

**New Changes and Challenges of Museums in a New Era:
Working Together to Promote Exchanges and Mutual Learning among
Civilizations**

SHAN Wei

Deputy Director, National Museum of China

Summary:

Asian civilizations have created brilliant chapters in the history of world civilizations, and the world civilization is greatly enriched because of Asia. In today's society, the development of museums is changing with each passing day. The museum management has become more advanced. Museums are providing more diversified exhibitions and friendlier services, colorful cultural creative products, and diversified mutual exchanges. Meanwhile, rapid development also has many problems and challenges, such as unbalanced and inadequate development, insufficient funding, and sharp increase in attendance. To overcome these problems and respond to these challenges, the Asian museum community must join hands. We can cooperate closely in various fields, including organizing academic conferences, having exhibition and personnel exchanges, sharing technical expertise, and combating smuggling and trafficking of cultural relics. The National Museum of China is willing to work together with museums from other Asian countries to achieve mutual benefit and mutual learning, to foster joint development of Asian museums and to contribute to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Presentation Text

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning!

Asian countries are linked by mountains, rivers and also share similar histories and entertain the same dreams. Asian civilizations have created brilliant chapters in the history of world civilizations, and the world civilization is greatly enriched because of Asia. This May, during the time frame when the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations was held, the National Museum of China launched *The Splendor of Asia: An Exhibition of Asian Civilizations*. It is the first exhibition centered on Asian civilizations ever held in China that was a collaboration of Asian countries through concrete efforts. Chinese President Xi Jinping and the leaders from other Asian countries viewed nine precious artifacts selected from this exhibition, which signified the aspiration of exchanges and mutual learning among Asian civilizations. Hereby on behalf of the National Museum of China, I'd like to express my gratitude to the national museums of other Asian countries as well as the Asian National Museums Association.

Now I'd like to share my views on the development of Chinese museums and on the cooperation and exchanges among Asian museums.

Firstly, Chinese museums are rapidly growing in number. The recent years see a remarkable development of museums in China. In 2014, museums in China counted 4,510. In 2015, the number increased to 4,692. In 2016, it was 4,826 and reached 5,136 in 2017. By the end of 2018, there were a total of 5,354 museums around China, signalling an annual average growth by 200. At the same time, museums are gradually becoming more diversified. Apart from state-owned museums, there are museums devoted to specific industries as well as private museums. Currently there are over 1,600 private museums. It can be said that a diversified museum system consisting of various types of museums and operators has taken form is growing fast. Within this system,

national-level museums take a leading role, followed by provincial-level museums and key industrial museums. Besides, state-owned museums are the mainstay and enriched by private museums.

Secondly, museums are receiving more visitors. The total number of museum visitors in China shows an exponential growth. In 2012, Chinese museums recorded 560 million visits. In 2018, the number reached 1.126 billion. That means there was an increase of about 100 million on annual average. In particular, large-scale museums in China see faster increases in visitor attendance. Taking the National Museum of China for example, in 2018, it was visited by 8.61 million people and saw a growth by 6.8% compared to the previous year, making it the second most-visited museum in the world.

Thirdly, museums are increasingly digitalized and smart. Thanks to the development of science and technology, "bringing relics back to life" becomes increasingly important to Chinese museums. Using the latest information technology, museums try to dig deeper into the cultural meanings of their own collections and improve the way of displaying them in order to create better visitor experiences. Specifically, the AR/VR, IA, 8K ultra-high definition digital technology, 4D motion picture and 3D printing, among other modern technologies, are applied to offer the visitors diversified three-dimensional experiences in the galleries. Museums are notably enhanced by advanced technologies. A case in point is an exhibition on view at the National Museum of China, entitled *Van Gogh Immersive Experience: Fantasy of the Inner World*. The application of 360-degree holographic technology in this exhibition has been well acclaimed by the visitors.

Fourthly, public services in museums are becoming more welcoming. In addition to launching wonderful exhibitions, museums are organizing colorful public education activities and offering better public services to meet the cultural needs of different groups of people. For example, in 2018 alone, Chinese museums organized nearly 260,000 educational activities. Facing new public expectations, museums keep updating visitor-friendly services, as evidenced by the fact that in many museums, advanced smart audio-guide

devices, nursing rooms, kids zone and ambulance staff have been available to visitors.

