China's Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale.
Is it working?

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Abstract

The Chinese desire of establishing an effective national cultural soft power affected even the diffusion of Chinese contemporary art in prestigious international art events. Specifically, the Venice Biennale has been used over the years as a Cultural Diplomacy platform suitable at displaying an "offical" contemporary image of China to the world. This master thesis examines the effectivity of such Chinese Cultural Diplomacy policies in the context of the Venice Biennale. This, by longitudinally controlling the evolution of both the average auction prices and the career of the artists who exhibited at the People's Republic of China pavilion of the Venice Biennale from 2003 to 2015. I argue that Chinese Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale can be considered as been successful in Europe, in the minor art markets of Latin America, Oceania, and West Asia, and also domestically, in the same China. By contributing on the literature on China's Cultural diplomacy at the Venice Biennale, the research stresses the relevancy of the China as a "soft-power superpower" and as a prime actor in the contemporary art world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since its entrance in the World Trade Organisation, Chinese government has strongly focused its efforts on the transformation of the nation into a "soft-power superpower" (Kynge and al, 2017). Indeed, next to its increasing economic and military influence, China has been structuring over the years a net of foreign policies stressing the importance of its domestic culture as an essential tool for attracting other nations towards its sphere of influence (Zhang, 2016, Xu, 2016, Ho 2018). As a consequence, Chinese cultural industries, over the years, have been employed strategically in order to enhance positively the perception of the nation around the world (Eleonor, 2018). In other words, Cultural industries, over the years, have been employed as a tool of Cultural Diplomacy, defined by Mark (2010, 43) as "the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy".

Over the years, even Chinese contemporary art has been included in this action of Cultural Diplomacy (e.g. Wang,2009; Yung-Wen, 2015; Peerce and al, 2016). Indeed, this artistic genre has been considered as instrumental because of its ability at displaying a perspective on Contemporary Chinese culture. In this way, when overlooked by Chinese's officials, contemporary art becomes a valuable instrument for perpetuating national Cultural Diplomacy around the world attempting to enhance the attractiveness of China in the international arena.

Outside its own borders, in the field of contemporary art, China Cultural Diplomacy has been especially perpetuated at the contemporary art exhibition of Venice Biennale (e.g. Wang,2009; Yung-Wen, 2017). This prestigious show, is considered by the specialized literature among the most important international contemporary art exhibitions of the planet (e.g. Robertson, 2005; Baia Curioni, 2012) and one of the most powerful artistic institution in the process of globalisation of the art world (Yugev and al. 2015). Not surprisingly, it represents an ideal platform for Cultural Diplomacy action generally, and of the Chinese government specifically.

To present date, the majority of the existing literature on Chinese Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale, focused its attention on assessing in which way Chinese Cultural diplomacy was being perpetuated at the Italian happening (Wang, 2009 ; Pollack, 2015; Rodner, & Preece, 2016; Yung Wen, 2017). Nevertheless, none of these studies clarified weather, or weather not, these policies could have been defined as effective.

This master thesis aims at filling this academic gap, aiming at investigating the effectiveness over the years of Chinese Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale.

From this standpoint, the present research will try to give an answer to the following research question:

To what extent Chinese Cultural Diplomacy has been successful in promoting Chinese contemporary art in the art world throughout the Venice Biennale?

Being the Venice Biennale an institution capable of conferring the highest degree of artistic recognition to an artist career (Peerce and al, 2013), we might expect to see an enhancement of the relevancy of Chinese art proposed in the art world after the Italian happening. However, it will be possible for us to assess the veracity of this expectancy only by developing a dedicated quantitative research investigating the longitudinal evolution of the artists exhibiting in Venice over the years.

By doing so, this thesis contributes to an additional aspect of the relevant literature on China's development in the art world. Indeed, the art market has been already used as a proxy for

determining the impact of specific factors over both the price for the art (e.g. Goetzmann and al. 2011, Shin and al., 2014), and the career path of an artist (e.g. Quemin & Van Hest 2015). However, as far as the researcher is aware of, it has never been utilized to assess the impact that cultural diplomacy practices have over the art market, especially considering the case of China. Seen under different lenses, this research answers to the call of Yugev (and al. 2015) for clarifications on why Asia specifically, and China especially is performing so well in the contemporary art market. By playing the card of China's Cultural Diplomacy I hope to contribute to answer to such a question.

To do so, this study will make use two main theoretical infrastructures. On the one hand, from the field of international relations, the concepts of Soft Power (Nye, 2004) and Cultural Diplomacy (Mark,2010) will be of great use for understanding both the current position of Chinese government towards Chinese contemporary art and the way it gets displayed in the art world.

On the other hand, an institutionalist-constructivist perspective on the art world (e.g. Velthius 2005; Baia Curioni,2012; Rodner, and Thomson, 2013) will help us at contextualizing Chinese cultural diplomacy practices at the Venice Biennale, setting them in the general ecosystem of the global art market.

From the same strain of literature, and with the help of cultural economics studies, we will elicit the methodological instruments necessary at assessing the effectiveness of China's cultural diplomacy practices in the art world.

The remaining of this master thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 is dedicated to the theoretical infrastructure sustaining the research and placing our case study within the literature. The concepts of Soft Power, Cultural Diplomacy, and their relationship with the art world will be firstly discussed. Then, the analysis of China Cultural Soft power and Chinese Cultural diplomacy will be exposed contextualizing the two entities to the case of Chinese Contemporary Art. Finally, the role of the Venice Biennale in the international art world will be explored, analysing how Chinese Cultural Diplomacy crossed the path of the Italian happening consistently over the years. Chapter 3 illustrates the methodological structure of the research highlighting both the research design and the research method of the study. Finally, at the end of the chapter, the limitations of the thesis will be presented. Chapter 4 will be completely dedicated to the report of the data elicited from the construction of our panel. There, I will describe the main statistics of the whole panel, for then focus the attention at understanding what happened to each set of artist representing People's Republic of China at the Venice Biennale at each edition from 2003 to 2015. In Chapter 5 I will present the main discussions of the findings of the research, first stressing the attention on what happened in the auction world, and then passing to the world of the exhibitions. There I will attempt to propose sounds conclusions capable of answering to the research question. Chapter 6 concludes this research resuming the main structure of the thesis, its limitations, its findings, and the venues for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy.

2.1.1 Soft Power

Within the field of the international relations, the association between culture and power saw a renewed interest because of the historical developments witnessed by our contemporary society. The end of cold-war, the phenomenon of globalisation, the rise of Asian Countries at the centre of world stage, the information age and the emergence of social media. These and many other factors deeply and rapidly re-defined our conception of the world and the way we perceive it. Within this cultural confusion, states adapted their nature to answer to changing times within the international arena in order to provide directions in such a confusing environment. Not surprisingly, nowadays one of the main point of strength that states can employ is the ability of changing the behaviour of other actors within the international arena (Zhang, 2016, 5). For a state, being able to make its international counterpart follow a preferred political direction in such a spinning environment is indeed, a source of power.
But how is it possible for a state to convince the other nations at following its propositions?

According to Nye (2004) power is to be intended as the capacity of making the others doing the things we want. This goal is achieved in three ways: by means of the military, by means of the economics and by means of persuasion. According to Nye, military and economic powers are to be considered as the "hard power" of a nation. A power recognisable and coercive. On the other hand, the capacity of states of being persuasive, attracting the others at doing what they want, is to be considered as "Soft Power".

