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Research on the Social Education Function of Modern History Museums

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Abstract

Modern history museums are valuable gene banks of red culture and are materialized carriers that evoke strong collective identity in aspects such as history, psychology, society, system, politics, and culture among all ethnic groups. Strengthening the social education function of modern history museums is conducive to enhancing the public's understanding of the ever-changing modern society, ideological agitation, technological innovation, and the human struggle process, as well as building consensus, providing resources for governance and education, and inspiring progress. By strengthening planning and design, enhancing the collection and utilization of cultural relics, improving the quality of exhibitions and displays, and enhancing the effectiveness of lectures and explanations, the social education function of modern history museums can be promoted.

Keywords

modern history, museums, social education

1 Concept Explanation and Basic Characteristics of Modern History Museums

In China, modern history museums usually refer to museums that take the collection, protection, research, display, and dissemination of cultural relics, documents, and related materials from the modern historical period (around 1840 to 1949) as their main functions. They include revolutionary memorial halls, themed exhibition halls, military museums, and also comprehensive martyr memorial facilities with exhibition functions. Their main characteristics are as follows:

1.1"Pluralistic unity".

Modern history museums undertake the important mission of popularizing modern history knowledge to the public. Through various forms such as exhibitions, explanations, and educational activities, the audience can understand the development context, major events, and deeds of figures in modern history, helping the public establish a correct view of history. Although there are differences in themes, contents, and sizes of various venues, the main line and core of the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the united struggle of people of all ethnic groups are highly consistent.

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1.2 Historical specificity of main collections.

The collections of modern history museums mainly focus on this specific historical stage. They are mostly related to events and figures in this specific historical period, as well as political innovation, mass movements, military struggles, science and technology, culture and art, production and life. Compared with ancient history museums, their collections do not particularly highlight the value pursuit in terms of artistic value, material and craftsmanship, but are more inclined to prove the facts, trajectories, and spiritual connotations related to major historical events and important historical figures.

1.3 Regional characteristics of display content.

Various modern history museums focus on collecting and displaying items and historical materials closely related to the modern historical development of their own regions, reflecting the regional characteristics of modern history in different regions and thus the uniqueness of their own venues.

2 Main Ways for Modern History Museums to Exert Social Education Functions

2.1 Highlight social education functions with its rich social memory patterns.

Modern history museums are large-scale comprehensive "memory fields" with a strong sense of memory. They break through the "dual evidence" method of traditional historical research (mutual verification of unearthed archaeology and handed-down documents). Their social memory patterns mainly include:

(1)Memorial facilities. Memorial facilities such as memorial halls, monuments (towers), memorial sculptures, and ruins and sites are witnesses of history, carrying specific spirits and being precious cultural heritages. Some important historical event sites and ruins and sites directly experienced revolutionary years and witnessed the vicissitudes of history.

(2)Cultural relics. Cultural relics mainly refer to physical remains that witness the glorious history since modern times and are identified and registered. They are important evidence of history and also a powerful weapon against historical nihilism.

(3)Exhibitions. The basic and special exhibitions of modern history museums are important means to present specific histories. They comprehensively use text, picture historical materials, cultural relics, sculptures, scene reproductions, and multimedia to form specific exhibition languages. They have characteristics such as immersion, interactivity, and multi-sensory experiences, which are significantly different from the presentation methods of other educational resources (or forms).

(4)Oral history. The collection and editing of oral history interview historical materials of historical witnesses and insiders vividly reflects the beliefs, feelings, and characters of historical figures and vividly presents the details of historical events. It can be used as a verification of historical facts and a supplement to

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presenting historical details. It has been widely used in the work of historical material reserves, exhibition applications, and lecture cases of modern history museums in recent years.

(5)Museum collections and other materials. The collection materials of modern history museums are diverse. In terms of content, they include historical materials and documents, exhibition outlines, curatorial plans, propaganda and education plans, interview records, and also include historical works, newspapers, periodicals and other materials that are sorted and collected. In terms of form, they include written words, pictures, videos, sounds, etc.

