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**To cite this article:** Julia Bethwaite (2025) *The Wanderers* in Shanghai: Russian Fine Art and Hegemonic Meta-Capital in World Politics, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 77:1, 133-156, DOI: [10.1080/09668136.2024.2443441](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2024.2443441)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2024.2443441>



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Published online: 17 Jan 2025.



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# ***The Wanderers in Shanghai:* Russian Fine Art and Hegemonic Meta-Capital in World Politics**

JULIA BETHWAITE

## *Abstract*

This article analyses a Russian art exhibition organised in China in 2017–2018. How did *The Wanderers*, which arguably represents social criticism, become a heteronomous site of capital accumulation and conversion, and what role did it play in Russia's status-seeking power pursuits? To answer these research questions, the article focuses on the central forms of capital related to the exhibition. The research data consist of semi-structured interviews and fieldwork in Shanghai. The article's theoretical-methodological framework is founded on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and the field-theoretic account of hegemonic order theory by Daniel Nexon and Iver Neumann.

IN DECEMBER 2017, THE STATE TRETYAKOV GALLERY, ONE of Russia's leading fine art museums, sent 68 Russian artworks to a temporary exhibition organised in Shanghai Museum, China, sponsored by the aluminium giant RUSAL. The exhibition, named *The Wanderers. Masterpieces from the Tretyakov Gallery*, presented paintings from one of the most important art movements in Russian history, famous for its realistic style and social criticism. The exhibition acted as a 'site' (Neumann 2013) of world politics by becoming a heteronomous space of capital accumulation and conversion and uniting both state and non-state actors from different social fields. For the Russian state, the exhibition offered an opportunity to utilise cultural capital derived from the nineteenth century and convert it into mobility capital, diplomatic capital and hegemonic meta-capital, thereby developing Russia's relationship with China and potentially increasing its status in world politics. The case study illustrates art's role in world politics and the productive power of heteronomy. Russia's war in Ukraine, which began in 2014, motivated this analysis of the

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland's project 'Cultural Statecraft in International Relations: The Case of Russia' (No. 298883, 2016–2021) and the Kone Foundation's 'Forms of Power on the Transnational Field of Art' grant (No. 202203763, 2023).

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2024.2443441>

strategic value of art and culture in Putin's Russia as well as the role China plays in Russia's status-seeking pursuits.

I apply Pierre Bourdieu's field theory as this article's theoretical-methodological framework. According to Bourdieu, the social space is made up of social fields, such as art, business and religion, each with its own specific rules and dominant forms of capital, in which actors take positions and accumulate and convert capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 97–8). While he mostly analysed French social fields, he did not deny the existence of international or global fields, which have been explored by other scholars who took up his methods (Adler-Nissen 2011; Bigo 2011; Häkli 2013). Bourdieu's central concepts, his 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 160; Leander 2008), enable the analysis of relations between different actors and social fields across different geographic scales and help examine and explain the dynamics between them caused by scale-crossing position-takings and capital-conversion strategies (Nexon & Neumann 2018). To capture how status seeking and power pursuits outstretch to diverse domains of world politics, I apply the concept of hegemonic meta-capital (Nexon & Neumann 2018, pp. 674–76). Some scholars have emphasised the role of economic and military capital in states' status-seeking pursuits.<sup>1</sup> However, this article illustrates the heteronomous field-crossing potential and strategic significance of art and cultural capital by analysing an art exhibition as a site of world politics. It suggests that fine art and cultural capital can contribute to the potential of hegemonic power, which is also acknowledged by Putin's regime. In this article, fine art and cultural capital are conceptualised as elements that contribute to Russia's hegemonic meta-capital in a way comparable to economic or military might and can affect Russia's international standing.

The Wanderers' split habitus enhances the heteronomous potential of *The Wanderers* exhibition as a site of world politics. 'The Wanderers' refers to a group of Russian realist artists who were officially registered in 1870 as the 'Partnership for Travelling Art Exhibitions' (*Tovarishchestvo peredvizhnykh vystavok*). On this basis, Russian art critics and the Russian public started to refer to the group as *Peredvizhniki*, that is, 'the Wanderers' (Shabanov 2010, pp. 51–3). The Wanderers were interested in finding new customers—for example, among Russia's provincial elites—by sending their artworks on tours (Shabanov 2019, p. 13). The group's name evokes romantic connotations of freedom (professional autonomy) and movement (mobility capital); however, heteronomy appears to have been its core trait.

The Wanderers' public image is based on a claim, originally endorsed by the prominent art critic and democrat Vladimir Stasov, that the artists had 'a coherent ideological and artistic programme, coupled with a strong commitment to public service' (Shabanov 2010, p. 51). Stasov, a supporter of socially relevant contemporary art, played an important role in promoting the Wanderers (Karg 2018, p. 197), whose artworks have been described as 'a critique of imperial establishment' embedded with political references in 'almost every category' of painting (Karg 2018, p. 195). This ideological framing, focused on public service, was also present at the exhibition in Shanghai, as well

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Casier (2020).

as in how the exhibition's central actors from the fields of art and business described the art movement.

Josephine Karg noted that the Wanderers' self-determination differed depending on whether the artists belonged to the movement's first or second generation. The first-generation Wanderers, from the 1860s, were motivated by a 'socio-political movement', while the second generation, from the 1880s and 1890s, 'were less interested in political issues' (Karg 2018, p. 195). However, Elizabeth Valkenier disputed claims about the political radicalism of the first-generation Wanderers and argued that the artists were motivated by 'individual liberation' rather than by overthrowing the Tsarist regime (Valkenier 1989, pp. 17–8). Moreover, some scholars have argued that the artists were motivated from the very beginning by a commercial agenda and financial success (Fedorov-Davydov 1929; cited in Shabanov 2010, p. 52) and took positions at the intersection of the fields of art and business, motivated by professional autonomy. The second-generation painters also showed interest in field-crossing internationalism, thus allying themselves with 'the main stream of progressive Western European trends' (Karg 2018, p. 196).

The emphasis on Wanderers' public service, initially promoted by Stasov, was strengthened by a Stalinist framing dating back to the 1930s, when Stalin's regime infused the art movement with the political mission of socialist realism (Valkenier 1989, p. 137), the official, state-supported art genre of the Soviet Union, realist in style and socialist in content. According to socialist realism, all art was 'created in the service of furthering socialism and communism' (Herrala 2022, p. 118). Stalinist art historians thus 'went even further than Stasov, politicising the group by labelling them as nationalists, faithfully carrying out the precepts of Russian revolutionary democrats of the 1860s, while bringing their didactic art to the people' (Shabanov 2010, p. 52). The Wanderers were used in Stalin's exercise of 'rewriting of the past' (Karg 2018, p. 205), leading to them being officially seen as pioneers of and inspirations for socialist realism, thereby appearing linked to the state (Shabanov 2010, p. 52).

Consequently, the Wanderers developed a 'split habitus' (Bigo 2011, p. 251), representing both early art market actors and painters of critical realism as well as state-supporting socialist realism, depending on the meanings ascribed to the artists within the various fields. This split habitus, in addition to heteronomy and the relational nature of art, made *The Wanderers* in Shanghai a fruitful site for meaning-making as well as an arena of capital accumulation and conversion dynamics. The potential of the Wanderers lies in the artists' split habitus and the tensions and opportunities it produces.

