operationalizations of concept, (b) sustainable development is still in the exploratory stages, and (c) sustainability is a long-term undertaking.

Rethinking the Definition of Sustainability in Art Museums

In their responses, virtually all the private art museum professionals attempted to define sustainable development, with half of them noting sustainability was closely linked to their status as nonprofit social organizations and undertakings operating in the interest of the public welfare. This is evident in the response from the participant from the Inside-Out Art Museum, who said, “We need to view the art museum as a public cultural venue that takes on its own social responsibility.” [“我们需要把美术馆看作一个公共文化场所，担当自己的社会责任。”] Sustainability is framed in similar terms by a participant representing the Guangdong Times Museum, who noted, “It is important to recognize the art museum as a public welfare undertaking from the source of cognition. And once the art museum registered as a private non-

enterprise organization, it must be a public welfare undertaking.” [“要从源头认知上把美术馆当做公益，你一旦做美术馆注册了民办非企业，它一定是公益的。”]

In responding to questions of sustainability, both individuals conceptually linked sustainability to (a) public service and (b) nonprofit status. This subtheme appears once more as another private art museum expert mentioned they believed there is a misconception among the general public, in which people believe the function of a private art museum is not that different from that of a cultural business. This individual, a representative from 3723 Art Museum, went on to criticize this view saying,

Don't see the art museum as a profit-making place. The state has told you; the art museum is privately-run but not a business place. It is a nonprofit place. So. if you want to invest in an art museum, it can be your personal sentiment. It can be your social responsibility. It can be your branding strategy. It can be your business empowerment. But the only thing is that you can't treat the art museum as a way to make profit. . . If you want to make money, I think you can open a hot pot restaurant, not an art museum. [不要把美术馆看作是一个牟利的地方，国家已经告诉你了，美术馆就是一个民办不是企业的地方，就是一个非盈利场所。所以如果你要投美术馆，可以是你个人情怀，可以是你社会责任，可以是你的品牌战略，可以是你的商业赋能，但唯独你不能把美术馆当做是一个谋利的方式. . .如果要赚钱我觉得你去开火锅店不要开美术馆。]

The practice of tying art museums to social responsibility can also be observed in the response from a representative from A4 Art Museum. They asserted

An art museum should be a way of thinking, a repository of ideas for a movement, an arena for inspired behaviors and generating your larger social connections like that. It's an everyday theater that you can have some relevance with anywhere. If art museums that

are still burdened by space, I don't think any art museum is sustainable. [美术馆应该是一种思维方式，是一个运动的思想库，是一个激发的行为和产生你更大的社会连接的这样的一个舞台，它就是一个日常的剧场，你可以在任何地方都可以跟它发生一些关联性。美术馆如果还是以空间所累，我觉得没有美术馆是可以可持续发展的]

This participant's response alluded to previous practices, wherein Chinese private art museums aimed to build architectural wonders, and were often designed by celebrity architects. But too much attention was paid to the architecture of art museums and quality of their exhibitions has often been neglected. That is why this respondent presents an attention to physical space—as in an attention to physical space exclusively—as a barrier to sustainability.

However, others were much more explicit in presenting hindrances to sustainability as rooted in misconceptions of the purpose of private art museums not only among the general public, but also with those people working in the art industry. Both those internal and external to the art industry were presented by some respondents as blurring the line between the purposes of museums, art museums, and commercial galleries. For example, a representative from UCCA commented on how this misunderstanding came to be, saying,

Around 2007, some art museums in Beijing at that time still represented artists and helped them to sell works. As an art museum that also represents artists and sells works, the concept of an art museum was very vague at the time. [2007 年左右，北京当时一些美术馆还有代理艺术家的。作为美术馆还代理艺术家并且销售作品，当时大家对于美术馆的概念都非常模糊。”]

The participant from 3723 Art Museum seemed to reflect on this misguided assumption an art museum doubles as a gallery, stating, “The word art museum it has a special meaning, it has an industry norm, it's not that you have a space in which you exhibit some works and that's an art

museum, that's wrong.” [“美术馆这三个字它是有特殊的意义的，它是有行业规范的，不是说你有一个空间里面展出一些作品，这就是美术馆，这是错误的。”]

Additionally, many of the interviewees pointed out private art museums are becoming more commonplace, but commonly held definitions regarding their function and obligations to society lag behind. As the participant from Rockbund Art Museum pointed out, “The number of private art museums seems to be continuing to increase, but there's still not enough thinking about what kind of art museum to build and how to run an art museum.” [“民营美术馆的数量好像还是在继续的增加，但是究竟做一个什么样的美术馆和怎么做一个美术馆，其实思考的还是不够多。”]

Indeed, definition of private art museums was a recurring theme which related to sustainable development in participant interviews. In fact, the individual from 3723 Art Museum mentioned one of the reasons mentioned for the ambiguity of the definition was the short history of private art museums. The following section explores respondents' perceptions of this timeline further, particularly as they framed the private art museum industry as still being in its nascent stages.

Sustainable Development is Still in Its Exploratory Stages

Most of the art museums professionals interviewed qualified their appraisals of art museum sustainability with a statement speaking to the early stage of development they were in. These professionals believed because private art museums are relegated to more marginal sectors, and because these types of museums have had a short history in China, they are still in a constant stage of figuring out their institutional identity and purpose. As the individual from Rockbund Art Museum related, “There are very few art museums in China that have thought about what kind of art museum they want to be from the very beginning, but usually they think about it

while they are running it.” [“中国很少有那种一开始就想好了，我美术馆是一个什么样的美术馆，一般都是做起来之后一边做一边想。”] In other words, as the Rockbund representative saw it, without an established guide predicated on a long history of all those museums that came before, private art museums are essentially just “figuring it out as they go.” In fact, this is the same language the participant from 3723 Art Museum used when they asserted,

Our development is very difficult because there is nothing to go by and refer to, we all have to *figure it out on our own* [emphasis added]. And in this process, we have to gradually form a methodology. Some private art museums learned from state-owned art museums but find that state-owned art museums have institutional limitations because they are financially funded by the government. Some of the art museums learned from the basic operating models of Western art museums but find that it couldn't learn from either. [我们的发展非常难，因为没有东西可以去依据和参考，我们都得自己去摸索。而且在摸索的过程中，我们要逐步形成一种方法论。民营美术馆有的借鉴国有美术馆，但发现国有美术馆它有体制上的局限，因为它是财政拨款的。有的去借鉴西方美术馆，但发现西方美术馆也借鉴不了。]

This notion of a lack of a model or guide also surfaced in the interviewee from How Art Museum's response: “China's private art museums don't have a fixed business model or template. They are all figuring it out on their own. . . . Because every art museum is different, and it's not the same as a Western art museum.” [“中国民营美术馆没有一个固定的商业模式或者模版，都是在自身摸索中...因为每个美术都不一样，和西方的美术馆也不一样。”] As with the previous excerpt, this respondent also identifies an inability to replicate a Western model as part of the problem.

To overcome obstacles to sustainable development such as these, many of the respondents identified a need for adaptability and resiliency. An individual from the Inside-Out Art Museum alluded to such qualities when they said, “The most important challenge still comes from the museums themselves, how to keep pushing their limitations, not being bound by what they already know, and maintaining constant creativity and motivation.” [“最重要的挑战还是来自美术馆自身，如何不断地突破自身的局限，不被已有的经验所束缚，保持持续的创造力和动力。”]

This idea of making dynamic adjustments according to the external environment was also presented as characteristic of this exploratory stage by the respondent from A4 Art Museum, who recalled,

We’ve adjusted our position countless times, and it doesn’t seem so exclusive, but it’s precisely because the gallery has been changing in response to change, and it’s leading its own change. When others don’t change, it will change. It’s important to recognize yourself dynamically and adapt to society. [我们调整了无数次自己的定位，看起来不是那么的专一，但恰恰是因为美术馆一直在顺应着变化而变,它也在引领自己的变化。当别人不变的时候它也会变。动态的去认识自己，去适应社会很重要。]

Exploration as an ongoing process was also addressed in the interview with the participant from 3723 Art Museum, who stated, “For China, we stand in the art museum industry. The development of private art museums is only for 10–20 years. In fact, all the people are exploring.” [“对中国来说，我们站在美术馆的行业来说，民营美术馆的发展也就那么 10 多年，它是 20 年都不到，其实所有的人都在摸索。”] One interviewee compared this stage of history in Chinese art museums to infancy, but people want babies to grow up fast. This

individual, from How Art Museum shared, “Private art museums in China are still a baby and may not even drink milk. But now we are desperately trying to give it milk to make it drink into a giant baby.” [“中国的民营美术馆还是一个婴儿，可能喝奶都不会喝。但现在我们是拼命给它灌奶让它喝成巨婴。”] The idea these museums have “a ways to go” to achieve sustainability likewise appeared in an interview with a member of the Bund One Art Museum staff, who stated, “Sustainability must be about constantly adjusting and experimenting as much as possible. . . It’s not easy for every private art museum, and there’s still a lot of way to go.” [“可持续发展一定是尽可能不断调整和尝试. . .每家民营美术馆都不容易，还有很长的路要走。”]

As these excerpts demonstrate, many of the participants attribute the relatively smaller social space that private art museums occupy in Chinese society to their young history. This young history represents not only an explanation as to why these types of museums do not enjoy the same notoriety, visitor figures, or funding as their larger museum counterparts, and a proven model for sustainable development, but also suggests an opportunity for future growth. In other words, as the respondents saw it, as private art museums have yet to become a pervasive cultural force, participants nonetheless intimated that these museums could be in the future.

A few respondents further framed the short history of private art museums in China in positive terms, such as the individual from A4 Art Museum, who identified the stage of development the museums were in as allowing them to not be confined by convention. Therefore, according to the museum professionals interviewed here, their recent entrance into the realm of museums in China is both an advantage and disadvantage. The next section addresses other tensions inherent in the concept of sustainability for the private art museum staff, specifically the tension between short- and long-term success.

Sustainability as Sustained Undertaking

Not only did the respondents in this study contextualize the concept of sustainability according to its young history in China, but they also classified sustainability according to two subtypes of success: short-term and long-term. When some museum professionals talked about short-term sustainable development, they did so in positive terms. For instance, one interviewee from Bund One Art Museum described private art museums as the “aura” surrounding their parent company, as the jewel in a conglomerate’s crown. In Chinese, the words “aura” and “crown,” as they are used here, have a negative connotation. They are being used in the pejorative sense to suggest, for these parent companies, acquisition of a private art museum is a mere appendage—a public relations project, add-on, or afterthought . This interviewee stated,

Go and see if the private art museums serve as an aura or a crown for the businesses it invests in. . . And then go and see which private art museums have daily visitors, whether the private art museums can continue to survive, whether it has a main business. [去看看美术馆是不是作为它投资企业的一个光环或者是一个皇冠. . .再去看一看哪个馆每天有观众, 这个美术馆能不能继续生存下去, 它是不是有主营业务。]

The representative from Rockbund Art Museum chose to describe short-term sustainability as “easy” in terms of founding a museum, managing exhibitions, and making decisions regarding the operations of private art museums. This representative said,

From this perspective it’s actually quite easy to run an art museum, it’s quite easy to do an art exhibition. In these easy situations, it may make decisions about the development of art museums less rigorous. . . In the future, the art museum may gradually become unsustainable. [从这个角度而言做美术馆其实也挺容易的, 做展览也挺容易的。所

以说这些挺容易的情况下，可能会让决策变得没那么严谨...然后可能后面美术馆慢慢就难以为继了。]

At first glance, this would initially appear to paint sustainability in positive terms. However, looking at this quote in greater depth reveals such ease was seen as the antithesis of sustainable development, as the representative concluded their reflections by suggesting if one gives into such ease in the short-term, then the museum may become unsustainable in the long-term. At the same time, these kinds of comments also point to the fact private art museums should think more about long-term sustainable development.

Chinese private art museums' short-term success was also presented as problematic and not necessarily indicative of success by the representative from Guangdong Times Museum, who pointed out:

The sustainability of private art museums. . . I don't know. It's as much of a boom to be able to look at it for up to 10 years as it can be seen. While private art museums are actually very far from being sustainable in the true ecological sense. [民营美术馆的可持续发展... 我不知道。这也是一波热潮，能够最多看10年，因为可以看得到的。而民营美术馆距离真正生态意义上的可持续其实非常远。].

Here, the participant from Guangdong Times Museum's usage of the "ecological sense" to describe sustainability efforts in the Chinese private art museum sector does not refer to environmental issues. Instead, because museums in China have yet to become largely concerned with environmental sustainability, "ecological sustainability" in this excerpt may best be understood in terms of social responsibility and contributions to effective dissemination of contemporary art to various audiences, artists, and galleries, and other educational and cultural institutions. Additionally, describing art museums as a boom suggested there will be an

inevitable bust. The boom-and-bust analogy this individual used implied that short-term success may not predict long-term museum viability.

As participants described short-term sustainability as easy, long-term sustainability was characterized as difficult, but unlike the early days when many private art museums sought short-term sustainability, today there are private art museums that are invested in long-term sustainability. For instance, the individual from A4 Art Museum related many of the private art museums in China are starting to focus more on long-term sustainable development, explained,

There are a number of art museums in China, they have done many years of collection and a lot of preparatory work when they built the museum, they have been different from the short and quick way before to construct an art museum. I think they have more of their own system, their own accumulation, and they are also more responsible for history. [国内有很多美术馆，它们做了很多年的收藏，在建馆时候做了大量的准备工作，它们已经不同于原来那种短平快的方式去建构一个美术馆的过程。我认为它们更加有自己的系统，有自己的沉淀，也对历史更加的负责。]

The interviewee presented the museums that are invested in long-term sustainability as having “done many years of collection and a lot of preparatory work,” implying achieving long-term sustainability is a difficult task. In the next line, then they contrasted these museums with short history—those that are looking for the “short and quick way.”

This theme of long-term sustainability being hard, but desirable was one that surfaced across interviews, with a number of individuals pointing out museums’ sustainable development is something that is accomplished over a long period and with much effort. Sustainable development of private art museums is presented in this way by the employee from 3723 Art Museum, as well, who shared,

Sustainable development, I think, is very important. The initiators of art museums, instead of calling them bosses, we should call them initiators. Let them realize that it is easy to open an art museum, but it is really not 3 years or 5 years of work if you want the art museums to be developed in the long run. [可持续发展我觉得是非常重要的 我们就应该让这些美术馆的发起人，我们不要叫老板，我们叫美术馆的发起人，就应该从一开始就认识到这一点，告诉他办一个美术馆是容易的，但是美术馆要长远发展，真的不是3年5年，也不是一朝一夕。]

Similarly, for the staff member for Rockbund Art Museum, successfully realizing sustainability was presented as something that is not achieved over a short period stated:

To run an art museum, you really have to measure it over a long time period. In a short period of time, it may succeed or fail. But for a long period of time, these experiences may be a small wave in the sea. If you're able to stick with it for a longer period of time, it basically means that's where you're going to get that part of what you want to get, a longer-term sustainability. [做美术馆真的要用一个很长的时间段去衡量它。一个短的时间段里面，它有可能成功，有可能失败。但是对于一个长的时间段而言，可能这些都是一个小小的浪花。如果说你能够坚持做一个比较长的时间，基本上就是说那就是你就会得到你想要得到的那一部分，一个更长远的可持续。]

This respondent also used an analogy like the “boom-or-bust” analogy the previous interviewee used. Here, the first wave is riding is like the boom in that the boom will inevitably crash (i.e., “bust”). These individuals' comments implied it is the ability to navigate that crash and “stick with it” that translates to sustainability. By describing such tensions between ease and difficulty,

and short- and long-term efforts, museum professionals in this study constructed sustainability as a complex concept, a topic that will be further explored in the next section.

Sustainable Development is a Complex and Multifaceted Concept

Respondents featured in this study attributed the complexity inherent to museum sustainability to a variety of factors, which can be classified according to two categories. First of these categories includes factors related to the often-unpredictable external environment in which private art museums are situated. Second category encompasses factors related to the environment internal to the institution. Therefore these interviewees indicated the sustainable development of private art museums is not only affected by the complex external environment, but faced with many internal challenges, as well.

Factors of Sustainability in the External Environment

Five external environmental factors were identified during the interview process. These factors included: (1) COVID-19, (2) socio-economic downturn, (3) geographic locations of art museums, (4) positioning of art museums, and (5) cultural governance structures. Each of these factors are described further in the next sections.

COVID-19

One of the most frequently cited external factors affecting museum sustainability, according to the participants, was onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The reasons why the pandemic was presented significantly to institutional sustainability was because, as the employee from Macalline Art Center pointed out, “The relationship between the art museum and the socioeconomic and sociopolitical is tightly connected because it inevitably changes with society as a whole.” [“美术馆和社会经济和社会政治之间的关系连接的很紧，因为它不可避免地会

随着社会整体的变化而变化。”] Therefore, as society was upended with the onset of COVID-19, so too were museums' operations and their prospect of sustainability.

In describing the changes COVID-19 had brought about, and how it negatively impacted sustainability for private art museums, most interviewees used words such as negative and bad. Discussions of the negative impact of COVID-19 centered around the economy, art production, new audiences and overseas exchange, and integrity of exhibitions. Some interviewees even pointed out their respective museums are still dealing with after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the respondent from Macalline Art Center noted, “The COVID-19 was really terrible, and it has been a hellish year. I guess all Chinese institutions are similar. And we are still forced to absorb the negative things from last year.” [“疫情真的太糟糕了，就是很地狱般的一年。估计所有的中国机构差不多。我们今年还在被迫吸收去年负面的东西。”]

Similarly, the interviewee from Rockbund Art Museum reflected,

For us, the biggest damage caused by COVID-19 is actually the audience. The number of visitors after the COVID-19 is still very poor so far. Then we did some preliminary observations and analysis and found that basically all of our old audiences have been lost, and 70% of the visitors who came were new, and a very large part of them were accidental visitors. I think part of the reason is due to the COVID-19 and the closure of the museum. [疫情对我们来讲，其实最大的一个损害就是观众。疫情之后的观众参观点量到目前为止都还很差。然后我们做了一些初步的观察和分析，发现我们以前的老观众基本上都流失了，然后来的 70%都是新的观众，然后有非常大的部分是属于那种偶然性的观众。我觉得有一部分的原因是因为疫情和闭馆造成的。”]

Four participants noted the pandemic had also, ironically, positively impacted museums. This theme of COVID-19 being a blessing in disguise was introduced in the following interview,

where the respondent presents COVID-19 as an opportunity to borrow works the museums would otherwise not have access to. This staff member, from Bund One Art Museum, explained the positive impact granted by COVID-19 in the following way:

In 2022, we think there was a big opportunity. Because of the decline in tourism in various countries, foreign art museums had many works to be released, so we can borrow the works. It's a two-way opportunity. For us it's content, there's more content for us to choose from and bring into China. For foreign museums there is revenue to supplement what they lose in tourist spending. [在 2022 年，我们觉得机会大。因为各国旅游业的下降，国外美术馆有很多的作品或者说作品会有档期出来，这样刚好我们就可以借得到作品。这是一个双向的机会。对我们来讲是内容，有更多的内容可以让我们选择和引进。对国外的美术馆而言有收入补充他们在游客消费上的损失。]

This sentiment was echoed by the representative from A4 Art Museum, who stated,

COVID-19 has changed a lot, but when we review it now, we feel that there are too many positive changes. The COVID-19 actually triggered our consensus on things like community and audience. Without this disaster, I believe many people would not be able to reach a consensus. Because everyone doesn't know what we really want to leave behind when encountering such difficulties? What should we really have? COVID-19 has brought us a sorting out and an awakening of ourselves. [疫情改变了很多，但是我们现在复盘会觉得有太多是正向的改变。疫情其实触发了我们对社区性和观众这些东西的共识。如果没有这场灾难，我相信很多人达不成共识，因为大家不知道遇到这样的一些困境的时候，我们真正要留下的是什么？我们真正该拥有的是什么？疫情

为我们带来的也是自我的一种梳理和一种觉醒。]

In between the two poles of the spectrum of COVID-19's impact on private art museums' sustainability, there were a few participants who viewed COVID-19 not as a threat to sustainability or an opportunity for promoting it, but as having little bearing on it at all. For this group of individuals, challenges and difficulties that private art museums face are perennial, and COVID-19 was no exception. This perspective is demonstrated in the interview with the participant from Guangdong Times Museum, who shared,

COVID-19 as a social aspect of the problem, an exotic virus slightly reminds humanity to keep a little bit of life competitive. But it does not affect the fundamental issues and the logic of business, nor does it affect the foundations of society. [疫情作为一个社会面的问题，外来的病毒稍微提醒一下人类要不要保持一点生命的竞争力。但它没有影响根本的问题和商业的逻辑，也没有影响社会的基础。]

Similarly, the representative from UCCA dismissed COVID-19 as a barrier to sustainability and instead presented it as an excuse for some private art museums, which used it to cover up organizational problems. This individual noted,

COVID-19 may have eased some of the problems. And people have at least found a reason why the art museums are bad now, such as the market is bad or commercially bad, which is actually the economy is bad. Instead, COVID-19 has masked some of the problems. [疫情可能让一些问题缓和了，大家至少找到了一个美术馆现在不好的理由，比如说市场不好或者商业上不好，其实就是经济不好了。疫情反而掩盖了一些问题。]

In conclusion, although some individuals believe COVID-19 has brought opportunities for the development of private art museums, majority of them still believed COVID-19 has brought

more negative impacts. At the same time, COVID-19 was also seen by some participants as a trigger or catalyst for the economic downturn. All in all, whether it is an opportunity or a challenge, COVID-19 has brought private art museums to think and reflect on the issue of sustainable development. Some private art museums have begun to realize how to live with public emergencies and crises.

Socioeconomic Downturn

COVID-19 caused a worldwide economic downturn many museums are still recovering from, and moreover illustrated how greatly influenced museums are by socioeconomic conditions. Several interviewees pointed out the development of private art museums is dependent on the greater socioeconomic environment, and the primary reason private art museums have flourished in the past was due to China's long history of economic development. But now, as that development slows, private art museums are falling on hard times. As the representative from Macalline Art Center explained,

When China's real estate economy was at its peak, private art museums were also at their peak. . . but now, we find that the real estate economy has completely lost its leading position in China's economy after 10 years, and it has become a very bad situation. China's real economy and China's society have changed dramatically over the past 10 years, and I think there's a pretty big crisis in the nonprofit sector, and we're all saying it's a dark moment. [中国地产经济最红火的时候，也是民营美术馆最蓬勃旺盛的时候. . . 折射到现在，我们发现地产经济在 10 年后彻底失去了在中国经济中领导性的位置，它变成了一个很糟糕的一个局面。过去 10 年，中国的实体经济和中国社会发生了巨大的变化，我认为非营利部门存在相当大的危机，我们都说这是一个黑暗时刻。]

The interviewee Inside-Out Art Museum had a similar opinion on the matter, as this representative noted, “The instability of the general economic development environment in the postpandemic era is a challenge for every arts organization.” [“后疫情时代经济发展大环境的不稳定是对于每个艺术机构的挑战。”]

Many private art museums feel the trickle-down effects of the economic woes experienced by their parent companies. Parent companies and private founders represent the primary source of financial capital and income for private art museums. For example, Rockbund Art Museum’s representative pointed out 60%–70% of the organization’s funding comes from its parent company in the interview. So, when the economy is in a downturn, income from the primary business of these parent companies will be affected, which in turn, affects the amount of financial support provided to private art museums. These private art museums’ dependency on their founders’ parent companies, which is then dependent on the greater economy, is explained by the representative from 3723 Art Museum shared:

Most private art museums have an owner or have a parent company as their source of funding. This brings a risk that when the main business is good, the art museum can do well. But if the parent company itself encounters financial difficulties or the owner encounters personal financial situation, the development of the art museum may be greatly limited and restricted. [大部分民营美术馆背后依托的是老板，它们几乎都有一个老板或者有一个母公司作为他的资金来源。这会带来一个风险，就是当他的主营业务很好的时候，美术馆可以做得很好。但是如果母公司本身遇到了资金上的困难或者遇到老板个人的财务状况，可能美术馆的发展就会受到了极大的限制和制约。]

But the financial troubles spurred by an economic downturn are not limited to a lack of funding from the museums' founders; revenue from ticket sales were also greatly affected. The staff member from How Art Museum commented on the difficulty museums face in bringing visitors in, stating, "Consumption is now downgraded, audiences are reluctant to spend money, and people's lifestyles have changed a lot. It's actually harder for art museums to attract people now than it was." ["现在消费降级，观众不愿意消费，人们生活方式发生很大变化。美术馆现在要想去吸引人，其实比原来更难了。"]

Interviewees also addressed secondary revenue sales, such as those from gift shops and dining, being profoundly impacted. The representative from Bund One Art Museum pointed out how sales from gift stores represented an important source of income when they explained,

Spending levels of audience may be a bit conservative in the postpandemic era, the audience don't go out as easily as they used to buy a RMB200 (\$28) exhibition ticket, and the impact is obvious for exhibition ticket sales and gift shop products, which is our main income. [疫情后观众的消费水平可能有点保守，观众不像以前 200 块的展览门票那么轻易出手了，对于展览票房和文创产品的收入而言影响很明显，而这是我们的主要收入。]

Although the economic downturn has put financial pressure on many parent companies, some private art museums gained an opportunity to develop if the museum's parent company was not affected by the economic downturn. This is what the staff member from 3723 suggested when they said,

During the COVID-19, because there were a lot of companies whose main business was affected, for example, the real estate sector was very much restricted last year and the year before. So, we saw a large number of art museums with a real estate background

challenged last year and into this year. However, for those whose main business is not necessarily affected by the COVID-19, this year may be a better opportunity. [在疫情期间，因为有很多企业的主营受到了影响，比如说房地产行业在去年和前年受到了非常多的限制。所以我们看到在去年到今年，有大量以房地产为背景的美术馆受到挑战。然而主营业务不一定在疫情中受影响的，那么可能今年倒反而是一个更好的机会。]

As these interviewees pointed out, Chinese private art museums are susceptible to both external financial influences and ones internal to the organization. In terms of external economic forces, unexpected events like COVID-19 and socioeconomic downturn that ensued, burdened these museums' operations and thus their prospects of sustainability. At the same time, internal economic forces, derived from the business model upon which they operate and the influences of their parent companies, have prompted many of these museums to explore self-financing options in the future.

Geographic Locations of Art Museums

Economic downturns will impact areas and regions differently. For instance, private art museums in larger metropolises may be able to withstand negative conditions better than their counterparts in rural areas. This is due to a variety of reasons, including a more well-established art scene, greater tourism, and larger network of artists. Of the 10 private art museum staff members interviewed, five participants positioned the geographic location of their individual art museums as integral to their institutional identity, and something that guided their subsequent development in many aspects. For both the respondents from UCCA and Macalline Art Center, which have venues in Beijing and Shanghai, specific characteristics of different geographical

locations led to different development strategies for their art museums. As the staff member from Macalline Art Center said,

Beijing is the closest place to the art ecology; it has the most artists, scholars and resources in different fields. If art museums want to do something more ecological and infrastructural, Beijing may be a better place to start. . . . Shanghai is more of a window, suitable for some outward-looking work, and it can connect with some people, such as salons of different topics. [北京是和艺术生态最近的地方，它拥有最多的艺术家，学者和不同的领域的资源。如果美术馆想做一些更生态和 infrastructure 的事情，北京可能更落地一点. . . 上海窗口性质更强，适合做一些外向型的工作，它能够连接到一些人，比如不同话题的沙龙。]

The interviewee from How Art Museum continued this theme of how geographic location determines development strategy. How Art Museum has venues in both Wenzhou and Shanghai, and has prompted its staff to adopt different approaches to operating each location. The How Art Museum staff member said,

Wenzhou is very different from Shanghai, for example, like the population base of Wenzhou, there are only a few million people in Wenzhou's home region, and there are limited young people, so it's a lot of difference from Shanghai and we've also adopted a completely different strategies to both museums [温州和上海很不一样，所以我们也采取了完全不同的策略。比如像温州的人口基础，温州的本市地区也就只有几百万人，年轻人也就那么点，所以说还是很多地方和上海不一样。]

A4 Art Museum chose its development direction based on a combination of geographic location and connections with the community, as the museum's representative noted:

A4 Art Museum is located in the community, and it cares a lot about public relations because the city's DNA and cultural lineage are very concerned with daily life. Also, because it is located in the community, it adjusts its work according to different feedback from the audience, which also influences its thinking about its self-positioning and role.

