

Museums and public engagement

changing concepts and strategies in China

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Since its opening to the world, modern China has been passing a great transformation. It has changed the maps of the world economically and politically, but increasingly also, culturally. The benevolent observers see it as prosperity for its inhabitants and a new richness for the world. Faced with radical challenges the world seems to appreciate culture and heritage with new arguments as they bring mentality of peace. Besides being economic and geopolitical proposal, The Silk Road initiative is probably the greatest developmental use of heritage concept so far. This resulted with unprecedented growth of museums in the last four decades. Heritage diplomacy¹ was a natural extension of taking the matters of culture and identity seriously at the top level of decision making, - a practice rather rare in world's diplomacies and among governments. Has China, parallel to its participation in the 4th industrial revolution, also entered its appearing cultural paradigm: the Age of heritage²? The latter may demonstrate that an integrated sector of public memory is able to remind the mankind of the qualities lost, those to be beneficially inserted into otherwise perilous "velocity, scope, and systems impact"³ of the current industrial revolution. It is time of great challenges and new quality solutions for the troubled Planet. By its importance and the irony of militarisation of the world, heritage should be considered as strategic domain, a matter of some ministry of identity defence.

From early beginnings to the goal of 6000 museums serving public interest

Before the inception of museums, like other cultures, China simply lived its heritage admitting gradual, sustainable changes. The 1840 war interrupted exceptionally long Chinese

¹ Dr. Tim Winter made a very inspiring lecture "Heritage Diplomacy and One Belt One Road" at Stockholm University Open Day, 26. Sept 2016. "Reframing Heritage as Movement".

² <https://www.mnemosophy.com/the-vault>

³ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/> (accessed in October, 2018); the article's author is Klaus Schwab, the founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum

history imposing a century of humiliating experience. Major western empires (joined by Russia and Japan), started what became an endless row of atrocities and failures for once invincible empire; the decaying society of a poorly run, disoriented, obsolete monarchy was menaced and literally poisoned. The long chaos with creeping westernisation followed. Colonial settlers built museums in China, like elsewhere, as a rationalisation of legitimacy of their presence.

Only in 1905 the Nantong museum was a sign of the other use, - that of emancipation of national identity, both culturally and politically. It is regarded as truly a specifically Chinese concept⁴ and it may be occasionally recognized as inspiration when seeing new Chinese museums. Obviously, many other museums followed, all to praise the endangered uniqueness of the country. But Nantong inspiration legitimized a very common occurrence of great museums in China: they actually consist of several museum buildings and different premises, often in traditional gardens, built as places, - altogether meant for contemplation and enjoyment (Naijing Museum, Fujian Museum in Fuzhou...). The basic democratic feature of the appearance of museums was, even in the West, certain democratization of culture and society, by offering opportunity of enlightenment to all.

After 12 years of eposée that started in 1937 country was finally liberated and started its long recovery. As historic pendulum usually does, it swayed from powerless chaos towards total control, - from decadence of absolutist monarchy to, what was proclaimed, the government of people and meritocracy of social commitment.

After 1949, culture became another battlefield in an effort of emancipation from, what was judged, backward and gruesome aristocratic rule. The other conditions consisted of fighting the imperialism and proving that socialism is a viable solution to modern society. Needless to say, museums and their exhibitions expressed this context in a very engaged way by offering very socially and politically explicit projects. At the time, even the Palace Museum “still held several exhibitions, such as *Comparing the Life of the Emperor and the Peasant*. Other museums held political exhibitions, such as *Labor Creates the World, Exhibition against US Imperialism*, etc. We call these kinds of exhibitions *political topic exhibitions*”⁵. The museum profession grew and got organized whereas museums were closely following the revolutionary ideals. At first, Party was very engaged in collecting the cultural objects for

⁴ Su, Donghai. Chinese museums’ tradition and changes, *Museologia e Patrimônio*, Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, vol.I no 1.,2008

⁵ Ibid.

