

Article

The Church Museums' Evolution of the Idea and Methods of Missionary Work in China: A Study of Tsinanfu Institute

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Abstract: This study explores the role of church museums represented by the Tsinanfu Institute in the spread of Christianity in modern China. Established in 1887, Tsinanfu Institute, formerly Tsingchowfu Museum, stands as an early pioneer of church museums in China with the mission of spreading Christianity. It has taken exhibition and knowledge dissemination and social education as its core functions, indirect evangelization and expansion of religious influence as its fundamental purpose, and the Chinese way of localization and the promotion of harmonious relations with the community as its important working guidelines. It has established a new operational concept as a “public cultural museum”, realizing the transformation of the church museum from a missionary venue for the intellectuals to a new type of missionary venue for the general public. The development stages of the church museum operational concept represented by Tsinanfu Institute are mainly socialization, education, localization, and the popularization of higher education, which is a microcosm of the development trend of the Christian Endeavour Movement, Social Gospel, and vernacularization thought. Tsinanfu Institute shows significant research value in studying new missionary concepts and exploring the new way of missionary work in the church during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Keywords: church museum; Tsinanfu Institute; J. S. Whitewright; museology; modern history of China



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1. Introduction

Museums in China can be traced back to the 19th century, and among the earliest batch of museum practices, the church museums founded by missionaries were the mainstream. Initially serving religious and church purposes, these early church museums gradually diversified in operational methods and functional characteristics. While almost all church museums during the early period primarily showcased collections of natural specimens, another genre of museums emerged, exemplified by Tsinanfu Institute, focusing on exhibitions, education, and community services, which some scholars call “public cultural museums” or “missionary museums”. This new type of museum aims to promote the local people’s recognition of the Christian religion and the Western world through exhibitions and educational activities, and at the same time, objectively, those museums spread modern science and criticized bad customs, which has had a great impact on Chinese society. The development of church museums is also an exploration process of integrating their religious attributes with Chinese circumstances. In a general sense, there was a trend in modern China’s church museums to transform from missionary venues to public educational venues, which not only expanded their impacts on the public but also profoundly contributed to the emergence of early local Chinese museology. Established respectively in 1904 and 1887 by English Baptist clergyman John Sutherland Whitewright¹, Tsinanfu Institute (济南广智院) and its predecessor, Tsingchowfu Museum (青州博物堂), stand as a church museum established very early in mainland China, pioneering the operational

model of “public cultural museums”. Its operational concept is highly compatible with the development of religious thought and museological thought in the world, and it has successively formed the stage characteristics of socialization, education, localization, and popularization of higher education, which has an important inspirational and leading role in the development of the Chinese museum in the first half of the 20th century. Therefore, they represent critical case studies for understanding early evangelism and museological thought in China. This paper intends to take this museum and its main director as an entry point to study the background, program, purpose, mission, functional orientation, and other important operational concepts of the museum and to discuss the formation and evolution of early church museums and their thought in China.

Some studies have been conducted about the development of church organizations and museums in modern China. While significant attention has been given to the spread of Christianity in China, particularly through missionary institutions like churches, schools, and hospitals, the focus has primarily been on church universities following the establishment of the United Board for Christian Colleges in China. Consequently, extensive historical research has been conducted on these institutions (Xu 1986). While some church museums also achieved great success during the same period, they received comparatively less attention and research. The reason for this phenomenon stems from their completely different missionary route choices. Universities aimed to cultivate social elites and pursue cutting-edge knowledge, while museums served the general public more and spread general knowledge. Although it is difficult for us to build a universally recognized standard to measure which side has a greater impact on the entire society, it cannot be denied that, at least in Chinese academics, the attention and research level of church museum issues are still far behind those of universities. Another important reason is that as the earliest museum in mainland China, Musée de Zi-ka-wei (徐家汇博物馆, Shanghai) has been a pure research institution for a long time, lacking social activities. Due to its significant representativeness in research, it may, to some extent, lead scholars to form a wrong first impression of church museums. In recent years, the academic focus has shifted towards museums of the “public culture” type, with scholars exploring multiple-scale analysis methods and evaluation mechanisms from the perspective of mass preaching (Xu and Liu 2020; Chen 2022). The research by Martha Lund Smalley from Yale Divinity Library is an important case of using church archives to analyze the operational model of church museums. In the paper “*Missionary Museums in China*” (Smalley 2012), she used Whitewright as an important case to illustrate this phenomenon. However, due to the lack of Chinese archives, this study did not touch on the issues of localization or sinicization. Similar analysis methods have been applied to colonial-era museums worldwide, examining their evolution from scientific research to political demonstration (Edmundson 2019). In China, most research was dominated by the examination of historical facts. Li Jun has expanded the scope of this research to a national scale (Li 2015), and some scholars have also paid attention to the process of transformation of museum operational concepts in line with social and academic development (Tai 2013; Jiang and Xiang 2022) or dealt with the Tsinanfu Institute and its cultural strategies, educational methods, and community relations (Zhang 2013; Zhao 2022). Nevertheless, previous studies have yet to extensively analyze ideological contexts outside of China or museology, failing to bridge domestic and international social movements and the ideological connections between church museology and theology. It should be noted that the term “church museums” in this paper mainly refers to museums opened by Western missionary organizations in overseas countries before the mid-20th century with the primary objective of spreading religious beliefs. Some scholars also call them “colonial museums” (Susan 1986), distinguishing them from contemporary museums that aim to display the culture and history of the church (Roque 2023).

2. Demonstrating “God’s Experiment”: The Beginning of Evangelical Operational Concepts of Church Museums

From 1872, when the church first decided to establish a museum in mainland China, to 1905, marking the inception of the first Chinese-owned museum, this period is widely recognized as the foundational stage in the history of Chinese museums. Notably, the majority of museums established during this epoch were founded by the church. However, due to the variances in missionary agendas and working methods among different churches, as well as the fact that museological thought worldwide was also in a period of transition between the old and the new, the operational concepts of these church-affiliated museums in China varied considerably.