[A4 Art Museum 地处社区，它非常关心公共的关系，是因为这个城市本身的基因和文脉就是非常关注日常生活。也因为它地处社区，它在做很多工作的时候会根据观众不同的反馈去调整，也会影响它在自我定位和角色上的一些思考。]

In conclusion, China is a country with a very vast territory and many nationalities, which makes development paths and strategies of private art museums in different cities completely different. This finding also shows there is no uniform template for the development of private art museums, but rather, development of private art museums needs to be adapted to local conditions. At the same time, how to operate and develop a private art museum from a local perspective has also become a new issue for this industry.

Positioning of Art Museums

Various elements comprise art museums' institutional identities, several of which have already been touched on thus far, including origins and nature of their parent companies and the geographic locations and communities they serve. The latter of these considerations figure heavily into how staff at A4 Art Museum wish to portray themselves. As the representative from this museum notes, their organization pivoted to become much more explicitly community-oriented:

Our museum's positioning has undergone a transformation to become a community-based contemporary art museum. . . In a sense, it's coming from a museum that was focused on objects and events, and now it's back to focusing on people. Art museums are

going to recognize more connectivity, communication, and stimulation, rather than simply defining value, making rational categorizations, and generating discourse with resources. . . . Private art museums must first do their own physical examination, that is, to know what their genes are. Otherwise, it is difficult to make a rational choice. [我们美术馆的定位经历过转型，转型成为社区型的当代美术馆. . .从某种意义上来说，是从一个原来关注于物和事儿，现在回到关注到人。美术馆要去承认更多的连接性、交流性和激发性，而不是简单的定义价值，进行合理的分类，用资源产生话语. . . 民营美术馆首先要自己做体检，就是知道自己的基因是什么？否则很难做出一个理性的选择。]

The individual from JinChen YFM Art Gallery also portrayed the community the museum is a part as integral to not only who they are as an organization, but what it is they value, reflecting, “We value the collaboration of art museums with communities or schools as these types of organizations, they are not only a sustainable development, but also an extension to the audience.” [“我们重视美术馆和社区或者是学校这种类型机构的合作，他们不仅是一种可持续发展，更是一种对公众的扩展。”]

For other respondents, their organization’s positioning was not determined by who it served, but rather by the size of their operations. As these individuals saw it, large-, mid-, or small-sized museums carried different connotations about who they were and what they were trying to do. This is suggested by the commentary from the Rockbund Art Museum representative, who explained,

First of all, there was a subjective condition that we had an unspoken consensus at the very beginning of running the museum. For the future art museum, we are definitely not a

big art museum, but we definitely want to be a relatively unique and good art museum. How to say it is a unique and good art museum actually depends on us to interpret it at different stages at different times, but we definitely don't want to follow the trend, we don't want to do that kind of art museum purely for the sake of the box office, so this is the basic premise, and then slowly it has been precipitated into the genes of our art museum. [首先有一个主观的条件，就是我们在一开始建馆之初就有一种没有说出来的共识。对未来的美术馆，我们肯定不是一个很大的美术馆，但我们肯定要做一个比较独特的好的美术馆。怎么样说是一个独特的好的美术馆，其实依赖于我们在不同的时间不同的阶段去阐释它，但是我们一定是不会想要随大流的，不会想要去做那种纯粹是为了票房的那种美术馆，所以这个是基本的前提，然后慢慢的它已经沉淀为我们美术馆的基因了。]

As this interviewee stated, their museum's status as "not a big art museum" directs their organizational goals and values, which in this case, means not focusing on turning a large profit, or as they put it, working "purely for the sake of the box office." The individual from Macalline Art Center likewise presented their museum's size as essential to its positioning efforts, saying, "We're positioning ourselves as a mid-sized arts organization that has its flexibility and the elasticity of its framework. And then do some more relatively experimental and then edgier content." [“我们将自己定位成一个中型的艺术机构，有它的灵活度和框架的弹性。然后做一些比较相对实验性的，然后比较前卫的内容。”] As indicated by this statement, a mid-sized museum may afford the organization with greater opportunities in some regard (here meaning, flexibility in program content) than larger museums.

In addition to museum size, their academic endeavors were also presented by positioning of academic development as a key part of their organizational positioning. Considerations for their academic commitments determined the development direction of the museum's artistic productions and public programs. As the representative from Macalline Art Center related,

Just like our academics are avant-garde on the one hand, but the academics are not a very serious academics, not like the academic exhibitions inside the academy. In terms of taste, we have to be avant-garde and radical. For example, 'The Cloud of Multiple Species' exhibitions are all oriented toward this kind of position. [就像我们的学术一方面是前卫的，但学术不是一个很干巴的学术，也不是那种学院里面学术性的展览。还是在 taste 品位的层面，我们都要做 avant-garde 和 radical 一点。比如说多物种之云的展览都是向着这样的定位去做的。]

Still, others, like the individual from JinChen YFM Art Gallery, presented the genre of the art featured in the museum as central to its positioning. This respondent said, "Our positioning is relatively more focused on painted modern and contemporary art, and then carry forward some of the influence of Shanghai-style art." ["我们的定位相对来说会更专注于绘画性的现当代艺术，然后发扬一些海派艺术的影响力。"]

Despite the diverse considerations that go into a museum's positioning, as illustrated by these interviewee responses, one thing was clear across interviews: positioning informed both operations and strategy, including development strategies. One example of this relationship between positioning and development is the case of Guangdong Times Museum, which positioned itself as having an internationally aligned focus and ethos, by founding a second exhibition venue in Berlin, Germany. Furthermore, several interviewees believed that the positioning of art museums is not fixed, and that the art museums may adopt different

positioning at different stages of development. Therefore, tying back to earlier discussions of sustainability amid unprecedented events like COVID-19 and related economic downturns, part of enduring in the long-term may mean reevaluating institutional positionality as circumstances in the greater society change. Furthermore, as some of the interviewees pointed out, there may be a strategic advantage in keeping museum operations at a smaller or mid-range scale, as this size equips them with the freedom to respond to community needs and social exigencies as needed.

A Sector on the Margins. Despite the fact interviewees have previously addressed private art museums as being mainly concentrated in China's major cities, they have also existed on the margins of society in a more figurative sense. For instance, echoing earlier commentary about private art museums still being in their nascent stages, for the individual from 3723 Art Museum, the peripheral space that private art museums occupy in China stems from fewer staff members they can employ, reduced number of museums in operation, and relatively short time they have been around. This individual remarked,

The development of modern art museums in the West [primarily, the U.S., the U.K., and Europe] is only a few decades, and the development of these museums, whether in the West or in China, actually belongs to a very new field, and its number is very small. . . . In Shanghai, there are probably 100 art museums of all types. There are only about 50 of them in operation, and most of them are state-owned. The average staff of an art museum is about 10 people. Among China's 1.4 billion people, the number of people working in private art museums is very, very small. [西方的现代美术馆发展到现在也就几十年, 这些美术馆的发展其实不管是西方的还是中国的, 其实都是属于一个非常新的领域, 而且它的数量又非常的少. . . 上海可能把全部类型的美术馆算进去有 100 家。这里真正在运作的大概只有 50 家, 这当中又绝大部分是国有美术馆。一家美术馆平

均的工作人员也就 10 人左右。在中国 14 亿人口当中，从事民营美术馆工作的人数非常非常少。]

Along these same lines, the staff member from Guangdong Times Museum used numerical evidence to explain why private art museums in China are granted such limited space in both society and industry: “Art museums are a very small percentage of the cultural industry, probably less than 3% for contemporary art museums. There’s even less money and practitioners in it. You know what the biggest ones are? It’s games and movies.” [“美术馆在文化产业中就是一个非常小的比例，当代艺术可能就 3% 不到。里面的资金和从业人员就更少了。你知道最大的是什么吗？是游戏和影视。”]

However, the issue with being relegated to the margins arises when it becomes an obstacle to sustainable development. In fact, one participant from 3723 Art Museum presented the social status of private art museums in China as a major obstacle to development. This respondent said, “We’re very minor and there’s no other industry can compare with us, so it’s very hard for us to develop.” [“我们非常小众，没有任何一个行业能够跟我们来比，所以我们的发展非常的难”]. Although this individual presents private art museums’ minor social position as explicitly at odds with development, the staff member from Guangdong Times Museum claims it to be troubling in terms of museums’ impact:

Because we are a very minor department, it is difficult to achieve a large-scale impact. . . .

The government may think that it has invested a lot of money in the art museum sector, but they don’t see that there are so many different private art museums from a high position. We are really weak and even sometimes unpopular. Even sometimes the private companies won’t treat private art museums well. [因为我们是非常边缘的部门，所有

很难去做 到一个大范围的影响...国家认为自己已经为美术馆投入了大量的资金，但它根本看不到下面还有这么多不一样的美术馆。而且我们确实就是很弱小 甚至有些时候也是不受欢迎的。甚至有时候民营企业也不会待见 民营美术馆。]

In short, as a relatively marginal sector of the social structure, existence of private art museums seems to be dispensable. This also suggests its development is more difficult than that of some of the more important cultural institutions. This is because they need to try to solve the problem of how to be seen by the audience, practitioners, local government, and state, and recognize the value of their existence.

Cultural Governance Structures

Museums' position in society is largely the product of government oversight, which is geared toward cultural governance. The cultural governance structures as they apply to private art museums involves following stakeholders: national and local governments, relevant legislative branches, and major players in society, such as private foundations. The larger topic of cultural governance can be broken down into four subtopics, all of which are introduced by interviewees as central to the question of sustainability for private art museums in China. These subtopics represent factors influencing sustainability, with this section being organized around them. They are: (1) external mechanisms differ from the west, (2) law and policy, (3) control over ideology, and (4) government support.

External Mechanisms Differ From the West. It became clear during the interviews the sustainability of Western art museums is due to a long history of healthy external mechanisms that allow art museums, governments, and social forces to work together to maintain sustainability of art museums. Although both China and the West have established business models and supportive infrastructure in place for both government and non-state-owned

museums, half of the interviewees featured in this study pointed out the primary difference differentiating the two locations are external mechanisms. For example, when compared to museums in the West, Chinese museums lack well-developed relationships with foundations, private patrons, and endowment systems, which has a significant impact on their financial sustainability. As the individual from UCCA explained,

The West has a tradition of patronage that goes back hundreds of years, and it has this tradition of aristocratic patronage of culture and art. It can be traced back to the Medici family's patronage of the Renaissance and so on. Although foreign art museums have supportive policies, there is no such incentive mechanism in China. The mechanism is different between the West and China. [西方有几百年的赞助传统，它有这种贵族赞助文化和艺术的传统。更早的可以追溯到美第奇家族赞助文艺复兴之类的。而且国外的美术馆有扶持的政策，但在中国其实没有这样的激励的机制。西方和中国的机制不一样。]

The representative from How Art Museum likewise noted funding for Chinese private art museums is singular in nature, having said,

Foundations in the West have an original basis there, but China does not. Like the United States in addition to the foundation will have government support, but China does not have such a mechanism, so museums can only rely on the founder to invest money. [国外的基金会有一个原生态的基础在那，而中国没有。像美国除了基金会还会有政府的支持，但中国没有这样的机制，所以说只能靠创始人来投钱。]

In many ways, this statement echoes earlier ones that link the tenuous quality of funding for private art museums to the fact funding sources are not diverse.

Some interviewees expressed envy regarding external mechanisms available to museums in the West. Yet this envy was also tinged with a sense of hopelessness because they believed they had a very long way to go toward achieving this benchmark implicitly set by the West. The representatives from Bund One Art Museum and Inside-Out Art Museum both indicated having external mechanisms of support, like the West has in place, as key to achieving sustainable development. The staff member from Bund One Art Museum compared the ideal structure to the Metropolitan Art Museum (i.e., the “Met”) in the United States in the following terms:

An ideal private art museum should ideally be like a mechanism like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has a strong capital group. If such a mechanism is established, I believe there will be more and more private art museums. [一个理想中的民营美术馆，最好就像大都会它的机制这样的，它有一个强大的资本团。如果有这样的机制成立，相信民营美术馆会越来越多。]

The employee from Inside-Out Art Museum placed a similar emphasis on external mechanisms of support, noting “the ideal art museum would have a healthy foundation operating mechanism, be sponsored by society, the public and other aspects, and have a longer-term sustainability.” [“理想中的美术馆会有一个健全的基金会运营机制，受到社会、公共等多方面的赞助，有较长时间的可持续性。”]

In conclusion, it is interesting to note China’s private art museums were born without the same perfect external mechanism as in the West, and their operational mechanism relies more on parent companies and investors as mentioned before. Whether Chinese private art museums need to copy the external mechanism of the West, and how to use the existing foundation and conditions to continuously improve their own external mechanism are called the new direction of thinking.

Law and Policy. How much money an institution can receive and from whom is naturally influenced by laws and policies. A number of interviewees referred to the existing government laws and policies designed to support museums in the long-term as “inadequate,” “too complicated to talk about,” “a big problem,” and with “too many contradictions.” Many of the interviewees felt the primary problem centered around inadequate laws governing tax exemption, specifically laws that could benefit these private companies after they invest in them. It became clear, over the course of the interviews, participants saw underdeveloped laws and policies as being the crux of the issue of financial sustainability. As the individual from UCCA shared,

China does not have a policy saying that after your enterprise invests in the art museum, you can be tax exempted or other benefits. So, there is no incentive for capitalists to support art museums, and China’s private art museums are completely a monolithic, naked state. [中国没有一个说你企业投资美术馆以后，你就可以免税有抵扣有什么好处这些都没有。所以说资本家没有动力去支持美术馆，中国的民营美术馆完全是一个单体裸奔的状态。]

Moreover, although majority of interviewees expressed disappointment about the fact corporations that financially support art museums cannot receive tax exemptions under current Chinese law, one interviewee said the Chinese legal system has progressed in this regard, and now art museums are able to accept donations directly from donors. As 3723 Art Museum elaborated:

In the past, only foundations in China could accept donations, and at the same time give tax exemptions to corporations that made donations. Most of the foundations behind the art museums in China were set up to enjoy the tax

exemption policy. . . . Art museums are now able to accept donations directly, and give certain tax exemptions to donors, which means that in the future, donations to art museums will be exactly the same as donations to foundations. I remembered that this should be a nationwide policy, because it's issued by the National Civil Affairs Bureau. [中国以前只有基金会可以接受捐赠，同时给到那些捐赠的企业以一定的免税政策。中国绝大部分美术馆背后的基金会是为了享受免税政策才需要去设一个基金会. . . 现在美术馆是可以直接接受捐赠的，并且给予捐赠人一定的免税政策，也就是说未来捐赠人捐款给美术馆跟捐款给基金会是一模一样的。我想起来了，这个应该是全国性的政策，因为它国家民政局颁布的。]

However, some participants pointed out passing of certain laws and their implementation are two different things, and it is difficult to put potentially beneficial tax exemption policies into practice to support private art museums. This also makes it difficult for them to realize financial sustainability through the establishment of various internal financial mechanisms. As was seen with participants' discussion of external mechanisms of support available to museums in the West, some interviewees' responses were characterized by envy. Such envy is evident in the following statement from the staff member from Guangdong Times Museum:

The West has great tax exemptions, this law and policy China doesn't have, that kind of tax exemption you can't get. In fact, contemporary art has never been legalized, nor is there a formal legislation and policy level. . . . For example, many private art museums have tried to patronage systems. However, if there is no policy and legal support and mechanism, sponsorship of private art museums really rely on sentiment? Sentiment can go how many years? If there is no policy and legal support, sustainable development in

China is almost impossible. [西方有很好的免税优惠，这个法律与政策中国没有，那种免税的资格你是拿不到的。其实当代艺术就没有被合法化过，也没有一个正式立法和政策的层面...比如很多民营美术馆都尝试过 赞助人体系,但是如果没有任何政策和法律上的支持与机制，赞助民营 美术馆真的靠情怀吗？情怀能走多少年？如果没有政策和法律支持，可持续发展在中国几乎是不可能的。]

All in all, these conclusions point to the fact internal construction of private art museums and their financial sustainability cannot be separated from the government's laws and policies, especially under a centralized system like China. However, differences in the private museums' understanding of policies and their complaints about laws and policies show some of the distance and disconnect between museums and government. How private art museums can deal with the relationship with the government to discuss laws and policies has also become a new issue.

Control of Culture Ideology. For many of the interviewees, part of the reason laws and policies of culture that exist today are there is so the government can control cultural ideologies. As interviewees pointed out, all exhibitions in Chinese art museums need to be approved by the local Culture and Tourism Bureau and can only be exhibited after approval. There exists a tension between creative expression of these museums' curatorial staff and restrictions on artistic production imposed by the government. The staff member from How Art Museum describes how this government control limits the kind of subject matter they can present. This individual reflected, "In the past 2 years, ideological control has been very strict, and exhibitions involving violence, and political themes are not allowed to pass the censorship." ["这两年意识形态把控非常严格，有涉嫌暴力政治主题的展览全部不能通过审查。"]

Additionally, several of the museum professionals interviewed believed the control the government exerts over cultural ideology only increases the sense of uncertainty and insecurity

members feel regarding sustainability of their respective institutions. This is because once an exhibition fails to pass the censorship of relevant departments, all previous preparations for that exhibition will have been in vain, with a substantial amount of labor and financial capital being wasted. The respondent from Guangdong Times Museum deemed such ideological censorship “unfriendly regulations” [不友好的监管], and commented on the dilemma museums face with respect to them:

The stricter the ideological censorship, the more art museums should actually talk about these marginal works. . . . But the more art museums talk about them, the faster they will die, it’s a dead end. That’s why many arts museums don’t do local interpretations as a hedge strategy, for the sake of the sustainability of the museum’s business level. . . .

When importing a foreign exhibition, all the formalities and approvals have already been passed, and as long as it passes the censorship the art museum can exhibit it, it’s very safe. [意识形态的审查越严格，美术馆其实越应该去讲这些边缘的作品. . . .但美术馆越讲就会死的越快，简直是一个死结。所以很多美术馆不做本土的的诠释是一个避险策略，是为了美术馆经营层面的可持续. . . .进口一个国外展览的时候，所有的手续和审批都已经通过了，只要通过了审查美术馆就可以做出来，非常的安全。]

The individual from Macalline Art Center provided a concrete example of the fear even inadvertently violating censorship protocols put in place by the government can bring about, having said,

In our last solo exhibition of artist Tong Wenmin, there were nudes in her art works, and she was named by some people who said that our exhibition was vulgar. It’s not clear where this is going in the future. . . . Although we think we can control it, we still feel

more uncertainties because of the ideological censorship. [上次艺术家童文敏的个展，她的作品里会有裸体，那么就会被一些奇葩点名说我们的展览低俗. . . . 未来不太清楚这个走向到底是怎么样的，虽然觉得是可以把控的，但会觉得意识形态审查这一块的不确定性因素会变多。]

In short, private art museums, as public-oriented cultural institutions, are subject to strict government censorship of exhibition content. This still touches on the conclusion mentioned earlier that there seems to be a lack of communication between art museums and the government, and the government also lacks an understanding of the art production of art museums, which results in the government's ideological control bringing unfriendly limitations to the cultural production of art museums.

Government Support

Having a museum's content censored would have a great bearing on the government support available to them. Although it has previously been established private funding remains the primary source of support for private art museums in China, government support is nonetheless available to most of these institutions to apply. Half of the respondents interviewed related private art museums could receive government support, mainly in the form of subsidies for filing projects and provision of certain other resources. A few interviewees confirmed there are special funds allocated for local projects, which are provided through the China National Arts Fund. As the interviewee from Bund One Art Museum pointed out, even if the museum does not directly benefit from government partnerships in the form of monetary assistance, it may still incur substantial benefits in more indirect ways. The government can help museums to build a platform to attract the attention of partners, and as the representative from JinChen YFM Art

Gallery further shared, receiving the endorsement of the government can serve as a promotional resource.

Every time we have publicity, some platforms of the Cultural and Tourism Bureau will help us to publicize together. Our exhibition named youth artist Chen Yifei took Shanghai 2021 key cultural tourism projects, there was a collective project of publicity, the government may dozens of media together, and then brought our museum in. Even if you do not enter government's key projects, they can also give you some other publicity resources. [我们每次有宣传的时候，文旅局的一些平台会帮我们一起进行宣传。我们青年陈逸飞的展览拿过上海 2021 年重点文旅项目，当时有一个集体项目的宣传，政府可能就会几十家媒体一起报道，然后把我们的美术馆带进去。 . . . 哪怕你没有进政府的重点项目，他也可以给你其他的一些宣传资源。]

However, as such forms of government support exist, they remain quite limited and represent a significant barrier to the sustainable development of private art museums in China. As the representative from UCCA shared,

The government will favor some other resources, such as bringing various leaders to the museum, and then some activities of large enterprises will be placed in UCCA to increase the attention, and these enterprises may bring some business cooperation and business development opportunities to the museum. . . . The Government must be the icing on the cake; it won't give away money in the snow. [政府会给一些别的一些资源倾斜，比如把各种领导带到美术馆，然后大企业的一些活动会放在 UCCA 为了增加关注度，这些企业可能会给美术馆带来有一些商务合作和商务拓展的机会。 . . . 政府一定是锦上添花，它不会雪中送炭的。]

By saying the “government must be the icing on the cake,” this individual argued it is not enough for the government to simply bring businesses to the table, so to speak. According to this participant, the government itself must play an active role in facilitating sustainable development. So, in this way, this commentary echoes previous reflections on the need for greater government involvement in the form of supportive legislation and policymaking.

The staff member from Bund One Art Museum additionally presented existing government initiatives as falling short: “The government will have some small declarations for projects or achievements every year. The amount of money is quite good for us, but it is still far from supporting the operation of an art museum.” [“政府每年会有一些小的针对于项目或者成果的申报。金额对我们来讲也挺好的了，但是要支撑一个美术馆的运营来讲还是比较有距离的。”]

Further complicating matters is the fact not only is the amount of government funding available to support private art museums limited, but number of institutions vying for such coveted funds has become increasingly high. A number of interviewees remarked on the fierce competition for art museums trying to be awarded financial support from the government. The representative from How Art Museum explained it in the following manner: “The government’s support funding is very limited, and it’s very difficult to win government funding support now. There are thousands of organizations that want government support and it’s like finding a needle in a haystack.” [“政府的的支持资金很有限，现在要赢取政府的资金支持也很难。有上千家机构都想要政府的支持，这像是大海捞针一样。 ”]

Some respondents, like the one from Macalline Art Center, saw funding as another mechanism the government could exert control over museum content. Therefore, this participant

claimed private art museums must balance competing interests—between seeking government funding and pursuing freedom in the kinds of art they produce. This individual stated,

It is a gray area for contemporary art to apply for the China National Arts Fund. At that time, the Art Fund of the Ministry of Education told us that if you want to apply for a project, don't apply for a project related to contemporary art because it's not safe and it's hard to apply. You can only apply for those very stable values, things that people think are reliable. So, I think it's very difficult to get the money from the government and it will put a lot of restrictions on you. [当代艺术去申请国内的国家艺术基金是一个比较灰色的地带。当时国家教育部艺术基金去给我们做宣讲就说你们如果要申请课题，就不要去申请有关当代的课题因为这不安全而且很难申请。你只能申请那些非常稳定的价值观，人家觉得可靠的东西，所以我觉得国家的钱是很难拿并且它会对你有很多限制。]

All in all, these results show the government is also trying to support private art museums in various ways, but not enough to solve the problem of financial constraints of art museums. How private art museums can create excellent exhibition contents under the rules of the game supported by the government and stand out from the fierce competition has become a new direction of thinking.

Factors of Sustainability in the Internal Environment

For this group of respondents, external circumstances with the government, local community, or greater social milieu were just one component making sustainability the complex issue they perceived it to be. For those like the respondent from How Art Museum, in discussions of sustainability, one needed to not only account for external factors, but internal ones as well: “If

private art museums do not have the internal structure and the external environment to work together, private art museums will all end up in a sense, reduced to supporting the enterprise or blank rooms.” [“如果民营美术馆没有内部架构和外部环境的共同努力，民营美术馆最后都会在某种意义上被终结，沦为企业的配套或者空白的房间。”]

Therefore, as these interview passages suggest, the complexity of sustainability is derived from multiple sources, and those looking to achieve sustainability within their respective institutions are seen as not only having to appraise the conditions outside of their organizations, but the ones internal to them as well. This discussion of the internal factors that museums are considering in the context of sustainability can be divided into the following five categories: (1) the “genes” of the private art museums, (2) identity of private non-enterprise social organizations, (3) limited budget and high operation costs, (4) establishing a self-financing function, and (5) the socialization of capital. Next, I will introduce these five categories one by one.

“Genes“ of Private Art Museums

This notion of a museum’s genes was used by the interviewee from the A4 Museum, and it can be taken to mean something akin to “legacy,” “origin,” or “heritage.” Here is how this individual used the term: “The art museums’ system, its own mechanism, and its different cultural context of each city, background and genes of each different art museum actually determine its development is different.” [“美术馆和它本身的体系，自己的机制，还有它每个城市不同的文脉，本身每一个不同美术馆的背景和基因其实都决定了它的发展是不同的。”] Just like a person’s genes distinguish them from others around them, the unique genetic makeup of each art museum contributes to its institutional identity, internal organizational culture, and developmental strategy. As other respondents did not necessarily use this phrasing, this same sentiment that each museum has its own heritage that influences its operations

resonated throughout multiple interviews. For them, “genes” of an art museums refers to its special historical context and conditions that allowed for establishment of the museum in the first place. When asked if “genes” would be an appropriate word to describe the narratives they were conveying, respondents indicated this terminology was indeed very appropriate in its Chinese usage.

