

Rationale of Mao Era Regional Museums in the Construction of China Political History and Culture, 1949-1978

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Abstract

With the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China's central government under Mao Zedong faced a test for political legitimacy. The complex domestic and international political situation had elevated the image of the new ruling party to the level of constructor of cultural identity for the regime. The central government had utilized the ability of regional museums to visualize and disseminate ideological ideas, making them indispensable venues for promoting the spirit of the new China. Many newly built regional museums subsequently disseminate the revolutionary image of the central government as a dedicated entity looking after the people. Through the concept of 'cultural relics presenting history', historical evidence was identified so as to fit in the spirit of the new China which has contributed to the identification of Chinese political history and culture. This study uses qualitative research including field visits to relevant exhibitions in Chinese regional museums and documentary analysis to dwell into the shaping of Chinese regional museums and the political history and culture of the new China from 1949 to 1978. The study aims to fill the gaps with regards Chinese regional museums in the construction of Chinese political history and culture.

Keywords: Mao Zedong Era; Regional Museums; New China; Political Identity; Cultural Formation

INTRODUCTION

Regional museums have always been associated with a particular location in order to promote understanding and love of the locality. In China, most of these museums are based on administrative divisions. All are closely associated with national museums, which made up the most significant section of the museum sector. They have also become the focus of national museum construction. The revival of history and culture requires the development of local cultural institutions. China has a long history and is a vast country. Each region has its natural beauty and distinctive features, ethnic groups and people, historical traditions and landscapes,

which are often described as 'different customs and traditions from one hundred miles to another'.

As a historical institution, the emergence of regional museums in China has a vital mission to adjust to different faces with the changes in social history. An examination of the Maoist period,¹ the early years in the founding of New China,² the thirty years of the founding of the state, and the early years of Reform and opening-up,³ show the distinctive features of the era in which regional museums were socially edifying, politically commanding, and culturally serving. Social, political, historical, and cultural factors have always been present in the construction and evolution of regional museums in China with different periods of growth and decline. Varutti (2021) proposes an alternative way of understanding the Chinese museum phenomenon. In her view, the museum boom, the historical heritage movement and the revival of traditional culture in contemporary China are broad derivatives of political constructs that complement history and culture. This assertion takes museums out of the ephemeral sequence of their own institutions. It places them in the path of specific political discourse and ongoing socio-historical and cultural change, revealing the complexity of understanding the entire picture of museums in China.

As an essential item in the category of museums, regional museums are nationally driven and, at the same time, historically and culturally created (Scott 2006). A regional museum is known for its varieties, adaptability and inclusiveness. It should recognise and integrate differences in terms of national, historical, and cultural mainstreams and tailor its own operations to these differences. As a national cultural institution, the operation of a regional museum is inevitably influenced by internal political actors and external socio-historical and cultural mainstreams. Generally speaking, regional museums represent the dominant local order or core values recognized by the state. Specifically, regional museum is also a tool and symbol of the state's efforts to build historical and cultural identity and to claim national independence. Representing the mainstream national culture, it has the closest contact with the public while its day-to-day management and practices are influenced by national politics and the direction of mainstream culture that it promotes. In particular, from 1949-1978, from the founding of New China to the initial development of a prosperous society, through China's 'Double Hundred Approach' policy⁴ and the Cultural Revolution,⁵ regional museums became physical spaces that shaped the country's political identity and historical and cultural evolution.

The study of this phase in the development of China's regional museums and China's political history and culture enables a clearer reflection on the links between the various periods since the founding of New China based on a political platform and social history and culture that could shed light on the rationale for regional museums constructing China's political history and culture. It also provides useful lessons from the museum's perspective in seeking a balance between the political mission of the state and the historical and cultural needs of the public.

