MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

UNDERSTANDING THE BUILDING BOOM

A NEW BOOK BY THE CHINESE MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION AND LORD CULTURAL RESOURCES

PREVIEW BROCHURE
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ABOUT LORD CULTURAL RESOURCES

Founded in 1981 in response to an emerging need for specialized planning services in the museum, cultural and heritage sector, Lord Cultural Resources is now the world’s largest cultural professional practice with the successful completion of more than 2,400 projects in over 57 countries on 6 continents. The firm has earned an international reputation for sector leadership, innovation and excellence.

We are dedicated to the creation of cultural capital worldwide, the value created as a result of the maximization of cultural resources. Our mission is to collaborate with people and organizations to plan and manage cultural places, programs and resources that deliver excellence in the service of society. We distinguish ourselves through a comprehensive and integrated full-service offering built on a foundation of visioning, planning and implementation.

We help clients clarify their goals; we provide them with the tools to achieve those goals; and we leave a legacy as a result of training and collaboration. Our clients are in all sectors including private and public corporations, foundations, governments and non-profit institutions.

With a network of offices in Toronto, New York, London, Mumbai and Beijing, we conduct ourselves with respect for local adaptation, cultural diversity and collaboration, embodying the highest standards of integrity, ethics and professional practice.

ABOUT THE CHINESE MUSEUM ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1935, the Chinese Museum Association (CMA) is a nationwide non-profit alliance. Its membership includes museum professionals as well as museum-related organizations and individuals. In 1983, CMA resumed its membership in ICOM and established ICOM-China.

Supervised by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, the CMA closely follows museum codes and ethical standards, to unify these values and collaborate with museums, and museum-related organizations and individuals on a nation-wide basis. It acts as a guide, monitor, coordinator and legal advocate of museum industry. CMA has been involved in the work of organizing academic activities, publishing academic journals, undertaking national research projects, conducting international communications, building platforms for inter-museum cooperation, providing services to its members and encouraging its members to develop the capacity for self-improvement. Its achievements throughout the years have greatly contributed to the improvement of Chinese museums management and academic research, contributing to the vigor and prosperity of Chinese culture.

Understanding the Museum Boom

By: An Laishun,
Vice President of the International Council of Museums

As lively places throbbing with life, today’s museums stand in sharp contrast to the desolate, dark and dusty institutions of 30 years ago. Part of this change has of course been driven by the visitor. The viewing public, who 30 years ago had few opportunities to even travel to different cities within their own province, now travel all over China and around the world and their tastes have changed accordingly.

Along with China’s increasing economic power, comes a new demand for diverse cultural products. It’s a story which very much reflects the stories of other countries as they transitioned into developed economies. But what’s unique about China’s situation is that while, Western governments are beginning to retreat from their role as cultural investors, the Chinese government has increased its investment in cultural heritage from 3.76 billion RMB in 2006 to 25.85 billion RMB in 2013—a six-fold increase. China’s museum boom has also seen other important drivers, such as the basic need for capacity building. While in the Reform Era, the government had previously measured its progress based on pure economic growth, it began to seek a balance between the economy and regional and cultural indicators—highlighting a new understanding of the subtle relationship between GDP and the value of soft power.

Chinese museums have also made great strides in terms of outreach with the full implementation of the free admissions policy. The policy was supported by government subsidies of 15 billion RMB (2.2 billion USD) per year over five years. In response to this stimulus we have seen the audience of each museum grow by over 50% attracting migrant laborers, urban low-income workers and other groups who previously experienced barriers to entry.

Chinese museums are also trying to extend their reach in a virtual sense with a recent push towards digitalization. The First National Survey of Movable Cultural Heritage was conducted from 2012 to 2017—a mammoth task whereby over 64 million collection items were either filed or re-filed digitally—to pave the way for the future sharing of this information with the public.

Perhaps some of the most interesting changes have emerged from the the management of the public and private sector. Private museums, which were previously left to more-or-less fend for themselves, have seen their fortunes improve due to a change in government attitudes since 2010. This involved new regulations and policies to encourage, support, guide and regulate the development of private museums towards healthy and sustainable growth. Therefore, through both the public and private sector engagement, we can look forward to continued evolution and transformation of this robust and dynamic industry.

—An Laishun,
Vice President Chinese Museums Association
Overview of the Book

By the editors: Gail Lord, Javier Jimenez and Rebecca Catching

Some Chinese scholars trace the origin of museums in China to 478 BCE—the year after the death of Confucius. Since then, we have seen unprecedented growth in both the number and scale of Chinese museums, from about 1,400 at the turn of the century to over 5,000 to date.

This book seeks to explore the motivations behind the rapid development of museums in China. It also aims to answer the questions such as “How is the public responding?” “Who pays for these museums and how?” “How has China’s rapid urbanization affected this trend?” “How do Chinese museums balance education, scientific research, social cohesion, cultural diplomacy, and tourism both internal and external?”

In the course of exploring these issues, we also aim to introduce readers to the rich diversity museological practice in China through a variety of case studies and a rich array of photographs. We have engaged leading Chinese museologists and academics to provide chapters exploring the history of museums in China, evolving national museum policies, museum exhibitions and cultural diplomacy, the role of private museums, and the impact of museums on society. We also reached out to knowledgeable Western contributors from such diverse fields as architecture, urban planning, and contemporary art, to contribute essays on Chinese in place-making, the creative economy, systems of governance, and the complex relationships between private and public sectors and the many levels of government.

The book is structured in four sections.

