

# *A New Philosophy on Construction and Operation of University Music Museums—Taking the Xinghai Conservatory of Music Museum as an Example*

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**Abstract:** With a long history of its establishment and development, the construction and operation of university music museums has become an integral part and is receiving increasing attention from various sectors in contemporary society. This paper uses Xinghai Conservatory of Music Museum as a case study to analyze its composition and construction concepts, explore innovative features in multiple fields such as music and culture communication, public education, and pedagogy. The current study aims to provide relevant insights and experience for the construction and operation of university music museums, while at the same time explore new philosophies of the development of music museums.

University music museums originated in western countries, and the first university museum, Ashmolean Museum, was established by University of Oxford thanks to the generous donation of the collector Elias Ashmole. It opened in 1683 and is recognized as Britain's first public museum [1]. In 19<sup>th</sup> century, worldwide prestigious universities such as Harvard University and Yale University began to construct their own museums. In the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, development of museum industry had globally moved to its prime. During that period, almost half of America's 3000 universities operated their museums or art galleries, and some comprehensive universities even owned more than one museum, for example, Harvard University has 14 museums[2].

However, compared to western countries, museum sector in China has been relatively slow. The first university museum and public museum in China was Nantong Museum, which was constructed in 1905 in Nantong Normal University. It was established by Zhang Qian, a Chinese patriotic industrialist and top scholar in late Qing Dynasty. Nantong Museum has always been guided by the philosophy that the aim of school is to enable students to be well-grounded[3]. Afterwards, several university museums appeared with the advent of Chinese modern education. Nevertheless, the majority of them was related to subjects and majors in order to serve the establishment of comprehensive universities, or to be repositories for artifacts or specimens instead of opening to the

public. Therefore, they cannot present museums' public-oriented nature. After the opening up and reform, China's first modern university museums, Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology at Peking University was successfully established in 1993 [4]. It was followed by other museums with the similar features of natural science, humanities, or engineering disciplines, such as Geological Museum of Peking University and Museum of Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

The development of Chinese music or art museums began to develop relatively later compared to aforementioned types of museums. In 1998, the former editor-in-chief of *People's Music* YU QingXin published an article named *Eight Thousand Years of Chinese music But Unknown Day of Own Music Museum*, coming up with the necessity and expectation for establishing Chinese music museums[5]. With more importance attached to it, artistic and musical colleges gradually established museum with artistic and musical features, such as Guangxi Folk Music Museums (the platform to display Chinese and Southeast Asia's music), Museum for Oriental Musical Instrument of Shanghai Conservatory Music (a specialized university music museum) and The Digital Museum of Traditional Chinese Instruments at the China Conservatory of Music (a digital university music museum). Those music museums own their unique features and thus have become integral part of university museum industry.

The importance of museums has been widely recognized. Just as the saying goes: "First-class university needs first-class museums as a university without its museum is culturally anemic [6]. China's National Cultural Heritage Bureau and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the Notice on Strengthening the Establishment and Development of University Music Museums, initiating to integrate university museums into national economic and social development as well as higher institution education development. Since then, university music museums have embraced its comprehensive development as a crucial part of university museums.

Therefore, it is prominently significant to explore how to establish and operate music museums. This paper will take the music museum in Xinghai Conservatory of Music, which is in southeast of China, as a case study to explore and summarize experience and insights during the long journey of establishing and operating music museums, playing a guideline role in the development of China's university music museums.

## 1. Introduction to the music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music

The music museum was established in the end of 2017, with an area of 2400 square meters. It constitutes four specific halls namely Lingnan Music Hall, Worldwide Ethnic Culture Hall, Xianxinghai Memorial Hall and Instrumental Culture Hall.

Here is the overview of Lingnan Music Hall. Lingnan Music Museum comprises three main exhibition halls: the *Comprehensive Music Hall*, the *Intangible Cultural Heritage Music Hall*, and the *Lingnan Guqin Hall*.

The establishment of Music Museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music embraced the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Xinghai Conservatory of Music. Afterwards, it gradually becomes a comprehensive research platform for higher institutions with multiple functions of showcasing, collecting, teaching, exchanging, communicating, co-operating, innovation and practice.

## 2. Design and Establishment Concept of Music Museum

### 2.1 Highlighting the collection and integration of first-hand information

The repeated investigation of old materials can derive the use of new materials, and the first-hand data obtained by the "field investigation" method can improve the richness, vividness and scientificity of the research content.

