

An Analysis of Xia Nai's Museum Education

Thought — A Study Centered on Xia Nai's Diary



Xiuli Ji^{1,*}

¹Taishan University, China

Abstract: Based on a systematic study of “Xia Nai’s Diary”, it was found that the famous archaeologist Xia Nai developed a systematic museum education philosophy based on his rich museum practice and mentor guidance. He believes that museums have important educational functions, serving as centers for professional knowledge learning, academic research materials, and patriotic sentiments. They should be fully utilized through the comparison of physical objects and literature. Based on this, he deeply realized the close relationship between museums and archaeology, providing valuable experience for guiding museum construction and archaeological development after returning to China.

Keywords: Xia Nai; museum practice; museum education; Xia Nai’s Diary

Introduction

As is well known, Xia Nai is “the main cultivator of contemporary Chinese archaeology talents, the main guide of archaeological work, and the main creator of a rigorous academic style in archaeology” (Hu, 1985, p. 319). However, according to a systematic study of Xia Nai’s Diary, during his educational process, he developed a systematic museum education philosophy.

1. The Source of Xia Nai’s Educational Thought in the Museum

1.1. Rich museum practice

Throughout Xia Nai’s museum practice, it can be divided into two stages in terms of time: before and during his study abroad period.

1.1.1. Before studying abroad (1931-1935) - First encounter with museums

From 1931 to 1935, Xia Nai studied at Tsinghua University. During this period, Xia Nai began to come into contact with museum like institutions. In his diary, there were 13 museum related records, including visits to natural museums and the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, Matteo Ricci’s tomb and Zhoukoudian, the Yuanmingyuan site, antique exhibition halls, the Women History Museum, the

Yungang Grottoes, the Taiyuan People’s Education Museum in Shanxi, and other museum like institutions. Among them, there were two visits to the exhibition of ancient relics, and as many as four visits to the Old Summer Palace.

Based on the immaturity of the development of domestic museum institutions at that time, his museum experience was not satisfactory. In his diary, he was worried about the current state of preservation of ancient relics in China. On October 20, 1934, after visiting the Beiping Antiquities Exhibition Center, he mentioned in his diary the high fees and other issues related to the exhibition center. “After the ancient artifacts were transported to the south, all the fine products were transported to the south..... A ticket of 40 cents per person is truly too expensive” (Xia, 2011a, pp. 360).

1.1.2. During my overseas study abroad period, I was one of the most experienced scholars in terms of practical experience in overseas museums among my contemporaries

In August 1935, he came to the UK to study archaeology under the guidance of Professor Yetts (W.P.) at the University of London’s Courtold Institute. After graduating with a master’s degree from the University of London in 1939, he conducted his doctoral thesis writing at the Cairo Museum in Egypt. He set off at the end of 1940 and returned to

Corresponding Author: Xiuli Ji
Taishan University, China
Email: tsgjxl@163.com

his homeland in early 1941.

During his study abroad, Xia Nai visited 69 museums in 8 countries including Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, and India, becoming one of the most experienced overseas museum practitioners among contemporary scholars. Among them, museums in the UK have a long history of construction, rich collections, and advanced management and service concepts. In addition, with the study abroad school in London, Xia Nai visited as many as 42 British museums during his overseas study period, including various types. He was particularly concerned about the types of museums that were not available in China at that time, such as the Pitt Rivers Museum and other archaeological site museums. When visiting the museum, Xia Nai described: "Although the objects collected and excavated by the Nai family were not large in scale and well designed, they were particularly significant in archaeology, with several models of excavated cemeteries and sites. The models were made of wood, and the terrain was indicated by contour lines. The location of the excavation pit and the original location of the relics were all clearly indicated by color, and the remains were even marked with small plaster (or lead). They lingered among them, making it unbearable to leave." (Xia, 2011b, pp. 260) From the source of the collection to the design of the display, he detailed each one in his diary.

