

Analysing the State, Challenges, and Prospects of Cultural and Artistic Exchange Between China and Australia

Yifan Pan^{1*}

¹ Shanghai Publishing and Printing College, Shanghai, China

Email Address

yifanpan2028 @ qq.com (Yifan Pan)

*Correspondence: yifanpan2028 @ qq.com

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Abstract:

In an era characterized by the thriving development of technology and strengthened global cooperation, the proximity of Sino-foreign arts exchange is notably intensifying. This signals a burgeoning period where cultural interactions are becoming increasingly intimate. Taking the artistic exchange between China and Australia as a case in point, this article, framed from the perspective of a Chinese artist, delves into the current landscape, challenges, and opportunities embedded within this dynamic cultural interchange. The examination reflects the intricate tapestry of artistic collaboration in the face of evolving technologies and deepening international partnerships. As the global stage continues to evolve, the intersection of Chinese and foreign arts serves as a microcosm of the broader narrative, highlighting both the hurdles and potential breakthroughs in the ever-expanding realm of cultural exchange.

Keywords:

Culture Exchange, Sino-Overseas Cultural Exchange, Australia China Arts and Culture Exchange

1. Introduction

Cultural exchange typically involves interactions among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, extending beyond national boundaries to encompass exchanges among ethnic and regional groups [1]. It manifests in various forms, including sports, arts, and more [2]. By facilitating organized cultural and artistic exchange activities, participants can glean insights from one another, leverage complementary strengths and weaknesses, dispel misunderstandings, strengthen mutual friendships, bolster connections, and cultivate mutual trust. Consequently, cultural exchange stands as a potent tool for enhancing relationships between parties, serving to align with the shared interests of both entities.

Since the inception of the Chinese economic reform introduced in 1978 [3], guided by the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the nation has achieved notable success across various domains, including the economy, technology, education,

military, and cultural arts [4]. In recent years, propelled by advancements in technological capabilities and strengthened global cooperation, cultural exchange between China and foreign nations, particularly with the global community, has become increasingly frequent and experienced significant growth. This surge is evident not only in the international presence of exceptional Chinese artists, such as Cai Guoqiang [2], who have showcased their talents and the allure of Chinese art on a global scale, but also in the visits of globally renowned figures like Professor Elisabeth Findlay to China [5]. These visits have facilitated profound exchanges with Chinese academic and artistic communities.

Overall, this thesis will employ the cultural and artistic exchange between China and Australia as a focal point, conducting a case study to examine the present condition, obstacles, and prospects within Sino-Australian cultural and artistic exchange. The analysis will be approached through the lens of a young Chinese artist currently studying in Australia, with the overarching goal of delving into the future potential of this cultural exchange.

2. Sino-Australian Cultural Exchange Status

As two major nations in the Asia-Pacific region, China and Australia share close ties in various aspects, including geopolitics, economics, and culture. Since the restoration of normal diplomatic relations between China and Australia on the 21st of December 1972 [4], cultural exchanges between the two nations have been carried out under the guidance of the “China-Australia Cultural Cooperation Agreement”, formally signed in 1981 during the visit of Huang Zhen, then Director of the National Foreign Affairs Commission [4]. These exchanges have included a series of activities spanning various artistic domains.

For instance, in 2002, the then Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, attended the “Australia Culture Week” in Shanghai [4]. In March 2008, the National Museum of China organized the opening ceremony of the “Great Wall of China Exhibition” in Melbourne [4]. The Palace Museum hosted the exhibition “The Crystal-Clear World - Ancient Chinese Jade from the Palace Museum” in Australia from August to November of the same year [4]. In 2010, the “Australia Year” was inaugurated in Beijing, followed by the “Chinese Culture Year” in Sydney the next year, attended by Yang Zhijin, then Deputy Minister of the Chinese Ministry of Culture [4]. According to information publicly disclosed by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China currently operates 13 Confucius Institutes and 76 Confucius Classrooms in Australia [4]. From this series of cultural exchange activities, it is evident that since the establishment of diplomatic relations, cultural and artistic exchanges between China and Australia have generally shown a trend of stability, increasing frequency, and gradually deepening engagement.

