

Cultural Hermeneutics of Ancient Chinese Local History Exhibition - A Case Study of Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace

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Abstract: Cultural hermeneutics in terms of its historical significance and interest plays a vital role in the ancient Chinese local history exhibition. The exhibition of Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace focuses on the combination of cultural hermeneutics and historical value of the palace and its unearthed cultural relics, and plays particular attention to the blend of three elements of exhibition - conception, exhibits and space. Therefore, it achieved the unification of seriousness and interest in the exhibition, which can be a reference to other ancient Chinese local history exhibitions.

1. Introduction

How to display and convey information vividly and make a combination of cultural and historical significance and interest is of great importance. Cultural conception should emphasize on the determination of exhibiting characteristics and the information to be conveyed, in other words, the specific content and information displayed by the museum. Visitors learn cultural and historical values of a museum from its exhibition. Therefore, the exhibition is one of vital indicators to the determination of merits of a museum. It was said (2001) that ‘the display of a museum is based on cultural relics and specimens and supported with some auxiliary exhibits which are arranged within a given space in accordance with a certain theme and sequence and art forms...and it is the main way for the museum to fulfill its social function’^[1]. Whatever the forms of exhibition are, these three elements (conception, exhibits and space) and their successful coordination are the key to determine the quality of the exhibition of a museum. Therefore, these three elements-conception, exhibits and place-should be highly concerned in the design of an exhibition. The conception determines the exhibiting theme, sequence and the arrangement of storyline. Exhibits are the most direct way of presentation. While design and use of space contribute to the blend of contents as an organic whole. Only the reasonable design of conception and exhibits as well as space can make the best performance of the whole exhibition possible.

The Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace of Guangzhou especially highlights the coordination of those three elements. The site has been included in the Chinese world cultural heritage tentative list in 2006 issued by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. Its permanent exhibition ‘Nanyue Palace’ is known for its dedicate design with remarkable historical significance and has achieved good exhibiting effect, which can be used for reference in the design of permanent exhibition of site museums. It is not only a useful example for the protection of historical remains but a model for the design of exhibition of site museums.

2. The conception of exhibition: highlighting the cultural and historical value of historical sites, palatial garden and cultural relics

2.1 General idea

Conception is the primary element for the exhibition design and a reasonable conception is the

prerequisite for the design of a wonderful exhibition. Conception should emphasize on the determination of exhibiting characteristics and the information to be conveyed, in other words, the specific content and information displayed by the museum.

The Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace is built based on the ruins of Nanyue palace. The emphasis of this exhibition should be on the displaying of important cultural value and historical significance of the Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace, the national key cultural relics protection unit. By presenting the archaeological achievements of the remains, the ingenious design of Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace and imperial garden can be interpreted so as to highlight the historical position of the state of Nanyue in Lingnan district and local features, and to unfold the two thousand years of history of Lingnan as the central place pioneered by the state of Nanyue.

As a result, the Nanyue Palace site, palatial garden, various palace and garden and unearthed architectural relics are the characteristics of Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace. It was pointed out that the palatial garden of Nanyue palace is the earliest imperial garden in Chinese archaeological findings, and the state of Nanyue is the first feudal Kingdom in Lingnan district(2010) ^[2]. Guangzhou has been considered as political, economic and cultural center of Lingnan district since Zhao Tuo built the state of Nanyue, with Panyu as its capital, 2000 years ago. (1995)^[3] Numerous building materials for palace and garden, bricks, pipes, china, wooden slips and flora and fauna fossils have been unearthed in the site of Nanyue Palace, which have significant cultural and historical values.

It is essential to present the content of exhibition after defining its whole conception. The conception design of the exhibition is challenged by the connection of a wealth of cultural relics in accordance with a certain structure to emphasize on the exquisite design of Nanyue Palace and the reasonability of the imperial garden, and by the clear presentation of two thousand years of the magnificent history of the state of Nanyue to highlight the cultural and historical value of unearthed cultural relics. The resolution of these matters lies in the arrangement of storyline, preparation of the content and form design of the exhibition.

