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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **A Comparative Analysis of Multimodal Discourse on Chinese and International Memorial Museum Official Websites: A Visual Grammar Perspective**

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**| ABSTRACT**

This study conducts a comparative multimodal discourse analysis of four official memorial museum websites from China, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. Focusing on representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, the research explores how digital commemorative discourse constructs national memory, identity, and ideology. Findings reveal that each country adopts distinct multimodal strategies aligned with its cultural values and historical narratives. China emphasizes ideological symbolism and institutional authority through conceptual processes and rigid compositional framing. The U.S. employs dynamic narrative imagery and open design to reflect democratic ideals. Australia personalizes remembrance through everyday civilian imagery and emotionally resonant layouts, while New Zealand foregrounds bicultural engagement and inclusivity using symbolic Māori representations. These visual configurations not only shape how history is presented but also how audiences are positioned—whether as observers, participants, or learners. The study underscores the role of digital interfaces as active agents in shaping public memory and highlights the value of cross-cultural multimodal analysis in understanding how nations visually encode collective remembrance. This research demonstrates that national memorial museum websites are not neutral platforms but active producers of meaning. Through their visual and multimodal discourse, these sites naturalize particular histories, mediate cultural ideologies, and shape collective memory. The study contributes to expanding the scope of multimodal discourse analysis by applying visual grammar theory to digital commemorative interfaces and highlights the importance of culturally informed design in the representation of public history.

**| KEYWORDS**

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), Visual Grammar, Representational Meaning, Interactive Meaning, Compositional Meaning, Memorial Museum Websites

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### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Research Background**

Memorial museums are critical spaces for preserving, interpreting, and communicating collective memory. Traditionally designed as physical sites of remembrance, these institutions serve as platforms where nations narrate their past, celebrate heroes, mourn losses, and shape collective identities. In the digital age, the role of memorial museums has extended beyond physical spaces into the virtual realm, with official websites becoming increasingly important as carriers of commemorative discourse (Hess,

2007). These websites function not only as informational portals but also as symbolic interfaces through which national ideologies and historical interpretations are mediated to a global audience.

As the digital interface becomes an extension of institutional identity and public engagement, visual and multimodal design elements—images, layout, typography, and interactive functions—play a crucial role in shaping how users experience and interpret memorial content. These multimodal elements are not arbitrary; they are culturally and ideologically loaded, reflecting specific historical perspectives and communicative intentions. In particular, the way images, texts, and spatial arrangements are combined contributes to the construction of meaning in ways that are often subtle yet powerful. Therefore, the official websites of memorial museums offer a rich and underexplored field for investigating how memory, identity, and ideology are constructed through digital discourse.

The integration of multimodal discourse, particularly visual design elements, into historical and political communication has become increasingly prominent. Drawing on the framework of visual grammar developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this study explores how different memorial museums utilize visual and textual modes to construct meaning. While existing literature has investigated war memorials and museums in various cultural contexts, relatively few studies have adopted a comparative multimodal perspective on memorial museum websites across different countries. Particularly underexplored is how such platforms represent national trauma, heroism, resistance, and unity through visual-semantic patterns in both Eastern and Western contexts.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the official websites of one Chinese memorial museum and three international counterparts, focusing on how commemorative meaning is constructed through multimodal discourse. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions based on the three metafunctions of visual grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006):

- What are the similarities and differences in the construction of representational meaning between Chinese and international memorial museum websites? How do choices regarding participants, processes, and settings reflect different historical narrative emphases?
- What are the similarities and differences in the construction of interactive meaning between Chinese and international memorial museum websites? How do these sites build a relationship with online visitors through strategies of gaze, social distance, modality, and attitude, and how do they guide emotional engagement?
- What are the similarities and differences in the construction of compositional meaning between Chinese and international memorial museum websites? How are visual elements such as layout, color, typography, salience, and framing organized to convey specific ideological or value-laden messages?
- How do these similarities and differences reflect the respective cultural values, modes of historical remembrance, political contexts, and institutional missions of the museums?

### **1.3 Research Significance**

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of multimodal discourse analysis, particularly in the context of digital memory representation. From a theoretical perspective, it deepens our understanding of how visual grammar theory can be applied beyond static images to dynamic, multimodal digital interfaces such as memorial museum websites. While Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework has been widely applied in education, advertising, and print media, its application to institutional digital communication—especially within the genre of commemorative discourse—remains limited. By extending this framework to state-affiliated websites, the study highlights how ideational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings work together to encode political ideologies and shape collective memory in culturally specific ways.

From a methodological standpoint, this research introduces a systematic approach to comparing multimodal resources across cultures, combining qualitative visual analysis with culturally informed interpretive frameworks. It demonstrates how visual elements—such as participant representation, gaze, color, framing, and layout—can be critically examined to reveal deeper layers of meaning. The comparative design, involving China and three Western countries, also enhances the study's cross-cultural relevance and addresses the imbalance in previous research that often focuses on a single national context.

In terms of cultural and political significance, the study sheds light on how different nations construct and perform memory in the digital space. In today's globally connected yet ideologically divided world, understanding how countries represent their histories online is essential for fostering intercultural awareness, combating historical bias, and promoting respectful global dialogue. The contrast between Chinese collectivist and Western individualist memory orientations, for example, can help reveal how cultural values are embedded in visual design and discourse structures.

Practically speaking, the findings of this research can inform the work of web designers, museum curators, and educators who are involved in shaping or interpreting online commemorative experiences. It offers insights into how visual elements can be used intentionally to guide user engagement, support educational missions, and strengthen national branding through digital heritage platforms. Moreover, as online memorials continue to grow in prominence, this research provides a framework for critically assessing their communicative impact and ethical implications in shaping public understanding of history.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Studies on Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) has emerged as a prominent theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing meaning-making beyond language, encompassing visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural semiotic modes (Jewitt, 2009; O'Halloran, 2004). Rooted in systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1978) and social semiotics, MDA recognizes that meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple modes, each governed by its own grammar and communicative affordances.

One of the most influential contributions to MDA is the visual grammar framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), which systematically analyzes how images communicate meaning through three metafunctions: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. This framework has been applied across a wide range of contexts, including educational textbooks (Unsworth, 2001), advertising (Machin, 2007), news reporting (Caple, 2013), and social media (Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018).

Recent research has further developed MDA to include dynamic digital texts, such as websites, mobile apps, and online videos. For instance, Baldry and Thibault (2006) highlight how MDA can be adapted for the analysis of multimodal screen-based texts, integrating image, text, layout, and user interaction. Similarly, Iedema (2003) emphasize the role of technological affordances in shaping multimodal meaning, particularly in interactive and hyperlinked environments. These developments underline the relevance of MDA for examining websites that rely heavily on visual and interactive design, such as those of memorial museums.