The music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music is designed through the guide of the aforementioned concept. In 2000, seven fieldwork groups organized by the Conservatory deeply investigated traditional music of Hakka communities, ethnic minorities, and the Chaoshan and Guangfu regions. For instance, during the investigation, they interviewed 50 famous musicians such as Chen Tianguo, Lu Zhongren and gained first-hand donated materials, which made up of the design materials for Lingnan Comprehensive Music Hall, thereby constructing the section of Lingnan Famous Musicians. Intangible Heritage Hall's material are primarily from the investigation outcomes from 2012 to 2016 in regions such as Chaoshan, Leizhou, Hakka, and Guangfu, which was conducted by experts and scholars in Xinghai Conservatory of Music. The ancient instruments and corresponding earliest usage in Instrumental Culture Hall were also acquired in-depth investigation and visits in rural areas, which was conducted by faculty and students in Department of Instrument Craftsmanship. In the design of Xian Xinghai Memorial Hall, the content of Re-experience the Xian's Life similarly derived from recording materials in Paris, Yan'an, Kazakhstan, and Moscow.

Those first-hand materials are more vivid and unique to be showcased, which can improve the vividness and scientific nature of design and content present.

### 2.2 Highlighting the Dig of Musical Value

The value of music as the dominance should be the most essential aspect in music museums. The core elements of music cannot be effectively demonstrated without music as the dominance, which is the main cause for music museums' absence of core element and essential value. It has become a tricky issue to comprehensively showcase and employ music in music museums. Insufficient digging out of music intrinsic value has been the common weakness of music museums, therefore, there are several music museums which are just labeled music museums but actually lack the music subjectivity [7].

As the core hall of Music Museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, the dominant content of Lingnan Music Hall is dug out closely within the subjectivity of music. During the establishment of music museums, it is extremely common to ignore the intrinsic value of music, and its corresponding aesthetic and artistic perception, due to the unique feature of music and stereotypical display way in museums. Through extensively collection and digging out of music in different Lingnan regions, Xinghai Conservatory of Music systematically exhibited music as a cultural entity. Through integrating cultural anthropology, history and folklore to form a solid musical discipline system, it presents the subjective musical content through music itself and avoids the absence of musical intrinsic value and simple display which lacks logical connection. Through this methodology, the musical artistic concept and scientific feature of humanistic value Lingnan musical culture is better exhibited.

### **3. Innovation and Features of Music Museum Operation**

Operation is the paramount to achieve the location and resources rearrangement of music museums more successfully and exert its influence in musical teaching, passing on, exchanging, scientific research and innovative integration. During the process, publicity of music museums, effectiveness of spread and popularity greatly needs to be improved to construct unique and innovative university music museums.

#### **3.1 Promote cooperation between music museums and universities to strengthen influence**

Cooperation between museums and universities originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Europe. Afterwards, a number of museums in the United States began to establish long-term collaborative relationship with local universities. For instance, the president of NWK museum John D designed and practiced a series of cooperation mode to improve the value of the museums. Cooperation between music museums and universities refers to activities with shared educational objectives. American Venue Federation described its cooperation with museums as the most successful and lasting relationships with other institutions based on common interest and ability in order to achieve shared objectives.

Through the music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music's continuous try with other venues, it has developed cooperation projects with the Southern Han Imperial Mausoleums Museum, The Museum Of The Nanyue King Mausoleum, Guangzhou Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, Red Line Women's Art Center, and Guangdong Chinese Medicine Museum, holding serieses of teaching activities (such as listening to Kangling, the living display project as the form of an immersive artistic scene) to integrate art , archaeological sites and historical relics to improve intrinsic cultural and extend artistic value. This way audience's experience will successfully transform from just seeing historical relics to listening to traditional culture and eventually appreciate Chinese art. The music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music also cooperated with Guangdong Chinese Medicine University to conduct Chinese traditional medical plaster produce workshop, with the theme of traditional Chinese musical instruments and integration of musical culture and artistic Chinese traditional medical plaster produce.

#### **3.2 Deepening scientific research and applying for bases to popularize humanities**

The College Federation of humanities and Social Sciences, also known as Union of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Higher Education Institutions, is an academic organization of all research member in philosophic society [8]. Its foundation origin is to explore a totally new organization system and academy integration mechanism, which is the distinct scientific research management department different from traditional one, as well as independent from faculty system. It can accelerate expanding and improving the knowledge cover of the federation itself, academic creativity and social influence. The College Federation of humanities and Social Sciences is a breakthrough in the single management situation of philosophy and social sciences in higher education institutions, which can better serve the academic unions, disciplines and social and scientific workers' comprehensive needs [9].

