



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

Master's Degree  
in Lingue, economie e  
istituzioni dell'Asia e  
dell'Africa  
mediterranea

Final Thesis

**Trade Fairs as  
China economic  
development and  
international  
outreach**

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**Academic Year**  
2019/2020

Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

# 引言

本文旨在分析有关世界贸易的展览会体系，尤其是中国的展览会体系。

展览会可以定义为将某一特定行业的不同成员聚集在一起以展示和讨论产品和服务的活动：其参与者可以结识业务合作伙伴和客户，获得有关竞争对手活动的情报，以及了解评估最新的趋势和市场机会。现今，对于那些希望在国际舞台上有所表现的公司而言，参加展览会是必不可少的重要活动，因为它们可以融合不同文化的各方面，在参展商和参观者不总是来自同一国家的情况下，这的确发挥了作用。

第一章首先概述了什么是贸易展览会：一个结合了经济、领土、政治和文化特点的非常复杂的系统。此外，还阐明了参与并组成多层次的贸易展览会的各种参与者，以及公司可以参与的活动类型。随后，从起源到现在讨论了展览会的概念在历史上的发展。最后，在全球背景下，使用主题相关的最新数据解释并讨论了当前世界展览会的情况。与此同时，分析了展览会作为营销传播工具的方面，在整个企业传播战略方面，展览会起着至关重要的作用。因为公司应当根据参展的表现，得出最好的实践方式。无论是最初的产品目标还是过程，在展会后都能得出相应的评价。

第二章着眼于中国的贸易展览会体系，这与中国近年来经济的快速发展密切相关。虽然中国的贸易展览会行业起步较欧洲或美国较晚，目前仍处于发展当中，但无论是举办的活动数量还是其所占用的展览面积空间，均位居全球第二（例如，在 2019 年，中国就举办了 11033 个贸易展览会，展览面积超过 600 万平方米）。

随后讨论了三个最重要，最著名的中国展览会：中国进出口商品交易会，中国华东进出口商品交易会和中国义乌国际小商品博览会。

综合介绍了这三个展会的概况，包括一些数据（参展商数量、观众人数、展览场地和营业额），以及对每个展会的历史和任务进行了概述。在这一章中所讨论的展览会非常重要，因为它们诞生并发展于城市，是商贸的十字路口，我们如今所看见的中国的商业发展就是从那里发生的。

第三章重点阐述了当前 COVID-19 新冠疫情大流行对世界经济的影响，进而对全球展览业产生的影响。在当前形势下（极具困难），尽管与其他国家的流动困

难可能会导致各种物流和组织的问题，从而损害行业复苏的有效性，但中国在展览业已经开始慢慢复苏。此外,为了更好地理解中国的世界展览会现状，重点探讨并研究了今年 11 月将在上海举行的中国国际进口博览会。

在最后，简要地探讨了在当前情况下所使用的主要 IT 解决方案(虚拟展会，展示网络研讨会，RFID)，从现在来看它们的确是一种有价值的替代方案，但从长远来看，它们永远不能取代“面对面”的方式，因为这种方式保证人们之间真实而直接的互动和讨论，而这也是所有商业市场中建立信任和进步的基础。

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## **Introduction**

The following paper aims to analyze the world trade fair system and, in particular, the Chinese one.

A fair can be defined as an event that brings together different members of a particular sector to display and discuss products and services: it allows attendees to meet business partners and customers, to gain intelligence about the activities of competitors, and to assess the latest trends and market opportunities. Fairs, today, are an essential element for companies that want to have a voice in the international arena, since they allow to amalgamate all the intercultural aspects that inevitably play a role in a context in which exhibitors and visitors do not always come from the same country.

The first chapter outlines initially what a trade fair is: an exceptionally complex system, which combines economic, territorial, political and cultural dynamics. The various players that participate to and make up the multifaceted world of trade fairs are also defined, as well as the type of events that companies can attend. Next, the evolution of the concept of fair over the course of history, from its origins to the present day, is discussed. Lastly, the current world fair situation, in a global context, is explained and discussed using updated data specific to the topic. The fair system as marketing communication tool is then analyzed; this aspect of the trade fair plays a fundamental role in the overall corporate communication strategy, since it suggest the best practices that companies should follow for optimal fair participation, from the initial phase in which objectives and processes are identifies, to the final evaluation carried out after the event.

The second chapter focuses on the Chinese trade fair system, which is closely associated to the country's rapid economic development in recent years, The Chinese trade fair industry, despite having had a late start in comparison to the European or American counterpart, is currently in the second place worldwide both in terms of the

number of events held and in terms of the exhibition space occupied (for example, in 2019, 11,033 trade fairs were held in China, on an exhibition space that exceeds 6 million square meters).

Three of the most important and best-known Chinese fairs are then discussed: The Canton Fair - 中国出口商品交易会, the East China Fair - 中国华东进出口商品交易会 and the China Yiwu International Commodities Fair - 中国义乌国际小商品博览会 .

An outline for each of the three exhibitions is presented, which includes some numerical data (exhibitors, visitors, exhibition space and turnover), and a description of each fair history and undertakings. The fairs discussed in this chapter are also extremely important because they were born and developed in cities that are commercial crossroads, where the commercial development of the China we know today has taken place.

The third chapter focuses on the impact that the current COVID-19 pandemic is having on the world economy, consequently on the global exhibition industry. In the current situation, (extremely problematic), China has started a recovery also in the exhibition sector, despite the fact that difficulties in interactions with other countries may lead to various logistical and organizational problems that can compromise the effectiveness of the recovery. In addition, in order to better understand the current situation of China's exhibition world, the China International Import Expo Fair - 中国国际进口博览会, which will be held in Shanghai this November, has been considered and studied.

Finally, IT solutions, (virtual fairs, showcase webinars, RFID) that are mainly used in the current situation are briefly discussed; today they represent a valuable alternative, but in the long run they can never replace a "in person" system, that guarantees real and direct interactions and discussions between people, which are the basis of trust and progress in any commercial market.

# Chapter 1: The Trade Fair system

## 1.1 Trade Fairs

### 1.1.1 Defining and classifying Trade Fairs

In the current age of globalization, characterized by a high level of complexity and interdependence among countries and businesses, there are some communication tools that are becoming increasingly important: the trade fair events. In fact, fairs may be considered as globalization mechanisms, as they represent central nodes of the global economy. Globalization is a process through which markets, production and consumption become connected on a global scale, thanks to a continuous flow of exchanges that makes them interdependent and unify. In the current economic situation, companies cannot ignore globalization, due to opportunities provided by foreign markets<sup>1</sup>. Fairs are periodic events that allow the meeting between supply and demand of goods and services, therefore between companies and operators in the sector, such as buyers, commercial structures, sales force, customers and journalists.

Trade fairs can be defined as:

“An event that facilitates marketing event, in the form of an exposition, fair, exhibition or market. As such, will take place at periodically recurring intervals, ranging from quarterly to triennially; it will have pre-established hours of operation during a period lasting between one day and several weeks. The primary objective of such event is to disseminate information about and display the goods and services of competing but complementary sellers; these sellers will have rented specifically allocated and demarcated areas or “booths”, clustered within a particular building(s), or bounded grounds. The event audience is a selected group of customers, potential buyer, decision influencers and middlemen<sup>2</sup>”.

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<sup>1</sup> SURUGIU, Marius R., *International Trade, Globalization and Economic Interdependence between European countries: Implication for Businesses and Marketing framework*, Procedia Economics and Finance, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2015, Vol. 32, pp.131-138. Available at: <https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com>.

<sup>2</sup> BANTING, Peter M., BLENKHORN David L., *The role of industrial trade shows*, Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1974, Vol. 3, Issue 5, p.285. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com>.



Currently the Global Association of the Exhibition industry UFI<sup>3</sup> defines trade fairs as:

“markets events where a large number of companies come and present their main product range of one or more industry sectors. Trade fairs are events of specific duration that are held at intervals and mostly trade and business visitors. They can be characterized as integration of several factors, including visitors, exhibitors, business partners, venue owners, media people and other stakeholders like politicians since they have a positive regional impact”.

Fairs make it possible for a company to develop business by collecting orders, concluding business contracts, commercializing products and services and entering new markets. Various companies from different countries are now looking for new growth opportunities beyond their home country borders<sup>4</sup>. They are also an effective marketing instrument as they promote visibility and increase communication, by showcasing and promoting the image of the company and the goods or services it offers. Furthermore, fairs and exhibitions represent a way for companies to test the market for the launch of new products, by unveiling prototypes and collecting feedback. In addition, during national or international trade fair events other important sectors of the economies can be stimulated, such as transport and ICT sectors. Despite their limited time, and their dynamic nature, fairs are places where the relationship between exhibitors and visitors start, and where the real process of information sharing begins<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Union des Foreis Internationales (The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry), was founded in Milan, Italy on 15 April 1925, by 20 leading European international trade fairs. UFI main objective is to represent, promote and support its members and the exhibition industry all over the world. UFI activities includes: the management of the exhibition network, the global promotion of events, the dissemination of studies and reports on the sector and the updating of associates through seminars. UFI, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ufi.org>.

<sup>4</sup> SURUGIU, Marius R., *International Trade, Globalization and Economic Interdependence between European countries: Implication for Businesses and Marketing framework*, Procedia Economics and Finance, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2015, Vol. 32, pp.131-138. Available at: <https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com>.

<sup>5</sup> REYCHAV, Iris, *Good for workers, good for companies: How knowledge sharing benefits individual employee*, Knowledge and Process Management, Wiley Online Library, Hoboken (New Jersey) 2009, Vol.16, Issue 4. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/kpm.335>.

Last but not least, since fairs allow people and companies from all over the world to get together to create new relationship and connections, they will help reduce the differences between countries in terms of economic, cultural, political, institutional and social structures<sup>6</sup>. Nowadays, Trade Fairs could be classified as<sup>7</sup>:

- Regional, national, international, or events organized abroad by national operators, according to the audience addressed. Regional fairs host audiences and exhibitors from a small area, such as a specific province or city; national events are attended by guests and exhibitors from the whole country or from areas that extent beyond a specific region; international trade fairs have exhibitors and visitors from all over the world; events organized abroad by national operators aim to develop the presence of national operators in a foreign market.
- Global or local, according to their content and scope,
- Exhibitions, trade fairs or specific fairs, according to their activities.

Also, Trade Fair events can be divided in four main categories<sup>8</sup>:

1. Trade fairs, where only sellers and buyers from the same industrial sector can meet;
2. Consumer exhibitions that are open to the public,
3. Mixed trade or consumer exhibits, that admit public on certain days only,
4. Private exhibitions, where companies show their own products in order to select audience.

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<sup>6</sup> REYCHAV, Iris, *Good for workers, good for companies: How knowledge sharing benefits individual employee: Knowledge and Process Management*, Wiley Online Library, Hoboken (New Jersey) 2009, Vol.16, Issue 4. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/kpm.335>.

<sup>7</sup> COP, Ruziye, KARA, Rifat Tekin, *The role of trade fairs in industrial marketing: a research on defense industry trade fairs*, Journal of Management, Marketing and Logistics, Academic Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 2014, Volume 1, Issue 3. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/375048>.

<sup>8</sup> RICHARDS, Greg, RICHARDS, Bill, *Developing corporate business for hotels through conferences and exhibitions*, Journal of Vacation Marketing, SAGE Publications, New York, 1994, Vol.1, pp.61-69. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/journal/1479-1870\\_Journal\\_Of\\_Vacation\\_Marketing](https://www.researchgate.net/journal/1479-1870_Journal_Of_Vacation_Marketing).

Recently, following the development of information technologies and electronic commerce, the concept of “virtual” trade fairs has emerged. Virtual trade fairs<sup>9</sup> are online business platform where companies have the opportunity to present their product and services, and to reach target groups; they also provide means for advertising in order to direct customers to the company’s websites. Virtual trade fairs can be defined as web-based platforms where customers, suppliers and distributors can get together virtually at any time and from any place. Attendees can visit virtual halls and booths online to obtain information about a company’s profile, its products and its services, and interaction between exhibitors and visitors take place entirely in a multimedia-based environment comprised of textual, visual and acoustical elements. Other important general terms, when analyzing fairs are exhibitors or sellers, visitors or buyers and the trade fair organizer: “Sellers comes to the trade fairs with the desire and authority to consummate sales and the buyer comes to the trade fair with the desire and authority to make purchases<sup>10</sup>”. Therefore, the transaction will be based on “continuous and regular relationship between the buyer and the seller<sup>11</sup>”. Traditionally, exhibitors are called sellers and visitors are called buyers. However, it is now certain that visitors and exhibitors may have a dual motivation for being both buyers and sellers to participate in the fair. Trade show organizers are companies that put the exhibition together, they recruit exhibitors and attract visitors, even though they often rely on exhibitors’ activities to invite suitable visitors. Sometimes they are also responsible for the content of the program, even if there is a program partner (such as an industry association) to provide knowledge, expertise and contact information in order to attract visitors.

In summary, trade fairs today represent fundamental communications tools for companies, which usually allocate large monetary and organizational resources to support them.

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<sup>9</sup> COP, Ruziye, KARA, Rifat Tekin, *The role of trade fairs in industrial marketing: a research on defense industry trade fairs*, Journal of Management, Marketing and Logistics, Academic Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 2014, Volume 1, Issue 3. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/375048>.

<sup>10</sup> STEVENS, Ruth P., *Trade Show and Event Marketing*, Southwestern Pub, Nashville, February 15, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

### *1.1.2 Trade fairs as complex system*

According to AEFI<sup>12</sup>, the trade fair system can be considered a complex system because it combines economic, territorial, political and cultural dynamics. From an economic point of view, these events are one of the most important instruments for developing supply and demand of goods and services. From a political perspective, trade fairs require policies that support the system, because such events represent a vital showcase for national production and favor the meeting between a country's companies and buyers from all over the world and, therefore, the international trade. On a cultural level, the exhibitions are ideal platforms to share ideas, lifestyles, habits and customs of different people from different parts of the world, thus allowing for participants' personal growth, discovery and dissemination of new trends and the development of innovation. From a territorial point of view events define a territory not only through the space they occupy, but also above all the networks of relationships they create. The link between neighborhood and territory is fundamental for the regional economy and provides mutual exchange of resources, skills and professionalism. Finally, from a social point of view, these events can affect the local communities not only because of the physical space they occupy, but most importantly for the network of relationships that they generate.

The interplay between neighborhood communities and the fairs is essential for the local economy and allows for a bilateral exchange of resources, skills and competences.

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<sup>12</sup>AEFI-Italian Exhibition and Trade Fair Association was founded in Roma in 14<sup>th</sup> March 1983. AEFI represents the interests of the country's trade fair industry: 38 Associated Exhibition Authorities hosting more than 1,000 events per year. On behalf of these associates, AEFI is taking action towards Parliament and the Government so that the Italian trade fair industry can better face international competition. Similar action is being taken at the Regional level, so that the transformation process currently underway may continue. AEFI collaborate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Productive Activities and with ICE-the Italian Institute for foreign Trade.

AEFI is the Association representing Italian Trade Fair Centers within UFI-Union des Foreis Internationales. AEFI, 2020. Available at: <https://www.aefi.it/it/>.

Specific characteristics of the entrepreneurial framework of the area define what kind of exhibition center is introduced in a given location. The exhibition center then induces a process of growth, adaptation and innovation of the area itself: this process may lead to further development of the specific services that prompted the initial establishment of the venue. It is therefore understandable that an exhibition venue<sup>13</sup> can develop more easily in some locations than in others<sup>14</sup>. This affects the value of the services created by a trade fair event, a value that is expressed at different levels:

- Level one includes services intended for users of the exhibition (visitors and exhibitors) such as parking, infrastructure, etc.
- Level two refers to those who provide services to the exhibition such as catering companies, service companies, companies that organize events, etc.
- Level three concerns the overall development of the area which is closely linked to the development of the exhibition system hosted in that area.

Coordination efforts between the first two levels of newly generated services are necessary in order to develop shared specific resources and skills to ensure the effective functioning of the activities offered by the exhibition center.

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<sup>13</sup> The venue is considered as the “hardware” of the event and it is normally divided into different halls which permit the organization of plural events at the same time, UFI, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> PIOTROWSKI, Marek N., *Designing for Trade Fairs, Designing the Trade Fair*, Edizioni Lybra Immagine, Milano, June 1, 2002.

For what concern the development of the area, it is possible to say that there is a connection between neighborhood and the territory itself:

“on the one hand, the presence of the fair stimulates the circulation of wealth, facilitates openness to the outside world, enhances and changes the real estate market and has an impact on infrastructure and mobility. On the other, the territory influences the results of the trade fair activity on the basis of infrastructural characteristics, entrepreneurial culture, sectorial specificities and innovative spirit”.

Furthermore, unlike the first two, effects resulting from a third level activities are felt long after the end of exhibits.



**Figure 1:** Fiera Milano 2020.

## 1.2 The History of Trade Fairs

### 1.2.1 Origin and evolution of the Trade Fair system

“ Fairs are old institutions, perhaps less ancient than the markets (but this is hard to define), which immerse negotiations in the endless roots of the past. [...] Trade fairs are living institutions, capable of adapting to different circumstances: their function is to break the too narrow circle of normal exchanges. Furthermore, big fairs mobilize the economy of vast regions: sometimes the entire West meets there, taking advantage of the given freedoms and franchises, which briefly erase the obstacles of many taxes and tolls. So much so, it clearly defines the fair is an out-of-ordinary meeting. The fair represents a particular, almost exceptional moment in both the social as well as economic life of the cities. ”<sup>15</sup>

The history of fairs is uncertain, and the documentation is less than complete. Nonetheless the story of mankind is brimming with reference to fairs, not in an institutional context, but as a part of everyday social interaction. Around the world for many centuries trade fairs have been crucial sales and communication mechanisms.<sup>16</sup> When considering the history of trade events, and the concept of exhibitions in general, it is important to consider for how long people have been selling things to one another: the exchange of goods and services is a fundamental principle of survival that has existed throughout history and around the world. Trade events or trade fairs probably started with people simply displaying their wares in public places, where they spent time to talk one-on-one with potential buyers and explained why their offerings were better than others that were available. Then, sellers negotiated a purchase price (or bartered goods or services) until a mutual agreement was reached with buyers.

