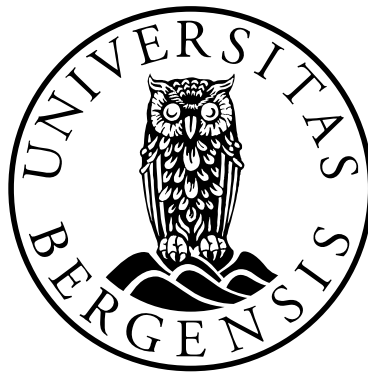


# Museum and Change

*Regional Museums in the People's Republic of China*

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## Abstract

Chinese museums have experienced dramatic changes during the time of the People's Republic of China (1949 - present) at the same time as the country itself has undergone dramatic changes. This thesis explores the correlation between museum and political and policy changes in the Peoples Republic of China with selected regional museums as the research object. The objective is to study what changes have taken place in selected Chinese regional museums and understand what roles political and policy changes in the country have had on the process.

Six regional museums from four regions are examined. Major focus is on the broad changes within the museums at the same time as close examination on the specific museum representations has been carried out. Pertinent issues include diversity and unity, regional identity and national identity, representation of identity, regional development policy and cultural tourism. The research revealed that policy has a strong influence on all the museums studied but there are also differences between regions. Museums are not only the targets but also the instruments of policy and government.

**Key words:** China, museum, change, policy, representation, identity, nationalism, diversity, unity, cultural tourism

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Museums are changing, which is reflected in their functions, their roles, their operations as well as their definitions. Kenneth Hudson (1998) once argued that “the museum refuses to stand still” (p. 43). Hudson notes one facet of museum change in that there is generally an aspiration of the museum, through its staff, for change. There is, however, another facet related to museums and change in that the museum is not immune to external change. Forces that generate museum change come from a number of sources including governments (of different levels), the public, related disciplines or peers. This thesis targets at museum and change and explores the correlation between museum and political and policy changes in the Peoples Republic of China (hereafter as PRC) through selected regional museums.

While many studies have discussed the after-effect of museum change, namely what museum change has or could have brought about, concerning issues such as social inclusion or social equality (see, for example, Cameron, 1971; Sandell, 2002), fewer have examined the lead up to museum change, namely what has brought changes to the museum, which could be related to the various stakeholders of the museum both internally and externally.

In exploring museum and change in the PRC, this thesis focuses on the precursors of museum changes. In other words, this thesis is not only studying “what”: What changes have taken place in museums, but also “why”: Why these changes have happened or been able to happen. The research question is shortly concluded as: How have Chinese regional museums changed in accordance with the political and policy changes of the PRC? And why? The objective is to study what changes have taken place in selected Chinese regional museums and understand what roles political and policy changes in the country have had on the process.

For this study, the scope I set is Chinese regional museums. Two restraints here: A). It is about *Chinese* regional museums, not European or American museums, nor museums worldwide; and B). The focus is Chinese *regional* museums, which in this thesis is further limited – as I will note in the later section – to the leading museum(s) of a provincial region, which are normally comprehensive museums, thus,

from the perspective of scope, not national, not city or local community, and from the perspective of type, not science museums, not art museums, not heritage sites. Let me explain further why I set myself these two restraints.

### **Why *Chinese* Museums?**

Chinese museums as the field to position the study is accounted for by a number of considerations.

First, Chinese museums have not been paid enough attention and have not been sufficiently studied in general. With the increasing awareness of the significant roles that museums could or do play in contemporary societies, world museums of various continents and nations have been extensively discussed and studied in the international field of museum studies, which is basically English language dominated. Amongst these diverse voices about museums of diverse places, there seems, however, to be a voice missing, or at least rarely heard – the voice about museums in the PRC. Even more rare is a voice from within the PRC. Despite China being a nation with a quarter of the world's population, with one of the world's major ancient civilizations, and with increasing international recognition on the world stage, Chinese museums have not yet become a popular topic within international museum studies and Chinese scholars have not yet become active players in the discipline.

There have been, of course, some museum studies covering China or the Chinese. They are, however, mainly about Chinese collections or exhibitions with Chinese themes held in museums outside of China (see, for example, Barrass & the British Museum, 2002; Portal & Kinoshita, 2007; Roberts & Barme, 2006). In other words, the studies have been predominantly about Chinese contents presented in foreign museums rather than about Chinese *museums*.

Edward Vickers is one of the very few scholars who have specifically studied Chinese museums (see Vickers, 2007). However, Vickers' major research interest is on education and his Chinese museum studies have a strong Hong Kong and Taiwan focus. Marzia Varutti is among the even fewer who have intensively studied Chinese museums. Varutti's (2008) doctoral dissertation examines the museums and the politics of representation in the post-Maoist transition (1976-2007). These studies

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about Chinese museums were done with an *outer* perspective rather than an *inner* perspective though some of the scholars are competent in the Chinese language. Studies about Chinese museums done by native Chinese have not yet really appeared in the English-language dominating international academia. To raise the issue of the origins of the scholars is because museum studies, particularly those regarding comprehensive and history museums within a certain national discourse, are closely related to the understanding of the history and culture of the country – a cultural competency beyond the language.

Second, the study of museums in China adds to the general understanding of museum development globally. World museums are a diverse category. Due to the close tie between museums and the polity, culture and economy they are in, museums of different nations often bear different characteristics.

Museums in China, in part due to a fairly distinct culture or set of cultures (I define this term in the next chapter), but moreover the ideology and political system that the PRC adopted since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a reformed version from the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have shown differences in theories including the definition, function and social role of the museum and in practices including exhibition methods and representational approaches. Even the evolving track that Chinese museums have taken is different from that of the western museums. Without understanding Chinese museums, I would argue, there are important gaps in the knowledge of the diversity existing in the global museum field.

The devotion of one special issue to museums of China in 2008 by *Museum International*, a leading journal in the global museum field, is a move towards incorporating China within the global spectrum of museum studies in the pursuit of representing diversity of global museums, as the journal's acting editor-in-chief Monique Couratier (2008) notes in the preface to this special issue, "As a conveyor of word, practices and values, *Museum International* testifies to the fact that long-lasting diversity can only be achieved through openness to others" (p. 4).

Third, to study museums in the PRC is also a way to study the country. With the rapid and dramatic social economic development achieved here, particularly in recent years, the PRC is taking a more active role in the world and has had increasing

influence on the world. At the same time, the PRC is also receiving increased attention and interest globally. Museums can be seen as windows to look at a country and the society although the image may often be distorted by local and national policies, disciplinary moves and forms of representation. Museum change is often a reflection of changes in policy as well as general attitudes. The study of museums in the PRC may therefore offer a better understanding of the country and its changing political landscape.

Finally, museums are experiencing dramatic changes in the PRC. Economic development has made it possible for both central and local governments to offer financial support for cultural sectors so that museums, once a relatively ignored area, have recently received major public attention as well as financial inputs. Museums are springing up at an unprecedented rate throughout the country. Museum practices, opened up to a broader selection of global museums, are also changing. It is therefore a good time to look at these changes and explore the driving forces behind them.

### **Why Chinese *Regional* Museums?**

Chinese museums, however, are diverse and multiple. There are national museums, regional (provincial) museums, city museums and local community museums. There are comprehensive museums, history museums, science museums, art museums and various theme museums. It is not possible, nor advisable, to cover the museums of all the levels and types from a country the size of the PRC in a single thesis. I have instead chosen a selection of regional museums as the focus of this research.

**The criteria of regional museums in this thesis.** As briefly noted in the beginning part of this chapter that *regional museums* in this thesis, by my criteria, refer to the leading museum(s) of a provincial region. The criteria contain two layers of meanings.

First, *regional museums* in this thesis mean the museums that are at the provincial level in the administrative division system, in distinction to national museums, or local museums of a city, county or town. The PRC has adopted a three-level administrative division system composed of provincial units, counties and

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townships. What this thesis targets is the first level – provincial units, which includes, as stipulated by the *Constitution*, “provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities” (*Constitution of the P.R.C*, 2004, Art. 30 [official English version]). Currently, the PRC has 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 centrally-administered municipalities and 2 special administrative regions. That is to say, in addition to provinces, there are also other regions at this level. I therefore apply the term *regional* rather than *provincial* to be more precise and inclusive of the autonomous regions.

Second, the category *regional museums* in this thesis does not include all the museums at the regional administrative level, but specifically refers to the museum(s) of the region and for the region, namely the representative museum(s) of the region. A regional museum(s) most often refers to the comprehensive or history museum(s) in a region but not the theme museums or historical sites museums, although many of which are also at a regional or provincial level. For example, in Shaanxi province, one of the case regions of this thesis (see Chapter 5), Museum of Emperor Qin Shihuang’s Terracotta and Warriors is also at a provincial level according to its administrative level, but not within the scope of this thesis because this museum is a heritage site rather than a museum of Shaanxi region.

**The reasons to choose regional museums.** Regional museums are, to a large degree, local museums, as in distinction to national museums which is a popular topic for discussion within museum studies. I will, however, not discuss national museums of China in particular though topics such as *national identity* or *nationalism* will be addressed in the analysis. To select regional rather than national museums to explore museum and change is due to the following considerations.

First, regional museums are often more indicative of the influences of political and policy changes at various levels. Political and policy changes in the PRC take place at two levels: the national and the local. What distinguishes regional museums from national museums is that regional museums receive influences from both national and local levels while national museums are predominantly subjected to the national level. So the choice of regional museums allows a look at changes on both regional and national levels as they affect museums. This also allows me to ask: Under the same national context, how could regional contexts influence museums?

Second, regional museums make up the main body of museums in the PRC. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage (2008) describes them as the “backbones” (*gugan*) of China’s museum system. In many ways Chinese regional museums could be seen as the most representative of Chinese museums. The change of Chinese regional museums to a large degree typifies the changes of Chinese museums in general.

Finally, regional museums, particularly with the regards to their role as the representative museum(s) of a region, are also channels to explore the tension and balance between regional identity and national identity in that museums are crucial in shaping and representing identities. As the representative museum of the region, to form or represent the regional identity seems an intrinsic task of a regional museum. At the same time, however, the regional museum exists also within the broader discourse of national identity construction. This dual character of regional museums may make them an interesting instrument in investigating museums’ role in identity representation and construction.

### **Particular Concern: Political and Policy Changes**

Within the PRC, the Communist Party of China (hereafter as CPC) and the governments (both the central and the local) have a leading role in decision making and policy designing in general covering all sectors including the cultural sector. It is therefore natural that a study of the driving forces of museum change is greatly concerned with political and policy change.

There are overlaps existing between political and policy changes as there are three nouns – *politics*, *policy* and *polity* – corresponding to the adjective *political* in English while only one in many languages such as German, French or Norwegian. In this sense, policy change is a component of political change. To list out policy separately instead of including it into the umbrella of political change is to show the weight I have put on it during this study while other political changes are also included. Policy in the other sense is also a broad category containing sub-folders such as political policy, economic policy, or cultural policy.



There are policies that are relevant to museums. These policies, in many cases, are cultural policies, for example, those to encourage the construction of public cultural facilities including museums. In some cases there are also policies specifically designed for museums, for example, the policy to make public museum free to the public issued by Chinese government in 2008. These museum-relevant policies directly or potentially lead to change within museums or the museum field.

There are also policies that are more general and at first sight seemingly irrelevant to museums such as economic or political policies. These policies enable changes in the macro dimension of society. These changes in the macro dimension either stipulate or promote the changes in the museum field, or cause the issuing of new policies that are relevant to museums. For example, the policy to reform an economic system may bring economic growth, which in turn could bring more funding opportunities for museums.

The characteristics of the Chinese political system make Chinese museums more likely to be subject to political and policy changes. The PRC has been a socialist country with the CPC as the only party in power since 1949. While the economy has been, to a considerable degree, released from the visible hand of the government after China's economic reform, cultural sectors and cultural sectors alike such as museums and media are still to a large degree centralized, although changes are being seen. In terms of museums, particularly regional museums as targeted by this thesis, both regional and national governments are their major stakeholders. Government ideas and thoughts are vital to museums as I will demonstrate through the study of specific museums.

### **Special Issues to Discuss: Representation of Diversity and Identity**

Museums are important to study predominantly because they are able to generate meanings and make representations. So, in this thesis, in addition to the changes of the selected museums, the representations made in these museums and the changes these representations have undergone are also to be studied. In doing so, extra light will be cast on the representation of identity – particularly in the encounter

of national identity and regional identity, and the representation of diversity – particularly in the encounter of diversity and unity.

**National identity and regional identity.** China is a country of diverse climates, topographies, and ethnicities. Regions in China enjoy distinctive characteristics not only geographically but also culturally. With this regard, regions in China bear their respective regional identities. At the same time, these regions are all under the umbrella of China. Beyond the regional borders is a common belonging to the Chinese nation. A common strand, presumed to be held by all the regions as part of their respective regional identities, is a sense of “Chineseness” or a common Chinese identity, which is variously expressed and interpreted. Analyses of specific museums in different regions give insight into how a common national identity – or “Chineseness” – is represented differently or similarly by different regional museums. Such analyses allow insight into how the selected regional museums approach the tension or balance of their own regional identity and a presumed Chinese national identity in their representations. Of particular interest is how such tension or balance has changed and what possible factors have driven these changes.

**Diversity and unity.** In the opening ceremony of Beijing 2008 Olympics, people around the whole world witnessed the scene of fifty-six children from China’s fifty-six ethnic groups in their respective costumes singing the song “Sing for Motherland” (*Gechang Zuguo*) with the national flag of the PRC held in their hands. This scene seemed to aim to deliver a two-fold message: China is a country with ethnic diversity – seen from the colourful ethnic costumes the children wore; This ethnic diversity is tuned in unification and harmony – seen from the national flag the children were holding and the patriotic song they were singing together.

The PRC is a nation composed of fifty-six ethnic groups. The Han group, however, hold the majority with 92% of the total population. In addition to population, the “culture” (lifestyles, artistic output etc.) of the central plains (predominantly the Han culture) has taken a central role in a presumed national “Chinese culture”. The present majority Chinese language, for example, has conventionally been called the “Han language” (*hanyu*) and the written language characters are called the “Han words” (*hanzi*).

The non-Han people in China, who are of various ethnicities, were officially identified as fifty-five minority groups by the CPC after the establishment of the PRC. Ethnic issues have always been crucial to the Chinese polity as they are related to national unification and social stability. It was not until recent years, however, that ethnic diversity – more in a cultural sense – has been substantially promoted in China. The above mentioned scene in the Olympic opening ceremony that could be seen as the desired national image highlighted such diversity, a presumed diversity within unity.

The representation of diversity and unity in museums, particularly in regions with diverse ethnicities allows for a more detailed understanding of museum and policy change. We can ask: Are the changes in representation in line with mainstream government policy regarding diversity? With the onslaught of recent phenomena such as cultural tourism, how is the balance between diversity and unity sought (or avoided) and kept (or broken), and why? While diversity could be used as a tag to brand or market a region for its development, how has the representation of unity, which is supposed to be beyond or above diversity as the national policy instructs, been treated?

Tied to regional policy change is the issue of the development of regional identity in line, or at odds, with national identity. In China recently regional identities have been promoted both nationally and regionally. The development of more separate regional identities can be tied to increases in cultural tourism domestically and internationally as well as an increased focus on “harmony” amongst diverse people rather than a single national identity. This is slightly complicated as the national identity currently promoted relates harmony to unity and a sense of oneness rather than distinctiveness as witnessed in the opening ceremony. This study aims to make a start at understanding the interrelations between policy, identity and representation as they affect museums over time.

## **Chapter Outline**

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. *Chapter 1*, this chapter, is a general introduction to the thesis and answers questions regarding the focus of the study.

*Chapter 2* is composed of two parts. In the first part I unfold the theoretical framework of this thesis to demonstrate the theoretical feasibility of this research. The second part is about the methodology I used in carrying out this research.

*Chapter 3* is an introduction to the development of Chinese museums in general. With this chapter I offer further background information for the research particularly in relation to changing government policy. At the same time, the chapter sets a reference line for the later study of specific regional museums.

*Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7* are the case studies of the thesis and are dedicated to Gansu Province and Gansu Provincial Museum, Shaanxi Province and Shaanxi History Museum, Yunnan Province and Yunnan Provincial Museum and Yunnan Ethnic Museum, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum respectively.

*Chapter 8* is the summary of this project. In this chapter, I look across the regions drawing out similarities and differences. I also review my research process and point to areas for future research.

## Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this chapter I present the theoretical framework and methodology for this thesis. In other words, I answer the questions as why it is feasible to conduct this study and how I carried out this study. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first half of the chapter includes the theoretical framework. The second half covers methodology.

### Theoretical Framework

This thesis studies museum and change with a particular concern in the relationship between museum change and political and policy change in selected regional museums in the PRC. This research aim implies a premise that it is feasible to study museum and change through the prism of political and policy change within a given national context – the PRC in this case. Some of the theories existing in the current academic field and some of the works previous researchers have done have formed a solid back to this premise, providing the keystones of the theoretical base of this thesis. In the following, I build up the theoretical framework of this study based on these keystones. To do so, I map out through three main properties of museums: **Museums as Texts, Museums as Representation and Museums as Politics**. I include a discussion on the concept of *culture*, a term crucial to the study of this thesis. To start, however, I will go back to the very beginning of the research topic to address the question “What is the museum?”

### What is the Museum?

While we have come to the age in which scholars of museum studies are naming their findings by adding the word *new* – for example, *The New Museology* (Vergo, 1989), *New Museum Theory and Practice* (Marstine, 2006), or by starting with those *re-* prefixed words – for example, *Reinventing the Museum* (Anderson, 2004), *Re-imagining the Museum* (Witcomb, 2003), *Rethinking the Museum and Other Mediations* (Weil, 1990), it may sound outmoded to nag at the question of what

is the museum. Kenneth Hudson (1998) proposed already one decade ago that one should never even invent an imaginary phenomenon called “the museum” since “the world contains hundreds of thousands of establishments called museums and each of them has its special characteristics, its own problems, its own opportunities and its own pace of growth and decline” (p. 45). Hudson’s proposal might make sense particularly to museums practitioners as their own institutions may be experienced as highly divergent to those of other “museums” even in their own region. To museum scholars, however, it is always of significance to discuss what is the museum, and it is perhaps even more significant now since museum studies have developed to a certain extent, as shown by the supposed arrival of the “new museology” (Vergo, 1989). While the old museology is “too much about museum methods”, the new museology calls for more attention on “the purpose of museums”, more frequency to see museology as “a theoretical or humanistic discipline”, and more discussion on “the political or ideological or aesthetic dimension” of museum practices (Ibid., p. 3).

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has been striving to define the museum since its own establishment. Starting with ICOM’s 1946 *Constitution* where the word “museums” was described as including “all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens” (ICOM, 2009), ICOM has respectively revised the definition in 1951, 1961, 1974, 1989, 1995, 2001, and 2007 (Ibid.). Looking through these revisions, we can notice a major shift starting in the 1974 version. In this version there is a departure from previous versions which emphasized the basic tasks and purpose of the museum to the later versions which emphasized also the purpose of study, education and enjoyment (Ibid.). The 1974 definition added a social concern:

A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of the society and its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment. (Ibid.)

Hudson (1999) argues that the definition “had been completely overhauled and rebuilt” (p. 372). In an earlier article he argued that the most fundamental change in the understandings of museums was the “now almost universal conviction that they

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exist in order to serve the public”, while “the old-style museum felt itself to be under no such obligation” (Hudson, 1998, p. 43).

This argument was echoed by Stephen Weil (1999) particularly through his frequently cited article “From Being *about* Something to Being *for* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum”. In Macdonald’s (2006) words, this transformation is the start of the “politicization of museums and their reorientation of their function” (p. 22).

While ICOM that has been trying to define the museum in a way “that might be found reasonably satisfactory from Canada to Congo” (Hudson, 1998, p. 43), scholars often approach the understanding of the museum in a more metaphoric or interpretative way. In their analysis, the museum has historically been viewed in various ways from regarding museums institutions for the elite – such as “primary haunt of the Museus” (Findlen, 2004), “the cabinet of curiosity” or “*Wunderkammer* (wonder-room)” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992), “the closet of rarities” (Lidchi, 1997) – to more broadly taking museums as social spaces such as a “contact zone” (Clifford, 1997). Or, as Janet Marstine (2006) put it more politically that the museum is “as shrine, as market-driven industry, as colonizing space” (p. 8-9). Stephen Weil (2002) covers the whole spectrum describe the museum “as Establishment, as Treasure House, as Philanthropy, as Process, as Presenter, as Social Enterprise” (p. 76).

All of these terminologies and interpretations push the idea of museums as institutions with a particular aim rather than as a neutral space – a concern of this thesis which I will return to repeatedly. All imply that museums may be viewed as texts.

## **Museums as Texts**

Museums as texts embodies two important points: museums carry meanings; museums can be read as texts. To understand how this is so we need to go back to early understandings of language and texts and how human beings ascribe meaning to the world in which they live. I begin with Ferdinand de Saussure who provided an important plank for this understanding through semiotics.

**Semiotics.** According to Saussure (1974), people communicate through a signifying system comprised of “signs”, each of which contains two elements: the “signified” (concept) and the “signifier” (sound-image) (pp. 65-67). Saussure argues that there is no inherent connection between the signifier and the signified and that the sign has an “arbitrary” nature in the sense that it is based on “collective behaviour” or on “convention” (Ibid., p. 68). In this sense, the sign is embodied with a “social nature” (Ibid., p. 78).

Saussure also argues for the “differential” quality of the sign (Ibid., p. 114). For Saussure, according to Culler (1976), language is a system of signs; the signs do not possess a fixed or essential meaning but are defined in relation to the other signs of that system (p. 19). That is to say, as Mason (2006) interprets, “meaning depends on a shared understanding of a given signifying system which is socially constructed” (p. 18).

In defining language, Saussure (1974) distinguishes the *langue* from the *parole* (pp. 8-17). In Culler’s (1976) interpretation, “*La langue* is the system of language, the language as a system of forms, whereas *parole* is actual speech, the speech acts which are made possible by the language” (p. 29). The *langue*, in Hall’s (1997) view, is the social part of language (p. 33). Saussure further points out that “language never exists apart from the social fact. [...] Its social nature is one of its inner characteristics” (p. 77).

In this way we can see that both the sign (the bond between the signifier and the signified) and the language (the rules and codes of the signs to form the language system) are socially constructed.

Saussure and the semiotic approach have been applied in museum research. Susan Pearce (1994), for example, has employed Saussure’s theory particularly his discussions of *langue* and *parole* in analyzing how the red jacket, which was worn by Lieutenant Henry Anderson at the battle of Waterloo and has now been a part of the permanent displays at the National Army Museum, London, accumulates meanings as time passes. In Pearce’s analysis, while the jacket exists as “a sign” in the Waterloo set to which it has an intrinsic relationship, it is acting as “a symbol” in the other sets (Ibid.). In other words, those museums objects “which were once signifiers become



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themselves the signified, as they become a chosen part of the society's *langue*, in which they play a role in modifying both the existing categories and the rules of their use" (Ibid., p. 25). In the case of the jacket, as Pearce expounds, "while the jacket survives physically, it retains its metonymic relationship to the battle itself; of Waterloo, whatever meaning may be attached to it, the jacket remains *not* [...] a 'symbol' [...] but 'sign', an intrinsic part" (Ibid.). The sign being able to carry meanings is because, Pearce explains, "it bears an 'eternal' relationship to the receding past", and it is this, Pearce argues, that "we experience as the power of 'the actual object'" (Ibid.).

In this thesis, I will employ this approach in two ways. First, each case museum of this thesis itself can be regarded as a sign. The meaning of this sign, the "signified" in Saussure's terminology, is signified through the signifiers such as its name, its building, its attributes, and its administrative position, and through its relationships with other signs – the other Chinese museums – within the system of the Chinese museum sphere as a totality.

The second level is within each case museum. In this level, the signs take the forms of the collections and the exhibitions of the museum. The meanings are signified through the signifiers – the objects and the other phonic, written and visual elements – in the exhibition and in the museum.

**Post-structuralism approach.** Saussure and semiotic theory fundamentally influenced later cultural theories particularly structuralism, then post-structuralism, with the latter having a closer connection to museum studies. Resting on the assumption that the meaning of a sign depends on its relationship to other signs within the structure (or system), structuralists proposed the concept of the binary opposition as central in their approaches. Taking a departure from Saussure and later structuralists who "focused on language and culture synchronically rather than diachronically" (Mason, 2006, p. 19), post-structuralists espouse some form of cultural relativism and emphasize change in meanings over time and within different contexts.

This diachronic focus of post-structuralism is closer to the approach of this thesis. As noted previously, this thesis is concerned predominantly with *change* – the

change of the museums through their relationship with, amongst others, political and policy change. Change always implies a time span and an historical development process. My concern then is how meanings of the selected museums and meanings made by them change over time.

Post-structuralism also proposes the significance of the context and contextual change to the meaning making. I also regard context as an inevitable and crucial issue in my research. To examine the change of the case museums, I look at the historical development of Chinese museums and their relationship to national political change (see Chapter 3 predominantly but also throughout the case studies). I also, briefly, look at the general circumstances of each case region such as the geography, history and economy (the beginning part of Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) to give the regional context of the case museums. When these contexts change, how do the meanings of these museums (the meanings embedded by them and made by them) change?

Semiotics and post-structuralism offer the basis for museums to be treated as texts. Meaning making through signs is attached to another key term in museum studies – representation, which I also use extensively in this thesis.

### **Museums as Representation**

Representation, as Stuart Hall (1997) views, “is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (p. 17). The definition discloses two basics of representation. First, representation is a process of meaning producing or constructing. Second, this meaning producing process includes two essential elements: “the concepts in our minds” and “language”, which, in Hall’s further interpretation, are “two systems of representation” (p. 17). Meaning, when it is produced, makes no sense if without being able to be understood. In this regard, representation entails an extension where meaning, after being produced, is exchanged between members of a culture. It is in this sense that *culture* is sometimes defined as “shared meanings or shared conceptual maps” (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay & Negus, 1997) – I will return to the discussion on culture repeatedly in the following. In other words, the two systems of representation acquire two premises: shared culture and shared language.

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Based on Saussure's discussion, however with an expansion, Hall (1997) views language in a broad and inclusive way. Language is, as he puts it, "any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning" (p. 19). In this sense, the exhibition as it is a system composed of signs (objects, phonic and visual elements, see also my previous discussion on signs) and capable of carrying and expressing meaning, is therefore a language. Similarly, a museum as it is such a system composed of signs (buildings, names, collections, exhibitions etc.) and capable of carrying and expressing meaning, is therefore a language. As thus, museums and museum exhibitions can be used to make representation.

Meaning constructed in representation refers not only to the simple concepts as it does in semiotics, for example, a "tree" refers to "a large plant that grows in nature", but also to those more complex, obscure or abstract concepts, such as *identity*, a subject, as argued by Kathryn Woodward (1997), "of increased academic interest as a conceptual tool with which to understand and make sense of social, cultural, economic and political changes", and also a concern of this thesis.

**Representation of identity.** Identity, in a general sense, gives us an idea of who we are. As Kevin Robins (2005) suggests, "identity is to do with the imagined sameness of a person or of a social group at all times and in all circumstances; about a person or group being, and being able to continue to be, itself and not someone or something else" (p. 173). Apparently, two dimensions are involved here: the personal and the group, or, the individual and the collective. Given the research topic of this thesis, group or collective identity is a focus of the discussions.

Identity is regarded as one of the key moments in "the circuit of culture" by du Gay et al. (1997). Woodward (1997) describes the connections between identity, representation and culture as: "Identities are produced, consumed and regulated within culture – creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which we might adopt" (p. 2).

Museums in many ways are, as Macdonald (2006) argues, "institution[s] of recognition and identity *par excellence*" since "it selects certain cultural products for

official safe-keeping, for posterity and public display – a process which recognizes and affirms some identities, and omits to recognize and affirm others” (p. 4).

Representation of group identity – in the paradigm case national identity – has become a highly charged issue for many museums as well as museum studies. The volume *Theorizing Museums* edited by Macdonald & Fyfe (1996) from a more theoretical perspective addresses museum debates with particular concern of museums as projection of identity and as contested terrains of diversity. Boswell and Evans (1999)’s edited book *Representing the Nation: a Reader* is not limited to museums, but explores the sense of national identity and how belonging to a nation comes about in general. The volume, however also designates two parts to museums – “Museums as classificatory systems and their prehistories” and “Museums and cultural management” – discussing what role museums, exhibitions and heritage sites play in the process with essays from active museum scholars such as Sharon Macdonald and Roger Silverstone, Tony Bennett, Carol Duncan, James Clifford, David Goodman, to name a few.

A recent example of research focused on museums and national identity is the European Union funded project “NaMu: making national museums”. The NaMu project organized six international workshops from 2007 to 2009 with the aim to explore “the forces and values of traditional national display in dealing with challenges to national, cultural and political discourse” (NaMu, 2007). Since 2010, the NaMu has been developed into a new project “Eunamus – European national museums: Identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen”. Maintaining the theme on museums and national identity, Eunamus focuses on, as stated, “understanding the conditions for using the past in negotiation that recreate citizenship, and [on] the understanding of layers of territorial belonging” (Eunamus, 2010).

Many of the works addressing the topic of museum representation and identity focus on particular national contexts. McLean and Cooke, for example, through their series of work, have focused on Scotland and examined the issues of national identity in the Museum of Scotland through perspectives such as visitor perceptions (McLean & Cooke, 2000), narratives of self and other (Cooke & McLean, 2002) and tourist

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encounters (McLean & Cooke, 2003), while Elizabeth Crooke (2000) has focused on Ireland and explored how a certain vision of the Irish nation has shaped and continues to shape the core of archaeology and the work of museums in contemporary Ireland. In her book *Beyond the Prado*, Selma Reuben Holo (1999) investigates the role of museums in forming identity in post-Franco era in Spain. In spite of the fact that diverse national contexts have been included into the discussion of museums and national identity, hardly heard is the discussion referring to the People's Republic of China. Hong Kong is an exception. Po Cheung Leung (2004), for example, discusses identity construction at the Hong Kong Museum of History.

The representation of national identity – *Chinese* identity in this case – is also a concern in this thesis. In the selected case museums, I examine how “Chinese” identity is represented, how such representation has changed, and how it differs in different museums. Alongside the examination I have kept in mind a concern that Macdonald (2003) holds in her investigation on museums and identity that museums move “not only to express but also to constitute” identities.

Macdonald (2003) also emphasizes that museums were not only concerned with “nation-state identity”, but also “more localised identities” (p. 4). She proposes that “Metropolitan areas generally sought to establish museums on very similar lines to those of national museums, each city thus effectively claiming for itself an identity – and a type of mastery – analogous to that of the national museums” (p. 4). However, Macdonald, further points out that “metropolitan museums were not *merely* small-scale nationals – they also had their own concerns and institutional dynamics” (p. 4). She then provides an interesting example – the Heimat museum (*home museum*) in Germany – of the ways in which regional museums both adopt particular national strategies or forms of address at the same time as seeking out an individual identity to mark some difference. She quotes Alon Confino (1997) on the relationship between local and nation: “the Heimat museum phenomenon [...] articulated, based on a metaphor of whole and parts, the relationship between the locality and the nation, between hundreds of divergent local histories and one single national history” (p. 140).

Macdonald's local angle and her concern with the local and the national in terms of museum and identities are in line with this thesis. Focusing on regional museums, this thesis investigates the issue of museums and identities covering both the national and the local level. The focus is on the balance – the tension and the negotiation – between local and national identity. Specifically, I ask questions such as: How do these case museums represent their regional identity? How do they represent a presumed national identity? How do they articulate the two? Additionally, how has the balance changed and why?

To discuss museums and representation of identity within the Chinese context, the concept of Chinese identity itself is to be debated.

**Chinese identity.** There have been two different even contradictory ways in viewing identity. The more dominant and conventional in popular understanding sees identity as natural and eternal, as the expression of some inner essence or property, while more recent and critical views on identity place it in particular social and historical contexts and therefore as socially constructed (Robins, 2005, p. 173).

Some essential core of Chinese identity is often conceived. Putting aside the biological differences, some features – the ancient civilization, Confucianism and other philosophical ways of thinking, the collective behaviours, to name a few – are used to mark Chinese out from other groups in the world, at least from a popular understanding.

Accepting a presumed essential core, however, does not necessarily mean denying changing forms and the addition of connotations of Chinese identity in different historical periods and within different contexts. *Chinese identity*, also in popular understandings, is seen to have reacted to changing circumstances and taken different forms with different added connotations.

A constructed or contextualized Chinese identity has been extensively explored and debated. Prasenjit Duara, for example, has repeatedly approached Chinese identity in his broad and systematic discussion through issues such as *nation*, *power*, *identity*, *nationalism*, *sovereignty* and *authenticity* (2009; 2003; 1995; 1993). Other researchers who have worked on this topic include William A. Callahan (2010), Jing Tsu (2005), Yongnian Zheng (1999), and Elionne L. W. Belden (1997).

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Questions appear on the way to explore Chinese identity in particular in relation with the concept of *Chinese*. Who are Chinese? Is *Chinese* a political cultural concept or an ethnic one? What is the boundary between the concepts of *Chinese* and the *Han Chinese*? Some brief background information to explain this issue and concern is needed.

**“Chinese”.** In Mandarin, the official language in China today, China is called *zhongguo*, which literally means the central country. This name at least reflects, if not represents, a traditional central Chinese view of the world, in which, as Myron Cohen (1991) puts it, “China’s society and polity were represented as dimensions of the cosmos itself” (p. 113). In this view, Cohen continues, “Being civilized, that is, being Chinese, was nothing less than proper human behaviour in accordance with cosmic principles” (p. 113). In Chinese history, the concept of Chinese for a long time referred to the Han people, which has always been the overwhelming majority in China. Even now, the Han is still the largest ethnic group making up 92% of China’s total population. “Han” firstly appeared as the name of a Chinese dynasty existing more than two thousand years ago when China was experienced great unification and prosperity. In modern times (after AD 1800), it became common to refer to Chinese culture as the culture of the Han people (Schwartz, 1993, p. 220). Schwartz thinks it ironical that “the word ‘Han’ refers not to an ethnicity but to an identification with the glories of the Han dynasty which provided the model of the later imperial state” (Ibid., p. 226). He gives out an underlying reason that culture has been seen as “the outgrowth of a natural ethnicity” (Ibid., p. 220).

The official inclusion of non-Han ethnicities into a comprehensive Chinese nation came with the founding of the Republic of China (1912 – 1949). The idea of “a republic of five races made up of the Han, the Manchus, the Mongolians, the Moslems, and the Tibetans” was developed and a five-colour flag was chosen as the national flag with the five colours representing the five ethnicities (Sun Yat-sen, “The Three Principles of the People”, cited by Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 183).

The People’s Republic of China (1949 – now) kept the inclusive nature of “Chinese” but further expanded the non-Han categories to all the ethnic groups within the country. It clearly defined in its first constitution implemented in 1954 that “The

People's Republic of China is a unitary multi-ethnic state” (*zhonghua renmin gongheguo shi tongyide duominzu de guojia*)<sup>1</sup> (P.R.C. Const., 1954, art. 3). This statement has in principal remained in the later versions including the current one, in which, it says, “The People's Republic of China is a unitary multi-ethnic state created jointly by the people of all its ethnic groups” (P.R.C. Const., 2004, pmbl. [official English version]).

The concept “Chinese” will also be addressed during the discussion on diversity later in this chapter. Chinese identity is also investigated in the case museums in the chapters to follow.

Identity in the contemporary world, as Woodward (1997) suggests, derives from a multiplicity of sources – from nationalist, ethnicity, social class, community, gender, sexuality (p. 1). Given the aim of this research, I focus the discussion in this thesis on the representation of Chinese identity by centring on two issues – *nationalism* and *diversity*, which I expound upon in the following two sub-sections and in the case studies to follow.

**Nationalism.** Nationalism is not a term that is easy to simply define, though researchers have made efforts to do so (see, for example, Gellner, 1983; Geertz, 1973; Hobsbawm, 1995; Heywood, 2007). Still, even if it is not possible to reach a definitive definition, we can at least conclude from these diverse opinions that nationalism is not only a political phenomenon, but also embodies cultural and ethnic facets, as Heywood (2007) calls them, “the political, cultural and ethnic forms of nationalism” (p. 143), or “the political nationalism”, “cultural nationalism” and “ethnic nationalism” (p. 147).

Chinese nationalism in the period of PRC, as it has been “fused with Marxism” (Heywood, 2007, p. 146), has indeed many layers and multiple facets.

In the early period of the PRC, the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese nationalism was strongly marked by socialism and revolutionary spirit. Museum representations, as I

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the quotations that are originally in Chinese, their English translation is used in the main body of the thesis for the consideration of easier reading as the thesis is written in English. The original Chinese pinyin, however, is provided in parenthesis for reference. Except for otherwise clarified, all the translations are made by the author. In this thesis, I will therefore not make any special note to indicate it is “my translation” for the purpose of conciseness.



