

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# Upholding Fairness and Bringing Forth New Ideas: Reflections on the Education and Social Services Issues of the Shaanxi History Museum

Xiaoning Wang<sup>1,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> School of Historical Culture and Tourism, Xi'an University, Xi'an, China

## ABSTRACT

As an influential national first-level museum in China, the Shaanxi History Museum not only has its own characteristics in education and social services, but also plays an important leading role in the industry. The museum people hold various exhibitions with professionalism and enthusiasm, carry out educational activities for the purpose of inheriting and promoting the excellent history and culture of China for thousands of years, support education by researching collections, and develop cultural and creative products to cultivate the audience's museum awareness, which are the embodiments of the museum's characteristics. However, the problems existing in the museum in terms of education and social services cannot be ignored, including many educational activities inside but few outside, the concentration of educational objects, the lack of educational cooperation, and so on. In view of this, this article believes that in the future education and social services work, the museum should further break through field restrictions, deepen the degree of cooperation between the museum and the school, and expand the team of practitioners, in order to improve its ability and level of serving society, so that the cultural living room of Xi'an, an international metropolis, can better serve visitors from all over the world.

## ARTICLE DATA

**Article History**

Received 20 June 2022

Revised 25 June 2022

Accepted 3 February 2023

**Keywords**

Shaanxi History Museum

Education and social services

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As a public social and cultural institution, museums consciously assumed the responsibility of serving society since the 1970s. After the International Council of Museums established the theme of the conference as "Museums Serving the Present and the Future" in 1971, the concept of "serving society and social development" has gradually been widely accepted by museum people and has evolved into the focus of museum work, and has also become the trend and tide of museum development in the world. As an ancient capital with thousands of years of cultural history, Xi'an is considered to be a "natural history museum". In 2003, the Xi'an Municipal Government proposed to build Xi'an "City of Museums", and the museum business in Xi'an has developed rapidly. The

Xi'an Museum contributes to society and social development with its characteristics as a public cultural and educational institution. The Shaanxi History Museum has played a very important role in it. As a comprehensive history museum, the Shaanxi History Museum collects more than 1.7 million cultural relics, including simple stone tools used in the initial stage of ancient human beings as well as various physical evidences of Shaanxi's economic and social development and changes since the Republic of China, being a palace of art that displays the history and culture of Shaanxi and ancient Chinese civilization and an important window for national education and foreign exchanges, which is honored as "the bright pearl of the ancient capital and the treasure house of Huaxia". The development of its education and social services deserves attention and research.

\*Corresponding author. Email: [wangxiaoning@xawl.edu.cn](mailto:wangxiaoning@xawl.edu.cn)

© 2023 The Authors. Published by Athena International Publishing B.V.

This is an open access article distributed under the CC BY-NC 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

## 2. THE STATUS QUO OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Shan Jixiang, the former director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration (2002–2012) and former director of the Palace Museum (2012–2019), has been engaged in cultural relic work for many years. His rich work practice made him realize the important position and role of museums in social development. He said, *"As an image of a country, a nation, a region, or a city, what a museum displays is a microcosm of the history of civilization. The museum is a space for contemporary people to have a dialogue with history and culture, a second classroom for improving the quality of citizens and cultivating civilized citizens, and a landmark facility for improving urban taste and shaping a cultural city"* [1]. As a cultural force that promotes social change and social development, the museum is more and more deeply integrated into social life and assumes the responsibility of serving the society. As far as its content is concerned, museum social services include exhibitions and services for education, scientific research, consulting, and tourism. Carrying out various educational activities is the main way for museums to serve society and social development, and is also a common practice in museums around the world. Education and social services of the Shaanxi History Museum are not only diverse in terms of form, but also rich in content. Since its establishment in 1944, the Shaanxi History Museum has continuously enriched its service content. At present, its social services include exhibitions, education, academics, and culture and creativity, each of which has many specific contents that highlight the history and culture of Shaanxi and ancient Chinese civilization.

