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Local Chronicles Museums in China: Digital Development and Community Outreach

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Abstract:

Local chronicles are unique carrier of traditional culture of the Chinese. Local Chronicles Museum is a multi-functional place for compiling, collecting and displaying these traditional culture. The 603 state-level, provincial, municipal and county-level local chronicle libraries officially built in China have different degrees of connection with cultural facilities such as libraries, museums and archives. But they have their own characteristics. Local Chronicles Museum has many functions, such as display of local conditions, collection and protection, compilation and research, professional consultation, information service, development and utilization, publicity and education, professional training, cultural exchange and so on. In recent years, with the development of computer and Internet technology and the update of data storage technology, people's new demands on the processing, storage, query and utilization of traditional literature and information are increasing day by day, and digital local chronicles libraries at all levels in China emerge as the times require. This article will reveal the fundamentals of local chronicles museums of China, it will also address current development of Functions and dissemination value of Chinese local chronicles museums in cooperate with the trends of information technology

Keywords: Chinese Local Chronicles; Local Chronicles Museums;
Local Chronicles Functions; Local Chronicles Features and Functions

I. The Development and Evolution of Local Chronicles Museums

Every country has its own history, which stays true for local areas and families that they have chronicles and genealogy respectively. Local chronicles play the role of ‘recording the history of local geography with documents’ and the ‘encyclopedia of all places’. They are unique treasures of Chinese traditional culture, containing copious information resources. Local chronicles which serve as informative literature records the history and current situation of a certain administrative region of its nature, politics, economy, culture and society in a comprehensive and systematic way. Local chronicles have endured a history of two thousand years since Sui Dynasty and extends to this day.

The Local chronicle museum is a public cultural service that collects, studies, develops and utilizes local chronicle resources, as well as publicizes and displays national and local realities. As an official organization responsible for the compilation of chronicles, it integrates compilation, collection, display and researches. Since ancient times, local chronicles museums have made significant contributions to the dissemination of the Chinese civilization and cultural heritage. They evolved from history museums, Hanlin Academy, Bureau of Records and Museums of Unified Chronicles in ancient times to Bureaus of General annals, Comprehensive Museums, etc. in the modern times. Besides, local chronicles museums of various types have played a pivotal role in the preservation and inheritance of a colossal amount of local chronicle records and other invaluable historical literature. The earliest local chronicles museum can be traced back to the Chorography and Chronicles Bureaus of the Nine Domains established in Northern Song Dynasty. Afterwards, it developed into the Hanlin Academy in Yuan Dynasty, followed by Museums of Unified Chronicles in Ming dynasty and then became Fanglue Academy in Qing dynasty. During the days of Republic of China, they were called the General Annals Museums. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, especially the time after economic reform and opening-up, the boom of revising chronicles on a large scale emerged for the first time. Therefore, the earliest chronicles institutions named as “Local Chronicles Museums” occurred, for instance, the Zhejiang Local Chronicles Museums which was established in 1990 is the first modern local chronicles museum of China.

At present, the cause of Chinese local chronicles is developing on an unprecedented scale. China’s local chronicles are evolving from being just “a book” to ‘developing multiple causes simultaneously’, covering chronicle books of records, annals, database of local geography, local chronicles museums, local geomorphic network via exploitation and utilization, journals, theoretical researches. Chinese local chronicles have also been transforming from simply a work to an undertaking and from compiling chronicles in accordance with the law to managing chronicles in the light of the law. Accordingly, the construction of local chronicles museums has also been accelerated. By the end of 2018, China had established 603 local chronicles museums at various levels, including one local chronicles museum at the national-level, 24 at the provincial-level, 136 at the prefecture-level, and 442 at the district and county-level.

In recent years, the newly-built national-level local chronicles museums along with local chronicles museums at provincial and municipal level in Beijing, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Guangxi and Shenzhen all demonstrate the spectacular architectures, advanced facilities, full functions to some extent, and some of which have become a major cultural landmark. Local chronicles museums in the new era shoulder an important mission of disseminating information of current China and spreading the culture of local chronicles to realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.