Associate Professor Fang Fang from East China University of Political Science and Law analyses the characteristics of cultural exchanges between China and Australia in her paper, “A Retrospective, Insights, and Prospects of 40 Years of Sino-Australian Cultural Interaction.” [6] Professor Fang points out: “a. Despite experiencing ups and downs, cultural exchanges between China and Australia have continually progressed overall; b. Bilateral cultural relations between China and Australia are not isolated but intricately linked to their political and economic ties, with increasingly diverse forms; c. Sino-Australian cultural relations possess their own independence and serve as means for both parties to achieve national interests.” [6] From Professor Fang's

insights, it is evident that while challenges exist in current Sino-Australian cultural exchanges, the overall trend is one of continuous development, and collaborative exchanges align with the developmental needs and common interests of both countries.

In short, since the establishment of diplomatic relations in December 1972, cultural and artistic exchanges between China and Australia have faced challenges arising from differences in culture, language, ideology, and political systems. Despite these differences, the undeniable reality is that cultural and artistic exchanges between the two countries have progressively deepened over the years. In summary, the current state of cultural and artistic exchange between China and Australia presents a blend of opportunities and challenges, maintaining an overall stable trend. These exchanges serve to enhance mutual understanding, foster trust, and align with the common interests of both nations.

3. Challenges in Sino-Australian Cultural Exchange

Despite the increasing maturity and gradual closeness of cultural and artistic exchange models between China and Australia, persistent misunderstandings arise from political ideologies and cultural disparities. This misjudgement of the current situation has resulted in Australia taking actions that undermine the amicable exchanges between the two nations. For instance, in 2018, the Australian media outlet News 9 published a report claiming that the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) had classified China as an “extreme threat.” [7] Such instances highlight the intricate web of challenges that persist despite the apparent maturity of cultural exchanges. Addressing these complexities is crucial for fostering a more nuanced and cooperative relationship in the realm of cultural and artistic exchange between China and Australia.

Within the realm of Sino-Australian cultural and artistic exchanges, the current landscape predominantly reflects an emphasis on traditional art forms originating from China. These include, but are not limited to, the exhibition of cultural relics and traditional Chinese paintings [4]. Moreover, contemporary artistic expressions, such as installation art [2] serve as complementary components to this overarching narrative. An illustrative example of this dynamic is encapsulated in events like “A Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor 1736-1795,” [4] meticulously organized by the Victorian Government and executed at the esteemed National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Australia [4]. Such initiatives play a significant role in elucidating China’s rich cultural heritage and historical depth to the Australian audience, thereby contributing to a nuanced cross-cultural understanding.

Furthermore, the collaborative research effort encapsulated in the “China-Australia Arts and Culture Exchange Report,” [8] jointly conducted by academic institutions of repute, namely Beijing Normal University and the University of South Australia, substantiates the critical standing of traditional art in shaping the bilateral cultural dialogue. The report [8] underscores the integral role that traditional art plays in bridging the cultural chasm between China and Australia, providing a foundation for mutual comprehension. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the inherent limitations of an exclusive focus on traditional art. Contemporary China, under the leadership of the Communist Party, has undergone rapid economic and cultural development, evolving into a dynamic and forward-looking nation [3]. Consequently, a more comprehensive narrative emerges when modern artistic expressions are seamlessly integrated into the cultural exchange paradigm. This synthesis becomes

particularly crucial in presenting a nuanced portrayal of a China that is a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity. Chinese scholar Yuchen Song [9] pointed out that in navigating the intricate nuances of cultural diplomacy, the confluence of traditional and contemporary artistic expressions emerges as a potent tool in fostering a holistic and nuanced cross-cultural dialogue.

