



Construction of the Overseas Image of the National Art Museum of China from the Perspective of Discourse-historical Analysis

Liu Ruoyang¹, Guo Fang²

^{1,2} School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China

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Abstract

In international art and cultural exchanges, the image and identity construction of art institutions play a crucial role. This research explores the construction of the National Art Museum of China's (NAMOC) overseas image based on the discourse-historical analysis (DHA). A qualitative and quantitative analysis is conducted in this study to analyze the prefaces of online promotional articles for NAMOC's international exhibitions. Combined with the corpus tool AntConc, the analysis of the discourse in this study mainly from three aspects of DHA: theme analysis, discursive strategies and the social and historical context. The findings reveal that NAMOC has successfully constructed itself as an open and inclusive platform for cultural exchange, a respectful and friendly national cultural institution, and a builder of the global community with a shared future. These images are constructed through the nomination strategy and predicative strategy that emphasize cooperation, mutual understanding, and cultural diplomacy. This study not only enriches the linguistic research on promotional texts but also offers new insights into the role of language in shaping China's cultural soft power and international cultural dialogue.

Key Words: discourse-historical analysis, National Art Museum of China, image construction, cultural dissemination.

1. Introduction

Artworks not only embody the aesthetic expressions of the creators but also serve as a vital artistic medium for identity shaping of the art institution, and even the country. The National Art Museum of China (NAMOC), housing over 100,000 exhibits, is a globally renowned institution capable of hosting world-

class exhibitions. In recent ten years, numerous exhibitions abroad have been held by NAMOC. Its promotional online posts are not only a showcase of the unique connotations of Chinese artworks but also a reflection of China's cohesion and development, which have facilitated interaction and exchange with foreign cultures. DHA is an important branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), proposed and

developed by Ruth Wodak and her team in 1986. This theory emphasizes the dynamic interaction between discourse and social structure, focusing on the evolution of language in historical context and its role in constructing social identities and power relations. The DHA approach delves into the historical context, ideology, and social cultural factors behind the text to reveal the power operation and identity construction mechanisms in language use. In recent years, DHA has been widely applied in research across various fields such as politics, society, and culture. However, current linguistic research on such art promotional texts is relatively scarce, especially lacking in-depth exploration from the perspective of DHA.

This study aims to fill this gap by using the discourse-historical analysis as the main analytical framework and corpus linguistics as an auxiliary method. A corpus of online posts on the National Art Museum of China's official website in recent ten years will be self-built, and a combined qualitative and quantitative approach will be employed to analyze the constructed national image and the discourse strategies utilized by NAMOC. This article not only enriches the linguistic study of art promotional texts, but also offers a new perspective for explaining the role of language in the shaping of China's national image. This can provide theoretical support and strategic suggestions for the promotional practices of cultural institutions.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Previous Studies:

2.1 Discourse-historical Analysis:

Discourse-historical Analysis (DHA) originated from the research on critical discourse analysis conducted by Wodak and her team in the late 1980s, which is one of the main approaches of critical discourse analysis. DHA has been influenced by various philosophical and sociological theories such as structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism during its formation process. The researches of

Discourse-historical Approach focuses on the diachronic analysis between discourse and historical context. As a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary research approach, DHA aims to integrate a large amount of existing knowledge regarding the historical origins and backgrounds of the social and political domains embedded within discourse "events" (Woldak, 2001). DHA emphasizes both the analysis of specific discursive texts, such as linguistic features, strategies, and genres, and the role of macro-level socio-historical contexts in the construction of discourse (Zeng, 2023). That is, DHA regards discourse as both a product of social structures and a productive force that shapes these structures through historical practices. Different from other CDA approaches, DHA emphasizes the interpretation of how discourse interacts with society within socio-historical contexts and how social practices are reflected in discourse. It thereby uncovers ideologies and hidden power relations in texts at a deeper level (Yang & Wang, 2019).

