



The Comparative Research of Exhibitions Between China and Australia and Future Development Strategy

Shuai Ma^(✉)

Academy of Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Sydney, Sydney 2006, Australia
shma8375@uni.sydney.edu.au

Abstract. The different cultural backgrounds of Australia and China have created differences in the work of artists from both sides, and the different cultures have produced a wide variety of artworks. While museums in different regions have been enriching their collections with works of art from other regions in line with the progress of time and cultural exchange, it is undoubtedly the works of art from the region that best encapsulate the cultural characteristics of the region and inspire the cultural identity of the community. It is clear that the museum and gallery systems and the museum's positioning are different in different contexts. However, these differences do not isolate the actual functions of museums, which are educational, research, and entertainment in both China and Australia. This paper selects Chinese and Australian museums as the subjects of this study and uses documentary and case study methods to explore the differences between Chinese and Australian museums and galleries. The results of the study found that Chinese and Australians are different in museum display contents, institutions and positioning, and in the future, both can strengthen the impact of inter-museum communication, by learning from each other and enhancing the customer experience. This paper hopes to bring foreign museums into China and provide a theoretical basis and practical approach for Chinese art and culture to go global.

Keywords: Museum · Exhibition · China · Australia · Development Prospects

1 Introduction

Museums are non-profit, permanent organisations that serve society and its progress (ICOM) [1]. They can be classified according to a number of different dimensions, using the nature of the subject as a starting point: historical, scientific, general, artistic and other categories. In terms of the type of content, museums can be divided into fine arts, science and technology, flora and fauna, and so on. In addition to these two most common classifications, there are also many museums that are classified by the nature of their organisation. Private museums, art galleries, and now the new online museums are all classified according to the nature of the museum's organisation. The category of these museums that are directly managed or operated by the national government can be called national museums, as can the concept of local museums. Local governments or

local community groups mainly run local museums, and their collections are focused on the region's history, culture, and nature, which can fully display the appropriate regional culture either. In order to analyse the differences in exhibition content between Chinese and Australian museums, it is necessary to find relevant case studies chosen to represent the different regional cultures of China and Australia adequately.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) is one of the top-ranked art galleries in Sydney and Australia, while the Shaanxi History Museum has a long history and has one of the largest collections of Grade-I listed artefacts in China. Art galleries may appear to be separate institutions from museums, but many are museums in their own right. Furthermore, many museums have also taken on the characteristics of art museums as they have progressed and developed to embrace and absorb contemporary art. Analysing the corresponding exhibitions then provides further insight into the content of different regional museums. Objects and their visual arrangement in an exhibition can be interpreted as epitomising a people or culture [2]. A comparison and analysis of these two museums provide a concise overview of the general development of museums and art galleries in Australia and China. The paper is divided into three main chapters, the first two describing the exhibitions at the State Gallery of New South Wales and the Shaanxi History Museum. The third chapter compares the two museums, drawing conclusions and concluding recommendations for development by comparing exhibition content, museum systems, and positioning. The study provides a better understanding of the management models, cultural differences, and characteristics of museum displays in the two countries and helps to promote exchanges and cooperation between the two museums.

2 Introduction to the Exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales

2.1 Introduction to Exhibition Types

The Art Gallery of New South Wales is an important cultural institution that combines art exhibitions, education, and research, and although it is called a gallery, it also has various functions of a museum at the same time. The most iconic permanent exhibition in the AGNSW is the Classic Art Exhibition, in which masterpieces by major artists from Europe, Asia, and Australia are displayed. These exhibitions often include works by Monet, Van Gogh, and Picasso artists. The AGNSW also contains a large number of contemporary artworks, and in contemporary art exhibitions, masterpieces by contemporary artists are usually displayed, including paintings, sculptures, installations, and video art. These contemporary art exhibitions mainly reflect modern society's cultural and political issues through artworks. AGNSW's event art exhibitions, on the other hand, showcase interactive and participation-based art forms such as performing arts, sound art, and digital art. With the growth of Indigenous art in Australia in recent years, Indigenous artworks have become prominent in Australian museums. The Australian Indigenous Art Exhibition is a showcase of work by artists from Australia, including Indigenous art and contemporary Australian art. In addition, the AGNSW also has an Asian Art Exhibition collection of masterpieces by artists from all regions of Asia, including China, Korea, Japan, India, and Southeast Asia.



