

Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures: Reflections on the Development of Xi'an Museums*

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ABSTRACT

Xi'an is a city built on the monuments and sites of thousands of years. Since the Western Zhou Dynasty in the 11th century BC, 13 dynasties have established their capitals here, leaving a large amount of cultural heritage. The imprints of thousands of years of time and history are concentrated in the collections of large and small museums in Xi'an, showing the world the splendor and glory of the old city as well as the traces of people's lives for thousands of years. Based on the current situation of the development of museums in Xi'an municipal district, this paper reveals their existing problems, including the lack of development momentum of non-state-owned museums, the large proportion of ungraded museums without assessment, and the large differences in the degree of museums' adopting new technologies and so on. The main reason for this is that the development of museums lags behind the urbanization process and the spiritual and cultural needs of the audience. In view of this, efforts should be made to increase the publicity of the value and function of museums, take measures to promote the development of non-state-owned museums, strengthen the construction of professional talents in the culture and museum industry, and effectively promote the development of Xi'an museums, making them the cultural living rooms of Xi'an, an international metropolis.

Keywords: Xi'an area, Museum, Current situation, Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Museums are the name card and soul of urban culture, carrying the historical connotation and cultural pursuit of a city, being the symbol and benchmark of urban civilization. The role of museums is the embodiment of "The Power of Museums". [1] Xi'an, known as Chang'an in ancient times, is an ancient city with a history of more than 3,100 years of city history and more than 1,200 years of capital history, and is one of the world top four ancient capitals, condensing a potential force of educating people with history and carrying culture with objects. "Shih-chi" has praised Xi'an as "a golden city stretching thousands of miles and a land of abundance". The unique natural and geographical conditions have nurtured Xi'an's splendid historical civilization and left rich historical and cultural heritage to the people of the

world. In 1981, UNESCO designated Xi'an as a "World Famous Historic City", and two six heritage sites in Xi'an were included in the "World Heritage List". The rich historical and cultural heritage makes the number of museums in Xi'an in the forefront of the country. Since May 18, 2013, Xi'an Yuanhao Huazang Museum officially opened, and Xi'an welcomed the 100th museum. In recent years, with the support of the Xi'an Municipal Government, especially since the launch of the "City of Museums" construction plan, the museum cause in Xi'an has been greatly developed.

2. DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF VARIOUS MUSEUMS IN XI'AN

Xi'an has a total area of 10,108 square kilometers and has 11 districts under its jurisdiction (Weiyang District, Lianhu District, Xincheng District, Beilin District, Baqiao District, Yanta District, Yanliang District, Lintong District, Chang'an District, Gaoling District, Huyi District) and 2 counties under city administration (Lantian

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County, Zhouzhi County) and a Xixian New District. Various types of museums are distributed in such administrative divisions, serving the spiritual and cultural needs of the people in China and foreign countries. According to the public information on the official website of the Xi'an Antiquities Authority, as of November 2020, there are 132 museums of various types in Xi'an, which are distributed in the above-mentioned districts and counties of Xi'an. Their spatial layout and type distribution are closely related to the spiritual and cultural life of the local people. The overall development of existing museums presents the following development characteristics:

2.1 The Number of Museums Continues To Grow

As a social and cultural institution, the social value of museums is recognized by all sectors of society. In particular, over the past few years, governments at all levels have put forward the slogan of "City of Museums", and the cause of museums in China has been greatly developed. At the Xi'an Cultural Relics Work Conference in 2009, the leaders of the Municipal Government put forward the idea of building Xi'an into a "City of Museums". Subsequently, the "Report on Xi'an's Construction of a 'City of Museums'" was released, which put forward implementation opinions on promoting the development of the city's museum cause in the next three years. In March 2010, the Municipal Party Committee and Municipal Government proposed to build another 50-80 museums in three years, making the total number of museums in Xi'an exceed 100. In May 2013, Xi'an Yuanhao Huazang Museum was officially opened, which is the 100th museum in Xi'an. According to the official website of the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration, there are currently 341 museums registered in Shaanxi. As a famous historical and cultural city in China and foreign countries, there are 132 museums of various grades and types in Xi'an, accounting for 39% of the total number of museums in the province. Among them, there are 66 state-owned museums and 66 non-state-owned museums.¹ In the "14th Five-Year Plan" for the development of cultural relics in Xi'an, another 15 museums are expected to be put on records, and another 14 museums are going to be renovated, expanded and exhibited. By