Parent Company Background and Will of Their Founders. In thinking about where one gets their genes, a person’s parents may be the first thing that comes to mind. The same may be said of museums, whose parent company and founders represent a significant factor internal to the organization influencing its operations and development. As outlined in Chapter 1, most private art museums in China were initially founded by corporations. Many of the professionals interviewed indicated these museums also have corporate backgrounds, and it is these parent companies that help provide a firm financial footing. Moreover, for several interviewees, museums with parent companies have different corporate backgrounds and primary businesses each company possesses, which leads them to have different resources, business models, and financial strengths. Different parent company backgrounds have led private art museums down different paths. As the individual from JinChen YFM Art Gallery related,

Because our parent group has hotels, commercial offices, villas, and residential properties, some of our large-scale activities or opening exhibitions can be supported by their hotels, including provided us with resource support. In short, our parent group can give us a lot of support in addition to financial support. [因为我们背后集团旗下有酒店、商业办公、别墅、住宅这样一些业态。我们一些大型活动或者是开幕展览，都是可以有酒店帮我们一起支援，包括在资源方面。总之可以给到美术馆除了资金之外很多其他的支持。]

Interviewee from Bund One Art Museum, which specializes in Western art exhibitions and has a bookstore, explained how commercial activities of their parent company propped up those of the museum's:

Behind us is a company that has been doing Western art exhibitions for 12 years and under the name of Shanghai Tianxie Culture. And we did the first Picasso exhibition at the China Art Palace in 2011, and we were the first company to introduce Western art exhibitions to China. Later on, we founded the museum together with Shanghai Xinhua Publishing Group, and we are the major investor. Actually, we are 80% and Xinhua is 20%. . . . But Xinhua gives us more resources, for example in the bookstore. [我们背后是一个做了 12 年的企业，原来一直是以上海天协文化的名义做展览。2011 年时候的第一个展览，是在中华艺术宫的毕加索展览，就是我们做的。我们也算是首个把西方的艺术展览引进到中国的一家公司。后来我们跟上海新华发行集团一起创办了美术馆，我们还是大的投资方。其实我们是占了 80%，新华是占了 20%。 . . . 但是新华会给予我们更多的一些资源，例如在书店上。]

Just as a child may be said to depend on a parent, these museums are largely dependent on their parent companies, with museums' following whatever trajectory the parent company is on. And when the parent company changes course, so too does the museum. This was the case for UCCA, as the professional from there elaborated:

UCCA has connections with parent companies' commercial businesses and investments. So, it started to cooperate with real estate, and in 2018, it started to appear the UCCA Dune Art Museum, and then UCCA Edge in Shanghai in 2021. Then UCCA Lab appeared, which is the commercial section of UCCA. Then it started to have to business constantly, brand to brand cooperation and art cobranding. There's also some branded

arts entrepreneurship, arts services, which is a more applied type of business. [UCCA 会有跟自己其他的商业业务连接，与自己投资的业务联动。所以开始和地产合作，在 2018 年开始出现了 UCCA 沙丘美术馆，然后 2021 年上海的美术馆。然后出现了 UCCA lab 就是 UCCA 的商业板块。然后开始不断的有 to b 的业务，品牌跟品牌合作，艺术联名。还有一些品牌的艺术创业、艺术服务，这一类更加有应用性的业务。]

But the museum is not only tied to companies that own them; they are also answerable to individuals at the helm of those companies. Over the course of the interviews, it became clear the support the museums received is often closely tied to particular individuals in companies, who have their own set of reasons for establishing museums in the first place. Participants mentioned the reasons founders from these parent companies started an art museum are also part of its genetic makeup, identity, and organizational ethos, and added these different reasons have made the art museums develop in different directions. The interviewee from Macalline Art Center touched on this, having said,

Founders come from the private company sector, and they may have decided to do an art organization like that for a variety of reasons, such as a family tradition of collecting or the love of art, and a variety of other reasons. [很多人会来自于私营企业的领域，他可能出于各种原因，比如说家庭有收藏传统或者自己热爱艺术等各种各样的原因，导致他决定那么做这样的一个艺术机构。]

Participant from A4 Art Museum added to this discussion of how the founders' reasons for starting a museum—its “origin story”—can influence its genetic makeup. Their museum was

seen by their current parent company as an investment, and so the notion of art as a business strategy is in its very genes:

The art museum, in a sense, as a very important kind of community construction of spiritual culture, it must be a very important element. . . The art museum is a strategy. That is to say culture in this place which is very important. We all want to make the city more resilient, diverse, and vibrant. Then the active role of culture in the middle is what we are exploring in both directions. [美术馆从某种意义上来说，它作为精神文化非常重要的一种共同体的建构，它一定是一个很重要的内容. . .美术馆是一个战略。就是说文化在这个地方这是非常重要。我们都希望让城市更加有它的弹性、多元性和活力。那么文化在中间的积极作用就是我们双向探索的内容。]

This suggests private art museums in China can be vulnerable to the whims of individuals, inferably more so than publicly held museums. For example, it was clear certain individuals had noticeable sway over the museums, but it was not always the founder or representatives of the parent company. As the staff member from Bund One Art Museum stated, “Our art museum is still dominated by the personal sentiments of the director, like our team is less than 20 people in total. Everyone is sentiment-oriented and aims for art education.” [“我们美术馆还是以馆长个人的情怀为主，像我们团队也就一共 20 个人都不到。大家都是以情怀为主，以艺术教育为目标。”] In this case, it is the museum’s director, and not founder or owner, per se, who directs which way the museum will go, and whether that will be toward or away from sustainability.

And it is also the case as the leader of a supporting company changes, this can have significant implications for the underlying sustainability of the museum it is connected to. As the individual from Macalline Art Center pointed out:

Art museums and business leaders are highly correlated. This is also an interesting phenomenon of contemporary private art museums in China, which means that a change in leadership may also have a direct impact, unless it is a family business. Problems with the leader of a company can lead to changes in the art organization. [美术馆和企业的领导者是高度相关的。这也是中国当代民营美术馆一个很有趣的现象，就是说领导换了也可能会直接有影响，除非是家族企业。一个企业领导者的问题都会导致艺术机构发生变化。]

Participant from Rockbund Art Museum highlighted the need for further clarification on the purpose of museums, outside of the meaning they hold for their founders. This participant said, “For why do you want to make an art museum, what kind of role can an art museum play in society beyond the significance it has for the individual founder? We haven’t really thought about this piece enough.” [“对于为什么要做一个美术馆，美术馆对于创办者个人对意义之外，它可以在社会上发挥什么样的作用？我们对这一块其实思考的还不够多。”]

Whereas the interviewee from Guangdong Times Art Museum suggested it is museum staff who should also ask such questions of themselves, for the representative from Guangdong Times Museum, it is the founders of the parent company who should reflect on their intentions for founding the art museum. They explained,

Running an art museum is really about staying true to your cultural mission and being willing to promote the arts. If you want to do something for art, then you can do an art museum. But if you want to do something with art, you just do a cultural company. [办美术馆真的是要坚持文化的使命感，愿意推动艺术的发展。你如果想为艺术做什么，那么可以做美术馆。但如果你想利用艺术做什么，你做个文化公司就行。]

But, being tied to a wealthy founder or parent company is not universally viewed as negative. As the individual from Rockbund Art Museum reminded,

Financial support from the founders and our organizers is very important. After all, a lot of things can't be done if no one comes to pay for the museum. Or if you must just be under the pressure to generate income, a lot of things will also be distorted. [创始人和我们的主办单位的资金支持是非常重要的。毕竟如果没有人来为美术馆买单，很多事情是做不了的。或者说如果你一定要就在这种创收的压力之下，很多东西也会变形。]

In short, the genes of Chinese private art museums are mainly determined by the background of the parent company and founder, and how to use strengths in the genes and avoid weaknesses in the genes is a question for art museums to think about. The conclusion also points out good genes mainly mean a good parent company will continuously support the development of the art museum. In addition to coping with the changes in the external society, private art museums today need to have the ability to recognize good or bad genes, rather than blindly choosing to start up.

Identity of Private Non-enterprise Social Organizations

One's genetic makeup may contribute greatly to their identity, and this is also true of museums. As discussions of institutional identity were alluded to in the earlier section on museum positioning, this section examines institutional identity as an internal factor affecting Chinese private art museums' sustainable development in greater depth. For private art museums in China, another key source of their identity comes from their status as nonenterprise social organizations.

As outlined in Chapter 1, private art museums in China can obtain the status of a private nonenterprise social organizations after they have been certified by the Civil Affairs Bureau and Culture and Tourism Bureau. This means these museums no longer exist as a corporate entity and are not allowed to make a profit and invest dividends, but rather adopt the standards of a social organization to guide the behavior of their organization's leadership. Many private art museums described achieving this recognition and classification as central to their identity as a private art museum looking toward long-term sustainability. In fact, the individual from Rockbund Art Museum described receiving this designation as identity-affirming, or a form of "self-affirmation," as they put it:

We successfully applied to become a private nonprofit organization in 2019. The landing of this status is a self-affirmation of great significance, both for the long-term development of the gallery and for the direction of the team's work. In the long run, one can expect a private nonprofit organization to be more stable and sustainable than a company. . . The art museum as a nonprofit organization, its legal status is very important. Registered as a private nonenterprise social organization, in addition to the economic interests of a consideration, what's more important is that we know what the museum is for. [我们在2019年成功申请成为民办非企业的非营利机构。这一身份的落地，无论是对美术馆的长远发展，还是对团队工作的方向，都是具有重大意义的自我确认。从长远来看，大家可以期待一个民营的非营利机构比一家公司更稳定，更可持续...美术馆作为一个非盈利机构，它的法律地位是很重要的。注册成为民办非企业的社会组织，除了经济利益方面的一个考虑，更重要的是我们自己知道美术馆是为了什么去做的。]

Along these same lines, achieving such a status became an important method of constructing the museum's identity. For instance, the representative from JinChen YFM Art Gallery, which registered as a private nonenterprise social organization in 2021, described wanting their identity to be characterized by greater formality. The designation granted through the Bureau is what allowed them to fashion such an identity for themselves. This staff member said,

We went to become a private nonenterprise social organization because we wanted to be more formalized, one is that the art museum will be under the coordinated management of the District Culture and Tourism Bureau and the Municipal Culture and Tourism Bureau, who can give the art museum more official and formalized guidance, and at the same time, they will also give the publicity resources and other resources in the district to the art museum. [我们去成为非盈利美术馆还是希望能够做得更正规一些，一个是美术馆会在区文旅局和市文旅局的统筹管理下，他们能够给美术馆比较官方和正规指导，同时他们也会把宣传资源和区里其他资源给到美术馆。]

Although private art museums can now obtain the identity of a private nonenterprise social organization by following certain government protocols, interviewees in this study pointed out in China's private art museum sector, some art museums are registered as private nonenterprises, whereas others are registered as private cultural enterprises. This has led to confusion among the public, which lacks a clear understanding of the museums' role and purpose. Even though Guangdong Times Museum has embedded its status as a private non-enterprise social organization in its identity for many years, its representative stated that confusion remains:

From the time the private art museums registered as a private nonprofit organization, it was meant to be a public welfare organization, and this is the first step for private art museums. . . . But sometimes the question of the identity of the museums disturbs the

public perception because galleries and art museums are different. And in the past, we were often asked if our art museums sell paintings. [美术馆从注册民办非企业开始，它就是要作为一个公益组织，这也是美术馆应该走的第一步... 但有时候美术馆身份的问题扰乱了公众的认知，因为画廊和美术馆是不同。过去经常会有人问我们美术馆卖画吗？]

Here, the source of confusion is not with respect to the museum's official designation, but being conflated with commercial art galleries.

Outside of being confused with art galleries, other challenges lie in the difficulty of acquiring the identity as a private nonenterprise social organization. The representative from Macalline Art Center described such difficulties in the following:

Applying private nonprofit organizations is very strict, and related government department uses various ways to prevent you from setting up this organization. For example, when our colleagues go to relevant department, they said that the nonenterprise organization must be surrounded by how many kilometers there are no other private nonprofit organizations. But we are in the 798 Art District, and there are several private nonenterprise organizations next to us. The department said that there is no way to apply, and government department would use all sorts of methods to let you apply, so it's very difficult. [民办的非盈利机构也卡得特别严，它用各种方式不让你成立这种组织。比如说我们同事去跑，有关部门会说非盈利机构必须周围多少公里没有其他民办非盈利机构你才可以申请。可我们在 798 艺术区，我们旁边有若干个民办非盈利机构。有关部门就说那你就没办法申请，反正他用各种方法卡你，所以很难搞。]

According to the participants, further adding to such difficulties is a lack of government impartiality. A small number of interviewees characterized the government as unfair in its methods of controlling, supervising, or supporting private art museums, even claiming they discriminate against museums according to their legal status. They believe such discrimination holds profound implications for museums' prospects of sustainability. For example, as the individual from 3723 Art Museum related,

If the government gives support funds to a private nonenterprise social organization, it is reasonable. But if the government supports an art museum limited company, this is problematic. This is because it is difficult for us to define whether, after the government has supported them, they use the money for the art museums or pay dividends to the company shareholders. . . There is a big problem with our government departments. Have they ever thought of treating these private art museums differently when they fulfill the law to control, supervise, or support them? So, there is actually an inequity inside, an unfairness of competition. When there is inequity in the competition of market behaviors, it will hinder the development of an art museum and the whole industry in the end. [如果政府把扶持基金给民办非盈利机构，这是合理的。但如果政府扶持一家美术馆有限公司，这是存在有问题的。因为我们很难界定政府扶持它们后，它们是把钱用于美术馆还是给股东分红...我们的政府部门存在很大问题，在履行法律对这些民营美术馆进行管控、监管或者扶持时，有没有想过区别对待？所以这里面其实是一种不公平，竞争的不公平。当市场行为的竞争存在不公平的情况下，最后阻碍的是美术馆的发展，阻碍的是这个行业的发展.]

In short, being granted the designation of a nonprivate social enterprise does several things for private art museums, according to participants. For one, the designation provides access to

material resources in the form of government funding and support. For another, the designation helps to construct a favorable identity for these institutions in the face of both their external audiences and community members, but also internally, among the staff as well. In turn, acquiring this identity may work toward increasing their visibility in the public sphere, which has also been presented by the participants as a key concern for sustainability.

Limited Budget and High Operation Costs

Another internal source of pressure the organizations faced in trying to work toward sustainability is with respect to a limited budget and high operating costs. Almost all of the interviewees cited this barrier as an obstacle to the private art museum sector in China. As Bund One Art Museum elaborated, “Our costs are high, the works are all originals, imported from abroad, so the whole cost of transportation, insurance, exhibition display operation and maintenance of the exhibition is quite high.” [“我们的成本很高，作品都是原作，从国外进口过来，所以展览的运输、保险、展览陈列运营维护整个成本是相当高的。”]

In addition to the costs associated with the exhibition content and display, other interviewees described how high costs impacted staffing. The representative from UCCA, for example, said this is the reason they cannot employ a curator: “Many museums feel that they don’t need to curate content, and that it is too expensive to employ a curator.” [“很多美术馆觉得做内容的话根本就不需要策展，而且养一个策展人的话成本太高。”].

Concerns for a limited budget and high operating costs were likewise expressed by the representative from Rockbund Art Museum, who shared,

Now we are actually quite tight financially. It is quite difficult for us to add an additional employee. . . . There’s also a situation where you’re under all kinds of pressure to maybe change the direction of your operation, to change your content. [现在我们实际上从财务

上还是比较紧缩的，你要增加一个员工是挺难的. . . . 还有一种情况就是在各种压力之下，也许你要改变你的经营的方向，改变你的内容。]

Here, this individual explicitly stated the relationship among staffing abilities and development strategy by saying financial pressure can force a museum to “change the direction of your operation.”

Staffing shortages amid financial distress was a theme that pervaded several of the interviews, showing up again in the interview with the professional from A4 Art Museum. This individual reflected without a particularly high budget,

We are always short of manpower overall, so that means there are still a lot of colleagues who are juggling a lot of work. . . . There were a lot of other things that A4 art museum wanted to do before, and then we realized that we couldn't do a lot of things because of the budget. For example, you want to do some big internationally introduced exhibitions and you want to do many kinds of projects that can evoke audience excitement. [我们总体的人力永远是不足的，所以说还是会很多同事会兼顾很多的工作. . . . 原来 A4 还有很多想做的事儿的，后来发现很多事因为预算做不了。你要做一些国际引进的大展，你要做非常多可以唤起公众嗨点的这种项目。].

Interpreting this comment in the context of previous discussions on public perceptions of private art museums in China, it becomes clear the participants saw their museums in a Catch-22 situation. On one hand, museums need to change audience perceptions—to get them excited about museum content, as this individual said—through international or large-scale projects and exhibitions. On the other hand, this endeavor requires a budget that is beyond their reach.

The staff member from How Art Museum broke down the museums' operating costs into very concrete figures, having said,

Not only the How Art Museum, but all art museums are facing financial pressure. Like our art museum in Shanghai, we invested 35 million RMB (\$5 million) in the previous year, and it costs 100,000 RMB (\$15,000) a day to open the door. [不仅是昊美术馆，所有的美术馆都一样面临着资金压力。像我们上海这边的美术馆，之前的一年投入了3,500万，你一天开个门就要10万块钱的成本。]

Because of the financial pressures most of these museums are facing, a number of interviewees expressed a keen desire for adequate financial support, even coming from unlikely sources. As earlier interviews have problematized private ownership of art museums in terms of the control they exert over content and organizational development, in the context of strong financial backing, the individual from How Art Museum spoke positively about what a well-established parent company can do:

It's ideal for art museums to have the financial backing of big corporations. For example, our art museum merged with Alibaba later, Alibaba Group invested money, we are responsible for the content, and they are responsible for the funding, that's ideal. . . Only with strong financial input can you make good exhibitions, otherwise everyone is inching forward. [美术馆有大企业的资金支持是非常理想的。比如我们美术馆后面跟阿里巴巴合并了，阿里巴巴集团投钱，我们负责内容他们负责资金，那就是最理想的. . . 只有强大的资金投入，你才能做好的展览，不然大家都是寸步难行。]

As these interviewees pointed out, the financial health of the individual museum greatly influences the nature and quality of the content they can put out, and thereby impacts development in the long-term. Without engaging content regularly drawing in audiences, sustainability may not be achievable. The same might be said of how limited budgets and high operating costs impact staffing. Without sufficient staff, quality of museum content is likely to

suffer, as are their prospects of sustainability. One important point of consideration addressed by these interviewees is the potential trade-offs of private ownership. Earlier in this chapter, interviewees described the pitfalls of private ownership in terms of the control founders and owners exert over the museum direction. But upside of such ownership, as some of these respondents note, is secure financial status if the parent company's financial position is stable. Museums' financial status can thus be seen as exerting a great influence on museums' path toward development, which may or may not include orienting their practices toward marketization.

One solution to high operating costs and limited budgets mentioned may come in the form of advance budget planning. Interviewees reported advanced budget planning is a necessary undertaking for every museum at the operational and decision-making levels. Almost all participants disclosed conducting advanced budget planning to maintain financial sustainability through proper allocation and use of funding. The representative from Inside-Out Art Museum summarized the importance of advance budget planning to sustainability, stating, "Art museums need to do sound long-term and short-term budget planning, which is important for sustainability." ["美术馆需要做好合理的长期与短期的预算规划，这对可持续发展很重要。"]

Similarly, the representative from 3723 Art Museum elaborated on the importance of budget planning by sharing their own experiences with it:

First of all, we do budget management. Normally, we manage the budget of the museum at the beginning of each year. How much fixed costs are needed for the whole year? How much does the staff salary need? How much does the exhibition cost for the whole year? We also do a yearly plan for exhibitions. How many exhibitions are we going to do in a

year, how about the scale of the exhibition, how much is our exhibition budget going to be in a year roughly? [首先我们会做预算管理。一般情况下，我们会在每年年初就对整个美术馆的预算做好管控。全年的固定成本需要多少？人员工资需要多少？全年的展览费用需要多少？展览会做一个年度的计划。我们一年要做几个展览，怎么样规模的展览，我们一年的展览预算大概要有多少？]

These comments help further clarify what sustainability for museums looks like and how museums might achieve it. Consistent with what has been presented in the following sections, sustainability may be seen as predicated on two things: establishing a self-financing function and socialization of capital.

Establishing a Self-financing Function

Another solution to challenges imposed by high operating costs and limited budget comes in the form self-financing, which is viewed as a means for becoming more independent amid the tumultuous and unpredictable economy. The representative from UCCA shared,

Now basically the museums are going to have a mechanism for generating revenue.

There will be some Key Performance Indicators (KPI), which means that we have to be self-financing. It won't say how much money the museum can make, but at least it should be able to support itself, which is a basic demand. Our art museums have to have a self-supporting function now, instead of waiting for someone else to give us money. [现在的话基本上美术馆要有一套创收机制。会有一些 KPI 的，等于要自食其力了。也不会说让你美术馆赚多少钱，但是说至少要能自己养活自己，这个是个基本诉求。我们美术馆现在要有一个自我造血的功能，而不是说等着别人给钱。]

As this comment indicates, pursuing self-financing measures presents museums as taking initiative to promote their own sustainability, rather than waiting for “someone else” to grant it to them. This interviewee’s reflections can be taken as advice for museums to look inwards in attempting to foster sustainability.

The participant from Rockbund Art Museum added self-financing is more than just profit generation, saying, “Now our organizers have a profit requirement for us, and we don’t call it profit generation. Anyway, that piece of the requirement is a little bit more stringent than it used to be.” [“现在我们的主办方对美术馆有盈利的要求，也不叫盈利创收。反正这一块要求比以前要更加的严一点。”]

Regardless of whether it is a requirement from the museum’s parent company or museums themselves wanting to relieve their own financial pressures, half of the interviewees claimed to be actively exploring more diversified ways of generating revenue. In addition to common self-financing methods, such as admission fees, memberships, and gift store revenues, participants also tried art-meets-commerce, sponsorship, and touring exhibition approaches to self-financing. The individual from How Art Museum mentioned they had tried various ways to be self-sufficient in terms of financing, stating,

The offline gift shops we invested in lost more than RMB 20 million [\$2.7 million]. Then we switched to online to support digital, online auction, online software selling, IP licensing, group exhibition plan. . . We are now thinking of all the ways, as long as the art is related to business. Including some of the collections of our museum, it would be good if you rent them out. The focus is on all kinds of ways whether it is sales or other methods. [我们投入的线下衍生品店 2000 多万亏损。后来转为线上，线上拍卖，线上小程序售卖，授权，群展计划，支持数字化. . .所以说我们其实现在都在想尽一

切的方法，只要是艺术跟商业相关的东西。包括一些库房（藏品）的东西，如果租出去也挺好。重点就是各种方式，不管是销售的方式还是其他各种方式。]

Likewise, the staff member from Bund One Art Museum shared the methods of self-financing their museum had explored, detailing the promise of touring exhibitions in particular:

There is also a sustainable method, we can make this exhibition a touring exhibition. As we said before, on the one hand, we can increase revenue and reduce expenditure. The touring exhibition can at least spread a little bit of the cost. . . Including that we now have a title sponsor, and the Bright Food Group is our largest annual title sponsor. Secondly, for each exhibition, for example, this exhibition is from Italy, so the Italian brand Delonghi sponsored our exhibition.

[还有一个可持续的方法，我们可以把这个展做巡展。我们前面说了一方面开源节流，巡展至少可以在成本上可以分摊一点点...包括我们现在有冠名赞助，光明集团是我们的最大的年度的冠名赞助商。其次针对于每个展览，比如说像这次展览是来自意大利的，所以意大利的品牌德隆小家电就赞助了我们的展览。]

However, half of the museums represented by this study's participant pool reported actively attempting different ways of becoming self-sustaining, but some interviewees questioned the effects self-financing had on long-term sustainable development. To be more specific, one participant criticized the concept of self-financing as contradictory to museums' status as nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, a number of interviewees pointed out museums and their staff need to first obtain a clear understanding of the concept of self-financing as the individual from Macalline Art Center saw it, not so much an organizational goal as it is an ability. This individual stated,

I think the direction of exploration is not simply self-financing, we're not trying to make a lot of money by art museums. We're talking about that we need to continue to enhance our self-financing ability, so that if there is a problem in the real economy, for example, a problem in the parent company. Can we still hold on or what, have such a safe base and so on. [我觉得探索的方向不是自我造血，我们不是要靠美术馆挣很多钱，而是说我们要持续增强自我造血能力，如果一旦实体经济出现问题，比如母公司出现问题的情况下，我们自己是不是依然能够撑下去或怎么样，有这样一个安全的底座等等。]

The staff member from Macalline Art Center continued to expressed similar reservations regarding self-financing when they remarked,

It would be best if it could have some self-financing ability, but we still have to return to the context of a nonprofit organization to pursue this possibility. . . . It is a relatively false concept to require art museums to make money. I think if you ask a nonprofit organization to start making money, it will become something else. [如果能有一些自我造血能力那是最好的，但我们还是要回到一个非盈利机构的语境当中，寻求这种可能性. . . . 要求美术馆去赚钱是一个比较伪命题的概念，我觉得如果要求一个非盈利机构开始去赚钱，它势必就会变成一个别的东西了。]

Some of the interviewees took a more qualified stance, opting not to completely renounce or support self-financing, but clarifying it should be pursued with clear boundaries in mind. If such boundaries are not established or respected, it could, according to them, have an adverse effect on art production and long-term sustainable development. One such example is private art museums renting out art museum space to obtain additional income, a practice with the capacity

to negatively affect development. The interviewee from How Art Museum cautioned against this approach: “If the art museum rents out space at will, there will be no content. Then there will be all kinds of exhibitions, and it will be a mess. But the art museum needs content.” [“美术馆如果随意向外出租场地这样就没有内容了。那就是什么展览都有了，乱七八糟的。但美术馆需要内容。”]

In sum, the findings demonstrated self-financing can alleviate financial pressures or risks to a certain extent, but interviewees were not optimistic about its role in long-term sustainable development. They cautioned against its overuse, or its use without firm boundaries in place, as it may have a negative impact on art production.

Socialization of Capital

Outside of self-financing, art museum professionals indicated a desire to foster socialization of capital as a way to encourage financial sustainability. The individual from Guangdong Times Museum explained the concept of socialization of capital in the following way:

There must be a model, socialization of public capital or funds, and it becomes a pure fund. Only this can truly solve the sustainable development problem. . . It is best to use public funds to support art museums. In other words, you do not use part of the money to run the art museum, but use the money to build a public foundation, and use the income from the foundation to maintain the operation of the art museum. This is much more stable. [要有模式，要资本公共化或者资金公共化，就变成纯粹是一个基金，这个才能够真正去解决所谓的可持续性的问题。最好用公共的基金或者公共的资金来支持美术馆。换句话说你不是

拿出一部分钱说来运营美术馆而是拿钱做基金，用基金的收益来维持美术馆的运营,这个就稳定很多了。]

The participant from Rockbund Art Museum agreed, stating, “When we talk about the sustainable development of art museums, I think opening up funds and capital to the society is also a step that should be taken.” [“当我们谈到美术馆的可持续发展的时候，我觉得把资金和资本向社会开放也是应该要走的一步。”]

As outlined in Chapter 2, foundations are a common way of socializing capital in the West, as foundations provide long-term financial sustainability for art museums. However, as interviewees indicated, this is not the case in China. As the participant from 3723 Art Museum shared, “There are very few art museums in China that can use foundations as their source of survival, very small number.” [“中国现在很少有美术馆能用基金会来作为它的生存来源，几乎没有吧很少。”]

To illustrate how atypical it is for a Chinese private art museum to be financially supported through a foundation, of the 10 museums represented in this study, only one had a foundation funding it. This museum, Inside-Out Art Museum, is primarily funded by the Middle Art Foundation and has greatly benefited from its relationship to the foundation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewee from Inside-Out Art Museum commented on how this form of supported ensures organizational sustainability during such times of crisis:

Luckily, we had the support of the Intermediate Arts Foundation which made us to avoid the pressure self-financing during the COVID-19. . . . The sustainable development of Inside-Out Art Museum is supported by the long-term and stable support from the Middle Art Foundation. This support guarantees that the museum can devote all its energies to academic research, exhibition preparation,

art publishing, academic activities, to maintain the museum's professionalism and academic independence. [幸运的是我们有中间艺术基金会的支持，得以最大程度的免于疫情中造血的压力...中间美术馆得以可持续发展，有着来自于中间基金会的长期而稳定的支持。这种支持保障了美术馆可以将所有精力都投入于学术研究、展览筹备、艺术出版、学术活动等工作中，以维持馆方的专业性和学术独立性。]

Given that foundations such as this one are supporting these museums, and thus providing them with greater chances of long-term sustainable development, many other interviewees expressed their plans and hope to establish a foundation in the future. As the individual from Rockbund Art Museum related, "We are considering the foundation plan, and I think this may be an option in the future. In the long run, the foundation should be an unavoidable way to continue the process." ["我们在考虑基金会这一块方案，我觉得未来这有可能这会是一个选项。从长期来看的话，基金会应该是一个绕不过的继续程序的方式。"]

However, a number of interviewees explained the reason there are not many foundations backing art museums in China, is due to a lack of social capital derived from an awareness of art museums and their philanthropic endeavors. As the participant from Guangdong Times Museum shared, "Awareness is the biggest challenge. Many people don't think art museums are public welfare, and this may not necessarily have to do with the amount of money." ["意识是最大的挑战。很多人不觉得美术馆是公益的，这个跟钱多钱少还不一定有关。"]

Along these same lines, the participant from How Art Museum pointed out a lack of financial capital provided by foundations really stems from a lack of social capital: "Because of the foundation, it still needs people's recognition of the art museum industry so that there will be

more foundations to support the art museum.” [“因为基金会的话，你其实还是需要大家对美术馆这个行业的认可才会有更多基金会原因支持美术馆”] According to this individual, social capital, achieved through the public’s acknowledgment of the value of private art museums, is a requisite for the foundation—and by extension, the museum—to thrive.

But even with public support, establishing a foundation can be a complicated and arduous task, as the staff member from Macalline Art Center further elaborated:

We have always wanted to set up our own foundation, but now it is very difficult to apply for a foundation in China. If you were to apply for a foundation 10 or 15 years ago, it would have been very easy, the registered capital would have been lower, and even the government would have encouraged you to do it. But now it’s completely the other way around, the government has strict regulations for social organizations, and it has a high level of distrust, so it’s very difficult. We’ve been waiting in line for years to apply for a foundation, but we couldn’t get one. Moreover, the registered capital is very high. In Beijing, you have to have at least 8 million dollars before you can apply for a foundation, and you have to have \$8 million every year, and you have to make up for the money you spend. [我们一直想成立自己的基金会，但现在国内申请基金会非常难。如果你是在 10 年前或者 15 年前申请基金会是非常容易的，它注册资金也会比较低，甚至政府国家会鼓励你做这个事情。但现在完全是反过来的，政府对于社会组织性质的机构监管严格并且它都有高度的不信任，所以非常困难。我们申请基金会排队排了好几年都排不上。而且注册资金非常高，在北京现在至少要有 800 万才可以申请基金会，并且是每年必须都有 800 万，你花掉的钱你还要补进去。]

In sum, this section explored alternative or supplementary sources of income that would allow Chinese private art museums to achieve financial stability, which would then allow them to achieve institutional sustainability. Both self-financing options and establishment of foundations built on public capital would provide these museums with a degree of independence and self-sufficiency, allowing them to withstand economic downturns and social turmoil. The next section continues these examinations of self-financing but describes how it is influenced by marketization of the art sector as a whole.