2.2 Key Content of Discourse-historical Analysis:

The main content of DHA analysis encompasses three aspects, which are the central of the DHA. The three dimensions are contents, discursive strategies and means and forms of realization (Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2009). Contents refers to the specific content or topic of a certain discourse that is to be studied. Discursive strategies analysis examines the specific strategies used in discourse. Means and forms of realization analysis explores how the discourse subject employs different means and forms to achieve specific effects. Moreover, regarding the analytical focal points of DHA, Wodak and Meyer (2009) have also identified and elaborated on five key discourse strategies in their research. which are nomination strategy, predication strategy, perspectivation strategy, argumentation strategy, intensification/mitigation strategy. (wodak 2001)

2.3 Previous Studies about Identity Construction on Discourse-historical Analysis:

Identity construction is an important topic in DHA. The first study on DHA was related to identity construction. It was the analysis of the emergence of anti-Semitic stereotyped images in public discourses during the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign of former UN General Secretary Kurt Waldheim (Wodak et al., 1990). Moreover, as one of the main founders of DHA, Ruth Wodak has also conducted more identity construction studies based on DHA, such as the analysis of discrimination against migrants from Romania and the discursive construction of nation and national identity in Austria (Wodak et al., 2009). During these researches, the framework and analysis content of these studies are also constantly developing.

In recent years, the application analysis of identity construction using the DHA theory has also covered many fields, mainly including political discourse identity construction, corporate identity construction, institutional identity construction, etc. In regard to political discourse identity construction, Yang and Shi (2021) analyze from the DHA perspective how the US government legitimized its discourse on the trade war. Zeng (2023) conducts a study on China's external speeches during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the DHA framework, he demonstrates that China has been practicing the diplomatic concept of a "responsible country" through concrete actions and has constructed a national image of being mutually beneficial with other countries. Wu, Ou and Bao (2024) analyze the environmental image of China constructed in the discourse practice of China Daily's reports on climate change from 2011 to 2020 by combining the LDA topic model and corpus methods. Zang and Liu (2025) analyze the White Paper on China's Practice in Poverty Alleviation mainly through three strategies in the DHA discourse strategy to shape China's image. In terms of the research on enterprise and institutional discourse, Shi and Cheng (2021)

compare the enterprise identity types constructed by Chinese and American banks based on the DHA, and conclude that Chinese enterprises construct the identity of industry leaders, while American enterprises construct the identity of social contributors. Zhao (2021), with the assistance of corpus methods and DHA, conducts a comparative study of the Chinese enterprise image in media merger and acquisition discourse, examining the construction of the Chinese enterprise image in the merger and acquisition reports of China Daily and The New York Times. The study finds that China Daily's use of naming, argumentation, and visualization discourse strategies was significantly insufficient, providing reliable suggestions for the language use in subsequent news reports. Hu & Xu (2023), based on previous research and through the study of Huawei's enterprise identity construction, further demonstrate the suitability of the DHA theoretical framework for the analysis of enterprise and institutional discourse, and also provide theoretical basis for this thesis.

These discourse analysis studies are basically conducted within the framework of DHA's three-dimensional analysis, and the content suitable for the analysis is selected according to the characteristics of the studied corpora. However, there are still relatively few studies on the identity construction of institutional discourse, especially of art institutions. This study will be based on previous researches and adopt the three-dimensional analysis framework of DHA to conduct discourse analysis on the overseas image construction of NAMOC, aiming to fill this research gap and provide research perspectives and bases for subsequent discourse analysis and identity construction of art institutions.

3. Research Methodology:

3.1 Research Design:

The analyzing objects of this thesis is the online promotional introductions for NAMOC's

overseas art exhibitions in recent ten years, a total of 11 promotional articles. All texts come directly from NAMOC's official website, which are publicly available and professionally prepared. This study is mainly qualitative and quantitative, which combines the using of corpus tool AntConc and discourse analysis. The use of the corpus-based approach can provide critical discourse analysis with empirical and quantitative evidence. This effectively reduces the subjectivity, arbitrariness, and one-sidedness of the critical discourse analysis, thereby enhancing the persuasiveness of discourse interpretation (Guo, 2011).

Based on Wodak's DHA theory, the following research steps are carried out at three levels: First, at the macro level, the word frequency statistics and collocation analysis of the corpus of this study are conducted based on AntConc to determine the theme of the discourse. Second, at the meso level, by identifying the discourse strategies involved in the discourse, the ways of constructing the national image in the overseas exhibition tweets of the National Art Museum of China are interpreted. Third, at the micro level, the language realization forms of discourse strategies are analyzed to reveal the language representation of discourse strategies.

3.2 Research Questions:

The research questions of this article are represented as follow: (1) What does the National Art Museum of China construct its overseas identity through its online promotions of the international exhibitions? (2) What specific discourse strategies does the National Art Museum of China employ in shaping its overseas image? (3) What social and historical factors have influenced the identity construction of the National Art Museum of China of its overseas image building?

