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China shuts museum with 'fake' exhibit

Chinese authorities have closed a museum which contained scores of fake exhibits, including a vase decorated with cartoon characters billed as a Qing dynasty artefact, state-run media reported Tuesday.

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The facility, built in northern China's Hebei province at a cost of 540 million yuan (\$88 million), has "no qualification to be a museum as its collections are fake", a local official told the Global Times newspaper.

It had been closed, the paper said, while its founders have been placed "under investigation" after local residents accused them of wasting money.

Pictures posted by the state-run China Radio International (CRI) showed a vase decorated with bright green cartoon animals, including a creature resembling a laughing squid, which the museum displayed as a Qing dynasty relic.

Several items lining the museum's 12 exhibition halls were supposedly signed by the Yellow Emperor, who according to tradition reigned in the 27th century BC, the Shanghai Daily reported.

But the signatures used the simplified Chinese characters brought in by the Communist Party after it took over in 1949, it pointed out.

The museum's owner, top local Communist Party official Wang Zongquan, developed a reputation for agreeing to "buy everything brought to him", the Global Times quoted a resident as saying.

Locals living near the museum in Erpu village told the Beijing News that Wang bought more than 40,000 fake exhibits at prices ranging from 100 yuan to 2,000 yuan.

They accused him of misusing village resources by funnelling money from land sales into building the ill-fated museum, which took up a four-hectare site.

China's antiques market is said to be rife with fakes, and the country has come under fire from multinational companies for its freewheeling attitude to copyright enforcement.

"Similar fake museums are found in many places in China in search of monetary gain," CRI quoted Chinese antiques expert Ma Weidu as saying.



Children play with a fake version of the Mona Lisa painting at an art shop in Dafen near Shenzhen in southern China on February 19, 2009. Chinese authorities have closed a museum which contained scores of fake exhibits, including a vase decorated with cartoon characters billed as a Qing dynasty artefact, state-run media reported Tuesday.