

## *Original Paper*

# Exploring New Paths for the International Outreach of Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival on the Foundation of Chinese and Western Folk Cultural Exchange

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## ***Abstract***

*This article aims to delineate the history and significance of the Zigong Lantern Festival, delving into its current limitations. It seeks to explore novel avenues for the international promotion of Chinese traditional folk culture, facilitating a more dynamic integration of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival into global cultural exchanges. The objective is to enhance the vibrancy of international cultural interactions and illuminate a new radiance for Chinese culture on the world stage.*

## ***Keywords***

*The Dinosaur Lantern Festival, International Outreach, Sino-Western Cultural Exchange*

## **Introduction**

The Dinosaur Lantern Festival in Zigong uniquely integrates the festive atmosphere of the Chinese Lantern Festival with the exquisite craftsmanship of Chinese lantern culture, forming a vivid tableau of traditional Chinese folk culture. Its vibrant and colorful lantern decorations not only showcase the excellence of traditional Chinese artistry but also serve as a testament to China's profound and rich cultural heritage on the global stage. As a distinctive representative of Chinese traditional folk customs, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival has evolved into a unique medium for conveying traditional Chinese culture to the external world, possessing boundless potential for international promotion.

## 1. The Historical Background and Cultural Significance of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival

### 1.1 The Historical Background

The Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival has a rich historical lineage, deeply rooted in the fertile soil of traditional Chinese culture. Originating during the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the festival carries a wealth of historical connections, symbolizing the enduring continuity of Chinese civilization. This distinctive lantern festival culture not only stands as a source of pride for Zigong City but also shines as a brilliant gem within the tapestry of traditional Chinese festive culture.

The Zigong Lantern Festival is one of the most representative traditional folk celebrations in Sichuan, uniquely blending traditional lantern art with the customs of the Spring Festival to develop into a regionally distinctive cultural phenomenon. Serving as an expression of the rich spiritual and cultural life of the people in the Salt City, the Zigong Lantern Festival showcases the unique mindset and spiritual essence of the local populace. It is a cultural symbol forged through millennia of historical and cultural evolution, drawing nourishment from a myriad of local cultural influences during its developmental journey, thereby imbuing it with a robust regional vibrancy and vitality.

The historical roots of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival are deeply embedded in local soil, amalgamating rich regional characteristics. Originating from folk legends in Zigong, the lantern festival intertwines with people's aspirations for auspiciousness and a better life. It transcends being a mere spectacle of lights, serving as a testament to the preservation and exaltation of historical traditions.

During the Qianlong period, Zigong's lantern artisans employed ingenious techniques, crafting lantern art that is both unique and imaginative. This art form integrates elements from religion, folklore, and art, giving rise to a distinctive cultural tradition. The Zigong Lantern Festival has evolved into a captivating cultural treasure, showcasing a fusion of charm and cultural significance.

### 1.2 The Cultural Significance

The distinctive cultural essence positions the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival prominently within the realm of traditional Chinese festivities. This prominence is not only evident in the craftsmanship of the lanterns but also encapsulated in its profound cultural significance. Beyond being a visual spectacle, this celebration vividly showcases traditional Chinese culture. Through the clever design of artistic lanterns, it conveys a profound understanding of nature, mythology, and history.

Zigong's lantern festival often features dragons as a central theme, symbolizing the noble spirit of the Chinese nation. Illuminated by the interplay of lights, these dragon lanterns soar like mythical creatures, not only portraying ancient Chinese myths but also conveying people's aspirations for a better life. A highlight of the Zigong Lantern Festival is the special material lanterns, a diverse array crafted by artisans from various fields using unique materials. Examples include porcelain lanterns from a ceramics company, medicine bottle lanterns from a health bureau, silk cocoon lanterns from a silk company, and glass coiled dragon lanterns from a glass factory—all demonstrating exceptional craftsmanship and illustrating the essence of "art derived from life, yet elevated above life".

In 2009, the "Nine-Dragon Cauldron" lantern installation at the Zigong Lantern Festival used 350,000

meticulously tied pieces of Jingdezhen blue-and-white porcelain, creating a structure with a height and diameter of 18 meters and a maximum diameter of 26 meters, weighing nearly 100 tons. Its profound creativity, colossal scale, exquisite craftsmanship, unprecedented nature, and awe-inspiring impact left an indelible impression.