Fifthly, cultural creative products developed by museums are gaining more popularity. In recent years, China witnessed a boom in the museum-related cultural creative industry. According to the latest statistics given by the National Cultural Heritage Administration, in 2017, income from museum-related cultural creative products nationwide reached about 3.52 billion yuan, covering more than 40,000 categories of products. In 2018, the National Museum of China designed more than 90 types of products labelled as the “NMC Original Art”. In terms of IP resources licensing, the National Museum of China has collaborated with dozens of brands. “Taking the museum home” has already been widely accepted by the general public.

The rapid development of Chinese museums has enriched the intellectual and cultural needs of the public, but it is not without challenges. Firstly, sharp increase in the attendance is a challenge to the security, operation and public services of museums. For example, during this year's Chinese Spring Festival, the National Museum of China received more than 60,000 a day. The National Museum had to take measures to control the visitor flow. Secondly, lack of funding severely hinders the sustainable development of museums. Due to the lack of funding, in some developing countries, museums face grave problems such as understaffing, slow updating of exhibitions and inadequate visitor services. Thirdly, museum development is unbalanced in different regions. In China for example, there are notably more museums in first-tier cities and historical cities, while in the western regions and poverty-stricken areas, museum development is insufficient. Fourthly, many museums are still low in the quality of exhibitions and services. In some small and medium-sized museums, exhibitions stay outdated, dull and monotonous, and provide little useful information. Therefore, they fail to meet the increasing public needs for better cultural experiences.

Today, museums have become places where people learn about history, culture, art and science. They are also important institutions that promote

harmonious social development. As we are facing the same problems and challenges, museums around Asia should join hands to strengthen exchanges and cooperation and build a community with a shared future for mankind.

Firstly, Asian museums must cooperate closely. Within the framework of the initiatives such as the “Belt and Road” and the “Two Corridors, One Economic Belt”, we, in the cooperative spirit of “sharing the same future and seeking common development”, can build a platform of cooperation and exchanges among museums. We can establish a regular meeting mechanism to jointly hold high-level academic conferences, discuss big or difficult issues on museum development, and seek Asian solutions to these problems.

Secondly, we can extend exhibition exchanges and cooperation. International exhibitions held at the National Museum of China as represented by *The Splendor of Asia: An Exhibition of Asian Civilizations* is a perfect example of excellent cooperation among Asian museums. The National Museum of China will continue to introduce high-quality exhibitions that will promote mutual understanding and mutual trust among Asian civilizations. It also encourages regular loans and key exhibition tours to keep the regular flow of artifacts.

Thirdly, we should further personnel exchanges. We can have joint professional trainings and academic exchange programs on exhibition, archaeology, conservation and scientific research, carry out joint researches on Asian cultural heritage and related issues, and train and select co-curators for international exhibitions. In addition, we may take joint efforts to build a mechanism for better exchanges among professionals and encourage regular high-level exchanges and mutual visits.

Fourthly, we can promote technological cooperation. We can endeavor to establish universal museum technical standards, promote inter-museum data connectivity, application and mutual learning, and share experiences in technological innovation. Currently, the National Museum of China is fully supporting the building of a smart museum. We are ready to work together with you all to explore the new developments of smart museums by strengthening

cooperation and sharing resources. With the above efforts, a sustainable and quality development of Asian museums will be possible.

Fifthly, we should build close cooperation in combating cultural relics smuggling. It is imperative to exchange information, collaborate closely to combat smuggling and trafficking of cultural relics, and share the experiences of repatriating cultural heritage from abroad. This will effectively reduce the risks of cultural relics smuggling and safeguard Asian cultural heritage.

Once again, I'd like to express my gratitude to the Seventh Executive Committee of Asian National Museums Association for its outstanding efforts in advancing exchanges and cooperation among Asian museums. On behalf of the National Museum of China, I extend an invitation to all of you to visit our museum. Let's join hands to make greater contributions to promoting harmonious social development and enhancing exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations.

Thank you!