Tourism and Museums in China

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Abstract: This paper looks at China’s museums and their role in tourism. It surveys the different kinds of museums in China and examines the definition of ‘museum’ by looking at the purposes museums serve. It discusses the heterogeneity among China’s museums: there are public and private ones, those aimed at real estate construction and those growing out of patriotic collections, those which are whole villages ‘museumified’, and those which present minorities and ethnographic others as ‘living fossils’. Within tourism, museums may be the main attraction for tourists, by means of the transporting experience they provide, or they may be just one among many options tourists have for recreation. Museums may serve as a legitimating presence or force which bestows authenticity on their exhibits and even on their gift shops, and which confers authenticity of experience on reproductions of minority villages and of storefronts alike. The paper ends with a comparison of two ecomuseums, in China’s ethnically diverse Guizhou Province and in wealthy Zhejiang. One grew quickly initially and later faltered, as its emphasis on displaying ethnic traditions fell out of favour with tourists. It is now rarely open. The other has been more successful, evolving, along with the mission of ecomuseums, to exhibit how people’s livelihoods emerge through interaction with the environment. Far from portraying locals as living fossils, it demonstrates how local industry draws on environmental resources for applications in science as well as in business. Thus the paper uses this comparison of two case studies to reinforce the point that museums achieve their purposes when they avoid presenting cultures and peoples as unchanging others untouched by the tourism industry. This latter process has sometimes been called ‘museumification’. However, we can also understand the museum as metaphor. To ‘museumize’ something is not necessarily to freeze it in time, but to preserve and display it, to set tourists up to encounter it, whether the display is high or low culture. So this actually informs the definition of museum: if a museum is a metaphor, then many of the cultural institutions tourists visit may be understood as museums.

Keywords: Museums, China, public and private, ecomuseum, museum as metaphor
Introduction

‘In general, Chinese people don’t like museums’.

‘Chinese don’t go to museums very often. They think they are about old things’.

‘I haven’t seen much research written about tourism and museums at all!’

‘That’s really an important issue always ignored by most of scholars in this field, maybe because museums are too serious for ordinary people, they are symbols of authority and country, or made people feel like that’.

These were separate comments Graburn have received from Chinese anthropologists and tourism specialists after since arriving in China to complete the research for this paper in October 2016 two weeks ago. While this paper is not about the demographics of tourists and visitorship or the growth of museum attendance, I think that museum staffs are quite aware of these notions and are trying to do something about it and, as we detail below, some are quite successful.

In this paper, we discuss the great variety of museums in China (cf. Denton 2014) and their relations to different kinds of tourism from an anthropological point of view. Chinese museums have until recently been official government enterprises though private museums were historically prior. In the past two decades private museums and industrial museums have emerged with striking consequences. Public/private arrangements are increasingly common too.

First, we see that museums complement and compete with other public institutions, such as historic temples, palaces, old towns, libraries and houses, questioning very nature of the museum from the tourist’s point of view. Secondly, we see museums as tourist destinations in themselves, taking the visitors on mental tours through cultural geography and art history. And thirdly, we examine the function of museums within the tourism system, as guides for and condensations of local and distant destinations. Examples are drawn from a wide range of contemporary museums, including provincial, city, village and ‘ecomuseums’ as well as archeological site museums. A final focus is on recent innovations including private museums, ecomuseums in Guizhou and the Anji County, Zhejiang ‘ecomuseum’ system.
History of Museums in China

The history of museums in China can be traced to Shang Dynasty (1,600-1,045 BC) when bronze vessels and jade articles were stored in the imperial household and ancestral temples for ancestor sacrifice. There were full-time officials to manage them. The earliest “museum” in China could be seen as the temple of Confucius (478 BC); it had the Museum-like functions of collection, education and research. In Qin/Han Dynasty (220 BC - 220 AD collections were stored in the Imperial household and the palace outside, which had the same function as a zoo or botanical garden where the emperors played and hunted. In the Han and Tang Dynasties, collecting Confucian Classics was very popular. Cultural relics and literature were stored together in special places called Tianlu, Shiqu and Lantai. In the Song Dynasty (960 - 128 AD), archaeological discoveries increased, especially bronzes, and stimulated scholar-bureaucrats’ interest in collecting. Scholars started to study the characters on the bronze and stone vessels, giving rise to a new discipline, epigraphy.

In these ancient dynasties, there were no places called ‘museums’. In China modern Western-style museums are only 150 years old. The earliest museums were founded by foreigners: the Zhendan Museum founded in 1868 by a French priest in Shanghai), the Asian Literature Society founded in 1874 by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain-Ireland in Shanghai and the Huabei Museum founded in 1904 by the French in Tianjin.

Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, leaders of the Reform movement (1898), thought museums from the West could help to build a new Chinese world. In 1903 Zhang Jian, the famous educator and entrepreneur, went to Japan to learn about museums. He returned to set up the first local museum, the Nantong Museum (Claypool 2005). The museum was divided into departments of nature, history and art with over 20,000 objects in the collections, including museum, zoo and botanical garden.

In the Republic of China (1911-1949), the first national (history) museum was established in 1912 and the Forbidden City (former Imperial Palace) became a museum in 1925. Seventy-five more museums were established up till 1936. Then came the War of Resistance against Japan and by 1938 only thirteen were left. After the Liberation of 1949, the Communist Party set up
a new type of museum, the museum of revolution, to enforce socialism and national unity. Under state ownership, individual museums became political cells of the socialist state, led by the CCP secretary whose leadership was based on political legitimacy instead of professionalism. All museums came under central control of the CCP, taking over from former stakeholders such as the elites and museum professionals. Every province or city was to have such a museum, but many were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. After 1980, museum formation was enthusiastically revived by the state.

By 2014, there were 4,510 museums in China. During most of this period museums were official government enterprises. In the past two decades private and industry museums have emerged with striking consequences as we shall see.

What are Museums for?

Museums complement and compete with other public institutions, such as historic temples, palaces, old towns and mansion houses, not only questioning very nature of the museum as a distinct institution from the tourist’s point of view but providing multiple outlets for people’s socio-psychological needs.