2.2 The arrangement of storyline

The storyline should be drawn in a certain sequence so as to ensure a clear organization and be straightforward to visitors. The storyline of “Nanyue Palace”, the permanent exhibition of the Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace, has adopted a narrative order from whole to local and presented in chronological order. The storyline of whole exhibition can be divided into two parts defined by different floors. The exhibition hall is depicted in a macro view. The history of unification of Lingnan by Qin and Han dynasties and the state of Nanyue have been dated back in a chronological order at first, and then the remains of palace, drainage facilities and imperial garden introduced with a clue of the capital and palace of the state of Nanyue. The second floor presents the furnishings of the inside palace microscopically, introducing the bricks, bronze and iron implements, remaining facilities used by the royal family and wooden slips with pottery inscriptions in sealed earth used in the palace. Last but not least, ecological environment before two thousand years ago in Pan Yu districts has been described. The outline of whole story is organized logically, schematized from whole to local and from macro to micro and in a chronological view according to the development of history. It has restored the history, political policies and culture of Nanyue palace in a vivid, stereoscopic and multidirectional manner, highlighting two thousand years of historical position of Lingnan as the central place and the scientific nature of the garden design. This outline is easier to be understood and accepted, helping visitors to rapidly grasp the skeleton of this exhibition in spite of starting from any routes.

2.3 Details of the exhibition

Every part of exhibition should be detailed with the general idea and the outline of story of the exhibition defined. To be specific, the content of exhibition can be divided as follows:

The history of unification, building and regime changes of the state of Nanyue should be tracked back so as to explain the groundbreaking significance of the establishment of the state of Nanyue by

Zhao Tuo in Lingnan district.

Efforts to the description of the constructing system of the imperial garden and the layout of capital and palace of the state of Nanyue should be made to recreate the landscape of the palace and imperial garden of the state of Nanyue to interpret their unique and scientific characteristics.

The archaeological achievement made in the remains of the Nanyue palace should be unfolded and the economic, political and cultural environment should be recreated in accordance with the building materials, drainage installations, remaining implements, bronze and iron implements used by the royal family and wooden slips, and sealed earth used in the palace.

The contribution of the state of Nanyue to the cultural exchanges between Chinese and western countries and the national amalgamation should be acknowledged.

The remains of flora and fauna and their survival environment in Pan Yu of Guangzhou two thousand years ago should be pictured.

This comprehensive and detailed arrangement has presented not only the history stories in a chronological order but the imperial gardens, buildings and various cultural relics in a spatial order, and also introduced the culture, diplomacy and ecological environment of the state of Nanyue. It enables the visitors to have a profound understanding of the history of Nanyue palace and the state of Nanyue from many aspects.

2.4 Forms of exhibition: the unification of seriousness and interest

It is essential to interpret the seriousness, decency and scientific nature of this exhibition as the state of Nanyue has a long history with a profound cultural background and it, as a site museum, has an educational function itself. The form of exhibition should focus on the quality of decency and primitive simplicity so as to create the in-depth insight of history of the state of Nanyue. It should also be diversified and attractive to all social groups based on the content and reliable data, leading to the unification of seriousness and interest. Color and light should be used to create atmosphere and activate all visual, audible and touch sense organs. All require the utilization of multimedia. This will be analyzed in the following parts.

3. Exhibits and ancillary supplies: the coordination of cultural, historical value and enjoyment

The Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace mainly exhibits the cultural relics unearthed from the remains of Nanyue Palace. The designers should consider how to select representative cultural relics from many unearthed relics. This museum has combined the history value and ornamental of cultural relics when exhibits are selected and displayed, and focused on the unique and representativeness of exhibits, such as the earliest glaze and biggest bricks in archaeological discoveries and delicate tiles inscribed with characters of “Wan Sui (Long Live)”. Ancillary supplies, meanwhile, also displayed so as to highlight the significance of relics in the given historical environment.