Fig. 1. The view of AGNSW (Photo credit: Original)

2.2 Exhibition Space and Collections

The AGNSW does not just include paintings, but other types of artworks are cleverly integrated into the various exhibitions. The permanent exhibitions at the AGNSW are concentrated in several galleries on the Ground floor, where paintings, sculptures, porcelain, and artefacts from medieval to modern times are collected, as well as many of the artist's first manuscripts. The exhibits are largely grouped by genre, even the walls where portraits, still lifes, and landscapes are hung are colour coded. The walls of the gallery where the landscapes are hung have been chosen in a more serene blue colour to allow the viewer to be more immersed in the aesthetic experience (as Fig. 1 shown). However, the backdrop for the portraits is red, not least because the paintings are precious antiques (as Fig. 2 shown). The red colour also provides a certain degree of concentration and an aesthetic experience of excitement and pleasure.

In addition to the regular galleries, the AGNSW has a team of professional curators who regularly curate exhibitions of different content and formats, including, but not limited to, artworks by indigenous Australian artists and includes many historical artefacts of Eastern origin. However, the curators at AGNSW do not group Chinese artworks and historical artefacts into a single system, except for exhibitions with specific themes. Therefore, by drawing on the exhibition set-up of the Shaanxi History Museum, these Chinese artefacts left abroad can be brought together into a coherent system, adding another clear and intuitive way for the world to understand China.

3 Introduction to the Exhibition at the Shaanxi History Museum

3.1 Types of Exhibitions at the Shaanxi History Museum

The Shaanxi History Museum contains a range of beautiful historical artefacts, and some of the exhibition types are based on ancient historical chronology. The museum is located in Xi'an, the ancient capital of the 13th dynasty, and this long and ancient city has



Fig. 2. The view of AGNSW (Photo credit: Original)

given the museum a rich cultural and historical heritage. The exhibitions at the Shaanxi History Museum are divided into permanent, thematic, and temporary exhibitions. The permanent exhibitions at the Shaanxi History Museum range from prehistoric times to the present day, spanning over a million years. The names of the permanent exhibitions are poetic, ranging from the Cradle of Civilisation to the Hierarchy of the Zhou Dynasty, with the imposing Qin Emperor and Han Dynasty being graphically summarised as the Eastern Empire and the Great Han Dynasty. The Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties are also named Conflict and Fusion, not only as a precise summary of historical events but also as a distillation of the different artistic styles of the period. The most representative of all the permanent exhibitions is the Tang Dynasty, of which Shaanxi is one of the most excavated places in the country. Even though Xi'an is the place that brings together the essence of thirteen dynasties, the Tang dynasty painted this city richly and colorfully. Apart from this, a long collection of cultural items shows Shaanxi after the Tang Dynasty (907 AD–1911 AD).

3.2 Exhibition Space and Collections

The architectural style of the Shaanxi History Museum combines traditional Han and Tang styles with modern building techniques, highlighting the heritage and development of Shaanxi's history and culture. The Shaanxi History Museum has seven exhibition halls, which showcase various periods and areas of Shaanxi history, such as ancient history, the history of the Shaanxi revolution, and folk culture. Various display techniques, such as physical displays, video displays, and model displays, allow visitors to experience the fascination of Shaanxi's history and culture through various senses. The Shaanxi History Museum has a rich collection of cultural relics, including many important artefacts from Chinese histories, such as the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of Qin, the Great Wall of Han, and Tang gold and silver artefacts, which not only reveal the magnificence of Shaanxi's history but are also an important part of Chinese civilisation. The Shaanxi

History Museum presents a diverse range of cultures, including Han Chinese culture and minority cultures, and this multi-cultural presentation allows audiences better to understand the diversity of Shaanxi's history and culture.