In the Chinese academic context, MDA has gained increasing attention in the past two decades. Scholars such as Wang (2023), Xi *et.al* (2020) and Su (2025) have applied MDA to political discourse, public signage, and official media, exploring how visual choices reflect ideological positioning. However, studies applying MDA to digital heritage communication—especially memorial websites—are still scarce. Moreover, most comparative studies focus on print media or advertisements rather than institutionally curated digital interfaces.

Given this gap, the present study contributes to MDA by applying visual grammar analysis to state-affiliated memorial museum websites in both China and Western countries. It also expands the framework's application by analyzing how multimodal elements are culturally coded and ideologically loaded, especially in the sensitive context of historical memory and national identity.

### 2.2 Previous Studies on Memorial Museums

Memorial museums serve as socio-cultural institutions designed to commemorate historical events, often involving conflict, trauma, or collective sacrifice. Unlike traditional museums that focus on collection and exhibition, memorial museums emphasize remembrance, moral reflection, and emotional engagement (Williams, 2007). The study of memorial museums has been approached from diverse disciplinary perspectives, including history, museum studies, memory studies, and communication.

From a memory studies perspective, scholars such as Assmann (2011) and Nora (1989) have emphasized the role of memorials in constructing "cultural memory"—a shared framework for interpreting the past that is actively mediated by institutions and symbols. Memorial museums thus function as agents of national narrative construction, shaping how historical events are framed, interpreted, and internalized by the public. In particular, digital memorials have emerged as powerful tools for projecting state-sanctioned memory narratives to broader and younger audiences.

In the international context, numerous studies have explored the design, curatorial choices, and affective dimensions of memorial museums. Linenthal (2001) analyzed American war memorials as arenas of ideological contestation, while Winter (1995) examined the politics of memory in post-war Europe. More recent work has focused on visitor engagement and emotional resonance in digital and physical exhibits (Reading, 2011). In the Asia-Pacific context, Heonik Kwon (2008) explored how East Asian memorial sites navigate tensions between historical victimhood and contemporary nationalism.

Despite the growing interest in memorial museums, relatively few studies have focused on their official websites as primary platforms of commemorative discourse. Some scholars, such as McGrattan (2012) has begun to address how digital design and visual communication strategies on websites affect collective memory, yet comprehensive multimodal analyses remain limited.

Moreover, there is a lack of comparative work that examines how memorial museum websites differ across national and cultural lines in terms of design strategies, narrative tone, and ideological content.

In the Chinese context, studies on memorial museums often focus on patriotic education, museum rhetoric, and exhibition design (Zhu, 2022; Wang, 2008). However, research tends to concentrate on physical museum spaces, with few analyses of how these narratives are transferred and transformed in the digital environment. Furthermore, critical multimodal analyses that situate Chinese digital memorials in cross-cultural comparison with Western counterparts are even rarer.

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the official websites of the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the United States Capitol, the Australian War Memorial, and the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Through a comparative lens grounded in visual grammar theory, the research investigates how these websites use multimodal resources to construct different visions of the past, engage emotional responses, and promote specific political or moral messages. In doing so, the study not only advances the understanding of digital memorial discourse but also contributes to global discussions on memory, media, and cultural representation.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Overview of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is a theoretical and analytical approach that examines how meaning is constructed through the interaction of various semiotic modes—such as language, image, layout, color, gesture, and sound—within a specific social and cultural context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2009). Rooted in Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), MDA recognizes that different modes are not merely decorative or supportive but contribute equally to meaning-making. Thus, a multimodal text is seen as a coordinated ensemble of semiotic resources rather than a set of isolated components.

The relevance of MDA has grown significantly in the digital era, especially with the rise of websites, social media, and mobile platforms where information is increasingly delivered through multimodal forms. In institutional and political discourse, the way visual, linguistic, and spatial elements work together often reveals ideological intent, persuasive strategy, and sociocultural positioning (Han, 2015). This makes MDA particularly suited for analyzing memorial museum websites, which aim to communicate historically and emotionally charged content to diverse audiences using a blend of visual and verbal modalities.

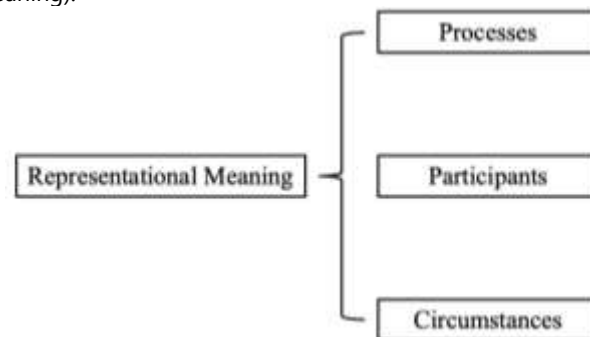
In this study, MDA provides the overarching analytical lens, within which Visual Grammar Theory—as developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006)—serves as the primary tool for systematic multimodal analysis. This framework enables the deconstruction of how historical narratives, national identity, and ideological meanings are visually constructed, perceived, and interpreted.

#### 3.2 Visual Grammar Theory

Building on the metafunctions of Halliday’s SFL, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) proposed that images, like language, realize three communicative metafunctions: representational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and compositional meaning. These provide a comprehensive model for analyzing the ways in which visuals construct and communicate meaning.

##### 3.2.1 Representational Meaning

Representational meaning refers to the way visual images depict people (participants), actions (processes), and context (circumstances). Kress and van Leeuwen distinguish between narrative processes (actions and events) and conceptual processes (classification, identity, symbolic meaning).



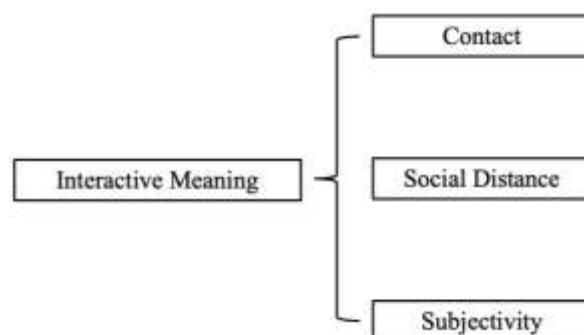
**Figure 3.1** Representational Meaning (Based on Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)

In memorial museum websites, narrative images may show war scenes, commemorative acts, or heroic figures in motion, while conceptual images may display statues, symbolic emblems, or architectural layouts. The choice of participants (soldiers, victims,

political leaders), the depicted actions (marching, grieving, fighting), and the setting (battlefields, ceremonial halls) reflect each museum's preferred historical narrative, ideological stance, and commemorative focus.

