

Keynote Speech at the High Level Forum on Museums

Dear Ministers, Museums Directors and experts,
Ladies and gentlemen, friends,
Good morning everyone!

It is a great pleasure to meet all of you here in Shenzhen, the “Design Capital” of China, and to attend the High Level Forum on Museums co-organized by UNESCO and the Chinese Government. In ancient China, a person with a wide range of knowledge was called “Bo Wu Jun Zi” (a man of great knowledge), from which the Chinese words “Bo Wu Guan” (museum) was derived. It can be said that today’s forum is a major event for all the “Bo Wu Jun Zi” worldwide. On behalf of the Chinese government, I would like to extend our warmest congratulations to the Forum, and our sincere welcome to all the guests.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has sent a congratulatory message to the forum, which has fully demonstrated the priority given to the museum sector by the Chinese government and the expectations we have for its role in promoting cultural exchanges as well as mutual understanding and friendship between Chinese people and people from other countries. And we believe this will kindle more cooperation and exchanges in culture and museum sector worldwide.

As a great treasure of the human civilization, museums represent the essence of the national history and the culture of a country. I have visited a number of museums in nearly 70 countries. Immersed in those cultural relics and art treasures shining with history and wisdom, I was amazed at the splendor and diversity of human civilizations.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the UNESCO Charter’s entry into force. Over the past 70 years, UNESCO has made unremitting efforts to promote the diversity of civilizations, enhance international cultural exchanges and protect cultural heritage. The Chinese government has given high credits to and proactively participated in the work of UNESCO. Especially since President Xi’s historic visit to the UNESCO Headquarters in March 2014, the cooperation between the two parties has reached a new level. In November, 2015, a new document outlining a *Recommendation Concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, Their Diversity and Their Role in Society* was adopted on the 38th UNESCO General Conference, calling on all countries to be prepared for new opportunities and

challenges and enhance their protection and utilization of museums and their collections. This forum aims at ensuring the Recommendation is implemented in each member country as soon as possible, which will have a significant impact on the international museum sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

Given the 5,000 years of the continuous Chinese civilization, it has long been the practice for the Chinese nation to learn and draw on other cultures with tolerance and inclusiveness, to respect cultural difference with the understanding of “seek common ground while reserving differences” as well as “harmony in diversity”, and to share the achievements of civilization in pursuit of peace based on faithfulness and common prosperity. All these inherent cultural genes have become unique spiritual marks of the Chinese nation. China has had the tradition of “cherishing the history and culture of the past”, and significant importance has been consistently attached to the protection of our cultural heritage. Since modern China, a group of far-sighted people have upheld the mission of developing the people’s intelligence and rejuvenating the country by education, and seen the building of museums as an important task to accelerate the development of China. In 1905, Zhang Jian, a famous industrialist and educator, established the first public museum in China, Nantong Museum. China’s museum sector, which has been expanding at a rapid pace over the past century, gained new impetuses with the creation of New China in 1949 and the introduction of Reform and Opening-up in 1978. It has played an active role in protecting cultural heritage, diffusing knowledge, educating people and promoting social progress.

Today, the Chinese people are striving to achieve the “Two Centenary Goals” and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Only 4decades ago, China was still an agrarian country with a huge rural population, and its per capita GDP was less than USD 200. Now, China is the world’s second largest economy with per capita GDP close to USD 8,000, and has lifted over 600 million people out of poverty. Both the economy as a whole and the standard of living of the people have had radical change. We have formulated development planning with a concept featuring innovation, coordination, green, open, and shared development in order to achieve higher-quality development that is more efficient, equitable, and sustainable. Therefore, we need to ensure that cultural development occupies a position of greater strategic importance, to be devoted to build a country with strong cultural competitiveness, to improve the public culture service system, to strengthen the culture creative industries, so as to

ensure the Chinese people enjoy a life of cultural richness as well as material abundance.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to the protection and utilization of cultural heritage, and makes the development of the museum sector part of the national strategy. Currently, the museum sector in China is developing in an unprecedented high speed. Museums, rather than the place merely for collection, protection, research and exhibition of cultural heritage, are now institutions of public cultural service and social education, responding to the comprehensive development of the people and the future of the nation. By 2020, the modern museum system of China will be further improved to enrich its collection resources, to manifest its functions, and to better boost economic and social development.

First, we should strengthen legal protection and improve the top-down design of the museum sector. We have put the development of museums as an important task in the *Constitution*, and have implemented laws and regulations including *Cultural Relics Protection Law* and *Regulation on Public Cultural and Sports Facilities*. In addition, the *Regulation on Museums* was introduced last year. We will further improve the legal system and strengthen the overall planning as well as macro-management to provide full support to the museum sector.

Second, we should optimize the scale and the layout of museums to establish a diverse museum system of full ranges. The number of registered museums nationwide has reached 4,692, which is 223 times that of 1949, and it is still on the rise with about 200 new museums emerging every year. We will continue pushing ahead the construction of a museum system featuring full ranges, diverse major players and rational layout, in which the state-owned museums should be the major player and the private ones serve as complement.