2.2 Highlight social education functions with its special on-site teaching system.

Modern history museums, with their rich and diverse symbol systems, build a strong "didactic" context and can quickly and deeply affect people's emotions, experiences, and thoughts when they enter the venue. They are the main front for social education. The elements of its teaching symbol system include:

(1)Environmental atmosphere. Modern history museums provide multi-sensory learning experiences. The audience can participate in learning not only through vision (exhibitions, cultural relics), but also through hearing (explanations, audio) and touch (interactive facility systems). This diversified learning method helps improve learning effectiveness and memory depth. In addition, ruins and sites provide real historical environment fragments. The audience can directly feel the profound sense of history, stimulate learners' curiosity and desire for exploration, and enhance the sense of immersion in learning. Large monuments (towers, sculptures) bring emotional changes to people in them with their majestic, solemn, and serious atmosphere, quickly guiding people into an emotional experience of humility, awe, and progress.

(2)Ceremony. Ceremony is not only a formal activity, but also "faith in action", the embodiment and perceptibility of emotion. Through ceremony, individuals and groups can experience and strengthen their beliefs and faith in action. Ceremonies such as laying flower baskets to heroes and explanations guided by interpreters are carried out under solemn and standardized procedures. People can significantly enhance their participation feelings and life experiences, enhance self-identification, strengthen group feelings, and strengthen the recognition and identification of specific cultures by participating in these ceremonies.

(3)Symbols and symbols. The memorial facilities, ruins, cultural relics, pictures, sculptures and other elements of modern history museums are specific symbols and symbols that can quickly arouse the emotional resonance and cognitive association of the audience. For example, weapons and daily necessities used by historical figures displayed in some venues symbolize the dedication and efforts made by people for specific struggles.

(4)Authority and authenticity: The content displayed by modern history museums is usually based on rigorous historical research and textual research and has gone through specific review and approval procedures, which has good reliability and can effectively eliminate noise and misunderstandings in information dissemination.

(5)Interactivity and sense of participation: Many venues have set up interactive experience areas to allow the audience to participate, enhancing the effect of information dissemination. The audience actively inte-

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grates, experiences, and thinks in the interaction.

(6)Guidance of "opinion leaders": Experts, scholars, interpreters, etc. play the role of "opinion leaders" in museums. Through vivid explanations and professional interpretations, they help the audience deeply understand the exhibition content and thus form a correct interpretation orientation.

2.3 Highlight social education functions with its typical public cultural space.

Since the founding of New China, various types of modern history museums have been generally established at the national, provincial, municipal, county, and even township levels. In particular, various revolutionary memorial halls, martyr exhibition halls, and other memorial facilities have formed a widely covered venue network. Along with the development process of the times, the modern history museum system has been continuously improved, and its functions have shown a development path from single to multiple, from special to three-dimensional, thus continuously adapting to the needs of social governance and the growing cultural service needs of the public. Taking Guangxi as an example, museums located throughout the region are closely integrated with people's production and life. Many revolutionary memorial venues have dense visiting traffic and have become typical public cultural places in a region, deeply integrated into people's work and life, and clearly become cultural melting pots for people's interaction, integration, and promotion. Taking some venues in Guangxi as an example of visiting traffic in 2023: Guangxi Revolutionary Memorial Hall with 610,000 person-times, Liuzhou Military Museum with 820,000 person-times, Memorial Park for the Red Army's Long March and Xiangjiang Campaign with 1.26 million person-times, and Baise Uprising Memorial Hall with 1.261 million person-times.

3 Paths to Enhance the Social Education Function of Modern History Museums

3.1 Create a "cultural landmark" with a high degree of consensus.

A "cultural landmark" is a materialized manifestation of people's high degree of identification with specific history. Modern history museums with highly cultural landmark attributes often have the following format elements in planning and design:

(1)Optimal symmetrical layout. In the layout of the venue environment, symmetrical landscaping should be given priority. In particular, the central area axis should be strictly symmetrical. The main gate, corridor, main facilities, and halls are centrally built on the central axis. Auxiliary facilities on both sides are symmetrically constructed. Street trees and landscape sketches are symmetrically planted, neat and uniform. Looking from a high place, it is magnificent, fully reflecting the majestic, solemn, and serious specific temperament of modern history museums. The planning layout should strive to reflect historical charm, highlight masterpieces, follow the long-term plan of drawing a blueprint to the end, and cultivate cultural and artistic characteristics.