Nevertheless, traditional art activities, while undeniably significant, grapple with inherent limitations. A conspicuous example lies in their potential inadequacy in portraying the contemporary facets of China to the Australian populace. Chinese academics Jiazheng Zhang and Baoqi Lin's research shows that Australian nationalist writers distorted images of lower-class Chinese, and demonized images of Chinese merchants. [10] The identified misunderstanding by Zhang and Lin underscores the necessity of incorporating modern Chinese artwork into cultural exchanges. The swift and multifaceted economic and cultural evolution orchestrated under the leadership of the Communist Party of China remains inadequately articulated through these conventional forms. Artworks exemplified by pieces like *Gravitational Arena* (Figure 1), which encapsulate the essence of modern China, should assume a more prominent role in the cultural exchange between China and Australia. In 2021, the Chinese government declared the successful culmination of the anti-poverty campaign. [11] Therefore, the transformative landscape, the remarkable strides, and the resounding success in achieving nationwide poverty alleviation have propelled China into a paradigm distinctly distant from the nascent nation of a century ago. Hence, the imperative arises for a nuanced narrative that transcends temporal constraints and encapsulates the dynamic synthesis of tradition and modernity characterizing contemporary China.

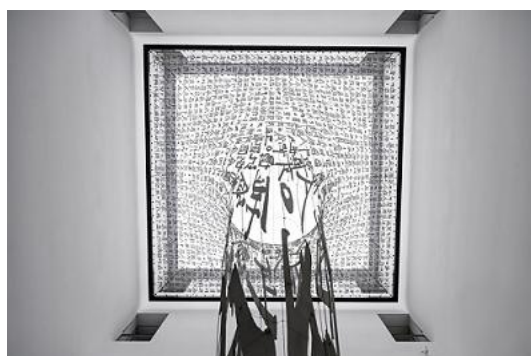


Figure 1. *Gravitational Arena* Bing Xu 2022.

Based on the observations stated above, the synthesis of traditional and modern art becomes a paramount necessity in this narrative endeavour. Only through this intricate fusion can a comprehensive portrayal emerge, shedding light on the harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity within China. This nuanced presentation transcends the simplistic dichotomy often perpetuated in cultural narratives, providing the Australian audience, and by extension, the Western world, with a more authentic understanding of China's multifaceted identity.

Simultaneously, the persistent vilification campaigns orchestrated by specific right-wing organizations in Australia, prominently represented by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), contribute to a protracted and deepening misunderstanding between the two nations. High-profile reports like "Uyghurs for Sale" [12] disseminate narratives that further exacerbate the existing misconceptions, triggering tangible repercussions such as the unwarranted decision by several overseas

corporations, including the American sportswear giant Nike, Inc., to boycott Xinjiang cotton. This substantiates the pervasive influence of the misinformation propagated by certain right-wing entities on a global scale, amplifying the impact of these narratives on corporate decisions and public perceptions. Chinese-Australian academic Zheyang Jiang [13] agrees that in this context, the imperative of exploring avenues for mutual understanding, bridging differences, and cultivating shared development becomes particularly acute, positioning artistic and cultural exchanges as pivotal instruments in challenging and rectifying the prevailing misinformation that impedes the progress of Sino-Australian relations.

It is evident that the existing cultural and artistic exchange model, predominantly centred around traditional culture, falls short in effectively accomplishing the imminent task of “dispelling the stereotypical impressions of China deliberately cultivated by certain right-wing media among the general Australian public.” This task is becoming increasingly urgent, necessitating a thorough reassessment of the current exchange framework to better address the challenges posed by misrepresentations and facilitate a more nuanced understanding between the two nations.

