The Function of Art in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *An Artist of the Floating World, Never Let Me Go* and *Nocturnes*
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Ernest Hemingway said that: “writing, at its best, is a lonely life”. After finishing this thesis, I deeply understand the meaning of writing. For me, writing is not just a lonely trip but a reflection to myself, which bring me an opportunity to face or break my limit and struggle for a brand new self. However, when writing this sentence, I don’t feel lonely or painful anymore because love and courage are always with me.
摘要

本論文採用文化資本主義之觀點來探討石黑一雄筆下之藝術運作，並以《浮世畫家》、《別讓我走》、《夜曲》為例。這三部作品裡的主要角色皆有他們審視藝術作品的方式，然而本論文證實他們操弄的方式皆有一定的規則變化：皆從純藝術美學轉變至具有社會與政治意圖之藝術作品。此藝術功能的改變來自於機械複製與文化場域中社會活動。在其多重影響下，藝術作品已不是藝術家的情感抒發或移情作用，而是文化結構下的產物。

首先，本論文將採用王爾德（Oscar Wilde）對純藝術的觀點來定義藝術本質與藝術家的責任，並以班雅明（Walter Benjamin）之理論探究機械複製下藝術作品的改變，最後則用布迪厄（Pierre Bourdieu）的概念來探索藝術在文化場域裡的運作模式。第一章將以在《浮世畫家》裡，主角小野增二在浮世價值中的定位與走向，再探究藝術的市場運作，及藝術如何與社會接軌；第二章先辨別《浮世畫家》裡，主角小野增二在浮世價值中的定位與走向，再探究藝術的市場運作，及藝術家如何與社會接軌；第三章將探討《夜曲》裡的藝術運作模式，點出其文化場域中，藝術家、觀眾及經紀人之市場定位與相互關係，並衍生出觀眾品味上的區隔。本論文將證實在消費者主義與資本主義的時代下，純藝術的觀念早已衰亡，取而代之的是，在社會與政治意圖建構下的藝術作品。
Abstract

This thesis adopts the perspective of cultural materialism to examine the operation of art in three of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels: An Artist of the Floating World, Never Let Me Go and Nocturnes. Characters in each novel have their own ways of valuing artworks; this thesis aims to prove that their uses of art follow a routine change from pure art to the social or political practice of art. This change of art comes from the influence of mechanical reproduction and social activity in the cultural field. Under these influences, artworks no longer reflect an artist’s empathy but rather become a product of the cultural structure. This thesis will first use Oscar Wilde’s views to deal with the definition of pure art and the duty of an artist, and then will seek to discover the change of mechanical reproduction in artworks through Walter Benjamin’s concepts, and finally adopt Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts to explore the operation of art in the cultural field.

The first chapters examine the meaning of art between clones and humans in Never Let Me Go and how they instrumentalize art for individual purposes through reproduction. The second chapter identifies Ono’s position in floating trends in An Artist of the Floating World and discovers how art operates in the market and artists establish social relations. The third chapter probes the operation of art in Nocturnes to clarify the position of artists, agents and audience in the cultural field, and investigates the relation between people involved in art and the distinction of taste in audience. This thesis will aim to prove that in the consumerist and capitalist age, there is no pure art but only socially and politically constructed art in our society.

Keywords: Art, Ishiguro, Walter Benjamin, Reproduction, Pierre Bourdieu
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Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro, a Japanese-British novelist, has published six novels and several short stories until now. Despite different contexts and framework, the themes in most of his works are related to universal human events which happen not only in his works but also in the real world. Several works subject to Ishiguro’s technique reflect similar characteristics regarding protagonists’ personality, beliefs, behaviors and careers. His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, concerns narrator Etsuko’s relationship with her two daughters and their life in post-war Nagasaki. His second novel *An Artist of the Floating World* introduces a retired artist, Masuji Ono, who propagandizes jingoism and imperialism but gets swamped by the changing social values. His third novel, *The Remains of the Day*, focuses on an English butler who believes he is playing important role in service, but it turns out to be a vain delusion. The fourth novel *The Unconsoled* deals with a pianist, Ryder, who visits an unnamed town and gives a recital to ameliorate the artistic crisis there. The fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans*, is about a well-known English detective named Christopher Banks, a once-supposed orphan who is eager to investigate the kidnapping of his parents in China. The sixth novel, *Never Let Me Go*, deals with clones’ story narrated by Kathy who recalls her previous life in Hailsham and her relationship with Tommy. Also, his short fiction *Nocturnes: Five Stories of Music and Nightfall* deals with musicians’ changes in seeking to survive, and their ups and downs in the music industry.

These works deal with universal human issues about characters’ memory, regret and struggle in their life style and job choice. Besides that, the connection between characters and art is also an impressive point in Ishiguro’s works. Art issues can be
related to narrators’ careers choices, interests, tastes and education. In several novels, art reflects characters’ social class and educational level. Ishiguro’s first treatment of art can be seen in his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, which is narrated by a painter and comprises the lifelong career in art. Also, *The Unconsoled* deals with audience’s wish to change their deteriorating musical taste through listening to good music. In particular, *Never Let Me Go* builds a world where the definition of humans hinges on artistic creativity. The short fiction *Nocturnes* even covers all those involved in art in the operation of the art market, such as artists, audience and agents. Creators’ social status and individual intention will change their style and function in artworks. In this way, artworks and artistic performance become a method for readers to understand the characters. These examples manifest the significance of art in Ishiguro’s mind and his technique of connecting characters with art in different fields. In effect, the possible reason for Ishiguro’s combination of art in the novel results from his background and multiple positions in his career/life.

In Ishiguro’s career, he had many experiences in various positions across different fields, such as novelist, screenwriter and song writer (Bigsby 18). These experiences help him depict the ups and downs of his art-linked characters, as he understands the development and situation of the art market. Therefore, various fields of art are mentioned in the novels: literature, paintings and music. Among these novels, *Never Let Me Go*, with a variety of classic literature mentioned by the narrator, serves as the best example to illustrate Ishiguro’s use of art to beautify and enhance the quality of his characters’ educational level and class. Other than literature and music, paintings are the only visual art that can be equipped with two different meanings both on the surface and deep inside. *An Artist of the Floating World* is the only novel that especially emphasizes paintings as the characters’ connection to the world. Besides, *Never Let Me Go* also
concerns the function of paintings, and considers it as the evidence of clones’ souls. Both novels demonstrate how Ishiguro adopts paintings as an approach to shorten the distance between artists and society. With musical empathy and social connection to artworks, both novels illustrate Ishiguro’s use of art and his attitude toward artworks in many conditions and fields. That is also the reason why this thesis takes these novels as the examples for research.

Differing from literature and paintings which only appear in a few novels, music is the cardinal concern among these novels due to Ishiguro’s personal interest. Gerry Smyth finds that “Ishiguro’s interest in music appears to arise in the first instance from his personal experience; like many young men of his generation, his earliest attempts at artistic expression were through the medium of the guitar-based song” (146). According to Smyth, Ishiguro has been influenced by the popular music from the 1960s to 1970s, as well as the “consequence of globalization and the impact of digitalization upon traditional cultural practice” (145). Under this condition, music becomes Ishiguro’s means to respond to the world. As a result, Ishiguro instills his taste and idea of music into the setting and plot of his novels. The Unconsoled and Nocturnes serve as Ishiguro’s typical works in regard to the installment of musical connections with characters and plots. In The Unconsoled, the protagonist Ryder is considered a leader who can solve the problem of a diminishing musical value in one town. However, due to the complex setting comprising memory, consciousness, dream and reality, readers often fail to identify the problem and value of music in the novel, and even Ryder never performs any recital in that town to manifest his music talent. The Unconsoled focuses only on Ryder’s reaction to the changes in reality and how he struggles between dreams and real world. Music, despite the major concern and function in the novel, cannot be related to this thesis due to its lack of connection to the art market and reproduction. It
fails to be the best example to explore the function of art in Ishiguro’s works. Conversely, *Nocturnes* clearly demonstrates how musicians change and survive under the challenge of communism and mainstream culture worldwide. It focuses on the circulated relations among artists, audience and agents. Both the challenge and the relations form the operation of art in the art market, which is connected to Ishiguro’s previous experiences in the musical industry. While some novels are also related to music, they just occupy a few parts there. For example, the title of *Never Let Me Go* is named after a song “from the so-called ‘Great American Songbook’ – a repertoire of twentieth-century jazz-tinged standards” (Smyth 144). In the novel, even clones can appreciate music and express their own understanding of the lyrics. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, there is a composer, Yukio Naguchi, who wields art to promote jingoism like Ono does. Unlike Ono’s attitude and reaction toward his previous behaviors, he cannot stand public denigration and commits suicide due to his shame. Naguchi’s case contradicts Ono’s but reflects the different ways artists face their past. Among these novels, *Nocturnes* is undeniably the optimal example to examine Ishiguro’s function of a musical association to the characters.

Mostly, Ishiguro’s art-related characters always go all out to pursue their dreams and targets through artworks but eventually face disillusionment. During their struggle, they will hesitate between the sacrifice of creativity for recognition and the cruelty stemming from the truth or reality in real world. These characters need others’ judgment and criticism to prove their potential and proficiency in art in relation to the general public. Mark Mazullo comments: “Ishiguro’s novels are filled with artists hungry for meaningful social relationships, striving to unearth the ethical core of their vocation, and often failing in the process” (78). Artists’ ethical standards and social relations with the public are the common issues in these three novels. For instance, Ono’s military
propaganda through his paintings becomes the mainstream and attracts the public during war time. Ono gains social and political relations with the general public but faces a problem: whether it is ethical for artists to boost specific groups or organizations through artworks for fame and fortune. Also, when clones are able to manifest their creativity in art, resulting in social relations with people, the ethical controversy lies in the fact that it is cruel to take organs from these human clones that possess souls and manifest love. Moreover, in Nocturnes, musicians’ ethical problems consist in their sacrifices of creativity for social relations and recognition to audience. Furthermore, from the social connection come the growth of market value and the demand for reproduction of artworks. These two factors erase artworks from the realm of pure art. All the issues related to social and ethical concerns connect these three novels together and show how connected the Ishiguro’s artistic characters to the social and ethical order.

The intention of this thesis is to explore the function and operation of art as a theme in three of Ishiguro’s novels: An Artist of the Floating World, Never Let Me Go, and Nocturnes. It will first examine Ishiguro’s treatment of art in each novel and adopt Oscar Wilde’s view of art as a standard to judge artists’ duty and the quality of artworks. Also, since characters create and reproduce artworks for social and political use, the function of art will be examined according to Walter Benjamin’s idea of mechanical reproduction in artworks. Through his theory, this thesis will unveil the change of artworks after reproduction in regard to authority and authenticity. Beside Benjamin, John Berger’s idea of image in reproduced artworks will be used to examine the changing meanings in reproduced images. In this thesis, Wilde’s and Benjamin’s ideas, which contrast, are employed to make a comparison in the use of art between characters; Berger’s idea is to expand Benjamin’s concept of reproduction. Related to the function of art is its operation in the market and field. When art works in social and political
ways, it will involve social activity and economic concerns. The operation of art will be probed according to Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of the cultural field. Through the observation of cultural field, this thesis can clearly identify the importance of all those involved in art and its circulation to maintain its operation in the cultural field. Besides Wilde’s idea, other theories convey a view of cultural materialism which locates art and culture in a structured hierarchy. This thesis focuses on three novels with different fields of art and arguments but similar themes and concerns as a whole.

Each novel forms a chapter in this thesis. The chapter summary will come first and then the summary of these novels. Chapter one, “Imitation versus Creativity in *Never Let Me Go*”, focuses on the conflict between reproduced and original artworks from clones and humans. First, in this chapter Oscar Wilde’s ideas of art are used to discover the importance of creativity in clones and humans, in attempting to define what pure art is. Through Benjamin’s theory, it will illustrate the process of change from pure art to functional art. From the idea of reproduction comes the fear of being replaced. The argument consists of the decline of the aura in the original works and humans due to the influence of reproduced art and clones. Humans, under this condition, face the threat from their own artificial products.

Ishiguro’s sixth novel *Never Let Me Go*, published in 2005, consists of a clone narrator Kathy’s reminiscence of early life with other characters Tommy and Ruth from the Hailsham institution, Cottage for clones, to being a carer of donors. Through Kathy’s eyes, we can discover the interaction and relation between clones and humans. According to the setting of this novel, clones are reproduced and disciplined by some institutions to donate their organs to society. Many institutions segregate clones from the outside world and the general public. Nevertheless, Hailsham, to which the leading characters’ belong, serves as the only institution that offers clones education and treats
them in a human way. Especially, Hailsham only offers clones the subject of humanities rather than science because they underline clones’ artistic performance and regard these artworks as a demonstration of both clones’ and humans’ struggle. After Hailsham, the clones move to Cottage for the preparation of their organ donation. In that place, clones adapt themselves to society and start to discuss the differences of students from Hailsham. In effect, Hailsham’s special emphasis on clones’ artworks brings some suspicions and rumors among clones, including the narrator Kathy. These rumors are said to concern clones’ souls, love, aesthetics and the qualification for deferral of donation. After realizing the truth from Madame, the creator of Hailsham, Kathy learns that all these rumors only relate to humans’ own purposes and benefits instead of the clones’ souls or deferral. In this way, Kathy and the other clones must face their machine-like destiny.

Chapter Two, “The Floating Function and Value in Art in An Artist of the Floating World”, probes how artists connect with economic concerns, social order and political values. It will starts from Ono’s career life and changeable position in floating world to unveil how these trends and values influence Ono’s ideas of art. Also, both Benjamin’s and John Berger’s ideas of reproduction in artworks and their images are adopted to manifest how Ono’s paintings arouse the general public. This chapter fully examines Ono’s purposes and manipulations, and proves it to be political practice in art. Artworks, under this condition, are far from the concept of art for art’s sake.

An Artist of the Floating World, Ishiguro’s second novel, published in 1989, deals with a once-famous artist, Masuji Ono, his present life with his family and how he faces the changes in Japan after World War II. The story, narrated by Ono, covers his childhood, career life and memories before the war and his daughter Noriko’s marriage affair. Since childhood, Ono wanted to be an artist irrespective of father’s rejection and
family business demands. In this career, he changed workplaces three times, including the Takeda firm, Mori-san’s villa and Okada-Shingen Society. Takeda’s firm is Ono’s first stage where he never created artworks but only produced commodities for foreigners. This firm is not what Ono sees as a place of pure art but rather a factory which caters to market demand. Subsequently, he moves to Mori-san’s villa where artists are isolated from the real world for the sake of creativity in art and the transient beauty of the floating world. However, due to Matsuda’s influence and Ono’s hatred of business corruption, he starts to consider artists’ duty in society and criticizes Mori-san’s luxurious lifestyle and floating art. After discovering the dark side of society and artists’ ignorance of the real world, Ono determines to join Okada-Shingen Society and instill his real function in artworks. In Okada-Shingen Society, Ono promotes jingoism through artworks and presents them with images. What he paints becomes military propaganda that spreads the spirit of imperialism. During wartime, Ono earns considerable fame and fortune by virtue of his military style. Yet, after the war, the spirit that he used to follow and promote turns out to be disillusioned. He confronts the dilemma between the traditional values and the new order; his values are contrasted to his grandson Ichiro’s. Despite his reluctance to forsake past glory and social value, he still condemns himself for his promotion of jingoism and assumes that his previous behaviors obstructed his daughter’s marriage. While lingering between his responsibility and shame, Ono, after everything is settled down, gradually becomes open-minded to face the brand new values in Japanese society.