The music museums of Xinghai Conservatory of Music applied social and sciences popularization base of Guangdong province in July 2024 to promote scientific research and academic

communication centering on university teaching. As the social sciences popularization base, the music museums of Xinghai Conservatory of Music not only emphasizes the preserve of musical material heritage, but also attaches great importance on sustainable development musical cultural heritage, highlighting music museums' influence on social spread and inheritance. This kind of unique operation concept helps this music museum pay more attention to the living display of publicizing musical heritage knowledge in reception activities. Therefore, music museums can make music more accessible to the public through cooperating with social service more actively, encouraging faculty and students to practice in society in person, and showcasing the potential of combing music to any other elements in living modes, namely music and more, as well as popularizing musical cultural and improve the public's musical quality. This methodology enables the simultaneous achievement of cultivation social sciences talents and transformation of social sciences. Additionally, through publicizing social sciences and promoting the development of scientific research, intrinsic cultural value and features of musical discipline can be better carried and demonstrated.

### 3.3 Communication of the Museum Culture

#### 3.3.1 Create culture of music museums

It is one of the most important issues for such museums to fully demonstrate the intrinsic value and attractiveness of fine Chinese traditional culture and tell historical relics' stories well[10].

It has been a trend to create material creative cultural products through utilizing multimedia and innovation. For instance, the Palace Museum has become a nationwide well-known center for creative cultural products and launched a series of excellent creative cultural products. Beyond material products, the number of digital and electronic educational cultural products has also been increasing, fulfilling the integrative purchase among culture, culture education and culture communication. This methodology is along with several advantages: the brand of Palace Museum has been popularized and at the same time there is a social trend to collect those products[11].

The music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music established its own center of creative cultural products. Through cultural innovation, media integration and communication, brand value and special concept of this music museum has been successfully achieved. This music museum finished the creation of 12 material products through VIS visual recognition system and brochure design, such as Blessing Bags (Fudai in Chinese), Habitat in Four Seasons (Si Shi Qi Xi in Chinese), Deep Green with a touch of jade (Qing Dai Han Cui in Chinese) and The Words of Lingnan Musical Instruments (including Wechat pocket covers, fans, delicate photo frames, scrapbooks postcards, etc.), which respectively showcasing the distinct culture of each hall.

#### 3.3.2 Creating Music Museums' Official Account to Construct Music Museums as an Influential Medium

A Music museum's official account can be created through designing distinctive logo, stamp and mark of this music museum to leave impression on the public. The official account of the Music Museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music sets different columns such as the *24 solar terms* theme exhibition, *Jie Yin Shi Cui* (which means improving music through studying previous excellent works in Chinese), a column to exhibit instrument collection of this music museum, *Echo With Fine Works*, a column on worldwide musical culture, *Traditional Memory*, a column on Xian Xinghai's life

experience, *Find Interest in Li Yuan*, a column with Lingnan opera culture as the special theme. In 2024, the official account of music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music has posted 481 passages on Wechat and accumulated a large number of online readers, which are nearly 100 thousand during the past three years. It is evident that this official account has acquired satisfied communication effectiveness and social influential power.

### 3.4 Creating N+1 mode to implement teaching

In 1984, *Museum of a New Century* compared educational function as the soul of museums, and considered educating and serving for the public as the core element of museums[12]. In the renewable definition of museums made by American Museum Association, education was nominated as the primary function of museums[13]. Similarly, musical education should be regarded as a significant function to step on its own stage in music museums.

The music museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music plays its role as the essential educational tool to design the *Culture + Lingnan Music* (referring to the N) series of core curriculums with Lingnan musical culture as the main focus. The *N+1* mode aims to create more extended curriculums based on discovery of the culture of this music museum.

### 3.5 Founding the Volunteering Team of Music Museums

International museum volunteers originated in the early of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1907, Boston Art Museum in the United States pioneered the first case of museum voluntary activities. With the development in the later 10 years, voluntary work was gradually institutionalized and accepted by more museums. Up to now, the quality of museum volunteers in China is uneven, which implies the issue of lacking standardized management. Therefore, strengthening the cultivation of professional museum volunteers can greatly ensure the development of university museums.

The music museum of this university has set strict volunteer management rules, clarifying its recruitment requirements, work responsibilities to make its volunteer work more standardized and transparent. Through various methods such as sounding mechanism, strengthening management, analyzing museum volunteers special nature, utilizing the advantage as a university and improving recruitment procedures, voluntary work in this music museum can gradually achieve the state of standardized and professional.