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<sup>15</sup> BRAUDEL, Fernand, *Civiltà materiale, economia e capitalismo*, Einaudi, Torino, 1984, Vol.2, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> KIRCHGEORG, Manfred, *The future of trade shows: Insights from a scenario analysis*, Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, 2010, pp.301-312. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235303536\\_The\\_future\\_of\\_trade\\_shows\\_Insights\\_from\\_a\\_scenario\\_analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235303536_The_future_of_trade_shows_Insights_from_a_scenario_analysis).

At one time, exhibiting of merchandises was one of the only few ways available to market or sell goods, and it likely served as a necessary survival tactic to provide for the wellbeing of families. Old and New Testament references to fairs are mixed with allusions to commerce, trade, marketplace, festivals, religious events and holy days: it is evident that religious activities were always associated to the commerce; the Latin word “feria”, which is the root to the word “fair”, means holy day. A “feria” was a day when a large number of people would assemble for worship<sup>17</sup>. In those early days, religious celebrations were held in temples located in great cities such as Athens and Rome, which were also regarded as the great commercial centers of the world. To take advantage of this interaction between religion and commerce, large areas surrounding the temples were structured for markets and trade. During the early Christian era, the church took an active part in sponsoring fairs on holy days, and as a result, fairs came to be a source of revenue for the church itself; probably our modern church bazaars retain some rudiments of these religious fairs<sup>18</sup>. In the Middle Ages, markets and, even more, fairs became increasingly important in the general economy, and trades and exchanges increased in parallel with the socio-political changes. From this point of view the decisive dividing line is represented by the so-called rebirth of year one thousand. Trade fairs were also popular in the late medieval Europe, during the period of merchant capitalism. During this era, farmers and craftsmen traveled to a variety of places to display and sell their offerings to open-market trade fairs<sup>19</sup>. At that time, the market was a convenient place to reach a large number of potential buyers from remote villages, and it was relatively cheap to do so.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> CAVANAUGH, Suzette, *Setting Objectives and Evaluating the Effectiveness of Trade Show Exhibits*, Journal of Marketing, SAGE Publishing, Thousand Oaks, 1976, Vol. 40, pp.100-103. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002224297604000414>.

<sup>18</sup> KONIKOW, Robert B., *Exhibit Design*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 1988, Vol. 6.

<sup>19</sup> BRAUDEL, Fernand, *Civiltà materiale, economia e capitalismo*, Einaudi, Torino, 1984, Vol.2, pp. 55-56.

<sup>20</sup> GOPALAKRISHNA, Srinath, LILIEN GARY, *Trade Shows in the Business Marketing Communication Mix*, Handbook of Business-to-Business Marketing, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., Cheltenham, 2012,



These market continued to develop and began to attract all kinds of people, such as vendors, merchants, and farmers. As early as the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, fairs became important places for buying and selling various products <sup>21</sup>.

The medieval “Champagne fairs<sup>22</sup>” are regarded as the classic examples of beneficial historical institutions that hold important lessons for the modern economic development. These trade fairs operated as the undisputed fulcrum of international exchange and financial settlements in Europe, and were central to the “commercial revolution”, the huge growth in long-distance trade during the Middle Ages. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, international fair were the main medium for attracting potential customers and introducing new products.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century trade fairs were used to dispose agricultural surplus. The fairs also provided opportunities for various business activities, such as collecting debts and rent, take orders or hiring personnel. For merchants, trade fairs were a good opportunity in order to buy things that were not available in the everyday life<sup>23</sup>. Anyway, it is possible to affirm that the first “contemporary trade fair” was the seven-month London World’s Fair held in 1851. The fair showcased the achievements of the British Empire and encouraged British companies to develop international business.

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pp.226-145. Available At: <https://pennstate.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/trade-shows-in-the-business-marketing-communications-mix>.

<sup>21</sup> MOORE, Ellen W., *The Fairs of Medieval England: An introduction Study*, Pontifical Institute of medieval studies, Toronto, 1988, pp.443-445.

<sup>22</sup> The Champagne fair were annual cycle of trade fairs which flourished in different towns of the Country of Champagne in north-eastern France in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, originating on local agricultural and stock fairs. Each fair lasted about two or three weeks. The Champagne fairs, sited on ancient land routes and largely self-regulated through the development of the *Lex mercatoria* (“merchant law”), became an important engine in the reviving economic history of medieval Europe, “veritable nerve centers” serving as a premier market for textiles, leather, fur and spices.

The Champagne fairs were one of the earliest manifestations of linked European economy, a characteristic of the High Middle Ages.

<sup>23</sup> MITCHELL, Ronald K., BUSENITZ, Lowell W., BIRD, Barbara, SMITH, Brock, *The Central Question in Entrepreneurial Cognition Research*, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, SAGE Journals, Thousand Oaks, 2007, Vol.31, pp.1-27. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2007.00161.x>.

Later, with the second Industrial Revolution, the function of fairs evolved: it was no longer just a place of exchange but became a promotional showcase for major national and international events. Popular fairs (or markets) therefore turned into trade fairs or “exhibitions of prototypes that were subsequently put into production”<sup>24</sup>, with samples and examples from all existing different production sectors. Since there were no mass media (radio or television), trade fairs were extremely popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century: they had a special entertainment value, and also were important in order to promote new technologies. With the development of international markets and the increasing specialization of market sectors, the generic trade fairs disappeared, and, after World War I, the first specialized trade fairs appeared.

Nowadays, specialized trade fairs are fundamental events for many companies; some examples are fashion fairs, agricultural fairs, motor shows, marble fairs, and furniture fairs. In the 1990s the concept of globalization started to emerge. Globalization is a situation in which people, cultures, markets and goods are constantly connected through a flow of information and relations on a global scale. The consequence of globalization was a rethinking and reorganization of the trade fair concept, with the results that while some fairs have become international, others have ended<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Fondazione Fiera di Milano, 2020. Available at: <https://www.fondazionefieramilano.it/it/index.html>.

<sup>25</sup> TOBIN, James, *Financial Globalization*, World Development, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2000, Vol.28, Issue 6, pp. 1101-1104. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X00000085>.

### 1.2.2 International Trade Fairs

“International events are temporary clusters [...] or hotspots of intensive and dedicated exchange of knowledge and network building, and generation of new ideas”<sup>26</sup>.

International Trade fairs are now perceived as important instruments that can substantially influence a company’s ability to compete and succeeded in the rapidly globalising business environment<sup>27</sup>. International events are strongly associated with innovations, during trade fairs new products are introduced to the markets and companies enter new markets<sup>28</sup>. Exhibitors invest large resources to bring their innovation, prototypes, and expert personnel to trade shows in order to communicate their expertises to current and potential customers. Markets and business relationship today have become global: trade fair events are considered a vital communication technique for all companies that operate in international markets and, in particular, small and medium-sized companies benefit from international trade fairs because usually their innovation attracts more interest within the trade fair than they otherwise would.

In the 2000s, the dawn of the Internet and B2B platforms made it possible for people to access online to any kind of information. This has had an important effect on the trade fair system: the event as a physical exhibition space loses its usefulness, because customers can now visit companies’ websites and obtain products information

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<sup>26</sup> MASKELL, Peter, *The roles of Trade Fairs, Pipelines, Crowdsourcing and Listing Posts*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2015, p. 19-41. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260981911\\_Accessing\\_remote\\_knowledge\\_-\\_The\\_roles\\_of\\_trade\\_fairs\\_pipelines\\_crowdsourcing\\_and\\_listening\\_posts](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260981911_Accessing_remote_knowledge_-_The_roles_of_trade_fairs_pipelines_crowdsourcing_and_listening_posts).

<sup>27</sup> WILKINSON, Timothy, BROUTHERS, Lance E., *Trade promotion and SME export performance*, International Business Review, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2006, Vol. 15, Issue 3. Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/iburev/v15y2006i3p233-252.html>.

<sup>28</sup> GOLFETTO, Francesca, *Marketing of competence, Exploring the resource-based content of value for customers*, Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam 2007. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223562323\\_Marketing\\_of\\_competence\\_Exploring\\_the\\_resource-based\\_content\\_of\\_value-for-customers\\_through\\_a\\_case\\_study\\_analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223562323_Marketing_of_competence_Exploring_the_resource-based_content_of_value-for-customers_through_a_case_study_analysis).

on line<sup>29</sup>. Anyway, the global economic crisis of 2008 had a huge negative impact on the international trade fair system, and as result trade fairs were forced to plan new business models and aim to increased product innovation in order to survive the crisis. Today, exhibitors no longer go to trade fairs only to show their products or to conquer new markets, but rather to study the market situation, get feedback and create knowledges networks<sup>30</sup>.

Nowadays, according to UFI, international trade fair events must then be able to respond to the these new needs of operators:

- Buyers no longer attend events to place orders, but to understand innovations, trends and new ideas: the product is only a small part of what they want to see and touch. Know-how, partnership capacity, skills and specific services of companies are now the most important elements.
- Exhibitors no longer have to focus on physical exhibition stands construction but must demonstrate their technical expertise and be up to date with market trends.
- Organizers are no longer space sellers; they must have organizational skills and sophisticated ability to guide exhibitors, even at international level.

As Sonia Thomas<sup>31</sup>, states it is possible to describe the timeline of the key activities necessaries for the succesfull installation of a new exhibition in four phases<sup>32</sup>:

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<sup>29</sup> TERZIA, Nuray, *The impact of e-commerce on international trade and employment*, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2011, pp.745-753. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042811015382>.

<sup>30</sup> ZIELINSKI, Marek, LESZCZYNSKY, Grzegorz, *Trade fairs as a source of knowledge, the role of trade fair organizer*, 27<sup>th</sup> International IMP Conference, Glasgow, 2011. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/2453788/Trade\\_Fairs\\_as\\_Source\\_of\\_Knowledge\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Trade\\_Fairs\\_Organizer](https://www.academia.edu/2453788/Trade_Fairs_as_Source_of_Knowledge_The_Role_of_Trade_Fairs_Organizer).

<sup>31</sup> THOMAS, Sonia, Director of Operation at UFI, 2019.

1. The sale of physical space (sale in square meters) that includes the sale of accessory services to the event, the catalogue of exhibitors and basic technical services.
2. The management and offering of practical services that includes the provision of integrated services, stand construction services and catering services.
3. The customer relationship management, based on marketing database, target group orientation and online ordering systems.
4. The “idea leadership”, which involves the creation of new business models for customers, intra-events activities, information brokerage and networking events, with the aim of becoming the place where exhibitors, visitors, trade associate and media can constantly communicate and exchange valuable content.

In the future the role of exhibition centers will increasingly be that of community integrators, knowledge providers, discussion platforms and social networking grounds thanks to the internet, which allows events to remain open even when they are closed. Finally, international trade fairs are multifunctional and allow both exhibitors and visitors to achieve many objectives at one time and in one place. The fair is a perfect place for direct sales to potential clients, to procure new clients, to get more educated by gathering information, doing market research, asking for feedback, and collecting high-quality information; it is also a great place to launch, demonstrate and promote new products, but also to find new ideas and innovation opportunities<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> ZIELINSKI, Marek, LESZCZYNSKY, Grzegorz, *Trade fairs as a source of knowledge, the role of trade fair organizer*, 27<sup>th</sup> International IMP Conference, Glasgow, 2011. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/2453788/Trade\\_Fairs\\_as\\_Source\\_of\\_Knowledge\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Trade\\_Fairs\\_Organizer](https://www.academia.edu/2453788/Trade_Fairs_as_Source_of_Knowledge_The_Role_of_Trade_Fairs_Organizer).

### 1.3 The importance of Trade Fair events for companies

#### 1.3.1 Trade Fair as communication strategy for companies

“It is this direct contact between the seller and the buyer that makes this marketing communication tool different from other such as advertising and promotions. Trade fairs also differ from sales calls, because the contact is not initiated by the seller, but by the buyer”<sup>34</sup>.

Trade fairs have been playing a long-standing important role in the promotion mix of companies of all sizes<sup>35</sup>. These companies' objective is to enhance their opportunities and have recognized the power of trade fairs to increase their sales<sup>36</sup>: if a company wants to be successful, it must integrate trade fairs events into its corporate communication strategy. Participation in trade fairs depends on the integration of different media, such as advertising, social media, direct mail, sponsorship, promotion and printed matter. In order to explain the relationship between the company and the fair event, a three phases communication model can be developed<sup>37</sup>:

1. pre-relationship phase
2. negotiation phase
3. relationship phase

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<sup>34</sup> MUNUERA, José L., SALVADOR, Ruiz, *Trade Fairs as services: a look at visitors' objectives in Spain*, Journal of Business Research, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1999. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0148296397001744>.

<sup>35</sup> BANTING, Peter M., BLENKHORN, David L., *The role of industrial trade shows*, Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1974. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0019850174900042>.

<sup>36</sup> A marketing communication strategy can be defined as anything that is capable of carrying or transmitting a marketing communications message to one or more people.

<sup>37</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: [http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/fi/ethesis/pdf/13660/hse\\_ethesis\\_13660.pdf](http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/fi/ethesis/pdf/13660/hse_ethesis_13660.pdf).

These stages involve many challenges in communication tools: in the pre-relationship phase, the main task is to raise awareness, which can be accomplished through mass media, reputation and advice. In the negotiation phase, the communication tool is dialogue, and the task is to convince potential customers through reasoning and other useful and influential strategies. In the third stage of relationship development, the task is to obtain commitments from all parties involved, which is achieved through the exchange of intentions and benefits through databases, internet applications, e-mail and interactive face-to-face communication <sup>38</sup>.

Obviously, trade fairs are very important marketing tools and should be part of the company's overall marketing communication strategy. Anyway marketing communication is only a part of a company's marketing plan, that could be divided into five categories<sup>39</sup>:

1. Advertising
2. Sales promotion
3. Public relations
4. Personal selling
5. Direct marketing

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<sup>38</sup> ANDERSEN, Paul H., *Relationship Developed and Marketing Communication: An Integrative Model*, Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, 2001, pp.167-182. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242023563\\_Relationship\\_development\\_and\\_marketing\\_communication\\_An\\_integrative\\_model](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242023563_Relationship_development_and_marketing_communication_An_integrative_model).

<sup>39</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: [http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/fi/ethesis/pdf/13660/hse\\_ethesis\\_13660.pdf](http://epub.lib.aalto.fi/fi/ethesis/pdf/13660/hse_ethesis_13660.pdf).

Since the interaction generated at trade fair is an opportunity to create a differentiating advantage in the future relationship, it is interesting that fairs are used successfully as communication tools throughout the relationship process<sup>40</sup>. Trade fairs are used as means of communication at all stages, including raising awareness and customer interest and commitment.<sup>41</sup> Marketing managers believe that fairs are particularly suitable for enhancing the brand awareness (71%), enhancing customer trust (69%) and enhancing customers loyalty to brand (68%). If companies want to remain skeptical, they need to integrate fairs into their multi-channel communication strategies. It is also particularly important that small businesses integrate fairs into their overall marketing communication in order to be more successful<sup>42</sup>. If participating in the fair is not part of the company's overall marketing communication strategy, and marketing does not participate in the exhibition, there is the risk that the information on the fair does not match with the company's goals, or may even be in conflict with other messages the company is trying to communicate through other media. In a comprehensive marketing communication strategy, the company should determine all situations where customers may interact with the company, its products and brands, and strive to convey consistent and positive messages in all possible situations<sup>43</sup>.

Obviously, fairs participation should be supported through by other marketing communication tools such as advertising, social media, direct mail, sponsorship,

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<sup>40</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>.

<sup>41</sup> LI, Ling-yee, *Marketing resources and performance of Exhibitors Firms in trade shows: A contingent resource perspective*, Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2007. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0019850105001501>.

<sup>42</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>.

<sup>43</sup> KOTLER, Philip, *How to create, win and dominate markets*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1999.



promotion and printed matter<sup>44</sup>. The trade fair marketing strategy must be thoroughly planned several months in advance, in order to avoid concentrating too much news in the week before the event begins. For this reason, it is essential to be actively present immediately on social networks: on the one hand, this leads to greater visibility in view of the event, on the other, during the fair, it allows potential customers who will meet you at the fair to acquire more trust in your business. A couple of months before the event it is important to “create suspense” around the fact of participating in the fair: posts that portray the staff working or preparing materials, with the words "we are working for ..." can attract the attention of the potential customer.

In addition to social networks, blogs are also a relevant tool in order to capture the user's attention. This is why, always keeping in mind an advance of weeks if not months to the event, it would be appropriate to publish an article about the event, that should present:

- the date and place where the fair will be held;
- the characteristics of the event: information on the edition, the numbers of exhibitors and visitors that has attended the fair in the last editions;
- the characteristic of the hall or the stand where visitors can meet the company's staff.