4. Sino-Australian Cultural Exchange Opportunities

Art, as a form of expression beyond national boundaries, serves as a universal language capable of fostering mutual understanding. Through artistic exchanges, the presentation of a contemporary China to Australia emerges as a pivotal strategy for dismantling prevailing misconceptions. I have received an invitation to partake in the “Diary in Time of Isolation” photography exhibition, jointly orchestrated by Poland and Australia. This collaborative showcase features works from artists spanning various nations, including Australia, Poland, Russia, Italy, and Spain. As the exclusive young Chinese art scholar participant, my exhibited piece, “From the Darkest Moment to the Light,” (Figure 2) intricately intertwines photography with bilingual text (Chinese and English), portraying the resilience and solidarity exhibited by the Chinese populace in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This artistic endeavour seeks to counteract inaccurate portrayals by Western right-wing entities regarding China’s pandemic management and articulate the nuanced narrative of China’s efficacious campaign against the epidemic. I posit that this exhibition offers a scholarly avenue for the people of Poland and Australia to gain nuanced insights into China’s triumphant struggle against the pandemic.

Within the intricate fabric of Australian cultural appreciation, the population prominently exhibits a profound affinity for the arts, as elucidated by the 2017 survey [14] commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts. Remarkably, a staggering 98% [14] of Australians recognize the pervasive influence of art in shaping the contours of their lives. Notably, a substantial 76% [14] actively partake in offline artistic pursuits, spanning a diverse spectrum of expressions, including exhibitions, dance, literature, and music. Of particular significance is the noteworthy 46% [14] participation rate in visual arts, serving as a testament to a robust embrace of contemporary artistic forms. This cultural milieu underscores that for three-quarters of Australians, art operates as a pivotal lens through which they glean nuanced perspectives on intricate societal matters [14]. As an art scholar, providing a compelling platform to authentically narrate China’s odyssey of modernization through the nuanced language of artistic expression. This confluence of high cultural engagement and a diverse artistic palette positions the Australian audience as

amenable to a multifaceted artistic narrative that seamlessly intertwines traditional and modern elements, facilitating a more profound understanding of China's intricate socio-cultural landscape.



Figure 2. *Yifan Pan From the darkest moment to the light 2020.*

As a young Chinese artist who has extensively studied in Australia, specializing in diverse modern artistic techniques such as photography, installation art, and digital media, I perceive the cultural exchange between China and Australia as both a challenge and an opportunity for artists and scholars residing in Australia. Embracing every conceivable opportunity, we should leverage various platforms, including academic institutions and exhibitions, to seamlessly amalgamate traditional and modern artistic expressions. Through this fusion, we aim to convey a multifaceted portrayal of China to the Australian people—a nation where tradition harmonizes with modernity, embodying a dynamically evolving, peace-loving, and prosperous modern China. As previously discussed, artists such as Cai Guoqiang [2] from China and Professor Elisabeth Findlay [5] from Australia actively contribute to elevating Sino-Australian cultural exchange through the integration of modern artworks. Employing art as a truthful medium, we endeavour to bridge the gap with the ordinary Australian populace, striving to diminish the stigmatizing narratives propagated by right-wing entities like the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI).

In conclusion, artistic exchanges between China and Australia offer a powerful means to challenge misconceptions and foster mutual understanding. Through author's participation in the “Diary in Time of Isolation” exhibition, he aims to convey China's resilience during the pandemic, countering right-wing narratives. The Australian population's profound affinity for the arts provides a receptive environment for presenting China's modernization journey through nuanced expressions. As a young Chinese artist, the author advocates for the seamless integration of traditional and modern art to bridge cultural gaps, using art as a truthful medium to dispel stigmatizing narratives propagated by entities like the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). This cultural exchange is an artistic imperative, revealing the rich tapestry of China's harmonious blend of tradition and modernity.

