

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the English Exhibition Overviews on the Official Websites of Museums in Beijing

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Abstract: *This paper carries out a case study of the 14 museums in Beijing, analyzing English exhibition overviews of around 60,000-words on their official websites with the help of Nvivo qualitative analysis software to obtain their topics and high-frequency words. At the same time, with a perspective of critical discourse analysis and a focus on the analysis of text representation and intertextuality, it aims to explain how these museums and exhibitions achieve their purposes of publicity and promotion in the specific social and cultural contexts. Based on this, this paper puts forward some strategies for the museums' international communication, including enhancing the professionalism of exhibition publicity, optimizing the English websites of the museums, and strengthening the promotional nature of exhibition overviews.*

Keywords: *Critical discourse analysis; English exhibition overviews; Intertextuality, Chinese museums*

1. Introduction

In the late 20th century, the concept of discourse was gradually recognized in the western academic domain. The related studies show the inextricable relationship between discourse and social environment. Norman Fairclough, influenced by Michel Foucault's thoughts, believed that the formal features of language, as a part of social practice, could construct the social identity of language users and also hide the power relationship in social relations. Fairclough, on the basis of systemic functional linguistics, followed the core idea of critical discourse analysis and proposed that discourse was a form of social practice, a symbolic component of social practice, and conveyed social significance. He put forward the "three-dimensional theory" of discourse analysis, i.e. text, discursive practice and social practice. In the practice of discourse analysis, the theory attaches importance to the description, interpretation and explanation of how language signs construct meaning.^[1, 2] According to him, social practice of discourse can be seen as the articulation of different social components related to specific areas of social life, and the link of discourse with other non-discourse social components.^[3]

2. Exhibition discourse as social practice

From the perspective of discourse research, the use of language related to museum exhibitions can be regarded as a part of social practice, which is collectively called museum exhibition discourse. This discourse can not only convey the relevant information of tourism to promote tourism, but also has an impact upon people's lifestyles and cultural habits, and construct social processes and structures. As the capital city of China, Beijing plays an important role in the construction and demonstration of the culture with Chinese characteristics with a contribution of its long history and modern urban development. In this process, museums in the city are the best cultural institutions to protect both the movable and immovable cultural relics.^[4] In recent years, Beijing has devoted to developing itself into a city of museums. Museums are not just common institutions, and they are also bestowed with a national nature in a sense, because they have become a part of public culture.^[5] Thus the publicity texts of museums, as a part of museums' external publicity, may serve their communicative functions through specific lexical and grammatical means to create institutional images, thus helping to shape and spread the image of the city and the country, and creating a good environment of public opinion and an atmosphere of harmonious interaction with the outside world.^[6]

The data used in this paper is English exhibition overview texts on the official websites of museums in Beijing from 2018 to 2022. According to the data from the official website of the Beijing Cultural

Relics Bureau, there are 144 registered museums normally open to public in Beijing at present, of which 27 museums have English introductions on their official websites, and 16 have English exhibition overviews on their official websites. In this paper, 123 English texts of exhibition introductions from 2018 to 2022 have been collected. The 16 museums are the Palace Museum, the National Museum of China, the Capital Museum, the Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum, the Prince Gong Mansion Museum of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Chinese Garden Museum, the Tsinghua University Art Museum, the Chinese Art Museum, the Beijing Planetarium, the Chinese Sports Museum, the Chinese Geological Museum, the Chinese Science and Technology Museum, the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Museum, the Beijing Museum of Nature, the Beijing Automobile Museum China Women and Children's Museum.

3. Analysis of topics and word frequency in the exhibition overviews

The introduction of the English exhibition on the official websites of the museums studied in this paper is an open introduction and a publicity activity of the museum's specialist affairs through the Internet. According to the above definition, we can regard it as a discourse that plays a role in the practice of museum exhibitions. In this paper, the software of Nvivo is used to analyze the theme and word frequency of 123 English exhibition overviews and 60,000 words of texts collected. And the following results are obtained. The topic analysis of the English overviews of exhibitions reveals that culture, people, art, exhibition, life and works are what the texts write about. The word cloud diagram as shown in Figure 1 illustrates that in this kind of text, high-frequency words include exhibition, cultural, Chinese, China, works, museum, etc.