During the mid-19th century, the development of natural science in Europe prompted the function of museums to shift from the traditional appreciation of treasures to scientific research, and museums focused their operations on collecting high-quality natural specimens and providing services to researchers. However, this transition also led to a need for attention to the social and educational function of museums in the European museological community at the time. As Hagen, the museologist of the time, says, “With few exceptions, perhaps, for a quarter of a century most museums became so exclusive that public admission was considered a hindrance or a nuisance.” (Hagen 1876). Complying with the background, the first museum in mainland China, the Musée de Zi-ka-wei, founded by the French Jesuit P. M. Heude, as well as the subsequent “Bainiaotang” Nature Museum (北堂博物馆, Beijing), Musée Hoangho Paiho (北疆博物院, Tianjin), etc., all adopted the idea of collecting nature specimens for scientific research (Wang 2013). Moreover, leveraging their expertise in natural sciences and museum practices, missionaries established connections with Chinese officials and scholars, thereby facilitating cultural exchange between the West and the Chinese hierarchy—a strategy that has been consistently employed by missionaries to China since the era of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) (Wiest 1997). Consequently, during this period, the operations of church museums primarily revolved around the collection and study of Chinese natural specimens, with limited emphasis on knowledge dissemination to society through exhibitions. Indeed, some of these museums were scarcely open to the public, with their influence largely confined to the overseas scientific community and the Chinese social elite, while the general populace remained largely unaware of their existence.

Tsinanfu Institute and its predecessor, Tsingchowfu Museum, marks a significant departure from traditional church museums in China as it pioneered an innovative approach to integrating science and technology exhibitions to attract public engagement. Despite lacking a formal background in museum management, the institute’s founder, Whitewright, initiated the establishment of the Tsingchowfu Museum as an experimental solution to the challenges faced in evangelization efforts. He said, “In former years, before the museum was opened, we have had great difficulty here in getting any of this class to listen to preaching at all.” (Whitewright 1894) There is no systematic documentation of the Tsingchowfu Museum’s operational concept, but its primary purpose and function can be summarized by the couplets hanging on both sides of the main door at that time: “All the living beings in the sky, in the water and on the land are all God’s merciful experiment; Electromagnetism, acoustics, and optics, are all the sources of wealth and strength for human beings (飞潜动植群生, 悉上帝慈悲实验; 电磁声光诸学, 皆下民富强本源).” (Jinan CPPCC Historical Committee 1984) Compared with some of its predecessors, the Tsingchowfu Museum had almost no collection or scientific research function, and the exhibits were not so precious. According to the records, its displays mainly consisted of historical and geographic charts, specimens of minerals, and scientific models of trains and electric motors. Most of them were acquired or assembled on an ad hoc basis for the exhibition (CPPCC Historical Committee 1996). However, such an exhibition better embodied the theme of “the sources of wealth and strength”, which undoubtedly had a great appeal to Chinese people who were under the influence of the “self-strengthening” and “abundance-seeking” ideologies of the Westernization Movement at that time. The annual number of visitors to

the museum once exceeded 100,000 ([Editorial Office 1989](#)). Although the above exhibition presents the theme of “the sources of wealth and strength”, in terms of the purpose of preaching, it is centered on the theory of “God’s Experiment”, in which nature and civilization are all created by divine power. In the process of actual operation, the museum required visitors to listen to a sermon before they could visit the exhibition free of charge, and it intentionally conveyed the idea that science originated from divine power through the design of the exhibition, the explanatory text, and the lecture service. Charles H. Corbett, a scholar who has visited the museum many times, once recorded that an assistant preacher of the museum, in order to show the Chinese audience “God’s great creation”, asked the audience to grasp the two poles of the power supply, and when the power supply was turned on, the audience immediately believed in the existence of electricity and also believed in the existence of divine power, which is occasionally mentioned in his records ([Corbett 1955](#)). This shows that the museum had a clear founding purpose, which was to attract the general public to come into contact with the church, listen to sermons, and become believers through advanced scientific and technological knowledge, as well as to dispel misunderstandings about foreigners and the church ([Forsyth 1912](#)). This distinctive approach sets the Tsinanfu Institute apart from conventional church museums in China, emphasizing its dual role as a venue for scientific exploration and religious engagement.

The merging of museum affairs with missionary purposes in the late 19th century reflects significant development in both religious thought and museology worldwide. From the perspective of the development of museology, the emergence of the British Museum in the 1880s and the United States National Museum pioneered the design of dedicated public display spaces, heralding the advent of “new museology” globally. The public responsibility and educational role of museums were increasingly emphasized and widely recognized as the basic functions of museums. As the Director of the Natural History Museum in London, William H. Flower, said, “The value of a museum will be tested not only by its contents, but by the treatment of those contents as a means of the advancement of knowledge.” ([Flower 1898](#)) From the perspective of religion, the path of spreading religion through museum exhibitions was mainly influenced by the Christian Endeavour Movement and early evangelical thinking in English-speaking countries. Since the arrival of the missionary groups holding the above ideas in the 19th century in China, they have gradually formed the viewpoint that “China is the country reserved by God to receive the most advanced theological ideas” and put forward a new program for their work such as each Christian has a responsibility for the evangelization of those about him ([Cornwell 1894](#)). Under the guidance of the above program, some churches began to expand their influence on society by founding hospitals or schools in addition to preaching in churches, thus enabling the majority of the people, who had a rare knowledge of foreign languages and cultures and were wary of foreigners, to come into contact with the churches. The Chefoo Museum (烟台博物院福音堂) and the Tengchow Collage (登州文会馆) affiliated museums that appeared in Shandong slightly earlier than the Tsingchowfu Museum, established by the Presbyterian Church (USA), also adopted working methods such as combining tours with sermons at the beginning of their founding, which means that the audience came to the museum in an organized manner, although it may be free, and the audience must first listen to the Bible’s explanation or preaching in the lecture hall, and then be led by clergy and guides to visit the exhibition. Tsingchowfu Museum adopted the above experience in its operating methods and exhibitions ([Li 2015](#)).