### 3.2.2 Interactive Meaning

Interactive meaning concerns the relationship between the visual content and the viewer. This involves how visual choices such as contact (demand vs. offer), social distance (close-up, medium, long shot), and subjectivity (high, low, frontal) position the viewer relative to the represented participants. For instance, a direct gaze may engage the viewer and invite emotional interaction, while an oblique angle may suggest detachment or objectivity.

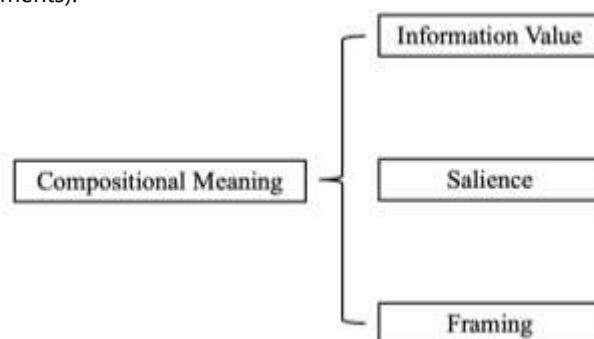


**Figure 3.2 Interactive Meaning (Based on Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)**

In the context of memorial websites, these choices influence how viewers relate to historical figures or events—whether they are invited to empathize, reflect, or observe. Modality, another key component, refers to the realism or emotional tone of an image, which can be shaped through color saturation, lighting, sharpness, and background. Through these elements, museums may invoke reverence, grief, pride, or reflection, thereby shaping user experience and emotional engagement.

### 3.2.3 Compositional Meaning

Compositional meaning refers to how visual elements are arranged to produce a coherent and persuasive whole. This includes the use of information value (left/right = given/new; top/bottom = ideal/real), salience (visual prominence), and framing (connectedness or separation of elements).



**Figure 3.3 Compositional Meaning (Based on Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006)**

In the context of website design, textual meaning is crucial for guiding viewer attention, structuring information hierarchies, and reinforcing thematic coherence. Layouts that emphasize certain visual elements—such as a national flag at the top center, or a quote in bold contrasting color—implicitly communicate ideological priority and emotional tone. These compositional strategies reflect deeper ideological choices: whether the focus is on the state, the individual, the trauma, or the victory.

## 4. Research Design

### 4.1 Data Collection

This study selects four official memorial museum websites as its research subjects, representing distinct geopolitical, cultural, and ideological backgrounds. These include the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the United States Capitol, the Australian War Memorial, and the Auckland War Memorial Museum in New Zealand. The Chinese site is of particular historical and political significance as it commemorates the founding of the Chinese Communist Party, serving as a key space for constructing revolutionary memory and projecting national identity. In contrast, the United States Capitol website situates memory within the context of democratic governance, legislative history, and civic ideals. The Australian War Memorial offers a digital extension of a national shrine that combines military history, personal sacrifice, and patriotic sentiment. The

Auckland War Memorial Museum, while similarly grounded in war remembrance, emphasizes bicultural inclusivity and regional identity, integrating Māori and Pākehā narratives.

The selection of these four websites enables a comparative exploration of multimodal commemorative discourse across Eastern and Western contexts. Each institution maintains an official online presence that not only serves informative or educational purposes, but also strategically constructs symbolic narratives through visual and textual choices. The diversity of institutional missions, historical emphases, and cultural values embedded in these websites provides a rich basis for cross-cultural multimodal analysis.

Considering that the content of website pages may be updated from time to time, all images are collected between March and May in 2025. Researchers preserve screenshots of typical pages from these two websites and then classifies and analyzes these images according to the three major meanings of visual grammar. A total of 60 images is collected, including 15 images from the official website of the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 15 images from the official website of the United States Capitol, 15 images from the official website of the Australian War Memorial and 15 images from the official website of the Auckland War Memorial Museum in New Zealand.

#### **4.2 Data Scope and Selection Criteria**

The data used in this study were collected from the official websites of the four memorial institutions. To ensure analytical depth and consistency, the selection focused on those webpages that contain rich multimodal resources and are directly relevant to the institutions' commemorative functions. These include homepages, introductory sections outlining the institution's historical background, pages hosting virtual exhibitions and digital archives, as well as multimedia features such as short documentaries, interactive galleries, or commemorative videos.

These pages often integrate visual, verbal, and spatial modes through the use of layout design, color schemes, image-text combinations, and navigational structures. Content that was purely administrative or logistical in nature, such as ticket booking or contact information, was excluded from the sample. Screenshots and screen recordings of approximately ten core pages from each website were collected, archived, and annotated for detailed multimodal analysis.

Through this sampling strategy, the study captures the most ideologically significant, visually engaging, and narratively constructed components of each site's digital discourse (Jones *et.al*, 2015). These components constitute the primary empirical basis for analyzing how national memory is framed through multimodal semiotic resources.

#### **4.3 Analytical Framework and Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative analytical framework grounded in Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar theory, which is situated within the broader tradition of multimodal discourse analysis. The core objective is to examine how meaning is constructed through the interaction of representational, interpersonal, and compositional elements in the visual and textual design of memorial museum websites. To support this inquiry, a coding schema based on visual grammar principles was developed based on Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), focusing on how participants, processes, gaze, distance, framing, color, salience, and information structure contribute to meaning-making.

Rather than isolating text and image, the analysis treats each webpage as a unified multimodal ensemble, where visual and linguistic elements co-construct historical and ideological messages. Particular attention is paid to how national figures are represented, how emotional responses are elicited through design choices, and how layout structures guide viewers' attention and interpretive pathways. By examining these multimodal configurations, the study aims to uncover the visual strategies used to construct commemorative discourse and promote specific political or cultural values.

Following the close analysis of individual websites, the study proceeds with a comparative interpretation across the four cases. This comparison is not limited to aesthetic differences but extends to cultural, ideological, and narrative patterns that emerge from the use of multimodal resources. The analysis highlights both shared conventions—such as the solemn tone, the foregrounding of sacrifice, or the use of national symbols—and divergent approaches, such as the collectivist orientation of the Chinese site versus the more individual-centered portrayals in Western platforms. These patterns are then interpreted in relation to each country's memory politics, institutional mission, and broader sociocultural context, allowing the study to reveal how commemorative meaning is visually shaped in distinct but comparable ways.