The global dissemination of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival has exerted a profound influence on traditional Chinese festival culture. Over several decades of development, the Zigong Lantern Festival has left its mark in over 60 countries across Asia, Europe, the Americas, Oceania, earning the title of the “Number One Lantern in the World.” In recent years, with the implementation of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, Zigong’s lantern culture industry has demonstrated significant momentum on the international stage.

To date, the Zigong Lantern Festival has achieved “miracles” held in more than a hundred cities nationwide and dozens of countries, attracting nearly three hundred million visitors. With its unique integration of “sound, light, and color” as well as the simultaneous pursuit of “height, size, and innovation” in artistic expression, the Zigong Lantern Festival imbues excellent folk stories, mythological legends, poetry, and local customs from Chinese culture with imagery, artistry, and dimensionality. It has become a crucial pillar supporting the strategy of cultural “going global”.

As a distinctive traditional cultural expression with strong local characteristics, the Zigong Lantern Festival showcases the unique charm of Chinese civilization through exhibitions, cultural events, and various other means. This cultural dissemination not only fosters the prosperity of local tourism but also provides a vivid and captivating medium for the international transmission of traditional Chinese culture.

Therefore, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival is not only a tradition rich in historical roots but also a precious contribution to traditional Chinese culture, playing a positive role in the inheritance and development of Chinese traditions. Through its unique artistic form and abundant cultural significance, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival continues to hold significant social and cultural value in contemporary society. Its dissemination not only deepens people’s understanding of traditional culture but also establishes a more unique image for Chinese culture internationally. The festival’s distinctive artistic style and profound cultural connotations make it a brilliant flower in the landscape of Chinese festival culture, injecting new vitality into the inheritance of traditional culture.

## **2. Current Limitations in the International Promotion of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival**

The dissemination of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival, despite being a unique cultural event, faces several limitations:

### *2.1 The Relatively Low Prominence of the City Zigong*

Zigong, situated in Sichuan Province, lacks the high visibility compared to some major metropolitan and tourist cities. This results in difficulties for the Dinosaur Lantern Festival to attract tourists and garner external attention. The city’s tourism resources and cultural features remain insufficiently

showcased, impacting the festival's visibility both domestically and internationally. Cities like Chengdu, Xi'an, and Nanjing, for instance, enjoy widespread recognition due to their unique culture, history, cuisine, and effective promotion, making them more adept at attracting visitors.

Therefore, Zigong needs to enhance its overall city visibility to increase both domestic and international attention towards the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival.

### *2.2 Low Publicity and Visibility*

The issues in promotional strategies are crucial factors affecting the dissemination of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival. The festival relies on relatively conventional methods, possibly centered around traditional media or local events, lacking the creativity and diversity found in more innovative promotional approaches. In contrast, well-known events such as the Chinese New Year Gala achieve broader attention through global broadcasts and social media. The limited publicity of the Dinosaur Lantern Festival could be attributed to budget constraints, preventing large-scale promotional activities. Simultaneously, the narrow scope of promotion, predominantly concentrated locally, fails to reach a more extensive audience. The insufficiency in promotional methods is also a challenge, such as the underutilization of emerging channels like the internet and social media, hindering the ability to attract more attention and participation.

### *2.3 Disorderly Development and Unhealthy Competition*

The emergence of a nascent industry inevitably encounters challenges such as disorderly development and unhealthy competition. Simultaneously, the shortage of professional talents with a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, talent generation gaps, lack of core technology and competitive edge, outdated production techniques, single production forms, and delays in the formation of the industrial chain all contribute to potential disruptions in the sustained inheritance and development of Zigong's artistic lantern culture, an exemplary facet of China's outstanding folk culture.

The powerful capacity of the Zigong Lantern Festival to create a festive, auspicious, and vibrant atmosphere has led numerous small and medium-sized cities, as well as businesses nationwide, to invite Zigong Lantern Festival displays or seek assistance from Zigong to organize local celebratory events in the form of lantern festivals. Initially, Zigong had only one government-organized exhibition team for external displays, with limited capacity to address the needs of smaller cities and businesses. However, there have been some improvements in recent years.

### *2.4 Low International Media Coverage*

The Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival experiences relatively low exposure in international media, lacking comprehensive promotion and a sustained exposure system. Due to the absence of a systematic promotional strategy, the event struggles to establish sufficient visibility on the international stage. In comparison to other internationally renowned festivals, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival has limited coverage in international media and lacks a systematic promotional framework. In contrast, some global cultural events like the Venice Film Festival have built strong brand images through

consistent international promotion.