1. *Awe and reverence*: ‘The Museum as cathedral’ - most often art museums, but for some archaeological sites such as the Leshan Grand Buddha (Figure 1.), the Jinsha Site Museum or Sanxingdui (Three-Star Piles) Museum near Chengdu. This experience has been called ‘reverential’ (Graburn 1977) or ‘sacred, out of the ordinary’ (Annis 1983), providing a direct ‘connection’ to something special or to authority - for some people a library or ‘nature’ may provide the same experience. Alone with one’s thoughts, even in a crowd . . . ‘[They] feel so strongly about the sight that they are visiting that they want to be alone its presence [or with close loved one(s)], and they become annoyed . . . at others for profaning the place by crowding around “like sheep”’ (MacCannell 1976, p. 43). Such people are put off by crowds, noise and irreverence, also by too much information, labels and signs. The extreme case of this attitude is a mental breakdown known as the ‘Paris Syndrome’ (Graburn 2012, p. 57) on first viewing the famous sites which they had long dreamed about.
The reverential experience has a remarkable resemblance to Urry’s ‘Romantic Gaze’ (1990). Although perhaps this attitude is or was more common in Europe or among older people, and less common among the ‘collectively minded’ (Nyiri 2007) Chinese, it is possible that for many middle-class Chinese, striking iconic objects such as the Golden Sunbird at the Jinsha site, known as the ‘Art of the Nation’, or immense representations of power, such as the huge rock Buddha of Leshan, have similar emotional powers.

Figure 1. Tourists awed by the Leshan Giant Buddha, Sichuan Province (713 - 803 AD). Source: Nelson H. Graburn.

2. Educational Space: ‘Three dimensional textbooks or laboratories’. This is the major contemporary rationale for the existence and funding many museums (Graburn 2012a). The enhancement of the life of the citizens, and chance to explore and learn new and important topics - about nature, science, history, the news. Thurot and Thurot (1983) have pointed out a similar trend in tourism, starting in the 1950s, where the tourist experience was supposed to be enriching, not just pleasurable. Most general museums, especially regional (National, Provincial, City, University), historical, geographical, science museums, openly play up these aspects and most tourism is supposed to ‘broaden the mind.’
Museum tour groups with guides explaining everything, instructing visitors to look a certain way and read the labels, are the adult equivalent of school classes which may visit museums with their teachers.

![Figure 2. Boy shows his father his work at a weekend parent-child class at the Anji County Eco-Museum, Zhejiang Province. Source: Nelson H. Graburn.](image)

Other museums, which may appear too technical and boring for most children, have special panels and displays in ‘cartoon’ form, explaining, for instance, an archaeological dig - in children’s terms and how they might be involved. Other museums take a more gee-whiz, Disney-like approach to present pre-history and history. The new Yunnan Provincial Museum’s chrono-theatre gives the audience the ‘feel of history’ by bumping seats for earthquakes and spraying water for floods, as well as the requisite smells (smoky fires) and dramatic animal and human noises.

Education is seen of prime importance to Chinese families and the state, as well for the ‘development’ of minorities. Museum staff are aware of this and are positively providing classroom-like opportunities, not only for school groups but also for the bonding of children and their parents (Figure 2)
Tourism and Museums in China through museum education (Draper 1984). The main Eco(logy)museum in Anji, Zhejiang, has a weekend program where parents come to the museum with their children who show off their educational projects and achievements (cf. Wu and Wall 2016).

3. Social Space: The Museum or the tourist attraction is interesting but it may serve mainly as a venue for the visiting group to socialize, chat, exchange opinions; the arts, displays or scenery provide ‘conversation pieces’ to keep the conversation going and provide shared experience/memories. The emphasis is on the shared experience, for the visitors to perform their roles as couple, parents and children, friends in a direct and relaxed way….and this requires a minimum physical or intellectual constraint (no tasks). And there must be comfortable social space . . . places for kids to get away from parents or couples from crowds. The social space is enhanced by occasions, such as museum opening or tourist festivals when visitors can choose to engage or just relax (drink) and socialize without feeling required to study the attractions. In many ways museums are tourist attractions - providing an out of the ordinary experience with enough interest and freedom to pursue social goals. This is most comparable to Urry’s (1990) ‘collective gaze’ and is undoubtably the attitude of most Chinese tourists visiting museums or scenic spots (Nyíri 2007).

What are Museums?

However, UNESCO or national, regional or professional authorities may define museums, that is not overwhelmingly important to most tourists and visitors. We all know the Western (Greek) origins of the word, and the history of the collections that became museums in Europe and the Americas (Graburn 2012a). Museums in China and Japan were directly introduced from European models in the 19th century (see above) though both nations had their own pre-modern kinds of collections.

But the concept of a museum as a metaphor has been extended to a wide range of things and places. Tung (2001) used the phrase ‘the City as Living Museum’. This certainly could be said of the Chinese and Japanese former capitals Xian and Kyoto and the same is attempted in many smaller tourist cities such as Dali and Lijiang in Yunnan. The concept Museum has also become a verb, museumifying, which implies that something is going to be kept and preserved, presumably because of its value.
The implicit idea that phenomena of two different time periods can co-exist, persisting in concept of the ‘Living Fossil’ (huóhuàshí 活化石), is a pervasive theme in the Chinese national heritage imaginary. Some minority minzu cater to this expectation - of their performances, buildings and museums - for Han domestic tourists. The same is sometimes said of preserved ancient cities such as Qingyan in Guizhou province, where street markets and lack of traffic create the nostalgic ‘out of time’ atmosphere, often sadly betrayed by garish advertising and overwhelming commercialism.

Therefore, for Chinese tourists, there is a vast array of ‘museum-like’ attractions which engender the same set of attitudes and pleasures as ‘real’ museums. We have already mentioned the Old Towns such as Lijiang, Dali and Qingyan, but many parts of famous cities, such as the Hutong area South of Tian’anmen Square in Beijing, are ‘museumized’ for both heritage and commercial purposes. Equally common is the destruction of old city centres and their resurrection as more commercially profitable ‘museums of themselves’ - containing inserts of some of their historical fabric - in Guangzhou, Kunming and Chengdu.

