

Tonying and Company

Established 1902

Chinese Art Dealer



Tonying and Company (Tongyun Gongsì) was established in Paris in 1902 by Zhang Renjie 張人傑 (1877–1950), who was also known as Zhang Jingjiang 張靜江. Westerners dubbed him “Curio” Zhang.

Son of a wealthy merchant family from Zhejiang province, Zhang gained an official appointment in 1902 as an attaché on the staff of Sun Baoqi, the Qing government’s Minister to France. While in Paris—and with the financial assistance of his father, Zhang Dingfu—Zhang founded the Tonying Company to import and sell works of art, tea, and silk.

Zhang’s business brought him into contact with several Chinese revolutionaries, including Sun Yat-sen in 1906, whose activities Zhang funded largely from Tonying profits. From then on Zhang supported the Guomindang, becoming one of its “Four Elder Statesmen” following Sun’s death in 1925. The next year Zhang masterminded Chiang Kai-shek’s rise to power. In 1928 he was made chairman of the National Reconstruction Commission, which was established by the Nationalist Government, and later governor of Zhejiang province, a post he held until January 1930. Zhang left China for good in 1938 after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. He traveled first to Europe and, due to World War II, to New York, where he died in 1950.

Tonying and Company was a family business first based in Paris at 26 Place St. Georges and then branching out to New York City (665 Fifth Avenue in 1925 and 5 East 57th Street in 1946). In addition to being an art dealer in its own right, Tonying supplied a number of British dealers, including John Sparks and Bluetts, from its sources in Shanghai. Zhang used his position in China to acquire high-quality works of art directly from the old Imperial Collection. (His friend Li Shizeng was appointed chairman of the newly created Palace Museum in 1925 and was responsible for the inventory of the Imperial Collections.) Zhang also oversaw the initial removal of more than half of the Imperial Collections to Shanghai in 1933 following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Many imperial works found their way into Western collections through Zhang and other dealers during this time. His crippled foot and associations with the Green Gang, China’s underworld narcotics trade, contributed to Zhang’s reputation. A great deal of Zhang’s wealth, and therefore the financing of the Nationalist cause, came from profits realized by Tonying.

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