To enhance its international prominence, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival should actively engage in international cultural exchanges, seek more international media coverage, and expand its global visibility. To address these issues, Zigong might consider increasing investment, enhancing local image, broadening the scope of promotion, adopting diverse promotional methods, and actively seeking cooperation and coverage from international media. Through these efforts, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival has the potential to overcome its limitations and attract broader attention and participation.

### **3. New Avenues for the International Promotion of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival**

#### *3.1 Promote Cultural Exchange with Other Western Cultures*

##### *3.1.1 Attempt to collaborate and Exchange with Other Western Festivals (e.g., St. Martin's Day)*

St. Martin's Day is a traditional Western holiday, usually celebrated on November 11th, commemorating the feast day of St. Martin. It is a significant religious holiday primarily observed in European and Latin American countries. St. Martin is considered a symbol of charity and kindness, leading to charitable activities, candlelight processions, and festive banquets during the holiday. Additionally, some regions have unique traditional celebrations such as bonfire evenings and parades. Children often carry self-made lanterns in parades to honor St. Martin. Although the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival and St. Martin's Day exhibit distinct cultural differences, they share some similarities. Firstly, both are festive activities intended to bring joy and togetherness to people. Secondly, they boast a long history and tradition, passed down through generations. Lastly, they are local celebrations embedded with distinctive regional and folk cultural significance. In the context of lantern-making, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival can offer insights and experiences to St. Martin's Day.

With the ongoing development of global integration, cultural exchange is imperative. To foster mutual understanding between Chinese and Western cultures, collaborating and exchanging with St. Martin's Day presents an excellent opportunity. Organizing a Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival cultural exhibition during St. Martin's Day could showcase the history, traditions, and celebration methods of the festival. This initiative would provide Western audiences with an opportunity to understand Chinese culture, facilitating deeper cultural exchange. Alternatively, inviting artisans skilled in Zigong Dinosaur Lantern craftsmanship to Western countries during St. Martin's Day could involve teaching lantern-making techniques, spreading awareness of Chinese traditional lantern culture, and conducting lantern-making events with prize sales. Initiating youth exchange programs between China and the West encourages young people to participate in cultural exchanges and interactions. Organizing student exchange groups could facilitate mutual visits, enabling students to explore each other's cultural heritage and participate in celebratory activities, fostering deeper understanding and appreciation for each other's cultures.

### 3.1.2 Establish International Partnerships and Cultural Exchange Programs

Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival can collaborate with Western cultural institutions, museums, and others to jointly organize cultural exhibitions and art displays. This can facilitate the sharing and exchange of cultural resources. Cooperation with artistic institutions and theater groups in Western countries can involve organizing exchanges and joint performances for artists. This provides a platform for artists from both countries to learn and create, fostering the prosperous development of the arts. Establishing academic collaboration projects with Western universities and research institutions can facilitate cultural research, exchange, and cooperation. Through academic collaboration, the dissemination of knowledge and the development of disciplines can be promoted. Tourism exchange programs can attract more Western tourists to visit the Self-luminous Lantern Festival in Zigong, allowing them to understand traditional Chinese culture. Simultaneously, encouraging Chinese tourists to participate in celebrations like St. Martin's Day in Western countries can enhance cultural exchange and friendship. Through these collaborations and exchanges, mutual understanding, recognition, and respect between Chinese and Western cultures can be promoted. This will drive the integration and development of Chinese and Western cultures, bringing more cultural experiences and shared development opportunities for the people of both countries.

## 3.2 Utilize Digital Technology to Enhance the Global Influence

### 3.2.1 Use Social Media Marketing

Share interesting, unique, and attention-grabbing content on social media, such as photos, videos, and stories about the Dinosaur Lantern Festival. Ensure the content is engaging and resonates with the audience. Identify the primary social media platforms used by the target audience and actively participate on these platforms. For example, use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as Chinese platforms like Weibo and WeChat. Develop a comprehensive social media strategy, including a content posting schedule, interaction strategies, and community management. Engage with the audience in real-time, respond to comments and direct messages to enhance user engagement. Encourage user participation through online events, polls, giveaways, etc., to increase user retention and involvement. Collaborate with travel agencies, travel bloggers, renowned photographers, travel programs, etc., to jointly promote the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival. Expand the reach through cross-industry collaborations. Utilize the advertising features on social media platforms to precisely target the audience, run relevant ads, and increase brand awareness and event participation.