### 2.1. Exhibitions: Writing a New Chapter With Professionalism and Enthusiasm

The basic way that museums serve the audience is to curate and display the collections. In terms of exhibitions, the Shaanxi History Museum has various forms, rich contents, distinct themes and attractiveness. At present, the permanent exhibition mainly displays "Ancient Shaanxi Civilization", with 2,393 pieces (groups) of cultural relics on display. The exhibition focuses on the development of ancient Shaanxi civilization, focusing on the achievements of civilization in the four historical periods of Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang, systematically showing the development process of Shaanxi from the early Paleolithic to more than one million years before 1840. The exhibitions on special subject include the exhibition of Tang Dynasty murals of special collections and the exhibition of unearthed cellaring

cultural relics in Hejia Village, as well as the Impressive Western Zhou, the Grand Style of Han, the Oriental Empire, the Cradle of Civilization, the Prosperous Tang, the Conflict and Integration, and the Lingering Context and so on. Temporary exhibitions are mainly curated according to social and cultural needs. At present, there are 18 relatively mature exhibition projects, reflecting the exploration and efforts of the museum staff in this regard from 2018 to 2021. Online exhibitions are mainly the virtual presentation of collections with the help of network and digital technology, including "Jin Memorial Temple — A Model of Chinese Ancestral Temple and Gardens", "Powerful Sports for a Powerful China — Sports Cause Led by the Communist Party of China", "The Tiger Hidden in the Shaanxi History Museum", "Colored Pottery China", "Hanxiu Tomb Mural Exhibition", and so on. At the same time, the Shaanxi History Museum conducts special publicity and introduction to the collections on its official website, including the top-one treasure, the fine collections and related cultural relics data of the museum. Although these collections are not presented to the audience in the form of exhibitions, for modern audiences, learning about the museum and its collections through online platforms is also a popular "cloud visit" experience.

### 2.2. Education: Inheriting and Carrying Forward the Excellent History and Culture of China for Thousands of Years

The arrangement of the Shaanxi History Museum in terms of educational services is mainly based on various specific activities that can inherit and promote excellent historical culture based on the development of collections, and the one that can best reflect the main purpose of its activities is the "Shaan Bo Xing Class — 18 Treasures Series". This activity cultivates the public's interest in history and culture through in-depth interpretation of 18 national treasure-level cultural relics in the collections, including the Ding (鼎), the Wusiwei Ding (五祀卫鼎), and the Duoyou Ding (多友鼎), representing the early, middle, and late periods of the Western Zhou Dynasty; the Empress's Imperial Seal of the Western Han Dynasty and the Gold Gilt and Silver Gilt Copper Bamboo Joint Sandalwood Burner; the Tang Dynasty's Gilded Silver Flask with Patterns of Horses Holding Wine Cups, the Agate Cup Inlaid with Gold Animal Head, the Handled Silver Jar with Parrot Patterns, the Golden Bowl with Mandarin Duck and Lotus Petal Patterns (2 pieces), the Male Musical Figurines Riding a Tang Tri-color Glazed Ceramic Camel, and the "Honor Guard of the Attic", "Palace Maid", "Playing Polo", "Hunting Travel" and "Protocol"; as well as the

Song Dynasty's Handled Celadon-glazed Reverse Pouring Pot and the Black-glazed Oil Bowl. The three kinds of Ding show the long history of ancient Chinese civilization. Tang and Song utensils show the profound history of Shaanxi. This series of courses won the "Excellent Case of Shaanxi Provincial Museum Education Project". And "During Tomb-sweeping Day in the Late Spring, Chang'an Is Full of Memories" is based on the 24 solar terms song, introducing the origin and customs of the 24 solar terms and the Tomb-sweeping Day. It allows children to understand the sports activities of people in the Tang Dynasty through the explanation of the colored figurines playing polo in the collection. And through games, it cultivates children's love for the excellent traditional Chinese culture. In addition, in the series of handicraft teaching and learning courses developed based on the collections, the audience can experience the culture carried by the cultural relics on the spot through the experience of handicraft skills. A total of 11 similar activities are well developed and are set to be organized at different times of the year.

