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Analysis of Mass Media Influences on British Contemporary Art: A Turner Prize perspective

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Abstract

Turner Prize has grown from an unattended state to an authoritative art festival. Besides the innovation of its own evaluation criteria, it also benefits from the extensive involvement of the media in the Turner Prize. The upsurge of visits and public discussion caused by this changed the cultural influence of contemporary art on the public, promoted the prosperity of the art market, and gave birth to new art forms. This paper attempts to analyse the positive and negative influences of mass media on British contemporary art from the Turner Prize and mass media.

Keywords: Contemporary Art; Mass media; Turner Prize; Art Market

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1.0 Introduction

In contemporary China, the artistic dissemination of mass media is mainly subject to non-artistic factors such as the times' interest, cultural accumulation, and media development level. The influence of contemporary art in China is still limited to the art circle and some art lovers, and the level of development is extremely uneven. The in-depth reports are mainly reflected in urban media in economically developed cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai. Compared with the UK, the development speed of Contemporary Art in China was very slow at the beginning, with a unique social and historical background in the initial stage. In the UK, the involvement of mass media in Contemporary Art seems to become a news event. With marketing strategies, some artists and collectors also use media opinions to build their personal brands and transform cultural capital into economic capital. Towards the scenario, this paper aims at how mass media influences British Contemporary Art by examining the relationship between British Contemporary Art and Mass Media through the representative Turner Prize. While the mass media develops contemporary art, it also brings challenges to it. First of all, art dissemination is somewhat utilitarian. Contemporary art itself is extremely complex, and it is difficult to set up any critical criteria to grasp it. In particular, the reality of Chinese contemporary art forces critics to make it impossible to refer to western standards of art criticism. This situation makes art criticism inevitably biased.

2.0 Literature Review

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2.1 The Turner Prize

The Turner Prize was created in 1984. It was named after the famous English painter J.M.W. Turner. It is one of the most prestigious visual arts awards in the UK. The group was founded to highlight great British art in the name of a British artist. Nevertheless, the early days of the Turner Prize were not so smooth. At this time, Britain was in a state of internal troubles and foreign aggression. The Second World War made Britain's economy depressed, and its domestic political situation was unstable. In 1979, the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher came into power and suppressed the art field that could not bring direct benefits to the society, making the British contemporary visual art, which had been in a difficult situation, have to rely on a small number of enterprises, groups, and individuals supporting the development of domestic art to sponsor. Furthermore, the Patrons of New Art group was a solid financial backer in the early days of the Turner Prize.

From 1984 to 1990, the criteria and nomination procedure of the Turner Prize have been in a state of exploration. British critics derided the first edition for honouring a lifetime of artistic achievement, and the way it was chosen was unappealing to the public. It even closed in 1990 when its American sponsor went bankrupt. Just when some people thought that the Turner Prize would be lost forever in the sea of history, the Turner Prize turned around after 1991, which has a lot to do with the innovation of the selection mechanism of the Turner Prize. The awards specify the criteria for selecting young artists who have made a significant impact on the British contemporary art scene in the past year, strictly limiting the age to under 50 and excluding art critics, museum staff, and older artists. The nominees and winners are selected by an independent panel of judges that changes each year, and the four shortlisted nominees display their work at the Tate Gallery in December each year before the winners are announced. The artists themselves are not allowed to be judged in the show. In addition, the selection form not only involves traditional painting, sculpture, and other fields but also extends to photography, media art, performance art, installation art, and other contemporary art range. With its unique selection criteria and subsequent commercial media operations, the Turner Prize has increasingly become the UK's most prestigious contemporary art award.

2.2 British Mass Media

Few countries can rival Britain's media industry, especially newspapers and radio and television, for its sophistication and coverage. Canary wharf financial center of Reuters, The Daily Telegraph, independent, mirror and other media agencies, media new wrapping, The Times, The Sun, the Daily Express, such as old newspaper, and also in the guardian in the center of London, the financial times, and in the west of the British broadcasting corporation (BBC) headquarters and guard the sky (SKYTV), Making London the city of information. Newspapers, books, radio, television, audio, and video products are almost everywhere in British People's Daily life. In a country of fewer than 70m people, newspaper circulation and readership remain significant, even as circulation in European countries has been declining in recent years. For example, the daily circulation of The Sun newspaper is over 3 million (Bi Jia, Long Zhichao, 2007). As the declining newspaper industry among media organisations, it can be seen that mass media has a significant influence on the British people. The success of British media is closely related to its own media system. Laws and government control activities exist widely in the UK, and the management system is clear and detailed. The UK also regulates the media through unwritten law, media regulatory bodies established by parliamentary decree, and the European Convention on Human Rights (Bi Jia, Long Zhichao, 2007). Despite this, the British media industry does not lack vitality because of these restrictions. Freedom of speech gives the British media industry a perfect space for development. Moreover, "objectivity and fairness" has been recognised by many people in western countries. Nowadays, the quality of British media has become the standard by which media organisations in most countries judge themselves and the standard by which audiences around the world judge news events.

