

The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities: The Case of Nanning Museum

Zhanghua Hu, Bei Qin

Nanning Museum, Nanning 530219, China

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Abstract: With the development of the times, Nanning Museum is actively implementing reform and innovation to better adapt to the requirements of the times. In this study, the focus will be on the in-depth analysis of the growth process of Nanning Museum in the process of transformation, with a particular emphasis on understanding the growth and changes of museums, in order to better explore diversified development models, improve the construction quality of Nanning Museum, fully tap into the contemporary value of museums, and promote the construction and inheritance of new era culture.

Keywords: Nanning Museum, Guangxi; Rapid change; Era innovation

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1. Introduction

Museums are important carriers of China's spiritual civilization and cultural construction, carrying rich historical and local cultures. Museums provide detailed records of the historical origins of local culture in social development, while also showcasing the influence of culture. Through understanding museums, local cultural customs, and other content can be better presented, thereby achieving the goal of cultural inheritance and promotion. The country also attaches great importance to the construction and development of museums, emphasizing that museums are important bridges connecting history and modern civilization, and museums should continue to grow and innovate in the process of change. With the development and progress of society, museums must also keep pace with the times and grow through change in order to better enhance their social influence and further promote the development and progress of social civilization^[1].

The 2025 International Museum Day theme, The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities, underscores the imperative for museums to adapt within dynamic global and sociocultural landscapes. As articulated by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), museums now stand at the forefront of societal transformation, navigating environments shaped by shifting global events and evolving public needs. This vision resonates deeply with Nanning Museum's founding philosophy: "The Growing Museum: A Civic Cultural Community for Dialoguing with History, Appreciating Art, and Transmitting Civilization." Today, museums

transcend their traditional role as repositories of artifacts; they have become proactive collaborators with the public, fostering pluralistic, inclusive, and harmonious cultural values. In an era of rapid change, museums function as living organisms—adapting, evolving, and expanding the boundaries of cultural dissemination and heritage presentation.

In recent years, the Nanning Museum in Guangxi has continuously achieved innovation in the process of transformation, better inheriting the urban culture of Nanning and promoting the high-quality development of cultural undertakings. The rapid growth of the Nanning Museum is an inevitable requirement for the development of the new era. Under the trend of globalization, influenced by national policies on museum development, digital technology, and social environment, the Nanning Museum in Guangxi has also shown an innovative development trend, better demonstrating the social influence of museums. In the future, how to maintain cultural depth and enhance international influence in the midst of change remains a topic worthy of in-depth exploration ^[2].

2. Overview of the Nanning Museum in Guangxi

In 1980, the Office of the Cultural Relics Management Committee of Nanning City, Guangxi, was established to perform administrative management of cultural relics and museum-related business functions. In 1992, the Nanning Museum in Guangxi was officially established, located in Nanning, the capital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It is a first-class museum in China with a total construction area of 30000 square meters, including an exhibition hall area of 12000 square meters. At present, the museum has a collection of 25000 pieces and 396 precious cultural relics/sets. From the type of collection, it includes various cultural relics from the Paleolithic era to modern times, such as stone tools, bronze ware, jade ware, ceramics, calligraphy and painting works, and textiles, providing sufficient collection resources for the Nanning Museum ^[3]. This museum plays a very important role in cultural heritage, and by keeping pace with the times and carrying out diverse museum activities, it provides guarantees for the innovative development of museums.

3. Dialogue with history, appreciation of art

The Nanning Museum has rich historical and cultural resources. In the context of the new era, by inheriting historical and cultural heritage, it can better guide the audience to appreciate the artistic charm of history and further build a culturally influential Nanning Museum.

On January 29, 2016, Nanning Museum's new building opened to the public free of charge. Housing two permanent exhibitions and three thematic displays, the museum showcases Nanning's historical and cultural identity through its rich collections, innovative curatorial approaches, and distinctive regional aesthetics. Visitors engage intimately with history and art, preserving local heritage while advancing its transmission.

Yongrong Huagui: Ancient Nanning History Exhibition chronicles over 10,000 years of Nanning's evolution from prehistoric times to the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). Combining artifacts with multimedia installations, reconstructed scenes, and interactive displays, the exhibition vividly narrates the city's multifaceted history (**Figure 1**). Interactive elements enhance visitor immersion, blending education with experiential engagement.



Figure 1. Part of Yongrong Huagui: Ancient Nanning Historical Exhibition (Photo by Zheng Zhihao)

A Century of Yongcheng: Modern Nanning History Exhibition recreates the city’s transformations from the late Qing Dynasty to the present. Highlights include the Republican-era Street, featuring iconic arcade architecture, historic shops like Wanguo Grand Hotel and Dashengxiang Sauce Factory, and the Shuangma Well from the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Atmospheric lighting and soundscapes transport visitors to early 20th-century Nanning, making it a popular destination.