(2)Highlight skyline management. The main memorial facilities should have a certain volume. The main

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body of the main facilities serves as the skyline control point, highlighting its majestic and tall architectural temperament, commanding the entire picture, becoming a symbol and memory point of a region or even a city's picture. Together with urban buildings, topography, mountains, and lakes, it forms a staggered and deep picture. Whether looking from a distance or standing under the venue, it inspires people's sense of awe for history and exerts the strong spatio-temporal dialogue ability and educational ability of large facilities.

(3)Skillfully use the climbing method. The main facilities and venues with strong landmark attributes should be built on high slopes and effectively connected with other auxiliary facilities to form a layout of gradually ascending visits. Through the climbing terrain, emotional hints are laid. People's experience process of climbing step by step, through physical exertion, gradual entry into the situation, and mental preparation, actively moves towards thinking and perception.

(4)Pay attention to the main and auxiliary configuration. Greening and landscaping should be auxiliary elements of the venue, with appropriate size, height, and density to set off the main venue. Do not put the cart before the horse. In the selection of tree species in the core area, and even in the number, shape, and height of trees in specific areas, great efforts should be made and long-term polishing of details should be emphasized. It should be noted that as a southern region, Guangxi has abundant rainfall and trees grow rapidly. When planning and constructing, it is necessary to consider in advance the expected effect after the garden landscape takes shape to avoid excessive compression of space.

3.2 Enrich the treasure trove of resources based on cultural relics and exhibition historical materials.

Cultural relics and exhibition historical materials are the advantageous resources of museums. Doing a good job in the collection, protection, and utilization of cultural relics and exhibition historical materials is the basic work to exert their functions.

(1)Focus on the needs of basic exhibitions. This is the basic work for a specific venue to fulfill its duties and tasks. The theme and content of basic exhibitions are often related to the main characteristics of specific venues. Collecting cultural relics and historical materials around the exhibition needs also focuses on the main tasks of the venue and achieves prominent key points.

(2)Take into account "collecting as much as possible". The collection of cultural relics and historical materials should not only focus on the current exhibitions but also simultaneously consider the needs and plans for conducting multiple types of temporary exhibitions in the future, and make multi-faceted collection reserves. The categories of cultural relics and materials collected can be expanded based on the idea of "cultural relics + culture". Cultural relics mainly refer to physical remains, while culture includes non-physical forms such as legends, stories, regulations, disciplines, music, and art. This greatly broadens the collection perspective.

(3)Enrich collection channels. Cultural relics and materials can be enriched by means of free donation and paid acquisition. The main mobilization objects for social donations are descendants of historical figures and relevant insiders. The acquisition objects can be flexibly obtained through collectors' purchases, auc-

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tions, and other channels. At the same time, replicating and copying cultural relics that have been included in grade protection can solve the problem of the uniqueness of precious cultural relics and the difficulty of sharing and common use.

(4)Standardize preservation and protection. Cultural relics of various materials such as metal, paper, textile, stoneware, and ceramics should be stored in categories, and various environmental technical conditions for warehouses should be created in categories. The protection of collections should be based on a working method that combines preventive protection and rescue protection. Timely "deacidification" of paper pieces of modern and contemporary crafts should be carried out. At the same time, the rescue and restoration protection of damaged cultural relics should be promoted in an orderly and prudent manner. In addition, for precious cultural relics used for exhibitions, attention should be paid to the performance of constant temperature and humidity, anti-theft, explosion-proof, and low reflection of display cabinets to prevent cultural relics from being damaged during the exhibition process.

3.3 Optimize exhibitions and create a venue cluster of "a thousand museums with a thousand faces".

Exhibitions are the "fist" cultural products of museums. "A thousand museums with a thousand faces" means that each venue has its own characteristics in terms of presentation methods, mainline logic, and key content.

(1)Highlight differences in exhibition themes and narrative logic. The basic exhibitions of different venues need to be created around appropriate and eye-catching themes according to the core content of the venue. It is also necessary to accurately position the narrative perspective and role of local and national, city and county, and provincial levels. "A thousand museums with one face" by copying historical textbook pictures and texts on the wall does not meet the requirements of exhibition language.