He has visited museums many times and has been there for a long time, particularly the British Museum and the Cairo Museum in Egypt. According to diary records, from September 1935 to October 1939, he visited the British Museum 93 times over a period of four years. Sometimes he stayed there for a whole day, and sometimes he visited the museum twice a day. For example, on September 30, 1939, "since the reopening of the British Museum, he read books in the museum every day, but it closed at 4 pm in the afternoon, which was not satisfying." (Xia, 2011b, pp. 41) On October 21, 1939, the day before leaving London, He just returned "the British Museum reading voucher B.59885 to the British Museum" (Xia, 2011b, pp. 264), and although it was used for 4 years, he still did not make good use of

this British Library, which is quite embarrassing. It can be seen that his interest in the British Museum is still incomplete. From October 31, 1939 to December 5, 1940, he spent over a year, except for closing days and handling other affairs, almost every day visiting the Cairo Museum in Egypt. For example, on December 1, 1940, he "went to the museum in the morning to extract records about bead stringing from Petri's report" (Xia, 2011b, pp. 274).

The rich museum practice has given it a profound and comprehensive understanding of the educational function of museums.

1.2. Mentor guidance

In 1934, Xia Nai graduated from Tsinghua University with a bachelor's degree in history and was admitted as an international student majoring in archaeology. He began to specialize in archaeology. The study abroad guidance teachers selected by Tsinghua University for him were Fu Sinian, who was then the director of the Institute of History and Language at the Academia Sinica, and Li Ji, the director of the archaeological group at the institute. Xia Nai had consulted the two of them, as well as Liang Siyong, Yuan Fuli, and others, on their study abroad plans.

On October 30, 1934, Fu Sinian told him that the archaeological research plan in China mainly consisted of three aspects: "excavation in prehistoric period, excavation in historical period, and museum" (Xia, 2011a, pp. 274). On April 2, 1935, Liang Siyong, who was in charge of the excavation of Prince Yin's Mausoleum in Northwest Gang in Anyang, told Xia Nai, who was currently undergoing an archaeological internship, that "the purpose of studying abroad in Europe and America was nothing more than: (1) the skills of museums and field work; (2) the knowledge and anthropological background in European archaeology; (3) to investigate the preserved Chinese things in Europe." (Xia, 2011b, pp. 368) Before Xia Nai went abroad, Li Ji also told him that in terms of the current research status of archaeology, there should be three types of training for the talents needed in China, and "the method of preserving ancient relics in museums" is one of them (Wang, 2017).

All three teachers emphasized that museums

play an important role in learning, making him pay more attention to the educational function of museums in the future.

2. Xia Nai's Museum Education Thought Content

2.1. Museums have important educational functions

2.1.1. Museums are learning centers for professional knowledge

Xia Nai's archaeological knowledge mostly comes from museums. Starting from January 15, 1936, he studied the purpose and methods of field archaeology, museum archaeology, and archaeological drawing with Dr. Wheeler and his wife at the London Museum. He learned various skills at the museum, including the method of washing bronze vessels, assembling and pasting pottery pieces, repairing pottery, and transporting Maxer stoves from excavation sites to museums, repairing pottery, painting pottery and washing iron vessels, field investigations, and archaeological drawing. He also often went to the British Museum to read archaeological research bulletins, journals, theoretical works, etc., learn about archaeological theories, and understand the trends in the archaeological community. For example, on January 6, 1936, he listened to the French sinologist Percy and his speech on Yin Xu in Anyang. The next day, he went to the British Museum to read the "Anyang Excavation Notes" in the Journal of the Royal Asian Society and the "Six Dynasties and Tang Dynasty Painters Examination" by Percy and other articles. The same applies to other museums, such as on October 14, 1935, when he visited the Museum of Natural History, he noted that "vertebrate dental specimens are also worth noting for their future use" (Xia, 2011b, pp. 35).

