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ARTICLE

THE EMBODIMENTS OF DISCIPLINE IN MUSEUMS: TAKING THE CAPITAL MUSEUM AS AN EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

In Foucault's conception, space and power are closely related, and spatial discipline is a crucial idea. Through the analysis of military camps, prisons, hospitals, schools, etc. in 17-19 centuries, Foucault proposes that discipline, as an art of distribution, has the characteristics of enclosure, partitioning, function, and rank. There are three main approaches to discipline: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. He also puts forward the idea of "panopticism", which he thinks has highly universal potential and has been extended to every corner of society.

Although Foucault does not discuss museums in detail in his research, it is still possible to find a place for museums in his conception of spatial theory. The museum, as a public cultural space, is an important part of Chinese socialist culture, and also an important place to enhance national ideology and cultural identity. This paper combines theoretical analysis and case study and takes the Capital Museum in China after the pandemic in 2020 as an example to make an in-depth analysis of the disciplinary practices embodied in the museum today. The paper points out that there exists discipline in museum space and the disciplinary role of museums is mainly reflected in the following aspects: the architectural structure of museums, the spatial location of exhibits, the planning of visiting routes, the arrangement of the staff and the norms and regulations of museums.

KEY WORDS

Space, Discipline, The Capital Museum, Panopticism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Space and time are two important dimensions of human perception of the world. However, throughout traditional western philosophy, time is more concerned by philosophers. It was not until the middle and late 20th century that multiple disciplines began to study space in depth^[1]. With the deepening of current research, space is no longer just explained on the physical plane. The concept of "space" runs throughout Foucault's thought. He analyses the relationship between space, power, and body from the perspective of sociology, and thinks that space is not only the basis of all public life, but also the basis of any power operation^[2]. Modern space displays the comprehensive application of knowledge and power, and space is no longer regarded as "dead, rigid, and static"^[3].

Foucault takes prisons, military camps, schools, and hospitals from the 17th to 19th centuries as examples. He claims that discipline does not mean physical punishment or institutions in a general sense, but subtly influences individuals and makes them submit to the existing socio-cultural order. A museum is also a site for the state to regulate the morality and behaviour of people, as well as a means to govern and educate the public. The social landscape drawn by Foucault constitutes the background of the museum to discipline the public^[4]. Therefore, although Foucault does not thoroughly discuss the power and discipline existing in museums, his research is of great value to the museum.

This paper adopts the research method of combining theoretical analysis

and case study. This paper is divided into five parts: the first chapter introduces the writing background; the second chapter introduces the relevant theories used, including space, discipline, and panopticism. The third and fourth chapters are the key parts of this paper. The third chapter focuses on the discipline embodied in the architectural space, and the fourth chapter analyses the specific disciplinary means adopted in the Capital Museum. Finally, the paper makes a summary of the discipline embodied in the museum and points out some shortcomings of this research.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Spatial discipline is an important aspect of Foucault's thought, and this chapter will address each of the theories used in this paper: space, discipline, and panopticism.

Before the 20th century, most scholars believed that time was more important than space, and "Time... Logically takes precedence over space^[5]." While in the second half of the 20th century, space gradually became the focus of theoretical research. With many changes, the spatial research paradigm in the 20th century moved from the geographical level to the sociological level. Foucault points out that the anxiety of our times has a fundamental relationship with space, more than with time^[6]. Foucault has a profound understanding of space. He observes that power exists by virtue of space, and that power is diffused in space, thus space is not only the basis of all public life, but also the basis of any exercise

of power^[2]. Another institution– museum, and another discipline– Art History – both apply to Foucault’s idea^[7].

The elucidation of discipline is also a necessary condition for understanding spatial discipline. In the English dictionary, “discipline” is defined as the practice of training people to obey rules and orders and punishing them if they do not; the controlled behaviour or situation that results from this training; or an area of knowledge; a subject that people study or are taught, especially in a university^[8]. Foucault points out that in the 17th and 18th centuries, discipline became a general form of domination, which was different from “slavery, vassalage, asceticism or ‘disciplines’ of a monastic type”, but meant the use of mechanism to manipulate and shape individuals, making them more obedient^[9]. Such “discipline” no longer only refers to the brutal punishment of the body, but turns to the control of individual psychology and behaviour, which is gentler. As a cultural exhibition institution, the museum also symbolizes a more subtle “show and tell” power.

The next step is to move on to “spatial discipline”, which is explained by Li Saiqiao and Pang Hong as follows:

Spatial discipline refers to the deliberate planning, setting, and construction of space, which has a subtle influence on the psychological state and personality structure of individuals, making them submissive to the established socio-cultural order and gradually transforming them into a docile and efficient “disciplined species”^[10].