Local chronicles museums have distinctive features in architectural designs and display respectively. The architectural designs of some local chronicles museums underline both local and national features, absorbing the styling and building techniques from modern exhibition museums, without following the single pattern of giving priority to displaying in a particular space in the past. Instead, utilization of space, multimedia, environment, interaction, graphic design, lighting, and mechanics design that combines multiple systems are adopted. Take another example of the local chronicles museum in Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, it comes with the architectural style of south of the Yangtze, which utilizes the skills of sculpturing, wood carving, and brick carving. Meanwhile, it connects inextricably with the cultural atmosphere in the south of the Yangtze River. The local chronicles museum in Liaocheng, Shandong Province, uses bricks produced in Linqing City (which were imperial tributes in ancient times) as the construction material. The overall design carries the connotation of a verse ‘Under the Wutong Mountain, inhabits a phoenix’, highlighting the alternative name of Liaocheng, that is the ‘Phoenix City’. The local chronicles museum in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province has its glass on the wall designed into a long scroll that displays the ‘magnificent scenery of Jinlin’ (the old name of Nanjing). In this sense, it manifests the unique charm of the culture of Nanjing. In terms of the way of exhibition, some local chronicles museums have broken free from the traditional approach of displaying chronicles in a plain way and have introduced a narrative means that combines space and time to merge national traditions, regional features and the spirit of the time. The sequence of historical development is shown in a more coherent way via a vivid ‘narration’, reproducing the true local history and the vitality of local life. Meanwhile, the museums also aim to combine dynamic elements with static ones. Technologies like sound, light, electricity, 3D, animation, videos and stereos along with wax figure, sand table, sculpture, light box, and symbols are interactively used. At the same time, installations, situation simulations, and story-telling techniques are also utilized to present local surroundings in a multi-dimensional and multi-angle way. Therefore, Local chronicles museums have been increasingly accepted and favored by the public due to its unique features. In addition, a visiting tour to the local chronicles museums has become a new life style to citizens.

II. The Distinctions between Local Chronicles Museums and Other Facilities

For a long period of time in history, Local chronicles museums perform main functions of being history museums, book collection museums, libraries, archives, and museums, while those facilities are confined to traditional functions for collection, compilation etc., which are different from local chronicles museum in reality.

Local chronicles museums are in common with other cultural facilities in terms of functions and nature, for instance, libraries, museums, cultural centers, archives, Party history centers, and urban planning centers, but differ from them in many aspects. Libraries have the deepest roots in history of local chronicles museums, which share a similar functional system with the local chronicles museums. In this sense, a foundation for extensive exchanges and cooperation is laid irrespective of seeking differential development. In the past, the operation of local chronicles museums relied mostly on libraries; thus libraries boost the development of local chronicles museums in a way. Archives are responsible for the collection and preservation of archives, assisting the maintenance of the archives and historical records needed by the Party and the country in a long term. Museums are places where shoulder the responsibility of

collecting, reserving, exhibiting, and researching natural and human cultural heritage. They present the ancient relics instead of reflecting current situations. Party history Museums generally display the history of the Communist Party of China and mirror the historical development and changes through a host of personal stories and cultural relics within a limited time featuring only the past 90 years history after the establishment of the Communist Party of China. Cultural museums provide space and support for the cultural life of the public. Urban planning Museums are mainly places where the planning and design, construction plan, prospect and even local geography are displayed with panoramic views. Therefore, museums, urban planning museums and Party history Museums mainly serve the function of displaying while exhibiting different objects. Compared with local chronicles museums, the history they present involves a specific moment or event, creating room for the construction of local chronicle museums.

