



A Study on the Construction of Visitors' Cultural Memories in a Global Context

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Abstract: This empirical study investigates how global visitors construct their (cross) cultural memories during their interaction with cultural symbols in Chinese museums, which could promote the reception of Chinese culture. We have conducted an on-site survey using questionnaires and interviews with actual visitors in Chinese museums. With the analysis of visitors' expectations and evaluations on three categories of cultural symbols, we find that two groups of visitors, Chinese visitors and international visitors, share some opinions on cultural symbols, while they show some different expectations and evaluations on some aspects, which reveals the trajectories of the construction of cultural memories. Based on the results of the survey, we develop a model of cultural memory construction that considers the multi-stage interactions of cultural symbols and visitors' cultural memories. The model describes that visitors' (cross) cultural memories are constructed in their continuous interaction with the text symbols transmitted by Chinese cultural institutions, and different stages of constructions may redefine or shake the thoughts and value systems of visitors to some extent, which is an ongoing and open process. This model will contribute to the effective dissemination of culture for institutions.

Key words: (cross) cultural memory, cultural symbols, expectation, evaluation, construction model

Introduction

Cultural memory goes beyond everyday memory and it is fixed and maintained through cultural formation such as institutional communication^[1]. In other words, cultural memory is a type of collective memory, and it originates from specific memories, grow up with everyday accumulation, and incorporate with input of new information. The concept of cultural memory includes texts, images, rituals, etc., and each having its own distinctive characteristics and creating a united social image. Specifically, cultural memory, unlike scientific knowledge, is obtained through practical activities, with six characteristics: (1) the concretion of identity; (2) the capacity to reconstruct; (3) formation; (4) organization; (5) obligation; (6) reflexivity^[2]. (Cross) cultural memory transcends the boundaries of "national culture" and usually involves various cultural exchanges between different countries^[3]. The study of (cross) cultural memory focuses on the following aspects: (1) cultural exchanges between countries can produce many shared memories; (2) different classes, age groups, ethnicity, religions, and subcultures within national cultures have their own memory frameworks and interactions between these frameworks; (3) cultural components between countries are interrelated. Museums, as cultural institutions, have long been objects of study for domestic and international scholars, with common research questions focusing on cultural representation, cultural transmission, and cultural interpretation. From a sociological perspective, we would explore how culture is exhibited, in what is shown, in who displays things, and in who consumes museum meanings^[4]. The real visitors are a good resource to study the formation of cultural memories in the process of communicating with the texts in museums^{[5][6][7]}. Besides, the cultural representation of the artifacts might not yield the same effect to all visitors and its manifestations are various in different period and space. Moreover, the diversified backgrounds and expectations of all visitors might result in different interpretations of Chinese culture. Thus the same texts in Chinese museums play different roles in constructing different (cross-) cultural memories.

Literature Review

As places of memory, museums present and represent the memories of our predecessors, interact with the visitors, and help them build their cultural memories. Cultural memory includes five aspects: carrier, medium, contents, practice, and form^[8], corresponding to the five aspects of communication studies: Who; Says What; In Which Channel; To Whom; With What Effect^[9]. For example, the carriers of cultural memory are the readers or the audience, while the carriers of communicative information are cultural institutions. The institutions present cultures in various ways to communicate with visitors very effectively, but the conveyed information might not be totally accepted by visitors, because of their different expectations on cultural symbols. Thus, the cultural institutions should take those expectations into consideration, which is the prerequisite of effective reception that is vital to cultural memory construction^[10]. To put it simply, it is impossible to produce new culture memory without input of new information. Whether visitors could understand and accept what cultural texts express is a standard to measure the success of culture dissemination. For museums, it is a challenge to come closer to the audience, because museums have to know very

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clear of what visitors expect and show them what they like accordingly. If the narrations in exhibitions could not be understood and appreciated by visitors, the stories could not go into visitors' memories. There is a typical example as follows. In order to have a major impact on future European cultural politics, the texts of European museums would address a broader audience of all age groups and all backgrounds, the majority of whom have little knowledge of history, and so a number of narrative techniques are necessary to present a fresh, coherent and memorable history, such as "synchronic defragmentation," "diachronic consistency," and "memory over history"^[11]. To be specific, in the process of narration, the author needs to find the shared cultural memories, which is very helpful to bridge different cultural frameworks. Finding the connections between textual symbols, and creating a coherent story from a multicultural perspective, could help audiences understand the new information, and could evoke their emotional resonance.