Outside of Chengdu is the tourist-oriented Old Town, mostly new, which itself contains old or resurrected museum-like buildings; one of them, a replica Hakka ‘roundhouse’, a multistory residential-defensive structure surrounding a large courtyard - explains how the Hakka migrated from Sichuan to settle in Fujian Province (Figure 3). And within it there is a large museum of Hakka culture with maps, dioramas, manikins, historic arts and ancient technologies. In the same teeming shopping, entertainment and restaurant-saturated area are two private specialized museums: The Film Museum, with old camera equipment, projectors and posters showing ‘trailers’; and the nearby Ethnography Museum, with photographs and original books of the famous, mainly European, ethnographers of the 19th and 20th centuries.7

Within the recent boom in heritage discourse and preservation, China has museumized almost everything of value, from the Imperial Palace in Beijing to the Potola Palace in Lhasa, to include Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist Temples and, of course archaeological sites. Many of the most significant excavations - both awe inspiring in scope and beauty and culturally foundational - such as the Terra Cotta Warriors in Xi’an and the Jinsha Site in Chengdu, have been
enclosed with a roof and walls so one walks into a presumably ‘authentic’ collection much of it still in situ. While the sites themselves cater to the reverential or ‘sacred’ experience, these institutions also have their own museum-buildings with collections, time lines, explanatory labels, catering to the informational and educational aspirations of the tourist/visitors.8

There are thousands of buildings which have been museumized in function, if not name, catering to local, regional - and ethnic - pride, to the Chinese long historical focus on education, and to the recent boom in interest in history and heritage. These often serve a number of what might appear to be disparate functions. For instance, in the centre of Old Town Dali is a rebuilt very traditional-looking huge Confucian temple compound, called Cultural Museum, built and run by the regional government. Tourists gaze in awe at the buildings and the huge statues of Confucius and his learned disciples. Many pray and put money in the donation box, while others leave their wishes, mainly for educational achievement, written on little plaques hung on

Figure 3. Luodai Old Town replica Hakka Roundhouse, with Hakka Museum inside. Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Source: Nelson H. Graburn.
a public stand to be blessed. Many of these ancient institutions are imbued with ‘residual powers’ from their political and religious pasts such as the Imperial and the Potola Palaces, where these ‘sacred’ auras (Benjamin 1968) more even than in other museums persist, in forbidding photography and barring entry to many areas.

The continuity of Chinese civilization, threatened by the orgy of neoliberal commercialism and the rebuilding of the natural landscapes and urban regions, is re-emphasized in the selection, preservation and labelling of almost any old building - especially those which can be used to express old and new values. For instance, Landlord Liu’s lovely mansion outside of Chengdu is a beautifully restored old house set in quiet gardens, but it contains numerous life size-manikin scenes of serfs and servants and women being exploited and thrashed by the greedy landlord, reminding today’s visitors how lucky they are to live under the guidance of the Party. Old libraries, expressing the reverence for learning and ancestors, catering to the newly encouraged Confucian values are similarly museumized, especially when they were the abode of a famous scholar or official. And even more so for the abodes and grave sites of the mighty, such as the Confucius family estate and grave in Qufu, Shandong Province (Figure 4), at the entrance of which the authorities proudly boast that is it classified as a national tourist attraction.

There are many other attractions which compete for the tourists’ attention, not all of them officially called museums or classified as ‘heritage’. These include theme parks, especially the popular Yunnan Minorities Village in Kunming with houses, dances, foods and souvenirs - which competes very favorably with the official collection of heritage artifacts the nearby Museum of Yunnan Minorities; others such as Shenzhen’s ‘Window on the World’ features Chinese minorities acting ‘themselves’ and acting as minorities of other nations - American Indian, Maori, Africans, etc. (Gordon 2005). And as unlikely as it may seem, the vast open air movie studio on the shores of West Lake in Shandong province contains replicas of many of the most famous buildings in China which are popular not only to see and photograph but as stages for ‘acting’ heritage performances, such as dressing up, sword fighting, kungfu etc., which caters to the common tourist need for participation.
Museums as Destinations

We can also see museums as tourist destinations in themselves, taking the visitors on mental tours through cultural geography and art history. Museums are of course one of the major tourist destinations all over the world and they rank amongst the most famous alongside historic cities, the highest mountains and the longest bridges for name recognition in the global tourist imaginary.

But it is what museums can do for the visitor that makes them a special kind of tourist attraction? A museum, whether officially designated or not, is a place out of the ordinary where people voluntarily visit for the purposes of experiencing something different - note this is almost identical to Valene Smith’s original definition of a Tourist (Smith 1977, p. 3). Museums offer tours, guides, self-guided, directed or intermittent where the mind is taken on a voyage - fleeting, intense or life-changing - to other places, times or cultural settings. Frey (1998) and Graburn (2012b) have usefully shown that we cannot understand tourism without following both the inner journey of the mind and the outer journey of the body.
The museum visitor lets their mind be transported to other countries and climates, to other artistic, visual and auditory systems, and above all to other times, usually in the past but sometimes to ‘see’ the future too. The sauntering or standing body remains in the museum but the mind is taken elsewhere and stimulated to imagine other kinds of existence, nature, life, scenes and so on. While most national, regional and local museums take us into various stages of the past, the more ambitious also take us into somebody else’s world or representations of it. For instance, in 2014 the Ningbo City Museum had a huge temporary exhibition of African art and culture, set against its excellent local historical exhibits. And in 2016 the Ningbo Contemporary Art Museum had an immense exhibition of five Russian painters, against the backdrop of its galleries of Chinese ‘modern’ arts.

Some museums are destinations just for ‘being themselves’. The immense fame of say, the Louvre or the Hermitage, like the Imperial Palace, is an important part of a tourist’s journey, Others specifically set out to ‘make a mark’ such as the famous Bilbao Museum which ‘put Bilbao on the map’. This has given rise to the new term ‘Starchitecture’ (Gravari-Barbas and Renard-Delautre 2015). The new Ningbo City Museum might be one example, with its eye-catching shape sheathed in gray bricks rescued from the thousands of old townhouses torn down for urban renewal (Figure 5).

**Museums in the Tourism System**

Within the tourism system, museums function not only as tourist attractions or significant icons within tourist destination but as guides for and condensations of local and distant destinations. In this sense museums are educational or at least informational and very useful for tourists.