Posters, give-aways and printed materials are also needed at the stand. The booth should be seen as a three-dimensional opportunity where exhibitors can let the rights people to get the right information and take action. Therefore, the booth should call for action, display information clearly, focus on strengths and characteristics and must be

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<sup>44</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>.

personable<sup>45</sup>. A large number of press kits should be provided in the press room of the exhibition organizer in the language of the host country, while other possibilities may be arrange a press conference or hold a press conference at the fair. After the meeting, a follow-up communication plan should be established and follow up. There are many ways to follow up the contact at the trade fair. After participating in the exhibition, personal emails, personalized thank-you letters, reminders of exhibition specials or website updates can all be used as communication options. Companies should keep in mind that the information that continues to appear after the fair may prolong the value of the investment in the exhibition. If some promises are made to customers at the trade fair, they should follow up; the company should always remember that a broke promise is worse than no contact at all. Finally, it is certain that when considering real-time communication and sensory inclusiveness, trade fairs are particularly unique compared to other marketing tools. For exhibiting companies, another huge advantage is that when entering the exhibition, visitors are usually already attracted and interested in these products. In addition, trade fairs promote knowledge sharing with customers, because at trade fairs, visitors can see products with their own eyes, talk to experts and communicate face to face.<sup>46</sup> These strenghts of the trade may support the firm's motives and objectives in terms of marketing aspirations.

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<sup>45</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

### 1.3.2 Planning and objectives of the Trade Fair participation

When a company decides to participate in an exhibition, it must establish its specific objectives<sup>47</sup>. These objectives must clearly derive from the company's mission and can be grouped into three macro categories<sup>48</sup>:

- create visibility and notoriety: elements that improve the image of the company;
- sending specific messages to a target audience: there are two activities for this objective; communication through promotion and advertising through physical elements of the stand, the staff and the contents of the fair website; public relations that take the form of dialogue and interpersonal relations, especially with its stakeholders and influential audiences;
- start a significant increase in demand: the different activities are selling at the fair, gaining new contacts with potential customers, analyzing the competition and improving its quality.

The objectives, whatever they may be, must be defined in advance and verified after the event has ended. However, one of the strengths of an exhibition event is that changes can be made during the course of the event, if it is assessed that participation is not bringing the expected results or if there is some poor performance<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> TANNER, Jeff, *Leveling the playing field: factors influencing trade show success for small companies*, Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2000. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0019850100001322>.

<sup>48</sup> SASHI, C.M., PERRETTY, Jim, *Do trade shows provide value?* Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1992, Vol.21, Issue 3, pp. 249-255. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/001985019290022L>.

<sup>49</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>.

Obviously, different companies have different goals for participating in the exhibition: introducing new products, establishing personal contact with existing and potential customers, and maintaining the company name and product popularity are the three most important reasons for companies to attend th exhibit. The most common goals for exhibiting at the trade fairs are securing customers leads, introducing new products, obtaining industry exposure, developing good will, obtaining positive publicity in the media, reaching out to find new buyers and influences and obtaining orders<sup>50</sup>.

Again, it is possible to divide the path of a company that participate in a fair in three different phases<sup>51</sup>:

1. The pre-event phase, which includes all planning and organizational activities;
2. The in-fair phase which consists of the actual carrying out of the exhibition;
3. The post-exhibition phase, which takes the form of a measurement of the results and an analysis of the work carried out.

The first phase is a very important one, as it is the basis for future activities and the success of participation in the event. This first period is primarily dedicated to planning, which requires a precise cost-benefit analysis, the definition of objectives and the organization of each individual activity. Therefore, within this phase it is possible to identify two separate moment: about twelve months before the fair, in the pre-planning, the company chooses the event to participate in and with which objectives; three months

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<sup>50</sup> BELLIZZI, Joseph A., LIPPS, Delilah J., *Managerial guidelines for trade show effectiveness*. Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1984. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0019850194000828>.

<sup>51</sup> LEE, Chang H., KIM, Sang Y., *Differential effect of determinants on multi-dimension of trade show performance: by three stages of pre-show, at show and post-show activities*, Industrial Marketing management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2008, pp. 758-766. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0019850108000242>.

later, so eight months before the event, the company starts the actual planning that takes place in the preparation of the fair and the definition of the budget. Specifically, in the pre-planning phase, the specific objectives to be achieved by joining an exhibition event are defined, which can be more than one and may vary during the course of the work. Subsequently, on the basis of these, the company chooses the fair in which to participate, trying to collect all possible information on each event of interest, such as the type and positioning of the event, the performance of the previous year in terms of quantity and quality of visitors, visibility, other possible companies present and costs, and then opt for the most suitable of all. After selecting the trade fair event to participate in, the company is active in thinking about how many resources to employ and the personnel to involve. In order to make these decisions, certain information are needed and are normally requested from the exhibition organizer, such as how to submit an application, how to pay, deadlines, what can be done or not done inside the exhibition, what events inside the exhibition are planned and what services the organizer offers the exhibitor<sup>52</sup>.

Once these elements are also defined, the enterprise can focus on planning in the strictest sense: it is now necessary to define the budget for the exhibition and to identify even more specifically what the objectives are, since these two elements determine the choice of stand design, the type of material to be distributed at the exhibition, the messages to be communicated to visitors and which communication channels to use<sup>53</sup>. At this point it is possible to proceed with the design of the stand, bearing in mind that the main purpose is to attract the attention of the public. Depending on the objectives envisaged, the space and characteristics of the stand will be different. If, for example, the

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<sup>52</sup> BELLO, Daniel C., LOHTIA, Ritu, *Improving Trade Show effectiveness by Analyzing Attendees*, Industrial Marketing Management, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1993. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0019850193900275>.

<sup>53</sup> BONOMA, Thomas V., *Get more out of your trade shows*, Harvard Business Review. Brighton, 1983.

aim is the promotion and sale of products they will be highlighted and placed in the center. If, on the other hand, the company wants to establish solid relationships with visitors, the interior space must allow for meeting sites, it must be comfortable and welcoming. Subsequently, a communication plan should be defined that includes an advertising plan, a promotional plan and information dissemination activities. The communication network used with the stakeholders are both traditional, as advertising spaces and specialized magazines, and new, website and social networks. In the planning phase, the necessary paper material such as company brochures, flyers with slogans, catalogs, etc. is also prepared. The key element in these tools is the text that must be comprehensive, complete but clear and easy to interpret<sup>54</sup>.

Finally, during the preparation phase, it is necessary to define the follow up program, so all the actions that will be done at the end of the event; the reservation of all the necessary services and the organization of the transport and eventual overnight stays of the staff. During the whole period of this phase, the person in charge will call several meetings with the staff to check the progress of the work and to define the details of each activity. The manager must also ensure that there are no errors or failures for participation a few days before the fair<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>

<sup>55</sup> HANSEN, Kare, *The dual motives of participants at international trade shows, an empirical investigation of exhibitors and visitors selling motives*, International Marketing review, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, 1996. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02651339610115764/full/html>.

In the in-fair phase the company put into practice everything that it has prepared and planned in the previous phase. In this phase there is the realization of related events planned: conferences, seminars, round tables, congresses, workshops and other events of different nature<sup>56</sup>. Through these occasions, the company increases its visibility and is known, as it can present the latest products or innovations and acquire new contacts of complementary organizations. During the days of the event, the focus is on interpersonal communication between stand personnel and visitors. For this reason, it is important that the stand personnel have been carefully chosen and must possess certain characteristics. First of all, the person in charge of the stand must have a predisposition for contact and an openness towards people. He or she must also use direct language, exposing himself as clearly as possible and using technical terms only when necessary. Anyone representing the company at a trade show must have the appropriate skills to provide accurate information about the company and the products or services offered<sup>57</sup>.

As already said in this chapter, the fair allows changes to be made during the course of the work. In case of difficulties, unforeseen events or non-linear elements to the initial project, significant changes can be implemented, so as to make the most of the opportunities offered by the fair<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> TAFESSE, Wondwesen, KORNELIUSSEN, Tor, *The dimensionality of trade show performance in an emerging market*, International Journal of Emerging Markets, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, 2011. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17468801111104368/full/html>.

<sup>57</sup> HANSEN, Kare, *The dual motives of participants at international trade shows, an empirical investigation of exhibitors and visitors selling motives*, International Marketing review, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, 1996. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02651339610115764/full/html>.

<sup>58</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>

At the end of the event, the post-exhibition phase begins, which consists in following the program defined in the first phase. The planned activities are the measurement of results to understand which mistakes were made and which activities were most successful. Through the evaluation of the results it is also possible to understand if the set objectives have been achieved completely, partially or not at all; which messages transmitted have been more effective and if the budget spent corresponds to the expected one. To analyze the results, it is possible to collect both quantitative and qualitative information. For the former refers to the data related to the number of people who visited the stand, how many of them showed interest and left a contact, the number of newspaper articles about the fair, the quantity of material distributed and the actual expenditure. The latter refers to feedback from visitors and exhibitors and an analysis of the content of newspaper articles about the fair<sup>59</sup>.

Finally, in this phase, activities started to create relationships with the contacts obtained in the event, through various means of communication, such as email, telephone and physical appointments. It may also happen to send the documentation of the events in which you have participated to your stakeholders who were not able to participate<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> BONOMA, Thomas V., *Get more out of your trade shows*, Harvard Business Review. Brighton, 1983.

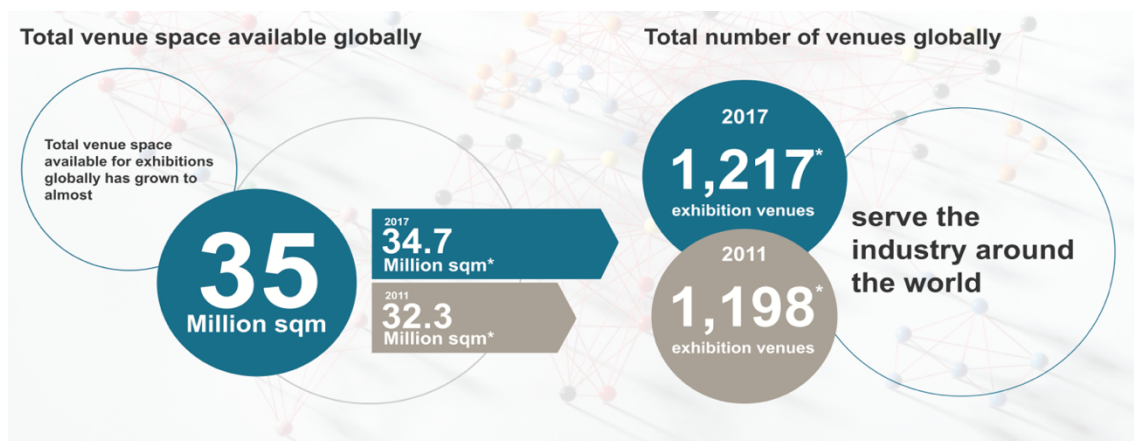
<sup>60</sup> ENGBLOM, Rilla, *Trade Fairs Role as Part of the Firm's Marketing Communication- an Integrated Trade Fair Participation Process*, Aalto University School of Business, 2014. Available at: <https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/handle/123456789/13701>



## 1.4 Trade Fairs in the world

### 1.4.1 The Trade Fairs Total Global Venue Space

From the last UFI analysis of the world-wide fair system (Dec 2018) the following emerges: at present, there are 1,217 exhibition venues with a minimum of 5,000 sqm of gross exhibition space around the world and a total global venue space<sup>61</sup> of 34.7 million sqm, a 7.6% increase over the last 6 years. Compared with the last census produced in 2011, this shows a 1.6% net increase in terms of the number of venues, and 7.6% net increase in terms of exhibition space<sup>62</sup> (an 1.3% increase on average per year).



**Figure 2:** The Total venue space available globally - The Total number of venues globally, UFI World Map of Exhibition Venues 2017 - Gross Indoor exhibition space, venues over 5,000 sqm.

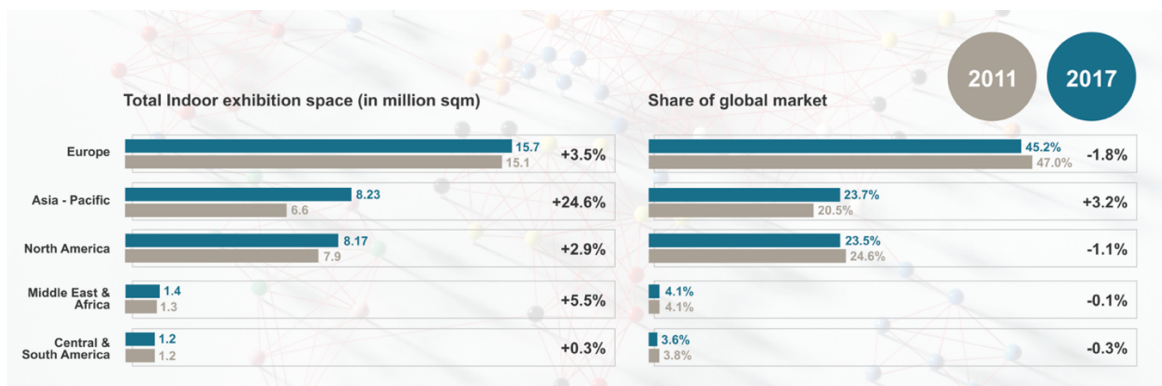
<sup>61</sup> Venue capacity is an important element for the exhibition industry and the resulting economic development it generates. Venue can be defined as any public assembly premises with a minimum of 5,000 square meters of indoor Exhibition Space and that hold various types of exhibition, trade fairs or consumer/public shows on regular basis. UFI, 2020.

The premises may be purpose-built exhibition center space or other premises including Exhibition Space (e.g. hotels, arenas, sport venues and amusement fair grounds).

<sup>62</sup> Exhibition Space can be defined as the amount of gross exhibition space in the venue regularly marketed and rented/licensed/used for exhibitions, trade fairs or consumer/public shows. UFI, 2020.

Europe has the largest exhibition area in the world (15.7 million sqm), and Asia-Pacific now provides more exhibition venue space than North America (8.23 and 8.17 million sqm respectively).

In terms of number of individual venues, Europe is first (499 available venues), followed by North America (394) and Asia-Pacific (205), respectively.



**Figure 3:** The Total Indoor exhibition space (in million sqm) – Share of global market, UFI World Map of Exhibition Venues 2017 - Gross Indoor exhibition space, venues over 5,000 sqm.

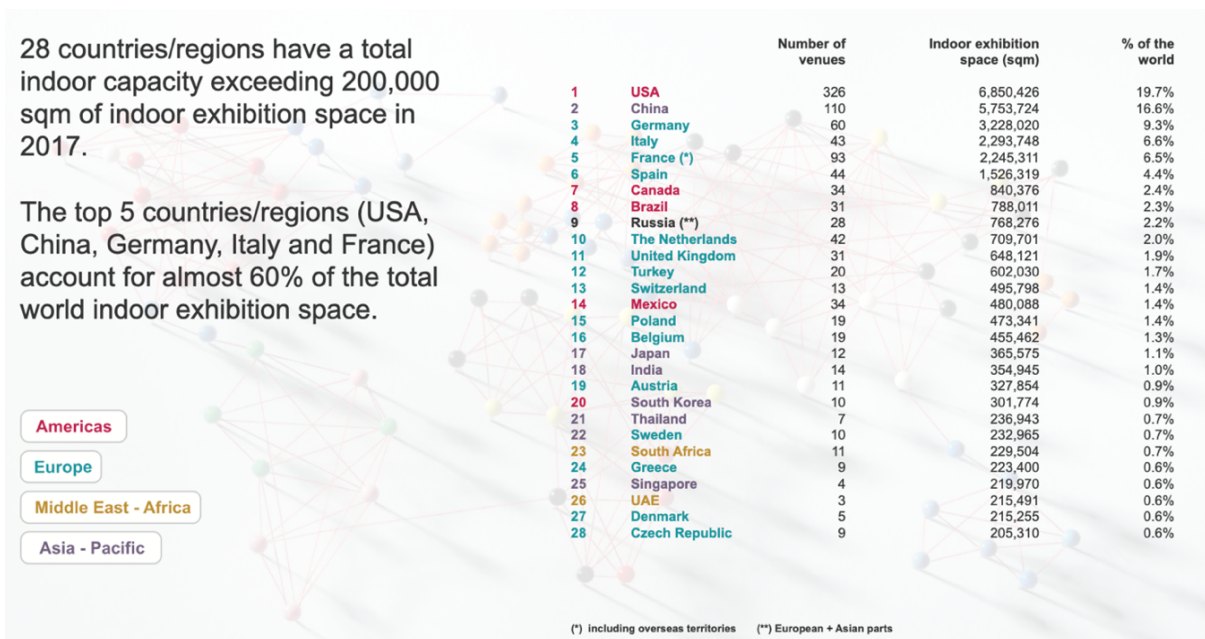
All regions, except Central and South America, where several venues are no longer operational, have significantly increased their capacity since 2011. This is particularly true for the Asia-Pacific region (+24.6%), which is also the only region that showed an increase in its share of the global market (+3.3%). These data confirm that Asia is currently experiencing a strong expansion of its trade fair system to the detriment of Europe. However, Europe has more than double the physical venues compared to Asia and, even more importantly, the headquarters of the major global event organizers and the most developed fairgrounds are located in Europe. Indeed, it is these global event organizers that often export the most successful events to the east. As the total amount of

exhibition space available around the world continues to grow, exhibition organizers have a more and more diverse choice of venues available in their target markets. Due to the proliferation of projects aimed to establish physical venues in Asia-Pacific, mainly driven by China, there is now more venue space available in this region than in North America. That being said, Europe retains its global lead on available venue capacities with 45% of the global market share (down 1.8% compared to 2011), ahead of Asia-Pacific with 23.7% (up 3.2%), and North America with 23.5% (down 1.1%)<sup>63</sup>.



**Figure 4:** Global Top venues: venues with a minimum of 100,000 sqm of indoor exhibition space in 2018, UFI World Map of Exhibition Venues 2017 - Gross Indoor exhibition space, venues over 5,000 sqm.

<sup>63</sup> UFI, Official Websites. Available at: <https://www.ufi.org>.