Analysing *The Wanderers*, I begin by studying how an art exhibition arguably representing social criticism became a heteronomous arena of capital accumulation and conversion. Then, I examine the role of the exhibition and different forms of capital as part of Russia's status-seeking power pursuits.

The article is based on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts as methodological thinking tools for detecting and analysing social dynamics that occur across social fields. According to Bourdieu, the social space consists of social fields, each with its own logic, on which actors accumulate and convert different forms of capital that appear both as weapons and as stakes of struggle (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, pp. 97–8). The research data are derived from a field trip to Shanghai during the exhibition's opening days in 2017 as well

as nine semi-structured research interviews with some of the key actors I met in Shanghai, Moscow and St Petersburg. The interviews were anonymised and defined in a Bourdieusian manner according to the interviewees' professional roles and, thus, the social fields that they appeared to represent. Based on the data, I identify and examine the central forms of capital (namely cultural, diplomatic, national, economic and mobility capital) and define cultural capital as the hegemonic meta-capital of the Russian state.

Next, I introduce the concept of hegemonic meta-capital and elaborate on Russia's claims about its status in world politics. I present the field of art, discussing what makes art exhibitions such powerful sites of world politics, and the central forms of capital that I identified based on the research interviews and field trip to the exhibition's vernissage. I also discuss Russia's cultural capital as hegemonic meta-capital that can support the state's position in world politics, despite a relative lack of economic or military capital. The article ends with remarks on productive tensions and the strategic significance of culture in Putin's Russia. Drawing on this, I seek to contribute to the discussion on hegemonic order theory and its field-theoretic account in international relations (Go 2008; Nexon & Neumann 2018).

### *Hegemony and hegemonic meta-capital*

While Bourdieu viewed the state as a field rather than an actor (Bigo 2011, p. 248; Bourdieu 2017, p. 376), a field-theoretic approach in hegemonic-order theory considers states' agency and power to influence the international order. This article considers a pluralistic approach to power and hegemonic pursuits in world politics, which 'operate along multiple dimensions' (Casier 2020, p. 48). In international relations, hegemons refer to 'nations capable of dominating the course of international politics' (Ikenberry & Kupchan 1990, p. 283). Hegemonic power is often exercised through 'manipulation of material incentives' as well as *via* substantive beliefs as a hegemon's norms and values are internalised by other nations (Ikenberry & Kupchan 1990, p. 283).

Here, capital accumulation and conversion play a central role. To participate in a particular field, one needs capital that is recognised there (Bourdieu 2021a, p. 157). Hegemony is based on the possession of different kinds of meta-capital—a type of symbolic capital—that builds on, for example, high military and economic capacity. By accumulating a sufficient amount of capital, a hegemon can exercise power over other fields and field-specific forms of capital as well as the capital exchange rate (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 663).

According to Gramscian hegemony, power can be reinforced not only through economic means and military power but also through culture (Cox 1983, p. 171). Oliver Marchart has encouraged scholars to 'look at more than just economic indicators' in hegemonic struggles, highlighting the 'cutting-edge role' of the field of art (Marchart 2014, p. 1). Hegemony operates in and through art and aesthetics (Marchart 2022), and it has been claimed that the Russian state has employed cultural resources in its attempts to challenge the liberal international order (Flockhart & Korosteleva 2022, p. 472). Cultural capital is among the central forms of capital in Bourdieu's field theory and allows the identification and analysis of factors other than simply material capabilities. In this article, I consider art

and cultural capital to be among the building blocks of the hegemonic meta-capital of the Russian state.

While Bourdieu considered economic and cultural capital to be the main forms of capital, he and other scholars elaborated on various other kinds: social capital, statist capital (Bourdieu 1994, p. 4), information capital (Bourdieu 2021b, p. 243), education capital (Bourdieu 2018a, p. 152), emotional capital (Reay 2004), celebrity capital (Driessens 2013) and fashion capital (Rocamora 2002), to name a few. Inspired by John Urry's thoughts on mobilities (2012) and the notion of motility<sup>2</sup> by Kaufmann *et al.* (2004), I apply and further develop the concept of mobility capital to highlight position-taking across different social fields and geographic scales. Mobility is a feature that actors possess (Urry 2012, p. 74), which, I suggest, can emerge from a combination of different species of capital and appear as symbolic capital or meta-capital. Symbolic capital is a type of meta-capital that implies 'any species of capital when it is perceived, recognized and acknowledged' (Bourdieu 2021a, p. 158). Hence, it is not a form of capital on its own, belonging to a specific social field, but its essence as meta-capital means that it stems from other forms of capital (Swartz 2013, p. 111).

Nexon and Neumann (2018) discuss the possession of hegemonic meta-capital as the capacity to alter capital exchange rates and be a central resource in states' hegemonic pursuits. They emphasise the role of military and economic capital in acquiring the status of a hegemon but noted that while, for example, Byzantium lacked those species of capital, it was high in cultural capital and, thus, respected by its neighbours (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 678). Symbolic resources and struggles matter in status hierarchies; therefore, cultural capital, with its symbolic potential, can also be considered a resource of a state's meta-capital. The case of *The Wanderers* shows how it became a site for capital conversion dynamics and symbolic struggles and how cultural capital could be considered Russia's meta-capital, potentially improving the state's position within the international hierarchy.

Hegemons may choose the path of a 'formal empire', taking over new territories as colonies, or they may select the route of an 'informal empire' (Go 2008, p. 201), the purpose of which is to spread influence across national borders to accumulate security capital and symbolic capital. A desire to undermine the existing liberal international order may originate from an ambition to gain more recognition, which the Western-centric 'recognition order' has failed to give (Adler-Nissen & Zarakol 2021, p. 612). Looking at the Russian state and its history, it has experience in both formal and informal empires. The Russian empire and Soviet Union recall formal empires, having controlled vast foreign territories, while Putin's Russia has also expressed imperialist ambitions (Zaporozhchenko 2024). Additionally, the contemporary Russian state has been attempting to gain recognition through other means, such as by supporting its imperial

<sup>2</sup>Here, the concept of motility captures both spatial and social mobility as it implies the capacity 'to be mobile in social and geographic space' (Kaufmann *et al.* 2004, p. 750). It is also an asset that can be exchanged to other forms of capital (Kaufmann *et al.* 2004, p. 754). In this article, the idea of motility inspires thinking of mobilities in and across social fields and geographic scales and considering spatio-social movement as a form of capital.

cultural heritage, including fine arts and other traditional forms of culture, such as ballet and classical music.<sup>3</sup> Museums, as will be discussed, have also participated in this exercise.