Museums present and represent cultures through exhibition activities using various modes of displaying, such as panels, photos, audios and videos. In the interaction with audiences, museums take an active part in constructing (cross-) cultural memories with the flow of cultural information. One of the criteria for measuring the effectiveness of cultural communication is whether the texts are accepted by readers or audiences and transformed into a part of their (cross-) cultural memory. The communication is very complicated, because every visitor has his/her own expectation and evaluation and the cultural presentation could not satisfy all of them. In reception theory, Jauss proposes two concepts: "horizon of expectation" and "aesthetic distance". Jauss^[12] believes that both readers and works have their own horizon of expectation. The reader's horizon of expectation comes from personal experience and system knowledge, while the texts' horizon of expectation comes from the artistic creation of the work. In a reader's dialogue with a new text, his or her horizon of expectation and the work's horizon of expectation often have an aesthetic distance. This distance makes readers negate their previous experience, challenge their cognition, and thus change or even reject the work to some extent. Thus narrowing down the distance could make the work and the readers closer and so some information of the work could be a part of reader's memory, and then visitor's expectations would be renewed by new memory. If the expectations of readers changes with the addition of the new memory, the distance will be altered. If the distance is narrowed down, readers will accept more information of the cultural texts. Therefore, the widespread dissemination of Chinese culture depends on whether the texts, carrier of Chinese culture, could successfully come closer to the target reader group.

This paper aims at developing a model describing how global visitors construct their (cross) cultural memories during their interaction with cultural symbols in Chinese museums. With the on-site survey, we explore the similarities and differences of global visitors' expectation and evaluation. We hypothesize that the similarities would reflect the significance of the shared memory in constructing (cross) cultural memories, and the differences would show the various of the trajectories of memory construction.

Methodology

(1) Research questions

The purpose of this research is to describe how Chinese and international visitors construct their (cross) cultural memory, during their interaction with cultural symbols presented Chinese museums. Global visitors have various expectations on Chinese culture because of their cultural memory, and they will have different evaluations on these cultural symbols accordingly. The source of the expectation is the previous cultural memory, and the evaluation is the result of the interaction between the expectation of visitors and the expectation of the work. Thus we could find how the previous cultural memory influences the construction of the new cultural memory.

The present study aims at answering the following questions: (1) What are the similarities in expectations and evaluations of Chinese and international visitors; (2) What are the differences in expectations and evaluations of Chinese and international visitors; and (3) What is the model of how Chinese and international visitors construct (cross) cultural memory?

(2) Stimuli

200 participants from 20 countries took part in this study. These participants were chosen randomly on site in the national museum of China. Specifically, they were from Asia, Europe, North America, Africa, and Oceania. Also, there were 100 Chinese speakers (50%) and 100 international visitors (50%), including 68 English speakers (34%) and 32 non-English international speakers (16%). 100 were women (50%), and 100 were men (50%). The research was conducted as a part of the participants' museum visit in the same exhibition hall of the national museum of China. Although international visitors were not a homogeneous group, who have different backgrounds and so different expectations about museums, international visitors and Chinese visitors as two groups would be discussed in this paper. The survey was carried out by means of questionnaire and semi-structure interview. These questions were to assess museum visiting experience from 10 aspects, which were open questions and could be adapted for the other purposes. With the instruction of Kavanagh's evaluating questions, I conducted some pilot surveys. Then I designed a survey and carried it out in the national museum of China. The survey includes the questionnaires and the interviews. For questionnaires, there are 8 questions in Chinese version and 10 questions in English version. For interviews, there are the 3 questions in each version. The questionnaire includes 3 parts. The first part is to investigate the Chinese museum experience of visitors, the second is to get the expectations of the representation of Chinese culture on the (translated)

texts, and the third is to get the assessments on the (translated) texts. For the interview, there are 3 questions, concerning on the assessments and suggestions on the (translated) texts.