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will discuss in the chapter to follow, had an emphasis or even exaggeration on revolutionary victories and socialist construction achievements.

The 1970s came with a shift that is as called by Yingjie Guo (2004) “the search for a new Chinese identity” (p. xi). Guo argues that identity has been reconstructed in the broad context of rapid modernization and globalization as well as the gradual debunking of socialism as the People’s Republic of China increasing became “derevolutionized” and that the result in the society was a “crisis of faith” in the 1980s, which was not merely a loss of faith in communism, but also a loss of Chinese culture and tradition as well (p. xi). Echoed in the museum field was neglect in museum construction and inertness in museum practice. Further details on this point will be made in the next chapter when I introduce the historical development of Chinese museums.

A further shift came in the 1990s when Chinese nationalism experienced a revival. The revival could be seen not only by the rise of China on the world stage, but also through the resurgence of Chinese traditional culture. As for the factors accounting for this revival, the two scholars Yongnian Zheng and Yingjie Guo give different opinion. According to Zheng (1999), it was first of all economic advancement that brought the Chinese a strong sense of national pride (p. ix). Guo (2004), on the other hand, viewed the shift of the guards of the CPC after the Tiananmen Event of 1989 – from the more innovative to the more conservative – as the most decisive factor (p. xii). Guo also argues that the CPC’s nationwide promotion of “excellent national traditions” gave rise to “a national essence fever” across the country (p. 52).

The revival of Chinese nationalism and the nationwide promotion of “excellent national traditions” by the CPC were echoed by a booming of museum construction in the 1990s. Of the case museums I chose for this thesis, Yunnan Ethnic Museum was established in this period and Shaanxi History Museum and Gansu Provincial Museum were renovated in this period.

From the above brief introduction about the nationalism in the PRC, we can see the interwoven political and cultural forms. During the rise-fall-revival process of Chinese nationalism, the political reflection – celebrating the national dependence

and socialist revolutionary victory, questioning, and rethinking the political ideology – has been intertwined with nationalist feelings and attitudes to its culture and tradition. This also echoes Heywood's (2007) argument on the two forms by which he describes political nationalism as "rational" and "may be principled" while cultural nationalism as "mystical, in that it is based on a romantic belief in the nation as a unique historical and organic whole" (p. 156).

Chinese nationalism embodying both political and cultural forms can also be seen from the nation both celebrating its ancient civilization and commemorating the humiliation it had suffered in modern history. William A. Callahan (2010) in his most recent work uses the compound *peessoptimist* – a word of his own invention – to describe such binary characters of China's identity.

In the examination on the representation of Chinese identity in terms of nationalism in the case museums, I will pay special attention on the political form and cultural form, particularly the balance between them. I will see how this balance changed in different historical periods, with, for example, the Cultural Revolution as an extreme case.

There is, however, one point that may be argued here in that the political form of Chinese nationalism, covered in the above discussion, may not be in strict line with the *classical* political nationalism which "holds the simple belief at heart that the nation is the natural and proper unit of government" (Heywood, 2007, p. 147). Nevertheless, socialists are more likely to reject nationalism in principle and treat internationalism as an article of faith, if not as a core value.

With this regard, nationalism is accepted in the PRC – officially still a socialist country despite the fundamental changes it has taken – only when or predominantly in its cultural sense. In reality, *patriotism* is more often a term used instead of *nationalism* within the Chinese context. Patriotism is even regarded as the "official nationalism of China" by scholars such as Yongnian Zheng (1999, p. 89). Despite the connoted difference between the two terms, as Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim (1993) argue, "the way the term [*patriotism*] itself was and is used suggests a conception of China which is state centered" (p. 63).

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Prasenjit Dara (1993) has also discussed Chinese nationalism by making links between the political and cultural sense:

Nationalism is quintessentially a politics of culture not only because national loyalties and identities are typically embodied in cultural media, but also because different views of the nation seek to validate and moralize their positions by appealing to a narrative or language that defines or specifies the scope of national history and culture. (p. 9)

As far as the representation of identity in museums in the case of China is concerned, nationalism may be more reflecting its cultural form, say, the love and loyalty to China's long history and rich culture. It may be argued, however, that the power of political form still prevails over the cultural one, particularly in some special historical periods, for example, the Cultural Revolution. These arguments will be demonstrated with the analysis on the case museums in later chapters.

In addition to the political and the cultural form, the other forms of nationalism such as the ethnic form as previously mentioned, is also endowed with Chinese nationalism. While overlaps exist between the term *ethnicity* and *culture*, differences still exist between ethnic nationalism and cultural nationalism at least in some respects. Further discussion of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism as well as culture and cultural nationalism is to be done in the next section of discussion on nationalism themed in *diversity*.

***Diversity.*** With museums being increasingly regarded as projections or constructors of identity, diversity has accordingly become a more frequently discussed topic, very often, compiled with the topics of social inclusion, community, or inequality (see, for example, Karp, Kremer & Levine, 1992; Sandell, 2002; Watson, 2007; Crooke, 2007). Many of the existing studies have predominantly focused on countries with colonial legacies, such as South Africa or Australia (see, for example, Goodnow, 2006; Mpumlwana, Corsane, Pastor- Makhurane & Rassool, 2002); or of migration groups within certain countries (see, for example, Ruffins, 1992; Zamora, 2007; MacDonald & Alford, 2007). Chinese immigrants in other countries have also been targeted for research (see, for example, Tchen, 1992).

China was not a colonized country in a normalized sense, nor a migration country with the exception of what is now seen officially as internal migration. The

diversity in the Chinese case refers to its ethnic groups, namely the internal diversity of ethnicity or ethnic diversity.

*Nationality vs. Ethnic groups.* As shown in China's fact-file offered by the Chinese government (the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China)'s official web portal [www.Gov.cn](http://www.Gov.cn) (English version), "China is a nation of 56 ethnic groups. As the majority (91.6 percent) of the population is of the Han ethnic group, China's other 55 ethnic groups are customarily referred to as ethnic minorities".

Here we encounter two seemingly confusing and ambiguous concepts or terms: *nationality* and *ethnic group*. Both of the two terms may be used to refer to the Chinese term *minzu*. The term *minzu* came to be widely used since 1903, alongside the western invasion of China. Chinese intellectuals and reformers such as Liang Qichao intended to arouse a sense of nationalism to fight against imperialism by introducing the western concepts such as *democracy* and *nationalism* (Ma, 2001; Huang & Shi, 2005). After the PRC adopted socialism from 1949, the concept of *minzu* was predominantly based on Marxism, specifically, Joseph Stalin's interpretation of *nation*: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin, 1913). Guided by this definition, all the ethnic groups in China including the Han and the other minority groups – the *minzu* – were called *nationalities*, for example, the Tibetan nationality. Various different opinions have been voiced within academia as to what is the proper English counterpart of *minzu*. In fact, in the 1960s, a wide-scale debate was held (Ma, 2001). No agreement was reached. *Nationality* was conventionally applied in most of the official occasions to refer to *minzu*. For examples, the official English name of the state commission in charge of *minzu* affairs was called the State *Nationality* Affairs Commission; the universities specialized in training people from minority groups had the English name marked by nationalities, such as Yunnan University of *Nationalities*, Beijing *Nationality* University. According to the scholars from the 1950s or 1960s, the Soviet Union influence also accounted for such convention (Zhou, 1998).

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The problems with using *nationality* to refer to *minzu* were increasingly realized. Even Xiaotong Fei, a leading figure in anthropology and sociology, admitted that it was improper to call the English name as Institution of Nationalities even though it was his own invention (Zhou, 2001). A more popular opinion was to use *ethnic group* instead (for example, Ruan, 1998; Ma, 2001). Apparently this opinion has been accepted by the government and the State *Nationality* Affairs Commission was changed to State *Ethnic* Affairs Commission in the end of 1990s, which has been kept until now. Another opinion is to keep the Chinese form of *minzu* in English due to the difference of the Chinese concept of *minzu* to the western similar concepts such as *nationality* or *ethnic group*. The American anthropologist Stevan Harrell (1996, 2001) and the Chinese historian Bin Yang, for example, both keep this practice in their English works.

In this thesis, in terms of the English counterpart of *minzu*, I am in line with the official narrative of Chinese government that is to use *ethnic groups* to call the Han and other minority groups in China and take China (Chinese) as a totality as a *nation (nationality)*. I view *nation* or *nationality* as implying a politically independent sense. China or Chinese as a whole is a nation or nationality due to its political independence. The Han and other minority groups are not political independent units but belong to the Chinese nation.

With this regard, the two case museums of this thesis whose Chinese name are marked by *minzu* are called ethnic museums here, though they have chosen their own English name as Yunnan Nationalities Museum and Guangxi Museum of Nationalities (see their websites <http://www.ynnmuseum.cn/ehome1.htm>; <http://www.gxmb.com/>).

In addition to the two ethnic museums, the other case museums of this thesis are not specifically dealing with ethnicities or ethnic minorities though they do raise issues of historic multiculturalism and are included in my research concern on diversity and unity.

*Diversity vs. Unity.* Drawing on perspectives from international research on diversity, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, I look at how the issue of diversity is treated in the case museums. I look particularly at how the minority

groups – their history, their culture and their life – are represented and how such representation has changed and why. Beyond this, I have particular interest in the power balance between the identities of minority groups and the national identity of Chinese. I keep *unity* as a concern in mind while investigating the issue of *diversity* in the museum representation since national unity is the Chinese government’s top concern while diversity is also promoted by the government’s recent policies (detailed analysis is offered in the case studies). How are the two seemingly incompatible issues – diversity and unity – negotiated in these museums?

In my analysis, I borrow the term “diversity within unity”, which, according to Andrew Heywood, is a key theme of multiculturalism. Heywood (2007) distinguishes the two perspectives of nationalism and multiculturalism in terms of diversity and unity: “whereas nationalists believe that stable and successful societies are ones in which nationality, in the sense of a shared cultural identity, coincides with citizenship, multiculturalists hold that cultural diversity is compatible with political cohesion” (p. 321). In other words, the multi-culturalist perspective of “diversity within unity” actually refers to *cultural* (sometimes also *ethnic*) – not political – diversity within the *political* – not cultural – unity.

It can be argued that the People’s Republic of China courts multiculturalism in that it promotes ethnic diversity within the regime of the People’s Republic of China but only ethnic and cultural diversity within political unity. It, however, may also be argued that in the case of China, unity is expected to work not only at the political level, but also at a cultural level under the umbrella of a presumed unified “Chinese culture”.

In other words, we may come to the political assertion: there is only one identity that is China or Chinese; under this identity there exist diverse ethnic and cultural identities; diversity in an ethnic and cultural sense is admitted and even promoted with the premise that it is under the unified identity of Chinese both in a political and cultural sense. In this sense, Chinese identity has a nationalist style.

Representation of diversity and unity may be examined through the treatment of similarities and differences between ethnicities or cultures, for example, the Han and minority groups. This is to be explored in the investigation of the case museums.

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In the above, I have discussed the quality of museums as texts and as representation. Both suggest that museums have power. As long as power is concerned, politics is generated.

### **Museums as Politics**

The concept of the museum normally has two basic references: museum exhibitions and the museum as an institution. Accordingly, the politics of museums include the politics of museum exhibitions and the politics of the museum institution.

**The politics of museum exhibitions.** I would like to start the section by quoting Sharon Macdonald with the series of questions she presents in the introductory chapter in her edited book *The Politics of Display*:

Who decides what should be displayed? How are notions of ‘science’ and ‘objectivity’ mobilized to justify particular representations? Who gets to speak in the name of ‘science’, ‘the public’ or ‘the nation’? What are the processes, interest groups and negotiations involved in constructing and exhibition? What is ironed out or silenced? And how does the content and style of an exhibition inform public understandings? (Macdonald, 1998, p. 1)

These questions approach the issues of power involved in exhibitions. In other words, they explore the political nature, or the politics of exhibitions. The discussion on politics of exhibitions Macdonald addresses is focused on exhibitions of “science”. “Science displays,” Macdonald contends, “are never, and have never been, just representations of uncontested facts. They always involve the culturally, socially and politically saturated business of negotiation and value-judgment; and they always have cultural, social and political implications” (Ibid.). Natural science is supposedly the least vulnerable subject of exhibition to power and politics since it is conventionally regarded as truth or as objective. The sense of Macdonald’s discussion here is therefore not only limited to science exhibitions, but to a broad category of public exhibitions in general.

Macdonald is obviously not alone in the assertion of politics in museum exhibitions. Two decades ago, in his discussion on museums and multiculturalism and the question “Who is in control?”, Steven D. Lavine (1989) asserted that “Every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural

assumptions and resources of the people who make it” (p. 36). This assertion presents the generality of power relations and politics of museum exhibitions.

Michael Baxandall (1991) decodes the exhibition in terms of power by viewing it as a field in which at least three distinct agents – “the maker of objects, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers of exhibited made objects” (p. 36) – are actively and independently playing. Baxandall’s view of exhibition as a field with different agents offers us a holistic view to understand the power relations endowed within exhibitions. Under this view, the exhibition is the final product of the mixing and even struggling and negotiating of these agents. The tension lies therefore not only in what is to be represented, but also who is controlling or dominantly influencing the means of representing.

Baxandall applies this holistic view in a micro level that puts focus on the internal system of the exhibition without considering the external factors, such as the social, political, economic and cultural situations and conditions, or the policy of local and state governments. One may, however, argue that these external factors can also work on the exhibition by impacting on the three basic agents – the objects’ maker, the exhibitors and the viewers as each makes decisions with influences from the society he or she is in, their education, interests, and social-cultural background.

Among the three agents, as far as the identity representation in museums is concerned, the most powerful one is, as argued by Karp (1991), the exhibitors or “the exhibition makers, who have power to mediate among parties who will not come into fact-to-face contact” (p. 15). The work of the exhibition makers, or the exhibitors in Baxandall’s term, includes collecting and exhibiting. Both practices, Lidchi (1997) argues, “are powerful activities” (p. 185).

Lidchi’s assertion was made in her discussion on “the politics of exhibiting”, to which the partner term is “the poetics of exhibiting” – two concepts not initiated but specifically defined and developed by Lidchi (1997) and widely used in museum studies. According to Lidchi, the poetics of exhibiting is “the practice of producing meaning through the internal ordering and conjugation of the separate but related components of an exhibition” (p. 168); the politics of exhibiting is “the role of exhibitions/museums in the production of social knowledge” (p. 185).



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In this view, the section “Museums as Texts” of this chapter, in which I discussed the meaning-making quality of museums by drawing on semiotics and post-structuralism, addresses the poetical part of *museums* – I use *museums* rather than *exhibitions* because I take the elements of museums outside of the exhibition as *signs* as well, while the section “Museums as Representation”, in which I focused issues of identity, nationalism and diversity, approaches the political part of museums. This section is entitled as “The Politics of Museums” and is of course also dealing with the political part of museums. The *politics* I mean here, however, is in a broader sense than that of Lidchi’s. It actually has included the poetical part because the poetics of museums is always already political in that the signs and the language are both socially constructed (see my analysis in “Museum as Texts” section). My other main aim to have this separate section specialized in the politics of museums is to address this issue in the view that museums are social institutions, as I note in the following section.

**The politics of museum institutions.** Recalling the discussion I made in the very beginning part of this chapter on the question of “What is the museum?”, particularly the series of definitions by ICOM, and putting aside the various opinions on the roles, functions or the practices of the museum, we come to the nature of the museum that it is, first of all, a social institution. Admitting the fact that in ordinary language *social institution* is a term to “refer to a miscellany of social forms, including conventions, rituals, organisations, and systems of organizations” (Miller, 2007) and that scholars from various disciplines have defined the term with various perspectives (see, for example, Turner, 1997, p. 6; Giddens, 1984, p. 31; Harre, 1979, p. 98), I use this term in a more social science perspective that “an institution is a regular and continuously repeated social practice”, as such it covers “not merely prisons, asylums, schools, hospitals and government offices, but also language, and moral and cultural practices” (Edga & Sedgwick, 2008, p. 175). Museums, accordingly, are social institutions.

As social institutions, the propaganda power of museums and their according responsibilities have been recognized and called for by earlier museum practitioners

such as Theodore Low. In his article “What Is the Museum?” written in 1942 when the world was at war, Low (2004) contended:

No one can deny that museum have powers which are of the utmost importance in any war of ideologies.... They have, in short, propaganda powers which should be far more effective in their truth and eternal character than those of the Axis which are based on falsehoods and half-truths. (Low, 2004, p. 30)

He argued that museums as social institutions must bear the responsibility that goes hand in hand with their educating and mass media role: “museums with their potentiality of reaching millions of our citizens must not fail to recognize their responsibility” (Low, 2004, p. 30).

This view – the museum as a social institution – has been also taken by Tony Bennett. Although he has never clearly defined it in this way, the concept permeates throughout his numerous works, particularly those which are collected in his book *The Birth of the Museum* (Bennett, 1995). Following the train of Foucault both of thought and of terminology, Bennett offers an account of the birth of the museum and explores the political rationality of it. For Foucault, according to Bennett (1995),

The development of modern forms of government ... is traced in the emergence of new technologies which aim at regulating the conduct of individuals and populations – the prison, the hospital and the asylum, for example. ... There is a mismatch between the rhetorical aims and the political rationality of these technologies. (pp. 89-90)

In his own account, Bennett specifies Foucault’s “technology” as museums and argues that there is also a mismatch between “the rhetorics which govern the stated aims of museums” and “the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning” (p. 90).

This mismatch of stated aims and modes of functioning also exist in the case of Chinese museums. The socialism that the PRC employed from 1949 could be seen as the *rhetorics*, governed by which, “serve the people” has been kept as one of *the stated aims* of Chinese museums since 1949. The actual modes of museums’ functioning, however, have been changing with time and situations (more discussion on the changing modes of functioning of Chinese museums is to be made in the following chapters).

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Bennett (1995) further argues that this mismatch fuels the demands of the reform of the museum. He characterizes these demands of reform as two principles – “the principle of public rights” and “the principles of representational adequacy” – and argues that they are the inherent characters of the museum – “ones which flow out of, are generated by and only make sense in relation to the internal dynamics of the museum form” – rather than being “imposed by the external political environment” (p. 90).

The two principles outline the ground of the politics of the museum, or say, fuel the political demands of the museum. In a way, they also provide a theoretical umbrella capable of covering the threads of high profile currently existing in museum studies such as museum and knowledge shaping, the educational role of the museum and social inclusion and exclusion issues of the museum.

Starting from the two principles, or the two inherent characters, Bennett presents two contradictions, which “have served to generate and fuel a field of political relations and demands peculiar to the museum form” (p. 102). Bennett puts it thus:

The first contradiction has consisted in the disparity between [...] the museum’s universalist aspirations embodied in the claim that the order of things and peoples it shaped into being was generally representative of humanity and [...] the fact that any particular museum display can always be held to be partial, selective and inadequate in relation to this objective (p. 103).

The second contradiction [...] consists in the fact that while it organised and addressed a public made up of formal equals it also served to differentiate populations via a combination of cultural markers which established it in a cultural zone clearly distinct from that of popular assemblies and regulatory technologies aimed at modifying the behaviour of the visitor (p. 104).

To put it simply, Bennett presents the contradiction between the claimed universality and the actual partiality of the museum; the contradiction between the idealized equal accessibility of the public and the actual eligibility of the audiences.

Bennett’s formulation of the principles and contradictions is based on the formation of nineteenth century’s museums mainly within western contexts. Of interest is to see how they work within the Chinese context – for example, how is the

political desirability of more equitable patterns of access to, and use of museums dealt with and achieved in the case museums of this thesis? For these case museums, is the museum part of the leisure industry or seen as a high culture institution disseminating knowledge?

Bennett's account of exploring the political nature of museums draws a great part from Foucault. Bennett, however, also presents an alternative in his writing that is a Gramscian perspective, which he thinks "is essential to an adequate theorization of the museum's relations to bourgeois-democratic polities" (p. 91).

According to Gramsci, the rule of one class over the others in the society was not just through force or coercion, but also through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the dominant class became the common sense values of all, as he contends in one of his elaborations on the concept of *hegemony*:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. The functions in question are precisely organisational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12)

So in the Gramscian paradigm, according to Bennett (1995), "museums are represented as instruments of ruling class hegemony" (p. 91). Bennett asserts,

For the birth of the museum could certainly be approached, from the Gramscian perspective, as forming a part of a new set of relations between state and people that is best understood as pedagogic in the sense defined by Gramsci when he argued the state 'must be conceived of as an "educator", in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilisation'. (Ibid.)

Such state-as-educator sense in terms of museums is not new in the case of China. Many museums in China are defined as bases for patriotic education. Within the museum organization, a CPC Committee is an essential component. How such a

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pedagogic role permeates into the museum exhibitions is discussed in connection with the specific exhibitions of the case museums in later chapters.

### **Beyond the Museum: A Cultural Paradigm**

In the above discussion of the museum as texts, as representations and as politics, there is a concern throughout, one that I have touched upon briefly but have not dealt with in detail but that will be extensively encountered in this thesis – the paradigm of *culture*.

**What is *culture*?** The question “What is culture?” is certainly amongst those that are difficult to answer concisely. According to *Oxford Dictionaries* (2010), in Middle English, the term *culture* denoted the meaning of “growing, cultivation” as a noun, or to “tend, cultivate” as a verb. The sense was later transferred to “cultivation of the soil”, from which then arose the sense of “cultivation (of the mind, faculties, or manners)” from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century (Ibid.). Departing from the original literal meanings of the term, the ensuing endeavours that scholars have made to explore and define *culture* have shown the great fluidity and diversity of the concept.

For the English poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold (1869), culture is “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world” (p. viii). Arnold’s view of culture may be better described as *high culture* or *elite culture* when the concept *culture* was expanded to be more broad and inclusive. Edward B. Tylor (1871), for example, held such a broad definition of culture: “Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 1). The broadness and inclusiveness of the concept of culture has been well shown in the list compiled by Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (1952), in which over 160 definitions of culture were presented.

For Raymond Williams (2002 [1958]), the word *culture* is used in two senses: “to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort” (p. 93). Therefore, Williams

argues, “culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind” (Ibid.). Williams added a new dimension of culture that concerns our everyday life to the privileged one emphasizing artistic production and specialist knowledge.

From an anthropological perspective, Clifford Geertz presented the symbolic forms of culture. According to Geertz (1973), culture is “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 89). That is to say, culture is, as in another anthropologist John H. Bodley’s (1997) words, “shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generationally, adaptive, and integrated” (p. 10). Culture is, for some other scholars, “shared meanings or conceptual maps” (Du Gay et al. 1997). Here the term *culture* is actually used to, as Bodley (1997) puts it, “refer collectively to a society and its way of life or in reference to human culture as a whole”. There is not just one culture but different cultures. It is in this sense that we have traditional culture or national culture or ethnic culture.

In 1961 Raymond Williams (1961) made an examination on the existing definitions of culture and categorized them into the “ideal”, the “documentary”, and the “social” (p. 57). Later in his work *Keywords*, Williams summarized a three-layer definition, which has been widely quoted by later scholars. As Williams (1983) concludes, culture could refer to: 1) “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development”; 2) “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general”; or 3) “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (p. 90).

At the same time, Williams (1983) also asserts that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (p. 87). This complexity does not pertain only to English. In the Chinese discourse, *culture* is also a word of great complication.

***Culture in the Chinese discourse.*** The term *culture* was introduced into Chinese on a par with another closely related term *civilization* through Japanese translations of works of European history and society in the nineteenth century (Wang, 1984). The Chinese words chosen for *culture* are *wenhua*, and for *civilization*,

*wenming*, both deriving from the common word *wen*. *Wen* conveys meanings related to figures, language symbols, textual works, achievements of human being, non-martial, mild, or social science. *Hua* literally means to transform or to change. It is also used as a suffix of verbs or adjectives to mean a trend or situation, as in English “-ize” or “-ization”, for example “to modernize” or “modernization” (*xiandai-hua*).

For culture, or *wenhua*, the *Modern Chinese Dictionary (Xiandai Hanyu Cidian, 1995)* gives three main entries. The first refers to “the total material and spiritual wealth created by mankind during the social historical developing process, particularly the spiritual wealth including literatures, arts, educations and sciences” (*renlei zai shehui lishi fazhan guocheng zhong suo chuangzao de wuzhi caifu he jingshen caifu de zonghe, tezhi jingshen caifu, ru wenxue, yishu, jiaoyu, kexue deng*) (p. 1204). The second is a specific usage in archaeology, referring to “the comprehensive whole of heritage and remains from a certain historical period which did not differ from locations” (*tongyige lishi shiqi de buyi fenbu didian wei zhuan yi de yiji, yiwu de zongheti*) (Ibid.). The third usage is to refer to “the literate capability or general knowledge” (*yunyong wenzi de nengli ji yiban zhishi*) (Ibid.).

The first entry of the above listed definitions, which is also the major usage of the term, contains two senses of culture: a broad and a narrow. The broad sense of culture covers all the activities of human beings during the developing process, which could be not only the material, but also the spiritual, not only the elite, but also the ordinary, not only the specific, but also the general, as long as they are qualified for “wealth” (or valued). Yet, the concept of “wealth” itself is fairly uncertain since what is valued as “wealth” depends on what criteria to use. One thing that is certain, however, is that the thing that is labelled as “wealth” must be something that has been acknowledged as good and worthy to be celebrated. In other words, culture, in Chinese discourse, must be – at least presumed to be – something good and celebrated. In my view, it is in this sense that culture bears some essence of the concept *civilization*, which has been commonly used to refer to “a later state, even a higher state, of development that brings together and swallows up specific cultures” (Wang, 1984, p. 2). With this usage, we can talk about, for example, Chinese culture (or Chinese civilization), or bronze culture (or bronze civilization).

This broad definition of the term culture in Chinese discourse is to some degree close to the first layer of Williams' three-layer-definition in that Williams' emphasizes the progressive process of culture, during which "wealth" or value is likely to be created. The difference is Williams does not include the material part while the Chinese definition includes both.

The narrow definition of culture in Chinese discourse, as the dictionary explains, specifically focused on the "spiritual" field referring to arts or literature and so on. It might be understood as intellectual and artistic activities and production as the third layer of meaning in Williams' culture definition. Additionally, the Chinese usage of culture to refer to literal ability and general knowledge (the third entry of the dictionary definition) could also be categorized in Williams' third layer of definition.

We may further interpret this sense of culture into "the signifying practices" as John Storey (2006, p.1) suggests, since these intellectual and artistic activities and productions, or spiritual wealth, produces and contains meanings. In this sense, the exhibits, the representation, as well as the museum itself are culture.

The second layer of Williams' culture – a particular way of life – seems not included in the Chinese definition. Yet, I would argue that in its usage as an archaeological term, culture *is* referring a particular way of life – the way of life in ancient civilisations. Additionally, as above noted, wealth, or value, itself is a vague, subjective and changing concept. A way of life could (or not) be valued as wealth or valuable. When it is judged as valuable or part of society's wealth (the judgement might be made according to the predominating ideology of the society), it is culture. A typical example of this usage is the ways of life of ethnic people. In the earlier time of the PRC, it was very rare to call the ways of life (including the production modes) of ethnic minority people as *culture* or *cultures*. Instead, they were viewed as in a different stage of civilization. This situation has been changed, however, in part through political as well as disciplinary influence. "Ethnic culture or cultures" has become a commonly used term in China today to refer to the ways of life of ethnic minority people as will be shown in my later discussion of ethnic museums.

**Culture in this thesis.** I have above discussed the term *culture* in western and Chinese conceptions. My perspective on "culture" in this thesis is based on both.



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Culture – the term and the concept – is used in this thesis in a fairly broad, tolerant and inclusive sense in line with the Chinese interpretation. In China, culture is often understood through its opposite. That is to say that culture is seen as something that is not related to economy, material wealth or nature. I differentiate in this thesis in my use of the word *culture*. I use “Chinese culture”, “national culture”, or “local culture” to refer to culture as a complex whole or a totality of material and spiritual wealth; I use “ethnic culture” or the culture of a certain ethnic group to refer to culture as a particular way of life which in museums often includes their artistic output; I use “cultural development” or “cultural undertakings” to refer to culture primarily as intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic activities and development, usually seen as counterpart to economy but in fact is generally closely tied to economy.

Culture, however, is bound and affected by economy, changes in disciplines and politics. The development of “cultural industries” or “cultural tourism” for example, has affected concepts of what is culture and what is seen as valuable and worthwhile supporting and salvaging. These industries, as I will note later in this thesis, have developed in part by changing disciplines within academia and museums, by the changing economies of national and regional China, and through the direct intervention and strategies of political leaders and national and regional governments.

## Summary

I have, so far, mapped out some of the theories, thoughts and ideas that this thesis is grounded on by following the tracks of three attributes of museums: museums as texts, as representation, and as politics.

I firstly discussed the quality of museums as texts in that they are capable of making or containing meanings. The choices made to include particular objects and exclude others are not neutral choices. The ways objects are selected and juxtaposed, or the texts added to them, are all processes of *encoding*, in Lidchi’s (1997) terms a process to “translate, de-exoticize, and transform that which is alien into that which is comprehensible” (p. 166). They are also *decoded* by audiences and curators in the process of “unravel[ing] the meaning of that which is unfamiliar, distant, incomprehensible” (Lidchi, 1997, p.166). Just as Jordan and Weedon (1995) claimed

that “all signifying practices – that is, all practices that have meaning – involve relations of power” (p. 11). In this regard, museums have power.

I then discussed the character of museums to make and convey representations which is enabled by their quality as texts. The formation of the museum texts represents people, things, periods of time as well as concepts and ideologies. These representations can never be neutral either. They are always affected by the conscious and subconscious influences of a variety of stakeholders. At any given time one or the other stakeholder is likely to have greater influence. Power is thus exercised by or in museums.

Finally, I discussed the politics of museums through two strands: politics of museums exhibitions and politics of museum institutions. It can be argued that the political rationality – to borrow the term from Foucault through Bennett – is an endowment of museums in both sense of museum exhibitions and museum institutions. The three attributions are, on one hand, parallel to each other representing characters of museums. On the other hand, there also exists a progressive causation: because museums are texts that have meanings, museums are able to make representation; because museums are able to make representations, museums are endowed with politics.

There are, of course, many other theories or theoretical inspirations that this thesis has benefited from but are not presented here. Some of them are permeated in my specific discussion offered in the chapters to follow.

## **Methodology**

In the last section, I addressed the theoretical framework that this thesis is based on. This section starts from a practical perspective and addresses the question of *how* – How was this research project conducted?

As noted previously, the aim of thesis is to study museum and political and policy change in selected regional museums in the PRC. Three essential points could be extracted from this research focus: (a) This project is concerned with museum change in parts of the PRC; (b) Museum change is studied with a particular concern on its relationship with political and policy change; (c) The study of museum change

is specified at a selection of regional museums. The research has been carried out at two levels: one is a broad level that is to take Chinese museums as a totality to look at their general development in the PRC to offer a backdrop for the specific study; the second is a close look at the developments of six selected case museums.

### **Broad Research**

As noted in the introductory chapter, “Chinese museums” are a domain of multiple longitudes and latitudes including diverse types, genres, and aspects of museums as well as different historical periods. One who is to study Chinese museums will therefore be confronted with a vast ocean of multiple possible approaches and routes to take.

I confined my research subjects on Chinese regional museums, particularly on the selected six regional museums, and within the time scope of 1949 – 2009, which is under the regime of the PRC. Be that as it may, general knowledge of the development of Chinese museums is vital in that it provides a context for understanding specific museums within specific time frames.

There is an inter-relationship between regional museums and Chinese museums as a whole (I would like to call the whole the *Chinese museum undertaking*): the former compose the main part of the latter.

As I describe in this thesis, the driving forces behind the change of the Chinese museum undertaking – the national cultural policies or the state political strategies, for example – also account for, at least partly if not mainly, changes in regional museums. Individual regional museums may not follow exactly the road that the Chinese museum undertaking takes, but there are clear similarities in development.

Despite the time frame I have set for this research, my investigation into the general development of the Chinese museum undertaking started from their first appearance in 1905. I looked briefly at the political conditions of that time to consider what caused the birth of museums in China and what shaped the earliest forms of Chinese museums (see Chapter 3). My aim was to make a comparison between Chinese museums in this early period and their development during the PRC so as to explore the influence of the political regime changes to museums. The period of

Chinese museums during the PRC, specifically, from 1949 to 2009, however, is the focus of my study.

**Policy as channel.** To investigate the general development of Chinese museum undertaking, I took policy, cultural policy in particular, as an entrance or channel. I have briefly presented in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1) the reasons to have policy as a concern of the research.

Policy, in a usual sense, refers to “the plans, programs, principles, or more broadly the course of action of some kind of actor, usually a political one such as a government, a party, or a politician” (Bennett, Grossberge & Morris, 2005, p. 258). In other words, policy reflects the wills and objectives of the political bodies in power. In the case of the PRC, such political bodies are the Party (the CPC) including the central committee and local committees and the governments including the central government and the local governments.

To add some background information: The leadership and governing in the PRC is bifurcated between the CPC and the government, the former leads the latter. This is true not only at every level of government – national, provincial (regional), municipality, county, town and village, but also in large or key industrial enterprises including museums – each museum of the national, provincial (regional) or other local levels has a Party committee included in its organization. The Party and the government are greatly intertwined and are often used interchangeably in reality when referring to their leading and governing over the country. In this thesis, if without specification, when *government* is mentioned, no matter it refers to the central or the local level, it always implies the inclusion of the governance of the Party.

Policy also points out the direction of development of all areas of society. This is particularly the case in the PRC due to its centralized political regime. Policy works more like the mediator between the government and the society. It is through policy that the government exerts the impact on society. Studying policies then can offer a link between the changes of the museums and the wills and objectives of the government, no matter they are of the national or local level. Highlighting the main policy guidelines as they are implemented regionally allows a chance to consider the

influence of policy on museums in a micro level (the regional) as well as the macro level (the national).

For this broad research part, the policies I discuss are focused on the national level (local policies are also discussed but mainly with the case studies). Among the variety of national policies, the focus is put on those that serve as the guidelines for the whole country and society, and those that are particularly dedicated to culture and museum. To study national policies – since they are made, issued and executed by different political bodies – an understanding about the Chinese political system is indispensable. Having this in mind, I interlude some introductory information regarding Chinese political system when listing out the main categories of policies that I resort to. Such introductory information – the facts or definitions – are mainly drawn from the official information portals of the CPC and Chinese government including particularly:

(a) *News of the Communist Party of China*

(<http://english.cpc.people.com.cn/>): this is the English version of the web site *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xinwen* (<http://cpc.people.com.cn/>). *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xinwen* is a branch site of *People's Daily Online* (<http://www.people.com.cn/>). *People's Daily Online*, as the name shows, is the web portal of *People's Daily* (*renmin ribao*), which has been the official newspaper of the CPC since 1949. With a current circulation of three million, *People's Daily* takes its place among the world's top ten, according to UNESCO. *News of the Communist Party of China*, first published on July 1<sup>st</sup> (birthday of CPC), 2006, is “the most authoritative web portal with the most intensive, systematic, comprehensive introductory information about the CPC” (*hulianwang shang zui jizhong, zui xitong, zui quanmian de jieshao zhongguo gongchandang de quanwei wangzhan*) (*People's Daily Online*, “Introduction”). *News of the Communist Party of China*, together with *News of the National People's Congress of the PRC* (*Zhongguo Renda Xinwen*, <http://npc.people.com.cn/>, Chinese version only), *News of Chinese Government* (*Zhongguo Zhengfu Xinwen*, <http://gov.people.com.cn/>, Chinese version only), *News of Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee* (*Zhongguo Zhengxie Xinwen*, <http://cppcc.people.com.cn/>, Chinese version only), *News of the General Labour*

*Union of the PRC (Zhongguo Gonghui Xinwen, <http://acftu.people.com.cn/>, Chinese version only), News of the Women's Federation of the PRC (Zhongguo Fulian Xinwen, <http://acwf.people.com.cn/>, Chinese version only), and News of China Association for Science and Technology (Zhongguo Kexie Xinwen, <http://scitech.people.com.cn/>, Chinese version only), has become “an essential platform to release the nation’s vital news, to publish authoritative interpretation of policies and rules, and to communicate with the people” (*fabu guojia zhongyao xinwen, quanwei jiedu zhengce fagui he goutong renmin qunzhong de zhongyao qiaoliang*) (Ibid.).*

(b) Website of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China (Chinese version: <http://www.gov.cn/>; English version: <http://english.gov.cn/>): this website was formally published on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006. It is a comprehensive platform of the State Council and its various organs, and the provincial, autonomous region, municipality governments to release governmental information and offer on-line services ([www.gov.cn](http://www.gov.cn/), “About us”).