In the first stage of development of the Tsingchowfu Museum from 1887 to 1904, the museum operated without a fully defined mission or operational concepts, and its working method came directly from the experience of preaching. As a museum, the Tsingchowfu Museum could neither be called a collection institution nor could it be said that it was a sound research or education institution, which was a significant flaw in its function. However, in any case, due to the pioneer of museums in China and the need for the public to learn about advanced scientific knowledge, Whitewright’s early attempts were successful, which prompted his work’s focus to shift to the field of museums. In 1904, the comple-

tion of the Qingdao–Jinan Railway enhanced Jinan’s transportation advantages, positioning it as an accessible hub, particularly as a provincial capital. Leveraging these factors, Whitewright sought funding from the church and made multiple social donations to relocate the museum to Jinan, renaming it the “Tsinanfu Institute” upon its opening in 1905 (Tsinanfu Institute 1931, pp. 1–2). This strategic move facilitated broader outreach and solidified the institution’s role in bridging scientific education with religious teachings in China.

3. “Social, Educational and Evangelistic”: The Establishment of a Museum Principle Based on the Balance among Religion and Other Aspects

During the 17 years of operation of the Tsingchowfu Museum, significant shifts occurred within Chinese society and the ecclesiastical landscape of China. With the enlightenment of the Chinese people and the increasing expansion and complexity of the museum’s activities, some of the missionary strategies in the Tsingchowfu Museum era became outdated in the context of developing the Tsinanfu Institute. A set of comprehensive and systematic museological theories and working methods, which are applicable to the church museums, urgently needed to be established.

What distinguishes Tsinanfu Institute from other church museums, which merely perform missionary functions, is the innovative core concepts for the operation of church museums, most notably the guiding principle and the mission of that museum. Upon its establishment, “Social, Educational, Evangelistic” was established as the core program (Whitewright 1913a). In fact, the rudiments of these three programs had already existed many years ago. However, due to the rigid missionary methods and the limited resources of the Tsingchowfu Museum, the social and educational functions were not fully exploited. As a result, during the period of Tsingchowfu, the museum was regarded by many locals as a simple place of worship, and many non-believers were deterred from visiting. Therefore, in order to overcome such problems, Whitewright, in the early stages of establishing the Tsinanfu Institute, formulated more refined and explicit missions based on programs: “The object of this Institution, is to assist in the endeavor to manifest the truth with regard to nature, the world, history and the progress of civilization. By its agencies it seeks to enlighten and educate, to do away with misconceptions in regard to the civilization of the West, to explain the true nature of the Christian faith and Its results on the individual and national life.” (Whitewright 1910) This mission statement was prominently displayed at the entrance of the Tsinanfu Institute in both Chinese and English.

The formation of the above concepts was inextricably linked to the changes in the world’s Christian thought at that time. After the mid-19th century, with the expansion of the labor conflict and labor movement in the United States, the traditional gospel gradually developed into the Social Gospel, and some missionaries proposed that the “Kingdom of God” should not only exist within the church but should be extended to the whole society. The influence of this change was particularly significant in East Asian countries, especially China (Wang 2014). At the same time, changes in Chinese society have also prompted the churches in China to transform their working ways. Especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the churches in China were greatly impacted by the Boxer Movement and began to seek a way of working that would be easily accepted by the Chinese. Due to the Christian thought change and the change in Chinese society, more and more churches jumped out of the box and began to participate in educational, medical, and charitable activities. A new emerging perspective among the missionary community has begun to dominate, namely that preaching is a mission, and the mission is God’s will (Fairbank and Feuerwerker 1983; Liu 1970), which has prompted them to shift the focus from preaching to broader social work.

The social program of Tsinanfu Institute aimed to promote the modernization of the local society to achieve the ambitious goal of “seeks to enlighten society” (Han 1932) in both the religious and social senses. The realization of the social program depended mainly on contact with the local people and service to the local society. Unlike earlier church en-

deavors in China, which primarily targeted upper-class intellectuals, Whitewright advocated for the institute to engage with various segments of Chinese society, fostering communication and interaction across diverse social strata. This inclusive approach aimed to build friendly relationships between churches and the Chinese populace, thereby advancing the institute's social objectives. The educational program of the Tsinanfu Institute was designed to promote the emancipation of the mind and to reveal the "truths" of nature, the world, history, and the progress of civilization so that it would develop into an "educational museum" (Whitewright 1910). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the idea that museums should serve as places of education for the general public gained international recognition, and the American Association of Museums enshrined it in its founding statement.