## 5. Analysis and Findings

### 5.1 Representational Meaning

#### 5.1.1 China: The Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China

The homepage image of the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Figure 5.1) is devoid of human presence but dense with semiotic significance. In terms of processes, the image realises a conceptual analytical process rather than a narrative one. There are no visible vectors or dynamic actions, nor any human actors engaged in activity. Instead, the spatial composition of the image, particularly the symmetrical arrangement of buildings converging toward the centrally positioned national flag, functions to classify and relate elements within an ideological structure. The flagpole emerges as the nucleus of political authority, with the buildings acting as historical extensions anchored in revolutionary legacy.



**Figure 5.1 Homepage of the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China**

Regarding participants, the architectural structures and the national flag serve as the primary represented participants. These inanimate entities become metonymic figures for the Party and its historical foundation. The buildings, rendered in traditional Shikumen style, signal continuity with China's revolutionary past, while the flag denotes state power and ideological permanence. The absence of individual human figures foregrounds the collective and institutional dimensions of national memory.

In terms of circumstances, the soft, greyed-out cityscape in the background situates the memorial within contemporary Shanghai while simultaneously distancing it through visual desaturation. This atmospheric treatment metaphorically separates the sacred space of revolutionary memory from the mundane present, reinforcing the site's timeless ideological status. The colour contrast—muted greys versus the vivid red of the flag—creates a temporal and symbolic layering that binds past, present, and future into a single, unified commemorative vision.

Overall, the homepage constructs a highly formalised and symbolic representation. Its emphasis on built space, symmetrical design, and national symbolism enshrines the memory of the Party's founding not as a story of individuals but as an enduring ideological architecture.

#### 5.1.2 United States: U.S. Capitol

The homepage of the U.S. Capitol (Figure 5.2) employs a mural fresco—*Apotheosis of Washington*—as its dominant visual, thereby adopting a highly narrative form of representation. In terms of processes, the image clearly manifests a narrative action process, where visual vectors such as pointing arms, upward gazes, and flowing banners radiate from the central figure of George Washington. These directional cues encode movement and energy, transforming the static painting into a dynamic tableau of national myth-making.



**Figure 5.2 Homepage of the U.S. Capitol**

The participants include both historical and allegorical figures. Washington, elevated and surrounded by classical deities, functions as the heroic actor and symbolic anchor of national identity. Other figures, such as artisans, soldiers, and farmers, serve to populate the scene with a democratic plurality. This multiplicity of participants reflects the idealised vision of American unity and collaborative governance embedded in foundational myths.

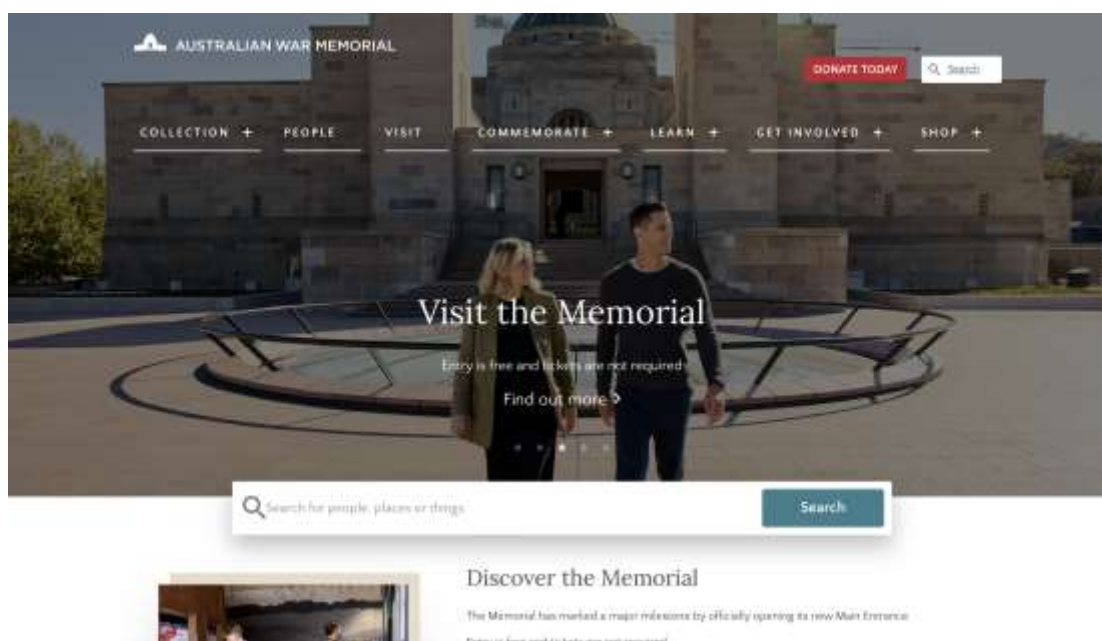
In terms of circumstances, the celestial setting—clouds, golden light, and expansive heavens—suggests transcendence and national exceptionalism. The mural's placement in the Capitol dome adds a layer of spatial circumstance, as the image not only depicts but inhabits a national site of political ritual. Through this integration of allegory and architecture, the circumstances become both representational and real, binding ideology and space.

The overall representational mode is one of glorification and inspiration. By merging political history with classical artistic tradition, the image constructs an aesthetic of patriotic elevation, transforming democratic governance into a visual mythos of divine sanction and civic virtue.

### **5.1.3 Australia: Australian War Memorial**

The homepage image of the Australian War Memorial (Figure 5.3) adopts a subdued yet approachable representational mode. In terms of processes, the image represents a narrative action process in which two civilian visitors are captured walking toward the entrance of the memorial. Their bodily orientation and forward motion form a visual vector, suggesting movement, purpose, and engagement. Unlike scenes of combat or heroism, the action here is understated and civilian, reframing remembrance as an act of quiet pilgrimage.





**Figure 5.3 Homepage of the Australian War Memorial**

The participants are the visitors and the memorial building. The human figures embody everyday Australians, offering identification points for the viewer. Their presence signals that commemoration is not reserved for the military elite but belongs to the public. The building, monumental in scale and austere in design, acts as a silent witness to national sacrifice, embodying institutional memory rather than individual narrative.

As for circumstances, the image is bathed in natural daylight, with clear skies and orderly paving guiding the eye toward the memorial's main entrance. The setting communicates openness and transparency, reinforcing values of democratic accessibility and civic participation. The absence of wartime iconography or military paraphernalia anchors the visual in peacetime, framing the act of remembrance as reflective and inclusive.

This representational configuration democratises war memory. By privileging ordinary participants and peaceful action within an open civic space, the image shifts the commemorative frame from heroic conflict to national unity and quiet reflection.