The questions in questionnaires and the questions in interviews have been overlapped to some extent, for the purpose of the involvement of the participants. If there is a conflicting opinions to similar questions in questionnaires and interviews, we will analyze them for the reasons. All of 200 visitors participated in questionnaires and semi-structural interviews, but the ranges of time are varied, from 3 minutes to more than 1 hour. The main reason is that the amounts of time of answering the questions in the semi-structural interviews are the same. Some answers are very short, while some answers are very long.

(3) Procedure

We have conducted a survey with questionnaires and interview. The questionnaire were designed on the basis of the questionnaire by Kavanagh for postgraduate students of museum studies at the University of Leicester ^[13]. The survey had been conducted in the national museum of China on site for 9 days. The 200 visitors have participated in this survey. Before this survey, 7 pilot surveys had been done in 4 Chinese museums, 1 Japanese museum and 2 American museums. One of the results of the pilot surveys showed that the maximum time the visitors would like to spend in a survey was 3-minute. So, we planned that each questionnaire had been done within 3 minutes, and for interviews, the time was flexible. According to the pilot studies, average international visitors would like to spend 10 minutes, and average Chinese visitors would like to spend 3-5 minutes in the on-site interviews. Normally, I read the questions for the visitors and recorded their choices on the paper. After questionnaires, I would ask them the 3 questions in the interview, and wrote the answers down on the paper with their permission. If there is a contradicting part, I will point it out for further answer.

Results and Discussion

(1) Similarities of Expectations and Evaluations between Chinese and International Visitors

Chinese and international visitors have various expectations on Chinese culture, which would lead to different reception about semiotic displaying in Chinese museums. This study finds that the variables of "gender" and "proficiency of English language" had very little correlation with the reception by Chinese and international people, which will not be discussed further in this paper. However, some factors with a higher correlation, such as "the number of Chinese museums visited", will be explained as follows.

The proportions of Chinese and international visitors in terms of the number, gender, and visiting purpose are all approximately the same. For example, the ratio of the number of Chinese to international visitors is 1:1; the gender ratios are approximately 2:3 and 3:2, respectively. For the three visiting purposes (history, art, and culture), the proportion of Chinese visitors' purposes is 9:3:7 while that of international visitors is 8:3:7. Most importantly, there is some similarity between Chinese and international visitors, such as their preference for media in presenting text symbols, expectations of text symbols, and their comments on the presentation.

Firstly, the similarity of media preference for presenting cultural symbols between Chinese and international visitors is very salient. There are 3 types of modals to present symbols in museums, such as verbal, audio, and visual, and visitors could get access to the information from some media, such as wall panels, booklets, posters, and labels. From the questionnaires, we get to know that visitors think audio guide and labels&panels are main choices for them to get information in Chinese museums. The similar tendencies of media preference among Chinese and international people are as follows. Around 95% of Chinese and international people would like to take panels and labels as their main choice to get access to the information. Around 18% of them take audio guide as their main choice. In view of the two choices, the visitors show their consensus on their evaluation on the two forms. For the adequacy of the written texts, around 71% of visitors think the length of written texts is enough. Most of them think the written texts are more visitor-friendly than audio guide, because the higher speed of audio guide makes the conveyed information more difficult to understand in the context of museums. Therefore, simple and explicit texts are more understandable and acceptable, which contributes to the construction of cultural memories.

Second, every group of global visitors' expectation on cultural symbols focuses on similar themes. More specifically, we have divided global visitors into 3 groups based on the number of visiting Chinese museums. Visitors in group 1 have visited Chinese museums no more than 3 times, those in group 2 have visited Chinese museums between 4 to 10 times, and those in group 3 have visited Chinese museums more than 10 times. As it can be seen from interviews, three groups of Chinese and international visitors share similar opinions on cultural symbols in Chinese museums, although their previous cultural memories are diversified. For instance, group 1 of global visitors express interest in specific cultural symbols, such as stories, with some saying that they would like to see more Chinese classics and stories (Chinese visitors), or prehistory stories of China (international visitors). Group 2 focuses on the interaction between the cultural symbols and visitors, with interviewees stating they would prefer a more interactive text design that facilitates a dialogue with the cultural texts (Chinese visitors) and museums might provide more audio guides and brochures for them in order to bring them a deeper engagement in the cultural messages of Chinese museums (international visitors). Group 3 aims to incorporate new information into their (cross)cultural memory based on their previous experiences. An example is that Chinese visitors propose written texts should be designed multi-level to cater to both professional readers and less-knowledgeable visitors. Some international visitors suggest that a six-sentence text presentation is