MUSEUMS AS CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF POLITICAL HISTORY

To a large extent, the museum's collection of artefacts reflects the country's historical development from ancient times to the present day and the subtle links between politics and culture in a historical context. As a cultural institution, a museum has five main functions, namely management, communication, research, preservation and transmission (Gray 2015). General research has focused more on the last four functions, i.e. on the nature of museums. In other words, the museum's true mission requires more attention. It is often assumed that the core of museum functions is collection or communication, pointing out objects and to the public

whether they are related to political selectivity or cultural imposition. After the founding of New China, the construction of Chinese political concepts and ideology became as important as the construction of socialist history and culture. In the late 1940s and early 1960s, cultural institutions on a large scale as represented by local and regional museums, were involved in the process of constructing the concept of history and culture (Hu Seng 1991). Through the 'opening up of society', the political structure of national rationality was proclaimed and consolidated which contribute to New China's early political landscape. Accordingly, Chinese regional museums have continued to maintain a holistic grasp of the cultural landscape within the national structure through a range of practices like renovation and enhancement, narrative strategies and technical means. This ensures the effectiveness of representational politics and constituting a structural resource for the historical identity and cultural representation of the nation.

At the beginning of the founding of New China, when the country was in a state of turmoil, the construction of history and culture entered a new period. As Mao Zedong, then the first President of New China, solemnly stated at a meeting of the new Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in March 1949: "With the climax of economic construction, there will inevitably be a climax of cultural construction. The time when the Chinese were considered uncivilized has passed, and we will appear as a highly cultured nation in the world" (Mao Zedong 1950). In July 1949 China held its first Literary Congress,⁶ which established the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles as well as associations in the various fields of art.⁷ This gave a boost to the mobilisation of the mass of literary and artistic workers to participate actively in the building of the new Chinese socialist culture and art. The conference spelt out the basic policy of culture serving the people, first and foremost, the workers, peasants and soldiers. In order to promote the restoration and development of culture and the arts (Zhang 1988), Mao proposed in 1956 the "blossoming of a hundred flowers" on artistic issues and the "contention of a hundred schools of thought" on academic issues should become the guideline for the development of science and the prosperity of literature and the arts in China. Inspired by the "Two For" direction and the "Two Hundred" policy, the enthusiasm of literary and artistic workers was greatly stimulated. They actively engaged in cultural production, creating a large number of excellent literary and artistic works while cultural and artistic circles were notable for their vibrancy. In this way the new People's Republic of China succeeded in completing the cultural transformation of its society (Jin 1999). It was in this historical context that the cultural concept of the museum as a political institution was born in the new China.

In the official discourse and political representations of China's 'Double Hundred Policy', the adjectives 'long-standing history' and 'traditional cultural heritage' are often used as prefixes (Jin 1999). The two adjectives 'long-standing' and 'traditional cultural heritage' are often prefixed in the official discourse and political expressions of the state's historical and cultural expression. For a long time, this "paradigmatic" expression has been deeply ingrained in people's minds that it has come to be used daily without realising it. While history and culture participate in constructing political legitimacy, museums play an essential role in this process as institutions that materialise official political and cultural forms. In 1953, the Chinese Ministry of Culture issued the 'Opinions on the Guidelines, Tasks, Nature and Development Direction of Regional Museums',⁸ which stated that local museums, provincial and municipal museums should be comprehensive and local in nature, and the main elements of their construction should include three main aspects: first, the natural aspect, including political, ethnic and other resources; second, the historical aspect, including revolutionary history; and third, the social construction aspect, including historical and cultural achievements. This enable mainstream regional museums to map contemporary China's political history and cultural dominance. By the same token, a look at the construction, narrative and technical practices of China's regional museums over the past 30 years prior to the Reform and opening-up of the

country, could provide glimpses into the trajectory of political representation and cultural evolution at the national level. For example, prior to 1966, the national revolutionary construction exhibitions as represented by the Chinese History Museum and the Chinese Revolutionary Museum, reflects the mainstream socio-political and cultural development of revolutionary culture at the time, using museum exhibitions to export the country's revolutionary ideology (Su Donghai 1996). With the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976, most of China's museums were guided in their artistic work by the ideology of the Cultural Revolution. Although most cultural institutions were destroyed during this period, their aims remained close to the political and cultural mainstream of the time (Su Donghai, 1996). In the period 1976-1978, the Chinese government wanted to break out of the Cultural Revolution as quickly as possible and needed a political vessel to carry out cultural recovery.⁹ Hence, museums proliferated and they served Chinese politics. The museum's abstract form achieves its cultural representation through the direction of the state's politics, so that political expression of ancient history and the museum's representation were adapted in line with socio-historical and cultural changes. In contrast, the state's memory and the writing of its own destiny remain consistent, the only change being the addition of an 'utopian' aspect that relies on the futurism of the museum (Karp 1991).