#### **5.1.4 New Zealand: Auckland War Memorial Museum**

The Auckland Museum homepage (Figure 5.4) presents a highly symbolic and culturally embedded representational structure. In terms of processes, the image enacts a conceptual symbolic process. There is no visible movement or interaction among participants. Instead, the alignment of two museum visitors—seen from behind and gazing toward a Māori carved Marae—produces a moment of contemplation and reverence. The lack of action renders the image meditative, foregrounding cultural inheritance over dynamic event.



**Figure 5.4 Homepage of the Auckland War Memorial Museum**

The participants include the visitors and the Marae carvings. The human figures are depicted as respectful observers, functioning not as central actors but as facilitators of cultural engagement. The Marae, rich with ancestral figures and intricate carvings, becomes the symbolic participant—a visual embodiment of Māori cosmology and historical continuity. The cultural artefact dominates the frame, suggesting that memory here is deeply tied to indigenous material heritage.

In terms of circumstances, the setting is interior and dimly lit, with the timber's warm hues evoking a sense of enclosure and sacredness. Unlike the open exteriors of the other websites, this environment privileges intimacy and spiritual resonance. The circumstance reinforces the idea that commemoration is not merely national but deeply cultural, rooted in specific historical traditions and epistemologies.

Overall, the homepage constructs a representational meaning that is less about national grandeur and more about bicultural memory. It invites viewers not to witness heroism but to participate in a shared cultural space defined by respect, reflection, and indigenous presence.

### **5.1.5 Summary**

The comparative analysis of representational meaning across the four memorial museum websites reveals distinct national strategies in the visual construction of memory. Each homepage selectively employs processes, participants, and circumstances to shape commemorative narratives that resonate with their respective cultural, political, and historical contexts (Sumartojo, 2016). China emphasises a conceptual and symbolic mode, using architecture and spatial hierarchy to foreground institutional authority and revolutionary ideology. The United States adopts a narrative and allegorical strategy, celebrating foundational myths through dynamic visual storytelling and heroic participants. Australia favours a civilian-centred narrative process, framing remembrance as an accessible and democratic act embedded in everyday life. New Zealand, by contrast, enacts a conceptual symbolic process that integrates indigenous cultural heritage as the cornerstone of national memory. Across these sites, the interplay between depicted processes, participant types, and environmental contexts not only reflects differing commemorative traditions but also articulates each nation's broader ideological commitments through visual means.

## **5.2 Interactive Meaning**

### **5.2.1 China: The Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China**

In the guided tour page image (Figure 5.5), a group of schoolchildren stands closely clustered around a female docent who gestures toward a wall of historical photographs. In terms of contact, no direct gaze is established between the viewers and the participants within the image. The children look at the docent or the exhibit, and the docent herself focuses on the materials. This renders the image an offer, inviting viewers to observe a pedagogical interaction without becoming a part of it.



**Figure 5.5 Visiting page of the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China**

The social distance is close and intimate. The camera is positioned within the same spatial zone as the group, suggesting proximity and inclusion. The tight framing and medium-to-close shot create an immersive experience, encouraging viewers to imagine themselves as participants in the educational moment. This spatial intimacy suggests a warm, didactic atmosphere grounded in national education and ideological instruction.

In terms of subjectivity, the image adopts a slightly elevated, yet eye-level perspective that maintains observational neutrality while fostering alignment with the viewer's everyday viewpoint. The presence of children also suggests a generational transmission of memory, reinforcing the idea that revolutionary heritage is not remote or exalted, but living and teachable. This interactive structure promotes cognitive engagement, collective learning, and reverence for institutional history.

### **5.2.2 United States: U.S. Capitol**

The "Book a Tour" image (Figure 5.6) presents a diverse group of visitors assembled beneath grand historical paintings inside the Capitol Rotunda. In terms of contact, most individuals are turned away or in profile, with no eye contact directed toward the viewer. This constitutes an offer image, where viewers are encouraged to spectate rather than engage directly. The docent pointing at the artwork signals educational facilitation rather than interpersonal address.



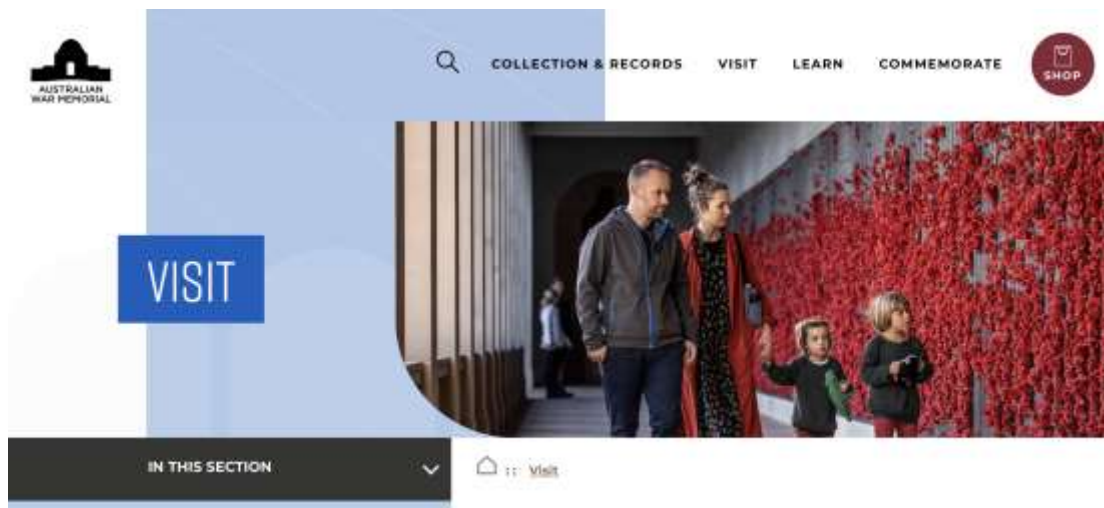
**Figure 5.6 Visiting page of the U.S. Capitol**

Social distance is established through a medium-long shot that captures the visitors, the artwork, and architectural space within a single frame. This distance indicates a formal but inclusive setting—public yet reverent. The viewer is positioned slightly behind the rope barrier, metaphorically aligned with national civic spectatorship rather than private participation.

As for subjectivity, the camera adopts a level, horizontal gaze, reinforcing a shared viewer perspective. The symmetrical composition and clear visual hierarchy subtly frame the Capitol as a site of orchestrated civic learning. Although the participants do not directly acknowledge the viewer, the institutional setting and inclusive representation of everyday people foster a sense of democratic accessibility, portraying the Capitol as a space where national identity is explored through visual and spatial engagement.