Marketization of the Art Industry

Emergence of commercial galleries, art fairs, and art auctions has caused the art industry to continue to move in the direction of marketization, which has brought a number of changes for private art museums. Several interviewees expressed their feelings about this change in the art industry, with most, like the representative from UCCA, adopting a critical tone: “The art industry is becoming increasingly commercialized. The underlying logic that supports art may be artists and curators in the past, it is still an academic thing, but now it is highly commercialized.” [“艺术行业变得越来越商业化了。支撑艺术的底层逻辑过去可能还是艺术家和策展人，它还是一个学术的东西，但是现在已经高度商业化了。”] To examine how this marketization trend impacts individual private art museums in China, this section will explore the phenomenon of marketization in greater depth, analyzing (a) penetration of marketization into the art industry, and (b) impact of marketization on art museums.

Penetration of Marketization Into Private Art Museums

Marketization of the art industry has not only occurred in commercial galleries, art fairs, and art auction sectors, but has also permeated private art museums themselves. Some interviewees pointed out the investment of private capital in art museums in China’s history has

led to a gradual “hollowing out” of the institutions’ intellectual and cultural capital. In describing this trend, interviewees used terms like “bubble” and “boom,” the latter of which was used earlier by interviewees to indicate their skepticism that museums could achieve sustainability in the short-term. Here, though, “bust” is attributed to a lack of art production to match such a boom. In fact, the representative from A4 Art Museum used this exacting wording of a construction “boom” in the private art museum sector, saying,

There are a lot of brain fever phenomena here, and they are actually untrue. In one word these parent companies have no better investment. Just like the previous historical stage of Japanese art museum boom. Urban movement of big renovation and construction has brought about the hollowing out of many future art museums. This hollowing out has already happened once during COVID-19. A large number of art museums can’t produce content, and no one goes there. [这里面有很多一脑子热的现象，其实是不真实的。简单来说公司没有更好的投资。就跟之前日本美术馆热潮的历史阶段一样，大修大建的这种大量城市运动所带来的是未来很多美术馆的空心化。这个空心化，在疫情期间已经爆发过一次了。大量的美术馆生产不了内容，也没有人去。]

As these comments suggest, participants viewed long-term sustainability of private art museums as dependent on the quality of these museums’ content production. A similar sentiment was expressed by the representative from How Art Museum, who said,

There seem to be a lot of private art museums in China. For example, there were 57 museums when we first started, and now there are about 100. But many founders just want to have a private art museum or art space in the community for supporting their purposes. It’s empty space and no content. [中国的民营美术馆看上去有很多家，比如

我们刚开始做的时候有 57 家，现在有 100 来家。但是很多人都是为了配套，在小区里面配套一个美术馆或者艺术空间，它都是空有空间没内容。]

With statements like “It’s empty space and no content,” the staff member from How Art Museum emphasizes, many of the museums referenced are conceptually hollow.

Even though marketization was thus construed as undesirable, for others, it was portrayed necessary to museums’ survival, and also the choice of many museums themselves. This was the view adopted by the staff member from Inside-Out Art Museum, who stated,

In recent years, to survive, a large number of art museums and institutions have chosen to cooperate with touring exhibitions, implement existing exhibitions, cooperate with the internet economy, and transfer their academic rights and physical space to galleries and capital, forming a phenomenon of art market guidance and impact on artistic practice. [近几年为求自我”造血”的生存，大量美术馆和机构选择和巡展、落地已有展览，和互联网经济合作，将自己的学术权利和物理空间让渡给画廊和资本，形成了艺术市场引导、冲击艺术实践的现象。]

It became clear as interviews proceeded that private art museums, under pressure to survive, have adjusted their mode of operation and developmental strategy to gravitate toward a market-oriented model. The staff member from Guangdong Times Museum summarized the issue in the following way: “In fact, private art museums have been having a hard time in the past few years. To survive, many private art museums may find different ways of operating, and they may be more market oriented.” [“因为这几年其实民营美术馆还是比较艰难的，很多的民营美术馆其实为了活下去，可能会去找不同的运营的一些方式，它可能会更偏向于市场化。”]

As these interviews show, trend toward marketization may be a requisite for long-term sustainability. For these participants, the issue with marketization arises when it comes at the expense of the quality of museum programs. But adopting a market-oriented business model may be accompanied by other drawbacks, as interviewees were quick to point out. Other disadvantages of marketization are further explored in this section and are grouped into the following two points: (a) market-oriented operation fosters shallow cultural consumption, and (b) it induces museums to set high admission fees for their exhibits.

Market-Oriented Operations and Shallow Cultural Consumption

One of the new changes in exhibition structure marketization has led to is a pop-up-style exhibition. The staff member from UCCA pointed out their museum has adopted this exhibition style, believing it to be more compatible with marketization being practiced by the local business community:

The art museum has more and more additional businesses, which means that the parts outside the art museum are growing bigger and bigger. In the past few years, we also tried to do the exhibitions for consumer-oriented to attract more consumers, which is called pop-up exhibitions. The first exhibition at that time had a small branch space named U2 in Beijing's Chaoyang Joy City, which relied on audiences to buy tickets. The first exhibition of U2 at that time was an exhibition of Alice, which cooperated with a super cultural IP with a history of 160 years. U2 was closer to the local business community, and had more modes of realization, more market-oriented operations. [美术馆它的附加业务越来越多了，等于美术馆之外的部分生长的越来越大了。前几年还尝试去做 to c 端就是做那些所谓的流量大众展览。第一个展览当时在北京的朝阳大学城做了一个小的分馆 u2，做 c 端的观众买票的展览。U2 当时开馆的第一个展览

是跟 160 年历史的超级文化 IP 合作的 Alice 的一个展。它跟本土的商业社会更紧密，也有更多的变现模式，更偏市场化运营。]

Just like UCCA's pop-up exhibition Alice, eight other interviewees stated their museums had seen an emergence of a large number of pop-up exhibitions, which tend to view art exhibitions as a form of consumer goods. Some interviewees referred to these exhibitions as deviating from an operational model that places value art production and coming to focus only on box office sales. Other interviewees who are trying out pop-up exhibitions said in the interview it is an unavoidable choice in the current marketized environment. For these participants, this new orientation has broader social implications as it encourages shallow cultural consumption.

According to the participants in this study, the reason for this new direction is museums are under extreme financial pressure. To alleviate such pressure, they aim to use these pop-up exhibitions to attract a large number of visitors, and thereby increase their revenues. UCCA was one private art museum that created pop-up exhibitions of modernist masters in 2023. The interviewee from UCCA elaborated on how market trends prompted them to “cater to the market” in such a way, saying,

The environment of the Chinese art market has changed greatly in recent years. Monet exhibitions began to appear in 2014, and after 2014, this model actually grew very rapidly in the past few years. Whether it is an exhibition of masters or a box office-seeking exhibition, art museums are increasingly pursuing this. Nowadays, there are more and more exhibitions of the so-called modernism, such as Picasso and Matisse, which is really a big change, and art museums have to cater to the market. [这几年中国艺术市场的环境变化很大。2014 年开始出现莫奈展，然后 2014 年之后，这种模式在这几年其实增长特别快。做大师展览也好，做票房流量的展，然后现在的美术馆越来越追

求这个东西。现在所谓现代主义的展览越来越多，比如毕加索、马蒂斯，这真是一个很大的变化，美术馆必须迎合市场。]

“Big name” artists like Picasso were also mentioned by the respondent from Rockbund Art Museum. This individual indicated catering to audiences by “constantly reinforcing a concept” (i.e., these are the famous artists they should care about) ultimately causes them to regard the exhibitions as a commodity. This interviewee explained the situation like this:

Nowadays, many art museums are constantly reinforcing a concept to the audience, which is to come here to see Picasso and see Monet. They regard artists and exhibitions as a commodity. To put it more bluntly, they promote it to the audience as a symbol. Let everyone think that going to art museums is just to see these things. This actually encourages a very shallow level of cultural consumption. Many people just go to art museums to check in. [现在很多美术馆都在不断给公众强化一个概念，就是到这来看毕加索，来看马奈。就是把艺术家把展览作为一种商品。说的直白一点，就是作为一种符号来推给大家，让大家认为到美术馆就是为了看这些东西。这其实鼓励了一种非常浅层次的一种文化消费，很多人就是去美术馆打个卡。]

In their discussions of pop-up exhibitions and marketization they are claimed to promote, many of the interviewees referred back to earlier discussions of short- versus long-term sustainability. As they see it, cultural consumption encouraged by a business model like this may aid in the survival of private art museums in the short-term, but negatively impact sustainable development in the long-term. The representative from Guangdong Times Museum explained how pop-up exhibitions work against long-term sustainability initiatives like this:

There is a problem with pop-up exhibitions. After seeing it once, people may not go there again. . . Audiences come to these central cities from other cities, and they hope to

worship the works of these masters. This situation may continue in 10 years. It's OK. But it's impossible to maintain it forever, and it's very difficult to maintain it sustainably. [网红展览有一个问题，大家看过一次之后可能不会再去了... 观众从其他城市来到这些中心城市，他们希望去朝拜这些大师的作品，这种情况再走 10 年应该是 ok 的。但是你要永远保持还不可能，可持续很难。]

Majority of respondents in this study associate pop-up exhibitions as incompatible with sustainability. This view is evident in the response from the A4 Art Museum staff member, who stated,

If art museums are going for a pop-up exhibition to create a spectacle of the landscape, it doesn't really pay off. Art museums certainly don't have the commercial systems that come faster with products like malls, Disney, and light shows. Because their interests are clearer, the way they operate is simpler, and the point is that there is no psychological burden for audience to go there. At first, when the museum held this kind of exhibition, the audience find it acceptable because they hadn't seen it before. After the audience has seen more, they feel that not only are art museums not temples, but they are also actually worse than shopping malls. The audience may feel that the air-conditioning in the mall is more comfortable than museum place, and I can still have a place to sit, but museums still have no place to sit? [如果美术馆是为了制造景观的奇观去做网红展，其实得不偿失。美术馆肯定没有商业系统，像商场，迪斯尼，灯光秀这类产品来的更快。因为它们的利益更清楚，运作方式更简单，而且关键是公众去那也没有心理负担。美术馆做这类展览一开始观众没看过觉得能接受。观众看多之后，就觉得你这不光不是庙宇，

其实连商场都还不如。观众可能觉得商场空调比你这还舒服一些，我还能有地方坐，你这还没地方坐？]

For the individual from Rockbund Art Museum, museums have a moral and professional duty to combat the trend toward shallow consumption, even if this means disappointing audiences:

The only thing we need to work together is how to get rid of the phenomenon of shallow consumption. Now I personally feel that it is more regrettable that our society is really too shallow consumption. . . We made three stipulations at the beginning of the Bund Architecture Festival. We will not build a center stage in the square, we will not have spotlights, there will not be an iconic sculpture and Instagram moment. What we want to do is an anti-landscape decentralization. But later we saw many audiences complaining about this, saying that even the Bund Architecture Festival didn't seem to have much to see. [唯一需要就大家一起努力的是在于怎么样去破除一个浅层次消费的一个现象。现在我个人觉得比较遗憾的是我们这个社会真的是太太浅层次消费了... 这次我们做外滩建筑节，一开始我们就约法三章，我们在广场上不会搭建一个中心舞台，我们不会有聚光灯，没有一个标志性的雕塑和 Instagram 的时刻。我们要做的是一个反景观去中心化的东西。但是后来我们看到很多观众吐槽这一点，就是外滩建筑节好像也没啥看的。]

The staff member from Inside-Out Art Museum agreed marketization of private art museums is an issue of perception, one that prompts further examination of what an art museum is—a business or a civic-minded organization. For this interviewee, answers to this question come back to discussions of identity of museum:

Art museums need to be firm in their identity as independent, professional, and serious researchers and content producers, and should not be reduced to part of a superficial, consumer-oriented cultural landscape. . . Pop-up exhibitions are first and foremost concerned with flow of people and income. It is a cultural consumption, rather than professional, academic and socially responsible cultural construction. [美术馆要坚定自己作为独立、专业和严肃的研究者和内容生产者的身份，不应沦为肤浅的、消费型的文化景观的一部分. . . ”网红展”和”流量展”首先考虑的是流量和收入，是文化消费，而不是专业、学术性和有社会责任感的文化建设。]

In short, participants pointed out shallow cultural consumption can bring short-term box office revenues and public attention, but they felt it is not conducive to long-term sustainable development, especially in terms of maintaining an audience base and preserving artistic integrity.

Setting High Admission Fees for Exhibitions

Marketization also shows up in cost of admission, with private art museums setting higher and higher admission fees for exhibitions in recent years. Half of the interviewees pointed out revenue from ticket sales has become a very important method for alleviating financial pressure. As the representative from Macalline Art Center stated, “Nowadays, the ticket price for exhibitions is 200 RMB (\$30) each, to get high box office feedback.” [“现在展览的票价都是什么 200 块钱一张，为了有高额票房回馈。”] However, the interviewee from Bund One Art Museum, an art museum whose price of admission is also about 200 RMB (\$30), explained their tickets are not more affordable because their exhibitions are very costly, as are the imported works featured in them. Meanwhile, a number of interviewees said they are still hopeful they can lower ticket prices because they believe museums should be accessible, but they also admitted

this desire to serve the greater good is tempered by their desire to lessen their own financial burdens.

Yet, some interviewees viewed high exhibition ticket prices as antagonistic to long-term sustainability as the Chinese public could not continue to afford such an exorbitant expense on several occasions. As the individual from A4 Art Museum explained,

Going to see art museums in the United States, especially the cost of joining a museum membership, is still acceptable for normal people, who can treat it as a way of life. But in Shanghai, a ticket costs 150–200RMB (\$25–30). Then it costs 600RMB (\$90) to see three exhibitions a day. I think this is unsustainable. . . . But if the museum is rented for a long time in the city center, you have to charge a higher ticket price, right? And you also need 500,000 visitors a year. See, everything is a paradox. [去看美国的博物馆美术馆，特别是加入博物馆会员这样的一些费用，针对他们日常的人来说还是可以接受的，是可以把它当做生活方式的。但在上海一张票 150–200，然后一天看三个展就要花 600 块钱，我觉得这不可持续. . . . 但是美术馆在城市市中心长租，你就得收票价高了是吧？然后你还需要一年 50 万观众来看，所有东西都是悖论的。]

Likewise, the interviewee from Guangdong Times Museum shared the number of families that can afford high ticket prices represent a small group in China, and therefore expressed the concern about maintaining a steady stream of visitors in the long-term: “Tickets for exhibitions are very expensive now. Only a very small group can spend 150–200RMB (\$25–30) to see a modernist exhibition in Shanghai.” [“现在展览门票都很贵，能在上海花 150–200 块去看现代主义大展的还是那些特别小的群体。”]

In short, participants pointed out private art museums’ current practices of setting high exhibition admission fees can alleviate a certain degree of financial pressure, but with it comes the problem

of unsustainable audiences and contradiction between that and long-term sustainable development of private art museums.

Impact of Marketization on Private Art Museums

Whether high admission prices and shallow cultural consumption have led to marketization, or are the products of it, makes for an interesting line of inquiry for future debate. What is clear is marketization itself has had an immense impact on museums, and therefore, this concept warrants closer investigation. During their interviews, interviewees in this study described forces of marketization as “big and fast,” but as museums’ responses as “small and slow.” Effects of marketization can be summarized according to the following four points, all of which represent important factors of sustainable development: (a) disruptions to public’s perception of private art museums, (b) competition among museums, (c) audience impact, and (d) weakening of the voice of private art museums.

First, interviewees pointed out marketization of private art museums has disrupted the public’s understanding of private art museums. According to them, audiences can no longer distinguish between commercial exhibition companies and private nonenterprise art museums, thus presenting a key challenge to audience cultivation and sustainability efforts. In other words, attracting and maintaining visitors becomes a difficult task if these audiences do not understand the social function such museums perform or public space they inhabit. The interviewee from Guangdong Times Museum provided one such example of public misconceptions of private art museums, stating the public often (mistakenly) assumes these institutions have extensive financial capital and can earn money here. This participant said, “The art industry is already relatively glamorous, so especially after art is marketized and commercialized, it has a lot of capital to show in it, so everyone thinks that art museums can bring money.” [“艺术行业本来就

就比较光鲜，那么尤其艺术在市场化 and 商品化之后，它就有很多资本在里面去显现，所以大家觉得好像美术馆这个东西是可以来钱的。”]

But these misconceptions are not only prevalent among the general public as the staff member from Inside-Out Art Museum noted:

The public's understanding of art exhibitions has become narrow. Everyone's understanding of art museums is confused, and the academic integrity of art museums has been greatly damaged. Ordinary people and even most practitioners in the art field, and it is impossible to distinguish the quality of art museums from bad ones and lumps all art museums together. [大众对于艺术展览的认知变得狭隘。大家对美术馆的认知混乱，美术馆的学术诚信度大受折损，普通人，甚至艺术领域中的多数从业者，也无法辨识美术馆的好坏，把所有美术馆都混为一谈。].

This interviewee listed both “ordinary people” and even most practitioners in the art field as classes of people who have misinformed notions about private art museums.

Second, in addition to disrupting the public's understanding of private art museums, marketization also has brought about intense competition among similar institutions, which are vying for both visitors and sizeable market share of box office ticket sales. With emergence of many art exhibition companies that operate without governing standards or oversight, many of interviewees claimed this level of competition led to unsavory or even unethical practices. For example, to attract greater numbers of visitors, some exhibition companies resorted to using reproductions of original artworks on social media. As the representative from Bund One Art Museum noted, even if certain museums or exhibition companies are not outright violating ethical standards, they are toeing the line. This individual commented, “Okay, some institutions are starting to play around with the idea again, saying the exhibition is an original work by

someone, but it may be a print or maybe a reproduction. But it is relatively not the only one.”

[“好了，有些机构又开始打擦边球了，就说展览的是某某的原作，但它可能是版画，讲不定是复刻画。但它相对而言不是唯此一件的。”]

Participants described such market competition not only damaging the integrity of the museum industry’s reputation, but as also squeezing out those museums adhering to certain ethical standards. For example, the individual from UCCA commented,

Art museums need to have a number of visitors, but objectively speaking, it would be too difficult for art museums to really rely on numbers of visitors. Because in this sense we have to compete on the same track with some venues that do not have academic standards. This should not be the path that art museums take, but we can only do this at this stage. [美术馆要有流量，但是客观说就是美术馆如果说真的到了靠拼流量的时候其实太难了。因为从这个意义上我们就是就要跟一些没有学术标准的场馆在一个赛道上竞争。这个不应该是美术馆走的路，但是我们现在这个阶段只能这样。]

As this interviewee articulated the problem, which the second part of this statement (“but we can only do this at this stage”) indicated, they currently feel helpless to address such practices.

The third way marketization has impacted museums is by changing the ways visitors interact with content. Penetration of marketization into the art industry has seemed to exacerbate changes in the media landscape today, such as shortened attention spans audiences have acquired with proliferation of new media. The staff member from the Guangdong Times Museum reflected on the issue of audiences’ fragmented attention, stating,

The global audience’s attention span has changed due to the Internet, small videos, social media, and changes in their perception of images and knowledge, and the change in attention span is very comprehensive. It’s not just a problem for Chinese audiences

anymore. It is a universal change in media society and media environment. [全球的观众由于互联网、小视频、社交媒介，他们的对于图像、感知这方面的变化，注意力的改变是非常全面性的。不仅仅是中国观众的问题了。它是一个普遍的媒介社会和媒介环境的改变。]

A number of interviewees expressed disillusionment with sustainability of audience attention span and how this figured into the larger issue of institutional sustainability. The respondent from Rockbund Art Museum, reflected,

Many art museums are using social media in the hope of causing this kind of viral spread, and then harvesting it. So, a very big problem we encounter today is basically this kind of 5-second consumption. I can't imagine what the result will be if the trend develops like this. [很多美术馆是在利用社交媒体希望能够造成这种病毒式的传播，然后就收割一波。所以说今天我们这个时代遇到的一个非常大的问题基本上就是这种 5 秒钟式的消费。我没法想象这样子的就是说趋势往后发展会是一个什么样的结果。]

This interviewee's comments imply if this trend is an enduring one, museums will need to figure out how best to respond to it to realize organizational sustainability.

When virtually all of museums' visitors exhibit such preferences, this leads to a homogenization among them, as the staff member from the Guangdong Times Museum explained:

Our industry is returning to the starting point of its cycle. In fact, it is shaping an increasingly narrow path on its own, both at the level of producers and audiences. . . Our shaping of audiences is powerful and irreversible. But we have molded the audience into a single consumer mentality very quickly. I don't think we can go back on this road for another 10 years. . . The audience maybe think that they are not consumers, but it's not a

civil society participation in the sense of this kind of negotiation, is it? [我们这个行业在回到它循环的起点，其实是它自己在塑造一个越来越窄的路，无论是生产者还是观众的层面... 我们对于观众的塑造是强力的，而且不可逆转的。但我们已经非常快的把观众塑造成单一的消费者心态了，再走 10 年这样的路我觉得回不来了... 观众他们会认为自己不是消费者，但它也不是一个公民社会意义上的这种协商讨论的参与对吧?]

In this commentary from the representative from Guangdong Times Museum, there is a certain degree of accountability on behalf of museum professionals. This individual implicated museums in shaping these audiences when they said, “Our shaping of audiences is powerful and irreversible.” Sense of apprehension and regret that characterizes this staff member’s response is also evident in another respondent, who expresses reservations about treating children as a target consumer. This individual, from A4 Art Museum, noted,

Now many different children’s projects have been born in China, but I still have some regrets. Most people still regard children as a consumer group in this way and regard this project as a strategic project that will add to the publicity of the museum. [现在国内已经诞生了很多不同的这种儿童项目，但我经常还是有一些遗憾的，大多数人用这种思路还是把孩子当成一个消费群体，把这个项目当做是一个能够给美术馆所谓的公共性添砖加瓦的一个策略性项目。]

The final impact marketization exerts on the museum sector is a weakening of the voice and influence of private art museums. As the representative from Macalline Art Center explained:

In the past 2 years, the market-oriented atmosphere has been very strong. The rights of art fairs, galleries, and artists who have the voice in the market have become more and more

clear in art industry. On the contrary, those things that we once thought were really rights, such as nonprofit art museums, actually no longer have such high weight. [现在这两年市场导向的氛围是非常强的，博览会的权利，画廊的权利，那些在市场上有话语权的艺术家的权利，在这个行业里变得越来越明确。反而是那种我们曾经认为是真正有权利的，比如非盈利美术馆其实没有那么高的权重了。]

In other words, rise of other market-oriented enterprises has led to a corresponding decline in the social importance once granted to private art museums, making it difficult for them to establish their own authority and sustainable development more fragile. In fact, “fragility” is the term the individual from Guangdong Times Museum used to summarize the current state of museums amid such marketization: “The whole environment has become increasingly capitalized, and the fragility of China’s public art education has amplified the capital, which makes the position of private art museums even more fragile.” [“整个环境已经越来越资本化，而中国公共艺术教育的脆弱又放大了资本，这让私立美术馆的地位更加脆弱。”]

In short, findings reveal various problems between marketization and art museums, presenting this concern as an important factor to museums’ long-term survival and their audience cultivation, art production, and sustainable development in general.

Social Context of Art Museums

Embedded in the problem of marketization are a variety of social contextual factors Chinese private art museums must contend with. However, interviews with the participants in this study tended to center around two social factors in particular: audience base and disconnect between contemporary art and its audiences. Sections that follow explore in detail the bearing each factor has on museums’ sustainability efforts.

Audience Base

As the term is used here, audience base refers to a particular audience habitually visiting an art museum and accepting the museum's espoused purpose, mission, and goals. Many of the professionals interviewed in this study noted due to Chinese private art museums' shorter history, their audience base lags behind the West, which poses challenges to the quality of these museums' artistic production, which in turn, negatively impacts audience sustainability. It is this way the cyclical nature of the problem may be observed. The respondent from Guangdong Times Museum related audiences' lack of familiarity and engagement with art museums to their relatively short history in country, saying,

Audiences in Europe are silver-haired, but China is almost exclusively young. . . China had art museums until China was reforming and opening up, and all the previous ones were disconnected. So, our previous generation didn't have the habit of looking at art museums, they probably didn't even know what an art museum was, so they look at the things in our art museums as rare. [欧洲的观众很多是银发团,但中国几乎全是年轻人. . . 中国改革开放的时候才有美术馆, 而前面都是断掉的。所以我们的上一辈没有看美术馆的习惯, 他们可能连美术馆是什么都不知道, 所以他们看我们美术馆里的东西是觉得稀奇的。]

The line of reasoning that claims audiences' lack of engagement is due to a lack of knowledge of private art museums was also apparent in the interview with the staff member from Bund One Art Museum, who stressed art museums need to strengthen public art education to cultivate audiences. They reflected,

We have seen many art museums abroad where most of the audience are children or elderly people. They are very independent, and visiting art museums is part of their daily

habits. But why our audience not have this habit? It's because they didn't have this habit before. . . We are doing so many public art activities now because we want more people to come into the art museums. [我们在国外看到很多的美术馆和博物馆里很大部分是小孩子，要么就是老年人特别多。他们都是很自主的，他们的日常生活习惯里面就有看美术馆。但我们的这些观众，为什么没有？是因为他们曾经没有这样的习惯. . . 我们现在做这么多的公共艺术活动，就是希望有更多的人走进美术馆。]

The interviewee from UCCA also noted one of the reasons they are having difficulties developing in Shanghai is because the public is unfamiliar with what their institution is or does: “After UCCA went from Beijing to Shanghai, the audience didn't know what UCCA is, the audience didn't know what UCCA did, the audience had no concept.” [“UCCA 在从北京到上海后，观众不知道尤伦斯是什么，观众不知道你做的事，观众是没概念的。”] This disconnect impedes dialogue and communication between private art museums and their audiences because, as this interview extract suggested, audiences often do not know who or what is trying to communicate with them. In sum, the history and development of Chinese society has led to a particular social context that constitutes an important factor for sustainability of audiences and art production, and also points to deeper social and political issues.

Disconnect Between Contemporary Art and Audience

The theme of the audience base being “ignorant” or “uneducated” does not just appear in the context of the role of art museums. Some visitors were also portrayed by respondents as being unable to read or understand contemporary art works, thus creating a disconnect between contemporary art and its audience. According to the interviewees, this disconnect seems to be more pronounced among the older audience, perhaps because of the aforementioned changes in

content delivery and methods for engaging with it. As the representative from Macalline Art Center mentioned,

Our exhibitions are a bit difficult to understand for the older audience. However, during the summer holiday, there are also cases where families come to see the exhibitions with their young and old. But on the whole, there are more young people who come to see the exhibitions and are more open-minded. [我们的展览年龄大的有点看不太懂。但暑期也会出现一家扶老携幼看展览的情况。但整体而言，来看展的还是思维比较开放的年轻人多。]

For this interviewee, the people who understood contemporary art exhibitions were younger and more “open-minded,” suggesting the more traditional way of thinking typically associated with old age acts as a barrier to understanding.

Similarly, the individual from Guangdong Times Museum related their audience members have asked for refunds because they could not understand the contemporary art exhibitions, saying, “Because we have quite a lot of video and installation works, they can’t understand these art works, audience said your museum have nothing to see here.” [“因为我们有着相当多的影像和装置作品，他们看不懂这些艺术作品，观众说你们美术馆这里没什么可看的。”]

On the other hand, the staff member from Guangdong Times Museum, did not surmise this disconnect to audience demographics or their familiarity with new media. Instead, they tied this disconnect to previously discussed shallow cultural consumption, and politics in China’s social development:

Many audiences think that artists are celebrities, and celebrities are, of course, very rich.