The national policies I mainly resort to during the broad research in exploring the general development of Chinese museums (Chapter 3) are reported through the following channels:

***Reports presented at National Congresses of the CPC.*** The National Congress of the CPC (and the Central Committee elected by it) is the highest leading body of the Party. The Party congress is held once every five years. The main functions of the congress, among others, include examining the reports of the Central Committee, usually delivered by the General Secretary of the Party, who is also the chairman of the state. The reports conventionally summarize the existing situations of various sectors of the country and society and point the way toward to the future. In other words, as commented by Franz Schurmann (1973), “far from being a ritual, the Party congresses mark decisive periods in the political development of communist leadership” (p. 140).

I am obviously not alone, instead, accompanied by a legion of scholars in referring to reports of the National Congress of the CPC for research about or related to China. They unanimously note the importance of the party congress and the

according reports in their works. For example, in their analysis on US-China relationship in the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Kerry Dumbaugh and Richard P. Cronin (1997) address the fifteenth party congress as “controlling even within the new term” and assert that “they [Communist Party Congress] are extraordinary important to Chinese leadership decisions and overall policy direction” (p. 162). An Chen (1999), in discussing the political power restructuring of China between 1978 to 1998, points out that the convention to hold the national Party congress a few months ahead of the National People’s Congress (NPC) highlights the “Party dominance over the [people’s] congress: Once the fundamental policy guidelines and changes of personnel were determined at the Party congress, it was the responsibility of the people’s congress to legitimate them and work out detailed, concrete policy measures” (P. 106).

James C. F. Wang (2002) gives the reason for the importance of the Party congress reports: “Since the Central Committee debates are never published except for occasional communiqués summarizing policy formulations and personnel changes, reports of the National Party Congress provide a unique source of information about the issues and programs of concern to the party” (p. 72). Wang (2002) further emphasizes such importance by pointing out the supreme power of the CPC: “The CPC is the source of all political power and has the exclusive right to legitimize and control all other political organizations. The CPC alone determines the social, economic, and political goals for society” (p. 69).

The democracy of the CPC is a controversial topic and is not the target for discussion in this thesis. My point here, however, is to show that the Party’s policy has an absolute guiding power to all aspects of the Chinese society. Detailed examination of these reports is offered in Chapter 3.

*Five-year Plans for National Economic and Social Development*<sup>2</sup>. *Five-year Plans for National Economic and Social Development* (*guomin jingji he shehui fazhan wunian jihua*), often known as its short form *Five-year Plans* (*wunian jihua*),

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<sup>2</sup> From the eleventh, it has been called five-year “guideline” (*guihua*) instead of “plan” (*jihua*). For the purpose of trimness and conformity, I keep it as “plan”.

are made by the State Council and endorsed by the National People's Congress (NPC). NPC is the highest organ of state power of the PRC and the State Council is the highest executive and administrative organ. There is, however, an interlocking relationship between the CPC and the government, noted previously, in that the CPC enjoys the supreme position in China's leadership. The State Council is responsible for carrying out the principles and policies of the CPC. In the process of the five-year plans' making, firstly the CPC will issue *proposals*. These *proposals* will be discussed by the sessions of NPC and serves as a guideline for the final making of the five-year plans.

*Five-year Plans* denote national key construction projects, manage the distribution of productive forces and individual sectors' contributions to the national economy, map the direction of future development, and set targets. From 1953 when the first five-year plan was made, a total of eleven five-year plans have been made and implemented to date. The five-year plans focus on economic development. Cultural policy, however, can also be traced in these plans. Especially when culture is industrialized and becomes a type of economy, to look at these five-year plans becomes more necessary.

***Papers, documents and announcements issued by Ministry of Culture of China and State Administration of Cultural Heritage.*** The Ministry of Culture is one of the ministries and bureaus under the State Council of China. It is mainly responsible for cultural policy and activities in the country, including making cultural policies and regulations, promoting and managing public cultural facilities, managing cultural industries, and conducting foreign cultural exchange and communication. State Administration of Cultural Heritage is subsumed under the Ministry of Culture and is in charge of issues related to cultural relics and museums in China. There is a division specialized in museums under the State Administration of Cultural Heritage.

Papers, documents and announcements issued or made by the two organizations have more direct and close influence to culture and museums. They, however, are actually responses to the national strategies and policies. The two mentioned organizations here in a sense play the role of agencies or middlemen between the government and the museums.



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The listed policies here are particularly concerned with the connection – either directly or indirectly – to cultural policies and sectors. I have, in addition, also been concerned with the policies on *ethnic diversity* and their effects on museums in China. Unlike general museum and cultural policies, however, I have not written separate chapters for ethnic diversity policies. The discussions about this topic are intertwined in the case studies.

To take a policy channel so as to study museum or museum-related areas within a national context has been adopted by numerous scholars. For example, Nigel Abercrombie (1982) has looked at the cultural policy development in the United Kingdom focusing on key legislation and developments from the late 1960s onwards. Nigel's work is not specifically dedicated to museums, but he does include the policies related to heritage as one of the three main sections of the whole structure.

From the Canadian context, Susan Ashley (2005) cast her research attention on governmental policies in her investigation on the changing role of the Canadian museum as voice of the state and as a public space for opinion and meaning making.

Ian Lawley (2003) employs the policy angle in examining ways in which local authority museums in England are adapting to the changing political, economic, social and cultural environment.

The factors that influence the development of museums in China are, of course, more than national political change traced in policies. Other areas, such as Chinese museology, the public influence and interpretation of culture and museums, the theories and ideologies of communism/post-communism, and international museum developments are not specifically covered but also have influenced the general development of museums in China. I have chosen to highlight political change with a particular concern on policies firstly due to its heavy influence on Chinese museums including Chinese regional museums that are the focus of the thesis. Additionally, the policy perspective used in the broad research to examine the general development of Chinese museums sets a coordinate system for the research on regional museums. Within this coordinate system, the application of the same national policies in different regions can be examined and explored.

I am aware that a broader view of the development of Chinese museums would be created if more areas, such as reception and audience studies, could be included in this research. Time and scope, however, do not allow this. It is an area, however, that I would like to cover in future studies.

## **Case Studies**

The broad research into changes in policy affecting Chinese museums in general has, as noted, been complemented with a set of close studies. In the following I lay out two concerns related to the case studies: why this particular selection and what approach taken. *Selection* here is in fact a two-fold issue: the selection of the case study as the methodology in general and the selection of the cases.

**The selection of case study as the methodology.** In the beginning of the book *Case Study Research*, John Gerring (2007) uses a metaphor to introduce case study method:

There are two ways to learn how to build a house. One might study the construction of many houses – perhaps a large subdivision or even hundreds of thousands of houses. Or one might study the construction of a particular house. The first approach is a cross-case method. The second is a within-case or case study method. (p. 1)

As we know, the case study as a research strategy has been commonly employed in academic disciplines such as psychology, political science, social work as well as in practical areas such as business and community planning.

According to Robert K. Yin (1981), “the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 59). In this thesis, the case study is to examine the change of Chinese regional museums (the contemporary phenomenon) in its real-life context that is the specific circumstances of the case regions and of China. The boundaries between the change of these museums and their regional and national contexts are not clearly evident.

Yin (2003) singles out the conditions that distinguish different research strategies: “(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on

contemporary as opposed to historical events” (p. 5) (See Table 1). He then summarizes these three areas by arguing that case study research is useful “when a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9).

**Table 1: Relevant situation for different research strategies**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Form of research question</b>	<b>Requires control of behavioral events?</b>	<b>Focuses on contemporary events?</b>
<b>Experiment</b>	How, why?	Yes	yes
<b>Survey</b>	Who, what, where, how many, how much	No	yes
<b>Archival analysis</b>	Who, what where, how many, how much?	No	Yes/no
<b>History</b>	How, why?	No	no
<b>Case study</b>	How, why?	No	yes

*Source:* COSMOS Corporation, cited in Yin (2003, p. 9)

Following the criteria presented by Yin, as illustrated in **Table 1**, I examined my project and concluded that the case study would be a useful research strategy to carry out this project. First, my research question of this thesis: “How has Chinese regional museums changed in accordance with the political and policy changes of the PRC? And why?” meets the first criteria on the form of research question. Second, I (the *investigator*) have no control over these museums (the *events*), which means I cannot carry out this research through experiments. Third, the object of this research – the change in regional museums in China - is a *contemporary event*. That means I can have “direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events not usually included in the historian’s repertoire” (Yin, 2003, p. 9).

Gerring (2007) argues that case-based analysis offers “a series of alternatives to the standard linear/additive model of cross-case analysis, thus establishing a more variegated set of tools to capture the complexity of social behavior” (p. 4). I do, particularly in the final chapter, but also in the second case study in each set, offer some comments across the cases. What I do not do, however, is to offer cross-cases across national boundaries. This is because the scope of Chinese museums in general is already a large entity. Also I hope my study on Chinese museums might add an alternative to existing museum studies that focus primarily on museums in western countries, thus offering an alternative view to look at world museums.

**The selection of cases.** *Case* in this research contains two layers: case *regions* and case *museums*. Currently there are thirty-four provincial regions in the PRC including twenty-three provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities and two special administrative regions. In the first phase of the project, I did a set of interviews with a broad number of museum directors from different regions (see **Appendix 2.**). The aim was to get a general background of the regional museum development in China as well as to aid choosing the cases for studies. The guideline I set for this round of interview (see **Appendix 2.**) was relatively general. It includes two parts: the first part includes questions about the general factual information of the museum. The second part included a set of special themes from which I chose two or three for different interviews, according to the specific situations. These interviews turned out to be very useful. On the one hand, they offered me practical references to a broad view of Chinese museums and assisted my decision on case selection. Although most of the museums here were not included in my final case studies, the conversations with these directors and their opinions and views broadened or adjusted my view on the state of Chinese museums. On the other hand, the process of arranging and organizing these interviews acquainted me with the challenging side of this research – not all the museums welcomed my project particularly when they were aware that I was based in a foreign university and not all the people I tried to arrange interview with were willing to talk on behalf of the museum.

Based on these interviews and considering the actual situation such as the feasibility and difficulty to conduct a site investigation, the supporting attitude of the

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museum to this project, as well as the relevance of the museum to the research theme, I finally selected four regions and six museums for my case study.

Why a selection? There are a total of thirty-four provincial regions in China – as mentioned previously, holding 2,400 public museums. It is impossible to cover all the regions and all the museums within a single Ph.D project. In dealing with the situation where a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed, the case study is a preferential methodology (Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991).

Why these cases? Alan Bryman (2004) argues that “case are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered” (p. 51).

The cases in this thesis were not selected by random. I set two criteria. The first is what I called *exemplary cases*, following the essence of Yin’s (2002) idea that “All of the cases [...] reflect strong, positive examples of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 12). That is to say, the selected case regions were able to reflect the development of Chinese regional museums in general. I call the second *diverse cases*. That is to say, the selected cases were to cover different regions of the country and to emphasize different factors that influence the development of museums.

I chose four regions as the cases and categorized them into two sets. Gansu province and Shaanxi province are in one set and Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region are in another. The two case regions of the same set share some common features but have differing characteristics. For example, Gansu and Shaanxi are both located in inland China and both have a “glorious” history with rich cultural relics. Both reflect attempts at creating and presenting a united China through references to the past.

In both cases, I explore the relationship between the economy and culture: how do museums react to local economic and social development? And how do they reflect policy changes and the need to create a diverse but unified China. They offer diversity, however, through their history as well as recent economic developments.

Shaanxi had hosted the capital of China for a long historical period. Of particular interest in relation to regional and museum development is the revival of the imperial culture in recent years and the reasons for this in relation to cultural

tourism and regional and national identity. Shaanxi province was the start of the Silk Road. Gansu, on the other hand, was the hinge of the Silk Road and also offers an insight into post-revolutionary and contemporary attempts at creating a unity in diversity through cultural output. In opposition to Shaanxi, Gansu remains on the list of China's poorest regions in contemporary time. Gansu offers then both a comparison case in relation to the historical creation of political unity as well as a difference in regional development and policy.

The representation of the nation as unity in diversity is also a concern for the second set of case studies. The link between Yunnan and Guangxi is that they both continue to have a large percentage of minority people. Yunnan holds a range of minority ethnic groups while in Guangxi the Zhuang people, whom Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region is named after, makes up the major portion of the non-Han population. In the case of Yunnan, I look in particular at how diverse ethnicities are represented by local museums and used by regional development in terms of cultural tourism. Compared to Yunnan, Guangxi was historically slow to present minority ethnic culture but with regional development and cultural tourism this has changed dramatically. The two regions offer then good comparisons both to the first set – approaches to presenting national unity through or despite diversity – as well as between them. Here also are economic as well as policy differences.

The selection of the museums of these case regions was from the following two considerations. First, the selected museum should be the museum for the whole region, not for a city or a town. Second, since I took primarily a social-political approach in this study, natural science museums and other theme museums such as art museums or historical sites were not prime candidates. Comprehensive museums and history museums offered, though this might be debated, better insight into the creation and representation of regional and national identities. Additionally, due to the special focus put on the topic of ethnic diversity, I included the regional ethnic museums into the cases. My final choices are: Gansu Provincial Museum for Gansu province, Shaanxi History Museum for Shaanxi Province, Yunnan Provincial Museum and Yunnan Ethnic Museum for Yunnan province, and Guangxi Zhuang

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Autonomous Region Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum for Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

**Generalizability.** In the above I elaborated on my selection on the cases. A selection, however, always implies a rejection. When you select something, you reject something else. The case study is a method of choice (Yin, 2002, p.4), thus leading to an arguable topic: the weakness of the case study.

The most standard criticism of the case study is its “generalizability”, or “external validity” (Bryman, 2004, p. 51). A frequently heard question is: “How can you generalize from a single case?” Specific to this project, the question would be: “How can I generalize the development of Chinese regional museums from the cases from four regions?” The answer is: “I can’t.” It would be impossible to fully present the development of Chinese regional museums within the scope of this research. Regions differ from other regions. Museums differ from other museums. Yin (2003), however, offers the defending opinion: “in doing the case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)” (p. 10). In this sense, what my cases do is not to show the full picture of all the regional museums in China, but to expound and demonstrate the interrelationship between regional museums and broader-scale political changes.

So the crucial question, as argued by Bryman (2004), is not “whether the findings can be generalized to a wider universe, but *how well* the researcher generates theory out of the findings” (p. 52). This is the challenge I confronted. The four case regions I selected are all from the western or inland part of China, in a way, an economically less-developed part of China. The eastern more developed regions are not covered. It would be good to look at also the museums in more developed regions – for example, Zhejiang province, one of the richest regions from the eastern part of China – to see how they react to recent political changes, but again this did not fall within the scope of this research.

**Approaches to case studies.** I approached my case studies through three ways. First I reviewed documentation about the history and policy changes that the case regions and museums experienced. Governmental documents, journalist reports,

history books, museum booklets are the main sources. In the reviewing process, I put special attention on *changes* – the change of the museums and the regions as well.

The second main approach was direct observation of the case museums. I was able to carry out two fieldtrips to the case museums. I observed and photographed the ways objects were displayed, the text wording and narrative, narratives of guides, image illustrations and the overall way the museums organized their exhibitions – looking at both presences and absences.

Interviews offered a third source of information. As noted previously that I did a first round of interviews in the earlier stage of this project. Three of the museums whose directors I had interviewed in the first round were included in the case studies. During the fieldtrips, I carried out the second round of interviews specifically targeting the case museums (see **Appendix 2** for the list of interviews). I had a looser interview guide as the people being interviewed had different backgrounds. There were, however, common themes throughout these interviews – the museum's treatment of the issue of diversity and unity in exhibitions, the negotiation of national identity and regional identity in the museum, museum funding and historical change.

The research, however, was clearly hampered by the size of the country and therefore travel costs. More time in each place and with interviews with a broader selection of museum workers would have been preferable. To arrange these interviews were also challenging particularly for a Ph.D student based in an institution outside of China. For example, I did not manage to get an interview with the Director of Shaanxi History Museum, although I tried different ways to make contact. Luckily I met a curator of that museum whom I had several casual conversations with (but not interviews) and she kindly offered me some internal circulated materials.

A combination of the three approaches offered me both internal and external perspectives and a systematic and contextual view. Problems and weaknesses, however, still exist in my approach to the case studies. First, as noted, the interviews I have done were mostly with the directors. It was good on one side that I could get first-hand information concerning the way the museum was run. The directors, however, offered me a *preferred history*, the history narrated by the directors



themselves in the way they understand the museum history or in the way they prefer to understand it. The preferred history required my further exploration through comparison with other sources of evidence. It, however, also created a threshold for further exploring: What is behind the directors' preference? And why?

Second, since the bias toward verification is a fundamental human characteristic, as Francis Bacon (as cited in Flyvbjerg, 2006) puts it:

The human understanding from its peculiar nature, easily supposes a greater degree of order and equality in things than it really finds. When proposition has been laid down, the human understanding forces everything else to add fresh support and confirmation. It is peculiar and perpetual error of the human understanding to be more moved and excited by affirmatives than negatives. (p. 234)

The close analysis of the museum representation is, inevitably, stamped with my subjective and arbitrary judgement since the bias toward verification is general.

Third, there is a part missing from my approach to case studies: reception studies. The data collecting was conducted from the side of the museum but not the side of the audience or the community. Due to time constraints and the choice to concentrate on policy, I was not able to interview audiences or make a survey on the local communities. This may have offered a better understanding of the museum representations and the way they reflect and are received by varying audiences.

Despite these insufficiencies I believe, however, that this research offers a first insight into an area that has seldom been covered before. With this brief background to theoretical anchor points and methodology, I turn then to policy background and museum history.

## Chapter 3. The Development of Chinese Museums

More than one hundred years have passed since the first Chinese museum was established.<sup>3</sup> During the one hundred years, fundamental upheavals including wars such as the Opium War (1840-1842), the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the Liberation War (1946-1949, also known as the Third Revolutionary Civil War, or the second phase of the Civil War), revolutions and movements such as the Xinhai Revolution (1911-1912, also known as the Revolution of 1911), the New Culture Movement (1910s-1920s) and the Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976), as well as various deep-ploughing economic reforms have taken place in China. Chinese museums witnessed these social political changes and have been fundamentally shaped by them. In this chapter I map out these economic, social and political upheavals and consider how they have affected the establishment of museums and museum policy in China in general. In the subsequent chapters I look at the effects particularly of later upheavals on the specific case museums.

The whole journey that Chinese museums have taken in the past century can be divided into two sections: Museums in the old China and museums in the new China with the establishment of the PRC in 1949 as the dividing line. I will, in the following, first introduce the situation of museums in the old China – the birth and early development. The focus of this thesis, however, is predominantly on museums in the new China and I will therefore give more space to this period. An introduction to museums in the old China, however, offers a historical context so as to better understand the development of Chinese museums after the establishment of the People's Republic.

My focus in this chapter is predominantly with national and centralised change. As I will argue in this thesis, changes in cultural policy in the PRC to a large degree come from the change of the views and thoughts of the leadership of the

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<sup>3</sup> Here I use the expression *Chinese museums* to mean the museums established by Chinese people within China. For the period after 1949, it means the museums established by Chinese people within the PRC. Those

country – the CPC. These views take effect through policy implementation at various levels. These policies are also a reaction to economic and social conditions in the country. Later chapters are more concerned with regional changes in policy and economic conditions and the ways in which national policy is interpreted, negotiated and implemented.

Among the numerous changes China experienced after 1949 were two that fundamentally shifted the country: the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the Reform and Opening-up (from 1978). The two, I argue, along with other shifts in leadership and policy, fundamentally influenced later museum development in China. I have therefore divided the post-1949 section into three sub-sections: Chinese museums in 1949-1965, 1966-1976 and 1978-now.

As I have previously mentioned in Chapter 2, there are two levels of national policy of China: the policy of the CPC and the policy of the central government, the latter guided by the former. The CPC presents the main views and plans through its National Congress held every five years. The central government develops and implements the policies and plans – for example, the *Five-year Plan of the Economic and Social Development of China* – under the guidance of the CPC. The local governments of the different regions implement the national policies and develop their own plans for the local development under the guidance of the CPC and the central government.

There are, in other words, national policies and local policies according to the administrative level. There are also policies within different disciplines such as cultural policy, economic policy or ethnic diversity policy. Museums as cultural institutions have a close tie with cultural policy. In this chapter, I will mainly look at the policies related to culture that have influenced museums. In the chapters to follow, other policies that have had a great influence on the development of museums, particularly policies of ethnicity, are discussed.

## Museums in the Old China (before 1949)

### 1905 – 1911: Inception

In order to understand the emergence and growth of the very first Chinese museums, one needs to consider the social and political situation of China in the second part of the nineteenth century.

It is widely accepted in China today that the first Chinese museum was established in 1905 by Zhang Jian in his hometown Nantong of Jiangsu Province (see, for example, Liang & Hu, 1998; Wang, 2001) – I will return to this museum later in this section. Hongjun Wang (2001) notes, however, that the first time the concept of a museum was introduced into mainland China was in 1848 by Xu Jishe in his book *Ying Huan Zhi Lue* (A Brief Survey of the Maritime Circuit), in which museums were introduced together with the local geography, history and cultures of the western countries such as Prussia, Spain and Portugal (p. 71). Xu Jishe's book did not come in isolation but alongside a movement of Chinese officials and literati of the period whose aim was to strengthen China's own knowledge and ability. The prominent figures of this movement included, in addition to Xu Jishe, Wei Yuan, Kang Youwei, Yan Fu, Liang Qichao and Zhang Binglin, amongst others.

As for the Chinese worldview or Chinese world order before the western invasion in the nineteenth century and the self-strengthening movement, Hao & Wang (1980) amongst others offer systematic and detailed analysis, which I draw on heavily on addressing this topic. For the worldview of the Chinese, Hao & Wang (1980) note:

China was not viewed as a part of Asia, much less of the 'Far East'; it was Chung-kuo, or the Middle Kingdom, that embodied civilization itself. [...] The relations of the Chinese with non-Chinese people were coloured by this concept of Sinocentrism and an assumption of Chinese superiority. [...] China was internal, large and high, while the non-Chinese 'barbarians' were external, small and low. (p. 143)

The Opium War (1840-1842) between China and the Britain and the following western invasions apparently wavered this worldview to the extent that Chinese literati realised that there was a need to understand western countries better, as Hao &

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Wang (1980) put it, “a segment of Chinese officials and literati of the period, after a war with a barbarian state of Western Europe, urgently sought to understand the enemy and discover what kind of place Europe was” (p. 147). The result included abundant writing about world geography. Between 1840 and 1861 a total twenty-two books were written, including the one introducing western museums (Ibid.).

The central idea of these writings was “to learn about advanced technologies from the West so as to subdue them” (*shi yi chang ji yi zhi yi*), presented by Wei Yuan (Wei, 1999 [1843]) in *Hai Guo Tu Zhi* (Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms). It can be argued that this self-strengthening movement of the Chinese literati accounted greatly for the Westernization Movement (*Yangwu Yundong*) of China between the 1860s and 1890s. Hao & Wang (1980) explain the relation between the two: “While self-strengthening was the goal of the literati-officials, Westernization in the narrow sense was the concrete programme for achieving it” (p. 167).

The Westernization Movement mainly focused on economics and technology. More influential to museum development in China, according to Wang (2001), however, was the upsurge of activities urging reform on the Western model in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, amongst which the creation of museums was advocated. A climax of this upsurge came with the Hundred Days Reform in 1898, initiated by scholar reformists Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao and accepted by the then Emperor Guangxu.

Emperor Guangxu issued more than 40 edicts concerning all conceivable aspects including education, science, industry, commerce, law, military as well as government administration (see, “Hundred Days Reform,” 2009; Lo, 1982). According to Wang (2001), the suggestion for museum creation was adopted by Emperor Guangxu and the government then issued specific reward measures to encourage people to establish museums (p. 74). The reform program, however, was destroyed by a conservative backlash after 103 days. Wang argues that along with the loss of the reform policies was the readiness of Chinese society for the creation of museums (Ibid., p. 75).

According to Liang (1998b), in 1905, Zhang Jian, an open-minded scholar and active educationist, argued for the establishment of *bolanguan* (museums and libraries) in China in two proposals – “Proposal for Establishing Imperial *Bolanguan* in the Capital” (*Qing Jingshi Jianshe Diguo Bolanguan Yi*), and “Proposal to the Central Educational Department about Establishing *Bolanguan*” (*Shang Xuebu Qingshe Bolanguan Yi*) – submitted to the Qing Court.

In “Proposal to the Central Educational Department about Establishing *Bolanguan*”, Zhang Jian stated that museums and libraries were an effective supplement to school education as they offered practical and experimental opportunities for those who are educated to better understand the knowledge they learn (Zhang, 1905). So he suggested the government request each region to employ the *bolanguan* system. To do so, he suggested establishing the imperial *bolanguan* in Beijing first as the model for regions to follow (Ibid.).

These proposals, however, didn’t elicit any response from the Qing court and Zhang Jian therefore established a museum in his hometown called Nantong Museum (Zhang, 1913).

Nantong Museum was built within a botanic garden and occupied an area of 23,000 square meters (see **Figure 1** and **2**).



**Figure 1. Historical images of Nantong Museum.** From left to right: North Building (for displaying fossils); Middle Building (for displaying inscription, calligraphy and paintings); and South Building (for displaying cultural relics and specimens). (Photos courtesy of Nantong Museum.)



**Figure 2. Renovated buildings at Nantong Museum.** In 2005, the celebration of the 100-year-anniversary of Chinese museums was held here. (Photos courtesy of Nantong Museum.)

As described on the museum website, the museum at the time included four departments: natural science, history, fine arts and education (Nantong Museum, n.d.).

According to Wang (2001), following the establishment of Nantong Museum, several museums or museum-like institutions were established including the Teaching Tools Exhibition Room established in Tianjin in 1905 and the Education Museum in Tai'an in 1906 (p. 78). These museums were relatively small and simple compared to the museums in China today. They pioneered, however, the journey that Chinese museums were to take.

### **1911- 1949: Early Development and Destruction**

Six years after Zhang Jian established Nantong Museum, the Xinhai Revolution broke out. One of the greatest historical effects of the Xinhai Revolution to China was that it ended two thousand years' rule of feudalism in China and led to the establishment of the Republic of China (1912-1949). The early period of the Republic was characterized by intellectual ferment, marked particularly by the New Cultural Movement. During the New Cultural Movement, scholars who had classical education nevertheless started to lead a revolt against Confucian culture and call for the creation of a new Chinese culture based on global and western standards, particularly democracy and science (Fairbank, 1992; Sun, 1986; "New Cultural Movement," 2010).

It was in this intellectual atmosphere that museums in China had their early development. During the Republic period, museums were subject to the Central Educational Department, under which an office was set specializing in the administration of museums as well as libraries, fine arts galleries, zoos, botanical

gardens and cultural relics collections (Liang & Hu, 1998). The inclusion of museums into the national educational system, I argue, also marked the transformation of museums in China from individual-initiated institutions to national public institutions.

According to Wang (2001), the first national museum of China – The National History Museum (*Guoli Lishi Bowuguan*) – was opened to the public in 1926 in Beijing under the administration of the State Educational Department. An embedded educational role of this museum can be read from its set objective: “to collect cultural relics in all ages and to strengthen social education” (*souji lidai wenwu, zengjin shehui jiaoyu*) (Wang, 2001, p. 80). This museum was regarded as the earliest historical form of today’s National Museum of China (*Zhongguo Guojia Bowuguan*) (National Museum of China, n.d.).

A trend of Chinese museums in the 1920s, noted by both Wang (2001) and Liang & Hu (1998) as one of the new features of Chinese museum undertaking, was the opening up of imperial collections to the public in the form of antiques display houses (*guwu chenlie suo*). A remarkable event following this trend was the establishment of the Palace Museum (*Gugong Bowuyuan*), sited at the Forbidden City, opened to the public on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1925. The historical significance of this event could be vividly seen from the description about Beijing on that day:

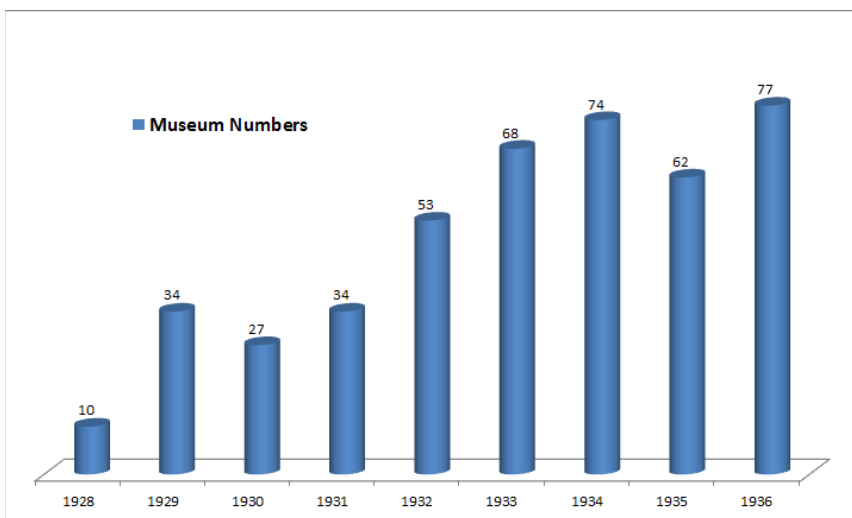
“Beijing became an empty city as all people went out to the Palace Museum. On the occasion of the celebration of the National Day, they all wanted to see this mysterious imperial place and the collections that had been forbidden from the public for centuries” (*wanren kongxiang, xian yu cheng ci guoqing jiajie, yi yikui ci shuqiannian shenmi zhi yuncang*) (cited in Liang & Hu, 1998, p. 750). Political change, in other words, led to the opening up of cultural relics also to those beyond the aristocracy.

Another trend started particularly from the late 1920s and continued in the 1930s was the establishment of museums at the regional or municipality level. Many of them were later developed into the museum category that this thesis focuses on – regional museums. The predecessors of two case museums of this thesis – Gansu Provincial Museum (Chapter 4) and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum (Chapter 7) – were established at this time.



Museums were expected to be primarily sites for education as indicated not only from the administrative position of museums of this time – within the management of Educational Department – but also from the rapid appearance of a series of science and education museums. Jiangxi Provincial Science Museum (*Jiangxi Shengli Kexue Bowuguan*), Jiangxi Provincial Educational Museum (*Jiangxi Shengli Jiaoyu Bowuguan*), Educational Museum of the Central Educational Department (*Jiaoyubu Jiaoyu Bowuguan*), and Jingzhao Mass Educational Museum (*Jingzhao Tongsu Jiaoyu Guan*), to name a few examples, were all established in the 1910s and 1920s (Liang & Hu, 1998).

Chinese museums had their first boom starting from the end of the 1920s and continuing in the first half of the 1930s. There were 77 museums in China by the end of 1936, 7.7 times of the number in 1928 (see **Figure 3**).

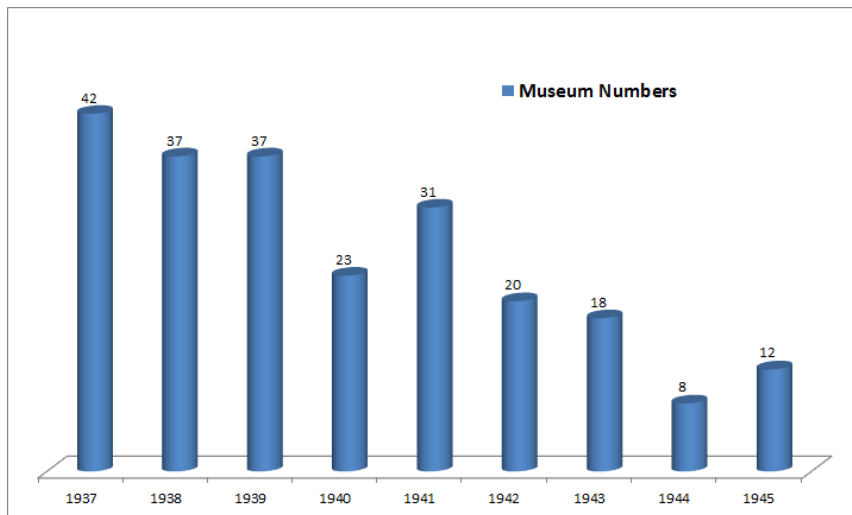


**Figure 3. Museum numbers in China, 1928-1936.** Based on data from Liang & Hu, 1998.

In addition to the increased number of museums, the 1930s museum boom was also reflected in the development of museum studies at the time. In 1935, The Museums Association of China (*Zhongguo Bowuguan Xiehui*) was established aiming at “studying museology, developing the museum undertaking and promoting the collaboration between museums” (*yanjiu bowuguanxue, fazhan bowuguan shiye, bing mou bowuguan zhi huzhu*) (Fu, 1998, p. 754). Books introducing foreign museums and the historical development of museology were published. These

included Chen Duanzhi's *Bowuguanxue Tonglun* (General Museology) published in 1936, which was regarded by Wang and Feng (1998) as "China's first museology monograph" (p. 51).

This boom, however, did not last long due to the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945). During the war, the museum undertaking of China, similar to other aspects of Chinese society, was greatly ravaged. The most direct evidence of the effect on museums is their decreasing numbers, which can be clearly seen in *Figure 4*. Numerous museum collections were lost. According to Wang (2001), an investigation carried out in 1945 by the central government showed that 3,607,074 pieces of cultural relics were lost and 741 historical sites were destroyed (p. 89).



**Figure 4. Museum numbers in China, 1937-1945.** Based on data from Liang & Hu, 1998.

While the war damaged many existing museums, it was also a time that saw the birth of a few new museums in inland China that were not part of the battlefield. Gansu Science and Education Hall (*Gansu Kexue Jiaoyuguan*), the predecessor of one of the case museums Gansu Provincial Museum (see Chapter 4) is an example. The others included Sichuan Provincial Museum (*Sichuansheng Bowuguan*) established in 1941 and Science Museum of West China (*Zhongguo Xibu Kexue Bowuguan*) established in 1943 (Liang & Hu, 1998, p. 750).

The Anti-Japanese War ended in August 1945. The Liberation War (1946-1949) between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party, however, broke out in

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the following year. Similar to the Anti-Japanese War, museums were heavily affected. Museum buildings were ruined by gunfire and collections were destroyed or lost. When the Nationalist Party retreated to Taiwan in 1949 after losing the war, numerous cultural relics selected from major museums of China including 231,910 pieces from the Palace Museum and 11,729 pieces from the Central Museum (*Zhongyang Bowuyuan*, which was still under construction at the time) were transferred to Taiwan, according to the data presented in Wang (2001, p. 84). By the year 1949, when the PRC was established, there were only 25 surviving museums including nine established by foreigners in the entire country (Wang, 2001, p. 100).

Looking at the birth and the early journey of Chinese museums, we can see that Chinese museums were initiated by individual intellectuals within an atmosphere of opening up and revival and that scientific and education was the first orientation of these early museums.

With the establishment of the new regime in 1949, Chinese museums in the PRC in general took on somewhat new characteristics.

### **Museums in the New China (1949-2009)**

1949 is a milestone in Chinese history with its shift to socialism. This major political upheaval changed every aspect of the country, museums included. From 1949, Chinese museums, I argue, took a road that is distinct not only from the one they took previously, but also the ones that museums in most parts of the world have taken.

From 1949, the PRC experienced two major watersheds amongst other significant historical events, which extensively and profoundly reformed the country. The first was the Cultural Revolution that took place between 1966 and 1976 and the second was the Reform and Opening-up national policy implemented in 1978. In the following presentation of the journey that Chinese museums have taken since the foundation of the PRC, I take the two watersheds as the divides and thereby break up the whole period into three sections: Early Period (1949-1965), Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and New Period (after 1978).

## Early Period (1949-1965): Political Upheaval and Socialist Museums

This period, particularly the first half, was seen as promising for the country in general. The official narrative states that “the guidelines and basic policies defined by the Party in this historical period [1949-1965] were correct and led to brilliant successes” (China Factfile: History, 2005 [English version]). In terms of museum development during this period, Liang & Hu (1998) and Wang (2001) have similar encapsulations. To sum up, both present two central themes: “reform” (*gaizao*) and “development” (*fazhan*). “Reform” meant the socialist reform on existing museums between 1951 and 1952. “Development” shows that both agree on the positive trend that Chinese museums had at the time although Liang & Hu (1998) note that it was a “tortuous” (*quzhe*) development.

In the following I present Chinese museums of this period in four sub-sections: Socialist reform, Soviet Union influence, Science and Education orientation and the Great Leap Forward.

**Socialist reform.** The first task that Chinese museums had to undertake after 1949 was socialist reform. The guideline for such socialist reform came from the document *Suggestions for the Principles, Tasks, Attribution and Developing Direction of Local Museums* (*Dui Difang Bowuguan Fangzhen, Renwu, Xingzhi ji Fazhan Fangxiang de Yijian*, hereafter as *Suggestions*) issued by the Ministry of Culture, October 27, 1951. According to these *Suggestions*, the general task of Chinese museums is to provide “revolutionary and patriotic education” (*geming de aiguo zhuyi de jiaoyu*) (Ministry of Culture, 1951). Museums shall, as the *Suggestions* state, “enable people to know history and nature correctly, love the motherland, and enhance their political consciousness and passion for production” (*shi renmin dazhong zhengquede renshi lishi, renshi ziran, reai zuguo, tigao zhengzhi juewu yu shengchan reqing*) (Ibid.).

