

# The Palace Museum and Archaeology

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## Abstract

Why did a museum, built on the site of a former imperial palace to treasure palatial cultural relics, establish an institute of archaeology on its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary? What is the advantage of having such an institute to the museum's academic studies and operations? Or, what contribution can the Institute of Archaeology make, through the museum's platform, to China's archaeological field and disciplines? The paper is set to mull over three points: I. Museum and archaeology; II. Characteristics of the Palace Museum and the methods and operations of archaeological studies; III. Orientation and plan of the Palace Museum's archaeological research.

**Keywords** The Palace Museum, archaeology, museum, cultural relics

In October 2013, the Palace Museum founded the Palace Museum Research Institute under which the Archaeology Research Institute was established. Three, including Zhang Zhongpei, Zheng Xinmiao, Shan Jixiang, the incumbent and former, directors of the museum attended the inauguration. That was the first time in nearly 90 years that the museum has an archaeology research institute, of which its functions defined in the charter are: an academic institution in the Palace Museum Research Institute installed by the Palace Museum for archaeological studies approved and sponsored by the State to perform initiatives of archaeological activities led by teams of experts who are given authorization qualification. The teams have the authority to apply independently or jointly for archaeological investigations and excavation projects. The operation of the institute is research-oriented and focused on projects in accordance with specified guidelines. Its objective is to become a new scientific research institution with results, talent incubation, unfettered atmosphere, open system, swift mechanism, dexterous technology, and assertive actions pertinent to archaeological research rules and the Palace Museum's practice.

The reason for a museum, built on the site of a former imperial palace to treasure palatial cultural relics, to establish an Institute of Archaeology on its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the advantage to have such an institute for the museum's academic studies and operations, or, the contribution of the museum's platform can create in China's archaeological field and disciplines are worth pondering.

By following the same context, this paper is exploring the following issues.

I. Museum and archaeology

II. Characteristics of the Palace Museum and the methods and operations of

archaeological studies

### III. Orientation and plan of the Palace Museum's archaeological research

#### I. Museum and Archeology

China's museums and archaeology have an inseparable relationship with the country's over millennia's collection tradition and epigraphy, and it is the same with the West. European royals and churches have a long collection history of objects. In this paper, the discussion focuses on the modern significance of museum and archaeology, not those before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Europe, having experienced the Renaissance and Enlightenment Movement, is the cradle of modern museums and archaeology that are as twins of the same bloodline. In 1807, the "Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities" became operational. Rasmus Nyerup (1759-1829) served as the secretary general, who founded the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen (or the former Museum of Northern Antiquities in Copenhagen) in the same year, and many later archaeological research achievements were done based on the studies on the collections of the museum. In 1816, Christian J. Thomsen (1788-1865) became the secretary general of the Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities and the curator of the museum.<sup>1</sup> Thomsen sorted through the collections of the museum and explored into the evolution of ancient tools and weapon materials by dividing them into stone, bronze and iron groups, of which each developed in a succession of three eras. In 1836, Thomsen proposed the Three-Age System in his book *Ledetraad til Nordisk Oldkyndighed*<sup>2</sup>, in which he sorted out the relics into social and historical frames and attached them with scientific explanations. Later, the Three-Age System was applied to the periodization of relics from the field archaeology of Europe by his student Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae (1821-1885). The Three-Age System is not only an important milestone of archaeology, but also an epoch-making achievement in museum collection management and research. The collections of museums after classification and studying were organized into a system attached with academic interpretations easier to be comprehended and memorized by audiences. In 1903, Oscar Montelius (1843-1921), a Swedish archaeologist, exploited his observation and studies on the museums' collections to bring forward the typology of the archaeological system in *Die älteren kulturperioden im Orient und in Europa*<sup>3</sup>, which completed the theoretical and methodological system of this new branch of science.

The Western museums, besides flourishing collections and enriching display, have more or less independent or collaborative archaeological activities with academic

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<sup>1</sup> Rowley-Conwy, Peter (2007). *From Genesis to Prehistory: The Archaeological Three Age System and its Contested Reception in Denmark, Britain, and Ireland*. Oxford Studies in the History of Archaeology. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> The book draft was published in 1836. A museum guide of the same title was published in 1946. Author Julius Sorterup, assistant of Thomsen.

<sup>3</sup> *Die älteren kulturperioden im Orient und in Europa* (1903). Stockholm, Selbstverlag des verfassers. In commission bei A. Asher & c:o, Berlin,

institutes. The British Museum, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has been organizing and participating in archaeological investigations and excavations beyond Britain to centers of ancient civilization of the world, including Egypt, Greece, Rome and Mesopotamia. The British poached and smuggled back valuable regional cultural relics to London and earned them much condemnation of the malpractice even today. Sponsored by King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, Karl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884), director of the Egypt Division of the Berlin State Museums, was commissioned to lead an expedition to Egypt's Valley of the Tombs of the Kings to perform many archaeological excavations during 1842-1846.

In 1863, French archaeologist Auguste Mariette (1821-1881), once vice president of the Louvre Museum in France, founded the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities to protect unearthed cultural relics in Egypt from being looted.

Jean-Luc Martinez, the president of the Louvre Museum since 2013, is also an archaeologist specialized in ancient Greek Civilization, participating in the archaeological excavation project on the island of Delos and the Delphic Tholos organized by École française d'Athènes (EfA).

