

The Ministry of Education and the Establishment of the Modern Heritage Conservation System in late Qing Dynasty (1905-1912)

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Abstract

Since the New Deal of the late Qing dynasty, the importance of cultural relics as an important bearer of the national spirit and the heritage of civilization has gradually become more important with the enlightenment of civilization for benevolent scholars, government officials and others. In the late Qing dynasty, the government put cultural affairs under the Ministry of Rites, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of civil affairs. Although the ministry of Education was the education department, it made a significant contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage, including the opening of the Cun-gu Academy, the rescue of documentary heritage and the establishment of the Beijing library. It has played an indelible role in the establishment and development of the modern heritage conservation system.

Keywords

Late Qing Dynasty; Ministry of Education; Modern Heritage Conservation System.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background research

The establishment of the modern heritage conservation system has been a tortuous process, influenced by a variety of factors such as changes in the concept of heritage, the loss of a large number of cultural relics overseas, and the promotion of emerging academic groups. The first heritage protection laws and regulations, "the preservation of monuments to promote the methods" was promulgated in 1909, followed by the "preservation of antiquities temporary regulations" in 1916, "the preservation of famous monuments and antiquities regulations" in 1928, until 1930, the Nanjing National Government formally promulgated the "preservation of antiquities law", to formally mark the creation of modern China's heritage protection system.

Department of learning and the creation of modern heritage conservation system is closely related. Since its establishment in 1905, the Ministry of Education has assumed the role of unified management of national education, but because the late Qing Dynasty central government reform did not set up a special cultural management agency with modern significance, and therefore also manage the cultural undertakings, including museums, and made an important contribution to the cause of heritage conservation. In the late Qing Dynasty, the Ministry of Education rescued a large number of cabinet documents and Dunhuang stone room art scriptures, so that some of the literature from destruction or loss of fate. After the promulgation of the Measures for the Promotion of the Preservation of Monuments, the Ministry of Education, from the motive of preserving ancient cultural relics and enriching library collections, requested all provinces to investigate and report all monuments and provide assistance for the preservation of monuments.

1.2. Review of the literature

The author conducted an advanced search on the CNKI for "The Late Qing Ministry of Education" and "The Heritage Conservation Systems", selecting a total of 40 documents from 1989 to 2021, including 33 journal articles, three doctoral thesis, three master's thesis, one meeting minutes. From 1989 to 2006, only 10 articles were published, and from 2007 onwards, the number of publications gradually increased, with 29 new articles added to date; in terms of the content of the selection, there were 21 articles on people, 14 articles on the heritage conservation system of the late Qing and early Republican periods, and 5 articles on the heritage conservation function of the Ministry of Education.

At the present stage, research on the modern heritage conservation system is dominated by domestic studies, mainly in chronological order and in terms of the relevant institutions and elements of a particular piece of legislation as the object of study. The chronological study is relatively adequate, by listing the legal provisions, briefly recounting the major events, in order to build the overall process of change in the modern heritage protection system; the study of the elements as the object of study, the academic community more focused on the education management function of the late Qing Ministry of Education, while ignoring the Ministry's heritage protection functions, and therefore lack of thematic discussion of the relationship between the late Qing Ministry of Education and the modern heritage protection system.

The current domestic research on the Ministry of Education and the modern heritage conservation system is imperfect and fragmented. The relationship between the Ministry of Education and the modern heritage protection system is only partially mentioned in the independent study of the school or the modern heritage protection system, the modern heritage protection system research at the level of the ruling class concept of cultural relics needs to be improved, and it is lacking in the research on the relationship between the officials and the heritage protection function in the Ministry of Education. From this, it can be concluded that at this stage the study of the Ministry of Education and the modern heritage conservation system is scattered, systematic research are expecting to emerge.

In the work, this study analyzes how the Ministry of Education promoted the establishment of the modern heritage conservation system from three perspectives: the attitude and measures of the Ministry of Education toward heritage conservation, and the impact on the establishment of the modern heritage conservation system. The study of the link between the Ministry of Education and the establishment of the modern heritage protection system has important significance in the study of the factors affecting the establishment of the modern heritage protection system. The study of the Ministry of Education on the establishment of the modern heritage protection system help study how the late Qing government perfect the work of the heritage protection laws and regulations and the lessons learned for future generations. At the same time, this study can also be complementary to past research.

1.3. Defining the concept of late Qing period heritage

As heritage conservation was a new business at the time, there was a lack of mature concepts and practice in the country, and the concept and scope of "heritage" was relatively vague, with multiple expressions. And the regulations mainly use the expression "antiquities". Therefore, this paper uses the concept of "cultural relics", using the meaning of "antiquities". In the study of the concept of "antiquities", scholars have slightly different definitions of "antiquities". Li Xiaodong believes that, in the Republican period, "antiquities" mainly includes "all kinds of ancient artifacts and other movable cultural relics"[1]; Liu Shourou believes that, in the late Qing Dynasty, "cultural relics" and the term "antiquities" can be used to denote both "movable and immovable cultural relics"[2]. In view of this, the concept of "cultural relics" in this paper takes the meaning of ancient movable artefacts in "antiquities".

