# CHINESE MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION GUIDE

edited by CMA



Miriam Clifford Cathy Giangrande Antony White

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## CHINESE MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION GUIDE



#### Introduction

This book, edited by the Chinese Museums Association (CMA), is based on *China:*Museums published in 2009. All the museums included are related to the CMA, so a number of the original entries have been deleted, while others have been added.

Since our first edition, China's museum building explosion has continued. In 2008, the official count was 2,310 and by 2012 had increased to over 3,000 with about 100 new museums being built annually. This official count excludes private museums, new art centres and vibrant districts and villages dedicated to contemporary art and culture.

Beginning in the Republican Period and accelerating after 1949, China established a system of national, provincial and city museums. New museums of world-class quality were opened, such as those in Nanjing and Shanghai.

Unlike in the West, these museums collected, almost exclusively, Chinese art and artefacts. This is still the case, in large part, but the situation is evolving, as Chinese audiences are exposed to more travelling exhibitions from the finest museums in the world and as galleries and individuals begin to collect from other cultures as well as their own.

Out-of-date exhibition practices are quickly disappearing from Chinese museums and being replaced with more modern displays which are attracting large numbers of people. Additionally, the Chinese government has made all state museums and memorials (except ancient architecture and site museums) free of charge. The number of buildings undergoing renovation and modernization, as well as the construction of compelling and innovative new structures, is staggering. Every day, new private collections and government-sponsored museums open their doors.

The key national and provincial museums, e.g. the Capital Museum in Beijing and the Shaanxi History Museum in Xi'an, present their displays historically. Every province has its own museum dedicated to the history and culture of that region. Exhibitions are didactic in nature, showing the development of Chinese history through its art, neatly compartmentalized by dynasty or material. Over time, these museums have also acquired newly excavated treasures in the wave of stunning archaeological finds after 1949. From this period as well, a fervent pride in the new state and its institutions emerged, leading

to the founding of institutions such as the Military Museum in Beijing and the Naval Museum in Qingdao. Is the government's purpose to use the artefacts in these venues to highlight the creation of China as a unified centralized state, in addition to showing their aesthetic value? Foreign visitors are often left with this impression. The emphasis on viewing objects with an eye to history rather than for its own sake can be seen in the common practice among Chinese museums of exhibiting copies of originals — and not always thus marked. This can occur even in a so-called 'Treasure Room', where a copy or cast is lovingly displayed as the real thing; it is not necessarily meant as a deception, rather the object itself may be deemed too valuable to risk exposure. This situation is likely to change with the creation of more modern museums, with ever better methods of conservation and tighter security.

Archaeological sites are now some of the most exciting art destinations in China, as new museums are built *in situ* and excavation pits are opened to the public – a trend that began with the Terracotta Warriors. Although, traditionally, the best finds went to the provincial museum or to Beijing, site museums are now able to start displaying their treasures in newly built, state-of-the-art galleries located at the excavation site. Great exhibitions of Chinese art are now being shown in the West, but, if able, do see the original collections *in situ*. No travelling exhibition can give more than a vestigial understanding of the impact of the Terracotta Warriors amassed in their burial pit the size of an aircraft hangar; or of the alternating intimacy and grandeur of the Forbidden City; or of the radiant magic of the great ancient bronze collection in Shanghai.

It is intended that the selection and presentation of museums will contribute to the quality of a visit to China and to the beginning of an enhanced understanding of Chinese art, culture, society and history.

Miriam Clifford, Cathy Giangrande, Antony White

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SHANGHAI AND EAST CHINA

THE YANGTZE

THE SOUTH

THE SILK ROAD AND THE NORTHWEST

TIBET

HONG KONG, MACAO, TAIWAN



# 北京与北方





## 1

## Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology

北京大学赛克勒考古与艺术博物馆 Beijing daxue Saikele kaogu yu yishu bowuguan



Inside the West Gate, Beijing University, Haidian District, Beijing

北京市海淀区北京大学西校门内

Tel: (010) 6275 1667

Open: 9.00–16.30 except public holidays, last entry 16.00 www.sackler.org/china/amschina.htm

Bookshop / gift shop

Pottery figure, Northern Qi burial, Hebei Arthur M. Sackler (1913–1987) was an American scientist, physician, collector, philanthropist and benefactor of the arts. Besides the numerous medical institutions he established, there are galleries and museums in New York, Princeton, Cambridge, MA, London and Washington, DC bearing his name. The idea for a *teaching* museum at Beijing University sprung from his desire to create a bond between people through art and archaeology. Completed in 1993, the museum was built by Sackler's wife, Jill, together with Beijing University after his death.

Because this museum was set up with a didactic purpose, it is the perfect place to begin one's journey through the art museums of China; a visit to the Sackler Museum offers a potted course in Chinese art history. When you have absorbed the information offered here, you are ready to tackle any of the

larger, more complex museums you might visit, as well as appreciate more focused collections. This is certainly one of the 'must see' museums of Beijing due to the quality of the collection and its modern, uncomplicated and informative presentation.

The museum is set within the University grounds. Walk past the lovely Weiming Lake – The Unnamed Lake – which when frozen in winter becomes the University's skating park. It is well worth exploring the campus, which was once part of the Imperial Parklands. The American writer Edgar Snow, author of *Red Star over China* (1936) and protégé of Mao Zedong, is buried on a small hillside by the lake.

The Sackler Museum, carefully designed to be in harmony with the surrounding University buildings, is based on a courtyard plan of the Ming dynasty. The Gillian Sackler Sculpture Garden adjoining the museum lies in part of the grounds of the Yuanming Yuan, the Old Summer Palace. The collection originally contained objects from the holdings and excavations of the University but has been expanded to include artefacts from other archaeological institutes and museums. As you enter, a sign