Figure 1: Word Cloud of the English overviews of exhibitions of museums in Beijing.

From the distribution of the above topics and high-frequency words, the overviews of the English exhibition of museums in Beijing, as an important way for the audience to understand the exhibition through the official website, not only contributes to the recreation of the exhibits and the exhibition itself, but also highlights the recreation of China, culture, people and life, which is facilitated by the nature of museum as a platform for cultural display, publicity and education. These themes and keywords are not only viewed as displays of the communicative purpose of the genre, but also are important aspects of the museum's own institutional image.

4. Text reproduction of the exhibition overviews and building of museum images

According to Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse theory, the text analysis mainly focuses on the specific analysis of vocabulary, grammar and text structure, and it also put a stress on the representation of meaning at the lexical and syntactic level. His textual analysis is mainly based on Halliday's theory of the three metafunctions, ie. ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function in Systemic Functional Grammar, while the representation of activities and their participants mainly involves the ideational function of clauses. This theory holds that speakers' experience of the real world can be realized by the ideational function at the discourse semantic level^[7], and by the transitivity system of clauses at the lexico-grammatical level, including process, participant and environment. The process can be divided into six categories: material process, behavioral process, mental process, verbal process, existential process and relational process.^[8] On the basis of the above thoughts, Fairclough proposed that discourses are "ways of representing aspects of the world" and "different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different

relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions they take in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships in which they stand to other people".^[3:124] In other words, through the analysis of the selected discourses, different social relationships and factors involving in the related exhibition practice can be revealed.

4.1. Reproduction of professional museum practice activities

Through the analysis of the clauses in the English exhibition text of the museum, we can see which social events or objects are included in the specific discourse and which are excluded; And thus realize the communicative purpose of the genre and the purpose of the social activity. This paper analyzes the transitivity of 316 sentences in which the high-frequency word exhibition is located. Appendix 1 provides three randomly selected analysis examples of participants and processes of the Palace Museum. The analysis found that most of the information was presented through the sentences of relationship process and material process, and most of the activities involved in the reappearance were "exhibition tips", "exhibition theme", "introduction to various parts of the exhibition", "exhibition background", "exhibition significance", "exhibition organizers", etc. Different museums choose different order to present the information, and the level of detail of each key point is also different. The reproduction of these information is mostly based on museums, exhibitions and exhibits. The relationship process is mainly based on the specific content, nature, characteristics and evaluation of the three, which is detailed, objective, professional and emotional. The participants of material processes generally include actors and goals. In this kind of discourse, the actors are less the actual executors of specific activities in the exhibition practice, but the impersonal actors such as the exhibition itself, the exhibition theme, exhibits and their details, museums and so on.

At the same time, psychological process and verbal process rarely appear. It can be seen that in the introduction of English exhibitions, Beijing museums tend to describe exhibitions and exhibits as objective objects, rather than reproduce them from the feelings of visitors. This way of expression, on the one hand, describes all kinds of activities related to the design and layout of the exhibition, academic support, publicity and education as the institutional professional activities of the museum, which helps potential visitors to recognize the museum as a whole object. On the other hand, it weakens the perspective of visitors in the exhibition introduction. Although the exhibition introduction is not an introduction to the visitors but a display of the exhibits and their cultural connotations, the visitors' feelings, interests and gains should be considered and reproduced by the curators in the introduction. From the corpus obtained in this article, the phrase "this gallery allows visitors to experience the natural measures of..." occasionally refers to the feelings of visitors. It also takes the exhibition hall of the exhibition as an additional agent, and expresses the visitors as the object of a short causative verb. This means that when presenting the role and activities of visitors in these English exhibitions, they are more considered as a part of the work of exhibitions or museums than as independent groups with initiative.

