

# On Contemporary Anhui artists and the art market

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**Abstract:** Contemporary Anhui calligraphers and painters can be categorized into four generations based on age, artistic achievements, and influence. This paper analyzes the attitudes, approaches, and outcomes of each generation of calligraphers and painters in facing the art market. It examines the market conditions encountered by each generation and explores the market performance of their works from both subjective and objective perspectives. Additionally, based on the unique characteristics of each generation, the paper makes predictions about the future market performance of their works and offers constructive suggestions.

**Keywords:** Four Generations of Anhui Calligraphers and Painters, Calligraphy and Painting Artworks, Art Market

## 1. Introduction

This paper delves into the intergenerational relationship between contemporary Anhui calligraphers and painters and the art market. By categorizing these artists into four generations based on age and artistic influence, the study examines their performance in the art market, attitudes towards it, and patterns of interaction. The findings indicate that the first generation, as inheritors of traditional culture and founders of the modern Anhui calligraphy and painting scene, show a relatively low market presence due to their disinterest in fame and fortune. The second generation, emerging in the tide of reform and opening up, actively engages with the market, achieving a closer alignment between the market price of their works and their artistic value. The third generation is currently in an ascending phase of artistic creation with significant market potential, though they have not yet reached the level of the second generation. The fourth generation, as emerging talents in the art world, faces the dual challenges of immature artistic styles and market temptations due to their early involvement in the market. Through case studies and data analysis, this paper explores the complex relationship between art and the market and offers constructive suggestions for the future development of Anhui's calligraphy and painting.

## 2. Generational dynamics of Anhui artists and the art market

### 2.1. The first generation: Artistic legacy and market paradox

The land of the Jiang Huai region, with its natural beauty and spiritual charm, has always been a cradle for heroes and talents throughout history. Scholars and artists have each excelled in their own times, leading the trends of their eras. Specifically in the realm of Chinese calligraphy and painting, masters such as Hong ren, Huang Bin Hong, and Lin San Zhi have shone like brilliant stars, illuminating the Jiang Huai region with their artistic brilliance. In the new era, Anhui calligraphers and painters are emerging like the mighty Yangtze and Huai Rivers, with a surging and powerful momentum. In the author's view, contemporary Anhui calligraphers and painters can be categorized into four generations based on their age and artistic influence:

The Paradox of Artistic Achievements and Market Performance of the First Generation of Contemporary Anhui Artists and Its Causes

The first generation of contemporary Anhui artists is represented by senior painters and calligraphers such as Zheng Zhen, Ge Jun sheng, Tao Tian Yue, Pei Jiatonin, and Zhu Xiu Li. These artists, who have mostly experienced revolutionary times and are now in their twilight years, are highly respected in the contemporary Anhui art circle. They have not only inherited the traditional cultural heritage but also

pioneered a new style for the contemporary Anhui calligraphy and painting scene, serving as the founders of the contemporary Anhui art world.

Most of these artists were born in the war-torn old China. The hardships of the nation meant that their youth was full of tribulations. However, it also cultivated in them a strong sense of patriotism. In their efforts to call for the rejuvenation of the nation, they tempered a resilient and forthright character.

Due to their own indifference to fame and fortune, and their lack of interest in the operation of the art market, the works of this generation of calligraphers and painters do not stand out prominently in the contemporary art market. Unlike the strong market consciousness of middle-aged and young artists, this generation of calligraphers and painters, to varying degrees, are influenced by traditional thinking and are not inclined to regard the market price of their artworks as a measure of their artistic value. Most of the time, their works are exchanged and appreciated among friends and peers. Moreover, due to their open-mindedness and reluctance to refuse requests from others, the prices of the artworks by the first generation of Anhui calligraphers and painters have not reached a level commensurate with their intrinsic value. As this generation of artists gradually passes away, it is only natural that the market prices of their artworks will rise.

## **2.2. Positive interaction between the second generation of Anhui artists and the art market**

The second generation is represented by Wang Tao, Zhu Song fa, Wang Ren Hua, Wang Shou Zhi, Tang Shao Yao, Li Jing Sheng, Ma Zhong Xian, Zhang Song, and Wu Tong Yan. The common characteristics of this generation of calligraphers and painters are that most of them were born around the founding of the People's Republic of China, are now over 60 years old, have a generally mature artistic style, and have achieved widespread recognition and significant academic influence. They have become the representatives and mainstay of Anhui calligraphers and painters in the contemporary Chinese calligraphy and painting art market.

Unlike the first generation of calligraphers and painters, this generation entered the art world and began to gain prominence in their artistic creation during the era of China's comprehensive opening up to the outside world. After experiencing large-scale social movements and being exposed to diverse cultures, these artists engaged in in-depth contemplation about the development and innovation of contemporary Chinese painting. Wang Tao, Zhu Song fa, Wang Ren Hua, Tang Shao Yao, Li Jing Sheng, and Ma Zhong xian are among those who withstood the test of time, responded to the demands of the era in their respective fields, and thus became the representatives of the second generation of Anhui calligraphers and painters.