### **5.2.3 Australia: Australian War Memorial**

In the “Visit” section image (Figure 5.7), a family group—parents and two young children—walk along a colonnade lined with thousands of artificial red poppies. The image evokes emotional warmth and familial intimacy. Regarding contact, the young child nearest the camera momentarily looks up, though not directly at the lens, while the others are engaged with the memorial wall or one another. This image operates as an offer, encouraging viewers to witness a private moment of remembrance within a public site.



**Figure 5.7 Visiting page of the Australian War Memorial**

The social distance is intimate. The medium shot places the viewer within the walkway, suggesting physical and emotional closeness. The inclusion of children, the natural lighting, and the casual body language all contribute to a sense of comfort and familiarity, presenting the memorial as both sacred and approachable.

In terms of subjectivity, the viewpoint is slightly angled and horizontal, aligning the viewer with the adults' eye level. This fosters a shared, empathetic stance. The perspective encourages viewers to reflect not only on national sacrifice but on the act of remembrance as an intergenerational civic ritual. The image humanises war memory through the lens of ordinary family experience, generating emotional resonance without overt sentimentality.

### **5.2.4 New Zealand: Auckland War Memorial Museum**

The “Plan Your Visit” image (Figure 5.8) features a mother and two children engaging with an illuminated interactive exhibit. The boy at the centre looks directly outward, his expression of excitement and openness establishing contact with the viewer. This eye contact renders the image a clear demand, actively inviting viewers into the museum space through the child's joyful gaze.





**Figure 5.8 Visiting page of the Auckland War Memorial Museum**

Social distance is close, framed at a medium-close range that brings the family group into visual and emotional proximity. The soft lighting and cosmic backdrop enhance the intimacy of the interaction, framing the museum as a site of wonder, curiosity, and familial connection rather than institutional solemnity.

In terms of subjectivity, the camera aligns with the mother's eye level, producing a horizontal perspective that emphasises equal footing between viewer and participants. The expressive faces and tactile gestures of the children create an atmosphere of immersion, drawing the viewer into a scene of dynamic engagement. The image repositions the memorial museum not as a place of detached reverence, but as an inclusive, sensory-rich environment for discovery and intergenerational connection.

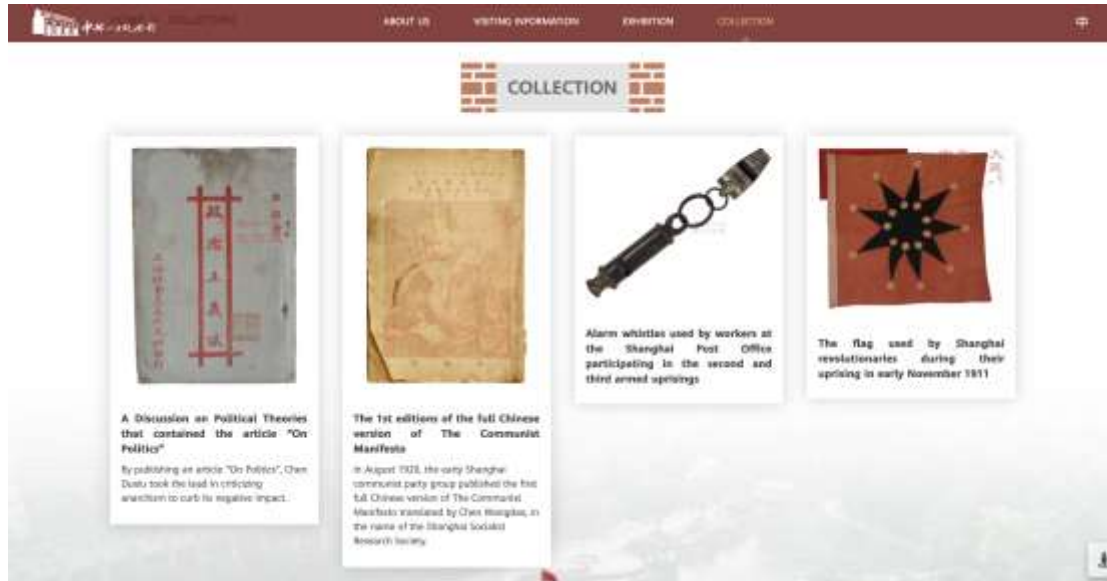
### **5.2.5 Summary**

These interactive images reflect distinct national approaches to commemorative engagement. China projects ideological instruction through close pedagogical scenes marked by observational neutrality. The United States balances civic formality with inclusive visual cues, positioning the viewer as an external but welcomed learner. Australia personalises war memory through emotionally accessible depictions of family pilgrimage. New Zealand, in contrast, constructs an open invitation into cultural learning, foregrounded by a child's direct gaze. Each configuration—through contact type, spatial arrangement, and viewer positioning—embeds interactivity within broader national frameworks of memory, education, and identity.

## **5.3 Compositional Meaning**

### **5.3.1 China: The Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China**

The online collection page of the Chinese memorial (Figure 5.9) adopts a highly structured compositional layout that reinforces ideological centrality. In terms of information value, the most ideologically significant object—the first Chinese version of the Communist Manifesto—is positioned near the centre, suggesting its thematic and narrative primacy. This layout spatially reinforces the textual and historical centrality of Marxist theory in the Party's founding.



**Figure 5.9 Collection page of the Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China**

Salience is manipulated through a combination of object positioning, colour saturation, and contrast. The bold red typography of the “On Politics” pamphlet and the iconic revolutionary flag visually stand out from the more subdued paper artefacts. This prioritisation invites viewers to focus on visual symbols of revolutionary struggle and ideological development. Text labels beneath each image vary in font weight, with bolder headlines guiding viewer attention.

The framing is defined by clear white boundaries around each item, producing visual separation between artefacts. This boxed layout segments historical items into discrete moments, supporting an encyclopedic mode of knowledge. Each item stands as an autonomous representation of a historical episode, yet together they form a coherent narrative of revolutionary momentum and ideological transmission. The museum’s collection page thus visualises Party history as a curated, linear progression through textual and symbolic milestones.

### **5.3.2 United States: U.S. Capitol**

The U.S. Capitol’s collection interface for “Fighting the Wars” (Figure 5.10) presents historical legislative documents within a minimalistic but symbolically weighted layout. Regarding information value, the visual hierarchy favours central placement: the middle document, concerning wartime military authorisation, is framed in blue and thus marked as the thematic core. This central placement conveys the importance of executive wartime powers in American political history.



