

Exhibiting the Modern: The Creation of the First Chinese Museum, 1905–1930*

Qin Shao

ABSTRACT This study examines the birth and use of the first Chinese-sponsored museum, in Nantong county, Jiangsu province, in the context of local elites' effort to make the county an example of modern progress. It reflects on the changing notion of progress among Chinese elites since the self-strengthening movement of the 1860s, and also illustrates an often neglected dimension of modernity – exhibitory modernity, or presentation. The Nantong elites proved to be masters at manipulating exhibitory modernity to reconstruct their community. Understanding exhibitory modernity in the early 20th century sheds light on China's current modernization effort. One of the distinct marks of the new era has been the tremendous energy and resources invested in exhibitory institutions and activities, as demonstrated in the national zeal for China to host the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo. These sorts of activities are in part aimed at showing the rising status of China. By bringing the world – globally recognized symbols for power, strength, respect, modernity and cosmopolitanism such as the World Expo – to China, it wishes to remake its national image as part of that advanced world on the one hand, and boost nationalism at home on the other. This and the Nantong experience illustrate both the artificiality of national and community identity and the enduring force of modernity.

The public museum is arguably one of the most important cultural institutions of the modern world. Since the mid-19th century, museums, together with public libraries, world fairs and other such “new cultural technologies,”¹ have helped shape not only some of the core ideas of the modern era, such as progress and nationalism, but also scientific and technologic frontiers, artistic taste and public behaviour. Accordingly, scholars in the West have paid due attention to the museum and have produced an impressive body of work on the subject. Their work has shed important light on the relationship between culture and society, politics, ideology, knowledge and modernity.²

* An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Modern China Seminar at Columbia University on 8 March 2001. A revised version was given at the Workshop on “Chinese Museums across Time and Space” at Princeton University on 14 November 2003. I thank the participants of both events for their thoughtful comments. I also wish to thank Tom Allsen, Stephen Averill, Magnus Fiskesjö, Richard Gunde, Susan Naquin, Mary Rankin and Zhao Peng for their very helpful suggestions. Part of the article is relevant to segments in my book, *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) and used here with the permission of the press.

1. Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 21.

2. *Ibid.*; Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991); Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

© The China Quarterly, 2004

The study of Chinese museums is an emerging field.³ Recent works have focused on major exhibitory institutions such as the palace museums and the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, as well as the relationship between the museum, memory and political legitimacy.⁴ While the palace museums in Beijing and Taipei have long been regarded as an embodiment of an ancient empire and the new Shanghai Museum a symbol of a forward-looking China, the origin of Chinese museums – museums that were created by Chinese in China – remains largely unknown. Of course, there were at least two foreigner-sponsored museums in Shanghai by the 1870s.⁵ But when and how was the first Chinese museum established? By whom and for what purpose? And, more importantly, what does the creation of this museum mirror about Chinese society at the time?

This study traces the beginning of the first Chinese museum in 1905 in an obscure rural town – Nantong, Jiangsu province. It examines the birth and use of the Nantong museum in the context of local elites' effort to modernize their community in reality and in reputation. In doing so, it reflects on the changing notion of progress among reform-minded Chinese elites after the self-strengthening movement of the 1860s and before the May Fourth intellectuals came on the scene. In addition to strengthening China through industry, those elites desired to become part of a modern cultural world as they perceived it. Furthermore, it illustrates an often neglected dimension of modernity – exhibitory modernity. Modernity is not merely about Western institutions and values, it is also about presentation, and requires validation. To be modern is to be seen, judged, consumed and thus legitimated as modern by the public. The Nantong elites proved themselves to be masters at manipulating this exhibitory modernity: they used the museum, among other instruments, to display their achievement and to transform their community from a rural backwater into a modern vanguard.

Understanding exhibitory modernity in the early 20th century also sheds light on China's current modernization effort. One of the distinct marks of the post-Mao era has been the tremendous energy and resources invested in exhibitory institutions and activities, as demonstrated in the national zeal for China to host the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo. All this was in part aimed at showing the rising status of China, which demands an increase in both the number and scope of visual

3. See some of the panels on Chinese museums in recent issues of the *Annual Meeting Program* of the Association for Asian Studies (2001, pp. 23, 26, 29; 2002, p. 21; 2003, p. 34).

4. Rubie Watson, "Palaces, museums, and squares: Chinese national spaces," *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1995), pp. 7–17; Tamara Hamlisch, "Preserving the palace: museums and the making of nationalism(s) in twentieth-century China," *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1995), pp. 20–30; Kirk A. Denton, "Visual memory and the construction of a revolutionary past: paintings from the museum of the Chinese revolution," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (April 2000), pp. 203–235.

5. One was the Siccawei (*Xujiahui*) Museum created by a Jesuit missionary and the other the Museum of the Royal Asiatic Society. See Yang Kuan, "Bowuguan suoyi" ("Recollection of museums"), in Tang Weikang, Zhu Dalu, and Du Li (eds.), *Shanghai yishi (Anecdotes about Shanghai)* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 1987), pp. 105–106; and Zhao Peng, *Manbu bowuyuan (A Walk through the Museum)* (Nantong: Nantong shi guangyuan caiyin gongsi, 2002), p. 7.

spectacles. By bringing the world – globally recognized symbols for power, dominance, strength and cosmopolitanism such as the World Expo – to China, it wishes to remake its image as part of that advanced world on the one hand, and to boost nationalism at home on the other. This and the Nantong experience, though almost a century apart and played out against different political backgrounds, illustrate both the artificiality of national and community identity and the enduring appeal of modernity.