**Figure 5:** Top countries/regions: Countries/regions with a minimum of 200,000 sqm pf indoor exhibition space in 2018, UFI World Map of Exhibition Venues 2017 - Gross Indoor exhibition space, venues over 5,000 sqm.

Considering the total covered exhibition area worldwide, the top three states are the USA (6.8 million total square meters representing 19.7% of the world surface), China (5.7 million square meters, or 16.6% of the surface worldwide) and Germany (3.2 million square meters which represent 9.3% of the world surface). Italy is in fourth place with 2.2 million square meters, or 7% of the world surface. France, Spain, Canada, Brazil, Russia and the Netherlands follow. The American most popular trade fairs are “The National Association Show” and “The Pack Expo International” (Chicago), “The International Franchise Expo” and “The summer Fancy food” (New York) and “The Cosmoprof North America” (Las Vegas). Some of the most famous Chinese trade fairs are “The Canton Fair” (Guangzhou), “The East China Fair ” (Shanghai), “The China Yiwu International Commodities Fair” (Yiwu). For what concern the German fairs it is not possible not to mention “The Frankfurt Messe” (Frankfurt), “The Hannover Messe”

Hannover) and “The Hamburg Messe” (Hamburg). The Italian Fairs that stand out for their size and importance at international level are: “Fiera di Milano” (Milan), “Bologna Fiere” (Bologna), “Fiera di Rimini” (Rimini) and “Veronafiere” (Verona).

Another interesting fact about the top 5 players is that they alone own 60% of the exhibition area worldwide. In regard to the main product categories, Europe is the world’s leading exhibition market in terms of quantity and quality of events. This leadership derives from the presence of a particularly developed manufacturing sector in Germany, Italy and France. However, the European exhibition market is now mature, and the demand is stationary. Despite the sustained growth of the trade fair systems in emerging countries, international European events retain their predominance, but niche exhibition are also beginning to develop to take into account different products and the origin of visitors. In the United States, trade fairs are designed to develop the internal market. In fact, several editions of the same exhibition are often organized in different geographical areas: east coast, west coast and southern states. In the Middle East, the trade fair sector has recently developed, with the goal of stimulate the business of tourism, which has considerable repercussions on local accommodation structures and positive effects on the reputation of the area (MICE system<sup>64</sup>).

Since industrial activities are virtually non-existent, local governments use the geographical location between Europe and Asia to create multi-functional locations where they can bring together structures and events of global excellence (museums, theme parks, U.S. university venues, high-end kitchens, shopping malls, large hotels, high quality medical treatment). In Asia, too, MICE is considered a wealth-generating sector that enjoys strong public funding. However, in the East there are also many

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<sup>64</sup> MICE: Meeting, incentives, conferences and exhibitions, is a type of tourism in which large groups, usually planned well in advance, are brought together.

manufacturing companies, especially in the technology and consumer market sectors, and this influences the characteristics of the development of the exhibition scheme.

Finally, focusing on the industrial sectors that are the subject of trade fair events in countries with an old tradition (Europe) and in countries with recent industrialization (Asia), it can be seen that in Europe the most important categories are, in order<sup>65</sup>:

- Leisure, Hobby & Entertainment;
- Construction and Infrastructure;
- Engineering, Industrial, Manufacturing, Machinery, Instruments, Hardware;
- Furniture, Interior design;
- Fashion, Textiles and Apparel;
- Food, Beverage;
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishery

While in Asia the most important categories are:

- Engineering, Industrial, Manufacturing, Machinery, Instruments, Hardware;
- Furniture, Interior design;
- Leisure, Hobby & Entertainment;
- Construction and Infrastructure;
- Fashion, Textiles and Apparel;
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishery;
- Premium, Household, Toys

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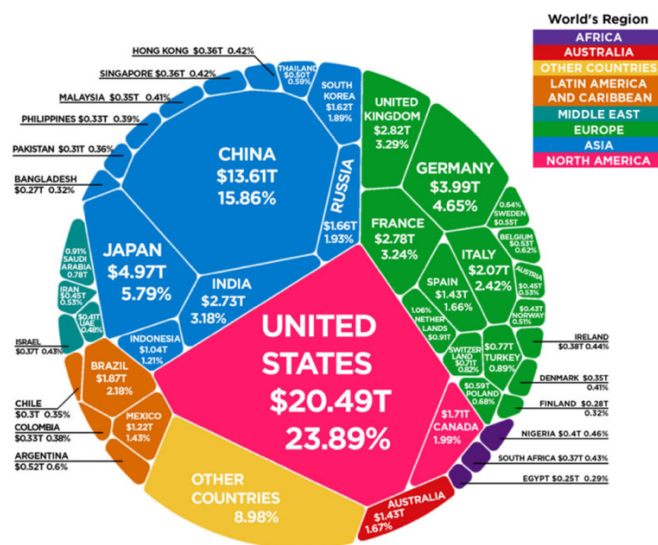
<sup>65</sup> UFI, Official Websites. Available at: <https://www.ufi.org>.

## Chapter 2: The Chinese Trade Fair System

### 2.1 The Chinese Trade System

#### 2.1.1 The Development of Chinese Foreign Trade system

The Chinese Trade Fair System is closely linked to the rapid economic development of the country in recent years: trade has become an increasingly important part of China's overall economy, and it has been a significant tool used for economic modernization. According to data from the year 2019, the People's Republic of China is now the second largest economy in the world: China Nominal GDP<sup>66</sup> is 13.61 trillion dollars, China GDP (PPP)<sup>67</sup> is 27.31 trillion dollars (while the largest economy in the world is still the United States, with 20.49 trillion dollars of Nominal GDP and 21.44 trillion dollars of GDP (PPP)).



China's economy has undergone an enormous transformation process in the last twenty years, making it one of the most important countries in the most recent phase of globalization. China has now become the protagonist of the world economy, becoming both a country that many other nations fear, given its continuous and high development, but at the same time a country from which to take cues and opportunities. For example, China has started to expand all over the world by investing in companies with important brands and strong know-how that have led it to increase its production differentiation. In addition, China attracts to its territory many industries from countries that are looking for cheap labor, and this allows it to increase its manufacturing production. China is often referred to as the “world’s factory”, given its huge manufacturing and export base. Today, China is a powerhouse for the production and export good. As a manufacturing and trade giant coming into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is easy to forget that China was not always as open to foreign investments as it is today. In fact, only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that China fully opened its economy to absolute free trade<sup>68</sup>.

Coming into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, foreigners were allowed into ports and could interact and dress as they pleased - a first in China’s history. Travel was allowed within cities, and foreigners - built railways and boats connecting trade from North to South. Consular appointments by foreign governments were made in China, and communication with Chinese officials developed<sup>69</sup>. After the Second World War, in China, the Communist party ruled the administration and formed the People’s Republic of China in 1949, and then shaped the whole system to its own ideology. Two different economic development were implemented in the country after 1949: the “Planned Economy” based on high level

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<sup>68</sup> KUI-WAI, Li, *Finance and Trade Development in Contemporary China*, The Chinese Economy, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk (New York), 2009. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227453820\\_Finance\\_and\\_Trade\\_Development\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_China](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227453820_Finance_and_Trade_Development_in_Contemporary_China).

<sup>69</sup> VOGELSANG, Kai, *Cina. Una storia millenaria*, Einaudi, Torino, 2014.



of centralism applied in Mao period (1949-1976) and the “Chinese Style Socialist Market Economy” developed after Deng Xiaoping’s outward opening and reform policy<sup>70</sup>. China started its process of liberalization and opening up the economy in 1978, first under Deng Xiaoping and then under Zhu Rongji, thanks to which in just over 25 years it has achieved an annual GDP growth rate of 10%. The reforms undertaken since that year have been many and fundamental to understand the process of economic growth but also its maintenance over all these years<sup>71</sup>. The objective was mainly the promotion of exports, in order to promote the modernization of the production system, while the liberalization of imports was considered important but less urgent and was practiced more gradually. It passed from a system entirely controlled by the State to a decentralized system. With trade liberalization, non-tariff barriers have completely disappeared, leaving only import tariffs to make trade more transparent. Since the reform and opening up policy was initiated, China’s foreign trade system has completed the transformation from mandatory planning to giving full play to the fundamental role of the market: from state monopoly to full openness and from indiscriminate egalitarianism to giving enterprises discretionary management power and making them responsible for their own profits and losses<sup>72</sup>.

On December 11, 2001, China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In this way, the country participates in the agreements on Trade in Services (GATS), Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS).

China is thus committed to progressively liberalizing trade. Obviously, the accession protocol required China to further and progressively dismantle its system of

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<sup>70</sup> MCALEAVY, Henry, *Storia della Cina moderna, Dalla dinastia manciù alla Rivoluzione industriale*, Odoja, Bologna, 2019.

<sup>71</sup> RUIZ, Maria L., *Lo sviluppo dell’economia cinese e la recente crisi*, 2015. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/79621293.pdf>.

<sup>72</sup> SAMARANI, Guido, *La Cina contemporanea. Dalla fine dell’impero a oggi*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Einaudi Bologna, 2017.

tariff and non-tariff barriers, and to further open the country to foreign direct investment (FDI). WTO accession mainly provided for the following principles to be respected: non-discrimination of other member countries: for example, all foreign companies must be treated in the same way as domestic companies with regard to trade rights; no price discrimination between goods produced for the domestic market and goods for export is allowed; no price controls may be used to give protection to domestic companies. All these reforms have undoubtedly led to a surge in the Chinese economy: China's foreign trade is growing at a rate of 15% per year from 1978 to 2006, while before 1978, it grew by 2.6% in the Maoist era. Obviously, the entrance into the WTO in 2001 has undoubtedly significantly increased the value of both exports and imports<sup>73</sup>.

The development of China's foreign trade has accelerated the modernization of the national economy, enhanced the country's comprehensive strength, and improved the standard of living of more than 1.3 billion Chinese people. As it accelerated its integration into the global division of labor, China has gradually developed into a major producer and exporter of industrial products relying on its labor cost advantage, relatively strong industrial supporting, processing and manufacturing capabilities, and increasing labor productivity<sup>74</sup>. It provides inexpensive and quality commodities to meet the diverse demands of the international market: China's is now the real purchasing power of consumers of its trading partners<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> BROADMAN, Harry G, SUN, Xiaolun, *The Distribution of Foreign Direct Investment in China*, Wiley Online Library, Hoboken (New Jersey), 1997. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-9701.00073>.

<sup>74</sup> LI, Lingchao, LIU, Jinlong, LONG, Hexing, *Economic globalization, trade and forest transition: The case of nine Asian countries, Forest Policy, and Economics*, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2017, p.76. Available at: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/forpol/v76y2017icp7-13.html>.

<sup>75</sup> 蒋廷黻, *中国近代史*, 民主与建设出版社, 朝阳, 1月, 2016年。

### 2.1.2 The development of Chinese Trade Fair system

The development of China's foreign trade has provided a broad market for its trading partners: since 2001, China's import of goods has increased by approximately five times, representing an annual growth rate of around 20 percent. China's rapidly expanding imports have become a major driving force for global economic growth, creating an enormous market for its trading partners to augment their exports. At present, China is the largest export market for Japan, Korea, Australia, Brazil and South Africa, the second largest for the EU, and the third largest for the US and India<sup>76</sup>. As China's industrialization and urbanization are moving forward rapidly, and its domestic demand keeps growing, the country's continuously expanding and opening market will offer increasing opportunities to its trading partners<sup>77</sup>.

Nowadays, China is regarded as the key emerging market in the global trade and so exhibition industry. In 2019, a total of 11,033 business exhibitions were organized in 187 major cities in the country, nearly 2,800 more compared to 2011. As the largest exhibition market in Asia, the Chinese trade fair system has just entered a stage of consolidation and recruiting. Exhibition play a vital role in Chinese national economic development: not only because they attract trade and investment, but also bring jobs and visitors. The Chinese exhibition industry has been thriving mostly in the economically developed regions in China, particularly in the Yangtze River Delta and in the Pearl River Delta<sup>78</sup>. According to UFI's estimates for 2019, the gross Chinese exhibition space exceeded the 5.7 million square meters, and the events were 292: Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong were

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<sup>76</sup> STIGLITZ, Joseph E., *China: Towards a new model of development*, Taylor & Francis Group, Oxfordshire, 2008, pp.33-52. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/161443511.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> 南加州大学美中学院, *PRC State Council, China's Foreign Trade*, December 2011. Available at: <https://china.usc.edu/prc-state-council-china's-foreign-trade-december-2011>.

<sup>78</sup> China Daily-use Articles Trade Fair 2020 Available at: <https://www.neventum.it/fiere/china-daily-use-articles-trade-fair>.

the leading regions for trade fairs and conventions. Before 1979, only a few international trade exhibitions were held in China: all were organized by government-owned organizations, along with their provincial city sub-councils. In 1979, many foreign business enterprises started to introduce their products into China through exhibitions. Foreign exhibition organizers from the United States, Europe and Hong Kong were invited to organize international exhibitions in China with the help of the government and the Chinese trade association. At that time, it was necessary for foreign exhibitors organizers to find a Chinese authority as a partner in order to organize international exhibitions in China, most of them choose the China Council For The Promotion Of International Trade (CCPIT), that was responsible for all the business liaison in China, including the government approval, the visitors invitation, promotions and the exhibition hall rental. The job of the foreign exhibitor organizer was simply to bring exhibitors from foreign countries to China: due to this simplicity, foreign exhibitor organizers, were able to dominate most of the Chinese international exhibitions before the Chinese part learned how to organize them. History shows that foreign exhibition companies have entered into China's exhibition market one after one. In the 1980s, Adsale, a Hong Kong entrepreneur exhibition organizer, was the top foreign exhibition organizer in China, and his most successful exhibitions were the ShanghaiTex Exhibition (上海国际纺织工业展), the Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition (上海国际汽车工业展览会) and the Beijing International Automotive Exhibition (北京国际汽车展览会). In 1990s, one of the most popular American exhibition company, the Reed exhibition, entered into the Chinese exhibition market and in the early 2000s, some world-famous exhibition companies such as Germany's Hanover and the Düsseldorf Messe started doing business in China as "exhibition consulting companies". Today, many European Trade Fair collaborate with the Chinese exhibition industry: Since 2016, the Salone del Mobile,

organizes an important furniture international exhibition in Shanghai (called Salone del Mobile Shanghai), with 20,000 attendees per year; while Veronafiore, every year in Shenzhen organizes “Wine to Asia”, an international event for the promotion of Italian wine in Cina.

Although it started late, China's exhibition industry has developed rapidly with the following characteristics<sup>79</sup>:

- Constant growth of the number of exhibitions, exceeding 11,033 in 2019.
- Saturation of exhibition themes, with all themes presented around the world featured at the Chinese exhibition market.
- Presence of the world’s top 10 exhibition companies, including those from Germany and the United States, at the Chinese market in different forms and with different levels of participation. According to the latest statistics, the world’s top 20 exhibitions (150,000 square meters) have entered in China with nearly 10 exhibition themes.
- Greater extent of globalization. By the end of 2007, a total of 73 Chinese exhibitions joined the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry and more than 30% of their exhibitors came from abroad, indicating China’s growth into a global exhibitor.
- Counting of the exhibition industry as their new growth engine and pillar industry by all provincial capitals and cities with independent budgetary status, besides Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Among the 31 Chinese provinces,

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<sup>79</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China’s Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.1.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.1.%202%2C%20No.%201).

municipalities and autonomous regions, 27 have included development of the exhibition industry in their development programs for the coming five years.

- Gradual formation of an exhibition economic chain along with the development of foreign trade services. With nearly 5,000 exhibition companies with 400,000 employees, China has now completed a healthy industrial chain integrating business, training and education.

However, unlike neighboring Taiwan, South Korea or Japan that have had consolidation and the emergence of large manufacturing companies, China remains very fragmented with over 42 million small and medium sized suppliers. Many attend Chinese Fairs because they are unable to afford international marketing to attract a foreign buyer and a coveted high-volume brand buyer<sup>80</sup>. Anyway, The Chinese government has been quite supportive of this 200 billion U.S. dollar industry. After a series of policies and resources had been directed into building exhibition venues, China has some of the largest exhibition centers in the world, such as the National Exhibition and Convention Center (NECC)<sup>81</sup> in Shanghai and the the Canton fair Complex in Guangzhou. With the accelerating construction of exhibition infrastructure, more exhibition halls would be ready for international exports and trade fairs. It suffices to say that the exhibition infrastructure in China has matured, yet the future challenges would come from ongoing logistical development, such as exhibition operation and venue management.

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<sup>80</sup> LISTER, Jane, LEBARON, Genevieve, *Shopping for Sustainability at the Canton Fair, The Political Economy of Transnational Retail Governance in China*, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2012. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/3037486/Shopping\\_for\\_Sustainability\\_at\\_the\\_Canton\\_Fair](https://www.academia.edu/3037486/Shopping_for_Sustainability_at_the_Canton_Fair).

<sup>81</sup> The National Exhibition and Convention (NECC) is currently the largest exhibition complex, making it one of the landmark buildings in Shanghai. The building was co-built by Ministry of Commerce of China and Shanghai Municipal Government. The center consists of four exhibition halls, the NECC Plaza, office buildings and the hotel.