### 2.3. Academics: Researching Collections to Promote Education

The research function is a prerequisite for museums to hold exhibitions and carry out educational activities. The Shaanxi History Museum pays attention to academic research and has a team of researchers with scientific research strength. They mainly organize relevant materials and interpret the history and culture behind the cultural relics through project-based research and have achieved fruitful results. They also found academic journals, such as "Wenbo", which was founded in 1984 and continues to this day, paying attention to new discoveries of archaeology and cultural relics in China and abroad in terms of the content, attracting a wide range of academic and artistic streams, advocating humanistic care, and being committed to promoting academic exchanges and development. And the value pursuit throughout is the protection, research and publicity of human cultural heritage. There are also "Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Yearbook", "Collected Essays of Shaanxi History Museum", "Shaanxi History Museum Yearbook", recording and witnessing the efforts of people in the Shaanxi History Museum in academic research and cultural inheritance. They also hold academic lectures and invite Chinese and foreign scholars to use Shaanxi History Museum as "platform" to reveal the historical culture carried by cultural relics, in order to achieve the purpose of inheriting and promoting historical culture. On May 26, 2009, the first episode of the Shaanxi History Museum Forum hosted by the Shaanxi History Museum was

launched to start the public welfare brand lecture and has continued to this day. By the end of 2020, 99 episodes have been held. The sponsor's ideal pursuit is to "make the museum a 'cultural pivot' in social development" [2]. It is worth mentioning that in addition to conducting scientific research within the museum, the Shaanxi History Museum also provides professional resources and services for the public, colleges and universities, scientific research institutes, experts and scholars. That is, through a variety of channels, it provides support for academic research, collection information, exhibitions, cultural relics identification, social education, etc., to help the public in scientific research in cultural relics and museums.

### 2.4. Culture and Creativity: Bringing the Exhibition Home

Cultural and creative products are the result of the activation of the cultural relics in the collection by researchers and cultural relic workers during the operation of the museum, as well as their interpretation of the historical value of the cultural relics in the collection and the manifestation of the cultural heritage of the museum. Especially in the context of the integration of culture and tourism, visiting museums has become one of the necessary links for tourists to go sightseeing. In order to bring the museum home and keep the good memory of visiting the museum for a long time, museum cultural and creative products are born at the right moment. The Shaanxi History Museum began to try to develop cultural and creative products in 2003 and has now developed more than a thousand cultural and creative products, involving home, daily necessity, stationery, jewelry, clothing, food and other categories. In 2017, its cumulative sales have exceeded 54 million yuan [3]. The various styles of cultural and creative products are exquisite and lovely and are very popular among tourists. Different styles of cultural and creative products have jointly shaped the characteristics of the collections of the Shaanxi History Museum, become the best witnesses for the audience to visit the museum, and indirectly cultivated the audience's museum awareness.

## 3. EDUCATION-CENTERED SOCIAL SERVICES ISSUES

Social services are one of the main ways in which museums realize their social function. It is the social responsibility of museums to provide social and public cultural services [4]. European and American museums have the "three E functions" theory, that is, educating the people, entertaining, and enriching life

(Educate, Entertain, Enrich). The International Council of Museums Statutes, revised in 2007, define museums as: A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution open to the public, serving society and its development, which collects, preserves, studies, disseminates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humans and the human environment for the purposes of education, research, and appreciation. Education is the main way in which museums serve, as can be seen from museum practice and the definition by The International Council of Museums. It is generally believed that all things produced by museums that have educational significance and functions can be regarded as museum education. The education and social services issues of the Shaanxi History Museum covered by this article mainly focus on the analysis of education issues.

### **3.1. Many Educational Activities Inside but Few Outside**

The museum's social services, especially educational activities and the museum's educational functions, are inseparable from the museum premises and its collections. However, when the audience cannot come to visit, using reverse thinking to extend museum services to outside the museum and to break through the field limitations of museum premises is the embodiment of the people-oriented service concept of today's museums and it is also a summary of the development experience of museums around the world. The various service projects currently carried out by the Shaanxi History Museum, especially the educational activities, are still attracting audiences to participate inside the museum. Although there are mobile exhibitions, Chinese and foreign exchange exhibitions, and many specific activities outside the museum, compared with activities inside the museum, the activities outside the museum are significantly less. Even during the COVID-19 epidemic, the museum adheres to the concept of "no closing down during closure, no lack of services", using new ways and methods with digital means to meet the needs of audiences through the Internet. However, "From the analysis of the Shaanxi History Museum's own collection resources and scientific research resources, the openness of collections and the transformation of research results are still less than 1/1000 of the collections... It cannot meet the needs of society at all." As a result, more audiences cannot feel the "beauty of culture and art" carried by the museum [5].