Local chronicle museums in a new epoch play the role of geography museums where provides the collection, information consultation and display of annals and geography materials. The features lie in that they reflect local conditions with ‘comprehensiveness’ and ‘specialization’. “Comprehensiveness” means the wide range of display of the local conditions in the administrative region, which offers the audience a glimpse of the local conditions and clues for history through local chronicle museums. In this regard, providing a supplement function to museums, libraries and archives. ‘Specialization’ signifies that local chronicle museums focus on the display of unique culture and conditions of a specific place. Therefore, chronicle museums has no substitute due to unique features and the role of which cannot be replaced by the above mentioned public cultural facilities

Undoubtedly, Local chronicle museums should also absorb the quintessence from other cultural venues during development, for instance, using modern approaches, the state-of-art technologies and teleservice network to better engage the participation of the public and to raise work level and efficiency. They should utilize useful display concept from other venues to provide multi service and to enhance the ability of providing public cultural services. Moreover, more attention ought to be paid to the fusion and sharing of multifunctional technologies from different venues. It is necessary to engaging more academic exchanges and inter-venue cooperation so as to complement each other and to maximize the comprehensive benefits.

III. The Functions and Features of Local Chronicle Museums

The construction of Local chronicle museums is an important approach adopted by the government for accomplishing cultural edification and solicitude, disseminating culture, cultivating and promoting cultural innovation and creativity to people from different classes and groups. Local chronicle museums serve multiple functions, for example, collection and preservation, exhibition and display, compilation and research, professional consultation, information service, exploitation and utilization, publicity and education, **business training**, cultural exchanges and so on and so forth. The features of Local chronicle museums are as follows:

To begin with, information transmission is one of the features. Local chronicle museums are not only places for the collection of local literature and informative materials, but also deals with the sorting, identifying, classifying, categorizing, and digitization of the related informative materials; thus transforming the local information contained into a systematic and well-organized database of information resources for efficient use in the long run. Meanwhile, Local chronicle museums collect literature of specific regions while assume the social responsibility and historical mission of disseminating culture among the public.

Public exhibition is the second feature of Local chronicle museums. Local chronicles carry the information about the conditions of a specific region, and record comprehensively the past and present of its nature, history, culture, politics, economy and social development. The literature of chronicles collected in the chronicles museums cover wide range of areas and encompass all kinds of topics. Specifically speaking, chronicles mainly cover the themes of nature and geography, history and culture, politics and economy, military, science and technology, health and sports, demography, folk customs and other cultural and natural scenery. The development of local economy can be greatly benefited from a bounty of resources on local conditions. Developing and utilizing Local chronicles resources can not only pass on special local history and culture, but also be a promoter and a leader in urban civilization. Therefore, Local chronicles museums are able to shoulder the responsibility to serve as the ‘culture card’ of a city to demonstrate its charm and characteristics. Take Chinese National Local Chronicles Museum as an example, there are two permanent showroom given the name of ‘Charming China’ and ‘Chinese Local Chronicles’ respectively displaying China's long history, splendid culture, and magnificent natural scenery, as well as the vigorous development and great achievements of the new Local chronicles cause in China. In the lecture hall of this museum, plenty of seminars, academic lectures and business training events on Local Chronicles have been held. In Beijing Local Chronicles Museum, permanent exhibitions and themed exhibitions complement each other, combining the 40th anniversary of the resumption of college entrance examination in Beijing and the release of *The Grand Canal Heritage Protection Plan (Beijing Section)* by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics. Beijing Local Chronicles Museum hosted ‘The Themed Exhibition of the 40th Anniversary of the Resumption of Chinese College Entrance Examination’ and ‘The Exhibition of the Heritage of Beijing Grand Canal Water Conservancy Project’. Guangzhou Local Chronicles Museum has also held many exhibitions, including ‘the Glory of the City - Guangzhou’ Exhibition’, ‘Exhibition of a Review of the 20 years History of the Local Chronicles Development of Guangzhou’ and so on, all of which have generated positive social impact and reaped benefits.

Thirdly, Local chronicles museums can store memory. To be more specific, the local literature stored in Local chronicles museums have unique form and are irreplaceable by other information resources since they stand out in storing the memories of a city and its society by collecting, screening, sorting literature and facilitating the utilization of materials on local conditions in an accurate, an objective and a systematic way to record a developing history of a region. Apart from that, they accurately reflecting the changes and glorious accomplishments of a region. As a medium, Local chronicles museums enable people to chase to the past and save the present.

