



# Location Selection for China's Exhibition Industry to "Go Global" under the Background of the "Belt and Road Initiative" : A Comparative Case Study Based on the Markets of Europe, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East and Africa

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**Abstract:** Under the impetus of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the "going global" of China's exhibition industry has become an important path to serve the globalization of enterprises and integrate into the global industrial chain. This paper constructs a location selection framework that includes market maturity, industrial fit, and policy and cultural connection, and comparatively analyzes the characteristics and strategies of the three major markets of Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East and Africa. Research findings show that the European market needs to leverage a mature system to achieve high-end integration, the Asia-Pacific market should deepen regional cooperation to expand growth, and the Middle East and Africa market can focus on emerging demands to seize the initiative. This research provides theoretical references for the location selection and differentiation strategies of China's exhibition industry in "going global", and helps it achieve high-quality international development.

**Key words:** the belt and road; exhibition and convention industry; go out; location selection; international market

## 1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative has promoted exchanges and cooperation between China and countries along the routes in the fields of economy, trade and culture. The exhibition industry, as an important bridge, is playing an increasingly prominent role in international economic and trade cooperation. With the transformation and upgrading of China's economy and the maturation of the domestic exhibition market, a number of exhibition enterprises with international competitiveness have emerged, and their willingness and ability to "go global" have significantly increased. The internationalization of China's exhibition industry is no longer confined to attracting foreign exhibitors and visitors. Instead, it actively expands its presence in Hong Kong, Macao and overseas, serving Chinese enterprises in "going global" and integrating into the global industrial and supply chains.<sup>[1]</sup> However, the global market is complex and there are significant differences among countries. For exhibition enterprises, the location choice for their first "going global" is a major strategic decision. A good choice can make things twice as effective with half the effort, while a wrong choice can bring risks. <sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, scientifically assessing the target market, establishing an analysis framework for location selection, and formulating differentiated strategies are urgent needs for the high-quality international development of China's exhibition industry.

## 2. The internal driving force and external opportunities for China's exhibition industry to "go global"

Table 1. Historical Data for 1st Quarter

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
MICE Events (No.)	122	68	97	234	336
Participants and Attendees (,000)	80.4	138.1	165.3	201.6	181.7
Average Duration (day)	1.5	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2
Floor Area Used (,000 m <sup>2</sup> )	89.1	45.4	73.1	188.2	212.9

### 2.1 The intrinsic demand driven by industrial upgrading

After decades of rapid development, China's exhibition industry has reached a considerable scale. However, it also faces problems such as fierce domestic market competition, prominent homogenization, and significant systemic risk restrictions. China currently has large-scale international exhibitions such as the China Import and Export Fair. In order to seek new

growth points, climb up the value chain and expand the international market, it has become an inevitable choice for leading exhibition enterprises. Meanwhile, as a large number of Chinese enterprises are deeply involved in global competition, they urgently need a "home" exhibition platform that is familiar with the domestic market and can provide all-round services to safeguard their market expansion and resource connection overseas.[3] This kind of demand from the client side constitutes the most direct and powerful internal driving force for China's exhibition industry to "go global". For instance, at present, Hong Kong and Macao have formed mature platforms for connecting exhibition resources and international exhibition venues. For example, the Macao Special Administrative Region, relying on its close ties with Portuguese-speaking countries, holds the China-Portugal Trade Fair every year. Promoting economic and cultural ties between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries along the Belt and Road has built a reliable platform for domestic enterprises to establish economic, trade and cultural ties with Portuguese-speaking countries. In addition, through international operation, Chinese exhibition enterprises can learn and draw on advanced exhibition concepts and management models from abroad, such as the professionalization and industrial linkage model of Germany, thereby enhancing their own professional level and brand influence.

## **2.2 External opportunities created by the Belt and Road Initiative**

The comprehensive advancement of the "Belt and Road Initiative" has laid a broad stage for the international development of China's exhibition industry. In 2024, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade has organized enterprises to participate in exhibitions in several countries along the Belt and Road Initiative, including Thailand, Indonesia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates, achieving good results. Finally, financial integration and people-to-people bonds provide a guarantee for the deepening of cooperation in exhibitions and conferences. The holding of various entrepreneur conferences and business summits has provided fertile ground for promoting the implementation of economic and trade cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, and has also deepened mutual understanding and trust between Chinese and foreign business communities.[4] It can be said that the Belt and Road Initiative is not only a blueprint for economic cooperation, but also a strategic guide and favorable wind for China's exhibition industry to "go global".

# **3. A comparative analysis framework for the location selection of the target market**

## **3.1 Market Maturity and Access Environment**

This dimension mainly assesses the development level and entry threshold of the exhibition industry in the target market. Specifically, it includes the local infrastructure conditions such as exhibition venues, the scale and professionalization level of existing exhibitions, the market competition pattern, the strength of local exhibition enterprises, as well as the legal and regulatory system related to exhibition activities. A mature market usually implies complete supporting facilities and a standardized business environment, but it may also be accompanied by fierce competition. While an emerging market may not yet have a well-developed infrastructure, it has less competition and enjoys a first-mover advantage. For instance, the exhibition market in Hong Kong and Macao, relying on its excellent geographical location, high policy flexibility and top-notch supporting services, has become one of the most suitable destinations for holding exhibitions in the Asia-Pacific region. The Venetian Macao Convention and Exhibition Centre and the Wynn Palace Convention and Exhibition Centre in Macao have reached full capacity throughout the year to host conferences and exhibitions. However, due to limited space, many conferences and exhibitions require queuing plans that last for at least five years.