The last chapter “The Circulation of Art in Cultural Field in Nocturnes” investigates how artists become popular and successful through their social activity in the cultural field. It first examines the way to be recognized by the audience, and analyzes the pros and cons of keeping the original artistic purity or following
mainstream culture. Beside the appropriate way to be recognized, audience’s taste and preferences are also required to be explored by Bourdieu’s idea. From the audience’s involvement in the art market comes the function of agents in the cultural field. This chapter identifies the position and function of all those involved in art, in order to understand the operation and circulation of cultural field.

Ishiguro’s collection *Nocturnes*, published in 2009, consists of five short stories related to music and art. The protagonists or narrators in these stories are usually musicians or music lovers. These stories include “Crooner”, “Come Rain or Come Shine”, “Malvern Hills”, “Nocturne” and “Cellists”. The first story “Crooner” deals with a guitar player named Jan who comes from a previously communist country and works in Venice. While playing music for a band in front of a coffee shop, Jan happens to meet the idol in his childhood, Tony Gardner, a once famous American singer. After several talks, Tony Gardner asks Jan to serenade with him for his wife Lindy Gardner. Without hesitation, Jan accepts his request and regards it as an honor. This serenade with Tony Gardner not only changes the Gardner couple’s future but also Jan’s ideas about the musical industry.

Differing from “Crooner”, the protagonist in “Come Rain or Come Shine” is not a musician but a music lover, Raymond, who teaches English and has no enthusiasm for his routine life. The story focuses on Raymond’s trip to meet his old friends, the couple Emily and Charlie. Raymond is Emily’s bosom friend due to their matching musical taste back in college. Besides a reunion, Charlie requires Raymond to revive his broken marriage with Emily. When staying in their home, Raymond deliberately reads Emily’s notebook on the table and discovers some comments which criticize him. He is too furious to recover his mistake of peek and turns out to make a mess in her house. After Raymond’s confession, Emily forgives him and they enjoy the old time American music
and their memories. The story ends with Raymond’s dancing with Emily without any clues to indicate the result of their marriage and friendship.

The third story, “Malvern Hills”, deals with an unnamed narrator who is a young songwriter searching for an opportunity to succeed in his musical career. Disappointed with the music industry in London, the narrator moves to the Malvern Hill where his sister runs a coffee shop and gives him a job. When trying to compose a new song on the hill, he encounters the Swiss couple Tilo and Sonja, customers whom he has served before. As professional musicians, Tilo and Sonja appreciate the narrator’s musical talent and give him some suggestions. After this encounter, Tilo and Sonja quarrel about the choice they made during the trip. This conflict manifests their difference in personality and attitude toward everything, including musical taste and attitude toward narrator’s future plans. The couple’s different attitudes and quarrel provide the narrator with some room to reassess his music and position in musical industry.

The fourth story, “Nocturne”, records the change of a middle-aged saxophonist, Steve, who fails to manifest his musical skills and still waits for any opportunity to succeed. Without remarkable features and appearance to attract audience, Steve, persuaded by his manager, accepts to undergo plastic surgery, for which his ex-wife Helen’s husband pays. In the recovery stage, Steve meets Tony Gardner’s ex-wife Lindy staying in the next room. As all the chance-takers who struggle for reputation in the same way, Steve and Lindy keep in touch and share their opinions on music and the entertainment industry. They even attempt to undermine the music award ceremony because Steve thinks the winner is unqualified. After several disagreements, they stand aloof from each other. The story ends by the time Steve is waiting to take off the bandage on his face for a new life and start in the field of music.

The last story “Cellists” is about a bizarre and mysterious relationship between a
Hungarian cellist, Tibor, and an American music lover, Eloise McCormack. Having graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in London, Tibor stays in some city in Italy and waits for a chance to success. In a coffee shop, he meets McCormack who proclaims that she had attended his recital before. McCormack constantly mentions Tibor’s potential in music and believes that she is the only person to nurture his talent. Afraid to offend McCormack’s pretended status and profession, Tibor accepts her training and comments. During their practice, he never receives any concrete suggestions or sees her playing the cello. Tibor’s suspicion unveils the truth that McCormack cannot play the cello but still sees herself as gifted in music and able to tutor him. After a confession, McCormack returns to America for marriage and Tibor accepts a job in Amsterdam to play music in a hotel.
Chapter One

Imitation versus Creativity in *Never Let Me Go*

Kazuo Ishiguro’s sixth novel *Never Let Me Go* prompts us to ponder whether clones’ artworks can prove their humanity and possession of souls. Besides the question of humanity, readers also cast doubt on whether clones possess creativity and originality in art. The controversy of clones’ artworks relates to Oscar Wilde’s definition of art and aesthetic value since clones never create artworks for economic or political reasons. Moreover, the artistic theme lies not only in clones but also in humans. Due to technological reproduction in art, readers fail to discover any difference between clones’ artworks and humans’. This ambiguous boundary between the originals works and the reproduced ones forms what Walter Benjamin describes in his art theory as the decline of authenticity and uniqueness in art works. Besides artworks, the existence of human clones possibly undermines the authenticity of real humans as well. This double complexity related to Benjamin’s reproduction brings controversy to humans and original works, which can be explored by his idea regarding the development of artworks.

The operation of art is another concern in the novel. As examined by Benjamin’s theory, the artworks by both clones and humans are proved to be equipped with functions or meaning. Clones’ artworks change from Wilde’s art for art’s sake to Benjamin’s functional art. In this way, the so-called art for art’s sake fails to be proved in this change due to the reproduction and multiple functions of individuals. Artworks become natural-born functional and feasible for the creators’ and audience’s use. Therefore, to identify and illustrate the function of art in *Never Let Me Go*, this chapter explores both humans’ and clones’ use of art, to fully understand the importance of art
Artworks in *Never Let Me Go* undergo two stages of change: the promotion of originality and the individual use of reproduction. This chapter will borrow the idea of individualism from Oscar Wilde to examine the significance of individuality with the emphasis on clones and their artworks. Their artworks explain why art becomes a tool used by clones and humans in *Never Let Me Go*. Also, to deal with the crisis of lacking an aura and the influence of mechanical reproduction on artworks, the second part of this chapter borrows the concept from Benjamin’s theory on artworks to explore the function of art for clones and humans.

**Pure Art: The Importance of Individuality and Creativity**

The possibility of clones possessing creativity is a repeatedly mentioned issue of the novel. This myth or rumor results from Hailsham’s emphasis on clones’ artwork as evidence of humanity and soul. For clones, their artworks not only manifest their possibility of having a soul but also become a path to construct their individuality. Clones’ individuality is evidence of creativity, singularity and individuality. The idea of artworks’ relation to individuality reflects Oscar Wilde’s concept of art and artists. Individuality, according to Wilde, is derived from the “condition of private property” to form what is inside man, his humanity (3). Wilde would argue that humans can still maintain their own individuality even under the socialism which deprives the right of private property for social balance. Therefore, individuality consists not only in what you own, personal property, but also in what is in your mind, creative ideas. Also, he emphasizes that “Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known” (13). Wilde’s individuality treats art not only as private property but also as the essence of humanity. This idea matches several points of the clones’ development of
individuality in the novel.

In the setting of the novel, clones are duplicated from original humans without individual singularity and characteristic. As a result, the idea of individuality from Wilde seems at first not to be feasible for clones. Rebecca L. Walkowitz observes the clones’ lack of individuality: “This distinction of individuality allows the donation system to function because while the humans value individuality above all and are able to distinguish individuality in themselves, they [humans] perceive the clones as lacking that highly valued individuality” (“A New Reading” 141). Individuality is used as a criterion to judge the superiority between clones and humans since humans believe that clones have no individuality. Despite Walkowitz’s argument, clones, under the discipline of Hailsham’s education in art, do have their own individuality through their artworks and humane behaviors, both of which manifest who they are.

Hailsham’s promotion of art lays the foundation for clones’ development of individuality. In addition to art education, Hailsham holds some “Exchanges” activities four times a year for clones to trade their artworks with tokens as money. This activity not only teaches clones how to appreciate or value art, but also instills the idea of private property in them. Kathy assumes the significance of “Exchanges” that “For a start, they were our only means, aside from the Sales—the Sales were something else, which I’ll come to later—of building up a collection of personal possessions” (NLMG 16). With private property, it is the first time that clones learn about individuality and humanization. Reflecting Wilde’s idea, clones would turn out to earn their individuality through these collections as their possession. The artworks which clones exchange in trading activities also symbolize their preference for personal taste in art. These collections form a sense of possession and individuality which render clones as possibly special and different from others or the original humans (Black 795). Therefore, these
activities fully navigate and emphasize clones’ taste, singularity and creativity in both art and humanity. Not as a real humans, clones create their own individuality in a social way—artistic education and activity.

Another activity concerning the proof of clones’ individuality is the visit of Madame, an organizer of Hailsham who collects their artworks for a clones’ once-believed gallery. Differing from the activity of exchange, Madame’s collecting offers clones spiritual value concerning their artworks rather than economic value like the label of tokens. Since Madame never returns their works or compensates them for anything, clones start to underline their own individuality and the value of their artworks, the “most remarkable stuff” (NLMG 39). Clones’ emphasis on tokens ignores the aesthetic value in their works. Although Madame’s collecting of artworks deprives clones of private property, this activity instructs them how to view themselves and their creativity through individuality. The switch from the focus on the quality of art’s to that of value in property is related to Wilde’s concern about individuality. Wilde would argue that “For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individuality, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray” (6). What Wilde would state is that individuality should not linger with the ownership of products but should return to the authors’ humanity and soul. Therefore, clones should emphasize what they learned and discovered in artistic education instead of the value or loss of property. Wilde’s argument is romantic but viable because the product will receive exterior influences such as reproduction and exhibition. It is only the authors’ thoughts that cannot be removed by other factors. Wilde would hold that “The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is” (6); this matches Hailsham’s emphasis on clones being “what you were like inside” (NLMG 260)—art for arts’ sake. Based on these ideas, clones’ soul and
humanity depend not so much on their artworks or private property as on their thoughts and humanity, echoing Wilde’s view of individuality.

In Hailsham, the way guardians treat clones depends on how creative their artwork is. Kathy mentions the importance of being creative: “A lot of the time, how you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at ‘creating’” (NLMG 16). Being creative is the paramount priority in Hailsham’s educational strategy for clones because it can directly indicate that clones are akin to real humans. Besides creativity, clones’ art appreciation also manifests their individuality. Instead of tangible artworks or private collections as evidence, clones’ comprehension of art is similar to real humans’ because they are able to create and appreciate artworks. In many episodes, Kathy frequently mentions some well-known writers and literary classics that she has read, such as James Joyce and Kafka, and The Odyssey and War and Peace. Kathy’s understanding of these masterpieces not only shows how art influences her but also what’s inside her mind. Moreover, Kathy, in retrospect, mentions: “When I think about my essay today, what I do is go over it in some detail: I may think of a completely new approach I could have taken, or about different writers and books I could have focused on” (NLMG 115). This quotation demonstrates that Kathy’s appreciation and creativity in art are more comprehensive than before. This change indicates her improvement in art and growth in humanity. Kathy’s case demonstrates Wilde’s idea of “what man is” in regard to individuality. Kathy is the ideal example of a clone with individuality and becomes the only one to digest an artistic education as reflecting the essence of humanity. In this way, Kathy’s individuality lies not in her artworks or private property, but in herself.

In contrast, reproduced things are depreciated not only in Hailsham but also in the real human world. Walkowitz agrees with this idea: “Throughout the novel then, copied
things are portrayed negatively, an economy made clear early in the novel when Kathy explain that when students like the poem of another student, they want the original, not the copy” (“A New Reading” 141). This statement is accurate in that humans deny clones’ likeness to them, as clones blame Tommy’s lack of creativity in art, generating a conflict between distinction and similarity. Tommy’s childish picture not only signifies a fiasco in Hailsham’s artistic education but also emerges as a different interpretation of individuality. Tommy’s lack of originality affects the way other clones treat him in Hailsham. Kathy remembers Tommy’s situation: “In fact, the harder he tried, the more laughable his efforts turned out. So before long Tommy had gone back to his original defense, producing work that seemed deliberately childish, work that said he couldn't care less” (NLMG 20). Without a clear expression of love and soul, Tommy’s artworks are certainly considered non-creative by guardians’ criterion on art. However, based on Wilde’s individuality, Tommy’s passive attitude toward his unoriginality is forgivable because Hailsham only underlines the artworks and private property he produces and collects. In the novel, Hailsham never searches for the reason why Tommy draws these childish style pictures which are below his age. Walkowitz holds that Tommy’s drawing, in particular, suggests that strategies of abstraction allow us to see some bodies as mechanisms and others as individuals (“A New Reading” 141). Since what he draws is unintentionally without individual or public demands, this kind of painting with abstraction forms Tommy’s singularity and individuality. Wilde’s idea would be extrapolated to Tommy’s case that “A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want” (13). Therefore, Tommy only needs to be concerned about his own temperament and who he is rather than his guardians’ demands or judgment. Tommy’s childish paintings represent his individuality
and personality which cannot be replaced and reproduced through technology. In this way, Tommy’s individuality consists in the pure intention from art creators instead of the exquisiteness of artworks.

Art not only proves their soul and humanity but also manifests clones’ individuality. With artistic education, artworks bring clones the sweet taste of childhood and memories rather than the cruel life like other clones treated as a commodity. Artworks function as a tool that records clones’ growth from personal individuality, singularity of taste, to creativity in art. Since clones only create artworks without any economic intention and manipulation, their artworks can be regarded as pure art and reach the idea of art for art’s sake. These points attest to clones’ artworks possessing originality and creativity, which manifest their individuality and humanity. From the individuality comes the possibility of their identity and similarity to real humans.

Instrumentalism: From Pure Art to Functional Art

Wilde’s ideas of art focus on the aesthetic value against political ideology and market demand. He mentions that “the arts that have escaped best are the arts in which the public take no interest” (14). In other words, Wilde believes that pure art should be isolated from public or market demands and only contribute to the creators’ personal ideas. In the novel, clones’ artworks without any individual intentions can be regarded as pure art according to Wilde’s standard. This statement and definition of pure art hinges only on the creators’ ideas and explanations regarding artworks. However, in the operation of art, preventing artworks from being used is impossible because the audience as well as creators will influence artworks together. Wilde would argue that “the operation of art, in effect, should include not only the creators’ contribution but also the receivers’ involvement (20). In this way, clones’ so-called pure art might turn
out to become functional artworks when involved by human receivers. In other words, humans will manipulate and instrumentalize clones’ artworks to fulfill their individual purposes, and their artworks will be far from the pure standard. In the novel, humans’ first involvement in clones’ artworks is Hailsham’s strategy of education in art.