Exhibitory Modernity

Modernity, broadly speaking, is a constant pursuit of what is perceived as new and fashionable and a continuous invention of ways to achieve, express and validate that pursuit. Looking back, historians can roughly identify the beginning and the different stages of the modernizing process in terms of the industrial revolution or representative government. Looking ahead, there is no telling as to the specific stages, because it is an evolving process without a “fixed paradise.”⁶ Exhibiting the modern has been an integral component of this modernity as a mentality and as a process. In the West, the exhibitory feature became especially evident during the “enlightenment” of the 18th century when public instruction – to educate and enlighten the public through arts and other cultural forms – was promoted as a more effective way of governing.⁷ This conviction in part contributed to the emergence in the mid-19th century of a host of new cultural technologies, including museums, libraries, reading rooms, expositions, parks and theatres, designed for the purpose of cultural governance of the populace.⁸ By 1850, for instance, the public museum which turned magnificent princely art collections into state treasure had become a fixture in every European capital.⁹ Around the same time, public libraries and other new cultural institutions began to appear in urban centres and gradually in provincial towns as well. In addition, world’s expositions, hosted by big cities, became a fashion.¹⁰ Through images and symbols, these expositions displayed and thus defined modernity, progress and, perhaps equally important, the hierarchy among nations and races in the modern world order.

Indeed, not all nations are equal in claiming the modern. When the West has supposedly set the standard of modernity, the pressure is on newcomers to imitate and compete. Nowhere is this more evident than in world fairs. Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo points out how world fairs provided

6. Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 12.

7. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 20; McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, p. 8.

8. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 21.

9. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, p. 200.

10. For a brief discussion of world exhibitions in the 19th century, see J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition* (New York: Arno Press, 1976 reprint [1876]), pp. 21–40. For a list of major exhibitions from 1871 to 1914, see Paul Greenhalgh, “Education, entertainment and politics: lessons from the great international exhibitions,” in Vergo, *The New Museology*, pp. 74–98.

opportunities for impoverished nations like Mexico to be “one with the modern community of values, beliefs, and concerns.”¹¹ To reinforce its sense of racial superiority, sometimes what the Western audience demanded to see in exhibitions of poor countries included evidence of ridicule and backwardness.¹² Nevertheless, those countries were eager to participate in such fairs, because being there was everything – it meant being part of an “international cosmopolitanism” upon which the image of a modern nation was “crafted.”¹³ The hierarchy in this licence to judge – advanced nations to underdeveloped countries and major urban centres to provincial towns – often generates anxiety among the disadvantaged countries to prove themselves. This sometimes produces disastrous results in social transformation. Little wonder that the “high-modernist ideology” and often failed grand schemes to transform society described by James Scott mostly took place in countries of the third world.¹⁴ In essence, for powerless and peripheral nations modernity and progress meant “a continual, tiresome, expensive, hopeless, and yet unavoidable attempt” to join the more advanced nations.¹⁵

While the process of political and economic modernization has proved to be difficult for the third world countries, the institutional forms of the modern exhibitory culture – museums, fairs, libraries, organized sports and public lectures – were easy to adopt. Because of their perceived association with promoting popular education and progress, these institutions held great appeal to countries that were eager to become modern. China was no exception. For Chinese politicians, it was a small leap from mastering the art of ancient ceremonies to learning the visual spectacle of modern exhibitions. From the last years of the Qing dynasty on, exhibitions were held at regional and national levels. For instance, the Ministry of Education in Beijing, regional and local educational associations and public and private schools all over China used exhibitions to present their achievements and to gain public support for the modern school system. They displayed textbooks, homework assignments, students’ handicrafts, and also music playing, dancing and singing.¹⁶ Professional educators such as Cai Yuanpei were among those who most eagerly promoted public exhibitions of arts as a means of enlightening the ordinary people.¹⁷ In 1910 the Qing court organized the Nanyang Exhortation Fair

11. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, p. 8.

12. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empires at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 228–29.

13. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, p. 8.

14. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

15. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World Fairs*, p. 12.

16. Jiangsusheng gongshu jiaoyuke (Department of Education, Jiangsu provincial public bureau) (ed.), *Jiangsu jiaoyu jin wu nian jian gaikuang (A General Account of Education in Jiangsu in the Last Five Years)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu yinshuguan, 1916), Part 2, pp. 19–20; Sally Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China: The Beginning of the Modern Era* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), pp. 135–36.

17. Yen Chuan-ying, “Meishu wenhua kongjie de bijiao: 1927 Taibei taizhan yu 1929 Shanghai quanguo meizhan” (“Art exhibitions as a cultural statement: a comparison between Taipei and Shanghai in 1927 and 1929”), paper presented at Workshop on the History of

in Nanjing, which was intended to be the first Chinese-sponsored international fair,¹⁸ and, in 1913, Beijing hosted the first National Children's Art Exhibition.¹⁹ By 1915 most provincial capitals had established public libraries, some of which, such as the one in Nanjing, also included a museum, lecture-hall, reading room and physical recreation facilities. Some recorded the number of visitors they received on a regular basis, testifying to the importance they attached to these institutions in educating and culturing the public.²⁰

China also began to participate in various international fairs, including the 1851 London Exposition, the 1867 Paris Exposition, the 1873 Vienna Exposition, the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco,²¹ although initially only as a passive player. If Westerners found the Chinese and their culture not only inferior but also puzzling, the Chinese were equally confused as to what these fairs meant generally and what they meant for Chinese particularly.²² But those early, tentative steps to the wide and wild world were also educational for the Chinese. They gradually learned to play Western games in Western ways, realizing that China could benefit first in terms of trade, and then in terms of reputation.²³ The 1910 Nanyang Exhortation Fair, as the first world fair hosted by China, was particularly designed to show foreign powers the Qing court's willingness and capacity to modernize an ancient civilization. While the Chinese offered few machine-made products to world fairs in the 19th century, the Nanyang Fair featured a science hall and motor races, among other trademarks of Western progress, and at the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition the Chinese government revealed a grant plan to construct a railroad between Beijing and Istanbul.²⁴ The latter stirred much interest among the American audience. China's performance at the 1915 fair, especially in light of the establishment of a Republic in 1911, gave the impression that China was getting on with "modern ways."²⁵

Ordinary Chinese also began to be exposed to this modern culture. The

footnote continued

Material Culture, Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan (14-15 December 2001), pp. 3-4.

18. Michael R. Godley, "China's world's fair of 1910: lessons from a forgotten event," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 12, No. 3 (1978), pp. 503-522.

19. Jiangsu sheng gongshu jiaoyuke, *A General Account of Education in Jiangsu in the Last Five Years*, Part 1, p. 19.

20. Paul J. Bailey, *Reforming the People: Changing Attitudes towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp. 204-207, 221.