adequate and that the most sought-after information should be ranked based on its level of demand. Thus, it is observable that the three groups represent three stages of cultural memory construction. Visitors of each stage show some similar patterns in expectations, while different stages show different patterns.

Third, Chinese visitors and international visitors have similar evaluations on textual features on cultural symbols in Chinese museums. To begin with, the adequacy of the texts are far below their expectations. For example, "the images and inscriptions on the artifacts should be described" (Chinese visitors), and "the poetry on the calligraphy and painting might be translated into one or two sentences, or a brief introduction could be made" (international visitors). Moreover, there is a lack of intertextuality between two texts. For instance, "there is no obvious connection between every two adjacent texts" (Chinese visitors), and "there are no clues or indicators to help us learn a complete historical context" (international visitors). In addition, the texts are too academic to understand. For example, "there are some words and phrases on labels and panels, and we don't know what they refer to" (Chinese visitors), and "there are some repetitions on labels, which is not helpful for our understanding but make us puzzled" (international visitors). Thus, it suggests there is a gap between the expectations of the texts and visitors, which could result in the ineffective reception of the cultural symbols.

(2) Differences of Expectations and Evaluations between Chinese and International Visitors

Chinese and international visitors show different expectations and evaluations on cultural symbols in Chinese museums, mainly because of their previous cultural memories. The variety in backgrounds, social experience and cultural frameworks make visitors' cultural memories have distinctive features. So, being aware of these differences is very basic to effective communication and (cross-) cultural memory construction. The differences are as follows. First, Chinese and international visitors have different expectations on 3 categories of cultural symbols. We have collected written texts on labels and panels in Chinese museums, and categorized them into 3 categories, representation symbolic, usage symbolic and meaning symbolic (see table 1). Representation symbols refer to something closely relating to artifacts themselves, which could be easily seen by audience. Usage symbols have some relation with the historical and social factors, which could be investigated by scientists. Meaning symbols are most subjective, which are described and evaluated by people. The results of the questionnaire show that Chinese visitors and international visitors have different expectations on these 3 groups of symbols as follows. To begin with, international visitors want to see more representation symbols than Chinese visitors, such as poems and pictures&inscription. It suggests international people need more Chinese cultural concepts and ideas to reconstruct their cultural memories. Moreover, international visitors pay more attention to "time". It reveals that the symbol of "time" is a very important indicator to construct the cultural memories, because the temporal-spatial framework is fundamental for narrating a story. In addition, International visitors would like to see more symbols on meaning than Chinese visitors. Especially, international visitors would like to see a more interactive texts design, such as the clear connection between visitors and the texts. Generally speaking, international visitors have a greater demand in pursuing both objective and subjective information, which reveals that they have more interests and they could not get support from their previous cultural memory.

| Cultural symbols | Items | Visitors | Chinese visitors | International visitors |
|------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------------|------------------------|
| Representation | Pictures & Inscription | 64.60% | 49.40% | 82.70% |
| | Material | 41.50% | 22.50% | 64.00% |
| | Poem | 35.40% | 14.60% | 60.00% |
| | Size | 28.00% | 22.50% | 34.70% |
| | Colour | 16.50% | 18.00% | 14.70% |
| | Mean | 42.38% | 27.25% | 60.35% |
| Usage | Time | 81.70% | 67.40% | 98.70% |
| | Utility | 74.40% | 76.40% | 72.00% |
| | Place | 72.60% | 69.70% | 76.00% |
| | User | 57.90% | 41.60% | 77.30% |
| | Technique | 57.30% | 52.80% | 62.70% |
| | Scene | 50.60% | 42.70% | 60.00% |
| | Mean | 65.75% | 58.43% | 74.45% |
| Meaning | Historic significance | 80.50% | 77.50% | 84.00% |
| | Story | 77.40% | 77.50% | 77.30% |
| | Connection with visitors | 41.50% | 13.50% | 74.70% |
| | Mean | 66.47% | 56.17% | 78.67% |