The Yunnan Minorities Village in Kunming consists of inhabited simulacra of the traditional villages of the 26 official minority minzu peoples who live in Yunnan. We have already mentioned it is not the official museum of the minorities, but it serves as ‘living museum’ of these perennially fascinating minority peoples (Graburn 2015, 2016) who for some visitors are still ‘living fossils’, part of China’s multicultural heritage. This large attractive park is both a condensation and guide to the many interesting ethnic areas but it is also a substitute. It takes the place of having to drive or take an expensive tour of hundreds of kilometers out to the ‘real’ villages. It is also probably cleaner,
example, with its eye-catching shape sheathed in gray bricks rescued from the thousands of old townhouses torn down for urban renewal (Figure 5).


more conveniently arranged, does not require scheduling in advance to see performances and has a lot more explanatory labels and ready at hand guides. These ‘fake’ villages are staffed by real members of the minorities who may take turns coming out to earn money there (some may live in the nearby city) and indeed resident minority urbanites often visit to see co-ethnic friends, much as homesick non-Javanese Indonesians visit Taman Mini in the capital of Jakarta (Bruner 2004; Errington 1998). Nevertheless, it can also be a guide for those tourists who didn’t know about these peoples or who want to make a selection of which ethnic group areas/villages to visit.

The Ningbo (City) Museum has an interesting twist on this: after showing prehistory and history and traditional performances and artifacts, a part of the main floor contains life-sized reproductions of the 19\textsuperscript{th} or early 20\textsuperscript{th} century restaurants, noodle makers, clothiers and so on that are still in existence! So, the tourist visitors can witness the ‘ancestors’ of the institutions they regularly visit today.
Above all, museums are supposed to provide the most authoritative guide to the authenticity of the artifacts and (hi)stories that they display (Lauwaert 2013). They are voices of historical authority (Nora 1989) and heritage discourse (Smith 2006). They are the most believed source of information about regions, places or institutions that tourists visit and about the authenticity of archaeology and heritage objects, including guide books, the internet and postcards. Museums also supply souvenirs, often replicas of ‘sacred’ or iconic objects important to the visitor in their understanding their place in the world, and these souvenirs are often deemed more authentic than commercial souvenirs of the same objects found elsewhere.

**Discussion: Trends and Innovations**

In a recent paper (Jin 2014, p. 1), China’s foremost anthropological expert of museums, Pan Shouyong stated:

> China is experiencing an unprecedented museum building boom, with an average of approximately 300 museums opening each year since 2005. The country currently has 3,866 museums, 75% of which are categorized as medium or small-sized. In addition, private museums, a totally new phenomenon in China, are rapidly increasing. As of 2012 the country had approximately 1,500 such museums, more than 1,000 of which are not officially registered. Why is the Chinese government, as well as private groups, so eager to build new museums? How are these funded? What types of museums are being built, and to house what collections? Most importantly, why is this boom happening now, and what might follow in the next decade?

**Private Museums: Dedication and Patriotism**

There are at least two features said to be distinctive of China’s current range of museums. One is the proliferation of museums dedicated to perpetuating the memory of the Pacific War, of the 1949 Revolution and the local and national achievements of the Party (Vickers 2007). Secondly there is recent proliferation of private museums free of direct Party or government control, usually the creations of and under the direction of rich men. Wong (2015)
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decries this process and fears that more and more of China’s culture and heritage has been ceded to the whims of wealthy men, in exchange for their support of the Party and its policies. As Pan noted (above) many museums are not even registered, and Wong fears that they were established as part of a deal to obtain permission to develop huge housing or commercial estates; yet we do not know how many ever opened and many are not. She fears these public ‘goods’ being built or kept for private commercial purposes and may be available only for the wealthy and their allies - if indeed they are ever completed and stocked. While this may be true in some cases, and the authors of this paper have not investigated this topic, we present some other examples which on balance enhance the public interest.

In Chengdu, a famous sculptor named Zhao Shutong made great efforts to collect leather puppets in Sichuan and throughout China. Since 1980s, he collected more than 100,000 leather puppets from over twenty provinces. The China Academy of Art in Hangzhou helped him construct the ‘Leather Puppet Art Museum of China Academy of Art’ of which he is still the curator. Then the Chengdu government asked him to come back and collect leather puppets for his city. He planned to house not only the wide variety of puppets but also to invite masters come and teach the regional styles and stories. When Graburn first saw the collection in 2006 it was housed in a museum-like warehouse with appropriate lights and screens for teaching performance, but no opening date. When he last visited in 2015 little had changed. However, the magnificent collection was not kept completely out of the public eye. That year Chengdu hosted the world summit exhibition of puppetry, from all over the world and some of the best leather puppets were on show along with pictures and biographies of the puppet masters living and deceased. Since the Chengdu Museum reopened on its new site near Tianfu Square all the collections belong to the new Chengdu Museum, and are on permanent show as the ‘Chinese Leather Puppet exhibition’.

Entrepreneur Li Yinglong recently completed the construction of a Museum of Orchids on his own property in his home town of Eryuan in Dali prefecture. As a young man in the PLA, his unit was blown up by a landmine during a skirmish on the Vietnam border. He was badly wounded but during his recuperation there he noticed all the beautiful orchids and as he recovered he thought that ‘orchids equal life’. Back home he dedicated himself to growing, selling and publicizing orchids. He studied in Beijing and travelled to other
countries and became very successful. He published a book with over 1,000 color photos of rare orchids and became known as the Orchid Prince. He researched and found there was no museum dedicated solely to orchids in the world so he decided to build one as a first for China and fame for Dali. He collected all sorts of art forms, sculptures, paintings, poems for his private museum. It is not open to the public and Graburn asked him if it would ever open and bring tourists to this remote area. He replied that it certainly would but needed planning, public facilities and a car park.