21. Li Gui, *Huan you diqiu xinju (A New Account of a Trip around the Globe)* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1980 reprint [1877]), p. 9; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, pp. 30, 228-29.

22. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, pp. 29-30; Li Gui, *A New Account of a Trip around the Globe*, "Preface" by Li Hongzhang, and p. 9.

23. Li Gui, *A New Account of a Trip around the Globe*, p. 9; Godley, "China's world's fair of 1910," pp. 504-505.

24. Li Gui, *A New Account of a Trip around the Globe*, p. 9; Godley, "China's world's fair of 1910," p. 504; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, p. 229.

25. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, p. 228-29.

preparation for national and international fairs often led to a chain of exhibitory events at regional and local levels. The 1910 Nanyang Exhortation Fair, for instance, stimulated great interest in exhibitions throughout China. Various trial fairs were held a year earlier in Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan and at the county level. For the 1913 Children's Art Exhibition, the Jiangsu Educational Association alone collected 30,000 items and started a provincial exhibit a year earlier to select works for the national event; 50,000 people were said to have come to visit. The regional and local exhibits all involved the creation of various special committees for the purposes of organization, review and giving out awards. All of them, of course, also involved collecting on a large scale.²⁶ Historically, Chinese elites were obsessed with collecting and consuming "superfluous things."²⁷ The regional, national, and world fairs, however, marked the rise of a culture in China that focused on collecting and showing achievements that represented the new and modern, with the purposes of targeting the public and remaking China's national image.

During the first two decades of the 20th century, Nantong, a provincial town located between Shanghai and Nanjing just to the north of the Chang [Yangtze] River, stood out in this exhibitory culture. At the time, Zhang Jian (1853–1926), a *jinshi* degree holder in the traditional civil service examination system, and other reform-minded local elites, initiated a series of programmes to transform this traditionally isolated community. They built factories, universalized the modern school system and created many public service programmes. By the second decade of the 20th century, Nantong was known as a model of modernity and local self-government and attracted a large number of visitors.²⁸ The creation of the Nantong model had much to do with the local elites' use of modern exhibitory institutions and performative activities to collect and display, and thus magnify and publicize their success.

In Nantong, various institutions, such as land reclamation companies, factories and especially schools, all had designated office space for presenting their history and achievements. In 1912 the County Educational Association initiated an exhibit in primary education. In 1913 a summer educational research project involving both teachers and graduates set up a "showroom" (*chenlie shi*) for school work. Such showrooms

26. Godley, "China's world's fair of 1910," pp. 516–17; Jiangsusheng gongshu Jiaoyuke, *A General Account of Education in Jiangsu in the Last Five Years*, Part 1, pp. 19–20.

27. Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

28. For a general account of change in Nantong under Zhang Jian's leadership and his lifetime achievements, see Samuel C. Chu, *Reformer in Modern China: Chang Chien, 1853–1926* (New York: Columbia University, 1965); on Zhang's ideas about educational reform in particular, see Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early 20th-Century China*, trans. Paul J. Bailey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988); for the background to and process by which Nantong became a model, see Qin Shao, *Culturing Modernity: The Nantong Model, 1890–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), ch. 1.

existed in individual schools as well.²⁹ In 1918 the Nantong Agricultural School started a cotton production exhibit to promote new methods in cotton planting. It attracted 300 visitors that year, but 3,000 the next year; it soon became an annual fair.³⁰ There were also special exhibits and small fairs. In 1915 the first autopsy performed at the Nantong Medical School was undertaken in order to display Western sciences. A formal ceremony was held at which prominent elites made speeches in front of 800 invited notables.³¹ These establishments and activities reflected the local elites' attempt to adopt new cultural technologies to engineer a modern community. The Nantong museum was not only among the first of such imported technologies but also perhaps the most emblematic representation of the New Nantong.

The Nantong Museum

The Nantong museum was a brainchild of Zhang Jian. The idea came from two main sources. Educated Chinese began to pay attention to the idea of a museum in the late 19th century. The Hundred Days Reform especially made this idea, among many others, visible as part of the reform programmes, as seen in Kang Youwei's *Grant Unity*, in some of Emperor Guangxu's edicts and in the principles of the Self-strengthening Society of Shanghai, of which Zhang Jian was a member.³² While the reform was short-lived, many of its ideas, including the museum, became part of the political and cultural discourse and continued to appeal to reform-minded Chinese. Also, in 1903, Zhang was invited by the Japan Council in Shanghai to attend Japan's Fifth Industrial and Agricultural Exposition in Osaka. His visit lasted for 70 days and became almost an inexhaustible source of inspiration for what he was going to achieve in Nantong in the next two decades. The early 20th century was a time of intense exchange in Sino-Japanese relations when Japan exercised immeasurable impact on various aspects of China's development.³³ When Zhang Jian started a normal school in 1902, he hired Japanese teachers, some of whom became department chairs and played an important role in training the first generation of modern school teachers and other professionals in the region. Clearly, Zhang Jian highly valued his opportunity to experience Japan first-hand. He spent the 70 days investigating several dozen institutions in minute detail. He also made multiple trips to the Osaka exposition and visited some national and local museums and

29. *Nantong xian tuzhi (Illustrated Gazetteer of Nantong County)* (Nantong Library, 1964 reprint [1922]), Vol. 9, pp. 4b–5a.

30. Zhang Jian, *Zhang Jian quanji (Complete Works of Zhang Jian)* (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1994), Vol. 4, p. 147.

31. Zhang Weibin and Zhu Pei, "Nantong di yi ci renti jiepou" ("The first autopsy in Nantong"), *Nantong jingu (Nantong's Today and Yesterday)* (1988), p. 40.