Within the field of international relations, many scholars reflected on the relationship between power and culture before Nye. The Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci, first put in place the differentiation between material-structural power and symbolic power underling how the latter was an essential tool for creating a cultural hegemony reinforcing the power of the dominant (Gramsci, 1975). Successively, British realist Edward Carr interpreted the notion of power as the capability of a state to obtain its objectives throughout its military and economic resources as well as its "power over opinion" (Carr, 2001). According to Carr, being perceived culturally in a positive way is vital for the capability of states of reaching their political objectives.
Influenced enormously by the ideas of Carr, Joseph Nye, defined "soft power" as the capacity of a state to obtain benefit without the use of economic or military means but by generating a positive attraction that facilitates the accumulation of other forms of power (Nye 2004: 5). Paraphrasing an old adage, an instance of this attitude would therefore be resumed by saying "where culture leads, power follows".

Considering prominent the role of persuasiveness within the sphere of power of a nation, the concept of soft power attracted numbers of criticisms. One initial problem concerns the differentiation between hard power and soft power and the fact that large parts of statecraft which involve negotiation, and/ or the non- coercive use of economic resources would be neglected by the analysis of Nye (Brown,2016,44). Additionally, some authors considered soft power utterly "too soft" for realising national interest (Ferguson, 2009). When vital interests are in

place, military and economic actions would fully be decisive for the realisation of the scopes of a nation. Other scholars even considered soft power as a threat for the state. Indeed, because of its vagueness, it would utterly undermine the effectiveness of traditional military and economic diplomatic goals (Gray, 2011). Furthermore, Mattern,(2016), even questioned whether a real differentiation between hard and soft power could ultimately be drawn. According to its view, soft power would be, paraphrasing Carl von Clausewitz, merely the continuation of hard power by other means.

Yet, despite these relevant objections, the concept of soft power has been largely considered within the field of the international relations because of its ability of providing a contemporary view for talking about "non-coercitive models of influence in international politics" (Brown, 2016, 37) and tackling cultural conflicts among states. Certainly, soft power reveals its full potential in context where cultural conflicts are in place. For instance, the one driving terrorist threats. Indeed, "the cultural stances empowering terrorism economically, politically, culturally and socially can only be removed by deploying soft power" (Zhang, 2016,15). Where different views are undermining cooperation and threatening peace processes, soft power aims at correcting the cultural gap between cultures enhancing negotiation and cooperation among cultures.

Soft power is the "attractive" power of a nation, obtainable throughout specific resources which are its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values
(when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). (Nye, 2008,97)

But in which way states can activate their soft power and convincing other actors within the international sphere to follow their stances?

A first way to mobilize the soft power resources in order to attract the public and the administrations of other countries (Nye, 2008), governments can employ their Public Diplomacy, defined as a set of communicative activities designed to generate a positive external interest regarding a political territory and diverse social groups. Using these activities, governments encourage various external actions considered beneficial for a specific political space" (Zamorano,2016, 168). By doing so, Public Diplomacy is directed not only to foreign governments but also and especially to "nongovernmental individuals". Indeed, under the action of Public Diplomacy, public opinion as well as private enterprises are equally targeted (Nye, 2008, 101) in order to capture their benevolence toward the state entailing this soft power action.

2.1.2 Cultural Diplomacy

Yet, public diplomacy it is not the only tool employable by governments to activate the soft power of a nation. An additional instrument is represented by Cultural Diplomacy.

Generally, within the discipline, the most quoted definition of cultural diplomacy is the one offered by Milton Cummins: "cultural diplomacy is the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their people to foster mutual understanding" (Cummins, 2003). Unfortunately, precisely identifying the notion of cultural diplomacy is a difficult task because of the difficulty of clearly assessing what are its boundaries, and what is the reciprocity among the actors within this theoretical framework (Mark, 2008). For these reasons, other authors are more prone to clearly identify the cultural diplomacy action within the sphere of "the activities of foreign policy that deal with culture, education, science and, to a degree, technical cooperation; in other words, those that relate to activities of the spirit" (Bélanger, 1994, 422). The debate on cultural diplomacy, therefore, would be related to the possibility that the use of culture would be either linked, or not, to foreign policy strategies of a state.

In this master thesis, I will refer to the concept of cultural diplomacy as proposed by Mark (2010, 43) who defines cultural diplomacy as the "deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy." Indeed, cultural diplomacy is here to be considered as a tool capable of activating the cultural soft power of a nation. Being soft power the attempt of perusing national interests by mean of persuasion, the researcher things that cultural diplomacy employs strategically specific cultural resources in order to enhance the attractiveness of a state, and, as a consequence, its policies.

In the academic literature many scholars debated over the possibility that Cultural Diplomacy would be part of the Public Diplomacy fields. Indeed, both cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy share an *ideational* diplomatic stance, which means that ideas are a mean to convey diplomatic messages. Additionally, they both target a public audience placed outside the official channels of diplomatic communication (Goff, 2013). Because of this similarity, and because of the fact that their definition is still undefined, it is difficult to say where public diplomacy ends and where cultural diplomacy starts (Topić and Sciortino, 2012).

Yet, many authors pointed out how cultural diplomacy answers to different rules compared to public diplomacy. Indeed, whereas public diplomacy takes an unidirectional relationship with the targeted audience cultural diplomacy acts in a different way. Indeed while "public diplomacy emphasises at explaining one's policy to the others, cultural diplomacy takes a bi-or multilateral approach with an emphasis on mutual recognition" (Berger, 2008, 3). Differently form public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy focuses on the things that are common to the interested cultures generating a circulation of the ideas which is reciprocal.

Moreover, as Sablosky (2003) affirms, whereas public diplomacy is more interested in practices able gaining results in the short term, whereas cultural diplomacy focuses on establishing fruitful long-term bundles as well as long term visible results.

These last two points are the ones differentiating cultural diplomacy from the notion of propaganda. Actually, as Melissen (2006) explains, whereas the "unidirectional manipulative propaganda aims at short-term political gains, cultural diplomacy implies a long-term reciprocal dialogue with foreign audiences" to reach its goals.

Lastly, an additional differentiation is provided by Clarke,(2014, 3) who clearly explains that "Whereas public diplomacy is produced by the political system for a political purpose, cultural diplomacy recycles the products of the cultural life of a country at the service of foreign policy goals". This latter point is expecially relevant for determining the independent particularity of cultural diplomacy practice. As Zamorano(2016, 169 explains)

"Aside from a nation's government, its business people, artists, emigrants, etc. also participate in this complex space [cultural diplomacy]. Their exchanges are usually pre-determined by the official definitions of culture and operationalized by the governmental institution and agents, which shape and promote a group of artistic and cultural goods and activities that identify with official cultural policy and national identity. This combination of government policies of international cultural promotion, framed as a general strategy, could be considered cultural diplomacy"
(Zamorano, 2016, 169).

Within this context, important contributions on the nature of cultural diplomacy as an independent entity have been provided by authors active in the field of international relations (e.g. Finn, 2003), international law (e.g Nafziger et al.2010), cultural economics, (e.g. Singh 2010), history (MacKenzie, 2013), and cultural studies (Clarke, 2014).

However, the efficacy of cultural diplomacy for reaching long-term foreign policy objectives has been harshly questioned within the literature. Firstly, because very long-term commitment is

required. Indeed, only after a long commitment specific results are intended to be persuaded (Ardt, 2001). Additionally, no definitive metrics been elicited are so far for understanding the efficacy of cultural diplomacy practices (Clarke, 2014). Without applicable measurements for understanding the effect of a specific cultural product on the mind of the individual, the overall efficiency of the cultural diplomacy practices can be fully questioned (Raj Isar, 2010). Additionally, it is important to consider that cultural diplomacy works when "people can easily move across borders. But security concerns can make exchanges challenging in certain moments (Goff,2013, 433)".

Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy maintains a relevant position in the field of the international relations. Indeed, starting from the assumptions that the arts, the education, and the language represent a primary access to enter in contact with a different cultures (Goff, 2013) this practice reflect on the way in which these resources can be employed for enhancing the attractiveness of a state on the international arena.

