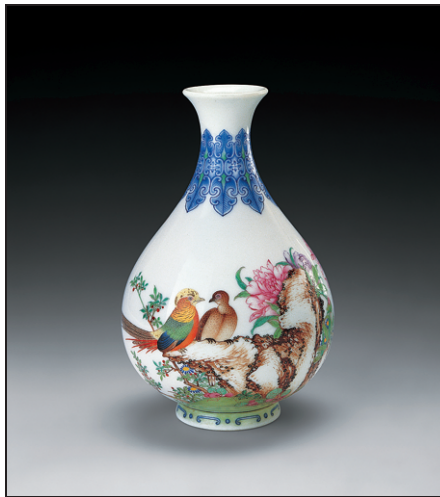




"Taibao" quadrupod, a sacrificial vessel from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC).



Cold Forest After Snow, a painting by Fan Kuan from the Song Dynasty (960-1279).



Painted enamel Chinese peony and pheasant design pear-shaped vase from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).



A semimonthly magazine published by the Tianjin Museum in 1931.

LEADING THE WAY

When it comes to museums, Tianjin leads the way. **Yang Cheng** takes a look at an institution that turns 100 this year

The Tianjin Museum is a prime example of China's bid to learn from the West how to showcase history and culture, says the curator Chen Zhuo.

The museum, which turns 100 in June, was China's first public museum. It was set up by local official Yan Zhiyi (1882-1935) in 1918, inspired by his father Yan Xiu (1860-1929), a renowned educator who founded the prestigious Nankai University, and someone who was a strong advocate of a Western education system.

While some experts say that the credit for the first museum in China should go to entrepreneur Zhang Jian (1853-1926), for his efforts in Nantong, in East China's Jiangsu province, the curator counters this saying "it (the Nantong museum) was a private one, not one initiated by the government."

As for Yan Xiu's background, the educator was exposed to Western thought during the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-95), which was championed by scholar-generals like Li Hongzhang (1823-1901).

Then, Yan Xiu was among the Chinese who went to the West to imbibe new ideas. Later, he encouraged his family members to focus on education to boost the country's prospects, and he got the idea to establish a museum, a dream which his son realized.

Ideal location

Speaking about why Tianjin saw China's first museum, the curator says: "When you look at the history of Tianjin, the setting up of the museum in such a city seems obvious as it boasts a Westernized outlook."

Tianjin was one of the earliest ports



Chen Zhuo, curator at the Tianjin Museum

opened to foreigners; and many entrepreneurs launched their businesses there after learning skills from the West. And the city also saw the setting up of the country's first modern army, private hotel, university and the issue of the first postage stamp.

So, the setting up of Tianjin Museum was no surprise. In its early years, between 1918 and 1937, the museum was open to the public on a regular basis, and periodically granted free entry without tickets.

Tianjin Museum was also the first one in China to have a museum council — comprising government officials and members from civil society — to run the institution.

A major part of the funding for the museum in the early days came from the government, while the remainder was mobilized from the public.

Separately, the curator says, the museum was the first one to publish books by China's top oracle researcher Wang Xiang (1876-1965).

At one point, in the 1920s, when Tianjin was administrated by Hebei province, the museum was called Hebei Museum, and published a half-monthly journal which covered global history.

New birth

Since the founding of New China, the museum has been merged with several other museums, including a local history museum and an art gallery.

In 2012, a new museum, involving an investment of 830 million yuan

(\$130.9 million), was opened.

The total area of the new museum covers 55,000 square meters including 16,900 sq m of exhibition space, 12,117 sq m of archives and 13,279 sq m of public space.

The highlights of the new museum's collection are oracle bones, jade ware, bronze ware, seals, glided bronze Buddhist sculptures, ancient Dunhuang texts (Dunhuang is best known for its Buddhist cave sites), paintings, stele rubbings, calligraphy and ceramics.

Separately, technology has become a new tool used by the museum to preserve its antiques, the curator says. And, between 2014 and 2016, the museum invested 10 million yuan to equip itself with state-of-the-art monitors for humidity, temperature, air and light to safeguard its 200,000 pieces.

