

# Preliminary Exploration of the Construction of the Great Site Museum in Jingzhou

-- A Case Study of the Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area

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**Abstract:** Jingzhou is the main part of the National Great Site Protection Zone in the Central China region of the Yangtze River Basin. In 2010, the National Cultural Heritage Administration and the Hubei Provincial People's Government signed a joint agreement on the protection of the Great Site in Jingzhou, marking a milestone event in the protection of Chu culture heritage and cultural relics in Hubei. The major sites in the Jingzhou area are located within the Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area, giving the construction and development of the site museum in Jingzhou's Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area a unique advantage. By analyzing the exhibition concepts, architectural concepts, interpretation concepts, and talent development concepts of the three major sites in the jurisdiction area, this paper explores some ideas for the construction of the Great Site Museum.

**Keywords:** Jingzhou, Great Site, exhibition concepts, architectural concepts, talent development.

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## 1. Introduction

The term "Great Site" refers to the historical and cultural information involving politics, religion, military, science and technology, industry, agriculture, architecture, transportation, water conservancy, and other aspects of ancient Chinese history. It includes large-scale settlements, city sites, palaces, tombs, and other sites or site clusters with significant size and profound influence. The Great Sites are important witnesses to the regional, national, and civilization evolution, possessing significant historical and cultural value. They are non-renewable cultural resources and an important part of local cultural resources. The Great Sites serve as capital and driving force for future sustainable development. The Chinese government attaches great importance to the protection and utilization of the Great Sites. As early as 1953, the Zhoukoudian Site Museum was established at the important "Peking Man" site and opened to the public. In April 1958, the Banpo Museum in Xi'an province was built and officially opened to the public. In 1997, the State Council issued the "Notice on Strengthening and Improving Cultural Relics Work," using the term "large-scale ancient cultural sites" for the first time. The restoration and utilization of historical and cultural cities such as Lijiang in Yunnan and Pingyao in Shanxi have opened up new prospects for the protection and utilization of Great Sites. However, the comprehensive launch of the "Great Site" protection action was marked by the formal issuance of the "Management Measures for Special Funds for the Protection of Great Sites" by the Ministry of Finance and the National Cultural Heritage Administration in August 2005. The "Eleventh Five-Year Plan for the Overall Protection of Great Sites," formulated and promulgated by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in 2006, further clarified the basic principles of Great Site protection.

Jingzhou city is the main part of the National Great Site Protection Zone in the central China region of the Yangtze River Basin. In 2010, the National Cultural Heritage

Administration and the Hubei Provincial People's Government signed a joint agreement on the co-construction of the Great Site Protection in Jingzhou. The goal is to make efforts in the planning, protection, exhibition, and research of the great sites in Jingzhou, and strive to develop the Jingzhou Great Site Area into an important demonstration area for the protection of large sites in southern China. This is a milestone event in the protection of Chu cultural heritage and cultural relics in Hubei. The major sites in Jingzhou are mostly located within the Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area, giving the construction and development of the site museum in Jingzhou Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area a unique advantage.

## 2. The Key Great Site Areas

The "sites" involved in site museums mainly refer to historical and archaeological remains. Historical remains are preserved remains with clear records, such as ancient structures and settlements. Archaeological remains are the state after archaeological excavation or the state after professional archaeological treatment. Archaeological sites not only present the state of ancient remains but also the state after archaeological methods are applied, such as ancient settlements and burial remains. Within the Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area in Jingzhou, there are numerous cultural heritage protection units, among which the highest level of protection is given to the Jigongshan Paleolithic Site, Jinan City, the ancient capital of Chu, and the Yingshi Site of the Qin and Han dynasties, which are all national key cultural heritage protection units.