1. All cited data are the statistics of the citer of the culture and museum information on the official website of the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration.

2035, Xi'an will form a modern public cultural service system for museums, providing a powerful driving force for fully demonstrating the charm of a world famous historical and cultural city.

2.2 The Spatial Distribution Is Scattered as a Whole, But Concentrated Locally

There are 132 museums of various grades and types in Xi'an, which are distributed in different locations within the jurisdiction. Among them, Yanta District has the largest number, with 39 museums, followed by 14 each in Beilin District and Weiyang District, 10 each in Xincheng District and Chang'an District, 9 each in Lintong District and Xixian New District, 8 in Gaoling District, 7 in Baqiao District, 5 in Lantian County, 4 in Lianhu District, 2 in Zhouzhi County, and only 1 each in Yanliang District and Huyi District. These museums together constitute the material carrier of the construction of Xi'an City of Museums.

2.3 Museum Collections Are Rich in Resources

The cultural relics and remains in the existing museums in Xi'an range from the Site of Lantian Man in the Paleolithic Age more than 1 million years ago, to the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui and Tang dynasties, and then to the modern revolutionary sites. A modern museum system with rich types and diverse subjects has been basically formed, endowing Xi'an the reputation of "Natural History Museum".² As far as the registered museums are concerned, there are 14 museums with collections of more than 10,000 pieces (sets), with a total collection of more than 5.09 million pieces (sets). The Xi'an Museum has the largest collection in a single museum, with more than 2.19 million pieces (sets). The second is the Shaanxi History Museum, with a collection of 1.76 million pieces (sets). The rich collection is not only the carrier of Xi'an's profound history, but also an important resource for influencing people with culture.

3. PROBLEMS EXISTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSEUMS IN XI'AN

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that a museum is a university. In the long-term

2. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1733172797668735802&wfr=spider&for=pc>

construction of museums in Xi'an, it has gradually formed a new pattern of museum development, with state-owned museums as the dominance, industry museums as the backbone, non-state-owned museums as the new force, various ownership systems developing simultaneously, novel and complete categories, rich and colorful contents, scientific and reasonable layout, and significantly improved social contribution degree. There are still many problems in the development of museums, which not only affect the performance of museum functions, but also affect the satisfaction of visitors.

3.1 The Lack of Development Momentum of Non-state-owned Museums

Unlike state-owned museums, most of the collections of non-state-owned museums come from the collections of the founders. Regardless of the small number, the identification of the authenticity of the collections is an important issue. And in terms of funds, the purchase of professional equipment for museums, the employment of professionals, and the safety and security of museums all require large and continuous funds. These expenses are basically dependent on the founder's investment and ticket sales. Without strong financial support, the development of museums is like being stuck in the neck, affecting the operation of museums. If museums have to be closed due to irresistible factors such as the epidemic, the income from tickets and cultural and creative products will be greatly reduced, making the survival of non-state-owned museums more difficult. If the core issues such as funding and technology are not resolved, the development of non-state-owned museums will certainly be quite tortuous. Regulating and supporting the development of non-state-owned museums is of great significance to promoting the protection of cultural relics in Xi'an, exerting the publicity and education functions of museums, publicizing Xi'an's history and culture, and realizing comprehensive social benefits.