Hailsham’s artistic education originates from their belief in the inspiration of the clones’ souls. One of Ishiguro’s critics, Sim Wai-chew, accepts that Hailsham’s education system offers “a non-instrumentalist and non-utilitarian approach” for clones to arouse their humanity through artworks (263; 267). The context that he describes seems congenial and appropriate for clones to produce artworks. Yet, what Hailsham pursues is to both cultivate and control clones from body to thought through artistic education. In this way, clones will imitate and act like real humans so that their organs can be well-developed and healthy, which will benefit the general public and fit the market demand. Clones, as receivers of education, fail to notice Hailsham’s manipulation of them because artistic education has emerged as an ideological force that works on them unconsciously. Shameem Black echoes that “Never Let Me Go illuminates the problems that arise when art becomes a governing ideological force. To professionalize its students, Hailsham builds a virtual electric fence through an emphasis on artistic production” (793). In this way, clones take it for granted to donate their organs and never attempt to revolt due to their hope for deferral and survival through artworks. Through artistic education, clones become what Hailsham expects them to be—humane clones.

In the novel, clones seem to benefit from the artistic activity, which forms their individuality through the collection of artworks. However, considering the motivation and function of these activities, readers can discover the hypocrisy and individual purpose that Hailsham retains. To take the Exchange as an example, the real function of
this activity is to teach clones how to evaluate artworks in an economical way because the value of clones’ artworks depends on the number of tokens. Kathy comments that “The Exchanges, with their system of tokens as currency, had given us a keen eye for pricing up anything we produced” (NLMG 38). In this way, clones’ artworks turn out to be the commodity for sale with market value instead of emphasizing creativity and originality. Gradually, the idea of art for art sake in clones’ works is undermined by materialism and the economic concern that Hailsham instills.

Hailsham treats clones’ artworks in an instrumental way. Shameem Black states that Hailsham’s Exchange is created for clones to accept early the instrumentalism in the society they face: “The Exchanges encourage students to think instrumentally about the worth of their peers, thus preparing them for an acceptance of their own instrumental lives” (795). In this way, clones will underline not only the value of their works but also the worth of their bodies in instrumental society. Hailsham even matches the time of Exchange with donations so that clones can get used to the routine of being deprived of personal possessions. Black adds: “Held four times a year, the rhythm of the Exchanges mirrors the four organ donations that each student expects, or hopes, to make” (795). The Exchange activity foreshadows clones’ destiny of donation and makes them become adapted in advance to the operation of a consumerist and market-oriented society. In this case, the promotion of art for art’s sake in this activity is a mean to condition the clones by Hailsham’s.

Madame’s collecting artworks, which used to offer clones a sense of honor regarding their art, serves as another example of how Hailsham manipulates art. In the novel, Madame collects clones’ artworks for two reasons. On the surface, through artistic education, Madame demonstrates that clones can act like humans with appreciation and creativity in art. In the deeper meaning, clones’ achievement in art
boosts Madame’s social and political status or profit in society. Under Madame’s promotion and exhibition in gallery, artworks emerge as a path to enhance the influence of Madame’s reputation or Hailsham’s educational strategy. Also, Madame points out that clones’ artworks function as a recorder: “That’s what we have to remind us of what we did” (NLMG 265). Clones’ artworks no longer manifest their individuality or creativity but indicate Madame’s involvement in them. For Madame, these artworks become the evidence to prove the humane and sympathetic way they treat and discipline clones. Also, Madame’s visit foreshadows clones’ future donation. The artworks collected by Madame for her own purpose resemble clones’ organs stripped by humans for their bodily use. Both artworks and organs are incubated individually by clones, the “most remarkable stuff” without return (NLMG 39). In this way, the function of Madame’s visit is to record her internal struggle and enhance the exhibitive value of clones’ artworks.

Hailsham’s offer of artistic education drives clones to imagine their future. Anne Whitehead agrees that Hailsham fails to help clones but deepens their destiny of donation, which shows human injustice: “Ishiguro indicates that both literature and care work can paradoxically function to uphold social inequalities, by producing consoling (but false) fictions of legitimacy and meaning” (73). For clones, considerable emphasis on their artistic performances ignores the cruel reality and limited future they face. From Hailsham’s focus on art comes a rumor of deferral through artworks to prove the existence of the clones’ souls. At the end of the novel, Madame even admits that the rumor is “something for them to dream about” (NLMG 258). Clones, under this artistic education, will regard producing artworks as the only salvation to get rid of their limited future. Black argues that “Never Let Me Go” indicts humanist art because such art works to keep the students unaware of their own inhumanity—it masks their own mechanical
condition and serves to prepare them for lives of exploitation” (790). The function of producing artworks keeps clones believe in their possibility to have soul and humanity, both of which bring them access to real humans. This idea makes clones lose the fundamental desires: resistance and disobedience to the donation system and human cruelty. Therefore, the function of art here is to decrease clones’ desire to struggle and increase human control over them. Human’s control is covered by their promotion of art in clones.

Throughout the novel, art, in the clones’ eyes, is liberal and ideal for them to prove their soul and humanity. However, for humans, artworks are always instrumentalized to accomplish specific functions and missions. Several examples, such as Exchange, mentioned before, thoroughly indicate that personal purpose will always come first for both Madame and Hailsham. Clones’ artworks are just their approach to fulfill their target. Patricia Waugh voices a similar idea: “The novel appears to endorse this Romantic-expressivist aesthetic but additionally suggests the actual erosion of the humanist notion of the self in a culture where materialism has paradoxically become the dominant metaphysics” (23). Based upon these comments and criticism, the so-called pure art only exists for a while under human involvement and the influence of capitalism in this novel. This situation matches the point Benjamin promotes in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, that artworks have always been equipped with functions and reproduced by humans and any human activities. In the novel, for the sake of benefit, humans continually reproduce clones and treat them as artificial works which are functional and available for use. In effect, these activities and examples from Hailsham, covered by the beauty of art, are to fulfill further practices for individuals or specific groups. The so-called artistic education which offers clones a ray of hope for deferral and a human soul turns out to backfire and accelerate humans’
From Reproduction to Replacement

From clones’ pursuit of individuality to humans’ instrumental use of art, the function of art varies according to the creators’ intentions and receivers’ purposes. In the novel, those involved in art are not only humans but also clones. This difference between clones and humans offers readers a complex setting to figure out the role art plays among them. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, the operation of art for clones’ is their pursuit of pure art. With the clones’ “Romantic-inspired” (785) idea of art, Black believes that “In many clear and subtle ways, the novel does appear to bolster the ideals of liberal humanist art and liberal humanist empathy” (790). Ironically, clones turn out to savor the beauty of art in a liberal humanistic way although they are just human clones. However, in the setting of capitalist and consumerist society, Walkowitz offers an answer for humans’ use of art: “In his novel, Ishiguro suggests that works of art, like people, should be valued for the social life they help to establish” (“Unimaginable Largeness” 226). Artworks indeed help humans establish their social life and function as a tool to control clones. In other words, humans emphasize what art brings to their social life rather than its aesthetic value. By only focusing on the function that art brings, humans will start to reproduce artwork to maximize its function. That is the reason why clones, like artificial works, are constantly reproduced by humans. The change of the function of art from reproduction to replacement results from the repercussion and relationship between the original works and reproduced ones, like humans and clones. This complicated operation of art in mechanical reproduction should be examined in relation to Benjamin’s theory of art.

Benjamin in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction states that art, with the advent of a capitalist society, has changed dramatically from its traditional
forms and purposes to a political agenda. What Benjamin indicates is that art, through mechanical reproduction, will be emancipated from cult value and exhibition value to political practice. However, reproduced artworks trigger the problem of the lack of authenticity or aura in regard to the original artworks. This crisis of authenticity makes original works lose in “historical testimony” (3), so that the original object fails to prove its authority. Also, Benjamin mentions that “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (3). Hence, when an artwork has been duplicated, it will not only affect its traditional form of art, but also lose “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (3). Thus, reproduced works depreciate the quality and the aura of originals at the same time.

Under the condition of liberation of traditional value and the shakable criteria of authenticity, Benjamin mentions that the function of art will change into “aestheticisation of politics or politicisation of art” (5).

Benjamin never offers readers a definition of art, but records the process how art intertwines with social practice from ancient times to the present. This process totally manifests the change of art in Never Let Me Go. The function of art starts from clones’ possibility to possess creativity and individuality. In their search for salvation, clones pay reverence to creative artworks or their creators and believe the rumor of deferral for donation through their artworks. Clones’ worship on creativity in art can be viewed as cult value in art. In this stage, clones’ producing and appreciation of artworks signifies their belief in the cultural and ritual value in art, which Benjamin mentions. The beauty of the art object is elevated to the level of divinity. Clones worship the authenticity and singularity in artworks which possess the aura and remain in the “presence of time and space” (3). Before the value of exhibition, clones still believe the idea of art for art’s sake and their soul in art work, both of which match Wilde’s aesthetic values.
Clones’ artworks under Madame’s manipulation can be divided into two functions: exhibition value and political practice. Exhibition value is derived from Madame’s collecting of clones’ artworks. Upon being selected and exhibited by Madame, the clones’ artworks will be emancipated from the cult value which cherishes the beauty of art and human soul and reproduced for Madame’s exhibition to humans. In this case, artworks will be scrutinized thoroughly by the audience. The authentic quality and historical testimony will be undermined by constant exhibition, audience’s over-notice and mechanical reproduction. Also, when exhibited to the public, these selected artworks will help Madame to prove her achievement regarding the clones’ art education. Her exhibition and strategy will reform clones’ living quality and social status. In this way, Madame will earn her reputation and enhance her political status. The function of the clones’ artworks soon switches from the exhibition value to Madame’s political practice.

In the novel, both humans and clones utilize art reproduction to fulfill their political practice. Whitehead argues that what Madame does is for her own sake not for that of the clones, and explains that “Their reading of the students’ artwork accordingly assumes that its value is purely utilitarian (it can provide ontological ‘evidence’ that will then be used to secure the guardians’ own political ends or gains); for them, it serves no higher or more redemptive purpose” (66). Through demonstrating clones’ artworks, Madame can support her idea of art education and safeguard her political or social position in both the human and clone worlds. Her struggles for political practice bring her and Hailsham a remarkable reputation and considerable profit. Also, Hailsham uses artistic strategy to manipulate clones’ idea and growth in their body and mind, both of which benefits humans’ control on clones and donation—politiciaization of aesthetics. These benefits all come from how she combines reproduction of clones with political
power. Madame has mentioned her influence before: “In the late seventies, at the height of our influence, we were organizing large events all around the country. There’d be cabinet ministers, bishops, all sorts of famous people coming to attend. There were speeches, large funds pledged” (NLMG 262). This passage indicates that Madame’s political practice was once influential and unshakeable in society. In this manner, artworks are instrumentalized by political practice and divorced from art for the art’s sake. All her influence derives from the exhibition value and cult value through clones’ artworks.

Besides Madame, Tommy also uses art as a means to attain his political purpose. After knowing the news of deferral, Tommy constantly draws what he believes to be creative. Yet, seeing Tommy’s paintings, Kathy comments that “It came to me that Tommy’s drawings weren’t as fresh now. Okay, in many ways these frogs were a lot like what I’d seen back at the Cottages. But something was definitely gone; and they looked laboured, almost like they’d been copied” (NLMG 241). What Kathy describes is that Tommy’s paintings lose the aura that they used to have. Tommy paints his animals with the intention of deferral in his mind; thus, his paintings are no longer pure art revealing his individuality but a consistent reproduction for his own purpose. Also, since Tommy is a clone duplicated by artificial technology, the same paintings he produces can be regarded as the mechanical reproduction of art. In effect, Tommy’s application of deferral is not only a chance to live longer, but also a hope to improve clones’ rights. If artworks can really prove clones have souls, it will successfully enhance clones’ status and overthrow human control. Hence, politically, every application for deferral is clones’ attempt to overthrow human power. Also, Tommy’s anger at the failure of deferral, and disobedience in Hailsham’s artistic education reflect his intention to topple human hegemony and authority, attesting to clones’ revolution through artworks.
In *Never Let Me Go*, replacement is the theme that results from mechanical reproduction. When original works are eliminated or inferior to the reproduced ones, they will be replaced. Humans confront the fear of being replaced by clones in the novel. The first example is the Judy Bridgewater tape Kathy earns from Sales. Although it is both reproduced and second-hand, Kathy still enjoys the song *Never Let Me Go* and revives the aura in this tape of her first time listening. Since clones have no idea of reproduction and copying due to their limited education, Kathy’s tape still holds its singularity and originality for her. The point of replacement is that she loses it later for no reason and finds a copy with Tommy in Norfolk, which clones believe to be the only place to find something lost. Nevertheless, Kathy still loses the pleasure that the old tape offered. For Kathy, the old type holds Kathy’s enjoyment of artwork from “its presence in time and space” and remains original or historical testimony for Kathy’s youth (Benjamin 5). The first one helped form her individuality as private property. In comparison with the lost tape, the Norfolk one helps Kathy recall the childhood memories in Hailsham and confirms her relationship with Tommy. This second tape rebuilds her social connection from the past to the present (Walkowitz 141). The Norfolk one under this condition is revived with a new aura for Kathy and proves that clones can find something lost in Norfolk. Although the lost tape can be replaced by the reproduced copy, the aura of old one will never come back.

Like artworks, humans also fear the same situation of replacement. For humans, clones, to some degree, function as artificial products, like the mechanical reproduction of the human body. The reproduced clones will depreciate the authority and authenticity of the original humans. In the face of this crisis, what humans do is to reject and ignore clones’ intelligence and similarity to them. Miss Emily explains humans’ attitude toward clones to Kathy: “So for a long time you were kept in the shadows and people
did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn't matter” (*NLMG* 263). The word shadow in the quotation means not only the dark side of humanity but also human blindness to clones’ progress, because shadow is just temporary. The reproduced clones will continue producing and challenging the definition of humans.

Besides humane clones, the Morningdale scandal about an adjusted baby also demonstrates the human fear of being replaced by clones. Miss Emily adds: “But a generation of created children who’d take their place in society? Children demonstrably superior to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people” (*NLMG* 264). For their own sake and central position, humans prevent the technology and clones’ development from progressing. In the face of human blindness and selfishness, Black retorts that readers as well as humans in the novel indeed notice clones’ art and souls but dread to accept them as real because like “the audience, far from being touched by the accomplishments of the clones, begins to feel threatened by their impressive talents” (794). Clones’ talents truly stun humans regarding their condition in the real world.