Archaeological activities initiated by Western museums secured not only the supplies of collections for the museums, but also the authoritativeness of interpreting the acquired objects, associated social influence, academic reputation, support and sponsorship of the royals, government, and non-governmental groups. As the time progresses, countries inheriting ancient civilization have tightened up their grip on protecting regional unearthed cultural relics and samples from exportation. Though currently some Western museums retain their archaeological department, their major activities incline toward academic studies rather than the acquisition of collections.

The sprout of modern museums in China probably began from the Zhang Jian's Nantong Museum in 1905, the program office of the National Museum of History at Beijing Guozijian of 1912, the Gallery of Antiquities in 1914 and the Palace Museum in 1925, where the collections of cultural relics were from the imperial court and folk. In terms of China's modern archaeology, from the perspective of field excavation, its birth was marked by the excavations in Mianchi's Yangshao Village of Henan of the Swedish scholar Johan Gunnar Andersson (1874-1960) in 1912, that of Chinese scholar Li Ji's in Xiaxian County's Xiyin Village of Shanxi in 1926, and that of the Archaeological Team of the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica in Anyang's Yinxu of Henan in 1928, which demonstrated the archaeological competence of the period.

In addition, some regional museums conducted their own archaeological activities on exposed ancient burial sites. For example, the archaeological work done by the Beijing National Museum of History in Song's city ruins in Julu, Hebei in 1921, Han tombs in Xinyang, Henan in 1924, and ancient tombs in Zhijiang, Hubei in 1926<sup>4</sup>, (excavation briefs of the former two have been published) and the discovery of the

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<sup>4</sup> Li Shouyi, *Collections of National Museum of History During the Republic of China Era*, *Journal of National Museum of China*, Issue 3, 2012

Liangzhu Culture of Yuhang, Zhejiang in 1936 by Shi Xingeng of the Provincial West Lake Museum of Zhejiang. Among the early museums, that of Henan, Shanxi, and Sichuan also carried out some provincial archaeological excavations.

In 1933, under the initiative of Cai Yuanpei, the president of the Academia Sinica, the Ministry of Education instructed the formation of the program office of the National Central Museum, which was led by Fu Sinan, the dean of the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica, who was succeeded by Li Ji in 1934 and Guo Baojun as the director general. They participated in the founding of the museum and the archaeological activities of the Institute of History and Philology, such as the excavation work of the Han cliff tombs in Sichuan's Pengshan. There is an overlap between the work of the museum and of archaeological research, so it is hard to make a clean-cut outline.<sup>5</sup>

After 1949, the archaeological work and work of museums continued to overlap and divide alternately. The situation in the academy of sciences (later, spun off another academy of social sciences) was improved, such as the Institute of Archaeology and Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences sponsored by the central government in 1950. Archaeological research institutes of Shaanxi and Xinjiang founded later once belonged to the system of academy of sciences (or academy of social sciences). Whereas places with richer earthed cultural relics, such as Beijing, Henan, Hebei and Shanxi, the archaeological work is under the direct system of the cultural relics management committee of the local government, commonly called the cultural relics teams. Some major museums, including the Museum of Chinese History, Nanjing Museum, and Shanghai Museum have an internal archaeological department set up, which remain operational even today.

After the Palace Museum became operational in 1925, scholars from Peking University joined the planning and design of the academic research structure. Ma Heng, later the president of the Palace Museum, an epigrapher and an enthusiast of archaeology, presided over the excavation of Yanxiadu of Yixian County, Hebei. Fu Zhenlun also participated in the work<sup>6</sup>.

After 1949, for some time there was not a general national museum, and the cultural management agencies of the central government often entrusted the Palace Museum for unearthed or collected objects from private collectors. As the reciprocity between Peking University, the other colleges' archaeology department and regional archaeological departments and the Palace Museum became frequent, the studies on cultural relics collected by using archaeological methods emerged. For years, the Palace Museum's rich collection, restoration techniques and academic research competence on the ancient artifacts has attracted collaborations with other regional archaeological organizations and made considerable results.

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<sup>5</sup> *Nanjing Museum's 80 Years*, Nanjing Museum, 2013

<sup>6</sup> Shen Songjin, *Archaeological Transition of Traditional Epigraphy – Ma Heng's View*, Study & Exploration, Issue 4, 2000; Fu Zhenlun, *Archaeological Chronicles of Yan's Xiadu (1921-1987)*, Annals of Cultural Relics, Issue 10, 1990

After the National Central Museum was renamed National Nanjing Museum in 1950, archaeologist and deputy director, Ceng Zhaoyu (became the director in 1956) led a series of excavation projects of Mausoleums of the Southern Tang Dynasty. After 1958, the Shanghai Museum established an archaeological division, which made significant accomplishments on the excavation projects of Fuquanshan and Guangfulin tomb relics. The achievements weighed equivalently as those of the museum's own work. The Beijing National Museum of History, after experiencing ebbs and flows, saw its archaeological division receive important rewards from collaboration projects of archaeological excavations in Shanxi, Henan and Jiangsu, especially the State's projects of underwater and airborne remote sensing archaeology after the founding of the Museum of Chinese History in 1959 (merged into the National Museum of China in 2003), which has become a critical milestone in China's archaeological history.

After the 1980s, archaeological missions began bearing more weight along with the advancement of China's economy and society that large scale infrastructure constructions develop rapidly. Under the initiative and sponsorship of the State's cultural relics management department, provincial and city governments separated archaeological tasks from museums and established archaeological institutes.