2.2 Art and Cultural Diplomacy.

2.2.1 Art and power, art and politics

Within the academic literature, some scholars approached their understanding of the arts on the basis of a general appreciation of the visual art displayed (e.g. Gombrich, 1995 neglecting the political environment framing its production. Some even claimed that the aesthetic creativity of an artists would totally totally derive on his pure artistic desire for self-fulfilment (Hirschman, 1983) and that the context in which the artist operates is of secondary importance. Unfortunately, these "romantic visions" (Rodner and Preece, 2016, 130) neglect the cosmos of events gravitating around the arts, so that the political and ideological dimension generating an art piece is "rarely acknowledged" at the advantage of the action of the individual artist. However, a different academic strains proposed a constructivist approaches to art production (e.g. Danto, 1964 ; Becker, 1982) in order to better investigate its relationship with power. Danto(1964) was among the first to link artistic production to the power structures characterising the art industry. Precisely, he first explored how legitimacy and success are to be achieved in the art world, underlying the relevancy of the modality by which artistic value is assessed and legitimized. Consequently, he stressed how within the same industry, a set of powerful institution inherently shape the artistic production, as more recent works (e.g. Velthuis, 2005) confirmed. This constructivist approach to art production allows us to see the generation of an artwork from a broader perspective than the one of the individual, without neglecting the relationship bundling art and power together. These approaches reflect Foucault positions (1991) on power. "As power is everywhere, he tells us, it pervades society and is in constant flux and negotiation, diffused and embodied in discourse and knowledge and reinforced and redefined through societal institutions such as the education system, the media and political and economic ideologies"(Preece, 2014,30). In realtion to the arts, the german-born artist Hans Haake expressed this concept by assessing how "no artists are immune by the socio-political value system of the society in which they live and of which all cultural agencies are a part, no matter if they are ignorant of these constraints or not'' (cited in Harrison and Wood 1992, p. 905). These considerations, taken to the extremes, acknowledge the fact that art, not only is fully intertwined and representative of the political

environment surrounding it, but that utterly *performs* politics in its display (Beech, 2010 ; Rodner and Preece 2016). This master thesis has a consideration of the arts exactly as such.

2.2.2 Art and Cultural Diplomacy

Few goods during history have been linked to power and politics as frequently as the arts. In facts, since ancient times, artistic artefacts have been used to display power or to indicate which individuals was prominent in the political environment of a given society in a specific moment in time. Indeed, over history, art has been instrumental in representing politics and power because it embeds in its narrative the social, economic and political conditions that brought at its creation (Rodner and Preece 2016). Not surprisingly, the use of art as diplomatic tool is a gesture embedded in human cultural exchange. Indeed, since antiquity the "exchange of formal gifts, involved precious man-made objects of beauty" (Arndt, 2005, 360) that ambassadors used to bring to their foreign counterpart as an instrument demonstrating empathy and cultural proximity. Possibly, the role of the arts in the diplomatic sphere relates to their nature, to the fact that they represent artefacts intertwining national identity and external views. This two-sided relationship has been accurately captured by Thomas Jefferson's correspondence to James Madison, on September 20, 1785, when he affirmed:

> *You see I am an enthusiast on the subject of the arts. But it is an*
> *enthusiasm of which I am not ashamed, as its object is to improve the taste*
> *of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile to them the*
> *respect of the world and procure them its praise. (Jefferson,1904 cited in Shnider, 2003)*

When seen under this perspective, artworks are essential tool for diplomatic action. They turn as "a mirror of society" objects able to "visualize traditions and change, progress and regression, extraversion or introversion. They are unequalled sources of cultural information. But, most of all they create opportunities to transcend borders and widen horizons." (Huygens, 2008, 18). The arts "have always had the advantage of transcending language barriers" because of their inner nature, because of their "imprecision" (Arndt, 2005, 360). It is not necessary to speak Italian for admiring Leonardo's *Monna Lisa* or mastering Spanish for being astonished by Velasquez's *Las Meninas.* Art can go in places where trade and politics cannot. Diplomats have to follow procedures, art no. Art is not conceivable as unilateral instrument to be employed coercively, but an instrument necessary to establish a long-term relationship with foreign cultures (Huygens, 2008). However, the arts have to be carefully handled if one wants to make them an item able to fulfil their diplomatic practice. Indeed, when artworks are created instrumentally to reach political goals without allowing for artistic expression to emerge, they can no longer realise their distinctive role and merely reflect the official policy of a country or other entity (Huygens 2008), utterly resulting in items of propaganda. Actually, its distance to power in production is what makes art valuable in our understanding of societies. This vision is shared by many scholars (Channick, 2005, 1 ; Berger,2008). Among them Nye (2004) who advocated the necessity of distancing one's cultural production from governmental pressure in order to make not only art as cultural diplomacy tool but the overall discipline of soft power effective. In order to be persuasive, art, as well as many other cultural goods, need to be free in production, otherwise it might well sustain the position of whom says that within the sphere of the international relations art is mere propaganda, or a costly frivolity (Arndt, 2005). Especially, in the contemporary art discourse, it is important to privilege the "art for art sake" discourse differentiating it from possible social control. Yet, this does not mean

at all that certain socio-political discourses are in circulation. It utterly means that these messages are indeed less noticeable (Preece, 2014).

If seen under these lenses, Cultural Diplomacy is the natural and public extension of the diplomatic use of the arts. But in which way this practice can utterly make use of them?

As referred by Zaugg (et al. 2015), the value of art can be classified in three distinct categories: intrinsic, instrumental, and institutional (Hewison and Holden, 2012). The intrinsic value of the art is the "the subjective effect on individuals, the pleasure of seeing and sharing art with others" (Zaugg et al. 2015, 137). Secondly, the instrumental value of the art is the benefit elicited when the arts are used as a tool or instrument to accomplish some other aims," (Hewison and Holden 2012) such as using the arts to promote intercultural understanding under the light of the foreign policy strategy of a state, under the point of view of its cultural diplomacy. Lastly, the institutional use of art stands for the way foreign individuals look to a state, on the basis of the observed correspondence, (or incongruence) between the way the institution would like the be perceived and the actual way people perceive it. (Hewison and Holden 2012).

These three levels are built one on top of the each other and are necessary one another to express the power of art at its best. Any artwork incapable of expressing its intrinsic value, difficultly will manage to convey its instrumental one. Equally, without the instrumental value, the institutional value of the art would be utterly neglected (Zaugg et al. 2015).

Therefore, the arts can be effective in displaying its message only when a powerful and convincing intrinsic power is exposed. In other words, if art is not able to express a genuine intense, intriguing and convincing message, it is of no use in terms of cultural diplomacy. Instead of fostering mutual understanding and enhance the attractiveness of national culture, it would merely result in a propagandistic action.

2.3 China's Cultural Diplomacy and the Arts.

As previously discussed, art is to be considered as a powerful medium for conveying cultural diplomacy policies to a broad audience, and an essential tool for each state willing to increase its soft power within the international arena. It is not a case if in the last decades, a relevant number of countries form both developed and developing nations focused their attention on the field of the arts for increasing their international attractiveness. (e.g, Brown, 2008, Wakefield, 2017). Among them, China represents an acute case. Indeed, China is strongly focusing its attention on using its contemporary culture as a soft power tool (e.g. Zhang 2016). This peculiar activity renders the nation of the Great Wall an incredible case for assessing the relevance of the arts for displaying national soft power.