The name shift from Tsingchowfu Museum to Tsinanfu Institute also reflected its evolving purpose. The Chinese name, "广智院" ("Broad Wisdom Institute"), underscored the goal of increasing public wisdom and knowledge, facilitating acceptance within the local community. The English name was also changed from Museum to Institute. The adoption of the term "Institute" emphasized its expanded scope beyond traditional museum functions. In the expected development, Tsinanfu Institute would have the function of both a museum and a missionary institution. Using the name of "institute" can more accurately reflect its characteristics and also benefit it by receiving more attention from church groups. In addition, combined with the actual operation of the institute, Tsinanfu Institute covered diversified and comprehensive services, greatly expanding the scope of traditional museums in terms of social service and public education. There were also many areas for reading, research, study, and sports activities. It was also equipped with wax statues, sand trays, charts, and cartoons for exhibitions with an educational function, and they showed the difference between the institute and the museums that are mainly focused on collections and exhibitions in a general sense. Additionally, the Tsinanfu Institute may have drawn inspiration from international museum organizations during the same period, influencing its name decision and operational concept. For instance, the Smithsonian Institution, established in the United States in 1846, is renowned as a leading museum, educational, and research complex. With a mission dating back to 1829 centered on the "increase and diffusion of knowledge", the Smithsonian has had a profound impact on museums worldwide. This influence has encouraged museums globally to prioritize education as a primary function (Zheng 2015). The guiding philosophy of the Tsinanfu Institute aligns seamlessly with this educational approach.

From 1904 to 1913, it was the stage of establishing the core operational concepts, such as the guiding program, mission, and purpose of the Tsinanfu Institute. Influence by the worldwide Social Gospel thought, the institute also established a social and educational program, which was a process of the church's re-discovery of the museum's primary function and mission, and it reflected the church museum's balancing and coordinating of the missionary purpose and the museum's function in this period. As can be seen from the relevant contents of the programs and objectives, the overall development goal of the Tsinanfu Institute is to become a comprehensive museum with multiple exhibition functions in nature, history, culture, science, and technology, with the function of edification of the people and the function of enlightenment of the society. However, evangelicalism is still the fundamental attribute of a church museum. The ultimate aim of the achievement of social and educational functions is also to promote evangelicalism, as Whitewright said: "The whole aim of all the work, the supreme object for which all else is but the means to an end, is the work of evangelization." (Whitewright 1913a). It can be seen that compared with the direct preaching and missionary activities of the Tsingchowfu Museum, the evangelization of the Tsinanfu Institute was indirectly realized through the provision of educational and social museum services. This shift marked a strategic redirection toward broader societal engagement while maintaining the church's evangelical mission.

4. Recognizing the Good in China: New Trends in the Localized Evangelization Concept of Church Museums in China

Guided by systematic purposes, missions, and other basic operational concepts, the Tsinanfu Institute has contributed outstandingly to construction, display, branch operations, and visitor services. Building upon these foundations, Whitewright further refined his ideas on museum operation and successively put forward several critical working principles, the most crucial of which was the principle of localization around 1913. This idea was articulated in Whitewright's report as "recognizing to the full all that is good in China and the Chinese people." (Whitewright 1913b) From a practical perspective, the meaning of "good in China" encompasses not only specimens and natural resources commonly emphasized in museums but also encompasses aspects of Chinese society and culture that have previously been overlooked by the West, such as Chinese morals, history, and customs.

The impetus for localizing the church's ministry was the awakening of national and ethnic consciousness among Chinese people, especially after the Boxer Movement and the May 4th Movement in 1919. The church urgently needs to change its strategy to maintain its harmonious and stable position in Chinese society. Various ministries have extensively explored and adjusted localization from the perspectives of ideology and practice. This process was later summarized as the far-reaching slogan of "more efficient, Christianized, and Chinese oriented" (Chinese Educational Commission 1922). In order to better adapt to this trend, Whitewright adjusted the statement of Tsinanfu Institute's purpose after 1912. In his report, he stated that all the work of the institute was "to awaken and educate the minds of men and women to a sense of the greatness of the universe, the oneness of mankind, the relationship of their own country to other countries, the proportionate wealth of different countries in physical products and the proportionate measure in which these products are being utilized, the mental and moral status of the different races of mankind, and a presentation of some of the causes which have operated for the uplift and degradation of mankind." (Whitewright 1913b) The revised mission statement reflects a shift in perspective from a focus on "people and self" to a focus on "people and society", with emphasis on the expression of human subjectivity and human greatness as well as an analysis of the relationship between people, countries, and nations in the presentation of communication. The emphasis on social development, social change, and differences between countries is also a response to the revolutionary process of establishing a republican system in China around 1912. It is in line with the urgent quest for knowledge and concern of the Chinese people for social and political issues.

The newly completed Tsinanfu Institute cleverly utilizes Chinese culture in both site selection and architectural design. Limited by the modest funding approved for the relocation, Whitewright balanced the missionary needs with the economic conditions and chose a public cemetery outside the south gate of the Jinan city wall. This site is not located in the central urban area, and according to traditional Chinese culture, it is not conducive to building residential houses but is suitable for religious venues, so the land price is quite low. The advantage is that the new address is close to the famous scenic spot Baotu Spring (趵突泉), around some temples and pedlars' markets, where pilgrims and tourists gather year-round. Most of these people are not intellectuals or elites, but they are the right target audience for church museums. In terms of architecture, the main building of the institute is a Chinese-style building with a two-story green tile gabled roof and semi-circular arched coupon doors, arched coupon windows, stone carvings, and decorative iron components used in decoration, showing a distinctive blend of Chinese and Western styles (Wang 2008). It is not like the European Christian church building with too typical religious colors, but enough to leave an impression of a "Western landscape", which is more acceptable for the local population (Figure 1).