In the practice of Chinese museums, the overall schema of cultural representation of political history took formal shape in the late 1940s and early 1960s, marked by the construction and opening of a series of national museums like the Chinese History Museum, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum, the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Museum and the National Culture Palace (Li Jun 2009). All of them are part of the museum system of political and historical representation in China. It took shape during the Cultural Revolution which was marked by the affirmation of the superiority and advancement of the rulers and the construction of an evolving and enriching ideology and conceptual form. Maturing at the end of the Cultural Revolution and before the Reform and opening-up of China, Chinese Communist Party emerged from backwardness to light. Moreover, the museum, which to some extent reflects the relationship between society and the production of immaterial culture and the continuation of history under certain political conditions, is an example of the new stage into which Chinese history and culture are about to enter (China's Reform and opening-up).

At the same time, the political, historical and cultural representations in Mao-era China did not stop at regional museums as revolutionary memorial sites and monuments were also important for the presentation of political, historical and cultural ideologies while artistic forms were officially appropriated for the ideological expression of the modern revolution. The political outlook of the Chinese Communist Party and the representation of mainstream of Chinese history and culture are always in a process of negotiation with the museum's past and future, and ultimately constructed and consolidated.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL MUSEUMS IN NEW CHINA AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE POLITICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE

As essential part of China's socialist cause, regional museums are closely linked to society's historical and cultural development and needs, especially as carrier of political culture. In the course of its development, regional museums have been subjected to constant demands for change. Although its particular metamorphoses have changed over time and place as a result of having particular political patrons, the discourse of change that has stimulated these demands has retained the same recognisable characteristics since the founding of the New China. Although it is tempting to see these as external demands imposed on museums by their external political context, they are generated by the inner dynamics of the museum form which reflects

not only the political legitimacy of the evolving model of regional museum, but also the evolution of the regional museum in line with the historical and cultural development of China.

In 1949, the founding of the People's Republic of China completed the most extensive and profound social transformation in the history of the Chinese nation, laying the fundamental political premise and institutional foundation for all fields of development in contemporary China. Nevertheless, the country was still in a state of ruin. While it was not possible to consolidate the regime and build a new China, the consolidation of the new people's power was the fundamental mission that the new China seek to fulfil. The field of history and culture was identified to undertake this mission and to consolidate the new people's power and to open up new paths and directions for the historical and cultural development of the new China. This was a period in which China's regional museums underwent unprecedented development and change, awakened from their hiatus and accorded new meaning by the state.

In November 1949, the Ministry of Culture of the Central People's Government established the Bureau of Cultural Relics which took the responsibility for unified management over regional museums throughout the country.¹⁰ Old museums were reorganised and reformed while their institutions were improved, their personnel enriched, their funding increased, and their management strengthened. At the same time a number of new museums were established, starting with general museums in provinces, municipalities. All museums were placed directly under the Central Government and autonomous regions. The nature and mission of museums in the new China were clearly stated at the time: "Museums are institutions for the collection of cultural relics and specimens, research institutions and propaganda institutions, serving the general public and scientific research" (commonly known as "three natures and two services"). It was also stressed that "museums must provide patriotic education to enable the people to have a correct understanding of history, nature and love for the motherland;" this was made a requirement for the renovation of old museums and the creation of new ones.¹¹ Many museums were established in the mid-1950s in accordance with the requirements set out at the time. For example, museums in Anhui, Gansu, Shandong and Hunan, all followed the requirements set out then. These museums later developed into large and medium-sized museums with more extensive collections while their achievements were nothing less than outstanding. According to official statistics, the number of regional museums rose from 21 in 1949 and 40 in 1952 to 72 in 1957. With the exception of Qinghai and Tibet, these new provincial museums had changed the unbalanced concentration of museums in a few cities as in the past¹². The late 1950s also saw the establishment of the larger Chinese History Museum, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum, the Central Museum of Nature and the Chinese People's Revolutionary Military Museum. All of these are located in Beijing. Several small and medium-sized museums and specialised museums, as well as museums which were former residence of famous people, were also established in various provinces and cities. During the 1950s, museums became a vibrant phenomenon, and achieved not only remarkable results, but also accumulated invaluable experience. This became the first high point in the development of museums in the country with museums providing a focus for public opinion and at the same time shaping the ecological environment for the development of the new Chinese history and culture. The period also saw the inauguration of the principle of "culture for the people, for socialism" (Chen 2009). This was an unprecedented cultural development in Chinese history then that formed the core value system of China's cultural policy for the next 70 years.