### 3.2.2 Collaborate with Digital IPs

To enhance the awareness of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival among younger audiences, consider partnering with well-known digital intellectual properties (IPs), such as games, animations, comics, etc., with a dinosaur theme. Together, develop digital products like games and virtual experiences related to the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival. Additionally, engage in cross-industry collaborations with digital media companies, online platforms, etc., to create virtual interactive experiences related to the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival, such as AR (Augmented Reality) or VR (Virtual Reality) exhibitions.

Online exhibitions provide a convenient service for audiences unable to attend in person. Utilize technology to establish interactive online activities related to the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival, such as online puzzle games, virtual adventures, guiding users to explore and participate in the cultural aspects of the lantern festival. Encourage creative activities online by initiating contests, stimulating user-generated content, and prompting users to share creative works related to the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival, including illustrations and short videos, on social media platforms.

### 3.2.3 Create a Virtual Exhibition

For those unable to attend in person, online viewing is an excellent option. Utilize virtual exhibition platforms, such as websites, mobile applications, etc., to showcase the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival's exhibition content. Through high-quality images, videos, audio, etc., transport viewers to the scene of the Dinosaur Lantern Festival. Use panoramic photography technology to create a 360-degree panoramic display of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival, allowing audiences to immerse themselves in the spectacular scenes of the lantern festival. Provide virtual guidance and multilingual explanations to help viewers understand the cultural background and features of each exhibition area, enhancing the viewing experience. Incorporate interactive elements in the virtual exhibition, such as quizzes, voting, commenting, etc., encouraging active participation and interaction among viewers. Offer online ticket purchasing and a souvenir shop on the virtual exhibition platform, making it convenient for viewers to buy tickets and memorabilia.

By utilizing digital communication, social media marketing, collaborative digital IP promotion, and creating a virtual exhibition, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival's influence can be expanded, attracting more domestic and international audiences, increasing the event's visibility, and enhancing participation. These strategies can also bring more commercial opportunities and contribute to the long-term development of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival.

### 3.3 Conduct Public Education and Cultural Promotion

In order to promote the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival and its significant role in traditional culture, lectures and workshops can be organized.

Before planning lectures and workshops, it is necessary to identify the target audience. For instance, whether it is aimed at students, professionals in the tourism industry, culture enthusiasts, etc. Determine the topics of the lectures and workshops, ensuring their relevance to the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival. This could include introducing the history, cultural background, crafting techniques, design concepts, etc. Inviting experts in relevant fields to speak enhances the authority and credibility of the lectures and workshops, such as lantern designers, cultural researchers, tourism experts, etc. Based on the target audience and topics, decide on the timing and location of the lectures and workshops. Choosing venues related to the lantern festival, such as museums, art centers, etc., could be beneficial. Produce promotional materials, including posters, flyers, promotional videos, etc., to attract more participants. Promote the lectures and workshops on social media to increase attendance. Posting information on platforms like Weibo, WeChat, Facebook, Instagram, and inviting followers to share can

help spread the word.

Through these strategies, the cultural essence of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival can be promoted to the international community, attracting more people to learn about and participate in the cultural aspects of the festival. Simultaneously, it can increase the festival's visibility and influence, laying a solid foundation for its long-term development.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival, as a new avenue for cultural exchange between East and West, has not only made significant contributions to the inheritance and development of Chinese indigenous culture but has also played a crucial role on the international stage. Through the exhibition, promotion, and global outreach of the lantern festival, audiences worldwide have the opportunity to explore both traditional Chinese culture and modern innovations. In its dissemination efforts, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival utilizes various mediums and channels, including social media, digital IP, virtual exhibitions, etc., to convey the cultural essence of the event to a broader audience. Simultaneously, it emphasizes the importance of continuous innovation and adaptation in cultural traditions within a global context, ensuring the lantern festival evolves to meet audience demands. Furthermore, the success of the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival explores new pathways for the international promotion of cultural events, offering insights and references for the promotion of other cultural activities. By leveraging digital technology, social media, and modern means, cultural events can extend their impact to a wider audience, enhancing both their commercial value and brand recognition. Looking to the future, the Zigong Dinosaur Lantern Festival holds the potential for further development and influence. With the ongoing advancements in emerging technologies like digital technology and virtual reality, it is believed that the festival can showcase its cultural essence and creative designs on a broader stage, attracting more audiences and tourists.

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