The 1929 Nanning Mutiny Exhibition chronologically details the causes, events, and outcomes of this pivotal uprising, celebrating the revolutionary contributions of figures like Deng Xiaoping.

Songs of the Land: Nanning Folk Art Exhibition pioneers a hybrid “exhibition-performance” format. It showcases indigenous folk music and the Nanning International Folk Song Festival, complemented by a 10-meter-high LED stage where dynamic light shows and traditional costumes immerse audiences in a multisensory experience.

Red Earth Rhythms: Lu Quanzhi’s Red Ceramics Art Exhibition highlights locally crafted red ceramics. The gallery’s crimson lighting evokes the primal interplay of “fire and earth” (**Figure 2**) while an on-site pottery studio offers hands-on workshops, aligning with festivals and temporary exhibitions to deepen public engagement.



Figure 2. Part of Red Earth Charm: Lu Quanzhi's Red Pottery Art Exhibition (Photo by Zheng Zhihao)

4. Pluralism, openness, and resource sharing

Temporary exhibitions serve as vital supplements to permanent collections, offering fresh perspectives and cross-cultural dialogue. Since April 2016, Nanning Museum has hosted 124 temporary exhibitions (averaging 12 annually), spanning archaeology, calligraphy, ethnic culture, fine arts, and natural sciences, ranking first in Guangxi's museum system for exhibition frequency.

In 2022, Nanning City Museum introduced Hebei Museum and Hebei Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, King's Underground Palace: Hebei Han Dynasty Royal Exhibition. During the exhibition, the related views of the entry King's Underground Palace were 172,000 times, the related views of the entry King's Underground Palace on the TikTok platform were 136,000 times, and the related views of the entry Nanning Museum on TikTok were 4.213 million times. In addition to the introduction of exhibitions, the Nanning Museum in recent years to focus on the launch of different types of original exhibitions. In 2023, the original exhibition *Image: The Aesthetic Appreciation of Costumes of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China and its Contemporary Reconstruction* hosted by the Nanning Museum has attracted more than 450,000 visitors in the past 7 months, and nearly 4 million people have watched the exhibition video on TikTok. The exhibition's main visual poster won the top 5 of the top 10 posters of the year of Chinese Museums and Art Galleries in 2022. In 2024, due to the high attention of hot search indexes such as Permanent Exhibition Index, New Exhibition Index, Visit Index, Nanning Museum won the list of top 100 national hot search museums in the second quarter and third quarter of 2024, and consecutively topped the list of Top 30 prefecture-level city museums in the first quarter, second quarter and third quarter of 2024.

5. Branding and community integration

Rich and colorful missionary activities in the museum attract visitors, build an interactive platform between the museum and the audience, especially the museum's characteristic activity brand, more able to retain the audience, seize the heart of the audience, and become a part of the audience's life world. Since 2017, Nanning Museum has focused on building the brand of museum characteristic activities. Based on the cultural characteristics of the museum, it has carefully designed and created the museum's Very 6+1 project based on the needs of the audience and the characteristics of different audience groups. Namely, art classroom, pottery workshop, art garden, museum, delicious food, little docent, cultural relics appreciation, six permanent activities, and a wonderful museum night feature activities. Since the implementation of the brand activity, it has been highly praised by the general public. The program No. 96 Steam Light Shop, designed and developed by the museum, was selected as one of the top ten representative education projects of museums in the region at the opening ceremony of the International Museum Day, Guangxi main venue and the Guangxi cultural expo tourism art activity week in 2024.

Every year, International Museum Day, Cultural and Natural Heritage Day, the Zhuang March 3 Festival, and other important festival activities during the New Year's Day, the Spring Festival, and the ASEAN Expo are the time nodes with high public participation, and also the focus of education activities. In 2023, Nanning Museum launched a series of online and offline research and education activities up to 262, with a cumulative audience of about 150,000 offline activities and about 130,000 clicks on online activities. During the Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holiday in 2023, the number of visitors to Nanning Museum reached 147,000, the highest number of holiday visitors since the opening of the museum. In 2024, a total of 104 educational activities will be held around the exhibition, with 832,500 participants and 1,014 million participants participating in live streaming and event viewing.