2. Personnel relations and attitudes towards heritage conservation Ministry of Education in late Qing Dynasty

2.1. Personnel relations in the Ministry of Education

In the late Qing Dynasty, the Ministry of Education was divided into the Zhili faction headed by Rong Qing and Yan Xiu, and the Hubei faction headed by Zhang Zhidong. At the early stage of the establishment, Rong Qing and Yan Xiu served as the Minister of Education and the Right Servant of the Ministry of Education respectively. Because of their close relationship with Yuan Shikai, the Ministry of Education was almost controlled by the Zhili faction headed by Yuan Shikai, and the management of the Ministry of Education was more adapted from the Zhili experience. In 1907, Zhang Zhidong took charge of the Ministry of Education as Minister of Military Affairs. In the early days of his tenure, Zhang Zhidong worked to improve the efficiency and quality of his staff, drawing on talent from all over the country, while at the same time overhauling the academic affairs of the provinces. As the two sides had different interests, often with different political views, and were in conflict, the Zhili and Hubei factions were formed within the Ministry of Education. But this does not mean that there is complete unity of position within the faction either. For example, Rongqing, although a member of Yuan Shih-k'ai's faction, advocated the old school and therefore often disagreed with Zhang Baixi, who advocated the new school.

2.2. The attitude of the Ministry of Education towards heritage conservation

The protection of cultural relics of Ministry of Education in late Qing Dynasty mainly happened in the period when Zhang Zhidong committed as the head of the Ministry of Education. Zhang Zhidong was fond of ancient books. When he was the governor of Huguang, he founded the Two Lakes Academy, and later, with Duanfang and Luo Zhenyu, he prepared the Beijing Library. In addition, the period, the Ministry gathered a large number of jinshi academic talent, such as Wang Guowei, Luo Zhenyu, etc.. They played an important role in the conservation of cultural relics in the Academic Department. It is worth noting that in 1907, Zhang Jian wrote to the Ministry of Education, "the old chapter of the Zhou official's external history" and "the old teaching of Confucius' book collection", citing scriptures and classics, stating that "the scriptures, the pictures, and the jinshi should be made public". It is also said that in "all the states of the East and West today", "the main part of the political and academic reference to support the schools is the library and the museum", and it was hoped that the Ministry of Education could follow the example of Japan, which has the best museum system, and set up an "Imperial Museum". It was hoped that the Ministry of Education would follow the example of Japan, which had the best museum system, and set up an "Imperial Museum" to promote national glory. Zhang Jian's proposal was forward-looking, but unfortunately it was not adopted by Zhang Zhidong and the Ministry of Education, the reasons for which are still to be studied.

3. Measures for heritage conservation by the late Qing Ministry of Education

3.1. Opening of the Cun-gu Academy

Zhang Zhidong was always committed to the preservation of the national essence through the establishment of the Cun-gu Academy. During his tenure as Governor of Huguang, he led the establishment of the Hubei Cun-gu Academy, which was followed by other provinces. After joining the capital, Zhang Zhidong submitted to the Ministry of Education to set the statutes of the Cun-gu Academy, considering that "the statutes have not yet been adopted, and that they may be different from each other, or may be famous but not real, or costly but less effective". He believed that "our country's ancient studies are profound and more difficult than other

scientific research" and requested an extension of the graduation year. In addition, in the proposed revised statutes of the Cun-gu Academy, Zhang Zhidong requested that the subjects of the Cun-gu Academy could be divided into three disciplines: scripture, history, and lexicography. The charter also mentioned that "Epigraphy, can be a resource for examining scripture and history", which shows the importance he attached to ancient studies. Historically, the Cun-gu Academy had produced such great figures as Meng Wentong who had made outstanding contributions to the history of history and the collation of Daoist documents, providing talent to support the cause of heritage conservation.

3.2. Rescuing documentary heritage

3.2.1. The Dunhuang Stone Chamber Relics

During the late Qing dynasty, Stein and Burghardt illegally transferred a large number of Dunhuang scriptures overseas. When Luo Zhenyu, then a second-class advisor to the Ministry of Education, learned of this, he hastened to visit him, together with Wang Guowei, and discussed with him the possibility of sending him images of the Dunhuang documents that had shipped to France, which he would then photocopy and publish. He also learnt that there were still a number of documents in the Dunhuang Stone Chamber that had not been removed, so he petitioned the Ministry of Education to send the remains of the Dunhuang Stone Chamber to the capital for preservation, and requested that the Ministry send someone to examine the ancient monuments of statues in the Dunhuang Caves and preserve them. Thanks to the joint efforts of Luo Zhenyu and the Ministry of Education, Dunhuang documents that had been lost overseas were photocopied and published in China, and the Dunhuang relics and ancient monuments that had not been removed were preserved.