Behind this logic means that the audience can hardly see the labor and dedication behind

the art industry. This includes the challenges and difficulties that the artist may face when creating art, and even the artist may not be able to feed himself. . . The reason behind is that with the growth and expansion of China's middle class, there have been some internal drives for contemporary art to seek new expressions, but this process of spiritual growth has been quickly reduced to a product and object of consumerism by the fast-developing society, and "political legitimacy" has not been fully established in China's contemporary art system. . [很多观众认为艺术家就是名人，名人当然是非常有钱的。在这个逻辑背后意味着观众很难看到艺术行业背后的劳动和投入，包括艺术家可能在做一件作品时候，他面对的各种挑战和困难，甚至艺术家可能自己都喂不饱...而这背后原因是随着中国的中产阶级的成长和壮大，产生过一些促使当代艺术寻求新表达的内在驱动力，但这种精神成长的过程，又被疾速发展的社会快速地简化为一种消费主义的产品和对象，在中国的当代艺术系统中"政治合法性"并没有被完全建立起来。]

Therefore, as interviewees stress, changing audience demographics and introduction of new media may also impact Chinese private art museums' sustainability in profound ways.

Museum Art Production

Thus far, Chinese private art museums have been examined in terms of the operations and practices, and institutional identities and legacies, but there has been little discussion of how the actual art they deliver to the public factors into their sustainability. This section is dedicated to examining six different aspects of art production in these art museums: (1) quality of art production, (2) art research, (3) giving back to the art ecology, (4) dialogue and communication, (5) societal engagement, and (6) professional teams and talents. It became clear over the

interviews art production is a complex issue that involves not only the museum itself, but also financial and social factors.

Quality of Art Production

As outlined in the previous section, art museums are encountering increasing penetration of marketization into their operations, which poses a serious problem for art production. In light of this marketization, some interviewees believed art museums should adhere to a responsible academic positioning and quality art production to develop more sustainably. As the respondent from Inside-Out Art Museum elaborated:

Private art museums should hold their own academic position, maintain the art museum's academic independence, and be free from the influence of business and capital. They should also have their own unique academic direction for exhibitions, with continuity and systematic curation, and present vivid artistic concepts and thoughts eventually become a part of the rich artistic ecology. . . Don't easily follow various popular trends, continue to think and promote academic output. In addition, in terms of artistic content, we must continue to conduct in-depth exhibitions and academic activities. . . Even during an economic downturn period, operational problems cannot be solved at the expense of the exhibition budget. [民营美术馆应当持有自己的学术立场，维持美术馆的学术独立性，不受商业和资本的影响。并且有自身独特的展览学术方向，策展具有延续性和系统性，呈现鲜活的艺术理念和思想，最终成为丰富的艺术生态中的一环. . . 不轻易追随各式各样的流行浪潮，持续思考，推进学术产出。并且在艺术内容方面，要继续做有深度的展览和学术活动. . . 即便是在经济下行期，也绝对不以牺牲展览预算为代价来解决运营问题。]

As this individual from Inside-Out Art Museum said, quality of art production should not be sacrificed to alleviate financial pressure on the museum. At the same time, the respondent claimed some of the methods museums might explore for remaining financially solvent (e.g., partnering with businesses) should be avoided to maintain the quality of the programs the museums put out; museums should be “free from the influence of business and capital,” as they said.

For the individual from Guangdong Times Museum, quality artwork is the antidote to marketization and fundamentally at odds with a market-orientation:

Art museums must present good quality and fight against consumerism. This is difficult.

The development of art itself is also weak. We see that Document a Kassel can be maintained for a while, and the Venice Biennale is almost become an international fair.

[美术馆要呈现好的品质，还要对抗消费主义。这很难。包括艺术本身的发展也是属于示弱的，我们看到可能卡塞尔文献展还能保持一下，威尼斯双年展都快做成博览会了。]

This statement was somewhat contradicted by the individual from Guangdong Times Museum, who emphasized quality artistic production requires substantial financial capital, at least some inferably comes from private financial holdings. For context, Guangdong Times Museum shut down in 2022 due to economic reasons. But as this respondent saw it, the way to be financially stable while avoiding the influence of private investors is to reduce the quantity of exhibitions offered. They explained their rationale as this:

Even though the number of exhibitions may not be as frequent as before, the quality must be maintained. The money for the exhibition cannot be reduced because this affects the quality of the exhibition. . . In the future, I hope that there will be some changes in art

museums exhibitions and public education which can reveal the sense of mission in art. The sense of mission sounds empty, but the reality is that you have to produce something good, and the product must be of high quality. [即使展览在数量上可能没有以前这么频繁，但一定要维持它的质量。展览本身的钱不能减，因为这是影响展览品质的... 未来希望美术馆展览和公共教育方面，希望能有一些变化，能够看到艺术使命感的東西。使命感听起来虚，实际一点就是你要出点好东西，出品的东西要有品质。]

As this quotation shows, in discussions of artistic production, it is quality and not necessarily quantity, that should take precedence. According to this study's participants, quality of art production is ensured through constant reflection and artistic innovation. The representative from A4 Art Museum cautioned against the dangers of an insular way of thinking, remarking,

We must be wary of falling into our own discourse system and think about how to maintain a sense of freshness and youthfulness of the unknown. We cannot be obsessed with what we do just because we have done a lot of things. We hope that our every project is subject to real discussion and feedback from society, and then there is an iterative process of reflection. With this kind of thinking in mind, we continue to work on different projects. [我们要警惕陷入自我的话语体系里面，思考如何保持一种未知感新鲜感，保持一种少年气。不能由于自己做了很多事儿，所以自己就很迷恋自己做的事。我们希望我们每一个项目都是真实在社会当中发生讨论和反馈的，然后又反思有迭代的过程。带着这样的思考不断在做不同的项目。]

Similarly, the individual from Rockbund Art Museum likewise pointed out it is the constant artistic innovation and reflection that allows their museum to maintain the quality of their art production:

What kind of thing do we want to create and what can the audience get from it? From a professional perspective, we still need be experimental and think about what new conditions and stimulation we have brought to artistic creation. Including recently, we began to use the windows on the second floor of the art museum facing the square, we turned it into a platform for drama, and then everyone used headphones to listen. It was a very interesting innovation in various forms. [我们要做一个什么样的东西，让观众从中间能够得到什么，大家从专业上面还是会有一个实验性，去思路我们为艺术创作带来了怎么样的一些新的条件和刺激。包括这两天我们开始利用美术馆二楼面向广场的窗户，我们把它做成一个戏剧的平台，然后大家用耳机去收听，从各种形式都是一个非常有意思的尝试。]

However, it is not only the quantity of artwork that impacts its quality, but also quantity of visitors the museum receives each day. As the staff member from UCCA related,

When we are doing curation or exhibition, on the one hand, we have to weigh the flow of visitors, but on the other hand, we have to maintain something like research. It is difficult to balance, in fact, it is very difficult. [我们在做策展或者展览的时候，一方面要去权衡流量，但是一方面又要维护一下研究性这样的一个东西。你很难平衡，其实是很难特别难。]

The individual from Rockbund Art Museum also highlighted that audiences in their discussion of what impact the quality of artwork has, might consider exploring a variety of needs stating,

From the needs of the creative fields, there is still some experimentation, so there must be requirements for the audience. But they also need to consider the most

ordinary people, and art must have a certain degree of acceptability. . . We think it's more importantly, about artistic taste. We don't want to shut out the audience with something very professional, nor do we want to cater to the audience, so there are some very subtle things that we need to grasp. How do we express to the entire audience that we welcome them, and that we are also an organization with an attitude and a stand? [从他们创造领域的需要，还是有这么一些实验性在，那么必然对观众来讲是有要求的。但他们也需要考虑最普通的大众，艺术要有一定的可接受度. . . 更主要的我们觉得是在趣味上面，我们既不想用很专业的东西把大众拒之门外，也不想迎合大众，所以这里面有一些非常微妙的这个地方我们在需要把握。我们怎么样去向整个公众表达我们欢迎他们，同时我们也是一个有态度有立场的一个机构]

In the context of this interview, the respondent focused on established audiences, elsewhere, they discussed concerns for the quality of art production in relation to new audiences. Some of the museums represented in this study were exploring exhibitions outside of conventional museum spaces. However, diversity of and differences inherent in audiences reached via these spaces could create uncertainty in terms of art production. The individual from Rockbund Art Museum shared a performing arts festival held outdoors has the advantage of attracting new audiences, but in its novelty also represents a challenge for museum staff:

For music and drama works, they must embrace a condition of this kind of performance, which is also an exciting challenge for them. Because of this open space and the face of an uncertain audience, for this performance art, it is also a challenge. [对音乐还有戏剧作品来讲，它必须要拥抱这种表演的一个条件，这对他们来讲也是一个比较兴奋的

挑战。因为这种打开的空间和面对不确定的观众，对于这些表演性的艺术来讲，也是一个挑战。]

The participant from Guangdong Times Museum added interacting with new audiences may bring about government supervision if the exhibition is not well-received, relating:

If once an exhibition starts to affect more people, it is actually the biggest source of uncertainty. If you push it to a wider range of audience, the audience will indeed be very different. If something goes wrong at this time the country will take action. [如果当展览一旦开始影响更多的人，其实就是不确定性产生的最大的根源，你把它推向更广泛的消费者，观众确实有很大的差异了。这个时候如一旦出了问题国家就会出手。]

In sum, the findings revealed quality art production requires adequate funding, and adherence to quality art production constitutes an important factor in the long-term sustainable development of art museums.

Art Research

An important part of ensuring quality art production involves conducting extensive research. The nature of the research described by participants varied, from research on exhibitions, artists, audiences, art history. But all of the participants positioned such research as integral to their sustainability efforts. The representative from A4 Art Museum interpreted “research” in the academic sense, noting it was their museum’s partnerships with external academic centers that contributed to institutional sustainability:

The art museum needs to do more precipitation and incubation work, because these sorting tasks are relatively difficult. . . We are now doing a lot of audience research. Doctors from the University of Oxford are now doing research with us, and there will be various very detailed reports on audience research. Because we found that China’s

research lack of public perspective. At the same time, we also go to follow up artists' projects, empowering some of the research, including the pulse of the artist's creation. We and the core of these participants and creators, both ways need to understand more, to go to do a good job of connecting them. [美术馆要去做更多沉淀孵化的工作，因为这些整理的工作是比较难的...我们会去做很多的观众研究。现在牛津大学的博士也在跟着我们一起做研究，会有很详细的各种各样的关于观众研究的这些报告。因为我们会发现中国整体的研究里面很缺少公众视角。同时我们也会去跟踪做很多艺术家的项目，赋能一些研究，包括艺术家创作的脉络。我们和核心的这些参与者和创作者，双向都需要更了解，才能够去做好它们的连接。]

The individual from Bund One Art Museum described their organization's efforts to conduct artistic research around exhibits' institutions as a means for promoting audience loyalty, explaining:

We did research on the origins of all the exhibits. Then we will also choose the cooperating institutions to see whether this institution is reliable, whether the institution has had research and collection about artists in the history. Because we will do studies and research, we have so many fans. Some of them who have seen our exhibitions since they were children are now young and middle-aged. Because they just believe in your museum's quality, believe that your museum's art works are screened. [我们对于所有展品的出处是会做研究的。然后我们也会选择合作机构，这个机构靠不靠谱，本身没有在历史上对艺术家有过研究和收藏。因为我们会做调研和研究，所以为什么我们会有那么多的粉丝量，有些从小时候看我们的展览现在都已经青年了，中年了都有。因为他们是相信你的品质，相信作品是被筛选过的。]

Saying “Because they [the audience] just believe in your museum’s quality, believe that your museum’s art works are screened,” this interviewee from Bund One Art Museum presented conducting research as an important way of filtering out subpar artwork. Similarly, the individual from Inside-Out Art Museum stated their museum used research to perform a “sorting” function, saying, “The museum needs to further sort out the existing materials, works, archives, and research results to form more professional and systematic research archives and collections, and make continuous efforts for the discipline construction of Chinese contemporary art history research.” [“美术馆需要对于已有的资料、作品、档案、研究成果进行进一步地梳理，形成更加专业、成体系的研究档案和馆藏，为中国当代艺术史研究的学科建设作出持续的努力。”]

However, although half of the interviewees recognized the importance of art research for long-term sustainable development of art museums, they also noted constraints conducting such research placed on museum resources in terms of the allocation of staff and time. As the staff member from A4 Art Museum explained, “Our overall manpower will always be insufficient, so colleagues in the research centers always take care of many other tasks.” [“我们总体的人力永远是不足的，所以研究中心的同事会兼顾很多其他的工作。”] Echoing what is being said here, many of the interviewees used the specific phrasing “lack of time” to account for why art research has not yet been carried out by their institutions.

The findings reveal despite many challenges faced by art museums, several of the participants are engaged in artistic research, and art research moreover constitutes a primary factor of long-term sustainability.

Giving Back to the Art Ecology

As mentioned in previous sections, the contemporary shift to marketization has affected private art museums in various ways. Half of the interviewees pointed out under such circumstances, private art museums should return to construction of local and Asian art ecosystems to better participate in global dialogues and exchanges. This shift would grant them greater opportunities for long-term sustainable development. As the individual from Guangdong Times Museum shared, “If we don’t pay attention to localization, there will be no diversity. Without local diversity, how can it participate in global communication?” [“如果我们不做本土化，就不会有多样性。没有本土化 diversity 的东西，它怎么样去参与全球性的交流？”]

On the issue of giving back to the local art ecology, half of those interviewed felt it was important to fight against mass commercial art production and promote healthy development of the art ecosystem by supporting noncommercial art production. For the representative from Inside-Out Art Museum, supporting noncommercial art allowed museums to gauge society’s most pressing issues in an up-to-date manner: “Another important aspect is to focus on supporting noncommercial artistic production and thinking. . . to grasp today’s important cultural, social and ideological issues in a timely manner. The practices in these two directions inspire and promote each other.” [“另一个同等重要的面向，是专注支持非商业性的艺术生产和思考. . . 来及时把握今时今日重要的文化、社会和思想议题，这两个方向的实践是相互启发与推动的。”]

Furthermore, it became clear during the interviews young artists in China face many challenges and art museums could aid in the development of the art ecosystem by sponsoring emerging artists and giving them the opportunity to exhibit. The logic underpinning this belief is without good artists (and thus good artwork), private art museums’ art production practices cannot be

sustainable in the long-term. The interviewee from Macalline Art Center shared their determination to give back to the local art ecosystem and support young artists through practical means, saying,

We have very good local artists in China, but it is difficult to have particularly good opportunities at important points in their artistic careers. For example, this time we exhibited artist Hu Wei, who has been working in the Beijing art scene for at least 10 years. But no organization has been able to come forward to give him a solo exhibition. . . . Before we established this organization, we had a relatively clear awareness that we wanted to give back to the local ecology. That's why we feel that art museums need to support the work of artists like him. Including when we give him a solo exhibition, we will try to appoint the artist to make new works and give him a certain amount of financial support, which I think is a very substantial help to the artist. [我们中国本土非常优秀的艺术家，但在艺术生涯重要节点很难有特别好的机会。比如说这次我们展出了胡伟，他在北京艺术现场已经至少工作 10 年。但没有一个机构能够挺身而出给他做一个个展... 我们在做这个机构之前，就有一个比较明确的意识就是我们要回馈本土生态。其实美术馆反而需要支持这样艺术家的工作。包括我们在给他做个展的时候，都会尽量委任艺术家做新作品，给他一定的资金支持，这是对艺术家很实质性的帮助。]

There were also some museums that supported art production in the museum's area of interest by sponsoring artists directly. As the respondent from Rockbund Art Museum shared,

We have a specially commissioned creation. It does not require these artists to make works for exhibitions. Of course, we do not rule out that this will happen in the future. We do not even have to ask them to complete the work in the end. We hope that through

the support of the museum, which can promote some artists' practices in the fields we are interested in, and the practices of curators. This is also a role we believe the museum should play, that is, we participate in the process of artistic productions of artists. [我们专门有一个委约创作，它并不是要求这些艺术家做作品来参加展览，当然不排除未来会这样。甚至我们都不一定非得要求他最后能够完成这个作品。我们是希望通过美术馆的支持，能够推进他在我们感兴趣的领域的一些实践，也有策展人的实践。这个也是我们认为美术馆所承担的一个角色，就是我们参与到这些艺术生产的一个过程中去。]

These excerpts revealed benefits of giving back to the art ecosystem, not just for artists, but for museums, as doing so allows organizations to keep their “fingers on the pulse” of society, so to speak. This, in turn, facilitates their participation in globalized dialogues and exchanges.

Dialogue and Communication

Fostering dialogue and communication with the local community, including being in touch with social issues and movements, was also highlighted as being important to sustainability. Engaging in sustained dialogue and communication with the community provided art museums with important feedback on their operations, allowing them to alter course based on this feedback if needed. This belief was evident in the response from the representative from JinChen YFM Art Gallery, who related, “An art museum should be interactive with society, and at the same time, it should be able to get feedback from audience and art lovers.” [“一个美术馆它和社会应该是有互动的，同时它能够得到不管是观众或者艺术爱好者的反馈。”]

It became clear during the interviews the dangers of not actively seeking feedback from the museum's audiences. Without such input, as the representative from the A4 Art Museum

explained, discussions surrounding future directions form a closed loop, thereby precluding further development:

In fact, it is useless for art museums to recognize themselves or just by investors. If there is no effective social dialogue after the closing exhibition, and there is no more valuable feedback from the artists, it will eventually become a small group of people who coexist in a very small circle. [美术馆其实光是自己认可或者被投资人认可，没有用。闭幕后没有进行有效的社会对话，艺术家也没有更有价值的反馈，最后就会变成一个小圈子的一个人共生的小团体。]

On the topic of innovation, external communication with a variety of stakeholders was presented by the interviewees as an important method for helping to create new ideas and as adding to society's repertoire of art knowledge. As discussed in previous sections, expanding audiences' knowledge of art and art museums works in the interest of audience building. The representative from Inside-Out Art Museum made a connection between educational initiatives achieved through community dialogue and building an audience base, saying,

With the continuous research and exploration of art practice, artists and scholars who hold the same beliefs will choose this venue to speak out, making it a home for practitioners and thinkers and attracting a fixed audience. Currently, our museum has become an important platform for art history, literary history experts and scholar thinkers from Peking University, Tsinghua University, and other universities to publish their works. This makes us a place for scholars from different disciplines and fields to exchange ideas and present new thinking results. Art museums should grasp the dialogue with reality, expand cross-field exchanges, and achieve the level of explaining profound things in simple terms and gaining broad insights. [随着对艺术实践持续的研究和挖掘，

持有相同信念的艺术家、学者会选择这个场域发声，让这里成为实践者和思想者的家园，吸引一批固定受众。目前，中间美术馆已经成为北大、清华等院校的艺术史、文学史专家与学者思想家发布作品的重要平台。这使得中间美术馆成为了更多学科、领域的学者们进行思想交锋、呈现全新思考成果的场域。美术馆应该把握和现实之间的对话，扩大跨领域的交流，达到深入浅出，博观约取的程度。]

For this respondent from Inside-Out Art Museum, “attracting a fixed audience” was a key motivation for engaging in dialogue, but also was the opportunity for interdisciplinary and interinstitutional collaboration, as evidenced by the reference to various Chinese universities. The staff member from A4 Art Museum similarly saw interdisciplinary collaboration, as facilitated by dialogue, as “very important to build your own interdisciplinary knowledge network with different scholars.” [“和不同的学者之间去建构自己跨学科的知识网络非常重要。”]

But importance of communication was not restricted to relationship building for these participants; it also served an important information dissemination role. As the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented interruptions to museums’ communications with their audience, a number of interviewees shared the importance of maintaining open lines of communication between art museums and the world, and desire and urgency to reestablish international communication in the postpandemic era. This belief is apparent in the response from the staff member at Macalline Art Center, who commented, “Now the international exchanges have been restored, I feel that connections, dialogue, and communication with institutions in Europe and other places are now very urgent.” [“现在恢复了恢复了这种国际的交流，我觉得和欧洲包括其他地方机构之间的连接，对话与交流现在又变得很迫切。”]

The pandemic also encouraged museum professionals to reflect on their own dialogic and communicative practices. In the wake of COVID-19, A4 Art Museum, for example, upgraded their Residency Center, which focused on forging connections between artists and local community, and shifted their attention to how to communicate with broader international audiences. The staff member representing the museum reflected after COVID-19, their institution was “very concerned about how international artists or Chinese artists who go abroad can form deeper dialogue and cooperation with local residents.” They elaborated on the importance dialogic exchange held for the museum and its views on art, saying,

For artists, for a place, and for a new and more complex art, the understanding should not just be expressed through the artist’s own creative expression or the world he/she imagines, but should be expressed through communication with more people and to do something together. . . Our genes prompt us to emphasize this kind of dialogue with international resources, but we also emphasize how the soil of China’s diverse arts and the characteristics of various new cultures in various places need to form a dialogue with the international context. [我们很关心国际的艺术家或者去到国外的中国艺术家，他们如何和在地的居民形成更深的对话和合作。对于艺术家，对于一个地方，对于一个新的更复杂艺术的认知，不应该只是通过艺术家自身的创作表达或者他想象的一个世界，而应该通过跟更多人的交流去共同做一些事儿来表达... 我们的基因会促使我们去强调国际性资源的这种对话，但我们又在强调中国多元艺术的土壤，以及各种地方各样新文化的特色，是怎么需要跟国际的语境之间形成对话的？]

These responses indicated dialogue and communication between museums and both local and global audiences was important to sustainability on two levels. On the first level, it worked toward rapport-building by establishing and maintaining various networks of support. Second

level operated as a reporting function, serving to bring information to different stakeholders. Thus, dialogue and communication can serve an educational function by disseminating ideas and can better bring together diverse sources of knowledge in art museums, and in turn, contribute to sustainable development.

Societal Engagement

Knowing, engaging with, and gauging audience perceptions was presented by respondents as an integral component of sustainability. This section explores respondents' understanding of the role of audiences in achieving sustainability and moreover groups their perspectives according to the following four points: (a) audience cultivation, (b) audience expansion and activation, (c) inclusiveness in art museums, and (d) professional team and talents. One important point worth mentioning in the interest of transparency is only one participant explicitly addressed inclusivity, but it has been included in this discussion given both its perceived relevance to discussions of sustainability and commonalities it shares with themes previously introduced.

Audience Cultivation

As outlined in discussion of previous findings, museum staff have been confronted with issues arising from changing media environment and marketization of the art museum industry, and impact these have on their audiences. Almost all of interviewees related an important part of sustainability meant recognizing the environment today's audiences are situated. As the interviewee from Rockbund Art Museum related, "On the one hand, we must be clearly aware of the reality that our audience is in and should have a common kindness and positive attitude to resist and reverse these challenges, rather than taking advantage of it." ["一方面我们要清醒的认知到我们观众处于的现实，并应该有一种共同的善良和正面的态度来抵制和扭转这些挑

战，而不是去利用它。”] Challenges to which this respondent referred presumably include the aforementioned preferences for consumption and reduced attention spans.

But rather than fixate on “correcting” audience preferences or behavior, the individual from Guangdong Times Museum encouraged meeting audiences where they are for future growth: “We should think about how the audience can grow and how the public can be sustainable.” [“我们应该思考怎么让观众能成长，公众怎么可持续。”] The respondent elaborated on this position by building on what others have articulated about museums’ moral obligation to educate the public, saying,

China really needs to understand more ideas, understand that people should be able to have more diversity and initiative, and cultivate the audience’s independent thinking and independent judgment. This is a very important social responsibility of the museum. . . We hope that through the medium of art or the platform of an art museum, I hope more people can open up their horizons and see something different, because contemporary art has this role. [中国确实需要了解更多的思想，了解到人应该可以有更多的多样性和主动性，去培养观众独立思考和独立判断，这是美术馆非常重要的一个社会责任感. . . 我们希望通过艺术的媒介或者美术馆的平台，希望更多的人能够打开一些视野，看到一些不一样的东西，因为当代艺术有这方面的作用。]

However, even though it became clear during the interviews participants had various ways of cultivating certain qualities in their audience, especially along the lines of their preferences for art production and engagement with art activities and education, it became equally clear audience cultivation was slow-going. Furthermore, because it occurs slowly, over a long period of time, audience cultivation was something that must be *sustained*. As one participant from Bund One Art Museum divulged,

The reason why most art museums are now focusing on children's art education is that they want to cultivate a way of integrating art into children's life through children's art education. Then over time, when they get older, this habit is developed. [为什么现在大部分的美术馆都在抓儿童艺术教育，是希望透过儿童的艺术教育培养孩子们艺术融入生活的一种方式。那么久而久之，当他们老年了以后，这种习惯就养成了。]

By investing in children, the "pay off" museums will see will be a long way off, but as this excerpt showed the investment is regarded as well worth it.

For example, A4 Art Museum is cultivating young children as future audience members for their museum by letting them serve as junior curators. The staff member from this museum presented audience cultivation as requiring giving rights to the audience, even the youngest among them, and allowing them to participate in the art museum they hope to create for themselves. The participant explained this line of thinking as:

To the audience, we have to transfer the right. So, this process is a two-way game and traction process. Although this method is slow, it sometimes works well. . . Many of the children who used to participate in our children's program are now 30 years old. They have children, some of them have PhDs. Now they come to be our interns and participate as cocreative artists. The first artists who participated in A4's exhibition program are now leaders in many fields and are the initiators or curators of very important projects. You will find that the power of such a kind of human growth is greater than the capacity of a space or decoration. [对于公众，我们要去让渡这个权利。所以这个过程是一个双向在中间去博弈去牵引的过程。这样的方式虽然慢，但是有时候效果很好... 以前参加我们儿童项目的孩子，很多今年已经 30 岁了。他们都有孩子了,有些已经读博士了。现在他们来做我们的实习生，作为共创艺术家来参与。最早参加 A4 美术馆展

览项目的艺术家，今天已经是很多领域的佼佼者，是非常重要的项目的发起人或者策划人。你会发现这样一种人成长的力量，它是会大过于一个空间面积或者装修这些东西带给你的容量。]

Instead of viewing the audience–museum relationship primarily in terms of how it may benefit the museum, a few interviewees described this relationship as more nuanced. As the individual from Guangdong Times Museum shared, the relationship between museums and audiences was mutually beneficial, saying,

Many of our audience follow our art museum for many years, and then they will bring their experience into his future growth. Even a lot of the younger audience, the very loyalty audience, he may have some influence and connection with the art museum in his future schooling and career choices. And then again they are all very specific people. . . . Our strength is that we have such a community They are very active and solid. [我们很多观众跟着美术馆非常多年，然后他们会把自己的经验带入他未来的成长。甚至很多年轻的观众，粘性很高的观众，他可能在未来的求学和职业选择上会和美术馆有一定的影响和关联。然后他们又都是非常具体的人. . . . 我们的优势就是我们有这样的共同体. . . . 他们是非常的活跃和牢固的。]

When it comes to audience cultivation and sustainability, participants advised museums to consider not just the audiences they have or could have in the present, but how to build the audience of their future. This meant developing outreach programs for children and instilling in them a sense of loyalty to the museum from a young age. Additionally, they advised museums to not just see the audience–museum relationship as primarily beneficial to the museums, but it is

also important to consider how museum visitors could cocreate and grow with the museum, which was conducive to long-term sustainability.