32. Zhao Peng, *A Walk through the Museum*, pp. 8–9.

33. Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898–1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

exhibits, which deeply impressed him by their educational value and their public orientation.³⁴

Upon his return, Zhang Jian became actively engaged in promoting the constitutional reform and local self-government movements, two agendas whose importance was reinforced by his trip to Japan. But the idea of creating a Chinese museum was never far from his mind. To him, such a grand undertaking (*shengju*) must be sponsored by the Qing court and located in Beijing. In 1905 he proposed to the Ministry of Education and also to Zhang Zhidong, the powerful late Qing official, the establishment of an institution to be called *dishi bolangguan*, literally imperial museum-library, a term borrowed from Japan.³⁵ Zhang Jian's proposal was among the earliest documents that systematically spelled out the essence of the modern museum as Chinese understood it.

The proposal first emphasized education, an urgent concern in 1905 when the Chinese educational structure was undergoing a historic transition involving the abandonment of the traditional civil service examination system. To Zhang Jian, education was the key to the success of the West, but schools alone were not enough; there must be "libraries and museums to supplement and support the school system."³⁶ Zhang then elaborated on the museum's conservational and public nature: to conserve valuable art works, artifacts and books, including those in the palace collection, for "all under heaven." Zhang Jian obviously understood the two basic functions of a museum: to conserve and to educate for the benefit of the public. He also stated its political function: to spread the emperor's moral influence and cultivate proper behaviour among the people; and to impress visiting foreign dignitaries with China's glorious past, and the magnificent architecture and culture of the capital. To grant the highest prestige to the museum, Zhang Jian emphasized that its director must be selected from distinguished personages (*mingliu*) and appointed directly by the emperor himself.³⁷ To Zhang Jian, as to the creators of the Louvre, the proposed first Chinese imperial museum was to be an integral part of the political establishment, "a state institution occupying center stage in the public life of the capital."³⁸ Zhang Jian conceived this imperial museum to be an "important aspect of modern politics in China" (*woguo jinzheng zhi yaoduan*). "Considering the current situation," Zhang Jian argued, "[we] cannot afford to wait to implement the museum project."³⁹

But the Qing court was near the end of its political life with no ambition or resources to take such an initiative. Zhang Jian then decided to fund a museum in Nantong instead. In 1904 he had planned to construct a botanical garden for the normal school students to study natural science. He modified the plan to turn the garden, a plot of 23,300

34. Zhang Jian, *Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, Vol. 6, pp. 483, 508, 512.

35. *Ibid.* Vol. 4, pp. 272–77.

36. *Ibid.* p. 272.

37. *Ibid.* pp. 273–75.

38. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, p. 50.

39. Zhang Jian, *Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, Vol. 4, p. 275.

square metres (or 48 *mu*), into a *bowuyuan* – meaning a museum-garden, which was supposed to be a combination of a Western style museum and a traditional Chinese garden. In 1912, after seven years of effort and at a cost of 48,760 *yuan*, said to be from Zhang’s private funds, the museum opened.⁴⁰

The main body of the museum consisted of three exhibition halls in the north, south and the centre with an eastern hall added later for offices and reception. Exhibits were organized under the rubrics of nature, history, arts and education. The central hall housed metals, minerals and stones, including inscribed ancient bronzes and stone tablets. The southern hall stored historical objects, from ancient musical instruments, jade and inscriptions to a flag of Yuan Shikai’s aborted “Imperial China” upstairs, and specimens of animals, plants and metals downstairs. Works of art, such as paintings, calligraphy, sculptures and stationery, were displayed upstairs in the northern hall, and a 40-foot giant fish skeleton, a local rarity obtained during land reclamation, occupied the downstairs of the northern hall. Later a separate space was set up for educational materials. Befitting the new conviction that education should serve the practical needs of China’s modernization effort, this part displayed modern industrial tools and models of various industrial machines, steamships and trains. The museum also included a garden with lily ponds, windmills, artificial hills, and pavilions and chambers for residential and decorative purposes, as well as rare Chinese and foreign plants, fruit trees and flowers. There was also a zoo with birds, deer, monkeys and other animals.⁴¹

Most of the buildings were two-storey, Western-style, designed by Sun Zhixia, a graduate of the normal school who became a renowned architect. His brother Sun Yue, who also studied at the normal school, was the first and long-term director of the museum.⁴² The Suns came from a humble family but, benefiting from the new education system, became prominent professionals in the local community.

The Nantong museum expanded in time. By 1915 it covered 32,000 square metres and possessed nearly 3,000 objects. The holdings came from many sources: the museum’s own purchases and production, such as some of the animal and plant specimens; donations from private individuals, private and public institutions such as temples, schools and government offices; and gifts from Chinese and foreign guests. Zhang Jian donated Chinese paintings, calligraphy and other artifacts he had collected over his lifetime. That this remote Chinese county museum was able to accumulate such a collection in only a decade was largely due to

40. Sun Qu, “Huiyi Nantong bowuguan jianwen” (“Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum”), *Nantongshi wenshi ziliao*, No. 2 (1982), p. 108; *Nantong bowuyuan wenxianji* (*A Collection of Documents on the Nantong Museum*) (Nantong, 1985), p. 64.

41. Sun Qu, “Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum,” p. 109; Huang Ran, “Woguo bowuguan shiye de kaitouzhe: Zhang Jian” (“Zhang Jian: the pioneer of Chinese museums”), in Yan Xuexi and Ni Youchun (eds.), *Lun Zhang Jian: Zhang Jian guoji xueshu taolunhui wenji* (*On Zhang Jian: Essay Collection of International Symposium on Zhang Jian*) (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 564.