Guided by these *Suggestions*, specific reforming work was carried out in local museums, which mainly focused on three aspects of museum practice: museum attribution, exhibition and collection (Liang & Hu, 1998, p. 751). In terms of museum exhibitions, the reform was centred on removing those that reflected “feudal, comprador and imperial ideologies” (*fengjian, maiban ji diguo zhuyi sixiang*) and

creating new exhibitions on the basis of “dialectical materialism and historical materialism” (*bianzheng weiwu zhuyi yu lishi weiwu zhuyi*) (Ibid.). The Palace Museum curated an exhibition called *Life of Emperors and Peasants in Contrast (Huangdi Nongmin Shenghuo Duibi)* at this time (Wang, 2001, p. 102), which I think vividly reflects the essence of such socialist reform of museums.

The socialist reform of museums in the PRC in the 1950s provides a good example of how the change of political regime in a country reforms or reshapes its museums fundamentally. As Liang & Hu (1998) argue, “With the fulfilment of the socialist reform to the existing museums in 1952, Chinese museums changed by nature and hence walked on the socialist road” (*dao 1952 nian jibenshang wancheng le dui jiuyou bowuguan de zhengdun gaizao, congci bowuguan fasheng le zhi de bianhua, kaishi zoushang shehui zhuyi guidao*) (p. 751). The socialist nature made Chinese museums a unique part of global museums along with their communist counterparts.

In the following decade Chinese museums witnessed major growth. Changes can be seen both from within museum practice and study. One characteristic was a strong socialist style, which was heavily influenced by museums in the Soviet Union.

**Soviet Union influence.** As noted earlier, the introduction of museums into China and their early development, were influenced predominantly by western countries. This was not the case from the 1950s. The Soviet Union was the leading country of the socialist group at that time and the PRC was a newly born socialist country. Therefore in the first few years of the PRC, the Soviet Union played a role as a *big brother*. Soviet Union models were applied not only in the economic and political systems, but also within social and cultural fields – museums included.

A book on museum practice from the Soviet Union was translated and published in the PRC in 1957 under the title *Sulian Bowuguanxue Jichu* (Basis of the Soviet Union Museology). This book, according to Liang (1998), had “extensive influence” (*guangfan yingxiang*) on Chinese museum practice (p. 510).

The Soviet Union influence on Chinese museums was comprehensive on both the ideological and the practical level. The extensive and comprehensive influences are presented in detail in Li (2007, for example, p. 66-67; 147; 545-546). I focus my

discussion of the Soviet Union influence on Chinese museums on a new type of museums – chorography museums (*dizhixing bowuguan*).

According to Liang & Hu (1998), chorography museums could also be called comprehensive museums (*zonghexing bowuguan*) and they were created in following the Soviet Union experience (p. 751).

In the same document that suggested a socialist reform on museums issued in 1951 as previously noted, the Ministry of Culture gave a description of the chorography museum and set the rules for it:

The museum of each greater administrative region, province or municipality should be local and comprehensive. That is to say, it should exhibit the “natural conditions” (including the local geography, ethnicities, living creatures, resources), “historical development” (including the revolutionary history), and “democratic construction” (including the construction achievements in politics, economy and culture) of the local, so as to be closely related to the local. (Ministry of Culture, 1951)

Originally in Chinese:

*Ge da xingzhengqu huo sheng, shi bowuguan, yingdang shi difangxing de he zonghexing de. Ji yi dangdi de “ziran fuyuan” (baokuo dili, minzu, shengwu, ziyuan deng), “lishi fazhan” (baokuo gemingshi), “minzhu jianshe” (baokuo zhengzhi, jingji, wenhua ge fangmian de jianshe chengji) san bufen wei chenlie neirong, shizhi yu difang miqie jiehe.*

Apparently, a local focus of this type of museums was stipulated in these lines. A warning, however, immediately followed which called for attention to “the coordination of the national and the local” (*quanguoxing yu difangxing de peihe*) and stated that “the tendency of emphasizing on the local but ignoring the national must be avoided” (*bimian qiangdiao difang hushi quanguo de pianxiang*) (Ibid.).

Based on this guideline, the first chorography museum in China – Shandong Provincial Museum – was established in 1954 and became a model for the other provincial regions to follow.

Jiming Lv (2004) notes that chorography museum construction was further promoted by Chairman Mao Zedong’s encouragement in his visit to Anhui Museum in 1958. Lv quotes Mao in his argument for the creation of such museums: “The major cities of each province should have a museum like this. It is vital to let people know their history and be aware of their own creative power” (*yige sheng de zhuyao*

*chengshi, dou yinggai you zheyang de bowuguan, renmin renshi ziji de liilang he chuangzao lishi, shi yijian hen yaojin de shi*) (Lv, 2004, p. 191). 31 museums of this type were established during this time (Liang & Hu, 1998, p. 751). Half of the cases I chose for this thesis – Gansu Provincial Museum, Yunnan Provincial Museum, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum – are of this type.

Memorial museums (*jinianguan*), revolutionary memorial museums (*geming jinianguan*) in particular, were another type of museum resulting from, or at least affected by, the Soviet Union influence. In addition to the establishment of the Museum of Chinese Revolution (*Zhongguo Geming Bowuguan*), registered in 1950 and opened in 1961 (Liu & Qi, 1998), the central government also called for creating local revolutionary museums or adding revolutionary objects display rooms in existing museums (Liang & Hu, 1998, p. 751).

This call was responded to by the appearance of a number of revolutionary memorial museums in various regions particularly those regions that served as the revolutionary bases of the CPC. For example, Yan'an Revolutionary Memorial Hall (*Yan'an Geming Jinianguan*) was established in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, in 1950 (Mi, 1998) and Memorial Hall of Zunyi Meeting (*Zunyi Huiyi Jinianguan*) was established in Zunyi, Guizhou province, in 1955 (Fei, 1998).

The adoption of the Soviet Union style of Chinese museums implies a rejection of Western museology. It accounted for a further departure of Chinese museum from their Western counterparts from the 1950s.

**Science and research oriented.** In addition to the Soviet Union influence, museums in China of this period were to a large degree oriented by science and research – a response to the government's national strategy in promoting and developing science.

In 1956, at the National Conference on Intellectuals (*Guanyu Zhishi Fenzi Wenti de Huiyi*), Premier Zhou Enlai, on behalf of the Party and government, made a national call of “marching to the science” (*xiang kexue jinjun*) and appealed for more efforts on the construction of libraries, archives and museums in the country (Zhou, 1956). Responding to this call, the first national museum conference was held in Beijing in 1956, in which, museums were defined as “organs of science and research”

(*kexue yanjiu jiguan*), “organs of culture and education” (*wenhua jiaoyu jiguan*), and “places of collecting and preserving material and immaterial heritages and natural specimens” (*wuzhi wenhua he jingshen wenhua yicun yiji ziran biaoben de shoucangsuo*); the basic tasks of Chinese museums were formulated as “to serve scientific research” (*wei kexue yanjiu fuwu*) and to “serve the people” (*wei guangdang renmin qunzhong fuwu*) (Wang, 2001, p. 104). This definition was later refined as “Three Attributes, Two Tasks” (*Sanxing Erwu*) in short and became the central issue for the Chinese museum field (Ibid., p. 39).

**The Great Leap Forward.** In May 1958, the central government launched the Great Leap Forward campaign with the guideline “drive to the full vigour” (*guzu ganjin*), “drive for the best” (*lizheng shangyou*) and “achieve socialist construction in a more productive, faster, better and more economical way” (*duokuaihaosheng de jianshe shehuizhuyi*) (Party History Research Centre, 2001, chap. 6.3).

The campaign reflected the urgent desire of the CPC to develop the country. An article by Xirui Liu (1958) “What People can Imagine, What the Land can Grow” (*Ren You Duo Da Dan, Di You Duo Da Chan*) published in the *People’s Daily* three months after the launch of the Great Leap Forward campaign is a vivid demonstration of the blind optimistic mood existing in the country at the time. However, as the Party itself later admitted, “[The guideline of the Great Leap Forward] had put undue emphasis on the developing speed of the economic construction, over-exaggerated subjective will, and ignored the objective laws that economic development must follow” (*pianmian qiangdiao jingji jianshe de fazhan sudu, guofen kuada ren de zhuguan yizhi de zuoyong, hushi le jingji jianshe suo bixu zunxun de keguan guilv*) (Party History Research Centre, 2001, chap. 6.3).

Museums were inevitably affected by this political trend. Quantity became the only pursued target. As noted by Liang & Hu (1998), the nationwide goal for the museum field at the time was to let “each county have its own museum and each community have its own exhibition room” (*xianxian you bowuguan, sheshe you zhanlanshi*) (p. 752). Museums soon numbered 480 by the end of 1959 (Ibid.). Many of this abundance of these perhaps hastily established museums created by the Great Leap Forward were either closed or merged in 1961 when the Party started to correct



the Great Leap Forward policy. The museum number decreased to around 200 in 1961 (Ibid).

### **The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)**

The Cultural Revolution was a political upheaval that took place in China between 1966 and 1976. It is frequently referred to as ten years of *haojie* (catastrophe) by Chinese people in the post-Cultural Revolution time. Mobo Gao (2008) has especially discussed the *haojie* discourse of the Cultural Revolution in his work. The Cultural Revolution brought a fundamental and long-lasting influence to the PRC, as Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals (2006) argue that “to understand the ‘why’ of China today, one has to understand the ‘what’ of the Cultural Revolution” (p. i).

The objective of the Cultural Revolution, as stated in *Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Guanyu Wuchan Jieji Wenhua Dageming de Jueding)* – generally known as the “Sixteen Articles” (*Shiliutiao*) and adopted by the CPC Central Committee on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1966 as the guideline for the Cultural Revolution – was:

to struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic “authorities” and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system. (CPC, 1966 [official English version])

The “ideology” to be struggled against, quoted above, included “old ideas, culture, customs and habits” (*jiu sixiang, jiu wenhua, jiu fengsu, jiu xiguan*), generally known as the “four olds” (*sijiu*). The Gang of Four (*Sirenbang*) – Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan and Wang Wenhong who tried to assert their power nationally and are regarded as the main driving force of Cultural Revolution – applied this policy to the extreme, which had severe influence on the museum field. The available information on museums of this period is very limited. Both of the two works – Liang & Hu (1998) and Wang (2001) – that I have referred extensively in

this chapter regarding the historical development of Chinese museums have very brief coverage of this time. One of the museum Directors that I interviewed for the case studies explained that information about his museum during this time was still under security restrictions even to him (Weifeng Wu of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, see chapter 7). Jimin Lv, a prominent figure who worked in the Chinese museum field since the 1950s, however, offers valuable information on museums during the Cultural Revolution in his series of published articles.

In the article “Museums Ought to be Brought into Order out of Chaos” (*Bowuguan Yao Boluanfanzheng*) published in 1978, two years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Lv gives specific description on how the Gang of Four desecrated museums and museum work. According to Lv (1978), in the view of the Gang of Four, cultural relics were equal to the “four olds”; to conduct archaeological excavations and preserve heritage were to promote “emperors-kings-generals-ministers” (*di-wang-jiang-xiang*) and “talented scholars and beauties” (*caizi jiaren*); to collect revolutionary relics and exhibit revolutionary history were to sing high for “traitors” (*pantu*) and “capitalist-roaders” (*zouzipai*) (p. 3). Lv notes that the Gang of Four called museums “the base of feudalism, capitalism and revisionism” (*feng zi xiu daheiwu*) and incited people to “rebel” (*zaofan*) and “smash” (*zalan*) them (Ibid.). Lv quotes the Gang of Four’s comment on museums, which for us today may sound unbelievable: “Museums ought to be smashed as they are nothing but broken pots and jugs and old and useless iron and cropper” (*bowuguan jin shi xie po tantanguanguan, feitonglantie, bowuguan shu zalan danwei*) (Ibid.).

As a result, according to Lv’s description, some museums were closed or merged, the museum buildings were taken for other uses, displays and exhibitions were destroyed or closed down, museum collections were robbed or smashed, museum professionals were attacked or persecuted (Ibid.). Lv concludes that this brought serious damage to the museum undertaking and caused its stagnation for a long time (Ibid).

In terms of the destruction that the Cultural Revolution brought to cultural relics, Chensheng Xie, an expert in relics protection and a main drafter of the *Law of*

*the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (Wenwu Baohu Fa)* who has also received persecution during the Cultural Revolution, repeatedly argues in interviews, however, that “the destruction to was not so severe as people thought” (*wenge dui wenwu de pohuai qishi bingbuxiang xuduo ren suo xiangxiang de nayang da*) (Jin, 2007; Shang, 2010). Xie presents two facts to demonstrate his argument: the destructive actions of the Red Guards to cultural relics took place only in the beginning time of the Cultural Revolution as they soon turned their focus to the seizure of power and political struggles; Premier Zhou Enlai had made great efforts to protect cultural relics from being destroyed (Ibid.). Despite of how sever the degree, destruction had been caused.

The influence of the Cultural Revolution also permeated into specific museum practices. In terms of museum exhibitions, the influence was marked by the increased emphasis on the voice of revolution and peasants. Lv (1998) recalls a trend existing in the museum field in the early 1970s towards “viewing all the peasant uprisings as revolutions” (*ba suoyou nongmin qiyi dou shuocheng shi geming douzheng*), “breaking the way of telling history by dynasty” (*dapo wangchao tixi*) and “dividing historical periods according to the development of peasant uprisings” (*an nongmin qiyi de fazhan huafen lishi shiqi*) instead, and “starting the presentation of each historical period with peasant uprisings” (*nongmin qiyi datou*) (p. 3).

On the other hand, Lv (1998) further notes that many historical figures who have played an enlightenment role or have had significant influence in history as well as many prominent thinkers and literati were removed from exhibitions as they were labelled either as “*di-wang-jiang-xiang*” or as “*caizi jiaren*” (Ibid.).

The *Exhibition of Chinese History (Zhongguo Tongshi)* in the Museum of Chinese History (*Zhongguo Lishi Bowuguan*) offers a good example of how museums exhibitions were influenced by the Cultural Revolution. The *Exhibition of Chinese History* was the main permanent exhibition of the Museum of Chinese History, which told the history of China from 1,7 million years ago to the year 1840 by dynasties grouped as primitive society, slave society and feudal society (Shi, 1998, p. 790). Based on Lv's recollections in an article he wrote in memory of Wang Yeqiu, the then Director of State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) who made

great efforts to save museums and cultural relics from the Cultural Revolution, the Museum of Chinese History was originally closed down when the Cultural Revolution started in 1966. Wang Yeqiu tried to re-open the museum. As a compromise to the political situation at the time, the *Exhibition of Chinese History* was re-curated. Lv was the then Head of Museum Department of State Administration of Cultural Heritage and participated in the re-curation of this exhibition. The new *Exhibition of Chinese History* was opened in 1975, however with a heavy Cultural Revolution mark.

Lv presents an example of the empty emphasis of peasant uprisings. An individual section was dedicated to *Li Chuangwang* (leader of the peasant rebellion that formally ended the Ming Dynasty). As there were not enough cultural relics to support the section, only statues and portraits of Li Chuangwang were displayed. Lv argues that it cannot demonstrate anything but the existence of Li Chuangwang in history (Lv, 2004, p. 221).

Museums during this period, the ones that still existed, were used as political tools and while museums are never free from prevailing ideology, this was never more clear than during the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 and the period and its ideology are widely accepted as a political mistake. As the CPC distanced itself from the practices of the Cultural Revolution in the document *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China (Guanyu Jianguo Yilai Dang de Ruogan Lishi Wenti de Jueyi)*, adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on June 27, 1981:

History has shown that the “cultural revolution”, initiated by a leader labouring under a misapprehension and capitalized on by counter-revolutionary cliques, led to domestic turmoil and brought catastrophe to the Party, the state and the whole people. (CPC, 1981[official English version])

The ending of the Cultural Revolution led the country into a new period. The issuing of an epoch-making national strategy of Reform and Opening-up in the end of 1978 added even more significance to this post-Cultural Revolution period.

## New Period (1978-2009): New Development

In presenting the development of Chinese museums after the Reform and Opening-up, MDSACH (Museum Division of State Administration of Cultural Heritage) divides the period from 1978 to the present into three stages: “full revival” (*quanmian zhenxing*) (1978-1990); “rapid development” (*kuaisu fazhan*) (1991-2000); and “increasingly prospering” (*riqi fanrong*) (since 2001) (MDSACH, 2008). I also divide this period into three stages, but choose to follow major shifts in the national cultural policy, as the political context behind museum change is the focus of this thesis.

Taking a general view of the Party and governmental policy, there were three different expressions or guidelines for cultural undertakings to which museums belong: “socialist spiritual civilization” (*shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming*) from 1982, “socialist culture with Chinese characteristics” (*you zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi wenhua*) from 1997, and “great prosperity and development of socialist culture” (*shehui zhuyi wenhua de da fanrong, da fazhan*) from 2007. The change of the expression, I argue, indicates the change of views on cultural undertakings from the central official level and offers a route to explore museum changes.

**Socialist spiritual civilization (1978-1996).** The Cultural Revolution left the PRC with serious political, ideological, organizational and economic confusion, requiring “*boluanfanzheng*” (to bring in order out of chaos; to set things right) – a term repeatedly used by the Party and government at the time – in each discipline including museums. According to Liang & Hu (1998), the main efforts of museum work at this time were put in sourcing and recovering cultural relics, many of which were destroyed or removed during the Cultural Revolution (p. 752).

The *boluanfanzheng* at the national ideology and strategy level was formalized through the third Plenary Session of the Eleventh National Congress of the CPC (*shiyijie sanzong quanhui*) at the end of 1978, a congress regarded as “a great turning point of significant influence in Party history since the foundation of the PRC” (*jianguo yilai dang de lishi shang juyou shenyuan yiyi de weida zhuanzhe*) (Party History Research Centre, 2001, chap. 8.2).

Another factor accounting for the significant influence of this congress session was that it adopted the national strategy of the Reform and Opening-up, which, as the Party History Research Centre concludes, “initiated the historical transition of China from ‘taking class struggle as the key link’ to taking economic construction as the central task, from rigidity, half-rigidity to a full reform, and from closure, half-closure to opening-up” (*kaishi le zhongguo cong “yi jieji douzheng wei gang” dao yi jingji jianshe wei zhongxin, cong jianghua ban jianghua dao quanmian gaige, cong fengbi ban fengbi dao duiwai kaifang de lishixing zhuanbian*) (Ibid.).

The focus of this Reform and Opening-up strategy – at least in the first ensuing years – was on economy, as economic construction was taken as the central task of the Party.

Regardless, new activity still took place within the museum field. A major event was the Symposium of Museum Works in Provinces, Municipalities and Autonomous Regions (*ge sheng, zhixiashi, zizhiq bowuguan gongzuo zuotanhui*) held in Anhui province in 1979, which resulted in the issuing of *Regulations on Museums of Provinces, Municipalities and Autonomous Regions* (*Sheng, Shi, Zizhiq Bowuguan Gongzuo Tiaoli*) by the SACH on June 29, 1979 (Appendix in Wang, 2001, p. 526). The *Regulations* outlined the definition and function of Chinese museums:

Provincial, municipality and autonomous region museums [...] are main institutions of collecting and preserving cultural relics and specimens, institutions of propaganda and education, and institutions of science and research. (SACH, 1979, Article 1)

Originally in Chinese:

*Sheng, shi, zizhiq bowuguan [...] shi wenwu he biaooben de zhuyao shoucang jigou, xuanchuan jiaoyu jigou he kexue yanjiu jigou.*

Compared to the “three attributes” (*sanxing*) of museums, advocated and agreed in the 1950s, no fundamental changes were made. Yet, slight adjustments are clear from the discourse.

First of all, the term “institution” (*jigou*) replaced “organs” (*jiguan*) in addressing museums. The Chinese term *jiguan* often implies a political or governmental sense while *jigou* is more neutral and does not have this connotation.

Otherwise, “propaganda” (*xuanchuan*) replaced “culture” (*wenhua*) in juxtaposition with “education” (*jiaoyu*), which, I argue, reflected a supposed closer relationship between museums and the Party.

In terms of the objects to be collected and preserved, “cultural relics” (*wenwu*) and “specimen” (*biaoben*) replaced “material and immaterial heritages and natural specimens” (*wuzhi wenhua he jingshen wenhua yicun yiji ziran biaoben*), which most likely was due to the object-oriented view of museums.

The *Regulations* was issued in 1979, the year after the *turning point* of 1978. In other words, “taking class struggle as the key link” had been abandoned and economic construction was taken as the central task of the Party instead (see previous discussion). The *Regulations*, however, still contained some revolutionary traces. Regarding exhibitions and displays, the *Regulations* instructed museums to “take the three types of revolutionary movements – class struggles, production struggles and scientific experiments – as content” (*yi jieji douzheng, shengchan douzheng he kexue shiyan sanda geming yundong wei neirong*) (SACH, 1979, Article 9).

As noted previously, the first and greatest concern of the Party and government in the first years of the Reform and Opening-up was the nation’s economic development. Culture and cultural related issues were accordingly less-stressed in national policies. A shift came in 1982 with the Twelfth National Congress of the CPC. A new phenomenon on policy of this Congress, amongst others, was the Party’s adoption of the term “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*) to address cultural and ideological and moral issues and the emphasis put on it.

Through his report to the Congress, the then Party Chairman<sup>4</sup> Hu Yaobang, on behalf of the CPC, called for working towards a high level of “material civilization” (*wuzhi wenming*) and “socialist spiritual civilization” (*shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming*) simultaneously, which was, Hu contended, “a strategic principle for

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<sup>4</sup> The Congress itself abolished the post of Party Chairman and Hu Yaobang became General Secretary of the Central Committee after this Congress.

building socialism” (*jianshe shehui zhuyi de yige zhanlue fangzhen wenti*) (Hu, 1982).

Hu divided socialist spiritual civilization into two related aspects: that of “culture” (*wenhua*) and that of “ideology” (*sixiang*). For the former, Hu gave a list of examples, in which, museums was included.

Hu emphasized the importance of socialist spiritual civilization and its indispensability to socialism by stating that “socialist spiritual civilization is an important characteristic of socialism and an important manifestation of the superiority of socialism” (*shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming shi shehui zhuyi de zhongyao tezheng, shi shehui zhuyi zhidu youyuexing de zhongyao biaoqian*) (Ibid.). He then pointed out that socialist spiritual civilization must contain the characteristic of “having communist ideology as the core” (*yi gongchan zhuyi sixiang wei hexin*) (Ibid.).

Broadly what was indicated from these new expressions and policies by the central authority was that the attention of the central authority would herein also be on cultural undertakings as well as economic undertakings. This new focus was embodied by a series of policies and documents with an effect – either direct or indirect – on museums issued in the following years. Let me note these briefly.

The 1982 *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* (issued five months after the Twelfth National Congress of the CPC) clearly declares that the state promotes the development of cultural undertakings including museums (NPC [National People’s Congress of the PRC], 1982, Preamble, Article 22). This may be regarded as the legal safeguard of the development of museums in the PRC.

Also in 1982, the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics* (*Zhonghua Renmin Gonghegong Wenwu Baohu Fa*) was issued (NPC, 1982). This law was not directed primarily at museums but it did set references for museums practices due to the close relationship between museums and cultural relics, since one of the functions of Chinese museums is “collecting and preserving cultural relics and specimens”, noted previously.

*The Sixth Five-Year Plan of National Economic and Social Development* (*Guomin Jingji he Shehui Fazhan Diliuge Wunian Jihua*) issued at the end of 1982 has an individual section for “cultural relics, museums and libraries” under the



chapter of “cultural undertakings” (*wenhua shiye*). Regarding museums, it suggests to enrich and improve existing museums and gradually build museums in those regions where there is no museum yet (NPC, 1982, chap. 33). These plans from the central government level gave a practical instruction to the museum development.

The *Resolution Concerning the Guiding Principles of the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction* (*Guanyu Shehui Zhuyi Jingshen Wenming Jianshe Zhidao Fangzhen de Jueyi*) issued in 1986 by the CPC Central Committee reaffirmed the importance of socialist spiritual civilization and called for a further development of cultural undertakings including museums (CPC, 1986).

Through the *Resolution* the CPC requests that the state guarantee the development of these cultural undertakings through policy and funding and that each region make plans for the development of cultural undertakings of their own. Furthermore, the *Resolution* is aimed at ensuring “the completion of the task of cultural construction as that of economic construction” (*xiang wancheng jingji jianshe renwu yiyang, quebao wancheng wenhua jianshe renwu*) (Ibid.).

The effects of these policies and outlines from the central authority level may be examined against the actual changes taking place within the museum field in the subsequent years.

Changes were firstly seen from the increasing museum numbers and more diverse museum types. By 1983, there were 467 museums in China. The number reached 827 in 1987 (Liang & Hu, 1998), 1,013 in 1990 (MDSACH, 2008).<sup>5</sup> To mention two examples of the museums established around this time: Shaanxi History Museum – one of the case museums of this thesis – was established in 1991; Shanghai Museum was established in 1996. Both are leading museums of China.

Changes also included disciplinary development, which is shown through at least the following two aspects.

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<sup>5</sup> The numbers here only refer to the museums subject to State Administration of Cultural Heritage. According to Jun Hu (1998), museums in China take a multilevel administrative system based on their types. Comprehensive museums, history museums, art museums, memorial museums and part of natural history museums are under the charge of State Administration of Cultural Heritage. Science museums and part of natural history museums are under the administration of the Ministry of Science and Technology. Museums specializing in areas such as geography, agriculture, and military are under the administration of different ministries.

1. Organizational or institutional development. The Chinese Society of Museums (*Zhongguo Bowuguan Xuehui*), “a civic academic community” (*qunzhongxing xueshu tuanti*) of Chinese museums, was established in 1982 (Qi, 1998). This reminds us of a similar community existing in China some decades ago – Museums Association of China (*Zhongguo Bowuguan Xiehui*) – established in 1935 (see earlier part of this chapter). According to Fu (1998), Museums Association of China was dissolved by itself in 1949. No evidence can show the inheritance of the two communities. They share, however, similar attributions and objectives: Both were set as of “civic and academic” and both focused on promoting museology and museum development and museum collaborations (Fu, 1998; Qi, 1998). What was new to the Chinese Society of Museums was its emphasis on the goal to promote *international* exchange of Chinese museums (Qi, 1998). The following year after its establishment, the Chinese Society of Museums joined the International Commission of Museums (ICOM) (Qi, 1998), marking the commencer of Chinese museums’ participation in the international museum network.

Exposing to the international network seems to have provided opportunities for Chinese museum scholars to look at museology with a broader view. As Su and Shi (2007) have argued that with the series of academic activities organized by ICOM, Chinese scholars “started to study museums consciously through a cultural angle” (*kaishi zijue cong wenhua jiaodu yanjiu bowuguan zhongzhong wenti*) (p. 549).

Since its establishment, the Chinese Society of Museums has been publishing a monthly magazine *Chinese Museum Correspondence* (*Zhongguo Bowuguan Tongxun*) and in 1984 it started publication of a quarterly journal *Chinese Museum* (*Zhongguo Bowuguan*).

The establishment of the Chinese Society of Museums and the similar societies established at local level and the creation of the periodicals have had great sense to Chinese museology, as Su and Shi (2007) argue that based on these academic societies and with the academic space offered by these journals, *Chinese Museum* in particular, “a new movement of museology studies was soon emerging in China” (*zai zhongguo xunsu xianqile yanjiu bowuguanxue de yundong*) (Su & Shi, 2007, p. 547).

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Another factor showing the organizational development of museum discipline was that museology was more widely accepted as a university discipline. According to Liang and Hu (1998), amongst others, Nankai University, Fudan University, Shanghai University, Hangzhou University, Henan University, and Jilin University all set up museology majors in the 1980s (p. 753).

2. Academic activities. The above mentioned organizational development also accounted for the thriving academic activities at the time, resulted in streams of publications covering a variety of topics of museum studies. These works include the two I have referred repeatedly in this chapter: *The Basis of Chinese Museology (Zhongguo Bowuguanxue Jichu)* edited by Hongjun Wang<sup>6</sup>, and *Encyclopedia of China: Cultural Relics, Museums (Zhongguo Da Baike Quanshu: Wenwu, Bowuguan)* edited collectively by Jimin Lv et al.

In addition to museum theory, museum practices and museum applications also became a topic of study. To name a few examples: *Preservation of Museum Collections (Bowuguan Cangpin Baoguan)* (Zheng, 1985); *Introduction to Museum Education (Bowuguan Jiaoyu Rumu)* (Wang, 1991); *Significance and Methods to Increase Museum Incomes (Kuoda Bowuguan Jingji Shouru de Yiyi he Tujing)* (Liu, 1985).

The changes in policy and practice of this period indicated that museums and museology in the PRC were recovering from the damages of the Cultural Revolution and had achieved certain development in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.

Museums, however, were classed as part of the very broad category of “socialist spiritual civilization” in national policies. I argue therefore that at the time the importance of museums was not completely acknowledged and museums were not promoted by the government in the same manner as today.

This lack of concentration on museums and culture in general, particularly before the 1990s, was partly due to the nation’s poor economic condition at that time. The view of the Party leaders towards the role of the ideological superstructure in its relationship to the material base of society, I argue, also played a role.

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<sup>6</sup> The initial edition of this book was published in 1990. The one I referred in this thesis is a new edition published in 2001.

I return to Mr. Hu Yaobang's report at the Twelfth National Congress of the CPC (1982) in which "socialist spiritual civilization" was officially presented. In the report, Hu also argued the relationship of material civilization and spiritual civilization: "Material civilization provides an indispensable foundation for socialist spiritual civilization. In its turn, socialist spiritual civilization gives a tremendous impetus to material civilization and ensures its correct orientation" (*wuzhi wenming de jianshe shi shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming de jianshe buke qieshao de jichu. Shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming dui wuzhi wenming de jianshe budan qi juda de tuidong zuoyong, erqie baozheng ta de zhengque de fazhan fangxiang*) (Hu, 1982).

Although Hu made further emphasis on the fact that "each is the condition and the objective of the other" (*huwei tiaojian, you huwei mudi*) (Ibid.), it is nevertheless not hard to deduce that spiritual civilization was made a function of economics, a point which was connoted in Hu's further remark: "We are determined to gradually promote cultural development so that it will no longer lag behind economic growth" (*juexin zhubu jiaqiang wenhua jianshe, zhubu gaibian wenhua tong jingji fazhan bu xiang shiying de zhuangkuang*) (Ibid.).

Despite this incorporation at a lower level within economic policies, the Chinese museum field developed during this period, which laid the groundwork for its further growth in the following period, in which the positioning of cultural undertakings, and culture in general, was changed in central and provincial policies.

**Socialist culture with Chinese characteristics (1997-2006).** This period could be called the golden age of Chinese museums. Encouraged by the guidelines from the Party and supported by the policies of both national and local governments, Chinese museums achieved great development during this period. Behind this development is the entwined relationship of economy, policy and culture. I would argue that on the one hand, the successful economic development of China awakened or raised the cultural demands of the populace and it was because of the improved regional and national economy that these demands were able to be met. On the other hand, when cultural undertakings – including museums – were industrialized, they themselves became one form of economy and thereby in turn promoted economic development.

As noted previously, Chinese museums did benefit from the guidelines from the CPC starting from its Twelfth National Congresses that put emphasis on the construction of “socialist spiritual civilization”. The focus was, however, more on the ideological and moral level, and the final goal was – at least primarily as noted previously – to facilitate the economy growth. A major shift came in 1997, again with the Party congress, the Fifteenth National Congress of the CPC.

In his report delivered to this Congress, Mr. Jiang Zemin, the then General Secretary of the CPC (and President of the PRC), on behalf of the CPC, expounded “the basic program of the Party for the primary stage of socialism” (*dang zai shehui zhuyi chuji jieduan de jiben gangling*), composed of the three “well integrated and inseparable” (*youji tongyi, buke fenge*) parts: “the socialist economy, politics and culture with Chinese characteristics” (*you zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi jingji, zhengzhi, wenhua*) (Jiang, 1997). He then used an individual chapter to elaborate on the development of “socialist culture with Chinese characteristics” (*you zhongguo tese de she hui zhuyi wenhua*) (Ibid.).

No longer positioned under the umbrella of “socialist spiritual civilization” – although Jiang did elaborate on the continuity and conformity of “socialist culture with Chinese characteristics” with “socialist spiritual civilization” – culture and culture related issues, for the first time, was addressed by the Party as an individual topic in its official narrative of national policies. This showed the Party’s intention to promote cultural development in the country in addition to economic growth that had been the central task for almost two decades.

Among the reasons for this change was the power of culture particularly in uniting the nation and strengthening the “national power”, as Jiang put in his report: “A socialist culture with Chinese characteristics is a major force in uniting and inspiring Chinese people of all ethnicities, and an important indicator of our overall national power” (*you zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi wenhua, shi ningju he jili quanguo gezu renmin de zhongyao lilian, shi zonghe guoli de zhongyao biao zhi*) (Jiang, 1997).

In the preceding congresses, as mentioned earlier, cultural development did receive promotion however at a second level to economic development. The

difference in this period is that cultural development was upgraded to the same level as economic development.

The change of the Party's focus brought about further changes of museum policy and direct governmental support for museums. A museum boom was seen in the following years. With awareness that museum development could be accounted for by a variety of factors, I still argue that the policy change from the central party and governmental level had a major part to play in this museum boom, given the PRC's centralized political system.

A museum boom can be read firstly and most directly from the increase of total museum numbers. According to data presented by Museum Division of State Administration of Cultural Heritage (MDSACH, 2008), there were 1,274 museums in China in 1997 and 1,722 in 2007, an increase of 448 museums in one decade. From the number only, the increase is not particularly significant – a similar increase has been seen in the previous decade (1987-1997) in which 447 museums were newly established (based on the data presented by Wang 2001, p. 114). However, the MDSACH reminds readers that this statistic only refers to museums registered within the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) system. If to include in the museums registered out of the SACH system – many of them were established quite recently, the estimated number MDSACH gives is 2,400 (MDSACH, 2008).

Another aspect showing the museum boom was the nationwide attention and enthusiasm on museum exhibitions other than focusing on statistical museum numbers and museum buildings, which was also, at least partly, driven by the promotion from the central authority level. From 1997, the SACH launched a biannual nationwide competition of “Nation's Top Ten Exhibitions” (*Quanguo Shida Jingpin Zhan*), eligible for all the museums within the PRC.

This competition seems having promoted further interest and enthusiasm by museum for their exhibitions, as noted by Jiansong Lu, professor in museum studies at Fudan University who is also among the judge panel of this competition (J. Lu, personal communication, March 5, 2009). To some degree it may also have stimulated a tendency within the museum field to renovate their existing exhibitions. For example, two case museums of this thesis – Shaanxi History Museum and Gansu

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Provincial Museum – both renovated their existing exhibitions during this period and won awards. Whether or not the redevelopment can be attributed to the creation of the awards is unclear. This tendency of renovation, however, does reflect the trend of museum practices of the time towards paying more attention on the contents. In other sense, more attention on exhibition contents also reflects a shift of general understanding in “what is a good museum”.

Chinese museums were previously always tied with cultural relics. There is a frequent term called *wenbo* in Chinese language, literally referring to “cultural relics and museums”. The term highlights the tight connection of museums to cultural relics or at least to objects. The promotion of *exhibitions* at this time by the government and individual museums indicates that the exhibitions in their broader sense (e.g. layout, interpretation, housing etc.), and not only the collections, were becoming a major focus.

Given the conventional binding relationship of museums and cultural relics, the law on cultural relics – *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (Zhonghua Renmin Gonghegong Wenwu Baohu Fa)* – issued in 1982 as previously noted – had been playing the role as the legal base for museum practice and management as there was no law specially dedicated for museums. A law, however, was greatly needed due to the rapid development of museums at this time.

A milestone of this process was the issuing of *Solutions on Museum Management (Bowuguan Guanli Banfa)* by the Ministry of Culture in 2005. The *Solution* provides regulations on the operation and practices of Chinese museums (Ministry of Culture, 2005). More significantly, the *Solution* became the base of the forming of *Regulations on Museum (draft) (Bowuguan Tiaoli (Cao’an Gao))*, which has been included in the nation’s legislation plan (Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council, 2008).

The changes of Chinese museums during this period – not only the way that museums were addressed in the official guidelines and policies but also the actual activities in the museum field – marked a new stage in the journey of mainland Chinese museums. The journey was further enriched in the following period.

**Vigorous development and prosperity of socialist culture (since 2007).** In 2007, Chinese museums encountered another policy stimulant. In the Seventeenth National Congress of the CPC held in 2007, in his report on behalf of the Party, Mr. Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the CPC and Chinese president, called for the “vigorous development and prosperity of socialist culture” (*shehui zhuyi wenhua dafazhan dafanrong*) (Hu, 2007). He contends:

We must keep to the orientation of advanced socialist culture, bring about a new upsurge in socialist cultural development, stimulate the cultural creativity of the whole nation, and enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests, enrich the cultural life in Chinese society and inspire the enthusiasm of the people for progress. (Hu, 2007 [official English version])

Continuing the Party's precedent policy on promoting cultural development, what's new this time is the emphasis on the basic cultural rights and interests of the public, as seen from the above quotes.