2.3.1 China Soft Power, and Cultural Diplomacy

From its entrance in WTO the 11th of December 2001, China enforced a political strategy aiming at sustaining the rise of the state as a "soft-power superpower" (Kynge and al, 2017). Indeed, the refusal of the western cultural standards, seen as a form of cultural imperialism, and the rise of the Asian Giant as a main character in the global state strongly enhanced the importance of

developing a strong national cultural belonging identity (Kissinger, H et al. 2011). Actually, Chinese soft power prioritizes strategic objectives such as "protecting cultural security, reduce cultural trade deficit, facilitate the development of cultural industries," (Xu, 2016,iii). China's soft power wants to be primarily cultural (Zhang, 2016) because of the relevance of applying it not only to a foreign audience, but also to its domestic population. Indeed, on the one hand, China's soft power is not limited at influencing its political and economic strength around the world but also at constructing a spiritual and ideological infrastructure of values to convey to the rest of the planet (Ho, 2018). On the other hand, the development of a national cultural soft power aims at fostering China's nation-building and state-making in the 21st century in order to promote internal political legitimacy (Xu, 2017). Chinese culture becomes in this way the vital component of a political vision aiming at preserving domestic stability, unity and harmony as well as peace, cooperation, and win-win solutions among nation (Zhang, 2016, 41). Coherently, over the years both the former Chinese President Hu Jintao and the present one Xi-Jinping officializedg the support of the government to this political infrastructure. Especially, in 2013 Xi enhanced the importance of Chinese cultural soft power, contextualizing it on the basis of a broader projetct, the realisation of the "Chinese Dream". This a large-scale planning initiative for national capacity- building aims for prosperity and rejuvenation" (Chen, 2016, 2) in a mix of personal and national values to be embodied by Chinese population aiming at building a "socialism with Chinese characteristics"

Not surprisingly, Chinese's cultural diplomacy has been empowered over time becoming an essential tool for enhancing national soft power all around the world. Indeed, over the years, Chinese cultural diplomacy become an important instrument throughout which Chinese's values, and its spiritual conviction spread inside and outside the nation (Hu, 2017, 316). Indeed, In the international arena, both official and unofficial Chinese's networks entailed a series of actions aiming at the enhancement of the world public opinion on the regards of China's culture. In 2018, five hundred Confucius institute distributed all around the world are active in the promoting Chinese culture, its language, its customs and traditions. Additionally, many other "societal and cultural channels, including literature, art, film, music" (Eleonor, 2018) have been employed for spreading an attracting image of China all around the world. Yet, it is questionable weather Chinese's efforts for enhancing its cultural soft power throughout its cultural diplomacy could be considered utterly successful. Indeed, according to (Eleonor, 2018) "environmental pollution and degradation, food safety issues, and Xi's exhaustive anticorruption campaign" might frustrate any cultural diplomacy attempt to reinforce China's attractiveness all around the world. Moreover, and especially relevantly for our research, the tight relationships between cultural distributors and the government create diffidence in international audience on the purity of the distributed messages undermining Chinese's attempt to being seen positively around the world (Chen, 2016).

2.3.2 Chinese Contemporary Art and Cultural Diplomacy

Chinese contemporary art has a long and difficult relationship with official Chinese government. Historically, PPC used art "to articulate China's national identity both domestically and internationally" (Yung-Wen, 2017), in order to provide direction both to its own citizens and the international community on the nature of Chinese nation under the rule of the Communist Party. Yet, contemporary art, especially after the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989, was not considered compatible with national "official" social and aesthetic values. Contemporary art, as other cultural medium, was considered as a western attempt to undermine the stability of the country, and it was soon demonized (Wang, 2009, 112). However, the necessity of slowly integrating China within the international economic system, and the development of Deng

Xiaoping market reforms in 1992, encouraged the practice of contemporary art in China thanks to a mix of local and international interactions (Kharchenkova, 2017). Slowly, contemporary art began to be practiced by artists such as Wang Guangyi, and Fang Lijun, who, together with other avant-gardist contemporary Chinese artists, started being invited to renowned international art events such as the Venice Biennale. The success of both these individual artists and their corresponding artistic movements, Cynical Realism and Political Pop, raised awareness and establish global interest for Chinese contemporary art within the international art world. The success of these "unorthodox" artistic movements made Chinese authorities understanding the necessity of emancipating contemporary art from the old vision of the party (Wang, 2009). Indeed, as long as contemporary art would have represented a colonizing and dissident language at the eyes of Chinese's authority, the international image of the PPC as suppressor of freedom of speech would have been perpetuated. This would have represented a problem for a government willing to perpetuate a foreign policy on the Tao Guang Yang Hui, (韬光养晦) doctrine (Sorensen, 2015), or differently stated, in the a "peaceful rise of china".

Additionally, Chinese government needed to provide a national, shared and contemporary image to its community throughout the arts. An image different from the one of the Cynical Realism, and Political Pop, two currents unrecognised by the authorities and almost unknown within the country but very appealing outside its borders. As a consequence, the government started investing in art more consistently, developing museums and assessing as contemporary Chinese culture represented a strategic "pillar industry" and a powerful force for country's development (Yung-Wen, 2017).

As a resultant, In 1996, the first Shanghai Biennale was organized, and in the year 2000 finally opened its doors to international actors within the art market "de-facto" officialising the opening of PPC to contemporary art in China, (Wang, 2009, Yung-Wen, 2017). After that, times were mature for an international exposure of Chinese contemporary art in the international arena. Yet, this new acceptance from the Party's authorities could not be considered as a total liberalisation of contemporary art in China. Indeed, the rise of contemporary art and of the market structure sustaining it, cannot be equated with the demise of governmental power over the artistic production in China. Actually, within the country, "Official Art Organisations"(OAO), still maintain considerable weight in determining the success of an artist in the Chinese contemporary art landscape (Kharchenkova al. 2015). Official art organisations are in facts bureaucratic artistic entities next to the party founded for managing and sustaining artistic activities. (Kharchenkova al. 2015). These OAO are essential institutions within the Chinese art scene. Indeed, they provide quality-signal to the market, and status to the artists belonging to these academies. Clearly, these organisations have very strong connection with the Chinese administration, so much that OAO can be considered as representative of the state, and a critical gatekeeper for whoever desires to entail a career in the arts. Not surprisingly, OAO are so successful in driving judgement in the market that a higher official rank can be connected with higher artistic and economic value in China (Kharchenkova al. 2015). In this way, OAO are perfect mediators between the new institutional logic of the market and the old institutional logic of the state bureaucracy (Kharchenkova al. 2015). A logic that artists needs to take into account if willing to be displayed in governmentally managed artistic events.

Moreover, the regulatory presence of Chinese government in the contemporary art world is electable also in the domestic system of auction houses. Indeed, in China, these are institutions that have been historically supported by the state (Yugev and al. 2015, Kharchenkova and Velthuis, 2017) in order to overlook the illegal trade of cultural relicts. Not surprisingly, when the market developed, they acquired a special prominence within the system differentiating their nature form their western organisations at least in two ways. Firstly, Chinese auction houses have

access not only to the secondary market of an artist but, also to his/her primary market. Additionally, in a developing art market, auction houses in China are organisations fundamental for signalling the quality of artworks. In some cases, they even represent the institutions conferring the highest degree of artistic value to an artist. (Kharchenkova and Velthuis, 2017). The role of Official Art Organisations and local auction houses, allow us to understand a specific relationship between Chinese government an contemporary art.

Indeed on the one hand, with the beginning of the new millennium, a new phase in the relationships between Chinese government and contemporary art has been inaugurated with the substantial liberalisation of contemporary art as a medium of expression going along with the loose of the overreaching censorship attitude that characterized the actions of Chinese government. On the other hand, by developing a centralized value-generating institutional setting, the government allowed for a more acceptant expression within the contemporary art world, still maintaining strong power structures in its diffusions (Wang, 2009).