Norfolk is a mysterious place which refers to replacement and disappearance. Kathy learns about the place Norfolk in a lesson, what “Miss Emily had said was that Norfolk was England's ‘lost corner,’ where all the lost property found in the country ended up” (*NLMG* 65). Norfolk may be related to clones’ birthplace or prototype of human possible. For example, Kathy obtains her similar tape and Rush tries to see her human prototype in Norfolk. It can be assumed that clones may try to find their lost organ in Norfolk. Ruth mentions that “We still had that last bit of comfort, thinking one day, when we were grown up, and we were free to travel around the country, we could always go and find it again in Norfolk” (*NLMG* 66). The myth of Norfolk has specific function for clones. Norfolk is a place where clones search for comfort over their loss.
Kathy expresses her feeling about losing Tommy: “The only indulgent thing I did, just once, was a couple of weeks after I heard Tommy had completed, when I drove up to Norfolk, even though I had no real need to” (NLMG 287). Although Ishiguro does not clearly indicate the reason for skipping revealing the features of Norfolk to the clones, the myth of Norfolk, like the rumor of deferral, brings a ray of hope to clones in search of their loss.

**Conclusion**

In *Never Let Me Go*, the major conflict originates from how art functions on clones and humans. For clones, the function of art starts with individuality and the clones’ humanity. Gradually, artworks are instrumentalized and reproduced to fulfill social or political purposes. In this way, clones, regarded as non-human, savor the essence of art for art’s sake while humans turn out to politicize artworks through reproduction. However, according to Benjamin, the changing function of art is not the end of pure art but a new progress and rebirth of the aura related to the reproduced artworks. Peter Fenves argues that “Benjamin proposes something similar—without supposing, however, that this thesis were the opening bid of a grand politics that world revive the era and aura of the great art” (66). The quotation illustrates that politics can inject artwork with new aura, a way of politicization of art. For Benjamin, the function of art is not to explore the old category of aesthetic value or revive art with new ideas, but rather to accept the multiple functions that artworks bring. In the setting of this novel, artworks can not only be merited in an aesthetic way, but also in a social way that benefits both clones and humans. It seems that the development of art in this novel hinges not on the conflict between pure and functional art, but on the interest and reaction of its audience and creator.

Artworks can transcend the limits of time and place through reproduction.
Krzysztof Ziarek mentions that artwork is mutable: “One could argue that works of art have always had a degree of mutability inscribed in their mode of existence, which allows them to persist as works through historical and social change” (224). The mutability in existence, according to Benjamin, is to perceive mechanical reproduction as first destroying the historical and social testimony, and then surpassing the limits of time and space. From its cult value and exhibition value to political practice, the function of art undergoes mutability via reproduction and manipulation in Benjamin’s theory. The same situation in the novel of the cult value in the clone world, paves a way for a specific culture for clones that emphasizes and creates artworks for struggle and revolution. In the human world, the exhibition value and political practice lay the foundation of politicizing aesthetics through mechanical reproduction. Both clones and humans treat art in an instrumental way and search for individual purpose and benefit. In this way, artworks, through reproduction to manipulation, have lost their authenticity and aura for both clones and humans.

In a nutshell, Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* indicates that it is inappropriate to regard singularity as the prerequisite to defining art, culture and human life (140). Ishiguro’s way of treating art, like this chapter shows, hinges on the singularity and individuality of the creators. However, since clones and humans have different backgrounds and identity, it would be unfair to judge their artistic performance in the same way. Therefore, Walkowitz offers a solution: “The primacy of uniqueness in demonstrating individuality is reduced and supplanted by a reconceptualisation of the idea of unoriginal that sees the object in its relationship and contexts” (“A New Reading” 142). This remark asks readers to take all the aspects into account when judging the function and operation of art. With an appropriate platform, reproduction will not be secondary and inferior to the original. In this chapter, the function of art in *Never Let Me Go* only
underlines the complex nexus between reproduced works and the original ones. The next chapter explores how artists benefit from mechanical reproduction.
Chapter Two

The Floating Function and Value in Art in An Artist of the Floating World

In An Artist of the Floating World, Ishiguro invites us to examine how artists respond to the floating value in the art market and Japanese society under the influence of capitalism. Also, through the protagonist Masuji Ono’s career changes, he demonstrates how art intertwines with the political system and social values. These social or political relations with artworks result from artists’ use of mechanical reproduction. Artworks, when reproduced, will be equipped with functions and purposes for specific groups related to their creators. In the novel, artists’ application of reproduced artworks demonstrates Walter Benjamin’s view of the process of art in reproduction, moving from ritual value and exhibition value to political practice. From the reproduction comes the crisis of authority and authenticity in artworks. This crisis influences not only the artworks but also the impression of Japan, which foreigners and new generation receive from commercials and products. In this case, reproduced artworks form an artificial image of Japan, which affects its historical testimony in art. Besides Benjamin’s ideas, another concept that will be used to examine the reproduced artworks is John Berger’s Ways of Seeing. Berger mentions that both artworks and their images will be artificially created and reproduced simultaneously in the process of mechanical reproduction. This idea turns out to reveal the meaning of changed images via mechanical reproduction. Also, Berger indicates that the images in paintings reflect the creators’ social status instead of what audience observes. Both Benjamin’s and Berger’s ideas deal with the influence of reproduction on artworks in different ways. These theories match Ono’s way of treating art and reproducing artworks for individual purposes. Therefore, the operation of art undergoing several changes is proven to be functional and
instrumentalized in a political way.

Artworks here, along with Ono’s career experience in his three stages of transfer include Takeda firm, Mori-san’s villa and Okada-Shingen Society. Each stage manifests not only the changes of Ono’s ideas about art, but also the development of reproduced artworks in a capitalist society. In this chapter, the first part will adopt the idea of art for art’s sake and Oscar Wilde’s ideas as a standard to examine Ono’s position in a floating world, as well as to judge all his artistic performances in later stages. It also analyzes the repercussion of mechanical reproduction to artworks and their images. The second and third parts adopt both Walter Benjamin’s and John Berger’s ideas to deeply scrutinize the function of art in regard to creators and audience.

**Ono’s Career Changes in the Floating World**

In this novel, the word “floating” illustrates the mutability of characters’ status, aesthetics, politic movements, and even Japan’s national value. Gregory Mason makes a similar remark about the floating situation in the novel: “So the floating world comes to refer, in the larger metaphorical sense, to the fact that the values of society are always in flux” (12). In the face of this flux in society, characters’ reactions or counteractions toward the changes of art and politics form the major part of this novel. For characters, the floating world is a transient situation for them to face their past, change their future and deal with the conflicts toward them. These characters, especially Ono, have their own ways to survive in the floating world. The fact proved in the novel is that Ono is not an ideal or unflagging artist with persistent dedication to art, but rather a speculator who changes his position according to the context.

From the unstable social values in the floating world comes the idea of change in relation to the characters. Matthew Beedham comments on the issue of change: “The
theme of change is expressed throughout the novel in descriptions of the growth and decay of various urban areas, changes in painting and building styles, as well as in the career and attitudes of narrator” (40). Ono’s attitude and manner toward his career are always unstable, without a concrete direction. Ono’s first stage in art is Takeda’s firm, which teaches him the basic skills of painting. Judging from the name, Takeda firm, readers may notice that Ishiguro uses the word “firm” to name Ono’s workplace instead of studio, atelier or gallery. Generally, the word firm refers to a company or some business concern. Ishiguro’s choice of this word indicates that this firm emphasizes profit and business rather than art and aesthetics. Under this profit-oriented circumstance, the artists in Takeda Firm work as laborers who earn profits for their company. Ono’s relation to Takeda firm is that of employee and employer. In this stage, according to Oscar Wilde’s classification, Ono would not be an artist but a craftsman. Wilde would describe this positional change: “Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman” (13). At the beginning of his career, Ono not only fails to become who he wishes to be, but also forsakes his pursuit of true art for the sake of market demand.

The second stage, Mori-san’s villa, offers Ono a congenial and isolated surroundings and atmosphere to pursue art for art’s sake. The artists there, to some degree, are similar to the writers of romanticism who are isolated, in seeking to find inspiration from nature. Brian Shaffer agrees with this assumption and comments on the difference between Ono’s two career stage and its context: “If Ono’s former firm adopts an art-for-the-profit’s-sake mentality, the new Mori-san’s ‘decaying villa’, in which Ono works and lives ‘without routine’, is the stereotypically bohemian world of the post romantic artist cut off from an in hospitable, materialistic, aesthetically shallow,
mainstream society” (52). Shaffer’s comments echo Wilde’s view of art, that artists should not take heed of the public. Without market demand and function, Ono, at this stage, totally shakes off the old self as a craftsman and become a real artist. About the importance of the romantic context for artists, Wilde’s idea seems to correspond to Mori-san’s: “But alone, without any reference to his neighbors, without any interference, the artist can fashion a beautiful thing; and if he does not do it solely for his own pleasure, he is not an artist at all” (13). Both Wilde and Mori-san promote artists’ inspiration and creativity through nature and personal pleasure; each focuses on the individuality and originality of artists. Under the concept of art for art’s sake, Ono becomes an ideal artist who savors the essence of beauty in art.

Artists, when indulging in individual pleasure and the intangible beauty of art, will overlook the real life situation in society and how the general public views them. Ono, persuaded by the organization of Okada-Shingen Society, defines his own version of pure art as the promotion of jingoism. In this stage, Ono attempts to equip artwork with functions instead of his essential creativity and humanity. Ono becomes a propagandist who instrumentalizes artwork for specific purposes and is unable to produce any genuine art. In this stage, Ono loses his aesthetic values and becomes a promoter of specific organization or community attempts to influence others: “… whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft” (Wilde 13). In this way, the involvement of any group or government in art contaminates and uproots the essential nature of artworks which then degenerate into ordinary tools without any individuality.

Under Wilde’s definition of artist, Ono spends most of his life not being an artist
but rather an art user. Ono does not become an artist but trend-follower of the floating world. The title of the novel seems ironic but fitting for Ono. In effect, Ono is a self-destructive person in his career life who firmly promotes his position at first but turns out to reject this in the second step. In his youth, Ono rejects running the family business to be an artist. Yet, when Ono works in this Takeda Firm, Shaffer comments that “Ironically, having broken away from his father’s vulgar materialism, Ono first joins an art business, a sweat shop producing local art merely to fill foreign demand” (*AAFW* 51). Also, when leaving the commercial Takeda Firm for pure art in Mori-san’s villa, he starts criticizing the vanity and pleasure of transient beauty in art for its invalidity. He comments that the beauty in the floating world is not for a young and ambitious artist like him. Conversely, he believes that jingoism will bring a new start for a nation and change people destitute condition. Therefore, the artworks with the spirit of jingoism become his version of true art. Again, he returns to the commercial art that Wilde denounces and falls into a floating period that increasingly arises but soon vanishes. In Ono’s return to commercial art, the reader can notice that Ono often eradicates his present effort and denounces his former actions. In other words, he becomes the man that he used to criticize, and reaccepts the path that he had refused before. Like his transient success in the art field, the so-called speculator Ono benefits from the floating values, but it eventually backfires in the end.

**The Effect of Reproduction: the Man-made Images in Artworks**

In a capitalist society, mechanical reproduction is a common method for humans to wield artworks for any purposes. Inspired by Benjamin’s idea, Berger’s essay *Ways of Seeing* states his version of perceiving any artistic objects, and explores the repercussion of man-made images in artworks. His idea focuses on how the image revives and retains
its condition under the influence of being reproduced. Berger assumes that people usually see things based upon what they believed and knew, i.e. past knowledge (8). Therefore, audience will try to find the relation with objects and discover that “every image embodies a way of seeing” (Berger 10). In this way, when presented as a work of art, an image is viewed and judged by audience’s personal assumptions and connections. Furthermore, these artificial artworks and images, when mechanically reproduced, will become available and functional for different uses. Hence, reproduced artwork and its images will simultaneously remain prevalent. However, the major difference between artwork and its images is the limitations of place and time. Under reproduction, artwork in Benjamin’s viewpoint will lose “its presence and time” (5), while images constitute “a set of appearance[s]” (Berger 9) isolated from place and time, and without any limit and control. Moreover, when audience appreciates a painting, they will unconsciously accept the method and what the painting represents. The image in that painting will reflect the illusion that the original creator injects, like his individual viewpoint and social status.

In An Artist of the Floating World, the images in artworks are related to the theme or topic that creators promote. Since paintings are the only artworks in the novel, Berger’s way of seeing paintings is helpful in addressing the creator’s meaning: “The painter’s way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on the canvas or paper” (10). Differing from painters, audience just needs a personal connection to the image and to be shown a way of seeing. Ono’s artistic trilogy serves as the optimal example to compare the difference between reproduced images and artworks. Ono’s first stage Takeda firm reproduces the painting of stereotyped Japan for foreigners. Ono recalls: “We were also quite aware that the essential point about the sort of things we were commissioned to paint—geishas, cherry trees, swimming carps, temples—was that they
look ‘Japanese’ to the foreigners to whom they were shipped out, and all finer points of style were quite likely to go unnoticed” (AAFW 69). The foreigner will purchase these fabricated products for the images that with which they are familiar. They find their connection to these artworks, the Japan that they believe to be, Berger’s so-called illusion. In this case, the Takeda firm regards this stereotype as serving market demand and attempts to fulfill it in the pursuit of profit. Also, the image of stereotyped Japan will be promoted by the use of reproduction and become prevalent around the world. These images even cross over the historical testimony and attempt to replace the original Japanese values.

In the second stage Mori-san’s villa, what Ono paints is the traditional painting style in Japan, a floating world. Originally, floating world indicated a kind of painting style which focused on the night life in Japan. Rebecca Walkowit introduces this style and its connection to the novel: “Its ‘floating world’ names a subject for art—‘those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light’—and also intimates a country, a cultural style, a social milieu, a past” (Ishiguro's 1053). Floating world means a transient beauty and a kind of culture which only grasps the pompous side of Japan in both economic and social ways. This kind of painting, according to Berger, results from Ono’s connection to the upper class life in Mori-san’s villa. Also, it is only the audience with the same lifestyle and status that can really appreciate the prosperous aspects of Japan in the painting. These paintings, through constant reproduction, deliver the prosperous but shallow images that Japan is under the cover of capitalism. Although regarded as pure art in Wilde’s definition, the artworks in this stage seem impossible to offer audience the whole picture of Japan through reproduction.