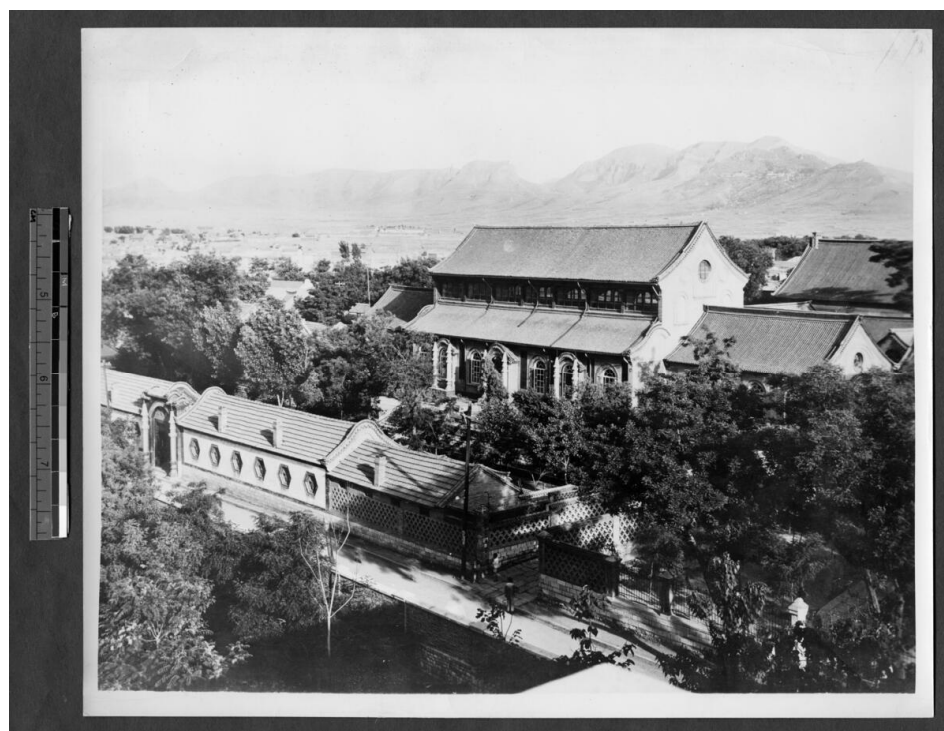


Figure 1. Tsinanfu Institute in the 1940s. Source: (UBCHEA 1947).

The themes of the institute's displays and exhibitions were well suited to the needs of Chinese society, focusing on the difficulties and problems that China was facing at that time. Whitewright believed that museum exhibitions should be educational "Exhibits of civilization" and be able to guide all aspects of China toward modernization (Whitewright 1910). Accordingly, more than a dozen exhibitions on different themes were displayed, covering various aspects, including science, agriculture, commerce, and other subjects, mostly curated based on the Chinese context (Table 1). The most significant exhibitions from Whitewright's perspective in his church report were the Health and Epidemiological Exhibition and the Forest Exhibition, which basically did not deal with religious issues but rather directly addressed the most urgent natural disasters in Jinan, Shandong, and even in China at that time—epidemics and the flooding of the Yellow River (Yard 1925). The Health and Epidemiological Exhibition popularized the primary causes of epidemics and effective methods of epidemic prevention by displaying insect models with germs, many charts, and printed documents (Figure 2a). Additionally, it vividly demonstrated the painful state of illness in people with dirty living conditions and unclean diets through models. The Forestry Exhibition pointed out that the root cause of the siltation of the Yellow River was the destruction of the forests in the basin and provided the latest research results from the West at that time, such as design models of river dredgers (Yard 1925). In response to the lack of morality and education in the military of the year-round warlord strife, Whitewright set up the Tsinanfu Soldiers' Institute, a branch of the Tsinanfu Institute, in 1913 in the garrison of the city. The primary displays were mainly educational, such as maps, new weapon types, introductions to various countries' armies, international conventions, and military obligations. Lecture halls, classrooms, reading rooms, and recreation rooms were also opened (Whitewright 1913c). By 1916, more than 25,000 soldiers and 13,000 citizens had visited the Tsinanfu Soldiers' Institute (Luce 1917).

Table 1. Exhibition Theme of Tsinanfu Institute as Seen in Travel Notes.

Exhibition Units	Exhibition Content	Exhibition Significance ¹
Bible	Display Bibles in various languages	Reveal that the road to heaven is not exclusive
Health	Display various hygiene charts with simple explanations	Enable people to be healthy
History	Display historical charts and graphs	Reveal the nation's evolution
Race	Display the living conditions of various ethnic groups	Understand world civilization
--	Display models and pictures of each country's palaces	Appreciate the development of fine art ideas
Forest	Display models that provide an overview of the Yellow River and the disaster	Demonstrate the idea that practicing forestry can prevent drought and flooding
Commodity	Display comparative tables of commerce between China and other countries and a number of commodities of Chinese and foreign manufactures	Reveal the progress of business competition
Science	Astronomy, geography, minerals, geology, etc.	--
Agriculture	Display various specimens of agricultural tools and seeds	--
Creatures	Display different kinds of creatures	--

¹ According to the original text. Source: (Wang 1923).



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. Exhibition photos of Tsinanfu Institute: (a) Main Hall: whale skeleton, Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum model, and analects slogans (1940s); (b) “Four examples of ‘Filial Piety’” (1947). Source: (UBCHEA 1947).

The localization process of the Tsinanfu Institute has profoundly influenced the narrative approach to exhibition display. As the collection expanded, the institute inaugurated an exhibition on “Chinese Culture,” encompassing the evolution of writing and language, epigraphy, and the development of boundaries through the ages. The exhibition sought to fulfill the significance of “promoting the culture of the country and giving the public a fair idea of the culture of the country” (Tsinanfu Institute 1931, p. 5). In the 1940s, religious content was even no longer the main exhibit of the institute, as evident from photographs held at Yale University Divinity Library. In the central hall of the institute (the No. 1 exhibition hall), the floor was dominated by a politically symbolic model of the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, and a whale skeleton representing a high-level natural collection hung in the air. On the walls, various transportation modes from different world ethnicities were displayed, with the beams adorned with famous quotes from Chinese Confucian classics such as the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Book of Rites*—none of which necessarily related to theological

concepts (Figure 2a). The theological subject matter was placed on equal footing with these exhibits, consisting of excerpts from biblical content such as the *Acts of the Apostles*. Despite the consistent inclusion of the “Bible” as a focal point of the exhibition, more and more aspects of Chinese culture were incorporated, such as filial piety stories that were important to Confucian thought, which eventually received separate cabinets (Figure 2b).