4. Discussion and Results:

In this section, the analysis of the online promotion of NAMOC's overseas exhibitions will be conducted from three dimensions: theme analysis, discursive strategy analysis, and socio-historical context analysis. Moreover, this section explores the social and historical factors may have an influence on the construction of China's image in the online promotion of NAMOC's overseas exhibitions.

4.1 Theme Analysis:

The lexical choice can help to identify the main topics of discourse. The author primarily employs the AntConc corpus tool for statistical analysis in this subsection. The top 20 high-frequency words (excluding function words such as “和”, “的”, etc.) extracted from the corpus are presented in the figure below.

Table: 1 The top 20 frequent key-words (Excluding function words)

Number	Word	Frequency	Number	Word	Frequency
1	中国 (China)	130	11	现代 (modern)	11
2	艺术 (art)	77	12	共同 (together)	9
3	文化 (culture)	47	13	创造 (create)	9
4	当代 (contemporary)	37	14	追求 (pursue)	9
5	传统 (traditional)	34	15	发展 (development)	8
6	精神 (spirit)	34	16	探索 (explore)	8
7	国际 (international)	24	17	民族 (nation)	8
8	历史 (history)	13	18	共同体 (community)	8
9	交流 (communicate)	11	19	价值 (value)	7
10	人类 (human)	11	20	未来 (future)	7

From the above word-frequency list, the author will attempt to summarize and analyze the theme. First the words of the subject of action can be summarized as follows: “中国” (China), “人类” (human), “民族” (nation) and “共同体” (community). These words reveal that the subjects of sharing and communicating art are not only from China but also from all over the world; NAMOC not only focuses on Chinese art and culture but also pays attention to the interaction between Chinese art and culture and those of other countries and ethnic groups around the world. Second, the action verbs are as follows: “交流” (communicate), “创造” (create), “追求” (pursue), “探索” (explore). These verbs reflect that while NAMOC is holding exhibitions abroad, it also attaches importance to cultural exchanges among countries and the creation and exploration of art. Third, some other noun terms are as follows: “艺术” (art), “文化” (culture), “精神” (spirit), “历史” (history), “发展” (development), “价值” (value), and “未来” (future). These words explain that the Chinese artworks to be exhibited by NAMOC are regarded as precious cultural assets that can be shared by the whole world, embodying not only the rich historical and cultural heritage of China but also the Chinese spirit that NAMOC intends to present to the whole world.

The above word frequency analysis reveals the theme of the discourse: Through holding overseas art exhibitions, NAMOC share Chinese outstanding traditional culture and contemporary art with the international community. NAMOC adheres to the goal of promoting historical cultural exchanges among all ethnic groups, pursuing common development and progress of human culture, and jointly advancing the construction of the community with a shared future for mankind.

4.2 Discursive Strategies Analysis:

Discursive strategies analysis is the core of the DHA three-dimensional framework. There are five discourse strategies in discourse-

historical analysis. Considering the specific strategies used in the texts of this study, this research mainly adopts two discourse strategies: nomination strategy and predication strategy.

4.2.1 Nomination Strategy:

Nomination strategies in DHA approach refer to how social actors, objects, phenomena, events and processes and behaviors in discourse are nominated and referred to from a linguistic perspective, with the linguistic means of categorizing members and realized in the form of indicatives and nouns (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). In this type of online promotion, the key task for the promoter is to establish an attractive and more easily recognized positive image for the audience. This approach requires a clear use of the nomination strategy to directly explain their identity positioning. First, in these promotion, there are extensive use of metaphorical expressions to implement the nomination strategy. In Examples 1 and 2, NAMOC is portrayed as a “palace of art”, an “envoy of international cultural exchange”, and an “important window for foreign art exchanges”. The positive identity names mentioned above will, on the one hand, attract more foreign tourists and art enthusiasts from various countries; on the other hand, this further emphasizes the role and image of NAMOC as a bridge for cultural exchanges with foreign cultures.