Figure 5.10 Collection page of the U.S. Capitol

Salience is guided by colour contrast and handwriting. The unique visual character of each document—margin annotations, blue tint, and cursive signatures—renders them distinguishable. Yet unlike China's red saturation strategy, the U.S. design relies on neutrality, trusting the viewer to assign weight through contextual cues. The centrality of the blue act enhances visual and rhetorical emphasis subtly but effectively.

Framing is managed through uniform spacing and monochromatic backgrounds. Unlike boxed framing, these documents float within ample white space, producing a sense of openness and interpretive freedom. This aesthetic restraint aligns with democratic ideals of transparency and viewer agency. The absence of heavy visual framing supports a liberal interpretive posture—visitors are encouraged to explore and derive their own connections across documents, rather than follow a prescribed narrative.

### 5.3.3 Australia: Australian War Memorial

The "Understanding the Memorial's Collection" page (Figure 5.11) on the Australian site combines text and imagery to construct compositional meaning grounded in usability and research orientation. In terms of information value, the left-hand navigation menu provides clear vertical sequencing, while the central heading "Understanding the Collection" occupies the ideal position of informational prominence, establishing the purpose of the page.



**Figure 5.11 Collection page of the Australian War Memorial**

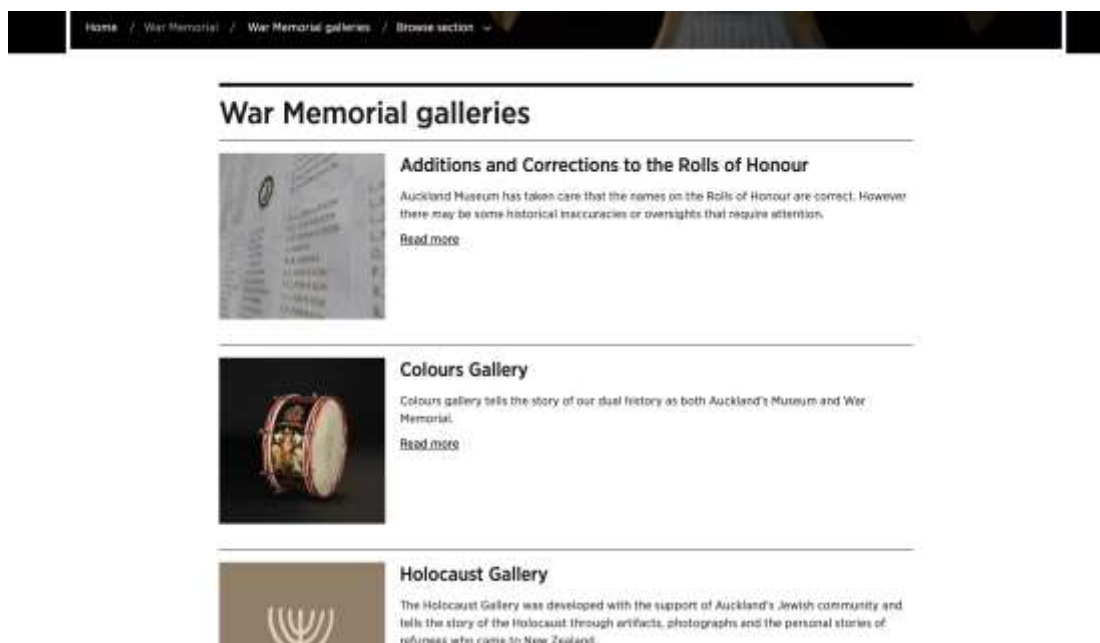
Salience is achieved through a contrast in typographic size and colour. The main headings are bolded and separated by fine lines, giving visual priority to core messages. Meanwhile, historical photographs—such as the one of three smiling soldiers with a nurse—draw emotional salience through facial expression and sepia tones. These images are smaller in size but symbolically resonant, providing human touchpoints amidst the textual density.

Framing here is relatively loose. Photographs and text blocks are separated by margins rather than bounding boxes, encouraging a flowing reading experience. The lack of rigid demarcation suggests an interpretive openness while maintaining thematic coherence. This design reflects the memorial's emphasis on research and discovery, allowing users to navigate memory as an exploratory, individualized journey.

#### **5.3.4 New Zealand: Auckland War Memorial Museum**

The New Zealand memorial site, particularly the “War Memorial Galleries” interface (Figure 5.12), arranges content in horizontally segmented bands that reflect compositional intentionality. In terms of information value, the topmost banner “Additions and Corrections to the Rolls of Honour” takes up the highest position, implying institutional accountability and historical precision as a moral imperative.





**Figure 5.12 Collection page of the Auckland War Memorial Museum**

Salience is generated by visual differentiation: the dramatic red of the Colours Gallery's drum and the stark lighting of the Holocaust Gallery's menorah set these items apart within an otherwise neutral visual field. The varied object types—text panels, artefacts, symbolic emblems—create points of visual and emotional engagement, inviting selective focus.

Framing is explicitly rectangular, with each gallery block enclosed by clean black borders. This grid-like segmentation conveys order and classification, facilitating quick navigation while simultaneously implying thematic autonomy. The result is a modular display system that supports both didactic clarity and multicultural inclusion. Each framed element tells its own story, yet together they build a visual mosaic of national remembrance.

### **5.3.5 Summary**

Across the four national memorial museum websites, compositional meaning plays a pivotal role in shaping how historical artefacts are visually prioritized, segmented, and contextualized. Each site constructs meaning through the orchestration of information value, salience, and framing—yet does so in culturally specific ways that reflect underlying ideological orientations. The Chinese site deploys a rigid and centralised layout, where salience is amplified through revolutionary symbolism and colour contrast, while framing enshrines each object as part of a linear, authoritative narrative. In contrast, the U.S. Capitol page adopts minimalist openness; it decentralizes authority by allowing visual hierarchy to emerge subtly through document coloration and spatial balance, in line with civic neutrality and liberal democratic discourse. Australia's design prioritizes usability and emotional engagement, integrating soft framing and typographic salience to facilitate exploratory, user-led encounters with history. Meanwhile, New Zealand's modular segmentation balances multicultural inclusion with institutional accountability—each framed gallery functions as both a thematic unit and part of a collective commemorative tapestry. Together, these layouts reveal how nations not only present memory but also discipline its reception through spatial organisation and visual hierarchy.