When it comes to the collections of the Shaanxi History Museum, one has to mention Hejiacun. Over a thousand artefacts were excavated in this Tang dynasty cellar from two huge urns and a large silver jar. There are 265 pieces of gold and silver alone [3], and this also includes a beast-headed agate cup, a gold bowl with a mandarin duck and lotus petal motif, a silver jug with a gilt dancing horse and cup motif imitating a leather bag, and a silver jar with a gilt parrot motif carrying a beam. All four of these relics have been designated as national treasures and are also treasures of the Shaanxi History Museum. In addition to these relics, there is a series of treasures, such as the three-colored camel-carrying figurines, hunting trips, courtesans, and the Queens' ceremonial figure, which form a special exhibition on the legacy of the Tang Dynasty. These relics represent the Tang dynasty from the perspectives of politics, economy, thought, culture, art, customs, and skills.

For Chinese museums, including the Shaanxi History Museum, there still needs to be the improvement in innovative exhibition themes and modern technology compared to Australian museums. The Shaanxi History Museum can therefore learn from AGNSW's advanced curatorial experience. Nowadays, exhibitions are not simply about the display of exhibits but also the design of the exhibition space and the integration of the works. Make full use of lighting and scenery to give the aesthetic audience a better and newer viewing experience. The innovation of the exhibition theme and the design of the exhibition draws on the strengths of Australian museums. Use modern technology to make up for the lack of richer multimedia and virtual reality displays in most Chinese museums to meet audiences' needs for diverse displays further.

4 Comparative Analysis of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Shaanxi History Museum and Suggestions for Future Museum Strategies

4.1 Comparative Analysis of the Art Gallery of New South Wales and Shaanxi History Museum

4.1.1 Comparison of Museum Display Contents

The Shaanxi History Museum and the Art Gallery of New South Wales are two museums with different cultural backgrounds, and their exhibitions and collections are very different. However, all museums share one more thing in common: the collection of objects [4]. This is what allows them to make comparisons. The Shaanxi History Museum is a national museum in China and is renowned for its collection and display of the remains of ancient Chinese civilisation. Its exhibits include many historical relics, artworks, and objects, such as the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of the First Qin Emperor, gold and silver objects from the Tang Dynasty, and ceramics from the Song Dynasty. These collections represent China's cultural heritage and development over thousands of years and are an important part of China's cultural heritage. On the other hand, the Art Gallery of

New South Wales is a major collection and demonstration of Western artworks. The collections from AGNSW include paintings, sculptures, photographs, and other art forms, including many European and American classics, and individual exhibitions include outstanding works by renowned artists on loan from other collections. These exhibits represent classic and representative works of Western culture and are an important part of Western culture and art.

Comparing the types of museum exhibitions in different regions, it is evident that Chinese museums prefer to adopt a historical chronological division in their galleries and exhibition settings. On the other hand, Australian museums prefer to classify artworks and collections according to the content and genre of art they express. Using a chronological approach to the layout of exhibitions allows the museum to exploit its educational and research functions fully but is heavier than the alternative model of thinking outside the box in relation to the space on display. A more enthusiastic approach to the exhibition can bring fun to the aesthetic audience, aptly fulfilling the museum's entertainment function and achieving the goal of educating and entertaining.

4.1.2 Differences in Museum Institutions and Positioning

Each museum and gallery have its own identity, for example, the two museums selected for this paper are classified as state museums and provincial museums. The AGNSW aims to enrich lives by engaging meaningfully with art, supporting artists, providing services, and exchanging ideas for audiences wherever possible. As a leading visual arts organisation in NSW, its aim is to promote Australian culture and be a beacon of Australian art, reflecting and exploring the place of Australian art in the world. The Shaanxi History Museum, on the other hand, focuses on the collection and display of Shaanxi history and culture and ancient Chinese civilisation, with a greater emphasis on the integration of social education, collection conservation, scientific research and industrial development.

