



## Yintong talks with...

### Du Geng, founder of Duton's Auction



I have always found Duton's Auction's catalogue and literature very memorable, both for its international, professional content and its beautiful design. When I met Du Geng, the company's founder, he was pleased that his efforts had been noticed: "Our brand and design are positioned to reinforce the company's credibility and strategic vision, as well as generating a loyal following." They have certainly achieved this and I soon discovered the reason why.

#### Entrepreneurial

Du Geng was born in Tianjin and studied graphic design at Tianjin Art Academy. After graduation he went to work in Shenzhen, China's first special economic zone, bordering Hong Kong, some 1100 miles south of Tianjin. In the 80s and 90s, many entrepreneurial and talented young people were captivated by this new phenomenon and its potential, Du included. He then spent a few years working for a design company there to perfect his craft and returned to Tianjin in 1999 to set up his own company – Ding Tian.

In 2013, Du came to London on a training course for chief executives in the auction industry at SOAS University of London. He instantly felt at home as he found many similarities between his home city and the UK's capital. He was particularly taken with the British Museum for its artefacts and antiquities from around the world as well as the approach the museum took to conserve such precious treasures and make them available for sharing and learning.



#### Eccentric

Du also observed that London offers easy access and environment for artists to express themselves as individuals, however eccentric their styles and views may be. More so, he was pleasantly surprised to find that many of the business model and ideas he had been contemplating, were already in practice here.

Spurred by his enthusiasm for the city and desire for business success, he set up the first Chinese auction company Duton's in London in September 2014. After five years of a certain amount of trial and error

Du's company has found its place in the market. So far he has been responsible for over 200 exhibitions and 100 auctions in Beijing, Tianjin and London, managed through the company's UK and China offices with a team of 30 staff.

#### Progress

How did he make such progress in such a short time? "We comply closely with the Chinese policy to invite the creators of our art pieces to authenticate their origin. We also guard our reputation and credibility fiercely. Should a buyer ever discover their purchase to be fake, Duton's

will take the goods back.

"We carry out research diligently so that we can position our auction and the market suitably. Furthermore, we take on the guardianship of Chinese art and culture and invest time and energy in academic studies, connecting it with our auction and business. This has also been a great strength perceived by customers and the industry as a whole."

#### Ambition

Du explained to me how Chinese art used to serve three functions in days gone by in the West – for trading, political and diplomatic exchanges, and as a symbol of luxury for display in rich people's houses. "My ambition is to reintroduce Chinese art to the world to reflect these functions, from porcelain vessels to paintings, from antiques to the modern artworks."

The company's business model, Du told me, is different from many other auction houses. It consists of investment, exhibition and sales, and auction activities. Within these categories academic exchange, marketing and branding, and foundations are developed and promoted.

#### Historical

Duton's next major project, this spring, is called Yun Ji (云集) which is a good demonstration of Du's vision. It will start with a large exhibition and auction of overseas Chinese art antiques. This will then become a roadshow following a tour schedule from Asia to Europe. The auction catalogue will be particularly vigorously researched and curated by experts as it is intended to become a historical document like a reference book. "It will be a celebration of Chinese art and culture, encouraging further interest including academic exchanges and high-end trading as a result."

<http://dutons-uk.leanapp.cn>

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