42. Sun Qu, “Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum,” pp. 107–108.

Zhang Jian's nationally recognized prestige and his broad social contacts: some of the gifts to the museum were meant purely to please him.⁴³ He also used his status to encourage professional collectors, men of letters and ordinary people in Nantong and Jiangsu province to contribute to the museum.⁴⁴

The development of the museum paralleled the rise of Nantong as a model of modernity. In fact, the museum helped shape and reflect a modern Nantong by following Western practice in a number of ways. One of the important components of modern museology is a catalogue.⁴⁵ A museum's catalogue is far more than an inventory; it introduces and interprets the holdings, and thus gives meaning and identity to the museum. As the Nantong museum was the earliest in China there were no references in Chinese to help it to produce a catalogue. In 1912 Zhang Jian gathered a group of experts in history, art and natural science to work on the project. Kimura Tadajiroo, a Japanese teacher who specialized in biology and who was Sun Yue's mentor, served as an advisor. The museum also subscribed to Japanese science magazines and purchased Japanese science books for the writing of the catalogue. The science terminology developed by the Japanese was especially helpful. After two years of effort, a two-volume *Nantong Museum Catalogue*, one for natural science and the other for history and art, was published and distributed to libraries in and outside Nantong.⁴⁶ Zhang Jian himself wrote the preface, in which he emphasized the nature of the museum in the West as an affair of the state and the rarity of locally sponsored museums such as the one in Nantong. Implicit in this was the idea that he had accomplished a modern project of great significance while the Chinese government had failed.⁴⁷

The catalogue, as well as the organization of the contents in the museum, is based on Western standards of specialization and classification. In the West, this practice is to impose "stability and order on bodies of knowledge" represented by the objects,⁴⁸ and thus allow us to "make intelligible a scientific view of the world."⁴⁹ The Nantong museum clearly followed the general principles of classification of the time by dividing its objects into nature, history and art.

The emphasis of the time was on science. Like museums in the West, the Nantong museum classified natural history as part of science, which included subjects in anthropology, archaeology, and studies of animals and plants, alive and in specimen. The giant fish skeleton was presented as an example of this science of natural history as it involved knowledge

43. *Ibid.* pp. 109, 111.

44. Zhang Jian, *Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, Vol. 4, pp. 278, 285.

45. According to McClellan, Alexandre Lenoir's catalogues for the Museum of French Monuments in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were the forerunner of the modern museum catalogue (p. 192).

46. Sun Qu, "Reflection of my experience with the Nantong Museum," p. 114.

47. Zhang Jian, *Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, Vol. 4, pp. 283–84.

48. Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 21.

49. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 2.

in all the areas mentioned above.⁵⁰ In fact, the museum's major holdings, 62.8 per cent of the total, were said to be in natural science.⁵¹ Since the 18th century, modern, Western science was privileged, but for different reasons in the West and in the rest of the world. If in the West science was mainly driven by industrial development, commercial profits, military conquest and intellectual curiosity, in other parts of the world Western science was "legitimized" largely by imperialism.⁵² It became a measure of one's strength and success in the modern world order. To defeat and compete with the West in Western terms, less advanced countries came to value scientific ideas and methods highly, from practical matters such as surveying and mapping the land to more elusive subjects such as eugenics.⁵³ Liang Qichao, the leading Chinese intellectual of the time, defined "science" as a system of true knowledge (*xitong de zhen zhishi*) that provides a comprehensive understanding of the inner connections of the world. With this in mind, he considered traditional China to be not only "non-scientific" (*fei kexue*), but also "anti-scientific" (*fan kexue*). According to him, promoting the scientific spirit was the only way to build a modern nation.⁵⁴ Indeed, the May Fourth intellectuals believed that the combination of Mr Science and Mr Democracy held the key to China's salvation.

Zhang Jian and his fellow Nantong elites were mostly traditional scholars at heart who had reservations about the wholesale application of Western culture and science in China. Nevertheless, they were informed and concerned enough to realize the need to adopt certain aspects of Western culture, science and technology to improve China's circumstances, and especially to educate the next generation of Chinese on whom China's future rested. Zhang Jian's writings on the museum clearly reflected his understanding of the differences between the traditional and the new learning and how the museum would help promote the latter. He criticized ancient scholars who mastered the Confucian classics but could not recognize different kinds of grain. Zhang then emphasized the importance not only of books but also materials, not only contemplation but also action: the learning process now included observing, examining and experimenting with the material phenomena of the natural world. In this re-ordering of the hierarchy in knowledge between using one's hand

50. Nantong youyi julebu (Nantong Friendship Club) (ed.), *Nantong shiye jiaoyu fengjing fu canguan zhinan* (*Nantong Industry, Education, Philanthropy and Tour Guide*) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1920), p. 72; Mu Xuan, "Zhang Jian and the beginning of Chinese museums," p. 8.

51. Huang Ran, "Zhang Jian: the pioneer of Chinese museums," p. 564.

52. Nicholas Thomas, "Licensed curiosity: Cook's Pacific voyages," in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *The Culture of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 116.

53. On eugenics and Chinese and Japanese scientists' effort to compete with Westerners, see Yuehsen Juliette Chung, *Struggle for National Survival: Eugenic in Sino-Japanese Contexts, 1896-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

54. The Science Society of China (ed.), *The Science*, Vol. 7, No. 9 (September 1922), pp. 859, 864, 869.

and using one's mind, the museum was considered to be instrumental for the new learning.⁵⁵

The application of Western nomenclature was crucial for legitimizing such learning as science. For instance, a tree is merely a tree, but a tree labelled with its Latin name suddenly carries scientific aura and meaning. The system of formal nomenclature in taxonomy developed in the West in the 17th and 18th centuries privileged the Latin language as scientific in establishing the genetic relationship of plants and animals. In the meantime, as Yuehtsen Juliette Chung has pointed out, in the early 20th century, attracted by the rich variety of animals and plants in the vast Chinese territory, foreign scientists were eagerly conducting botanical surveys and collecting specimens in China. Chinese scientists were compelled to develop their taxonomic knowledge as a way not only to claim what the territory possessed, but also to strengthen China's claim on the territory itself. Being scientific here was being nationalistic.⁵⁶ And applying Western nomenclature helped legitimize such claims. Indeed, in Nantong, much of the energy in producing the museum catalogue was invested in checking the Latin names and origins for various species the museum owned. Contemporary literature on the museum, to underscore it as a scientific institution, continued to emphasize how all the plants in the museum were classified and labelled with their Latin names.⁵⁷

Zhang Jian also used the museum as an instrument to reform public behaviour, which further distinguished it as a modern institution. Public morality was a central concern in the development of museum culture in the West. The growth of public institutions since the 18th century made behaviour management – regulating the conduct of the visitors – an urgent concern, which was reflected in the museum practice of guided tours and restricted right of entrance. Gradually, apart from architectural and technological solutions, a public culture about crowd behaviour took shape which set the standards as to what was civilized, acceptable conduct. The museum was one of the first institutions to reshape and manipulate what was later to become general norms of public behaviour. The “modern museum idea” was that museums should be places of “civilizing rituals,” and museum visitors, through cultural cultivation, should become self-monitoring, and thus a regulatory force in themselves. This, however, remained an ideal in the West until the completion of a century-long overall improvement in education and parallel developments in architecture and technologies.⁵⁸