For instance, king-sized and printing rectangular bricks are exhibited in the part of “large bricks and glaze”, of which the king-size bricks are the largest one in our Chinese archaeological discoveries (2008)^[4]. The highly valuable king-sized brick is put in a separated showcase convenient to be appreciated in an all-round manner. Visitors are impressed by its huge size at the sight of it. While the printing rectangular bricks printed with ornaments are delicate and exquisite. Both are an indicative of the design level of imperial palaces in the period of the state of Nanyue. Visitors are easily attracted for their rich historical value and ornamental performance. Exhibits are mainly the actual cultural relics unearthed in remains. A few exhibits hard to be displayed are presented in copies. For example, the inscribed wooden slips are replaced with copies, as they are easy to be rotten. However, copies have little impact on the integrity of exhibition.

Ancillary supplies are also used to make the content and information of exhibition more complete and direct. For instance, to show the whole view of the Nanyue Palace, a sand table model is made to allow visitors to better learn the macro view and location of this palace. Diagrams to count tiles and iron pivots are made respectively, which facilitate visitors knowing the specific position and function of scraps of building materials in the palace. When glazes are present,

analysis diagram for glaze is provided. For the separated glaze and iron pivot exhibited are hard to allow ordinary visitors to understand their actual function and significance. The utilization of ancillary supplies offers a physical survival environment for the isolated exhibits such as building materials for palace, ceramic fragments and glaze, emphasizing the historical significance and scientific value of relics in context.

The layout of exhibits in Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace is quite particular. Titled tables have been used to highlight parts of small-sized exhibits, such as copper coins, ceramic fragments and cross-section of tiles, making the appreciation easier. The tilted table has been fixed with a base for preventing exhibits from falling. The height of bases varies from different types of exhibits, making the classification clearer and more logical. For example, although the pottery inscription, sealed earth and brick inscription are put in a showcase, their bases are different in height and tilted angle. As a result, visitors are able to clearly learn the fact that those exhibits belong to different types. Another example is the representative relics, the titles with the Chinese character “Wan Sui (Long Live)”. Watt head of the imbrex and non-imbrex are located at the different height of bases, allowing exhibits to be well-arranged and artistic.

4. The space design: the exquisite coordination with the content of Nanyue Palace presented

4.1 The general design style of the architecture

The design for the hall are blend with the content of Nanyue Palace and the display space are built with the imitation of red black wall of palace of the state of Nanyue. All these allow visitors to be as if in the actual palace of the state of Nanyue when under the exhibiting space. A few ceilings of halls have imitated the ancient palace design as a triangle titled shape with a sprung roof using crossed blown wooden, which creates a feelings of extension for the headspace. Each side of the red wall is decorated with black wedges to create a classical atmosphere. The coordination of the building style of the hall and the content of exhibition contributes to the air of magnificent and profound history of the Nanyue palace.

4.2 The interior space design of the hall

The space of lobby is relatively wide. The names of past dynasties from the Qin dynasty starting from the unification of Lingnan district to the modern times are written on the floor of lobby, making people as if in the thousands of years of history. Either side of the wicket guide visitors to the formal hall where visitors as if entered into the tunnel of history to start their journey of exploration to the state of Nanyue.

The interior exhibiting space of the Nanyue palace has adopted the series connection structure. ‘The series layout refers that every lobby is linked end-to-end...allowing every lobby to be visited in sequence and making the road lines clearer (1997)^{[5]93}’. The display space of the lobby in the first floor is relatively narrow, extending as a straight line. The visiting road line thus starts from one end to the other one. This design is linked with the chronological development of history, contributing a clear historical development for visitors. The hall in the second floor is wider than those in the first floor. As a result, the visiting road line is shaped as the Chinese character “Hui (回)”. Entering from the middle of hall, visitors begin their journey from either side direction, then back to the middle, and continue from the other side. The construction of visiting road line is a series space connection with a certain sequence.