Audience Expansion and Activation

In their interviews, respondents discussed adopting a variety of methods for developing and activating audiences, such as through membership systems, public projects, and art exhibitions in communal spaces. Audience expansion and activation constitute an important element of audience sustainability, and COVID-19 made it apparent just how important it was for museums to reach their audiences. Over half of the participants in this study reported using online methods, such as using virtual reality technology to bring online exhibitions to a public they could no longer access in person and leveraging online magazines and blogs to expand their audience base during this time. Employing virtual reality techniques allowed those at JinChen YFM Art Gallery to reach audiences that would otherwise be inaccessible, as the interviewee from this museum noted: “Under special circumstances at that time, we filmed the exhibition part of VR, and we also hope that everyone can better view the exhibition online.” [“当时在特殊情况下，我们就把 VR 的这块拍摄出来了，也希望大家在网上能够更好的进行一个观展。”]

Similarly, the respondent from A4 Art Museum shared they carried out online exhibitions through the Artist Isolation Log Project, which connected artists with their audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, explaining,

COVID-19 caused a lot of the projects we wanted to do at the time not to be allowed, then we had to re-perceive the artists and residents around us. What is our relationship with them? Are we going to close our museum and say bye-bye to everyone for a while, or are we going to activate them in more ways. . . The Artist Isolation Log project

reconnects people in isolation in their homes, and even creates a bigger connection. This could be three times the amount of work that has been done in the past. [疫情导致当时我们很多想做的项目做不了，那么我们就要重新去认知我们身边的艺术家和居民。我们和他们到底是什么关系？我们是要关门跟大家暂时说拜拜，还是我们要用更多的方法去激活他们. . . 艺术家隔离日志项目，让大家在家里隔离的时候重新建立连接，甚至建立了更大的连接，可能是以往三倍的工作量。]

In part due to the efforts at audience cultivation during the pandemic, the interviewee from Macalline Art Center expected audience expansion following its resolution: “What we are looking forward to now is to expand our audience outwards. That is to say, we hope that more audience will come to our art museum and more people will agree with our values.” [“我们现在非常期待就是向外拓展观众，就是说我们期待有更多的观众来看，然后有更多的人认同我们的价值观。”]

Echoing earlier sentiments presenting that the pandemic was a “blessing in disguise,” some participants shared COVID-19 encouraged their respective museums to focus on community building to increase audience participation. This was the case for Rockbund Art Museum, as their staff member related in the following:

We started doing some work called community building around the time of COVID-19. We hope to slowly have some individual connections with the audience. It should also be said that we take advantage of the reality of today’s social media. That is, we hope to find people who have similar interests with us and to establish a relationship with them, not necessarily working together, but people who agree with our values and ideas. . . But what we do is particularly amateurish, because our team does not have professional teams

like those outside who are so good at attracting crowds. But this is something we hope to continue to do. [我们从大概疫情期间开始做一些我们叫社群建设的工作，我们希望能够慢慢的跟观众发生一些个体的一些联系，应该也是说利用了今天社交媒体的一个现实。就是我们希望能够找到真的跟美术馆志同道合的一些人，不一定是说一起工作，但是认同我们的价值和理念的一些人，去跟他们建立一种关系...但我们做的特别的业余，因为我们的团队不像那种外面的专业团队那么善于去拉群。但这是我们希望去继续做下去的一个事情。]

Similarly, community-building was presented as an important part of A4 Art Museum's vision for sustainability, as their representative noted:

Our current community has 20,000 young artists and almost thousands of cocreators, including many different scholars, artists, and curators. Every year, almost 2,500 children participate in iStart project. Developing and growing, this has become a very organic community. . . But we are also thinking about some questions: What is a community? How to involve the audience? To what extent is a true participation and cocreation? Rather than just becoming a kind of insider which like make an appointment of a hospital and just came to there in an afternoon. [我们现在 iStart 的社群有 2 万个小艺术家，差不多几千位共创者，其中包括了很多不同的学者、艺术家、策展人，每一年都有差不多 2500 位小朋友在这个项目当中去发展和生长，这就变成了一个非常有机的群体...但是我们也在思考一些问题到底什么是社区？如何让观众参与？参与到什么程度是真正的参与和共创？而不是说只是成为一种知情者。像那种去医院挂了号的，我在今天下午来过了那种。]

However, simply involving the audience and soliciting audience participation in this way was not enough, according to the participants. There was also the challenge of audience retention. In other words, as the representative from Guangdong Times Museum, concluded, it is not sufficient to attract audiences, museums must be able to keep them: “We shouldn’t imagine that the audience is always following you. In fact, many audiences or people who follow museums’ social media don’t know whether you are currently exhibiting.” [“我们不要想象观众跟着你，其实很多观众或者很多关注你的人并不知道你们现在有没有在展览。”] The interviewee from A4 Art Museum described the audience problem presented by the previous respondent in terms of a lack of “stickiness,” saying, “Although many audiences have changed from bystanders to cocreators, the stickiness is not enough. Art museums still seem to be a dispensable thing in life.” [“虽然说观众已经有不少人从旁观者变成了共创者，但是但是粘性还不够。美术馆似乎还是一个生活中可有可无的东西。”]

These findings highlighted challenges associated with audience cultivation and expansion, but also lessons for future applications. For example, many of the strategies participants detailed using during the COVID-19 pandemic may be adapted to reach more diverse audiences in the present day. But recruiting, and moreover retaining (as this section points out), diverse audiences means practicing inclusiveness.

Inclusiveness in Art Museums

Among all of the participants featured in this study, only one participant noted to be inclusive, private art museums should seek to reach more audiences, particularly those who have been historically marginalized. The fact only one participant broached this subject demonstrated inclusiveness was still a new area for private art museums in China. It is included here, though, as it is a nascent subject in China, it is viewed as almost universally important in contemporary

museum studies in the West (Eardley et al., 2022; van Slooten, 2018). As inclusiveness was just becoming a topic of concern for Chinese private art museums, A4 Art Museum was at the forefront of this movement, as it attempts to include disabled children and other marginalized groups in China:

We need to empower them through art museums, let them be seen by society, let many experts and scholars approach them, empower them, and let them form a very organic part. Researchers use them as research objects, and then see their most vivid practices, and at the same time give them more suggestions and guidance, and then they continue to do it again and continue to give feedback, so that it forms a breaking point of the original information or reconnect the breaking point of ecology between a group of people. We hope to do more social welfare and public projects to lean toward more people and things in underdeveloped areas, and then gain more social support. It's a relatively distant part, but it can help us create sustainable meaning locally. [我们就要去通过美术馆去赋能他们，让他们被社会看见，让很多的专家学者去走近他们，为他们赋能，让他们形成一个很有机的部分。研究者以他们为研究对象，然后去看到他们最鲜活的实践，同时又给予他们更多的建议和引导，然后他们继续又去做，继续又去反馈，这样它就形成了一个把原来信息的断裂点，或者叫做一个人群之间生态的断点给它重新连上。我们希望做更多的社会公益和公共项目，去向更多欠发达区域的人群和事情去倾斜，然后获得更多的社会的支持。这是一个相对远方的部分，但是它恰恰帮助我们在地能够产生可持续的意义。]

In short, although inclusiveness is a new concept for many private art museums, participants viewed it as a topic to be explored further in the future in the interest of sustainability.

Professional Team and Talents

Many of resources addressed by interviewees as necessary to sustainability were presented in very tangible or material terms (i.e., financial capital), but they presented other intangible resources (i.e., human capital) as just as important. Half of the interviewees related private art museums and museum industry cannot adequately develop without a dedicated team of talented professionals. Additionally, talent requirements for private art museums were seen as unique because of differences between private art museum industry and other art industries. For the staff member from Inside-Out Art Museum, these unique talent requirements were geared toward academic production: “Sustainable development also means that private art museums must continue to cultivate professional talents capable of academic production.” [“可持续的发展，还意味着民营美术馆要持续培养能够进行学术生产的专业人才。”]

But academic knowledge was not the only important talent for operational success, as the individual from 3723 Art Museum pointed out. A keen understanding of logistics was likewise necessary:

The art museum is a very professional institution, and it should be run in a professional way. In terms of management, you can be in charge of administration, personnel, and finance. In some professional areas of the art museum, such as curatorial, academic, collection, education, even exhibition arrangement, mounting, insurance, and transportation, all aspects are professional. Let’s take an example. If you send an artwork now, do you dare to use Shunfeng Express? You need a professional art logistics company. Although there are many things on the surface that are similar to traditional industries, it must have its own art logistics, the design is art design, and the exhibition is art exhibition, not to mention the academic research. It is just a brochure, they are all

professional publishing, not that kind of magazine publishing. So, we must respect the profession and have a professional team to do it in the professional field. [美术馆是一个非常专业的机构，就应该用专业的方式来做美术馆，不管从管理上你可以去分管行政、人事、财务。在一些美术馆的专业领域，比如说策展、学术、收藏、教育，哪怕是布展、装裱、保险、运输，所有的各个环节都是专业的。我们举个例子，你现在寄送一个东西，你敢用顺丰吗？你要有专业的艺术物流公司。它虽然表面上有很多东西跟传统行业是通的，但是它一定有自己的艺术物流，设计是艺术设计，展陈是艺术展陈，更不用谈什么所谓的学术研究。就是一个宣传册，我们都是专业的出版，并不是那种什么杂志的出版。所以要尊重专业，在专业领域内要有专业的团队来做。]

As it was clear the rapid growth of the private art museum industry has called for new requirements in the types of professional talents of current art museums, the notion a talented professional was one who effectively integrated academic knowledge with practical considerations was a theme that ran across participant responses. For example, as the individual from Inside-Out Art Museum noted, “We need to have enough professionals with planning capabilities to support our own professionalism and achieve comprehensive specialization in academics, professions, and management.” [“我们需要有足够的有策划能力的专业人才，支撑自身的专业度，做到在学术、专业、管理的全面专业化。”]

The staff member from A4 Art Museum placed a higher value on an understanding of pragmatic concerns than on a “disciplined profession,” stating,

What we need is a profession that faces real problems and real people, not a disciplined profession. How well the lights in the museum are adjusted, how beautifully the

museum's articles are written, how standardized the museum's documentation center's archiving is, these are only narrowly defined professions, and it's something we need to do. But the broader point is that these talents have to understand why they do what they do. Then they need to put in more specialized work for this, and this process of refinement is more important. [我们需要的是面对真实问题和真实人群的专业，而不是一种学科化的专业。美术馆的灯调得有多好，美术馆的文章写得有多漂亮，美术馆文献中心的归档归的有多规范，这些只是狭义的专业，它是需要我们去做的。但是更广义的这个点是这些人才是要去理解他为什么这么做。那他为此需要付出更多专业的工作，这种精专的过程是更重要的。]

Some of the art museum professionals featured in this study noted the rapid growth of the art museum industry had forced a reorganization of their staffing structure, but in doing so, has prompted the staff to acquire new professional talents. As Rockbund Art Museum shared,

From the perspective of our organizational structure, we still don't have enough manpower, especially people who are professional in the art market. Due to professional limitations, doing these things does not seem to be our strong point, so we are still learning. . . But now I am also asking our operational colleagues to learn more and try more, for example, to explore some aspects of marketing. [从我们组织架构来讲，我们人手还是不够，特别是没有偏艺术市场方面专业的人。由于专业的限制，做这些东西好像也不太是我们的强项，所以我们还在学习...但现在我也在让我们的运营同事多去学习和尝试一些，比如说市场营销这些方面去做一些探索。]

As this excerpt illustrated, organizational restructuring may provide invaluable opportunities not for recruiting new talent but developing talent from within.

In short, according to participants, achieving sustainability entailed recruiting the right kind of personnel. The participants depicted their ideal workforce as one comprised of those who had an eye for logistics and degree of pragmatism. Yet, with staffing shortages being a constant concern, this may be difficult to do.

Private Art Museums' Operating Mechanisms

As outlined before, private art museums have a complicated relationship with their parent companies and founders, so it is common for private art museums to rely on individuals at the center of their operational mechanisms. However, a number of interviewees believed this method of operation was unhealthy for the long-term development of art museums. If the founder's or company leader's perception was limited, it is hard to expect much of a breakthrough in the museum, as the interviewee from 3723 Art Museum explained:

Our first-generation private art museums are almost always centered on company investors, because only the company owners are willing to spend money on an art museum. There are many art museums where the boss is the owner, although there are curators, academic curators, exhibition department and academic department in the art museum. But these are useless, in the end the boss can decide with a word. [我们第一代的民营美术馆几乎都是以企业投资者为中心的, 因为只有老板才愿意花钱去做美术馆。很多美术馆老板是美术馆的所有者, 虽然美术馆里有馆长, 学术馆长, 展览部, 学术部。但这些没用的, 最后就是老板一句话。]

Similarly, other interviewees pointed out shortcomings of the centralized mechanism focused on a particular owner or parent company. As the individual from A4 Art Museum further related,

If an art museum does not have its own vitality, it spreads out around a center. For example, there is one person who keeps pulling all the people. This is problematic

because the state of this person will affect the state of everyone. [一个美术馆如果没有自身的生命力，它是围绕着一个中心去发散。比如说有一个人一直牵引着所有的人。这是有问题的，因为这个人的状态会影响所有人的状态。]

In contrast to the centralized mechanisms currently in place, interviewees called for a healthier and more long-term sustainable operating mechanism, such as one rooted in a decentralized model. In such a model, operating mechanisms are not centered around individuals or parent companies, but rather geared toward socialization. As the interviewee from Inside-Out Art Museum elaborated, “Art museums should establish their own good mechanisms to ensure the continued operation of private art museums.” [“美术馆应该建立自身良好的机制，以保证民营美术馆的持续运营。”]

Likewise, the respondent from 3723 Art Museum further explained what this decentralized model stipulated or entailed:

Being an art museum is supposed to be social and neutral. You can be an investor, but museums can't be tied too much with the parent company. Just because you're good today doesn't mean you'll be good in 10 years. . . Art museums have to set up your mechanisms right from the start to ensure that funding sources are diversified to attract more like-minded people. [做美术馆就应该是社会化的，中立化的。你可以作为出资人，但你不能跟母公司品牌捆绑死。你今天很好不代表着你10年后还很好... 美术馆一开始就得建立好你的机制，来保证资金来源的多元化，吸引更多的志同道合的人来加入。]

One means operating mechanisms become more socialized is through establishment of academic committees, which would open up the museum's decision-making processes related to art

production to experts in the field. Among the museums represented in this study, A4 Art Museum presented an interesting case for analysis. As a museum with a parent company behind it, A4 Art Museum adopted a professional management mechanism for its art production and public programs, thus avoiding accusations of subjectivity and bias by running proposals and implementation of its programs through a pool of diverse museum staff and societal consultants. In the case of A4 Art Museum, program managers act as advocates, or as they were called here, “representatives”:

A4 Art Museum is compatible to the characteristics of its own genes, and a group of professional managers as a representative to promote the development of the art museum. Many of the young people working in the art museum were able to incubate their own small projects in a very short period of time, and some of them had a lot of good developments in their own field, and we would feel that this force is very much alive. [A4 Art Museum 兼容到自身的基因的特性，是一个职业经理人为代表性去推动美术馆发展的群体。在美术馆工作的很多年轻人能够在很短的时间孵化出自己的小项目，有些在他自己的领域也有很多很好的发展，我们会感觉到这种力量是很有生命力的。]

However, A4 Art Museum also related the challenges of this mechanism, which could serve as a point of reference for other art museums, sharing,

The main difficulty lies in the person’s ability to believe that he himself is capable of facilitating the connection, and in getting a person to take more responsibility. Because a lot of people has gotten used to going passive in the system. [它主要的困难在于人是否能够相信他自己是能够去推动连接的，以及去让一个人承担更多的责任。因为很多人他已经在系统当中习惯了去被动的接受。]

In addition to the decentralization mechanism of art production, most interviewees indicated supporting decentralization of art museum finances and decision-making through establishment of a council system. A council system opened up art museum funding resources and decision-making to society, thus making it conducive to the financial and operational sustainability of these museums. Even though it was a young museum, 3723 Art Museum already had a council system in place, and the representative from this museum noted the council system not only served as a source of financial support, but also as a risk mitigation mechanism, explaining,

Our art museum now has six trustees, and we are constantly expanding and developing new ones. Even if something goes wrong with one of the trustees's business or the trustee personally, and he is no longer able to continue to support our art museum, we lose only one-sixth of what we have. [我们美术馆现在有 6 位理事，我们还在源源不断的拓展和发展新的理事。就算某一位理事的企业或者理事个人出了问题，他没办法继续支持我们美术馆了，我们损失的只是 1/6。]

Additionally, as many participants did not currently have a board of trustees, approximately half expressed their desire to implement one in the museum plan for the following year. The interviewee from How Art Museum pointed out how valuable council systems (or boards of trustees) had become in recent years, saying, “We used to not need a council or other people to sponsor our museum, it was all on our own money. Now we need these mechanisms, or you don't have the means to support the museum.” [“以前我们因为我们以前是不需要理事会，也不需要别的人来赞助，都是靠自己的钱去支撑。现在我们需要这些机制，不然你没办法支撑美术馆。”]

Similarly, the participant from Macalline Art Center also shared they hope to return to a private nonenterprise status to further future possibilities of development, and a council system was an essential part of realizing that goal:

In the future, we hope to establish a young board system, that is, a young association of young board members. We hope to gather a group of like-minded board members or young partners, and then raise funds in this way. [我们希望在未来建立 young board 制度，就是年轻的 young association 这种年轻理事的制度。希望能够召集一批志同道合的理事或者年轻的伙伴，然后以这种形式来筹集资金。]

Despite the fact interviewees mentioned the council system was on their institution's agenda for museum development, they felt there were many challenges to actually setting the system up and running it. This sentiment was evident in the following statement from the A4 Art Museum representative:

It's not as easy for the council to start doing that in the Southwest area because the Southwest is not an aggregated system of capital across the country. It needs to be nurtured slowly, and we've nurtured a lot of young trustees now, but there's still a process for them to really be able to support art museums in a tangible way. [理事会在西南地区开始做的时候没有那么容易，因为西南地区并不是全国资本的一个聚集系统。它需要慢慢培育，我们现在已经培育了很多年轻的理事，但是他要真正能够实实在在支持到美术馆还需要有个过程。]

Similarly, the individual from Bund One Art Museum further pointed out:

There are two sides to a coin. On the one hand, there is a little bit of funding, and on the other hand, these members of the Board of Directors may have some opinions about some exhibitions, operation, and control of the site. To deal with these things, it may take

a big chunk of energy. [一个硬币有双面性，一方面有一点资金，另外一方面这些理事成员，他可能对于一些展览、经营、对于现场的管控，他可能也有一些意见。要处理这些事情，可能就会花掉很大的一块精力。]

The representative from 3723 Art Museum, an experienced museum with an established council system, shared reasons why some museums' council systems do not work very well. This brings us to particularity of Chinese private art museums. Many private art museums in China were named after their parent companies or their founders, which made social groups reluctant to become involved in these museums. As the participant from 3723 Art Museum explained,

The reason some museums don't run its council very good is because some art museums are tied too deeply to its corporate brand, naming the museum in the name of the parent company. For example, why would I, as a third party, want to join the museum council named by the parent company behind you? [大家没有去把它的理事做得很好的原因，是因为有的美术馆跟它的企业品牌捆绑的太深了，包括美术馆的命名也是如此。比如，我作为一个第三方，我为什么要去给你背后母公司命名的美术馆扬名？]

As the above quote from the 3723 Art Museum participant demonstrated, museums may not have a say in who founded them, but they did have some discretion over what companies they partner with. Given what this respondent has indicated about how a company's reputation could "spill over" onto the museum it owns, participants suggested museums should be mindful of public perception as they moved toward decentralization. That said, they also pointed out decentralization came with its own set of advantages, and operating mechanisms like council systems could impart diverse and more objective opinions.

External Cooperation

Outside of establishing external partnerships for the sake of operational mechanisms like council systems, Chinese private art museums were looking to partner with commercial art galleries and other organizations. Whereas once before they might have viewed them as competition, now private art museums see them as collaborators, as the interviewee from Inside-Out Art Museum pointed out: “Communication and cooperation between art museums and other art organizations is something that will have a win-win positive impact.” [“美术馆和其他艺术机构之间的交流与合作，是会带来双赢的积极影响。”]

Almost all of interviewees shared their practice of collaborating with different social organizations, such as universities, foundations, and other cultural institutions. The primary means this cooperation occurs is through art research, exhibitions, public programs, and consignment of artwork. The interviewee from A4 Art Museum detailed the synergistic effects of such collaboration, stating,

We now have to connect the different ecologies to bring it together, and the university can use the A4 Art Museum as its research site, while there are a lot of people deeply involved in it. Then they combine the researchers and participants of the research together, and this is better. It's actually more of a partnership. [我们现在要把不同的生态把它连接起来，高校可以把 A4 Art Museum 作为它的研究现场，同时有很多人深度的参与其中。那么他们把研究的实践者和参与者结合起来，这个就会比较好。其实这更多的是一个合作关系。]

Collaborations of this sort could even occur with the most unlikely of partners. For instance, the representative from JinChen YFM Art Gallery mentioned their institution had collaborated with a hotel, saying, “We've done art exhibitions with our hotel before. And then we do some

cooperation with the neighborhoods, for example, just with the companies under the neighborhoods, we do some thematic art tours with them.” [“我们之前和我们酒店合作做过艺术展览。然后我们和街道也会进行一些合作，比如说就跟街道旗下的企业进行一些合作，我们会跟他们做一些美术馆艺术游这种主题性的活动。”]

Bund One Art Museum also once cooperated with a bookstore as a means of generating revenue for the museum. The staff member from this museum detailed the nature of the collaboration, saying,

We're cooperating with Tsutaya Bookstore. The posters and folders of the exhibition appear in the bookstore, and our exhibition brochures are sold at their bookstore. In this way our exhibition goes out again, and it's a drop in the bucket of a little bit of revenue. [我们在和茑屋合作。展览的海报和折页在书店出现，我们的画册在他们那销售。这样展览就又走出去了，它也是杯水车薪的一点点的收入。]

From hotels to bookstores, these private art museums demonstrated a marked interest in ongoing cooperation with external organizations, yet when it came to state-owned entities, interviewees found collaboration difficult or altogether impossible. As the staff member from Guangdong Times Museum related,

Another very big problem for private art museums is the cooperation between private art museums and state-owned art museums. Needless to say, there is a big difference in their financial resources, and the barriers to cooperation are also very big. For example, it is impossible for private art museums to lend any collections from state-owned art museums, and it is even difficult to cooperate on public programs. [民营美术馆还有一个非常大的问题，就是国内的民营美术馆和国有美术馆中间的合作。彼此资金的差异就不用说

了，合作. 的 壁垒也很大的。比如民营美术馆不可能从国有美术馆做任何的藏品借出，甚至公共项目的合作也是困难的。]

Moreover, it became clear during the interviews with penetration of marketization into art museums, many opportunities for collaborating with the market had arisen. Most of the representatives from these private art museums reported looking forward to partnering with different organizations in the future, but this group of professionals expressed concern about potential for blurred boundaries between commercial cooperation, art production, and independence of art museums. As the individual from How Art Museum related, “What we’re going to be thinking about in the future especially is how to go about interacting and collaborating with these other companies or other organizations.” [“未来我们要思考的尤其是怎么去跟别的这些企业或者其他机构互动与合作。”]

The same degree of hesitation was likewise apparent in the response from the employee from Macalline Art Center, who endorsed corporate partnerships, but with stipulations, saying, “We look forward to having opportunities like this with more media and even commercial brands, and don’t reject this stuff at all. But we have to control the form of cooperation.” [“我们期待和更多的媒体甚至商业品牌有合作这样的契机，完全不拒绝这个东西。只不过合作的形式我们要把控。”]

In sum, participating museums are trying out various methods for external cooperation and present it as a primary factor affecting sustainability of their organizations, particularly with respect to the social dimension of sustainability.

Space and Field of Art Museums

Discussions of how Chinese private art museums entered the community and how the community entered these institutions warranted a closer look with regard to the space and field

these museums inhabited. The space and field of a museum referred to its internal space and cluster that was formed by the museums in the surrounding neighborhood. It became clear during the interviews the construction of space and field could affect the flow of visitors to museums, meaning these aspects are therefore closely connected to audience sustainability. As the individual from UCCA shared,

All art museums have to form a field. After all, the UCCA in Shanghai is in a relatively single place. It is difficult for it to form an overall effect like the West Bund. Some venues are in warehouses or office buildings. It is difficult to create the feeling of an art museum and the architectural shock of a temple. This is something we particularly lack. UCCA in Beijing has a lot of additional auras. It is in the 798 Art District, and that place is very pure. There are many big galleries there, which adds to the overall atmosphere. . . They all joke about how the black-hearted travel agency carried tourists to visit 798 Art District. Those tourists wander around inexplicably, but it brings organic visitor numbers. [美术馆都是要形成一个场域的，上海的尤伦斯毕竟在一个比较单体的地方，它很难形成一个像西岸那样整体的这种效应。有些场馆在仓库或者写字楼里，它很难形成那种美术馆殿堂的感觉，圣殿的那种建筑的震撼力，这个也是我们特别缺乏的。北京的尤伦斯有很多附加的光环，他在 798 艺术区，然后那个地方很纯粹，有很多大画廊在那，整体烘托了一个氛围. . . 旅游大巴什么旅行社，他们都开玩笑说黑心旅行社一车一车人拉过来拉到 798，然后来逛，那些游客逛得也莫名其妙，但它有自然的流量。]

Similarly, JinChen YFM Art Gallery was located in the Hongqiao International Business District. The staff member from this museum detailed how this location affected the flow of visitors, saying, “Sometimes, travel and business groups often come to stay in hotels near us, and then

they will bring the group to see our art museum together.” [“有时候经常会有团来住这里附近的酒店，那么就会带团来一起来看美术馆。”]

In addition to forming clusters in the surrounding neighborhoods, participants used two other key words to describe construction of spaces and fields inside their different museums: “living room” and “destination.” These descriptions of the museum spaces showed museums as tapping into the multifunctionality of such spaces to increase number of visitors they received, and thereby promoting sustainable development. The interviewee from Rockbund Art Museum spoke to how their museum capitalized on this versatility of space, saying, “Our art store is no longer called a store, it’s called a living room. We have coffee sellers here, we can also listen to music there, and we can also meet people here.” [“我们的艺术商店现在已经不把它叫商店了，叫客厅了。在这里面我们有卖咖啡的，我们也可以在那里听音乐，也可以在这里面见人这么一个概念。”]

The participant from Guangdong Times Museum used the same wording (i.e., “living room”) to describe their museum’s space: “We call it a cultural living room, or it is more like a Sohu, which is like an art Disney. There will be a bookstore, coffee shop, video bureau and multipurpose room.” [“我们叫文化客厅，或者它更偏向于像 Sohu，好像是一个艺术迪斯尼这样的状态。会有书店，咖啡厅、录像局和多功能厅。”]

If not a living room, the museum was being portrayed by the interviewees as a destination. In fact, a number of interviewees expressed their desire to strengthen the museum as a destination that could attract more visitors and build the museum’s influence in the minds of visitors. The staff member from How Art Museum likened the museum to other hallmarks of a destination, saying, “We want to turn our hotel and art museum into a landmark IP of a place.” [“我们想要把我们酒店和美术馆都要变成一个地方的地标性 IP。”] But for the individual

from Rockbund Art Museum, the museum is not intended to be landmark of a destination, but destination itself: “In the future, we may strengthen the museum’s role as a destination in its own right.” [“未来的话，我们可能会加强美术馆它本身作为观众的一个目的地这一方面的工作。”]

As these interviews show, there is a very close connection between the physical space of a museum and social space it occupies. Constructing their institutions as something as an exotic destination or as mundane as a living room could affect the public’s perception of them, and perception was already been identified as a key concern for sustainability.

