

Redefining “Minor”: An Empirical Research on Two Biennials in Contemporary China

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Abstract : Since the 1990s, biennials, and large-scale transnational art exhibitions, have proliferated exponentially across the globe, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It has spurred debates regarding the inclusion of "new art cultures" and the deconstruction of the mechanism of exclusion embedded in the Western monopoly on art. Hans Belting introduced the concept of "global art" in 2013 to denounce the West's privileged canons in art by emphasising the inclusion of art practices from alleged non-Western regions. Arguably, the rise of new biennial networks developed by these locations has contributed to the asserted "inclusion of new art worlds." However, phrases such as "non-Western" and "beyond Euro-American" attached to these discussions raise the question of non- or beyond- in relation to whom. In this narrative, to become "integrated" and "equal" implies entry into the "core," a universal system in which preexisting authoritative voices define "newcomers" by what they are not. Possibly, if there is a global biennial system that symbolises a "universal language" of the contemporary art world, it is centered on the inherently dynamic yet asymmetrical interaction and negotiation between the "core" and the rest of the world's "periphery." Engaging with theories of "minor literature" developed by Deleuze and Guattari, this research proposes an epistemological framework to comprehend the global biennial discourse since the 1990s. Using this framework, this research looks at two biennial models in China: the 13th Shanghai Biennale, which was organised in the country's metropolitan art centre, and the 2nd Yinchuan Biennale, which was inaugurated in a geographically and economically marginalised city compared to domestic centres. By analysing how these two biennials from different locations in China positioned themselves and conveyed their local profiles through the universal language of the biennial, this research identifies a potential "minor" positionality within the global biennial discourse from China's perspective.

Keywords : biennials, China, contemporary, global art, minor literature

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