In Okada-Shingen Society, the theme of Ono’s paintings manifests how serious the situation of corruption in Japan has become. After visiting some destitute areas, Ono
adapts the scene of the boys he saw in a slum for his painting named “Complacency”; the boys “would have worn the manly scowls of samurai warriors ready to fight. It is no coincidence, furthermore, that the boys in my picture held their sticks in classic kendo stances” (AAFW 168). Ono hints in his painting that only through war and struggle can people shake off the suffering of poverty. These images manifest Ono’s promotion of jingoism and social status. Also, he describes “three fat, well-dressed men, sitting in a comfortable bar laughing together. The looks on their faces seem decadent; perhaps they are exchanging jokes about their mistresses or some such matter” (ibid). Ono uses artworks to criticize how corrupt and decadent businessmen and politicians are. In Berger’s idea, these images are artificial, but reflect Ono’s attitude toward jingoism and the decadence of capitalist society. One of Ishiguro’s critics agrees that Ono’s antipathy to the business corruption can be discovered in his paintings (Sim 84). The images between these two groups form a conflict of two generations and social values. Eventually, Ono concludes with a slogan “But the young are ready to fight for their dignity” (ibid) near his painting. According to Berger, the words or slogan near the artworks may maintain its continuity of image and deepen its “verbal authority” in regard to the meaning (28). In other words, verbal power will deepen or even change the meaning of images for the audience. If Ono’s slogan was not about fighting but about peace, it would produce different meanings and values in that painting. Therefore, the slogan will illuminate paintings and vice versa. With image and slogan, these artworks, through reproduction, will emerge as political propaganda which successfully spreads the idea of jingoism. In this way, the reproductions of words and images serve as a catalyst that accelerates the instrumentalization of artworks.

**Masuji Ono’s Artistic Trilogy Examined through Walter Benjamin’s Theory**

Ono’s memory of his artistic journey forms the major part of this novel. His journey
parallels the changing political and social values in Japan. He even personally participates in several political activities and movements. As mentioned before, Ono in the floating Japan randomly switches his career position, which proves that he is not an artist in Wilde’s perspective. Hence, from Takeda firm and Mori-San’s villa to Okada-Shingen Society, what Ono really pursues is not the pure art that Wilde would promote but functional art for the general public, propaganda. In other words, Ono’s artistic journey is a path to define and seek his own version of true art which cannot be classified by any traditional category and aesthetic standard, like Oscar Wide’s idea of art. In the novel, Ono’s use of art refers to reproduction, exhibition and then to political practice. These stages turn out to fully match the development of art that Benjamin describes in a capitalist society. Therefore, Benjamin’s theory is helpful to unveil Ono’s application of art and his real intention. Since Ono’s artistic journey forms who he is and his version of true art, this part examines it sequentially based upon the places where he works.

The previous chapter explored the crisis of authenticity and aura between original artworks and reproduced ones through Benjamin’s theory. This chapter provides more details about the growth of reproduction in artworks and its depth of political practice. According to Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the general public’s demand to pursue and possess the uniqueness of works broadens the range and level of reproduction. Benjamin notes that “Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things closer spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction” (4). In order to possess the singularity and aura from artworks, humans start to accept the reproduced objects and regard the
process as a way to gain access to the reality that artworks maintain. Virtually, the act of reproduction can eliminate the traditional form of that reproduced objects and substitute “a plurality of copies for a unique existence” (3). Through reproduction, humans can possess copies to meet their demand and condition, both of which reactivate the value in that reproduced objects (3). When the growth of reproduction causes the crisis of original artworks lacking their aura, Benjamin posits that “the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed” (5). Rather than ritual and a cultural approach, he concludes that art will turn out to be political practice on the political stage which triggers public revolution. What Benjamin addresses is that art, through mechanical reproduction, will be manipulated by humans and reversed into two directions ‘the aestheticisation of politics or politicisation of art’ (5).

**Takeda firm**

Ono’s journey to the world of the Takeda firm demonstrates how artworks are influenced by capitalism and consumerism. As mentioned before, Takeda firm is not a studio for artists but a sweatshop where employees produce commodities for foreigners. Ono describes this firm that “The Takeda firm prided itself on its ability to provide a high number of paintings at very short notice; indeed, Master Takeda gave us to understand that if we failed to fulfill our deadline in time for the ship leaving harbor, we would quickly lose future commissions to rival firms” (*AAFW* 66). Takeda firm’s competitiveness does not come from how splendid and unique their works are but from how fast they can produce a commodity. In this case, painting skills and original ideas are no longer the cardinal concerns in their works. In Wilde’s view, these artists have degenerated into craftsmen. Their artworks have become products that can be constantly
reproduced for profit, and exhibit value as Benjamin illustrated. The function of art here is to entertain via the customs, fit the market demand and gain some profit as well as reputation for their firm. Also, the rapid production of artworks symbolizes the spread of capitalism in Japan.

In Takeda Firm, mechanical reproduction results from increasing market demand and their pursuit of profit; market demand, according to Benjamin, derives from humans’ eagerness to possess the uniqueness of works. To obtain closer experiences and the likeness of objects, people start to accept reproduction of works. Therefore, foreign buyers who purchase the commodity from Takeda Firm grasp and possess several parts of Japanese images at that time, despite their fabrication and shallowness. Yet, the reproduced artworks from Takeda Firm fail to offer their audience the real situation of Japan. In this way, Takeda Firm not only promotes the exhibition and reproduction of artworks but also causes a lack of authenticity in the original artworks as well as the original Japan herself.

The problem of authenticity in artworks is ostensible in Takeda Firm since the workers there seemingly ignore the original works. Benjamin mentions the importance of authenticity: “The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” (3). In the case of Takeda Firm, their reproduced commodities render customers an ambiguous boundary between original and replica. Since the employees reproduce the works, the original works simultaneously lose their authority and authenticity when customers’ orders are sent. Although the loss of authenticity in original works never affects a company which only emphasizes profit, the quantity of reproduced works will influence the level of market value. Berger assumes that “Market value is to substitute for what painting lost when constantly
reproduced” (23). Hence, when an artwork is over-reproduced, it will depreciate not only the original’s aura, but also the market price of the reproduced one. In this way, reproduction has a negative effect on both the reproduced and original works.

Since Takeda Firm only produces the fabricated and stereotyped version of Japan, these stereotyped paintings also depreciate the status of Japan in the world. If Japan herself were the original prototype of artwork, the reproduced paintings of shallow Japan must deteriorate the authenticity of real Japanese value. Also, according to Berger, the image in reproduced paintings can exist individually and separate from the influence of “place and time” (9). In this way, these fabricated artworks which exaggerate Japan, through constant reproduction around the world, will undermine the authenticity of other Japanese paintings. In addition, these produced paintings affect the way other foreigners see Japan, and topple the historical position and authority of original Japan, the crisis of “historical testimony” (Benjamin 3). Under the influence of the reproduced Japanese stereotype, Japan in such a floating world seemingly fails to reconstruct her position and style in regard to both its aesthetic and political authority after World War Two.

Mori-San’s villa

Earlier on, Ono regarded Mori-San’s villa as the birthplace of true art. Before leaving Takeda Firm, Ono delivers his manifesto of true art when his colleague is mocked by others: “That’s enough, can’t you see you’re talking to someone with artistic integrity? If an artist refuses to sacrifice quality for the sake of speed, then that’s something we should all respect” (AAFW 68). Artistic integrity emerges as Ono’s standard to define true art at the first stage, which stands for only the beauty and quality in art. In Mori-San’s villa, artists’ pleasure and appreciation in art form the theme in their art
works: the style of a floating world. Without an economic concern, or individual purpose, the artworks here can be regarded as pure art in Wilde’s standard. However, Benjamin’s idea still works here in both man-made reproduction and the counteraction of “theology of art” to functional art (5).

Man-made reproduction lays the foundation for a mechanical one. Benjamin offers his idea about the origin of reproduction: “Man-made artifacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain” (2). The process of man-made reproduction brings benefits in three directions. It is reasonable and useful for disciples to imitate and reproduce masters’ artworks for training and practice. At the same time, a master can promote his works and ideas through pupils’ replicas. In the story, Mori-san can improve his own reputation and receive more students than before. Besides the relation of master and pupils, the vendors can also gain profits through man-made reproductions. This mutual relationship in art equips the cycle of reproduction with an economic concern, profit. Therefore, this example proves that any artwork, upon being reproduced, will lose its aura and be equipped with functions or other purposes. This simple idea justifies Benjamin’s idea regarding reproduction.

In the face of the challenge of reproduction, pure art promoters mention the idea of art for art’s sake as a solution to this crisis in artistic quality and authenticity. According to Benjamin, this “theology of art” (5) attempts to eradicate any additional functions of artworks, such as commercial, social or personal purposes. This idea and reaction is similar to Wilde’s idea of healthy artworks in his art theory. Wilde would promote that in style, “a healthy work of art is one whose style recognizes the beauty of the material it employs, be that material one of words or of bronze, of colour or of ivory, and uses that beauty as a factor in producing the aesthetic effect” (16). Also, he adds that in
subject, “a healthy work of art is one the choice of whose subject is conditioned by the temperament of the artist, and comes directly out of it” (16-7). Both the solution of art-for-the-art-sake and Wilde’s healthy artworks promote that art should return to what it is, instead of how it is presented.

The way art reacts to the problem of reproduction is similar to what Mori-san and Ono pursue—the idea of pure art. In the novel, Mori-san regards the transient beauty in the floating Japan as pure art which has no other functions to creators and audience. Also, Mori-san provides his pupils with a congenial context and practical experiences in night life, offering them the opportunity to truly savor the beauty of the floating world and pure art. In other words, their night life and entertainment experience are the process of producing artworks and searching for inspiration; it is not their personal purposes but part of art itself. Mori-san’s treatment of art, to some degree, fits Wilde’s standard of art. The subject and style in Mori-san’s artworks are simple, only calligraphy and watercolors, coming from artists’ original ideas and pleasure. Without any function, Mori-san’s artworks match the idea of art for art’s sake. However, this kind of subject and style belong to Mori-san’s version, not Ono’s pursuit of pure art.

In effect, the definition of true art hinges not only on their creators’ ideas but also on how receivers feel. Although Mori-san’s artwork of the floating world meets the criteria of Wilde’s healthy artworks and pure art, the way Ono sees this style with night life and business, based upon Berger’s idea, connects to his hatred of his father’s business conference. The way Ono sees the art of floating world influences the way he sees Mr. Moriyama. Ono starts to doubt the duty of artists: “I am puzzled that we artists should be devoting so much of our time enjoying the company of those like Gisaburo-san” (AAFW 148). Ono’s dream of so-called pure art is totally disillusioned, like transient beauty in the flouting world, without stable status. In effect, what
Mori-san offers is not only pure art, but also a kind of artistic discipline for Ono. In Mori-san’s villa, what Ono follows is Moriyama’s guidance and demands during his painting. Under this standard, only works similar to the master’s style can be regarded as masterpieces. The true art that Ono believes in turns out to be limited by the master’s authority without open-minded creativity and others’ opinions. In this case, however talented or potential you are in art, to show your obedience must be the prerequisite for artists to survive in Mori-san's villa. Master’s authority, like the artistic strategy in Hailsham mentioned in the previous chapter, is an ideological power that both cultivates and controls students. Walkowitz agrees with this idea and comments on Mori-san’s discipline of pupils: “Mori-san's impressionism is saturated with politics: those who paint in a style or with a subject that differs from his example are considered ‘traitors’ to his cause” (“Ishiguro’s” 1057). The attitude of the artists here changes from the pursuit of true art to obedience to the master’s authority and discipline in both art and life style. Ono’s so-called true art turns out to be what he used to do in Takeda firm, repetition and reproduction. Therefore, Ono believes that pure art should not always involve in entertainment and personal pleasure, but rather devotion to society.

**Okada-Shingen Society**

The effect of Okada-Shingen Society on Ono is paradoxical because it brings him the reputation and honor in art but a downfall in social status and the art field. After meeting with Matsuda, the member of the organization, Ono keeps Matsuda’s perspectives on the artists in mind: “The Okada-Shingen exists to help the likes of you open your eyes and produce work of genuine value for these difficult times” (*AAFW* 172). For young and ambitious Ono, the genuine value of art switches from the beauty of the world to a concrete contribution to society. He tells Mori-san:
Sensei, it is my belief that in such troubled times as these, artists must learn to value something more tangible than those pleasurable things that disappear with the morning light. It is not necessary that artists always occupy a decadent and enclosed world. My conscience, Sensei, tells me I cannot remain forever an artist of the floating world. (AAFW 180)

Ono promotes jingoism to the general public in the floating time instead of appreciating or lingering in floating values. In this situation, Ono determines to create his own trend and equip his paintings with a spiritual function—inspiration. With functions and political purposes, Ono’s artworks fully match Benjamin’s idea of reproduction in political way.

In the novel, the political practice of reproduction brings benefits to Ono and Okada-Shingen Society. Ono becomes a propagandist who utilizes art to gain widespread reputation and social and political status. Okada-Shingen Society, with Ono’s helpful propaganda, successfully spreads their idea of restoration of imperialism and revolution. Ono’s propaganda promotes jingoism which revives reproduced works with a new function. Ono’s works, such as posters, stir the general public’s willingness to engage in war, campaigns and their nation’s struggle. Besides Ono’s propaganda, Okada-Shingen society believes that “Large exhibitions held regularly throughout the city, attracting ever more artists, would bring significant relief to these people” (AAFW 171). Through frequent exhibitions, the propaganda can really influence people and deliver the ideas of jingoism. In this way, what Ono promotes can be spread around the city through exhibitions. Ono’s emphasis is on the function of the exhibition’s value of reproduction. Beside exhibitions, Ono utilizes mechanical reproduction to spread his propaganda, such as “The China crisis posters” or “poster campaign” (AAFW 102). In this case, the function of these reproduced works is to promote not only the exhibition
values but also the political practice.

Ono’s political purpose and willingness to promote public revolution can be noticed through the images in his paintings. In Ono’s propaganda works, there are several images that would indicate war or revolution, such as “stern-faced soldiers”, “bayoneted rifles”, “flanking an officer who held out his sword” and “the military flag of the rising sun” (AAFW 169). These objects or images only exist during wartime. In this way, we can assume that what Ono wants to do through his artworks is to inspire people to launch the war. Based upon Berger’s theory, these images can spread across time and space so that whenever audience sees these images, they will think of war and jingoism. In a highly political and social position, Ono, at the end of this part, acts more like a political agitator than an artist. When one of his works is awarded, Ono only cares about whether his campaign is successful. He recalls: “But happy as I was that night, the feeling of deep triumph and fulfillment which the award should have brought was curiously missing” (AAFW 202). He believes that what makes him jubilant is not the award but the campaign. Artistic achievement and performance no longer satisfy Ono’s expectations or fit his ambitious demands. Political purposes which were originally catered to by art turn out to become paramount in Ono’s pursuit.

Under Ono’s manipulation, the further development of political practice in reproduced artworks brings the promotion of cult value to imperialism. Ono’s political practice attempts to get people to fight bravely for imperialism, and Okada-Shingen society tells him that “We wish for a restoration. We simply ask that his Imperial Majesty the Emperor be restored to his rightful place as head of our state” (AAFW 173). What they want to do is to go back to the imperialism and empower the Japanese Emperor. In this stage, the Emperor becomes the core concern during wartime, like heroism with cult value. Through reproduced artworks, Ono beautifies the function of
war and the imperialism so that people will believe and worship both imperialism and the Emperor. The image of the Emperor still retains his singularity and authenticity. The spread of reproduced artworks and images will not undermine their aura but helps imperialism expand its influence and power. Beatrice Hanssen agrees Ono’s strategy that “In the process, the cult of auratic art object had made way for culture in which a fully transportable image could finally be brought in proximity to the masses” (78). In this way, the cult value in reproduced artworks and images brings audience to revere both imperialism and Emperor, and forms a specific culture for the masses.