3.2 The Large Proportion of Ungraded Museums Without Assessment

In the existing museum structure, only 17 museums have been graded and assessed, and the remaining 115 museums have not been graded and assessed. The museum grading and assessment is not only an affirmation of the museum, but also means that the museum has good conditions for the

collection and management, scientific research, exhibitions, and education and dissemination of cultural relics, specimens, and other collections. This directly promotes the industry management of museums, the improvement of museum quality, and the playing of museum social service functions. At the same time, the museums that have obtained the grading and assessment will accept the supervision, inspection and operation evaluation of the Chinese Museums Association, which can effectively supervise the sustainable development of museums. As stated by the National Cultural Heritage Administration when formulating the museum grading and assessment criteria, the purpose of criteria setting is to strengthen the quality management of museums, to promote museums to fulfill their responsibilities for the protection, interpretation and promotion of human cultural and natural heritage, to cultivate and promote the core socialist values, to prosper the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, to improve the level of social education and public cultural services of museums, and to better meet the people's needs for a better life.

3.3 The Large Differences in the Degree of Adopting New Technologies

New technologies mean to build a museum's exclusive website with the help of network and digital technology, so that the audience can still use the museum's collection resources even if they are unable to visit in person. The opening of the museum's official website indicates that new media has become another important way for the museum's mass communication. The application of new media and digital technology has brought a large number of cultural relics and cultural relic practitioners from behind the scenes to the front, such as "National Treasure", "Every Treasure Tells a Story", Douyin livestreaming, "Cloud Exhibition", etc. Practice has proved that digitalization can bring innovation and vitality to museums, bring new experiences to audiences, and at the same time bring more possibilities for museums to cross borders, making museums obtain sustainable development. The Shaanxi History Museum, the Xi'an Museum, and the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum are industry benchmarks in this regard. Their website construction is not only rich in content with timely updated information, but also subtly uses the digitization of collections to meet the audience's cloud visit needs. However, among the 132 existing museums in Xi'an, 53 have no website or official account,

accounting for 40% of the total number of museums in Xi'an. Most of these museums without websites or official accounts are non-state-owned topic museums. Because of the high degree of specialization of their collections, only those who are particularly interested in the museum are likely to visit. It is indeed a loss and regret that 40% of the museums lose their attractiveness to the audience due to the lack of such conditions. If a museum can't attract the attention of the general audience, it will restrict the effective play of the social service function of the museum.

4. COUNTERMEASURES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF XI'AN MUSEUMS

Museums are the carrier of urban culture, not only collecting the past, but also witnessing the present and revealing the future. In museums, the audience feels the past, thinks about the present, and looks forward to the future. The reasons for the three outstanding problems in the development of Xi'an museums have their own uniqueness. However, whether it is the lack of development momentum of non-state-owned museums, the large proportion of ungraded museums without assessment, or the use of new technologies, funding and personnel support are needed all the time. And funding and personnel issues are fundamentally directly related to the concept of managers. The value and significance of museums in social development and people's lives have not been fully valued. Therefore, the fundamental solution to the above problems is to continue to improve the social recognition of museums and make visiting museums a way of life for the people.

4.1 Increasing the Publicity of the Value and Function of the Museum

American scholar John Cotton Dana put forward the concept of "the living museum" in "A New Museum". He believes that "It's easier for museums to acquire collections than to acquire minds, but obviously, the latter is the most important." He emphasizes that "The museum that is really used by the public is the museum." [2] There are so many museums in Xi'an, in addition to the Shaanxi History Museum, the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, the Xi'an Museum and other large-scale museums which are favored by the audience, those topic and smaller-scale museums can only display their value and significance if they can enter the audience's field of