## 2.2 *The profile of China's main exhibition centers*

### 2.2.1 *The Canton Fair* 中国出口商品交易会

中国进出口商品交易会，又称广交会，创办于1957年春，每年春秋两季在广州举办，由商务部和广东省人民政府联合主办，中国对外贸易中心承办，是中国目前历史最长，规模最大，商品种类最全，到会采购商最多且分布国别地区最广，成交效果最好，信誉最佳的综合性国际贸易盛会。广交会历经63年改革创新，发展，经受各种严峻考验从未中断，加强了中国与世界的贸易往来，展示了中国形象和发展成就，是中国企业开拓国际市场的优质平台，是贯彻实施我国外贸发展战略的引导示范基地。已成为中国外贸第一促进平台，被誉为中国外贸的晴雨表和风向标，是中国对外开放的窗口，缩影和标志。截至第126届，广交会累计出口成交约14126亿美元，累计到会境外采购商约899万人。目前，每届广交会展览规模达118.5万平方米，境内外参展企业近2.5万家，210多个国家和地区的约20万名境外采购商与会。广交会在改革开放和经济社会发展中的重要地位和积极贡献，指明了新时期广交会的工作重点和努力方向，对广交会进一步扩大对外开放，培育外贸竞争新优势，加快建设经贸强国，推动广交会改革创新具有十分重大的意义。广交会的目的是积极推进从出口贸易单一功能平台向结识客户，展示洽谈，行业交流，信息发布，产品推介等综合功能平台转变，更好发挥全方位对外开放平台作用，把广交会打造成成果一流的“卖全球买全”球的新时代全方位对外开放平台，为推动经贸强国建设和开放型经济发展作出新的贡献<sup>82</sup>。

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<sup>82</sup> Canton Fair official websites. Available at: <https://www.cantonfair.org.cn/en/about/last>.

The Canton Fair is the most representative Trade Fair in China and was established in Guangzhou in the Spring of 1957, it has served as a major portal and vehicle for the growth of China's commerce with foreign buyers and the opening of China to the West<sup>83</sup>. The Canton Fair is part of the huge Canton Fair Complex<sup>84</sup>, formerly known as Guangzhou International Convention and Exhibition Center (广州国际会议展览中心), is the second largest exhibition center in Asia and holds hundreds of professional exhibitions and events around the year, including:

1. The Canton Fair - 中国出口商品交易会

2. The China International Furniture Fair - 中国国际家具博览会 (CIFF)

Founded in 1998, the Fair takes place annually in Pazhou (Guangzhou) with a total of exhibition space of 750,000 square meters, and in Hongqiao (Shanghai) with an exhibition space of 400,000 square meters. The Fair hosts 6000 brands from China and abroad, gathering over 340,000 professional visitors in total.

3. The China International Building Decoration Fair - 中国建博会 (CBD)

Founded in 1999 takes place annually on July. With a scale of 300,000 square meters, the fair attracts nearly 1,600 exhibitors from China.

4. The Guangzhou International Automobile Exhibition - 广州国际汽车展览会 (GIAE).

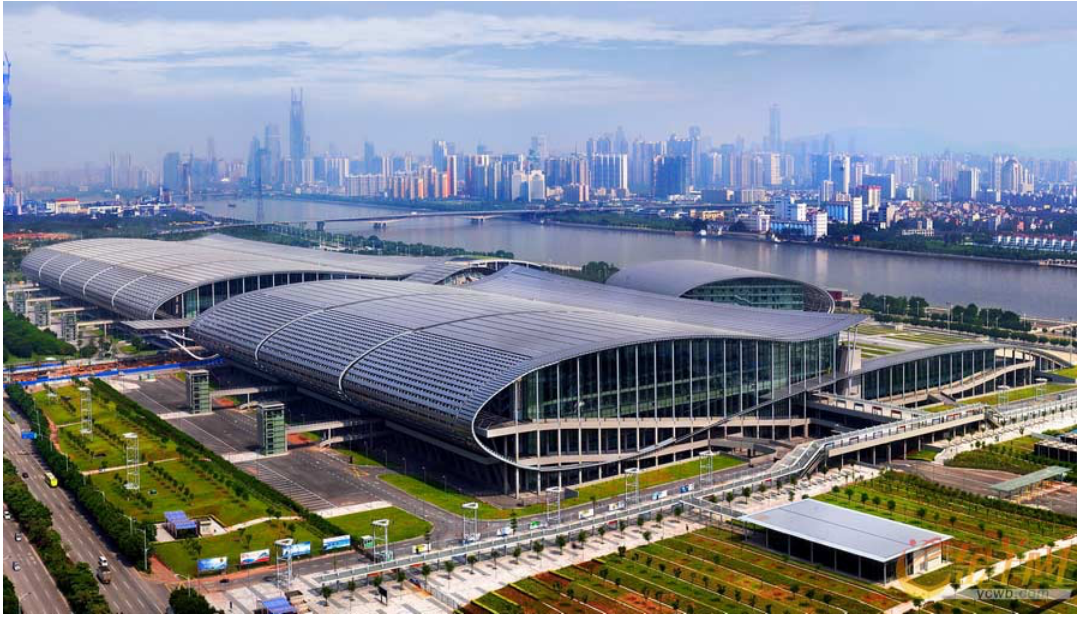
Founded in 2003, the fair total exhibition space is about 240,000 square meters, during the last session, the exhibition exhibited 1,085 vehicles.

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<sup>83</sup> The Canton Fair is primarily about export development, but recently fair organizers have added and International Pavilion to encourage import trade activity.

<sup>84</sup> JIN, Xin, WEBER, Karin, *The China Import and Export Fair: Past, Present and Future*, Taylor & Francis Group, Oxforshire, 2008, Vol.8, Issue 3. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15470140802325863>.





**Figure 7:** The Canton Fair Complex, China Import and Export Fair, 2020.

The Canton fair is co-hosted by the Ministry of Commerce of PRC and the People’s Government of Guangdong Province and organized by China Foreign Trade Center. Its full name since 2007 has been China Import and Export Fair (中国进出口商品交易会), renamed from Chinese Export Commodities Fair (中国出口商品交易会) but, we all call it “Canton Fair” because by the time the city Guangzhou still has “Canton” as its English name. Reputed as the “China’s Top Fair”, the Canton Fair enjoys a time-honored history and rich brand heritage. With more than 200,000 overseas buyers from more than 200 countries and regions and more than 24,000 domestic quality exhibitors, it has become the largest annual exhibition in the world. The fairgrounds stretch over an area of 1.1 million square meters (equivalent to approximately 160 soccer field)<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> 中国出口商品交易会城都交易团，城都交易团，1月，2006年。Available at: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/3990a64ea617866fb84ae45c3b3567ec102ddca8.html>.

With rapid industrialization, the city has become a major global manufacturing center with the highest concentration of factories resident population of more than 12 million<sup>86</sup>. Big brand retail companies attend the Fair, at the last November 2019 session, 83 of the world's top retail companies were in attendance, this includes Walmart, Carrefour, Tesco and Metro (four of the ten global retailers). The Canton Fair is now considered a comprehensive international trading event with the longest history, the largest scale, the most complete exhibit variety, the largest buyer attendance, the broadest distribution of buyer's source country and a greatest turnover to China. The Canton Fair enhances trade connection between China and the world, it is an outstanding platform for Chinese enterprises to explore the international market and exemplary base to implement China's strategies for foreign trade growth. It serves as the first and foremost platform to promote China's foreign trade, and a barometer of foreign trade sector: it is the window, epitome and symbol of China's opening up<sup>87</sup>.

It is important to remember that Guangzhou has been a hub for trade with China for over 500 years and was at the center of the British opium trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: on April 25, 1957 the first Chinese Export Commodities Fair opened, and the Premier Zhou Enlai proposed to call it the Canton fair for short. The first Canton Fair had a total exhibition area of 9,600 square meters, with only 5 exhibition halls for more than 10,000 products including industrial products, textiles, food, handicrafts and native products. Only 13 professional foreign trade companies participated to the fair and there were more than 1,200 buyers from 19 countries and regions that were attended the fair. In the first year of the Canton Fair, the transaction amounted to \$87 million. The first Canton fair was successfully established and quickly became the main channel for China to earn

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<sup>86</sup> LISTER, Jane, LEBARON, Genevieve, *Shopping for Sustainability at the Canton Fair, The Political Economy of Transnational Retail Governance in China*, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2012. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/3037486/Shopping\\_for\\_Sustainability\\_at\\_the\\_Canton\\_Fair](https://www.academia.edu/3037486/Shopping_for_Sustainability_at_the_Canton_Fair).

<sup>87</sup> Canton Fair official websites, Available at: <https://www.cantonfair.org.cn/en/about/overview>.

foreign exchange through exports: the fair opened up an important channel for China to interact with the world. Beginning in 1965, the annual export transactions of the Canton fair accounted for more than 30% of the country's total annual exports. In 1972 and in 1973, both accounted for more than 50%. In the past few decades, the Canton fair site has been relocated several times, while the number of exhibition halls has increased a dozen of times. The original intention of the government to hold the Canton Fair was to break the international blockade and earn valuable foreign exchange to buy important supplies. Even when China was closed off to the world in the 1960's and 1970's, the Canton Fair remained in operation as the only accessible window to China and Foreign Trade<sup>88</sup>. In the early 1970s, following US President Nixon's visit in 1972, the Fair opened for the first time to the United States, American journals described the fair as "an interesting glimpse into the day-to-day workings of Chinese foreign trade process and trends in Chinese foreign policy generally", and served as "an indicator of how China's political relations are faring with the rest of the world"<sup>89</sup>. At first, most exhibits on display were raw materials, gradually the ratio manufactured goods has risen from 20% at the outset of Fair in 1957 to 85.6% in 1995, even more now. On the 101<sup>st</sup> session in the spring of 2007, in order to promote trade balance, the Canton Fair organized an International Pavilion, and so the fair was officially renamed as "China Import and Export Fair" export deals totaled just under \$75 billion. Activity at the Fair has mirrored China's rapid growth: in 1999, China's exports were just one third as compared to U.S. export values. In its first years, the Fair generated around \$250 million annually. The 24,000 vendors at each session of the Fair are small and medium sized privately-owned enterprises (SMEs):

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<sup>88</sup> LARDY, Nicholas R., *China in the World Economy*, Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington D.C., April 1, 1994.

<sup>89</sup> BRUNER, Jerome, TAOKA, George, *Marketing and Negotiation in the People's Republic of China: Perceptions of American Businessman who Attended the 1975 Canton Fair*, Journal of International Business Studies, Academy of International Business, East Lansing (Michigan), 1977. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490687>.

China's SMEs account for 70% of the country's exports<sup>90</sup>. Paralleling the Chinese economy, the rate of business growth at the Fair has slowed since the global financial crisis in 2008. The EU is China's and also Canton Fair largest trading partner and US the second, while, although still much smaller in terms of total demand, buyers from emerging economies such as India, Brazil, Russia, the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asia are gradually rising to fill this gap. The rise in emerging economy buyers at the Fair mirrors the overall shifts in China's light industrial product sector. Over the past year exports to Africa, Oceania, Asia and Latin America increased 26%, 29%, 30% and 36% respectively<sup>91</sup>.

The last session of the Canton Fair (126<sup>th</sup> Canton Fair) was concluded with an export turnover of CNY 207.09 billion (USD 29.288 million), with about 186 overseas buyers, 25,000 exporters and 642 exhibitors: in 2019 the sum of the Spring and Autumn session led to an annual turnover that was approaching to 60,000 USD million. Obviously, the 127<sup>th</sup> session of the Canton Fair (Spring 2020), due to COVID-19 pandemic, is an online virtual trade fair: buyers and exhibitors for these sessions can only trade remotely, while the 128<sup>th</sup> session of the fair (October 2020), despite the fear that contagious will increase, will be held in presence.

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<sup>90</sup> An SMEs in China is defined by less than 2,000 employees, revenues under 300 million RMB, and total assets less than 400 million RMB.

<sup>91</sup> LISTER, Jane, LEBARON, Genevieve, *Shopping for Sustainability at the Canton Fair, The Political Economy of Transnational Retail Governance in China*, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2012. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/3037486/Shopping\\_for\\_Sustainability\\_at\\_the\\_Canton\\_Fair](https://www.academia.edu/3037486/Shopping_for_Sustainability_at_the_Canton_Fair).

Year	Number of Buyers		Number of Countries and Regions	
	Spring Session	Autumn Session	Spring Session	Autumn Session
2019	195,454	186,015	213	214
2018	203,346	189,812	214	215
2017	196,490	191,950	213	213
2016	185,596	185,704	210	213
2015	184,801	177,544	216	213
2014	188,119	186,104	214	211
2013	202,766	189,646	211	212
2012	Nearly 210,000	188,145	213	211
2011	207,103	209,175	209	210
2010	203,996	200,612	212	208
2009	165,436	188,170	209	212
2008	192,013	174,562		

**Figure 8:** Buyers Attendance of Previous Sessions, China Import and Export Fair 2020.

Year	Turnover (USD Million)		Annual Turnover (USD Million)
	Spring Session	Autumn Session	
2019	29,730	29,288	59,018
2018	30,080	29,860	59,940
2017	30,020	30,160	60,180
2016	28,084	27,890	55,974
2015	28,056	27,010	55,066
2014	31,051	29,160	60,211
2013	35,540	31,690	67,230
2012	36,030	32,680	68,710
2011	36,860	37,900	74,760
2010	34,300		
2009	26,230	30,470	56,700
2008	38,230	31,550	69,780

**Figure 9:** Business Turnover of Previous Sessions, China Import and Export Fair 2020.

The Canton Fair takes place every spring and autumn in Guangzhou over three-week period. In particular, the Canton Fair Phase One focuses on electrical, electronic products and industrial products. Most of China's latest high-tech products are in the first phase of the Canton fair and it has the largest number of deals and buyers of the three phases and includes:

- Electronics & Household Electrical Appliances
- Lighting Equipment
- Vehicles & Spare Parts
- Machinery
- Hardware & Tools
- Building Materials
- Chemical Products
- Energy Resources

The Canton Fair Phase Two focuses on such labor-intensive products, the second phases involve the most significant number of buyers from the western countries and involves:

- Consumer Goods
- Ceramics
- Household Items & Home Decorations
- Personal Care Products
- Toiletries
- Pet products
- Food
- Gift & Toys

The Canton Fair Phase Three focuses on clothing, medicines and food, and involves:

- Textiles & Garments
- Shoes
- Office Supplies, Cases & Bags
- Medicines, Medical Devices and Health Products
- Food & Native Produce

Since its 101<sup>st</sup> session in April 2007, the China Foreign Trade Centre<sup>92</sup> has set up in the Canton Fair an International Pavilion inviting overseas enterprises to participate. According to different products categories, the International Pavilion of Canton fair it's set up in both Phase One and Phase Three. In the Phase One the exhibition area of the International Pavilion is 15,000 m<sup>2</sup>, and the major products categories are: Machinery and Equipment; Small Vehicles & Spare Parts; Electronics; IT Products and Household Electrical Appliances; Hardware & Tools; Building Materials; Kitchen & Sanitary Equipment; Raw Materials. The International Pavilion in the Phase Three involves 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition area, the main products categories are: Foodstuffs & Agricultural; Medical Equipment and Health Products, Personal Care Products, Consumer Goods; Decoration and Gifts; Textiles, Clothing and Footwear. The Canton Fair International Pavilion it's extremely important since it provide an unique opportunity for visitors to see and compare innovative products and service without having to travel the world, it offers other important advantages than just making sales: potential distributors and licensees can see a firm's products and observe the market reaction<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> The China Foreign Trade Centre (Group) is an institutional unit directly led by the Ministry of Commerce of the Peoples Republic of China.

<sup>93</sup> PREMA, Nakra, *How exporters can make the most of international trade shows*, The Guardian, London 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2016/feb/05/international-trade-fair-exporting-overseas-business>.

### 2.2.2 *The East China Fair (ECF)* 中国华东进出口商品交易会

中国华东进出口商品交易会（简称华交会）由中华人民共和国商务部支持，上海市，江苏省，浙江省，安徽省，福建省，江西省，山东省，南京市，宁波市等 9 省市联合主办，每年 3 月在上海举行，由上海华交会展经营服务有限公司承办。华交会是中国规模最大，客商最多，辐射面最广，成交额最高的区域性国际经贸盛会。自 1991 年以来，华交会已成功举办了 30 届。第 29 届华交会在上海新国际博览中心举行，展览面积达 12.65 万平方米，标准展位 5868 个。设服装服饰展，纺织面料展，家庭用品展，装饰礼品展，现代生活方式展（下设进口展区和跨境电商展），参展企业 4000 余家。境外展商分别来自日本，韩国，马来西亚，新加坡，越南，泰国，尼泊尔，巴基斯坦，印度，立陶宛，中国香港等 15 个国家和地区。第 29 届华交会有来自全世界 111 个国家和地区的 22757 名采购商和国内 14408 名采购商到会洽谈，出口成交总额达 23 亿美元<sup>94</sup>。华交会出口展区展品类别：

1. 服装服饰展；
2. 纺织面料展；
3. 装饰礼品展；
4. 家庭用品展

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<sup>94</sup> East China Fair official websites. Available at: <https://www.ecf.org.cn>.



The East China Fair, or ECF for short, is Asia's leading Light Industry and Garment Textile Trade Show. The East China Fair was established in 1991, and it is held annually on March 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> in Shanghai. ECF is the largest Regional International Economic and Trade Show in China with the most trade visitors, the highest transaction volume and the greatest variety of exhibits on a global basis. The East China Fair is supported by the Ministry of Commerce and is co-organized by nine provinces and cities including Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong, Nanjing and Ningbo. ECF has been held for 30 consecutive years. The 29<sup>th</sup> East China Fair (2019 Shanghai) was held in the Shanghai New International Expo Center. The exhibition halls were separated into five themes as Garments, Textiles, Home products, Gifts and Modern Lifestyle (including Overseas Products and Cross-border E-commerce), covering an area of 126,500 square meters and having over 4,000 exhibitors with 5,868 standard booths in the fair. During the 4-day exhibition, the total amount of trade deals was \$2,3 millions, decreased 0.6% than the previous year. The Shanghai New International Expo Center (SNIEC) is an exhibition center in Pudong, Shanghai, and it is the only Sino-German joint venture with western management. The SNIEC construction started on November 4, 1999 with its opening taking place on November 2, 2001, with a total investment that was around \$591 million. The Expo has a capacity of 200,000 square meters indoor, and 100,000 square meters outdoor exhibition area. The Expo Center facilities include 17 exhibition halls, conference room and business center. With more than 100 exhibitions per years, including the East China Fair, The SIAL China<sup>95</sup> and the Shanghai Motor Show<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> The SIAL China is Asia's largest food innovation exhibition located in Shanghai. The fair hosts 4,300 exhibitors and 117,595 professional buyers and visitors. The 2019 edition grew 23% to 200,000 square meters of exhibition space, equivalent to 27 football fields. In 2019, nearly half of all exhibitors, 49% came from overseas markets with the ten largest contingents coming from Korea, Russia, Brazil, Austria, Argentina, the USA, Turkey, Spain, Poland and Germany.

