

Functional Transformation and Value Reconstruction of Art Intermediaries in the Digital Age

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Abstract— Against the backdrop of digital technology reshaping the art ecosystem, art intermediaries, as the core hub connecting art production, dissemination, and consumption, have seen their traditional functional boundaries broken, ushering in a systemic transformation. Supported by art intermediary theory, the cultural diamond model, and stakeholder theory, and combined with practical cases of public art foundations in mainland China, Taiwan, and Macau, this paper analyzes the transformation characteristics of art intermediaries in the digital age from three dimensions—resource allocation, value construction, and relationship coordination—in terms of functional positioning, operational mechanisms, and value orientation. The study finds that digital technology not only drives art intermediaries to achieve de-layering of resource allocation, precision in value dissemination, and flattening of relationship networks, but also triggers new challenges such as the reconstruction of intermediary authority, digital divide, and ethical dilemmas. In this context, art intermediaries need to build collaborative governance mechanisms, strengthen digital literacy, and uphold the bottom line of publicness, so as to realize a value reconstruction from "gatekeeper" to "ecosystem builder," providing support for the virtuous cycle of the art ecosystem.



Keywords— digital age, art intermediary, functional transformation, public art foundation, art ecosystem

I. INTRODUCTION: THE REALISTIC SITUATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF ART INTERMEDIARIES UNDER TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

In the traditional art system, art intermediaries have always played a significant role, serving to regulate resources, transmit information, and construct relationships. Whether they are museums, art foundations, or art critics—traditional art intermediaries in the conventional sense—they all rely on their professional authority to evaluate artistic value, select art resources, build connection channels between creators and audiences, and form a relatively stable circulation channel for the art ecosystem [1].

Along with the digital wave, technologies such as the Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence have

profoundly changed the entire chain of art production, dissemination, and consumption. The barriers to art dissemination have been dismantled, art creation has become popularized, and the field of art consumption has been greatly expanded, reshaping the living environment of traditional art intermediaries.

The proliferation of digital media enables audiences to connect directly with artists, allowing creators to no longer rely entirely on intermediaries for promotion. Meanwhile, algorithms and big data are intervening in art evaluation systems, and "algorithmic authority" is constantly challenging "expert authority." However, the technological revolution has not eliminated the *raison d'être* of art intermediaries; instead, it has forced their functions to iterate and upgrade. As Pierre Bourdieu revealed in *The Rules of Art*, artistic value is not determined solely by the work itself, but is co-constructed

by power relations and intermediary groups within the art field. Building on the cultural diamond model, Victoria D. Alexander further pointed out that mediation is always needed between art and society, creators and consumers; only the forms and functions of intermediaries need to be updated with the times [2].

As a typical art intermediary organization, public art foundations rely on public finance, professional operation, and public welfare attributes, making them an important sample for observing the transformation of art intermediaries in the digital age. Public art funds in the Chinese Taiwan region and the Hong Kong and Macao regions, which also belong to the Chinese cultural circle, have evolved differentiated practical paths in response to the digital environment: the Beijing National Art Fund relies on digitalization to enhance the openness and timeliness of its funding work; the Taipei Cultural Foundation has built a digital platform for art information sharing; and the Macao Foundation uses digital means to broaden the coverage of art education. These practices provide vivid cases for this study [3].

Based on art intermediary theory and the current state of digital practice, this paper focuses on the role evolution of art intermediaries in the digital environment, attempting to answer three core questions: What new requirements does digital technology impose on the functions of art intermediaries? What transformation characteristics do art intermediaries exhibit in terms of resource allocation, value creation, and relationship coordination? Facing the practical challenges brought by technology, how should art intermediaries accomplish value reconstruction?

II. THEORETICAL TRACING: THE TRADITIONAL FUNCTIONS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF ART INTERMEDIARIES

2.1 Definition of the Core Functions of Art Intermediaries

The concept of art intermediaries originates from the study of art institutions in the sociology of art. Arthur Danto's "artworld" theory and George Dickie's institutional theory of art laid the theoretical foundation for this issue. Danto proposed that the value of an artwork derives not only from the work itself, but is jointly defined by intermediary groups within the artworld, such as critics, curators, and artists [3]. Dickie further incorporated art intermediaries into the core framework of the art institution, emphasizing their crucial role in artwork recognition, value assessment, and dissemination and promotion [4].