In a provincial town like Nantong a “museum public,” let alone an educated museum public, was non-existent. In fact, the museum was never open to the general public during Zhang Jian's lifetime. During the

55. Zhang Jian, *Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, pp. 272, 283.

56. Yuehtsen Juliette Chung, *Struggle for National Survival*, p. 40.

57. Sun Qu, “Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum,” pp. 114–15; Mu Xuan, “Zhang Jian and the beginning of Chinese museums,” p. 12; Huang Ran, “Zhang Jian: the pioneer of Chinese museums,” pp. 564–65.

58. Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926*, p. 6; Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, pp. 6–7, 48–58.

first seven years, when it was being built, it was gradually made available to the students at the normal school. In 1912, when its basic construction and arrangements were complete, it extended an invitation to other local schools and institutions, though limits were set on the number of visitors each day. Soon unpleasant incidents occurred. Some students from the normal school picked flowers, damaged the lawn, jumped out of windows and beat the gardeners who tried to stop them. Such behaviour was not unusual for a museum-unfamiliar people and was in this case probably caused by students' mischief, but Zhang Jian nevertheless was upset. He immediately wrote a set of "Regulations for museum visitors" and posted it.⁵⁹

To justify the regulations, Zhang Jian pointed out that when Westerners visited Japan, they laughed at the signs saying "Do not damage flowers and trees" in Japanese parks, for the need for such signs betrayed the lack of public morality among the Japanese people. "Now what happened in this museum is lower than what happened in Japan," Zhang Jian declared. He emphasized the need to treat such a "disease" with "medicine" – strictly enforcing the regulations. The museum regulations reveal a number of issues concerning the operation of the museum in particular and of public institutions in China generally. They were definitely not user friendly, nor did they treat everyone equally. If anything, they were penalty oriented and discriminatory. Visitors were expected to come collectively from organizations and institutions, not on their own as individuals. Between 12 and 20 regular passes were issued to a group, with a special pass for its captain who would be held responsible for any wrongdoings. Of the seven regulations, only one concerned "outsiders," meaning those who did not belong to any institutions. It was required that they come with a reference in order to get a regular pass and had to be accompanied by someone from the normal school who held a special pass.⁶⁰ Such rules effectively excluded any individuals without institutional affiliations from visiting the museum. That these individuals were identified as "outsiders" testified to the growing tendency of urban China to become a society by associations, and the power of organized knowledge in such a society to discriminate against its marginalized members.⁶¹

The punishment for violating those rules was severe. For instance, if the captain failed in his duty, no pass would be issued to his school for a month. If anyone entered the museum without a pass or with a pass from an unofficial channel, that person would be expelled from the museum permanently and his or her name would be exposed in the newspapers together with a description of his or her conduct that was

59. *A Collection of Documents on the Nantong Museum*. p. 36.

60. *Ibid.* pp. 36–38.

61. For an account of the rise of associations and societies among Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing dynasty, see Sang Bing, *Qingmo xin zhishijie de shetuan yu huodong (The Societies and Activities of the New Intellectuals of the Late Qing)* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1995).

deemed “lawless and harmful to public interest.”⁶² Such provisions underscored the museum as a special, new cultural institution.

While the museum was perhaps intimidating to some people, its very existence, based on Western and Japanese standards with its emphasis on modern science, culture and civilized public behaviour, was a powerful validation of the new Nantong. The local elite was well aware of the museum’s appeal, especially to the educated. In 1918 when Nantong’s reputation began to rise, Zhang Jian decided to hold a major convention, meant to be an international fair of local self-government, in Nantong in 1922. He intended to have the national and international community evaluate the Nantong experience so that “a public judgement can be made whether it is truly worthy.”⁶³ As part of the preparation for this grand event, Zhang Xiaoruo, Zhang Jian’s son, and his friends, managed in 1920 to publish a book with more than 100 photographs providing a nearly exhaustive visual record of Nantong’s new projects. It was targeted at foreigners as well as Chinese and had captions in both Chinese and English. The book was meant to be a souvenir for those who came to visit and a “spirit tour” for those who could not come.⁶⁴ Things related to the West were prominently featured. Not surprisingly, the museum was a star item, taking up nine pages, the most space given to a single institution in the book.⁶⁵ The Dasheng Cotton Mill, the first modern factory in the Jiangbei region that Zhang Jian helped create, and a source of funding for many of the local projects, only had one page.⁶⁶ Also telling is that of the nine pictures on the museum, only two reflect its contents, with the rest featuring its chambers, halls, grounds and the surrounding scenery. The purpose was clearly to impress readers with its grand scope and thus the overall achievement of its sponsor.

The museum was a focus for many celebrated visitors and major local events. In May 1920, invited by Zhang Jian, elites from all the counties in Jiangsu province gathered in Nantong to hold the inaugural meeting of the Su Society (*Su she*), set up to promote local self-government in Jiangsu supposedly with Nantong as an example, and their visit included a tour of the museum. Visiting the museum was also scheduled for John Dewey’s 1920 trip to Nantong, while he was on his southern China lecture tour. Other foreign visitors included professors, editors, writers, entrepreneurs from the West, and businessmen, investigators and investors from Japan.⁶⁷ Such tours were usually brief, just providing an overall impression of the institution, which was probably the intended result, as demonstrated by the pictures in the 1920 souvenir book.

The museum was also multi-functional because of its structure as both

62. *A Collection of Documents on the Nantong Museum*, p. 37.

63. Zhang Jian, *Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, Vol. 4, p. 458.

64. *Nantong Industry, Education, Philanthropy and Tour Guide*, Preface.

65. *Ibid.* pp. 68–76.

66. *Ibid.* p. 19.