3.2.2. Documents of the Grand Treasury of the Cabinet

In 1909, Luo Zhenyu asked Zhang Zhidong to put the cabinet documents under the management of the Beijing Library, and Zhang Zhidong ordered him to "go to the cabinet and examine them". Luo Zhenyu saw the "piles of manuscripts of the court" and heard that Prince Zai Feng considered most of these documents to be useless and asked the court to burn them. The court approved, but Luo Zhenyu, who was extremely sensitive to the value of cultural relics, thought that "all of these manuscripts and documents are related to national history" and asked Zhang Zhidong to stop the burning of the documents and to "store them in the Ministry of Education", which saved the Cabinet's archives from destruction[3]. Although a large number of documents did not escape the fate of being lost overseas due to the turbulent times and government corruption, Luo Zhenyu and the Ministry of Education's timely rescue of the Cabinet's documents allowed some of them to be preserved, providing important research materials for the study of national history.

3.2.3. Opening of a modern library

Luo Zhenyu had proposed to the Ministry of Education to create a library in the capital first, and then, after the regulations were sound, to extend it to the whole country and establish provincial libraries. In the process of preparing for the establishment of the Library of the Capital, the Ministry of Education proposed to store the books of the Wenjin Pavilion and the books of the summer palaces in the Beijing Library. In the selection of the site, four buildings were selected in the north and south of the Jingye Lake within the Deshengmen, "to collect the Four Treasury Books and the Song and Yuan Fine Editions", and on the north and south shores of the lake, "separate purchase of private house", three book stores were set up to store government and private textbooks and overseas books. In the library's management, considering that the library was first set up and had a lot of affairs, commissioners are sent to take care of the daily affairs.

4. The Impact of Ministry of Education on the Modern Heritage Conservation System

As an important department in charge of education in the late Qing Dynasty, the Ministry of Education's measures relating to the protection of documentary heritage have had a significant impact on the creation and development of the modern heritage conservation system. Firstly, the founding of the Cun-gu Academy affirmed the value of national heritage and held on to its cultural roots. In the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican periods, during the dissemination of estern learning to the orient, with a large number of Western ideas flooding into the country, creating a trend of foreign worship and impacting on cultural identity. The Cun-gu Academy, with its aim of preserving the essence of the country and affirming the essence of old learning, stabilized the cultural ground to a certain extent and facilitated the implementation of modern heritage conservation.

Secondly, the rescue of documentary relics by the Ministry of Education promoted the introduction of "The Preservation of Monuments Promotion Approach", and in 1909, when a large number of Dunhuang relics were lost overseas, Luo Zhenyu and other Ministry officials actively rescued them, saving Dunhuang treasures from exile. The tortuous and bumpy salvage campaign directly exposed the huge loopholes that existed in the protection of documentary heritage during the late Qing Dynasty. A number of factors influenced the Ministry of Civil Affairs to promulgate the first heritage protection law in the history of modern heritage protection in 1909 - "The Preservation of Monuments Promotion Approach", which was the beginning of the creation of modern heritage protection system. Some scholars define it as "The first legally binding government charter in the history of the country to implement special protection of cultural heritage"[4], and the status is very high.

Thirdly, the creation of a library provided a place for the study and protection of documentary heritage, but also provided ideas for the protection of heritage in modern times. The founding of the Beijing Library is a successful case of public ownership of cultural relics, changing the previous situation of official and private collections of cultural relics. Notably at that stage (1905-1912), although literature was part of the heritage, it was not managed by a unified heritage conservation agency, but was under the separate jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education; and that in the "The Preservation of Monuments Promotion Approach" issued as a result of the loss of Dunhuang literature, there was no mention of the protection of literature, although there was special mention of the collection of heritage containing handwriting.

5. Conclusion

The Ministry of Education was born in the context of the New Deal at the end of the Qing Dynasty. It was founded in 1905 at the initiative of Baoxi, a scholarly official of Shanxi, and existed for a brief period of about seven years until 1912, when the Xinhai Revolution overthrew the imperial system and the Qing Emperor abdicated. During the seven years, the Ministry of Education carried out the preservation of documents and cultural relics, opened the Cun-gu Academy to preserve cultural roots. It rescued the remains of the Dunhuang Stone Chamber and the documents of the Cabinet's Great Treasury to guard the national archives. The foundation of the Beijing Library accelerated the process of public ownership of cultural relics. Guan Xiaohong pointed out that "the late Qing Dynasty society suffered a thousand years of change, and there was no government department dedicated to cultural affairs specially, the Ministry of Education set the insightful views of educators and cultural leaders, using the power of the central education administration, measures to protect valuable cultural relics and ancient books, advocate the construction of libraries to expand the spread of modern culture, so that education and culture to promote each other, the work of inheritance and inspiration should

not be forgotten and erased "[5]. The efforts of the Ministry of Education actively contributed to the establishment of the modern heritage conservation system, and was an important driving force behind the first modern heritage conservation legislation, "The Preservation of Monuments Promotion Approach".

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