In this way, Chinese authorities were able to discern the art conceived as compliant with an "official" discourse from the one that did not do so in order to propose it in specific settings. In this way, Chinese contemporary art has more and more been invited at promoting images compliant to cultural soft power political goals of the party, in an attempt to articulate the contemporary cultural Chinese identity throughout the medium of the arts.

The thin red line between "official" and unofficial art creates problems in the contemporary Chinese discourse though.

Indeed, which kind of Chineseness are we talking about? On the one hand, Chinese contemporary art mirrors contemporary Chinese society, a society in constant development, that has difficulties in clearly defining itself (Yung-Wen, 2015). On the other hand, the government pushes for "addressing" national and personal values that should characterise contemporary Chinese society and that the arts should display. How? The 15th of October 2014 the same president Xi invited 72 eminent figures of the "official art world" were invited to an unconventional art symposium. There, Xi pointed at some general guidelines for identifying Chinese way for looking at art : "We should not tailor Chinese aesthetics to Western theories, and more importantly, we cannot allow business standards to replace art standards." "a good work of art should first and foremost benefit society, unifying social and economic benefits." "Art and culture should not be subject of the market, and should not be tainted with a commercial air". "Popularity is not vulgarity, desire does not represent hope, and base pleasure for the senses is not spiritual happiness." (cited in Xu, 2014). As it is noticeable, these are general guidelines, not clearly defining what should or what should not be displayed. These are a series of "implicit" more than "explicit" rules that should drive art practice. In doing so, the party wishes to overcome the unnecessary practice of censorship by proposing a narrative strategy renewing the past and covering contested meanings and ambiguous definitions in reconstructing the present" (Yung-Wen, 2015).

This approach creates contradictions though. The arts are supposed to display values and norms which are genuinely proper of a society. Yet, if these are against party goals, will not be displayed in "official art settings". As a consequence, contemporary chinese art "not only reflects the tension between China and the West but also exemplifies the complexity of China's reconstructed cultural identity". (Yung-Wen, 2015).

2.4 The ideal Cultural Diplomacy platform of the contemporary art world: the Venice Biennale

2.4.1 The Importance of Biennale's in the Contemporary Art framework.

The global art market is a complex, international, economic system composed by a number of institutions necessary at its sustainment. From the artists producing art to the museums exposing it, (and the gallery selling it) an incredible mixture of intertwined cultural, social and economic relationships establishes the nature of the market as we see it nowadays. Indeed, within the industry, artists need to pass through an artistic, social and economic validations utterly defining weather or not they will find a place in the art world (Velthius, 2005; Robertson, 2005; Rodner, and Thomson, 2013). Becker (1982) identified the institutions providing these endorsement as: "curators, dealers, galleries, critics and theoreticians, auction houses, commercial art fairs and non-commercial international arts events such as biennials and triennials, collectors and investors (individual and corporate) and their advisors, together with museums" (Rodner, and Thomson, 2013, 60). At each step of an artist's career, one (or more than one) of these gatekeepers acts as enabler and certifier of the quality of an artist's work. In assessing their preferences, these institutions take into account "financial, social, political, geographical factors as well as unpredictable ones such as taste-variations, chance and faults and frictions within art world (Rodner, and Thomson, 2013, 58). From a constructivist point of view, these institutions are fundamental entities for creating cultural, social, and economic value around an artist and his/her art finally assessing his/her relative place within the art world.

Within this panorama, a special kind of institution recently emerged. Indeed, one of the most important developments within the art market in the last decades of the 20th century is the world-wide establishment of a system of Art Fairs and International non-commercial Art Events, such as Biennale and Triennale. Only in 2017 almost 250 events were hosted in a growing number of cities generally beneficing culturally, socially and economically from hosting these kinds of events (Rodner and al, 2011). Indeed, Art fairs and non-commercial international art events boomed simultaneously both numerically and geographically within the global art market, acquiring more and more relevancy because of their efficiency in representing an infrastructure sustaining the artists community and its collectors all around the world. Actually, suppliers in the art world see these happenings as "organisational forms for the market value-creation process that these events mediate and re-structure" (Baia Curioni, 2012). Art fairs and Biennale, can be considered as two entities generally providing the same level of legitimation within the market (Rodner, and Thomson, 2013) but in a different way. Indeed, on the one hand, fairs are meant for producing a temporary commercial cluster, where professionals of the art world display and propose the art they represent for sale without any curatorial attitude. On the other hand, each actor at Biennales and Triennales has clear and strong artistic and curatorial attitudes, closer tights with museums and exhibition spaces within an event which has not direct commercial porpoises (Baia Curioni, 2012).

The global success of these institutions can be considered as a sign of the happening globalisation within the art market. Actually, while new, emerging economies all around the world, modernize their art market standard using already existing western institutions, (as Biennale's and Art fairs are) they found in these International (non)commercial art events a perfect place for displaying their own artistic offer and their own aesthetics in front of the world. (Baia Curioni

2012, Vermeylen, 2015,) Indeed, being the international art market the resultant of a sum of local art markets (Yogev and Ertug, 2015) art fairs and non-commercial art events represent an amplifying device for exposing and selling the most relevant artistic production of a specific nation -or region- to the world. However, not every Art fair and Biennale play the same role as gatekeepers in the art market. Indeed, some events are more important than others in certifying the rise of an artist, or an artistic movement, within the art world (Baia Curioni, 2012). In this way, commercial events such as Art Basel or TEFAF are indeed more powerful than to smaller events such as the Rotterdam Art Fair, or Miart. at establishing validating relationships within the market. The same pattern occurs for non-commercial art events, where Documenta and the Venice Biennale play a prominent role within the art world. Particularly, the latter plays a special role within the art world….

2.4.2 The Venice Biennale

Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale is the oldest Art Biennale and among the most visited contemporary art international events, with approximately 615,000 visitors attending the 2017 edition (Biennale di Venezia, 2018). From the point of view of the artists exhibiting the event represent an incredible opportunity. Indeed the Venice event is widely acknowledged as one of the most relevant and prestigious happenings within the international art market (Robertson, 2005 ; Poli, 2007, Rodner, 2013, Peerce and al. 2016). Actually, even if the former Director of the 53rd Venice Biennale, Daniel Birnbaum, claimed that the event is not a platform to launch fashionable artists but a pace where looking "at where artists are going and [. . .] where the world is going" (Birnbaum and Volz, 2009) simply participating in it, allows "the industry to confer a 'seal of approval' on an artist's work (Rodner, 2013, 66) with potential important consequences for the valuation of an artist oeuvre within the art market (Velthuis,2005). Robertson (2005) even position the participation at the Italian event as one the pinnacles of an artist career, and one of the last steps for definitely enhancing the price of his/her artworks. However, the success of an artist participating at the Venice Biennale within the global art market is not to be taken for granted after the participation (Rodner et al, 2011). Indeed, as the 50th Biennale Art Director Francesco Bonami pointed out "mediocre artists will simply sink into "oblivion" after the show finishes" (Adam, 2009, p. 2), and only artworks with a relevant intrinsic value will make it in the complex world of the art market. But what is the peculiarity that makes the Venice Biennale such an important event?