Social Impact of Art Museums

Lastly, as previously discussed, the voice of private art museums had become weaker. Based on where these museums stood within the greater social milieu, the interviewees in this study presented increasing the social impact of art museums as an important factor for long-term sustainability. As the individual from Inside-Out Art Museum elaborated,

In the face of an evaluation mechanism that does not distinguish between good and bad, art museums should not become a game ground for the number of visitors but should enhance their social influence without losing academic professionalism. [美术馆在面对良莠不分的评价机制中，应该不沦为流量的游戏场，在不损失学术专业度的前提下增强增强自身的社会影响力。]

Similarly, for the representative from Macalline Art Center, broadening museums’ influence was a central component of sustainability: “I think the next very important direction is to expand externally and expand our influence. There is actually a good case for this in China, which is Aranya’s model.” [“我觉得接下来一个蛮重要的方向是对外拓展和扩大影响力。这个在国内其实有很好的案例，就是阿那亚的模式。”]

Even though participants reported detesting the market-oriented direction of the industry, one respondent from Macalline Art Center advocated use of market tools for expanding museums' influence, saying,

To expand the influence, you'll find that it's really the internet celebrity economy now. So how do you get along with the celebrity effect and traffic? On the one hand, we definitely have a certain critical attitude toward the celebrity effect and traffic, but on the other hand, we have to rely on the power of these and we have to rely on the power of media and propaganda. We have to deal with these very down-to-earth things. [扩展影响力就是这样，你会发现现在确实是网红经济，那你怎么跟流量共处？一方面我们肯定会对流量持某种批判性态度，但另一方面我们又要借助流量的力量、媒体的力量，宣传的力量，我们要借助这些东西。要去跟这些很落地的东西打交道。]

The participant from Inside-Out Art Museum elaborated on how exactly museums could make their voice heard, remarking, "Establishing a high-level image of an art museum as an academic institution and making itself a part of cultural construction can gradually increase the social influence of private art museums." ["建立美术馆高水准的学术机构形象，让自己成为文化建设中的一环可以从而逐渐增加民营美术馆的社会影响力。"]

Although most interviewees recognized art production as a way of exerting a greater social impact, they were eager to see a shift—a shift from gaining greater social impact through art production to greater social impact through the charisma of the art museum itself. There were already a handful of participants who reported making such a shift as a means for the future development. For the individual from 3723 Art Museum, the desire for change came back to private art museums' status as subsidiaries of their parent companies:

It turns out that these art museums serve the corporate brand before, and they should be transformed into the art museum itself as a brand. This is the art museum's own development goal. You should eventually create an art museum's own brand. And this brand is actually related to art museums' positioning. A good art museum in the past and now may rely on artists or curators or exhibitors or a certain theme. But in 10 or 20 years, it need to be artists be proud to have exhibitions in an art museum. This is the future development direction of art museums. [原来这些美术馆是为了企业的品牌服务的，应该转变为美术馆自身作为品牌。这是美术馆自我的发展目标，你最终就应该打造一个美术馆自我的品牌。一个好的美术馆在以前和现在靠的可能是艺术家或者靠策展人或者是靠某一个主题，别人是冲着展览来的。但是过 10 年过 20 年，一定是艺术家在美术馆做展览为荣，这就是美术馆未来的发展方向。]

In addition to building an identity outside of the one afforded to them by their parent companies, the individual from Rockbund Art Museum likewise agreed private art museums should not rely on reputations of individual artists. Instead, they should seek to build their reputation as an institution:

We now hope that everyone come to the art museum not because they want to see a certain exhibition by a certain artist. We want to weaken the impact of the specific exhibition on the audience. We want the audience to go to the museum to encounter some new ideas, or some new experiences. . . It is better the art museum have a richer appearance, and they need to be diversity type. Because if we admit that the entire society and the audience are diverse, then art museums should also be diverse. [我们现在希望大家到美术馆来不是因为要看某个艺术家的某个展览，我们想要弱化是这种具体展览对观众的影响力。而是希望到美术馆来遭遇一些新的想法或者是说一些新的体

验...美术馆应该是面貌越丰富越好的,它需要有一个多样性。因为假如说我们承认整个社会和公众是多样的话,那么我们也应该有多样性。]

In sum, the respondents almost universally agreed that constructing a more robust social image was the way to sustainable development. They furthermore elaborated that this may mean stepping out of the shadow of their parent company. Additionally, although artists with celebrity-like status could draw in crowds, the participants argued that museum should not use these artists' reputation as a crutch, but rather seek to enhance their own reputation.

Conclusion

The primary finding of this study was that professionals from 10 different Chinese private art museums agreed that sustainable development is a complex and multifaceted concept, one that was constantly evolving. Participants also noted several competing tensions they had to navigate, such as those between financial dependence and independence, the quality of the art and changes in audience preferences, and the desire for longevity, despite a short-lived history within this country. Additionally, unforeseen disruptions, such as COVID-19, presented yet another tension, between opportunities and challenges, as it provided museums with the opportunity to reinvent themselves. It was also under the pressure of this mercurial external environment that the private art museums were constructing and exploring sustainable development that was not limited to the economic, cultural, and social dimensions. In the next chapter, I discuss the findings, limitations, and implications of this study, as well as areas for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this study was to explore the sustainable development of 10 Chinese private art museums. It aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. In a complex and changing social environment, how do art museum professionals view the sustainable development of private art museums in China?
2. What factors affect the sustainable development of China's private art museums?

For the purposes of this study, the sustainable development of museums was categorized according to three dimensions: economic, social, and cultural. Using narrative inquiry as the methodological approach, this study analyzed various documents, in-depth semistructured interviews, and researcher's reflective notes to identify themes related to sustainability that were present across these data. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of this study by drawing connections between data generated and extant literature on sustainable development of private art museums in China and museums globally. This chapter summarizes key findings according to the framework employed in this study. It then proceeds to consider the practical implications of these findings for (a) private art museums, (b), the government and policymakers, (c) art museum audiences, and (d) educational institutions. This chapter then acknowledges the limitations of the study and presents suggested areas for future research.

Discussion of Findings

This study used Stylianou-Lambert et al.'s (2014) theoretical model for conceptualizing the sustainable development of museums according to the intersecting dimensions of social,

cultural, and economic factors.¹ The central tenet of this theoretical model is sustainable development of museums requires museum professionals to balance competing needs in these different realms. Results of this study indicate museums in different regions throughout China need to adapt to and renegotiate a model of sustainable development that works for them rather than adhere to a one-size-fits-all approach. Analyzing these interview narratives provided insights into private art museums' understandings of the concept of sustainable development and factors that influence their operations and practice as museums attempt to achieve it.

The findings from this study are discussed in more detail next and in the context of the existing literature. These findings are divided into three categories, each of which represents its own section: (1) cultural factors impacting Chinese private art museum sustainability, (2) social factors impacting Chinese private art museum sustainability, and (3) economic factors impacting Chinese private art museum sustainability. The first of these sections examines the notion of sustainability as a culturally specific concept and considers where Western models fall short when applied in a distinctly Eastern context. The following section discusses social factors influencing these museums' sustainability, such as audience preferences and the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the last section outlines economic factors affecting museum sustainability, particularly as they relate to funding sources, market orientations, and government support.

Cultural Factors Impacting Chinese Private Art Museum Sustainability

This study found there are four main differences between the sustainable development of private art museums in China and the West, suggesting that a successful model of sustainable development may therefore be a culturally specific one. The following sections examine each of these differences in depth.

¹ The original model also includes an environmental dimension, which has been excluded from this study for reasons aforementioned.

The “Genes” of the Private Art Museums

This study provided valuable insights into how private art museums in China view sustainable development. Findings emphasize interpreting sustainable development along the lines of development status, length of time the museum has been operating, perceived social purpose and function, and institutional identity, all of which differ from Western perspectives. Western understandings of sustainable development have primarily interpreted the concept in the context of environmental concerns (Ernst et al., 2016; Logan & Sutter, 2012; Pop & Borza, 2016a), institution’s economic viability (Pop & Borza, 2014a; Pop & Sabou, 2013), and ongoing service to the public (Brown, 2019; Hudson, 1998; Lord et al., 2012; Pencarelli et al., 2016). However, the Chinese private art museum professionals interviewed emphasized other issues, ones more germane to the Chinese context. First, in China, sustainable development is clearly linked to the sociopolitical landscape of the country and museum’s individual “genes”—that is, their institutional origins and legacy.

Although the literature often accounts for the institutional history of certain museums (see Coman & Casey, 2020), such examinations of the genes of private art museums in China remains underrepresented. Moreover, even fewer studies seek to understand the interplay between museums’ genes and sustainable development through the words of their own staff, making this study an important part of filling in this relative gap in the scholarship. The few references to “genes” in a museum context that are present in the literature describe the “genealogy” of museums in very abstract terms.

For instance, Lord (2006) adopted a Foucauldian standpoint to argue “The role of the ‘genealogical’ museum would be to record the history of the emergence of different interpretations” (p. 11). Similarly, Meringolo (2012) adopted an equally macro perspective in his

book, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History*. For this study's participants, though, genes does not reference large-scale social movements, but rather, the specific histories of their parent companies and founders.

The results of this study showed genes of Chinese private art museums, such as the resources the parent company possesses and advantages (or disadvantages) conveyed by the museum's geographical location, exert a greater influence in this context. As the participants explained, for museums to know where they are going (ideally, toward sustainability), they must know where they came from. Put simply, museums must analyze their own genes or reflect upon their own individual circumstances. Doing so is more conducive to sustainable development, as these museums may be able to better set up a position in line with their own genes, giving full play to their strengths, and simultaneously avoiding the associated weaknesses.

One advantage private art museums may wish to utilize developing their strategies for sustainability include defining an identity for themselves as the public is not familiar with the role or function of private art museums. Many participants attributed the problem of perception surrounding their organizations to the fact they were still early in their development. Their comments about how private art museums are in their exploratory stages, or in their infancy, are very interesting on a few fronts

For one, as these individuals represent various art museums, they are in some ways accountable for the fact art museums have not achieved sustainability and are still on the periphery of society. Therefore, claiming these art museums are still in their exploratory stages may be a way of defending both themselves and their museums for their relative lack of success so far. Second, presenting these museums in their exploratory or initial phases implies the potential for future growth, and this future orientation is consistent with most international

organizations' definition of the concept, such as the one offered by the United Nations (United Nations Bundtland Commission, 1987).

Finally, the one participant's (from How Art Museum) response likening these museums to a "baby can't drink milk. But trying drink more and become into a giant baby" invites questions about what the milk is. Unpacking this respondent's metaphor, one is prompted to inquire as to what it is will allow these museums to grow (i.e., "to get bigger"). Is it greater funding? Is it revised perceptions of the role and purpose of private art museums in society? In other words, the question these participants are asking is, What mechanisms will allow these museums to continue their explorations so as to become sustainable?

From the participant interviews, it becomes clear private art museums in China suffer from a perceptual problem that the public considers them as for-profit businesses rather than nonprofits working for the good of society. This is problematic, as it may diminish willingness of visitors to support the museum through financial donations or other types of advocacies. This problem is evident in the comments from the individual representing Guangdong Times Museum, who presented current understandings of private art museums as oppositional to sustainability, and ultimately concluded they did not "think any art museum is sustainable."

These comments add to the discussion on the ambivalent public perceptions of museums in China, as illustrated by Jin and Min's (2021) article entitled, "Public Benefits or Commercial Gains: Chinese Museums' Online Activities in the COVID-19 Age." It is clear from these comments there needs to be change in terms of the way private museums are perceived in China. Perhaps also in the way they develop their operations that are geared toward addressing the interests or concerns of the public. However, these misguided public perceptions may stem from the fact sustainability and long-term private art museum development is still in their nascent

stages. But because private art museums in China are still in their exploratory stages, these organizations may be granted a degree of freedom to carve out the direction of their organization, even if they presently lack the cultural capital to do so because of their nascent status.

Museums may want to craft their development plans to avoid include overly attempting to cater to audiences' tastes and comprehension level and relying on a single source of funding (i.e., through their parent company). With respect to a lack of understanding of among the public in China, there seems to be some confusion about the definition of private art museums, including the social function they serve, which represents a significant barrier to sustainability. This suggests discussions of the sustainable development of private art museums need to keep returning to the identity and status of private art museums as nonprofit and nonenterprise organizations dedicated to the public welfare. Having these discussions would therefore entail museum professionals reflecting further on their own definitions of private art museums to then raise awareness among the general public. Another disadvantage pertains to the need to maintain a healthy relationship with the museum's parent company, which is often entails exchanging financial support for control over content.

By detailing how participants attempted to merge museums' history (i.e., their genes) with their goals for sustainability, this study adds to the body of literature seeking to do much the same. An example of such work is Leifeste and Stiefel (2018)'s book, which looked at how heritage preservation and sustainability can be simultaneously achieved. Adopting a broad interpretation of heritage so to include genes of a specific museum, this study's participants can be seen as doing something similar, preserving their organizational heritage and still meeting the demands of sustainability.

Balancing this dual concern for change in the interest of sustainability and remaining faithful to one's roots or genes relates to participants' discussion of short- and long-term organizational success. In their interviews, participants indicated the museum's focus and issues deemed relevant will differ based on whether or not they are working toward achieving sustainability in the near future or over a longer period. Short-term success is mainly described in relation to the economic and social dimensions (Pop & Borza, 2014b; Pop & Sabou, 2013), and framed by participants as "easy," but also in terms of a "boom" (and bust). However, long-term success was repeatedly described as hard, but as also having greater potential in promoting these museums' staying power. Therefore, based on the insights garnered from participant interviews, sustainable development of private art museums will also likely involve assessing this sector's current stage of development, setting goals for short- and long-term development, and then strategizing how to realize such goals and adhere to the definition of private art museums established.

Cultural Governance Structures

A central component of how these museums orient toward sustainability is how they have been impeded or constrained by cultural governance in China. This study provides valuable insights into external mechanisms, business models, and supporting infrastructures of public culture via private art museums in China, which are fundamentally different from the West. Chinese and Western art museums differ in their implementation of sustainable development, primarily because in China, the government oversees many aspects related to the museum's identity, economy, and art production (Lu, 2014). First, when compared to the West, China lacks comprehensive policies related to art museums. This lack of supportive or protective policies becomes even more problematic when one considers China's donation and tax exemption system

is complex and not easy to navigate (ARTDBL, 2023a; De Nigris, 2018; Hi Art, 2023; L. K. Zhao et al., 2020).

Additionally, as several studies have examined government oversight of private art museums (see Ho, 2019; X. Liu, 2019), this study adopts a more in-depth approach at examining how the status of private nonenterprise social organizations, which is a policy unique to China, exerts a bearing on these museums' sustainable development; for the few museums able to achieve this designation, it is very advantageous to development, but for those institutions that lack this designation, this policy represents a significant barrier. However, addressing the inequities between those institutions that are able to receive this status (and thus the benefits that go with them) and those museums that are unable to will be more conducive to sustainable development of the sector as a whole.

In addition, the government's control of ideology through art chosen to be included in museum programs has a profound impact on the art production of museums. Ideology, in this case, refers to a way of thinking or set of beliefs, which may or may not be in line with nationalistic ideals. Therefore, this study adds to an expansive body of literature detailing government control over museum content in China, including Varutti's (2014) examination of museums as sites for contesting the politics of representation in the post-Mao era. However, this study's unique contribution is it looks at government censorship and curatorial autonomy through the distinct lens of sustainability. Museums' concerns over whether or not their programs align with national ideals can give rise to uncertainty when it comes to sustainable development. However, results of the study reveal how government-sanctioned ideologies can be contradicted or otherwise at odds with production of art for broader audiences with their own set of evolving preferences.

Considering findings from participant responses, there seems to be a pronounced tension at play. On the one hand, respondents in this study have called for greater government involvement in the form of supportive laws, policies, and funding. On the other hand, they have also called for reduced involvement in the form of censorship. Achieving sustainability may thus necessitate navigating these difficult and often competing tensions. In their book *Curating Under Pressure*, Marstine and Mitcheva (2020) describe censorship of the Chinese government over museum content as “omnipresent” and “overt” (p. 8). Authors also seem to suggest this censorship is not going anywhere anytime soon. Therefore, if Chinese art museums are interested in sustainable development, then having conversations as to how to navigate such censorship may be necessary.

Social Factors Impacting Chinese Private Art Museum Sustainability

Findings from this study demonstrate at this stage of the implementation of social sustainability, Chinese private art museums are becoming increasingly audience centered. In their interviews, participants emphasized audience cultivation, expansion, and activation. Additionally, inclusiveness, a great concern to organizations in the West, as evidenced by the work of Coleman (2015) and Eardley et al. (2022), for example, has yet to be thoroughly integrated into sustainability plans in China.

Inclusiveness, as it is referred to by the Chinese museum professional in this study, focuses on socially marginalized groups and economically underdeveloped regions. For this individual, inclusiveness is central not only expanding audience bases, but development in the long-term. However, the museum professional who did reference inclusiveness did not draw connections between inclusiveness and art museums’ economic dimensions, something commonly done in the West (Maleuvre, 2012).

In Western contexts, inclusion focuses more on providing services for people with disabilities, with access for people with disabilities serving as a critical criterion for cultural funding (Weisen, 2020). Inclusiveness in art museums has been extensively cited as a key social factor contributing to sustainable development of museums (Logan & Sutter, 2012; Pencarelli et al., 2016; Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014). So, as inclusiveness may be understood differently in China and the West, and hold different implications in each context, with increasing globalization, it may acquire greater significance for the sustainability of Chinese private art museums in the years to come.

Although study participants may not have universally attended to including diverse audiences, they did nonetheless demonstrate an audience-centered orientation. This study detailed reasons why museum professionals focus on audience cultivation, pointing out their efforts are determined by realities of China's societal context, challenges faced by audiences in today's commercialized world, and ethical obligations of art museums as they attempt to grow their operations. The literature contends the number of visitors brought into the museum is directly related to the source and amount of funding it receives (P. Johnson & Thomas, 1998). This is perhaps why participants were so concerned with audience expansion and activation, and establishing greater communication and fostering dialogue with the external communities. Especially in the postpandemic era, museum professionals discussed methods for promoting museum loyalty, such as by attempting to reach younger audiences.

Almost across the board, participants indicated the museum should consider their audience base when implementing sustainable development initiatives. The different history of the development of museums in China and the West has resulted in a drastically different audience base for museums in each context. Therefore, in their implementation of sustainable

development, respondents suggested private art museums first assess their audience base. Assessing falls short of catering to, as many of the study's respondents expressed concerns about the shallow cultural consumption preferences of today's audiences. This brings me to another noteworthy finding from participants' interviews, which relates to the disconnect between contemporary art and museums' audiences.

As several interviewees pointed out, specifically one from Rockbund Art Museum, after museum staff decided they would not design for the commodification and mass consumption of art, audiences were described "complaining" or "can't understand." This finding invites discussions of how the trend toward cultural consumption aligns with the trend in museum studies to be more audience-centric (Di Pietro et al., 2014). In other words, are museums obligated to cater to audiences' wishes when those wishes would promote the view of art as a commodity? Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out as the contradictions inherent in participants' responses indicate, one possible reason for this disconnect is due to the very fact they are wary of offering content dictated by audience preferences. As Chinese audiences have a different degree of knowledge and familiarity with contemporary art than those in the West, this study's findings suggest Chinese private art museums should consider methods for helping Chinese audiences better understand museum content, thereby bridging this disconnect.

These responses build upon earlier discussions of museums' genes, and their identity, institutional positioning, and public perceptions of museums. As it concerns genealogy, one might ask, Is an organization's identity always bound to that of its parent company or founder? Furthermore, if museums' identities are evolving, who steers the direction of that identity—the audience or the museum staff?

COVID-19

This study's findings also provided deeper insights into the COVID-19 pandemic as a social factor affecting sustainable development of art museums. Some of the Chinese private art museums that closed during the pandemic still have not reopened, such as the Guangdong Times Museum, which speaks to the pandemic's long-lasting impact on this sector. At the same time for many of the participants, COVID-19 was a thing of the past. Perhaps it is because mandatory lockdowns have been lifted and push for mass vaccination has also warned COVID-19 does not seem to hold the same connotation as an absolute and perilous threat for participants, whereas it once had. For many of the cultural institutions represented in this study, COVID-19 appeared to be an event of the past that can be forgotten. Whether they choose to forget it or not, findings of this study also suggest these cultural institutions can learn from the innovativeness and alternative models of operation they resorted to during the pandemic to remain sustainable.

To elaborate, participants in this study did not discuss the impact of COVID-19 in exclusively negative terms. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives from private art museums emphasized an aspiration to engage in dialogue and communication with other organizations and with the world at large. Participants portrayed the pandemic as an opportunity for innovation by experimenting with new modes of content delivery. Therefore this study builds upon previous work likewise detailing the opportunities COVID-19 presented to museums, such as those by Bertazzoni (2021) and Giusti (2024). Another study by Crooke (2020) found in the case of UK-based museums, COVID-19 prompted these institutions to develop new programming that led to increased audience engagement and positioned museums as versatile and relevant in times of crisis.

Space

Space, both literal and figurative, was also presented as a key concern for sustainability by participants. As it concerns the social space afforded to these museums, this study found private art museums have a strong vision and desire to expand their influence, which directly stems from their more peripheral social location in the cultural landscape in China. Previous research has explored private art museums' efforts to engage audiences by adding to the visitor experience (Camarero et al., 2011; Walker, 2019). Through its attention to methods of audience cultivation and activation, results of this study suggest a developmental path for private art museums to construct themselves as influential brands, and increase the influence of the private art museum sector as whole, thus aiding in sustainable development.

But according to participants interviewed in this study, it was not just the social space granted to museums that was a concern, but physical space they inhabited as well. Findings of this study suggest private art museums are focused on construction of museums as spaces with multiple functions and methods for rendering the art museum as a destination in its own right. This contrasts with previous studies in which private art museums' attention to space has been largely concerned with creating an architectural marvel (Frey & Meier, 2002). Findings of this study emphasize construction of space and field has a close relationship with audience sustainability, thus providing a future direction for sustainable development of private art museums.

Economic Factors Impacting Chinese Private Art Museum Sustainability

Closely related to COVID-19 is the economic downturn it induced, which brings me to the next influential factor of sustainability addressed by the museum professionals: economic environment. These individuals indicated economic environment and governance structures

discussed in the previous sections were two of the most influential factors in sustainable development implementation. Findings support previous literature that art museums globally are facing limited funding and higher cost pressures (Atkinson, 2024; Weide, 2011), and changes in the economic environment are also a global concern (Lindqvist, 2012; Pop & Borza, 2016a; Silberman, 2020), not just one affecting Western institution.

Marketization of the Art Industry

Findings of the study show in addition to the challenges brought on by the economic environment and unexpected opportunities presented by COVID-19, marketization of the art industry was addressed as another important factor of sustainability. According to participants, museums' market orientation and commercialization were a primary method for attempting to meet their financial goals, which is consistent with what others have found (e.g., Ekström, 2019; Pop & Borza, 2016a; Toepler & Dewees, 2005). But results of this study highlighted how the marketization of the art industry resulted not only in adoption of more market-oriented operations, such as high admission fees for exhibitions, but also shallow cultural consumption among audiences.

However, as Ekström (2019) noted in her book, *Museum Marketization: Cultural Institutions in the Neoliberal Era*, marketization of the art industry and superficial engagement with curations is not a new phenomenon. With emergence of pop artists like Andy Warhol in the 1960s, "in a world of high-end consumption," distinction between "fine art and mass-produced commodities" became blurred (Witkowski, 2021, p. 427). Furthermore, such marketization creates intense competition in the museum sector, with different institutions relying on practices the participants frame as questionable to attract visitors. For instance, participants cited dissemination of copies of original artwork on social media as a means to lure in audiences as

one example. Such practices, in turn, contribute to the public's confusion over private art museums as a nonprofit cultural institution, as opposed to for-profit businesses. This confusion over what the museum is or does weakens their collective voice in society. Malero (1994) advised museums look to professional ethical codes to guide their operations to avoid "weakening the integrity of the nonprofit sector and public confidence" (p. 30).

In sum, considering the effects of marketization participants discussed, this study can therefore be seen as supporting the literature that argues marketization and corporatization can have a negative impact on the social dimension of sustainable development (DesRoches, 2015; Palumbo et al., 2022; Toepler & Dewees, 2005). In light of the fragile status of private art museums in the public eye, and as indicated in this study, private art museums are becoming increasingly wary of marketization as they look toward sustainability. Referring back to the discussion of cultural governance, one method for alleviating such confusion amid marketization would involve providing greater access to securing nonprofit status.

Toepler (2006) claimed museums like the Met and the Smithsonian are experiencing a decline in retail sales, signaling a trend toward decommercialization. As results of this study do not suggest private art museums in China are part of that trend, if it is impending, seeking nonprofit status could impart greater chances at sustainability. As Worts (2016) noted, in the past few decades, as for-profit corporations have witnessed a boom, private foundations and the government have redirected increased amount of funds to nonprofit entities, suggesting there is security and growth with such a designation.

From these interview excerpts, a few important points of consideration emerge. First, assuming intention, institutional identity, and organizational culture are all important elements of sustainable development, both museum staff and their founders/owners may wish to reflect on

their reasons for starting the museum before deciding where they go from here. Second, these comments provide insights into the ongoing debate (as exemplified by Kwok and Garlandini's (2019) work, for instance) over how much control owners of private museums can (or should) be able to have. Finally, it is also worth keeping in mind as one participant pointed out, there are other individuals, like museum directors, who also exert a great influence on the organization's development.

Funding of Private Art Museums

Findings from this study demonstrated one of the main internal changes private art museums in China are making is through advance budget planning, establishing self-financing mechanisms, and securing the public funds needed to support private art museums to implement economic sustainability. These findings support the literature on economic sustainability that calls for the need for a rational allocation of the museum's budget (Půček et al., 2021), and to generate additional streams of revenue from a variety of sources (Kolbe et al., 2022; Luksetich & Partridge, 1997). However, as the previous section illustrates, museums may wish to exercise caution when seeking additional sources of revenue through commercialization activities and marketization efforts.

Participants in this study emphasized the need for private art museums to pay greater attention to the boundaries of self-financing. In other words, as they see it, self-financing should not deviate from art museums' identity as a nonprofit and should seek to balance the self-financing function with the quality of art production. Additionally, most participants mentioned foundations as a primary method to solve the economic problems of museums, whereby museums can use public funds to support their operations. However, as participants continually reminded, in the West, foundations are based on a completely different legal system and a long

tradition of public donations. This raises the question of how Chinese private art museums can explore the establishment of public funds to support private art museums under the reality of a less-than-favorable system and tradition of donation in China.

In the literature, Stylianou-Lambert et al. (2014) presented cultural employment, revitalization of the local economy, and other elements as conducive to economic sustainability. However, in my research, none of these issues were mentioned by any of the participants, which reflects differences between private art museums and museums broadly conceived in terms of both scale and mode of operation. For example, participants from private art museums are just now attempting to move toward establishing independent council systems. However, in the West, such an operating model has been in place for several decades (Franco, 2017; Olofsson, 1977). For example, Stylianou-Lambert et al.'s (2014) study was set in Cyprus, where a comparable model is well-established. It is possible once a more distributed museum leadership and administrative model becomes more commonplace among private art museums in China, museum staff may look to more systemic factors related to sustainability, such as those cited by Stylianou-Lambert et al. (2014).

In sum, an operating mechanism that is more distributed in nature may further facilitate a healthy relationship, characterized by firm boundaries over curation between museums and their parent companies and thus help these museums to move toward long-term sustainable development. In addition, such a model provides greater opportunity for interinstitutional collaboration, as multiple foundations, agencies, and committees come together to inform the future direction of the private art museum. In the literature, increased collaboration is presented as an asset that will allow private art museums to increase their impact and solve certain crises on an economic and cultural level (Kolbe et al., 2022; Pop & Borza, 2015). This study shows

collaboration with different organizations is one of the focuses of private art museums in China, both now and in the future.

Summary

These findings represent key differences distinguishing the concerns this group of professionals have from those of their Western or global counterparts. Such differences are largely attributable to the unique economic, cultural, and social conditions of China. For example, concerns for government censorship are not experienced to the same extent by museum professionals in the West. Differences in government classifications between China and the West have led to private art museums in China adopting a different development model from the West. For example, receiving culturally specific designation of a nonenterprise social organization is a complex undertaking, which has led many of these museums to instead turn toward marketization and a business model that makes them more susceptible to whims of their founders and parent companies.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature on museum sustainable development by providing a more nuanced understanding of sustainable development in Chinese private art museums. This understanding is characterized by numerous tensions Chinese private art museums must navigate—tensions that may not be as pronounced in a social context where such museums are state-funded and have a well-established history and identity. Some of these tensions include greater financial stability, but at the same time, control over art production; less government control, yet more government support through legislation and subsidies; and catering to audience preferences and maintaining the integrity and quality of the artistic productions.

Sustainable development of private art museums is a complex issue in China, and one that resists understanding through an exclusively Western lens. The private art museum scene in

China is in a transformative stage, one attempting to intertwine old and new, tradition and progress, external and internal concerns, limitations and possibilities. Contrary to what is indicated by the existing literature, findings from this study indicate, in addition to economic, social, and cultural dimensions, there are many other factors that affect sustainable development of private art museums. Sustainable development of private art museums may also be shifting from external demands to place a greater emphasis on the museums' own development in an environment filled with uncertainty. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by presenting a model for analyzing the sustainability of private art museums in China that is inherently culturally specific.