Table 1: Visitors' expectations on cultural symbols in Chinese museums

Second, Chinese and different visitors have different evaluations on the cultural symbols. Chinese visitors think the textual presentation of cultural symbols is lack of intertextuality. For example, "there is no connection between texts". And they think the lack of intertextuality might make the texts are more difficult to understand because they could not get help from necessary clues provided by previous texts. The international visitors think there is a massive omission in translation, which prevents them from getting enough information to know about the artifacts. For example, "many exhibits have only one name", and "maps and chronology are not translated, so we cannot grasp the overall situation, and it is easy to get lost".

Third, the trajectories of cultural memory construction are different between Chinese and international visitors. Generally speaking, the

cultural memory construction of Chinese visitors is vertically built, while that of international visitors is horizontally built. That is to say, Chinese visitors have constructed their cultural memories more effectively than international

visitors. The trajectory of Chinese visitors shows a very evident growth of their cultural memory beyond the specific information, while that of international visitors is lingering over the specific information. Specifically, the construction trajectory of Chinese visitors is radial, that is, the focuses of the three stages are transformed from "point" to "surface", and finally to "whole". For example, Chinese visitors of stage 1 pay attention to the details, such as the typical features of artifacts; those of stage 2 care more about the interactive function of the text, such as narrowing down the distance between visitors and artifacts; those of stage 3 show their concern for aesthetic distance between readers and texts, such as whether the texts could satisfy the needs visitors of various social and cultural backgrounds. The trajectory of cross-cultural memory construction of international youth is linear, that is, the focuses of the three stages are from "point" to "point" and finally back to "point". For example, visitors of these three groups are always paying attention to the details, from "Ming dynasty porcelain"; "more languages" to "chronology needs to be fully translated".

(3) The Model of Cross-cultural Memory Construction

At the beginning, we analyze the interview by Nvivo11 and find 200 highly relevant concepts from the transcripts for axial coding. Then we organize the related categories and dimensions, such as the categories of the interviewees (gender, nationality, language, personal experience, etc.), and classify each category into different dimensions. In the third step, the data undergoes the three-level coding, and so we develop the model of the construction process of Chinese and international visitors' cross-cultural memory (as shown in Figure 1).

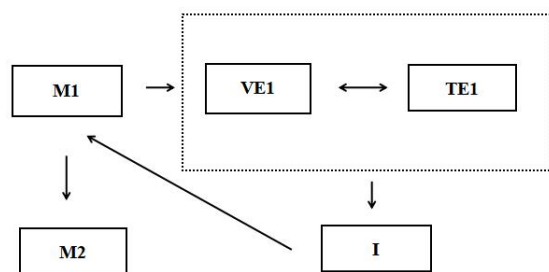


Figure1 : (Cross) cultural memory construction process of visitors

This figure shows how visitors construct (cross) cultural memory during rounds of the interactions between the readers and texts. As the figure illustrates, there are five key factors in the model, which are M1, M2, VE1, VE2 and I. M1 represents original (cross) cultural memory, M2 is the newly constructed (cross) cultural memory after one round of interaction, in which the new information (I) was integrated

into M2. The process of first interaction between texts and visitors involves 2 agents, visitors' expectation towards the texts (VE1) and texts' expectations towards visitors (TE1). VE1 is from the original cultural memory, which reveals the complexity of cultural memories. TE1 is shown in the presentation of the texts, which could be seen by the method of textual analysis. However, we have to say TE1 is not the expectation of the author and translator, who do have their expectations on the visitors. The reasons are as follows. First, there are other stakeholders for text presentation. Second, there is a loss and a change in turning thoughts into words. Basically, the first round of interaction could generate a piece of new memory, with the addition of new information, which is symbolized by "I". When "I" is understood, accepted and added into the M1, M1 will grow into M2. A new (cross) cultural memory has been created. That is to say, the more interactions, the more (cross) cultural memory will be.

