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## Managing Quality and Motivating Innovation

### Revisiting Museum Industry Awards in China and Their Effects

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The International Council of Museums (ICOM) offered the latest definition of museums in the August 2022 Prague General Conference, as follows:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.

The word “professionally” suggests that a museum is measurable and is able to be evaluated in terms of its nature, quality, and realm of expertise. In addition to the museum accreditation and quality evaluation system, the museum community worldwide establishes awards, in order to “push museums to seek a disciplinary attribute and a real professional status in the self-reliant industry with a stable status in the social contract and to develop the ability to shoulder responsibilities in decision making” (Sola and Cipek 2022: 129). Awards incentivize museums to improve their operations, to fulfill their missions, and to follow professional and ethical public quality standards. China’s museums are no exception. In the PRC, museum awards cover a complete set of categories—displays and exhibitions, social education, creative cultural products and new media, and so forth—significantly enhancing the potential and capacity of museums to serve society at large. However, there are several noteworthy concerns. In this article, we use a quantitative data analysis method to study the history of China’s museum awards and conclude that in the context of China’s pursuit of high-quality social and economic development, the bodies issuing museum awards should refine and quantify the criteria to highlight the most important achievements of museums and to encourage social participation and academic research.

### Overview of the Research Strategy and Results

There is less current research on Chinese museum awards than on other themes in the available literature. Although the earliest award was designed for exhibition guides or docents in 1991, there was insufficient research on this award (Song and Liu 1996). Most research has focused on exhibition awards—Chinese Top Ten Display and Exhibitions Award or China’s Top Ten Excellent Museum Exhibition Awards (1997–2000 annually, 2001–2012 every two years, 2013–annually). Observations from the management level include the criteria, score points, and submission procedures (Li 2010, 2020, 2021), while analysis from the museum side was conducted by several scholars (Lyu 2017, 2018; Mao 2021; Yan 2008) who believed this award had contributed significantly to the current best practice and new theoretical and technology-informed curating. However, they frankly admitted that the current studies do not fully capture the reality of museum practice in the sector and that further research is required. From a macro level, some new



awards, such as the creative cultural products awards (which celebrate the best-selling museum products) and the special awards for educational programs, were not examined thoroughly. By contrast, the authors of the current research apply an integrated perspective, using quantitative methods, to investigate the history of museum awards, assess their impact, and propose refinement and improvements.

In terms of methods and results, the authors retrieved the Chinese equivalents of three key phrases—museum awards, museum industry awards, and museum award-winning—on the websites of the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI),<sup>1</sup> the China National Cultural Heritage Administration,<sup>2</sup> and the Chinese Museums Association,<sup>3</sup> as well as the official websites of cultural heritage administrations, museum associations, and museums at the provincial and the municipal or county level. These data sets were then analyzed and categorized.