### 2.1. Jigongshan Site

It is located in Yingbei Village, Fenghuang Office, Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area in Jingzhou City. It is a Paleolithic site. The original area of the site is about 1,000 square meters, and the excavation area is 400 square meters. The site is full of Paleolithic artifacts and their processing debris. The cultural layer is over one meter thick, with two

periods of cultural accumulation. The first period dates back approximately 50,000 years ago, and the second period dates back about 20,000 years ago. The Jigongshan Site has not only unearthed tens of thousands of flaked stone tools, cores, and stone waste but also discovered abundant traces. In the middle of the site, there are several irregular-shaped open spaces surrounded by a large number of stone tools. The Jigongshan Site is a long-term and well-preserved stone tool manufacturing site, filling the gap of plain settlements in China's Paleolithic era. It is the first discovered late Paleolithic residential site in the plain area of China, and its discovery and research have brought forward the human development history in the Jiangnan Plain by 40,000 to 50,000 years. It is a milestone in the archaeological research and exploration of human habitation and life in the plain areas during the Paleolithic era in China.

## 2.2. Jinan City: Chu's Former Capital

It is located in Songbai Village, Jinan Town, Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area, Jingzhou City. It was the capital city of the Chu State during the Warring States period and was known as "Yingdu" at that time. The city was situated south of Jina Mountain, also known as "Ji Ying". From the first year of Emperor Wen of Chu Dynasty (689 BC) when the capital was relocated to Ying (Jinan City) until the 21st year of Emperor Xiangqiang (278 BC) when it was captured and destroyed by General Bai Qi of the Qin Dynasty, a total of 411 years, there were twenty generations of kings who established their capital here. During this period, the Chu State also unified nearly fifty small states and had a great influence. At its peak, the Chu State extended north to the Yellow River, east to the coast, west to Yunnan, and south to the southern part of Hunan. Jina City became the political, cultural, and economic center of the Chu State, and was the largest metropolis in the south at that time. The site of Jina City is of large scale, with a length of 4.5 kilometers from east to west and a width of 3.5 kilometers from north to south, with a total area of approximately 16 square kilometers. The city walls have a circumference of 15.5 kilometers and the remains of the city walls are well-preserved, all built with rammed earth and very sturdy. There are seven city gates opened around the city, and three gateways have been excavated at the northern section of the west city wall, with architectural remains resembling gatehouses on both sides. At the exits of the ancient river channels of the southern and northern city walls, there are two water gates. The city is densely filled with rammed earth platforms of varying heights, some reaching up to 6 meters. The site is scattered with ancient wells, kiln sites, and other relics, as well as cultural artifacts from the Eastern Zhou Dynasty such as cylinder tiles, flat tiles, etc. In the southeastern part of the city, houses from the Eastern Zhou period were excavated. The wall foundation is 60 meters long and 14 meters wide, indicating a large-scale structure that was likely part of the palace complex at that time. Fenghuang Mountain inside the city became a cemetery during the Qin and Han Dynasties after the capital was moved to Chen (now Huaiyang, Henan). Numerous well-preserved Western Han mummies, a large number of Han Dynasty bamboo slips, and exquisite painted lacquerwares were all unearthed here<sup>[1]</sup>. Outside the city site, in the Yutai Mountain cemetery area, there are more than 700 large and medium-sized tomb mounds belonging to kings and nobles of that era. Since being captured and destroyed by General Bai Qi of the Qin Dynasty, Jinan City became ruins.