## **3.2 Industrial Fit and Synergy Potential**

This dimension aims to analyze the degree of match between the industrial structure of the target market and China's advantageous industries and export orientation. A successful overseas exhibition must be closely integrated with the local industrial development needs in order to attract high-quality exhibitors and purchasers. For instance, industrial equipment exhibitions can be held in regions with developed manufacturing industries, while information technology exhibitions can be organized in areas with an active digital economy. Evaluating industrial fit helps to identify potential synergies, enabling the exhibition to effectively integrate into the local industrial chain and become a platform for resource integration and value creation.

# **4. Mapping Global MICE Markets: A Regional Strategy for Chinese Enterprises**

## **4.1 European Market: Leverage a mature system to achieve high-end integration**

Among the developed countries in Europe, such as Germany and France, they are the birthplace of the world's exhibitions and conferences. They possess the world's most advanced exhibition and conference technologies and the largest exhibition and conference companies in the world. They are the birthplace and benchmark of the global exhibition

and conference industry. Their market maturity is extremely high, with world-class exhibition hall facilities, professional exhibition organizing institutions and complete industry standards. From a market perspective, Chinese exhibition companies should focus on anchoring local market demands and find suitable ways and opportunities to enter the Chinese exhibition market.<sup>[5]</sup> For Chinese exhibition enterprises, directly entering the European market to hold large-scale comprehensive exhibitions poses huge challenges. A more realistic strategy is to "borrow a boat to go to sea", adopting a more flexible model of cooperation and penetration. For instance, by cooperating with well-known European exhibition companies, a "China Pavilion" or special exhibition areas can be set up at top local exhibitions. Or hold small but high-quality professional forums for specific "specialized, refined, distinctive and innovative" fields; It is even possible to consider taking a stake in or acquiring European small and medium-sized exhibition enterprises that possess high-quality brand resources. The key point of this strategy lies in learning and integration. By connecting with mature systems, it aims to enhance its own brand image and international operation capabilities, especially in fields such as high-end manufacturing, environmental protection technology, and service trade.

**Table 2. MICE-driven receipts of the non-gaming industries in Macao**

MICE Events (No.)	413	336	77 no
Participants & Attendees ('000)	188.4	181.7	3.7 %
Average Duration (day)	1.2	1.2	-
Floor Area Used ('000 m <sup>2</sup> )	205.5	212.9	- 3.5 %
Meetings & Conferences (No.)	387	317	70 no
Participants ('000)	37.3	35.5	5.2 %
Average Duration (day)	1.1	1.1	-
Floor Area Used ('000 m <sup>2</sup> )	166.8	162.1	2.9 %
Exhibitions (No.)	12	12	-
Attendees ('000)	150.1	144.6	3.8 %
Average Duration (day)	3.3	2.8	0.5 day
Floor Area Used ('000 m <sup>2</sup> )	35.5	43.3	- 18.0 %
Incentives (No.)	14	7	7 no
Participants ('000)	1.0	1.6	- 37.4 %
Average Duration (day)	2.5	2.1	0.4 day
Floor Area Used ('000 m <sup>2</sup> )	3.1	7.4	- 57.9 %
Per-capita Non-gaming Spending of MICE Visitors (MOP)	5528	5148	7.4 %
MICE-Driven Receipts <sup>a</sup> (Million MOP)	658	870	- 24.3 %

## 4.2 Asia-Pacific Market: Deepen regional cooperation and expand incremental space

The Asia-Pacific region is the birthplace and core area of China's "Belt and Road Initiative". It is geographically close to China, has deep cultural ties, and has formed a close regional economic cooperation network. This market is characterized by uneven development, featuring both mature international convention and exhibition centers like Singapore and a large number of emerging economies with huge potential. Chinese exhibition enterprises have a natural advantage in this region. Strategically, emphasis should be placed on "co-construction and sharing", relying on existing platforms such as the China-Asean Expo to promote the upgrading of the exhibition. Meanwhile, new professional exhibitions can be established for emerging topics such as the "Digital Silk Road" and the "Green Silk Road", especially in fields like e-commerce, fintech, new energy and infrastructure construction. In countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade has already had successful experience in organizing exhibitions.

## 4.3 Middle East and Africa Market: Focus on emerging demands and Seize the blue ocean opportunities First

The Middle East and Africa are important participants in the Belt and Road Initiative. The countries in these regions are generally in a period of accelerated industrialization and urbanization, and have a strong demand for technology, equipment and consumer goods. Most of its exhibition industry is still in its infancy, and the market competition is relatively mild. It is a "blue ocean" full of opportunities. Chinese exhibition enterprises should adopt the strategies of "market cultivation" and "leading and pioneering" here. Large-scale comprehensive commodity trade fairs can be held first, with themes covering

infrastructure construction, agricultural technology, medical and health care, daily consumer goods, etc., directly meeting the most urgent needs of local development. Dubai in the United Arab Emirates has become a regional convention and exhibition hub and can serve as a bridgehead for entering the Middle East market. Holding exhibitions in regional powers such as South Africa can effectively reach the surrounding markets. By organizing exhibitions, not only can Chinese products and services enter the local market, but also China's exhibition standards and experience can be brought in, leading and shaping the development of the local exhibition industry.

## 5. Conclusion

The "going global" of China's exhibition industry is an important measure to integrate into the global economic pattern and serve the construction of the "Belt and Road Initiative". Its location selection needs to take into account both market characteristics and its own advantages. The mature system in Europe, the regional synergy in the Asia-Pacific region, and the emerging potential in the Middle East and Africa provide multiple paths for exhibition enterprises. Through scientific layout and differentiated strategies, China's exhibition industry can not only achieve its own international upgrade, but also inject continuous impetus into economic and trade cooperation and cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries, promoting the construction of a more dynamic international exhibition industry.

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