## Categories of Awards

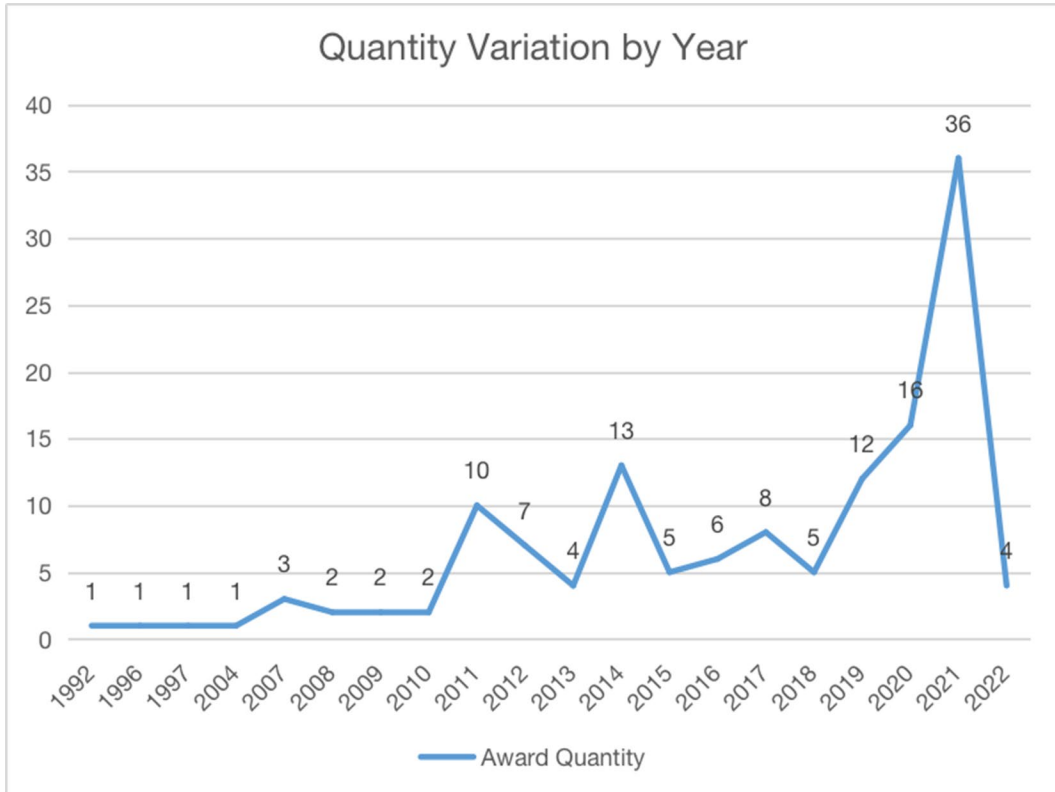
The results include four award categories: award title, level of administration, organizational form, and disciplinary involvement. Under the award title, there are general awards (one item) and special awards (seven items), with the latter including displays and exhibitions, publicity and education, oral interpretation, volunteer, new media, creative cultural products, and miscellaneous. Under the heading of administration, there are seven award categories, at three levels—national, provincial (municipal), and city (county), plus other types occasionally mentioned for reference. Under organizational form, there are three categories that are evident in the data—alliance, industry organization, and expo—with the number of industry organizations much higher than non-industry organizations. Subject content reveals four categories: collections, technology, academics, and publicity. It mainly includes general awards and special awards.

General awards total 139, covering almost all the fields and administrative levels in the museum profession. Among them, awards established for social education represent the largest number with the most categories (23 for volunteers 22 for oral interpretation, 12 for education), displays and exhibitions awards rank second with 21 items, the creative cultural products awards take third place with 20 items, the comprehensive awards take fourth place with 15 items, and new media and miscellaneous categories tie for fifth place with 13 items.

The spatial distribution of the general awards is vast, involving 23 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, nearly 69 percent of the total (34). Zhejiang topped the ranking (11 items) (Wenzhou Museum 2022), followed by Shaanxi (six items), Shandong, Hunan, and Jiangsu (five items each), Guangdong and Fujian (four items each), Heilongjiang (three items), Guizhou (two items), and others (one item). This result is partially associated with local museum resources and support policies.

The quantity variation by year is shown in Figure 1 below. Starting from 1992, the museum industry awards culminated in large numbers of awards in 2011, 2014, and 2021. It seems that the intermittent closures of museums during the long COVID-19 pandemic didn't make a major impact on this gradual improvement of quality and efficiency through bottom-up awarding mechanisms.

The Special Award for National Top Ten Museum Exhibitions is now the established and most influential competition in China's museum community. It has four categories: Special Award, Top Ten Excellence Award, Outstanding Award, and the International and Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Cooperation Award. It covers permanent exhibitions, temporary exhibitions, and inbound and outbound exhibitions. By the end of 2016, 190 quality awards had been granted to various museums from more than 15 provinces (Lyu 2017, 2018), a result which really reflected the new concepts, methods, technologies, and managerial modes in the domains of display and exhibition production. Beijing, Shaanxi, Guangdong, and Jiangsu are the most active participants in this category, contributing to almost every session and winning numerous awards. Some museums did not participate again after they had received an award, while others compete more frequently. Besides the national awards, more than 10 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, including Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Sichuan, and Shaanxi, have organized quality exhibition promotion activities, facilitating the nationwide museum exhibition award selection system to take shape (Mao 2021).

**Figure 1.** Variation in quantity of Chinese museum awards by year (Note: 139 items in total).

Social Education Awards include oral interpretation awards, excellent examples of interpretation, excellent teaching design for young students, best case studies of social education, and outstanding volunteer programs at the national, provincial, or municipal level. The volunteer awards constitute an important part of the museum awards, showing the new museum trend towards public engagement.