From 1966 to 1976, the "Gang of Four"¹³, led by Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan, launched the "Cultural Revolution", which was fueled by Mao's erroneous analysis that deviated from the inevitable trend of social development and the objective reality of China. The Cultural Revolution subsequently led to a decade of civil unrest in the country. The movement swept through China like a violent storm. The historical wounds left by the unprecedented civil strife in Chinese society are deep and momentous, long-lasting and

sometimes painful. During this period, China's political direction changed from one of 'total struggle' to one of 'beginning to reflect',¹⁴ and the country's history and culture moved from a period of massive destruction to one of recovery. From 1970 onwards, museum workers at the region level worked under complicated circumstances to preserve museum collections, carry out archaeological excavations and to organise temporary exhibitions so as to minimise the damage and losses. After the establishment of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in 1973, the museum business recovered somewhat from the turmoil. Museums around the world have relaunched their operations, cleansed and reorganised their collections, rebuilt their custodial system, organized exhibitions of excavated cultural relics, prepared primary displays, and gradually carried out normal cultural propaganda work.¹⁵ Heavy losses marked the first five years of the Cultural Revolution, but the second five years saw a rebound from the trough while the reconstruction of regional museums began to proceed in an orderly manner. Chinese history and culture gradually recovered.

The period 1976-1978 was a two-year hiatus for Chinese history and culture. The salient issues are the total recovery and revival of the historical and cultural sphere and the complete reconstruction and development of regional museums, including the evolution and renewal of Chinese cultural policy. In 1977, the Chinese government resumed its cultural policy of a hundred schools of thought, which was first reflected in the feedback from regional museums (Cai Qin 2021). During this period, the regional museums played an irreplaceable role as a constant in the field of Chinese history and culture, particularly in the problematic exploration and evolution of history and culture in the post-Mao era, and in the emergence and transformation of the direction of Chinese cultural policy after 1976. On the one hand, regional museums have contributed to the comprehensive restoration and reconstruction of cultural relics and historical materials destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. It further contributed to the implementation of the 'Double Hundred' cultural policy, enabling the orderly implementation of China's new cultural policy and to a certain extent, to accelerate China's grand march towards reform and opening up. As the caretaker of China's history and culture, the construction of regional museums embodies the vision of the revival of China's political, historical and cultural development.

MUSEUMISATION OF CHINESE HISTORY AND CULTURE

Museums are an important testimony to the history of the Mao era and a symbol of the spiritual vehicle and source of strength for the Chinese people and the Chinese nation to keep moving forward. It was "the best nourishment for the history of the Chinese revolution". As a new regime, the People's Republic of China faced both internal and external problems in its early years. The central government urgently needed to adopt a suitable political and cultural governance strategy in order to secure the acceptance of the leadership of the Communist Party by the entire nation (Wang 2012). The construction of a socialist ideology and the formation of a socialist cultural consensus within the country became an important political proposition for the CPC at that time. The concept of "museums presenting history" (Yi Kai 2021) and giving it a unique connotation became an effective strategy for shaping the ruling image of the CPC in the early days. The museumisation of history and culture was a further step in the construction of the political, historical and cultural identity of the Communist Party, with museums no longer remaining at the level of collection and conservation, but becoming a vehicle for presenting the revolutionary and historical traditions of the ruling party and shaping its new image. Thus regional museums become the historical and cultural expression of the political mission undertaken during this period.