4.2. Reproduction of China and Chinese culture related activities

Through the theme analysis of such discourse, it can be seen that the text not only reproduces the exhibition practice as a part of the museum's professional activities, but also as a platform for building the image of China. In terms of transitivity, through the analysis of 406 clauses containing Chinese, it is found that they cover the exhibition background, exhibition content, exhibition significance and others. The specific topics involved mainly include the origin and history of Chinese culture, many specific aspects of Chinese culture including art, architecture, catering, traditional Chinese medicine, etc., Chinese traditional cultural concepts, Chinese customs, Chinese achievements, and exchanges between China and other countries. By these descriptions, the image of China's ancient civilization with a long history and splendid culture has been built. It also means that museums in Beijing display not only the historical and cultural heritage of the region, but also the profound image of the entire Chinese civilization. The museum has thus been constructed as an important platform for visitors to understand and learn about China and its culture.

Here, an excerpt from the overview of the special exhibition "Mirroring the Heart of Heaven and Earth - Ideas and Images in the Chinese Study" of the Palace Museum can be taken as an example to see how the text reproduces these exhibition practices.

C1 Chinese culture grew and prospered while being passed down from generation to generation for millennia to become as profound as it is today. C2 the Chinese nation shaped a distinctive spiritual

world and understanding of the universe. C3 In ancient China, the study was not only a venue for reading, writing and collecting books, but also epitomized cultural inheritance and prosperity. C4 This exhibition, focused on the "Ideals and Images in the Chinese Study," aims to explore and explain the cultural core of the Chinese study and give this traditional facility fresh meaning of contemporary times. C5 Specifically, it aims to increase cultural literacy and inspire love for the country by reflecting on the present by looking back at the past. (In this excerpt, C1 represents clause 1)

This paragraph includes "Chinese culture", "The Chinese nation (China)" and "In ancient China" as the starting point of the clauses, which may be interpreted as the main topic in this paragraph. The exhibition itself (such as "this exhibition", the pronoun "it") or the exhibition object (the study) may also be a topic here. These text features show that the Palace Museum, as one of the five largest museums in the world and the largest ancient cultural and art museum in China, is often compared on the national level and plays an important role in building the national image. The concept of the Chinese nation, the Chinese culture as a whole, and the Chinese-style humanistic feelings highlighted in the text are also well-matched with the identity of the largest ancient culture and art museum in the Palace Museum, the "National Name Card", and the national 5A scenic spot. "The fundamental purpose and ultimate mission of global museums are to protect and inherit the multicultural and colorful environment of human society. Social education and public services are important means for museums to fulfill their missions and realize their respective purposes".^[9] In the context of tourism, culture is an important driving force for people. It provides new opportunities for tourism destinations to promote cultural elements and attract more tourists.

The first three sentences show that Chinese studies are taken as a reflection of the Chinese literati's spiritual world and their understanding of the universe. In traditional Chinese culture, a study (a room, especially in a house, used for quiet work such as reading or writing) was viewed as an activity of Chinese cultural spirit and as a manifestation of cultural heritage and prosperity. This representation of the study is closely related to the understanding of studies in traditional Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese studies are tokens of beauty of celebrities, beauty of extreme and beauty of sublime.^[10] These are some of the grander themes, which are more closely related to the building of national image. They are more about "Who I am". However, as a kind of publicity, it is also necessary to express the discourse of "Welcome". Some scholars believe that discourse of governance may include the "promotion" genre, which is related to sales, brands, and the purposes of organizations or individuals. The dramatic increase in the promotion genre is one aspect of the new capitalism.^[11] Fairclough also maintained that one of the changes entailed by new capitalism is that national governments and even individual towns and cities now need to actively promote themselves.^[3] Similar to the analysis in the previous section, the English introductions of the selected exhibitions here also mainly provide information, but rarely persuade or urge visitors to take actions.

5. Intertextuality in the discursive practice of exhibition overviews

According to Fairclough, the relationship between text and genre is a potentially complex question. A text may not only involve a single genre and it usually mixes or blends various genres. When texts and their interactions are studied from the perspective of genre, one of the foci is the role they play in social events and their contributions to social actions and interactions.^[3] Thus, each text is not isolated, and should be analyzed in connection with other texts and interpreted in the social context. In other words, texts as well as discursive practice and social practice of discourse should be treated equally.