Traditional art intermediaries can be divided into three core functions. The first is the resource allocation function: relying on professional screening, public and market resources are distributed to high-quality art projects and creators to maintain the operation of the art ecosystem. The second is the value construction function: relying on professional authority to complete aesthetic judgment and cultural interpretation, guiding the public's artistic cognition. The third is the relationship coordination function: building a communication bridge among multiple stakeholders such as governance entities, creators, and consumers, balancing the demands and interests of all parties [5]. As a public cultural intermediary, the public art fund highly fits this functional framework: it achieves fair resource allocation through policy interpretation and project review, participates in art value construction through professional standards, and coordinates the multi-party relationships among the government, artists, and the public by relying on funding mechanisms.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: An Integrated Perspective of the Cultural Diamond and Stakeholder Theory

This paper integrates the cultural diamond model and stakeholder theory to construct an analytical framework. Graeme Turner's cultural diamond model divides the art ecosystem into four elements: cultural objects, creators, receivers, and the social world, focusing on the interactive relationships among these elements [4]. Building on the original model, Alexander added "art distributors," namely art intermediaries, pointing out that intermediaries are the core hubs connecting all elements, and their operational models directly determine the circulation efficiency of the art ecosystem [6]. In the digital age, the underlying logic of this model remains valid, but the operational carriers and interaction patterns of intermediaries have undergone fundamental changes.

Stakeholder theory provides support for interpreting the relationship coordination function of intermediaries. This theory holds that the key to an organization's survival and development lies in balancing the demands of various stakeholders [7]. The stakeholders of art intermediaries include government regulatory departments, artists and art groups, and the general public. Digital technology enables more direct expression of demands from all subjects and significantly increases interaction frequency, placing higher demands on the coordination ability of intermediaries. As a public intermediary organization, public art funds have a more complex stakeholder structure and need to find a dynamic balance among policy orientation, artistic creation freedom, and public cultural needs.

2.3 The Real Impact of Digitalization on Traditional Intermediary Functions

Digital technology is reshaping the operational environment of art intermediaries in an all-round way, bringing multiple impacts on traditional functions. At the resource allocation level, the decentralized nature of digital platforms is prominent; artists can directly obtain creative funding through channels such as crowdfunding, weakening the resource dominance of traditional institutions like public art funds. At the value construction level, algorithmic recommendation has become a new driving force for dissemination; public aesthetic preferences directly affect the popularity of works through data, diluting the aesthetic authority of professional intermediaries. At the relationship coordination level, social media allows audiences to directly comment on and give feedback on creative content, enabling direct dialogue between artists and audiences, weakening the information relay function of traditional intermediaries.

However, impact does not equal replacement; technology is driving the iterative upgrading of intermediary functions. For public art funds, digitalization brings new propositions: how to optimize funded projects by relying on databases? How to expand the coverage of art education through the Internet? How to balance artistic professionalism and public popularity? These constitute the core issues of the functional evolution of art intermediaries in the digital age.

III. TRANSFORMATION CHARACTERISTICS OF ART INTERMEDIARIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

3.1 Resource Allocation: From Hierarchical Distribution to Decentralized Collaboration

Traditional art intermediary resource allocation exhibits obvious hierarchical attributes. Represented by public art foundations, it adopts a linear process of "government funding—expert review—project funding," forming a rigid hierarchy that restricts resource mobility and transparency. Digital technology breaks down the original hierarchical barriers, giving rise to a decentralized collaborative allocation model, and drives the evolution of resource allocation toward greater efficiency, fairness, and precision.

The allocation process has undergone digital restructuring. Media empowerment shifts resource distribution from an offline closed loop to an online open flow. The Beijing National Art Foundation has built an online funding management platform, where project application, review, supervision, and conclusion are all conducted online. Artists submit materials online, and the

system automatically archives them based on region and category; review experts score anonymously online; the public can query project information and implementation progress. Online processing, double-blind review, and full traceability enhance the efficiency of resource allocation while ensuring fairness and transparency.

Resource entities are diversifying. Digital media dissolves the boundaries of resource allocation entities, enabling public art funds to aggregate the forces of government, society, and the market. The Macao Foundation has established an aggregation model of "government funding + corporate funding + public funding." It solicits projects online, encourages corporate sponsorship and donations, and allows ordinary citizens to support projects of interest through small donations. Donors can view project progress in real time, broadening funding sources and strengthening public identification. At the same time, digitalization promotes cross-regional resource linkage. Public art funds from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and Macao jointly build a digital resource sharing platform, carrying out online performances and artist exchanges online, eliminating geographical restrictions on resource circulation.

The allocation goals have achieved a precise upgrade. Big data helps intermediaries identify pain points in the art ecosystem and achieve precise resource allocation. The Beijing National Art Foundation reviewed historical application and funding data, identified the high difficulty faced by young artists and grassroots art groups in accessing resources, and specifically established youth talent projects and regional special funds. It also focuses on supporting traditional art categories such as opera and ethnic opera, facilitating the creative transformation of traditional culture. The Taipei Cultural and Arts Foundation analyzed audience consumption data, captured the aging audience problem in the performing arts market, and added audience development funding projects to support art groups in attracting younger audiences through digital marketing [8].