Implications for Practice

Results of this study showed sustainable development of private art museums in China is in an exploratory stage, rife with complex and multifaceted issues. Thus, private art museums need to be prepared for the complex external environment, but also to construct and explore sustainable development independently, to gradually increase the social influence of private art museums in the country. Based on the participants' narratives, findings suggest the sustainable development of private art museums in China involves not only private art museums themselves, but also the government and policymakers, various audiences, educational institutions, and joint stakeholders.

Implications for Private Art Museums

First, Chinese private art museums should aim to achieve sustainable development by attending to perspectives of museum professionals, genes of private art museums, cultural governance structures, and social context in which these private art museums are situated. It may be helpful for private art museums to adopt a culturally specific model to implement additional

strategies for sustainable development of these local museums by considering characteristics of the Chinese context. One way this might be accomplished is by surveying prospective audiences on their understandings of private art museums and then tailoring development initiatives to these beliefs.

Second, it is important to consider external uncertainties and to prepare for them, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other unforeseeable social issues. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic is an event of the past, it may be helpful for private art museums to seriously reflect on what they have learned from the pandemic to meet the challenges they may have to face in the future. Additionally, museums might also see a place for implementing changes to delivery and content brought on by COVID-19, even in times not characterized by crisis, as a way to innovate for sustainability.

These interviewees' comments on COVID-19 hold important implications for studies examining how museum planning factors into sustainability initiatives. COVID-19 is surely not the last unforeseen event museums will have to grapple with, so as museum staff cannot anticipate the unexpected, they can anticipate how they will respond to the unexpected. Participants' comments that portrayed COVID-19 as a much-needed opportunity for recalibration supports research like Kasiola and Metaxas (2023), which presented the pandemic as an event that allowed Greek museums to pursue methods for improvement. Furthermore, even though COVID-19 brought these issues to the forefront of discussion, funding concerns and content delivery remain perennial concerns for museums in general, meaning takeaways from COVID-19 will be applicable to a variety of social contexts down the road.

As these interviews show, an economic downturn, such as the one incited by COVID-19, may disproportionately affect private art museums as they rely heavily on income from their

founders' parent companies. This finding adds to the debate around how funding sources (i.e., private vs. public) factors into sustainability efforts. This topic has received a great deal of attention, with Chmelik's (2019) *Sustainable Revenue for Museums* most recently serving as a prime example. Given how tied private art museums' funding is to finances of their founders and their founders' companies, it may be prudent for them to consider alternative sources of revenue to ensure their long-term existence.

Another suggestion involves construction and exploration of sustainable development policies and practices of private art museums, which could be strengthened by addressing pressures from the external environment, when possible. Thus, recognizing the negative impact marketization and commodification of the art industry has had on art museums, those working in museums studies, and museum professionals, may wish to explore methods for balancing their organization's commercial interests and their commitment to the greater social good, and work together to resist shallow cultural consumption. Research shows that the state of an institution's finances is one of the main factors for the sustainable development of private art museums (see Velthuis & Gera, 2024).

Therefore, art museums may wish to consider making annual budgets well in advance, exploring boundaries between art production and self-financing functions, and resisting the urge to sacrifice the quality of art production to alleviate financial pressures. Setyagung et al. (2013) have shown the division between quality of art production and financial stability may be a false binary. By applying the triple-helix concept of organizational innovation, wherein governments, academia, and businesses collaborate for cultural preservation (Etzkowitz & Ranga, 2012), they may be more poised to achieve sustainability.

Due to the complicated relationship between private art museums and their founders, private art museums may want to continue to explore how they can improve the construction of their own professionalization mechanisms, so they can develop independently of corporate or personal constraints. At the same time, it may be helpful if private art museums continue to investigate using council systems, academic committees, and methods for promoting the socialization of funds. As this model is not commonplace, there are still some private museums in China that have their own foundations designed to support economic sustainability, but the number of these museums is very small; to illustrate, of all the museums represented in this study, only the Inside-Out Art Museum has a model like this in place. However, acquiring more diversified support could better prepare these museums to face society, understand the current audience, interact with said audiences, and fill the generational gap between the public and contemporary art through continuous art production and public education.

For a long time, Chinese private art museums relied on the owner/single funder to establish many well-received private museums and had sufficient funding to prevent them from having to participate in the marketization typifying the industry. Guangdong Times Art Museum was a case in point. However, once the owner/single funder exits, the question of how to make Chinese private art museums economically sustainable remains an unsolved issue. Many private museums have tried the Western model, which relies on admission fees and commercial ventures as methods for generating revenue, but the reason they fail is that the revenue accrued represents a nominal sum compared to the cost of running a museum.

I see three distinct approaches to economic sustainability in the future. First, owners/single funders will still remain, but a more positive relationship between the parent companies and museums must be negotiated, one that is collaborative and mutually empowering.

Second, as the value of art museums continues to be acknowledged, parent companies will set up foundations to support their respective art museums, or capital can be socialized to set up foundations to support one or more art museums. Third, art museums themselves should explore the balance between a commitment to art and the market, thereby exploring a new model of art museum development, one that does not harm the quality of the museum's art production, but also brings in economic income to promote development of the museum.

In addition to more flexible or hybrid financial models, museums may wish to further reflect on who comprises their audience. Encouraging private art museums to explore inclusiveness and pay attention to marginalized social groups may bring new audiences and different perspectives to the museums. Given the previous discussion of globalization, it stands to reason China will soon attend to inclusiveness in a way similar to the Western world, though perhaps to a varying extent. Therefore, other museums may wish to use A4 Art Museum as a model for including diverse audiences in their program designs.

Finally, additional strategies private art museums may find useful are expanding the role of art museums' spaces and possible venues for attracting new audiences and promoting urban renewal, thereby strengthening the construction of art museums as tourist destinations and increasing their overall competitiveness. In many ways, as participants demonstrated in their comments, geographic location plays a large role in the museum's institutional identity. Those working in the field of museum studies have long been concerned with effective use of space, with installation art being a classic example. By examining some of the metaphors (e.g., "living room," "destination") these interviewees used to conceptualize the museum space, we can better imagine the versatile spaces in society that museums may adopt and identities they wish to fashion for their organizations. As Murray (1904) noted, "Every museum should, as far as

possible, have a predominant character” (p. 256). It is up to these professionals to collectively decide what the character of their organization will be. This character, or institutional identity, will, in turn, affect how museums position themselves with respect to the public.

Implications for Government and Policymakers

Results of this study pointed out sustainable development of private art museums is affected by external environmental factors, with the government being one of the more relevant stakeholders mentioned by participants. The government cannot be asked or relied upon to solve sustainable development of private art museums, but it can provide conditions for their favorable development by continuously improving cultural governance structures. Governments and policymakers may find it beneficial to learn more about the current situation of private art museums, including problems they face. This deeper understanding may then facilitate reviewing and revising laws and policies regarding donations, tax exemptions, inheritance tax, and other issues to better support private art museums. With this deeper understanding, governments and policymakers may also consider streamlining processes for approving and certifying private nonenterprise social organizations, art museums, and foundations in China, and continue to provide incentives and support to private art museums in the interest of sustainability.

Achieving the designation of a private nonenterprise entity would do more than just provide access to financial resources, however. Private nonenterprise units are social organizations organized by enterprises, institutions, social organizations, and other social forces. Individual citizens use non-state assets to engage in nonprofit social service activities. But most museum audiences do not understand what a private non-art museum is and its practical entailments. The government should do more to convey to the public the significance of private non-art museums, differentiating exhibition companies and galleries from private non-art

museum and state-owned art museums. As the following section will show, changing audience perceptions, including those regarding the official designation of private art museums, is crucial to their sustainability.

Implications for Art Museum Audiences

As stakeholders in the sustainable development of private art museums, the audience is also a participant and collaborator in the construction of the museum's institutional culture. Some suggestions stemming from the findings related to the audiences of private art museums are as follows: (a) encourage the audience to learn about the history and current social role of private art museums in China, and (b) foster the ability to distinguish between art museums, commercial exhibition companies, and commercial art galleries. Collectively, engaging in these undertakings will help address the problem of perception plaguing these institutions, and the issue of audiences' superficial cultural consumption.

As mentioned, participants' responses highlighted how important constructing a particular identity for themselves is for realizing their sustainability goals. One key takeaway from these responses is greater transparency and clarity needs to be granted to the public regarding how (a) private art museums differ from art galleries and (b) they are distinguished from private cultural enterprises. To accomplish this, museums could implement open house days, where they invite the community in at a free or reduced rate and strategically place staff throughout the exhibits to answer questions or provide information about the museum's social role. Additionally, addressing this problem of perception may, as Mayer (2012) noted, necessitate debunking myths about museums in the art education sector. Clearing up such sources of confusion and debate could therefore allow them to adopt an institutional identity that would enable them to flourish and moreover achieve long-term sustainability.

Another method of community engagement may be high quality exhibitions and public art education getting into community. Participants in this study referred to pop-up exhibitions in the pejorative, claiming them to be feeding into superficial cultural consumption. Pop-up exhibitions are, by definition, ephemeral and temporary. Grant (2015) described them “as part exhibition, part program, part story potluck” (p. 14). In their responses, some participants seemed to reject pop-up exhibitions due to their fast-paced nature, and their art production is fragmented which maybe make deeper misunderstanding of contemporary art to the Chinese audience. Therefore, high quality exhibition and public art education may be a more preferable option for bridging sustained audience alliances.

These museums may also be able to more effectively resist pressures of marketization by exploring different financing options. Participants’ responses touch on several tensions that have appeared throughout the participant interviews. On the one hand, participants desire greater financial stability and support for their museums, but on the other, they are skeptical of marketization and influence of individual investors. One interesting workaround presented by participants is reducing the scale of the operations. This recommendation from the interviewees is in line with common adages like “less is more.” By reducing the number of exhibitions offered, museums may be able to avoid seeking private capital, and disadvantages associated with it.

Additionally, broadening their audiences and reaching greater numbers of people was a perpetual concern for participants in this study. However, they tended to situate their discussions at the regional and national level. These museums may wish to explore digitalization trends in the museum industry to cultivate a more global audience. As P. Li and Li (2019) point out, digitalization among museums in China is underway, but still lags behind Western institutions. So, this concept may be an area where private art museums may wish to concentrate their efforts.

Additionally, A. Li and Chen (2014) presented globalization as an opportunity and threat to museum development. By employing methods for better reaching a global audience, then, private art museums may be better poised to achieve sustainability.

Implications for Educational Institutions

Findings of this study revealed many of the problems that private art museums in China face stem from a lack of knowledge about such museums and art they feature, making them relevant for educational institutions. First, educational institutions can include knowledge about art museums and contemporary art in their content to bridge the gap between the audience and these industries. Second, educational institutions can facilitate integration of private art museums into Chinese culture by educating the public on practices and problems that arise in the local context of private art museums. Furthermore, results of the study indicated private art museums could benefit from specialized teams and talents. If they want to develop sustainably, institutions of higher education are encouraged to continue to advance education in disciplines that meet the needs of today's art museums—especially interdisciplinary fields that span the subjects of art, management, business, and education—to cultivate multidisciplinary talents suitable for the sustainable development of today's art museums.

Talent acquisition and staffing issues are a perennial concern for private art museums, as indicated in the interviews featured earlier in this study. As these respondents point out, without sufficient staff for conducting research, quality of their artistic production may suffer, which would negatively impact their audience following. Recruiting volunteers may represent a possible solution to solve the problem of staffing and funding constraints in art museums., but whether volunteers have interdisciplinary skills and qualifications becomes a problem. One possible solution, as the participants suggest, could be in partnering with universities, as the

representative from A4 Art Museum mentioned their institution was doing. This way, different specialties between art museums and colleges and universities form an interdisciplinary dialogue and cooperation and can jointly participate in the cultivation of composite talents, which is a mutual win–win.

Therefore, talents required for sustainable museum growth require a blending of academic and practical knowledge. In recruiting and hiring new talent, museums may strategically seek to identify candidates who have both academic and industry experience. An ancillary benefit of organizational restructuring is it provides the opportunity to develop existing talent. In this way, findings from this study add invaluable insights into studies of talent management in museums (Khalil et al., 2017; Ochieng’Ojwang, 2019). The diverse sources of the collaborations detailed in this study’s findings suggest the key to the sustainability of private art museums in China could likewise lie in such diverse partnerships.

Limitations

Narrative inquiry allows researchers to take participants’ narratives and organize them into meaningful sequences and deepen our understanding of the world and society (Bell, 1997, 2002; Conle, 1992). This study generated enough data to identify meaningful themes and subthemes related to sustainability of specific private art museums in China. However, private art museums represented in this study were located exclusively in big cities in China, which presents two issues when determining the extent its findings are translatable. First, because social milieu of cities is different from that of more rural regions, these findings may not be applicable to museums in less populous areas. Second, as focus of this study was on Chinese private art museums, specifically, these findings would inherently not apply to other countries. These aspects of this qualitative study, therefore render it vulnerable to criticisms of a lack of

generalizability. It is not expected results from this study will necessarily be applicable to other types of art museums, or even other private art museums, in China.

In addition, complexity and diversity of private art museums in China also make it difficult to generalize the results of the study. Participants in this study focused primarily on modern and contemporary private art museums in major cities. I chose participants from across the significant time period of private art museum development from 2000 to the present and endeavored to cover a wide range of participants in terms of their institutions' backgrounds, legal status, and degree of accessibility. However, due to limitations of my personal resources, I was unable to interview more private art museums founded by private collectors.

Another significant limitation pertains to the research design, which intentionally omitted considerations of sustainability from an ecological perspective. Instead, this study adopted a tripartite framework that examined the cultural, social, and economic factors influencing Chinese private art museums' sustainability. This choice was intentional, as sustainability from an ecological or environmental perspective is not as pressing a concern in China as it is in the West. However, such a decision was made based on my personal experiences and firsthand knowledge and, therefore, was susceptible to bias.

Areas for Future Research

Despite these limitations, I was nonetheless able to gain keen insights into the sustainability of private art museums in China and develop the following suggestions for future research. My hope is future research can build on the results of this study and other existing studies to provide additional insights into the sustainable development of private art museums in China.

The first suggestion for future research involves using a case study to expand on this topic on a deeper level. As a methodological tool, case studies can focus on representative private art museums, such as those with a relatively long history, are well-established in various regards, and have undergone major changes and adjustments. In recent years, private art museums in small cities and villages in China have also gradually emerged. Case study research could help to explore the details of these art museums to yield more detailed and specific findings.

At the same time, this study represents a snapshot in time. Because the private art museum scene in China is relatively young, a longitudinal study may be more equipped to assess sustainability from a more macro perspective. Assessing factors impacting sustainability over a longer period of time would add a temporal dimension to the analysis with the effect of imparting greater insights.

Additional recommendations for future studies involve expanding the study population. This narrative inquiry study focused on sustainable development by listening to narratives of private museum experts. Future research could include the narratives of museum visitors and conduct dialogues and exchanges between museum experts and visitors through focus groups. Moreover, listening to perspectives of governmental administrators and policymakers who regulate activities of private art museums would also be another line of inquiry to pursue. Conducting narrative inquiry research with more participants of different backgrounds will furthermore allow future researchers to hear more diverse voices and enhance understandings of different perspectives on this topic.

Referring once more to this study's intentional decision to omit considerations of ecological sustainability, future work may examine this factor to empirically determine if

environmental sustainability does have a significant bearing on private art museums' sustainability. This would serve to extend the present study and confirm or call into question the veracity of its findings. Given the globalizing trend present in the museum industry, it stands to reason the ecological sustainability, which is presently a primary concern in the West, will soon be a concern in the East.

Furthermore, as this study has argued, there are aspects of the Chinese social and cultural climate that encourage museums to operate in a manner different from the West; a comparative analysis between Western museums and Eastern museums may likewise be fruitful. For example, as this study has argued, government censorship plays a great role in how private art museums are run in China, one may wish to analyze Chinese museums side by side against museums in the West, which lack a comparable degree of censorship.

Finally, further research could focus on specific issues at the different levels of sustainable development of private art museums, such as research on audience cultivation and community building, research on inclusiveness, and localized interpretations and internationalization in art production. By narrowing the focus of the study, more specific findings may emerge, which could further the development of sustainable policies and practices for private art museums.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study adapted the Western theoretical model of sustainable development of museums (Stylianou-Lambert et al., 2014) to provide a culturally specific research perspective and offer valuable insights into the sustainable development of private art museums in China. Findings confirmed the sustainable development of private art museums is a

complex and multifaceted concept and determined by factors both external and internal to the art museum itself.

This study highlighted the complex environment and uniqueness of the sustainable development of private art museums in China. Art museums around the world are facing challenges regarding the economic environment, marketization and commodification of the art industry, and effects of COVID-19. Chinese private art museums also face issues that are unique to China, including the museum's own genes, external mechanisms of operation, and social context of the art museum. Results of the study showed Chinese private art museums are constructing and exploring sustainable development in a limited space and complex environment.

In addition, the study identified several factors that contribute to the construction and exploration of the sustainable development of private art museums in China, including the operating mechanisms of the museums, funding issues, art production, institutional positioning, management of field and space, and societal impact. The study emphasized sustainable development of private art museums is a complex and ongoing issue, and COVID-19 is no longer a significant factor affecting the sustainable development of private art museums. Despite limitations of this study, it provided a detailed understanding of the factors influencing the sustainable development of private art museums in China, and thus contributes to the broader literature on sustainable development in art museums.

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Appendix A. Adult Informed Consent in English

ADULT INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Sustainable Development of Private Art Museums in China

Members of the Research Team

Principal Investigator: Doug Havard, PhD

Office: (714) 289-2088

Researcher: Chaoran Li

The purpose of this research:

In the complex and ever-changing global environment, private art museums in China face more severe and diverse issues than state-run art museums because of COVID-19. The purpose of this narrative research is to explore the understanding, practice and value of sustainable development at three levels(culture/society/economic) of private art museums in China.

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. You should take your time deciding whether you want to participate.

If you agree to participate in this study, this research will involve:

- Individuals who are 18 years or older, Staffs (director/curator) working at private art museums in China
- Procedures will include an interview approximately 1 hour
- Risks that do not exceed what would typically be encountered in daily life

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

The research subjects should be officially working staff (director/curator) in private art museums in China.

You are being asked to be in this study because you meet the criteria.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

This research aims to explore the practice and understanding of sustainable development of private art museums in China, in terms of culture, society and economy. Explore what kind of adjustments and experiments Chinese private art museums have made under the complex and ever-changing environment. This study also hopes to provide a powerful empirical supplement for the development of existing private art museums, help cultural institutions at home and abroad to increase their understanding of Chinese private art museums, and shed some light on promoting the sustainable development of Chinese private art museums.

What will be done during this research study?

You will participate in an online semi-structured interview. The time is about 1 hour. The interview will be conducted via tencent meeting room, and the interview will be audio-recorded for coding and data analysis.

How will my data be used?

The data will only be used for this study.

Your data will not be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

The first possible risk is although the data will be protected, any collection of identifiable information may compromise your privacy. So, all data will be stored in the Chapman cloud storage provider, and passwords will be set to ensure your data security.

The second possible risk is some questions may be sensitive in nature, and you may feel embarrassment. So, you may elect to not answer any questions posed by the researcher at any time throughout the interview process.

What are the possible benefits to you?

The potential benefits may give you working experience and understanding of sustainable development in private art museums in China. The results from this study will also reveal similar and divergent approaches to sustainable development that may provide a unique set of information to participants.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The benefits is to better understand the practice, understanding and value of the sustainable development of Chinese private art museums, and help independent cultural institutions cope with the complex environment in the future, and how government policies will support the sustainable development of Chinese private art museums.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Instead of being in this research study, you can choose not to participate.

What will participating in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

You have no compensation in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the primary concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data.

The data will be stored electronically in a Chapman cloud storage provider (e.g., OneDrive, Dropbox; recommended) and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for 1 year after the study is complete.

The only people who will have access to your research records are the research team members, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. Information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but the data will be reported as a group or summarized data, and your identity will be kept strictly confidential. We cannot guarantee total privacy.

What are your rights as a research participant?

You may ask any questions about this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study or during the study.

For study-related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at irb@chapman.edu.

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (i.e., “withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Chapman University. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent

You are voluntarily deciding whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that

(1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered, and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You may print or save this consent form if you would like a copy to keep.

Printed Name of Participant or Legal Guardian

Signature of Participant or Legal Guardian

Date

AUDIO RECORDING:

I have received an adequate description of the purpose and procedures for audio recording sessions during the course of the proposed research. I give my consent to allow myself to be audio recorded during participation in this study, and for those records to be reviewed by persons involved in the study, and for other professional purposes as described to me.

____ **Yes**, I agree to allow the research team to **audio record** my interview(s).

____ **No**, I do not wish to have my interview(s) **audio recorded**.

Signature of Participant or Legal Guardian

Date

Appendix B. Adult Informed Consent in Chinese

成人参与研究的知情同意书

中国民营美术馆的可持续发展

研究小组成员

首席调查员： Doug Havard博士 办公室： (714) 289-2088

研究员： 李超然

研究目的：

在复杂多变的全球环境中，由于 COVID19，中国的私立美术馆面临着比国营美术馆更为严峻和多样化的问题。本次叙事研究的目的是从三个层面（文化/社会/经济）探讨中国民营美术馆对可持续发展的理解、实践和价值。

我们邀请您参加这项研究。研究只包括自愿参加的人。您有一定的时间可以考虑然后决定是否要参加。

如果您同意参加这项研究，请悉知，这项研究将涉及：

- 18岁或以上的美术馆员工（馆长或者策展人）
- 研究包括一次约1小时的访谈
- 风险不超过日常生活中通常会遇到的风险

邀请

我们邀请您参加这项研究。本表中的信息是为了帮助您决定是否参加。如果您有任何问题，请提出。

为什么邀请您参加这项研究？

研究对象需要为在中国民营美术馆正式工作的工作人员（馆长或者策展人），您被邀请参与这项研究是因为您符合对研究对象的身份要求。

做这项研究的目的是什么？

本研究旨在探索中国民营美术馆对可持续发展的实践、理解和价值观，有关文化、社会与经济的三个层面。探索在复杂多变的环境下，中国民营美术馆作出了什么样的调整与实验。

本研究还希望为现有的民营美术馆的发展提供有力的实证研究补充，帮助国内外文化机构增加对中国民营美术馆的了解，对促进中国民营美术馆的可持续发展有所启示。

这项研究包括什么？

您需要参加线上半结构化的访谈。时间约为1小时。访谈将通过腾讯会议进行，访谈将被录屏和录音用于后续编码和文本分析。

数据将如何被使用？

这些数据将只用于本次研究。

您的数据不会被用于未来的其他研究，也不会与其他研究人员共享。

参加这项研究可能有什么风险？

第一个可能的风险是，虽然数据将受到保护，但任何可识别信息的收集都可能会损害您的隐私。所以所有数据都将存储在查普曼云存储提供商中，并设置密码以确保您的数据安全。第二个可能的风险是有些问题可能是敏感的，你可能会感到尴尬。因此，在整个访谈过程中，您可以随时选择不回答研究人员提出的任何问题。

参加这项研究可能有什么好处？

潜在的好处可能会让参与者获得在中国民营美术馆的工作经验和对可持续发展的理解。这项研究的结果还将揭示相似和不同的可持续发展方法，这些方法可能会为参与者提供一组独特的信息

参加这项研究对其他人可能有什么好处？

好处是更好地了解中国民营美术馆可持续发展的实践、理解与价值观，帮助独立的文化机构

应对未来的复杂环境，政府的政策将如何支持中国民营美术馆的可持续发展。

参加这项研究的替代方案是什么？

您可以选择不参加这项研究。

参加这项研究您需要付出多少费用？

您参加这项研究不需要任何费用。

参加这项研究是否会得到补偿？

您不会从这项研究中得到补偿。

如果在这项研究中遇到问题，应该怎么做？

研究小组成员将密切关注每个参与者的情况。如果参加本研究会产生任何后果，请您立即与本同意书开头所列的任一研究人员联系。

您的信息将被如何保护？

我们将采取合理的措施来确保您的隐私和研究数据的保密性。

数据将以电子数据的方式储存在查普曼大学云端储存设备中，在研究期间和研究结束后的三年内，只有研究小组可以看到。

也只有研究小组成员、机构审查委员会(IRB)以及法律规定的其他人员、机构或赞助人可以查阅您的研究参与记录。本研究的信息可能会在科学杂志上发表或在学术会议上汇报，但数据将作为一个整体或汇总数据进行汇报，您的身份将被严格保密。但我们不能保证完全的隐私。

作为研究参与者，您有什么权利？

您可以提出关于这项研究的任何问题，并在同意参加研究之前或在研究期间得到这些问题的回答。

有关研究的问题，请联系本表开头所列的调查员。

有关您的权利问题或对研究的投诉，请联系机构审查委员会（IRB），irb@chapman.edu。

如果您决定不参加这项研究，或在研究开始后决定停止参与，会发生什么？

您可以不参加这项研究，也可以在研究开始之前、期间或之后的任何时候以任何理由停止参加这项研究（即“退出”）。决定不参加本研究或决定退出不会影响您与研究或查普曼大学的关系。您不会失去您有权享受的任何权益。

知情同意书

您是自愿决定是否参加本研究的。签署此表意味着

(1) 您已阅读并理解本同意书, (2) 您已得到同意书的解释, (3) 您的问题已得到解答, (4) 您已决定参加本研究。如果您想保存这份同意书, 您可以打印或自行留存。

参与者或法定监护人的打印姓名

参与者或法定监护人的签名

日期

录音:

我已收到关于在本项研究过程中进行录音的目的和程序的充分说明。我同意在参与本研究期间对对话进行录音, 并由参与研究的人员对这些记录进行审查, 或用于已经向我描述过的其他专业目的。

-是的, 我同意并允许研究小组对我的访谈进行录音。

-不, 我不希望对我的访谈进行录音。

参与者或法定监护人的签名

日期

Appendix C. Interview Guide in English

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study about sustainable development of private art museums in China. We will be asking you a series of questions that will take approximately 1 hour. During this time, you are free to ask to skip questions or refuse to discuss anything that may be uncomfortable to you. Please review the following consent forms, and then we can get started.

Please answer a few basic background information questions to get us started:

- A. Can you introduce yourself? Please describe your role and main responsibility in your museum.
- B. Have you ever heard of sustainable development?
 - a. If so, how do you understand sustainable development of private art museums?
- C. Have COVID-19 and the downturn in the regional economy affected your museum development in the past three years?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not, why not?
- D. What other factors do you feel are constraining the development of private art museums in China ?
- E. What other qualities/elements are important to the development of private art museums in China?
- F. What are the biggest challenges to the sustainable development of your museums?
- G. What are your museum's work priorities for now and the future?
- H. What aspects of private art museums would you like to see change and breakthrough in the future?

Thank you again for your time today. Is there anything else that we did not cover that you would like to share with me today?

Great. Thank you again. We will continue our interviews and then type up the transcripts and analyze the results. We will share our findings with you in the near future. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Appendix D. Interview Guide in Chinese

感谢您同意参与我们关于中国私立美术馆可持续发展的研究。我们将询问您一系列问题，大约需要 1 小时。在此期间，您可以自由要求跳过问题或拒绝讨论任何可能让您感到不舒服的事情。请查看以下同意书，然后我们就可以开始了。

请回答一些基本背景信息问题以帮助我们开始：

- A. 你能自我介绍一下吗？请描述您在博物馆中的角色和主要职责。
- B. 您听说过可持续发展吗？
 - a. 如果有，您是如何理解民营美术馆的可持续发展？
- C. 近三年来，COVID-19 和地区经济的低迷对你们博物馆的发展有影响吗？
 - a. 如果有的话，是如何影响的？
 - b. 如果没有，是什么原因呢？
- D. 您认为还有哪些因素制约着中国民营美术馆的发展？
- E. 对于中国民营美术馆的发展来说，还有哪些重要的品质/要素？
- F. 你们美术馆在可持续发展上面临的最大挑战是什么？
- G. 你们美术馆当前和未来的工作重点是什么？
- H. 您希望未来民营美术馆在哪些方面有所改变和突破？

再次感谢您今天抽出时间。还有什么我们没有提到但您今天想与我分享的吗？

伟大的。再次感谢你。我们将继续采访，然后打出笔录并分析结果。我们将在不久的将来与您分享我们的发现。如有任何问题或疑虑，请随时与我们联系。