That is to say, discipline can be developed through space. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes four aspects of the discipline, including control, classification, and planning of space, time, human development and its dynamics^[11]. He considers space planning to be the Art of distributions, which is mainly concerned with four important characteristics, namely enclosure, partitioning, function and rank. He also proposes three main means of discipline: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination.

Foucault refers to “Panoptic prison” as the most perfect model of spatial discipline. Bentham, a British utilitarian thinker, puts forward a hypothetical prison “Panopticon”, which constitutes the architectural image of discipline. Its basic construction principle is as follows:

... at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other... in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible^[9].

Foucault holds the view that the panoptic architecture can have universal application and should not be limited to the specific space similar to the prison, but expanded to all corners of the society. Today, Panopticism has been widely adopted by many institutions, including governments, courts, schools, psychiatric hospitals and military camps, thus becoming the institutionalized basis for the establishment of the modern state authority^[10].

3. DISCIPLINE EMBODIED IN THE ARCHITECTURAL SPACE

Foucault thinks that space discipline, as an art of distribution, has important characteristics such as enclosure, partitioning, function, etc. This chapter will analyse how these features are embodied in the architectural structure of the Capital Museum.

Discipline sometimes requires the enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself^[9]. Like military camp, schools and factories, which are completely enclosed within high walls, museums are constructed in such a way that individuals (i.e., visitors to the museum) must be enclosed in airless interior space, and only visitors who have made “reservations”, “ticket checks” and “security checks” can enter. As shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the strict security measures and high walls in the Capital Museum.

Just as the panoptic prison is a site of discipline built for prisoners, the purpose of museum enclosure is to: Restrict the entry of irrelevant personnel outside the museum to avoid the occurrence of riots or unsafe



Figure 1: Strict security measures.



Figure 2: High walls.



Figure 3: The entrance of an exhibition hall.

incidents; supervise the activities of individuals within the museum effectively, so that all individuals are kept within a fixed space.

The “enclosure” machinery works space in a much more flexible and detailed way, namely partitioning, which means that space is subdivided into smaller “elements”^[9]. In terms of the Capital Museum, the following measures reflect the partitioning of spatial discipline: the separation of the showrooms, the distribution of exhibition halls on different floors, and the division of departments in the museum. In such a venue, visitors are placed in separate spaces within the museum, so that their movements and activities at any given moment can be monitored by staff. The museum carefully organizes the space for the halls and the position of exhibits, showing control and discipline to the audience. As shown in Figure 3, the entrance of a permanent exhibition hall on the second floor of the Capital Museum, *Ancient Capital, Chapter on the History and Culture of Beijing*, is separated by glass panels, which plan visitor’s walking routes. Such a spatial design has a subtle but mandatory effect on visitors’ browsing behaviour to control and guide them and effectively avoid the intensive gathering of people on both sides of the exhibition cabinet. It was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, and anti-concentration^[12].

In Figure 4, at the entrance of the museum, space is divided into folded lines with isolation belts to avoid crowding during peak times and effectively divert the flow of visitors.

Based on the analysis of Rochefort hospital and factories that appeared at the end of 18 century, Foucault also suggests that space should be a “functional site”, some special spaces are designated not only to meet the need to monitor and break harmful links, but also to create a useful space^[9]. In the Enlightenment period, museums were regarded as art education institutions, and the purpose of the construction of museums was to educate the public^[13]. This is also one of the most important functions currently undertaken by museums, which will not be described



Figure 4: The entrance of the museum.



Figure 5: Notice.



Figure 6: Temporary Isolation Area.

too much in this paper. Besides, during the 2020 global pandemic, in accordance with the instructions of The Epidemic Prevention Centre in Beijing, the Capital Museum has implemented a staggered booking system based on the actual situation. Besides, museum staffs must strictly detect tourists' temperature, check "Health Kit" and force visitors to wear masks. For emergencies (e.g. patients with fever), a dedicated isolation "Temporary Isolation Area" has been set up with epidemic prevention materials, including medicine cabinet, masks, alcohol, hand sanitizer, etc., as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

In conclusion, the essence of space and discipline lies in the creation of "complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical"^[9], as reflected in the concrete, tangible spaces of the Capital Museum.

4. DISCIPLINARY MEANS ADOPTED IN MUSEUMS

The previous chapters discuss the discipline embodied in architectural space in the Capital Museum. This chapter will discuss different disciplinary measures represented by museums: hierarchical



Figure 7: Staff in the exhibition hall.