3.0 Methodology - A Descriptive Study

For the purpose of this paper, a descriptive historical approach which in particular takes the Turner Prize as a sample of the study, including past Turner Prize winners such as Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Douglas Gordon, Martin Creed, Grayson Perry, and other cases to be examined. A contextual document review is used to collect and sort out existing literature and materials related to art communication and analysing how British mass media are used to disseminate contemporary art, including books, periodicals, and papers.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Media involvement in the Turner Prize

Apart from its unique selection criteria, the interaction with the media is the external condition for the success of the Turner Prize, which has gone from the embarrassment of being ignored to the most significant cultural event. Since the resumption of the award in 1991, the promoters of the Turner Prize have paid attention to the publicity and commercial operation of the prize. The awards campaign has partnered with Channel 4 to introduce a public awards mechanism. This move has sparked the enthusiasm of the audience to participate, although every time the nominees are subjected to the audience's abuse and ridicule, this heated situation attracts more people's attention. It also broadcasts the awards live. The organisers will invite celebrities in the arts, entertainment, and other circles to attend the annual award ceremony. In addition, the BBC's interviews with the nominated candidates and the critical reports on the works of influential newspapers make contemporary art seem like a news event. Due to the success of the Turner Prize in media publicity, it has become a

stage for a group of young artists to showcase and promote themselves. The Turner Prize winners of the 1990s, for example, were mainly from YBA, which promoted iconoclastic young artists like Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, and Douglas Gordon.

4.2 The Turner Prize expands the influence of media organisations

Technology-based media has been transformed into a content-based cultural industry. Therefore, art is of vital importance to the cultural industry. It is precise because of the joining of art that the cultural industry, which cannot create itself, achieves economic success through commercial operation and provides a feasible new way to develop the market (Song Meng,2006). Therefore, the coverage of hot topics in art has become an indispensable part of media culture.

Creating public opinion and capturing the hot spots that can resonate with audiences and readers is important for media organisations to occupy a favourable position in the industry. Therefore, it is very important to select the subject matter of the art report. It is a natural hot selling point for the media to be involved in the current and eye-catching topic, which has a novel criterion for the Turner Prize. Major media have competed to report the Turner Prize, undoubtedly increasing their media influence channel. The essence of media influence lies in possession of social capital formed by media through interaction with public opinion, and the essence of media economy is to realise the transformation between social capital and economic capital (Li Qinglin,2008). In other words, the richer social resources they occupy, the more they can have the right to speak in social activities and thus gain more commercial interests.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Dialogue between contemporary art and the public

First, mass media enables people to have more direct and convenient access to contemporary art and realise dialogue with art. This has changed the relationship between art and the public in the traditional sense. Contemporary art is no longer a luxury belonging to "aristocrats" but has begun to step down from the altar to the public. Moreover, the power of media extends the possibility of public acceptance of art and changes people's attitudes and concepts towards contemporary art. The media's interpretive reports on art guided the audience's way of thinking, and the British public generally changed from being challenging to understand, distrustful or even disgusted with contemporary art at the beginning to actively participating in it. For example, The Turner Prize was voted by the audience on Channel 4 in Britain, which increased the public's enthusiasm to participate in art activities. Predicting the winners of each year has become an exciting story for the British public, enhancing the cultural influence of contemporary art on public life.

5.2 Promoting the art market

In the sociological sense, the publication of an artistic work does not mean its completion. Only after it is accepted can it be regarded as completion (Wang Desheng,2004). In today's society, mass media make art more acceptable. Some commercially sensitive artists, collectors, patrons and so on are also aware of this. Tracey Emin is a master of marketing, and she excels at courting controversy in public and generating media hype about her work. She stormed out of discussions at the 1997 Turner Prize on Channel 4 and has since made regular appearances in the British press, at gallery openings and the fashion awards. However, *My Bed* in 1999, for which Emin was nominated for the Turner Prize, made her most famous. The naked display of her post-sex bed has caused a media frenzy and sparked a war of ideas among the British public. A woman living in Wales, England, went to the Tate Gallery in London to clean up with dishwashing liquid and cloth. Almost all well-known newspapers and periodicals to a different degree of evaluation, and Britain's guardian exaggerated to report the work with the second page, the prominent topic goal is "how can this bed with less than two weeks from contemporary art into a symbol", and in banner headlines to congratulate "of the work in the Tate Gallery, Made Tracey Emin from minor celebrity to notoriety." Moreover, they commented: "Emin is a professional media celebrity and labelling fan."