## 2.3. The Yincheng Site

It is located in Yingcheng Village, Fenghuang Office, Jinan Ecological Cultural Tourism Area, Jingzhou City. It is approximately 2.12 kilometres south of the ancient city of Jingzhou and about 2.61 kilometres northwest of the ancient city of Jinan. The Yingshi Site has a square-shaped layout with well-preserved earth-rammed city walls. The circumference of the city walls is 5.56 kilometres, covering an area of approximately 1.918 million square meters. The cultural deposits within the city mainly date back to the Han Dynasty. The earliest cultural layer can be traced back to the Warring States period, but it is scattered and relatively thin. On top of the Han Dynasty cultural layer, there are also localized cultural layers from the Qing Dynasty and Ming Dynasty. Yingcheng was known as Nansun County and Jiangling County during the early Western Han Dynasty, Yingcheng County during the late Western Han Dynasty, and Yingcheng Pavilion during the reign of Wang Mang. It played an important role in the urban system of the Qin and Han periods. The Yingcheng Site contains rich historical information. As one of the representatives remains among a series of city site relics in the Jiangling region, it witnessed the end of the fragmented state of the warring states and the formation of a new hierarchical system under the unified situation of the Qin and Han empires. It is important physical evidence for the study of urban construction and the culture of Jiangling during the Qin and Han periods. The city walls and water systems of Yingcheng have outstanding regional and temporal representativeness. The site and its surrounding contemporaneous tombs have also unearthed a large number of valuable and distinct artefacts with strong regional characteristics. The discovery of bamboo slips is particularly rare and serves as valuable historical research material. The Yingshi Site, along with the ancient city of Jinan and the ancient Jingzhou, forms a complete sequence of urban development in the Jiangling region, witnessing the changes in political power and human activities throughout the historical periods of the region.

## 3. Exhibition Concept

The *Jigongshan* Paleolithic Site, the Former Capital of Chu-Jinan City, and the Yingcheng Site are three large-scale key cultural heritage protection units. They have evolved gradually through different periods, from the Stone Age to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, and then to the Qin and Han Dynasties. Together with the ancient city of Jingzhou, they form a complete urban development context in the Jiangnan Plain. Moreover, they are located in close proximity to each other, within a distance of less than 2-3 kilometres, making it entirely feasible to develop them into large-scale heritage parks. These parks can be designed to have distinct cultural characteristics by constructing different types of museums based on the nature and features of each site.

For the Jigongshan Paleolithic Site, a museum should be established to showcase the production and living scenes of people during the Paleolithic era, revealing the origins of human development in the Jiangnan region.

Considering the large area of the Former Capital of Chu, Jinan City, and to be practical, it is recommended to follow the model of an open large-scale heritage museum, similar to an ecological museum. This museum should include dredging the historical water systems and moats within the Jinan City

site, repairing the city walls, and southeast corner watchtowers, and rebuilding the south gate and south water gate of the eastern wall, to reflect the grand characteristics of a southern water city. By restoring the moats and city walls using vegetation, soil covering, or steel structure restoration, the former glory of the Chu Palace, including the interconnected corridors and terraces, can be vividly brought back. Additionally, the burial mounds of the Chu tombs in Yutai Mountain can be restored to recreate the scenes of the common people and lower-class nobles' burial grounds of the Chu Kingdom. Combined with forest vegetation, a serene and leisurely tourist attraction can be created. The surrounding areas of Jinan City, including Yutai Mountain and Changhu Lake, can gradually restore the pre-Qin wetland ecological environment by establishing bamboo gardens, lacquer gardens, mulberry gardens, and planting local pre-Qin vegetation. Yutai Mountain can become a place with diverse and enjoyable tourist products while serving as an integral part of cultural heritage interpretation. The perfect combination of the authenticity restoration of heritage tourism and the protection of the ecological environment is also an important means of transforming the heritage culture into a "living culture."

For the *Yingcheng* Site Museum, in order to coordinate the overall environment of the Qin and Han periods' *Yingcheng* Site with the Former Capital of *Chu-Jinan* City, and to prevent human-induced destruction, it is necessary to relocate all residents inside the *Yingcheng* Site and gradually demolish the scattered buildings. Without damaging the essence of the site, existing street buildings can be utilized as a "clothing and hat" for the site, carrying out appropriate utilization for creative cultural heritage industries to ensure that the overall style aligns with the era of the *Yingcheng* Site. The city walls should be restored, and the historical water systems and moats within the city should be dredged. Shallow-rooted vegetation should be planted on the city walls to prevent soil erosion. Based on archaeological surveys and excavation research, some functional buildings should be selectively restored in a protective manner to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the Qin and Han cultures in the southern city.