museums but, eventually the bitter, convulsive decade (1966-1976) of the so called cultural revolution did much harm to the country. The unique civilizational experience was easily destructed but, happily enough not irreversibly rejected as weak and elitist heritage. Whatever stayed preserved, as one can see in present China, is due to a certain reluctance and discrete but effective appreciation. Ironically, the sixties, particularly the 1968 in the West, were the time of the fight for civil rights, for peace, freedom, against military, bourgeoisie and bureaucracy. Be it in Paris or Beijing, museums still had neither vision nor experience to have they own say. Critics of museums could rightfully note that museums stayed everywhere aside from all turmoil. Scientifically aloof, ignored and marginalized by the mainstreams, they were however suddenly perceived as “culture of others” (in France) or still too bourgeois (in China), - similarly, to an extent. The swelling Chinese pride is part of the new self-confidence, a sight of a balance that will calm the former strains and make culture and museums a proven tool of social coherence. The historic socialism and communism collapsed under the burden of political dogmatism and bureaucratic tyranny liberating the space of freedom but largely failed to pass on the hard learned lessons to the world in turmoil. Only China remained firm upon the project of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

But, fifty centuries of civilisation and twenty-two of continuous statehood, are inexhaustible, practically unfathomable collective experience. Had it not been for colonial era, and for this martyr history until fairly recent times, would China ever create public museums? “The modern museum concept has been imported from overseas”⁶ as is seemingly the case. Would it supposed, undisturbed continuity bring some other solutions, - a museum concept different from the western one? Possibly, but that specificity might occur in the next decade already.

They are coming into existence, “150 years later than those in Europe”⁷ while their vigour and ambition are due to “China-specific factors as the *historical debt* in museums in their early history”. This frustration and eagerness and “cultural demand by the people”⁸ pushed strongly the national policy. The recent statistics indicate that the number of museums rose from 2,970 in 2008 to 4,873 in 2016, with an average annual increase of 237 museums⁹. It seems that the ambitious goal set up by the state of creating a museum for every 250 000 inhabitants by 2020, will be realized by merely keeping the present growth rate, - a new

⁶ Song, Xinchao Dr., The Recent New Development of Chinese Museums, introduction address at the International Museum Management Workshop, Palace Museum, Beijing, June, 2015.

⁷ An, Laishun. "The Development and Innovation in Museums in China", Spotlight, The Best in Heritage conference, Dubrovnik, 28-30 September, 2017.

⁸ idem

⁹ idem

museum every day and a half in the last four years. China want to use its heritage for bonding with the world beyond its borders: Chinese Association of Museums has created in 2018 the International Museum Alliance “to enhance cross-border studies of Silk Road” with more than 100 members. But, with one million golf players in the country (2015) growing by 10% a year, China shows its willingness to be the part of the world.

For those in China who will be overwhelmed by these statistics and will tend to see investment in heritage institutions as a waste of resources, the very western experience should serve as corrective. Good museums pay off! They earn I various ways. In fact, China needs more museums than that, and they will happen by applying new strategies and viewing the mission of museums as more concerned for the quality development of tiny communities.

Cultures are, naturally, formed by influences and cross-fertilizing and China is very much part of the global community, so, all that happens will reflect the global chances and others’ experiences. The basic understanding of museum concept means that we use them as means to manage the change, maintain vital forces of own identity alive and assure continuity and survival of own identity, - of what makes us different from all others. In brief, China will be finding practical and conceptual answers suiting its own identity and its perception in the world.

Towards an open authority mode

Shaanxi Museum located in the ancient city of Xi’an (famous for the nearby archaeological site where the “Terra Cotta warriors” were buried) is one of the oldest museums in China (1919)¹⁰. The city is quite central to whatever China was or even is, so no wonder the museum disposes with more than 100,000 sq. meters of space and an enormous collection. It continues the powerful developmental momentum demonstrated firstly by Shanghai Museum and Sun yat-sen’s Former Residence Memorial in Guangdong. It innovated an open mode of governance by including community leaders and various experts (“social system of management “) on museum’s Advisory Board, to guide and direct the development programmes and assist strategic management in the museum. The lack of human resources, on the other hand, made museum turn to local universities which led to attractive upgrading of the usual internal programming. In such way museum was, besides outsourcing many routine jobs, entrusting even research, to external experts by providing the equivalent of staff

¹⁰ <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2014/Shanxi%20Museum>

remuneration while the museum leadership retains control of the quality of their contribution. By integrating the academic world, science and entertainment, more than one million visitors per year experience their elaborate and ambitious scheme of participative exhibitions.

Open authority is a strategic approach for participation, supposed to lead to a museum which is recognized as useful and amusing place. This happens only with innovative practices ,, which made unfamiliar archaeological finds and rigorous science much closer to public life¹¹.