*Russia's status seeking and claims of a multipolar world order*

Russia's quest for a multipolar world order is related to its recognition struggles. In the context of existing hierarchies in the current liberal international order, some actors are dissatisfied with their positions (Adler-Nissen & Zarakol 2021, p. 612). Status and identity have been topics of interest to Russia and China, which can both be seen as 'status-seekers' (Flikke 2016, p. 161; Casier 2020, p. 55). To acquire a higher position in the hierarchy of the liberal international order, states have been expected to adopt 'Western' norms and accept the Western-led order (Adler-Nissen & Zarakol 2021, p. 621). However, a declared commitment to pursuing this goal has not necessarily guaranteed them a powerful position, which has caused frustration in some authoritarian governments, such as Putin's Russia (Adler-Nissen & Zarakol 2021, p. 625).

While Russia has loudly criticised Western domination (Casier 2020, p. 56) and encouraged divisive conflicts within Western states, it is debatable whether it has the potential to change the current liberal international order. Russia's material resources (that is, economic capital) are low compared to the US or China, as is its military expenditure (namely military capital) (Casier 2020), and it has been claimed that these forms of capital are among the central elements in constituting hegemonic power (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 672).

Besides economic and military capital, ideas—or cultural capital—also contribute to hegemony (Casier 2020, p. 49) and high status (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 678). Russia has relied on the ideational component of power by claiming to offer an alternative to the Western-led order, a pursuit in which it has been somewhat successful, considering that Russia has held relatively high status in international relations despite its comparably low amount of economic and military capital (Casier 2020, pp. 56–7).<sup>4</sup> This highlights the influence of cultural capital at play.

While some authors have argued that the Russian-led order is part of an emerging multi-order world, together with China's 'Belt and Road order' (Flockhart & Korosteleva 2022, p. 471), others do not believe that Russia or China can truly challenge the existing order. Ayşe Zarakol has noted that for the Western order to change, there needs to be a 'convergence on standards and terminologies that are alternatives to those we have now by which we define, categorise and evaluate actors, places, geographies, communities' (Zarakol 2022, p. 243). However, both Russia and China express 'high degrees of buy-in to the fundamental norms ("ecumene") of the existing order, such as sovereignty and nationalism' (Zarakol 2022, p. 239), which suggests that the symbolic power of the liberal international order prevails for now.

<sup>3</sup>For example, Forsberg and Mäkinen (2022).

<sup>4</sup>Russia's military power is mostly based on the possession of a large number of nuclear weapons, comparable to the nuclear assets of the US (Casier 2020, pp. 53–4). This also supports Russia's claims for a high status in the international hierarchy of states, even if its overall military expenditure is lower than that of the US or China (Casier 2020, p. 53).

However, even if Russia does not have the potential to shift the world order, it seeks to raise its position in the hierarchies of world politics, and the field of art and cultural capital offer opportunities for this.

*The field of art and art museum exhibitions*

*The Wanderers*, by primarily being a museal art exhibition, is related to the field of art, but it also connects other fields, which are seen through the central actors and forms of capital involved with the exhibition. In addition to more conventional art field actors, such as museum employees, an influential corporate sponsor and diplomatic incentives were also present. This highlights the heteronomous pole of the field of art and its tempting, potentially productive force, which manifested in *The Wanderers* as a site for such dynamics to unfold.

Social fields, such as the field of art, are structured to have both an autonomous and a heteronomous pole. While the autonomous pole functions according to the field's own logic and is autonomous—that is, independent from external influence—a social field's heteronomous pole is more connected to different fields and external forces (Bourdieu 1993, p. 49). In the case of art, the principle of 'art for art's sake' is at the core of the autonomous pole, while the heteronomous pole is where art market actors take positions and political agendas unfold. Moreover, a heteronomous pole is where dynamic capital accumulation and conversion happens as actors convert capital from one form to another to improve their positions in a variety of fields. The fields are relational by their nature; that is, linked to each other and in constant movement. The heteronomous pole can enable position-takings in different fields. In the case of *The Wanderers*, the exhibition became a heteronomous site that connected multiple social fields.

Similar to social fields, art is embedded with relationality and implies relational thinking (Bourdieu 1993, p. 29). This stems from the very nature of art, which 'has always been relational in varying degrees' (Bourriaud 2002, p. 15). For example, an artwork's meaning 'changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated' (Bourdieu 1993, pp. 30–1). Hence, it is not static but relational, in the sense that, for example, significant societal changes, such as a change in a political regime, may affect the field of art and artworks' meanings.

For example, the Wanderers was established as a professionally independent movement interested in managing the artists' own art sales, but their art developed a highly politicised, still widely applied Stalinist interpretation, as Stalin's regime replaced the Wanderers' art market interest with an ideological agenda of serving the Soviet state (Valkenier 1989, p. 137). Putin's regime has also explicitly applied culture to nation building (Herrala 2022, p. 119). Traditional art forms, such as fine arts, have been particularly favoured, while funding for contemporary art has been limited or even neglected (Herrala 2022, p. 181). This conservative turn was enforced after the anti-regime protests in Russia in 2011 and 2012, since contemporary art implies independent reflection and questioning the official consensus, while historical art is safely removed in time from the context it may have been questioning (Jonson 2015, pp. 249–55).



Art museums play a special role in the field of art and in production of art. *The Wanderers* was staged at Shanghai Museum, which appears close to the Chinese field of power. An interviewee from the museum said that potential art exhibitions at Shanghai Museum are usually evaluated based on whether they are in line with China's 'great vision' and relationships with other countries.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the State Tretyakov Gallery is situated close to the Russian state and carries the status of a federal museum. In its development plan, the museum's strategy explicitly implies 'a significant contribution to cultural diplomacy',<sup>6</sup> emphasising its relationship to the state. Hence, diplomatic instrumentalisation can be initiated and promoted by museums as a strategy for appearing useful and securing funding in a competitive environment (Nisbett 2013).

Indeed, art museums are 'heavily political, often involved with or implicated in international relations, and savvy about power' (Sylvester 2009, p. 3). As Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy note, museums are 'always the sites of struggles for highly consecrated symbolic capital within the cultural and political fields' (Grenfell & Hardy 2007, p. 106)—and sometimes, other fields, such as business. Museal art exhibitions are among the sites where these heteronomous struggles occur.

### *Forms of capital at The Wanderers*

I interviewed nine actors, representing the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation; the State Tretyakov Gallery; Shanghai Museum; the State Museum of Oriental Art; the main sponsor, RUSAL; and central facilitators of the exhibition. Most interviews were conducted between December 2017 and August 2018, with two additional interviews in April 2021. The interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analysed using ATLAS.ti software. Based on them, I discuss how cultural, diplomatic, national, economic and mobility capital manifested in the art exhibition. These forms of capital also indicate the central social fields involved in the exhibition, namely, the field of art, the field of state, the field of business, the global financial field and the meta-field of diplomacy. Furthermore, I introduce cultural capital as an element of the hegemonic meta-capital of the Russian state and discuss, using *The Wanderers* as an example, how fine art can potentially contribute to diplomatic and business relations between Russia and China and foster Russia's international standing.