#### 4. Architectural Concept

The site museum is a specialized museum established on ancient cultural sites for excavation, protection, research, and exhibition of the specific cultural heritage of the site<sup>[2]</sup>. "Due to the spatiotemporal nature of archaeological sites as 'places of historical occurrence,' site museums possess a natural contextual setting that other museums do not have."<sup>[3]</sup> This "spatiotemporal characteristic" gives site museums a chronological and regional nature, constraining their architectural design to consider relevant principles and key points.

As a unique form of public architecture, the site museum has different functions compared to ordinary residential buildings and significant distinctions from general public facilities. For architects, a museum is not merely a building but an organic space with diverse needs. In recent years, the most prominent feature of site museum construction nationwide is the integration of museum architecture as part of cultural heritage interpretation, highlighting the characteristics of the site. The *Hanyangling* Museum has introduced the "Slovenian conservation exhibition approach," abandoning grand but "invisible" environmental conservation concepts, effectively preserving the site's features and

resolving environmental conflicts to the greatest extent. The architectural design elements are rugged and simple, not confined to specific forms. The architectural structure echoes the content, hinting at the mysterious and magnificent nature of the site. By utilizing advanced technology, it aids in the physical conservation of cultural relics. To avoid the shortcomings of a "dark museum," the architectural design considers many energy-saving measures. The *Yin Xu* Museum Park, according to local conditions, adopts various exhibition techniques such as on-site preservation, lifted ground partial restoration, lifted ground restoration foundation, sandstone ground signs, glass-covered ground displays, plant signs on the ground, and lifted ground body restoration. The restored architecture, with its "high platform base, surrounding corridors, and double-pitched thatched roofs," emphasizes the elements of the Shang Dynasty's architectural culture. Based on this, the ideal site museum should possess the following conditions:

Safety is the most fundamental requirement for all buildings and is of utmost importance in museum work. Museums are not only public places for visitors but also crucial sites for preserving cultural relics. The preciousness and non-renewability of cultural relics make safety work particularly important in museums. Architects need to systematically consider the safety of the building from various aspects such as security, fire prevention, cultural relic protection, tourism management, and hygiene, to ensure the safety of both the exhibited cultural relics and visitors. The site selection should be adjacent to the site itself but outside the protected area, choosing a location that is free from sources of pollution, has smooth drainage, good ventilation, a harmonious environment, and convenient access for visitors, without compromising the cultural heritage or obstructing visitors' appreciation of it. The architecture should harmonize with the regional cultural characteristics of the site, emphasizing both the cultural connotation of the site and the cultural traits of the city, highlighting the traditional cultural characteristics of the heritage site and making the architecture an integral part of heritage interpretation.

Considering the site environment, the relationship between the architectural space and nature should be viewed as a whole. The museum should be re-evaluated within the larger context of the heritage site, drawing inspiration from elements such as the era and region in the architectural design. It should have complete functions for collection, research, exhibition, education, service, and leisure. Additionally, it should have space for temporary exhibition halls and various activities. The functional flow should be networked and barrier-free, with a clear separation between visitor activity areas and working areas. It should have reasonable lighting, energy-saving and environmentally friendly features, intelligent systems, and comply with national safety standards for earthquake, fire, and theft prevention, as well as the "Museum Architectural Design Code." Space for future development should be reserved around the building.

#### 5. Expository Concept

Explanation is an important means for museums to assist visitors in their tours. It is one of the contents of the social education and services provided by museums. The explanation of a heritage museum is different from other types of museums. It is based on scientific and authoritative foundations, focusing on the explanation of typical heritage sites. The static, fixed, and authentic heritage site itself is a

precious cultural relic. Its excavation and display demonstrate its authority and seriousness, which are the main themes and essence of every heritage museum explanation. After understanding the connotation and special charm of the heritage site, one or a group of representative unearthed cultural relics are selected for explanation, and in-depth thematic exploration is carried out from the perspectives of its scientific, artistic, and historical values, reflecting the primitive aesthetic views or the emergence of primitive thinking consciousness. This reveals the historical significance, practical significance, and influence on modern society of cultural relics.