5.1. Genre-blending of the exhibition overviews and news bulletins

In the collected exhibition overviews, in addition to the reproduction of the basic information of the exhibition mentioned above, some overviews also provide information such as "opening ceremony and guests", "detailed explanation of the exhibition features", "information about relevant activities or products around the exhibition". In different exhibitions, these contents are usually combined with other common contents, so that visitors can not only understand the necessary information of the exhibition, but also fully appreciate its characteristics. By reproducing other activities related to the exhibition, discourse can better promote the museum and related cultural elements. At the same time, it also helps to build a professional image of the museum to a certain extent so as to attract more international visitors to relevant exhibits and themes for a better experience and understanding of Chinese culture.

Museums, represented by the Palace Museum, tend to take the "meeting" (opening ceremony) and

"exhibition" (exhibition) as a whole and reproduce them in the exhibition introduction. Most of the clauses containing "opening ceremony" are material processes, and "opening ceremony" acts as a participant or environmental component in the clauses. This means that the opening ceremony of the exhibition may be reproduced as the object of publicity. At this time, more descriptions are made in terms of time, place, guests and related activities. For example:

(1) On 25 January 2022, the opening ceremony for the exhibition... was held at the Belvedere of Literary Profundity (Wenyuange) in the Forbidden City.

(2) Li Qun, member of... President of the China Construction Bank, attended the opening ceremony and visited the exhibition.

(3) Hu Heping, the minister of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism ... and Zhang Jianqiu, the chief executive officer of the Yili Group of Inner Mongolia, were present at the opening ceremony and shared comments.

(4) The opening ceremony was held in tandem with a launching ceremony hosted by Chairman Liu Aili for a new series of postage stamps for the 2019 jilai year (i.e., the Year of the Boar) designed by Han Meilin for China Post.

It may also be reproduced as the environment for publicizing other objects. At this time, the exhibition practice activities involved include those of guests, such as speeches, visits to the exhibition, donation activities as well as theme activities related to the public, and the opening activities. For example:

(1) Wang Xudong and Li Li, representing the organizing institutions, spoke during the ceremony; Wan Jie, representing the supporting organizations, also shared thoughts.

(2) During the opening ceremony, congratulations were shared by Irina Bokova, former director-general of the United Nations Educational, ...

(3) On the day of the opening ceremony, the diplomats in attendance also toured "Beyond the Bounds of History..." in the Meridian Gate (Wu men) gallery.

(4) During the opening ceremony, Han Meilin gifted ten of his works to the Museum.

(5) During the opening ceremony, Director Shan Jixiang shared how artistic depictions of the Chinese Zodiac are an integral part of traditional Chinese culture and, especially, the customs surrounding the Spring Festival (i.e., Chinese New Year).

(6) On the day of the opening ceremony, the Palace Museum also held a class on printmaking titled "Great Civilization" with ten groups of families and six groups of students and teachers participating. After touring the gallery, the participants were guided by artists to complete their own prints with cultural elements unique to the Palace Museum.

Although these activities and participants are not the core and essential information related to the exhibition, this discourse can be used to reproduce part of the exhibition as a ritual. From the perspective of genre, it will present the introduction genre of information about exhibitions and exhibits, which will be mixed with the news bulletin genre that reports the opening ceremony of the exhibition, to construct a new type of publicity genre of news motion, i.e. the new discourse of exhibition newsletter-overview.

5.2. Recontextualization of ancient literature as expression of Chinese aesthetics

The intertextuality in the selected discourse also includes the interaction between other genres and the present text. An important topic to be discussed is the "recontextualization" of the historical text into the current text. Recontextualization here refers to the transfer of various components of social practice to another one, placing the former in the context of the latter, and transforming it in a specific way in the process.^[12, 13] Here, the titles of each unit of the special exhibition "Mirroring the Heart of Heaven and Earth-Ideals and Images in the Chinese Study" of the Palace Museum will be good examples at this point. The intertextuality between the present genre and the historical genre can help to explain how the cultural and aesthetic aspects of the exhibition are achieved. The first unit is entitled "Vision Beyond Books". It comes from the line "when I was young I didn't care about the world, and immersed myself in zither and books" in a poem by Tao Yuanming, a poet of the Wei and Jin dynasties in ancient China. The name of the second unit is "Morality and Responsibility", whose Chinese version is upright friendliness and bright virtue literally. This is an idealistic moral requirement put forward by

Dong Zhongshu, who was a scholar instrumental in establishing Confucianism as the state cult of China and as the basis of official political philosophy. The theme of the third unit is "Bond with Nature". Its Chinese equivalent is making a covenant with frost and snow literally and means being accompanied by plum blossom, which comes from a line of an ancient Chinese poem written by Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty. This historical text says "when I bond with the plum blossom, I follow the true voice of the nature". Because in traditional Chinese culture plum blossom is a symbol of spring, while spring has a connotation of benevolence according to Confucianism, the intertextuality between them helps to reflect the literati's aesthetics of a Chinese study.