Figure 1: Works by Wang Tao



Figure 2: Works by Zhu Song fa

As a generation of artists who emerged in the tide of reform and opening up and the market economy, their strong market consciousness is incomparable to that of the first generation of artists. Unlike the first generation of calligraphers and painters who either intentionally or unintentionally avoided the art market, the second generation actively adapted to the market economy, proactively engaged in and embraced the art market. They were adept at utilizing various media and channels to promote their artistic philosophies and introduce their works, thereby achieving good market returns. The market prices of the works of the second generation of calligraphers and painters are more in line with their actual value compared to the first generation. We can clearly see this trend from the auction prices of Mr. Zhu Song fa' s works in recent years.

Table 1: Art Auction Transaction Records (Selected Works)

Work	Estimate	Hammer Price	Auction House	Date of Sale
"Cold Fragrance"		187000	Beijing Han Hai Auction	2008-03-24
"Memories of Jiangnan" (Mirror Heart)	6,000--8,000	7700	China Guardian Guangzhou International Auction Co., Ltd.	2008-03-16
"Proud Plum" (Mirror Heart)	6000--8000	9350	China Guardian Guangzhou International Auction Co., Ltd.	2008-03-16
"A Visit to an Old Friend in a Familiar Place" (Mirror Card)	20000--30000	31900	Beijing Zhong Bo International Auction Co., Ltd.	2007-11-04
"Spirit of the Jade Terrace" (Hanging Scroll)	100000	110000	Beijing Han Hai Auction Co., Ltd.	2007-03-18

This generation of Anhui calligraphers and painters is at the peak of their artistic career, with their academic influence also at its zenith. They hold a high social status and possess a certain degree of discursive power. Therefore, the second generation of calligraphers and painters represents the artistic achievements and image of the contemporary Anhui calligraphy and painting community.

### 3. Analysis of the third generation's art world status and market potential

The third generation of calligraphers and painters in Anhui generally were born around the 1960s and are between the ages of 45 and 60. This generation of Anhui artists demonstrates great potential for development in terms of artistic creativity, breadth of vision, contemplation and perception of the times, development of new artistic themes, exploration of new forms of artistic expression, and acceptance of new artistic trends. Represented by Fu Aiguo, Sang Jianguo, Hu Jialong, Wang Yong Jing, Shao Xin, Chen Zhi, Zhao Wen tan, and Zhang Yu, this generation represents the direction of development for contemporary Anhui calligraphy and painting art.

Viewing the four generations of Anhui calligraphers and painters from a historical perspective, the historical positioning of the first generation has largely been settled; the artistic achievements of the second generation have been widely recognized, and their place in modern Anhui art is a given. The fourth generation of artists, being relatively young, belongs to the future. Therefore, we should focus on the third generation of calligraphers and painters. On the one hand, as discussed earlier, this generation is in an ascending phase in every respect and serves as the weathervane for the development of contemporary Anhui calligraphy and painting art. At the same time, their artistic styles have not yet been finalized. The enhancement of their artistic influence will take time, and there is unlimited potential for the maturation of their artistic styles and significant room for further artistic achievement.



Figure 3(Work by Sang Jianguo)

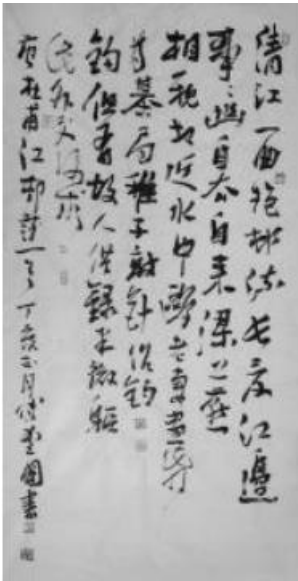


Figure 4(Work by Fu Aiguo)

The third generation of Anhui calligraphers and painters, due to the era in which they live, has found the art market to be as indispensable to their artistic careers as limbs are to the human body. From the day they stepped onto the art scene, how to manage their relationship with the art market and maximize their artistic value within it has been a crucial issue that most of this generation of calligraphers and painters must address. They often regard artistic creation and the market as two legs of a person, moving in parallel without contradiction and complementing each other. Among them, the outstanding ones, such as Sang Jianguo, have already achieved a relatively ideal market price for their artworks, even surpassing that of the second generation of calligraphers and painters. However, overall, the market prices of this generation's artworks are still relatively low.

There are two main reasons for this: On the one hand, this generation of painters is still relatively young, and the maturation of their artistic styles and the enhancement of their artistic influence will take time. On the other hand, the market is still in the process of evaluating and selecting this generation of calligraphers and painters, and it will take time before they gain full market recognition. Nevertheless, the recent upward trend in the market performance of this generation's artworks has already demonstrated that their market prices are bound to rise significantly in the near future. This is an inevitable trend.