The trend towards the Chinese way in all aspects of Tsinanfu Institute helps to make it integrated into the local community and Chinese society, gaining popularity and wide acceptance by the public. During the same period, other church museums in Shandong almost required visitors to listen to preaching before appreciating—the same was true for the early period of Tsinanfu Institute—Whitewright was one of the first to waive this policy (Shandong Historical Committee 1996). The institute took the lead in implementing the free-visiting mode, except for a few years later when tickets were charged due to high foot traffic, opening for more than 7 h every day from Monday to Saturday (CPPCC Historical Committee 1996; Zhang and Jiao 2005). Therefore, as the writer Lao She noted, “When the country people go to Jinan to catch the fair, they must visit the Tsinanfu Institute” (Lao She 1932). In 1912, the institute served 231,117 visitors throughout the year, of whom 50,000 were educated, 21,310 were women, and 931 lectures were held, with attendance ranging from 40 to 200, and 187 European and American visitors paid for their visit (Whitewright 1910). According to a survey conducted by the Department of Sociology of Cheeloo University, the annual attendance of the institute around 1924 was more than 500,000, including a large number of visitors from abroad, a figure roughly equivalent to the total population of Jinan at that time (Parker [1924] 1993). Considering the annual budget from the English Baptist Missionary Society to the institute during the same period (around USD 4000), the budget per audience was less than 1 cent per annum (UBCHEA 1921). Meanwhile, the tremendous amount of traffic dramatically changed the neighborhood around the museum. Many Western expatriates congregated here, and Chinese business people also come to gather here. A British report commented: “Wealthy men began to build for themselves dwellings adjacent regardless of ‘luck’ (Affected by cemeteries). Some years later, when the site of the Shantung Christian University was decided upon, the practical value of the Institute was shown.” (A.H. S. 1917).

However, it should also be noted that localization is not equal to independence. The localization of Tsinanfu Institute began around 1913, during the historical period of the awakening of nationalism, and can be seen as an adaptive behavior commonly adopted by Western institutions in China. The timing, manner, and scale of this adjustment are almost determined by Western management, and the “good” of China and the Chinese people mentioned by Whitewright was also primarily in the sense of religion and promoted by the church. In fact, the localization reform of Tsinanfu Institute did not deeply touch the management. Before being taken over by Shandong Province Chinese Christianity in 1948, the institute did not have a Chinese director; only a few Chinese people who had studied in the West served as deputy directors. Of course, in any case, the process of localization undoubtedly exists and is becoming increasingly evident. The localization of the institute not only created a long-term harmonious relationship with the local community but also brought great success to itself and its affiliated churches, making it a typical example of the process of “localization” of the ministries of Western churches coming to China in the early 20th century. This operational concept revealed a respect for the country, the community, and the culture of the country in which it was located, which was still very meaningful in the context of the time as a friend of Whitewright wrote a eulogy in his honor: “(Whitewright) who ever looked for what was best in China and her people. He had his reward in the affection and confidence of those about him. His relations with all classes of the Chinese were cordial, and at the same time, he cultivated friendly intercourse with the foreign community in Tsinan.” (Burt 1926) Looking at various foreign-based church organizations throughout China and outside the Western world, this process may have universal similarities, reflecting a global phenomenon of changing religious concepts and awakening nation-state consciousness.

5. Extension Department: New Development of the Museum as a University-Affiliated Institution

In 1917, under the unification arrangement of the Christian churches in Shandong, the church schools from Qingzhou (formerly known as Tsingchowfu) and Weixian were unified and moved to Jinan to jointly form a university later known as Cheeloo University (i.e., Shantung Christian University). Due to the good Christian atmosphere in the neighborhood of Tsinanfu Institute, which was religion-friendly, the new campus was located there. Tsinanfu Institute was then merged into Cheeloo University and has since become an extension department of the university, along with arts and sciences, theology, and medicine (Wang 2008).

According to the *Charter of Cheeloo University*, the purpose of the Tsinanfu Institute, as a social education department, was stated as “Religion: to elucidate the Way of Heaven; Education: to subsidize education; Communication: to liaise between the East and the West” (Cheeloo University 1921), which was consistent with the original program of the institution in terms of its macro-direction. At the same time, to better fulfill its function as an institution of higher education, the specific functions and missions of the institute have also adjusted accordingly, mainly manifested in two aspects. The first is to promote higher education and scientific research, which can be said to promote the realization of the educational function of the university; the second is to enhance the liaison and communication between the university and society, which can be said to compensate the educational function of the university towards the general public by the museum. As Whitewright said: “A home where all are welcome, a school where all may learn, and a door through which to bring the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ.” (Ingle 1925) In practice, Tsinanfu Institute has gained access to a wide range of high-level resources available at the university through the merger, which provides the basis for further optimizing the museum’s educational, scientific research, and social service functions. Accordingly, the institute has adjusted its management system and mode of operation following the university’s nature of scientific research and education.

