

ROLE OF THE VIETNAM NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY: ON BALANCING POLITICAL HISTORY, ETHNOGRAPHY AND ART

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Logo of Vietnam National Museum of History
Image courtesy of the Vietnam National Museum of History

INTRODUCTION

A National Museum is a special cultural institution. It is the head of the museum system in a country. It leads, influences and orients the operation of a nation's museum system. It is also a place that stores the majority of a nation's artefacts (cultural property) and is the most abundantly resourced with human resources, typical display systems and basic research programmes. Its research covers the entire country and a broad range of historical periods (from the ancient to contemporary) that relate to the most essential characteristics of the culture, civilisation and history of the nation.

THE ROLE OF THE VIETNAM NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY

In this regard, the Vietnam National Museum of History has always played an important role in Vietnamese museums' activities. Its function is to give people an objective view

- the most objective and balanced approach in understanding political institutions through history. It not only provides the value of information and knowledge to the public, but also gives politicians and contemporary political institutions a deep understanding of the basics of national political history in strengthening cooperative relations. Through exhibitions and other research projects (such as archaeological excavations, surveys, basic research etc.), the public can recognise the formation and development of the state. The public can also learn of the role of the state in the historical evolution of the nation from the primitive to the contemporary, in relation to ethnic issues. The representation of history, culture and civilization of each nation means addressing ethnic issues, ethnic groups and ancient kingdoms in history. This creates unity in diversity. In a multi-ethnic nation like Vietnam, the research and introduction, storage and preservation of ethnic cultural values addresses the historical formation and development of the nation, ethnicity and territory.



The Vietnam National Museum of History precinct
Image courtesy of the Vietnam National Museum of History



Co-operation Exhibition "L'envol du dragon-art royal du Vietnam" at Guimet Museum in Paris, France
Image courtesy of the Vietnam National Museum of History

The Vietnam National Museum of History has to set goals. It gives priority broadly to ethnic issues. In this process, we have built a collection and a combination of permanent exhibitions

that addresses the theme of ethnic, national culture, civilisation and the diversity of a unified multi-ethnic country. We build a general awareness of the cultural and civilised values of eth-

nicities as components of national and cultural civilisation. Many collections with multi-ethnic themes are managed by the Vietnam National Museum of History. However, intangible culture is not valued enough because it is not codified and promoted.

With contemporary trends of development, ethnic issues are one of the most complex issues for a country or social group to address. Seeking an ethnic balance in a national museum's activities is a basic task that contributes to stabilising this complex problem.

ART AND THE VIETNAM NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY

With regards to art, we must first define the concept of art for museums. Art is cultural and historical property. Artefacts through the ages are full of artistic elements. Secondly, modern artworks are independent works, and

architecture is a pluralistic construction. The artworks of a country is managed and promoted by the national museum. Artworks can be historical evidence that represents the nation, civilisation, culture or a certain period of a nation's history. This is why the management, promotion, research and collection are focused in a National Museum.

Many artworks are introduced to the public locally and abroad regularly through media channels and publications. This is the most effective way to provide the public with information and to build public awareness and understanding of all the activities of a national museum. However, it can be said that the management of contemporary works of the Vietnam National Museum of History is not a priority. The National Museum is the place that stores national art. It is necessary to establish policies and strategies for collecting and storing contemporary artworks in this context.



The activity of Volunteers Club, Vietnam National Museum of History at a Primary School
Image courtesy of the Vietnam National Museum of History



The activity of I love history club at the Vietnam National Museum of History
Image courtesy of the Vietnam National Museum of History

CULTURAL PROPERTY AND THE VIETNAM NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY

It can be said that the National Museum is the place that contains the full and most profound evidence of the nation's history. It stores historical artefacts associated with the civilisation and development of the nation. Cultural institutions (such as the National Museum) are the pride of each nation and its people. Cultural property assigned to the National Museum to manage certainly deserves to represent a nation in a historical and cultural dialogue with external relations.

ON BALANCING POLITICAL HISTORY, ETHNOGRAPHY AND ART

Obviously, the theme of the 5th ANMA conference is a problem arising out of the traditional nature of museums, politics and the current affairs of each National Museum. The

National Museum through its activities plays an important role in society of balancing political history, ethnography and art and has always faced many challenges to fulfil that mission. National museums are cultural institutions. Culture is one of the few best possible approaches to address peoples and nations. In other words, cultural understanding and economic benefits of a nation are the most important factors and the foundation of effective cooperation between countries and their peoples

With this awareness, I totally agree with the theme of this conference given to each member to share and discuss perceptions of how we accomplish our mission of contributing to the nation and addressing our common interests. I trust that this conference organised in Asian Civilisations Museum (Singapore) will continue to achieve success as those previously have.

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