

Ming Costumes in Memory

China National Silk Museum, Hangzhou, China

Institution Information

Located close to the famous West Lake in Hangzhou, China National Silk Museum (NSM) is a state-level museum with 9,000 square meters of galleries, surrounded by a traditional southern Chinese garden of 40,000 square meters. Established in 1992, NSM is one of the largest museums in the world specializing in textiles. The main goal of NSM is to research, conserve, exhibit, and educate the public on textiles and costumes.

In 2016, NSM underwent a major renovation, significantly increasing its gallery spaces and facilities. It can now house a permanent collection of over 40,000 pieces of Chinese and Western textiles and dresses. With this large amount of collections that span over 4,000 years of human creativity, NSM has organized various exhibitions and has become a leading fashion institution. It is the only museum in China with a permanent fashion gallery. The museum now aims to tell the full story of textiles and dresses across time and cultures.

All projects in NSM are centered on silk. It is opened for all researchers, curators, and public interested in silk heritage, conservation technologies, traditional weaving and dress-making techniques, and contemporary fashion designs. In the meantime, NSM is also active in seeking collaboration opportunities worldwide, expanding its international outreach and impact in the service of the sustainable development of culture, economy, and society.

Project Description

Ming Costume in Memory is a large-scale project conducted from March 15th to June 5th, 2019. It featured the excavation of a joint tomb in Wangdian in November 2006. The tomb occupants included Li Xiang, an official active in mid- to late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), his wife, and his two concubines. 10 pieces of costumes were discovered in the M4 tomb, and sent to NSM for emergent protection, conservation treatment and long-term research.

Through thorough conservation work and scientific reproductions of the excavated pieces, NSM contributed new knowledge of Ming costume styles and weaving textiles to the current field of Chinese dress history, while advancing the understanding of the prosperous silk manufacture of that period. This project also considered the deep influences of the forms and cultures of Ming costumes on neighboring countries, especially Korea, where similar sartorial styles and systems were established. As an additional part to the project focusing on China, we collaborated with Korean National University of Cultural Heritage (KNU) to research Korean costumes and display reproductions, as a new angle to expanding the studies of Ming costume history.

1). Project components

The whole project lasted about three months, encompassing research, exhibitions, events

and social activities. The main parts of the project consisted of two exhibitions and a major event called China Ming Costume Festival, with additional evening events, monthly lectures and weekly trainings.

- **The exhibition *Costumes in Memory***

The exhibition *Costumes in Memory: Sino-Korean Joint Conservation Project of Ming Dynasty Textiles* was the core of the eponymous project. It displayed silk garments, textiles of the tomb in Wangdian and some replicas of Ming costumes. Since the excavation, NSM carried out emergency protection, conservation treatment and long-term research for the group of silk costumes and textiles of Wangdian.

The most important factor of the exhibition was the conservation, restoration and reproduction process for collections. The treatments executed on the costumes unearthed from the M4 Tomb in Wangdian were all based on studies of ancient textile and traditional techniques of costumes, which largely extend the longevity of the textile objects. As for the replica project, it analyzed and reproduced the complex textile manufacturing techniques of the Ming Dynasty, which facilitated the preservation and heritage of the culture.

The long-term preparations for the exhibition included conserving and reproducing the textile collections, conducting academic research for Chinese traditional clothing structure in Ming Dynasty period, curating the whole exhibition, and so on. All details including conservation report, exhibition catalog and brochure were uploaded in the official website of NSM at:

http://www.chinasilkmuseum.com/yz/info_98.aspx?itemid=27354

- **The exhibition *Traditional Korean Costumes and Textile***

During the exhibition period, NSM opened another exhibition *Traditional Korean Costumes and Textile* concurrently, also in collaboration with KNU, focusing on presenting traditional Korean costumes, fabrics and the weaving and dyeing techniques used in the costume making process. By coordinating with each other in different galleries, the two exhibitions provided an informative comparison between Chinese and Korean traditional cultures, while illuminating on a complete clothing system of the Ming Dynasty. NSM also posted all details of this exhibition, so audiences who missed the exhibition can be easily check the exhibition introduction site at:

http://www.chinasilkmuseum.com/yz/info_98.aspx?itemid=27356

- **Chinese Ming Costume Festival**

In April 2019, the Chinese Costume Festival featuring a theme on the Ming Dynasty was held in NSM. The audience was guided through the exhibition *Costumes in Memory*, observed the conserved Ming costumes, and attended academic lectures from experts.

Evening event “Hanfu Evening” was held at the night of China Ming Costume Festival. “Hanfu,” literally meaning Han Chinese garments, is a contemporary term referring to newly tailored costumes in the traditional styles to be worn, which range from relatively faithful reproductions to imaginary versions loosely incorporating traditional elements. Along the theme “Ming Dynasty”, NSM invites performers from China and Korea to perform in all kinds of the costumes designed in the Ming Style. The event aimed to create a platform for audiences to communicate Chinese and Korean traditional clothing cultures, and to prove a channel for bridging modern fashion and traditional dress. More image and video information about the

event can be found at: http://www.chinasilkmuseum.com/info_182.aspx?itemid=29534

2). Goals of the project

The central goal of this project was to showcase the achievements in researching and conserving the 10 pieces of Ming-dynasty costumes excavated from the Wandian tomb. NSM tried its best to bring archaeological evidence as accurately as possible, so the audience was able to trace back the Chinese dress history in the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries. In the meantime, by presenting the Chinese and Korean Traditional costumes simultaneously, *Ming Costume in Memory* aimed to help public to distinguish the differences in the clothing systems between the two countries in the same period.