Creative Cultural Product Awards were set up in 2014 and flourished when the General Office of the State Council forwarded the *Opinions on Promoting the Development of Cultural and Creative Products of Cultural Relics Units*, issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism with other authorities in May 2016. It includes the Cultural and Creative Development Award, the Excellent Cultural and Creative Product Award, and the Top 100 Cultural and Creative Products.

New Media Awards appeared after 2019 at three levels: national, provincial, and industrial. High participation by media giants, such as *People's Daily*<sup>4</sup> and Sina Weibo,<sup>5</sup> is also evident, which promoted the cloud transmission or all-media transmission of Chinese cultural heritage. For example, the Weibo (V-blog) of the national top 10 museums, the most searched hashtags of museums in China, best short videos, the Most Popular City Reader Museums, New Media Forum on Museology, and Annual List of New Media for Museology, have all demonstrated museums' enthusiasm for and progress in adopting new media technologies.

Miscellaneous Awards include the National Top 10 Collection Restoration Project Promotion, National Top Ten Heritage Museum Technological Product, National Outstanding Achievements in Museology, and awards for selections of museology or research achievement, Hongbo Net Excellent Museum Recommendation Award, the Museum Poster Award, the Selection Activity of Top 10 Museum Posters, Top 10 Exhibit Labels Promotion Activity, and Museum Achievements Review Promotion Activity for Celebrating

the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China. All these awards introduce new fields of endeavor and represent new concerns in the museum industry.

## Main Characteristics and Significance

Most of the above-mentioned awards are permanent (some have set periods, such as annual, biennial, or triennial awards; some are shortened from triennial or biennial to annual awards), and the remaining are temporary awards—event-based single awards—such as the National Museum Achievements Review Promotion Activity for Celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Republic of China in 2019. All the awards, permanent or temporary, represent the characteristics and professionalism of museums. The trajectory is clearly towards a growing number of awards with themes ranging from local to general.

### *Main Characteristics*

We identified three main characteristics of the awards. The first is reasonable setting and inclusiveness. The establishment of awards is congruent with China's museum landscape, highlighting the characteristics and professionalism of museums. First, history museums and general museums dominate the existing museum structure in China, accounting for 35.27 percent and 36.28 percent, respectively. Second, there are diversified awards, including special and general ones. General awards include the Most Innovative Museums in China, while the special ones cover many themes, including collection, display and exhibition, education, cultural and creative products, and communication.

The second main characteristics is clear hierarchy and diversified organizations. The organizations are mostly administrative departments—such as tourism or cultural relics<sup>6</sup> bureaus—and industrial organizations at all levels, such as museum associations and alliances. Some organizations in the museum industry also collaborate with other institutions or industries. For example, *China Cultural Relics News*, the working platform for the industrialization, application, and collaboration of cultural relics protection equipment, and the Three Gorges Cultural Relics Science and Technology Preservation Base, jointly organized the awarding of “National Top Ten Cultural Heritage Museum Technological Products.” All these demonstrate that national museum governance has proceeded in an orderly and horizontal-vertical manner in the new era.

The third main characteristic is upholding fundamental principles while breaking new ground with prominent foci. In the museum industry, awards for education, displays, and exhibitions were established early, as the main focus was on consolidating the basic functions of museums, particularly the large and medium museums. However, over time three new categories have been further developed as follows:

*Interpretation awards.* This category was established relatively early—such as Shaanxi Province's earliest attempt in 1984 (Zhang 2014)—and has developed rapidly. At present, museum interpreter competitions at all levels are popular around the country. “With the introduction of award selections and competitions to museum publicity and education,” writes Zhang, “the previous narrative interpretation has been lifted to a new field, that is, interpretation studies began, and the art of interpretation was born” (Zhang 2014: 275).

*Display and exhibition awards.* At the national level, two competitive brands have been established, namely, the “National Top Ten Museum Exhibitions” (19 successive sessions since 1997) and the collection and promotion event for the exhibition themed “carrying forward the excellent traditional Chinese cultures and cultivating the core socialist values” (six successive sessions since 2014). At the local level, more than a dozen provinces and municipalities, including Zhejiang, Guangdong, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi, Shanghai, Chongqing, and Tianjin, have organized annual or biannual excellent exhibitions as well as the relevant selection and recommendation activities. These activities have promoted professional communication, public sharing, and publicity of museum dis-

plays and exhibitions and raised public awareness, promoting museums' abilities to curate and design exhibitions through model museum projects.