[Example 1] 中国美术馆作为中国国家级美术殿堂，肩负着国际文化交流的重任。

[Example 2] 中国美术馆是中国唯一的国家美术馆，是中国对外艺术交流的重要窗口。

Besides, NAMOC will also adopt the nomination strategy and employ the “other-shaping” approach to shape the image of the cooperating partners’ countries or the image of the art museum, so as to bring the psychological distance between countries and foreign audience closer. In Examples 3 and 5, NAMOC named the exhibitions jointly held with other countries as “a feast of beauty” and “a milestone

of cultural exchange” by means of metaphor. In Examples 4 and 5, NAMOC also emphasized the status of the cooperating countries. Such a nomination strategy, by highlighting and respecting the status of the cooperating parties, indirectly reflects NAMOC’s respect and inclusiveness towards the art and culture of different countries, thereby shaping an image of openness, inclusiveness and respectful.

[Example 3] 此次两座国家级美术馆的对话, 有助于增强中韩两国在文化上的共鸣, 以映照千年并仍为当今观众所喜爱的艺术形式, 为两国民众带来美的盛宴。

[Example 4] 墨西哥同样拥有历史悠久的古代文化传统, 是北美洲印第安文化的中心之一。

[Example 5] 此次展览既是庆祝中乌两国建交 30 周年的重要文化活动之一, 也是两国之间文化交流进程中的一座里程碑。

Apart from metaphor and anaphora, these promotions also employ the pronoun “we” to delineate “in-group” and “out-group” (Cun, et al., 2022). In these promotions, NAMOC employs numerous “我们” (we) to emphasize the collective “in-group” attributes, as shown in the following sentences.

[Example 6] 不同的历史发展特征和文化差异相互吸引着彼此, 让我们共同面对着现代化转型语境下如何梳理、发展自身文化的命题。

[Example 7] 新冠肺炎疫情阻隔了我们面对面的交流, 那么就让艺术作为使者, 让这艺术互鉴的盛宴带去我们美好的问候与祝福吧!

[Example 8] 透过这些作品, 我们得以通感中国意象、传统韵味、现代形式的交相辉映。

By building a shared “self” identity with other national art museums and audiences, NAMOC achieves a positive two-way interaction of identity recognition, thereby

promoting active international cooperation. NAMOC refers to “us” as the people of all countries in the world, thus enhancing the willingness to cooperate and the sense of identity among art museums and audiences of various countries. The expression of “us” can convey the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind advocated by China and construct a positive and cohesive image of NAMOC.

4.2.2 Predication Strategy:

Predication strategies refer to linguistic ways of assigning features and attributes to social actors, objects, phenomena, events and processes, and are realized in the form of positive or negative evaluative language; explicit predicates or predicative nouns and adjectives (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). In the self-image construction of the art museum, NAMOC employed positive and affirmative verbs to shape its image for visitors. By using AntConc to conduct statistics and analysis on the predicate verbs of “我们”, the following table is about the predicate verbs.

According to the table 2, in the online promotion, NAMOC used many positive words to elaborate on the actions or intentions related to “我们”. These positive words include: facing, hoping, basing on, expecting, and being able. These predicate words not only have a strong positive nature, but also possess a certain degree of euphemistic quality. The use of these words can help NAMOC establish a reliable, humble, and inclusive image, and in this way, they expect to gain the recognition of the audience. Meanwhile, since the subject of a sentence is sometimes omitted in Chinese, there are some positive predicates and complements in the following example sentences.

Table 2: Summary of predicate verbs of “我们”

通过它们	我们	<u>可以感受到</u> 中国和墨西哥民间文化中某种精神性的契合
不同的历史发展特征和文化差异相互吸引着彼此,让	我们	<u>共同面对着</u> 现代化转型语境下如何梳理、发展自身文化的命题
这是一个开放的时代	我们	<u>期待能够</u> 为人类文化的进步贡献出自己的力量
此次参赛的作品中	我们	<u>可以感受到</u> 艺术家们均领悟此真谛
-	我们	<u>希望通过</u> 展览的举办,实现与乌拉圭之间“高山流水觅知音”的文化活动
-	我们	<u>希望通过</u> 本次展览,观众能体会到艺术家们为发掘
-	我们	<u>立足于探讨</u> 中国传统美学思想中“写意精神”的“当代性”转换
-	我们	<u>希望</u> 本次展览能够让泰国人民对当代中国艺术有比较全面的了解