3.2 Value Construction: From Professional Authority to Pluralistic Co-Governance

Under the traditional model, art intermediaries center on professional authority, and public art funds rely on expert reviews and academic interpretations to define artistic value, thereby forming an elite aesthetic evaluation system. Digitalization has expanded the subjects of value judgment from elites to the general public, and shifted value construction from one-way output to pluralistic co-governance [9].

Value judgment has moved toward diversified participation. Online platforms provide the public with

channels to participate in art value judgment, so artistic value is no longer monopolized entirely by professionals. The Beijing National Art Fund has introduced audience evaluations in its project completion acceptance process, collecting public opinions through online questionnaires and social media comments, and incorporating them into project performance assessments. It also holds online art criticism solicitation events to build an evaluation system combining professional and public reviews. The Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts has established an online commentary space, inviting experts, creators, and ordinary audiences to jointly discuss artworks, balancing professional guidance with public demands, and broadening the paths for interpreting artistic value.

Value dissemination has undergone digital innovation. Digital technologies have enriched the carriers for art value dissemination, and intermediaries use digital means to expand the reach of art popularization. The Macao Foundation uses VR and AR technologies to transform funded exhibitions and traditional opera performances into digital content for global online dissemination, enhancing the experience; it also uses short videos and lives streaming to popularize professional art knowledge, lowering the threshold for public acceptance [10]. The Beijing National Art Fund has built a digital resource library, digitizing outstanding works and talent project results for open access, establishing a regular dissemination base, and realizing cross-temporal and cross-spatial dissemination of artistic value.

Value guidance has strengthened a public-oriented approach. In the Internet environment, value guidance has shifted from elite aesthetic education to the creation of public aesthetics. Public art funds, based on their public nature, aim to enhance public art literacy and foster a public aesthetic atmosphere. The Beijing National Art Fund carries out online outreach activities such as “Art into Schools” and “Art to Rural Areas,” delivering high-quality art resources to grassroots communities and promoting equal access to public culture; it prioritizes the support of creations on realistic themes and traditional cultural themes, conveying mainstream values through digital dissemination. The Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts is dedicated to the digital preservation of local culture, supporting digital museums and online folk exhibitions, inheriting regional culture, and shaping cultural confidence.

3.3 Relationship Coordination: From One-Way Connection to Networked Interaction

Traditional art intermediaries relied on one-way information transmission and hierarchical systems to achieve relationship coordination, with public art funds

unidirectionally connecting with the government, artists, and audiences to complete resource allocation and value transmission. Digital information technology has restructured relationship patterns, forming a networked interactive landscape, making the intermediary's relationship coordination function more complex and diversified.

Collaborate and interact with art governance entities. Cyberspace broadens intermediary dialogue channels. The Beijing National Arts Fund leverages platforms such as Weibo and WeChat public accounts to solicit project opinions from creators and the general public, establishing real-time feedback loops, shortening psychological distance, and making art projects more aligned with the needs of the masses.

Deeply empowers art producers. In the digital era, intermediaries are no longer merely funders; they have become empowering entities for creators, providing digital support across the entire chain of creation, dissemination, copyright, and promotion. The Beijing National Arts Fund offers digital creation training to its grantees, provides online copyright protection services, builds digital artist archives, and offers online exhibition and academic promotion channels to enhance creators' influence. The Taipei Foundation for Arts and Culture launches digital art incubation programs, funds digital art creation, collaborates with technology companies to provide technical support, and promotes the integration and innovation of art and technology. Intermediaries and creators build a community of shared interests, unleashing creative vitality [9].

Build two-way interaction for art consumers. Digital platforms open up two-way communication channels between intermediaries and audiences. The Macao Foundation conducts public cultural needs research relying on online platforms, adjusts funding directions based on the survey results, simultaneously launches online art courses and interactive experience projects, guiding the public to establish healthy art consumption habits. The Beijing National Art Fund uses big data to analyze audience preferences, achieving precise project recommendations; it opens online comment and feedback channels, collects public suggestions to optimize project design, balances artistic professionalism and public accessibility, and boosts the healthy development of the art consumption market.

IV. CORE CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digitalization brings opportunities to the transformation of art intermediary functions, while also

giving rise to multiple practical challenges, which are concentrated in three aspects: authority reconstruction, digital divide, and ethical norms.

4.1 Practical Dilemmas in Authority Reconstruction

Digitalization imposes a dual impact on the authority of professional intermediaries: algorithmic recommendations and public reviews weaken the discourse power of professional aesthetics; some platforms chase traffic, spreading entertaining and vulgar content, which impacts traditional aesthetic standards. Public art funds are caught in a dilemma: adhering to professional standards may lead to projects alienating the public; blindly catering to public traffic will sacrifice artistic professionalism. In the practice of the Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts, it was found that applications for popular entertainment projects increased, while those for experimental avant-garde art declined. How to balance professional standards and public acceptance has become a transformation challenge [10].