67. Frederick R. Sites, “Chang Chien [Zhang Jian] – a man who would reform a nation by precept and practice in a model city,” *Asia*, Vol. 18 (July 1918), pp. 587–92; Sun Qu, “My experience with the Nantong Museum,” p. 111; Huang Ran, “Zhang Jian: the pioneer of Chinese museums,” pp. 565–66.

a residential and a cultural complex. It hosted special guests and served as a conference site for important events, as well as being a centre of entertainment and other social functions. The Beijing opera master Mei Lanfang was lodged in one of the museum chambers during his performances in Nantong in the early 1920s. In 1922 the Science Society of China held its seventh annual meeting in Nantong. One conference session, attended by Liang Qichao, Zhu Kezhen, a renowned scientist, and Tao Xingzhi, a pioneer in rural education, among others, was held in one of the museum's chambers.⁶⁸ Such multi-functional museums are in fashion today for the institution both to reach out to the public and to make a profit. But the Nantong museum did so for neither reason; its aim was to display local achievements to various cultural brokers and to enhance the county's image.

Perhaps overwhelmed by all the new things they experienced in Nantong, none of the visitors left an extensive account specifically of their impressions about the museum. But from what they did mention, it is clear how the museum affected their overall view of Nantong and Zhang Jian. Uchiyama Kanzō, a Japanese cultural entrepreneur and writer, concluded that Nantong was an "ideal cultural city" in China.⁶⁹ The Chinese elite scientists and scholars who attended the Science Society meeting claimed to have found in Nantong a new perspective and new spirit in adopting scientific knowledge to build this "bright model district." One delegate especially mentioned the museum and schools as evidence of Zhang Jian's success.⁷⁰ The customary flattering of the host aside, if Nantong had only factories and no cultural inventions such as the museum, it is unlikely that it would have been regarded as an all-round modern city.

The same was true for Western visitors. Frederick R. Sites, a contributor to *Asia*, visited Nantong in 1918 and wrote a long article about the trip, including an interview with Zhang Jian. The article was printed with five photos, one of which showed a "well-kept corner" of Nantong city that encompassed an "ivy-covered museum." Sites passionately described this corner and its "charming group of buildings, well lighted, and set amid gardens which are fragrant with roses and bright with the red glow of the berries of the 'Heavenly Bamboo.'" To Sites, this was an artistic representation of the "spirit of progressive enterprise" at work and he termed Nantong the "Mecca of Chinese progress" and his trip there a "pilgrimage."⁷¹ A year later, after its chief editor visited Nantong, the Shanghai-based English publication *Millard's Review* printed an essay on the cotton industry in Nantong,⁷² and introduced Zhang Jian in its "Who's

68. Sun Qu, "Reflection of my experience with the Nantong Museum," p. 111. For a brief account of the history of the Science Society of China, see Yuehtsen Juliette Chung, *Struggle for National Survival*, pp. 32–33.

69. Uchiyama Kanzō, *Kakōroku (Recollection of the Past)* (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 1960), p. 65.

70. *The Science*, pp. 982, 993, and see also pp. 965, 971, 983–84, 989, 998 for similar comments.

71. Sites, "Chang Chien," pp. 588, 591–92.

72. 19 July 1919, pp. 283–84.

Who in China,”⁷³ a column which in that month featured a number of Western-trained PhDs in the financial and legal fields.⁷⁴ To place Zhang Jian among China’s Western-educated elite bankers and law makers was a reflection of how Nantong, with its many cultural and industrial inventions, was perceived by outsiders.

Unfortunately, the museum was not a profitable enterprise and financially depended on Zhang Jian and local factories, especially the Dasheng Cotton Mill. In late 1921 Nantong’s industry took a fatal down-turn from which it never recovered. Contributing factors included a devastating flood that destroyed many of the hallmarks of the new Nantong, the re-entry of foreign competitors to the China market at the end of the First World War and local elites’ long-term mismanagement of the enterprises.⁷⁵ Zhang Jian struggled to maintain the museum during the remaining years of his life. With his death in 1926, Zhang Xiaoruo took over the local enterprises which were in great financial difficulty. The Nantong museum steadily declined. The doors and windows were broken and the number of staff, including gardeners and guards, was reduced.⁷⁶ Many objects went missing.⁷⁷ In 1931 Sun Yue proposed plans to Zhang Xiaoruo to renovate the museum and strengthen its security, but these could not be done because of lack of funding.⁷⁸

In the winter of 1932 the museum suffered a major loss when its most valuable southern hall was burgled by four locals. Eighty pieces from Tang jade to Qing paintings were stolen, amounting to a total loss of 300,000 *yuan*. Though in the end the robbers were caught in Shanghai and the lost items recovered, this incident became a sensational scandal with month-long media coverage in Shanghai and Nantong. The theft revealed the inner chaos of the museum: it had suffered chronic underfunding since Zhang Jian’s death, security was non-existent and the roof of the southern hall was about to collapse. All of this greatly damaged its reputation. Under these circumstances, Sun Yue, after almost 30 years of service to the museum, resigned, a sign of permanently shattered hopes for the revival of this institution. Sun’s letter of resignation, published in a local newspaper, not so subtly criticized Zhang Xiaoruo’s negligence. Under great pressure, Zhang Xiaoruo did try to refurbish the museum in 1934, but he could not recover its past glory.⁷⁹ In 1938 the museum was occupied by the Japanese and its holdings suffered massive destruction. After the communist take-over in 1949, it was gradually restored at a

73. 9 August 1919, pp. 400–401.

74. They included T.T. Cheng, University of Chicago graduate and the president of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of Hong Kong, and Wang Conghui [Wang Chung-hui], a Yale graduate and the president of the Chinese Civil and Criminal Law Codification Commission (16 August 1919, p. 448; 30 August 1919, p. 454).

75. See detail about Nantong’s decline in Qin Shao, *Culturing Modernity*, ch. 5.

76. Sun Qu, “Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum,” p. 121.

77. *A Collection of Documents on the Nantong Museum*, pp. 68–69.