Each year, the Biennale's management invites a number of selected nations, (more than 80 in 2017), at displaying a selection of national contemporary artists representative of the values and artistic visions of a state. In this way, each national pavilion aims at being an accurate representation of the country and its art scene (Rodner et al, 2011). Because of this peculiar nature proposing a defined national artistic representation, the Venice Biennale is also known as the "Olympics of Art," being a temporary international platform for select countries to share their contemporary art with the world (Zaugg et al, 2015, 134). Because of direct relationships between the nature of the exhibition and the national identity of the state represented, the Venice Biennale maintains close relationships with the government of the invited nations. In this way, what it is displayed within a national pavilion is the resultant of a net of arrangements among a number of stakeholders as government and/or private sponsors, cultural and diplomatic ministries, national galleries, curators, and contemporary artists (Paradoxus, 2013, cited in Zaugg and al, 2015, 134). By maintaining these close connections, the Venice Biennale aims providing an artistic definition of the nations exhibiting (Rodner et al, 2011). In other words, visitors not

acquainted with certain nations can make a up their mind on the cultures and the values that the exhibiting states are representing. Within this framework, "Venice becomes a platform for selected artists to be cultural ambassadors of their home-grown art scene on the global panorama", in a framework that, within this international an sanctifying event, gives significance to the cultural, and political stances underlying the art exhibited (Rodner and Preece, 2016, 134). Not surprisingly, on a general level different national pavilion are conditioned by their culture when they expose their art. For instance with Asian countries demonstrated over the years of been prone at proposing messages of an harmonious "collective agency" (where individual success stands for the social harmony), whereas many Western nations exposes a more individualistic attitude (Rodner and Preece, 2016).

2.4.3. The Venice Biennale and Chinese Cultural Diplomacy

The Venice Biennale represents a unique event in the worldwide artistic panorama. On the one hand it represents a critical industry gatekeeper and one of the most renowned and respected art exhibitions in the world. On the other hand, its nature allows for the artistic display of a nation values, ideas, and perspectives thanks to a tangled collaboration between governmental agencies and independent artistic actors. As a consequence of these intertwining characteristics, The Venice Biennale possesses the perfect conditions for representing a loudspeaker for national cultural diplomacy practices. It is not a case then, if the Venice Biennale has been already studied in relation to cultural diplomacy generally (e.g Zaugg, 2015) and Chinese Cultural Diplomacy specifically (e.g, Rodner, & Preece, 2016; Yung Wen, 2017).

As we have seen, the relationship between contemporary art and Chinese government has not always been linear. However, the Venice Biennale has always been present in this relationship. Indeed, in 1993, the invitation of independent Chinese artists at the Italian happeing triggered the attention of the world towards the movements of Political Pop and Cynical Realism, enhancing the internal debate on the role of Contemporary art in modern China (Yung Wen, 2017).
Always at the Venice Biennale, China finally accepted contemporary art as a medium capable of portraying China's culture to the outside world in a foreign setting with the opening of a dedicated national Pavilion in 2003(Wang, 2009). In that year though, the threat of the SARS virus blocked the physical participation of the national pavilion in the city of Venice, with the official 2003 Biennale exhibition held at the Guangdong Museum of Contemporary art. Therefore the first presence of the Chinese pavilion in Italian territory occoured only in 2005 when finally China officially displayed its contemporary art, and its aesthetic views in a foreign setting (Yung Wen, 2017).
Since then, "China has been careful to display conservative works trying to portray traditional subject matters focusing more on the "soft politics" than on the art itself" (Rodner, & Preece, 2016, 134). Indeed, over the years, the Chinese pavilion proposed different themes, called different artists, invited different curators, when organising its exhibition. Yet, up to 2015 (which is the time-frame considered in this master thesis), a curatorial attitude compliant with official cultural soft power directives in relation to contemporary art was utterly proposed (Wang, 2009 ; Pollack, 2015; Rodner, & Preece, 2016; Yung Wen, 2017). Indeed, year after year Chinese ministry of culture appoints different players to organise the Chinese's space in Venice. Generally, Chinese government demanded an Official Art Organisation, to organise the national Pavilion. Not surprisingly, a Chinese "official" in the managing committee of the Chinese exhibition in Venice can always been found, either in a direct relationship with the government or throughout its belonging to an Official Art Organisation (or both). When displaying Chinese contemporary art at the Venice Biennale, an official rationale is always present. It can be badly received, as for the

2011 edition (Yung-Wen,2017) of the Biennale, or warmly welcomed, as in 2015 (Pollack, 2015). but always occurring.

Yet, it is not clear what is the overall reception of the art world of these Chinese Artists after the Venice Biennale. Indeed, a problem for the Chinese artists exhibiting at the national pavilion relates to the fact that individual art becomes contextualized within a social framework and its intrinsic value wains in the context of the exhibition. This is a conflicting attitude in the system of the art market valuation, focus on the individualism of the artist oeuvre, on its independent artistic value. Actually, "at a global level exhibiting artists will be efficient only if artistic identity is strongly enhanced over and above that of the group/nation that accompanies them" (Rodner & Preece, 2016, 135). In other words, if the artistic messages are strong enough to evoke interest in the art world. Or to put it in to extremes, if Chinese Cultural Diplomacy has been effective.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Research Design

This master thesis aims at verifying the impact that Chinese cultural diplomacy at the Venice Biennale had in the art market over the years, utterly clarifying if it can be considered as effective or not. Yet, as highlighted in the literature review, one of the most challenging tasks for academicians and officials involved in cultural diplomacy policies is understanding the empirical effectiveness of these complex practices. Especially, in the case of China and its contemporary art, it is still not clear whether the art world reacted positively or negatively to the "official" contemporary Chinese art in the fashion proposed at the Venice Biennale. As a consequence, the researcher entails an exploratory research aiming at filling this academic gap and, possibly, to develop methods to be employed in subsequent studies (Babbie, 2014) for better understanding the cultural diplomacy practice of different nations in the global art market.

Being Chinese contemporary art the subject of this inquiry, this deductive master thesis needed to make use of existing theories on cultural diplomacy, contextualizing them within the contemporary art world to verify their application in a dedicated case study.

Therefore, to develop an intense and detailed analysis (Bryman, 2012) on the application of Chinese cultural diplomacy practices in the contemporary art world, this master thesis focuses its attention on Chinese Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale.

As extensively explained in the literature review, the Venice Biennale represents a unique institution within the art world providing both cultural and economic value to an artist oeuvre. Additionally, it represents a platform for loud-speaking particular cultural and artistic propositions in a setting where "official" Chinese contemporary art is deeply rooted. Actually, on the one hand, the Venetian happening is considered the event where contemporary art was firstly allowed to display Chinese identity outside its the national frontiers (Wang, 2009). On the other hand, a relevant strain of literature described how a culturally diplomatic and "official" artistic language has been employed over the years at the Chinese's pavilion of the Venice Biennale (Yung Wen, 2017).

Yet, was this Chinese cultural diplomacy action at the Venice Biennale successful?

As we said, the Venice Biennale is one of the most important institutions in the art market and a relevant threshold providing quality signals in the contemporary art world. Clearly, it is possible that artists exhibiting at the Venice Biennale would see the value of their artwork sensibly enhanced after the exhibition. Additionally, it might be possible that their acquired status would attract museums and public institutions to exhibit their own works all around the world. However, these circumstances are not to be taken for granted. Indeed, the art world could also reject the artistic proposition of a given artist when inherently lacking the necessary qualities. In other words, even if Chinese "official" art is displayed in one of the most relevant art Biennale in the world, this might not be enough for validating its status in the art world, that could choose its own champions independently.

Consequently to corroborate these claims is essential to verify the impact of these "official" Chinese artists in the art world. How to do it? The researcher thinks that the employment of quantitative data can provide relevant contribution on existing relationships between the art market and successful cultural diplomacy practices. Indeed, by employing numerical and statistical techniques the author would be allowed to develop its research and, possibly, to find some correlation between Chinese Cultural Diplomacy and potential effects in the art world thanks to the employment of a dedicated dataset investigating the presence in the art

world of the "official" Chinese artists before and after their presence at the Venice Biennale. Coherently, this research will carry a longitudinal trend analysis, in order to examining the changes of our population (Babbie, 2014) in the art market over the years. Indeed, in order to verify the dissemination of Chinese art carrying an "official" discourse in the art world, it is essential to understand how the latter reacted to the artistic proposition of the same population over time. Moreover a longitudinal analysis is essential for inferring the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy practices. Actually the success of these practices are always to be conceived under a long-term perspective (Sablosky, 2003).