4.2 Constraints Caused by the Digital Divide

Differences in digital infrastructure and digital literacy across regions and social classes have created a new digital divide, hindering the equalization of public services. In some remote rural areas of China, digital development lags behind, grassroots artists and the public lack digital skills, and it is difficult for digital funding and popularization to reach the grassroots. In Macao, the elderly and low-income groups lack digital literacy, making it difficult for them to participate in online art activities [11]. The digital divide can easily trigger the Matthew effect, violating the public welfare nature of public art funds.

4.3 Lack of Ethical Norms

Technology is iterating rapidly, but the corresponding ethical supervision mechanisms have not yet been perfected. First, there are risks to data privacy: when intermediaries collect data from creators and the public, there are hidden dangers of leakage and misuse. Second, there is algorithmic ethical bias: algorithm recommendations can easily lead to an imbalance in resource allocation and aesthetic homogenization. Third, there is the challenge of digital copyright protection: in the online environment, the threshold for piracy dissemination is lowered, threatening the rights and interests of artistic works. The digital resource library of the Beijing National Art Fund has experienced problems with works being illegally downloaded and distributed, necessitating a balance between open sharing and copyright protection.

V. VALUE RECONSTRUCTION PATHWAYS FOR ART INTERMEDIARIES

Faced with multiple challenges of digital transformation, art intermediaries should uphold the principle of publicness, reshape their value from multiple dimensions such as mechanism innovation, capacity building, and norm improvement, and shape a new form of intermediary in the digital age.

5.1 Building a Collaborative Governance Mechanism to Balance Diverse Value Demands

Under the digital wave, the professional authority of art intermediaries is challenged and public participation in evaluation somewhat dilutes professional discourse power. In response, art intermediaries should reposition their role in the art ecosystem, consolidate professional capabilities, strengthen social responsibility, and gain public trust through open and transparent operation models. They should build a collaborative governance mechanism involving multiple entities, combining expert review, public feedback, and third-party evaluation, balancing artistic professional standards and public cultural demands, and resolving the contradiction between professional authority and public recognition. [12]

5.2 Strengthening Digital Literacy Development to Bridge the Digital Divide

The digital divide amplifies the uneven distribution of art resources. Intermediaries need to focus on vulnerable groups such as rural populations, the elderly, and grassroots creators, carry out digital skills training, and lower the barriers to using digital platforms. In addition to online digital services, some offline service channels should be retained, complementing online and offline to ensure equal participation of different groups in art activities and build a more inclusive art ecosystem.

5.3 Improve the Ethical Norm System and Uphold the Bottom Line of Publicity

Establish and improve ethical guidelines for digital operations, defining boundaries for data collection, use, and dissemination. At the data ethics level, formulate privacy protection rules, limit the scope of data collection, and use encryption technology to ensure information security; at the algorithm ethics level, optimize algorithm models, correct algorithmic bias, and ensure fairness in resource allocation; at the copyright ethics level, use blockchain to build a digital copyright protection system and combat piracy. Drawing on the experience of the Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts in establishing an ethical review mechanism for digital projects, domestic public art funds can collaborate with industry authorities to

issue ethical norms for digital operations and set an example for the industry.

5.4 Promote Deep Integration of Technology and Art, and Innovate Intermediary Service Models

Intermediary agencies should proactively embrace digital technologies and innovate service models. Leverage artificial intelligence to optimize the review process, enhancing efficiency and fairness; use VR and AR to create immersive art experiences; rely on big data to study trends in the art ecosystem and optimize funding strategies. The Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts continues to expand its digital art incubation projects; the Macao Foundation continuously explores online-offline integrated exhibition and performance models. Intermediary agencies must promote the two-way empowerment of technology and art to meet the development needs of the digital art ecosystem.

VI. CONCLUSION

The digital wave brings both opportunities and challenges to the role of art intermediaries. Art intermediaries need to ground themselves in the three core functions of resource allocation, value construction, and relationship coordination, and complete the transformation from "gatekeeper" to "ecosystem builder." [13] As art intermediaries with public attributes, public art foundations' digitalization efforts concern not only institutional operational efficiency but also profoundly influence the overall art ecosystem. The practical experiences of public art foundations across the Taiwan Strait and Macao offer valuable references for various types of art intermediary institutions.

Looking ahead, art intermediaries should uphold public interest objectives, leverage technological innovation as a driver, role transformation as a vehicle, and conceptual reshaping as the core. While maintaining professional standards, they must respond to public demands; while promoting artistic innovation, they must adhere to aesthetic criteria, thereby fostering an open and healthy art ecosystem. Future research can further expand cross-national and cross-regional empirical comparisons, analyze the logic of digital evolution of art intermediaries in different socio-cultural contexts, and provide more references for formulating development strategies for art intermediary institutions.

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