In summary, the special relationship between museums and archaeology are:

1. China's long and incessant history and rich culture have played a significant role in regional museums. The time-space framework bridged by cultural relics unearthed and research results has become a sustainable prop as demonstrated in "China's General History" and "Ancient China" of the National Museum of China, and exhibitions regarding regional history of civilization and local history in other museums. Objects in arts and special museums, regardless of pottery works, textile, tea, currency, history of science and technology, sports history, and history of drama, have relied heavily on data sorting and research methods of antiquities of archaeological excavation and study results.
2. For decades, important archaeological findings surfaced continuously nationwide have given museums a large volume of highly scientific, historical, artistic exhibits of value. These objects have become treasures and highlights of museums and the most favorite items in overseas exhibition tours.
3. Should an archaeological body operate independently or be run by a museum? This issue involves regional museums and the historical practice of archaeological activities, such as the academic studies, operations, scope, capacity, talent structure, storage, configuration, regional cultural relics protection measures and mechanism of museums and operational orientation. Regardless, the special relationship between museums and archaeological work objectively exists and cannot be ignored.
4. Cultural relics, archaeology, museum, and cultural heritage of recent years are different yet inseparable in China's historical background and social context. The distinction is vague with ambiguous boundaries. Legal articles in the Cultural Relics

Protection Law and the work of administrative agencies of the cultural relics all involve archaeological activities, museums, movable cultural relics, immovable cultural relics and cultural heritage. The governmental entities include museums, archaeological institutes, cultural relics research institutes, cultural relics and archaeology research institutes, and cultural relics teams. The interaction, nourishment and support between the archaeological bodies and museums have complicated the case, resulting in a newly coined term “Relics and Museology” to cover them all. Matters, academies, books, titles, names of professional journals and scope of the relics and museology fall into the gray zone between the archaeology, cultural relics, museum, relics and museology, and cultural heritage, requiring self-determination as a mainstream and the traits for existence.

5. In the aspect of archaeological talent cultivation, many intensive training classes of the archaeology of cultural relics offered earlier by the State and local governments have trained a great number of cadres who become specialists or management staff of museums. Also, the archaeological curriculum of higher education institutes was in place relatively early before the museum management and cultural relics protection majors were established, resulting a great deal of personnel with archaeological background and operation talents in staff and managerial positions. Since the adoption of the policy of reform and opening up, droves of archaeologists have been assigned to management posts of museums, archaeological institutes and administrative units of cultural relics. In the late 1980s, archaeologist Zhang Zhongpei became the director of the Palace Museum, and Yu Weichao the director of the Museum of Chinese History. Most archaeological majors taught by the two have become leaders of various disciplines in museums. Zhang has served the Palace Museum for nearly 30 years, devoted to the forefront of China’s archaeological work and taught in schools. His influence cannot be ignored. Under his guidance and initiative, *Pedigree Compilation of Chinese Pottery Pot* was written and published by the Palace Museum Press as a Class A Publication No. 1 of archaeological publication of the Institute of Archaeology of the Palace Museum.<sup>7</sup>

## **II. Archaeological Research on Palace Museum’s Collection**

The Palace Museum has been at a unique position among China’s museums. Its site in the Forbidden City of the Ming and Qing dynasties is a grandest treasure of ancient Chinese official architectural complex.

Over 1.8 million objects are in the museum’s collection, of which 80% come from the Qing dynasty imperial collection. Of the non-Qing’s collection, pieces were donated, purchased, or conferred by the government, which even includes bricks of the transferred Song tombs of Baisha in Henan. In these early unearthed objects, a few have confirmed sites and era providing valuable research references. Many of the objects have not been sorted out and published, degrading their academic value and

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<sup>7</sup> Zhang zhongpei, *Archaeological Study on Formation of Chinese Civilization*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 4, 2000; Zhao Binfu, *Zhang Zhongpei’s 80 Years of Archaeological Life*, China Cultural Relics News, October 21, 2014

being on the verge of becoming apocryphal.

Use the research results of field archaeology or new archaeological investigation and exploration to study the voluminous Qing's collection acquired through non-field archeology is an important step to the study of apocryphal relics of the museum. The application on ancient pottery and porcelain is a successful case.

The Palace Museum has over 320,000 pieces of palatial pottery and porcelain of the Qing, and over 30,000 fine pieces through donation and acquisition, plus many fine objects unearthed during archaeological activities after 1949, which include the Northern Wei's celadon lotus vessel discovered in a tomb complex of the Fengs in Jingxian County, Hebei, the white-glazed emerald quaternary jar of 576 CE or the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Wuping Reign of Northern Qi of Li Yun Tomb of Puyang, Henan, the Geyao tray of 1371 CE or the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Hongwu Reign of Ming of Wang Xingzu Tomb in Nanjing. However, the Ming and Qing's objects account for the main collection of the museum, of which most are wares made by the imperial kiln of Qing's Jingdezhen. From the Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing to the Republic of China era, the collection and study of ancient pottery and porcelain had been a historical legacy. Its path might be treatises or oral impartation. Sun Yingzhou and Geng Baochang are two contemporaneous masters retaining the legacy of this cultural heritage hired by the Palace Museum in authenticating and studying ancient potter and porcelain works. They are dexterous in all dynasties' pottery vessel, designs, inscriptions, materials and artisanship. At the museum, they are able to study official and private collections, look into the official and apocryphal documents or even practice kilning methods that were found to conduct reverse engineering on the materials and methods. From exercises, they have enriched and developed an academic study system of visual and documental authentication.