Chinese museums and galleries borrowed from the founding of Western museums in their nascent stages but gradually developed their systems and styles. The Shaanxi History Museum, for example, was the first large modern national museum in China and covers an area of 65,000 square metres, with a collection of 1.71 million artefacts and 11,000 square metres of exhibition space [5]. This means numerous points where the Shaanxi Historical Museum can be extended and developed. The Shaanxi History Museum has also worked in recent years to create a space for cultural exchange that is more in line with the standards of the new era of development, striving to provide a more comfortable exhibition experience for the public. However, it is undeniable that compared to Western museums and galleries, Chinese museums and galleries are still in a nascent stage. There also needs to be more information on the viewers of exhibitions in Chinese museums. Little research has been conducted to determine who these visitors are (their demographics, such as age, gender, and occupational class) and how they interact with and comprehend these shows [6]. Therefore, learning and absorbing advanced museum concepts is still one of the development strategies for Chinese museums.

For Australian museums and galleries, the presence of Asian art has always been part of the composition of these museums. It is only through a thorough understanding of the cultural context and spiritual core of Asian countries that Asian art can be better

presented to a global audience. Undoubtedly, Chinese art and Chinese artefacts can be compared to one of the jewels in the composition of Asian art. The history of ancient China is long and varied, and the various schools of art and artistic techniques are all of a different order. It is foreseeable that with a full understanding of Chinese and Asian culture, the Australian Art Gallery will be able to make further breakthroughs in this area.

4.2 Suggestions for Future Museum Development

More and more museums are breaking away from the original scope of their collections and exhibition directions, shifting from a single type of collection to a comprehensive one. There is also a greater willingness to explore cross-border collaborations with museums, galleries, and other institutions and companies. At the same time, museums and galleries should also come down from their pedestals and break the distance between them and the public. They should provide richer forms of participation in exhibitions and enhance the participation of aesthetic audiences in experiencing them, besides Integrated promotion in different locations can also extend the reach of the museum [7]. While promoting traditional culture and preserving cultural heritage, they can also pay more attention to contemporary art and explore new connections between contemporary art and historical artefacts to create more interesting interactions. These practices are undoubtedly a way of injecting new energy into museums and galleries, and only by following the times will we not be heading toward the demise of stagnation.

4.2.1 The Impact of Inter-museum Communication

Museums often display local or national history and culture, and these exhibits can attract visitors from all over the world to learn and understand them. This helps to promote cultural exchange and understanding and enhances national identity and diversity. For example, the exchange of cultural heritage exhibitions between countries is an important way of spreading history and culture and an effective means of showcasing a country's image and improving its cultural soft power [8]. Cultural exchange between museums can help people better understand and appreciate other cultures' art and history, thus promoting cross-cultural understanding and inclusiveness. Exploring the differences between Chinese and Australian museums can facilitate inter-museum exchanges between Chinese and Australian museums. Different museums can bring different cultures and styles of exhibitions to visitors, adding diversity and depth to the exhibition and enriching the visitor experience. The exchange between museums can promote international cooperation and academic exchange, enhancing cultural institutions' international influence and academic standards. In addition, unique exhibits and cultural backgrounds can attract visitors from all over the world. As more and more visitors come, the local tourism industry will be boosted. While museums drive tourism and economic development, they need staff to maintain and manage the exhibits and professionals such as guides and educators. Thus, the development of museums will also create jobs and improve the quality of life of local residents.

4.2.2 Exploring Development Directions

As custodians and disseminators of cultural heritage, Museums are also exposed to many risks and challenges, including human factors, natural disasters, financial difficulties, and technological developments. As museums often house valuable artefacts and works of art, they are often targets for theft and vandalism. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and fires can also lead to the loss and destruction of museum collections. At the same time, museums are expensive to maintain and operate, including the conservation of collections, exhibitions and maintenance, staff salaries and building maintenance. External causes like competition for resources can also affect the development of museums, and the allocation of public resources significantly impacts the development of museums [9]. Therefore, museums need to secure their collections and take the necessary precautions in advance (building security, fire protection, disaster preparedness and budgeting). In addition, the issue of technological development is a challenge for museums.