5. Future of Sino-Australian Cultural Exchange

Presently, China and Australia face numerous divergences due to ideological disparities and the influence of certain right-wing forces in Australia. However, sustained communication and enhanced collaboration align with the practical needs and mutual interests of both nations. According to the “China-Australia Arts and Culture Exchange Report,” [8] jointly conducted by Beijing Normal University and the University of South Australia, the artistic communities of both countries exhibit a positive and open attitude towards exchange, anticipating deeper collaboration. The

report indicates substantial interest from artistic and cultural institutions, as well as ordinary citizens, in both China and Australia. In surveyed Australian institutions, 61% [8] express plans for cooperation with China in the next five years, while 63% [8] of Chinese institutions express similar intentions with Australia. This strong willingness for collaboration within the artistic communities, coupled with the keen interest from the public and industry [8], suggests that artistic and cultural exchanges align with the expectations of both nations. Consequently, it is my contention that the future of artistic collaboration between China and Australia will exhibit undulating dynamics but overall maintain a positive trajectory, fostering continued deepening of exchange and cooperation on an equal basis.

The advancement of technology has opened new avenues for artistic expression and presentation, as indicated by the Australia Council for the Arts' 2017 report, revealing that 8 out of 10 Australians now engage with art through online platforms. [14] This significant shift from 2009 underscores a habitual inclination among Australians to explore and appreciate art digitally. In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, influential art institutions in Australia, such as the Cafa Art Museum have adeptly curated impactful online exhibitions. Despite the current dominance of offline events in Sino-Australian cultural exchanges, focusing on art festivals and exhibitions, there is a compelling case for a strategic shift. Embracing virtual platforms, videos, and trending technology such as VR can overcome spatial limitations, providing a more inclusive and expansive reach to Australians across diverse regions, offering them an immersive experience into the intricate facets of Chinese culture and art. In envisioning the future trajectory of cultural exchange, a nuanced approach that harmoniously blends both online and offline dimensions emerge as a promising avenue, leveraging cutting-edge technologies for a comprehensive and accessible engagement with Chinese art.

In the current landscape of Sino-Australian cultural and artistic exchange, the predominant focus lies on offline events, characterized by art festivals and exhibitions [4], while online activities remain relatively scarce. Although offline events effectively showcase the richness of Chinese culture to participants, they grapple with inherent constraints imposed by geographical limitations, particularly in the vast and sparsely populated expanse of Australia. The expansive geographical challenges of Australia make traditional offline events less suitable for the current context, and embracing the opportunities offered by online exhibition technologies becomes imperative. The maturation of online exhibition technologies provides a compelling avenue to transcend spatial boundaries, offering a more inclusive and expansive reach to ordinary Australians in diverse regions. By leveraging virtual platforms, cultural and artistic exchange activities can seamlessly bridge geographical gaps, providing a dynamic and immersive experience that extends beyond physical confines. This strategic integration of online and offline elements not only enhances accessibility but also fosters a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Chinese culture among diverse Australian audiences, contributing to the overarching goal of strengthening cultural ties and fostering mutual appreciation between the two nations.

In the realm of collaborative education, China and Australia have established numerous cooperative projects, involving various schools. Notably, Griffith University in Australia has formed educational partnerships with several domestic institutions, including Shandong University of Arts. [5] The existing collaboration primarily follows the "N+N" model [5], indicating a combination of years spent in China and Australia. While some institutions have engaged in activities such as

mutual visits and joint lectures (illustrated by the 2019 visit of design faculty and students from Queensland College of Arts to Shandong University of Arts),[5] many schools lack more in-depth exchange initiatives. Looking ahead, in addition to collaborative educational programs, academic communities in both China and Australia should initiate activities akin to the reciprocal visits between Queensland College of Arts and Shandong University of Arts. [5] Such initiatives provide Australian faculty and students with the opportunity to experience China firsthand, fostering an appreciation for its culture. Similarly, it allows Chinese faculty and students to venture abroad, learning from the mature teaching practices of Australian institutions and showcasing the cultural refinement of the Chinese people. The approach should be one of both going out and welcoming in.