After applying categorizing and comparison of numerous physical objects, the regularity found and new data from archaeological findings, a new method of identifying and authenticating porcelain of the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing was formulated. In the early 1950s, Sun Yingzhou published over dozens of treatises of authentication and study<sup>8</sup>, which have become the exemplar of the highest standard of the time. After the 1980s, Geng Baochang's publication of *Authentication of Ming-Qing Porcelain Wares*<sup>9</sup> has remained as the classic of porcelain authentication and the must-have reference of the profession.

A strict and systematic method of pottery and proclaim archaeological study was formulated after Chen Wanli, Feng Xianming and Li Huibing of the Palace Museum taking an excursion tour to investigate, sample, identify kilns, review treatises and explore other archaeological data, especially, the ones with chronological records of porcelain wares unearthed from ancient tombs.

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<sup>8</sup> Refer to *Sun Yingzhou's Pottery and Porcelain World*, edited by the Palace Museum, Forbidden City Press, 2003

<sup>9</sup> Geng Baochang, *Authentication of Ming-Qing's Porcelain*, Two Wood Press in Hong Kong, Forbidden City Press, 1993. The two volumes set was published by Chinese Antique Shops Printing as teaching materials of Yangzhou training course of State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the 1980s.

Chen Wanli paid “eight visits to Longquan and seven visits to Shaoxing” to investigate Zhejiang’s ancient kilns on site since 1928, marking the start of the field and the kiln archaeology of China’s ancient porcelain. Based on the survey data, Chen published *Porcelain and Zhejiang* and *Brief Chinese Celadon History* that serve as a milestone of a new era of China’s ancient porcelain research. Under his guidance since the 1950s, scholars of the Palace Museum, including Feng Xianming, Ye Zhemin and Li Huibing formulated a comparative study method on legacy collections by performing field verification on kiln sites documented. Following the method, they did archaeological investigations over 150 ancient kilns in 17 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government and made dozens kiln survey reports in succession<sup>10</sup>, becoming the mainstream of kiln research of China’s ancient pottery and porcelain before the 1980s. Chen acquired over 30,000 samples of porcelain pieces and published a series of *Ancient Chinese Kiln Samples*<sup>11</sup> that covers from the Eastern Han to the Ming-Qing era, during which those in the Tang, Song, Jin and Yuan were eminent. Especially, those of a considerable number of lost kilns are the most precious. On the confirmed kiln sites and a large amount of new archaeological data, Feng wrote *History of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*<sup>12</sup> and *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*<sup>13</sup>. The latter is one of the teaching materials of which the compiling was organized by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH). Meanwhile, Li Zhiyan et al. were appointed by the Palace Museum to participate in the kiln archaeological work of Longquan’s east zone in Zhejiang. Geng Baochang has been joining on site ancient kiln excavation projects, including the authentication study of recovered underwater porcelain. Especially, to curb foreign plundering of porcelain relics of sunken shipwrecks in China’s territorial waters, Feng and Geng pushed forward the founding of China’s underwater archaeology. The 2005 Ancient China’s Kiln Samples Expo at the Palace of Prolonging Happiness in the Palace Museum presented a systematic summary of years of archaeological work on Chinese pottery and porcelain.<sup>14</sup>

A more direct involvement in archaeological research is to participate in the excavation of ancient kilns. That was exactly what Wang Guangyao, archaeology major and archaeological researcher of the Palace Museum, did. Wang, with the qualification to lead field archaeological excavations, has joined several regional ancient kiln excavation projects. Such as the Ming and Qing’s imperial kiln sites of Jingdezhen<sup>15</sup>, the Yuan and Ming porcelain kiln relics of Jingdezhen’s Liyang Township<sup>16</sup>, Jingdezhen’s Guanyin kiln and Huoshaoshan celadon kiln site of

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to *Chen Wanli’s Archaeological Collectanea of Porcelain*, Forbidden City Press, 1997 or Cultural Relics for investigation report

<sup>11</sup> Palace Museum, *Ancient Chinese Kilns* (Henan I, II) (2005, 2013), *Ancient Chinese Kilns* (Hebei) (2011, 2013), *Ancient Chinese Kilns* (Shanxi, Gansu, Inner Mongolia) (2013), *Ancient Chinese Kilns* (Beijing, Shandong, Shaanxi, Ningxia, Liaoning) (2013), Forbidden City Press

<sup>12</sup> Feng Xianming, *History of Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, Cultural Relics Press, 1985

<sup>13</sup> Feng Xianming, *Chinese Porcelain*, Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988

<sup>14</sup> Feng Xiaoqi, *Ancient Chinese Kilns Exhibition (1)*, Collectors, Issue 8, 2005, *Ancient Chinese Kilns Exhibition (2)*, Collectors, Issue 12, 2005, *Ancient Chinese Kilns Exhibition (3)*, Collectors, Issue 1, 2006

<sup>15</sup> School of Archaeology and Museology, Peking University et al., *Excavation Brief of Ming-Qing’s Imperial kilns of Jiangxi Jingdezhen*, Cultural Relics, Issue 5, 2007

<sup>16</sup> Palace Museum et al., *Excavation Report of Yuan’s Kilns in Liyang’s Duijiushan of Jiangxi Jingdezhen*,



Zhejiang's Deqing County<sup>17</sup>. These joint projects put the ancient pottery and porcelain research at a leading edge for the Palace Museum<sup>18</sup>, as well as facilitate a tight grip of the status quote of archaeology, more inspiration to ameliorate the stereotyped pottery and porcelain archaeology and the formulation of newer methodologies<sup>19</sup>.