### *Cultural capital*

The 68 exhibited paintings, flown from Moscow to Shanghai, appeared as objectified forms of highly valued cultural capital. Ivan Kramskoi's famous artwork *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* welcomed visitors at the entrance of Shanghai Museum and was also pictured in the exhibition's brochure. Kramskoi was a founding member as well as 'the initial intellectual leader' of the Wanderers (Shabanov 2019, p. 3), and promoting the exhibition with his

<sup>5</sup> Author's interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>6</sup> 'Kontseptsiya razvitiya Tret'yakovskoi galerei', The State Tretyakov Gallery, 2016, p. 38, available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/55903445/>, accessed 3 December 2024.

work framed the exhibition with consecrated cultural capital derived from his skilful technique, intellectual—or autonomous—nature and close relationship with the merchant Pavel Tretyakov, the art patron and original founder of Tretyakov Gallery. In addition to Kramskoi's paintings, the exhibition included many iconic Wanderer artworks, such as Ilya Repin's *Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Sultan* and *The Duel*, Isaak Levitan's landscape paintings and Viktor Vasnetsov's *Alenushka*. The famous artworks were considered high in symbolic capital, named 'masterpieces' both in the exhibition brochure and by an interviewee from Shanghai Museum.<sup>7</sup>

It was Shanghai Museum's fourth cooperation with a Russian museum.<sup>8</sup> Since Shanghai Museum does not have an extensive collection of paintings, one interviewee noted that it was interested in receiving more 'special exhibitions' of paintings and other objects different from the museum's collection.<sup>9</sup> *The Wanderers* offered Shanghai Museum an opportunity to expand its collection, even if only temporarily, and become a destination for the wandering 'masterpieces', thus granting the museum consecrated cultural capital—symbolic capital—in the form of prestige and recognition.

The art of the Wanderers also illustrates incorporated cultural capital in the form of artistic skills. Such embodied capital is something that only an individual can acquire over time, and this form of capital is tied to its holder (Bourdieu 2021a, pp. 166–68). As an interviewee from Shanghai Museum noted, the Wanderers were famous among Chinese painters of the twentieth century, who had 'learned much about how to paint, the basic painting technique, from the Russian masters'.<sup>10</sup> Many Chinese artists studied realist oil painting techniques in the Soviet Union throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Saobin 2017). Arguably, such a positioning had the potential to boost the status of the Russian state, appearing in the role of a teacher for China, superior in cultural capital derived from the European style of painting. This cultural power relation carries patronising undertones based on the assumption that the Russian state is more progressive and developed by possessing more of a specific type of cultural capital.

The State Tretyakov Gallery, the usual home of the works featured in *The Wanderers* exhibition, is an example of cultural capital in its institutionalised state. A prestigious world-class museum,<sup>11</sup> it has 'a very special status' among Russian museums.<sup>12</sup> This institutionalised form of cultural capital illustrates 'state magic' (Bourdieu 1996a, p. 374), the 'performative magic of the power of instituting' that leads to the power to 'impose recognition' (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248): the works within its walls, over 200,000 pieces,<sup>13</sup> a huge collection, have the status of officially recognised art. Additionally, the museum

<sup>7</sup> Author's interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Author's interview with representative B, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Author's interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Author's interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Author's interview with Representative A, RUSAL, Moscow, 26 February 2018; author's interview with Representative A, Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 27 April 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Author's interview with representative from the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 27 August 2018.

<sup>13</sup> 'Kolleksiya', State Tretyakov Gallery, 2022, available at: <http://www.tretykovgallery.ru/collection/>, accessed 16 December 2022.

carries out academic research and has 18 research departments.<sup>14</sup> This academic function creates a further link to the state: Bourdieu noted that when academics are seemingly acting in honour of public service, they are in fact serving the state's interests (Bourdieu 1996a, p. 375).

*The Wanderers* also generated 'informational capital', which is equivalent to cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 119) and closely related to diplomatic and national capital, since the exhibition contained important educational substance regarding the Wanderers, Russian official culture and the Wanderers' influence on the development of Chinese realist art in the modern era. Here, the concept of informational capital enables seeing 'how the incorporated, objectified information that defines cultural capital is information that is both structured and structuring' (Bourdieu 2021b, p. 243). This structuring effect added diplomatic potential to the informational content of the exhibition. The exhibition was intended to familiarise Chinese visitors not only with Russian artists but also with 'Russian culture and civilisation', which suited the 'huge political, favourable political environment'.<sup>15</sup> According to an interviewee from the Shanghai Museum, it offered 'a very easy way to understand Russian culture', 'including the religion, education, economy and culture and everything'.<sup>16</sup>

### *Diplomatic capital*

*The Wanderers* exhibition illustrates how national actors, such as state museums and state-loyal companies, are intertwined with various scale-crossing fields, namely with the 'meta-field of diplomacy' (Adler-Nissen 2011, p. 328) and the global field of finance. The exhibition created a heteronomous space through which actors could accumulate diplomatic and political capital beyond strictly domestic realms as different fields became relationally and heteronomously connected.

Cultural attractiveness is considered a power source that can be further converted into diplomatic capital (Adler-Nissen 2011, p. 329), and museum diplomacy has the potential to affect states' relations.<sup>17</sup> A representative of Russia's Ministry of Culture mentioned that Russian culture has always been popular in China,<sup>18</sup> suggesting that it carries a special status there and, thus, is potentially imbued with diplomatic and symbolic capital. While these shared aesthetics function as a unifying nuance in relations between Russia and China, they also hint at an uneven power relationship by creating a patronising impression of 'developed' Russia teaching art to 'developing' China. This has the potential to support Russia's status-seeking pursuits by appearing superior in cultural capital, which can be further converted to diplomatic and political capital in relations with China.

<sup>14</sup>'Nauka', State Tretyakov Gallery, 2022, available at: <http://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/about/science/>, accessed 16 December 2022.

<sup>15</sup>Author's interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>16</sup>Author's interview with representative B, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Bethwaite (2022).

<sup>18</sup>Author's interview with Representative A, Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 27 April 2021.

Russian embassies and consulates are expressions of the bureaucratic field, as well as the wider field of the state, and they embody state-derived symbolic and diplomatic capital. While the Russian embassy and consulate did not play a significant role in planning or implementing the exhibition, the consul general of the Russian consulate in Shanghai attended its official opening. This was considered to carry important symbolic significance, since if the consulate had been absent from the opening, it ‘would have been a bad signal for the press’.<sup>19</sup> The consul’s visit thus underlined the diplomatic capital related to *The Wanderers* and its relationship with the ‘meta-field of diplomacy’ (Adler-Nissen 2011).

The diplomatic tone and strategic value of *The Wanderers*, especially in the context of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), were highlighted in the words of welcome by Yang Zhigang, the director of Shanghai Museum, which were printed on the wall at the exhibition’s entrance:

China and Russia have kept their bilateral traditional friendship. With the deepening of ‘The Belt and Road Initiative’ strategic partnership in recent years, the two countries have become more closely tied and active in humanistic exchanges and communications. We hope that this exhibition, as a model project of Sino–Russian cultural exchange, can help visitors to get a better understanding of the Wanderers’ glory in art history. (Yang 2017)

This welcome illustrated the wider framework within which the exhibition was positioned, highlighting cultural diplomacy and the BRI as well as the diplomatic capital with which the exhibition came to be embedded. It also functioned as a public position-taking of the museums, illustrating that they were situated within the field of art as well as the fields of state and diplomacy. The exhibition was explicitly positioned as a site of world politics.