The Chinese Communist Party gave museums different cultural missions at different times since 1949. The first seventeen years of New China were the seventeen years in which

the development of museums made remarkable achievements. This was a period of significant development for regional museums, as well as for museum displays and exhibitions (Han Lin, 2011). At the time of the founding of New China, there were only 25 museums in the old country, nine of which were run by non-Chinese investors. The ones run by non-Chinese investors include the Japanese-run Shandong Industrial Museum and the Qingdao Aquarium, and the French-run Northern Border Museum. Most of these museums were in a state of paralysis or semi-paralysis¹⁶. At that time, the national economy was recovering, and the war between the United States and North Korea was in full swing, so museums could not develop in a proper manner. The State adopted a policy of "renovating existing museums and building new museums only in those areas where they are available"¹⁷ museums. The main task during this period was to renovate and reorganise these museums. The government took several measures to rehabilitate and restore them. On 9 November 1949, the Administration of Cultural Relics was set up to take over the cultural relics and museum business throughout the country, followed by the establishment of similar bodies at the provincial, municipal and autonomous regions to supervise cultural relics and to take over the museums of each region. These were transformed and reorganised¹⁸ while exhibitions in regional museums were based on the theme of the new China.

In this scenario, the importance of regional museum exhibitions as a means of communication for the history and culture of new China came to the fore. It became an essential undertaking. Of these, the archaeological community was particularly prominent in its all-encompassing use of heritage exhibitions. In 1951, the Chinese State Council issued instructions regarding reforms in the development of traditional Chinese history through the exhibition of cultural relics: "Where possible, a national exhibition of historical relics should be held once a year, exhibiting relics excavated and preserved from all periods, and holding archaeological seminars to guide their development".¹⁹ In 1956, the Chinese Ministry of Culture held an exhibition of documentary material (cultural relics) on the reform of Chinese writing. Based on the collection of over two thousand pieces of documentary materials on the reform and simplification of Chinese characters, this exhibition was very well received by visitors. Efforts were made to enrich it in preparation for a large-scale public exhibition in 1959.²⁰ The fact that cultural institutions of different disciplines have also chosen museum exhibitions to project themselves shows the importance the state had attached to museum exhibitions. The intervention and promotion of state power also led to the rapid development of the industry of museum exhibition with exhibitions of various types launched in cities and the countryside. The Chinese People's Daily even published an article on museum exhibitions denoting it as an important form of contact with the masses, not only in terms of content that is relevant to the immediate interests of the public, but also in terms of format, which must be pleasing to the masses. The museum exhibition industry was widely used as an important means even for the state's internal affairs and diplomacy (Huang 2016). According to official figures, in the two years since the founding of New China, "four hundred exhibitions of various kinds were held in Beijing on military, political, industrial, health, artistic and scientific subjects, with an audience of more than eight million."²¹ With the construction of the new China in full swing, the state's influence in participating in various museum exhibitions has considerably increased. The unique charm of the exhibitions themselves, with their irreplaceable advantages in presenting traditional Chinese culture and political philosophy of the new China, was highly valued by the state. It can be said that the construction of museum exhibitions in the new China has not only presented the world with a politically independent and industrialiser China, but also conveyed a national cultural image through the presentation of China's traditional and long-standing history and culture.

The Cultural Revolution was a cataclysmic event for the Chinese people, their culture, and museums in China were not immune to it. During this period, many museums' cultural