Ono’s political practice through artworks brings not only the cult value but also the effect of aestheticisation of politics to Japan. In the novel, Ono’s political practice attempts to lead people to devote to imperialism. The promotion of imperialism is covered by Ono’s artworks so that audience will receive and accept this political information and stream, which forms the effect of the aestheticisation of politics for imperialism. During that period, all of the original and reproduced artworks are to rebuild the value and position of Emperor. The aestheticisation of politics beautifies the function of war and revolt for imperialism. In this way, people, under the influence of the aestheticisation of politics, will suddenly believe and worship both imperialism and Emperor. The aestheticisation of politics uses reproduction of artworks to promote and inject the value of imperialism into people’s mind. In this situation, the aestheticisation of politics brings the function of art back to the cult and ritual values for Emperor.

Conclusion

The conflict between the younger and the older generation, politics and aesthetic in *An Artist of the Floating World* constitutes a complicated context for readers to unveil the real function of art. Through the parallel between Ono’s career life and political turmoil,
readers can first examine the opposition between art for art’s sake and functional art. One of Ishiguro’s critics, Lars O. Sauerberg stated: “In An Artist of the Floating World, we also find a traditional—aesthetically inclined—view of art set up against—didactic/propagandist—innovation” (196). Propaganda works can be seen as the representative of innovation while pure art is regarded as an old category. This idea is similar to Benjamin’s theory that audience should not reject but embrace the reproduced artwork and the function it brings, a new way to view art.

The function of Ono’s artworks undergoes three stages in the sequence of Benjamin’s reproduction: from exhibition value to political practice and finally back to cult value. Artists’ use of reproduction first removes their own opportunity to access pure art and brings artwork functions as well as the crisis of authenticity in historical testimony. The novel describes a situation whereby history has been manipulated, repressed and distorted in order to construct a flourishing present condition (Wright 61). This effect impacts not only artworks but also Japan herself. In the floating world, Japan and artworks all fall into a chaotic status where they fail to prove their authenticity and authority as the originals did. In this way, both Japan and artworks face the crisis of losing auras due to the floating historical consciousness.

In many novels, Ishiguro’s treatment of aesthetics in the characters and plot starts from aspiration but ends in reminiscence. Sauerberg mentions that “In Ishiguro’s novel, aesthetics, as thought of by Ono, are made to appear in terms of absolute aspirations: either you embrace this or that way, but after the choice there must be consistency” (198). Ono’s artistic journey only catches any booming but unstable value or trend in the floating world. Ono starts from foreigners’ curiosity about Japan, to momentary beauty in the upper-class, and finally ends up with the breakdown of his transient value, imperialism. He never stands in a steady position in his pursuit of art. His experiences
teach other artists a lesson, that to follow the trends and only fit the market demand are hazardous in the field of art. Therefore, artists in the midst of the floating world and transient trends should randomly switch their positions like Ono and avoid overreaching themselves. In this chapter, the function of art in An Artist of the Floating World focuses on how an artists’ career/life intertwines with social and political activities. The next chapter discusses the relation between artists and audience in the art market and how they influence each other’s tastes and preferences.
Chapter Three

The Circulation of Art in Cultural Field in Nocturnes

Ishiguro’s treatment of art in Nocturnes no longer focuses on the dilemma between the defense of liberal art and the application of functional art as in the previous chapters. Nocturnes examines how artists change and survive in the musical industry under the influence of consumerism and mainstream culture. Furthermore, the novel especially emphasizes artists’ relation with all kinds of people involved with art, such as audience, agents and critics. Their relation brings repercussion to artworks and forms an intangible area that Pierre Bourdieu calls a “cultural field” (The Field 6), where all people involved with art cooperate with each other and participate in the operation of art in an economic and political way, art as a “social phenomenon” (“Art” 299). Also, the cultural field classifies artworks and audience into different classes and levels according to taste and market demands. Individual taste, according to Bourdieu, refers to an audience’s educational level and social status, each of which forms a hierarchy in class. From his idea of taste and the cultural field in art comes the fact in Nocturnes that the value of artworks hinges not on creators’ originality but on audience’s feedback and any related social activities that promote them. Therefore, his idea of the cultural field helps readers to comprehend the operation of the art market and the function of people involved with art in the novel. Moreover, the idea of taste in his Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste illuminates audience’s preference for, and familiarity with, music and artists in Nocturnes. From this analysis of audience’s taste comes a way for artists to be recognized. This chapter adopts Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas as the theoretical framework to unveil the entire operation of art in Nocturnes. The first part introduces the importance of being appreciated and recognized by the audience, and
focuses on how artists face their selection between change for the mainstream and persistence in seeking to satisfy one’s potential. The second part examines the hierarchy of class level in audience’s musical taste, and reveals how the music industry works in this novel. The third part explores the function of agents and audience through the idea of a cultural field to identify what roles they play in the art market.

**From Artists’ Originality to Mainstream Culture**

How to be recognized by audience is a pervasive issue throughout the novel. Both music and musicians need to be recognized and appreciated by the general public and the music industry. The idea of recognition is alluded to in Pierre Bourdieu’s art theory in *The Field of Cultural Production*. According to Bourdieu, the definition of pure art hinges on the “disinterestedness and misrecognition” in artworks. This pure intention rejects any additional functions, even the most elementary one: “…representing, signifying, and saying something” (*Distinction* 4). In other words, any artworks without public recognition and interest can be regarded as pure art and remain in an “autonomous realm” (“Art” 300). In this way, audience’s recognition emerges as a standard to judge artworks. Public misrecognition brings artworks the name of pure art rather than profit and reputation in market. However, without audience’s interest and recognition, the artists and their artworks would not be accepted and appreciated by the general public. Therefore, to be recognized or not becomes a question for artists to think about before pursuing their goals.

In *Nocturnes*, leading characters are not all musicians but music players and lovers, all of whom search for their audience’s recognition and acceptance. Most of them face a strenuous selection between compromise to mainstream culture for a better life and belief in their originality and potential in art. In the setting of the novel, characters
retaining originality usually lose the opportunities of performance and familiarity with audience. However, following the mainstream functions is not only a stable way to be appreciated, but also as a transition period waiting for any chance to succeed. In effect, both selections may help music players or professional musicians to be recognized by their audience. The only difference hinges on the scale and number of their audience. Also, the way audience sees these music-related characters is not the same as they see themselves. These characters need to get back to reality to identify their position and status in the market first and reconsider the way to treat audience’s demands and mainstream culture later. Either of the two paths offers the characters different careers and positions in art field, as musicians or players.

Nocturnes does not emphasize artists’ aesthetic values but rather audience’s demands. This change from creators’ value to audience’s needs signifies the fact that audience’s feedback and reactions play a significant role in an art consumerist society. Hence, leading characters have no choice but to pursue popular art and weigh the idea of personal originality against mainstream culture to obtain jobs and stabilize their position in the music industry. In the novel, some characters, after a long struggle, eventually change to fit the mainstream culture or audience’s preference, allowing them to dominate their performance and style. This compromise sacrifices artists’ originality or potential in art and the spirit of pure art. These characters are the unnamed narrator in “Malvern Hills”, an American Jazz player called Steven in “Nocturne” and a Hungarian talented cellist, Tibor, in “Cellists”. These characters are examples of how artists struggle for their own aesthetic values and demonstrate how serious the influence of the mainstream is to artists and their originality.

Originality brings artists uniqueness in art but the lack of social connection to audience’s taste. Whenever these characters show their uniqueness, they always receive
audience’s unfamiliarity and public ignorance to their works. In this way, being creative is the long route to construct reputation and recognition in the art market. Several examples can illustrate this situation of the decline of originality in Nocturnes. The unnamed narrator in “Malvern Hills” is the victim of repetition of mainstream who cannot believe his creativity is an obstacle to success in musical industry. Whenever he plays his own song, he obtains some comments like “There’d be little shrugs, shakes of the head, sly smiles exchanged, then they’d be giving me their rejection patter” (Nocturnes 91). However, the rejection he faces signifies the publics’ non interest and misrecognition regarding his artworks. Since audience is unfamiliar with his songs, his works are not stained by economic concern, which earns the “disinterestedness” in art and remains in the “autonomous realm” (“Art” 300). His songs can be regarded as pure art in Bourdieu’s standard. However, under the cover of mainstream, his potential and originality will never be seen by the general public but only experts in the same field. Without audience’s acceptance and appreciation, his music will not be recognized let alone recorded for sale. The case of “Malvern Hills” indicates that originality in art has no relation to any social activity and economic practice in the cultural field. In addition, this rejection echoes all three characters’ careers/lives in the other stories. Besides him, Steven and Tibor are also refused by the art market due to the low demand from audience and their self-confidence or over-persistence in their potential. Eventually, they are forced to play the songs or accept the jobs they hate in order to survive. The protagonist Steven in “Nocturne” mocks himself as a jazz player “only when I’m inside my cubicle”, playing songs like “Car commercial” and “the walk-on theme for a talk show” (Nocturnes 127). Also, Tibor, who used to believe and have pride in his talent and educational background in music, faces disillusionment and accepts the job as a cellist in a small chamber group. These examples illustrate that originality in art cannot
offer a path for musicians to earn their living and social status, so that they linger in the transition to mainstream culture and gradually sacrifice their originality and potential in art.

In the face of the decreasing market demand for originality, these musicians grumble about their disappointment at audience’s taste and the cruelty of the art market. The following passage from the narrator in “Malvern Hills” perfectly echoes these musicians’ perspectives and describes the deteriorating situation of the music industry:

The stupidity of this position, which seemed to extend right across the London scene, was key to persuading me there was something if not utterly rotten, then at least extremely shallow and inauthentic about what was going down here, right at the grass-level, and that this was undoubtedly a reflection of what was happening in the musical industry all the way up the ladder (Nocturnes 91-2)

The narrator makes the change to move to the country where he was born and to search for a stage comeback. The words he chooses: “rotten” and “shallow” indicate audience’s taste and popular music. Audience’ preference for pop music reflects their shallow taste and ignorance regarding originality in art, both of which signify these characters’ rotten social status and career life in musical industry. The music that he describes in the novel should be the song of Godfather which is frequently repeated many times to entertain the audience so that they will stay in the café shop. Throughout the novel, these characters promote the aesthetic values and originality in art but are forced to sacrifice these characteristic and their potential to compromise with mainstream culture for survival. This situation indicates that the pursuit of originality and pure art in the profit-orientated art market is not the way to be recognized for artists in the setting of this novel. Also, Lindy’s comments on Steve seemingly match other musicians with great ambition: “The trouble with people like you, just because God’s given you this
special gift, you think that entitles you to everything” (Nocturnes 166). In the cultural field, these characters should compromise not only their potential but also their attitude.

In Nocturnes, the repetition of mainstream culture paves the way for public recognition. Mainstream culture is different from pure art which has no social connection to the public. For musicians, following the mainstream means repeating some popular songs which offer them more chances to be recognized due to audience’s familiarity and taste with the mainstream. According to Bourdieu, popular art avoids “social separation” and promotes “the continuity between art and life” (Distinction 5). Since popular art has a strong connection to audience’s social life and activities, it soon becomes the mainstream culture that dominates the art market in the cultural field. Bourdieu even explains why people prefer mainstream instead of novelty: “To bring a new producer, a new product and a new system of tastes on the market at a given moment is to push the whole set of producers, products and systems of tastes into the past” (“Art” 308). In other words, people, who are accustomed to the mainstream or inherent taste, cannot accept new values of art and taste because their taste is deeply injected by the social or educational system. Bourdieu believes that the new tastes and forms of art will undermine or eliminate the old ones which the audience is used to follow. In this way, the repetition of popular culture brings familiarity to the audience and arouses their interest in the artists who pursue mainstream culture too.

In the novel, the repetition of mainstream culture is a feasible way to access to audience’s taste. The most ubiquitous melody throughout the whole novel is the repeated song of the Godfather, which is played in three different stories: “Crooner” “Malvern Hills” and “Cellists”. For the sake of attracting audience, playing popular songs is a common strategy in Nocturnes. For example, Jan, the protagonist in “Crooner”, mentions his experience in playing popular music: “I remember once last
summer, going from band to band and playing ‘The Godfather’ nine times in one afternoon” (Nocturnes 5). Also, when the narrator in “Malvern Hills” isolates himself from the city by going to the country, he meets Tilo and Sonja, professional Swiss musicians, and asks them what kind of music can attract audience. As a duo, Tilo and Sonja usually play some popular songs and forsake the traditional Swiss folk music in their creatively “radical manner” (Nocturnes 109). Undoubtedly, the answer that the narrator of “Malvern Hills” receives is still some popular music, such as the Beatles, the Carpenters and Abba. Meanwhile, the narrator realizes that despite professional musicians like them with abundant experiences, they still need to follow the way the art market works.

Additionally, in the story of “Nocturne”, Lindy Gardner, Tony Gardner’s ex-wife, recommends that Steven listen to some music played by the old pros and learn from them. In this case, Lindy Gardner serves as the representative of the public and asks Steve to present the old classics for the audience’s recognition. This example catches the point that Bourdieu mentioned before, i.e. audience’s dislike of novelty. These old pros have established a fundamental taste in audience’s mind. Therefore, the public will accept these classics because they cannot change what they used to believe and pursue. In this way, following what seniors do will be appropriate and feasible in regard to the market demand and audience’s recognition. Furthermore, audience will refer to these classics as benchmarks to judge any new artworks in form and style. From the repetition of popular art to the representation of the classics, the way to be recognized consists in the similarity between your works and popular or classic one. The idea of originality is forgotten or ignored by the audience.

From originality to mainstream culture indicates two directions for musicians to deliberate. This process explains why a musician changes from his own potential to the
mainstream and forsakes his own originality for the sake of market demand. On the other hand, it also can indicate a situation that a musician retains his own originality persistently until he becomes the representative of mainstream and dominates the market. In the face of artists’ dilemma between originality and mainstream, Bourdieu mentions that both producers and creators in the cultural field who pursue commercial and political practice in art lose the opportunity to be recognized by specific audience. In this way, those people involved with art, creators as well as agents, fail to earn the name of pure art and any benefits from disinterestedness, both of which signify the impossibility of their dominating the art market (“Art” 301). Therefore, these characters should first clearly identify their position in the art market, as musical players or musicians. In this way, they will not linger in the dilemma between what they are and what they think they should be. After confirming their position, they can determine their way to be recognized.

