

The Relationship between Cultural Institutions, Cultural Identity and Ideology in Chinese Museums: a Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: *This study examines the relationship between cultural institutions, Cultural identity, and ideology in Chinese museums through a discourse analysis. The Palace Museum, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, and the Xinjiang Regional Museum are used as case studies. The research methods employed include discourse analysis, content analysis, critical discourse analysis, in-depth interviews and a field survey. The results of this study show that these museums present narratives that construct a Cultural identity rooted in the past, but also forward-looking and modern. These narratives are closely tied to the ideology of the Chinese and are used to promote a sense of unity and continuity among the Chinese people. However, there are also contradictions and limitations in the construction of Cultural identity through these cultural institutions.*

Keywords: *Cultural institutions, Cultural identity, Ideology, Discourse analysis, Chinese museums*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of study

In ancient China, there was no such thing as a museum until the first one established in 1915 [1]. It seems that they never attempted to share these collections with the public. However, Chinese emperors have a longer history of collecting habits than the Western people. The emperor longed for the right to possess the collections, rather than focusing on the constructed meanings of objects. Chinese intellectuals realized the importance of establishing public museums after the Opium War (1840AC) because Shanghai, Guangzhou and other important Port cities have been colonized one after another. Chinese progressives were worried that China would face the crisis of division. So, the construction of Chinese Cultural identity has become an urgent social issue at that time to avoid this crisis.

The Palace Museum had collections of fine works of 5000 years of Chinese civilization. Besides, all the scholars of Chinese museology, archaeology and museum research acknowledged that the Palace Museum is a milestone in the study of Chinese cultural relics [2]. Urban Planning Exhibition Hall was built to construct an important narration and it is the major development of Chinese cities. China has constructed at least 410 Urban Planning Exhibition Halls, which are distributed in 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities and 2 special administrative regions through Chinese scholar Yan Yuanjians research [3]. He also pointed out that the urban planning exhibition hall has expanded from large cities such as Shanghai and Beijing to local small cities and each province has at least one of them. The Xinjiang Museum was established in August 1959 in Urumqi, Xinjiang, China. The museum holds over 40,000 items of various cultural relics and specimens, including 381 national first- grade cultural relic. In May 2008, the Xinjiang Museum was included in the first batch of the National first-grade museums of China.

There are many scholars like Kavita Singh and Sharon J. Macdonald, who have researched about the museums and construction of identity. They have argued that museums construct some identity [4]. In this view, the Palace Museum, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, and the Xinjiang regional museum might construct an important identity which represents the whole Chinese nation. This construction of Chinese Cultural identity is based on a complex relationship between its ancient past, change, and development of the city. These three museums are part of the construction of complex relations. It defines the relations as follows: contemporary identity in relation to historical China; in relation to the change and in relation to its future.

1.2 Research problem

According to the literature, discourse analysis can be applied to the research on the practice of cultural institutions, which could help to expose the structure of constructivism and provide insights for the practice of cultural institutions. China is one of the nation-states often mentioned in this research because it is committed to build various cultural institutions to construct unique purposes. Museums are one of the focal points of these cultural institutions. In the past few years, the Chinese Museum has become a good site for studying politics, economics, and social dynamics. The research on Chinese museums and constructionism proceeds from the narration, political construction, and ethnic or national construction. However, when looking at this research, the purpose of Chinese cultural institutions practices in China is limited, weak, and its contradiction is still prevalent. When studying discourse meaning creation of Cultural identity in Chinese museums, previous studies cannot simply explore the structures of narration in English literature, which are different from that in cultural institutions. To study the museum constructions, researchers need to explore other potential discourse formations which are different from those applied in Chinese museums previously. Also, the relationship between cultural institutions and ideology must be explored. Therefore, this research will illustrate the relationship between the cultural institution, the Cultural identity and ideology.

2. Objective of this study

The major objectives of this study are as follows:

- To explore "how the Chinese cultural institutions in Beijing and Xinjiang construct the discourse meaning creations about Chinese Cultural identity".
- To observe "what is the relationship between the cultural institutions and ideology in China".

3. Research Questions

The major research questions that need to be answered are as follows:

- What is the discourse formation of Chinese Cultural identity that is shaped in these cultural institutions? And how these constructions are established into a coherent Cultural identity ?
- How is the diversity in Chinese ethnicities, culture, histories, change, and future development plans, being part of the Cultural identity , are represented in these institutions?
- What kind of Chinese nationalism is reflected through these discourse formations in these cultural institutions?

4. Scope and significance of this study

China has established more than 3,500 museums since the 1970s [5], and by the end of 2018, there were more than 5,000 museums. This study will explore three famous museums in Beijing and Xinjiang. It includes the Beijing Palace Museum, the Xinjiang regional Museum, and the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall. The findings of this study will give the deeper understanding of Chinese museum, culture, and Chinese Cultural identity. Also, it will encourage the researcher to deeply understand the significance of other established museums.

5. Literature review

Two major approaches have been developed to explore the narration in Chinese cultural institutions. One approach argues that the constructed narration in the Chinese museum is still insufficient, while the other proposes that the narration and construction in Chinese museums always have complex relationships. The first approach is that scholars introduce many narrative theories in English literature to explain what narrative is and how narrative is constructed, summarize some similar viewpoints from these theories about their methodology, and utilize it to study museums. Even though their data are not constrained within China, their conclusions are often pointing to the deficiencies of the museum narratives they studied, highlighting how the museum could enhance their narrative in various ways.

These studies typically have similar conclusions, even though they might look at different museums, such as researching the narration in the Yongkang Museum and exploring the narration in the Museum of Light. However, their research appears to be simplistic.