Along with the goal of exploring the past, NSM also set objectives to encourage the niche fashion in the present time, that is, to encourage more public interests in wearing Hanfu in daily life, which offers a channel to access the tradition.

3). Outputs

All aspects of the project received positive outcomes. The average flow rate was about 60-70 thousand visitors each month. The visitors primarily consisted of academic researchers, students, and Hanfu fans. Many of them were willing to visit the exhibitions over and over again, while participating in other activities.

The Chinese Costume Festival in Ming Theme was tremendously popular. During the festival period, the museum was full of people dressing in Ming-inspired costumes, with a daily flow about two to three times more than normal. All lectures were reserved soon after the announcements were posted.

There were over ten reports about the project by official media, including conservation, exhibitions, activities, etc. The international reports mainly focused on Korean media since the KNU participated in the project.

4). Intended impact or contribution

The most significant impact of the project is to bring the public awareness of the importance of Chinese Costume. It inspired a large audience to develop an interest and historical understanding of traditional dress. Discussions of the project and Ming Costume have flourished on the social media since this project took place. For NSM, although the institution started its research on Chinese costume history in 2018, it was not regarded as the authority until Ming Costume in Memory opened.

A Brief Summary of How It Meets the Award Criteria

Ming Costume in Memory was a large-scale team project. It explored the potential of the combination of traditional dress and contemporary fashion. Through careful research, NSM replicated the costumes of the Ming Dynasty, differentiated the clothing system between China and Korea, and created opportunities for modern fashion to absorb the unique features of historical dress.

In order to advance the knowledge of Ming Costume, NSM was fully involved in the excavation, conservation, and restoration of the costumes found in the tomb, so experts were able to restore the costumes of the Ming Dynasty as accurately as possible. For the Korean costume exhibition, the museum cooperated with professors and researchers from Korean National University of Cultural Heritage to ensure the correct knowledge of Korean traditional garments. In addition, NSM also invited various academic experts in the costume research field to give world-class lectures.

The project understood its target audience very well. We carried out the project with a consideration that young people and Hanfu lovers needed a platform to communicate and learn about Chinese costumes with professional guidance. All aspects of the project aimed to suite the needs of the target audience, including collections, lectures, training, and activities. After the final investigation, NSM also found out that, the target audiences were the most active group of people on the Internet. Therefore, NSM benefited from their social network in disseminating information about the project.

Summary of Target Audience

The target audience of this project can be classified into two groups.

The first and most important group consisted of fans of Chinese costume history and costume reproductions. Their interests motivated them to attend the exhibitions and activities, to keep researching Chinese costumes, and to share knowledge in their communities. The museum provided a crucial platform for them. The visitors statistics of this exhibition showed that over 60% of visitors came because they were interested in Ming costumes. It is interesting to note that young people were the majority in the first group.

The other target audience NSM was the experts in the Chinese Costume field. Undoubtedly, they participated in this project because the displays or lectures provided substantial academic knowledge and helped advance the field. Their preference leaned towards visiting exhibitions repeatedly.

Attached Images of the Project



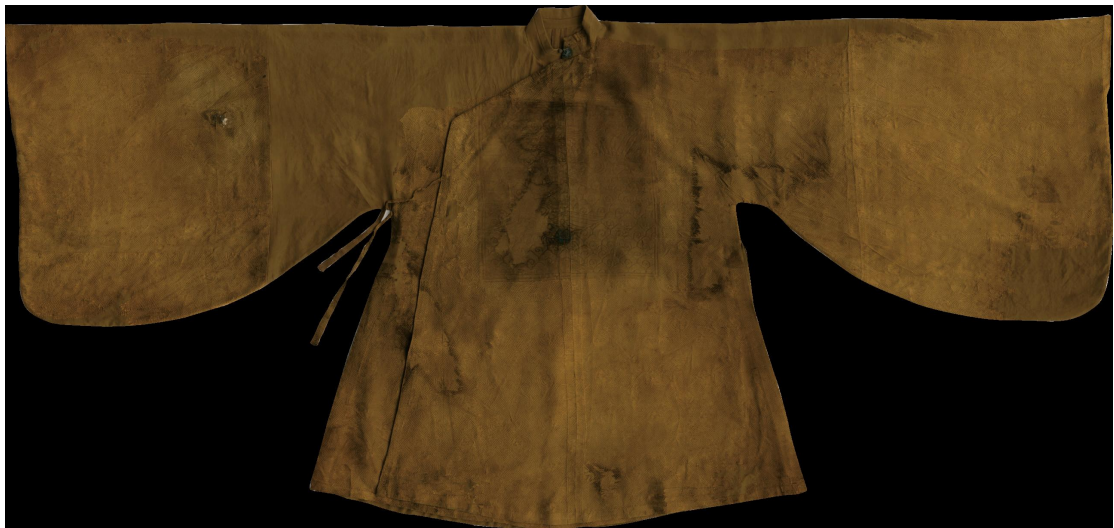
The conservation team of China National Silk Museum



China National Silk Museum signed Memorandum of Understanding with Korean National University of Cultural Heritage



The original pieces of a Ming costume (Collection Number: 2011.1.1) excavated from Wangdian



The same piece of Ming costume(Collection Number: 2011.1.1) after conservation



The replica of the same Ming costume(Collection Number: 2011.1.1) excavated from Wangdian



Traditional drawloom for Ming textile weaving



The exhibition *Costumes in Memory: Sino-Korean Joint Conservation Project of Ming Dynasty Textiles*



The exhibition *Traditional Korean Costumes and Textile*



Showing Ming costume to visiting group during the Festival



Evening of Ming costume during the Festival