

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

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This conference is themed on the role of a national museum, namely, the role and function of the museum in modern society. As is known to all, the museum is an important public institution delivering cultural services. It displays human civilization, promotes cultural exchanges, and enriches the visitors' spiritual and cultural world.

In general, the museum's functions are reflected in the following four aspects: Firstly, the museum solicits and preserves collections, which constitute the basis for the museum business; secondly, it holds exhibitions which represent the main channels through which the museum serves the public; thirdly, it contributes to pub-

licity and education and thus delivers cultural services; and fourthly, it carries out academic research. The museum should base all its major business upon scientific research.

Since the inauguration of the National Museum of China (NMC) with the merging of two museums in 2003, the foremost issue it has faced is addressing the scope of its role and function. Thereupon the NMC has set itself the goal of becoming a leading museum in China and a first-class museum in the world, showcasing history and art. Moreover, the NMC emphasises talent, collections, academics and services as key factors in running the museum. Thus, the NMC attaches equal importance to both



*The Exterior of the National Museum of China
Image courtesy of the National Museum of China*



*The West Entrance Hall in the National Museum of China
Image courtesy of the National Museum of China*

history and art and integrates its collection, exhibition, research, archaeology, public education and cultural exchanges into its displays and programmes. All of which carry salient Chinese characteristics.

These roles and functions also greatly influence the development of the NMC. Since its reopening in March 2011 and with efforts to build the world's top-notch comprehensive museum, the NMC has prioritised building its own exhibition system based on its collections. This consists of two permanent exhibitions on history and special exhibitions on more than 10 categories of art.

We also host international exchange exhibitions mainly from prestigious overseas museums. Lastly, our temporary exhibitions at home and abroad carry evident features of the time and represent distinctive art styles. Through the years, this exhibition system continues to expand and improve.

Over the past four years since the museum's reopening, we have held more than 200 exhibitions, receiving nearly 30 million visitors from China and abroad. We have established and improved the people's foremost public cultural service system, and developed a safe and efficient operation system, which has won the museum accolades around the world. According to the *2014 Theme Index and Museum Index: The Global Attractions Attendance Report* released by the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions on June 4, 2015, the NMC ranked as the second most popular museum in the world. It continues to be one of the most visited and popular museums in the world.

In recent years, the NMC has made headway in delivering public services. Still, we must be aware of the challenges, opportunities and historical missions facing the museum. The 2015 International Museum Day is themed "Museums for a Sustainable Society", which emphasises the significance of the museum as a cultural medium and educator. The role

and related work of the museum necessitates it being a guardian of cultural heritage and an entity pushing for better society. Therefore, the museum should continuously strengthen and improve its collections, exhibitions, public services and management.

As we know, due to historical reasons, many Asian museums including the NMC cannot compare with some of the international prestigious museums in terms of the size of their collections. They keep inadequate cultural heritage and artwork of different cultural periods. These museums have yet to establish an inseparable link with the public. Many of them have a long way to go to improve their management.

The Asian National Museums Association was formed for this very reason. Its aim is to improve the management and services of the Asian museums and promote cultural exchanges and development among Asian museums. I believe that through the association Asian national museums will enjoy even smoother communication, more frequent contact and increased cooperation. The NMC will use the

platform to vigorously carry out communication and cooperation with its counterparts in other Asian countries.

In 2016, the NMC will host the “China-Japan-Korea National Museum Directors Conference” and hold the “China-Japan-Korea National Museums Joint Exhibition.” Additionally, the following year will be the “China-Qatar Culture Year”, for which we plan to stage joint exhibitions with the National Museum of Qatar.

I sincerely hope the fifth conference of the Asian National Museums Association will yield rich fruits in promoting museum personnel exchanges, exhibitions, public cultural education services, academic research and publishing.

Finally, I wish the fifth conference of the Asian National Museums Association a complete success.

Thank you!

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