*Innovation awards.* This category focuses on emerging fields—such as the awards for creative cultural products and new media—and highlights the evolution of museums in keeping with the times, playing an important role in the development of cultural heritage undertakings, such as the Hongbo Awards. For example, the National Top Ten Heritage Museum Technological Products Awards (since 2009; the seventh session was held in 2021) and the National Top Ten Cultural Relics Collection Restoration Project Promotion Activities focus on cultural heritage protection, inheritance, and utilization.

## Significance

Museum awards are a significant driver for Chinese museums to improve their operations. First, they play an important role in shaping and guiding industrial development with significant influence. These awards serve the museums' overall development patterns, systems, and key trends, as well as the high-quality development of China's museum industry. For example, the National Museum Interpretation Competition has advanced the introduction and improvement of relevant national standards and service specifications. The "National Top Ten Museum Exhibitions" has promoted a large number of classic case studies on the characteristics of successful development, thus enhancing the quality of displays and exhibitions on the whole and accelerating the professional development and specialization of Chinese museums.

Second, awards provide metrics for excellence and best practice as well as evaluation. It is indicated that the award categories are abundant, covering nearly all spheres of museum operations while emphasizing the main functions of exhibition, education, and technical innovations in collection, preservation and conversation, research, cultural creative products, and public communications. These awards have occurred over a long time span from the former charged entrance system to the free-entry policy in 2008 and up until 2022, despite the intermittent disturbance of COVID-19. Their incentives for sustainable operation are crucial for museums to fulfill their obligations and commitments. Recently, these awards have become more specific, such as Museum Top 10 Exhibit Poster Promotion Activity and the Excellent Exhibit labels Promotion Activity.

Apart from the national level awards, more provincial- and municipal-level awards have been created, showing a bottom-up enthusiasm for professionalization. The typical examples include the Gansu provincial awards for excellent museum displays and exhibitions, and the Xi'an municipal awards for excellent museum exhibitions and education. As the categories grow, the criteria have become increasingly internationalized, dominated by network participation and multi-media publicity and promotion. Some award-winning Chinese museum projects have been showcased at international professional museum awards. For example, the Most Innovative Museums in China Award has been staged at the TBIT (The Best in Heritage) European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) multiple times.

Notably, a special "Lifetime Achievement Award," established by the Chinese Museums Association on 21 May 2012, was epoch-making in that it celebrated individual contributions. It is very prestigious and has so far only been granted to the famous museologist Su Donghai (1927–2021) (Liu 2012). In terms of collections, the awards have competitions for preservation and conservation skills, aiming to attract and to inspire young professionals. In addition, some museums have set up museum-level awards, forming a layered structure of museum awards.

Third, awards demonstrate a promising trajectory of quality-driven museum management under various administrative levels. It is evident from the changes, to give one example, that the organizing framework has shifted from industry-leading implementation to internal-external cooperation. Over the years, museum exhibitions have undergone a significant transformation. Curatorial practice has arguably shifted from individuals to teams, from single to multiple museums, and from internal-external staff to independent curators, demonstrating a growing disciplinary and academic rigor. Academic teams are encouraged to carefully curate exhibitions with advanced international concepts. Features such as digital technology, interactive experience, online exhibition, and public education are prominent, fully embodying the functional orientation, high standards of display, and popularization of science, which are features of

contemporary museums. In addition, immersive experience, 4D cinema, VR and 3D animation, network interaction, and online lectures are all indispensable parts of almost every shortlisted project.

All awards claim to encourage innovation while upholding fundamental concepts. In terms of content, the awards cover wider themes, such as archeological finds, collections of “cultural relics,” protection and restoration of cultural relics (including objects associated with the Chinese Revolution from 1921 to 1949), and intangible cultural heritage. As well as conventional museum approaches, new media is often applied to encourage public participation and bring out the voices of audiences.