To give a brief review on the appearance of culture and cultural undertakings in the national guidelines by now and the impact on museums: In the period of 1978-1996, culture was addressed under the scope of “socialist spiritual civilization” and museums were consequently developed for the propaganda of socialism and patriotism; In the period of 1997-2006, culture was addressed separately and paralleled with economy and politics, altogether composed “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and the purpose to promote and develop cultural undertakings to which museums belong was for an all-round advancement of Chinese socialism.

In the period from 2007, finally, the public's basic cultural rights and interests came on the agenda. Museums in China were now promoted and developed more in accordance with the contemporary conception of a museum, as shown in ICOM's 2007 definition:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM, 2009)

One direct result of the change in Party lines is the policy to make museums free to the public. In 2008 at the Eleventh National People's Congress, in his report to



the Congress on behalf of the State Council, Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of China, promised that “all public museums, memorial halls and exhibition centers of a nonprofit nature will stop charging admission fees this year or next year” (Wen, 2008 [official English version]).

Wen’s promise was safeguarded by the official document – *Notice on the Free-Entrance of Museums and Memorial Halls of China (Guanyu Quanguo Bowuguan, Jinianguan Mianfei Kaifang de Tongzhi)* – issued by Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee in association with Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Culture, and State Administration of Cultural Heritage in 2008 (Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee, 2008). According to Jixiang Shan, Director of SACH, by 2009, 1447 museums have been free to the public (Liao, 2009).

The free entrance of Chinese museums can be regarded as the response of the museum field to the Party’s guideline, which was noted in the above mentioned *Notice*, “the practice of the Party’s [guideline] on promoting vigorous development and prosperity of socialist culture [...] is a positive action to realize and guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests” (*shi dang de shiqida guanyu shehui zhuyi wenhua dafazhan dafanrong de juti shijian, [...] shi shixian he baozhang renmin qunzhong jiben wenhua quanyi de jiji xingdong*) (Propaganda Department of the CPC Central Committee, 2008).

Another change taking place in this period is the further emphasis on the quality of the museum as well as the quantity. The SACH adopted a museum evaluation system in 2008, based on which museums are to be classified into First-level, Second-level or Third-Level. The SACH announced the first 83 museums that were evaluated as the nation’s First-level Museums (SACH, 2008). Four case museums of this thesis – Shaanxi History Museum, Yunnan Provincial Museum, Yunnan Ethnic Museum, and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum – were included. The museum evaluation system is supposed to improve the level of Chinese museums in general. As Jixiang Shan emphasized that “the real point was to encourage them to offer better spiritual and cultural products” (*guanjian shi yao bowuguan tigong genghao de jingshen wenhua chanpin*) (cited in Ying, 2008).

## Summary

As shown above, Chinese museums in the past century experienced a series of changes. Behind them, I argue, is a close relationship between museums and policy, particular cultural policy. There are also other policies such as ethnic diversity policies that have had a major influence on museums. These have been introduced in the last chapter but will be further discussed through specific cases offered in the following chapters. Changes to the discipline in part through the Opening-up policies have also had an effect, as I will note in the individual case studies.

The museum boom still continues in China at present. Not only at the provincial level, also medium-small sized cities and counties are building their own museums. The reasons behind these moves, in addition to policy change, include developments in tourism, regional development and changes in staff. As Professor Lu has noted: “Cultural projects, instead of GDP, has become the assessment criteria of the central government to the local governments” (J. Lu, personal communication, March 5, 2009). While it is unlikely that the GDP is not an important assessment criteria, Lu’s general comment that there is increased attention to cultural output seems to be substantiated.

The museum boom, together with historical changes in museums and exhibitions, will be a part of the examination of the individual regions and cases in the chapters to follow.

## Chapter 4. Gansu Province and Gansu Provincial Museum

As noted in Chapter 2, the case studies of this thesis are grouped into two sets. Each set includes two case regions. Set One, which I would describe as “historical cultural regions”, includes Gansu Province and Shaanxi Province. Set Two includes Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which I describe as “ethnic cultural regions”.

The two case regions from Set One – Gansu Province and Shaanxi Province – are both from the central-western part of China. Geographically they are in the central part of China but politically they belong to the West. To describe them as “historical cultural regions” is because both of the two regions are important historical sites with rich cultural relics and heritage and both were active in the historical stage of *China* – China in a traditional sense. An important section of the Silk Road passed through Gansu leading to interchange of religious and political ideas and cultural goods, thus making Gansu a historical frontier for China to communicate with the world and for Chinese civilization to communicate with other civilizations. Xi’an in Shaanxi was the capital city of China for many hundreds of years. At times Xi’an was not only a national political, economic and cultural centre, but also an international metropolitan that gathered diverse peoples, cultures and ideas. The Silk Road started from Xi’an, promoting not only economic, but also political and cultural exchanges. So both regions can be seen as having historical glory and had been historical frontiers of cultural diversity. Presently, however, both are relatively less-developed regions in China but longing for regeneration. For both museums in this set, similarly to those in the following set, I ask: How have the regional museums been affected by the region’s both historical and contemporary features? Specifically, how have the regional museums changed? Are the changing trends in line with the general development of museums in the PRC or have they departed? If departed, what are the regional contexts behind? How are the region’s historical features been represented in the museums? Whether or how have the present regional features influenced such representation? Particularly, how the representation of identity (regional and national)

and diversity is approached by the museums? These issues will be explored through specific practices in the case museums.

As noted in the introduction, I have chosen Gansu Provincial Museum for the case of Gansu Province and Shaanxi History Museum for Shaanxi Province. These two museums highlight some of the major changes in museum development over the last fifty years. Gansu Provincial Museum has its provenance in Gansu Science and Education Hall (*Gansu Kexue Jiaoyu Guan*) established in 1939, one decade before the founding of the PRC. The museum underwent many changes throughout the tumultuous years that followed. Shaanxi History Museum also has long historical roots. The current museum developed out of Shaanxi Provincial History Museum (*Shaanxisheng Lishi Bowuguan*) established in 1944. Its various changes in form and name also reflect the political changes of the six decades that followed.

The two chapters form contrasts. While both were affected by national policies such as Developing-the-West launched in 2000, one province has had major economic growth while the other has remained quite poor. In addition to differences in natural resources, cultural tourism has also been an important factor influencing regional development. The rising interest in the nation's imperial history in China, particularly in Xi'an, the historical imperial capital, set off a boom of cultural tourism in Shaanxi. Museums of both regions are used as a tool to promote cultural tourism. Museums in Shaanxi have been in the economic, geographic and political position to respond more rapidly to cultural tourism while Gansu has been somewhat slower. Gansu Provincial Museum has made, however, several attempts at promoting local tourism, if not international. These attempts and their contexts will be discussed later in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into two major sections: Gansu Province and Gansu Provincial Museum. In the section on Gansu Province, I start with a description of the province looking at the geography, population demographics and economies. I follow this with an introduction to the cultural and political history of Gansu. In the section on Gansu Provincial Museum, I start with a brief introduction, looking at the location, the building and the layout of the current museum. Then I move back to the birth of the museum and follow the historical development of the museum. Changes –

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changes of the museum name, the building and the exhibitions – are steppingstones for this chronological line. Of particular concern are the connections between museum and political and policy change. The last part of this section is the analysis of the current exhibitions and representations in the museum. Identity and diversity are a particular concern.

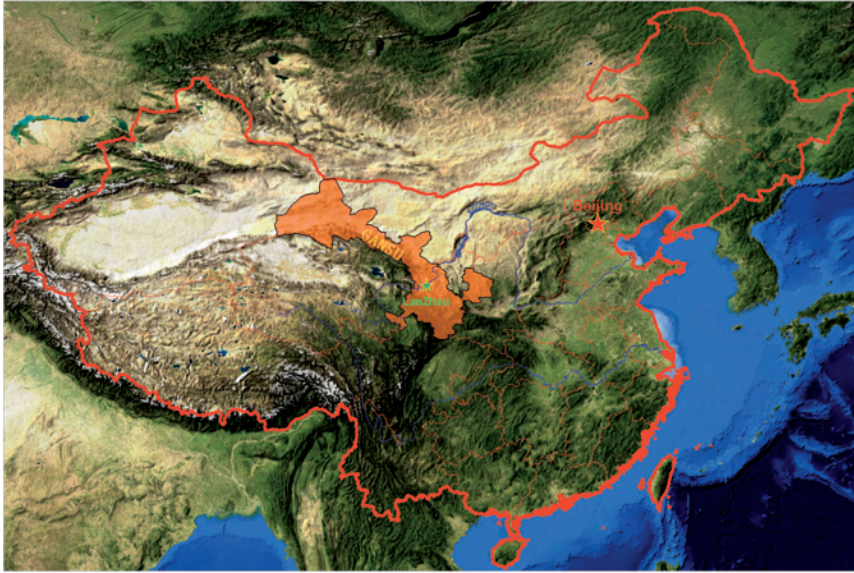
## Gansu Province

### Specifications<sup>7</sup>

Gansu is an inland province of the PRC with a total area of 455,000 square km (see *Figure 5*). It lies in the upper reaches of the Yellow River (*Huanghe*), the so-called mother river of China as the area around the Yellow River has been conventionally regarded as the birthplace of Chinese civilization, although the later archaeological discoveries have shown proofs of the origin of Chinese civilization in other areas of present China. Stretching from the northwest to southeast, Gansu is shaped like a dumbbell: Big at both ends but long and narrow in middle. The narrowest section is only 25 km wide. Gansu is surrounded by three ethnic minority autonomous regions – Xinjiang Uygur, Inner Mongolia and Ningxia Hui – in the north and east. It is neighboured by Sichuan Province in the south and Shaanxi Province in the east. The western part of Gansu is connected to Qinghai Province, home to the Qinghai-Tibet plateau. Gansu also shares a short border with Mongolia in the north.

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<sup>7</sup> Except where clarified, the facts about Gansu in this section are mainly based on materials offered at the official website of Gansu Provincial Government, <http://www.gansu.gov.cn/>.



**Figure 5. Map of Gansu Province.** (Made by author.)

Gansu is a geographical centre of China. In this province three plateaus – the Loess Plateau, the Inner Mongolia Plateau, and the Qinhai-Tibet Plateau – conjoin. Here the dry region and the humid region meet. Gansu is also considered the separation line of Central Asia and Eastern Asia since it is the place where the Eastern Asia monsoon reaches furthest.

Various topographic forms – plateaus, mountains, plains, valleys and deserts – can be found in Gansu. This mixture of topography has given Gansu multi-ecological environments that left abundant fossils of great diversity. Gansu Provincial Museum holds a rich collection of ancient fossils excavated within Gansu. One of the current permanent exhibitions of the museum is dedicated to the display of these fossils. I will return to this later.

Historically, this special geographic position made Gansu the only link between the East and the West. The main path of the Silk Road – the Hexi Corridor, or Gansu Corridor – runs within Gansu (More detailed information about the Silk Road is given later in this chapter). As a geographic link also in history, Gansu received various economic and cultural inputs that collided and integrated in Gansu and gave Gansu a rich and diverse cultural background. “The small stone your feet just booted is probably a relic from some thousand years ago” is a common saying

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about the area. Cultural prosperity, however, as I will describe later in this chapter, is a legacy of the past. The province declined economically and culturally with the slowing of traffic along the Silk Road. At present Gansu is one of the poorest areas in China.

The international exchange through the Silk Road also brought Gansu vast migration of diverse ethnicities in history. Today, Gansu still remains a multi-ethnic region. In addition to the Han, the majority group of the PRC, there are thirty-eight minority ethnic groups in Gansu. By 2005, the minority population had reached 2,399,700, making up 9.26% of the province's total population (NBSC [National Bureau of Statistics of China], 2008). Ten of these minority groups – the Uygur, Zang, Dongxiang, Tu, Manchu, Yugu, Baoan, Mongolia, Sala, Hasake – have a population over 1,000. Three of them – the Dongxiang, Baoan and Yugu – are exclusive to Gansu.

## **History**

Gansu has a long history of civilization (see Chapter 2 for the discussion on the term *civilization*). The archaeological discovery of Dadiwan site within Gansu province, which was carried out by Gansu Provincial Museum between 1978 and 1984 and has been officially evaluated as one of the 100 Key Archaeological Discoveries of China in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Shi, 2001), is used to demonstrate that Gansu was one of the origins of what is today considered in mainstream politics as *Chinese* civilization. As asserted by Shude Lang (2002), Chief archaeologist of the Dadiwan excavation project, the archaeological discoveries at the Dadiwan site have extended the history of Gansu backward to 8,000 years ago so that they firmly demonstrate Gansu as one of the origins of Chinese civilization (p. 136).

Peoples are always curious about the origins of their civilizations. Chinese are not an exception. The efforts to source the origins of Chinese civilization have been always made from ancient times to contemporary. However, as Patricia B. Ebrey (1996) has argued that “unlike other peoples who pointed to gods as their creators or progenitors, the Chinese attributed to a series of extraordinarily brilliant human

beings the inventions that step by step transformed the Chinese from a primitive people to a highly civilized one” (p. 10).

To explore the source of Chinese civilization embodies, at least in an official view, a series of political advantages in addition to the academic significance, as Jixiang Shan, Director of State Administration of Cultural Heritage, asserted in the preface he wrote for the exhibition *Early China: The Formative Period of Chinese Civilization (Zaoqi Zhongguo: Zhonghua Wenming Qiyuan)*:

It is also of vital importance to carry forward the excellent traditional culture, to stir up the national spirit, to safeguard the national unity, to construct a harmonious society, to promote sustainable social development, and to achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. (Shan, 2009, p. 7)

Originally in Chinese:

*duiyu hongyang zhonghua minzu youxiu chuantong wenhua, zhenfeng minzu jingshen, wei hu minzu tuanjie he guojia tongyi, goujian hexie shehui, cujin shehui kechixu fazhan, shixian zhonghua minzu de weida fuxing tongyang juyou shifen zhongyao de yiyi.*

It is therefore not surprising for the local governmental authority and museum to show interest in emphasizing their role as historically part of China and therefore today a natural part of the PRC by approaches such as highlighting the inclusion of Dadiwan people as within the concept of *China*. Dadiwan culture is presented in one of the permanent exhibition in Gansu Provincial Museum. I will further discuss this point when I analyze the exhibitions of Gansu Provincial Museum later in this chapter.

As early as the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) when China was for the first time unified (see also Chapter 5 for further information about the Qin; see **Appendix 1** for a brief chronology of Chinese history), Gansu, part of today’s Gansu Province to be more precise, has been included into the territory of China. The Great Wall that Qin built to form a vast defensive system to protect against incursions from the nomads to the north extended westward to *Lintao*, which is today’s *Minxian*, south of Gansu Province. In the Western Han time (202 BC – AD 8), the territorial reach of the Han state was vastly extended that the entire part of today’s Gansu was included (see Ebrey, 1996, p. 65 for the illustration of the Han territory; see also Chapter 5). It was



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since the Western Han, to a large degree with the development of the Silk Road, that Gansu began its economic and cultural development in earnest.

The Silk Road is now well known as an ancient trade route starting from Chang'an (today's Xi'an) to Central Asia and Europe by way of Gansu. The Silk Road as a major trade route was officially formed and developed in the Western Han time, after Zhang Qian's missions to the west.

In seeking for allies to fight against the *Xiongnu*, a confederation of nomadic tribes, the Han Emperor Wudi (r. 141-87 BC) sent Zhang Qian, one of his officers, west in 138 BC and 119 BC. It was through Zhang Qian's journeys that Emperor Wudi learned about the other civilized states comparable to China such as Ferghana and Parthia and that these regions were importing Chinese goods especially silk (Ebrey, 1996). In the following years, partly due to the promotion of the Han state, the trade and exchange between China and the western regions through the Silk Road began to thrive. Ebrey (1996)'s description of the goods exchanges between Rome and China may offer an image of such: "Chinese silk was already popular in Rome by the time Julius Caesar died in 44 BC, and was imported in even larger quantities in subsequent decades. [...] Caravans returning to China brought gold, horses, and occasionally luxury goods of west Asian origin such as glass beads and cups" (p. 70).

Due to its location, Gansu's development at the time was largely affected by the Silk Road. By the Sui (AD 581-618) and Tang (AD 618-907) dynasties when the Silk Road was plied by more and larger groups, Gansu had become a relatively developed region in China, as depicted in the Chinese classical history book *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government (Zizhi Tongjian)*: "No places in China were richer than Longyou" (*tianxia cheng fushu zhe wuru longyou*, "Longyou" is the alternative name of Gansu at the time) (Sima, 2000[1084], Vol. 216, "*Tangji: Tianbao shi'er nian*").

Economic exchange generally comes with cultural exchange. So was the case of the Silk Road. The transmission of Buddhism from India into China by way of the Silk Road, which has left Gansu with abundant Buddhist heritage, is one such manifestation. Today, the Mogao Caves, a cluster of Buddhist architectures, sculptures and paintings, has become a most famous tourist site of Gansu and has

been listed as World Heritage. Buddhist heritage is also a main category of collections of Gansu Provincial Museum. I will return to the representation of the Silk Road and religion later in this chapter.

With the advance of maritime traffic, the Silk Road was on the wane from the Song Dynasty (AD 960-1276). Gansu was also declining economically at the time. This may be partly due to the economic and political centre of China shifting towards the south at the time (Cheng, 2004; Maddison, 2007). Gansu's location – between the central part of China and the northern nomads – caused it also to become a battlefield of ethnic conflicts in the following periods. In the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368-1644), Gansu was the frontier for the Han fighting against the Mongolians. In the Qing Dynasty (AD 1644-1911), Gansu was the base of the Qing government to suppress the ethnic rebellion in Xinjiang and to recapture Xinjiang. As Rong Su, the then Party Secretary of Gansu Province, wrote sentimentally in the preface of the book series *Gansu Shihua* (History of Gansu), “From the Song Dynasty [...] Gansu gradually fell behind the civilization centre, desolate and melancholy, gloomy and lonely. The best time has passed” (Su, 2006).

An economic shift came with the founding of the PRC in 1949. With assistance from the Soviet Union, the “big brother”, China started an industrialization campaign from the 1950s. Gansu was chosen as one of the priority areas for this industrialization. Gansu's natural resources such as petroleum and minerals may account for it. A political consideration to balance the distribution of national industries in the country, however, may have taken a bigger account. According to Cishou Zhu (1990), 70% of the country's industries were in coastal areas before 1949 and Northwest China took a little share as 2% of the country's industrial output in 1949 (p. 7). An over-centralization of industry in eastern regions, Dong & Wu (2004) argue, was also a threat to national security (p. 1).

Among a total of 156 industrial projects set up in China during the first Five-year Plan time (1953-1957), 16 projects were set in Gansu. Most of them were within the petrochemical industry so that Gansu had been one of the major petrochemical industry bases in the following two decades (Ibid., p. 459).

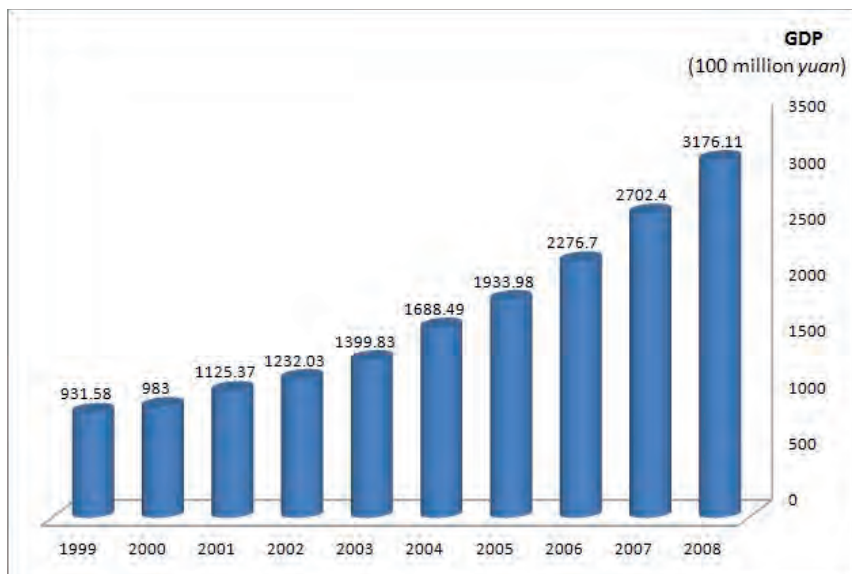
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A downward shift, however, came at the end of the 1970s with the launch of the national Reform and Opening-up strategy, as noted in Chapter 3. The primary goal of this strategy was to develop the national economy. The strategy also implies, as the economic historian Bowen Gao (2005) argues, a shift of the governmental policy priority from inland regions to eastern coastal regions and to take eastern coastal regions as the “frontier of the Reform and Opening-up policy” (p. 92).

This east-prioritized national policy led to an increasing polarization between the eastern and the western regions in the following two decades. A comparison of income per capita between the eastern and western regions may offer a direct view: In 1986 the per capita yearly income in eastern region was 1.15 times of that in the western regions. By 1999, the rate had increased to 1.4 (Yang, 2006). The economic stagnancy is more evident in the case of Gansu. Based on data presented by NBSC (1999), Gansu had dropped to 26 out of 31 regions in the regional GDP ranking of China, lower than Tibet.

To balance the economic and social development between the east and the west was therefore a goal of the Developing-the-West national policy, which was included into the nation’s tenth Five-year Plan (2001-2005). The focus of this policy, in addition to “infrastructure” (*jichu jianshe*) and “environment” (*shengtai huanjing*), also included “science” (*kexue*) and “education” (*jiaoyu*) (State Council, 2001).

Developing-the-West did stimulate Gansu’s development. The GDP of Gansu increased rapidly from 1999 (see **Figure 6**). Nevertheless, given the rapid economic growth in the whole country, Gansu remains one of the poorest regions in China.



**Figure 6.** GDP of Gansu province, 1999-2008. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

These regional specificities, I argue, have affected the museums of the region. In the sections to follow, I link these factors to historical changes as well as current representations at Gansu Provincial Museum.

## Gansu Provincial Museum

### General Introduction

Gansu Provincial Museum lies in Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu province. It is a grand building set back with a large square in front. It was rebuilt in 2000 on the foundations of the old architecture of the 1950s. A Soviet Union architectural style can still be seen today (see *Figure 7*).



**Figure 7. The new building of Gansu Provincial Museum.** (Photo by an anonymous staff of the museum.)

The entrance to the museum leads directly into a large reception hall with broad stairs on both sides leading to the second floor. Following one of the set of stairs to the second floor, the visitor comes to the exhibition *The Silk Road Civilization of Gansu* (*Gansu Sichouzhilu Wenming*). A further permanent exhibition on the second floor is *Exhibition of Paleontological Fossils of Gansu* (*Gansu Gushengwu Huashi Zhan*). Through this exhibition, the visitor may move directly to the third floor, where the exhibition of *Painted Pottery of Gansu* (*Gansu Caitao*) is held. The three are the permanent exhibitions at the museum presently. I will describe these exhibitions in detail later in this chapter.

According to the introductory information presented at its website, over the years Gansu Provincial Museum has collected around 82,000 pieces (or sets) of cultural relics through procurement, donation and archaeological excavations carried out by the museum itself. 744 pieces (or sets) of the collections are valued as the nation's first class cultural relics and 16 pieces (or sets) have been awarded the title of "national treasures" (*guobao*) (Gansu Provincial Museum [GPM], 2006a).

## **Historical Development**

Since its birth, Gansu Provincial museum has undergone a series of changes: Changes in name and form, building, exhibition, forms of storytelling, and concepts of what makes up *a good museum*. These changes, I argue, can be related to changes in the political and economic situation of the PRC and the region as well as general changes in museology as a discipline. In the following, I will briefly describe these changes and relate them to the political contexts behind them.

**Predecessors (1939-1956).** Gansu Provincial Museum, as noted at the start of this chapter, had its origins in Gansu Science and Education Hall established in 1939. China at this time was involved in the Anti-Japanese War (1936-1945). Many museums were damaged by the war. Gansu Science and Education Hall was one of the few newly built museums in inland China which was not on the battlefield (for more information on this period see Chapter 3). The establishment of Gansu Science and Education Hall was in line with the early initiative to promote science and research in China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that also included establishing universities and research institutions and sending students to study abroad (Fairbank & Feuerwerker, pp. 361-419).

In 1950, the year after the PRC was founded, Gansu Science and Education Hall changed name to Northwest People's Science Hall (*Xibei Renmin Kexueguan*). It is not hard to trace the name change to the political change at the time. For example, adding "Northwest" was obviously a response to the administrative division system change. The central government divided the country into six greater regions right after the founding of the PRC. Gansu, Shaanxi, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang made up the Northwest Greater Region (see also Chapter 5). Including "people" in the name may be seen as following the creed of the CPC that people were the real owners of the country, just as the Republic's name shows. This name change of the museum, in other words, reflected the strong socialist bent of the early period of the PRC.

**Early periods (1956-1990s).** The museum was finally formalized as Gansu Provincial Museum in 1956, inheriting the main part of the Northwest People's Science Hall (GPM, 2006a). 1956 is conventionally regarded as the birth year of the present Gansu Provincial Museum.

**Soviet Union Influence.** As noted in Chapter 3, the 1950s witnessed great development of museums in China. A main characteristic of the museum development of this time was the influence of the Soviet Union. One of the results was the establishment of a series of chorography museums in different regions (see Chapter 3). Gansu Provincial Museum was one of them. The organizational structure of the museum also followed the Soviet Union model that divided the museum into three departments: History, Nature, and Socialist Construction (GPM, 2006b).

Accordingly, the exhibition of the museum was themed at three parts: historical cultural relics, natural resources, and revolutionary cultural relics of Gansu (Ibid.).

In 1959, before the tenth birthday celebration of the PRC, the museum was moved into a new building funded by the central government. The building was of strong Soviet Union or Stalinist style: grand, tall, spacious and symmetrical. The steeple on the top, however, was replaced by a traditional Chinese roof. This building, by combining Soviet Union and Chinese styles, vividly mirrored the political environment of that time: China followed the path of Soviet Union on the road of socialism but small adjustments were made (see *Figure 8*). The choice of the museum location seems also a result of Soviet Union influence in urban planning. Tianming Li, Head of the Research Department of Gansu Provincial Museum, argues that to build the museum in a location far from the downtown area at the time was “based on the consideration to take a long-term view of a city’s development”, which was under the general trend of “following the Soviet Union model” (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009).



**Figure 8.** *The old building of Gansu Provincial Museum.* (Photo by an anonymous staff of Gansu Provincial Museum.)

The first exhibition the museum held in the new building was *Ten Years’ Constructional Achievements of Gansu Province* (*Gansusheng Shinian Jianshe Chengjiu Zhanlan*), opened to the public in 1959. This exhibition was, as argued by Li, the main reason that the central government chose to invest in a new building to host the museum. Li also explains that to hold an exhibition of such – showing the ten years constructional achievements – was among the national trend at the time: “the whole country was doing this” (Ibid.).

In addition to this exhibition, the museum created two other exhibitions in 1962 – *Historical Cultural Relics of Gansu (Gansu Lishi Wenwu)* and *Natural Resources of Gansu (Gansu Ziran Fuyuan)* – composing the permanent exhibitions of the museum at the time (GPM, 2006b). It can be seen that this three-theme exhibition model was in close line with the concept of the chorography museum defined by the Ministry of Culture (see Chapter 3).

**Propaganda base.** Defined as a chorography museum, Gansu Provincial Museum was embodied with a political form as the museum was supposed to present the socialist construction of the region in addition to the natural conditions and history. When it came to the Cultural Revolution, this political form was more prominent.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, during the Cultural Revolution, many museums in China were closed or dispersed and many collections were destroyed. Gansu Provincial Museum, however, remained open but with effects of the Cultural Revolution.

These effects were reflected in a variety of museum practices including the administration and exhibitions. In August 1968, a Revolutionary Committee (*Geming Weiyuanhui*) was set up in the museum to replace the existing board in administrating the museum. The “revolutionary committee” was a power structure model adopted at provinces, cities as well as universities, factories and other work-unit levels during the Cultural Revolution. It was formed, as Harding (1991) argues, “as a result of the seizure of power” (p. 165). The set of the revolutionary committee in Gansu Provincial Museum indicated, I argue, a strong imposition of politics of the time to the museum practice through the administration channel.

In terms of exhibitions, if taking a review of the exhibitions held in the museum at the time (GPM, 2006b), it can be seen that political exhibitions were predominating and conformity existed between the exhibition themes and the propaganda themes of the time. For example, the museum organized exhibitions such as *Exhibition of Class Education in Gansu Province (Gansusheng Jieji Jiaoyu Zhanlan)* and *Origin of Class (Jieji de Qiyuan)* while class struggle was a highly stressed topic by the leadership at the time. According to Li, in these exhibitions,



objects such as landowning contracts were displayed to “reflect the darkness of the old society” and to “form the contrast between the present and the past” (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009).

The museum also held a series of exhibitions highlighting Chairman Mao such as *Ten-Thousand-People Propaganda Team of Maozedong Thoughts (Maozedong Sixiang Wanren Xuanchuandui)* opened in 1966 and *Chairman Mao’s Thoughts Have Lit the Labour Movement in Anyuan (Maozedong Sixiang Zhaoliangle Anyuan Gongren Yundong)* opened in 1968, in tune with the personality cult of Mao during the Cultural Revolution.

Li agrees on the conformance of the exhibitions and politics at the time and argues that “these exhibitions were mostly created to coordinate with the political situation and to meet the demand of propaganda at the time” (Ibid.).

It may be argued that during the Cultural Revolution, although remaining opened, Gansu Provincial Museum had been deprived of its nature as a museum and had become, as Li puts it, “a base for propaganda” (Ibid.).

With the ending of the Cultural Revolution, similar to most museums in the PRC (see Chapter 3), Gansu Provincial Museum went back to its original track. A primary signal was the removal of the Revolutionary Committee from the museum structure in 1978.

**Opening-up.** As noted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 3, there was a shift in national strategy towards Reform and Opening-up in 1978, which led to two direct products in terms of the country’s development: National attention was transferred to economy and the door of China was opened onto the world stage. These shifts in attention can also be traced in the practice of Gansu Provincial Museum.

For example, respectively in 1985, 1986 and 1987, the museum held the exhibitions of *Economic and Technological Achievements in Gansu (Gansu Jingji Jishu Chengjiu Zhanlan)*, *Plant Grass, Plant Trees, Eliminate Poverty and Become Rich (Zhongcao, Zhongshu, Zhiqiong Zhifu Zhan)*, *Economy and Trade of Gansu Province (Gansu Sheng Jingji Maoyi Zhan)* (GPM, 2006b). These exhibitions, I would argue, reflected the local response to the national policy shifting towards economy.

More direct influence of this national strategy to the museum was the “opening-up” part, which also opened the door of Gansu Provincial Museum and led to the museum’s international exchange, for example, the museum exhibited its collections in Japan and Singapore and received a number of international museum practitioners and scholars, including a research group sent by UNESCO studying the Silk Road.

**New development (1990s - present).** Since the middle of the 1990s, particularly in the new century, Gansu Provincial Museum experienced fundamental changes not only in the building and permanent exhibitions, but also in shifts in concepts about ways of running a museum and what constitutes a *good* museum.

***From repairing to rebuilding.*** After four decades of running, the museum building had been in bad physical condition in the 1990s. The current director of the museum Jun E ascribes it to the Great Leap Forward movement in the 1950s that emphasized quantity and speed but generally ignored quality (see also Chapter 3) since the museum building was constructed at that time (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). As Director E explains, the museum received 4 million *yuan* from the provincial government in 1994 to repair the building. The repairing project turned out to be a rebuilding one and the financial input gradually increased to 150 million. This dramatic process – from 1994 when the first fund for repairing the building was received to 2006 when the museum was re-opened to the public in the rebuilt building – was described by Director E as “a process of running for money; a process with Chinese characteristics” (Ibid.). Behind it, I may argue, was intervention from both the central and the local governments and the interrelation between the two governmental levels as well as the efforts from within the museum itself to become a “modern museum”, as shown in the paragraphs to follow. The historical facts of this part are mainly based on the introduction by Director E through my interview with him in 2007 and the supplemental material from the museum’s historical documents.

While receiving the 4 million from the provincial government in 1994, the museum experienced an event at the same year that led to more major changes to the museum building. The opportunity was brought by a visit of Li Tieying, member of

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Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee particularly in charge of culture and education. According to Director E, Li Tieying was impressed by the museum's rich and valuable collections but concerned about the poor condition of the museum in preserving and exhibiting these collections. After Li Tieying's return to Beijing, 25 million *yuan* was granted by the central government to the museum for its maintenance. The funding was with the requirement that the provincial government should input 20 million *yuan* as well. Therefore by 1996 the museum received a total sum of 45 million *yuan* to renovate the museum.

Forty-five million was a huge amount for a museum in a region like Gansu whose regional gross production in 1995 was around 553 million *yuan* (NBSC, 1996). As E describes, the museum leaders wanted to make the best use of this funding, so they decided to *rebuild* the middle part of the building instead of *repairing* with permission from the provincial government. The two wings, however, had to be kept unchanged due to the limit of the funding.

After the middle part was rebuilt in 2000, the museum leaders realized the need to rebuild the two wings as well. The reason, according to E, was from the concern for safety. As he explains, the juxtaposition of the new middle part and the two old wings could cause problems as they are of different architectural structures and underpinnings.

E was appointed Director of the museum in this year. As he himself describes he wished to make Gansu Provincial Museum "a modern museum" (E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). This desire for modernization was likely to be equally important to the decision to apply for rebuilding funds as concerns for structural issues.

The museum's application for more funding to rebuild the two wings was, however, rejected by the provincial government. The museum, as E recalls, then turned to the central government for funding. With support particularly from National Development and Reform Commission (*Guojia Fazhan he Gaige Weiyuanhui*)<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> It was called National Development and Planning Commission (*Guojia Fazhan Jihua Weiyuanhui*) between 1998 and 2003, and State Planning Commission (*Guojia Jihua Weiyuanhui*) from 1952 to 1998.

the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, the museum received a funding of 20 million *yuan* from the central government (Ibid.).

I understand that decision making for funding allocation can never be singly factored. Amongst the factors that accounted for the success of Gansu Provincial Museum in applying funding from the central government, the new policy trends of the Party and central government at the time, I argue, made a large impact. These new policy trends included firstly the emphasis on cultural development (as I have noted in Chapter 3 that cultural construction was included as one of the major chapters in Party's outlines for national development from 1997). In addition, the strategy Developing-the-West launched in 2000 was also a prominent step of national policy. Developing-the-West was not only aimed at promoting the economic development in the western regions of the country, but also involved cultural and educational development (see also the earlier part of this chapter). The launch of this policy may explain why Gansu Provincial Museum's application received particular support from National Development and Reform Commission – a body in main charge of the implementation of Developing-the-West policy.

Given the funding received from the central government, the provincial government reconsidered the museum's rebuilding project. According to E, by the completion of the museum's reconstruction including new exhibitions and technological facilities, the provincial government gradually input 105 million. The new Gansu Provincial Museum was opened to the public in 2006. The new museum building has become the iconic architecture of the city of Lanzhou.

To follow the central governmental policy and guidance may account for the attitude change of the local government to the museum project. A consideration for local development, however, I argue, also contributes. This may be seen in a speech by Shousheng Xu, Governor of Gansu province, at the opening ceremony of the new Gansu Provincial Museum:

This is a key and symbolic project of Gansu's cultural construction, and a major event which has attracted public attention province-wide and has been long-awaited. The fulfilment of this project is of great significance in carrying forward fine Chinese traditional culture, boosting the development of the cultural undertakings of our province, meeting the public's spiritual and cultural demands, publicizing our province, and promoting the construction of

a harmonious society as well as construction of spiritual civilization. (as cited by Ruan, 2006)

Originally in Chinese:

*Zheshi yixiang gansu wenhua jianshe de zhongdian gongcheng, biaozhixing gongcheng, yeshi yijian quansheng gejie shifen guanzhu he qipan yijiu de dashi. Zhexiang gongcheng de jiancheng, duiyu chuancheng hongyang zhonghua minzu youxiu chuantong wenhua, tuijin wosheng wenhua shiye fazhan, manzu guangda renmin qunzhong jingshen wenhua xuqiu, jiaqiang duiwai xuanchuan, cujin shehui zhuyi hexie shehui jianshe he jingshen wenming jianshe, dou juyou shifen zhongyao de yiyi.*

The speech reflects an awareness at the local governmental leadership level of the importance of a museum to a region. Regional development and *regional identity* (see Chapter 2) is reflected in the desire for “publicizing the province”. This idea was echoed by the museum director Jun E in his comment on the museum’s function as “an important platform of the local government” (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). E elaborates, “For the [local] government, to receive the most distinguished guests should be at this place, isn’t it? All the non-local businessmen who come [to invest] will certainly visit a museum. You must have a platform for presentation” (Ibid.). E further points out his view on the importance of museums to the local by asserting “museums are always an indicator of the advancement of a country and a region” (Ibid.).