To do so, this master thesis will control the evolution of both the artistic career and market valuation of the artists involved in the People's Republic of China at the Venice Biennale. Especially, to see weather "official" Chinese art has been able to make its way within the art world, this master thesis we will need to control the evolution of Chinese Artists career where the art value is created: art institutions and the art market.

3.1.1 Artists presence in major international museums and Alpha Galleries:

As discussed in the literature review, the art market ecosystem is made by a net of institutional players, each one of them representing a critical gatekeeper in the career of an artists. For each one of these steps, the art world confers cultural and economic value to an artist oeuvre. Nevertheless, only when an artist exhibits in major museums, he gains the maximum level of institutional approval within the art world. (Rodner and Thomson, 2013)

Actually, museums provide a certification on the high aesthetic quality of an artwork conferring the "ultimate seal of approval within the contemporary art market" (Baker,1982, 187). This happens because selected artists acquire a great deal of cultural value when being displayed in major museums, such as the Tate Modern in London or the MOMA in New York. In these settings, paintings and sculptures are displayed in front of an international audience interiorizing the work of art, absorbing it, and acquiring it within their own cultural capital. By doing so, branded museums provide both international exposure and cultural status within the art world, utterly defining the artists contributing to cultural capital of the art world (Robertson, 2005). If major museums around the planet certify the relevancy of an artist oeuvre within the art ecosystem, verifying the presence of "official" artists in these institution after their presence at the Venice Biennale can be considered as a proxy for verifying the relevancy of their works on the cultural capital of the art market.

However, museums are not the only institutions capable of conferring an outstanding cultural capital in the art world. Indeed, on this regards, it is widely acknowledged in the specialized literature that "alpha gallery", the most important commercial galleries in the art world, represents formidable players in the art market. Actually, the artists represented by these "alpha" organisations "benefit from global dissemination and financial success thanks to the seal of approval bestowed upon their work by prestigious art institutions" (Rodner and Thomson, 2013, 61).

As a consequence, in order to verify the cultural influence that Chinese cultural diplomacy had after the Venice Biennale, the researcher will analyse the evolution of the presence of Chinese artists in major international museums and "alpha galleries".

CONCEPT	DIMENSION	INDICATOR	MEASURE
Cultural Diplomacy	Cultural Influence	Presence in branded museums and alpha galleries worldwide.	N

Table 3. 1: Operationalisation Dependent Variable 1- Coding concepts from literature to dataset

3.1.2 Appreciation within the art market.

When talking about artworks, cultural value and economic value are deeply intertwined. Indeed, in the art market, the price of an artwork is largely a function of a process of endowment by tastemakers within the ecosystem" (Patterson, 2014, 67) resulting in the attribution of outstanding cultural characteristics in relation of a given piece of art. Actually, when artists got recognition and cultural appreciation within the market, they will be even able to coordinate choices of a large set of actors, such as collectors desiring to acquire their scarce artworks full of a cultural capital capable of setting them apart from other comparable creations (Hutter & Frey, 2010). As a direct consequence of this process of consecration, the economic value of the art piece sees a direct increase in the art market, given that the demand for these artists will grow as a direct consequence of the growing cultural prestige (Hutter & Frey, 2010 ; Patterson, 2014).

This correlation between cultural and economic value of an artwork has deep influences on an artist career. Actually, the appreciation of an artist within the art market, his market validation, often plays a terrific role in providing the last assertion on his rank within the art world. Taken to the extreme, price can become the prime quality indicator for the relevance of an artist in the contemporary art world (Patterson, 2014).

In other words, controlling the appreciation of an "official" artist oeuvre within the art market after his/her participation at the Venice Biennale can be considered as a way for assessing the relative positioning of his/her cultural influence within the art world.

Actually, on the long run, one can see the cultural value and economic value of an artwork evolving, developing, and affirming the relevance of an artist in the art world (Patterson, 2014). In this way prices are more than mere numbers, but, in our case, real tools for assessing both the increased cultural influence of the Chinese contemporary artists exposing at the Venice Biennale, and the consequent success of Chinese Cultural Diplomacy.

CONCEPT	DIMENSION	INDICATOR	MEASURE
Cultural Diplomacy	Cultural Influence	Demand for Art	$

Table 3.2: Operationalisation Dependent Variabe 2 - Coding concepts from literature to dataset

3.2: Research Method

The study will rely on a non-probability, purposive, ad-hoc sampling method where the researcher will personally select the interested artists on the basis of the concerned case study (Babbie, 2014).
Indeed, our interested population is represented by the contemporary Chinese artists who exhibited at the Chinese pavilion of the Venice Biennale. As a consequence, the researcher easily selected the artists involved in the study. However, our sample will consider only those artists who exposed their works at the editions from 2003 to 2015 of the Venice Biennale. The justification of this timeframe is given by two main rationales. On the one hand, 2003 is the year when firstly China opened its national pavilion within the framework of the Venice Biennale (Yu Weng, 2017). On the other hand, 2015 represents the last year considered appropriate by the researcher for assessing the impact of the presence of an artist at the Venice Biennale within the art world. Indeed, to verify the reaction of the art market towards an artist exhibiting at the Venice Biennale, the researcher needs to take into account the historical development of its prices and exhibition history before and after the participation at the Venetian happening. For this reason, the 2017 edition of the Venice Biennale has not been included in the composition of the panel data, assuming that three years were the minimum amount of time necessary for eliciting reliable results.

The data necessary at composing our panel and developing the quantitative database will be gathered from secondary sources, provided by the researcher from specific on-line database. Indeed, firstly, the author gathers the names of all the artists involved at the National Pavilion of the People's Republic of China from 2003 to 2015. Without any problem, the administration of the Italian Foundation delivered them throughout its historical online database ASAC (ASAC, 2018).

Yet, it is important to notice that the researcher did not include the name of all the individuals listed by La Biennale in the final sample. Indeed, in every edition, different performers (such as architects and professors) other than visual artists participated in the realisation of Chinese national pavilion. For instance, the famous Chinese musician Tan Dun realized a specific musical soundtrack for the 2015th edition of the Chinese exhibition at the Venice Biennale. Being this master thesis interested in the medium of contemporary Chinese Art, the researcher will therefore exclude from the analysis all those individuals involved in the realisation of the pavilion that are not professional visual artists. These are to be considered as the ones that has been active in solo or group exhibition for at least a period of ten years.

To verify this fact, and for developing the database necessary at studying the historical development of an artists career, the researcher build a panel looking at the exhibitions at which an artist participated over the years. These information were elicited from the online database ArtFacts.net(2018) as well as from the website of the artist him/herself.

However, as we have mentioned previously, it will be fundamental for this master thesis to differentiate the quality of these exhibitions in order to assess the relevancy of these shows in the art world, and their historical development over time.

Drawing form previous studies indicating possible venues for entailing a quantitative research on the topic of the exhibitions (e.g. Quemina and Van Hest, 2015), I differentiated the shows at which an artist participated by distinguishing each solo or group appearance in two categories: Branded and Non-Branded Exhibitions.

For defining a show as "Branded" exhibitions, I considered all the event hosted in "alpha galleries, and major museums" whereas all the other happening will be labelled as "non-branded". Indeed, as explained in section 3.1.1, "Alpha Galleries" and major museums have to be considered

among the most important institutions for conferring aesthetic and cultural value to an artist oeuvre. Consequently, in defining major art museums, the researcher considers the art institutions listed in the "Top 100 most visited Museums" yearly review organized by The Art Newspaper (2018). Indeed, because of their attractiveness, these museums are to be considered the "idealized repository of art" (Chong, 2010,19), and places where the cultural value of a piece of is institutionalized at his highest levels.