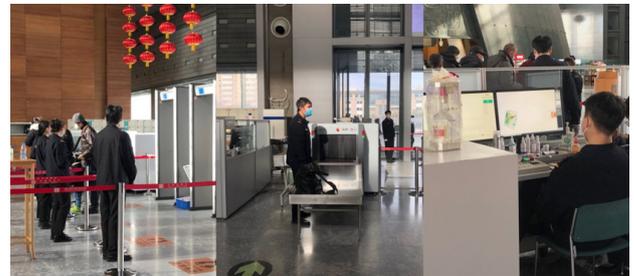


Figure 8: The security check work by staff.

observation, normalizing judgment, and the combination of the two in the examination.

Observatories are required for the implementation of discipline. Foucault proposes these "observatories" had an almost ideal model: the military camp^[9]. The camp is the diagram of a power that acts by means of general visibility^[14] like strict rules of access, number and distribution of tents, arrangement of soldiers, etc. This architecturally constructed space achieves better surveillance, not only in prisons, schools, hospitals, but also in museums. Museums are places to consume, watch and learn, also places for warders to control, guide and investigate their behaviour^[15]. In such a place, visitors are placed in separate spaces within the museum, so that their movements and activities at any time can be monitored by managers or monitors. Each exhibition hall in the Capital Museum is equipped with a staff, as shown in Figure 7, who holds a "Please keep quiet" sign. The role of these staff is to monitor and discipline visitors: to supervise visitors for misbehaviour, and to manage or guide visitors who misbehave wrong in order to achieve individual discipline. Also, surveillance equipment in every corner and mobile staffs on every floor are constantly watching and constraining the behaviour of visitors.

The power of the "Norm" appears through the disciplines^[9]. The author analyses the norm in the museum including the code of conduct, regulations, relevant laws, etc. The Capital Museum has the following information listed on its WeChat website: a. Flammable, explosive, controlled weapons, etc. are strictly prohibited from being brought into the museum. b. No cameras in the exhibition hall... c. Consciously maintain environment... After entering the museum, the visitors also enter into a "huge power space". The rules of the museum always restrict the behaviour of the visitors, such as keeping quiet, taking the temperature according to the regulations, visiting according to certain routes and other regulations mentioned above. In the museum, visitors are placed in the power order of the space, and must adjust their behaviour to the requirements and norms of the space under the gaze of staff, supervisors, and each other.

The third means of discipline mentioned by Foucault is the combination of the above in examination. The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement^[9]. In the 18th century, regulations began to require doctors to make "visits" every day, transforming hospitals into "inspection institutions". Schools had gradually become test-taking institutions. In the museum, the most intuitive "examination" is the "security check" at the entrance of the venue. As shown in Figure 8, staffs were assigned to check ID information and Health kits, scan bodies with metal sensors and check bags and belongings. One of the functions of examination is to introduce individuality into the field of documentation^[9]. For the Capital Museum, recording the identity information of each visitor has the following functions: to facilitate tracing the movements of individuals who may be infected during the epidemic; to be incorporated into the museum

system to analyse the annual visitor flow and other data of the museum, so as to improve and present the museum information.

5. SUMMARY

As a public cultural space, museums encounter great challenges in their functions such as cultural dissemination and education when facing unexpected public events. In the face of the public health emergency COVID-19, museums respond positively. In the early stage of the pandemic, museums closed their venues to coordinate the national work. Museums in Beijing have been reopened since April 29, when the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Cultural Heritage announced that museums in Beijing would be allowed to resume operation from May 1, 2020^[16]. Taking the Capital Museum after the epidemic as a case study, this paper analyzes the space of the museum in terms of two main aspects: the characteristics of the architectural space and the means of discipline, and concludes that the disciplinary effect of the museum on visitors is mainly reflected in the following aspects: the architectural structure of the museum, the spatial location of exhibits, the planning of the visitor route, the arrangement of staff in the exhibition halls, as well as the regulations of the museum. It can be seen that the discipline in the museum makes it well equipped to fulfil its social responsibilities. The staggered booking system, the visitor information system, the ticketing and security checks, and the monitoring system within the museum all visually reflect how the museum discipline its visitors. Visitors are subject to the discipline and restriction of the museum throughout the whole process from booking to finishing the visit. It is not difficult to see how such highly visible disciplinary means ensured the safety of visitors and the smooth progress of museum work in this special period, just like the form of disciplinary power in the 19th century described by Foucault.

Foucault is devoted to investigating how power and discipline play a role in space, which provides a solid theoretical basis for this paper to study the spatial discipline of museums. In addition to the highly visible and intuitive means mentioned in this paper, museums also have more subtle and hidden ways to restrict and guide people's visiting behaviours, such as the use of the internet and new media in cultural communication. Given the limited time and ability, the author did not further analyse the value of museum research from this perspective. There is still much to be researched in depth in this paper, which is exactly what the author needs to continue to learn in the future.

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