This model of the cross-cultural memory construction process shows a positive, open, and continuous tendency. In this infinite diachronic process, various expectations interact, and gaps appear here and there. For example, visitors and text authors have their own cultural expectations based on their cultural memories, and their expectations have some gaps, which are called aesthetic distance. The distance might result in dissatisfaction and conflicts, which might hinder the reception of the new information more or less. That is to say, some information might be adsorbed by visitors, while some would be rejected by visitors. Thus, the curators, writers and translators would realize the gaps, and adjust their design to come closer to the visitors constantly, if they want to bring new memory to the visitors. More specifically, visitors have various experiences, such as beliefs, mindsets and specific cultural framework, and so they will hold different horizons of expectations. They come to Chinese museums and get access to the same presentation of Chinese cultural texts, and the reception would be diversified. For Chinese museums, they have the expectations on the coming visitors, and write the texts according to their expectations. The distance between two types of expectations would lead to ineffective reception of visitors. Therefore, stakeholders in Chinese museums would better have the awareness of the diversified expectations of visitors, and find a better way to present cultural texts to ensure a better reception by the majority of visitors.

The cross-cultural memory construction process has 3 characteristics as follows. First, visitors' demand for the content of museum text symbols is multi-layered and constantly changing. Factors such as background, prior experience, language, and life experience classify visitors into different groups, each with different demands for text symbols. And their expectations will be changing with the new information. Second, the reflective ability of visitors from China and abroad leads to the continuous growth of the cultural memory constructions. When interacting with Chinese culture, visitors show their initiatives to participate in the communication with the symbols. They are willing to get more information from museums. When constructing cross-cultural memory, visitors' reflection on the content and form of cultural communication in museums has been elevated with the growth of cultural memory. The expansion of thinking dimensions continuously extends the framework of cross-cultural memory. Third, the source cultural memory framework of visitors plays a foundational role in the cross-cultural memory construction process. The establishment

of a new cultural memory framework begins with the expansion of the source cultural framework, so visitors would initially find the shared knowledge between their culture and a new culture when constructing new cultural memories in order to make full use of the source cultural framework, either extending it vertically or expanding it horizontally, thus constructing a new cultural memory or establishing a new cultural memory framework.

Conclusion

The cultural memory of Chinese and international visitors might reflect their beliefs, thoughts, and values across cultures. And new information from new culture could influence or reshape visitors' cultural memories, and so has an impact on their mindsets and so on. Visitors have the capability of reflection, by which they could construct cultural memories. Cultural institutions play an important role in imparting cultural information, and so providing new data to cultural memory. If receivers could accept the information disseminated by cultural institutions, it would be a part of their new cultural memories. That is to say, cultural institutions, as the source of cultural memory, need to take into consideration the value systems and cultural memory frameworks of different cultures when disseminating culture; the stakeholders in institutions need to fully explore and utilize the similarities and differences between different frameworks, making them the driving forces of the cultural memory construction process. For Chinese visitors, the process of constructing cultural memory is relatively simple, as it is an extension of the existing framework. For international visitors, the construction of a Chinese cultural memory is more difficult because Chinese cultural memory symbols are very new. When a large number of new symbols come into their vision, they could not get help from their previous knowledge. With the massive reception of Chinese cultural data, a systematic Chinese cultural memory might be formed and become a part of the old cultural memory gradually. However, if Chinese cultural institutions want to have an effective cultural communication, they have to know very clear of the process of the (cross) cultural memory construction, and clarify the logical relationships between various links and factors. For example, to ensure that the information is successfully received by the visitors and transformed into (cross) cultural memory, cultural institutions cannot simply assume the original cultural memory of Chinese and international visitors and their expectations for text symbols without investigating the visitors, and so the institutions need to establish a feedback system to collect the data and make a detailed analysis. Authors and translators of Chinese texts, when selecting and presenting the text, need to adopt different methods based on the characteristics of the cultural memory construction process of Chinese and international visitors, effectively disseminate Chinese culture, and help Chinese and international visitors build Chinese cultural memory.

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