(2)Highlight differences in the combination of exhibition elements. To achieve the originality of exhibition perception effects, the first task is to clarify the "family background", understand the structure and quantity of the museum's collections, and understand the spatial structure of the exhibition venue. Based on the limitations of the museum's collections and exhibition space, grasp the narrative angle and length to highlight the historical characteristics of specific regions, highlight the reserve of cultural relics and the results of data excavation of different venues, and flexibly exert the reasoning function of cultural relics. Specifically, it can be considered from the following aspects: First, highly focus on the "treasure of the museum" collection and highlight its weight in terms of length, space, and light; second, express the core historical events in a scene-based way and take this as the focus to preset the climax of the exhibition line; third, collective display or comparative display of similar ordinary exhibits breaks out of the limitations of a single ordinary exhibit, gives play to the visual perception advantages of large-scale similar exhibits, endows familiar elements with new exhibition senses, and enhances the visual impact of exhibitions.

(3)Highlight differences in exhibition technology combinations. That is, through combinations and changes of colors, heights, shapes, lights, sounds, and different manufacturing processes, guide the audience's attention, emotions, and emotional immersion and fluctuations. For example, through the square main body

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shape, create a calm and peaceful atmosphere. Through the combination of special-shaped spaces, relieve visual fatigue caused by long-term visits. At the same time, create a depressed and angry mood in expressing some specific historical events. The introduction of ergonomic design concepts that have been widely concerned in the industry in recent years is also a direction worthy of attention. For example, deliberately create an upward-looking viewing angle to create an atmosphere of admiration and reverence. Through horizontal viewing and shortening the distance, it is convenient for the audience to read and create a friendly and quiet artistic conception. In addition, in the techniques of presenting specific historical events and historical figures, it is advisable to combine the iteration of public aesthetic tastes and make appropriate artistic transformations. Some venues refer to the artistic presentation methods of art galleries, breaking through people's stereotypical impression of single, rigid, and black-and-white historical exhibitions, transforming into emphasizing character angles and vivid character depictions, highlighting strength and spirit. The commonly used glass engraving techniques, oil paintings, mother-of-pearl carvings, inlay techniques, woodcarving techniques, and re-creating martyr photos and historical materials pictures are worthy of reference.

3.4 Strengthen the "connection" with the audience to enhance the output effect of propaganda and education services.

Handling the relationship between propaganda and education content and "me" is the prerequisite for the audience to actively participate and think, and it is an objective law to attract people's attention. There are two strategies for reference: First, combine time nodes such as major national and regional festivals and commemorative days, and use people's participation habits in traditional festivals to organize propaganda and education activities with fitting themes. Second, combine the "life experience" of the audience, organize various oath-taking, coming-of-age ceremonies, entrance education and other propaganda and education activities in modern history museums, and let important nodes in the audience's life course be held in modern history museums to enhance the "connection" between activities and the audience. This is the greatest advantage that school classroom education and other propaganda and education methods do not have. Third, "use life to influence life" and give play to the educational influence advantage of peer groups. For example, from 2020 to 2023, the Guangxi Revolutionary Memorial Hall selected and trained nearly 500 "little kapok" volunteer interpreters in batches from primary school students. After education and training and professional training, they preach heroic deeds and historical stories to their peers, which is easy to resonate among primary and secondary school students and has a good response. Such practices have been explored to varying degrees in many venues. The core is to give play to the mutual influence advantage of "homogeneous" groups and let a group of service objects become service providers, propagandists, educators, and resource linkers.

Adapt to the audience's cognitive structure. On the one hand, exhibitions mainly open to the public should highlight popularization, emotionalization, and concreteness, and weaken overly rational and abstract expression methods. The textual expression should be easy to understand. Through expression methods with strong readability such as cultural relic stories and historical stories, abstract beliefs are turned into concretes, which are often more popular. In the division of parts, units, and groups of exhibitions, it is not advisable to completely adopt the narrative logic of historical textbooks. Otherwise, it is easy to lead to "a

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thousand exhibitions with one face", lose the unique impact of exhibition language, and make it difficult to be impressive. On the other hand, based on the characteristics of different audience groups, differentiated and personalized interpretation strategies should be adopted. For "vulnerable groups" such as infant groups, child groups, and elderly groups, interpretation methods such as care, waiting, supplementary explanation, and concrete expression should be highlighted. For groups such as experts and scholars, more emphasis should be placed on academic language depth and conceptual expression.

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