Such diplomatic instrumentalisation may have benefited not only the Russian state but also the State Tretyakov Gallery. Following Melissa Nisbett’s observations in her analysis of British art institutions, museums can diplomatically instrumentalise themselves to gain organisational benefits and economic growth. In her case study, Nisbett discovered that it was beneficial for cultural institutions to appear as actors of cultural diplomacy, and thus, ‘an instrumental policy was initiated, formulated and implemented by the cultural sector itself’ (Nisbett 2013, p. 570). Similarly, the State Tretyakov Gallery’s contribution to the state’s cultural diplomacy was explicitly inscribed in its development plan; the Gallery’s international activities were to be coordinated with ‘the cultural programs and cultural diplomacy of the Russian Federation’. Thus, *The Wanderers* exhibition, with its diplomatic overtones, was clearly planned in the context of the museum’s national and international strategy.

Moreover, acting as a cultural diplomat may have allowed the museum to accumulate diplomatic capital that could potentially be converted into additional symbolic or economic capital within Russian national fields and in fields located on an international scale. Natalia Grincheva observed that contemporary museum diplomacy is influenced

<sup>19</sup> Author’s interview with Facilitator A, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

by neoliberal globalisation and that ‘museums gain access to international resources and establish connections with international audiences and constituencies in ways that no longer require support of patronage from their respective governments’ (Grincheva 2020, p. 106). In her research, Grincheva examined the State Hermitage Museum, offering a slightly different perspective. While the Tretyakov Gallery’s founding principle was primarily the collection of Russian art, the Hermitage has a network of foundations abroad, and its collection consists of items originating from different national contexts.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the Hermitage has opened satellite museums abroad, which has not been part of the State Tretyakov Gallery’s strategy.<sup>21</sup> However, the decision by the Tretyakov Gallery’s Board of Trustees to request a development plan illustrates that museum management has been aware of the expectations evoked by neoliberal tendencies that have made the museums rethink their roles in society. For example, the Tretyakov Gallery’s development plan discusses the museum’s ‘brand’ and its position on the ‘market of cultural services’,<sup>22</sup> and aims to decrease state subsidies by increasing the income that the museum generates through, for example, cafes, restaurants and shops.<sup>23</sup>

Considering the ‘huge political background’ and close relationship between Russia and China,<sup>24</sup> the Wanderers’ artworks acquired diplomatic value. Hence, cultural capital in its objectified state (for example, artworks) ‘exists as symbolically and materially active only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 247). Here, art can be seen as sort of a ‘weapon’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 247), especially considering the strategic role of culture, such as fine art, in the status-seeking exercises of the Russian state.

The exhibition’s national character was overlaid by a seemingly ‘universalist façade’ (Bourdieu 1994, p. 8) that could touch visitors unfamiliar with Russian culture and engage the exhibition with wider field-crossing dynamics. For example, the director of Shanghai Museum Yang Zhigang announced that the Wanderers had ‘formed a new realist art form that would serve the common man and society as a whole, rather than the high and the mighty’ (Wang 2017), thereby building connections between representatives of different social classes across national boundaries. This was supported by another representative of the Shanghai Museum, who noted that the exhibition provided ‘a large number of common themes between common Chinese people and common Russian people’.<sup>25</sup> A universalist notion had the potential to contribute to the generation of diplomatic capital through *The Wanderers*.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Kontseptsiya razvitiya Tret’yakovskoi galerei’, The State Tretyakov Gallery, 2016, p. 26, available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/55903445/->, accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Kontseptsiya razvitiya Tret’yakovskoi galerei’, The State Tretyakov Gallery, 2016, pp. 38–9, available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/55903445/->, accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Kontseptsiya razvitiya Tret’yakovskoi galerei’, The State Tretyakov Gallery, 2016, p. 5, available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/55903445/->, accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Kontseptsiya razvitiya Tret’yakovskoi galerei’, The State Tretyakov Gallery, 2016, pp. 41–2, available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/55903445/->, accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Author’s interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Author’s interview with representative A, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

As one interviewee noted, it was a ‘comprehensive exhibition’ that was ‘not only [about] the paintings’.<sup>26</sup> Besides illustrating the artists’ relationships with Chinese art and displaying common themes, the curated exhibition represented national capital by introducing official ‘Russian’ art and culture to the Chinese public.

*National capital and its international potential*

The founding collection of the State Tretyakov Gallery was obtained by the Moscow-based merchant and art patron Pavel Tretyakov, who established the gallery in 1856. After the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the museum was nationalised (that is, turned into national capital). Its collection grew through artworks confiscated from private collections by the Soviet state (Zhilyaeva 2022). It has been a state museum ever since, deriving part of its symbolic capital from its closeness to the field of the state as well as from the nature of art museums as supposedly economically—and politically—disinterested ‘sacred places of art’ (Bourdieu & Darbel 1991, p. 112). State museums represent national capital derived from their state connections. As a federal (state) museum, the Tretyakov Gallery is positioned as a ‘national treasure’, ‘the best that there is’ on a world scale.<sup>27</sup>

Museums are both affected by symbolic power and execute it, being capable of naming and categorising and, thus, constituting the social world. This is part of the ‘cultural bedrock of political life’ (Swartz 2013, p. 88). *The Wanderers* had the symbolic power potential to affect cognitive structures and schemes of perceptions of the social world. Considering Russo–Chinese relations, the interviewee from the Russian Ministry of Culture pointed out that ‘the Russian side has both the desire and the will to develop relations with the eastern vector, including China. This is certainly the case. But this is a completely objective consequence, since we live in a multipolar world’.<sup>28</sup> This claim, by a representative of the Russian state, that the world is multipolar can be seen as a performative act of ‘naming the world’ (Bourdieu 2018b, p. 81)—or, rather, an attempt, enriched with state-derived symbolic power, to produce worlds that favour the Russian state. In fact, the existence of a multipolar world is a matter of debate and reflects various political interests and desires.

*The Wanderers* was framed with a specific protest capital that emphasised the social criticism and public service inherent to the Wanderers, and it was also linked to national capital. Like the interpretations by Stalinist art critics, the director of Shanghai Museum indicated in his words of welcome the Wanderers’ ideological essence by describing the artists as:

a group of liberal artists in protest to the official academy .... In order to highlight the critical, ideological and populist natures of the Wanderers’ art, this exhibition illustrates the group’s concerns over national destiny and the life of the masses ... with their aims either to expose the problems in reality or to praise the commendable social phenomena .... Besides, a parallel

<sup>26</sup> Author’s interview with representative B, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, 15 December 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Author’s interview with representative from the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 27 August 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Author’s interview with Representative A, Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 27 April 2021.

comparison is made between the Wanderers and the Academy in terms of their artistic themes and techniques, with a view to highlight the social function and innovative consciousness of the former. (Yang 2017)

By criticising the social conditions of the nineteenth century produced by a political regime that preceded socialism, the art exhibition could emphasise the superiority of socialist ideology in improving the lives of the people. This could enforce the political regimes in China and Russia as well as boost a sense of socialist brotherhood that China and Russia, while part of the Soviet Union, once shared. Thus, such protest capital has the potential to perform a state-supporting role for both contemporary Russian and Chinese states and enforce national capital.