Fourthly, the features of consultation and introspection of Local chronicles museums cannot be overlooked. Local chronicles museums are centers that collect informative materials about local conditions, connecting historical heritage and development in reality. The informative literature at Local chronicles museums accurately record the previous policies of the local government, the decision-making process, results of implementation, and lessons learned. The

basic conditions of a region ranging from the nature to the society and from local people to local landscape are recorded comprehensively. The distinctive natural landscape, human landscape, and places of historical interest are included. The establishment of Local chronicles museums provides convenience for experts and scholars to study local natural environment, local history, urban construction, local people and other basic information. Moreover, Local chronicles museums offer consultations and basis for the decision-making of the local Party committee and the local government in terms of scientific planning of the relevant departments, the sound development and utilization of local tourism cultural resources. They provide creations of literature and artistic works with a broad thinking space and materials of social life.

Fifthly, exchanges and sharing constitute one of the features of Local chronicles museums by displaying local conditions including its historical wax and wane, economic ups and downs, social changes, regime changes, ethnic integration, and so on and so forth with pictures, description, as well as sound, light, digital means and other modern technologies. They are platforms where the public can communicate and exchange ideas with each other. At the same time, they can aid local residents to have a better understanding of the local norms, resource distribution and historical changes of their hometown. Overall, providing informative materials of local conditions on natural environment, local customs, historical stories, and social development is the mission of local chronicles museums.

Local chronicles museums function on the basis of the Local chronicles literature. Their feature embody the wide-ranging coverage and consistency of the chronicles literature, which integrate and magnify the development and utilization value and significance of Local chronicles. The chronicles museum functions as the display and collection center of regional information, regional research and consulting center, local cultural exchange center, patriotic publicity and education base.

IV. The Value of Communication of Local Chronicle Museums

President Xi Jinping has pointed out that ‘Diversity spurs interaction among civilizations, which in turn promotes mutual learning and their further development. We need to promote exchanges and mutual learning among countries, nations and cultures around the world, and strengthen popular support for jointly building a community with a shared future for both Asia and humanity as a whole.’ Liu Yandong, former vice premier, has stated that ‘Local chronicles should be rigorous informative literature, but the forms and ways of dissemination should be vivid and diverse. The better the development and utilization of Local chronicles and the more extensive the promotion and application are made, the more significant the practical meaning of Local chronicles can be and the more contributions they can make’. Therefore, it can be seen that as an important platform to display local history and Local chronicle culture, the influence of Local chronicles museums obviously are more potent than the simple compilation of chronicles.

Since ancient times, foreign countries, especially some western countries, have collected a large number of precious Chinese historical literature through various means due to different reasons, It is because of the existence of Local chronicles, a unique form of traditional culture of the Chinese nation that foreign scholars have been attaching more and more importance to the value of Local chronicles; and thus generally regard them as a window to understand Chinese history and culture. As a result, the in-depth research on Local chronicles has been

carried on increasingly. It is necessary to rely on Local chronicles museums to effectively spread the culture of Local chronicles and is urgent for us to pay attention to and ponder on how to build the Local chronicles museums as an influential, dynamic and open venue, thus making them a center for the exchange of Chinese and foreign records of Local chronicles. We should learn to value the development of Local chronicles museums in the international background with wild vision. Beside, we should take effective measures to send the resources of Chinese Local chronicles abroad and bring in the precious resources from abroad. In order for more people to comprehend and understand the culture of Chinese local chronicles, we also have to make use of Local chronicles museums for better development and publicity, for example, we can hold a series of overseas lectures on Chinese local chronicle culture and tour exhibitions of Local chronicle achievements via the platform of Local chronicle museums; or to introduce the old Chinese chronicles and other historical literature from abroad elaborately; or to gradually promote inter-museum communication with overseas book collection organizations; to cooperate with overseas universities to systematically cultivate the Local chronicle talents, further strengthening inter-museum communication and cooperation to better exert the dissemination value of Local chronicles museums.