Governor Xu’s speech is interesting also in its linking the museum to “Chinese traditional culture”. We may understand it in the sense that terms like “culture” and “traditional culture” are used in a very loose way in China (see Chapter 2 for my discussion on *culture*). It still implies, however, an emphasis on unity with *China* and Gansu’s *natural* place within this current political entity. Not only is local culture part of China but it is part of its “traditional culture”. One can only presume that Governor Xu is referring to the ancient relics of potteries and so on that have been co-opted here to stand as objects of long and therefore permanent and *natural* historical lines.

**Informationization.** The long and dramatic process of the museum to strive for a new building, as shown in last section, could be seen as the museum’s attempt to be a *good* one first of all by having a modern building. This was only one step of it. From 2001, the museum started another step towards being a good museum –

“informationization” (*xinxihua*). Informationization was a term that can be repeatedly encountered in present Chinese society, referring to the application of technologies for information and communication. Gansu Provincial Museum applied information and communication technologies into all the aspects of its operation including security, management, internal communication as well as a multimedia database for its collections (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). Director E describes this informationization as “the soul project” of his museum in the sense that the building as the body. He admitted that he had no previous knowledge about informationization but had the conscious that “a modern museum without a soul project is never modern but a new building” (Ibid.).

Apparently, modern technology, and *modernity* in general, is an important element in the director’s notion of a *good* museum, the notion the director himself credits to a museum tour he participated in to the United States in 2000 – an example of opening up to international influence. This was a program organized by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. The selected participants included seven directors from provincial museums that were being or about to be rebuilt or renovated and officers from two governmental departments – the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance – that were responsible for providing special funding for museums’ reconstruction. They visited a number of museums in different cities of America. Their American colleagues and the institutions seemed to have left them great impression, at least to the director of Gansu Provincial Museum, who was, as E himself describes, “deeply impressed by the modernity of American museums as well as their thoughtful service and advanced exhibiting means” (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). Right after the America tour, Director E took a domestic round tour to Shanghai Museum, Nanjing Museum and Henan Provincial Museum. After this tour, he had, according to himself, “almost formed an idea of what a first-class museum is and what Gansu Provincial Museum shall do” (Ibid.). Back from these tours, in the beginning of 2001, E started to initiate the informationization in his museum.

It can be argued that how much degree to which a director’s personal awareness for modernity could assert impact on the actual change of museum

operation. As far as the informationization in Gansu Provincial Museum is concerned, I would, however, add an account of governmental policy change.

As previously mentioned that informationization has increasingly become a high-profile issue in China. Kathleen Hartford (2007) has argued in a paper she delivered in the International Conference on Information Technology and Social Responsibility at the Chinese University of Hong Kong that “China’s highest leaders have, increasingly over the past two decades, encouraged, urged, and embraced not only the development of ICT [information communication technology] industries but the application and use of ICTs in all spheres of government, industry, education, culture, and even [...] agriculture”.

A fact which may manifest Hartford’s argument was the CPC’s *Proposal for Formulating the Tenth Five-year Plan for National Economic and Social Development* (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Zhiding Guomin Jingji he Shehui Fazhan Dishige Wunian Jihua de Jianyi*), issued in October, 2000 (CPC, 2000). In this proposal, the CPC contends that “informationization is a general tendency of the world economic and social development of today, and is the linchpin of China’s industrial optimization and upgrading as well as industrialization and modernization” (*xinxihua shi dangjin shijie jingji he shehui fazhan de da qushi, yeshi woguo chanye youhua shengji he shixian gongyehua, xiandaihua de guanjian huanjie*), so the CPC proposes to “extensively apply information technologies in the society” (*yao zai quanshehui guangfan yingyong xinxi jishu*) (Ibid.).

The Party’s proposal for promoting informationization was formulated with an individual chapter entitled “speed up the development of information industries, propel the progressing of informationization” (*jiasu fazhan xinxi chanye, dali tuijin xinxihua*) in the *Tenth Five-year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the PRC (2001-2005)*, issued by the central government in the following year (State Council of the PRC, 2001). Seven months later in October 2001, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) issued the *Tenth Five-Year Outline for Informationization Construction of the Nation’s Cultural Relic and Museum Undertakings* (*Quanguo Wenwu Bowuguan Shiye Xinxihua Jianshe Shiwu Guihua*). Obviously, this is a direct response of the cultural relic and museum field to

the central policy appeal. In this *Outline*, the SACH (2001) quotes the central government's appeal for informationization and further emphasizes that informationization is "the only way" (*biyou zhilu*) leading to the future of cultural relic and museum undertaking.

In the project "cultural relics investigation and database management system construction" (*Wenwu Diaocha ji Shujuku Guanli Xitong Jianshe*) launched by the SACH in 2001, Gansu was selected as one of the four experimental provinces. As a result, the collections of Gansu Provincial Museum was included into the provincial database for cultural relics and other related materials, which was integrated into the National Data Centre for Cultural Relics (*Guojia Wenwu Shuju Zhongxin*) (You, 2005).

It was within this macro circumstance that the informationization of Gansu Provincial Museum was carried out. One of the results of the museum's informationization, amongst others, was the creation and updating of the museum website (<http://www.gansumuseum.com/default.aspx>).

The museum website was launched at the same time as the new museum was opened to public in the end of 2006 (E, 2007b). In June 2007 when I was preparing the interview with Director E, I discovered, however, that the museum website was in a very crude status and seemed uncompleted yet. Very little and out-of-dated information was offered on the website. If one only consulted the website with no reference to other information sources, he or she would not know that the museum had been re-opened to the public in 2006 with a new building and new exhibitions. It seemed that the website was holding back the museum instead of promoting. I addressed my concern to Director E during the interview. As he explained that a new version of the website was under construction at the time and to be publicly accessed soon (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007).

The new Gansu Provincial Museum website came with a complete different outlook with much richer contents and timely updates. In addition to practical information regarding visiting, the website offers a well-categorized and searchable system for the museum's selected collections with photographs and introductory texts. Obviously the website has been expanding the public access of the museum and



particularly to its collections. Just as the director argues: “To turn the value of cultural relics to a better account, [...] internet is undoubtedly a best choice” (E, 2007b).

The informationization of Gansu Provincial Museum offers an illustration of how a change in practice could be driven by both the macro environment such as governmental policy or museum field policy – the latter is often influenced sometimes determined by the former – and the micro conditions, for example, the museum director’s personal view. It is not possible to account to any precise degree how much the two factors respectively count. It, however, may be argued that without one or the other the change of the museum – informationization in this case – would still be able to take place.

**Commercial encounter.** In addition to the space for permanent exhibitions, the new museum building also includes sixteen additional exhibition rooms, designed for not only for holding the museum’s temporary exhibitions, but more primarily for renting out for commercial fairs (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). It seems to be a good business practice. According to E, the rooms were fully booked and the museum had gained decent income (Ibid.).

Gansu Provincial Museum’s commercial practice seems not having been widely accepted. Criticism is heard. For example, in 2007 after three commercial fairs had been held in the museum, a report entitled “Gansu Provincial Museum Became a Groceries Market” (*Gansu Bowuguan Chengle Nongmao Shichang*) was published at *China Business Herald News Weekly* (Chen, 2007). In the report, the museum was described as “full of various small commodities” (*wuhuabamen de xiaoshangpin*) for holding a silk trade fair. The reporter quotes anonymously a museum professional that “to allow various ‘groceries’ in is not in line with the supposed image of a museum” (*ba gezhong zahuo banjin bowuguan, zhe yu bowuguan de xingxiang hen bu xiangfu*) (Ibid.).

The report reflects a still existing concept of the public that the museum is a shrine of high culture and that commerce and culture are two incompatible categories. In terms of the convergence of commerce and culture, *Te Papa*, the new National Museum of New Zealand, has offered an interesting example. The Museum Board of

Trustees of Te Papa included “commercially positive” as one of the four key principles for the institution’s future development (Tramposch, 1998). Tramposch notes that as a consequence, Te Papa employs a variety of revenue generators “ranging from audio guides distribution to gift shops; from an espresso bar, restaurant, and café, to dark rides and publications” as well as runs conference facilities and hosts evening events and functions frequently (p. 348). Commercial thinking, as Charles S. Smith (2006) argues, has been expected to inform all aspects of Te Papa’s redeveloping project (p. 546). Smith also argues that one aspect of Te Papa that greatly informed its thinking was to “try to break away from the traditional elite characteristics of museums, the idea that they are in some way a special and distinctive place for quiet study and contemplation, by modelling the displays wherever possible on new techniques in retailing and the entertainment industry” (Ibid., p. 545).

Such commercial thinking of Te Papa’s and other museums globally is echoed in Gansu Provincial Museum, particularly in the view of Director E regarding a museum. For Director E, the first role of a museum, amongst others, is “a place of cultural leisure” (*wenhua xiuxian changsuo*) (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). E argues that one comes to the museum is not always with the purpose to be educated; he could come just for enjoyment – “just like going to the cinema” (Ibid.). The director’s view – it may have been greatly driven by his Western colleagues particularly through his America trip as previously noted – may have accounted for the commercial practices within the museum. The funding shortage the museum was faced with, however, seems also to be a reason. According to E, many may have thought that the museum was well funded by the state but it was not the case. Items such as the cost for security maintenance – a yearly sum of 400 thousand *yuan* – and costs for holding temporary exhibitions have no dedicated funding source.

The same concern was addressed with Te Papa. According to Tramposch (1998), Te Papa staff and Board were required to generate a quarter of the annual operation cost, which, “for an institution already dedicated to free admission” is “quite a challenge”, yet people are “reluctant to give support to an institution which is

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widely perceived to be well-funded by government and already quite popular with the public” (p. 348).

It could be argued that museum operators’ views on the roles of a museum could account for the museum’s commercial thinking or practices. Janet Marstine (2006), however, has argued the crucial status of finance in museum operation, as she puts it: “A museum may profess to be a shrine but financial issues are still central” (p. 9). In this regard, it could also be argued that the intrinsic financial concerns influence museum operators’ views and accordingly influence museums’ roles in reality.

In expounding the financial challenge that Te Papa was faced, Tramposch (1998) even addressed the worry that Te Papa might have to charge an admission fee in the future (p. 348). Te Papa remains free admission today. The case of Te Papa that free admission worsens the financial situation of the museum seems not the case of Gansu Provincial Museum. As noted previously that the Chinese government launched the campaign of free entrance of museums in 2008 (see Chapter 3). Gansu Provincial Museum was among the first museums to be free to the public. Instead of exacerbating the museum’s financial situation, the free admission seems have financially benefitted the museum since more funding was offered by the government. According to Tianming Li, Gansu Provincial Museum is eligible for an annual funding of 15.5 million *yuan* from the central government since 2009 (12.5 million in 2008) while the museum’s yearly total income had never surpassed 5 million *yuan* before (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009).

It would be interesting to see the effects of the free-entrance policy to the museum practice. I would, however, leave this issue to future research as it had not been a period long enough to examine the effects of this policy by the writing of this thesis.

In the above, I have, mainly from the perspective of political and policy influence, examined the historical development of Gansu Provincial Museum from its predecessors to the current operational practices. In other words, I have studied museum change by focusing on the museum as an institution. In the following, I will,

however, move the focus of study to another aspect of museum practice – the exhibitions and representations.

### **The Current Representation**

Conventionally, a museum holds both permanent and temporary exhibitions. Temporary exhibitions do reflect the curator or the museum's view to some degree. The curation of temporary exhibitions, however, is also subjected to timely needs and the availability of touring exhibitions. Permanent exhibitions, on the contrary, are more indicative of the curator (or the museum)'s solid concepts and views. My investigation on the exhibitions in Gansu Provincial Museum will then centre on its permanent exhibitions. In the paragraphs to follow, I will firstly look at the permanent exhibition composition in Gansu Provincial Museum to analyze the factors that have influenced the museum's selection over the exhibition themes. Then, I will take a close look at the three permanent exhibitions to analyze the relative political contexts behind these exhibitions.

**Composition of permanent exhibitions.** When Gansu Provincial Museum was re-opened to the public in 2006, all the exhibitions in the museum were re-curated. The current three permanent exhibitions, as noted previously, are: *The Silk Road Civilization of Gansu (Gansu Sichouzhilu Wenming)*, *Painted Pottery of Gansu (Gansu Caitao)*, and *Exhibition of Paleontological Fossils of Gansu (Gansu Gushengwu Huashi Zhan)*. In short, three themes – the Silk Road, painted pottery, and paleontological fossils – make up the composition of the museum's permanent exhibitions. In other words, the Silk Road, painted pottery and paleontological fossils are selected by the museum to primarily represent Gansu Province given the status of Gansu Provincial Museum as a chorography museum that is supposed to represent the region.

There may be a variety of factors that could affect a museum's choice over its exhibition themes. The strengths and limitations of the museums own collections are perhaps an inevitable factor. Obviously Gansu Provincial Museum has also included this factor in its concern in creating the permanent exhibitions. The museum does hold a rich collection in all of the three themes. The museum, however, also holds

rich collection of other categorizes of materials than the selected three, such as bronze wares, bamboo slips (*jiandu*), and jade, golden and silver wares (GPM, 2006c).

Within the permitted scope of finance and space, what to exhibit and what not show a museum's priorities. Priorities reflect intentions. The intention of Gansu Provincial Museum, I argue, is to highlight the regional identity – this is a museum of Gansu, not Shaanxi, not Shanghai – and make itself a unique one.

As noted previously in the introduction on Gansu Province that a part of the Silk Road ran through Gansu and the historical development of Gansu had a close relationship with the Silk Road. It could be said that the Silk Road has eventually become a tag of Gansu. So in addition to the factor that the museum holds a rich collection of remains regarding the Silk Road, to represent regional identity of Gansu through the Silk Road seems natural a choice. Detailed analysis of the exhibition of the Silk Road will be made later in this chapter.

To include painted pottery as one of its permanent exhibitions also reflects a highlighting of the regional identity. Gansu is also called “the land of painted pottery” (*caitao zhixiang*). What makes painted pottery identical to Gansu is the time continuity of the painted pottery wares excavated within Gansu. In other words, painted pottery is also capable of identifying Gansu.

To include paleontological fossils, I would argue, is also driven, at least partly, by a concern of highlighting regional identity. Gansu has been well known for the unearthing of several paleontological fossils of archaeological significance such as the Yellow River Stegodon (*Huanghe Xiang*) fossil unearthed in 1973 and the Mamenchisaurus (*Mamengi Long*) fossil unearthed in 1947. Even though the original fossils of the mentioned two are not kept in Gansu Provincial Museum today, their copies are presented with emphasis in the *Exhibition of Paleontological Fossil of Gansu*. These paleontological fossils unearthed in Gansu in some way contain a pride for the region's long history.

The intention to highlight the regional identity could also be seen from the museum breaking the exhibition contents frame of a chorography museum set in the 1950s, according to which, the museum was supposed to exhibit the “natural

conditions”, “historical development” and “democratic construction” of the local region (see Chapter 3).

We may acknowledge that the regional approach had been adopted in the older exhibitions as they were supposed to exhibit the three aspects of the *local*. Nevertheless, as the adoption of regional approach had to be restrained within the set frame that all the chorography museums in the country must follow, the regional uniqueness and identity was not specially marked. Instead, an impression of Gansu as a region among many others of China was easily delivered. Breaking through the frame, the current three exhibition themes, however, bring the audience directly with the features of the region and make it easier for the audience to identify Gansu as different from the other regions.

To highlight the regional identity may also be seen as the museum’s pursuing for “distinctiveness” (*youtese*). This pursuit for distinctiveness has been carried out in the curation of the museum’s new permanent exhibitions. As noted by Director E that they were not intended to make the permanent exhibitions grand and full, but “most distinctive” (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007).

The pursuit of distinctiveness was also permeated in the museum’s goal for development – “a most distinctive top-class museum in West China” (E, 2007). Director E explains the connotation of this goal: “It doesn’t mean we could be the best in China. [...] We cannot make it. But we could be the most distinctive” (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007).

A museum’s intention and pursuit for distinctiveness in a way also reflects an allowance in the museum field in general towards marking a museum as different from others. A certain level of competition has entered the field.

By moving back to the comparison of the current exhibition themes and the old supposed ones set in the 1950s, we can see that the exhibition content of “democratic construction”, defined as “including construction achievements in politics, economy and culture” (see Chapter 3), has been completely removed. Exhibitions dealing with democratic construction, on the one hand, were marked with a strong political colour since they were meant to show the achievements of socialist construction – in other words to show the success of an ideology. The first exhibition

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held in the new museum building *Ten Years' Construction Achievements of Gansu Province (Gansusheng Shinian Jianshe Chengjiu Zhanlan)* is one of such examples (see earlier part of this chapter). On the other hand, what this category of exhibitions dealt with are contemporary issues of the region rather than ancient. Therefore, the removal of this part of contents, on the one hand, may suggest a lighter colour of politics in the museum. On the other hand, it may also suggest a departure of the museum from exhibiting both the historical and present to including only the historical.

In the following paragraphs I will take a close look at the three current permanent exhibitions in Gansu Provincial Museum. Among the three, I will particularly focus on the Silk Road and painted pottery exhibitions since the two are more concerned with issues such as diversity, unity, and national/regional identity which are also the main concerns of this thesis. The exhibition of paleontological fossils will be discussed relatively briefly.

**The Exhibition of Paleontological Fossil of Gansu.** As noted previously, the complicated topographical and climate features of this region has left Gansu with a large quantity and variety of paleontological fossils over time. Gansu Provincial Museum holds a rich collection of them. This exhibition presents the museum's paleontological fossil collections, all unearthed within Gansu, according to the order of life evolution of the earth.

I have argued previously that to include paleontological fossil in the composition of the museum's permanent exhibition theme reflects the intention to highlight the regional identity since Gansu has been well known for its paleontological fossil remains. The regional approach could also be seen from the confrontation between the local and the universal – the story of life evolution on the earth is told by objects unearthed from Gansu. Life evolution on the earth is quite general a topic. To interpret a general topic in a specific and local approach is most likely to deliver the message that Gansu has been in synchronized steps with the evolution on the earth. What is implied is a pride in the region's long history.

This exhibition has also applied a variety of modern exhibiting ideas and technologies. The exhibition space is designed to simulate the environment of the

ancient times with audio-visual and interactive approaches. While walking through the exhibition, the visitor can hear the low-pitched dinosaurs mooing, watch videos shown on walls, and access relative information by touch-screen applications. These modern approaches, on the one hand, show the museum's modernity which has been pursued by the museum through its striving for a new building and the practices of informationization. On the other hand, these approaches, particularly the interactive applications, could possibly make the exhibition more entertaining and attractive. This also reflects the director's view regarding the role of a museum to be first of all a place of cultural leisure (see earlier part of this chapter).

This exhibition describes the remote antiquity of the earth, long before any civilization was formed. There is no narrative, either by text or graphics, making claims or defining *China* or *Chinese* in this exhibition. In this way it sets an interesting contrast to the other two permanent exhibitions where a strong sense of Chinese identity can be felt.

**The exhibition of *Painted Pottery of Gansu*.** Painted pottery is one of the leading collection categories of Gansu Provincial Museum. The museum has a hold of around 5,000 painted pottery objects, the age of which spans from 8,000 to 2,000 years ago. I have argued previously that painted pottery being selected as the museum's permanent exhibition theme may be partly driven by the museum's intention to make the regional identity stand out more.

Taking a close look at this exhibition we can see that the theme – “Gansu is one of the origin places of Chinese civilization” (*Gansu shi zhonghua wenming de qiyuandi zhiyi*) – is represented throughout the exhibition and also appears in the prelude texts of the exhibition.

The exhibition is composed of six sections. The first four sections are dedicated to the historical development of painted pottery and the last two introduce pottery art and the manufacture craft of painted pottery wares. My following analysis will be centred on the first four sections since they are the focus of the exhibition.

The four sections are following a chronological order with each dedicated to one cultural form: Dadiwan Culture (8,000 – 7,000 years ago), Yangshao Culture (7,000 – 5,000 years ago), Majiayao Culture (5,000 – 4,000 years ago) and Bronze



period cultures (4,000 – 2,600 years ago). The development of painted pottery in Gansu under each cultural form is respectively presented. As there is a time successiveness existing between these cultural forms, the continuousness of painted pottery development in Gansu is accordingly illustrated.

The exhibition starts with the section called “Spark of the Civilization: Painted Pottery of Dadiwan Culture” (*Wenming shuguang: Dadiwan wenhua caitao*). As noted previously, the archaeological excavation of the Dadiwan site carried out by Gansu Provincial Museum has usually been used as the demonstration of Gansu as one of the origin places of Chinese civilization. This point is particularly obvious in this section. The section title makes a first and general manifestation.

At the start of the section, the introductory texts include the following line: “The settlement of Dadiwan people brought about painted pottery” (*dingju shenghuo cuisheng le caitao*), which could be seen as the reasoning of the museum to connect painted pottery to human civilization. In the section introduction, it is also stated that Dadiwan Culture is “the earliest cultural form in China that had painted pottery production” (*woguo shuaixian shiyong caitao de shiqian wenhua*). This statement marks the position of Dadiwan Culture in the developing process of “Chinese civilization” through the channel of painted pottery.

The archaeological excavation of the Dadiwan site is introduced in this section with graphical illustrations as well as textual introduction. In the textual introduction, it is argued that “the archaeological excavation at Dadiwan site has for the first time uncovered the developmental process of ancient cultural forms in the eastern part of Gansu dating back to 8,000 and 5,000 years ago, demonstrating that the eastern part of Gansu is one of the origin places of Chinese civilization and one of the key areas to explore the origins of Chinese civilization” (*Dadiwan kaogu shouci jiekaille jujin yue 8,000-5,000 nian de gansu dongbu diqu guwenhua fazhan de zhenshi mianmu. [...] biao ming gansu dongbu shi zhonghua wenhua de faxiangdi zhiyi, shi tansuo zhonghua wenming qiyuan de zhongyao quyu*).

In addition to textual explanation, the theme that Gansu is one of the origin places of Chinese civilization is further emphasized through the display of objects

excavated from Dadiwan site that bear reference to the existence of civilization in Gansu in remote history.

For example, displayed living utensils such as bowls and pots referring to daily life are likely to give the audience the impression that Gansu had had civilized people living there around 7,000 or 8,000 years ago (see *Figure 9*).



**Figure 9. Three-foot Painted Pottery Bowl (around 8,170-7,370 years ago).** Excavated from Dadiwan site, Gansu Province. (Photo courtesy of Gansu Provincial Museum.)

There are also some pottery shards with symbols on display (see *Figure 10*). Academic agreement has not yet been reached regarding the meaning of the symbols. These pottery shards, however, are likely to lead audiences to make connections between the symbols and contemporary Chinese writing characters. Writing characters are popularly regarded as one of the elements of civilization, the view of which is also taken by some major archaeological scholars in China (see, for example, An, 1987; Zou, 1987; Li, 1988). The chief archaeologist of Dadiwan archaeological project Shude Lang (2003) has also argued that the symbols on the pottery shards are of major significance in studying the origins of Chinese writing characters (p. 6). The display of these pottery shards is possibly persuasive of the theme that Gansu is one of the origin places of Chinese civilization, thus pushing the

concept of the origins of Chinese civilization much further west than was previously conceived.



**Figure 10. Painted pottery shards with symbols on.** (Photo courtesy of Gansu Provincial Museum.)

The second section of this exhibition introduces the painted pottery in the Yangshao Culture (around 7,000 – 5,000 years ago), when painted pottery achieved rapid development. Although the origins of Chinese civilization have been studied also in a plural framework (see, for example, Su & Yin, 1981; Zhao, 2000), for a long time, Yangshao Culture had been preconceived as the single and central precursor of Chinese civilization. The reasons may include that, as Harold M. Tanner (2009) argues, “Yangshao culture happens to have developed along the Yellow River Valley, and particularly in the Central Plains area – an area that later emerged as a center of political and economic power and which ancient Chinese historians regarded as the central place from which their civilization originated” (p. 20). In modern times, Tanner continues to argue, “Chinese archaeology, often driven by nationalism to find evidence for the ancient historical accounts, has paid particular attention to the Central Plains” (Ibid.). In other words, for the general public, Yangshao Culture tends to be regarded as a synonym to earlier Chinese civilization.

In this exhibition, Yangshao Culture is described as “the key stage for the formation of Chinese civilization” (*zhonghua wenming yunyu xingcheng de zhongyao*

*jiedian*) in the introductory texts (Exhibition texts). The successive position of the two sections suggests for the precursor status of Dadiwan Culture to Yangshao Culture. What could be read is that Dadiwan – located within Gansu – plays also a significant role – perhaps more significant concerning the earliness of time – in the formation of Chinese civilization.

Following the section of Yangshao Culture is that of Majiayao Culture. The connection between the two has been marked through the texts at the end of the last section stating that Yangshao Culture has made “significant influence” (*juda yingxiang*) to Majiayao Culture. Majiayao Culture was a cultural form firstly discovered at the site of Majiayao within Gansu. In other words, this cultural form contains a more *local* meaning for Gansu and Gansu Provincial Museum. To mark the successiveness between Yangshao Culture and Majiayao Culture in some way marks the connection between the local and the national.

The section after the Majiayao section introduces the painted pottery development in Gansu during the Bronze Age about 4,000 years ago. According to the exhibition, painted pottery at the time had nearly given the place to bronze in the other regions of the country but not in Gansu. The exhibition uses the narration of “shining solely” (*duju meili*) to describe the painted pottery development in Gansu at the time. A regional uniqueness, or regional identity, could therefore be singled out.

To sum up, we may see two points highlighted in the representation of this exhibition.

The first is the continuity of the painted pottery development in Gansu. This is made through the emphasis on the successiveness of each cultural form and the influence of previous cultural forms to latter ones in terms of the pottery painting designs and motives. The continuity of painted pottery development is also used to show the continuity of civilization in Gansu, given the notion that painted pottery is a vehicle of civilization.

The second is the highlighting of the regional identity of Gansu. The story of painted pottery told in this exhibition is strictly centred on Gansu, instead of China in general. The aspects identical to Gansu regarding painted pottery development such as the earliness and continuity are emphasized. However, such highlighting of

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regional identity is simultaneously made through the implied national identity of China – the representation of civilization of Gansu in this exhibition has been closely tied to the concept of Chinese civilization. For example, the representation of the earliness of the civilization in Gansu – mainly through the presentation of Dadiwan Culture – is made by emphasizing Gansu’s role in the early formation of Chinese civilization. The statement that “Gansu is one of the origin places of Chinese civilization” appears not only in the preface but also the epilogue of the exhibition.

Apparently, the claimed *Chinese civilization* in the exhibition is a more inclusive concept involving all the territory of the PRC. The Dadiwan Culture belonged to the Neolithic period. Ethnicities, either the Han or the others, had yet to be formed. To represent Gansu as one of the origin places of Chinese civilization reinforces the inclusiveness of the concept of Chinese civilization. To tie the regional identity to Chinese national identity, I would argue, is a reflection of the notion that China is a unified multiethnic nation, as has been stressed by contemporary Chinese polity. This representational balance of regional and national identity can also be seen from the exhibition of *The Silk Road Civilization of Gansu*, to be discussed in the following section.

**The exhibition of *The Silk Road Civilization of Gansu*.** As noted in the first part of this chapter, the Silk Road played a significant role in Gansu’s history. The Silk Road exhibition, although amongst the three permanent exhibitions, is treated and seen as the core exhibition by the museum itself (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009). The core position of this exhibition can also be seen from its position in the museum building – led to directly by the museum entrance.

The story of the Silk Road is unfolded in the exhibition through the order of its historical development. Four main sections compose the exhibition, respectively dealing with the pre-formation, formation, flourishing and extension of the Silk Road.

The story is apparently endowed with a local focus, a direct manifestation of which is that the displayed relics supporting the story are all unearthed within Gansu. Just as the exhibition name shows that it is about the Silk Road civilization of *Gansu* (not general, or China). While being represented as one of the origin places of Chinese civilization in the painted pottery exhibition, in this exhibition, it is easy to

see that Gansu is mainly represented as a historical communication frontier of China to the world, which is also noted in the prelude of this exhibition: “Located in the eastern section of the Silk Road, Gansu was the gateway of the ancient China to the West. It was also a major trunk and one of the most active areas for the communication between the East and the West” (*Dichu sichouzhilu dongduan de Gansu, shi gudai zhongguo tongxiang xifang de menhu, yeshi dongxifang jiaowang de zhugandao he zui huoyue de diqu zhiyi*) (Exhibition texts). From the narration we can see that the local identity of Gansu as a communication frontier is not represented as individual, but attached with the national identity of China. In other words, the cultural integration that took place in the area of Gansu is the integration of Chinese culture (not Gansu culture) and other cultures.

Communication signifies the encounter of differences of cultures and ethnicities. Communication could possibly lead to some similarities as well. In representing Gansu as a communication frontier, both cultural diversity and unity are focused.

I have made a brief discussion in Chapter 2 regarding the topic of diversity and unity and have argued that under the context of current Chinese polity and society, diversity in an ethnic and cultural sense is admitted and even promoted with the premise that it is under the unified identity of *Chinese* both in a political and cultural sense (see Chapter 2). This argument could be manifested here – “Diversity within unity” is a major theme represented throughout of this exhibition.

Diversity is firstly represented by a map of the Silk Road offered at the start of the exhibition. On the map, goods and technologies exported from what is deemed *China* today to western countries through the Silk Road (such as silk, paper, gunpowder, printing, campus, porcelain and tea) and those imported from the western countries to *China* (such as glass, religions, music and dancing, foods, dresses and some plant and animal species) are respectively marked, setting a contrast between Chinese culture and foreign cultures. The position of Gansu as a communication frontier is thus emphasized.

In the first section of the exhibition, to present the pre-formation of the Silk Road, two major civilizations are presented. One is what is conventionally regarded

as traditional Chinese civilization – the agricultural civilization – developed in and around the central plain of China and is eventually the Han civilization. The presentation of this traditional Chinese civilization is through the introduction of the Zhou and the Qin dynasties. Bronze wares such as sacrificial vessels and weapons unearthed from tombs of the Zhou and the Qin times are displayed.

Another particularly presented civilization is that of the northern nomadic peoples, referred in the exhibition as “horseback civilization” (*mabei wenming*). These peoples and their cultures are distinct from the Han, which is illustrated in a panorama offered in the exhibition (see *Figure 11* and *12*). The panorama presents the scenario of horse riding, music instruments playing and dancing that are not typically characterized by the Han. Differences between the central plain Han culture and the northern nomadic ethnic culture are thus shown.



**Figure 11. Panorama of Horseback civilization (1).** (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)



**Figure 12. Panorama of Horseback civilization (2).** (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

Differences are, however, not the only focus of the exhibition in representing the cultural and ethnic diversity. Similarities and connections are also sought and even more highlighted. In the exhibition, it has been a general practice to give notes with texts or figures about the foreign influences of the displayed objects.

A first example is the “winged-animal-shaped bronze *He* with loop handle” (*yi shou xing ti liang he*, see **Figure 13**). *He* is a type of wine-holder. The body of this *He* is carved with a winged dragon on each side. According to the introduction, the figure of winged animal is originated from Griffin, the legendary creature of western Asian with the body of a lion and the wings of an eagle. A panel listing the figures of Griffin in North Africa, South Europe, South Asia and West Asia is offered beside the object (see **Figure 14**). This object, as noted in the label texts, “is greatly characterized with the integrity of Eastern and Western cultures” (*po ju dongxifang wenhua ronghe zhi tese*).





Figure 13. *Winged-animal-shaped bronze He with loop handle.* (Photo by Author.)



Figure 14. *Griffin in North Africa, South Europe, South Asia and West Asia.* (Photo by author.)

Another example is a set of “bronze big-antler-deer” (*Qingtong dajiaolu*, see *Figure 15*) unearthed within Gansu. Beside the displayed objects, the images of big

antler deer of Siberia are presented (see *Figure 16*). The similarities of the two are self-evident.



Figure 15. *Bronze big-antler-deer-shaped ornament.* (Photo by author.)



Figure 16. *Big-antler deer in Siberia.* (Photo by author.)

A further impressive example is “Bronze Galloping Horse” (*Tongbenma*, see *Figure 17*). According to the introductory panel, this “Bronze Galloping Horse” combines the characteristics of the *Hexi* (Gansu) horses, Ferghana horses and Mongolian horses and is therefore, the introduction notes, “a symbol and envoy of communication and exchange between the East and the West” (*dongxifang wenhua jiaowang de shizhe he xiangzheng*) (Exhibition texts).



**Figure 17. Bronze Galloping Horse.** (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

Objects with combined influences are a direct demonstration of cultural communication or cultural diversity and integrity. In addition to material heritage, the representation of “diversity within unity” in the exhibition has also been made through the display of hybrid immaterial forms such as religion, music, or dance.

The exhibition has a separate section on Buddhist art called “Shining of Buddha” (*Fotuo zhiguang*). According to the textual introduction offered in the exhibition, Buddhism spread along the Silk Road to China and Gansu was one of the first places in China that received it. The abundant Buddhist heritages remained in Gansu today is a reference to the flourish of Buddhism in the past in this area. A certain degree of localization would then be expected. The museum gives the answer

through the panel texts offered in the exhibition noting a combined influence of both Chinese and foreign to the displayed Buddhist arts.

For example, for a coloured mural painting of a Buddha collected from Tiantishan Cave, Wuwei, Gansu province (see **Figure 18**), it is noted in the introduction that the painting techniques such as dyeing the face and upper body in cinnabar and using white to highlight the lighted parts are evidently affected by the painting style of Western Regions; while the “iron-wire-painting” (*tiexianmiao*) skill is a typical Chinese traditional painting style.



**Figure 18. Coloured mural painting of a Buddha.** (Photo courtesy of Gansu Provincial Museum.)

Another impressive example is “Gaoshanmu Stone Pagoda with Buddha Statues” (*Gaoshanmu shi zaixiang ta*), unearthed in Jiuquan, Gansu province (see **Figure 19**). The structure shows an Indian pagoda style. The pagoda base is an octahedron carved with a Buddha statue and a sign of Eight-Trigram (*bagua*) on each panel. It is well known, not only for the Chinese but also the foreigners, that the Eight-Trigram is a typical symbol of Chinese ancient philosophy. The display of this

stone pagoda is evidence of the combined Chinese and foreign influences. The introduction to this pagoda offered by the museum on its website notes that it is the earliest example discovered in China by now of simulating the Indian Covered-Alms-Bowl pagoda.



**Figure 19. Gaoshanmu Buddhist Stone Tower Statue.** (Photo courtesy of Gansu Provincial Museum.)

Through the early painted pottery wares and the story of the Silk Road, the image of Gansu as an initial region of Chinese civilization and as a communication frontier of diverse cultures and ethnicities is underscored. The regional identity of Gansu as historical and as of cultural diversity is accordingly represented. Nevertheless, as I have noted previously, the emphasis on a unique regional identity sits closely with an emphasis on an historical position within the entity “China”. The primitive people of Gansu, despite their enormous differences from contemporary Chinese (the Han and others), are presented as a starting point of a natural chronology. The region’s uniqueness and difference from the East was through the meeting of “Chinese” civilisation with “foreign” civilisations. This meeting point is

presented predominantly as a peaceful and enriching event (despite the wars that were waged and continued to be waged for many centuries).

Similarities and connections between cultures are deliberately sought and noted, which suggests that the diversity is a harmonious integration of West and East, of ethnic minority and the Han, and of peripheral and the national central regions. In short, a unity within the diversity – a theme in tune with the current political ideology in China – is implied.

### **Summery**

In this chapter I have looked at Gansu province and the museum of the region – Gansu Provincial Museum. I examined the historical development of the museum within the context of the region and the nation. Gansu Provincial Museum basically followed the road that most of Chinese museums passed. It, however, also sought its own track: Striving for status as a modern and good museum though restricted by the poor regional financial conditions. I have also taken a close look at the specific representation in the museum exhibitions. The museum exhibitions present an advanced and vigorous past for Gansu – an imagery that revises the stereotyped regional identity of Gansu as impoverished, desolate and peripheral.

## Chapter 5. Shaanxi Province and Shaanxi History Museum

The focus of this chapter is Shaanxi Province and Shaanxi History Museum. As noted in the beginning of the last chapter, this chapter makes up the second of this set of two and is a comparison case to Gansu province and museum. I chose Shaanxi Province, as noted in the last chapter, since Shaanxi, similar to Gansu, is a historical site with rich cultural relics and numerous heritage sites. Historically, Shaanxi had hosted at times the national capital for fourteen dynasties lasting 1,077 years in total (Wang, Chen, Zhang, & Li, 1995). Statistics from a province wide census shows there are 8,656 historical heritage sites, 5,678 ancient mausoleums (79 are that of emperors), and 2,233 ancient architecture sites in Shaanxi (Ibid.). Shaanxi tops the PRC regarding the quantity, quality, and geographic distribution intensity of cultural relics (Ibid.). The world famous Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shihuang (or the first Qin Emperor) and his sacrificial terracotta warriors and horses are located in Shaanxi. The history of Shaanxi and its changing fate as capital, site for revolution, development stagnation and recent international recognition and tourism growth offer insights into regional and museum change.