relics and displays, as well as publications, were reduced to the 'black goods' of 'feudalism'²², and many museums' precious collections were falsely labelled as 'Four Olds' (Lu tiechun and Wang Xixue 2009). Some important historical relics and ancient buildings were destroyed. A large number of private collections that were scattered among the people were looted as never before. During this period, museums in the region were severely damaged. It can be said that the period of the Cultural Revolution was a time of negative development of Chinese museums. As a result of the exceptional circumstances at the times, the construction and development of museums took on a different character. Museums became heavily tainted with political colours. History and culture exhibitions were significantly reduced, while political propaganda increased exponentially. This change in museum exhibitions reflects the significant changes in the political, economic and cultural environment of Chinese society during this period. Many researchers in the past have looked at this period in a different light, dismissing its role in the political, historical and cultural life of Chinese society (XieJiannan 2021). However, a closer look at the museums of this period reveals their relevance to socio-politics, history and people's lives. While the exhibition function of museums was weakened during the Cultural Revolution, their political function was highlighted. The display of political ideas reached an unprecedented height in terms of form and content that override other things. The flourishing of exhibitions on political aspects was a product of that era. It was an important stage in the history of Chinese museums that suited the people's understanding of society in particular situation and circumstances. These exhibitions, to a certain extent, also enriched people's lives. As a form of communication, museum exhibitions became a tool for the "class struggle for total ideological dictatorship" which carried out effortlessly during the Cultural Revolution. It can be said that all activities then served the purpose of socialist political propaganda, glorifying the Communist Party and Mao Zedong. The prominence of political exhibitions during this period was a special phenomenon in the history of museum exhibitions. It was a product of the times and a perverse form of museum display that turned its back on the attributes of the museum itself and brought about negative effects that are detrimental to the development of the museum. Compared to the period before and after the Cultural Revolution, the museums of the period suffered setbacks and achievements, but they should not be ignored. Museum displays in a particular era have their own particular form and role, and are a reflection of the history, politics and culture of that particular period.

The period 1976-1978 following the end of the Cultural Revolution was the most crucial in China's social and historical development. During this period, the country hovered over the rectification of a series of mistakes made during the Cultural Revolution, learning from the experiences and lessons of the Cultural Revolution and exploring and defining a path of socialist construction appropriate to China's national conditions. The construction and restoration of regional museums was an important tool in the development of historical and cultural construction by the Communist Party, providing a political guarantee for the development and prosperity of China's historical culture in the post-Mao era, as well as promoting reform of China's social and cultural system to better meet the cultural needs of the people. During this period, museums of a regional nature with local and ethnic characteristics were restored and built in various provinces, cities, districts and counties, as well as in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. The creation of local museums greatly relieved the pressure on national museums caused by people's eagerness to visit cultural relics (BeiJing 2008); at the same time it reflected local cultural characteristics and folk traditions, enabling cultural diversity and integration to be achieved (BeiJing 2008). From 1976 onwards, regional museums gradually improved their systems of collection management, changing the nature of museum's essential task. Basically, they had completed the archiving of their primary collections and cataloguing of their general collections; they rationalised the shelving of their collections and achieved more significant results in the scientific maintenance of their artefacts,

materials and photographs that enabled diversity in their exhibitions. Before 1978, there were more regional museums in the relevant socio-historical fields, due to China's long history and the abundance of historical sites and relics, which is also the strength of China's regional museums. After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978, China began to see the establishment of museums in various sectors and industries. State, departmental, collective and individual museums of all types have come to the fore, creating a large number of distinctive regional museums. This connotes collections is no longer confined to the traditional concept of 'historical' or 'relics' but is constantly expanding to include representative objects that reflect human society and human history. In 1978, regional museums were officially incorporated into the Chinese government's cultural development programme.²³

The specific values of regional museums serve the historical and cultural mainstream of the time and are, in most cases, a cultural carrier structured on political consciousness. Through different contexts and social backgrounds, new mainstream directions are called to ensure, either through exhibitions, the expression of social, historical and cultural cohesion and identity, and the construction of harmonious social relations. The work presented by regional museums does not stop at simple historical overviews but is given a more political and cultural aspiration of the time.

RATIONALE OF REGIONAL MUSEUMS REGARDING THE FRAMEWORK OF CHINESE POLITICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE

As a vital cultural record of the history of the phases of Mao era, regional museum could evolve into valuable and researchable historical tool within the political framework of the different periods of the new China. Its reflection of the different social stages of New China maintains, in some dimensions, the historical integrity and cultural continuity of each stage. As 'cultural coordinate' of political history (Barnes 2016), it facilitates the formulation and implementation of national cultural policy and responsible for the revival of Chinese history and culture.