The Ancient Ceramics Examination and Research Center of the Palace Museum has established a rich database of Chinese pottery and porcelain through comparative analyses of the unearthed pottery and porcelain pieces from different archaeological site nationwide and the museum's collections, the laboratory analysis of those of the Song's official kilns and the Ming and Qing's are in particular. The comparative study of the museum's collections and the unearthed pieces of kilns has earned the museum many academic results and its innate advantage in the technological study of Chinese pottery and porcelain.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the ancient pottery and porcelain study of the museum has been focused on the accumulation of traditional and modern archaeological excavation experiences to keep it at the forefront of academic research.

Furthermore, there are over 30,000 jade pieces collected by the Palace Museum, most of which are from the Qing's collection of different dynasties' ancient jade and the Ming-Qing imperial jade workshop. Among the pieces, some early objects that used to be unverifiable now have been confirmed by using modern archaeological excavation results obtained in recent years to be related to the Hongshan Culture or the Liangzhu Culture. Some objects of the Liangzhu Culture were found being reworked by the Qing's imperial workshop to have Emperor Qianlong's poem inscription. The museum has conducted excavations itself to obtain a small number of unearthed objects, such as the exquisite jade articles from the tombs of the Warring States Period in Anhui's Changfeng County. In addition, over one hundred jade vessels were obtained from Hanshan County's Lingjiatan in Anhui, which is of great academic value since these cultural relics are official archaeological findings. Yang Boda of the Palace Museum has conducted textual research in his study treatises of jade vessel, which includes a large volume of archaeological excavation data<sup>21</sup>. Yang Jing, the museum's researcher and an expert of ancient cultures, is proficient in various research methodologies, such as the comparative study using archaeological typology, stratigraphy periodization, or cultural pedigree determination of various heritage traits in his involvement in the jade study<sup>22</sup>. Under the initiative of Zhang Zhongpei, the Palace Museum organized jointly the "Jade, Soul of China —

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*Excavation Report of Ming's Kilns in Liyang's Ciqishan of Jiangxi Jingdezhen*, Cultural Relics, Issue 3, 2007

<sup>17</sup> Zhejiang Archaeological Institute of Cultural Relics, *Excavation Report of Deqing's Huoshaoshan Celadon Kiln*, Cultural Relics Press, 2008

<sup>18</sup> Wang Guangyao, *On the Creation of Imperial Porcelain – Archaeological Periodization of Ming's Imperial Kilns*, Southern Cultural Relics, Issue 4, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Wang Guangyao, *On Pottery and Porcelain Archaeology*, Southern Cultural Relics, Issue 1, 2008; *On Ancient Chinese Porcelain Export*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 3, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Li He, Xu Wei, Li Weidong, Liang Guoli, Miao Jianmin, *Nondestructive EDXRF Analysis on Song's Official Kilns Collected by the Palace Museum*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 5, 2010; Li He, Ding Yinzong et al., *Technological Study on Porcelain Shatters of the Southern Song Unearthed in Hangzhou*, Southern Cultural Relics, Issue 2, 2013

<sup>21</sup> Yang Boda, *Chinese Jade Corpora*, Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005

<sup>22</sup> Yang Boda, *Chinese Jade Corpora*, Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House, 2005, Yang Jing, *Identification of A Carved Jade Ware*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 5, 2004; Yang Jing, *6,000 Years of Chinese Comb*, Forbidden City Press, 2007

Exhibition of Lingjiatan Exquisite Jade Articles” with the Liangzhu Museum in 2011 to put the museum’s research results of Neolithic jade vessels on exhibition<sup>23</sup>.

Besides the above porcelain and jade objects, the museum’s collection also includes bronze wares and sculptures, such as over 4,000 terracotta figurines spanning from the Warring States Period to the Ming-Qing in varieties of regions and motifs. For example, the animal terracotta objects of the Eastern Han’s tombs unearthed in 1951 in Baiquan of Henan’s Huixian County, those unearthed in 1955 of Lei Fujun’s Madam Song tomb dated 745 CE or the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the Tang’s Tianbao Reign of Hansen stockade village of eastern suburb in Xi’an, and those unearthed in 1950 of Qinling Mausoleum of Li Bian dated 943 CE or the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Southern Tang’s Shengyuan Reign in Zutangshan of Jiangsu’s Jiangning. The stone sculptures of the Xiude Temple of Hebei’s Quyang remain as a special topic of archaeological study<sup>24</sup>. The inscription collections include stones, such as that on stone drums, sutra Dhvajās, painted-carvings (including bricks), huangchangshi, well rails, sarcophaguses, epigraphs, royal seals, and lutes, needless to say, lacquered and glass objects of the Warring State Period and the Han. Imagine what the splendor would be if a special topical exhibition of China’s ancient artworks of generations of archaeological collections organized by the museum. From the predecessors Tang Lan et al.<sup>25</sup> to current scholars Du Naisong, Liu Yu, and Wang Suzhu, the study on the museum’s collection have been based on extant archaeological findings requiring no verbosity.<sup>26</sup>