These titles here are all examples of intertextuality between the introductions and the ancient poetry or writings. In the context of the current museum exhibitions through recontextualization the meaning of the text itself is used as the theme of different sections of the exhibition. Besides, the profound connotation of Chinese culture is expressed in the genre of poetry or philosophical notion. The concept of intertextuality is closely related with the productivity of a text, including how a text can change the previous texts, and how it can reconstruct the existing genre and discourse so as to create new ones^[1]. Therefore, those metaphors or symbols in ancient Chinese poetry express the poets' thoughts and feelings at that time and realize the poetic function or the entertainment function of language. For example, the "zither" and "books" here are ontological metaphors. In the original poem, the line describes that the poet is indifferent to worldly affairs and enjoys playing zither and reading. In the current context, it not only conveys or indicates a specific theme of the exhibition to the visitors, but also expresses the quality and accomplishment of traditional Chinese literati to them through the creative transfer of use of the ancient Chinese poetry and prose, and strengthens the relationship between the exhibition theme of "study" and Chinese literati. Although some researches have shown that the promotion style has developed rapidly today and has permeated into many genres, promotion is very weak in this particular English publicity discourse. There is a kind of "vertical" intertextuality here, which reflects the connection between the current text and its remote background, and connects with those texts historically.^[1]The image of the Palace Museum as an exhibitor and inheritor of ancient Chinese culture has also been built here. The theme of the third unit, "bond with nature", is of the same case.

At the same time, there is also a phenomenon of "horizontal" recontextualization in English-Chinese translation in these examples. The English expression itself interprets the metaphor and uses a more straightforward text to realize it. For example, Vision Beyond Books is used to express "Wei Huai Qin Shu", Morality and Responsibility is used to express "Zheng Yi Ming Dao", and Bond with Nature is used to express "frost and snow". The dissimilation strategy is used here to make the English text easier for the audience to understand, but it has lost its original elegant charm. In this context, it needs further discussion. Therefore, in future exhibition introductions, in addition to an expression of the meaning, it is quite necessary to consider how to reshape the social behavior reproduced in the original text while expressing the meaning as well as the translation of special nouns in a specific cultural activity. The English introduction also explains the title and theme of the exhibition, and directly quotes the "Four Aphorisms of Hengqu", which highly reflects the Chinese humanistic spirit. "The so-called vision of the heart of heaven and earth is to strive to inherit a spirit: 'establish a heart for heaven and earth, establish a life for the people, follow the unique learning for the saints, and open peace for all generations'". In the exhibition practice, the audience may have a deeper understanding of the humanistic spirit expressed in the "Four Aphorisms of Hengqu" by watching the exhibition and obtaining extended information. In addition, the 3D modeling of "Xiangxue" is mentioned in the exhibition. This and "Xiangxue and Qianlong" (the theme of the first issue of "The Study of the Forbidden City") form the intertextuality between the exhibition introduction discourse and the cultural relics academic discourse.