Table 2: Trends in Artists' Work Prices (by Year and Art Category)

Artist	Year	Price per Square Fo	Art Category
Wang Ya Zhou	2009	800	Calligraphy
Wang Ya Zhou	2010	1000	Calligraphy
Wang Ya Zhou	2011	1300	Calligraphy
Wang Yong Jing	2009	2000	Landscape
Wang Yong Jing	2010	2500	Landscape
Wang Yong Jing	2011	3000	Landscape
Chen Zhi	2009	400	Calligraphy
Chen Zhi	2010	700	Calligraphy
Chen Zhi	2011	1100	
Zhang Yu	2009	2000 (Flower and Bird, Figure) / 2500 (Landscape)	Traditional Chinese Painting

Zhang Yu	2010	2000 (Flower and Bird, Figure) / 2500 (Landscape)	Traditional Chinese Painting
Zhang Yu	2011	2000 (Flower and Bird, Figure) / 2500 (Landscape)	Traditional Chinese Painting
Shao Xin	2009	500 (Calligraphy) / 800 (Landscape) / 600 (Flower and Bird)	Calligraphy and Painting
Shao Xin	2010	700 (Calligraphy) / 1500 (Landscape) / 1000 (Flower and Bird)	Calligraphy and Painting
Shao Xin	2011	1000 (Calligraphy) / 2000 (Landscape) / 1500 (Flower and Bird)	Calligraphy and Painting

The third generation of calligraphers and painters in Anhui is currently in a preparatory phase in terms of social status, reputation, and market performance within the Anhui calligraphy and painting community. They are the successors to the second generation of calligraphers and painters, and their development directly impacts and will even determine the achievements of Anhui calligraphy and painting in the next twenty years. The developmental trajectory of this generation of calligraphers and painters should be actively followed by critics, collectors, investors, art dealers, and the general public alike.

#### 4. Market pros and cons for the fourth generation of Anhui artists

The fourth generation of calligraphers and painters, mostly born in the 1970s and 1980s, are the rising stars of the art world, like buds about to bloom. Some outstanding individuals, such as Fan Chun Xiao, have already begun to make their mark. They represent the future of Anhui's calligraphy and painting art, and we have every reason to place high expectations on them. However, it is alarming that the artistic styles of this generation are still immature and in the process of development, yet they have prematurely entered the art market, either actively or passively.

While reaping market benefits, some exceptionally talented young calligraphers and painters have succumbed to the temptations of material gain and become lost in the tide of the market economy. They have lost their artistic independence and autonomy, which is the most precious asset for any artist. It is even more heartbreaking that a very small number of young calligraphers and painters, in an effort to cater to the art market, not only fail to stand up against the fake, evil, and ugly phenomena in the contemporary art market but even actively participate in them. This situation, of course, stems from the current restless social atmosphere and is closely related to the lack of the spirit of dedication and indifference to fame and fortune that characterized the earlier generations, especially the first generation of Anhui calligraphers and painters.

This generation of calligraphers and painters will determine the achievements of Anhui's calligraphy and painting art in thirty to forty years and will shape the future of Anhui's art market. Therefore, from the perspective of the art market, it is essential to provide this generation of young artists with sufficient space and time to allow them to focus and delve into their craft. Sometimes, a temporary period of neglect can be the greatest help for an artist. For the young calligraphers and painters themselves, it is crucial to recognize that they belong to the future. Their most important task at present is to develop their professional skills rather than lose themselves for the sake of immediate market gains. The deeper the accumulation of skills and experience today, the farther and more brilliantly they will go in the art market in the future.

#### 5. Conclusion

From the above analysis of the generational relationships between contemporary Anhui calligraphers and painters and the art market, it is clear that there is not always a linear correlation between an artist and the market value of their works. In fact, there is sometimes an imbalance and a paradoxical divergence. This is closely related to the broader historical context in which the artists live and their market consciousness, or that of the artistic community as a whole.

On the other hand, we can also see that correctly managing the relationship between art and the market is a win-win situation for both artists and the market. Through the market, artists not only realize the material value of their works but also liberate themselves, achieving a certain degree of creative freedom. At the same time, the broader public gains more channels to access, appreciate, and collect artworks. This has a

significantly positive impact on improving the public's artistic cultivation and aesthetic taste, creating a virtuous cycle between art and the market.

However, we can also observe that under the impact of commercialization and marketization, the creative behavior of calligraphers and painters is constantly being alienated. In order to cater to the market, the artistic taste and quality of some works have declined. Meanwhile, the creative subjectivity of artists is being diminished by the tide of marketization and commercialization. Some artists, tempted by the market, have even lost their independent artistic pursuits and the awareness to consciously defend the intrinsic value of art. This is a serious issue that contemporary Anhui calligraphers and painters, especially the middle-aged and young artists, must face and address earnestly.

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