6. Diversified development of technological innovation

With the development and progress of science and technology in our country, digital technology has been widely applied in various industries. In the context of digitalization, museums can better enhance their influence and expand their cultural dissemination effects by keeping pace with the times and innovating new paths for digital reform and development. By considering the innovative transformation path of museums under the background of digital technology, it is possible to better guide museums towards intelligent development. With the help of digital technology, silent cultural relics in museums can travel through time and space to have a "dialogue" with audiences^[4].

From the perspective of the Nanning Museum, in the process of digital development, the use of digital technology has created a three-dimensional spatial model, which has provided support for the transformation and development of museums. For example, the Nanning Museum has leveraged the advantages of digital technologies such as AI and AR to achieve innovative changes in user interaction. In the construction of the museum, it has developed AR smart glasses for navigation, bringing a digital innovation experience to the audience. With the support of AR smart glasses guided tours, compared to traditional museum operation models, it can provide visitors with an immersive experience environment, fully demonstrating the advantages of digital technology, better enhancing the cultural experience of the audience, and strengthening their sense of identity with historical culture.

In the exhibition hall of the Nanning Museum, visitors can also see many developments and changes that

integrate digital technology. For example, in areas such as the Historical Scene Restoration Area and the Children's Archaeological Exploration Area, the Nanning Museum combines research on audience needs, uses digital technology to construct venues, enhances exhibition service space content, brings digital experience space to audiences, creates an immersive experience environment, and further improves the service quality of the Nanning Museum. Through the application of digital technology, the integration of history and modernity, culture and technology has been achieved, which better brings intelligent service models to the audience and further promotes the high-quality development of the Nanning Museum.

7. Expand channels and keep pace with the times

With the rapid dissemination of information, new media platforms are developing rapidly. WeChat public accounts have become an important window for the public to obtain information by virtue of their convenience and universality. Museums all over the country have joined the camp of WeChat public platform, and the fierce competition is becoming more and more intense. How to attract more audience attention has become a problem for museums to think about. How to stand out in the mass of information and attract more audience attention has become a difficult problem for museum operators to overcome. Nanning Museum made precise efforts and carefully planned a series of unique activities with the help of WeChat public account, covering exhibition publicity, interactive classes, online museums and cultural relics push and other rich sectors, successfully attracted a large number of fans' attention, and made a mark in the field of new media.

The Nanning Museum, through the WeChat platform, has launched the "Museum Online" themed WeChat posts featuring bronzeware, pottery, and jade artifacts; it has also conducted multiple online quiz events with prizes such as How Much Do You Know About the Luoyue Culture?, A Mini Science Class on Calligraphy and Painting Restoration: Flour World, and the Museum Fun Trip on International Museum Day on May 18th. These events enhance the audience's experience and interactivity through various forms, including text, videos, and animated games; the museum has also extensively utilized live streaming to carry out events like Big-name Live Streaming: The Director Tells the Story of Chaoyang Business Circle's Past and Present.

During the International Museum Day in 2020, Nanning Museum, in collaboration with Guangxi Broadcasting Station's Education Radio Program "Private Car 930" and Guangxi Audio-Visual, launched a live program called Cloud Touring the Museum through the antique-style street in the museum's modern exhibition hall. This program, known as Yongzhou Zhi Fou, was a multimedia live broadcast that was streamed across various online platforms, including the Private Car 930 Radio, Sina News, and Guangxi Audio-Visual, attracting nearly a million viewers. On the day of International Women's Day in 2022, the official Weibo account of Nanning Museum released the hashtag "Deng Yingchao, Daughter of Nanning" to promote the revolutionary deeds of Comrade Deng Yingchao to the public. The campaign received support from the official Weibo accounts of 65 cultural and museum systems, including the National Museum. The hashtag was viewed 786,000 times on that day, achieving a positive communication effect.

8. Thrive amidst change

At the outset of the construction phase, the concept of the growing museum was repeatedly discussed and refined. Over time, people have come to realize that museums are more than just static custodians of a city's history and culture; they should also serve as dynamic urban cultural hubs that transcend temporal and spatial dimensions,

bridging ancient and modern, breaking through regional boundaries, deeply integrating into the daily lives of ordinary people, and becoming an indispensable part of their living world.

In this era of rapid and continuous transformation, museums must align with societal changes, respond to global events, meet evolving social demands, and embrace iterative challenges to achieve sustainable development. In 2024, the Nanning Museum was awarded the prestigious title of National First-Class Museum, achieving this status in just eight years, which is a remarkable feat among national first-class museums in China. Through the dialectical interplay of inheritance and innovation, the Nanning Museum has actively explored effective pathways for cultural integration, continuously growing amidst change and ultimately realizing leapfrog development, infusing ancient culture with new vitality in the contemporary era.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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