Third, we should better protect and take advantage of museums to create a colorful museum culture. China has yet launched 5 national censuses on cultural relics, registering a total of 0.767 million entries of unmoveable cultural relics, 53.13 million pieces / sets of moveable ones. The total collection of cultural relics in museums nationwide has reached 40 million, among which more than 4 million were deemed highly precious. The types of collections are in wide ranges from ancient works of arts and works of contemporary arts to the relics of folk customs, industrial heritage and intangible heritage. An inventory system for cultural heritage has already been in place, comprising national cultural heritage conservation units, cities of historical and

cultural prominence, historical towns and villages, etc. We will encourage museums to improve their management through innovation in collections and display, and hosting exhibition and education activities of various types and themes.

Fourth, we should adhere to the principle of serving and benefiting people, and promote equal access. Over 20,000 exhibitions and over 200,000 educational activities are held in China's museums every year with about 700 million museum visitors, including a large number of primary and middle school students as well as the elderly and the disabled. Awareness of cultural heritage, assisted by the Cultural Heritage Day and Museum Day, are permeating into people's lives. In recent years, we have implemented the policy of free access to museums with last year's overall financial investment reaching RMB 15.6 billion. There are now 4,013 museums nationwide with free access to the public, accounting for 85.5% of the total. The Chinese people are getting closer than ever to museums, and the latter have become a "cultural necessity" in daily life of the former.

As China is increasingly opening up to the outside world, the cooperation between the museums in China and those of other countries is growing closer day by day. Through cooperation agreements between governments, and collaborations with museums or museum institutes of other countries, we have over 100 exchange exhibitions annually, which significantly facilitates the "going global" of the Chinese culture and the introduction of the world culture to China.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

It has become an irresistible trend for countries to develop and cooperate in a peaceful environment in today's world. However, obstacles and threats against cultural diversity are still in play in the international community, and conflicts and disputes arising from cultural differences still emerge from time to time. It has never been more urgent than today for the mutual understanding and tolerance of people from all countries.

As a specialized institute for showcasing the natural and cultural diversity, the museum serves as an important bridge for promoting cultural exchanges. We need to further enhance the awareness that the destiny of all humans are connected, to form new cultural views that call for coexistence of variety, mutual learning, as well as cooperation and sharing, and to project UNESCO's *Recommendation* to the policy design of museums and actions. And for this purpose, I would like to put forward the following suggestions:

First, the government of each country should provide museums with full support for their preservation, research, education and publicity of cultural heritage. The precious cultural heritage of all nations has witnessed the long history of human society, and has fully demonstrated human vitality and creativity. Museums in different countries and regions need to enhance the protection, research and display of various cultural heritage of great historical, artistic and scientific value, to promote the inheritance of civilization and the diffusion of knowledge, to help cultivate the humanistic quality of the population, especially that of teenagers, and to promote economic and social development in a balanced manner. Meanwhile, we should fully implement relevant international conventions and work together to crack down illicit smuggling of cultural relics so as to eliminate the possibility that museums become the destination and hotbed for crimes of cultural relics such as smuggling.

Second, the government of each country should encourage museums to further improve their services and accessibility to better serve the community. The purpose of museums is always to serve the public and the community. We need to better display various collections of cultural heritage and keep the public better informed, to develop more cultural and creative products of better design and quality, to combine the development of the cultural industry and other industries such as tourism, to build a long-term sustainable mechanism with extensive public participation so as to realize the multi-functions and social value of museums.

Third, the government of each country should encourage technical innovation of museums to turn technological achievements into practical use. As technical support is integral to the vigour of a museum, we need to further strengthen the technical research and development and call for cooperation in this area so as to turn technological achievements of modern times into practical use in fields of archaeological excavation, restoration of cultural relic, display and publicity, and in particular, to take full advantage of the Internet, big data and digitalization to build online museums, enabling people to enjoy museum collections of different times at home.

Fourth, we should strengthen the inter-governmental cooperation to improve the cooperation mechanisms in terms of display and exhibition, protection of cultural relics, and personnel training. Museums in different countries have their own characteristics and should learn from each other and draw on each other's advantages to achieve common development. Under the framework of UNESCO, we need to

expand the inter-museum cooperation, to build a broader platform for cultural exchanges and communication, to promote personnel exchanges and joint research, to open up new channels of cultural exchanges, and to lay a solid foundation for the communication and friendship among people from different countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

Museum, a great creation of the human society, is not only for paying tribute to the glory of human reason, for demonstrating the power of knowledge, and for gathering the collective memory of mankind, but also for inspiring people to be more creative and innovative, helping advance the whole society. Let us work together to promote the development of the museum sector and to make unremitting efforts to build a harmonious world of long-lasting peace and common prosperity!

Best wishes for the success of the Forum!

Thank you!