So it is partly due to the museums' new attitude and partly to an increasingly eager public that Chinese museums now annually attract 900 million visits. Palace museum in Beijing has probably become the most visited museum of the world with 16,7 million visitors in 2017 (State Administration of Cultural Heritage). The re-discovery of China is a natural interest both for China and for the world. To happen, it has to be backed by efficient new institutions. Suzhou Museum, located in one of the oldest cities in China, is one of those which took lead in demonstrating that a friendly atmosphere in a museum can provide the perfect setting for the museum experience for contemporary audiences¹². Ieoh Ming Pei, (I.M. Pei) the world renowned Suzhou-born Chinese-American architect, designed a new exhibition hall for Suzhou Museum which opened to the public in October 2006. Two years after, as a proclaimed matter of national policy, and taking pride in being "a World Class Museum, among the best in China"¹³ the museum offered free access to the visitors, attracting over one million a year. When it was pronounced as "best creative museum in China" (2013) it was mainly for its pioneering role in developing volunteer services (400 in 2014). Their organisational structure, their training, ways of recruitment, elaborated responsibilities and level of engagement which reaches well outside museum's walls gained model status for other museums in China and even internationally. Volunteerism (although a new idea in China's museums) creates the atmosphere of citizens working for citizens, a traditional socialist ideal.

¹¹ Challenging the Stereotypes of Management, The Best in Heritage, conference publication, Zagreb, 2014.

¹² <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2014/Suzhou%20Museum>

¹³ The Museum Feasts Your Eyes, the Volunteer Touches Your Heart -The Growth of a Creative Volunteer Programme in Suzhou Museum, The Best in Heritage, conference publication, Zagreb, 2014.

Smart museum or thinking museums the ICT way

Under the guidance of the No-Boundary Museum concept, much affirmed by its director and meaning that the functional realization and cultural service of modern museums should break through the limitations of their physical space, and actively expand exhibitions, activities and resources into public spaces such as cities and communities in a physical or digital sphere”¹⁴. This approach is promoted by the Chinese Museums Association in their strategy of modernisation and rapid development of the sector. Guangdong Museum was established in 1959, but in 2003 People’s Government of Guangdong Province, decided to relocate the museum and make it an important part of a new cultural centre of this South province. The new sumptuous and iconic building (2010), by elaborate design of an international team of architects an evocation of a treasure lacquer box, makes one of the four cultural landmarks for the new financial hub in Zhujiang Xincheng (Pearl River New Town) of Guangzhou province. It is a comprehensive museum (history, culture, nature, arts), with more than 40 000 sq.m. out of which half is exhibition space. Museum team has dedicated itself since 2014 to smart museum construction, museum-community integration planning and creative industry projects (...) promoted integrated innovation in methods, technologies and organization”¹⁵ The concept of smart museum was inspired by Smarter Planet and Smarter Cities strategic thinking and respective sites as proposed by IBM company, but actually makes a good example of application of smart cities movement into both, museum planning and programing.

Their smart museum project focuses on setting up multi-dimensional exchanges among museum collection, information and the public. The road to smart museums based on big data, the internet of things, and cloud computing should include three dimensions, such as smart management, smart conservation and smart services. Such "smart" museums are significantly different in nature from "digital" museums, which started to be popular toward the end of last century. „In order to implement smart museum projects, (they) have systematically designed programs in terms of development philosophy, construction pattern, main content, technical route and time schedule“¹⁶. When they claim that “museums matter only to the extent that they are perceived to provide communities they serve with something of value beyond their

¹⁴ Dr. Wei Jun has proposed it for the first time at US-China Museum Summit, New York, 2016

¹⁵ Direction of Museum Innovation - Examples from Guangdong Museum. The Best in Heritage, conference publication, Zagreb, 2017

¹⁶ <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2017/guangdong-museum>

mere existence“¹⁷, one may understand it as an overstatement, but the 4.5 million visitors a year to the museum and its touring part sound like a convincing argument. The system comprises all functions of museums and its urban context, from conservation information management, micro and macro environment monitoring, to the smart service, comprising new media, multi-media, service systems, literally from transport of visitors to their enhanced communication with museum contents, - be it collections or current programs in terms of sharing collection data, or roaming exhibition panorama and visiting digital interactive spaces. Museum has expanded its physical and its virtual space in its strive to clear the sharp boundaries between the institution and its users. Its exhibitions and educational outreach programs include important public spaces such as metro stations, airports, parks, city squares, as well as residential areas, schools, hospitals, shopping centres etc. Moreover, Guangdong Touring Museums platform is created to reach outside the cities, to the remote islands, villages and military camps, - otherwise deprived of rich cultural offer.