Digital local chronicles museums have played a pivotal role in cultural communication of Local chronicle. In recent years, with the development of computer and Internet technology, as well as the updates of data storage technology, people's craving for the processing, storage, inquiry, utilization and other aspects on the information of traditional literature are increasingly made with each passing day. As a result, digital Local chronicles museums at all levels have emerged in response to these new demands. Digital Local chronicles museums are born to solve the problems of collecting, processing, preserving, disseminating and utilizing Local chronicle resources in the digital age. By making use of advanced computer technology, database technology and Internet technology, digital Local chronicles museums process various kinds of data, texts, images, sounds and other information materials that can be incorporated into various databases. With these databases, modern Local chronicles museums can disseminate information via the Internet, and are able to share the utilization of information. Thus, being digital, open, mobile and efficient, modern Local chronicles museums provide a broader platform for the development and utilization of chronicle resources as well as the more convenient use of historical chronicle resources to all industries.

Digital local chronicles museums are considered an innovation in terms of the construction patterns of Local chronicles museums, they provide opportunity to develop for the sustainable utilization of the resources of local chronicles museums. Digital local chronicles museums can be categorized into digital local chronicles museums with digital informative materials, panoramic digital local chronicles museums and comprehensive digital local chronicles museums. Digital local chronicles museums with digital informative materials are the ones that use technological approaches to transform local chronicles, comprehensive annals and other local literature into digital data and materials so that the public can access and read them online through the Internet and the mobile phone. Panoramic digital local chronicles museums have an extensive presence in the construction of digital local chronicles museums and are the ones that use computer technologies for instance, Photoshop, video and audio to represent the content in a brick-and-mortar museum on the basis of the Internet in the forms of picture, text, video and audio interaction and so on. Comprehensive digital local chronicles museums combine the resources and literature database with the way of exhibition of panoramic digital local chronicles museum. This type of Local chronicles museums uses computer technologies

such as Flash、 After Effect、 Premiere、 3Dmax and adopts multiple approaches including audio, video, visual effect, and image to build virtual local chronicles museums by 3D modeling and 3D animation, which comprehensively display local conditions, history, historical sites, digital cultural relics, regional culture and intangible cultural heritage.

On May 13, 2016, the opening ceremony of the Chinese National Digital Local Chronicles Museum was held. As an important part of the project to construct China's informative and digitized local chronicles, the National Digital Local Chronicles Museum aims to develop a resource management system for all the local chronicle resources in China and integrate all the digital chronicles, annals, records of local conditions, old records, journals of local chronicles, audios, videos, pictures and other resources. By utilizing modern technologies and merging diversified display methods, and sorting out the compilation of local of all time and chronicles cause in new China. The National Digital Local Chronicles Museum aims to popularize local chronicle knowledge, present local chronicle achievements, and promote local chronicle culture.

President Xi Jinping pinpointed that we should uphold the cultural spirit that transcends time, space and countries with its everlasting charm and contemporary values. We should also spread the fruits of innovation of contemporary Chinese culture that reflect the spirit of the times and is inherited from the outstanding traditional culture to a global focus. This has made clear what requirement would modern Local chronicles museum meet in terms of construction. With the multi-polarization, economic globalization, information Technology trends of society and cultural diversity dominating today's world, Local chronicles museums in the new era have made it possible for Local chronicles to be 'richer, more vivid, more outstanding, and more popular' through creative transformation and innovative development. Having developed from one dimension to multi-dimension, and with abundant cultural achievements and a rich resource reservation, Local chronicles museums have combined the "going abroad" and "introducing" strategy to realize the coordinated development between physical and digital local chronicles museums. Having courageously undertaken the momentous mission of disseminating outstanding Chinese traditional culture, Local chronicles museums will continue to conduct in-depth researches and fully present Local chronicles and the relevant information contained to better publicize China to the world with the goal that the world would understand China better.

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