Fourth, we witness an increasing public participation in awards, which suggests that participatory museums are being normalized. Public online votes became essential reference for six major awards—Top Ten Exhibitions, Excellent Oral Interpreters, Top Ten Cultural Heritage Museum Research Practice and Education Cases, Top Ten Museum Posters, Top Ten Cultural Heritage Museum Short Videos, and Excellent Works in Cultural Heritage Revitalization and Utilization. Moreover, public judges in the final evaluation are mandatory and livestreaming is prevalent. Companies, research institutes, and individuals are eligible as candidates. For example, the Award for Excellent Works in Cultural Heritage Revitalization and Utilization, hosted by Sichuan Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration and undertaken by Sichuan Provincial Cultural Heritage Information Center, Sichuan Museums Association, and relevant special committees in 2022, was open to individuals, enterprises, and public institutions, in addition to museums, memorial halls, and relevant cultural heritage museum units. The award for “excellent creative and digital museum works used for publicity and exhibition” was planned to be launched this year; online exhibitions, H5 pages, mini-programs, and VR exhibitions are all encouraged to apply, and there are no limits for the candidates (Announcement 2022). Besides this, the publicity and communication methods for these awards have been enhanced, including high profile up-to-date social media, significantly increasing the transparency and inclusiveness of the awards process.

## Main Problems, Possible Solutions, and Ways Forward

Museum awards are only popular within the sector. Some awards are not forward-looking, motivating, socially competitive, or influential enough to promote the high-quality development of the corresponding fields of museum practice. There are some obstacles to multi-disciplinary integration and development. Museum awards favor historical themes over art and science themes (Jiang 2021). For history awards, quality display and exhibition projects demonstrably play a more leading role (Sohu.com 2019). However, there are more domestic and industry awards than international ones (except for a few architectural design awards) to interpret Chinese civilization and history, convey the qualities of Chinese culture, and enhance people’s cultural confidence through awareness of artifacts. There are few awards for scientific research achievements in the museum industry, and these are mostly from the provincial associations of museums, such as Shandong (from 2003 to 2021 annually), Jilin (2003–2020 annually) (Jilin Provincial Museum 2012), Heilongjiang (since 1984 it has been held biannually), and Henan (since 2020 it has been held annually) (Henan Museum 2020). The National Museums of China (since 2016, it has been held every three years) and some big provincial museums have their own research awards, but their influence is relatively limited and not widely recognized. Additionally, *China Cultural Relics News* launched the annual award for the “Ten Best Books on Cultural Relics Archaeology” in 2000, which has become a famous brand within the cultural heritage preservation industry in China. As this category covers multiple themes—including archaeological excavation, foreign exchanges, cultural relics conservation, and museum construction—few awards have been granted.

There are few academic studies of awards. For many awards, there are only news reports and introductory articles, but no academic papers discussing issues involved in their competition (Song and Liu 1996). At present, the research on museum industry awards is divided into two categories: First is the macro perspective, whose representatives are Li Yaoshen and Mao Ruohan (Li 2010, 2020, 2021; Mao 2021). Second is current discussions of particular awards, whose representatives are Lyu Jun and coauthors (Lyu, Hao, and Ma 2018; Lyu 2017; Lyu, Zhang, Yuan, and Wang 2018; Lyu, Ma, and Hao 2018; Lyu, Xia, and He 2018). For other fields, there is little research. The reasons for this include the lack of scientific purpose and

long-term goals in the establishment of some awards, the pursuit of short-term benefits of winning awards while ignoring the application of lessons and continuous improvement afterwards, and the search for quick success. In other words, there is a clear gap between the goals and purposes of awards.

Problems exist in the process as well. First, according to one study, “the current index system is based on more samples from general museums under the management of the cultural relics and cultural system” (An and Mao 2019). Second, these awards are generally unbalanced, or mere formalities that contradict the purposes of the competition, or only pay attention to the competition itself and the results, while ignoring the summary and improvements (Li and Lin 2022).

In our view, these issues can be addressed by strengthening the goal-oriented strategy of the awards and discouraging the simple pursuit of nominal fame. The winners of some awards are less likely to win the same award, especially for some individual awards. For example, a few of the first prize winners of the National Interpreter Competition have participated in similar competitions. This somewhat deviates from the award’s purpose—quality improvement—and the goal of training expert interpreters. The same is true for some other awards. The establishment of awards should improve professional quality and continuously cultivate high-level leading talent.