The organisational framework and the way in which regional museums operate are constructed on the basis of national politics. The political nature of regional museum does not exist independently but relies on its own historical and cultural nature to disseminate its functions. What distinguishes it from other cultural institutions is that regional museums itself embodies four core elements (dominant ideology, export legitimacy, social legitimacy and power support) (Gaither 1992). Interdependent and influential, each element reveals aspects of national political formations in the form of historical culture in regional museums. This political formation is used to justify political choices that encompass the nature of social authenticity, belonging and identification of the state within the society. This provides the basis for understanding central government interference in the museum field and sectoral policy implying museum ideology is equivalent to policy activity. On the one hand, the state establishes the core values and traditional beliefs of historical and cultural development. On the other hand, it also consolidates political ideas and cultural practices that are accepted by members of social groups. For example, the New Cultural Policy introduced during Mao's time relied on Chinese museums to facilitate its implementation, with national as well as regional museums disseminating the ideological will of the state to develop history and culture which was presented and practised through the display of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Under the combined influence of these elements, museums often come to typify the dominant values and core beliefs of society's developing history and culture.

Regional museums have a critical role to play in the functioning of Chinese political history and culture. As national restoration or revival of historical culture depends on the individual and concrete practice of museums at the local level, the work of local museums is

focussed on the realisation of the corresponding specific cultural functions. Much of the content of museum exhibitions is propagandist designed to highlight the history of the local and national development process. At the same time, they are seen as expressions of the underlying spiritual values and beliefs of the national era which are an integral part of the museum function. On the other hand, the original intention of regional museums to establish values, to uphold their relevance and importance, is to integrate the mainstream of the history and culture of national development and to establish the importance of their own identity. Consequently, local museums are keen to establish a national and regional identity highlighting their differences. For example, regional museums often have temporary exhibitions in addition to its permanent displays. These temporary exhibitions are in line with major national commemorative events or in response to social needs. They provide an effective outlet for mainstream national history and culture besides incorporating popular preferences. These exhibitions not only meet the needs of society, but also promote the collection of cultural artefacts, the identification of collections and the development of thematic research in regional museums (Macdonald 1998).

The development of regional museums in China reflects the politics, history and culture in different periods of its history, and also houses many relics and materials of major Chinese historical events and various ethnic groups as well as invaluable craft and art pieces. It served as important component of the renaissance that opened up the history and culture of the Chinese nation and played a key role in building a blueprint for China's political history and culture.

CONCLUSION

The history of regional museums in China is closely linked to the history of the political, historical and cultural development in the Mao era. It reflects the face? Or phase? of the social evolutionary process of the time. As a historical and cultural institution with a mandate to be a vehicle for collection, research and interpretation, regional museums has to some extent, preserved the achievements of the civilization of the time. It managed to gauge the transmission of history and the writing of culture in the Mao era.

This study analyses regional museums through cultural representation of political history which is a manifestation of the interrelationship between history and culture at different stages of the evolution of history and culture in the Mao era. From the beginning of the founding of New China in 1949 to the implementation of Reform and opening-up in 1978, a new stage in the development of history and culture was attained, from the unfulfilled needs of the new Chinese culture to its reconstruction and revival. Local cultural institutions, represented by regional museums, participated in the construction of the historical and cultural concepts of the new regime and, through the 'opening up of society', consolidated the rational political structure of the state thus contributing to the construction of the political will and the blueprint for the future development of the new China. China's regional museums have also contributed to the evolution and development of history and culture at different stages of society through their exhibitions and other functions. They managed to accompany the historical changes in Chinese society and to be politically constructed, becoming the bearers of the historical and cultural identity of a country and of a nation. Thus, regional museums can genuinely reflect and embody the evolution of the socio-historical changes that took place in China in 1949, 1966 and 1978 and able to integrate the mainstream of historical and cultural direction of national development and to establish their own historical identity. In short, regional museums have been given a certain degree of motivation for the development of history and culture within China's political framework justifying the evolution and development of political history and culture in the Mao era.

END NOTES

¹ The Mao era refers to the period of Chinese history between the founding of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949 and the death of Mao Zedong on 9 September 1976. For political studies, the time frame would end with the convening of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978. Footnote no.1. From the Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the People's Republic of China* (中华人民共和国简史 Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Jianshi), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House (上海人民出版社 Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe), 1999, p.1.