5.3. Intertextuality between political discourse and the exhibition significances

Through intertextuality analysis, how the exhibition introductions interact with discourse activities in other parallel fields can be understood. As an attribute of a text, intertextuality means the fragments in a text from other texts can be clearly distinguished or integrated, and the present texts can absorb, contradict, or respond to them and so on. In terms of production, an intertextuality perspective emphasizes the existing speech communication chain, which is composed of previous texts, and which the present text should respond to.^[14]It also helps to explore the relatively stable networks, along which texts change from one type to another, they run along these networks and experience predictable changes. In terms of consumption, an intertextual perspective helps to emphasize the view that not only texts but also those other texts brought into the interpretation process by the interpreter with rich

changesconstruct interpretations.^[1]

Theintertextuality in the selected discourse also includes the recontextualization of the political discourse about the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage. In the historical texts, they are part of the speech or report from the present. The themesinvolved here includes making traditional culture serve modern times, the value of traditional culture, the core ideas of traditional Chinese culture, including the unity of heaven and man etc., the Chinese characteristics of exhibition and archaeological work, and the significance of exhibition in cultural exchanges. This can also be taken as a kind of representation of the social role of the museum andthe exhibitions. Some researchers believed that the present definition of museum from ICOM (International Council Of Museums) somewhat undervalue the social role of museums, which “appears to be of paramount concern to the museum world today”.^[15] The intertextualityhere is to transform the political notions of the Chinese government in the field of cultural relics work into the present discourse to show the social and national significance of the exhibitions usually. They also emphasize the concern and the national political representatives over the exhibition and the related cultural activities. In other words, it helps to transfer texts in the past to discourses existing. This process may be achieved in a relatively traditional and normative way, or in a creative waywith the help of a new structureessential to the discourse order.^[1] In this example when themuseums in Beijing reproduce their own activities and participants, they are at the same timecreating the image of China being innovativein the protection and inheritance of culture, and take the professional activities as their important support in practice.

6. Suggestionsfor the exhibition publicityin Beijing’smuseums

6.1. Improving the professionalism of exhibition overviews

Exhibition is one of the four major functions of the museum. It is closely linked with other collection, research and education functions. A good exhibition cannot be done without professional planning. In the international museum exhibition discourse, there is the term "curator", which is a very important concept in the international museum exhibition practice. The system has been gradually established in China. Most Chinesetop museums implement the curator responsibility system. "Generally, each department will submit the exhibition plan for the next year to the academic committee of the museum at the end of a year. After discussions by the museums, the exhibition will be put on official websites, WeChat, Weibo and other digital platforms. The visitors will rate the most wanted exhibitions. After comprehensive evaluation, each curator will start to form a team to operate the next year's exhibition."^[16]At present, occasionally some English introductions of exhibitions in some Chinese museums may mention the curator, for instance the introductions from the National Museum and the Palace Museum, but the importance and significance of them are still underestimated. The construction of the discourse at this point is also the embodiment of the professional and academic nature of the museum exhibitions.

6.2. Strengthening the promotional nature of exhibition publicity

In the current exhibition, from the perspective of the "ritual view" of communication,^[17] people may not pay much attention to whether they learn anything new, but to the description and strengthening of the specific values and worldviews in the regular ritual process.^[18]Therefore, while giving a good explanation of the characteristics of the exhibition, the overviews of the exhibitions will also help to enhance the sense of presence and solemnity of the participants if the museums have made an integrated representation of the exhibition and the ceremony or delivered more detailed reports on the relevant offline activities related to the exhibition. Besides, to a certain extent, it will also better realize the publicity function of the museums, and thus strengthen the recognition of the visitors to the exhibition and the museum.

7. Conclusion

From the perspective of critical discourse, we can not only understand the characteristics of the text itself, but also examine its activities in practice as part of the exhibition. The analysis of text reproduction of the discourse shows that although the main function of museum exhibition discourse is to display the theme, meaning and background of the exhibition, both high-frequency words and the perspective of publicity involve many aspects of the museum itself and Chinese culture. In addition, the

publicity discourse interacts with the political discourse on the protection and inheritance of culture and cultural relics, and the ancient Chinese genre with literary interest. These text reproductions and the characteristics of discourse practices show that when the exhibition introduction is presented to international visitors, it not only displays the exhibition as a professional practice of the museum, but also from the perspective of the state and institutions helps tourists to have a new understanding of China and its culture. In the future, when the publicity for external exhibitions is made, the professionalism of publicity should be enhanced by highlighting the role of curators, strengthening the construction of the museum's English website to optimize the international image, and enhancing the promotional nature of publicity by increasing the visitors' experience. Therefore, the museum plays a more important role in the cultural life of visitors, and provides them with the opportunity to travel through time and space and converse with history so as to connect the past with the future.

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