Finally, we suggest the following steps to improve the museum awards system in China:

*Highlight the individuality of the awards to downplay the phenomena of homogenization and conventionalization.* Some awards emphasize form over content, and norms over quality. Some have even been commercialized. This addresses the fact that “it is really difficult to make any indexing system applicable to all museums with different sizes, systems, and themes” (An and Mao 2019). It seems to us that awards should promote the purposeful and personalized development of museums based on their missions and functions, to foster the development of museums in advantageous or key areas in a planned way, such as learning programs, community engagement programs, video, film, animation and live media. For example, the award “National Top Ten Museum Exhibitions” has encouraged some award-winning museums to develop their branding and strengths. Shaanxi History Museum in Xi’an won the exhibition award multiple times, helping the museum to realize its development strategy of creating more award-winning exhibitions (Lyu, Hao, and Ma 2018).

New types of museums should also be invited to compete, for example, ecological museums, art museums, industrial and agricultural heritage museums, or practitioners from libraries, archives, and cultural centers. Categories such as Best Small Museum or Family Friendly Museum should be added into the award lists to stimulate grassroots museums to pursue higher and personalized development. The burgeoning digital engagement or activities that promote diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion should be emphasized to honor individuals, organizations, and programs advancing the museum field in these areas, both internally through workplace culture, programs, and policies and externally through engagement with museum audiences and communities.

*Encourage social participation and extend the reach of awarding events.* In the digital era, social participation in museum award evaluation has become a common phenomenon, as many awards are voted for by netizens or evaluated by public representatives. However, with increasing social competition faced by museums and quasi-professional viewers challenging the intellectual authority of museums, enhancing the participation of people from relevant disciplines and industries in museum award evaluation can fully embody the museums’ role as public institutions. This could change the unconventional current situation in which the award evaluation process is dominated by a handful of industry experts, or situations where the award-winning exhibitions are constantly questioned by the audience.

*Further strengthen integration between industries to allow positive competition among museums of different types.* Although Chinese museum awards do not exclude competition among different types of museums, at present the establishment of awards is still restricted to such categories as history, natural science and technology, and memorials. University museums performed pretty well recently. In 2020, the permanent exhibition “Media Industry and Education History” at the China Media Museum, Communication University of China, won China’s Top Ten Best Exhibitions (2019), an encouraging sign of greater inclusiveness.

Awards for museums of history and culture and museums of natural science and technology might also be combined. For example, the American Alliance of Museums developed a joint evaluation system for exhibitions to “build an improved platform to allow adequate exchange in the evaluation process, highlight the characteristics of exhibits of different disciplines, and clarify consensus reached during the evaluation” (Ruan, Gu, and Li 2021: 51). Also, for example, on 8 February 2021, the Chinese Alliance of Sci-Tech and Cultural Institutions broke through the barrier between science and culture and promoted the integrated development of sci-tech and culture. It was initiated by 16 organizations, including the Chinese Association for Science and Technology, five sci-tech museums represented by The Chinese Science and Technology Museum and The Geological Museum of China, three cultural museums represented by The Palace Museum, The National Museum of China, and The Dunhuang Academy, and eight social organizations represented by The Chinese Association of Natural Science Museums (CANSM). This joint endeavor aims to promote interdisciplinary applications for the industry awards. For example, history museums and cultural museums are encouraged to participate in the National Science and Technology Exhibitions Competition and the International Popular Science Works Competition of China by CANSM, and vice versa.

*Pay attention to shortcomings and establish more awards for less-rewarded or newly emerging museum practices.* Figure 1 shows that few awards are run for collections and research activities, except those appointed at the museum level by the Committee on Museology of the Chinese Museums Association. Given the common perception of the deficiency of museum scientific research, and the vision of fostering excellent, world-class museums that are more research-oriented with top-level design, what needs to go on the agenda in the future are awards to encourage exactly these qualities. Besides, we feel that a wider range of things, such as resources for scholars and researchers, and hard copies or E-books, should be awarded too, particularly the digital content for adults and children, including teachers, families, classes, and independent visitors. Other possible examples include exhibition microsites, teacher resources, lesson plans, and plan-ahead and post-visit content. Resources for general audiences and families should be honored to celebrate digital content for adults and children, including teachers, families, classes, and independent visitors.

