

**The International Market for Chinese Art in the 1940s and 1950s:
The Rockefellers and Chinese Antiquities**

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The Rockefeller Archive Center grant-in-aid gave me a rare opportunity to work with experts and materials that I would not otherwise have had the ability to examine. My project, a study of the integration of antiquities into the modern Chinese state, necessitated an understanding of the international market for Chinese art during the 1940s and 50s. The documents I found at the Rockefeller Archive Center not only illustrate the Rockefellers' own interests in Asia, but also the working lives of many Chinese art dealers and collectors, with whom the family maintained contact with throughout the twentieth century.

One of the most surprising discoveries in the archives is a rare document regarding the Rockefellers' involvement with the restoration of the National Palace Museum in Beijing during the 1930s. While John D. Rockefeller 3rd's work with the Asia Society is well documented, little has been written regarding the Rockefellers' early interest in the National Palace Museum. When put in context with similar records in Britain, these documents show the ways in which knowledge about Chinese art was co-produced, by both Chinese and overseas enthusiasts of antiquities, during the Republican era. Correspondence between the Rockefellers and Chinese art dealers, such as Sparks of London, Bluetts of London, and C. T. Loo of New York, reveal the workings of the Chinese art market at the regional level. The dealers' own references to extant contacts in Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong illuminate the ways in which international dealers relied on guilds and middlemen to buy, sort through, and export works of art. These documents point to the important role of regional guilds and contacts - a seldom studied but important aspect of the international art trade.

Another unexpected find in the Rockefeller Family Archives is a fascinating trail of correspondence between the Rockefellers and a ceramics restorer. This artisan became known to the family through the Japanese dealer of Chinese art, Yamanaka & Co., and repaired several of the family's Chinese vases. Art dealers tend to keep their restoration sources secret, and, as a result, very little is known about the men who did daily upkeep on the antiquities that now grace major museums and private collections. This rare record demonstrates how Chinese art restorers operated in the United States. Specifically, it shows that as the demographics of Chinese art

dealers changed, so too did the demographics of art restorers: from Japanese to Chinese. These findings are consistent with oral history records that I collected during previous research trips.

The Rockefeller Archive Center grant also afforded me valuable time in the New York City area. This allowed me to meet with curators, dealers, and philanthropic organizations that I previously had no opportunity to contact. Max Hearn at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gave me an illuminating interview about the Douglas Dillon fund, and its role in building the museum's collection of Chinese Art. I also interviewed veteran New York dealers, such as Jim Lally, who worked with Chinese art dealers who immigrated to the U.S. during the 1940s. The executors of the Friends of the Shanghai Museum, a philanthropic organization that maintains strong ties with Shanghai's cultural industries, gave me valuable information regarding the PRC's work on the Chinese art market during the 1980s and 1990s. Although my work in Chinese archives gave me a clear picture of how dealers and collectors fared in the PRC after 1949, I had little knowledge of how Chinese expatriates and overseas enthusiasts of Chinese art interacted before my time at the Rockefeller Archive Center.

Perhaps the most delightful aspect of working at the Rockefeller archives, however, was the daily contact with fellow researchers and the archival staff. I had pleasant and fruitful interactions with both the researchers who shared my shuttle to and from the Tarrytown train station, as well as the archive staff. Although incidental, this warm social environment was as important, and memorable, as the findings that I made in the archives.

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