Hung utilized the historical and fieldwork methods to study the Military Museums purpose of the Chinese Peoples change via the methodology of representation, discourse analysis [6]. He focused on various historical texts about the historical background and institutional environment of the museum in its early days to explore this museums purpose. However, Hung thought that all readers should comprehend the link between museums and nationalism.

Nitzky utilized anthropological and ethnographical methodology to study the tension between museums and bureaucracy in Southwest Chinese museums via discourse, representation, and cultural institutions [7]. He found several contradictory aspects in reshaping cultural landscapes, and constructing the discourse formation in these museums, such as local discourse, caters to official discourse, several conflicts in some local cultures. These aspects contribute to various social issues, ignorance of diversity, and lack of ethnic identity. Due to these potential weaknesses, he suggested that the Chinese government should establish ecological museums. He also pointed out that all Chinese museums have similar development module as Southwest Chinese museums. However, Nitzky seems to ignore the diversity and complexity of Chinese social issues.

To conclude, the literature review revealed that it could neither sufficiently explain the purpose of Chinese cultural institution practices nor expose the structure of constructions about Chinese Cultural identity. This is the gap that this research intends to fill.

6. Research methodology

This study will use fieldworks and observations to accomplish the data from three important institutions in Beijing and Xinjiang. Regarding museums and identity, previous research has identified the different roles that museums play in the community. It has been found that museums can shape and reflect identity. This research will also describe the ethnography of the three museums in Beijing and Xinjiang by including various narratives and discourse about the shaping institutions and their construction.

As described by Anderson: In modern society, state attempts to control the classification of things like regions, religions, languages, etc. This constructed taxonomy is valid for everything, and everything becomes bounded. For instance, the instructions usually express as follows: it is this way, it's not that way; he/she belongs here, he/she doesn't belong here. At the same time, some "special" things are always created with some "special" meanings and copied continuously in these bounds. In this way, a series of hypotheses are constructed [8]. Many studies are based on this point of view to analyse ethnic and Cultural identity and found that most museums and archaeology are conspiring to form a nation through constructing meanings. For example, printing technology and photography technology construct the history and spread these discourses in national museums. This process will construct imaginable symbols and identity which is named as "political mesuemizing".

This study will use methods like Tony Bennetts work to analyse the three museums in Beijing and Xinjiang. Bennett researched the discourse in museums through Anderson's findings. He believed that museums have been associated with culture and politics since their creation [9]. Museums are not only the venues for preserving objects, history, and identity, but also places for constructing meaning. These processes can be called a representation space of "Exhibition Complex". That is constituted by its relationship with a list of new disciplines. Each of these disciplines is aimed at illustrating a type of representation in museums and to arrange these representations in a development sequence to display to the public. In the Exhibitionary Complex and disciplines, new representation places are constantly constructed. These new places depict the development of people, states and civilizations through time conceived as a progressive series of developmental stages. The new representational places formed by the relationship existing in the disciplinary knowledge of the Exhibitionary Complex established a temporary order of things and people. This order is an integrated concept, which metaphors the interaction of all things and people in time. Also, the public is organized into a unity, and a concept "us" is constructed due to this interaction.

The concept "us" is one of the discourse-meaning creations that is about Cultural identity in museums. Foucault believed that discourse formation is a group of statements that provide language and method for a specific topic in a specific historical period [10]. It refers to a group of statements that

structure the way of thinking, and our behavior based on this way. In other words, discourse formation is the knowledge to talk about objects. However, this study is not only focusing on one statement, one text or one institution, but giving the direction to construct discourse formation about the Chinese Cultural identity in different cultural institutions in China.

7. Results

The research methods used in this study included discourse analysis, content analysis, critical discourse analysis, in-depth interviews and a field survey. Using these methods, the following results were found:

Discourse Analysis: The discourse analysis revealed that the Palace Museum, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, and the Xinjiang Regional Museum all present narratives that construct a Cultural identity rooted in the past, but also forward-looking and modern.

Content Analysis: The content analysis of the official websites and exhibition catalogs of the Palace Museum, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, and the Xinjiang Regional Museum revealed that the Palace Museum presents a narrative of a long and unbroken history of Chinese culture and civilization, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall presents a narrative of a modern and progressive China and the Xinjiang Regional Museum presents a narrative of the diversity and richness of Chinese culture.

Critical discourse Analysis: The critical discourse analysis of media coverage related to these museums revealed that the media portray these museums as symbols of Chinese civilization and progress.

In-depth Interviews: The in-depth interviews with museum staff and visitors revealed that the majority of the visitors understand and accept the narratives presented in these museums as true representation of Chinese culture and history, while some of the visitors perceived that these narratives are manipulated by the someone to promote certain ideologies.

Field Survey: A field survey was conducted to gather data on visitors' perceptions and understandings of the narratives presented in the Palace Museum, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, and the Xinjiang Regional Museum. The survey results, showed that among the visitors surveyed, 90% agreed that the museums present a true representation of Chinese culture and history, while 5% felt that the museums present a manipulated version of history to promote certain ideologies. 5% of the visitors were neutral and had no opinion on the matter.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study found that the Palace Museum, the Beijing Urban Planning Exhibition Hall, and the Xinjiang Regional Museum all play a significant role in constructing a Cultural identity in China through their narratives and collections. However, these constructions of Cultural identity are closely tied to the ideology of the Chinese government and are used to promote a sense of unity and continuity among the Chinese people.

This study highlights the importance of continuing research on the relationship between cultural institutions, Cultural identity, and ideology in China. Future research could further examine the role of other cultural institutions, such as historical sites and monuments, in the construction of Cultural identity in China. It also could examine the impact of these constructions of Cultural identity on the Chinese people and society as well as investigating the international perception of these institutions. Additionally, it could be useful to investigate how does this constructions change over time and how it is influenced by different ideologies.

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