[Example 9] 中国美术馆携手波兰华沙民俗博物馆…为两国友好与交流献上特别的礼物。

[Example 10] 为中法当代艺术界搭建起一个欣赏、研究和交流的平台。

[Example 11] 此次两座国家级美术馆的对话,有助于增强中韩两国在文化上的共鸣,以此加深相互理解、促进民心相通,以艺术讲好故事、构建人类命运共同体。

Based on Examples 9 and 10, in the context of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, NAMOC regards cultural exchanges among countries as an important way for countries to enhance friendship. The predicates such as “hand in hand”, “offer gifts”, and “build” demonstrate that this event is not only an art exhibition but also promotes harmony and cooperation among countries through the power of art. This can also shape the positive image of the practitioners of NAMOC’s cultural diplomacy among countries. In Example 11, through positive and proactive predicate verbs such as “deepen understanding”, “promote”, and “construct”, it further emphasizes the promoting role of NAMOC in international art exhibitions in conveying friendship and the values of common development. It can also constructs its image as a builder of the community with a shared future for mankind.

To sum up, through the analysis of discursive strategies, the image and path constructed by NAMOC through the promotion of overseas art exhibitions are as follows. Firstly, through the nomination strategy, it uses metaphorical and other naming methods to present itself to foreign audiences as an inclusive, friendly and cultural exchange facilitator. Moreover, by using “we”, it constructs a collective identity with the audiences of foreign art museums, thereby conveying the image of a builder of the human community of common destiny. Secondly, through the predication strategy, by using some positive predicates, NAMOC constructs an identity of being humble, inclusive and a practitioner of cultural diplomacy in these promotions.

4.3 Analysis of the Social and Historical Context:

The emergence of a certain discourse cannot be separated from its social and historical context. From the perspective of social and historical context, the overseas image construction of NAMOC is mainly based on three main kinds of aspects: challenges and opportunities of Chinese art in the cross-cultural context, China’s cultural diplomacy and the

need to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

In the last century, the “going out” of Chinese art was mainly achieved through the individual efforts of artists and international exchange activities. However, Chinese art has also been constantly exploring ways to integrate with the international community while maintaining its own characteristics. In recent years, the “going out” of Chinese art has become an important part of the country’s cultural soft power. Through cooperation with cultural institutions in various countries to hold exhibitions, Chinese art not only showcases its artistic achievements but also promotes international cultural exchanges and cooperation (Qing, Chen, 2024). Based on this, NAMOC, as the only national museum of fine arts in China, shoulders the important responsibility of promoting outstanding Chinese artworks to the international community. This not only demonstrates the diversity of Chinese art but also enhances friendly relations between countries through cultural diplomacy.

Since the initiative of building a community with a shared future for mankind was first proposed in 2013, China has continuously emphasized the strengthening of cultural exchanges and interactions among different countries and ethnic groups, and has promoted the new vision of building a human community with a shared future that is culturally inclusive. The director of the China Art Museum, Wu Weishan, proposed in his speech that countries must have a deeper understanding of each other’s artistic characteristics, and that art institutions of various countries must explore appropriate cooperation methods and approaches. The key to building a community with a shared future for mankind lies in the connection between hearts. Through the exchange of classic works, the hearts of countries and ethnic groups can be better communicated. In today’s world, globalization is constantly advancing and

cultural exchanges are becoming increasingly frequent. As a national-level art institution, the construction of the overseas image of the China Art Museum is not only a way to promote artistic and cultural communication and exchanges, but also can showcase the Chinese spirit. This image can help the world better understand China and can better convey China’s open and inclusive, pursuit of peace and kindness spirit to the world, enhancing understanding and respect among countries, and thereby promoting international exchanges and cooperation.

5. Conclusion

This research has explored the construction of the National Art Museum of China’s (NAMOC) overseas image through the application of Discourse-Historical Analysis. By examining the online promotional content of NAMOC’s international exhibitions, this study have identified key themes, discourse strategies and the social and historical context that shape its international identity. The findings indicate that NAMOC employs nomination and predication strategies to present itself as an inclusive, friendly, and culturally diplomatic institution. These strategies emphasize cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and the construction of a shared future, thereby enhancing China’s cultural soft power on the global stage. NAMOC has successfully constructed a positive and progressive identity that is an open and inclusive platform for cultural exchange, a respectful and friendly national cultural institution, and a builder of the global community with a shared future. Meanwhile, this study also analyzed in detail the social and historical background of the image shaping. This study not only provides a deeper understanding of how art institutions can shape national and cultural identities but also offers valuable theoretical support and strategic suggestions for future cultural promotional practices. Future research could further explore the impact of these strategies on audience perception and the potential for other

cultural institutions to adopt similar approaches in their international outreach efforts.

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