4.3 The isolation of space: the use of partition

Partition, with a function of guidance, has been highly concerned during the arrangement of space to separate exhibition space so as to distinguish different themes. “Partition can effectively increase the coverage of extension line, define and guide the visiting road line by means of isolated layout, making display, exhibiting room varied (1997)^{[5]117}”. For instance, every part of the display space of the hall in the first floor has been isolated with a large red wall so as to distinguish different themes. Therefore, each theme of the hall are independent and focused, rather than be

plainly visible for visitors. The secluded hall is echoed with the design conception of ancient garden in Lingnan district.

A large display space generally corresponds with a big theme, with some small supported themes added. For instance, a small partition has been used to isolate a small room from that large display space in the second floor to introduce the “the firing of tilts” sprinkled in the “remaining instruments used by loyal families”. It is because the tilts are the essence of the relics unearthed from the Nanyue palace. As a result, introducing the firing of tilts is the supplementation of the making process of such relics as tilts exhibited in the remaining instruments used by loyal families. It is an indication that themes exhibited are not only relations but also distinctions.

5. Diversified exhibition forms: presenting the history of the state of Nanyue in a vivid and three-dimensional way

The Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace highlights not only the coordination of the content, exhibits and space but the diversification of exhibition forms. For instance, the cooperation between lights and color activates various sense organs such as visual and touch senses. The use of multimedia improves the interaction between exhibition and visitors.

Firstly, the coordination of lights and color facilitate the creation of atmosphere. “The color design should be arranged as a whole. Therefore, the specified and primary color should be considered at first, as they are the tone color for the exhibition (1998)”^[6]. The lobby is relatively bright. As a result, the color for lobby should be mainly greyish-white to create a wide view for visitors. The color tone of the formal hall, which can be entered from the wickets in each side of lobby, changes immediately with lights fairly darken. The matching of red wall and black wedges shows a link with the red black palace of the state of Nanyue, creating a sense of seriousness, which allows visitors to be as if passed through the history and were in the actual palace of state of Nanyue.

Apart from the reasonable utilization of color and light for the creation of atmosphere, the Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace also concentrates on the activation of touch sense of visitors to create interaction between visitors and exhibits. “as visitors are able to directly interact with exhibits displayed, and explore or even touch exhibits by themselves, it is easier for them to understand the theme of an exhibition (2006)”^[7]. For example, parts of tilts made in the period of the state of Nanyue have been inserted in the wall of hall in the second floor when large bricks and glazes are exhibited, allowing visitors to touch while watching the appearance of tilts to truly feel the texture, size and volume of tilts. As a consequence, the distance between visitors and relics are bridged.

Meanwhile, this museum also makes a full use of multimedia. Television screens are displayed in every hall, introducing the history and buildings of palaces of the state of Nanyue. It provides a good opportunity for visitors to learn the state of Nanyue. Touch-screen computers are also installed at the end of hall and equipped with history resources and jigsaw puzzle for tilts, which enables visitors to learn more of history about the state of Nanyue as they are entertained. The dynamic exhibition of static relics increases the interaction between exhibits and visitors, changing the exhibition from a pale education to a vivid and interesting study.

6. Conclusion: the unification of cultural value and historical significance and the exquisite coordination of conception, exhibits and space

To sum up, “Nanyue Palace”, the permanent exhibition of Archaeological Site Museum of Nanyue Palace, focuses on the cultural and historical value of the remains of Nanyue palace and its unearthed cultural relics, the delicate design and local characteristics of imperial garden of the state of Nanyue when take the conception of exhibition into consideration. The selection and arrangement of exhibits emphasize on the combination of historical and ornamental values and the reasonable utilization of ancillary supplies makes the scientific value and historical significance prominent. As to the space design, the building style is blended with the content of exhibition, and

the series place connection structure delicately isolates walls to distinguish different exhibition space. The forms of exhibition are diversified, using color, light and multimedia to activate various senses so as to increase the interaction between visitors and exhibits. All in all, the blend of three elements of exhibition- conception, exhibits and space and its focuses on the cultural hermeneutics and historical value of the palace and its unearthed cultural relics, has enabled the information spread by the permanent exhibition, 'Nanyue Palace', to be appreciated in all groups and achieved the unification of cultural value and historical significance, the combination of seriousness and interest.

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