<sup>96</sup> East China Fair official websites. Available at: <https://www.ecf.org.cn>.

The East China Fair is divided into three main areas that differ for the types of goods expose:

1. The Export Area, that includes:

<b>Garment Exhibition</b>	<b>Textiles Exhibition</b>	<b>Decoration and Gifts Exhibition</b>	<b>Home Products Exhibitions</b>
Clothing	Home Textiles	Sport, Travel	Home Appliance
Garment Fabric	Textile Raw Material	Leisure products	Consumer Goods
Accessories	Auxiliary Material	Home decors, gifts	Electronic products

2. The Modern Lifestyle Area, that includes:

<b>General Home Products</b>	<b>Furniture Appliances and Decorations</b>	<b>Fashion Goods</b>	<b>Textile, Exhibition Material</b>
Home products	Furniture	Clothing	Home Textiles
Kitchen ware	Kitchen appliances	Shoes	Bedding
Bathroom ware	Crafts and Accessories	Luggage and Bag	Auxiliary Material

3. The E-commerce Area, that includes

<b>Domestic E-commerce Platform</b>	Self-owned brand e-commerce, Third-party platform
<b>Overseas E-commerce Platform</b>	Self-owned brand e-commerce, Third-party platform
<b>E-commerce Platform Seller</b>	Brand trader, Trader
<b>Physical Store and Park</b>	Cross-border. E-commerce park
<b>Foreign Trade Comprehensive Service</b>	Import and export trading company, customs clearance, credit inquiry, factoring, Insurance
<b>Cross-border E-commerce Services</b>	E-commerce solutions, Finance and payments
<b>Digital Marketing</b>	Social Media, Search engines, SEO
<b>IT Technology</b>	ERP software, IT equipment
<b>Association and Organization</b>	Business association, Trade promotion organization

The 29<sup>th</sup> East China Fair attracted a total of 37,165 buyers, among them, overseas buyers were 22,757 and domestic buyers were 14,408. The number of overseas buyers has continuously increased to a new high in the past five years. Overseas buyers from 111 countries and regions around the world were attending the last session of the East China Fair: 18,261 were Asian overseas buyers, 2,404 were European Overseas buyers and 1,459 were from North America.



**Figure 10:** Top 10 Countries and Regions of the Overseas Buyers, East China Fair 2019.



**Figure 11:** The Number of All Buyers and Overseas Buyers in the last five years, East China Fair 2019.

According to the ECF last buyer's analysis, 64% of the buyers had already attended the fair in the past, while it was the first time for the 36%. In addition, the buyer's attending the fair purposes were in order<sup>97</sup>:

- Seek New Suppliers 57.02%
- Trade Negotiation 53.62%
- Collect Market Information 52.17%
- Seek New Partners 49.66%
- Other 8.02%

Attending the last session of the East China fair were over 4,000 exhibitors, including 452 overseas exhibitors that were organized by 14 trade groups from Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong, Nanjing, Ningbo, Hangzhou, Xiamen, Qingdao, United Trade Group and Overseas Trade Group, with more than 5,868 standard booths in the fair. The domestic exhibitors who have participated before accounted for 80.18% of the total domestic exhibitors, while the overseas exhibitors who have participated previously accounted for 62.5% of the total overseas exhibitors<sup>98</sup>. In particular, the 75.23% of the domestic exhibitors have already participated to the fair once or twice, the 19.82% of the domestic exhibitors were attending the fair for the first time, while the 4.95% of the domestic exhibitors have participated in the fair for more than three consecutive years. For what concern the overseas exhibitors, the 62% already participated the fair before, while for the 37% was the first time. The 57.21% of the

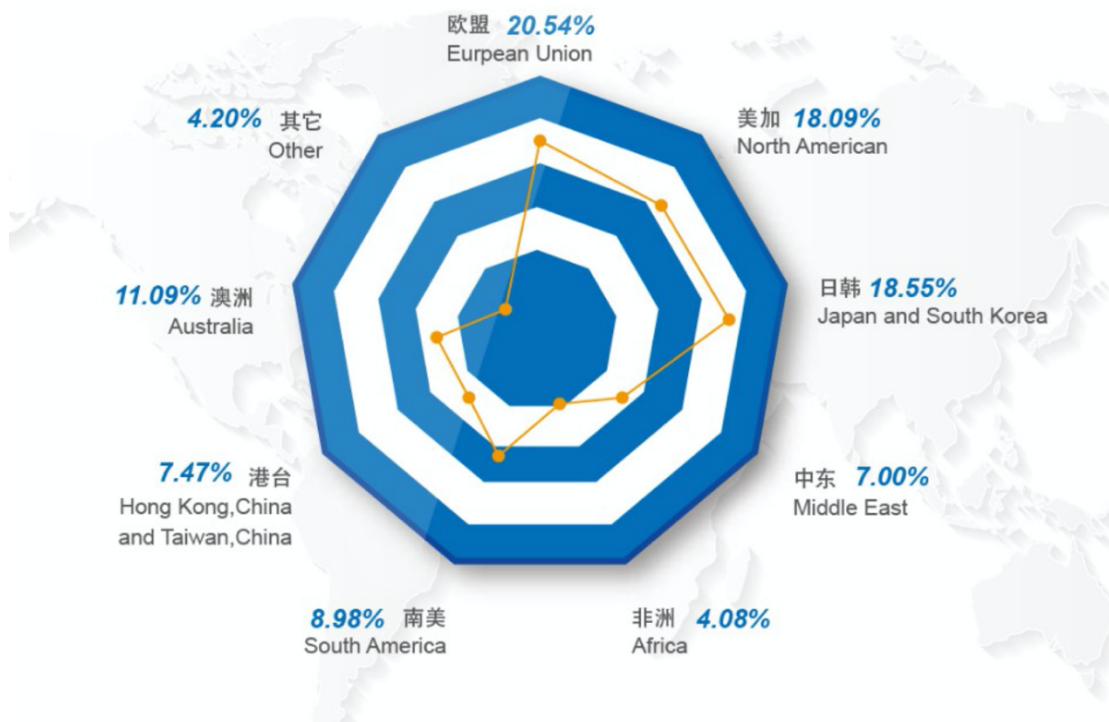
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<sup>97</sup> East China Fair, Buyer Analysis, 2019. Available at: <https://www.ecf.org.cn>

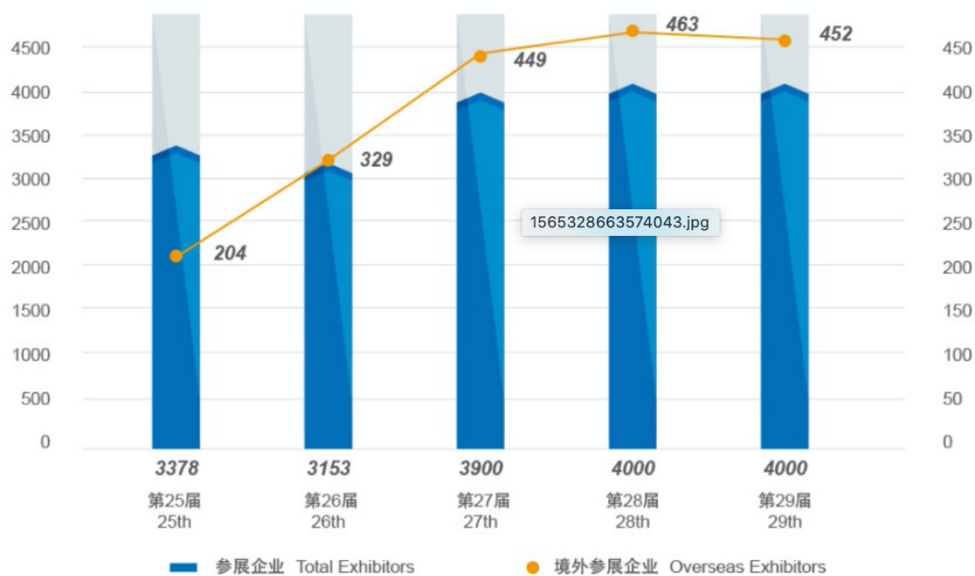
<sup>98</sup> East China Fair, Exhibitors Analysis, 2019. Available at: <https://www.ecf.org.cn>.

companies that participated to the 29<sup>th</sup> East China Fair were production enterprises, while 42.79% were selling enterprises. In 2019, the main products categories where in order:

- Home Products 35.48%
- Garments 23.9%
- Textiles 15.2%
- Gifts 13.2%
- Modern Lifestyle 12.12%



**Figure 12:** The Markets in which exhibitors focus on, East China Fair 2019.



**Figure 13:** The Number of All Exhibitors and Overseas Exhibitors in the Last Five Years, East China Fair 2019.

During the 29<sup>th</sup> East China Fair, the total amount of trade deals reached \$2,3 million. Among this, the total turnover on textile and garment reached \$1.03 million; the total turnover on art gifts and consumer goods reached \$1.2 million, while the total turnover on other goods reached \$74,000. For what concern the 14 trading groups, the Zhejiang trading group had the largest export volume, accounting for 17.68% of the total volume. Furthermore, the target exporting country with the largest turnover was Japan, with \$900,000<sup>99</sup>.

The 30<sup>th</sup> East China Fair, due to Coronavirus pandemic was held online from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020, lots of authoritative Chinese media such as newspapers and magazines, TV radio, online media, e-commerce media helped buyers and exhibitors to trade remotely in the best and efficient way.

<sup>99</sup> East China Fair, Exhibitors Analysis, 2019. Available at: <https://www.ecf.org.cn>.

## *The Shanghai Model*

As the commercial hub and gateway of China, Shanghai connects the rest of the country with Asia and the world.<sup>100</sup> Because of its location it would be natural to assume that Shanghai was always China's primary industrial and commercial center. The city produces machines, chemicals, metals, fertilizers, petroleum products, ships, textiles and consumer goods. Shanghai is located near the mouth of the Yangtze River on a delta that is only 10 to 20 feet above the sea level. In English Shanghai – 上海 means “*on the sea or going to the sea*”. The Shanghai major commercial area is called Pudong, built east of the Huang Pu River, it is precisely in this area that the major Shanghai's trade fairs are annually held, including the East China Fair. Shanghai is mainland China's commercial capital and most populous city. Alongside Beijing, Chongqing and Tianjin, it is one of four municipalities directly controlled by the central government. Shanghai has the highest GDP of any Chinese city<sup>101</sup>; it is also a core port for domestic and international trade, with the value of its imports and export accounting for 20% of the country's total<sup>102</sup>.

It is important to say that Shanghai is now transforming into a post-industrial economy: its tertiary industry, or service sector accounts around 70% of the city's GDP and is still rapidly growing. Important industries in Shanghai include financial services, wholesale and retail, real estate, transportation, construction and manufacturing. Shanghai has been undergoing major industrial restructuring and developing its high-tech industries. Six key advantage industries, namely electronic information products, automobiles, petrochemicals, fine steel, equipment, and biomedicine, accounted for 68.5%

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<sup>100</sup> SNIEC, Shanghai New International Expo Centre, official website, Available at: [http://www.sniec.net/about\\_aboutsniec.php](http://www.sniec.net/about_aboutsniec.php).

<sup>101</sup> ZHANG, Zoey, Ye, *Shanghai: Industry, Economics and Policy*, 2019. Available at: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/author/china-briefing/>.

<sup>102</sup> 国家统计局, 2020. Available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/>.

of the city's gross industrial output in 2019. Other economic indicators, in order to better understand the importance of Shanghai for the Chinese economy are<sup>103</sup>:

- The total investment in fixed assets was around \$107.6 billion;
- The total retail sales of consumer goods were around \$188 billion;
- The total value of import and exports were around \$1,266 billion;
- The total value of import was around \$540 billion;
- The total value of exports was around \$725 billion

Shanghai has become the home for one of the largest trade fairs in the world also because the city has always been the forefront of pilot reforms and economic liberalization. In fact, in September 2013, the first Pilot Free Trade Zone (FTZ)<sup>104</sup> in mainland China was established in Shanghai. As the FTZ is equipped with world-class infrastructure and is home to a well-established service sector, which creates a quarter of the city's GDP and about 40% of China's total foreign trade, it is possible to affirm that certain types of foreign businesses and organizations (including the trade fairs) are only permitted to set up within the Shanghai FTZ area. In Shanghai, the FTZ has been gradually expanding covering an area of 28.78 square kilometers in 2013, to 240.22 square kilometers in 2019<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> ZHANG, Zoey, Ye, *Shanghai: Industry, Economics and Policy*, 2019. Available at: <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/author/china-briefing/>.

<sup>104</sup> A Free Trade Zone (FTZ) is an economic zone where companies can operate under specially defined regulations. In particular, they offer preferential customs handling and initial import without paying duties. To a certain extent, FTZ in China still follow this original structure but have also taken on an expanded meaning. China additionally uses FTZs as a testing ground for new policies, tax, regulatory or foreign exchange. Introduction in a single, tightly controlled, region allows tests and development of such policies before considering nationwide expansion.

<sup>105</sup> 中国（上海），自由贸易试验区管理委员会 2020. Available at: <http://www.china-shftz.gov.cn/Homepage.aspx>.



### 2.2.3 *The China Yiwu International Commodities Fair* 中国义乌国际小商品博览会

中国义乌国际小商品（简称“义博会”）创办于1995年的义博会已连续举办了十四届，每年10月21日-25日在浙江义乌举行。义博会，办展特色鲜明，国际化水平突出，信息功能强劲，服务体系完善，安全卫生保障到位，已成为国内最具规模，最有影响，最富成效的日用消费品展会。是国内由商务部举办的继广交会，华交会后的第三大展会，先后被评为2005年度中国管理水平最佳展览会，2006年度中国十大最具影响力的品牌展会，2006年度中国（参展效果）最佳展览会，2007年度中国长三角地区优质会展项目。以“面向世界，服务全国”为宗旨，对扩大商品出口，提升小商品制造业，促进区域经济发展发挥了积极的推动作用。中国小商品城会展中心由中国小商品城集团公司投资1.5亿元建设，占地6万平方米，建筑面积46500平方米，集国际国内展览，会议，智能网络，餐饮设施等多种功能为一体，是华东地区规模最大的大型专业展馆之一，属中国展览馆协会理事单位。中国义乌国际小商品博览会的参展类别是：文化办公，体育娱乐，玩具，针织辅料，服装鞋帽，工艺品，工艺装饰，日用品，流行首饰，化妆美容，箱包皮具，五金机电，电子电器，汽车用品，服务贸易，水晶及玻璃制品。中国义乌国际小商品博览会的展览面积是120,000平方米，国际标准展位：5,000个，参展企业：3,000多家，共设14个室内展馆。分为一层，二层和地下一层三个部分。展位分配上也将更加合理，相关配套设施更加完善。展览交易总额是115.43亿元，比上届增长11.4%，其中外贸成交额为10.17亿美元，占总成交额的61.7%，内贸成交额为44.21亿元，比上届增长13.2%<sup>106</sup>。

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<sup>106</sup> The China Yiwu International Commodities Fair official websites, Available at: <http://en.yiwufair.com/aboutfair/intro/>.

The China Yiwu International Commodities Fair started as a regional exhibition in 1995. In 1998 it grew into a national fair sponsored by the provincial government. In 2002, it was promoted to a global exposition sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce. Despite its short history of less than two decades, the Yiwu Fair has become China's third-largest international exposition after the Canton Fair in Guangzhou and the East China Fair in Shanghai. The Yiwu Fair is an effective platform attracting global buyers and providing Chinese enterprises with immediate access to the global market. Yiwu is a city in Zhejiang Province, 300 km from Shanghai, and it is now considered a key city that connects "the various economies in China to regional and global markets". Every year, hundreds of traders buy their goods in Yiwu, which is now considered the world's largest wholesale market specializing in small goods. The term "small goods" includes items such as jewelry, decorative items, household items, stationery and small electronic equipment<sup>107</sup>.

In less than 20 years, Yiwu Fair has developed from nothing to an exposition with global influence. It has changed from a business mainly existing in the local market to a platform serving the whole country and connecting with the world. Its development history can be divided into three parts:

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<sup>107</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China's Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201).

1. The beginning (1995-1997)<sup>108</sup>:

The sponsor was the Yiwu County People's government, whose purpose was to "improve circulation, promote market and develop trade". In particular, it hoped to further improve his products, to offer more business opportunities to manufacturers and distributors and to promote the development of the market economy. From May 18 to May 22, 1995, the China Commodity Fair, co-sponsored by Zhejiang Administration for Industry and Commerce and Yiwu County People's government, was held on the third floor of Yiwu Commodity City. This was the first Yiwu Fair with an exhibition area of nearly 5000 square meters and 348 stalls. It has attracted 16 overseas enterprises, 123 enterprises from Guangdong, Shanghai and Fujian, and 40 well-known local enterprises. It attracted an average of 200000 visitors a day with a total turnover of 15 million dollars. The second Yiwu Trade Fair, renamed China Commodity Fair, was held in Binwang market from August 8 to 12, 1996. With an area of 16000 square meters, the exhibition attracted 448 enterprises, with an average of 500000 visitors per day and 43 million dollars.