### **3.2. Centralization of Educational Objects**

The service object of the museum is the audience and serving the audience is the purpose of the museum's

work. Therefore, the audience is the core of the museum. The people-oriented concept of museum development requires respecting the audience, understanding the audience, caring for the audience, and continuously meeting the overall needs of the audience. However, museum visitors are a fairly broad and complex group. This group consists of people of different ages, occupations, education levels, and interests. According to the age level, there are juvenile audiences, young audiences, middle-aged audiences, and elderly audiences. Audiences of different age groups have different learning and visiting needs. At present, the audience service objects of various museums, especially the development of educational activities, are mostly carried out around adolescents and children, and there are relatively few educational activities dedicated to serving the elderly. The Shaanxi History Museum is no exception. Although all exhibitions are open to the broad audience, no matter the basic display or the temporary exhibition, the curator arranges the collection based on the collection to present a certain theme, which doesn't have the purpose of serving a certain audience group. The development of educational activities and those projects with relatively mature development are mostly to meet the visiting needs of adolescents and children, which leads to a trend of concentration of service objects.

### **3.3. Insufficient Educational Cooperation**

The educational cooperation here is mainly between the museum and the school. Although the museum is the second classroom for students to study, as an off-campus classroom, to be able to play a practical role, it also needs to cooperate with the school. Although the Shaanxi History Museum also has cooperation projects between the museum and the school, from the perspective of the social status of the museum, as the first modern museum in China and the most important museum in Shaanxi, there are few cooperation projects between the museum and the school. From the perspective of museum collection resources, the degree of cooperation between the museum and the school is also relatively shallow. The Shaanxi History Museum has a collection of more than 1.7 million pieces (groups) of cultural relics, second only to the Xi'an Museum. However, the current museum-school cooperation mainly focuses on serving primary and middle school students and there is less cooperation with universities. Meanwhile, the cooperation between the museum and primary and secondary schools also extends the services in the museum to the campus in the form of activities and fails to realize the integration of museum education into the national education system. The depth of

cooperation is not enough and the museum-school cooperation is not institutionalized and normalized.

The problems of the Shaanxi History Museum in educational services are not only the problems of the museum itself, but also a complex problem that is closely related to the needs of the audience and social development. To analyze the reasons, it is mainly because the role and value of the museum in society and social development have not been fully recognized, the demand for the museum in primary and secondary schools has not been paid attention to by schools and society, and the shortage of relevant professional service personnel in the museum.

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS**

As a national first-class museum with important influence in Xi'an, Shaanxi and the whole country, the quality of education and social services of the Shaanxi History Museum not only directly affects the visiting experience of the audience, but also has a very important radiation and guidance effect on the improvement of the service level and influence of the industry. In order to further improve its service quality, the Shaanxi History Museum should not only continue to do a good job in the existing service projects, but also need to continue to innovate and strive to improve in the following aspects, in order to better play its social functions.

##### **4.1. Expanding the Museum's Service Field**

Every museum preserves unique cultural resources. The Shaanxi History Museum is an art palace that collects and displays the history and culture of Shaanxi and ancient Chinese civilization. In order to allow more audiences to experience the artistic beauty of this historical and cultural palace, it is necessary to change the current situation of strong on-site educational activities and weak off-site educational activities. In recent years, museums at all levels in China have been exploring to break through the field limitations of museum services. Various museums have carried out the "six entering" activities of entering the countryside, entering the institution, entering the military camp, entering the enterprise, entering the school, and entering the community. At present, the Shaanxi History Museum's social services, especially the development of educational activities, develop various forms of educational activities under the guidance of the people-oriented concept and also establish cooperative relations with many primary and secondary schools in Xi'an. However, the museum's services in other fields have not been fully

developed. It is necessary and possible to strengthen other activities, especially the cooperation with schools in suburban counties or remote areas in the province still has a lot of room for exploration.