2.1.2. Museums are data centers for academic research

He fully utilizes the resources of the museum, deepens his knowledge, and conducts academic research. On November 15, 1935, he was reading a book at the British Museum, "because he had to submit a short essay on Chinese bronze artifacts, he inevitably had to flip through several Chinese books." (Xia, 2011a, pp. 377) His doctoral thesis was titled

"A Study of Ancient Egyptian Beads". In order to conduct research, he utilized bead resources from multiple museums, including the 1760 pieces of ancient Egyptian beads collected by the Petrie Museum at the University of London, as well as collections from other museums. For example, on June 26, 1937, he read the Egyptian Inscription No. 64 and the borrowed Gregorian collection at the British Museum. He also read the Egyptian Archaeological Journal (Xia, 2011a, pp. 390) and April 10-13, 1939, At the Ashmolean Museum, "Take notes of the displayed beads." (Xia, 2011b, pp. 114) He spent more than a year focusing on systematic research using the beads collected at the Cairo Museum in Egypt.

2.1.3. Museums are places to express patriotic sentiments

As a Chinese, although Xia Nai lives far away in a foreign country, he still "anxiously waits for news of his homeland day by day" (Xia, 2011b, pp. 244), "self hating being overseas and not being able to fulfill his duties to his motherland, feeling ashamed and self hating" (Xia, 2011b, pp. 116). His strong sense of social responsibility has prompted him to use the Chinese collections in the museum as a symbol of his love for his country.

When visiting museums, whenever he sees Chinese collections, he feels extremely friendly and has a myriad of feelings, detailed in his diary. On September 7, 1935, when Xia Nai first arrived in London, the first museum he visited was the Villa and Albert Museum. Inside, he saw "Chinese porcelain, many excellent products, and the actual Yangshao painted pottery, which was also his first time seeing it." (Xia, 2011b, pp. 130) On September 25, 1935, he visited the First Museum in North Park and found that Chinese artifacts included "a model of an opium bed room and pipes and guns. In their eyes, China was probably related to the North Park Museum" (Xia, 2011a, pp. 358).

2.2. Fully utilize the educational function of museums by comparing physical objects with literature

Faced with abundant museum resources, Xia Nairu made full use of Baoshan:

One is to pay attention to the use of exhibition

materials such as visit guides, reading instructions, and exhibition display boards. Before visiting a museum, he usually needs to read the museum's visit guide, exhibition instructions, and other materials in advance before entering the museum for a visit. Before going to England, he began to prepare for visiting the British Museum. From November 8th to 22nd, 1934, he read the British Museum's Guide to Visiting Stone Age Antiquities, Bronze Age Antiquities, and Early Iron Age Antiquities. After arriving in the UK, he insisted on reading the guide before visiting museums. On January 25, 1936, he read the "Guide to Visiting Roman and Greek Antiquities" at the British Museum and spent half a day preparing to carefully read it. (Xia, 2011a, pp. 368) Using this method, Xia Nai visited the permanent exhibitions of the British Museum one by one, including porcelain, pottery, ironware, Greek sculpture and architecture, Paleolithic artifacts, ethnological specimens, Neolithic artifacts, Egyptian sculpture, and jewelry department.

Secondly, in addition to reading tour guides, he also reads research books on related exhibits, further preparing himself for viewing physical exhibitions. As of September 24, 1935, he wanted to go to the city to see the Chinese porcelain in the museum. Today, I will finish reading a part of the explanation about China. I will also take out the relevant points from "Drinking and Flowing Porcelain" and record them next to "Explanation" (Xia, 2011a, pp. 394).

3. The Influence of Museum Education Ideology

A profound understanding of the educational function system of museums has had a direct impact on Xia Nai's dedication to the development of museums and archaeology after returning to China.