When technology is taken less as mere technique and more as a new of the mind-set, a new liberty of innovation, the change is apt to spread into society bringing new quality of living. This seems to be happening at least in Chinese museums. The Palace Museum in Beijing is immense, symbolically central institution to Chinese identity so when innovation happens there it reveals well the heritage sector's mode and commitment. For a giant to be a versatile and innovative reveals the strategy: it has recently (2017) established „Creative laboratory“ in cooperation with the technological Internet giant „Tencent“ to explore digital technologies for protecting, researching and displaying cultural relics to work with curators in artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing and other areas, in a bid to provide smart solutions and technological supports for preserving national heritage for instance by providing an immersive experience for visitors. They can, for example, take a selfie and see how it would look dressed in Qing-dynasty costumes on an LED screen or see pictures coming to life in animations by making photo of the fan object or picture with their cell phone. Already in 2016 Tencent's creativity competition, Next Idea, encouraged young contestants to make use of the intellectual properties of Palace Museum to create emoticons, games and comic strips. In September last year Tencent launched a mobile augmented reality "Museum Officer", but spread it to other 100 museums helping users navigate the museums. The Palace Museum is

¹⁷ Idem.

working hard to „distribute“ its museum extensively and technology is only one avenue of this fruitful development.

Creating Cultural Destinations with Visitor Appeal

That „social progress and development always rely on reform and innovation“ is almost an official mantra in China, so innovation has been embraced as a national strategy and its importance is very often reinforced from the highest positions in state¹⁸. Hence the annual Chinese Museum Association - Most Innovative Museums Award. For the year 2014, the winner was the huge complex of Nanjing Museum¹⁹ with six main galleries and temporary exhibition gallery with ten exhibition halls including one on intangible heritage, that has re-opened in 2013. It claims to be more than a mere museum, but much wider, a leisure place for outing and fun, offering art and learning as enhanced experience. To that goal much is offered in the form of exhibitions, ambiances, events and festivals. The museum has taken a step towards the entertaining role of heritage by providing a live experience of Nanjing’s past of the 1930s in its “Republican Gallery”. Authentic period items have been quite successfully incorporated into dioramas, whereas cafes, bookstores and a theatre are places of real consumption of cultural offerings. “Authentic items are incorporated in the set scenes, memories brought into reality, so that the exhibition turns into a participative experience. Visitors can walk into a retro coffee house and have a real cup of coffee, walk into a variety shop and buy some rouge, or walk into a bookstore and scan old books for a while“²⁰. The Digital Gallery, highly interactive, offers stepping into the period ambiances; as elsewhere in the museum, here too the profession is tested in how far towards the visitors’ wants they need to go. There are many electronic devices which help visitors learn more about the details of the objects. By opening a window on the wall one sees the ancient traders peddling goods in the town. In fact, it is a part of an old painting aiming to capture the daily life of ordinary people. A puzzle teaches about the interior structure of an ancient vessel, or even engage in a video game killing the enemy in the wars of the past and passing on own comments and photos by using a QR code. As everywhere in the world the sophisticated technique is latently in position to blur the concept or the curatorial intention. The numerous festivals are an

¹⁸ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/19th-party-congress-xi-jinping-calls-for-turning-china-into-nation-of-innovators> (site visited in July, 2018)

¹⁹ <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2015/Nanjing-Museum>

²⁰ Nanjing Museum: A Palace of Culture and Space of Leisure, The Best in Heritage, conference publication, Zagreb, 2015.

excellent occasion for direct visitor's experience and the museum daringly engages to serve the public, shopping and dining included. Being the first large national comprehensive museum in China, housed in two palaces simulating Liao Dynasty architecture, in a martyr city known by massacre of winter 1937-38, Nanjing Museum exercises great influence on public as well as on other institutions.