Speaking about the future, curator Chen says: "We are keenly aware of the challenges for the museum."

He adds that with the advent of the digital era and new media the museum is studying ways to use the new technologies.

On the funding issue, Chen says that many countries allow tax deductions or rebates to those who fund museum activities, but China does not have such policies.

Also, when it comes to educating citizens about museums, Chen says that the country still has some way to go.

"We hope China will include lessons about museums too, as is done abroad," the curator says.

As for the future of Tianjin Museum, the curator hopes it can write a new chapter in the transformation of China's museum sector.

Contact the writer at yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn



The Tianjin Museum boasts diverse collections and dynamic programs which offer something for everyone.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“
We hope China will include lessons about museums too, as is done abroad.”

Chen Zhuo
curator at the Tianjin Museum



Spotlight on hearing-impaired as new deputy uses sign language

By **YANG JUN**
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Dressed in a purple gown, she moves her hands and fingers in a manner that almost mesmerizes. But all she is doing is using sign language to say — "I will study hard, work hard and live a full life."

The deputy who started her speech at the National People's Congress meeting in Beijing on March 6 with sign language is Shi Huifen, a special education teacher at a county-level school in Wuchuan, in Guizhou.

Speaking about her background, Shi, who can easily pass by as someone at least five years younger than her age, says: "I come from an unusual family that gave more priority to girls' education."

Shi Huifen is the youngest of three children in a rural family in Daozhen, Guizhou province.

And her father was unusual in that he wanted good education for the two girls in the family, sending them to specialized normal schools. Shi's sister is a primary school math teacher.

With the special education skills Shi acquired in the normal school, Shi has been imparting knowledge to aurally-challenged children since she was 19.

Shi now teaches at the Wuchuan County Special Education School in China's southwestern Guizhou province.

The school has 32 teachers and 121 students in 10 classes, from the first grade to the ninth.



Shi Huifen (first from right in the left picture) teaches at the Wuchuan County Special Education School in China's southwestern Guizhou province. Her main task at the school is to help the children acquire basic social skills. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

At the school, there are five classes for mentally-challenged children, one for autistic children, and Shi heads one of the four classes for the aurally-challenged.

To her, the students exhibit the best humanity. "They have pure souls because they are free from worldly distractions," she says.

Shi's main task at the school is to help the children acquire basic social skills. So, she often takes her nine students on trips to grocery stores where the six-graders do their own shopping and haggling.

Similar exercises are also carried out repeatedly in banks, libraries

and hospitals.

"I want them to be exposed to different social settings, so that they can feel confident when interacting in society," says Shi.

Her work seems to be paying off, as according to Ran Runquan, the mother of one of Shi's nine students, Ran's son has been transformed from being a "lazy bones" into mom's little helper within two years of Shi Huifen's training.

Now, the boy volunteers to do things around the house, whether it is mopping the floor, cleaning the table or washing dishes, because "Miss will be very happy if I do so."



"She is more than a teacher to the students, she is like their mother," says Ran.

The students reciprocate Shi's love with touching gestures.

Hu Linyu, a student from Shi's 2015 class refers to her as "mother".

Now a high school senior in Guiyang, the capital of Guizhou, Hu visits Shi every time she is on break from her school.

Speaking about Shi's commitment, Hu's father says: "I trust her (Shi) completely, because I see the bond between Shi and my daughter."

But despite the praise, Shi still

feels inadequate. And she admits that she occasionally fails to understand her students' sign language, because they are constantly making up new signs and shaking up the "grammar" in ways normal kids devise texting slang.

"That's one of the reasons why I still have so much to learn," says Shi, whose idea of a perfect teacher is one who has command over every conceivable situation in the classroom.

To fulfill that dream, Shi has stepped down from being vice-president of the school to focus on honing her teaching skills.

Now, she spends long hours talking to her students. And, whenever she has the time, she devours books and periodicals on new teaching techniques.

Besides her bid to be a better teacher, one thing that weighs on her mind is employment opportunities for the children.

She feels that given adequate training, the children can be gainfully employed when they grow up. "I hope we can find ways to allow them to make a living," she says.

Liu Yinglun contributed to this story.