Cases of periodization and analysis made by the museum’s scholars in architecture, furniture, articles and dresses in ancient paintings are also plenty. Yu Hui, researcher of the museum, has spent years on the authentication of calligraphies and paintings, especially by using ethnology, philology, and archaeology. His research results used to create a standardized method and theory to identify early paintings to explore the insights of the images in paintings and the historical background have been highly praised in the profession<sup>27</sup>. So have been those of Fu Dongguang. In 2011, the museum attempted to recount the time of the “9<sup>th</sup> year of Yonghe Reign” of the famous Chinese calligrapher Wang Xizhi’s Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion (Lantingxu) during its exhibition of “Orchid Pavilion”, the visualized, intuitive “wine vessel” of “floating wine vessel in winding stream” in particular, the organizer went to Jiangxi only to borrow the eared lacquer cup (yushang) in M3 (Lei Gai Tomb) unearthed during the excavation of the Eastern Jin’s tomb complex of Nanchang’s railway station in 1997 for the exhibition. According to the excavation briefs, one wooden piece of the burial objects has a black-ink writing of chronicle

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<sup>23</sup> Yang Jing, Jiang Weidong, *Jade, Soul of China — Proceedings of Ancient Chinese Jade Articles and Traditional Culture* (V), Zhejiang Ancient Books Publishing House, 2012

<sup>24</sup> Yang Boda, *Art Genre and Characteristics of Unearthed Statue of Quyang’ Xiude Temple*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 6, 1960

<sup>25</sup> Li Gang, *Tang Lan’s Research on Bronze Wares and Inscriptions*, PhD. Dissertation, Jilin University

<sup>26</sup> Du Naisong, *Ancient Bronze Wares*, Cultural Relics Publishing House, 2005; Liu Yu, Lu Yan, *Collectanea of Yin-Zhou Bronze Inscriptions Recently Unearthed*, Zhonghua Book Company 2002; Wang Su, *Han-Tang History and Unearthed Scrolls*, Forbidden City Press, 2011

<sup>27</sup> Yu Hui, *Scroll Year Authentication of Han Xizai Night Banquet & Early Figure Painting Authentication*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 4, 1993

event “the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Yonghe Reign...”<sup>28</sup>.

Religious items have a great deal of significance in the museum’s study on cultural relics, especially, the architecture and collections of Tibetan Buddhism. Luo Wenhua and other scholars of the museum have collaborated with archaeological agencies in Sichuan, Qinghai, Tibet, and Gansu to investigate and record findings on regional Buddhist monasteries, temples, frescos, grottos, Thangka, rubbings on precipices, statues, and ancient roads by using current standard field archaeological procedure and equipment, bringing the study of religious cultural relics to a new horizon. In addition, during the process, the field survey has confirmed the landscapes of Dajinchuan and Xiaojinchuan consistent with the *Illustrative Album of Pacifying Jinchuan Battle* of Qing’s imperial paintings collected by the museum. With additional unearthed objects and local historical records, the marching routes of the Qing’s army were identified. In 2013, the joint project, “Archaeological Survey of Sichuan’s Shiqu Tibetan Stone Carvings”, of the museum and Archaeological Institute of Sichuan discovers three stone carving relics of the early Tubo (Tibetan) period. The number of total carvings found is 18, which completes the Tang-Tibet Ancient Road east to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and becomes a piece of valuable evidence for the studying of Buddhism history of Tibet, history of Buddhist art, history of Tang-Tibet reciprocity, early Buddhism acculturation of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The findings have been designated as one of the ten great contemporaneous archaeological discoveries of China.<sup>29</sup>

The Forbidden City can be said as the greatest collection of the museum. The study of ancient architecture is part of architecture and archaeology. The narrowing meaning of architectural archaeology covers only the foundation and unearthed architectural constructs of dilapidated structures. The Forbidden City is the largest and the best preserved ancient wood structure architectural complex that receives the most attention of scholars. However, for six centuries after its construction, despite its foundation remaining the same, works that partially abandoned, rebuilt, renovated, and relocated internal palaces, halls, rooms, buildings, courtyards, walls, paths, and drainage have not stop. Ancient architecture experts of the museum have paid long-term attention to this issue. They have surveyed, drawn and photoed timely the exposed foundation and facilities during any reconstruction work in conformance with the requirements of the ancient architectural archaeology to collect sets of valuable

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Jiangxi Cultural Relics Archaeological Research Institute, Nanchang Museum, *Excavation Brief of Eastern Jin’s Tombs near Nanchang Railway Station*, Cultural Relics, Issue 2, 2001; Palace Museum, *On Lanting Exhibition*, Palace Museum Press, 2012

<sup>29</sup> *Investigation Report of Sichuan Songge Mani Stone Town*, Cultural Relics, Issue 2, 2005; *Regional Ethnicities and Archaeology of Sichuan Ganzi*, Palace Museum Journal, Vol. 2, 2005; *Investigation Report of Temples under Chieftain Lu in Liancheng of Gansu’s Yongdeng*, Palace Museum Journal, Issue 1, 2010; Luo Wenhua, Palace Museum, Sichuan Cultural Relics Archaeological Research Institute, *Frescos of Ming’s Tibetan Buddhism in Muya Region*, Palace Museum Press, 2012; *Investigation Report of Sichuan’s Shiqu Tibetan Stone Carvings*, Sichuan Cultural Relics Press, Issue 6, 2013

data for deep study.<sup>30</sup> In recent years, because of the need of building a center of cultural relics protection along the Xihe River in the Forbidden City, the museum per required procedure must carry out an archaeological excavation first. This was the first time an excavation was conducted by the Beijing Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics according to the modern field archaeological requirements in the Forbidden City. The excavation survey confirmed that there are no important architectural relics in the area and the only architecture there before was destroyed in Daoguang Reign of Qing. Extant preserved wells and sewage will be incorporated into the construction plan for long-term protection and future exhibition.<sup>31</sup>

### **III. Academic Orientation of Institute of Archaeology**

After touching on the museum and archaeology and the archaeological means applied to the museum's collections, the following topic is the academic orientation of the museum's Institute of Archaeology.