3.1. After returning to China, he first devoted himself to the development of the museum industry

On January 29, 1940, Xia Nai received a letter from Mr. Li Ji: "It is allowed to place a position in the Central Museum at a monthly salary of 180 yuan. Although it is 100 yuan lower than Zhejiang University's 280 yuan, he would rather take up this position with a lower monthly salary for his own future." (Xia, 2011a, pp. 398) It was precisely

because he understood the significance of the educational function of museums in archaeology that he chose to work at the Central Museum with a lower salary.

3.2. Utilize archaeological knowledge to promote the development of museum industry

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Xia Nai devoted himself to the field of archaeology. However, in 1952, during the first training class for archaeologists, he clearly stated that "the gradual development of the museum industry, especially the historical museum, requires a lot of archaeological specimens for display. At the same time, the exhibition of museums is to bring the results of archaeological work to the public, make archaeological work serve the people, impart historical knowledge, and play a patriotic role, so that the archaeological work can lay a foundation among the people and be supported by them." (Xia, 2000, p. 175) That is, archaeology provides collections for museums, and museums are important institutions for protecting and promoting archaeological achievements. The two are conditions for each other and complement each other.

Therefore, on the one hand, he advocates for the establishment of more "museums to collect antiques" (Xia, 2011c, p. 92). He paid special attention to the construction of museum collections. In April 1956, the Preservation Department of the Palace Museum began repairing copper artifacts unearthed from five provinces. Xia Nai, along with Chen Mengjia, Tang Lan, and others, formed a review team to provide guidance on restoration. On October 17, 1956, Xia Ding donated part of his collection of books and 131 ancient coins that he had collected for many years to the Wenzhou Cultural Relics Management Committee. (Jin, 2013, p. 221) In 1959, he sent archaeologist Chen Mengjia to Lanzhou to assist the Gansu Provincial Museum in organizing the newly unearthed Wuwei Han bamboo slips. (Fang, 2012, p. 32) Visiting foreign museums is also an important place for them to learn about international archaeological trends. For example, in 1983, Xia Nai, then Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Honorary Director of the Institute of Archaeology, visited Democratic

Germany for a friendly visit. His main activities were visiting museums and laboratories to investigate their use of natural science methods in archaeological research (The Chinese Archaeological Society, 1984, p. 262).

On the one hand, emphasis is placed on using academic knowledge to guide exhibition layout and write materials such as museum introductions and guides. In 1953, Xia Nai repeatedly proposed revision suggestions for the exhibition images and titles of the Chinese History Museum. (Wang, 2022, p. 202) On January 6, 1955, Xia Nai participated in a discussion on the theme structure of the historical exhibition of the Shandong Provincial Museum. In June 1971, during the Cultural Revolution, the Palace Museum, which had not been open for a long time, was scheduled to open as soon as possible. Thirteen experts, including Xia Nai and Bai Shouyi, carefully considered word for word, and revised the introduction of the Forbidden City while respecting historical facts and not glorifying feudal emperors, which facilitated the early opening of the Palace Museum. In 1972, China was preparing for the “Exhibition of Cultural Relics of the People’s Republic of China Going Abroad”. Xia Nai was responsible for reviewing the Chinese and English/French translations of the exhibition brochure, including descriptions of nearly 500 exhibits. In his diary from October 1972 to February 1973, he detailed the process of repeatedly reviewing and discussing translations until the final draft was finalized.

4. Summary

Throughout Xia Nai’s Diary, under the guidance of his mentor, Xia Nai systematically and maximally utilized foreign museum resources, forming a systematic concept of museum education. This idea not only made significant contributions to the development and practice of cultural and museum undertakings under his leadership after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, but also has guiding significance for the close cooperation between contemporary museum and archaeological

undertakings.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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How to Cite: Ji, X. (2024). An analysis of Xia Nai’s museum education thought — A study centered on Xia Nai’s diary. *Journal of Global Humanities and Social Sciences*, 05(02), 95-99. <https://doi.org/10.61360/BoniGHSS242015790206>