

History and museum essay sample

[Countries](#), [China](#)



Museum is a place of presenting and preserving history of a country or a place with educational implication. Museums, as stated by Brown and Davis-Brown (1998, p. 19), “ help to preserve a collective national memory and thence to constitute a collective national identity”. The way of displaying war photos and different exhibits may have functions of raising national identity and present multiculturalism to audience. This essay will be discussed about how nationalization and multiculturalism presents through history in China’s museum from examine several museums in China. China as a communism country usually takes various measure to remain the stability of the country to emphasis the identity of People’s Republic of Chinese other than ethnical identity.

“ The museums should promote scientific knowledge and the nation’s long history while resisting the decadence of feudalism and capitalism... All the museums should be more attractive to people and contribute to the development of community culture, the minister said. With more than 5, 000 years of history, China has developed a unique culture which has captured the interest of people from other countries. When facing much fiercer competition in the cultural field worldwide, museums should intensify efforts to popularize patriotism and socialism, Sun said. He also encouraged primary and high schools to bring their students to visit museums to improve education. ” As the news from Xinhua mentioned, Museums in contemporary China are officially defined as “ the bases of patriotic and socialism education” for educating the unique culture of China and “ resisting the decadence of feudalism and capitalism”.

National Museum of China is the significant case of spreading national identity and patriotic ideology by museum visit. National Museum of China set in Beijing city, the biggest official history museum in the capital of China. National Museum of China combined from Museum of the Chinese Revolution and National Museum of Chinese History at 2003 to make it the biggest history museum of China with over a million items. This big architecture becomes one of the landmarks of Beijing just right beside the Tiananmen Square. “ National museums served as icons of museums in mainland China and as a podium to disseminate the ideological and political discourse of the Communist Party of China (CCP).”(Lu 2014, p. 129) Promoted as a must-visit museum for Chinese, visitor of National Museum of China reached to five million in a year at 2012. This amount shows the power of museum and we can imagine how effective the National Museum of China educate and promote the ideology of national identity by the number of visitor.

Permanent exhibitions of National Museum of China like Ancient China and The Road of Rejuvenation are mainly focus on history information which consists with the mission of “ educate about the arts and history of China”. The Road of Rejuvenation exhibition transmitted from the Museum of Chinese Revolution separated into 5 parts, 17 sessions in total. This exhibition talks about the story from 17 century “ China as an abyss of semi-imperial and semi-feudal society” to the “ Road of socialism with Chinese characteristic” in the People’s Republic of China. First few sessions of the exhibition meant to emphasis particularly on the history of the Communist Party of China’s fight for the people’s liberation and independence of every ethnicity.

Various kinds of exhibits, for example, contemporary Chinese paintings of Chairman Mao and revolution, war pictures, historical documents embodied the meaning of glorious history of Communist Party of China and the revolutionary martyrs, the historical fact of invasion and failure of democracy to set off the success of socialism which lead China to a happy and prosper country.

There are also videos and other important exhibits such as the first national flag hoisted by Chairman Mao, the Olympic flame light of Beijing Olympic Game 2008 and the space are displayed to arouse the Chinese awareness and highlight the glory of country. “ The information contained in these exhibitions... is to consolidate people’s national identity to the new state. By comparatively displaying the ‘ revolutionary events’ ranging from the Opium Wars in the nineteenth century to the Civil War in the 1940s and illustrating that all revolutions were failures except the revolution art campaign led by the Communist Party of China (CCP) in the 1940s, with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the ‘ Chinese people’s victory in the last 100 years’. The newly founded PRC was portrayed as the best nation-state for the people. Thus a loyalty to this new state is built and/or enhanced.” (Lu 2014, p. 132) As Tracey Lu mentioned, those historical information are actually disseminating the message to all visitors in mainland China and overseas concerning the victories and achievements of the Communist Party of China through museum. National Museum of China in this case obviously taking the role of spreading national identity and education

China is a multi-ethnic country which has 56 ethnic groups in total. Han is the biggest ethnic group in China. There are still numbers of ethnic minorities like Tibetan who has conflicts with Chinese government and other minorities. Multicultural education plays an important role in this circumstance. “ Multiculturalism relates to communities containing multiple cultures. It refers to ideologies or policies that promote this diversity or its institutionalization ... various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group they belong to.” Multiculturalism is important and complicated in multi-ethnic countries, especially the socialist China.

It is a big issue to emphasis national identity of Chinese in general and balances the ethnic cultural identity in the same time. National Museum of China didn't mention about the development and culture of ethnic groups. However, the multi culture message is actually hidden in the content of the exhibitions. Ancient China covered the Chinese history from the Yuanmou Man to the Qing Dynasty has a permanent collection of over two thousands exhibits which provided a complete picture of the long Chinese history.

From the prehistoric times to the last imperial dynasty, the exhibition meant to display a picture of abundant culture and continuous evolution of Chinese civilization to voice out the message of this prosperous country. The introduction of the Ancient China exhibition mentioned: “ It also demonstrates the historical process of building a multi-ethnic country by Chinese people from different ethnic groups, their splendid

political, economic, and cultural achievements, and their contributions to human civilization.” Although the ethnic issues seems ignored in the National museum of China, the ethnical awareness still reveal in the words. The message of spreading China as a country of diligence, wisdom, and peace, has made contributions to the progress of human civilization, that China has been a multi ethnic country embraced different culture by the sumptuous process of civilization in thousands of years. Besides, in China, multicultural education was conducted by establishing different types of museums which there are 2300 ethnology museums in local scale. Although most of them are still developing their own collection, over half of the minority groups have museums representing their own ethnic group, some of them even in provincial level.

One of the political strategies of multicultural education in China is to exclude ethnology out from the history museum and make it a new category of museum in China to emphasis the importance of ethnology issue. Chinese National Museum of Ethnology establish from 1987 is the biggest ethnology museum in China. “ The museum will become the first cultural relic’s center in China which systematically demonstrates the diverse yet united historical origins of the Chinese nation, and therefore become the country’s most authoritative center for ethnic minority-oriented cultural relic’s collection, exhibition, study and protection. It will also become a research and exchange base for ethnologists and anthropologists, and offer training and consulting services in the field of ethnic minority study, with a powerful database of China’s ethnic minority cultural heritage. ”

As the only national Level museum of ethnology in China, their mission is to uphold the principle of equality for all ethnic groups, which was stipulated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese National Museum of Ethnology is still keep on building its own collection of costume, accessories and photos of different ethnic minorities for showing their characteristic and culture. They had exhibition on Traditional Culture of Li Minority in Hainan Province and Chinese National Festival Culture Exhibition to present and demonstrate the multiculturalism of China. “ The existence of minzu museums is therefore intended more as a display of government ideals than as an assortment of independent institutions promoting the value of multiculturalism and reinforcing minorities' identities.”(Kim 2011, p. 10)

Chinese National Museum of Ethnology as a unity role which connect region local ethnology museum together and do collaboration to promote equality to stabilize society. Since history Museum has its educational function of instilling ideology, ethnology museum as an official institution bringing symbolic image of multiculturalism education and narrative of minorities cultural history in shaping National identity and understanding. All in all, both National Museum of China and Chinese National Museum of Ethnology are well supported by the official government statement on the mission of Chinese museums “ to increase the nation's self-confidence and cohesive force, and contribute, by way of intellectual support, to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics” for education on national identity and multiculturalism to stabilized the country.

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