² New China means the People's Republic of China established in 1949 with the Communist Party of China as the core. Footnote no.2. From the China Baidu Encyclopedia search - Chinese Party History entries.

³ Reform and opening-up, a policy of internal Reform and opening-up to the outside world that China began to implement at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. Footnote no.3. From the Zhang Yiwu 张颐武, *A History of China's Cultural Development in the Thirty Years of Reform and Opening-up* (中国改革开放三十年文化发展史 Zhongguo Gaige Kaifang Sanshinian Wenhua Fazhanshi), Shanghai: Shanghai University Press (上海大学出版社 Shanghai Daxue Chubanshe), 2008, p.2.

⁴ The "Double Hundred" policy is the basic policy of the new China on the development of literature, art and science and technology, i.e. "a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend", the basic spirit of which is that different forms and styles in art are free to develop, and different schools of thought in science are free to argue. Footnote no.6. From the China Bei'jing Party History Archives-Party History Records, China's Socialist Revolutionary Construction Period.

⁵ The Cultural Revolution, which took place in China from May 1966 to October 1976, was a civil unrest that was wrongly started by the leaders and brought serious disasters to the country and its people of all races, leaving behind extremely painful lessons. Footnote no.7. From the Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the Cultural Revolution* (文化大革命简史 Wenhua Dageming Jianshi), Chinese Communist Party History Press (中共党史出版社 Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe), 2005, p.4.

⁶ The Cultural Congress is the Congress of Chinese Culture and Art Workers, later renamed the Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, which is divided into the Central Cultural Congress and the Local Cultural Congress. Footnote no.11. From the China Baidu Encyclopedia search - Chinese Party History entries.

⁷ The China Federation of Literary and Art Circles is a people's organization led by the Communist Party of China and composed of national literary and art associations, federations of literary and art circles of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government, and national federations of literary and art circles of industries (trades). Footnote no.12. From the China Baidu Encyclopedia search - Chinese Party History entries.

⁸ Footnote no.16. From the China Bei'jing Party History Archives-Party History Records, China's Socialist Revolutionary Construction Period.

⁹ Edited by the Third Research Department of the Party History Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China 中共中央党史研究室第三研究部编, *History of*

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¹⁰ Footnote no.22. Data from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China -Heritage bodies introduce regulations.Historical entries for the period of China's socialist construction, 1949. (ncha.gov.cn).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Footnote no.24. Data from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China - Cultural Heritage Statistics 1957. (ncha.gov.cn).

¹³ Generally refers to the executors of the Cultural Revolution in China. Footnote no.26. Data from the China Baidu Encyclopedia search - Chinese Party History entries.

¹⁴ Edited by the Third Research Department of the Party History Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China中共中央党史研究室第三研究部编,*History of China's Reform and opening-up* (中国改革开放史Zhongguo Gaige Kaifang Shi).Liaoning:Liaoning People's Publishing House (辽宁人民出版社Liaoning Renmin Chuban She), 2002.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Footnote no.33. Data from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China - Cultural Heritage Statistics 1966.(ncha.gov.cn).

¹⁷ Footnote no.34. Data from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China -Heritage bodies introduce regulations.Historical entries for the period of China's socialist construction, 1949. (ncha.gov.cn).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Footnote no.36. Data from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China -Heritage bodies introduce regulations.Historical entries for the period of China's socialist construction, 1951. (ncha.gov.cn).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹Footnote no.39. Data from the China Museums Annual Report,1951(nb.ncha.gov.cn/museum)

²² Chinese Cultural Revolution terminology, generally referring to the ideas and relics of feudal traditions.Footnote no.40. Data from the Lu tiechun卢铁春and Wang Xixue王西学. “Reflection on the Cultural Revolution of the Cultural Revolution(对文化大革命的反思 DuiWenHuaGemingDeFanSi)”,*Consumptionguide* (消费导刊 XiaoFei DaoKan), No.6, 2009, pp.219-219.

²³ Society of party history of the Communist Party of China中共党史协会.*China in the Mao Zedong era (1949-1976)*(毛泽东时代的中国,Maozedong ShidaiDe Zhongguo), BeiJing, CPC History press(中共党史出版社CPC ChuBanShe), 2003, p.198.

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