##### **4.2. Deepening the Degree of Cooperation Between the Museum and the School**

The "Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)" proposes to schools to "make full use of social educational resources and carry out various extracurricular and off-campus activities". Museums can be said to be ideal places for schools to carry out extracurricular and off-campus activities. However, most of the current cooperation between museums and schools are service projects designed and developed by museums and pushed to schools. In the process of carrying out the activities, the school is relatively passive, especially the teachers' participation is low. After investigation, some researchers found that "In-depth cooperation between museums and schools is still very lacking. Museums exist more as external original resources independent of school education. There is no systematic support for the implementation of museum education programs" [6]. Therefore, deepening the cooperation between the museum and the school should be the focus of the Shaanxi History Museum's education and social services in the future. This kind of cooperation can learn from the practice of museums in western countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In the 1980s, the United Kingdom began to explore the establishment of a cooperative relationship between museums and schools and finally formed a cooperation model with the "national curriculum" as the link, so that the two parties work together to serve school teaching and personnel training based on the principle of sharing and for public use. The United States has always been committed to the cooperation between museums and schools through the K12 education department and jointly develops curriculum resources suitable for students' learning through cooperation between museums and schools, which plays a positive role in students' knowledge reserve and construction. On the other hand, the in-depth research work is the premise of further education and social services. The Shaanxi History Museum should cooperate extensively with colleges and universities in Xi'an, strengthen the research of the museum by using the research conditions and personnel of the colleges, reveal the cultural value and historical significance of the cultural relics in the collection as objectively as possible, and give full play to the educational function of the museum.

### 4.3. Enlarging the Team of Museum Service Personnel

The functioning of museums, especially the development of educational and social education activities, requires sufficient professionals to explore and practice. But the museum management system has personnel establishment restrictions. All kinds of work cannot be undertaken by the permanent staff alone. However, the value and significance of the museum need to continue to expand their business. The problems of existing education and social services are closely related to the shortage of human resources in the museum. To solve this problem, recruiting more volunteers can be a more effective way. Existing volunteers mainly serve within the museum, while newly recruited volunteers don't have to be confined to the museum. The Shaanxi History Museum can make full use of social resources to recruit volunteers in villages, enterprises, communities, the military, institutions, schools, etc. for professional training and guidance, let them be the disseminators of museum knowledge, let the museum become a museum for "everyone", and make visiting (participating in) the museum a part of people's cultural life, so that the museum can constructively participate in the political, social and cultural issues of modern society, in order to demonstrate its close connection with society.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Through these efforts, the Shaanxi History Museum should be able to better function as it should, as its director addresses on its official website, "*We believe that when visitors wander through the big school of the Shaanxi History Museum, they will not only benefit from the high quality exhibitions, but also marvel at the museum's beautiful environment, quality service, excellent order, unique architecture art and the five thousand years of glory and splendor of Chinese civilization condensing within it*" [7].

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article is the result of a project of Xi'an Municipal Social Science Planning Fund, entitled "Realization Path for the Construction of Xi'an City of Museums From the Perspective of Social Services", project No. 22LW162. Person in charge: Xiaoning Wang.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Shan Jixiang. The Cultural Responsibility of Museums. Tianjin: Tianjin University Press, 2017, pp. 23. (in Chinese)
- [2] Li Zhan. Upholding Fairness and Innovation, Retrospect and Prospect: Thirty Years of Scientific Research in Shaanxi History Museum [J]. Collected Essays of Shaanxi History Museum, 2021(00): 287-294. (in Chinese)
- [3] Li Boya. With Long-Term Adaptability, Being Independent at the Age of Thirty: An Overview of the Development of the Cultural Industry of Shaanxi History Museum [J]. Collected Essays of Shaanxi History Museum, 2021(00): 361-372. (in Chinese)
- [4] Zhang Jing. Social and Public Cultural Services of Museums and the Development of Museums: Taking the Shaanxi History Museum as an Example [J]. Collected Essays of Shaanxi History Museum, 2020(00): 360-363. (in Chinese)
- [5] Hou Ningbin. Research on Museum's Society Function Under the Current Situation: Taking Shaanxi History Museum as an Example [J]. Museum, 2020(02): 45-49. (in Chinese)
- [6] Song Xian. Museum-School Collaboration: History, Type and Suggestion. Global Education, 2013(12): 103-110. (in Chinese)
- [7] Shaanxi History Museum. Welcome to the Website of Shaanxi History Museum. (in Chinese) <https://www.sxhm.com/about/detail/209.html>