One of Britain's most famous art galleries, the Tate, which includes Tate Liverpool, Tate St Ives, Tate Britain and Tate Modern, was visited by 796,673 people a month in 2012-13, or nearly 8 million people a year, according to DCMS figures. The site's popularity is closely related to Tate's reliance on mass media to promote the Turner Prize every year. The Tate relies on its very successful official website to promote itself, with 50m visitors a year. It includes the introduction information of the four branches, collection information, exhibition news, artist discussion and short films, etc., which can present the concept of Tate Gallery to the audience. The National Art Museum of China once interviewed Stephen Deuchar, director of The Tate Museum, and asked about the impact of the Tate Website on the museum itself. Stephen (2007) said, "This is a positive impact. The increase in website visits is directly proportional to the increase of museum visitors. People could look up information on the museum website before they come, such as booking a seat for a lecture. For Tate, the link between increased website visits and increasing attendance is not in itself a coincidence."

5.3 Media fraud

Media coverage of a work of art acts as a guide for the art market. Through thematic reports, artists and the whole art circle are guided to create public opinion and hot spot effect to occupy a favourable position in the communication chain. With the development of mass media and driven by its interests, it has become the dominant force in art production and consumption (Luo Yiping,2004). The media also control the public opinion bias. Mass communication achieves participation in the daily life of the masses using vivid and vivid symbolic information created by itself. In daily life, the masses repeatedly perceive mass communication's symbolic content and ideological characteristics and accept and imitate those reproducible mass communication images. This is essentially a media hoax, or "propagating illusion" -- readers

and viewers observe and learn about other activities in a designed field of vision, resulting in cognitive dependence and obedience without questioning or undermining the process.

The media has the right to speak and can attract numerous audiences to easily believe its recommendation and conclusion on an artist, a certain type of artwork, and an artistic phenomenon, which can influence readers and audiences positively and negatively (Luo Yiping,2004). In fact, it allows the general public to get close to art in a virtual environment. It does not realise a dialogue with art but creates a gap with real art. In addition, to some extent, the discourse power of the media will shake the creative direction of some artists, so eventually, artists will be controlled by the media, which makes contemporary art fall into the trap of the media.

5.4 The loss of artistic self-discipline

Contemporary art cannot help falling into the media's deception and being controlled by the media, which leads to the loss of artistic self-discipline. The systematic exposition of artistic autonomy originated from Kant. In the Critique of Judgment, he proposed that "beauty is pleasure without interest". "Appreciation is the ability to judge an object or a mode of representation without any pleasure or displeasure. Such an object of pleasure is called beauty." In this way, art will become pure and seek its standard and independent standard in this purity.

However, under the influence of mass media, the popularity and consumption of art are increasing, and creativity is replaced by "copying" and "making". Much of Hirst's recent work, for example, has not been produced by himself but by hired assistants. Of the hundreds of paintings in the "Dot" series, only five were painted by him. Moreover, half of Hirst's works sold at auction belong to three almost identical series: "Dot", "Butterfly", and "Whirl". Apart from the size difference, there is no other creativity. Under the control of commercial money, the originality of art in production gradually disappears and is replaced by popular cultural symbols and media forms. It is a kind of market behaviour, which also makes the boundary between art and popular culture collapse.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

Through a comparative study of Chinese and British contemporary art and mass media, we can learn from the British contemporary art system, so that contemporary art can have more space for development in China through media dissemination, and the mass media can better disseminate contemporary art to the audience. At the same time, we should recognize the negative impact of art dissemination, make better use of it, and find new points of convergence to resonate with the public. At the same time, influenced by their interests, the media control the production and consumption of art as well as the audience's thoughts, making contemporary art fall into the situation of false propagation and facing the contradiction between the purity of art essence and the popularity and consumption of art. For the public, it is necessary to have a critical thinking attitude towards the media's coverage of art events and jump out of the trap of media control.

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