While still on the subject of private museums, we can also introduce the other topic for which China is said to be unique in the worlds of museums, the patriotic emphasis on the Party and the Great Pacific War against the Japanese. Dr. Fan Jianchuan, a wealthy Chengdu developer, built a whole collection of museums on his own land about 40 km. north of the city. Twenty-six separate but by no means small individual museums are scattered in a pleasant rural park, along with a hotel, a restaurant, exercise area and a tea house. At the entrance one is greeted by a jet fighter plane standing outside across from the entry pavilion. Without going into detail, let us list the museums;

WWII Battlefield with maps of campaigns, War captives never give up (vs. Japanese), The Flying Tigers American Cavalry come to the rescue; Fingerprints and photos of old soldiers; Tower of Strength (military); the Shocking Diaries from the War, Sichuan Volunteer Forces (3 million) in the Japanese War, Very Brave Soldiers, Military Mess Hall (Figure 6).

Aircraft Factory and Workers’ lives with two jet aircraft outside and jet engines in the museum, Red Square (Party), Museum of our Leaders, People Sent Down (in the Cultural Revolution), Facing the Mirror of Challenges.

Old Family House and Ancestor Worship, Old Mansion Museum Furniture, Pottery Museum, Museum of Bound Feet, Museum of Carved Name Stamps, Memory of the Famous Old Landlord, Old East Wind Dock.
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in a pleasant rural park, along with a hotel, a restaurant, exercise area and a tea house. At the entrance one is greeted by a jet fighter plane standing outside across from the entry pavilion. Without going into detail, let us list the museums; WWII Battlefield with maps of campaigns, War captives never give up (vs. Japanese), The Flying Tigers American Cavalry come to the rescue; Fingerprints and photos of old soldiers; Tower of Strength (military); the Shocking Diaries from the War, Sichuan Volunteer Forces (3 million) in the Japanese War, Very Brave Soldiers, Military Mess Hall (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Anti-Japanese War Museum, part of the Jianchuan Museum, est. 2012, in Anren Town, Sichuan Province. Source: Nelson H. Graburn.

Things of Daily use, River Rafting on the Chengjiang River, Museum of Good Young Scholars, and Museum of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake, represented by crushed cars and trucks and a live pig which survived in a village and has grown enormous.

I found his museum (complex) well attended but not crowded, with families and couples and singles (not many tour groups). The main interest seemed to be in the gritty war portrayals and for men and boys the aircraft factory. There were hardly any interactive or child centered exhibits. State efforts to commemorate the Revolution and Mao Zedong in the past half century have peaked, with a range of types of ‘Red tourism’ from mockery and mirth to ‘pilgrimages’ to the sites and remains of the ‘deified’ Mao (Han 1997; Xu 2015). The more recent rise of nationalism and re-emphasis on the war and anti-Japanese has been a theme in the last two decades in China and its mostly public museums.
Prominent at the national and international level are high end art museums. Established by the billionaire Liu Yiqian and his wife Wang Wei, the Shanghai-based Long [Dragon] Museum is one of the biggest private art museums in China with two branches open and two more planned. They purchase almost exclusively from top auction houses with high, if not exorbitant, prices. This museum exemplifies rich Chinese’s manipulation of public Chinese ‘goods’ or cultural heritage. It charges relatively high admission 200 Yuan/person (about US $29) for its two branches. It is not a museum for the lower-middle class, neither is it a ‘cabinet of curiosities’ reserved only for the rich. Thanks to Liu’s high-profile purchases of expensive Chinese artworks such as the renowned Chenhua Chicken Cup and a well-esteemed Ming *Thangka* painting, the museum attracts a wide variety of Chinese. Intriguingly, Liu’s frequent pursuits of highly priced Chinese art pieces has led many middle-class Chinese to visit his museum as well as prestigious state museums. Liu and his museum arouse more interest in traditional Chinese culture and art among the general public and the museum is a destination for high end tourists.

The same can be said of the Guanfu Art Museum operated by the famous collector Ma Weidu in Beijing. Though both the Long and Guanfu Museums charge high admissions, they are still embraced by bourgeois Chinese audience and help the public become better aware of the value of traditional Chinese art and history. Even though these rich men’s museums do not play as positive a role as public museums in education and accessibility, many Chinese start to cherish (or at least know about) Chinese cultural heritage. In a society where the rich are generally admired and envied, what they do will always be partially emulated by the middle-class. Hence, the rich’s craze for collecting Chinese cultural heritage ignites more passion for cultural artifacts by the lower-middle-class Chinese as well.

The Guanfu Museum bookstore has a diverse selection of books covering the collections of its founder, Ma Weidu. Since the books usually involve tips on how to authenticate and collect antiques, they are popular among the middle class and can also be found in the National Library of China. However, many prestigious scholars and professors in China seem to ‘hate’ Ma and his publications (mainly because they think Ma is far from academic), so most of Ma’s fans are amateur collectors, the newly rich, and the general public.
Long Museum has a small number of catalogues on its special exhibitions and they are more expensive than those at the Guanfu Museum. It is not easy to have a full view of Liu’s entire collections. The Chinese (and even Western) media cover Liu Yiqian’s purchases and Long Museum’s special exhibitions from time to time. When the (in) famous Chicken Cup was on view in Shanghai, local evening news programs featured interviews with visitors and city residents who went to the museum to buy replicas of the Chenhua chicken cup as souvenirs. The objects at the two museums are not (or very rarely) lent to other museums. But they are known to the public through TV programs or paper media. Ma Weidu used to host a popular TV program in which his collections were shown from time to time.

It should be mentioned that there is a crossover between private museums and commercial museums. Many industries sponsor museums as a form of advertising attracting tourist customers, e.g. the milk museum in Ningbo, the wine museum in Yunnan, the Bed Museum in Anji (see later) and the Wuyuan Bay Cultural Exhibition in Xiamen.

Wuyuan Bay Cultural Exhibition Garden: Wuyuan Bay is located at the Northeast of Xiamen Island and was the last area to be developed. In the late 2000s, it was designed and gentrified with four major parts: A yacht club, a cultural exhibition center, a coordinating schooling system, and a wetland eco park. The Wuyuan Bay Cultural Exhibition Garden, occupies about 310,000 square meters, of which the buildings cover 110,000. In this ‘garden’, there are 48 buildings, either in local Minnan or European style, or both (Chen 2012).