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<sup>108</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China's Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201).

2. The enhancement (1998-2001)<sup>109</sup>:

Yiwu has benefited from the strong support of the provincial government. In this way, after four years of development, the fair has become more influential, more attractive, more open internationally. Since the second edition, the Yiwu fair is usually scheduled to be held in autumn. With the continuous expansion of scale, these expositions were transferred from Binwang market to Yiwu indoor market, and then to Meihu Convention and Exhibition Center. In 1998, the total exhibition area of the Expo was 50000 square meters, attracting 673 enterprises from 20 provinces of China, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Germany, Australia and South Korea, with a total turnover of \$80 million. In 2001, the 7th Yiwu Fair made another brilliant scale, attracting 1026 enterprises from 30 provinces of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as 27 countries and regions such as the United States, South Korea, Japan and Australia.

3. The breakthrough (2002-2007)<sup>110</sup>:

In 2002, the Yiwu Expo was upgraded and sponsored by the Ministry of foreign trade and economic cooperation, which attracted worldwide attention. Overseas participants were more professional, and more tourists were interested in foreign

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<sup>109</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China's Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201).

<sup>110</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China's Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201).

trade. The fair has become more and more well known outside China, and Yiwu became the largest commodity distribution place in the country. In 2007, the total turnover of the 13th Yiwu Fair was \$1,5 billion, involving 110156 professional businessmen, including 17011 businessmen from 172 countries and regions.

Since the first appearance of the Yiwu Fair in 1995, the local fair economy has entered a process of rapid growth. The first result is that the construction area of the exhibition site has expanded from 5000 square meters in 1995 to 100,000 square meters in 2007. Another important result is the continuous growth of the company turnover. In 2007, the volume of transactions reached 1.5 billion dollars, second only to the Canton Fair and the East China Fair, making China the third largest international exhibition. The third result is the degree of internationalization. In 2007, the Expo attracted 17011 foreign entrepreneurs from 172 countries and regions, more than 60% of which came from developed countries. Yiwu International Commodity Fair is now sponsored by the Department of foreign trade and economic cooperation of Yiwu Municipal People's Government of Zhejiang Province.

## China International Commodity Fair 2019 review<sup>111</sup>

EXHIBITION AREA	100,000 square meters
TRADE BUYERS	58,462
STANDARD BOOTH	4,136
EXHIBITING COUNTRIES	18
PURCHASING COUNTRIES	179
EXHIBITORS	2,200
VISITORS	146,233
TRADE TRANSACTIONS	¥18,428 billion

## Exhibitors Regional Distribution of 2019 China International Commodity Fair<sup>112</sup>

ZHEJIANG PROVINCE	42.80%
OTHER PROVINCES	31.60%
YIWU	24.70%
OVERSEAS	0.90%

<sup>111</sup> The China Yiwu International Commodities Fair official websites. Available at: <http://en.yiwufair.com/aboutfair/intro/>.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

### Visitors' Interested Industries of 2019 China International Commodity Fair<sup>113</sup>

HARDAWARE	31.52%
DAILY NECESSITIES	23.27%
CRAFT & NECESSITIES	11.04%
KNITWEAR	7.57%
ELECTROMECHANICAL FACILITIES	7.46%
ELECTRONIC & ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES	5.89%
SPORTING GOODS AND OUTDOOR LEISURE PRODUCTS	4.03%
TOYS	3.95%
TRADE & SERVICE	3.84%
STATIONERY AND OFFICIAL GOODS	1.42%

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<sup>113</sup> The China Yiwu International Commodities Fair official websites. Available at: <http://en.yiwufair.com/aboutfair/intro/>.

## *The Yiwu Model*

The establishment and development of Yiwu Fair has set a unique example in China's exhibition economy. This model, known as "Yiwu model" is of great significance to the development of China's exhibition industry. Yiwu Expo has become an annual event with unique functions and is also the legendary locomotive of prosperous regional exhibition economy. There are many factors that explain why a city like Yiwu has developed into such a success: <sup>114</sup>:

1. the long-term government support;
2. a clear recognition of its advantages and market needs;
3. high quality and service with low administrative costs;
4. the separation between administration and executive party has prevented corruption;
5. ad hoc commercial surveillance department for counterfeit products or poor-quality products;
6. the government holds courses for Yiwu traders, teaching them the laws and regulations, and also some computer skills.

Yiwu was once a big agricultural county with poor land and natural resources. Since its decollectivization in the late 1970s, this city has taken advantage of the favorable conditions for the growth of its markets thanks to the constant support of local authorities. The creation of a wholesale market in Yiwu in 1982 came in the wake of the economic

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<sup>114</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China's Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.1.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.1.%202%2C%20No.%201)



opening promoted by Deng Xiaoping in 1979. Since 1984, the policy of development through trade has allowed producers to make local industrial production more visible to traders, first those in Zhejiang Province and then those throughout China. In 1986, the central government ordered the reorganization of the distribution market allowing manufacturers to deal directly with wholesalers. After 1989 and during the 1990s, the Chinese government pursued a path of major economic reforms, in particular by reorganizing the distribution of goods and services. This was followed by a progressive decentralization that guaranteed regional and local governments greater autonomy to intervene in the development and organization of markets. Reforms of China's distribution system have sought to facilitate the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, giving producers access to new customers and allowing wholesalers to benefit from 30% lower prices than those charged outside the program, and as a result, Yiwu has become one of the new commercial cities.

The development of the Yiwu city from an economic and commercial point of view is also extremely important because: first of all it had significant impact on the restructuring of Zhejiang's industrial landscape, mainly composed of SMEs, attracting producers across the province in Yiwu City in a new context of increased growth and competition<sup>115</sup>. Secondly, Yiwu's success has led to the expansion and diversification of markets specializing in the wholesale of small goods, such as home appliances, stationery, toys, clothing and religious objects. In these markets, sellers want to offer wholesalers the widest possible choice and ensure that buyers can more easily find what they are looking for by classifying products by type and location. Today 1288 overseas enterprises from more than 100 countries and regions have set up permanent representative offices

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<sup>115</sup> BELGUIDOUM, Said, PLIEZ, Oliver, *Yiwu: The Creation of a Global Market Town in China*, Journal of Urban Research, 2015. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/articulo/2863>.

in Yiwu<sup>116</sup>. Yiwu has a large and well-equipped international logistics center and five professional freight service markets. It has also a transportation hub, with freight services connecting more than 250 large and medium-sized cities, 5 freight railway routes, more than 20 air routes and more than 6000 domestic and foreign freight service providers. Among the top 20 shipping companies in the world, 8 have set up representative offices in Yiwu. The daily export volume of local customs is 2500 TEUs<sup>117</sup>, and the annual export volume exceeds 400000 TEUs, ranking the first among the inland customs in China. Driven by the wave of economic globalization, many international manufacturers and commodity suppliers come to Yiwu. In Yiwu International Trade City alone, there are more than 300 overseas enterprises. At the same time, it has become a meeting place for many buyers - an average of 200000 customers a day - as well as a large number of sellers, including distributors from China's light industrial base and more than 100000 local convenience goods producers.

Yiwu Trade Fair has gained eternal power from a large number of commodity stocks and the development of the five-generation market. The history of the fair represents the history of the overall development of Yiwu's special market. Yiwu's unique advantages have helped the city realize the integration of "trade driven exhibition", "exhibition led trade" and "market operation". These achievements not only promote the development of the local exhibition industry, but also help the city to achieve the dream of "creating the largest supermarket in the world"<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> MU, Guo, Senior industrial artist and Director of the Zhejiang Provincial Foreign Trade Center, *The Yiwu Model of China's Exhibition Economy*, UTS Press, Sydney, 2010. Available at: [https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial\\_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201](https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/index.php/provincial_china/issue/view/Provincial%20China%2C%20Vol.%202%2C%20No.%201)

<sup>117</sup> TEU means Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit, is an exact unit used to measure cargo capacity for container ships and container terminals.

<sup>118</sup> *A Collection of Materials on the China Yiwu International Commodities Fair*, Yiwu Archives Office, 2000. Available at: <https://www.yiwuen.com/tag/office-supplies>.

## Chapter 3: The COVID-19 pandemic impact on Global Economy and Trade Fair System

### 3.1 The COVID-19 effect on Global Economy

Despite all the scientific and technological developments of the last hundred years, biological issues such as pandemics are a constant threat to society. While one aspect of a pandemic is the loss of life, the epidemic has a multidimensional impact on all regional and global societies<sup>119</sup>. The COVID-19 outbreak (previously 2019-nCoV) seems to be caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This outbreak was triggered in December 2019 in Wuhan city in Hubei, province of China, and then continues to spread across the world. Initially the epicenter of the outbreak was China with reported cases either in China or being travelers from China. While some countries have been able to effectively treat reported cases, it is uncertain where and when new cases will emerge. Amidst the significant public health risk COVID-19 poses to the world, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a public health emergency of international concern to coordinate international responses to the disease<sup>120</sup>.

The first and foremost aspect of a pandemic is human suffering and the loss of life, as evidence by the coronavirus pandemic already having 29.356.292 global confirmed cases of infection and closing on 930.000 confirm deaths<sup>121</sup>. It is necessary to

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<sup>119</sup> NOROUZI, Nima, DE RUBENS, Gerardo Z., CHOUPANPIESHES, Saeed, ENEVOLDSEN, Peter, *When pandemics impact economies and climate change: Exploring the impacts of COVID-19 on oil and electricity demand in China*, Energy Research & Social Science, Elsevier, Amsterdam, October 2020. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629620302292>.

<sup>120</sup> MCKIBBIN, Warwick, FERNANDO, Roshen, *The Global Macroeconomic Impacts of COVID-19: Seven Scenarios*, CAMA (Centre for Applied Macroeconomic Analysis), Crawford, 2020. Available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3547729](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3547729).

<sup>121</sup> Health Emergency Dashboard, September 16, 2020. Available at: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3547729](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3547729).

remember that the world economic situation at the beginning of 2020, so before the explosion of the Covid-19 virus, was already weak, although supported by the most important central banks. However, as the Coronavirus expanded and changed into a global pandemic, the situation began to get worse. Specifically, since the health emergency in China, the whole world has begun to suffer the impact, further increased by the lockdown and restrictions imposed, in fact, the COVID-19 has placed 30% of the global population in lockdown, with country-specific stay-at-home orders. Despite the lower mortality level of Covid-19 (2.5%) compared to other recent epidemics such as Ebola (50%) or SARS (10%), the impact of the Coronavirus on the global economy and markets is significant for several reasons<sup>122</sup>. First of all, the worldwide geographical spread: the contagiousness (every patient can potentially infect two healthy people), so the impact on an already weak economy at the beginning. It is also important to consider the economic and social aspects it has caused in a country like China, which was the first to face this emergency<sup>123</sup>. However, there are still unknown data on the virus, namely its seasonality and the exact number of cases, given the fact that there are many asymptomatic or sick people who have not performed the swab and therefore cannot be included in the official statistics.

These assumptions suggest that global GDP will contract even further in 2020. The pandemic, in fact, is having a big impact on the economy and also in the future it will have great repercussions both in terms of supply and demand. Countries are developing fiscal policies to safeguard the economy, but the forecast for global growth in 2020 varies

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<sup>122</sup> Considerations for quarantine of individuals in the context of containment for coronavirus disease (COVID-19), WHO, [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331497/WHO-2019-nCoV-IHR\\_Quarantine-2020.2-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331497/WHO-2019-nCoV-IHR_Quarantine-2020.2-eng.pdf), 2020.

<sup>123</sup> The Great Lockdown: Worst Economic Downturn Since the Great Depression. Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/countries-on-lockdown-coronavirus-italy-2020-?IR=T>.

from -1.5% to -4%, the lowest since World War II<sup>124</sup>. Data on the first-quarter 2020 GDP performance of major economies has shown how significant the impact of COVID-19 has been on economic activity and jobs, with large contractions across the board<sup>125</sup>.

The U.S. real GDP contracted at a seasonally adjusted annual rate (SAAR) of 4.8% in the first quarter of 2020, the worst outcome since the last quarter of 2008. The second quarter is likely to be even worse, with forecasts pointing to a real GDP decline of around 40% SAAR. These are figures not seen since the Great Depression of the last century. More than 20 million U.S. workers lost their jobs in April 2020, and the unemployment rate reached levels as high as 14.7%.

The Eurozone is another fallen giant, in the first quarter of 2020, its GDP shrank 14.4% SAAR, as lockdowns were imposed around mid-March and activity started to run about a third below normal levels. The level of activity may have bottomed in May, assuming that restrictions will be gradually eased in the subsequent weeks. In any case, forecasts point to a 45% annualized rate of GDP drop in the first half of the year.

Japan's real GDP is forecast to decline by more than 40% SAAR in the second quarter 2020. Daily increases in the number of infections led the government to prolong the state of emergency for an additional month after May 6.

China, in turn, suffered first an outbreak-induced sudden stop in February. Based on official data from the World Bank, China unpredictably describe a trade deficit of \$7.09 billion in January-February 2020, that reflects the acute impact of the rapid spread of

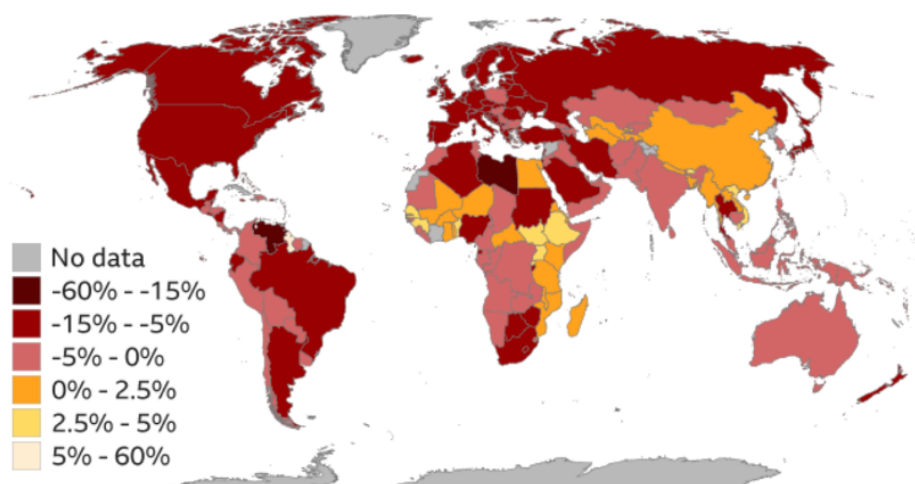
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<sup>124</sup> FELSENTHAL, Mark, *COVID-19 to Plunge Global Economy into Worst Recession since World War II*, The World Bank, Washington, June 8, 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii>.

<sup>125</sup> CANUTO, Otaviano, *The impact of Coronavirus on the Global Economy*, June 22, 2020. Available at: <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/impact-coronavirus-global-economy>.

COVID-19 outbreak on the economy of China<sup>126</sup>. There was a rebound in March, but not enough to allow to return to previous GDP levels.

The plunge in exports in May 2020 reflects the global nature of the crisis and the wide variation in first-quarter annual rates of GDP negative outcomes among the giants U.S. (minus 4.9%), Eurozone (minus 14.4%), and China (minus 34.7%), can be associated with the different timing of their COVID-19 outbreaks. But they will all have passed through a rough patch at the end of the semester. Anyway, the depth and severity of the crisis were highlighted in the IMF's World Economic Outlook forecasts released in mid-April: the IMF expected global GDP per capita to shrink by 4.2% in 2020, compared to a decline of 1.6% in 2009, during the global financial crisis. The vast majority of all countries are poised to exhibit negative GDP growth in 2020. The recovery in 2021 is not expected to be enough to compensate for the ongoing GDP declines<sup>127</sup>.



**Figure 14:** Majority of countries on the brink of recession, Real GDP growth, International Monetary Fund, September 2020.

<sup>126</sup> BRADSHER, Keith, *China's Economy Rebounds From Coronavirus, but Shares Fall*, The New York Times, July 15, 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/15/business/economy/china-coronavirus-economy.html>.

<sup>127</sup> CANUTO, Otaviano, *The impact of Coronavirus on the Global Economy*, June 22, 2020. Available at: <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/impact-coronavirus-global-economy>.

### 3.2 The COVID-19 effect on Global Trade Fair System

“Right now, the marketplace that industries rely on to trade are closed around the world. This is unprecedented. Mass closures of events in relation to COVID-19 have reached Asia, Europe, North and South America, meaning the entire global exhibitions and events industry is grinding to a halt<sup>128</sup>”

The outbreak of the coronavirus has first created a complex situation of reduction of events, but in a record time basically all trade fairs and events around the globe have come to a standstill. With a majority of companies expecting “local” and “national” exhibitions to open again during the second half of 2020, the level of activity is expected to slowly increase, and two companies out of three projects at least a “reduced” level of activity in the last quarter of 2020. In all regions, a majority of companies believe that exhibitions with an international scope will not open until 2021<sup>129</sup>.

On July 2020, UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, has released the latest edition of its flagship Global Barometer research<sup>130</sup>, which takes the pulse of the exhibition industry. The report highlights the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the exhibition industry worldwide. Globally, 85% of companies declared their overall level of activity was “normal” in January. This quickly dropped to 15% in March, to reach between 5% and 6% in April, May and June. For both April and May, 73% of companies

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<sup>128</sup> KAI, Hattendorf, UFI Managing Director, April 2020.

<sup>129</sup> MANCINI, Giovanna, *Salone del Mobile, edizione 2020 cancellata per coronavirus*, Il Sole 24 ORE, March 27, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-coronavirus-ferma-grandi-eventi-anche-salone-mobile-il-rinvio-AD2zJNG>.

