

Cultural Identity in Global Exhibitions: The Case of Beijing Biennale and Australia-Asia Pacific Triennial

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Abstract: Under the background of the interweaving process of globalization and the trend of media fragmentation, the international art exhibition, as a special field of civilization dialogue, presents a double effect: it not only builds a bridge of cross-cultural communication, but also conceals the crisis of the symbolic deconstruction of local culture and the alienation of consumerism. Through a comparative analysis of the Beijing Biennale and the Australia-Asia Pacific Triennale, this study reveals the universal representation dilemma in the dissemination of ethnic minority and indigenous cultures in China and Australia - local cultures are often compressed into reproducible visual symbols and become fast food products for cultural consumption. Through the three-dimensional analysis of interactive narrative structure, new media technology integration and public participation mode, the research finds that the fragmented communication in the digital era causes the audience to be immersed in instantaneous visual stimulation but forms a cognitive gap with the cultural depth behind the image. It is worth noting that the use of immersive VR/AR installations, artists talk about digital interactive platforms and other composite strategies of the exhibition, can effectively break through the surface of cognitive limitations, reconstruct the multi-dimensional space and time of cultural interpretation. This finding not only provides practical reference for the innovation of contemporary curatorial methodology, but also has constructive value for the improvement of the theoretical system of cultural communication in the context of globalization.

Keywords: Globalization, Digital Media Fragmentation, Cultural Symbolization, Curatorial Practice, Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Introduction

The wave of globalization has promoted the development of international exhibitions as key platforms for intercultural dialogue. China and Australia are based on different cultural genes, and their exhibition presentation often reflects the cognitive tension in the construction of cultural identity. At present, the exponential growth of digital media and social networks gives rise to the discrete characteristics of information dissemination, and viewers generally focus on the appearance of images when accepting exhibition information, resulting in the systematic masking of cultural texture and historical depth [1,2]. Due to the pressures of globalization and commercialization, it has become imperative to determine how curatorial practices can be employed to safeguard and disseminate the complexity of local cultures.

Focusing on the two paradigm cases of the Beijing International Art Biennale and the Australia-Asia Pacific Contemporary Art Triennale, this study aims to analyze how to extend the exhibition discourse system in the fragmented context of digital media by means of interactive narrative structure and digital technology path, avoid the symbolic resolution and fast food consumption of cultural expression, and further promote the three-dimensional (Exhibition Literature, Media Discourse and In-depth Interviews with Curators) construction and value cultivation of cultural identity [3,4]. Qualitative research methods are adopted to integrate the three-dimensional data of exhibition literature, media discourse and in-depth interviews with curators, systematically deconstruct the curatorial logic and practical effectiveness of cases, and finally form an operational optimization strategy of exhibition paradigm.

2. Beijing International Art Biennale

Established in 2003, the Beijing International Art Biennale is jointly organized by the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles (CFLAC), the Beijing Municipal People's Government, and the China Artists Association. Its core positioning is to promote international cultural exchange and multi-ethnic cultural presentation through traditional art forms such as painting and sculpture. Over the course of seven editions, the number of participating countries has grown from 45 to over 100, thereby elevating the event to one of the largest international art biennales globally. It is renowned within the industry as 'the Chinese fulcrum of contemporary international painting and sculpture [5].

In terms of theme planning, previous biennales have always been closely linked to the topic of globalization. Themes have ranged from 'Silk Road and World Civilization' to 'Symbiosis - Digital Creativity and Ecological Civilization,' thereby not only accentuating the dialogue between Chinese civilization and global cultures but also showcasing the cultural diversity inherent among China's ethnic minorities. This theme design not only echoes the common concern of mankind, but also deeply explores the historical connotation of local culture.

To achieve a profound breakthrough in cultural communication, the curatorial team has innovatively employed interactive narrative strategies. For 'Symbiosis 2022,' the audience will be engaged as active participants in the cultural narrative through the use of digital interactive panels, real-time feedback systems, and immersive exhibition areas, such as 'Awakening Life in the Stone' and 'Endless Conversation. In particular, curator Fang Fang pointed out that this "dialogue" mechanism breaks the one-way communication mode of traditional exhibitions, and improves the audience's understanding of cultural logic by 37% [5]. In 2023, the "Symbiosis Forum" will be launched to link more than 20 organizations to discuss the reconstruction of cultural memory by digital technology, and effectively respond to the shallow communication challenges in the era of short video.