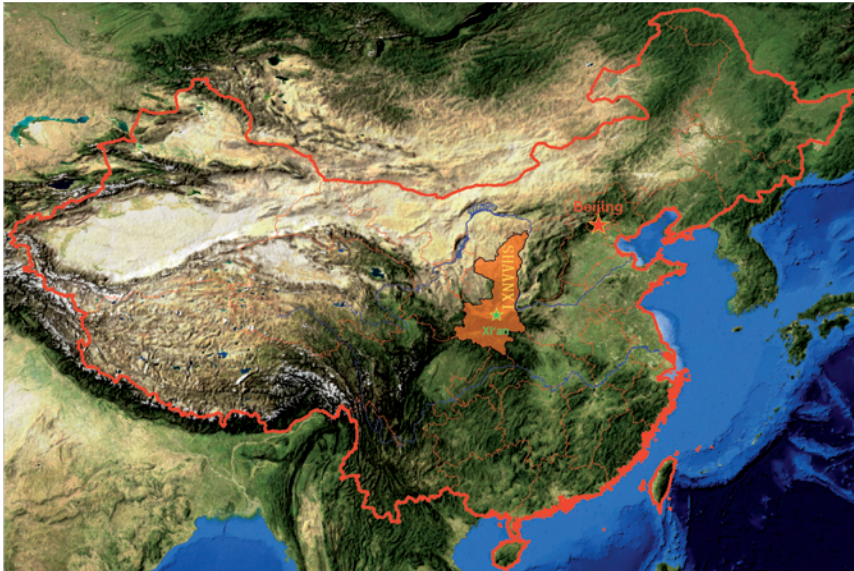
There are many museums in Shaanxi. Shaanxi History Museum was chosen here in part because of its international recognition but more importantly because it attempts to represent the broader Shaanxi region and its history. It is a museum about this region and stamped by this region. As will be described in the second main part of this chapter, the history of the museum – and all the changes it experienced – reflect the political and economic changes in this region and by extension the nation.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first, I describe the history and geography of Shaanxi Province so as to provide a context for the historical and macro environment of Shaanxi History Museum. The second part, on the museum itself, includes two sections. I start with a general introduction to the museum and describe its historical development in relation to policy changes. I then look at the museum's permanent exhibitions, both past and current, noting changes in approaches to display and representation.

## Shaanxi Province

### Specifications<sup>9</sup>

Shaanxi province is located in the central part of China with an area of about 2 million square km. It is generally viewed as “the west of China but the east of the west” due to its central location in Chinese territory (see *Figure 20*). Shaanxi borders Shanxi province and Henan Province in the east, Hubei province, Chongqing municipality and Sichuan province in the south, Gansu province and Ningxia Hui autonomous region in the west, and Inner Mongolia in the north. The middle reach of the Yellow River runs from the north to the south along the eastern border of Shaanxi separating Shaanxi with its neighbour Shanxi. Shaanxi’s central location made it an important traffic node. The most important railway of China, Longhai Railway that connects the eastern, middle and western parts of China, runs through Shaanxi and made Shaanxi a gateway to China’s vast western regions.



**Figure 20.** *Map of Shaanxi Province.* (Made by author.)

<sup>9</sup> The facts regarding Shaanxi province covered in this section, unless otherwise clarified, are mainly based on the official website of Shaanxi province regarding its factual information – *Web of Ground Information of Shaanxi Province (Shaanxi sheng diqing wang)*: <http://www.sxsdq.cn/>.



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The territory of Shaanxi is long on the north-south axis (around 870 km), and narrow west-east (around 200-500 km). The mountain range Qinling spans the province from the east to the west, resulting in different geographic features of the northern and southern parts of Shaanxi with plateau in the former and mountains latter. Qinling is also regarded the separation of Northern China and Southern China.

The largest branch of the Yellow River – Weihe – runs along the northern side of Qinling. The alleviation of the Weihe formed the plain in the middle part of Shaanxi. Present archaeological and historical studies have shown the important role that Weihe valley had played in the forming and early developing of Chinese civilization (Fairbank, 1992; Ebrey, 1996).

Statistics shows that Shaanxi Province has a population of 37.35 million composed of fifty-four ethnic groups, among which, the Han population makes up to 99.4% (Shaanxi Provincial Government [SPG], 2007).

## **History**

The one-million-year-old fossil remains of the Lantian-Man, discovered at Lantian village of Shaanxi Province in the 1960s has been generally used – also by Shaanxi History Museum (to be discussed later) – as a demonstration of the trace of the earliest pre-history human being civilization in Shaanxi (see, for example, Li & Zhang, 1996; Shaanxi History Museum, 2008). The discoveries and studies of historical sites in Shaanxi such as Banpo and Jiangzhai sites (see, for example, Wang, Chen, Zhang, & Li, 1995) have suggested the active status of the area of Shaanxi in the Neolithic times regarding human being activity.

In addition to the archaeologists' version, Chinese ancient myths and literature offer another version of history in which Shaanxi also played a significant role regarding the origin of Chinese civilization. The generally known “five-thousand-year-long Chinese civilization” (*zhonghua wuqiannian wenming*) comes from the myths of *Huangdi*, or Emperor Huang, recorded in historical literature such as *Shiji* (historical records) written by Sima Qian of the Western Han time. According to myth, around 5,000 years ago, the tribe ruled by Huangdi started to live in the area around the Weihe valley, middle of Shaanxi. During Huangdi time, there were not

only technological advancements in fields such as agriculture and medicine, more significant were the advances related to *culture*, such as the invention of writing and drawing as well as the regulating of religious ceremonies. Huangdi has therefore been conventionally regarded as the “humanity ancestor” (*renwen chuzu*) of Chinese civilization (W.-M. Yan, 2009, p. 15). The myths regarding Huangdi have not been completely verified by archaeological studies. The claimed Mausoleum of Huangdi (*Huangdiling*) located in a county in the middle of present Shaanxi<sup>10</sup>, as noted by He and Liu (2005), has been all along history serving as a place for the Chinese to show respect to their ancestor. In the regime of the PRC, a yearly grand sacrifice ritual has been held by the Shaanxi provincial government since 1955 except for the period of 1964-1979 (Ibid.).

Shaanxi reached further historical prominence with the establishment of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC-771 BC), the capital of which was set in Haojing, present Xi’an, the provincial capital of Shaanxi. Western Zhou period has been generally regarded, particularly by Chinese scholars, as the commencement of feudal system in China, although western scholars such as Fairbank & Reischauer (1979) have presented concerns with the use of the term *feudal* and have argued that the Western Zhou system was probably not so close “to the feudal organization of Europe two millenniums later” (p. 31-32). From Western Zhou and in the following centuries of feudalist history of China, Xi’an had been the national capital for over ten dynasties including those when China made significant advancement such as the Qin, Han, Sui and Tang. The different dynasties are important to note as they frame the way the museum exhibitions in Shaanxi History Museum are curated.

In history, the first time that “China” appeared as a unified nation came in 221 BC, when Yinzheng, known as Emperor Qin Shihuang conquered the other states and established the unified and centralized empire of the Qin (221 BC-206 BC).<sup>11</sup> The capital was set in Xianyang, near present Xi’an in Shaanxi. In addition to political

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<sup>10</sup> There are several regions in China claiming themselves as hosting the Mausoleum of Huangdi other than Shaanxi. The site in Shaanxi is the only one which has been officially authorized.

<sup>11</sup> The historical facts covered in this section are based on Fairbank & Reischauer (1979), Dillon (1979), Fairbank (1992), and Ebrey (1996).

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unification, Emperor Qin Shihuang also asserted unification on aspects such as weights and measures, currency forms, and the writing system. He even tried to impose uniformity on knowledge and thoughts so that all literatures other than those on agriculture, medicine and divination were forced to be burned; recalcitrant scholars were suppressed even buried alive. This is known in history as “burning of the books and burying of Confucian scholars” (*fenshukengru*).

2,000 years later, in 1974, three vast pits containing thousands of life-size terracotta figures of armed soldiers and horses were discovered in Shaanxi, close to the emperor’s tomb. Today, the site has been widely known as Emperor Qin Shihuang’s Terracotta Warriors and Horses and has become a popular tourist spot of Shaanxi, attracting large numbers of visitors, which has gained Shaanxi both national and international fame.

The Qin was replaced by the Han regime in 202 BC which ruled China for the following almost four centuries until AD 220, except for a brief usurpation. The earlier Han is also called Western Han (202 BC–AD 8) and the later, Eastern Han (AD 25–220). The Capital of Western Han was set in Chang’an, present Xi’an. From then, Xi’an was set as Capital of China repeatedly in Chinese history until the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The Chinese empire was greatly consolidated and developed during the Han regime. According to Patricia B. Ebrey (1996), the Han dynasty asserted sovereignty over vast regions from Korea in the east to Central Asia in the west and Vietnam in the south (see **Figure 21**). As Fairbank (1979) notes, “corresponding roughly in time to the heyday of Rome, the two Han empires also paralleled Rome in power, prestige, and historical significance” (p. 59). A present reference to the historical significance of the Han to China is that even today the Chinese language is still sometimes referred as Han-language (*hanyu*) and the writing characters as Han-character (*hanzi*).

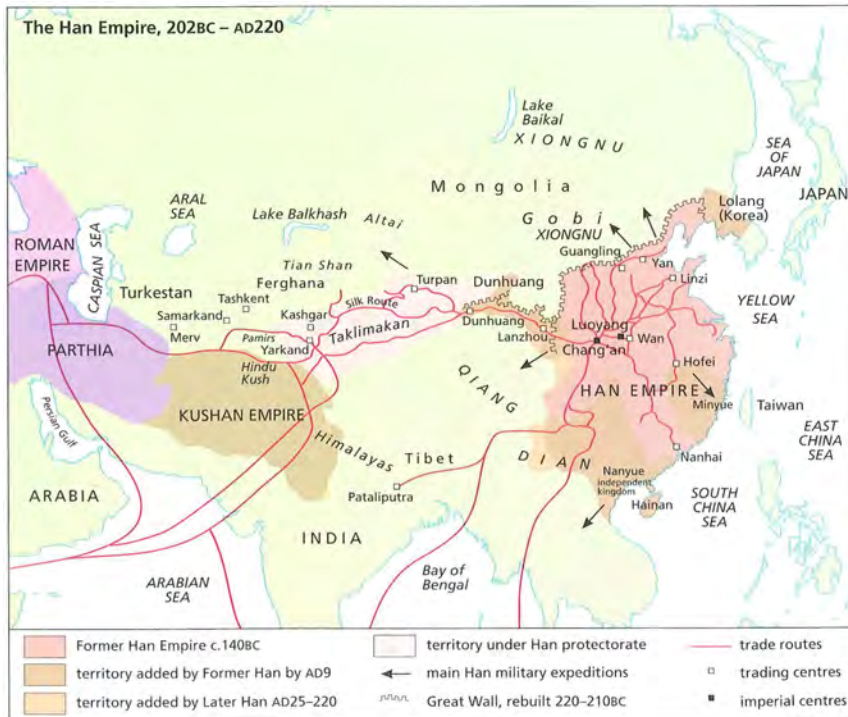


Figure 21. *The Han Empire*. From Patricia B. Ebrey (1996), p. 65.

With the collapse of the Han regime in AD 220, the Chinese empire fell into separation, which lasted for the following three and a half centuries. The Chinese imperial unification was regenerated in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century under the Sui Dynasty (581-617), whose capital was set in Daxing, also within present Xi'an.

The Sui was succeeded by the Tang (AD 618-907), during which China gained great prosperity and became, in Ebrey's (1996) words, "an expansive, dynamic, cosmopolitan empire" (p. 108). At the Tang time, not only the territory was expanded vastly, but also the economy, technology, as well as culture received great growth and development. The Tang Dynasty is often put on a par with the Han as two golden ages of the Chinese Empire. Same as the Han, the Tang capital was also in Chang'an, or Xi'an. Xi'an was said to be at the time the largest city in the world and was thronged with people from all over Asia (Fairbank & Reischauer, 1979, p. 105; Ebrey, 1996, p. 108). In other words, Shaanxi, particularly Xi'an, had been the focus and centre of China, and even the world.

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The historical spotlight cast on Shaanxi faded with the ending of the Tang Dynasty in the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. From then on to the following succession of feudalist dynasties, Shaanxi was no longer housed with the nation's capital.

Shaanxi returned to focus in the 1930s when the CPC set their base in northern Shaanxi and led the Chinese revolution there. Shaanxi is therefore regarded as the cradle of Chinese revolution.

In the period right after the establishment of the PRC, Shaanxi followed a similar road to Gansu. In the 1950s when China started the industrialization campaign, Shaanxi, with its inland and western location, was also selected as a key region to develop. National industries were established and supported with direct investment from the central government as a result of the national strategy to balance the industrial distribution in the country. Of the first batch of national industrial projects set up in China during the first *Five-year Plan* (1953-1957), those set up in Shaanxi made up 15% (Zhang, 1991, p. 102). In the 1960s and 1970s, it can be seen from the statistical data offered by National Bureau of Statistics of China (1990a, p. 819) that the central government made a second-round massive investment in Shaanxi to develop the industries, particularly national defence industries. In other words, Shaanxi had been the focus of national development before the 1980s.

The situation changed with the launch of the Reform and Opening-up policy in China in 1978. As noted in previous chapters, the eastern coastal regions took the place of the western ones in enjoying national policy support. Similar to Gansu, while the economy was fast developing in coastal regions, Shaanxi, as with the other western regions, became one of the less developed regions in China.

In the first decade of the new century, Shaanxi seems having experienced rapid economic growth, as shown from the GDP growth in **Figure 22**. The launch of the national Developing-the-West policy in 2000 seems to have made a certain contribution.

Developing-the-West, as noted previously in Chapter 3 and 4, was aimed to promote the development of the western regions in China including Gansu and Shaanxi (see Chapter 3 and 4). In a governmental statistical report released in 2009,

Shaanxi provincial government confirmed the positive effects of Developing-the-West policy to the region and argued that “it is the decade that Shaanxi had the rapidest development in history” (*Shaanxi lishi shang fazhan bufa zuikuai de shinian*) (Shaanxi Provincial Statistics Bureau, 2009).

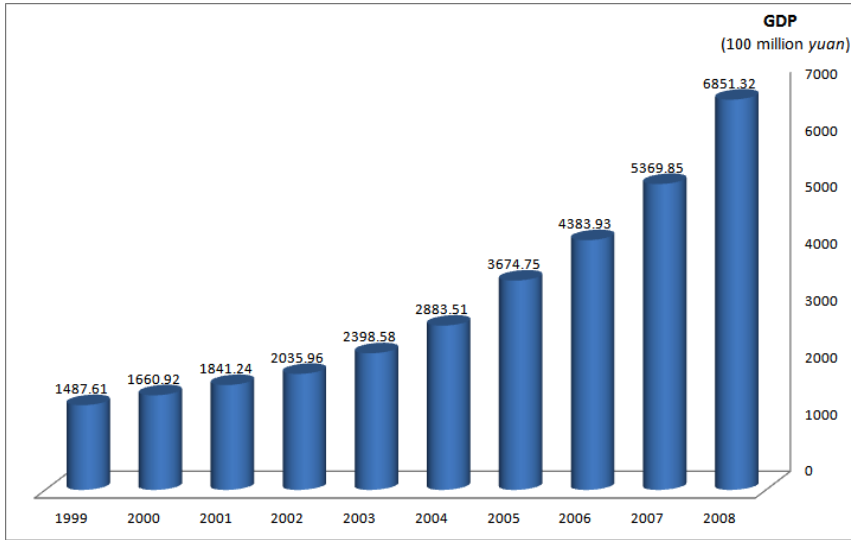


Figure 22. GDP of Shaanxi Province, 1999-2008. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

With this brief introduction to the historical and recent development of the region, I now turn to museum development with a focus on Shaanxi History Museum. The close relationship between the policy changes mentioned above and the changes of the museum will be discussed in detail.

## Shaanxi History Museum

### General Introduction

Shaanxi History Museum lies in the capital city of Shaanxi, Xi’an. The visitor coming to the museum will see a set of grand architectures resembling imperial palaces (see *Figure 23* and *24*). According to Jinqiu Zhang (2006), the architectural designer of the museum, the architectures are strongly imbued with a Tang Dynasty flavour and the design follows the principle of “axial symmetry; principal and subordinate in order; a main palace hall in the centre with buildings surrounding in

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four sides” (*zhouxian duicheng, zhucong youxu, zhongyang diantang, siyu chonglou*) that “characterizes the spatial composition and formative features of Chinese imperial palaces” (*gaikuo zhongguo gudai gongdian de kongjian buju he zaoxing tezheng*) (p. 10).

Museum architecture, like museum exhibits, is also signals of the museum, so it can be read as texts and is capable of making representation. It may function as, in Giebelhausen (2006)’s term, “a symbolic container” signifying the contents within (p. 230). It may expose political traces that the museum has experienced, as the Gansu Provincial Museum building does (see Chapter 4). It may also deliver messages that the stakeholders of the museum would like to spread – the case of Shaanxi History Museum seems to be a manifestation. The imperial-palaces-like museum architecture is likely to remind the visitor of the glorious times of Shaanxi when it was the political, economic and cultural centre of the Chinese Empire. The intention of the museum’s stakeholders – in this case, the provincial government is the major one – to represent the regional history by its imperial past is evident from the architecture, which has also been confirmed by the museum’s architecture designer Jinqiu Zhang. According to her, the local government requested the museum to be designed as “the symbol of the long history and rich culture of Shaanxi” (*Shaanxi youjiu lishi he canlan wenhua de xiangzheng*), which drove her to reference the Tang palaces given that “the Tang was the most flourishing time of Shaanxi in history” (*Shaanxi lishishang dingsheng shiqi wei tangdai*) (Zhang, 2006, p. 10).



**Figure 23. Shaanxi History Museum architecture complex.** (Photo courtesy of Xi'an Tourism Bureau.)



**Figure 24. Main exhibition building of Shaanxi History Museum.** (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

The museum is well known for its rich and valuable collections. According to information offered at its website, the museum holds a collection of over 370,000 items, 17,000 of which are ranked as the nation's first class cultural relics and 18 are authorized as "national treasures" (*guobao*) (Shaanxi History Museum, "*Bowuguan Jianjie*"). The collection includes simple stonewares from primitive times as well as fine artworks from recent times, spanning more than one million years (Ibid.). The



featured collection of the museum includes bronzes of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, bronze mirrors of the Han dynasty, mural paintings from graves of the Tang Dynasty, and terracotta figures, pottery and porcelain, construction materials, golden, silver and jade wares and coins of various dynasties (Ibid.).

## Historical Development

When we refer to the Shaanxi History Museum today, the reference is generally to the one established in 1991. That is the one I have introduced in the above and shown on **Figure 23** and **24**. The origin of this museum, however, can be dated back to half a century ago. From 1944 to 1991, the museum experienced transformations from a history museum to a comprehensive museum then back to a history museum, from a museum of Shaanxi to a museum of the northwest region then back to a museum of Shaanxi, and from being hosted in a shared site to having a grand imperial-palace-like architectural complex. In the following, I will have a look at these changes particularly with a concern of the political transformation of China that may have contributed to these changes.

**Historical formation of the current Shaanxi History Museum.** In the year 1944, when China was still under the regime of Republic of China (1912-1949), the Education Department of Shaanxi Provincial Government established Shaanxi Provincial History Museum with the purpose to “maintain national culture, stimulate national consciousness, and promote academic research” (*baocun guoyou wenhua, jifa minzu yishi, cujin xueshu yanjiu*) (Tan, 2003, p.1).

The museum was hosted in a historical site called “*Beilin*” – literally means the forest of steles – named after the large number and scale of stele (stone inscriptions) collection there (see **Figure 25**).<sup>12</sup> *Beilin* was formed around one thousand years ago (Xi’an *Beilin* Museum, 2007). According to Xi-xing Li (1994), for a long time during the feudal ages, *Beilin*, together with the Confucian Temple at its front, had served as the feudal education base of Xi’an in history (p. 222). The

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<sup>12</sup> “Stele” is an archaeology term. It means, according to *New Oxford American Dictionary* (second edition) by Erin McKean, an upright stone slab or column typically bearing a commemorative inscription or relief design, often serving as a gravestone. Stele is also a form of traditional Chinese art in calligraphy and stone inscription.

historical educational function of Beilin may explain the reason that the Education Department of Shaanxi posited the museum here.



**Figure 25. Beilin (Steles forest).** *The precedent of the current Shaanxi History Museum was hosted here. (Photo by author.)*

Beilin served as the home of the museum from 1944 until 1991 when the museum was moved to the new site, the one that I have introduced in the beginning of this section. During this half-century-long period the museum experienced a series of changes. One of the main changes is in name. As noted in the last chapter, museum name change reflects political changes of the time. The name changes for Shaanxi History Museum followed a similar pattern as that of Gansu Provincial Museum.

The year of Shaanxi Provincial History Museum's establishment was just before the Liberation War, which broke out in August of 1945 between the CPC and the CNP (Chinese Nationalist Party). As noted previously, the CPC finally won the war and took over the country in 1949. The central government then divided China into six greater regions in order to execute a more effective administration. Shaanxi province was included into Northwest Greater Region (see also Chapter 4). Subsequently, Shaanxi Provincial History Museum was subordinated to the Administration of Northwest Greater Region. This resulted in the name of the

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museum being changed to Northwest Historical and Cultural Relics Display Hall (*Xibei Lishi Wenwu Chenlieguan*) in 1950, which was further changed into Northwest History Museum (*Xibei Lishi Bowuguan*) in 1952 (X.-x. Li, 1994, p. 223). In 1955, the museum was renamed as Shaanxi Provincial Museum as the central government abolished the administration system of Greater Regions and returned to direct leadership over provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions (Ibid.). To remind the reader, Gansu Provincial Museum experienced similar name changes at almost the same time (see Chapter 4).

Omitting the word *history*, the name Shaanxi Provincial Museum showed that it was to be a comprehensive museum for Shaanxi Province. This was, again, similar to Gansu Provincial Museum, in response to the government's call to build a chorography museum in each region, as a result of the Soviet Union influence (see Chapter 3 and 4 for a description of the Soviet Union influence).

In spite of the series of changes in name, the site of the museum remained unchanged. The need of a new site, however, seemed clear due to the limited space in Beilin.

In narrating its history particularly the initiation to build a new site, the museum often gives a reference to the visit by the then Premier of the State, Zhou Enlai, in 1973 and his instruction to the museum when he saw the limited and poorly equipped exhibition space: "Build a new museum at a suitable time" (*zai shidang de shihou xinjian yige bowuguan*) (see both X.-x. Li, 1994, p. 224; and Tan, 2003, p. 2).

Normally, in the case of the PRC, the instruction from a leader has absolute priority and power. This seemed not the case during the Cultural Revolution even though the instruction was from a person whose position was as high as the State's Premier. The special political climate during the Cultural Revolution time (the general effect of the Cultural Revolution on museum development has been described in Chapter 3) was possibly the reason that Premier Zhou chose the expression "at a suitable time" when he gave the instruction.

The preparation for building a new museum started after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Based on the information offered both in Xi-xing Li (1994) and in Tan (2003), in 1978, the State Planning Commission allocated funds for Shaanxi to

building a new Shaanxi History Museum, but the construction was not started until the mid of the 1980s. The delay was accounted by, Li (1994) concludes, disagreements on issues regarding the choice of site, the scale of the new museum as well as whether the stele collections were to be moved into the new museum (p. 224).

The project's commencement in the mid of 1980s with more funding and higher reputation seemed to have benefited from the national policy change regarding culture and cultural undertakings. As I have noted in Chapter 3, the Party and central government started to assert emphasis on the construction of the nation's "spiritual civilization" from the 1980s, and particularly in 1986, the CPC addressed a national call for a further development of cultural undertakings that included museums through the issuing of the *Resolution Concerning the Guiding Principles of the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction* (CPC, 1986). In this document, the CPC called on both the national and the regional governments to develop policy and providing funding support to promote cultural undertakings (see Chapter 3 for more details regarding the policies at the time).

According to Yang (2001), further funding for building a new Shaanxi History Museum was granted by the central government upon the application by Shaanxi Provincial Government in 1985. In the application, the provincial government tactfully linked the regional museum project to the matter of the state by emphasizing that "to establish a museum, which could be China's first modern museum, is a major event of the nation" (*jianshe woguo diyizuo xiandaihua bowuguan, shi guojia de dashi*) (Ibid., p. 452). This could be seen as an example of the local to make good use of national policy. With the funding came also the upgrading of the museum: The museum was deemed a national one and was constructed as one of the "key national projects" (*guojia zhongdian jianshe xiangmu*) (Li, 1994). Accordingly, the museum name was termed as Shaanxi History Museum, as is the current one. Xi-xing Li (1994) has argued that the removal of "provincial" from the museum name was to emphasize the national level of the museum and the adding of "history" showed that the museum was aiming at present the local history of Shaanxi (p. 225).

The new Shaanxi History Museum was opened to the public in 1991. As argued by Qianxue Tan (2003), the museum represented the highest level of the

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development of Chinese museums in the 1990s regarding the architecture function, display and exhibition, and the skills and equipments of collecting and conserving cultural relics (p. 4). Tan (2003) in particular argues that the establishment of Shaanxi History Museum decreased the distance between China and western countries concerning museum development (Ibid.).

The Museum Division of State Administration of Cultural Heritage (MDSACH), in the report regarding the development of Chinese museums in the three decades after the Reform and Opening-up (1979-2009), has also regarded the establishment of the new Shaanxi History Museum in 1991 as the start of the museum-building boom in China (MDSACH, 2009, p. 3; see also Chapter 3).

Since the opening, one of the major changes that the museum has experienced was the re-curation of its permanent exhibition completed in 2008. In the following section, I will take a close look at the exhibitions in the museum, both the old and the current, to analyze further the sources of museum change and in particular the relationship between representational and political change.

**Re-curation of the permanent exhibition.** As recorded in the museum's historical documents, with the opening of the new Shaanxi History Museum in 1991, the solo permanent exhibition of the museum *Shaanxi Ancient History (Shaanxi Gudaishi)* was opened to the public (Shaanxi History Museum, 2003).

This exhibition, as introduced by the Department of Exhibition of Shaanxi History Museum (1997), presented the general history of the current territory of Shaanxi from prehistoric times (around one million years ago) to the year of 1840 with the display of over 2,000 cultural relics (p. 346). This exhibition was re-curated and re-opened in 2008. The detailed discussion regarding the exhibition contents and methods will be made in the next section where I will make a comparison of the old and the new versions. Here instead, I will focus my investigation on the process of this exhibition being re-curated and the factors contributing to the re-curation by linking to the changing policy environment at both local and national level.

According to Jianzheng Cheng (2008), director of the museum, on average the museum had been receiving 0.6 million visitors each year (p. 5). A need and desire for renovation and improvement, however, seemed to have been generated after a

decade of operation as a proposal regarding the expected renovation of the existing exhibition was published in the eighth volume of *Journal of Shaanxi History Museum* in 2001 (Ma, 2001). According to Ma (2008), the idea for renovation came in 1998.

In Chapter 3, I have noted that 1997 came with a new policy shift regarding cultural undertakings – more impelling than that in the 1980s – that the Party addressed culture as an individual theme, instead of including it in the broad category of “spiritual civilization”, in the national development strategy (see Chapter 3). Chinese museums, as a result, came to a new round of boom for construction, starting from the end of the 1990s. This included the establishment of a number of new museums which employed new technologies.

The concern at the time of being left behind by their fellow museums are noted by both Jianzheng Cheng and Zhenzhi Ma, director and vice director of the museum, in their respective reviews of the renovation project. As Cheng (2008) notes, not only did the exhibition equipment such as showcases, lighting and background panels look old, but also the exhibition methods, lacking interactive approaches, were outdated (p. 5). Ma (2008) also notes that the exhibition was to some degree incorrect due to the new archaeological discoveries and studies over the past decade (p.5). Both of the two directors have argued that the maintained popularity of the old exhibition was primarily credited to the intrinsic value of the displayed cultural relics (Cheng, 2008; Ma, 2008).

Despite the great desire by the directors for a renovation to the exhibition, the plan initialized in 1998 was hampered. The major reason was, noted by Ma (2008), lack of funding (p. 5).

Statistics offered by the museum itself regarding the yearly income and cost (Zan, 2007, p. 175) have shown that the income of the museum majorly came from the tickets selling while the governmental funding took only a small part, which was, as the vice director Zhenzhi Ma puts it, “only a cup of water for a cart of burning woods” (*beishuichexin*, a Chinese idiom to describe the utterly inadequate measure) (cited in Ou, Wang, & Zhang, 2003).

This was not surprising given the economic situation of the region at the time. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Shaanxi, as a western and inland region, did

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not benefit as much as the coastal regions from the country's Reform and Opening-up policy launched in 1978, although the policy did stimulate the country's development in general. Statistics have shown that the GDP of Shaanxi in 1998 accounted for only 1.74% of that of the country (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1999). A poor economy in the region hardly could enable the local government to give satisfying financial aid to the museum.

The museum's income, shown by data of the period 1991-2001 (Zan, 2007, p. 175), barely covered the cost, leaving little financial power for the museum to implement a renovation project.

The national campaign of Developing-the-West launched in 2000 seemed to have created a positive macro environment for the development of Shaanxi History Museum. As the investigation made by Eduard B. Vermeer (2004) shows, Shaanxi has benefited "socially and economically from immediate preferential policies" from the Developing-the-West programme (p. 423). Vermeer particularly notes, "it is a tremendous opportunity to receive central funding for a variety of local projects and services" (Ibid.). That is to say, the local government of Shaanxi province, with benefits from Developing-the-West, was armed with more financial power to support its priority projects.

In 2006, Shaanxi provincial government allocated 27 million *yuan* to Shaanxi History Museum to re-curate its permanent exhibition (Ma, 2008, p. 5). Economics can therefore be seen as a driver of museum change also here as it is elsewhere. Economics in the PRC, however, is perhaps more subject to political control than in many other places as shown through the effects of policies such as Developing-the-West and the Reform and Opening-up.

Regarding the provincial government's choice over the museum as its priority of supporting, I may argue that the central government's promotion on museum and culture in general at the time worked as at least one of the major background reasons.

As I have noted in Chapter 3, since 1997 when the CPC for the first time highlighted *culture* in the guiding lines for the country's development, culture and cultural development has been increasingly promoted by the Party and government. In 2006, the Central Committee of the CPC (CCCPC) and the State Council of the

PRC (SCPPC) co-issued the outline regarding the nation's cultural development in the eleventh five-year period (2006-2010), which is the first long-term national blueprint specialized in cultural development in PRC (CCCPC & SCPPC, 2006).

Amongst others, the *Outline* proposes to construct and improve facilities concerning "public cultural services" (*gonggong wenhua fuwu*) with direct reference to museums (Ibid.). The *Outline* also emphasizes "the protection of national and ethnic cultures" (*minzu wenhua baohu*) including promoting traditional customs and preserving both material and immaterial cultural heritages and so on (Ibid.). This national policy emphasis on culture, following the general pattern of command in the PRC, would stimulate the local governmental support of museums.

Another driving force behind the local government's action in funding the museum, I would argue, may come from the situation of the nationwide booming tourism, particularly cultural tourism, and the consideration to boost the local cultural tourism.

The first time that tourism was politically accepted as an industry in the PRC was in the end of the 1970s with China's adoption of the Reform and Opening-up strategy and since then tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors in China's drive to modernize (Sofield & Li, 1998). Given the fact that significant distances exist between different regions in the PRC in terms of economic development, tourism, as Julie Jackson (2005) argues, has been resorted to as "one means of promoting regional economic development and ameliorating regional inequalities" in the sense that tourism could help the inland regions in China to increase their regional comparative advantage (p. 695).

In terms of *cultural tourism*, the definition seems as diverse as that of *culture* (for the various definitions, see). Cultural tourism may be viewed as a name that "means many things to many people and herein lies its strength and weakness" (USICOMOS [U.S. Committee of International Council on Monuments and Sites], 1996, p. 17). Scholars such as McKercher & Cros (2002) and Richards (1996) have listed out the various definitions of cultural tourism in their works.

Amongst others, I choose one that I think is most close to the concept addressed in this thesis that is the one made by the World Tourism Organization,



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according to which, *cultural tourism* refers to “movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monument, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages” (cited in Richards, 1996, p. 21). Apparently, *culture* is essential to this type of tourism. I would therefore simplify the concept of *cultural tourism* in this thesis as “tourism related to culture” in that culture is interpreted in a relative broad, loose and inclusive sense (see Chapter 2).

In the PRC, the present practical sense of developing cultural tourism may primarily lie in the potential value of cultural tourism in forming and strengthening the regional competitive advantage particularly for those relatively less developed regions in inland or western China. In a national perspective, cultural tourism, or a juncture of tourism and culture, being able to be accepted by the present Chinese polity may be because, as noted by Sofield & Li (1998), “the contribution it [tourism] could make to national unity through the preservation of folklore and heritage sites” (p. 377). Cultural tourism, it is hoped, would support the policy of unity in diversity.

Shaanxi has a regional advantage with regards to cultural tourism in the current political climate (a climate accepting of some forms Imperial history). As noted earlier in this chapter, the dynastic history has left Shaanxi with abundant material and immaterial heritage as well as a number of heritage sites. Though the Developing-the-West programme has asserted immediate impact on its economic development, Shaanxi still remained behind compared to other eastern regions in China. To boost the regional economy remains a mission to be accomplished for the regional government. Under this condition, to promote cultural tourism could be a good practice since it may formulate new approaches for fiscal achievement. With this regard, Shaanxi History Museum could serve as a good resort to promote cultural tourism as the museum’s rich collection may have the potential to attract tourists and to market Shaanxi as a region of long history and rich culture.

With the funding from the provincial government, Shaanxi History Museum started the re-curation project for its exhibition in 2007 and made the new exhibition open to the public in March 2008 (Ma, 2008, p. 5).

In the above, I have looked at changes that Shaanxi History Museum has experienced since its establishment. I have also briefly explored the links between these changes and political change. The changes I have noted so far lie all in the dimension of the museum as an institution. From now I will look at another dimension of the museum as representation. More specifically, I will centre on the museum's permanent exhibitions to investigate the representations the museum has made.

### **Exhibitions and Representations**

Different from Gansu Provincial Museum which is deemed a comprehensive museum of the region, Shaanxi History Museum is a history museum, although through its historical development (see the first part of this chapter) we can see that Shaanxi History Museum is in fact playing a role as “the museum of Shaanxi”. Since its establishment in 1991, the museum has held only one permanent exhibition, which is dedicated to the ancient history<sup>13</sup> of Shaanxi. This exhibition, however, received a thorough re-curation, as previously noted. That is to say, regarding the permanent exhibition(s) of Shaanxi History Museum, there are two, the old and the new. My discussion covers both. I will firstly make a comparison of the two with a concern on *change*. Afterwards, I will concentrate on the representations made through the exhibitions to analyze how the museum treats issues such as regional identity, national identity, diversity, and unity. I now start with the old exhibition, *Shaanxi Ancient History*.

***Shaanxi Ancient History: A general history approach.*** As I briefly mentioned previously, when Shaanxi History Museum was opened in 1991 with new buildings, the museum held one single permanent exhibition *Shaanxi Ancient History* (*Shaanxi Gudaishi Chenlie*) (see **Figure 26**). This exhibition covered the history of

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<sup>13</sup> “Ancient history”, as well as “modern history” and “contemporary history”, are relative terms subject to definition changing, as contemporary or modern could become ancient with time goes by. According to Wikinson (1998), “Currently [1998] in China, political criteria are applied: ancient history (*gudaishi*) covers antiquity to the early nineteenth century; modern history (*jindaishi*) is from 1840 to 1919; and contemporary history (*dangdaishi*) is from 1919 to the present” (p.5). Shaanxi History Museum, in creating its exhibition, adopted these criteria and set the time frame to cover until 1840. In the re-developed version, the time frame has been extended to 1911.

the territory of present Shaanxi Province from about one million years ago to the year of 1840 (Exhibition Department of Shaanxi History Museum [EDSHM], 1994, p. 346). The exhibition was divided into seven sections: Prehistoric times, Zhou (including Xia, Shang and Western Zhou dynasties), Qin (including Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States), Han, Wei-Jin-Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui-Tang, and Song-Yuan-Ming-Qing). All the sections followed a similarly structured composed of sub-sections respectively introducing the economy, culture and civic life of the period (Cheng, 2008, p. 5).