<sup>130</sup> The Global Barometer is a bi-annual report on industry developments within the exhibition world. The study based on a global survey, concluded in July 2020, represents up-to-date information on the development and outlook of the global exhibition industry as well as on 20 countries and 5 aggregated regional zones (North America, Central and South America, Europe, Middle East/Africa, Asia/Pacific).

worldwide declared “no activity”. Globally, industry revenues for the first half of 2020 dropped by two thirds on average, compared with the same period last year. Looking at 2020 as a whole, it is currently expected that revenues will represent only<sup>131</sup>:

- 44% of those from 2019 in Europe and North America
- 39% in Asia-Pacific
- 33% in Central and South America
- 31% in the Middle East and Africa

These numbers indicate the level of activity of companies for the first half of 2020, and the expectations for the second half of 2020.

As already established, exhibitions events have a direct impact on the territories where they are held, the total output not produced, for the exhibition industry itself (including venues, organizers and service providers) and for all the industries that benefit from participants’ expenditure (accommodation, restaurants, transport), is estimated to be a minimum of \$180 billion, and translate into 1.9 million jobs affect globally. In particular:

- \$59 billion for Europe
- \$76 billion for North America
- \$40 billion for Asia-Pacific

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<sup>131</sup> TATRO, India, *COVID-19, Impact on Trade Shows and Events: A List of Cancelled and Postponed Events*, September 4, 2020. Available at: <https://www.keypointintelligence.com/news/editors-desk/2020/april/covid-19-impact-on-trade-shows-and-events/>.



Exhibitions are strong and important communication channels for companies to develop their business: the lack of exhibitions, combined with the fact that many international trade fairs have been postponed, has put a hold on contracts being drawn up between exhibitors and visitors because they meet at exhibitions. Based on current predictions, a minimum of \$290 billions of contracts were not signed.<sup>132</sup> With regard to the four most important countries from the exhibition industry point of view (U.S., China, Germany and Italy) many national and international fairs during these months have been cancelled or postponed.

In March 2020, the U.S. Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR), released a project of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the American exhibition industry. As of 15 March 2020, 50 trade fair events have announced their cancellation. These 50 events amounted to a total loss of \$318 million in show organizer revenue, taking into account direct spending of exhibitors and attendees, the loss to the economy stands at \$1.8 billion. At the end of May, 80% of U.S. exhibitions events were cancelled or postponed, with a total loss of \$3.6 billion in show organizer revenue. Combined with direct spending by exhibitors and attendees, CEIR estimates that the total loss for the U.S. economy is going to be \$22 billion<sup>133</sup>.

In Germany, AUMA, the Association of the German Trade Fair Industry, calculates that cancellations and postponements of German exhibitions may cost up to €3 billion in 2020.

In Italy, according to AEFI, it is estimated that at the end of 2020, the Italian trade fair system will lose €900 million.

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<sup>132</sup> ROKOU, Tatiana, *Global assessment of escalating economic impact of COVID-19 on trade shows and exhibitions*, Daily News, Los Angeles, March 23, 2020. Available at: <https://www.traveldailynews.com/post/global-assessment-of-the-escalating-economic-impact-of-covid-19-on-trade-shows-and-exhibitions>.

<sup>133</sup> CEIR reports on Economic Impact of COVID-19 to U.S Exhibition Industry, March 2020. Available at: <https://www.ceir.org/news/ceir-reports-on-economic-impact-of-covid-19-to-u-s-exhibition-industry/>.

*Case study: The China International Import Expo (CIIE) 中国国际进口博览会*

The Chinese trade fair industry seems to be the one that has reacted better and faster to the global economic crisis. In fact, unlike Europe and the United States, where the exhibition world has yet to effectively start again, in China many fairs have been reopened. However, even the Chinese exhibition sector has suffered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought many problems from a logistical, organizational and economic point of view. In order to better understand the problems that the pandemic has brought to the industry, I want to consider the China International Import Expo, a trade show that will be held in Shanghai in November.

中国国际进口博览会，简称 CIIE 或进博会，由中华人民共和国商务部，上海市人民政府主办，是世界上第一个以进口为主题的大型国家级展览，旨在坚定支持贸易自由化和经济全球化，主动向世界开放市场。举办中国国际进口博览会是中国政府坚定支持贸易自由化和经济全球化，主动向世界开放市场的重大举措，有利于促进世界各国加强经贸交流合作，促进全球贸易和世界经济增长，推动开放型世界经济发展。中国国际进口博览会作为世界上第一个以进口为主题的大型国家级展会，包括展会和论坛两个部分。展会既国家贸易投资综合展（简称国家展）和企业商业展（简称企业展），论坛即虹桥国际经贸论坛。

2020 年 11 月 5 日至 10 日，第三届中国国际进口博览会在中国上海举办。第三届进口博览会首次设置公共卫生，非银行金融等新题材，同时，首次开启“边招展，边对接”模式，帮助全球参展商和采购商更好对接<sup>134</sup>。

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<sup>134</sup> China International Import Expo, official websites. Available at: <https://www.ciie.org/zbh/en/>.

The China International Import Expo (CIIE) is a trade fair held in autumn annually since 2018 in Shanghai. The CIIE is the first fair dedicated to import exhibition in the world. In the fair, many foreign companies can introduce themselves to the Chinese market and explore opportunities for local cooperation. The CIIE is organized by the China International Import Expo Bureau and the National Exhibition and Convention Center. The partners are the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Program, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Trade Center. The 2019 China International Import Expo was attended by 181 countries, 380 thousand exhibitors, and over 500 thousand buyers on an exhibition area of 360,000 square meters. The fair is divided into two sectors: the exhibition sector, where local or foreign exhibitors can actually exhibit their products or services (also divided into several sub-sectors) and a forum, where the various industry conferences are held.

The 2019 edition of the fair was based on the theme “New era, sharing the future” and the ten top countries and regions in the business and commercial exhibition area that participated in the event were in order: the United States, Japan, Germany, Hong Kong, South Korea, Italy, France, Australia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. In the 2019 edition, many high-quality international products have made their way into China and have quickly become popular in the market. For example, the sale of the smallest pacemaker has been presented and approved in the country, many stores sell folding glasses that can be reduced to 9mm and the new generation of the Swiss range knife has already been used for over 200 Chinese patients. All of this has given to foreign investors a clear perception: as long as high-quality products and services can be launched, the enormous potential of the Chinese market remains unimaginable. Especially in the context of the current rise of protectionism and unilateralism and the slowdown in global

trade and investment, a permanently open Chinese market is an unmissable opportunity for them.

However, after a sensational edition like the one in 2019, the fair today has to deal with the problems caused by the current pandemic.

The 2020 edition of the Expo will also be organized in sectoral pavilions, divided by products and services. Interested companies, in the various specialized halls, can participate with individual stands or within collective exhibition areas.

The products sector includes:

- Quality life (luxury products, fashion furniture and jewelry)
- Sci-tech life
- Automobile
- High End Intelligent Equipment
- Food & agricultural products
- Medical equipment, healthcare products

The services sector includes:


- Tourism
- Financial services
- Culture & Education
- Logistics


The 2020 edition of the fair, despite fears that contagious may arise, will take place in presence, and this has brought many problems to international exhibitors and buyers. In fact, for all those arriving from abroad there is a two-week quarantine, which can be carried out in the facilities affiliated with the fair (hotels, apartments) or in their home in Shanghai (in case a foreign exhibitor has one). Only some conferences that will be held in the first days of the fair, such as those promoted by the ICBC (the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China – 中国工商银行股份有限公司) will be held online. Currently, the data shows that, the countries that will participate in the fair will be not more than 90 (so half of the countries that participated in the 2019 edition) and buyers seem to be no more than 150 thousand (therefore 100 less than last year).


Moreover, according to the China-Italy Chamber of Commerce, which every year organizes the participation of Italian companies in the various Chinese fair, this year only 12 Italian companies have applied for participation in the China International Import Expo fair, while last year there were more than 80 Italian companies that took part in the fair. In addition, the Chinese government has no yet issued the various invitations for participation in the fair, so companies worldwide still do not have the security of being invited, to have time to complete all visa procedures, and to carry out the mandatory quarantine. In short, companies still do not have the security of actually participating in the event.

All these organizational and logistical problems not only risk to damage the numerous local and international exhibitors, who in this way cannot actually participate in the fair and therefore exhibit their products, but also, and above all, the success of the fair itself, a fair which in 2019, had a potential import market of \$ 10 billion.

Around the world, many authorities are now allowing exhibitions and businesses events to take place again, given certain preconditions and protective measures are put in place. Obviously, according to UFI's research, European, American, Asian and African states are responding differently to the reopening of the Exhibition events. The following tables show how the different state have responded to the reopening of trade fair events, in particular<sup>135</sup>:

 Means that the fairs are open unconditionally or open with some restrictions, such as sanitary measures, distancing or other measures.

 Means that the fairs are partially open, with some restrictions or are expected to open (but the open date is not officially confirmed).

 Means that fairs are closed, or the country is in lockdown.

 Means that the Status is unclear

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<sup>135</sup> Re opening of the Exhibition Industry, Exhibitions & Events re opening by market, following the COVID-19 pandemic, September 17, 2020. Available at: [https://www.ufi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Reopening\\_of\\_exhibitions\\_global\\_timeline\\_\\_17-september.pdf](https://www.ufi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Reopening_of_exhibitions_global_timeline__17-september.pdf).

Market	2020					
	July	August	September	October	November	December
Australia	Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Cambodia	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
China	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Hong Kong	Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
India	Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Indonesia	Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Japan	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Macau	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Malaysia	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Myanmar	Red	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow
New Zealand	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Pakistan	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Yellow
Philippines	Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Singapore	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
South Korea	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Taiwan	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Thailand	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Vietnam	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow

Market	2020					
	July	August	September	October	November	December
Austria	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Belgium	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Bulgaria	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Croatia	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Finland	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
France	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green
Germany	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Greece	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Italy	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Latvia	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Luxembourg	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Netherlands	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Poland	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Portugal	Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Russia	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Spain	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Switzerland	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Turkey	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green
Ukraine	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
UK	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green

## AMERICAS

		2020					
Market		July	August	September	October	November	December
Argentina		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Bolivia		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Brazil		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Canada		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Costa Rica		Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Cuba		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Chile		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Colombia		Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Ecuador		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
El Salvador		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Guatemala		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Honduras		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Mexico		Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Nicaragua		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Panama		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Peru		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
USA		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow

## MEA

		2020					
Market		July	August	September	October	November	December
Algeria		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Bahrain		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Egypt		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Jordan		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Kuwait		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Lebanon		Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Morocco		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Oman		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
Qatar		Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Saudi Arabia		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
South Africa		Red	Red	Red	Grey	Grey	Grey
UAE		Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green

The tables shows that continents (Asia and Europe) and the countries (China, South Korea, Taiwan, Italy, Spain, Netherlands) that were affected earlier by the pandemic are responding more quickly and efficiently to the reopening of trade fairs, while the situation in America and in Africa (apart from a few exceptions) still seems quite serious.



Since March, the world has wondered when we will be able again to return to normal, including the tradeshows and exhibitions we've attended in the past and the way we've attended them in the past. It may be a while. For trade show managers, in the event of a disaster, it has always been important to develop emergency plans, but the COVID-19 pandemic will change the way we make these plans. The pandemic surprised the entire industry and caused huge financial losses. Exhibitions managers must will do more in the future to prevent unforeseen situations. It may be a year or two, hopefully no longer, before we can see those crowded aisles again. Just like we've adapted to Zoom calls, Microsoft Teams meeting and, on a larger scale, virtual conferences, the trade show industry is now adapting to virtual events. Companies are already considering ways in order to reduce the participation in live events and reallocate budgets. As a result, the following trade show alternatives were discussed<sup>136</sup>:

- Virtual tradeshows: discussion about traditional face-to-face shows online will save the company the cost of travel, accommodation and booth construction and dismantling.
- Showcase webinars: the company can hold some webinars, inviting industry insiders, consumers and journalists to introduce new products or services.
- Special events: more and more companies are now considering holding their own events for their industry, inviting only a few people to live the events online.

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<sup>136</sup> BURDURLU, Erol, *COVID-19 and the Future of Tradeshows*, July 13, 2020. Available at: <https://www.expotoolsusa.com/covid-19-and-the-future-of-tradeshows/>.

With the right technology, these virtual trade shows can fill the void as we wait for a return to being able to get on a plane, fly to a major convention city, check into a hotel, meet a colleague for dinner and then brave the crowds at a massive expo hall<sup>137</sup>. There are a number of companies that can help organizations take their shows to virtual level, one of these is Intrado<sup>138</sup>: its goal is to eliminate “pain points”, including low audience retention, inability to measure influence, lack of participant and so on. The experience they provide is similar to a high-end computer game, with rich graphics and details. In a virtual environment, the ability to interact with others is a normal video call. In this way, users can experience the lobby, resource center and exhibition hall: everything they might experience at a live event. In addition, people can gamify the experience and award prizes for time spent in the exhibit hall, the number of exhibits visited and more. Contests with prizes may be a huge motivation for attendees to visit specific booths. The demand for virtual trade shows has led to many innovations and new integrations of products and services in the event industry, all of which are designed to create participant experiences that compete with live events.

Another way tradeshow technology can make tradeshow safer after the COVID-19 pandemic is by making contactless tradeshow possible. RFID<sup>139</sup> tracking has been used in events and attendees’ activities. RFID badges can also allow the participation in special events and seminars inside the show. Trade show managers and exhibitors can access this data through software and mobile applications, which eliminates the need for close

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<sup>137</sup> HYKEN, Shep, *Trade Show and Exhibitions in The Post-COVID-19 Era*, Forbes, New Jersey, August 9, 2020. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shephyken/2020/08/09/trade-shows-and-exhibitions-in-the-post-covid-19-era/#5a7014692810>.

<sup>138</sup> Intrado, formerly West Corporation, is an American telecommunication company. Intrado reorganized in four main segments: Life and Safety, Enterprise Collaboration, Digital Media and Health and Wellness.

<sup>139</sup> RFID is an acronym for “radio-frequency identification” and refers to a technology whereby digital data encoded in RFID tags or smart labels are captured by a reader via radio waves.

contact with attendees. Because the RFID tracking system automatically collects important attendee data, exhibitors can still talk to attendees within a safe distance.

Anyway, although the discussion of these alternatives in the current pandemic has attracted attention, there is no reason to believe that these alternatives will replace traditional live exhibitions. In the long run, the experience of face-to-face and personally experiencing products with important players in the industry is too great to be completely replaced by virtual events. The trade show industry will continue to develop, and traditional tradeshows will retain in their importance when we will be able to move past the pandemic<sup>140</sup>.

Currently, it is difficult to determine when the global tradeshow industry will stabilize after COVID-19 is no longer a direct threat. There is likely to be a strong demand as event organizers will try and find way to make their postponed events happen. This may cause many activities to occur in a short period of time, which will reduce the supply of available space and personnel to help carry out the activities. As the organizer may be reluctant to arrange a trade show immediately for fear of cancelling event, the opposite may happen. For everyone involved, the best scenario is that the trade show industry stabilizes and returns to a level of activity similar to the days before the pandemic.

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<sup>140</sup> BURDURLU, Erol, *COVID-19 and the Future of Tradeshows*, July 13, 2020. Available at: <https://www.expotoolsusa.com/covid-19-and-the-future-of-tradeshows/>.

## Conclusions

Fairs, today as in the past, represent a unique opportunity for different people to meet and exchange not only commercial goods, but also culture, ideas and innovations. The evolution of fairs has been a companion to the economic development of the old continent, but also of those areas that today represent emerging countries and therefore the future of our planet. The dominant theme today in B2B trade fairs is internationalization, therefore the need of companies to broaden the horizon of their markets and consequently the need of fair organizers to conceive their events in an increasingly global perspective. The competition between trade fair events increasingly takes on the dimension of a comparison between “country systems” that are able to support the internationalization process of the respective companies. The fair is therefore a meeting place between supply and demand, a place of communication at 360 degrees, strategic and irreplaceable for companies, one of the few opportunities to meet customers and get to know them personally. Consequently, an accurate preparation phase is necessary to make the fair experience a success to be repeated also in the following editions.

Data shows that China, the second largest economy in the world, has had and is currently experiencing an increase in the exhibition sector. As a matter of fact, many of the largest and most famous trade fairs in the world are nowadays found in China, for example those of Canton, Shanghai or Beijing. These fairs probably have contributed more than any other factor to promote “Made in China” by bringing Chinese artifacts to invade the most remote corners of our planet. Trade fairs facilitate movement of huge capital at an international level, thus supporting the expansion and consolidation of the Chinese international market. Participation in Chinese trade fairs is not only essential for

those companies that want to expand their markets in the Asian country, but also for all those that want to establish themselves globally, because it allows to quickly and concretely understand the real situation of the sector in question. Participating in a trade fair is therefore an opportunity to establish new contacts, a fundamental element for the Chinese culture, whose network of knowledge (关系) represents a reference point in the personal, economic, social life of individuals: an added value that goes beyond the value that the network has in the west.

Unfortunately, all this recently came to halt, because of the global COVID-19 health emergency. The pandemic is having a big impact on the world economy and on the global trade fair system, that was one of the first economic activities to pay the effects of this pandemic. Fairs and events worldwide have been cancelled or postponed, causing considerable damage to the countries concerned. Some trade fair organizers have considered viable alternatives to “in presence” trade events, such as virtual tradeshows; however, these digital fairs are now not able to replicate the typical characteristics of traditional physical events, made up of people, meetings, presentations and shows.

Nevertheless it is very likely that there will be a recovery, and a consequent increase in trade fair activities; representatives of the various economic sectors will be attracted to China because of its expanding role in the global market, a role that will hopefully accompanied by a sustainable development, respectful of the environment and its inhabitants.

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