The project was launched, financed and supervised by the Xiamen city government. According to a curator of Shinegood Cultural Gallery, all the buildings had to be used as cultural space. The government constructed everything first, then recruited private cultural institutions to move in with their exhibitions, renting spaces for less than residential prices. For five years it costs very little, then rents gradually increase. The private museums charge the visitors for tickets (while all public museums have been free since 2008). Any other kind of business, such as restaurants, hotels, shopping malls, etc. are forbidden.
The earliest museums were opened in 2011. There are more than a dozen private cultural institutions including museums, art galleries, workshops and auction. The major ones include Shinegood Cultural Gallery, Yuangu History Museum, Gulangyu Piano Art Museum, Guan Tianxia Museum of Fujian and Taiwan Ancestor Halls, Xinmeng Museum of Modern Art, etc. Some museums sell their own tickets. Others cooperate and sell package admissions. They all collaborate with tour agencies to get visitors.

Some of the companies saw this place as a good opportunity to enter cultural industries using their money from previous businesses. Some of the exhibitions became controversial and their practices are now changing: for instance, one of the institutions exhibited many replicas of archeological objects from different areas of China. It was titled as ‘museum’ at first by the owner, who struggled very hardly to prove those objects were real archeological excavations, using alleged professionals and certificates from some evaluation institutions. Later they realized the exhibition was not necessarily historical materials, so they changed the title into ‘gallery’.

And this takes into our next section, the emergence and proliferation of “ecomuseums” culminating in the extraordinary Anji County Ecomuseum system, which exemplifies another kind of collaboration between the state and private institutions.

**Ecomuseums in China and the Zhenshan case**

At a cultural planning committee meeting convened in Guizhou province in 1986, a proposal was made for China’s first ecomuseum to be established in Guizhou (Su 2005). In 1994, two authorities in the field of ecomuseology and the new museology, Andre Desvalles and John Gjestrum, attended the Beijing meeting of the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM). They talked about the ecomuseum project with some Chinese participants. In 1997, the Chinese and Norwegian governments signed a cultural cooperation agreement for the project. King Harald V of Norway and former Chinese president Jiang Zemin attended the signing ceremony. The Norwegian government provided the initial funding and professional support of ecomuseums, and the Chinese government provided the further funding to develop them.
In the nearly twenty years since the first ecomuseum was set up, sixteen ecomuseums have been established in China and several more are underway. According to Su (2008), there are several stages in the story of ecomuseums in China. The first generation of ecomuseums comprises the four ecomuseums in Guizhou. They were built under the Sino-Norwegian joint cultural project 1997-2004. The four are Soga Qingmiao Ecomuseum, Zhenshan Buyi Ecomuseum, Tang’an Dong Ecomuseum and Longli Han Castle Ecomuseum, the first three of which are ethnic villages.

The second generation of ecomuseums includes the Olunsum Ecomuseum in Inner Mongolia (2001), which is the first in Northern China, and the Guangxi Museum of National Minorities in Nanning City, which encouraged villagers to promote and preserve their own culture while facing up to development pressures from the outside world. The latter was passed as ‘1+10 construction project’, which was aided by the Guangxi Museum of National Minorities, ten ecomuseums are planned in Guangxi.

In the third stage, ecomuseums in China entered a multi-faceted stage. In 2005, the Bulang Nationality Ecomuseum in Yunnan successfully transferred administrative power to the villagers. The Shui Nationality Ecomuseum in Guizhou was set up by a Hong Kong businesswoman Enmei Tan and local villagers, and was originally a test case of a public-private partnership.

Ecomuseums in China have been extended from rural places to urban and industrial areas in recent years. In 2001, the Qiamian Hutong Social Housing Recording Project was set up in Beijing to preserve the history of Hutongs, old-fashioned urban neighborhoods. Some industrial museums have also been established, for example the Shenyang Tiexi Museum, which focuses on the traditional dwellings of residents of historic industrial areas. Ecomuseums in China are still in the process of development.

Zhenshan is an ethnic Buyi village of Guiyang, in Guizhou Province. The village has a population of more than 600, of whom about 90% are Buyi. According to pedigree of one clan, ancestry can be traced to the Ming Dynasty when a Han General married with a local Buyi woman.
Zhenshan was developed as an ethnic cultural protection village from late 1980s to early 1990s because of its beautiful natural landscape and its cultural heritages. In 1994, a project was put forward to build up a multi-ethnic open-air museum in Zhenshan. The Agency for Cultural Affairs of Guizhou was about to give 3 million RMB to build classical buildings of Miao, Dong, Shui, Yi, Yao, Buyi and Han etc., in order to exhibit the main ethnic groups in Guizhou. The project ceased with the development of the ecomuseum project in 2000.

However, the basic work on open-air museum project gave the foundation of establishing an ecomuseum. For example, road maintenance, the training of locals to be service personnel and the collection of tangible cultural heritage in and out of the village. In 2000, the government officially declared the village an ecomuseum which made Zhenshan the second ecomuseum in Guizhou. The documentation centre (the ‘museum’) was built in 2002 to hold historical documents and traditional artifacts (Figure 7).

*Figure 7. The Documentation Center, Zhenshan Village Ecomuseum, Guizhou Province. Source: Lu Jin.*
The main differences between an ecomuseum and open air museum is: most museums pay more attention to economic development of the village, such as through tourism. The concept of ecomuseum pays more attention to preservation of pre-modern traditions. In 2005, the international conference of ecomuseums in Guizhou was held in Guiyang. Zhenshan was appointed as the fieldwork site for participants. From 2000 to 2005, the development of Zhenshan was fast and made it famous. Since 2006, the development of Zhenshan ecomuseum has slowed down. There are more rural villages developing tourism and the nearby Old Town of Qingyan has become very popular. Tourists are changing their interests to homestays, eating in the village and boating on the reservoir and less on ‘ethnic tradition’. The ‘museum’ is only open when busloads make an appointment and, as NG noted on his most recent visit (2011), part of the building is rented out as a warehouse to a local company.

**The Anji County Ecomuseum, Zhejiang Province**

The Ecomuseum in Anji County, Zhejiang province, has one central museum in the town, twelve theme ecomuseums and forty affiliated rural village museums or exhibit halls. It is a huge ‘ecomuseum system’ and quite different from the first generation of Chinese ecomuseums (such as Soga and Zhenshan) introduced by Prof. Su Donghai. Anji County prides itself as an example of the “China Beautiful Country” program, promoting its ‘green’ industries and banning polluting ones.