Recent years, China's archaeological industry has been jaw-dropping. According to the posts on the website of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, as of July 2014, nationwide there were 73 qualified field archaeological organizations, of which eight are in Beijing. The Institute of Archaeology, as a restituted old and a small institute of a large organization in the Palace Museum, its performance, features and accurate positioning have become critical issues.

The objectives of the Institute of Archaeology can be summarized into the following: under a macroscopic context of studying the formation and advancement of the ancient Chinese civilization, the orientation of study is to focus on the advantageous areas of imperial supremacy and palatial relics, including pottery, porcelain, bronze, jade, architecture, arts, and religious objects, of the Forbidden City. Explore the innovative mechanism of a research institute with existing cross-disciplinary divisions of the museum and the collaboration platform of domestic and overseas academic institutes to exert the advantage of training talents together with colleges and universities.

#### **(I) Archaeology of the Forbidden City**

The terminus ante quem in colleges' archaeological curriculum includes from the Paleolithic Period to the Song, Lao, Jin and Yuan, to current Song, Yuan and Ming. But to the Forbidden City, the cutoff has been extended at least as necessary to the late Qing and early Republic of China period. The Forbidden City was built in 1420 CE or the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Yongle Reign of Ming, and in the following 600 years on the 720,000 square meters perimeter, although the basic layout remains the same, localized dynamic changes never stop, including relocations and renovations, especially the underground foundation and drainage, which are areas the researchers and protectors

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<sup>30</sup> Bai Lijuan, Wang Jingfu, *Investigation and Research on Architectural Foundation of the Forbidden City, Architectural Study and Protection – On Palace Museum's 70th Anniversary*, Forbidden City Press, 1995

<sup>31</sup> Beijing Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics, Xiheyuan Relics of the Forbidden City, *Excavation Report of Beijing Imperial Architectural Relics*, Science Press, 2009

never put hands on before. As a daily routine task of protecting the world heritage, with the least interference, the infrastructural maintenance, emergency, repair and renovation of water supply, drainage, power supplies, heating supplies, and security, excavation cannot be avoided every year. The execution per regulations is by assigning professional archaeological agencies to monitor, examine, survey and coordinate necessary excavation tasks, asking professionals for protection suggestions, and deciding whether to reroute the construction to preserve the relics, or acquire complete site data before construction.

Right after its founding in 2013, the Institute of Archaeology received approval of three coordinated excavation projects of the Forbidden City. The projects include (1) the eastern city wall foundation's water dispersal, drainage, and the rammed earth purlin; (2) the paved surface outside the Southern Warehouses, porcelain dump pit, and dump pit for important unearthed relics; (3) the eastern drainage, paved surface, early foundations of large architecture, rammed earth underlayment, and stone underlayment of Garden of Compassion and Tranquility, where numerous clearly dated with verifiable stratum imperial porcelain, jade vessels, bone and shell vessels, jade, crystal, broken Kapala bowls unearthed on the Southern Warehouses site. These findings were scientifically excavated and recorded. After a series of sampling and verification of architectural materials, a dataset was constructed to give a good future reference for the study of architectural periodization, composition, and artisanship heritage of the Forbidden City. After sorting and technical examination of unearthed relics, the institute has created a first-hand physical data on the inner palace handicraft production and imperial porcelain administration. The discovery of Kapala bowls provides valuable information on the archaeology of Tibetan Buddhism and the court's administration on the religion and Dharma vessels.<sup>32</sup>

Mulling over the protection and exhibition of well-preserved Ming's palatial foundation like the Garden of Compassion and Tranquility or similar, such as the familiar Musée du Louvre in France, where the Louis XIV of France put a large underground construction in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that allows visitors to enjoy the archaeologically preserved castle relics built by Philippe II Auguste.

The archaeology of the Forbidden City is decided to be a large, general topic per the macroscopic guidelines of the ancient capital Beijing. Through archaeological results of the construction work of the Palace Museum in the succession years, the workflow, scientific research orientation and protection plan will be established. Relying on the accumulation of excavation, recording and study, we will put the pieces of findings together to complete the underground composition map to deepen our understanding of the layout, structure and association of the collective architecture of the Forbidden City as a major reference source for the recreation of the architectural history of the Forbidden City.

## (II) Archaeology of Imperial Relics

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<sup>32</sup> *Archaeological Findings of the Forbidden City – Ming-Qing's Architectural Relics Discovered in 2014*, Chinese Cultural Relics, Jan. 9, 2015

As the palace city of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Forbidden City is not an isolated creation. As the contemporaneous political, cultural centers of the two dynasties, its influence radiated across many major cities of the entire empire. This is attested by many large palatial architectural relics, such as The Old Summer Palace, imperial detached palaces, imperial ranges and ranches, mausoleums, and workshops. Among the above architectural relics, the volume of homogeneous study topics is sufficient to provide cross verification and complementary references to each other. For instance, the once monopolistic official kilns of the Forbidden City discovered in the joint project of the Palace Museum and Jingdezhen on the Ming-Qing official kilns and imperial kiln relics were in fact a link between the official handicraft productions to the end users. Therefore, Interactive inspiration between academic study topics is common. Also, The glass kiln found in Danjiangkou City by the joint project of the Forbidden City and Hubei Research Institute of Archaeology was part of the imperial project of the Wudang Mountains at the same period of the construction of Beijing's Forbidden City during the Ming's Yongle Reign, which has extremely high value of the study of the glass constructs of the Forbidden City.