Chinese museums have appreciated the importance of creating museum clusters in order to accommodate the large population and to create a travel-worthy destination. The extraordinary long history of the country, its cultural spirit, its size and the imperial tradition favour grand schemes. To this came the economic and political model which produced about as many billionaires as there are in the USA, and that contributed to the world's unprecedented rise of private museums.

One of the great private museum collectors and museum owners is Fan Jianchuan, director of Jianchuan Museum Cluster. His Jianchuan Museum, in Chengdu, said to be the largest private museum cluster in the world received professional recognition by being awarded in 2015 by Chinese Museums Association as the "China's most innovative museum. The owner's motto for his museum project is "collect war for peace, collect lessons for the future, collect disasters for safety and collect folklore for inheritance"²¹. Jianchuan Museum, in Chengdu, a greatest private museum cluster in the world received professional recognition²² which is a benevolence extended and a risk taken. At least five of its thirty museums within the complex are politically delicate to be left to an individual initiative. And yet it happened. It consists of thirty individual museums spread across 80 acres of land with a gross building area of over 100 000 sq. metres. Its collection of more than 8 million artefacts made possible exhaustive coverage of the museum's major four themes: Anti-Japanese War (1937 – 1945), the 'Red Age'... There is a museum of Cultural Revolution 1966 – 1976), the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, and Folklore and Culture.²³ At least five of its thirty museums in the complex are about politically sensitive subjects like war and peace and natural disasters, but the liberty of interpretation seems to be to a great extent left to the owner's judgement in spite of apparent differences to what is perceived as official political stance. His Museum of Front Battlefield leaves no battle, happening, protagonist or political side, unmentioned (22 important Kuomintang battles, Museum of Flying Tigers commemorating alliance with USA, captives,

²¹ Most Innovative Museums Award 2015

²² Chinese Museums Association Most Innovative Museums Award 2015

²³ Jianchuan Museum Cluster: China's Largest Private Museum Project, The Best in Heritage, conference publication, Zagreb, 2016

civilian suffering etc.). Some monuments and squares dedicated to these memories are untypical, singular conceptual and artistic solutions. This liberty extends further as the owner exercised unconventional understanding of the museum concept by regarding his museum complex as new realm of cultural industry adding various commercial properties, such as hotels, teahouses and antique shops.

It was a concerted effort, as in 2009 Chengdu's government invested \$ 820 million in making the small city of Anren near Chengdu (Dayi County, Sichuan Province), a heritage tourism destination a push that, with the major private museum created a well-functioning attractive offer²⁴. The very same year China's Association of Museums and the National Heritage Board granted the city the title of „Museum Town of China “.

Thus the aim of museum was from beginning not only to serve the purposes of exhibition, research and education but very purposefully those of tourism too. Is the development of mixed use cultural destinations a commodification of cultural experience? Will the merging of the Ministry of Culture and National Tourism Administration into a Ministry of Culture and Tourism as it has happened (April 8, 2018)²⁵ further commodify culture or does it democratize it both for national and international visitors? . It is certainly an interesting perspective for entire public memory sector that was historically regarded as strictly non-profit and entirely public by its implied mission. The move is aimed at coordinating the development of cultural and tourism industries, enhancing the country's soft power and cultural influence, and promoting cultural exchanges internationally²⁶. Will it leave operational decisions to museums (as it should!) and to what extent, remains to be seen.

²⁴ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1083347.shtml> (July, 2018)

²⁵ <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201804/08/WS5ac98f72a3105cdef6516b09.html> (July, 2018)

²⁶ http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/13/c_137035525.htm (14.03.2018)

China passes the phases of verification of own understanding of museum concept, of media misconceptions, of authenticity and originality of objects, and is simultaneously experiencing the conspicuous temptations of the neoliberal commoditization. It seems that China will bravely explore culture not only as value but an asset too, a process delicate and dire in many ways. Taking crowd as the preferred measure of success is a mishap that explains many failures of the modern times. Engineering public consent and staging elections is one of the favourite skills of malign managerial elites. False as they are, they're taking over one sector after the other, eliminating the professionals in charge from the decision making positions. Namely, public sector, fixed upon the humanist mission, and un-ballasted by (financial) profit-making is trying to fulfil the needs of the population whereas, heritage industry, for instance, is selling what the market asks for, following the wants (themselves often artificially created to maximize the profit).