The Hierarchy of Taste in Audience

All of the people involved with art in Nocturnes search for a way to be recognized and their own specific group of audience. In effect, the most efficient way to attract audience is to first scrutinize their tastes and preferences concerning artworks so that artists can meet audience’s need. This emphasis on taste in a consumer culture disconnects artworks from aesthetic value but connects with audience’s choices and market value. According to Bourdieu, to explore the operation of art in taste is to deconstruct audience’s “cultural code” which is “a decoding operation” (Distinction 3). Therefore, in the cultural field, consumption involves “a process of communication” and “an act of deciphering”, both of which link to the tastes they prefer (Distinction 3). In this way, Bourdieu assumes that “A work of art has meaning and interest only for
someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (Distinction 2). In this situation, if an audience lacks the same cultural code as that of a specific artwork, it will be unable to recognize it or build the connection with it. This cultural code simply refers to individual taste concerning art, and cultural competence is what shapes their preference in art.

According to Bourdieu, taste derives from audience’s educational level and social status. He assumes that taste is a “product of upbringing and education” which is closely related to “educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin” (Distinction 1). Therefore, individual tastes might come from different home background, educational system and social status, each of which forms a hierarchy in class level. These factors not only inherently influence audience’s taste but also help them identify the features in artworks. In short, individual tastes result from educational and social construction, cultural competence, and become a cultural code in audience that communicates with specific artworks for close recognition. This process is how audience’s taste influences the operation of the cultural field. Also, the distinction of audience’s cultural competence brings a hierarchy in tastes, consumers and cultural goods in the cultural field.

Audience’s taste determines whether an artist can be recognized and appreciated. In Nocturnes, most people involved with art at least have their own specific audience. Despite different social and educational levels, these audiences can fully recognize and understand artists with similar background or taste. However, the novel especially reflects a situation that several artists are only appreciated by a specific audience, but rejected or misrecognized by the general public and mainstream culture. In “Crooner”, Jan’s major audience is the tourists around the world whose tastes are too varied for him to satisfy. Also, what audience want is not just something they recognize but some
classics that match the atmosphere in Venice. Nevertheless, Jan mentions that “what tourists can’t take too much of is the classical stuff, all these instrumental versions of famous arias” (*Nocturnes* 4). Saliently, most audience, without classical taste built by specific cultural competence, cannot accept it continuously so that they gradually misrecognize and soon lose interest in that kind of music. As well as general audience, Jan is the particular audience for Tony Gardner, a once-famous singer, and vice versa. In the story, it is not Jan but Tony Gardner that needs audience’s recognition. Among all the people in the café, Jan is the only one that recognizes Tony due to his taste in classical music which originated from his mom’s interest and personal education. Also, after a serenade, Tony appraises Jan’s wonderful skills in playing guitar. The case of “Crooner” manifests that only through a similar connection in taste can audience truly recognize the authors. In “Malvern Hills”, the unnamed narrator finally finds the audience that appreciates his potential and originality, a Swiss couple of professional musicians. As musicians related to the same cultural field, the Swiss couple really perks our narrator up to reconsider his position in the music industry. Their acceptance and recognition manifest that their taste is similar to his music.

Both stories demonstrate that tastes are influenced by cultural competence. Only the people in the same cultural code can be familiar with those specific works. Audience without the same cultural code as that of the artists usually fall into misrecognition, like most tourists in Venice who are unable to notice Tony Gardner. In this situation, narrators all give credit to the senior musicians who possess the same cultural code in musical taste. Also, this distinction of taste assumes that audience who recognizes classic and original music probably comes from the upper class, such as Tony Gardner and Swiss couple. Therefore, the hierarchy lies in the different taste between general audience and these professional musicians.
Among these five stories, “Come Rain or Come Shine” differs from the others in several ways. First, the protagonist Raymond is not a musician or music player but a music lover with distinguished taste. Therefore, he has no need to struggle for fame and fortune in the music industry. Without these limits, Raymond is the only character who truly enjoys his own taste and creativity in music selection. Nevertheless, Raymond’s taste and lifestyle are criticized by the publics’ standard. The case of Raymond manifests how individual taste influences the way people recognize others, and reflects social class. In the story, Raymond retains his own taste in both music and lifestyle, and acts like an artist or social outsider in his own isolated way. His old friend Emily criticizes him with the eye of general taste: “Raymond, don’t you ever stop and ask yourself who you are? Emily asked. When you think of all your potential, aren’t you ashamed? Look at how you lead your life!” (Nocturnes 49). However, this criticism of Raymond’s taste in lifestyle seems partial and unfair because his friends are unable to comprehend his way of life, as a result of dissimilar cultural codes and competence. Especially, in the contrast to Raymond, his friend Charlie is a businessman who follows the mainstream in taste and lifestyle, a representation of normal middle-class. He usually advises Raymond what he should do and how to live according to his own standard. For Charlie, Raymond is “Mr. Perspective” (Nocturnes 51); he reflects on his superiority to Raymond’s gypsy-like life. In this case, the hierarchy of taste consists in the lifestyle and social status between Raymond and Charlie: lower class and middle class in taste and lifestyle.

The distinction of taste in music is assumed to be the root reason for Charlie and Emily’s crisis in marriage. Since university, Emily and Raymond have similar tastes in music and a close connection with each other. It can be assumed that their same tastes are cultivated by education and mutual interest in music. At the beginning of the story,
Raymond mentions that “Like me, Emily loved old American Broadway Songs” (*Nocturnes* 37). The way he describes “Like me”, which he mentions several times, indicates that he has a unique taste and Emily is just his follower or specific audience that recognizes and appreciates his taste. With the same cultural code in music, Raymond can fully communicate with Emily in the cultural field and they can recognize each other. Conversely, Charlie seems to have no such taste as theirs, and becomes an outsider in their relationship. He is even afraid of Raymond’s musical taste, which is used by Emily to belittle him. It turns out that there is a hierarchy of taste in their relationship which is over social class. Also, to help Charlie, Raymond rejects all his preferences and taste in music irrespective of Emily. Emily, as a partner with mutual interest, feels disappointed and cannot believe Raymond’s change in taste. In this situation, Emily loses the partner that can share and recognize her taste, as does Raymond. In their relationship, Raymond’s unique taste becomes his way to be recognized and appreciated, while Charlie’s ordinary life and mainstream taste turn out to trigger the breakdown of his marriage with Emily, and make him search for another specific audience. In effect, differing from Charlie’s mainstream and Raymond’s persistence on unique taste, Emily has her own cultural code to communicate with people in different taste and maintain her middle-class lifestyle. For example, Emily’s attitude in dealing with the “concept album” (*Nocturnes* 38) in pop rock is the same as the discussion on the classics she had with Raymond. Also, this is evident in the way Emily decorates the room for Raymond’s accommodation, posh hotel like. Even, the manner in which she criticizes Raymond manifests her compromise with the real life situation in the taste of music and lifestyle. These examples show that Emily is a changeable audience with various cultural codes for both mainstream and different tastes. Emily learns to negotiate with public taste and standards, while Raymond still
circumscribes himself in his cultural code and only has Emily as his specific audience. Despite their distinction, when the same taste returns again, their hierarchy in social status and lifestyle is temporarily dismissed until they start to dance out of nostalgia.

In the novel, there are two stories with some characters who claim to possess the unique taste to judge musicians’ potential, but turn out to be dismissed in the end: “Nocturne” and “Cellists”. In “Nocturne”, the protagonist Steve is a saxophonist misrecognized by the general public. Since the saxophone is an instrument related to classical music, the audience who appreciate this music may come from upper-class in social and educational level. To attract more audience from different levels, he decides to receive plastic surgery to improve his appearance. Before his return to the stage, Steve’s only audience in hospital is Lindy Gardner who constantly changes her social position for a better life. Since Steve and Lindy are all covered by bandages, their cultural code emerges as a social language to communicate with each other over musical taste. Steve's taste is built by his career, life and education so that he fully understands the music field but not the art market. Conversely, Lindy’s taste is cumulated by several changes in relationship with musical celebrities. What she understands is mainstream culture and that audience’s taste is not the pure taste or precise judgment in music style. That is the reason why the way Lindy praises Steve’s music as ambiguous without any direct criticism and suggestion, which makes Steve furious. It can be assumed that Lindy’s socially created taste is too shallow to really judge the essence of Steve’s music. From preference for classic music comes the problem of taste between Steve and Lindy. The story of “Nocturne” manifests not only the difference of taste between the general public and upper class, but also the difference in the taste built socially or educationally, as with Steve and Lindy. Also, the case of Lindy lets Steve to get accustomed to the audience with socially founded taste in
the future and the hierarchy in music taste and the art market.

The last story, “Cellists”, deals with a relationship like master and disciple which is based upon musical taste. The protagonist Tibor, trained by a remarkable musical school and a well-known teacher, has prominent taste and skill in music, long with self-confidence. Nevertheless, these advantages fail to offer him a splendid career/life. During his transition, he meets a woman named McCormack who claims to see his talent and attempts to cultivate his potential, but becomes disillusioned after her confession. With McCormack’s company, Tibor believes that he has found a trustworthy audience and builds a mutual taste with McCormack that other musicians fail to understand, a cultural code and outside the cultural field. Musical taste, their cultural code, serves as a mutual language to communicate with each other. In effect, McCormack, like Lindy who judges music in a vague way, believes she has is talented in musical taste. McCormack’s musical taste is cultivated socially because she never continually received a musical education due to her belief in teachers’ lack of qualification to teach her. Her attitude toward music manifests that her taste is superior to all her teachers and the general public. Besides, McCormack’s lifestyle and social activity forms her musical taste, which becomes the cultural code to communicate with musicians like Tibor. However, her foundation in musical taste is too vulnerable and frangible to build a connection with Tibor. When her background information is totally unveiled, McCormack becomes an imagined audience who soon vanishes. Meanwhile, the hierarchy of taste between them and other musicians in the story vanishes immediately. Both Lindy and McCormack are the representative of shallow tastes which are cumulated through constant switches in social status and social activity in the cultural field. They all pretend to be experts and specific audience to these artists so that they will fit the qualification to approach the taste of the higher class. For the two
musicians, both McCormack and Lindy are the temporary audience who recognizes their taste by chance and give the musicians a break to identify themselves. It is a pity that Steve and Tibor, different from the characters in other stories, still have no genuine audience who really appreciates them in similar and related cultural code. With these shallow audience whose tastes are socially constructed, Steve and Tibor still remain in their hierarchy and savor their taste in lonely isolation.

In effect, the way to catch audience’s taste is revealed in the story of “Crooner.” Tony Gardner mentions that musicians should differentiate and distinguish their audience around the world. He shares his secret with Jan: “You’ve got to ask yourself, what’s the difference, what’s special about a Milwaukee audience? What makes it different from a Madison audience? Can’t think of anything, you just keep on trying till you do” (Nocturnes 18). This quotation manifests that it is arduous for musicians to satisfy the variety of taste in different areas. Therefore, a successful musician should not only represent or become part of mainstream culture to attract audience, but also voluntarily build a connection to their individual taste. In this way, musicians can break the boundaries in multiple tastes formed by the hierarchy in educational level and social position. In this way, distinction of taste will not prevent musicians from becoming recognized.

The Function of Agents in the Cultural Field
The operation of art in Nocturnes focuses not only on the relation between authors and audience but also on all the other people involved in art that incorporate any social activities in the cultural field. Bourdieu defines the term cultural field: “The cultural (literary, artistic, etc.) field exists in a subordinate or dominant position within the field of power, whose principle of legitimacy is based on possession of economic or political
capital” (*The Field* 15). The field is defined by audience and marketplace instead of by creators. The structure of the cultural field consists of various types of capital and its power. Capital can be any approaches or resources through which agents can search for appropriate audience with similar taste to their artists and success in the field, such as cultural capital, social capital and economic capital (*The Field* 6-7). From the variety of capital comes the symbolic power that exists in the interior and exterior of the cultural field and influences all people involved in art in their positions. In this way, art, according to Bourdieu, becomes a “social phenomenon” related to any social practice in the cultural field. What Bourdieu underlines in his theory is the “relationship between works and art and the societies that spawned them” (“Art” 299). Therefore, he seldom explores the aesthetic value of works but examines the “broad array of social actors who play a role in maintaining art as a social practice” (“Art” 300). These social actors include authors, audience and agents that spawn relations with society and maintain artworks in an economical give and take system. Among these actors, agents play a pivotal part in the promotion of the value in artworks and artists. Hence, from agents’ promotion and manipulation come the clear operations of the cultural field which artists face.

In *Nocturnes*, the operation of art in several stories seems to correspond to Bourdieu’s cultural field regarding the relationship between artists and other people involved in art. In the cultural field, audience as well as agents can cooperate together to boost the value of artists and artworks according to their taste and preference. In several stories, some characters are specific audience to the artists first and later turn out to become their agents. In other words, agents should be the specific audience and discover artists’ characteristics to match the general public. Agents form and bring taste to both artists and audience so that they can introduce each other. It seems like agents
match taste through their specific capital in search of audience, and audience later become agents when transmitting their preference and cultural code to others. Therefore, in the cultural field, agents might play a pivotal part in producing the value of artworks. Also, in Nocturnes, there is a phenomenon that musicians are always the last ones to know or recognize their value in the art market. This situation is derived from the distance between the dominant position and subordinate one for artists in the cultural field. This distance makes authors “the first and last source of the value of his work” (“Art” 302). In other words, the dominant authors can be the primary source regarding the value of their work while the subordinate ones fails to offer any source due to the misrecognition and ignorance of the public.

As mentioned earlier, most musicians in Nocturnes have their specific audience related to their taste in a social or educational way. These audience become agents who introduce not only the taste but also the music industry to the artists. Most agents in the novel adapt economic and cultural capital to judge our musicians. In “Crooner”, Jan’s first agent is the manager of the coffee shop who adapts economic capital in viewing Jan and audience. To match the exotic atmosphere in Venice, Jan needs to avoid talking so that the audience will not discover he is not Italian. Also, his instrument, a guitar is criticized as being too modern for Venice’s classic taste, and fails to attract an audience. These examples manifest how agents use economic and cultural capital to influence musicians’ performance and style. Besides the manager, Tony Gardner is another agent who instructs Jan the operation of art in the cultural field. He serenades his wife Lindy in a gondola to attract the audience’s attention for his stage comeback. For Tony, the audience in Venice is his agents for promoting his news. As an old pro in the cultural field and art market, he really understands how to startle the audience through divorce and remarriage instead of his own music. The news of a divorce can attract the general
audience with lower cultural code, and make them recognize him first without understanding classic taste in music. The operation of art here stems from audience’s curiosity regarding the gossip and recognition of Gardner’s music again. The way Tony plays up the news introduces the operation of the cultural field and the way to be recognized for Jan. In this way, Jan can understand audience’s taste and cultural codes through Tony’s eyes and experiences, as the role of agents.

