

Meeting the Challenge: The National Palace Museum's Transformation Over the Past Thirty Years

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Abstract

The National Palace Museum traces its beginnings back to the Forbidden City in Beijing on October tenth in the fourteenth year of the Republic of China, corresponding to 1925. It was created as a national museum to accept and preserve for posterity the cultural assets of the former Qing dynasty court. With the eruption of conflict with Japan in 1933, however, the decision was made to select, pack, and move many of the finest specimens from the collection for their safety. They were transported in five installments from the Forbidden City in a retreat inland toward the southwest, inaugurating a period of travel and temporary storage until part of the collection was once again shipped in 1949, this time to Taiwan. In 1965, to commemorate the centennial of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's birthday, the Preparatory Office of the Central Museum was united with the Palace Museum collection in Taiwan to form the "National Palace Museum" and established in Taipei, making the history of the Museum so far ninety years. In this paper, I analyze the developments of the National Palace Museum collection over these past nine decades, dividing the period into five stages: Beginning, Moving, Beigou, Growth, and Transformation. This essay in particular examines the above-mentioned period of "Transformation" (from 1983 to the present), first dealing with the challenges that the Museum faced when confronted with the rapid social, political, and economic changes over the past 32 years. Then I discuss how the Museum has met all these challenges by make corresponding adjustments to its operational methods and direction, as seen in the various activities it has engaged in. By doing so, the National Palace Museum has been able to rapidly transform itself to become the institution that it is today.

In 2013, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) for its annual meeting came up with the following theme: "Museums (Memory + Creativity) = Social Change." This, in fact, accurately describes the recent developments of the National Palace Museum. Despite the social impact created by continued changes in society, the Museum has not only been able to keep up with the times but also undergo

transformation in the process. Thus, the history of the National Palace Museum over the past 32 years precisely reflects the social changes in Taiwan over this period.

Keywords: National Palace Museum, museum, social change

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