In the Appendix A, it is possible to consult the complete list of the top 100 museums.

As far as the major contemporary art galleries are concerned, the researcher defines as "alpha" the galleries who participated at the 2018 edition of the international art fair Art Basel. Indeed, the Swiss art fair and its collateral editions of Miami and Hong Kong are to be considered among the most important art fairs in the world (Baia Curioni, 2012) and, consequently, as the place where the most important art dealers worldwide gather to sell their artworks at the very top notch of the art market. In the Appendix B it will be possible to consult the whole list of the "Alpha gallery considered". Moreover, each exhibition in "branded" and "non-branded" institutions will be subdivided in a "solo" and a "group" show. Actually as Rodner and Thomson (2013) highlighted, solo exhibitions and group exhibition have a different weight on the artistic career of an artist. For this reason it will be important to include this differentiation in our analysis.

After having constructed the biographical dataset, the researcher focused his attention on the study of the evolution of the art market for the Chinese artists active at the Venice happening. These informations are to be found on the online auction sales indexes Artprice.com (2018) where we controlled for the average price evolution and the artist oeuvre in order to look to study his/her appreciation within the art market. As methodological reference, our analysis will draw from previous studies who analysed the historical appreciation of a given sample in the art market (e.g. Noël, 2014).

In order to fully grasp the effectiveness of Chinese Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale, both exhibition history and art market appreciation will be pondered within a timeframe starting from 1996 to nowadays. In facts, 1996 represent the year in which the first Shanghai Biennale - the first official Chinese contemporary art event - occurred, and a milestone in the modern development of the national institutional setting sustaining Chinese contemporary art (Wang, 2009). By considering a time frame of 22 years, the researcher is confident to be able to capture the effects of the participation of an artist at the Venice Biennale, in order to verify if the Chinese cultural diplomacy action can utterly be considered as successful.

Additionally, being interested in understanding the specific geographical distribution of the artworks, both artist appreciation in the art market and the artist presence in major museums and art galleries will be analysed not only in its aggregated distribution, but also within distinct regions of the world. In this way, the researcher will have the possibility of highlighting the evolution of the artistic career of an artist after the Venice Biennale in determined areas of the world. This is a very important fact for our analysis. Indeed, on the one hand, the art market can be considered as a geographically segmented entity, where specific artists could develop a different demand for their artworks (Renneboog and Spaenjers. 2015). On the other hand Cultural diplomacy practices are especially intended to be directed towards a foreign and international audience (Goff, 2013). Therefore, by segmenting our analysis, we are able to understand not only if Chinese Cultural Diplomacy have been successful in the art market, but also where it resulted being especially significant.

The following table, 3.1 clarifies the selected geographic distribution. It is important to notice that the segmentation of the geographical location have been arbitrarily chosen by the

researcher after having consulted previous works analysing the regional segmentation of the world art market (e.g.Quemin, & Van Hest, 2015)

Area	Countries involved
EUROPE	European Union, United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Albania, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Former Yugoslavian States
NORD AMERICA	Canada and USA
WEST ASIA	MENA Arab Speaking Countries, Turkey, Russia, and former Asian URSS republics (e.g Uzbekistan)
EAST ASIA	Mongolia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Philippines, and South Est Asia
CHINA	China, Hong Kong and Macao
OCEANIA	Australia and New Zealand
LATIN AMERICA	Spanish And Portuguese Speaking Countries in the American continent and Caribbean
OTHER	India, Africa and all the states that are not been previously included.

Table 3.1: Geographic Segmentation of both Quantitative Analysis of the

3.3 Limitations

In this chapter, I outlined the way in which I procedurally organized the research in order to answer to the research question. However, the methodology employed in this master thesis is not lacking substantial limitations that could utterly undermine its validity. Despite the enormous efforts that the researcher employed for avoiding possible problems, it is important to list them accurately:

Firstly, the use of secondary data, as Babbie (2014, 303) states, "involves the recurrent question of validity. When one researcher collects data for one particular purpose, there is no assurance that those data will be appropriate for the research interests." Specifically, Among the secondary data involved, the researcher had to select databases providing only prices on the secondary market for artworks. Indeed, as far as the author knowledge is concerned, it does not exist a systematic listing of primary market deals in the art world. Therefore, it was impossible for the researcher to consider the almost inaccessible systematic pricing for art in the primary art market. As a consequence, considering the appreciation of an artist in the whole art market the dataset could well contain internal validity issues. Therefore, we need to consider the data provided by secondary market databases as good approximations of what happens in the primary market as well. Additionally, the secondary data concerning the biography of the artists might have problems of internal validity as well. Indeed, it is well possible that the author would not be able to draw all the exhibitions at which the artists participated, lacking precious information and creating internal validity issues because of the incompleteness of the databases utilized.

Secondly, in analysing the longitudinal evolution of the auction prices, the researcher did not took into account important factors that might well explain the appreciation of the average price for artworks over a prolonged period of time. For instance, the inflation rate of the US Dollar, European Euro and Chinese Renminbi have not been considered. Also, the research did not consider the spectacular evolution of the Chinese art market, that just few years after its

establishment became the biggest art market in the world - even if only for a brief period - (Quemin and al., 2015), Additionally, I did not consider the enormous growth of Chinese GDP per capita over the years. This latter factor might be especially problematic for this dissertation given that has been already demonstrated as art market prices are correlated with the growth of GDP per capita (Goetzmann and al, 2011).

Thirdly, always concerning the price analysis, the researcher chosen to verify the evolution of average prices for artworks in the market. Even if this decision is due practical consideration, and the nature of the data utilized, this choice calls for important bias. On the one hand, average prices call for extreme results, possibly biasing the outcomes of the art market analysis (Nöel, 2014). On the other hand, the absence of median price statistics denies the possibility of obtaining more mitigated outcomes and, possibly better results.

Fourthly, again on the average price study, the researcher selected to differentiate the regional analysis on the basis of the percentage share of artwork sold. Yet, the whole number of artworks sold per region could have been more useful for providing a extensive analysis of the total distribution of artworks in the market.

Fifthly, in establishing the branded exhibitions in the art world the author included "major museums", and "alpha" galleries. However other important institutions which are very important in the art world such and Dokumenta, (Roberston, 2005 ; Baia Curioni, 2012) have not been included, reducing the overall internal reliability of the dataset.

Sixthly, in formulating the exhibition dataset, the author did not consider the processes of aesthetic validation particular of specific regions of the art world. Indeed, especially in the Chinese case, what the western world might consider as prestigious or "branded" might not be conceived as such by its Chinese counterpart. For instance, auction houses in China have prerogatives denied to their western colleagues such as the direct access to the primary market of an artist, and a governmental support historically established (Kharchenkova, & Velthuis 2017). Clearly, this incongruence involves the role of the artists as well. For instance, Quemin (and al., 2015) mentions one of these contradiction by indicating how the most priced Chinese Artists in the art market are constantly absent from the most important exhibitions worldwide.

Seventhly, it is important to underline how this master thesis assumes the cultural messages embedded in an artist oeuvre as stable and compliant to Chinese cultural diplomacy over time. However, this might not be the case. Indeed, an artist exhibiting in 2003, by 2015 might well have changed his own artistic style, and its message might be not compliant with the "official" Chinese discourse anymore. As a consequence, by finding possible correlations between an artist presence at the Venice Biennale and its success in the art world, the author might underline more the importance of the Venice Biennale as a validating institution more than the success of Chinese cultural diplomatic practice in the art world.