### **5.4 Multimodal Strategies in National Memory Construction**

Across the four national memorial websites, the multimodal orchestration of representational, interactive, and compositional meanings reveals not only surface-level visual differences but deeper ideological logics embedded in their semiotic designs. Representationally, each site leverages distinct narrative or conceptual strategies to encode its historical memory—from China's abstraction of revolutionary legacy to New Zealand's symbolic valorisation of bicultural heritage. Interactive meaning varies in the construction of viewer relationships: China stages distance and deference; the U.S. blends civic neutrality with textual invitation; Australia fosters emotional alignment through everyday imagery; and New Zealand encourages participatory engagement via direct gaze and familial framing. Compositional meaning, in turn, reinforces these patterns by determining what information is central or peripheral, what is made salient through design, and how elements are spatially framed to guide interpretation. Taken together, these multimodal strategies not only shape how visitors read and relate to institutional memory but also manifest each nation's preferred mode of commemorative discourse—be it ideological consolidation, democratic pluralism, civic accessibility, or intercultural inclusion.

Moreover, the interaction among representational, interactive, and compositional meanings is not merely additive but synergistic. The way a participant is visually constructed (representational) influences how the viewer is expected to engage (interactive), and both are reinforced or subverted by layout and emphasis (compositional). When China's collection displays political texts with strong visual salience and no interpersonal gaze, the effect is one of distant reverence—commemoration as ideological instruction. By contrast, New Zealand pairs culturally symbolic objects with warm lighting and open framing, resulting in a participatory and emotionally inclusive commemorative encounter. These multimodal strategies do more than mediate memory—they naturalise national values, discipline viewer positions, and institutionalise collective ways of seeing the past. Through these integrated visual grammars, the museum websites act not only as digital archives but also as ideological terrains where the politics of memory are performed, negotiated, and visually encoded.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Major Findings and Implications**

This study has conducted a comparative multimodal discourse analysis of four national memorial museum websites—China's Memorial Hall of the First National Congress of the Communist Party, the United States Capitol Visitor Center, the Australian War Memorial, and the Auckland War Memorial Museum in New Zealand—focusing on the dimensions of representational, interactive, and compositional meaning. The findings demonstrate that each institution employs distinct visual strategies to construct narratives of public memory and identity, revealing deep-seated ideological, cultural, and political frameworks that shape their digital commemorative practices.

In terms of representational meaning, the study reveals a strong divergence in how historical processes, participants, and circumstances are depicted. China's homepage relies on a conceptual symbolic mode, using architecture and static symbols like the national flag to encode ideological continuity and Party legitimacy. The U.S. site embraces narrative action, featuring mythic imagery that elevates civic heroes and democratic ideals. Australia presents a more grounded narrative, portraying ordinary civilians as participants in remembrance, while New Zealand emphasises symbolic engagement with indigenous artefacts, highlighting a bicultural understanding of national history. These choices reflect each nation's commemorative priorities—whether institutional glorification, democratic mythmaking, public inclusivity, or cultural reconciliation.

Regarding interactive meaning, the four websites differ significantly in how they construct the relationship between the viewer and the memorial content. China's approach maintains a formal social distance and indirect address, consistent with an authoritative communicative style. The United States adopts a more neutral stance, offering textual guidance while avoiding emotive appeal. Australia humanises the interface through emotionally expressive images and inclusive perspectives, thereby reducing social distance and fostering empathetic alignment. New Zealand offers the most intimate interaction, with direct gaze, warm lighting, and culturally resonant imagery facilitating emotional engagement and participation. These patterns suggest different national attitudes toward public engagement and the role of emotion in historical interpretation.

In terms of compositional meaning, the layout, salience, and framing techniques further distinguish the memorials' rhetorical approaches. China employs boxed frames, centralised red imagery, and symbolic sequencing to guide viewers toward a unified ideological narrative. The U.S. adopts an open, text-driven interface that favours interpretive freedom and legislative documentation. Australia presents an accessible, navigable design with modular visuals and emotionally salient touchpoints. New Zealand leverages bold visual segmentation and symbolic artefacts to elevate underrepresented narratives, especially Māori perspectives. These compositional strategies are not merely aesthetic but serve to structure user experience and mediate institutional authority.

Collectively, these findings underscore the power of multimodal design in shaping historical consciousness and public memory in the digital age. By analysing how meaning is constructed across visual modes, the study exposes the subtle interplay between ideology and interface. The implications are twofold. First, they highlight the capacity of institutional websites to act as active agents in cultural transmission—not neutral archives but persuasive commemorative environments. Second, the cross-cultural comparison reveals how global institutions increasingly adopt digital commemorative forms that are rooted in local historical discourse, thereby asserting national identity while negotiating global visibility. Future design and scholarly practice must therefore remain attuned to the ways multimodal semiotics influence civic engagement, historical literacy, and digital heritage communication.

### **6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies**

While this study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of multimodal strategies in memorial museum websites across four nations, several limitations must be acknowledged that restrict the generalisability and depth of its findings.

First, the dataset is limited in both scope and scale. The analysis focuses exclusively on the homepage and selected subpages of each museum website at a fixed time point. Although these pages are carefully chosen to reflect key aspects of visual discourse, they represent only a fraction of each institution's broader digital ecosystem. Important multimodal resources—such as interactive maps, online exhibitions, 3D virtual tours, and video content—were excluded due to feasibility constraints. As such, the findings may not capture the full richness and complexity of each website's commemorative narrative or user engagement mechanisms.

Second, the analytical framework, while grounded in established visual grammar theory, inherently involves subjective interpretation. Although efforts were made to apply consistent coding across the representational, interactive, and compositional systems, semiotic interpretation can vary depending on the analyst's cultural background and disciplinary perspective. This is particularly salient when comparing Western and non-Western visual traditions, where the same visual element may encode different meanings or serve distinct cultural functions. Future research could mitigate this limitation by incorporating inter-rater reliability checks or employing a triangulated approach with audience reception studies, such as interviews, eye-tracking, or clickstream analysis.

In light of these limitations, several directions for further research are recommended. First, expanding the dataset to include more museums within each national context—as well as across additional geopolitical regions—would provide comparative depth and global perspective. Second, integrating multimodal analysis with corpus-based linguistic approaches could enrich understanding of how verbal and visual modes interact to construct national narratives. Third, investigating the role of technological affordances—such as virtual reality, gamification, and AI-powered personalization—in shaping the evolving multimodal landscape of digital memory could offer a future-oriented extension of the present study. Lastly, developing culturally adaptive analytical frameworks that consider non-Western aesthetics and narrative structures would contribute to the decolonisation and diversification of multimodal discourse studies.

Ultimately, while the study identifies key patterns in the multimodal construction of national memory across four major institutions, it also opens important avenues for deepening and diversifying the analysis of how visual grammar mediates public history in the digital age.

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