Power of great temporary exhibitions

It is often the case that a single institution in China comprises several institutions forming extensive heritage agglomerates. Fujian Museum in Fuzhou is one of those that offer all from art and nature to underwater archaeology. The museum is noted for the grand project and the exhibition “Splendour of the Maritime Silk Road“ that toured both China and the world. Exhibitions and museum refurbishments, specially the big ones, often reflect the political spectrum and changes in geopolitics²⁷. Such compatibility of state politics and cultural policies, is rather specific for China²⁸. The mentioned exhibition was an occasion to set up new technological standards, both conservationist and communicational as well as those of contextualizing events around the exhibition. The momentum created by the exhibition, turned it into a long term research project. 20,000 temporary exhibitions a year, even in a big country as China is an impressive number that implies achievement and importance.

Big museums turn very productive in making exhibitions as this is how they demonstrate their energy and engagement. A good example is also Changzhou Museum that was created as historical museum but also became a comprehensive one spanning from art to archaeology and natural history. In 2016 it was awarded²⁹ for its display as the most innovative museum.

²⁷ <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/podcast/bruce-nauman-at-moma-plus-the-british-museum-s-new-islamic-galleries> (Oct. 26 2018)

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/14/china-xi-silk-road-vision-belt-and-road-claims-empire-building>

²⁹ <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2017/changzhou-museum>

With 20 temporary exhibitions a year, many set to travel, Changzhou museum presents well the dynamism of present Chinese museums.

From public participation to social project

Ningbo Museum is an excellent museum in an astonishing, innovative building. It was built from debris of traditional Chinese buildings, by Chinese architect Wang Shu who is the first Chinese architect living in China to be awarded the Pritzker Prize for architecture, notably for this building. The museum has been rightfully praised and recognized as one of the few museums of top national importance by the Chinese Museums Association and awarded in 2014 for innovative approach to the public³⁰. It is a very prestigious and ambitious museum project, imaginable and logical in one of the fastest growing city agglomerations in China with one of the busiest ports in the world. Its financing structure demonstrates these circumstances: 60% of the operational fund is provided by Ningbo municipal government, 20% comes from local district government, while central government provides about 10%. Only the rest is raised by Ningbo Museum itself, but museum returns the confidence by very dynamic and innovative programme (much concentrated upon exhibitions), professional performance and keenly observed feedback.

To define its role even while being built, the museum changed names of its strategies: “Grand Resource” focused on the integration in the use of social resource on national and international scale, “Citizen’s Museum” focused on making Ningbo Museum into a service-oriented place for citizens and then in 2012 the new tagline “Common People’s Museum” only to replace it with “Citizen’s Museum”, and then within a year again by “Museum: People’s life style”, - a strategy for which museum was granted the award. Since 2012 the museum was transforming from “supplying museum” to a “demand driven museum”, by creating special exhibitions on the vote from public. This is done by questioners as a proactive survey, assisted by hundreds of volunteers, on the spot and on-line, like “Special Exhibition on your vote” so that ever since half of exhibitions are decided this way making it quite a demand-driven museum. There are some 800 registered volunteers plus some 1300 student volunteers in a museum providing service in various sectors. By profiling the language and providing contextual interpretive material and accompanying events the

³⁰ <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2015/Ningbo-Museum>

museum makes sure to bring otherwise aloof scientific contents close to the public, while the collected feedback made improvements logical. Besides being free access, to make their commitment more obvious museum applied directly the experiences of tourist industry. Museum offers itself as a promenade within the building and the garden, as simple outing with a coffee and free Wi-Fi, while more than two thousand registered volunteers care for a friendly atmosphere.

This abundance of volunteers' assistance is frequent in big Chinese museums. Another, also awarded project, Hunan provincial museum³¹, disposes with practically same help and uses volunteers also as a guarantee of certain perfection in museum's serving the public. This success with the public has turned inwardly to beneficially influence the internal organisation. It has further motivated workers towards "quality service", and they claim this was the decisive reason for museum to have received the Chinese Museums Association award (2012) becoming the example of best management. Interactivity, especially in workshops and events is everywhere similar but here the quantity of occasions and participants, special concerning intangible heritage is well matched with quality experiences. Massive outreach programs are natural proactive continuation of this mentality that strives towards "social harmony" by "providing professional service to those visitors who have turned from *watching the fun* to *appreciating culture*".