The unnamed narrator in “Malvern Hills” is also a musician who needs agents’ promotion and assistance. He is unable to understand how to survive in the art market and the operation of art in the cultural field. In the story, he has two chances to follow the agent. During his audition, he meets several cover bands and their managers who can be agents to discover his potential and match their style with him. These cover bands, like agents, seek partners with the same taste to fit both market and their demands. They stand in the position of economic capital to judge him. Yet, in his case, due to the narrator’s personal factors and dissimilar cultural code with these agents, he is eliminated by the agents and general taste. Additionally, musicians Tilo and Sonja are the agents for the narrator who recognize his cultural code and guide him in the operation of art in the cultural field. What Sonja instructs to the narrator is the definition of professional musicians. Sonja explains to him that “We make our living this way, so, yes, we are professionals” (Nocturnes 108). For Sonja, playing music is not a personal empathy or achievement but just a way to make a fortune. The meaning of being professional refers only to the job rather than skill or quality. Also, the narrator’s brother-in-law, Geoff, considers being a musician as a job: “And I don’t really think he’d accept that his work and your work are quite on the same level” (Nocturnes 117). These comments on musicians manifest the discrepancy in cultural codes and also how the public treats being a musician as a job. Through agents Tilo and Sonja, this
unnamed narrator can reconsider what position he wants to chase in the art market and cultural field. In these two stories, agents offer narrators their experiences to survive in the cultural field and a way to face the misrecognition from audience and other agents.

“Nocturne” evinces Bourdieu’s idea of the function of agents. The story of Steve manifests the relationship between authors and agents in the art market. The narrator, Steve, is persuaded by his agent, Bradley Stevenson, to undergo plastic surgery due to his ugly face. In this case, Steve resembles a product that Bradley packages for the market demand. Like the case of Tony Gardner, Bradley catches audience’s taste and preference through musicians’ outer appearance and adopts it as an advantage to simultaneously promote both the musician and his works. Agent Bradley stays in a wonderful place to observe and integrate artists’ wish for reputation with public’s taste for more profit through their strategies. Bourdieu agrees with this idea and comments: “Although dealers form a protective screen between the artist and the market, they are also what links them to the market and so provoke, by their very existence, cruel unmasking of the truth of artistic practice” (“Art” 305). Bradley becomes an introducer who matches the taste between audience and Steve. Through the brand new appearance, Steve can break the limits and discrepancy of the cultural code to be recognized by the general audience. With his acceptable appearance comes the further recognition of musical taste and embracing mainstream culture. In the cultural field, what artists do first is not to show their originality but to follow agents’ steps for audience’s gradual recognition. This process is what Bourdieu mentions as consecration of the artist in economic values.

The way art dealers consecrate artists in the cultural field is not to promote the aesthetic values, but to create a reputation for both artworks and artists through advertisements, marketing, critic’s judgment and any other related social activities.
Bourdieu believes that this consecration brings mutual benefits to both artists and agents. When an artwork is successfully consecrated through this process, both artists and agents of that specific works are simultaneously consecrated in social status and position in the cultural field. Therefore, Bradley attempts to consecrate Steven through surgery for their mutual reputation, profit and recognition. Once Steven truly receives remarkable recognition from the audience, other people involved in art, like critics, commentators or managers, will bring him various chances to manifest his potential and spread his cultural code in music. In this way, plastic surgery is just a method to dominate the art market. These people involved in art and the audience will become the agents that pave the way for Steve’s career.

All people involved in art can support the operation of art in the cultural field, like agents do. In “Nocturne”, Lindy Gardner is another character who benefits from consumer culture and perks up Steve’s ambition to change himself in return for more opportunities, acting like his agent. Lindy is also an old pro in cultural field who utilizes audience and celebrities as agents to access the upper class. For Steve, she is an example of how deteriorating the musical industry and entertainment cycle are. Steve criticizes Lindy as a figure “who epitomized for me everything that was shallow and sickening about the world” (Nocturnes 136), someone without musical ability who turns out to be famous due to her several marriages. However, Bradley sees things in a different way and explains to Steve the importance of Lindy’s visit: “Get her on your team, get your new face, doors will open” (Nocturnes 147). With this gossip and relation with Lindy, Bradley can play up the news and manipulate their connection with her so that Steve will have a chance to earn audience’s recognition. That is how an agent manipulates the affairs of artists for public notice. However, Bradley’s manipulation seems to undermine Steve’s artistic integrity and confidence; he argues: “The week
before, I’d been a jazz musician. Now I was just another pathetic hustler, getting my face fixed in a bid to crawl after the Lindy Gardner of this world into vacuous celebrity” (*Nocturnes* 138). Nevertheless, Steve does not seem to have any choice but to accept this path to success and admit what position he has in the cultural field.

In these stories, the function of agents is to not only get their artists involved in cultural field but also consecrate them through any methods in different capital. With these strategies, their artists may possibly climb to the dominant position which becomes the mainstream in the art market. Bourdieu explains the consecrated author:

> The consecrated authors who dominate the field of production also dominate the market; they are not only the most expensive or the most profitable but also the most readable and the most acceptable because they have become part of the general culture through a process of familiarization which may or may not have been accompanied by specific teaching (“Art” 308).

If an artist is successfully consecrated, audience can easily recognize him through familiar taste. That artist can create his own culture or stream without audience’s further recognition or judgment. This consecrated culture that artists produce can individually operate in its own market out of the challenge stemming from public taste. Also, this culture can communicate with their audience in their specific cultural code. Besides these strategies, Bourdieu believes that the value of artwork can be enhanced through the process of “competition between agents” and the “conflicts between agents occupying different positions” each of which is related to “different cultural good” (“Art” 304). From the competition and conflict between agents’ struggles in cultural field come the benefit and recognition to artists.

The stories above are the examples of how agents strive to promote and manipulate any strategy to consecrate their artists in the cultural field. However, there are two
stories with agents which are not related to economic concerns: “Come Rain or Come Shine” and “Cellists”. In “Come Rain or Come Shine”, the protagonist Raymond serves as an agent who stays in a position between Emily and Charlie in the discrepancy of taste. For Emily, Raymond is an agent who introduces her old American Broadway songs which forms her musical taste. Conversely, for Charlie, Raymond becomes both a “Mr. Perspective” and middleman who promotes Charlie’s advantages in social status and career. Besides playing the middleman between their relationships, Raymond in the cultural field acts more like a critic who potentially benefits the artworks he defends. Not being a musician who needs to entertain audience, Raymond criticizes music through his unique taste and preference. There is no other character in the novel that thoroughly judges music in detail and style. Raymond can clearly point out the year, name and version of any songs he prefers. In the story, Raymond never adapts an economic eye to appreciate music; the way he comments on music style is critical and direct. He describes his favorite version of Ray Charles’s song: “the words themselves were happy, but the interpretation was pure heartbreak” (Nocturnes 38). This kind of description seems to come from a real critic who appreciates only the quality and beauty of music. Also, Raymond criticizes the young generation’s taste and the music he believes to be low culture from a “pretentious rock band or vacuous Californian singer-songwriter” (Nocturnes 38). His judgments on music never hinge on market value but on the level of taste. Raymond’s criticism and judgment contrast to the mainstream but promote the autonomous field in art. Like his lifestyle, Raymond’s taste and criticism are isolated from the general social activity in the cultural field. Whatever role he plays, agent or critic, Raymond will always be a music lover who never forsakes his own taste.

In “Cellists”, McCormack is also an agent who brainwashes Tibor to embrace the
same taste and potential like hers. She introduces her idea about musical taste to Tibor and persuades him to follow the way she treats art, the belief in personal potential. Like Raymond, McCormack maintains her specific cultural code without any influence from a social activity in the cultural field. Also, like Bradley in “Nocturne”, agent McCormack successfully persuades Tibor to accept her strategy of practice, only words as judgment without practical performance. Through several meetings and training, Tibor even agrees that “Your words open windows for me. If you played yourself, the windows would not open. I’d only copy” (Nocturnes 208). In this case, Tibor deeply believes that this kind of method is the way to consecration. In effect, McCormack’s strategy is unable to offer Tibor any chance to be consecrated in the cultural field like the point mentioned before regarding the part of taste. That is the reason why at the end of the story the narrator’s friend, Ernesto, criticizes Tibor: “He’s spent the summer being told he’s a genius” (Nocturnes 220). Agent McCormack’s strategy only encourages Tibor's confidence, not his skill, let alone his becoming a consecrated musician. In this way, McCormack fails to be a successful agent who promotes Tibor’s music. Both Raymond and McCormack exclusively establish their own cultural codes and strongly keep their status and taste in music. They cherish their specific audience and remain unique agents only for the people with potential and insight.

Conclusion

Ishiguro’s Nocturnes addresses artists’ way to find success in the cultural field: from recognition and agents’ manipulation to consecration. It no longer explores the beauty in liberal art, but rather how artists survive and struggle in the challenges from consumerism and mainstream culture. Mark Mazullo agrees this perspective that “Ishiguro deals more directly with the question of art as a vocation, and thus as an
ethical pursuit” (88). This question refers to whether their artwork will be different when becoming an artist signifies a vocation. Also, artists’ attitude toward their works and position in the market will be examined in an ethical way. Hence, the novel offers us the operation of art in the cultural field, to observe how artworks change in the face of different stages in the field and tastes from audience. Gerry Smyth uses the word “Nightfall” in the title to describe the situation that characters face in the cultural field:

It [nightfall] appears to refer, rather, to the existential landscape in which people live out their sense of self: when the hopes and desires which animate our day may succumb all too soon to the disappointments of nightfall. Nocturnes seems a particularly apposite title, as each of the stories in Ishiguro’s collection depicts characters inhabiting musical landscapes which are compromised in some manner, or to some degree (150).

To identify their position in the cultural field and be recognized in the art market, most characters have no choice but to compromise with themselves, and to change for more opportunities to succeed. Compromise becomes artists’ necessary step before they dominate the mainstream.

As well as the way to achieve audience’s recognition, artists also have to learn how to observe and even manipulate the operation of art in the cultural field. In this way, artists will realize that to be recognized hinges not only on the style or theme in their works but also on the extraneous factors and affairs that artists or agents play up. In the structure of the cultural field, what is emphasized is not aesthetic value but the various kinds of capital and social activities available throughout the field. Obviously, the so-called idea of art for art’s sake will be totally erased in this novel. In the cultural field the importance of agents and the distinction of audience’s taste reside. The variety of taste derives from different educational and social levels. Several examples in
*Nocturnes* demonstrate that education-based taste is superior to socially constructed taste in the communication and deciphering of cultural codes. Also, the support of agents totally decides whether an artist can be appreciated and recognized in the art market. The function of art in *Nocturnes* is to bring readers to an observation of artists’ ups and downs, agents’ competition and audience’s preferences. Ishiguro’s *Nocturnes* offer us a practical understanding of the operation of art in the cultural field where audience and agents come first in the promotion of artworks.
Conclusion

Ishiguro’s treatment of art illuminates the process of changes in art: from the essence of art and functions of artworks to the relationship between those involved in art. This process expands from interior aspects to exterior considerations in art, and forms an art trilogy in the series of Ishiguro’s novels. *Never Let Me Go* attempts to clarify the definition of art by examining the discrepancy of reproduced and original artworks, and uses both clones and humans as examples to point out the crisis of authenticity and authority. *An Artist of the Floating World* shows the perils of following the trend blindly and how politics, social order and economic concern influence artists’ style and works. *Nocturnes* brings readers into the musicians’ world where fame and fortune are the most imperative targets to chase. Through Walter Benjamin’s and Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas, artworks in these novels are proved to be related to politics and social activity. And, both their ideas bring art into a fact that artworks are constructed by human activities and ideological power. In this way, artworks no longer deal with artistic empathy or pure aesthetics, but rather with the social or political functions in the society. However, Ishiguro’s critic, Mazullo, mentions that Ishiguro’s intention of art is not “a rejection of liberalism but a plea for the continued relevance of empathetic art in a world of increasing social, ethnic-racial, and biological complexity” (80). In these three novels, the idea of pure art, which symbolizes human liberalism and romantic art, is promoted for a while but soon eliminated by social and political values for individual intentions and benefits. Therefore, Ishiguro seems to use the settings in these three examples to offer hints of the real situation of art in our world that there is no pure art.

Both Benjamin’s and Bourdieu’s ideas offer readers a structure of artworks’
functions and proliferation under capitalism. This operation of art no longer focuses on the authors of works but on the change in artworks themselves. Benjamin’s concept manifests the repercussion that mechanical reproduction brings to art, classifying the value and function of art according to its external factors. These ideas and effects can be noticed in *Never Let Me Go* and *An Artist of the Floating World*. Bourdieu’s conception illustrates that the work of art operates in a complicated and intangible field, and that all those involved in art are engaged in their positions to promote the artworks they prefer. Therefore, the style and value of art in Ishiguro’s novels all hinge on audience’s and agents’ needs, such as clones’ works for humans, Ono’s work for the public and musicians work in *Nocturnes* for general audience. This idea of demand offers readers the fact that a successful artist is created not by his skill or works but by agents’ strategy and manipulation to earn audience’s recognition and appreciation. Under the influence of capitalism and consumerism, there must be a gap between domination and subjection in artists and artworks.

Several ideas from the relevant theories help readers to identify Ishiguro’s real function of art in the novel. This thesis discovers that the function of art works in a collaborative way and involves various social activities in reproduction and consumption. In this situation, artworks are not just a tool to judge characters but rather an approach to its function and condition mixed with the operation of the whole cultural field behind it. Throughout these novels, the idea and value of uniqueness in art are repeatedly mentioned and regarded as a standard to judge the quality of art. However, Ishiguro turns out to consider uniqueness only as a “potential for comparison and likeness” (“A New Reading” 143). In other words, to connect with other types and functions is more significant than to be a singular and specific art. This idea echoes Bourdieu’s strategy of consecration in art that unique or inexperienced artists should
follow the mainstream and general taste first to gain the public’s recognition, then to gradually dominate the market and eventually earn the opportunity of being consecrated. Only through publics’ similarity and recognition can the unoriginality of art access the art market, work in cultural field and finally change the culture that used to be.

Despite the discoveries and consequences from theories, the function in the work of art still needs to be examined and identified by the readers and audience based upon their own interpretation. Therefore, both the readers of Ishiguro’s works and audience in each novel have their own way to judge the function of work of art in characters. From the function of art in these novels, Ishiguro offers readers a world where art is constructed in political and social way. What Ishiguro encourages readers is to face the fact that art can be explored in various ways and angles rather than pure art or originality. Audience should accept all these change and embrace the multiple functional artworks for a new sight.

This thesis offers an overall view of Ishiguro’s treatment and description of art in these novels through the perspective of cultural materialism. Therefore, it does not take Ishiguro’s fourth novel The Unconsoled as an example since the artworks in that novel cannot be seen in a political or social way. In effect, the function of art in these novels can be seen in other ways and different theories, like Martin Heidegger’s The Origin of the Work of Art or some idea about globalization. Also, Ishiguro has recently published his seventh novel The Buried Giant which may possibly offer a new way of understanding of Ishiguro’s use of art to enrich his novels. These suggestions may provide other researchers with more directions to explore the function of art in Ishiguro’s novels.
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