## 4. Shape the New Concept of Music Museum Development

### 4.1 Make Communication Content More Scientific

First and foremost, the proportion of previous and new knowledge should be attached to great importance. University museums have the advantage of being rich in professional knowledge. Therefore they tend to publicize new knowledge and innovative concepts, which is too professional for ordinary people to understand. As a result, university music museums are expected to construct a sound knowledge proportion between the previous and the new, and then follow in order and advance step by step when spreading and publicizing culture. Professor Wilson R. Obert in University of Arizona and his research team found out a sound formula to figure out how much people master the previous and the new knowledge through simulated experiments [14].



$$ER^* = 1/2\{1 - \text{erf}(1/\sqrt{2})\} \approx 0.1587$$

The result 0.1587 was worked out in the simulation of living creatures; mind network through using mathematical models and AI neural network learning algorithms. The figure means that study efficiency and experience will be the best when the proportion of previous and new knowledge reaches 15.87:84.13. Therefore, we can set the exhibition proportion of popularized and new content through referring to this figure in order to present new content step by step and achieve the best communication result.

## 4.2 Making Visitors the Constructors of Meaningful World

In the contexts of museums and musical culture, the subjectivity of spreading museum culture and objectivity of being visitors should be at the equal status, so that real communication, dialogs, understanding and echoing can be achieved rather than simply knowing and mastering knowledge, or even glancing over hurriedly. Museums are expected to enable visitors to really learn and echo with museum knowledge through museums' own power instead of just looking at and analyzing the number of visitors. Only in this way visitors can become participants of realizing their own cultures and generating their own meanings, and thereby being constructors of the meaningful world.

Interaction between visitors and content to engage visitors should be the key point to take into consideration when museums are conducting culture output. Visitors are important subjectivity when artists are expressing the intrinsic value of their artistic activities. Therefore, increasing visitors' engagement and interaction, providing opportunities for visitors to communicate equally and improving their cultural recognition are significant aspects in artistic activities. Museums are expected to transform the stereotypical concept of learning knowledge to improving visitors' recognition and provide an equal platform for artists and visitors to communicate. Through this methodology, museums can successfully be transformed from a venue created by others to active behavioral subjectivity [15].

## 4.3 Making Public Social Service Nature More Comprehensive

In 2022, International Council of Museums redefines museums as the venue which replaces the old objective of education research appreciation with the new objective of educating, appreciating, reflecting and sharing knowledge, to further demonstrate museums' public social service function[13].

The active exploration of museums has witnessed initial effectiveness, and museums can refer to university museums to improve the aspect of public education. For instance, the Museum of Art in University of Michigan allows schools as teams to visit in order to provide better service for K-12 curriculum. According to various grades, knowledge is specifically penetrated into students in different grades. For example, students can choose courses like the *Spring of Art: Weather, Season and Art*; *The Mystery of History: Thinking As An Art Historian* according to their grades [16].

Music museums currently can combine museum culture with school curriculum to professionalized existed activities. They can design relevant assisting courses for students from different ages, and integrate those courses into education system to play a role of assisting education, training professions and supplementing knowledge.

#### 4.4 Making Curriculums More Disciplinarily Specific

Under the current characteristics of *N+1* mode of the Music Museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, more than ten elective public courses are provided for students in this university to choose. A trend of promoting both professionalization and popularization can be seen in existed museum courses. It can refer to the mode of museums in other countries. For instance, in 1943, the then president of Harvard University Conant came up with a concept of *Neoliberal Education*, which means to develop parallel general education and professional education. In 2007, his *General Education Working Group Report* divided curriculums in the university into eight different fields, and students were required to take each course in every field to meet graduation requirements [17]. Therefore, music museums can also make improvement in this direction by offering general education courses and including music museum courses as compulsory ones to achieve the integration of popularized education, professional education and general education to support professional teaching in music.

#### 5. Conclusion

University museums are carriers to record history and inheritance and embrace future and innovation. With the development, they also take significant responsibilities as scientific research, teaching, public education and communication. As the integral part of university museums, university music museums play a crucial role in the establishment and operation of university museums due to the special feature, scientific innovation, development, sound management, institutionalization and reshaping the concept of engaging visitors, which are all brought by musical value. This paper summarizes relevant innovation and experience of the Music Museum of Xinghai Conservatory of Music, providing insights of exploring the development of university music museums.

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