Firstly, the operational team was expanded under the standards of a higher education institution. Tsinanfu Institute used to have very few regular employees due to financial constraints, and Whitewright himself had to take on model-making for a long time (A Correspondent 1926). As the financial situation improved after the merger, by around 1926, the institute had a professional team of building maintenance, model making, and audience service (Figure 3a). It also employed more than 20 Chinese staff, including supervisors, officers, technicians, and male and female preachers (Yard 1925; Zhu and Gao 1993). More university professors began to serve as leaders and participate in academic affairs, as mentioned in a letter from Whitewright in 1921: “Over twenty professors, Chinese and foreign, have in one way or another taken part in the work of this department, for the most part in lectures and addresses.” (UBCHEA 1921) After the death of Whitewright in 1926, except for Henry Payne, who acted as a church officer for a short term, the following three directors, H. R. Williamson, J. C. Harris, and F. S. Drake, were professors at Cheeloo University and missionaries at the same time. The vice deans and assistants were selected among the Chinese elite. Williamson was well-versed in ancient Chinese history, Drake was a proficient librarian of classical Chinese literature and the former director of the University Library, and Tang Enliang (唐恩良), who had returned from his studies at Purdue University in the United States, was appointed as the first Chinese vice-director of the institute (Cheeloo University 1921). Their appointments have markedly enhanced the professionalism of the institute, reflecting the significant benefits of university resource intervention in the development of the museum’s academic level.



Figure 3. Photos of Tsinanfu Institute in 1947: (a) workshops showing model makers at work: 4 Chinese and 1 Westerner are working on painting models for the various displays; (b) astronomy models “are of great value in teaching students”. Source: (UBCHEA 1947).

Secondly, the quality of collections and exhibits has been upgraded. Since its establishment, Tsinanfu Institute already arranged exhibitions on nature and science. However, due to the lack of funding and access to these exhibits, they were generally of low quality and standard, and many of the exhibitions had to be filled with models. After the institute merged into Cheeloo University, specimens and materials obtained by other faculties in their research and investigation activities were preserved in large quantities in the Tsinanfu Institute, which were used for exhibitions and as college teaching aids (Figure 3b). During Drake’s tenure as director, he organized multiple academic collaborations to complete archaeological surveys of the Longshan culture Chengzi cliff (城子崖) site and the Han dynasty Dongpingling site (东平陵故城), as well as geological surveys of the Mount Taishan strata and the Zibo coal beds, and the outputs of the specimens and models as well as the materials were soon incorporated into the exhibitions (Jinan CPPCC Historical Committee 1984).

Thirdly, in line with the academic research standard, Tsinanfu Institute began undertaking a wide range of scientific research, academic publishing, and conferences at Cheeloo University in the 1920s. Paul D. Bergen, an American missionary who was once the president of the university, donated some of the oracle bones collected over the years to the Tsinanfu Institute. In order to protect and study this vital batch of ancient documents, the institute invited several experts to formulate a new type of lacquer anti-moth-eaten protection method and invited Cheeloo University professor J.M. Menzies to perform the facsimile and interpretation, which resulted in the formation of the *Bergen’s Old Collection*. The institute also successively published the *Zhilue of the Tsinanfu Institute*, *The First Glimpse of Greek Script Law* (Menzies 1936; Tsinanfu Institute 1931; Li 1937), and other thematic works, as well as instruction manuals for medicine and agronomy, which were distributed in the exhibitions. In addition, the institute also regularly held large-scale exhibitions on rural development and health topics during the spring and fall seasons annually. It also functioned as a venue for pivotal academic conferences, including the Conference of the Chinese Society for the Improvement of Education (1922) and the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Chinese Economics Society (1933) (Tian 1986; Ma 2017). Renowned educator Hu Shi, who attended one of these conferences and made a visit, recorded in his diary: “This institution has become an important educational institution in Shandong society.” (Hu [1922] 2003).

Fourthly, as the Extension Department of the university, Tsinanfu Institute’s newly revised constitution stipulated its mission to “liaise with people from all walks of life in China and the West in order to serve the community” and to “make up for the inadequacies of school and family education”. Therefore, the institute further promotes public education and the education of women and children (Cheeloo University 1921). The institute fully guaranteed public education by setting up a women’s affairs committee and a public

education committee in the board of directors' meeting, as well as a women's section and a juvenile section in eight subordinate departments to ensure that the relevant activities could be carried out. These units have also promoted some exhibits related to the welfare of women and children to enter the exhibition. (Tsinanfu Institute 1931, pp. 10–11; Ingle 1925). Subsequently, the institute carried out a more comprehensive range of socio-educational activities. The main target groups were women, children and young people, and farmers in the countryside, and the main forms included holding public schools for both men and women, which offered daily classes in literacy, arithmetic, hygiene, and general knowledge without any enrollment requirements and free of charge (Tsinanfu Institute 1931, pp. 8–10). Free summer schools are for elementary school students, teaching the Bible and developing students' artistic competence over 6 weeks. Children could experience scouting, chanting, and acting (Jinan CPPCC Historical Committee 1985).

Tsinanfu Institute was incorporated into the university between 1917 and 1931², directly due to the merger of the church schools in the Shandong area, but the deep cause is the strategic adjustments made by the church in China in light of China's national conditions. Due to the rapid awakening of national consciousness in China in the early 20th century and the increasing friction between the people and the direct missionary activities of the church, the education of China's elites in the church was gradually regarded as an essential means of enhancing the missionary work (Xu 1999). The essence of the incorporation of Tsinanfu Institute into the university is an enhancement of its function of serving higher education and optimizing the cultivation of elites with the museum's resources. Additionally, the various educational activities carried out by Tsinanfu Institute are an extension of the church's higher education to society, providing people who are interested in the church but cannot attend university with further opportunities to receive church education. During the same period, Musée de Zi-ka-wei, the earliest museum in mainland China, was also incorporated into Aurora University, founded by French Jesuits in 1930, but its main function is still centered on serving the university's education and scientific research on natural specimens (Tai 2013). From the perspective of dealing with the relationship between religion, museums, and society, the operational concepts of the different types of museums represented by Tsinanfu Institute and Musée de Zi-ka-wei vary greatly. Tsinanfu Institute is more inclined to expand its service and educational functions of the church universities to the society, choosing a missionary strategy that applies to both the intellectuals and the average in order to establish a bridge between church higher education and the people outside the campus.