Many museums demonstrate their educational zest by an activist attitude in caring for the intangible heritage. In Changzhou Museum it is guarded and continued by organising all sorts of workshops and encounters but summer camps, and various outreach programmes out of which Tangible Museum attracted national award³². Museum became a moderator of encounters between experts, private collectors, artist groups and members of the public, a real place of happening.

The surge of private museums

The world is changing and museums change with it. Public acquisition of private collections or even more often their donating to museums was the cultural practice of the former times. With neoliberal change in societal guiding values, establishing own, private museum has

³¹ https://issuu.com/tbih/docs/zbornik_tbh_2013_web

³² Characteristic Activities Award for National Science Day in 2015.

become an increasingly frequent practice. Public, official museums lost their aura of unattainable flair; it became obvious that anybody is entitled to create a museum. The rich individuals and corporations became so powerful that they preferred to enjoy entire prestige of creating museums for themselves. Architect and designers were at hand. As curators did not turn into a full fledged profession, many others claimed their expertise, not necessarily understanding the very nature of their mission. The good side of that development is a new proliferation of museums. To the steep increase of private museums China joined in most productive way. In 2015 there were twice as many private museums as only a decade before: 982 (21% of total number of museums) founded by corporations, private persons, universities etc.³³ In the eight years (2008-2016) the number increased from 319 to 1,297³⁴. Such a rapid increase of private museums is an interesting phenomenon not only culturally but also politically. So far, the liberty and assistance granted to their owners is quite impressive. has extraordinary significance. The message is powerful as well as was the decade of growth of his agglomeration of museums, encouraging many to do create ventures.

The state and the professional association is rightfully concerned with the reality and future of private museums. The chances are that most of them will follow high standards of the profession and public expectations and thus increasingly be part of the system of public memory institutions. The fact of ownership will probably become irrelevant everywhere provided the quality of public commitment.

Acculturation as cultural colonisation

John Adams American president and statesman was saying that a nation can be enslaved by sword or by debt. The early wisdom can be upgraded by adding: ...and by acculturation, by a turning one's culture into somebody else's... This is the permanent problem of globalisation in which great cultural models replace smaller and weaker, - a process parallel to a certain internationalisation and uniformisation of cultures in general. On a managed Planet, we like the idea of "industrialisation" of all values so that they are privatized as any other assets. Any culture is set of values, a set of criteria that condition our ways of thinking and our mindset. Losing soul of this integrity imperceptibly subdues such cultures to further political and

³³ Same as note 5

³⁴ Same as note 6

economic consequences. The spread of English language as a lingua franca of the world is a practical and welcome consequence of globalisation and so is the increasing interplay of cultures being exposed to each other like never before. But withdrawal and progressive disappearance of local cultures and spiritual practices is a sort of demotion, degradation of the richness of differences. Museum institutions, and all other institutions that manage the process of memorialisation, of, in fact, transfer of collective experience, - have to play the decisive part.

We shall always have to have scientists, professions and institutions that will take up the task of interpreting the world and manage the dynamic, critical assessment of the value systems that we live. Any identity is a value system subject to changes, but to maintain continuity and assure the survival of its vital forces we need those in charge, those who understand what is the societal mission of public memory institutions.

Developing museum concept to a heritage strategy

Public memory institutions, museums included, are basically about the noble transfer of the socially formed, collective experience. About two centuries ago the West responded to this societal need the way it was possible at the time, - by its rationalist myth of scientific knowledge. Museums were created as the houses where evidence of the victorious civilization (and culture) were collected, researched, cared for and communicated. By the end of 19. century it was clear that their task would be divulgation of knowledge, while sixties determined that their final task is education. Seventies made it more precise, - education for development, both of society and economy. Now we seem to go even a step further noticing how desperately we need wisdom to assure survival. Instead of knowledge society, we need the wisdom society, - the responsible, ethically founded knowledge to make responsible choices and wise decisions in the managed society.

China will appropriate if not the same than certainly similar approach. With a very vigorous state politics and the push it created for the heritage, China has made this remarkable progress in museums. The state created programmes aiming to produce strategic goals. The purposeful investments, like the one of half a billion of Euros a year made free entrance possible and it contributed to popularity of museums. Chinese take the practice of free access to museums the outer sign of dedication to the public cause. Like national museums in Great Britain and

rightly so. In Hunan provincial museum³⁵ one can find probably rarely ever exceeded elaborate strategy for caring for visitors before the visit, while they are queuing and during the visit. Literally anything is calibrated to their care and specificity. Assiduity and attachment to this commitment is noticeable. It is like making access to museums free opened the avalanche of beneficial consequences, forming “a new type of cultural ecology” as they claim in Hunan Provincial museum.