The future of museums cannot be developed without the use of technology and the enhancement of services, and museums should consider improving the quality of the visitor experience. With the development of society and the improvement of people's artistic quality, the role of museums in people's lives is becoming increasingly important. Advances in technology have strongly contributed to the development of online museum exhibitions in both places, providing access to more aesthetic audiences who cannot appreciate museum exhibitions in person. The advent of online exhibitions has largely compensated for the limitations of space and distance. Developing new technologies and multimedia has also provided avenues for enriching exhibition formats, and various art forms have opened more possibilities. Museums can enhance the visitor experience through digital displays, virtual, augmented reality, and other technological means. Virtual reality, for example, allows visitors to immerse themselves in the architecture and artwork of ancient civilisations, and this new way of visiting can also appeal to a wider audience. The focus of museums and galleries is not only always on the 'objects', which means, the collections but also on the 'human' element. Even digital museums should concentrate on the visitor experience rather than the technology itself, taking into account both the user experience and the use of the technology [10]. Museums and galleries need to continue their efforts to enable aesthetic audiences to communicate with artists through artworks and collections and further appreciate history's fascination.

5 Conclusion

The cultural differences and different historical backgrounds between China and Australia also affect the development and management of museums in both countries. Consequently, a study of the differences between Chinese and Australian museums may assist individuals in better comprehending the management methods, cultural differences, and features of museum exhibits in the two countries, as well as foster cooperation and exchanges between museums in the two nations. This paper analyses the relationship between exhibition content, museum systems and positioning, culminating in a conclusion and recommendations for further development. In the future, museums should provide more diverse cultural experiences for visitors. Museums should engage

more closely with the community and encourage community residents to participate in museum activities. Collaborating with local schools and community organisations, providing cultural and educational services to community residents, and strengthening ties with the community are all means of promoting the development and progress of museums. At the same time, it is also more important for museums to strengthen collaboration and cooperation in order to expand their reach and sustainability. Museums can collaborate with other museums, galleries, cultural institutions, and businesses to develop cultural products and create new cultural experiences. For example, museums can collaborate with companies to develop cultural tourism products and turn cultural resources into economic benefits. This paper only refers to museums in Australia and China rather than Europe or other regions, so there is still much room for research. Future scholars could conduct more qualitative research to gain suggestions for a wider range of communication strategies.

References

1. Golding, V., & Modest, W. (2017) Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections and Collaboration. In *Asian Ethnology* (1st ed.), Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture., 76:406–408. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474215299>
2. Su, S. (2021) Exhibition as Art Historical Space: The 1933 Chinese Art Exhibition in Paris. *The Art Bulletin* (New York, N.Y.), 103(3):125–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2021.1882808>
3. Wang, P.J. (2017) The design, use and evolution of public space in Shaanxi History Museum [D]. Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology.
4. Ambrose, T., & Paine, C. (2006). *Museum basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
5. Zhang, P. (2020) Exploring the reform and development of museums in the new era: Shaanxi History Museum as an example[J]. *Qianling Cultural Studies*, 2020(00):428-432.
6. Lu, Dawei. (2017) A Sociological Exploration of Cultural Distinction in Chinese Contemporary Art Museums and Galleries: Contemporary art and its visitors. PhD thesis, University of York.
7. L, Zan. (2007) Managerial Transformation in Chinese Museums: The Shaanxi History Museum in Xi'an. *Museum Management and Curatorship* (1990), 22(2):151–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770701470351>
8. K, Da Kong. (2021) Museums, international exhibitions and China's cultural diplomacy. In *Museums, International Exhibitions and China's Cultural Diplomacy.*, pp.1–190. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003104513>
9. Půček, M. J., Ochrana, F., & Plaček, M. (2021). *Museum Management: Opportunities and Threats for Successful Museums*. Springer International Publishing AG.
10. Yu-Chang Li, Liew, A. W.-C., & Wen-Poh Su. (2012). The digital museum: Challenges and solution. 2012 8th International Conference on Information Science and Digital Content Technology (ICIDT2012), 3, 646–649.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