Heritage museums have unique requirements for explainers due to their special characteristics. A reasonable knowledge structure, extensive knowledge, and broad interests are important ways to cultivate the knowledge of explainers. Similarly, explanation is an art and the life of a museum. Explainers must have highly comprehensive qualities. The level of explanation does not depend on appearance. Elegance in posture, refined temperament, rich knowledge, and accurate and fluent answers are the embodiment of the inner beauty of explanation work.

For large heritage sites and heritage museums, most visitors are visiting for the first time, and it is difficult for them to have a comprehensive understanding in a short period. If in-depth explanations are given directly, visitors will be affected in their learning due to a lack of psychological preparation and overall concepts, and they may get lost in the architecture of the exhibits. Therefore, it is necessary to provide a “tour” before the “explanation”, starting with a “broad perspective” introduction and then introducing the “specific details”. This way, it is easier for visitors to know where they stand and make the content of the explanation “see the trees and the forest”. When explaining specific relics and artefacts, it is not about reciting historical dates or describing the shapes and sizes of architectural terms. These answers can be seen or found by anyone, but not everyone wants to hear them. The focus of the explanation content should be the untold stories behind what visitors can see, combining with people’s lives and echoing their experiences. Don’t just talk about pure theory, facts, names, and data, to avoid being dry and tasteless. Engaging and appealing explanations should be written, focusing on explanation strategies and personalized positioning, setting points of interest for the audience, strengthening communication and interaction with the audience, exploring cultural information in the explanation content, pursuing language expression skills, using storytelling, examples, fun interactions, and other methods of explanation. Stories are most likely to arouse people’s interest, so they are excellent entry points. Organizing experiences and grasping key points through storytelling is a very important method and has surprising effects. Stories themselves are important cognitive events because they condense various information, knowledge, emotions, and the ins and outs of the story. Their purpose is to enhance the effectiveness of audience learning, allow the audience to have empathy and a sense of identification, and thus understand the true meaning of the explanation.

## 6. Talent Cultivation Concept

Site museums are professional cultural institutions, whose main business scope includes the collection and appraisal of

artefacts, artefact preservation and protection, exhibition planning and display, data resource management and utilization, as well as public education and cultural exchange. They require a large number of professionals with expertise in these areas.

To meet the diverse needs of talent cultivation, higher-level departments and site museums themselves should formulate differentiated training plans. Specifically, higher-level departments should release guidelines for talent cultivation, guiding museums in carrying out training work. Museums, on the other hand, should develop corresponding training plans for personnel at different levels, positions, and professional backgrounds, based on their actual situations. This will enable all personnel to have a clear understanding of their development positioning within the institution, play to their strengths, and become true industry professionals.

To evaluate the effectiveness of talent cultivation, a specialized talent cultivation evaluation system should be established. By assessing the development of the talent team at various stages, timely adjustments and optimizations can be made to the talent cultivation plans, providing a practical reference for the continuous advancement of talent cultivation work. At the same time, the evaluation criteria themselves also provide direction and guidelines for museum talent cultivation.

In the process of strengthening the construction of the talent team, site museums need to mobilize various forces and make full use of various resources. This includes government support, industry associations, and social organizations, among others, all of which can provide different forms of support for museum talent cultivation. With regards to the government, it is mainly seeking policy support; as for industry associations, their role is to lead the work of cultivating museum talent teams and utilize their influence to secure funding, expert teams, and other support for various institutions. Additionally, museums can also collaborate with social organizations to enhance their level of talent cultivation by introducing third-party professional institutions.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, sites have vitality and are dynamic. The business practices of site museums ensure the effective protection of sites, the realization of their value, and the enhancement of their importance. Through professional practices in museums, the vitality of sites can be stimulated and maintained, and this vitality can be transmitted to the general public and future generations. Sites are engines that evolve and develop along with contemporary society, bearing witness to the progress of human society.

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