This very ambitious ‘ecomuseum system’ - one big central city museum and twelve specialty (theme) ecomuseums - e.g. Bamboo Culture Ecomuseum (bamboo and its uses in modern technology) - and 40 village museums, e.g. leather puppets in a village of Henan immigrants. In 2013, we were driven round by the very scholarly and helpful curator Cheng Yongjun - including going to an archaeological site excavation in progress, and to Shang Zhang Mountain Peoples Culture Ecomuseum - in his own village.

The idea of this ‘system’ is to relate the center, Anji town, to (1) the special activities and industries in the county, including bamboo manufacturing, as well as traditional leather puppet-making and shadow plays, or the culture and foods of the She minority group, and (2) to the traditional agricultural villages in the area in relation to their special cultures of agriculture, rural technology, domestic and wild plants, topology and soils etc.
What is this ‘grown up ecomuseum’? It is certainly not a ‘traditional’ ecomuseum in the sense of those originating in 1970s France, and transferred to China (via Norway) in Guizhou and later in Guangxi (Nitzky 2011, 2012). But those European ecomuseums have also changed since then. The plan of showing how the county consists of industries and people who are in turn dependent on traditions of agriculture and forestry which are in turn dependent on the soils, land forms and climate of the area is logical enlargement on the original Ecomuseum premise. In fact, it may be closer to the roots of Eco- which is derived from the Ancient Greek οἶκος (oikos) meaning ‘family household business’, like a farm, referring as much to human management (as in Eco-nomics) as ‘nature’ as in Eco-logy. Secondly the scheme is very much is tune with the UNESCO system of World GeoParks (UNESCO 1998) which demonstrates how human life and prosperity rest on geological processes and events.

It is a success? It is both too early to say whether it is a complete success because a lot of the smaller museums are not finished and because we do not have the time or experience in the region. One may also ask, how do we measure success? There are three measures we shall should consider - whether the system achieves conceptually what it appears to set out to do, and secondly whether these units are working; also, whether the cultural heritage is still alive in the communities and whether the community members have the awareness and involvement to preserve their heritage, questions we were unable to answer at this time. Our consideration will be limited to the central museum and three or four of the sub-units.

The central museum, is a rather successful combination of a natural history, archaeology and history museum. Claiming to cover the ‘The Peaceful and auspicious space between the Tian mu Mountain and the Tiao River’, it starts with a Paleolithic scene of naked primitive manikins, followed by the monuments and cultural relics of archaeological periods. Another scenario, Neolithic agriculturalists along the lower Yangtze, is followed by towns and their crafts and arts and then defenses and warfare. Many paintings emphasizing the rural, technological, agricultural aspects of the rice civilization, and later many photos of farming, fishing, forestry, cooking and other processing. With its emphasis on pre-modern manufacturing, festivals and community life, this central museum moves into the contemporary themes of the more specialist museums, such as traditional bamboo wares - bowls, chairs, frames woven
crafts, musical instruments, cooking utensils (with photos of them in use) and the related modern furniture, screens, furnished rooms, artwork as well as bamboo floors, walls, and textiles.

Not far from the town center is the Bamboo Museum, celebrating the biggest local industry in Anji which claims to be the bamboo capital of China. This is an adjunct to the huge Yongyu Bamboo Company industrial plant which claims to promote ‘Ecological civilization construction on the way to sustainable development circular economy’. Thousands of modern usages are presented - computer keyboards, office furniture, calculator cases, textiles, carpets, with whole rooms of awards for innovative uses in scientific fields such as biochemicals.

A different kind of museum, the leather puppet theater brought by an immigrant group from Henan province, is now situated in an old house, with beautiful calligraphy and paintings of children learning puppetry, proudly announcing its award as a China Intangible Cultural Heritage. Inside are a selection of old and new puppets as good as any seen, even in the national leather puppetry museum in Chengdu. There are photos of the ‘living masters’ of the art, of performing groups, some on tour e.g. ‘Troupe artistique et traditonelle du theatre de l’ombre Daoqing de Huaxian de Chine’. (Traditional artistic troupe of shadow theatre Daoqing of Huaxian, China.) Others show them skinning animals and preparing the leather to make puppets. There is a small theatre for performances, mainly used by school groups. But some of the tourists tried out the gongs etc.

Further up the road to the West is the model She (minzu, peoples’) Village (theme park), an elaborate set of buildings including the usual performance space and ‘totem poles.’ However, the She people number only about 100 within the Han-dominated Lang village, and the overly ambitious project has shut down, save for the restaurant.

The agricultural villages lie further into the hillsides surrounding the river valley. Ideally the village ecomuseums trace and preserve the village history, its pre-industrial technology and a guided and mapped tourist path through its environmentally contextualized fields and forests. Not all of them are complete but the Mountain Peoples Culture Museum in Shang Zhang village is a particularly good example. The Ecomuseum, housed in an old agricultural
building, shows a map of the ‘eco-walk’ in an aerial photo, a model of the museum itself and model of the village landscape; on the walls are old engravings of the village, photos of people, the village, its products, buildings, old games, old walls and rural-technology such as a pedal-powered ‘water-lifter’. And there are examples of a water-powered rice pounder, traditional clothes and capes, bamboo forestry tools, old saws, hoes, food processing, weaving, and tin smithing, with paintings of traditional life, old houses and room décor, and books of *Nong jia shu wu* (rural library).

The ‘Zhang Wu village museum of bamboo fan makers’ exposes some of the origins of the system. Before the ecomuseum system started in 2008-12, local tourism promoters had introduced the one village-one product (*Yī cūn yī chǎnpǐn*) system, common in Asian rural tourism development. The villagers were trained to make folding fans and became successful selling not only in China but even to Japan; and when the ‘ecomuseum’ system started they were one of the ‘village-museums’ that were incorporated.