But, to be accessible one needs to enlarge, maintain and modernize the offer. One example is digitization. Relatively modest investment of the state led to a five years’ programme of producing massive inventory of moveable heritage for all China, partly digitized and mostly ready to be used in future. To make it possible, the number of trained heritage professionals had to grow five times and it did.

The awarded museums accounted in this text are the witness of the certain fascination with innovation. Needless to say, most people prefer the innovation that can be bought like a device (machines, equipment) or technology or acquired as certain managerial knowledge. But, to use one example, knowing the best techniques of marketing will not help much anybody who cannot define museum product or understand what makes its quality. Most Chinese museums have mastered that museographical level. We also like innovation that can be trained (managerial techniques; formal knowledge), but, we like less the innovation that requires education, possible change of attitudes, new understanding, different sensitivity, change of mind-set, different worldview. Can museum curators answer what is the wisdom needed to run a society?

The Future of Public Memory in China

Such a profession could probably teach all employees of museums that public memory institutions are agents of selection care and communication of value systems: they are not about past but about present, a true value systems management profession in making. It could teach them that except for prestige circumstances, when architecture needs to be an attraction, the excellence of museum institutions lies in their effectiveness in serving the true interests of their community.

³⁵ <http://presentations.thebestinheritage.com/2013/Hunan%20Provincial%20Museum>

That is why we need to have museums, preferably, as we shall mention later again, as the part of an elaborated public memory network. But, in brief, Chinese museums too, have realised that they are the first and last line of defence of endangered living variety, of the richness of the specificity, - be it nature or culture. At first sight, it is about nationalist temptation disguised into scientific ambition for guarding endangered identity. In fact, it is about civilizational mission to keep the richness alive to sustain the quality of human condition and assure the survival of values that constitute our uniqueness.

The problem can of course be derailed from this seemingly societal agenda, in two ways. One is, so to say, the conventional museum history, - by insisting that museums remain showcase of the scientific research and trophies of excellence and importance, isolated from the problems of social or economic development. The other way would be by sliding them into heritage industry which, in a neo-liberal justification has to serve the public wants (and in turn), - the satisfied public would directly support them upon receiving their service.

However, in China too, the future will depend upon the answer to the question: Are museums to remain (and become more of) a public service or cultural industry? One can ask the same about the public health and deal equally with dilemma. Though with occasional temptations, with freely accessible museums, opened to all, China seems to have decided to pursue the societal project that involves centralised strategy and strong state support. If versatile and wise, it can be right solution in a specific Chinese formula of welfare state. Continuing strong central, regional and local government support as well as private sector museums have led to free admission and the growth of public participation and attendance. The Chinese model socialism was capable, unlike with other countries, of providing the country with a successful, self-contained transition embracing the potentials of two economic mind-sets at the same time. That well may be the sign of the ability to retain what is proven good in the western heritage practices and yet add to it qualities that derive from their own long cultural experience.

Therefore, China has to turn to the very heart of its identity to understand that public memory institutions are about processing knowledge into usable daily wisdom. The usable theory of public memory sector should be equally able to sustain the sandstorm as well as the tropical rain³⁶ and suggest universal and yet specific solutions. The Daoist understanding of human

³⁶ Šola, Tomislav. Role of museums in developing countries. Varanasi: Bharat Kala Bhavan Hindu University, 1989. pp. 24

condition and the noble Confucianist social reciprocity, energized by the latest ICT, are able to produce strategic innovations for China. We may soon see the turn from quantity and size, from iconic buildings conceived by the most famous world architects and from attractions, - to fine elaboration of the network of tiny units of a network. A public memory network consisting of thousands of micro-museums may become the beating heart of new democratic society where public memory institutions will be central to all fashions of literacy for peace and democracy in a society of equal chances and harmonious development. Will the future of Chinese museums be a network of community-based museums of individual and collective memory or will the future be commodified memory organized into commercial cultural destinations? Or will it be a balance of both, maybe something new altogether that awakening zest for national culture may bring about? After four decades, museums contributed largely to the development and newly awaken people's self-confidence.