

New Noah's Ark: Predicting the Possible Future for Museum Collecting in the Modern Society

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Abstract

Museology has made a dramatic turn at the end of the last century, from the emphasis on the evidence of material cultural to the provision of visitor service. Some museums even abandoned the function of collecting and transferred their collection to research or academic institutions. It seemed that museum collecting was going nowhere and into a dead end. However, just before the dawn of new century, collecting in museums has regained the attention from the society because collections, either artifacts or specimens, represent opportunities and possibilities. They not only play the key role but triggered the creativity in our modern life.

For centuries, museum has become the time capsule for human civilization, carrying tangible heritage and recording some intangible cultural heritage. In a way, museum collecting is the foundation for all other functions. Yet in the digital age, with the advance of the information and communication technology (ICT), museums are under formidable pressure, including the function of collecting. Digital archives have made it possible to document as well as preserve the data of any objects; on the other hand, it also raises the question of necessary visiting the museum to confront the real things. In the meantime, the limitation of space has forced collection managers to consider the issue of sustainability, focusing on the object selection and conservation. Furthermore, the constrain of exhibition space creates the problem of isolated collections with no public access.

Should we collect more objects? Should we exhibit more specimens? Should we provide more access to collections? These issues have set great impact on museum collection managers and implied that there must be new ways of thinking for museum collecting in the new century.

This research is based on the observation of the author, to draw a profile of the evolution of museums in recent years. Through the review of literature and analysis of collected data, this research aims to find a better picture of the future of museum collecting and give it an unusual name as the New Noah's Ark. On the one hand, it will be an abstract idea of an assemblage of an ark for human civilization, carrying the natural and cultural evidence; on the other hand, it will be a digital ark to preserve all important data of the above mentioned evidence.

The existence of the New Noah's Ark in the museum studies is the realization and representation of museum governance. The decisive elements are focusing on the decision-making of the content and management of collections, the provision of access to the general public, and the preservation of important objects for the future. The ultimate goal is to create endless possibilities in our generation and to pass on our inheritance of culture for the future generations.