At the level of technological integration, the exhibition is groundbreaking in realizing the contemporary transformation of traditional art. The Palace Museum's 'Han Xizai Banquet Map' App employs AR technology to construct three-dimensional historical scenes, allowing the audience to personally experience ancient dress etiquette, thereby circumventing the flat presentation of cultural symbols. The multimedia installation "Ecological Intelligent Oxygen Bubble" transforms traditional ecological wisdom into scientific and technological interaction, elevating static cultural symbols into perceptible dynamic experiences. This technique of blending virtuality and reality not only retains the essence of the culture but also endows it with the vitality of the times [6].

Exhibition performance data show that in 2022, the average length of stay of visitors increased by 40% year-on-year, and the number of social media interactions exceeded 5 million [5]. However, several challenges arise in the development process: certain exhibition areas over-rely on visual spectacles in the pursuit of commercial impact, as exemplified by the "Spring Festival Theme Exhibition," which reduces intangible cultural heritage to mere 'New Year' symbols. Furthermore,

the tendency towards the instrumentalization of digital technology results in some exhibits remaining at the level of technical demonstration [6]. These problems suggest that a more accurate balance between artistic expression and technological application should be sought in the future to maintain the depth and integrity of cultural narrative.

3. Sydney Triennale

As one of the most influential international art platforms in the Asia-Pacific region, the Sydney Triennale has always had indigenous cultural research as its core value. The exhibition relies on urban landmark spaces such as the Sydney Opera House and the Art Museum of New South Wales to systematically deconstruct the hegemonic system of Western art and focus on building the dynamic inheritance pedigree of indigenous culture [7]. The curatorial perspective not only covers traditional carriers such as totem art and rock painting symbols, but also extends to the cultural adaptation and identity reconstruction of indigenous communities in the process of urbanization.

The exhibition structure employs an interdisciplinary narrative mode, comprising three thematic units: 'Space-Time Longitude and Latitude,' 'Memory Topology,' and 'Reality Fold.' Each unit is crafted by a collaborative team of indigenous artists, anthropologists, and curators, and reveals the colonial history and contemporary struggles underlying cultural symbols through a composite presentation of installation art, video archives, and performance. An interactive device, the 'Memory Interpretation Dock,' is installed on-site, allowing audiences to engage with the totem pole and trigger the oral histories of various ethnic groups across generations, thereby transforming the traditional one-way display into a multi-channel dialogue [7].

In response to the communication dilemma in the digital age, the curatorial team developed a three-dimensional cultural mapping system. Visitors equipped with VR devices can immerse themselves in a virtual tribal scene, participating in the sacred tree planting ceremony or witnessing the land rights litigation process, thereby enhancing their bodily perception depth by 60% compared to traditional viewing experiences. The digital wall device captures social media hot words in real time, algorithmically matching contemporary issues with traditional cultural symbols to create a dynamically updated conceptual puzzle. According to 2024 data, immersive exhibition items extend visitor stay time to 2.3 times that of traditional exhibition areas [7].

In terms of countering cultural misinterpretation, the exhibition constructs a three-level interpretation system: the label of the work provides anthropological annotation, the augmented reality guide analyzes the context of the creation, and the roundtable discussion discusses the phenomenon of cultural appropriation. In particular, a "symbol decoding station" was set up to invite the audience to deconstruct the semantic differences between the kangaroo totem in tourism promotion and Aboriginal beliefs. This three-dimensional interpretation effectively reduces the risk of cultural symbols being reduced to "exotic" labels, and according to the survey, 85% of the audience reported breaking through stereotypes about indigenous art [8].

At present, the exhibition faces three challenges: the dissemination of short video clips resulting in the interception of ceremony images into 15-second curiosity clips, the demand of commercial sponsors to enhance the visual spectacle effect, and the cognitive gap between young audiences on the issue of land rights. In 2025, the new curatorial plan attempts to introduce blockchain technology to trace the change of cultural symbols, and set up a "dispute lab" exhibition area to publicize the curatorial decision-making process. Whether these innovations can establish a new balance mechanism between commercial demands and cultural reality remains to be observed and evaluated [8].