Section One places the current building boom in context. Dr. An Laishun provides an overview of the development of Chinese museology. Javier Jimenez and Gail Lord identify two comparable museum building booms in the global North and West and propose some causes—urbanization in particular—that are also in contributing to the boom in China today. Professors Song Xiangguang and Duan Yong provide histories of Chinese museums while Sofia Bollo and Yu Zhang share their experience of the evolution of Chinese museum policy and practice.

Section Two addresses how China’s rapid urbanization has stimulated the museum building boom, framed it, formed it and in some cases financed it. Doug Saunders who is an expert on urbanization and migration writes about the particular ways that Chinese cities grow and how real estate development impacts new museums throughout the country; while urban planner Phil Enquist shares his experience working with new Chinese cities and helping them develop a sense of place. He Jingtang explains why symbolic architecture has become the hallmark of China’s newest museums and two case studies illuminate the role of private developers (the Today Art Museum) and the genius loci of the Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum.

Section Three analyzes how Chinese exhibitions are tools for cultural diplomacy (Zhou Ming) and key elements of soft power (An Laishun). Chinese-Canadian curator Chen Shen contributes a memoir on international exhibition exchange. Tomislav Sola sees a new form of internationalism emerging through China’s global cultural activities. Tian Kai explains how opening up to more international influences has profoundly changed the philosophy of Chinese museums and Tim Reeve has written an insightful case study on the V&A partnership in Shenzhen.

The five case studies in Section Four provide insights into the impact of a British Museum blockbuster on Chinese museums, exploring how China’s museums are harnessing technology, what it means to be visitor-centered at the Palace Museum, and in Suzhou the expansion of merchandising. We have titled this section Challenges and Opportunities because it explores the range of both, including how private museums create bridges to contemporary art (by our co-editor Rebecca Catching), the enduring popularity of natural history museums (Jian Guan) and the dichotomy between relic preservation and public access (Han Yong).

This book is an international collaboration which aims to discover how much East and West can learn from each other about museum roles, our publics, how we preserve what we preserve and future sustainability—even as we marvel at the amazing accomplishments of China’s museum building boom.

—Gail Lord, Co-founder and President of Lord Cultural Resources
—Javier Jimenez, Director of Organization and Strategy Operations
—Rebecca Catching, Museum Planning Consultant
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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION
Preface
Guang Qiang

Introduction
Gail Lord
Javier Jimenez

SECTION 1 - CHINA'S MUSEUM BOOM IN CONTEXT
1.1 Transforming China's Museums
An Laishun

1.2 Museum Booms in a Global Context
Gail Lord and Javier Jimenez

1.3 A Brief history of Chinese Museums to 1949
Duan Yong

1.4 A Brief History of Chinese Museums 1949-1995
Song Xiangguang

1.5 The Musealization of China
Sofia Bollo and Yu Zhang

1.6 The Dichotomy of Precious Objects and Public Service in the Structures of Public Funding
Han Yong

SECTION 2 - MUSEUM BUILDINGS IN THE NEW URBAN CULTURE
2.1 How Chinese Cities Stimulate the Museum Boom
Doug Saunders

2.2 Case Study: Today Art Museum: Born of Real Estate
Gao Peng

2.3 The Role of Culture in Planning China's Cities
Phil Enquist

2.4 Character Building in Museum Architecture
He Jingtang

2.5 Case Study: Jingdezhen Imperial Kiln Museum: Adapting Architecture to the Needs of Heritage
Zhu Pei

SECTION 3 - OPENING UP TO THE WORLD
3.1 Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power
An Laishun

3.2 Exhibitions as Tools of Diplomacy
Zhou Ming

3.3 Navigating Cross-cultural Collaborations: A Memoir of Cultural Exchange between China and Canada
Chen Shen

3.4 Museums and Public Engagement: Changing Concepts and Strategies
Tomislav Sola

3.5 The Changing Ideology of Museums: From Hermetic and Inward-looking to Outward-reaching and International
Tian Kai

3.6 Case Study: The V&A Partnership with the Design Society in Shenzhen
Tim Reeve

SECTION 4 - INNOVATION AND RISK-TAKING
4.1 Case Study: Shanghai Museum: “A History of the World in 100 Objects”—Growing the Capacity for Institutional Change
Yang Zhigang

4.2 Case Study: Guangdong Museum: The Dawn of the Smart Museum
Wei Jun

4.3 Case Study: Palace Museum: Museum Fever—Keeping Up With Public Demand for New Experiences
Shan Jixian

4.4 Private Museums — Building Bridges to Contemporary Art
Rebecca Catching

4.5 Underappreciated, Yet Wildly Popular — The Development and Evolution of Natural History Museums over the Last Four Decades
Jian Guan

4.6 Case Study: Suzhou Museum: Harnessing the Power of People, Products and Place
Chen Ruijing

4.7 Case Study: Guanfu Museum: Entering Through the Gift Shop: Creating Products Which Speak to for the Museum and to the Visitor
Pei Deqiang

CONCLUSION
Towards a Sustainable Future
Gail Lord, Javier Jimenez and Rebecca Catching
Terra Cotta Warriors at the Romanian Museum of National History

Keeping up with the Latest Trends in Museology

Lord Publications are available through booksellers and our website. These include our manuals on various aspects of cultural planning and management, and our Lord museum books for young people.

Publications:

Published by Rowman and Littlefield, rowman.com:

- The Manual of Strategic Planning for Cultural Organizations, 2017
- Artists, Patrons, and the Public: Why Culture Changes, 2010

Published by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

- Cities, Museums and Soft Power, 2015
- Art & Energy: How Culture Changes, 2014
Museum Development in China is published by Rowman and Littlefield and will be available at select bookstores and online in Spring 2019. For more information please contact glord@lord.ca