Besides actors from the fields of art and the state, the main sponsor, RUSAL, can also be seen as possessing national as well as political capital. Despite being part of the global financial circuit, RUSAL has been positioned close to the Russian field of state. RUSAL's majority shareholder, the 'Kremlin-loyal' billionaire Oleg Deripaska, is known for his close connections with the Russian state (Zhdannikov 2010). For almost two decades, Deripaska was married to Polina Yumasheva, whose father worked for Boris Yel'tsin's administration and had married Yel'tsin's daughter. This may have assisted the businessman in accumulating vital social and political capital among Russia's power elite. Furthermore, aluminium is considered part of Russia's strategic energy sector, which is why RUSAL, among other aluminium companies, is watched closely by the political elite in Russia (Godzimirski 2018, p. 85) and intertwined with national capital.

The possession of national and political capital can lead to favourable business deals in national and international fields. In 2007, RUSAL merged with oligarch Viktor Vekselberg's SUAL as well as with Glencore, growing in size to become United Company RUSAL, the largest aluminium-producing company in the world and controlling 100% of aluminium production in Russia. Curiously, the Russian anti-monopoly agency approved this merger. As Jakub Godzimirski noted, 'Vekselberg and Deripaska seemed to have managed to persuade Russian political decision-makers that the interests of the Russian state partly overlapped with the interests of the country's aluminium producers' (Godzimirski 2018, p. 84). Furthermore, Godzimirski suggested that Deripaska's business plans may have fitted well with Vladimir Putin's strategy, since presumably, the world's largest aluminium-producing company 'could successfully resist Western pressure and dictate its own terms instead . . . . The Kremlin might thus hope that the merger would produce an economic actor that could pursue not only its own, but also Russia's global economic interests' (Godzimirski 2018, p. 84).

Drawing from this, *The Wanderers* may have offered RUSAL an opportunity to convert its national and economic capital into political capital in the Chinese field of business, and such lobby power could be valuable, especially considering the close relations between the field of business and the Chinese state as well as the important role of personal relationships in doing business in China (Blanchette 2021; Mattlin *et al.* 2022). This is supported by the claim of a RUSAL representative, who noted that by sponsoring the exhibition, RUSAL was not aiming to reach wide masses of people but to address its Chinese partners.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Author's interview with Representative A, RUSAL Moscow, 26 February 2018.



Furthermore, considering RUSAL's Kremlin-supported national capital and the assumption that not only states are diplomatic actors (Adler-Nissen 2011, p. 329), RUSAL may have also possessed diplomatic potential, having accumulated diplomatic capital through sponsorship of the art exhibition.

### *Economic capital*

The Wanderers' founding principles were initially motivated by economic capital: the artists wanted to gain professional autonomy to control the sale of their paintings and acquire new clients by sending their artworks on tours of Russia. This ambition can be seen to be opposing the disinterested, 'anti-“economic” economy of pure art' (Bourdieu 1996b, p. 142) according to which artists often position themselves (Grenfell & Hardy 2007, p. 129). However, artists 'need both an audience and a market' (Grenfell & Hardy 2007, p. 177).

Entry to *The Wanderers* exhibition at Shanghai Museum was free of charge, but it required economic capital to bring a large art exhibition of 68 paintings from Moscow to Shanghai. Unlike the Tretyakov Gallery, which does not usually pay for incoming exhibitions, the Chinese state partly funded *The Wanderers*, which demonstrates the Chinese state's interest in cultural collaboration with Russia's leading art museums.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the expense of bringing *The Wanderers* to Shanghai was largely covered by RUSAL. Both RUSAL's press release and one of the interviewees from RUSAL emphasised the size of the art exhibition, describing it as being of 'a grand scale' (RUSAL 2017a) and 'the most beautiful and the largest project' RUSAL had ever organised.<sup>31</sup> This suggests that the cost of the project was high, thereby demonstrating the generous amount of economic capital offered by the company.

Sponsorship can be seen as 'part of a company's promotional toolkit' (O'Hagan & Harvey 2000, p. 205), and it can bring a range of benefits to a sponsoring company, from promoting and improving the company's public image to bringing it closer to decision-makers and gaining opportunities for rent seeking. A representative of RUSAL pointed out that a company's reputation builds upon its social responsibility, such as through its support of cultural initiatives.<sup>32</sup> Acting as the exclusive sponsor of *The Wanderers* and providing economic capital, RUSAL could emphasise its status as a leader—distinguishing itself from other companies who lacked such leadership—and demonstrate its interest in the Chinese market as well as its desire to develop pre-existing relationships further or initiate new ones.<sup>33</sup>

The director of communications at RUSAL, Vera Kurochkina, noted the potential of the exhibition to 'strengthen mutual understanding and friendship between both countries and peoples' (RUSAL 2017a), linking the exhibition not only to the field of diplomacy but also to other social fields, such as those of business and global finance, crossing different fields and scales. Besides communicating with the public, RUSAL supported the art

<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator A, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator A, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator A, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Author's interview with Representative A, RUSAL Moscow, 26 February 2018.



exhibition to address its business partners and investors in Asia.<sup>34</sup> As another RUSAL interviewee noted, the aim was not to reach across the masses and increase the brand awareness of the company but rather to communicate with existing Chinese partners already familiar with RUSAL.<sup>35</sup> Expressing financial disinterest and generosity by giving to the art exhibition without seemingly receiving anything back, and thus presenting RUSAL as financially successful, socially responsible and politically cooperative, would make RUSAL appealing to prospective Chinese partners. Hence, the exhibition was opened only nine months after RUSAL issued yuan-denominated Panda bonds on the Shanghai Stock Exchange in March 2017.

Due to the nature of its core business and the company's debt to foreign banks and domestic lenders following the significant losses during the economic crisis in 2008 and 2009 (Godzimirski 2018, pp. 90–3), RUSAL needed economic capital to remain one of the leaders in the global field of aluminium production. To secure funding, it was listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in 2010 (Godzimirski 2018, pp. 94–5) and issued yuan-denominated Panda bonds on the Shanghai Stock Exchange in March 2017 (RUSAL 2017b), becoming the first Russian company to do so in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Besides illustrating that, through economic capital, RUSAL was deeply intertwined with the 'global financial field' (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 672) and the 'global financial space' (Tellmann 2017, pp. 149–50),<sup>36</sup> the Panda bonds also served as a powerful sign of positioning within the Chinese fields of finance and business. As stated in the press release by the Zhong Lun law firm that advised the issuance, RUSAL's Panda bonds' success also played a role in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative: it expanded further the financing channels related to the BRI and deepened international financial cooperation along it.<sup>37</sup> For the Chinese financial market, RUSAL's Panda bonds issuance marked 'a step forward in the process of opening up China's onshore markets to international borrowers' (Hale 2017), which is why the incident was characterised as 'a milestone event in China's capital market' (RUSAL 2017b). Thus, by acting as the main sponsor of *The Wanderers* exhibition in the same year as the issuance of the Panda bonds occurred, RUSAL could convert its economic capital into cultural and symbolic capital, thus accumulating prestige, which could appeal to its local partners and potentially enhance its accumulation of economic capital on the Shanghai Stock Exchange.