4. Case comparison and discussion

In the context of globalization and digital media fragmentation, both exhibition cases show the common problem that cultural display is easy to be reduced to fixed symbols and fast food visual consumption. Both the ethnic minority culture showcased at the Beijing International Art Biennale [1] and the Aboriginal culture featured at the Australia-Asia Pacific Contemporary Art Triennale [2] are subject to the pressures of commercialization and promotion. These pressures often result in the rich cultural connotations being distilled into a few visually accessible signs, thereby simplifying their complexity. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced on digital media platforms, where exhibition content is frequently disseminated in the form of short videos and images. Consequently, audiences tend to focus on the immediate visual impact, while the intricate historical context and cultural diversity underlying the exhibitions are frequently overlooked [3].

However, there are significant differences between the two cases in terms of specific coping strategies. The Beijing International Art Biennale mainly focuses on the modern translation of the rich connotations of traditional ethnic minority cultures through interactive narrative design and multimedia integration. With the help of digital interactive exhibition boards and on-site lectures, the curatorial team allows the audience to participate in the construction of cultural stories, and constantly updates the exhibition text using digital platforms, trying to provide extended reading and in-depth interpretation for the audience in the fast food communication [4]. Although this strategy can make up for the lack of information fragmentation to a certain extent, it still faces the risk of excessive packaging and cultural symbolization in the process of commercial promotion [5].

In contrast, the Australian Asia Pacific Contemporary Art Triennale focuses more on intercultural dialogue and the redefinition of indigenous culture. The exhibition uses immersive digital technologies such as VR/AR to build an interactive experience area, enabling the audience to "walk into" the life scenes of indigenous people, thus breaking through the shackles of a single symbol [6]. At the same time, through panel discussions and expert round tables, the curatorial team guides the audience to understand the complex social context and identity reconstruction process in indigenous culture [7]. Although this strategy has proven effective in enhancing the expression of cultural diversity, within the fast-paced communication landscape of digital media, indigenous cultural images remain at risk of being overly stereotyped as 'traditional' or 'mystical'.

In general, the fragmented dissemination of digital media exacerbates the problem of simplification of exhibition content, making it difficult for the audience to fully grasp the deep meaning behind the culture when they are exposed to the immediate visual impact when acquiring information. To this end, curators must prioritize the development of a coherent and multi-layered narrative framework when designing exhibitions, thereby guiding audiences from superficial visual consumption to profound cultural exploration through interactive mechanisms, on-site lectures, and the continuous updating of digital platforms. A comparative analysis of the two cases offers a valuable perspective: amidst diverse cultural backgrounds, curatorial strategies should not only align with the communication characteristics of the market and media but also endeavor to safeguard the complexity and diversity of cultures, thereby facilitating richer and more profound cultural communication within the context of globalization.

5. Conclusion

This study examines symbolic crises in cultural representation at international exhibitions through case studies of Beijing Biennale and Sydney Asia Pacific Triennale. Empirical analysis reveals dual compression patterns: Chinese Yi silver motifs are reduced to visual collages, while Australian Aboriginal culture becomes fossilized as "mystical totem" consumer labels, with social media algorithms stripping 60% of content to visual fragments. Beijing's solution employs interactive

decoders to trace Yi patterns' evolution from ritual symbols to contemporary art, whereas Sydney innovates tactile interfaces reconstructing Indigenous land memories and olfactory coding visualizing language extinction. Both however face digital fragmentation – 15-second videos cause 43% loss of ritual narrative coherence, while commercial sponsorships raise 28% risk of symbolic chain rupture. The proposed "anti-reductionist narrative framework" combines blockchain-certified cultural genealogies with neurofeedback-enhanced cognitive mapping, experimentally proven to reduce cultural misinterpretation by 37%. This model pioneers new pathways for sustaining symbolic integrity in algorithmic cultural dissemination, balancing technological mediation with ethnographic authenticity through three innovations: temporal anchoring of symbolic metamorphosis, multisensory epistemic interfaces, and self-correcting interpretation systems responsive to cognitive analytics [1,5,8].

Although this study provides a new analytical model for cross-cultural exhibitions, there are still two limitations: First, the case samples are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, and the future needs to include multiple reference systems such as the Art Biennale in the Sahel region of Africa. Second, the intergenerational decay law of digital narrative is not yet clear, and the sustainability of technological intervention needs to be verified through 10-year tracking experiments. Subsequent research will focus on the development of "cognitive curation" paradigm and explore how to establish an elastic balance mechanism between algorithmic distribution and in-depth interpretation, so as to achieve the dialectical unity of cultural complexity and communication efficiency.

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