In conclusion, the Sino-Australian relationship faces challenges due to ideological disparities and right-wing influences in Australia. The “China-Australia Arts and Culture Exchange Report” [8] indicates a positive trajectory for artistic collaboration, with strong willingness from both nations’ artistic communities. Embracing technology, the Australia Council for the Arts’ report [14] highlights a shift toward online art engagement, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While offline events dominate current exchanges, strategic integration of online platforms, including VR, presents an opportunity to transcend spatial limitations, providing Australians with a nuanced understanding of Chinese art. This approach aligns with the overarching goal of strengthening cultural ties. In collaborative education, the existing “N+N” model [5] calls for more profound engagements, emphasizing reciprocal visits and joint lectures, fostering mutual understanding, and showcasing cultural richness for a deeper educational alliance.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this thesis has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the cultural and artistic exchanges between China and Australia, shedding light on their historical context, present dynamics, and future potential. The multifaceted nature of cultural exchange, extending beyond national borders and encompassing various domains such as sports, arts, and academia [4], underscores its significance as a powerful tool for fostering mutual understanding, dispelling misunderstandings, and building enduring connections.

The backdrop of China’s remarkable achievements since the economic reforms of 1978 [3] has set the stage for increasingly frequent and substantial cultural exchange activities with foreign nations [4], showcasing the nation's prowess in diverse fields. Notable figures such as Cai Guoqiang [2], and Professor Elisabeth Findlay [5] have played pivotal roles in these exchanges, facilitating profound interactions between Chinese and global academic and artistic communities.

The thesis’s focus on the Sino-Australian cultural and artistic exchange, particularly through the lens of a young Chinese artist studying in Australia, has illuminated the challenges and opportunities within this dynamic relationship. The examination of historical events, such as the China-Australia Cultural Cooperation Agreement and the analysis of scholarly perspectives, as presented by Associate Professor Fang Fang [6], have provided valuable insights into the evolving nature of Sino-Australian cultural interactions.

Despite the evident progress in cultural exchanges, persistent challenges arising from political ideologies, cultural disparities, and misjudgements have been identified.

Right-wing influences in Australia [12] have led to misconceptions, impacting bilateral relations. The emphasis on traditional art forms in the current exchange model [4], while significant, faces limitations in portraying the contemporary facets of China. The need for a nuanced narrative that integrates both traditional and modern artistic expressions become imperative in dispelling stereotypes and fostering a holistic cross-cultural dialogue.

Art, as a universal language, emerges as a potent means to bridge these cultural gaps. The 'Diary in Time of Isolation' exhibition, featuring the works of the young Chinese artist participating in this thesis, exemplifies how artistic expression can counteract misrepresentations and provide nuanced insights. Leveraging the profound affinity for the arts within the Australian population [14], the integration of traditional and modern art becomes a compelling strategy to present China's multifaceted identity authentically.

While ideological disparities and right-wing influences pose challenges[12], the thesis remains optimistic about the future of artistic collaboration between China and Australia. The "China-Australia Arts and Culture Exchange Report" [8] signals a positive trajectory, with strong interest from both nations' artistic communities. The advancement of technology, especially the shift toward online art engagement, presents an opportunity to overcome spatial limitations and reach diverse Australian audiences[14]. The strategic integration of online and offline elements becomes crucial for fostering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Chinese culture.

In the realm of collaborative education, the "N+N" model [5] suggests a direction for more profound engagements, emphasizing reciprocal visits and joint lectures [5]. Such initiatives not only enrich the educational experience for students and faculty but also contribute to mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural richness [5].

In essence, the cultural and artistic exchanges between China and Australia stand at a critical juncture, poised for further growth and deepening collaboration. By addressing challenges, embracing technological advancements, and fostering reciprocal educational initiatives, the two nations can continue to build bridges of understanding, appreciation, and cooperation, contributing to a more interconnected and harmonious global community.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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