### *Mobility capital*

The notion of movement is depicted in the Wanderers' name, creating idealistic connotations about autonomy, free movement and entering new territories. Through the movement of artworks across Russia, the artists possessed a type of mobility capital that they were motivated to convert into economic capital. This mobility differentiated them from their

<sup>34</sup> Author's interview with Representative A, RUSAL, Moscow, 26 February 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Author's interview with Representative A, RUSAL, Moscow, 26 February 2018.

<sup>36</sup> See also Sassen (2006).

<sup>37</sup> 'Zhong Lun Advised Underwriter on Successful Panda Bonds Issuance of U.C. RUSAL, First Issuer from "Belt and Road" Countries', Zhong Lun, 6 April 2017, available at: <https://en.zhonglun.com/news/trade/30411.html>, accessed 2 December 2024.

Russian contemporaries, who were rooted in the national and cultural capital of St Petersburg and eventually came to symbolise them. As I will explain next, mobility capital was one of the central forms of capital occurring in and through the exhibition in Shanghai. It highlights capital conversion dynamics that cross different social fields and geographic scales and implies actors' ability to take positions across fields and scales. It is thus also closely related to the idea of heteronomy.

Mobility is not a 'neutral process' that simply occurs (Urry 2012, p. 82). In this article, it is conceptualised as the capacity to move across fields and scales, based on the possession of one or several forms of capital. It can be viewed as a form of symbolic capital if a social field grants it as such. The amount of mobility capital can be linked to, for example, social capital and one's social networks, cultural capital in terms of competence and knowledge, as well as economic capital that can enable an individual to cross and enter different fields.

*The Wanderers* exhibition was fuelled by mobility capital, which stemmed from different forms of capital and touched on a range of social fields. Some actors involved converted the mobility capital they possessed to other forms of capital, while others sought to acquire mobility capital through the exhibition to improve their positions in different social fields and geographic scales. This illustrates the meta-capital character of mobility capital, generated from other forms of capital and not necessarily being limited solely to one field but having wider-reaching field effects.

The set of actors that I refer to as facilitators played an important role in making the exhibition happen. They possessed mobility capital that could be further converted into economic capital. One of the companies involved had significant experience in logistics, specifically moving valuable artworks across the globe, which was crucial in bringing *The Wanderers* to Shanghai. It was considered possibly 'the best' in its field among companies in Russia.<sup>38</sup> Such practical mobility capital, accumulated through years of experience, could be converted to economic capital through financial earnings, as the actor received payment for this service.

Another individual also possessed a type of mobility capital, but in their case, it had a more complex origin, being a blend of different species of capital. The facilitator was the central person in bringing together the museums—being 'an adviser to both parties'<sup>39</sup>—as well as connecting the exhibition with the sponsor, RUSAL. This person had previous experience of organising exhibitions with Russian museums and had previously worked with Shanghai Museum, having accumulated incorporated cultural capital in the form of skills for organising international museal exhibitions. They were able to cross different social fields and heteronomously connect actors from different fields. Furthermore, their mobility capital consisted of knowing the right people in Russia and China, that is, possessing a high volume of social capital: 'It's all about relationships. It's not about what I know about art'.<sup>40</sup> The facilitator was familiar with the code of conduct inherent in the fields of art and business, effortlessly taking positions in both fields. This knowledge can be seen as incorporated cultural capital accumulated over time through

<sup>38</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator B, St Petersburg, 13 February 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator A, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator A, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

experience and exposure. Because the facilitator was familiar with the Russian and Chinese fields of both art and business, their mobility capital could be productively employed across scales beyond solely domestic realms. This mobility capital enabled the actor to take positions on fields' heteronomous poles and bring together several fields, thereby creating a heteronomous space of position-takings and further enabling capital accumulation and conversion activities by actors from different fields.

One of the actors that had the opportunity to accumulate mobility capital through the exhibition was the sponsor, RUSAL. Mobility capital had the potential to support RUSAL in situating itself in the Chinese field of business and, perhaps, in the global financial field by attracting international investors and, thus, taking positions on a greater scale. As RUSAL enforced its position in the Chinese field of business through the issuance of Panda bonds and the sponsorship of *The Wanderers*, its mobility capital could be further converted into a higher volume of economic capital. Furthermore, allowing RUSAL to enter the Shanghai Stock Exchange may have assisted the Chinese state in accumulating mobility capital for the BRI by generating goodwill among the Russian elite.

Business interests and mobility capital were present in the Shanghai Museum director's words of welcome, since it was explicitly suggested that the art exhibition was playing a role in the 'the Belt and Road Initiative's strategic partnership' between Russia and China (Yang 2017). An experienced art-world professional was struck by the open political framing of the exhibition, stating that they had not seen anything like that at art exhibitions organised in Europe, the UK or the United States.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the BRI, with mobility capital at its core, appeared to be an important theme for a Chinese state museum. *The Wanderers* may have provided the Chinese state with a chance to accumulate and exchange diplomatic capital through the Shanghai Museum and its interactions with the State Tretyakov Gallery. In particular, this diplomatic capital had the potential to be converted into mobility capital in the form of the progression of the BRI, which has corridors running through Russian territory.<sup>42</sup> Considering Russia's worsening relations with the West since the war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the State Tretyakov Gallery could potentially assist the Russian state in accumulating 'eastern' mobility capital from its connections with a Chinese state institution and, thus, create new avenues for international cooperation as well as opportunities to benefit from China's BRI. After all, as one of the interviewees noted, 'Russia wants to introduce ... Russian art to foreign audiences',<sup>43</sup> and the possession of mobility capital can support such position-taking beyond domestic fields.

*Fine art and cultural capital as elements of the hegemonic meta-capital of the Russian state*

As seen in the case of *The Wanderers*, the Russian state utilised fine art and cultural capital derived from the nineteenth century and exchanged it for mobility capital and political

<sup>41</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator B, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

<sup>42</sup> 'The BRI and China's International Trade Map', Belt and Road Research Platform, 2021, available at: <https://www.beltroadresearch.com/the-bri-and-chinas-international-trade-map/>, accessed 31 January 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Author's interview with Facilitator B, Shanghai, 16 December 2017.

capital, that is, ‘the ability to attract allies’ (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 668). Here, the cultural capital possessed by the Russian state became an asset in the meta-field of diplomacy in developing relations between Russia and China and increasing Russia’s international standing by finding an ally in an economic superpower that did not represent the liberal international order.

Besides state actors, a multitude of other actors and processes can shape world politics and its hierarchies and capital exchange rates across different scales (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 676). While hegemonies can create and change other fields, they do not have the full freedom to do so, since their actions can be shaped and limited by other states and non-state actors in global fields (Nexon & Neumann 2018, p. 672). As discovered in the case of *The Wanderers*, it is essential to look beyond mere states and include other types of actors participating in the field dynamics motivated by, for example, economic or symbolic incentives, since these actors may also influence the dynamics taking shape at different scales in world politics.