78. Sun Qu, “Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum,” p. 121.

79. *Ibid.* p. 123; Xiao Ning, “Nantong zui da de wenwu daoqian” (“The biggest theft of cultural artifacts in Nantong”), *Nantong jingu (Nantong’s Today and Yesterday)*, No. 3 (1993), p. 31.

reduced scale with its garden area converted into a park. To the local people, the museum has become an invaluable cultural legacy of their community and a monument of Zhang Jian's ambition. Since the late 1970s, the Chinese government and scholars have come to recognize the Nantong museum as the first such institution in China. They celebrated its pioneering status by holding national conferences on it and identifying it as a key site for cultural preservation.⁸⁰ Now, as then, the museum brings attention and prestige to the community.

Closing Remarks

In 1916 when the Jiangsu Provincial Educational Bureau took its inventory of popular education facilities, Nantong was still the only county in the province to have a museum.⁸¹ However, after 1912 Chinese-sponsored museums of various types began to emerge in Beijing, Tianjin, Nanjing, Baoding and other cities as well as on college campuses, of which the Palace Museum created in 1925 was the most grand in both its scope and its representation. In 1935, nearly 30 years after the birth of the Nantong museum, the Chinese Museum Association was formed. An estimated 200 museums existed in China before the Japanese invasion in 1937. While whether Zhang Jian's ideas had directly influenced any of those museum projects is a subject open for study, he was recognized as the pioneer of Chinese museums.⁸²

The modern museum has been closely associated with the state and nationalism, which Zhang Jian clearly understood, as he initially proposed an imperial museum to represent China as a nation. When that failed, he created the Nantong museum to represent his community. While there had been foreign-sponsored museums in Shanghai since the 1860s, which Zhang Jian had to be aware of, he hardly ever referred to any of them as an inspiration for his museum work in Nantong. Perhaps this was his way of subtly rejecting the colonial museum model and distinguishing the Nantong museum as a successful, active, Chinese adoption of a modern institution. But with the overwhelming cultural penetration of the West backed by its effective military force and government power, there was no escape from the colonial mentality,

80. In 1979 the Association of Chinese Science Museums held a conference in Nantong. The Nantong Museum is preparing for a major celebration of its 80th anniversary in 2005 (personal communication, 31 October 2001); see also Lü Jimin, "Zhang Jian kaichuang bowuguan lilun yu shijian de zhongda yiyi" ("The theoretical and practical significance of Zhang Jian's creation of the museum"), in You Shiwei (ed.), *Zai lun Zhang Jian: jinian Zhang Jian 140 zhounian danchen lunwenji (Another Look at Zhang Jian: Essay Collection on the 140th Anniversary of Zhang Jian's Birth)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1995), p. 194, 198.

81. *A General Account of Jiangsu Provincial Education in the Last Five Years*, Part 2, p. 17.

82. Lü Jimin, "The theoretical and practical significance of Zhang Jian's creation of the museum," p. 194. Also, in 1913 when China was in a chaotic transition from the Qing dynasty to the Republic, Zhang Jian once again proposed to establish a national museum and library in Beijing. Among his concerns was the urgent need to protect the palace treasures from being destroyed or stolen (*Complete Works of Zhang Jian*, Vol. 4, p. 280).

which in part is reflected in the effort to compete with the West on Western terms. A primary example of this is the way the Nantong museum emphasized science and used its Western-constructed respectability to project the image of a progressive county.

The Nantong museum did meet some of its claimed purposes. It served as a place of learning for students, despite the strict rules. These rules, though, did render public access almost impossible, and thus compromised Zhang Jian's goal to have the museum benefit "all under heaven," that is, the public.⁸³ How much a loss was that? In reality, the museum was essentially irrelevant to the daily lives of the ordinary people of Nantong; for them, it was merely a novelty. Also, the composition of the public is always elusive; it never actually means every member of society. The museum public requires a certain degree of literary, artistic and visual competence. In that sense, the museum is inherently exclusive. Despite every effort to expand the museum public in society today, it is still unrealistic to expect everyone to be a patron.⁸⁴

The Nantong Museum demonstrated that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, transnational exchange was greatly expanded not only by new communication and transportation modes, but also by new cultural technologies and new men. In China, the young men who engineered the Hundred Days Reform introduced a great many bold ideas and programmes which, together with the collapse of the central government, turned China into a social laboratory that produced institutions such as the Nantong Museum as well as experimentations such as the Nantong model. In that sense, the reform was more of a personal tragedy to the individuals involved than a political failure. Under its influence, Chinese elites such as Zhang Jian began to redefine the concept of modern as a more complete package that went beyond military defence and industrial advancement. Such elites were not young, Western-educated, radical intellectuals like those known of the May Fourth period. Yet they became increasingly aware of the importance of modern culture and demonstrated an intense desire to be part of it. In the process, they mastered the art of exhibitory modernity and successfully put the Nantong model on display. By being patrons of the museum and presenting a modernity beyond industry, these elites were also acquiring new social and cultural skills to identify themselves as modern, cosmopolitan reformers.

Interestingly enough, China's path of modernization since the 1980s has followed a similar pattern from focusing on economic reform to pursuing cultural cosmopolitanism. In recent decades the Chinese government at various levels has made a remarkable effort to create new museums and exhibitions, to organize large-scale, international conferences and sports events, and to build magnificent exhibition halls. China's

83. After Zhang Jian's death and especially after the Northern Expedition of the late 1920s, the museum was gradually opened to anyone who wished to visit. See Sun Qu, "Recollection of my experience with the Nantong Museum," p. 121.

84. For a detailed analysis of "the cultural meaning of museum visiting" in contemporary Britain, see Nick Merriman, "Museum visiting as a cultural phenomenon," in Vergo, *The New Museology*, pp. 149–171.

successful bids to host the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo are among the most notable examples of such efforts. The campaigns to gain China the right to undertake these and other international spectacles were highly emotionally charged for the Chinese. They used the campaigns to deal with their humiliating past at the hands of foreigners, on the one hand, and to validate their new status as a rising power, on the other. Such campaigns are reminders of both the lingering ghost of the colonial age and the continuous reproduction of the international hierarchy in claiming the modern. In the process, much as in early 20th-century Nantong, exhibitory modernity is contributing to the making of a new China, however ambivalent and artificial it may be.