vision through publicity and attract the audience into the museum. Otherwise, museums lacking audiences will become warehouses for the storage of cultural relics, and the value and meaning of cultural relics will be submerged along with them. Building a distinctive publicity platform can improve the effectiveness of museum publicity. In particular, Internet technology and digital technology can be used to expand the influence of museums, which can meet the needs of audiences to a certain extent and make potential audiences develop into present audiences. When it comes to the sustainable development of museums, on the one hand, it is not only the sustainability of the museum itself, but also the source of funds, management system, curatorial methods, etc.; on the other hand, it is how the museum fits into the current mainstream sustainable development mode, including green curation, harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and sustainable inheritance of cultural heritage. While relying on information technology, the museum side still needs to keep in mind its own cultural characteristics and purposes, must not lose themselves in the "technology flow", but should continue to play its role in disseminating knowledge and educating the public.[3]

4.2 Taking Measures To Promote the Development of Non-state-owned Museums

Although non-state-owned museums don't have the strong financial strength and professional personnel and equipment of state-owned museums, compared with state-owned museums, non-state-owned museums have more flexible collection sources and management systems. Moreover, non-state-owned museums have made outstanding contributions in supplementing the types of state-owned museums and dispersing the pressure of tourists. But the actual value and function of the existing non-state-owned museums have not been well revealed and played out. If non-state-owned museums can enjoy the same policy treatment as state-owned museums in terms of development, especially in terms of funding, it will remove bottlenecks for the development of non-state-owned museums. As Zhang Lizhi, chairman of Xi'an Museum Association and the seventh director of Xi'an Banpo Museum, put forward, "I think that from a higher level, that is, from the national level, the state subsidy for the operating funds of non-state-owned museums should be clearly written into the law, so as to relieve the worries of functional

departments at all levels as well as relevant departments and officials, and enable non-state-owned museums to gain momentum for sustainable development." [4]

4.3 Expanding the Team of Professionals in the Culture and Museum Industry

Modern museums have been considered as social and cultural educational institutions and their functions are based on collections, but the actual effect depends on professionals who are engaged in management. Excellent talent team is the foundation and backbone to promote the development of culture and museum industry, can improve the taste and popularity of museums, and determine the strength, level and development direction of a museum. However, the reality is that there is a serious shortage of professionals in China's domestic culture and museum industry. Some researchers have done statistics: The number of museums in China has increased from 3,069 in 2012 to 5,132 in 2019. The number of museum practitioners increased from 71,748 in 2012 to 107,993 in 2019. The number of museums increased by 675, while the number of practitioners increased by 51%. [5] The number of practitioners is far from enough to meet the development of museums. Xi'an is no exception. Cai Yiyang, a CPPCC member and an expert in cultural relics identification, found in his investigation that most of the non-state-owned museums currently have a shortage of professional and technical personnel and lag in the construction of talent teams, resulting in serious deficiencies in scientific research level, cultural relics protection, exhibition design, management system and other aspects in the development process, making it difficult to truly realize the "four functions" of museums.³ Because of this, the development of Xi'an museums needs to expand the talent team of culture and museum, on the one hand, it can be realized through school training, and on the other hand through professional training, to improve the professional level and ability of the existing staff. Once the human problem is solved, the technical problem will also be readily solved. For the digital construction of non-state-owned museums, the Xi'an Antiquities Authority can assign working groups according to the grade of museums and cultural relics collections in Xi'an to carry out digital collection in a unified manner and then share the digital results with non-

state-owned museums, so as to promote the opening of digital resources by non-state-owned museums and play a role in educating the public.

5. CONCLUSION

In the process of social civilization, the release of museum energy has affected social education and civilization and is also related to social harmony and public education. It is precisely because of the cultural dependence of the public that the museum has become a landmark of the city. [6] Serving the public is the mission and responsibility of the development of modern museums. Under the guidance of the government's overall planning, Xi'an museums will achieve better development, and through their high-quality services, they will meet the people's pursuit of a better life and effectively play their social functions.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Yan Feng was responsible for the collection, collation and compilation of the paper data. Wang Xiaoning was responsible for the revision and editing of the paper.

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