Here, heteronomy is a fruitful concept in answer to the first research question concerning how *The Wanderers* became an arena of capital accumulation and conversion. First, the very nature of art is relational; the field of art is dominated by the field of power, and changes occurring there can also affect the field of art. Having occupied different positions during the different regimes of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, the Wanderers developed a split habitus. The artists and the art movement were intertwined with different fields, and they were interpreted differently depending on the viewers’ field positions. Second, this split habitus has productive, heteronomous potential. The Wanderers’ split habitus supported heteronomy and heteronomous capital accumulation dynamics by appealing to a range of different actors across a variety of social fields. Third, the connection of *The Wanderers* to the field of state through the State Tretyakov Gallery also enforced the exhibition’s role and significance in international relations and world politics, since the art movement could become a component of the hegemonic meta-capital possessed by the Russian state and thus participate in the state’s status-seeking pursuits. The exhibition created a heteronomous site that bridged multiple different fields—namely, the fields of art, the state and business as well as the meta-field of diplomacy and the global field of finance—and enabled cross-field position-takings as well as capital accumulation and conversion dynamics.

### Conclusions

In this article, we examined the 2017–2018 *Wanderers* exhibition at the Shanghai Museum and delved into the different forms of capital intertwined with the artistic site. By looking into the Russian state’s status-seeking pursuits through the heteronomous space of the art exhibition, we identified fine art and cultural capital as elements of the state’s hegemonic meta-capital. This also backs Herrala’s (2022, p. 181) observations that the contemporary Russian state prefers traditional forms of culture, such as nineteenth-century fine art.

This article developed the concept of mobility capital, which implies an actor’s ability to cross social fields and geographic scales. Together with fine art as an element of Russia’s hegemonic meta-capital, mobility capital has become one of the central forms of capital that could support further capital accumulation dynamics, considering China’s BRI and

Russia's position within the initiative as well as more widely in world politics. Mobility capital also appeared to be in the interest of the sponsor, RUSAL. Facilitators who already possessed mobility capital were crucial in realising the exhibition and connecting actors from different fields and across national boundaries, thereby enforcing the heteronomous site of *The Wanderers*.

*The Wanderers* case illustrates productive tensions between artists' professional autonomy and heteronomy in art, infused with ambitions such as financial and political objectives. While artists aim to acquire professional autonomy, they need an audience and a market. Moreover, art is relational and produced collectively, and the artwork's value is formed by a collective belief (Bourdieu 1996b, p. 172). Thus, artworks lack just one fundamental meaning. Drawing from this, the juxtaposition of professional autonomy and heteronomy—and split habitus—was an integral part of the Wanderers movement, which demonstrates how different periods, with their political regimes and publics, framed, interpreted and produced the Wanderers differently. Hence, the Wanderers' split habitus can generate fruitful 'frictions' that do not just create conflicts but provoke different effects and illustrate the 'creative qualities of interconnection across differences' (Tsing 2005, p. 4). Here, heteronomy carries a productive potential, bringing together various fields and offering opportunities to a range of actors for different kinds of capital accumulation and conversion manoeuvres.

The case study provides an example of how the site of an art exhibition, along with the state and non-state actors involved, can be analysed from the perspective of international relations. In *The Wanderers*, tensions between universal and national accounts were present: on one hand, the exhibition's universalist nature could touch a variety of visitors regardless of their national origin. On the other hand, the exhibition constituted a site that projected a specific image of Russia and 'Russian' art. It is noteworthy that while fine art has been supported by the Russian state, offering opportunities for the state's status-seeking pursuits, it has limited instrumental potential in world politics. That is, Russian fine art may not play a significant role in changing the liberal international order altogether, since—for example, based on the Wanderers' aesthetics—it does not truly offer alternatives to the West. As Ayşe Zarakol wrote:

The decline of the West (for better or worse) will truly have come to pass when there is a convergence on standards and terminologies that are alternatives to those we have now by which we define, categorise and evaluate actors, places, geographies, communities. We will know it happened when those who live elsewhere forget to wonder what those of us who live in the West are doing or thinking, when they forget that we act at all, that the people who lived here once upon a time even produced world orders. (Zarakol 2022, p. 243)

Moreover, it is worth asking whether there are real prospects for major world order shifts as long as global financial capitalism exists. Both RUSAL and China, with its stock exchanges and financial instruments, exist within global financial circuits rather than in their own, separate, parallel, non-Western financial space. The global financial space—or field—'resides within the national space but reconfigures it' (Tellmann 2017, p. 149)<sup>44</sup> and,

<sup>44</sup>See also Sassen (2006).

thus, can support the existing world order by promoting the norms and values that constitute it. 'The distinct structural configuration and cultural content of the global field' have a constitutive effect on actors such as states and their practices (Go 2008, p. 223).

Since the exhibition's vernissage in 2017, general global trends have significantly strengthened. The discussion on the multipolar and 'multiorder' world (Flockhart & Korosteleva 2022) has persisted, especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Xi Jinping's tightened grip on power (Thomas 2023). After 24 February 2022, Russia was heavily sanctioned, losing ties with many Western partners and, consequently, increasing its trade with China (McCarthy 2023). In addition, the State Tretyakov Gallery seems to have become even closer to Putin's regime; in February 2023, Zelfira Tregulova, 'one of the most successful directors of Russian museums in recent years',<sup>45</sup> was unexpectedly dismissed from her post as Tretyakov's general director and replaced by the lesser-known Elena Pronicheva. Tregulova was recognised for her efforts in organising blockbuster exhibitions in Moscow and promoting Russian art abroad in China, India and Central Asia, having been named a 'cultural politician' rather than simply a museum director.<sup>46</sup> Pronicheva, in turn, entered the museum sphere only in 2013, having previously worked for prominent Russian state institutions such as the State *Duma* and Gazprom (Mikhant'yeva 2023). She has close personal ties to *siloviki*, actors from Russia's security services, who are considered the backbone of Putin's regime (Lieven 2022). Her father had a long career both in the KGB and in its successor, the FSB, in which he held high positions, such as acting as the first deputy director (Pronichev 2023).

Selecting a new museum director with such a background supports the argument that fine art has strategic significance for the Russian state, and thus, partly explains the state's increased control of the fields of cultural production and art.<sup>47</sup> In the authoritarian conditions of Putin's Russia, state museums reproduce the social order dictated by the state and the field of power, and field heteronomy has the potential to further expand these processes and effects to fields beyond domestic domains. However, due to art's relational nature, the Russian state cannot fully capture, control and own art or how Russian fine art is perceived beyond its borders.

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<sup>45</sup>Bonami cited in 'Epokha Zel'firy', Artgid, 11 February 2023, available at: <https://artguide.com/posts/2531>, accessed 11 February 2024.

<sup>46</sup>Kamenskii cited in 'Epokha Zel'firy', Artgid, 11 February 2023, available at: <https://artguide.com/posts/2531>, accessed 11 February 2024.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, Turoma *et al.* (2018).

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