In 1941, due to the Pacific War and Japan's war against the United Kingdom and the United States of America, all the institutions in the occupied area belonging to the church were occupied by Japanese invaders, and the Tsinanfu Institute was renamed the Science Museum. Although it remained open on the surface, many of its collections were plundered, the number of spectators was drastically reduced, and its educational function was greatly diminished. After China's victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the institute was recovered by the English Baptist Missionary Society, with Drake as its director, and after September 1948 (the PLA enters Jinan), it was taken over by the Shandong Province Chinese Christianity. In 1952, the Tsinanfu Institute was taken over by Shandong Province's Institute of Natural Science and was ultimately merged with a part of the present-day Shandong Museum, with its original architectural site surviving today as a "national key cultural relics protection unit". Additionally, the Tsingchowfu Museum also survives today as a "provincial key cultural relics protection unit".

6. Conclusions

Previous studies of the history of Christianity in China have commonly highlighted the trinity of the modern evangelical movement, comprising churches, schools, and hospitals (Xu 2010). These three departments are relatively direct forms of evangelism and embody the characteristic of aiming at the intellectuals. This approach hopes to directly influence a small group of elite nationals, thereby driving the evangelization of the whole

society. Church museums have received relatively little attention in the examination of church history, with scant recognition of their significance in the missionary endeavor. Nevertheless, an analysis of the case of Tsinanfu Institute reveals that ecclesiastical museums filled a crucial gap in engaging with the middle and lower classes of society. Through a “bottom-up” approach, these museums disseminated theological knowledge, projected the church’s image, and fostered religious connections with millions of ordinary people. Their profound impact on local communities and populations underscores the importance of regarding church museums as vital instruments for propagating modern Christianity beyond Western boundaries.

The church museums, such as the Tsinanfu Institute studied in this paper, known as “public cultural museums” or “missionary museums” in academia, are established by foreign organizations with the aim of attracting people or shaping the image of the church by imparting technological and cultural knowledge. They have a unique historical background as they exhibit certain deficiencies and gaps compared to conventional museums. Generally, they are established in “foreign” countries, lack outstanding collections, struggle to provide profound education, and lack high-level artistic design, among other issues. Therefore, these types of church museums can only exist in situations where the sending country is highly developed in science with a strong missionary zeal, while the receiving country is significantly backward and has a low level of education. As this gap gradually narrows or closes, the avenues through which these museums fulfill their mission become increasingly narrow. Only through continuous ideological reforms and adjustments in working methods can they maintain their appeal to the local population and sustain their development. Many early museums initially only had one or a few basic museum functions, but gradually became equipped with functions such as collection, protection, display, education, research, leisure, etc. in the development process, thus achieving the transformation to a fully functional museum. Such changes are inevitable for them, failure to transform in a timely or sufficient manner can easily lead to their elimination by rapidly evolving societies. Focusing on the Tsinanfu Institute as a representative case study, its several successful transformations reflect the changing demands of Chinese society on museums and cultural institutions during its period. According to this paper, there have been four important conceptual innovations in Tsinanfu Institute’s establishment and development, which can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Implement universal and open mass missionary.
- (2) Shift to educational and socially oriented museums.
- (3) Valuing local culture in exhibits and activities.
- (4) Comprehensive transformation towards multifaceted cultural institutions.

In terms of chronological order, these four conceptual innovations occurred successively, with a clear sequence between them. They do not exist as distinct or independent entities but rather as a step-wise progression. In this process, the curiosity of the Chinese people, the need for common knowledge education, national self-esteem, as well as the demand for learning and experiential activities played crucial roles. Looking at the later stages of Tsinanfu Institute’s development, it can be said that it embodies the key characteristics of all four conceptual innovations. Throughout the same period in China, including other forms of church-established museums, this process of transformation is widespread and similar. For example, the Musée de Zi-ka-wei, established earlier, focused primarily on collection and research rather than exhibition. However, starting in the 1930s, it rapidly expanded its public exhibition space and moved to a newly constructed building open for public visitation. This developmental trend is also evident in several museums founded by Chinese individuals directly influenced and propelled by the Tsinanfu Institute, including the Tianjin Institute³ and several museums aimed at broadening the views of local people.

The missionary operational concepts of the Tsinanfu Institute underwent a process of socialization, education, localization, and popularization of higher education, which not only epitomizes the development of traditional Christian evangelism, social gospel, and vernacularization but also coincides with the process of the emergence of the new muse-

logical thought in Britain and the United States at that time. Through an examination of the evolving operational concepts of church museums, exemplified by Tsinanfu Institute, insights can be gleaned into the evolving missionary strategies of churches in China and global trends in Christian thought.

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Notes

- ¹ J. S. Whitewright (1858–1926), born in Edinburgh, was an English Baptist clergyman after graduating from the Baptist College at Bristol in 1879. He was dispatched as a missionary to Qingzhou, formerly known as Tsingchowofu, the political center of Shandong in ancient times. In 1887, he founded Gotch-Robinson Theological College (培真书院) in Qingzhou and Tsingchowofu Museum on the campus. In 1904, Whitewright moved the Tsingchowofu Museum to Jinan, formerly known as Tsinanfu, which had gradually replaced Qingzhou as the capital city of Shandong province since the 14th century. In the same year, he established Tsinanfu Institute and was the director until 1926.
- ² In 1931, in order to fulfill the requirements of the Ministry of Education of the Government, Tsinanfu Institute became independent of Cheeloo University. However, it still maintained a close relationship with the university.
- ³ Tianjin Institute (天津广智馆), built in 1925, was founded by educators Yan Xiu and Lin Moqing. It was the first private museum in Tianjin by Chinese, and its Chinese and English names are synonyms with the Tsinanfu Institute.

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