*Conduct more studies on museum awards to advance the industry’s standards and continuous development.* As early as 2002, the National Cultural Heritage Administration incorporated industrial awards into annual key research topics of the humanities and social sciences for national relics and museum systems. Cao Bingwu, the project leader, suggested multi-disciplinary and continuous research on these awards for a sustainable purpose (Cao, Sun, and Zhang 2006). We considered it necessary to study and give full attention to the positive role of awards in regulating industry operation, stimulating industry potential, spreading industry information, popularizing knowledge of cultural relics, fostering public awareness of cultural heritage protection and conservation, and mobilizing communities to participate in cultural heritage protection and conservation. First, we should strengthen a quality-led awards principle so as to integrate criteria for awards within the overall development goal setting and shaping of China’s museums. A transparent, objective and fair awards mechanism is crucial for the quality of the awards themselves so that they can then be used to foster, to support, and to guide the task of raising standards in museums, thus laying a good foundation for building world-class museums. Some museums do not currently have the conditions to grow into world-class museums, but their particular individual strengths and qualities can be continuously enhanced to create first-class topics or themes, such as oral interpretation, display and exhibition, and collection technology.

Second, other award standards and systems should be studied (Šola and Cipek 2022). Similar awards in other parts of the world can provide a reference, while recognizing that it is preferable to foster and incubate awards that are not superficial but function at a deeper level. For example, some elements from the awarding mechanism of the Excellence in Exhibition Competition of the American Alliance of Museums would provide useful discussions on possible improvements for China’s Top Ten Museum Exhibition Awards (Li and Lin 2022). Third, research on the practices and applications of the award-winning museums should be intensified *after* the award and actively followed up to determine if there is a “one-time effect.” Would these museums give further attention to the competition after



winning? After winning awards, do some museums set aside innovative practices or applications developed for award-winning projects, or are these maintained? Encouragement should be given to those museums that continue to apply for awards and maintain innovative practices in their work. Awards are a means to an end, and not an end in itself.

## Conclusion

Museums are facing a diverse and changing social environment, so multi-dimensional award systems are required to consolidate museum practice internally and enable them to be better known outside their rather fixed circle. At the top-designated level, Chinese museums are given more political connotations. On 8 July 2022, China's President Xi Jinping emphasized the necessity to better preserve and utilize cultural heritage in a letter replying to senior experts at the National Museum of China on the occasion of its one hundred and tenth anniversary:

Museums, which are important places that protect and pass on human civilization, as well as bridges that link the past, the present, and the future, play a special role in promoting the exchanges and mutual learning of the world's civilizations. Museum professionals undertake a glorious mission and shoulder great responsibilities to hold confidence in our culture, to deepen academic research, to [create] innovative exhibitions, to promote the utilization of cultural heritage, to facilitate exchanges and learning among civilizations, to make great efforts to preserve and to exhibit the extraordinary achievements of Chinese civilization, and to make continuous improvements in the quality of museums (Xinhua News Agency 2022).

The phrases, "to deepen academic research," "to create innovative exhibitions," and "to make great efforts to preserve and to exhibit the extraordinary achievements of Chinese civilization" once again chart a course for the museum industry, especially with regard to exhibitions and awards. The current process of establishing criteria for museum awards should be reviewed. As one commentator has put it:

When setting awards, we should consult the index system, scoring points, supporting documents and data, and other institutional designs in museum grading evaluation and operation evaluation to tailor specific requirements on supporting document submission, so that the applicant museum is scored item by item and accurately during the evaluation process, and the result is justifiable, fair, authoritative, and convincing (Li 2021: 3).

Only by doing so can the award process propel museums toward standardized, innovative, high quality, and individualized development and help them gain recognition. However, the systematic and professionalized development of awards requires ongoing effort. Therefore, following up with museums in the post-award period may be a fruitful area for future research.

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2. China National Cultural Heritage Administration: <http://www.ncha.gov.cn/>. (accessed 15 August 2023).
3. Chinese Museums Association: <https://www.chinamuseum.org.cn/>. (accessed 15 August 2023).
4. People.cn. An online version of *People's Daily*, a daily newspaper issued by the Central Committee of the CPC.
5. Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging platform, or a Chinese Twitter-like social media platform by Sina Corporation.
6. The phrase “cultural relics” is a direct translation of the Chinese word, and was substituted for “antiquity” after the 1950s. It refers to all valuable material remains created, made, or imprinted by human beings during their social and historical evolution. The earliest official usage of “cultural heritage” was in 2000, although it was introduced into Chinese academia during the 1990s. Some scholars treated “cultural relics” as tangible cultural heritage (Editing Committee 2019: 28).

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