### (III) Provincial, Municipal, Regional Archaeological Collaborations

The Ming and Qing Forbidden City is the last glory of China's ancient agriculture and handicraft industry. Only by seeking for its root, the understanding and reconstruction of its skeleton and lineage of heritage and the interpretation of its historical interaction and changes become possible. The Institute of Archaeology of the Palace Museum, therefore, is actively taking part in archaeological investigations and excavation projects of different eras of Chinese civilization nationwide. For example, Researcher Wang Rui's participation in the joint archaeological investigation project of the Archaeological Institute of Henan and the National Museum at the downstream of Hebi's Qihe River, and the excavation project of Dalaidian relics, and Wang Zhuang tomb, has helped the understanding of the regional samples during the key period of the formation of China's ancient civilization between the late Neolithic Age and the Xia-Shang era. The same work will be carried out in Hebei. Researcher Xu Haifeng's involvement in a number of long-term field archaeological surveys, excavations and data collections has given him a solid foundation of his work. His continuous work on archaeological investigation, excavation, data collections and publishing of Jiaodong's Qin-Han ritual relics, a joint project of the Shandong Archaeological Institute and the National Museum has helped decipher the imperial ritual system, complexity, heritage and change from the Qin-Han to Ming-Qing eras.<sup>33</sup> The collaboration between the Palace Museum's Institute of Archaeology and other provincial and municipal archaeological agencies has been in development to cover the capital, Yellow River-Huaihe River region, the Great Wall and Inner Mongolia region, Sichuan, Tibet, Gansu and Qinghai. The orientation is necessary for the growth of the Institute of Archaeology's own field archaeological team and the improvement of the team

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<sup>33</sup> Wang Rui, *Influence of Zhou-Han's "Eight Deities" Ritual*, Archaeological Collectanea on National Museum of China Centennial, Science Press, 2012; Xu Haifeng, *Archaeological Chronicles of Shang-Zhou in Hebei*, Annals of Cultural Relics, Issue 12, 2000



members' capability of investigation and excavation and understanding of various relics of different times.

#### (IV) Foreign Exchanges and Collaboration

Cultural propagation and exchange is another indispensable aspect of the study of ancient Chinese civilization. The Han-Tang's Land Silk Road and the Song-Yuan-Ming's Maritime Silk Road have drawn much attention recently. The pottery and porcelain research specialty of the Institute of Archaeology of the Palace Museum will make greater contributions in the latter. The Palace Museum has significant long-term accumulation of knowledge and experience on the study of exported porcelain works and imported porcelain materials. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Han Huaizhun devoted to the collection of overseas Chinese porcelain works before he returned to work in the Palace Museum in the 1950s and became the leading expert in the exported Chinese porcelain wares. He published a book on *Ancient Chinese Export Ware Found in Nanyang*<sup>34</sup>. In 2013, Wang Guangyao et al. joined the archaeological excavation of Kerala's ancient Kollam Port southwest coast of India and Pattanam relics and discovered voluminous Chinese coins and porcelain shatters, which is an indication of ancient Chinese influence in the regions. These provide important evidence to the study of the maritime Silk Road. Under the national strategy of the "Belt and Road Initiative", Southeast Asia, Southern Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Africa can be included in the going-out archaeological activities.

#### (V) Archaeological Research on Palace Museum's Collection

The archaeological research on the Palace Museum's collection remains as the key orientation. The Palace Museum has plenty of experts, collections, documents, data, academic amassment and teams on ancient pottery, bronze, jade, architecture, arts, and religious objects. Profundity is better than quantity, and fineness is better than coarseness. The archaeology of the Forbidden City will focus on proper topics to be its breakthrough for a long-term and progressive advancement.

#### (VI) Cross-Disciplinary Coordination

Another advantage of the archaeological competence of the Palace Museum is the versatile, mature specialties backed by its rich resources and advanced knowledge and technological results. The institute has strong departmental supports of knowledge, facilities, technology, research results and talent across domains of ancient architecture, documents, relics protection, repair, examination, images, photos, information technology, virtual reality, etc. Its outside partners include organizations specialized in archaeological planning, architecture, construction, geology, forestry, remote sensing, survey, seism and Beijing's history and geography. There will be more domestic and international research institutes, experts and scholars joining its archaeological activities.

In general, the archaeological units and operations established by the Palace Museum

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<sup>34</sup> Han Huaizhun, *Ancient Chinese Export Ware Found in Nanyang*, Singapore Youth Book, 1960

must be an open, innovative platform that is dedicated to exploring the research orientation and mechanism within the system of the museum. The accomplishments of the museum in archaeology will be presented through exhibitions, seminars, academic symposiums, publications, multimedia publications, Internet feeds and modern educational activities to deliver deep contents to wider audiences. It is expected within 10 years on the centennial anniversary of the Palace Museum, the archaeological achievements will be at a new high with the new generation's enthusiasm, vitality and participation.

March 2015

### **Afterword**

This is to acknowledge unselfish help, suggestions and materials given by the institute, instructors and colleagues.