Overall this is a very successful and realistic enlargement of the Ecomuseum concept. It does not pretend nostalgically that the folk still live like this. It stresses the diversity of livelihoods and lifestyles, and the dependence on natural resources and landscape features. Above all it relates nature and rural traditions to the modern world and tries to show that beauty and integrity can be preserved. Like museums discussed earlier, it is a public/private system. The financing and development was paid for by the government, with half the money coming from Beijing through the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. But it has partnered with local industries which established museums the Bamboo Museum mentioned above, the Bean Museum (a tofu company), the Black Felt Hat museum, a Sleep Museum (a bed factory), a White Tea Museum (local industry).

Its tourist visitors are not as numerous as the big city museums, and vary between the impressive main Anji town museum, which has a strong educational component, including the weekend parents and children program, to arts and crafts devotees (fans, calligraphy, paintings), loyal Communists (at the local Party Museums, the Tonghang Military Culture hall) and those interested in nature and agriculture (the Mountain Peoples Village museum, the white Tea museum, the Silkworm Mulberry museum) or history (the Old Bridge Museum, the Ancient Post House museum, the Filial Piety museum).
There is a strong element of civic promotion and political connections, as Wong (2015) suggested. Prominent visitors, famous professors, governmental and foreign officials and industry representatives, are especially welcomed, sometimes shutting out the general public. Honours are sought in the all-China competitions and their UNESCO awards are highly valued and further pursued.

**Conclusion**

This paper provides a look at China’s museums and their role in tourism. It does this by surveying the different kinds of contemporary museums in China and by considering what the definition of ‘museum’ is, a process guided by looking at the purposes museums serve. It presents a wide range of heterogeneity among China’s museums: there are public and private ones, those aimed at real estate construction and those growing out of patriotic collections, those which are ‘museumified’ whole villages and those which present minorities and ethnographic others as ‘living fossils’ (and the latter two are not necessarily exactly the same thing). Within tourism, museums may be the main attraction for tourists, by means of the transporting experience they provide, or they may be just one among many options tourists have for recreation. Museums may serve as a legitimating presence/force which bestows authenticity on their exhibits and even on their gift shops, and which confers authenticity of experience on reproductions of minority villages and of storefronts alike.

The paper ends with a comparison of two ecomuseums, in China’s ethnically diverse Guizhou Province and in wealthy Zhejiang Province. One grew quickly initially and later faltered, as its emphasis on the display of ethnic traditions fell out of favor with tourists. It is now rarely open. The other has been more successful, evolving, along with the mission of ecomuseums, to exhibit how people’s livelihoods emerge through interaction with the environment. Far from portraying locals as living fossils, it demonstrates how local industry draws on environmental resources for applications in science as well as in business. The paper thus uses this comparison of two brief case studies to reinforce the point that museums achieve their purposes when they avoid presenting cultures and peoples as unchanging others untouched by the tourism industry. In Museum Studies literature, this latter process has sometimes been called museumification. Yet museumification need not
take on this negative connotation; instead, we can understand the museum as metaphor. To museumize something is not necessarily to freeze it in amber, but to preserve and display it, to set tourists up to encounter it, whether the display is high or low culture. So, this actually informs the definition of museum: if a museum is a metaphor, then many of the cultural institutions that tourists visit may be understood as museums.

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Notes

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1. When we write ‘tourists’ we mean Chinese domestic tourists unless otherwise specified. International tourism is exceedingly rare. In summer 2015 Graburn travelled for three weeks to many famous tourist destinations mentioned in this paper, and only saw seven obvious foreigners and four of them were on planes and two more in airports.

2. Nor is it about heritage *per se* (e.g. Lowenthal 2015; Park 2013; Yan 2017). Heritage is a major component of museums as destinations, though probably less for the tourists than the museum professionals.

3. There are many other good works on Chinese museums Jacobsen 2013; Lee 2016; Lu 2014; Varutti 2014) which focus more on production, ownership, politics, heritage and the arts, rather than on tourism/tourists.

4. According to the Statistical Communique on Economic and Social Development in 2016, there were 2959 museums belonging to the National Cultural System by the end of 2015. Liu Yuzhu, director of the State
Administration of Cultural Heritage said that the number of registered museums reached 4692. By the end of 2016, there were 3060 museums belonging to the National Cultural System (Communication from Wang Junhong 2017; from Sohu News (http://mt.sohu.com/20160518/n450211914.shtml).

5. A place for the nine Muses, the goddesses of the arts and sciences, daughters of Zeus, the King of the Gods.

6. Ironically Kyoto was founded in 794 AD as Heian-kyo by Japan’s China-emulating rulers as a simulacrum of Chang’an, the then capital of China which later became Xian.

7. Started by a journalist interested in anthropology; this has been moved (in 2015) to Sichuan Minda, the Minorities University in Chengdu.

8. We purposely use both terms for the public who visit these museums are for the most part domestic tourists from outside the regions, unlike city and town museum audiences.

9. The most of any province in China, followed closely by Guizhou. For both of this ‘distant’ and not too wealthy Western provinces, ethnic tourism is a very significant part of their economy as well as their identity.

10. Professor Nelson H. Graburn wishes to thank Dr. Peng Xiaohua for introducing him to the collection in 2006 and Prof. Li Fei for providing him with more up to date information in 2016.

11. Except for Osaka’s famed Bunraku company recognized by UNESCO as World Intangible Cultural Heritage

12. Dali is a well-known resort area and an ethnic tourism (Bai peoples) destination. Eryuan is adjacent to a recreational Eryuan lake and the famous Dali GeoThermal Paradise hot spring resort. The prefectural government is also building an ambitious Mahayana Buddhist park on a nearby hill.

13. This information was kindly supplied by Yang Xiaoyi (Bard School, New York); see also Fan 2016.
14. This research was the subject of author Jin’s dissertation, published as Jin (2012, 2014 and 2016).

15. After teaching at the Department of Tourism at Ningbo University, in 2013 Dr. Jin Lu traveled to Anji County with her co-author, Nelson H. Graburn, and her husband, Liu Junjun. After meeting with Director Cheng Yongjun at the central Museum, we were taken to see three of the theme museums and two of village site museums. In 2015 Graburn explored the Anji Museum system with Dr. Rongling Ge, visiting other parts (Borelli and Ge 2016). Dr Jin has also taken her students from Ningbo University to study there.

16. The Museum calls itself literally Ecological Museum but this is immediately followed by (Community) so we have translated it as Ecomuseum.

References