**Figure 26. Entrance of the exhibition Shaanxi Ancient History.** (Photo courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum)

In Chinese historiography, the approach to trace history from the time in question back to the beginning of civilization is called *tongshi* (general history), as distinct from the term *duandaishi* that only covers single or certain dynasties (see Wu, 1989, p. 149; Wilkinson, 1998, p. 492). Apparently, the way that history was approached in the exhibition fit in the criteria of “general history” since it covered all the periods of ancient history in Shaanxi<sup>14</sup>. In fact, this was a deliberate decision taken by the museum curators in developing the exhibition.

<sup>14</sup> According to current practice in China, ancient history covers antiquity to the early nineteenth century; modern history is from 1840 to 1919; and contemporary history is from 1919 to the present. See Wilkinson (1998, p.5).

According to Wei Li (1994), curator at Shaanxi History Museum and chief content designer of this exhibition, over the three proposed options – “local general history” (*difang tongshi*), “histories of the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties only” (*zhou-qin-han-tang zhuanishi*), and “general history briefly introduced by a introductory section with the main section displaying cultural relics from the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang dynasties” (*tongshi daoyin xuzhan jia Zhou-Qin-Han-Tang wenwuzhan*), he and his colleagues finally chose the first one (p. 235). The other two options that cast light only or predominantly on the Zhou-Qin-Han-Tang dynasties are fairly understandable as these selected dynasties are the major periods when Shaanxi was the political, economic and cultural centre of China. By singling out the four periods, the historical glory of Shaanxi could be impressively represented. Li and his colleagues’ choice shows that they would like to underscore not only the *locality* but also the *longevity* and *continuity* of the region’s history.

Wei Li further notes three considerations he and his colleagues have taken in account when making the choice, briefly recounted: a) The history of Shaanxi is to some degree the epitome of the history of China therefore it is not proper to be presented it fragmentally; b) Shaanxi has cultural relics from all the historical periods which are sufficient to support the exhibition; and c) As the history museum of the region, Shaanxi History Museum is supposed to deliver to the audience a complete package of Shaanxi’s ancient history (Ibid.).

In other words, for Wei Li and his colleagues (they could be regarded as the representatives of the museum), it was due to Shaanxi’s significance to Chinese history, Shaanxi History Museum’s significance to the region, and the rich historical remains in Shaanxi and the rich collections in the museum that the “general history” approach was applied. What has been implied, I argue, is pride in Shaanxi and in the museum itself.

This “general history” approach was, however, changed or adjusted in the re-developed version, at least in form if not substantially.

***Shaanxi Ancient Civilization: A focused history.*** In March 2008, the re-developed exhibition was officially opened to the public (see **Figure 27**). The first and most direct change a visitor may notice is the exhibition name: the previous

*Shaanxi Ancient History* was now changed to *Shaanxi Ancient Civilization*. The word *civilization* (*wenming*) replaced *history* (*lishi*).



**Figure 27. The exhibition of Shaanxi Ancient Civilization.** Re-developed and opened in 2008. (Photo courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.)

“*Civilization*” vs. “*History*”. Name is the first impression given to audiences. *History* is a relatively neutral word. There could be positive or progressive histories. There could also be negative or regressive histories. *Civilization*, nevertheless, is endowed with a positive sense. A history being defined as *civilization* means the history has been regarded as worthy of being celebrated and being proud of. To include the word *civilization* into the exhibition title delivers a clear message telling the museum’s positive attitude to Shaanxi’s past. The comment from Jianzheng Cheng (2008), Director of Shaanxi History Museum makes an even clearer gesture: “To re-name the exhibition as Shaanxi Ancient Civilization was because we hope, under a macro historical frame, to represent, through the display of cultural relics, the historical connotation, cultural achievements, characteristics of the times, and civilization achievements, which the cultural relics are supposed to represent” (*zhisuo yi jiang qi dingmingwei “Shaanxi Gudai Wenming”, jiushi xiwang zai lishi de dakuangjia xia, tongguo wenwu biao xian suoyao zhangxian de lishi neihan, wenhua chengjiu, shidai tezheng he wenming chengjiu*) (p. 5).

Regarding the historical discourse of the word *civilization* (*wenming*) in Chinese, I have made a discussion in Chapter 2, particularly concerned with the connections and differentiation to another similar word *culture* (*wenhua*) (see Chapter 2). *Civilization*, generally, is perceived as more authentic, more historical, and more strictly used. It is often used at a relative macro scale such as national or super-national, for example, Chinese civilization, Egyptian civilization, or Mesopotamia civilization. It is rarely used at a provincial scale. To pair *civilization* up with Shaanxi, on the one hand, makes a stress on the glory of Shaanxi's past. On the other hand, it is also likely to refer the audience to *Chinese civilization*, or *human civilization*, terms much more commonly used, with the implication that Shaanxi had made a contribution to Chinese civilization or even the world civilization. A strong regional pride and a celebration of the past is thus represented from the title, although it is a past that for periods of time in The People's Republic of China, was considered problematic due to its feudal connotations.

***Civilization history vs. General history.*** The name for an exhibition is often indicative of its theme. In addition to the above mentioned different connotations of the two terms *civilization* and *history*, the name change also shows, as Zhenzhi Ma (2008) puts it, "an exhibition of general history has been transferred to an exhibition of civilization history" (*tongshi chenlie gaiwei wenmingshi chenlie*) (p. 5).

Previously I have noted that the "general history" (*tongshi*) approach was what the curators of Shaanxi History Museum deliberately chose for the old exhibition *Shaanxi Ancient History*, in which, each historical period in Shaanxi's history was addressed, although certain highlights were given to some periods. In the new exhibition, although the time frame also covers the entire span of Shaanxi's ancient history (in this sense, the new exhibition also adopts the general history approach), some periods or dynasties have been diluted of their individual dynastical colour and addressed as a totality under a theme to the demand of the representation. For example, Shaanxi in the Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing dynasties is addressed as a totality as "Shaanxi after the Tang Dynasty" (*Tang yihou de Shaanxi*) with the title "Farewell to Empire" (*gaobie didu*). To use Tang as the dividing line shows the curators (or the

museum)’s intention to promote the Tang Dynasty and the significance – at least what the curators would like to argue – of the Tang to Shaanxi’s history.

Also, the history in the series of periods between the Han and the Tang – the two long-lasting stable dynasties during which China had been a unified empire – is addressed under the theme “Conflicts and Integrations” (*chongtu yu ronghe*). In contrast to these unstable periods, the stableness and unification of the preceding period – the Han – and the subsequent period – the Tang – are more impressive. The representation of the theme “unification” is accordingly enhanced.

The transformation from general history to civilization history of the exhibition lies not only in the time dimension – the individual colour of dynasties was depreciated and they were categorized as themes, but also in the horizontal dimension – the history of one certain period is not presented generally but with a focus on civilization of that period.

In the old exhibition, the history of a time period (a section) was approached through presenting the general, or major, aspects of the society at that period, say, the economy, culture and civic life (Cheng, 2008; Ma, 2008). The new exhibition, however, abandoned this general view but concentrates on *civilization* instead, that is to represent a time period by presenting the, as Ma (2008) puts it, “civilized achievements created by the ancestors at the time” (*women zuxian chuangzao de wenming chengguo*) (p. 5).

While concepts regarding *civilization* or *civilized achievements* are in themselves multi-layered or multi-viewed (see Chapter 2 for discussion on the term civilization), for Shaanxi History Museum, these civilized achievements include

pottery manufacture at pre-historical times, bronze casting at the Zhou time, terracotta army of the Qin time, City of Chang’an and Zhang Qian’s journey to the west of the Han Dynasty, ethnic integration and religions of the Wei-Jin times, ... the palace architectures of city of Chang’an, golden and silver wares, ceramics and jades, terracotta figures, and those exotic objects which reflect China’s foreign communication of the Tang Dynasty. (Ma, 2008, p. 5)

Originally in Chinese:

*shiqian de taoqi zhizuo, zhou dai de qingtongqi zhizuo, qin dai de qinyong junzhen, han dai de chang’an cheng he zhangqian tong xiyu, wei jin de minzu ronghe he zongjiao. ... tang chang’an cheng gongdianjianzhu, jingmei de*

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*jinyinqi, ciqu he yuqi, qianzibaitai de taoyong, fanying zhongai jiaoliu de juyou yiguo qingdiao de wenwu.*

From the list we can see what Shaanxi History Museum has perceived regarding civilization lies mainly in the technological and art advances and political strength. What is interesting is the inclusion of ethnic integration and foreign communication, which reflect the museum's view regarding the representation of diversity and unity. I will hold off this discussion to the later section when I particularly address the topic of the representation of diversity and unity in the museum.

The transition from general history to focusing on the civilized achievements of the times in the new exhibition may also be seen from the adjustments made to showcases. The old exhibition used integrated showcases to display objects, which, according to Ma (2001), was due to the general history approach in order to "provide the audience with systematic and integrated traces of the historical development, as many museums do" (*tongshi chenlie weile guanzhong neng dedao xitong wanzheng de lishi fazhan xiansuo, daduoshu bowuguan dou caiyong tonggui*) (P. 458). It is not hard to imagine that with an integrated showcase, little could be done to differentiate different historical periods so as to represent their respective features. In the new exhibition, the visitor could see various types of showcases with diverse colours and materials as well as different lighting approaches. For example, in the gallery pertaining to the Zhou which enjoys a good reputation for its advanced bronze casting technologies, instead of putting the bronze vessels in integrated showcases as was done in the old exhibition, a set of individual showcases are positioned in the centre holding some major exhibits (see *Figure 28*). It is likely to catch more attention from the audience to these individual bronze objects – some of them are so called national treasures – and the bronze civilization of the Zhou is more likely to be represented, as the museum intends.





**Figure 28.** *The gallery pertaining to the Zhou with a set of individual showcases in the central of the gallery to highlight the major exhibits. (Photo courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.) Source: Tian (2008, p. 6).*

In the above I have discussed the old and the new exhibitions in Shaanxi History Museum and have also noted the major changes between the two, particularly with regards to historiography approaches. Change could be used as a channel to explore the motivations that brought the changes and the according implications, so could those that are unchanged. There are also ideas and practices from the old exhibition that are kept and even strengthened, for example, the way to divide the sections, or the special treatment on some certain historical periods. In the following, I will concentrate on the representations made by these exhibitions with two particular strands: regional identity vs. national identity, diversity vs. unity. The analysis over specific exhibits is based on the new exhibition (the current one) in Shaanxi History Museum.

**Representation of regional identity and national identity.** In the previous chapter, in the discussion of the representation in Gansu Provincial Museum, I have argued that the museum has attempted to represent Gansu as one of the original areas of Chinese civilization and a communication frontier of China to the world. What has been implied by these representations is the regional identity incorporating with the national identity and cultural diversity harmonizing under a political unity. Shaanxi seems a different case as Shaanxi had been for long periods in history centre stage of China. The regional track had been for times overlapping with the national one. For

Shaanxi History Museum, it seems therefore more challenging to highlight the regional character over the national.

One of the practices which may show the museum's endeavour to strengthen the regional colour is the way to divide sections. As previously noted, the old exhibition was composed of seven sections, among which, the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang were apportioned with individual sections. The new exhibition followed this way, although with slight adjustments. All of the four – the Zhou, Qin, Han, and Tang – are times when Shaanxi hosted the national capital and were serving as the national political, economic and cultural centre. To present them individually is likely to make a more forceful representation of Shaanxi's historical significance.

Noteworthy also is their alternative way to address the “Zhou” and “Qin”. “Zhou” is the name of a local clan of Shaanxi (the Zhou people), as well as the name of a dynasty, which was composed of Western Zhou and Eastern Zhou and established by the Zhou people. In historiography, “Zhou” is generally sensed to refer to the Zhou Dynasty. This general sense, however, seemed blurred in the exhibition, where the rising of the Zhou clan and their developing process until they established the Zhou Dynasty was traced as a main story line. So the concept of “Zhou” in the exhibition actually covers the time span from 21<sup>st</sup> BC to 8<sup>th</sup> BC, corresponding to the Xia, Shang and Western Zhou Dynasty.

Similar treatment was given to the “Qin”, which in the exhibition referred to both the Qin State (770-221 BC) and the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). The exhibition traced the whole process from the establishment of the Qin State and the end of the Qin Empire, during which Shaanxi had been hosting the base for the Qin.

This special treatment reveals the museum's intention to strengthen the “local flavour” of the presented history. By these “slightly vague” terms of “Zhou” and “Qin”, as Wei Li (1994) argues, “the characteristics of Shaanxi would unlikely to be shadowed in addressing the historical periods when the history of Shaanxi was likely to be duplicate to the history of China” (*zai yiyu zhongguo tongshi leitong de lishi jieduan jiu buzhi hulue shaanxi de tedian*) (p. 236).

Additionally, this alternative way to approach the concept of “Zhou” and “Qin” – to trace not only the two dynasties but also their pre-forms and pre-activities

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which all took place within the area of Shaanxi – contains the connotation that the Zhou and Qin dynasties, which had played a significant role in Chinese history, had their historical roots in Shaanxi. In other words, this alternative approach suggests a historical and cultural purity, which is often endowed with a regional pride.

Another practice which may also be, at least partly, driven by the intention to reinforce the local image is to emphasize the city of Chang'an, today's Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province. In the exhibition, the section pertaining to the Han and that to the Tang both start with a sub-section dedicated to the city of Chang'an. The grandness, the highly advanced civic life, and the well recognized international frame of Chang'an at the Han and Tang times, all of them have made Chang'an more than qualified enough to be celebrated in an exhibition about civilization. I would, however, also like to point out that the representation of Chang'an could also set a more close reference to the present as Xi'an is the present capital of Shaanxi and Shaanxi History Museum is right located in Xi'an. A highlight on Chang'an will most likely encourage the visitor to connect the historical glory of the city he or she is encountered with in the museum to the present which his or her feet are at that moment standing at. In this sense, the representation of Chang'an may be perceived as more illustrative of the historical significance of Shaanxi than the other exhibits such as the bronze vessels.

Otherwise, the adjustments made in the new exhibition including to claim the history of Shaanxi as civilization through a name change, and to label the histories after the Tang Dynasty as an integrated concept as "Shaanxi after the Tang", all reflect the museum's intention to strengthen the local flavour of the presented history, or, to strengthen the representation of a regional identity.

An emphasis on local or regional identity, however, does not mean a denial to national identity. National identity could also be traced throughout the exhibitions. Reminders of the connection between Shaanxi to China are offered repeatedly through labels, panel texts and so on. Particularly the brief introduction offered at the start of each section sets a regular reference for the contents shown in the section to be positioned into the wider scaled national context of "Chinese history", "Chinese civilization", or "Chinese culture".

For example, in presenting the pre-historical times of Shaanxi through the display of Paleolithic and Neolithic remains excavated within Shaanxi, the introductory texts remind the visitor, “[they] represent the primary characteristics of Shaanxi antiquity culture and the vigorous childhood of Chinese nation” (*zaixian le Shaanxi yuangu wenhua de jiben tezheng he zhonghua minzu shengjibobo de tongnian*) (Introductory texts of Section One of the exhibition). In the section regarding the Zhou, where the locality has been highly strengthened by representing Shaanxi as the motherland of the Zhou people, the introduction tells the visitor, “The political system, economic pattern and particularly the ethical spirits and bronze casting of Western Zhou fully presented the characteristics of early Chinese civilization” (*qi zhengzhi zhidu, jingji xingtai youqi shi lunli jingshen yiji qingtong zhuzao jishu, chongfen zhanshi le zhongguo zaoqi wenming de tezheng*) (Introductory texts of Section Two of the exhibition).

In addition to making clear remarks for the region connected to the nation, the reference to national identity could also be made through skirting around particular periods. This is the case that the history of Shaanxi after the Tang Dynasty is approached in the exhibition. The time span after the Tang includes a series of dynasties and political regimes. During these periods, the concept of *China* itself was sometimes vague as there were times when more than one polity existed in China proper, and there were times when the Mongols and the Manchus other than the Han Chinese were in power. Shaanxi was, or partly was, therefore under the power of “non-Chinese” ruled states. For example, the northern part of Shaanxi was under the Xixia power by Tanguts, a people related to the Tibetans; most of the parts of Shaanxi were under the Jin power by Jurchens, an agricultural, herding, and hunting people based in eastern Manchuria (see Ebrey, 1996, p. 149-150; p. 167-168). To represent this part of history, the museum picked strands such as ceramic arts, civic life including the way of dress, or the popularizing of religions, which are all, in the curator Wei Li (1994)’s words, “the cultural characteristics that were shared *nationally* [my italics] at the times” (*poju quanguoxing de shidai wenhua tezheng*) (p. 236). The aim, Wei Li (1994) further argues, is to “reveal the essential tendency of

the local historical development” (*tixian difang lishi fazhan zhong de benzhi Dongxiang*) (Ibid.).

How to, and to which extent to, assert a local perspective in addressing history may be questions crucial to regional (local) history museums in general. It could be more crucial in cases where national unity is a priority goal pursued by the current national polity – the People’s Republic of China, for example. It could be even more crucial in cases where the region, of and for which the museum is, had been a national centre for long in history but not any longer in present – of which Shaanxi History Museum is a case.

The above discussion has shown that Shaanxi History Museum, on the one hand, would like to present the history of Shaanxi in a national dimension so as to show its historical glory. On the other hand, it has also avoided a duplicate of national history by adding some local flavour through approaches such as special segmentation on historical periods.

**Representation of diversity and unity.** Looking back to the history, as I have noted previously, Shaanxi, and Xi’an in particular, played a role as a meeting point first because of its geographic position – connecting the west to the east, and perhaps more because of its political position – Xi’an had been the national capital for a series of dynasties including the Han and the Tang, both of which were well known for, in addition to their grandness, their openness to the world and inclusiveness to other cultures. Historical records have also verified the ever existing vast ethnic population in Shaanxi’s history (Cao, 1986, pp. 51-71).

Given this historical climate, a certain degree of representation of diversity of history could be expected from the exhibition, as was the case of Gansu Provincial Museum. The voice for diversity is heard in Shaanxi History Museum, however, with a relatively low tone, I argue. Unity, instead, is the major key.

**Unity through the representation of unification.** As I have noted repeatedly in my previous discussion, the Zhou, Qin, Han and Tang are treated as the focus of the exhibition. Of these four, except for the Zhou, the other three are all times when China was unified.

*Regarding the Qin.* The visitor coming to the Qin gallery is promptly caught in a dark, slightly mysterious, scene. Right in the centre of the gallery is a rectangular pit, coloured in black, with rows of life-sized terracotta warriors and horses standing (see **Figure 29**). Obviously it is imitating the real pits of Emperor Qin Shihuang's terracotta warriors and horses located outside of the city Xi'an. Behind these terracotta figures is a wall full of photographs of the warriors' faces. The opposite side wall is equipped with a wide screen showing documentary films regarding the Qin's unification over China over two thousand years ago. Around the pit are showcases presenting materials and information regarding the uniformity imposed by Emperor Qin Shihuang on the other aspects of the society including the currency, weights and measures, and writing system, after the political unification.

These verisimilar terracotta figures and the conglomerated photographs of non-identical faces as well as the audio-visual information delivered from the wide screen create an overwhelming atmosphere, most likely to point to the might of Qin Empire and Emperor Qin Shihuang, generating an impression of national unity, which would be further strengthened by the introduction regarding the unification of the civic life (see **Figure 30**).



**Figure 29.** Life-sized terracotta figures of warriors and horses. The Qin gallery of the exhibition of Shaanxi Ancient Civilization, Shaanxi History Museum. (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)



**Figure 30.** *Life-sized terracotta figures of warriors and horses, with the background wall full of photographs of warriors' faces. The Qin gallery of the exhibition of Shaanxi Ancient Civilization, Shaanxi History Museum. (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)*

While his contribution to the unification over China is highly celebrated in this exhibition, it is interesting to point out that Emperor Qin Shihuang was not, however, celebrated by Chinese scholars after the Qin Dynasty as a great conqueror, but rather excoriated as a tyrant.

Positive views on the emperor have developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly from Mao's time – Mao himself made a favourable evaluation on Emperor Qin Shihuang, reflected from his poems, his conference talks as well as the political campaigns initiated by him (see Fu, 1993, pp. 186-188; Cheek, 2010, pp. 260-262). In today's China, Emperor Qin Shihuang seems to have been officially viewed as a positive and prodigious ruler and the founder of China as a unified nation, with little critics on his cruel ways to control knowledge and thoughts. This could be accounted by the political needs and goals in contemporary China regarding national unity, security and stability. Shaanxi History Museum's practice – to promote the unification of the Qin Empire – may be driven from the desire to highlight the regional uniqueness therefore to strengthen the regional identity, as have argued previously. In some sense, it also keeps uniformity with the national trend in contemporary China in evaluating Emperor Qin Shihuang – not only a reflection but

also a manifestation of this trend. It could be, however, argued that to choose black as the primary colour for the Qin gallery may be an implication of the ruthlessness of the Qin rule.

*Regarding the Zhou.* Even in the Zhou time when no national unification existed in China proper yet, a spirit of *unity*, I argue, had been generated in the sense that the Zhou rulers legitimated their power by proclaiming it as the Mandate of Heaven, which is, as Ebrey (1996) interprets it, “The ruler mediated between heaven and the realm of human beings, and his virtue ensured the proper harmony of the two sides” (p. 31). In other words, as Franz Michael (1986) argues, “a rational, responsible form of government has been instituted” (p. 32). These political philosophies are often regarded as elaborated by the Zhou rulers as a kind of propaganda to win over power (see for example, Ebrey, 1996; Michael, 1986), although some scholars also believe the sincerity of these philosophies (see Bol, 2008). Michael even argued that the introduction of these concepts of Heaven and human morality is “the most remarkable contribution made by the new Zhou rulers”, which became “a cornerstone for the imperial Chinese system and its social order” (Ibid., p. 27).

Eventually, in traditional Chinese historiography, according to Fairbank (1979), Western Zhou was seen as a golden age by later Chinese thinkers with “their own desires for political unity and organization and the emphasis on ritual, propriety, and morality that they felt should be the governing principles in politics” (p. 32). Understood in this manner, the Zhou can be seen embodying a spirit of unity.

In the exhibition, Western Zhou is presented as “the key stage in the formation of early Chinese nation-state” (*zhongguo zaoqi guojia de zhongyao fazhan jieduan*) (Exhibition texts). The representation of the Zhou in the exhibition is mainly through the display of various bronze vessels. The “fiefs and vassals system” (*caiyi yu fengguo*), and the “hierarchical system of etiquettes and penalty system” (*lizhi yu xingfa*) of Western Zhou are introduced as sub-sections. The connection between the displayed objects and the introduced abstract concepts regarding the Zhou’s social, political and economic system is made through supplementary methods such as panel texts or graphs. For example, upon the display of different *Dings* (cooking vessels)



and *Guis* (food holding vessels), a chart illustrating the correspondence between the social classes – Son of Heaven, lords, great ministers, senior officers and junior officers – and the ways to use these food vessels is offered. In earlier times of the PRC, such representations would be connected with more negative commentary.

***Unity through the representation of continuity.*** In addition to national unification, the sense of unity could also be gained in the exhibition through the representation of historical continuity. This can be seen basically through the museum's treatments on the periods when China was not in unification. As noted previously, one example is the period between the Han and the Tang. This period spanned over three and a half centuries and was marked by political division and frequent alteration of political regimes in China proper. More distinctive to this period in the sense of Chinese identity was the establishments of a series of powers in northern part of China by ethnic peoples. As far as Shaanxi is concerned, several of these non-Han regimes had set their capital in Shaanxi, including those by Xiongnu, Di, Qiang and Xianbei peoples. Despite the political discontinuity of the time, Chinese cultural continuity is regarded by some as undisrupted. Patricia B. Ebrey (1996) has argued that the solidarity of those aristocrats, who “saw themselves as embodying Chinese civilization, maintaining the high cultural accomplishment of the Han dynasty and the tradition of the scholar-official [...] provided a centre around which Chinese culture could adhere during a period when no state could serve that function” (p. 91).

This cultural continuity is also represented in the exhibition. Through objects and texts, it is implied that Shaanxi Chinese culture was never lost but even advanced through times when no national political unification was achieved and the region was under the power of other peoples.

This part of history is represented in the exhibition under the theme “Conflicts and Integration” (*chongtu yu ronghe*). With the display of the objects that are “exotic looking”, it is pointed out that the cultural remains from this period excavated within Shaanxi are endowed with a strong *ethnic colour*. Interesting to note is the expression adopted in the exhibition to refer to this ethnic colour, which is rendered in the term “*difang secai*”, literally meaning “local colour”. It could be argued that the *local* here

is used as distinction from *national*, which may stand for *Chinese*. In other words, to be more specific, the texts offered in the exhibition can be understood as suggesting that these objects are of a strong non-Chinese colour.

While indicating the non-Chinese colour of these objects, the introductory texts at the same time tell the audience that they are also representing the “characteristics of ethnic integration” (*minzu ronghe de tezheng*). What can be interpreted is that the essence of Chinese culture was not lost although foreign influences were asserted.

To view this representation along with the attached implication in a holistic perspective by connecting to its precedent period – the Han – and its successor – the Sui-Tang, a historical cultural continuity is evident and a sense of national unity (in a cultural sense beyond the political; albeit the concept *nation* itself may have been threatened) is implied. In other words, the national unity lost in the political sense has been compensated in a cultural sense even though “local colour” was added.

***Unity through the representation of diversity.*** In the above, I have used the case of the non-unified periods to further my argument regarding the museum’s practice in representing unity in the sense of cultural continuity. In fact, that case is also indicative of the museum’s practice in approaching the issue of diversity. Turbulent political situations – wars, conflicts between different peoples, and replacements of powers – are likely to cause or boost contacts and exchanges between ethnicities and cultures. Differences, or diversity, are thus generated. The museum’s approach – to represent the diversity as integration – suggests an essential unity beyond the pro forma diversity.

To continue the analysis, I would also take a look at the periods of national political unity to see how diversity is treated as diversity has also been one of the characteristics of those times. I take the Tang Dynasty as example.

As noted previously, the Tang Dynasty was one of the most open and inclusive dynasties in Chinese history, as has been commented by many scholars. For example, in the Chinese historian Da Xiang’s description (2001), “No discrimination would be asserted on Chinese or non-Chinese regarding all aspects. All were embraced. Since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Chang’an had been so international a metropolis that various peoples

and religions could all be found here” (*yiqie wenwu yifu bujian huayi, jianshoubingxu. Di qi shiji yijiang Chang’an, jihu wei yi guoji de duhui, gezhong renmin, gezhong zongjiao, wubuke yu Chang’an dezhi*) (p. 42). Western scholars have also widely acknowledged the diversity of the Tang time. Mark Edward Lewis (2009), for example, has credited the vitality of the Tang to “eclecticism (its ability to draw on all the cultural strands that constituted the history of the preceding centuries) and cosmopolitanism (its openness to foreigners and their diverse ways of lie)” (p. 163).

The cosmopolitan rule of the Tang may be best seen from the Tang rulers’ ideas. Emperor Taizong of the Tang, who ruled China between 626-649, (his reign is considered the first great high point of the Tang Dynasty) had the following comments: “While emperors since ancient times all regarded highly for the people from the central plain and lowly for the Di and Yi peoples<sup>15</sup>, I regard all the same” (*zigu jie gui zhonghua, jian Di Yi, zhen du air u yi*) (cited in Sima, 2000, Vol. 198).

Given this cosmopolitan environment of the Tang Dynasty, the representation of diversity of the Tang time could be expected. The theme of diversity, however, has not been taken as a focus in the exhibition. The section regarding the Tang is composed of four sub-sections respectively dedicated to the capital Chang’an, industrial advancements, culture, and the Silk Road. Among the four, only in the part pertaining to *culture* is the topic of foreign influences addressed at any length. The representation of culture is made through three aspects: dress and ornaments, entertainments including music, dancing and sports, and religious arts. Foreign influences are mentioned in all the three categorizes.

In the sub-section presenting Tang dress, the introduction at the beginning notes the “influence from northern and western region minorities” to the development of the daily dresses of the Tang people. The display also includes pottery figures

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<sup>15</sup> *Di* and *Yi* together with the other two *Man* and *Rong* are terms used by Chinese people in the central plain to call those ethnic peoples living outside of the central plain (see Ebrey, 1996, p. 33; p. 56). Here Emperor Taizong referred to the ethnic peoples in general by *Di* and *Yi*.

dressed in foreign style, see for example, *Figure 31*, the painted pottery figure showing a lady in *Hu*-Dress<sup>16</sup>.



**Figure 31.** *Colour painted pottery figure: Lady in Hu dress.* (Photo courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.)

Under the section presenting the entertainment activities of the Tang time, a series of objects illustrating people playing music, dancing or doing sport activities are displayed (see *Figure 32*).

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<sup>16</sup> *Hu* was the term used to refer the non-Chinese people in ancient China. It was particularly used to refer to the northern minorities and peoples in Central Asia. It was also loosely used to refer all things that are foreign or exotic (see, online Xinhua Dictionary <http://xh.5156edu.com/html3/13895.html>).



**Figure 32.** *Colour painted pottery figure set: Playing polo.* (Photo courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.)

As we may note, the foreign influences represented in the exhibition are all within the areas which are likely to be included under the umbrella of *culture* – areas I would describe as “relative soft”. In the “hard areas” such as economy and technology, the emphasis is on Han achievements with no mention of foreign influence at all. For example, in representing the advanced handicraft industry of the Tang Dynasty, golden and silver works are presented (see **Figure 33**). Current research has shown the great influence of Persia-Sassanid to the gold and silver wares and manufacture craft of the Tang Dynasty (see, Tan, 2004; Gao, 2008). The introduction does mention the Persia-Sassanid influence to the gold and silver wares of the Tang. The reference, however, is made to the design and style instead of to the manufacture skills or technologies. The later assimilation of these Persia-Sassanid influenced designs – the forms and patterns – into Chinese style is however noted, by which, the powerfulness of Chinese civilization is likely to be sensed.



**Figure 33. Gold bowl and silver wine cup.** (Photo courtesy of Shaanxi History Museum.)

## Summary

This chapter is dedicated to Shaanxi province and Shaanxi History Museum. I have looked at the historical development of Shaanxi History Museum in the context of the development of the province.

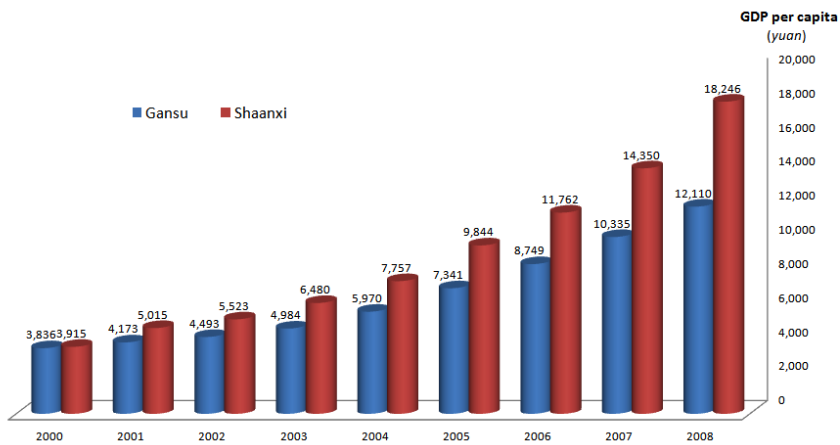
In the second half of this set, this chapter followed a similar disposition as the last chapter on Gansu. This led to bringing out similarities and differences between the two.

Due to the similar geographic conditions, the two regions followed somewhat similar trajectories. Both hold traces of early civilization. Both were closely tied with the Silk Road and therefore were marked by diverse ethnic and cultural exchanges. Both achieved their peak of development in the Tang Dynasty and both faded out with the national political and economic centre moving eastward after the Tang.

Contemporarily in the PRC, the two regions also followed a quite similar track as regards to national policies and strategies. In the beginning of the new China, both were selected as the bases to develop national industries. Both suffered from the Cultural Revolution as did all the regions. In the nation's Reform and Opening-up

process, both were to some degree marginalized and fell behind the eastern coastal regions in economic and social development. Both, however, were eligible for the nation's Developing-the-West campaign and have enjoyed economic benefits. Perhaps due to the similarities in background of development and the closeness in geographical location, in 2009, in the government's second round of the Developing-the-West campaign, Gansu and Shaanxi were selected as a pair to co-construct the Guanzhong (Shaanxi)-Tianshui (Gansu) Economic Zone, so as to "form an important growth pole to support and drive the more rapid development of western regions" (*zhicheng he daidong xibu diqu jiakuai fazhan de zhongyao zengzhangji*), and to "lead the greater Northwest" (*yinling daxibei*) (National Development and Reform Commission, 2009).

Difference regarding their respective strategies for local development appeared in recent years. From 2005, Shaanxi started to develop cultural tourism and took it as the major approach to boost local economic and social development. Gansu was a bit slower in this respect. *Figure 34* shows the data of the GDP per person between Gansu and Shaanxi from 2000 to 2008. The comparison shows an increased gap in economic development between the two.



**Figure 34.** *GDP per capita of Gansu and Shaanxi (2000-2008).* Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China.

Both of the two museums represent their own regions. Although Shaanxi History Museum is focused on history, as there is no comprehensive museum in

Shaanxi as of yet, it in fact takes the representative role for the region. Both museums were affected by political changes – discussed previously – in their own regions. Both had their predecessors in the old China – before the People’s Republic was founded. A difference lies in the fact that Gansu Provincial Museum was *physically* established in the 1950s with a Soviet Union influence both in the architecture style or the museum practices. Reflected was the social situation at that time – the establishment of socialism in China. Shaanxi History Museum was *physically* established in the 1990s as “a national museum” (*guojiajiguan*) with the expectation from the central government to “set a model for the construction of modernized museums [in China]” (*yibian wei xiandaihua bowuguan de jianshe jilei jingyan*) (Yang, 2001, p. 451). The museological contexts behind were national, and international, changes in the field in relation to forms of address (nationally from the 1990s, internationally in some places earlier).

Both of the two museums had fundamental renovations. In Gansu Provincial Museum it was the renovation of the whole building and in Shaanxi History Museum, renovation of the main exhibition. Both renovation projects met funding problems but had them solved with the influence from policy changes and improvements of the national and regional economic situation.

Both of the two museums cover diversity issues in their exhibitions. In Gansu Provincial Museum (mainly the *Exhibition of the Silk Road*), the connections between diverse ethnicities and cultures are emphasized. *Communication* is the theme running through the whole exhibition. In Shaanxi History Museum, the representation of diversity in comparison seems relatively reluctant. Emphasized more greatly is national unity. A strong regional identity is represented in both museums however with different views and approaches. The representation of regional identity in Gansu Provincial Museum is closely tied to that of the national identity in the sense of the active role Gansu played in the formation of early Chinese civilization and in the communication of China to the world. The intention to justify the region’s present image against an eastern view of “peripheral” and “lagging behind” could be perceived. In the case of Shaanxi History Museum, the representation of regional identity was challenged by the negotiation between the local and the national due to



the historical central position of Shaanxi. The intention to avoid the duplication of the national identity is sensed perhaps due to the desire to emphasize the region's historical *central* position.

With this first comparison I now leave these *historical-cultured* regions and look instead at regions with a high level of ethnic diversities, the *ethnic-cultured* regions. To general economic and cultural policies and their influences on museums, I add a concern with ethnic and diversity policy.

## Chapter 6. Yunnan Province, Yunnan Provincial Museum and Yunnan Ethnic Museum

This chapter and the next form a further set of two. Chapter 6 is dedicated to Yunnan province and Chapter 7 to Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The regions in the last set both enjoyed to some degree a *central* position in the authorized Chinese history. As described in the last set, Xi'an was the capital of the growing empire. Gansu, although geographically not the national centre, was close to the then national centre Chang'an. Particularly, with the thriving Silk Road, Gansu was once China's frontier of international exchange. The two regions in this set are relatively *peripheral* both in a geographical and cultural sense from the centres of power in the PRC. Even the degree of their *Chineseness* (in the sense of historical political alignments and assimilation with normative Han Chinese modes of living) could be arguably discussed, as I will return to later in this chapter and the next.

Both of the two regions contain diverse ethnicities. Yunnan has the most varied ethnic groups in the PRC. In addition to the Han, there are twenty-five minority groups living in the province. Guangxi also is the home to diverse ethnicities with eleven minority groups in addition to the Han. In contrast to Yunnan where no single minority group makes up a dominant part of the population, of Guangxi's eleven minority groups, the Zhuang is the biggest group and makes up 84.57% of the total minority (non-Han) population. That is the reason that Guangxi is defined as *Zhuang Autonomous Region*.

Geographically, the two regions are both located in the south of China and border each other. Different from the last set where the two regions are both nestled within China, the two regions in this set make up part of China's border area with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. This leads to geopolitical and geo-economic effects. For example, the strategies and policies regarding cooperation with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) have an important influence on the two regions. Their geographical placement has meant that national minorities are represented on both sides of the border. Proximity is also an encouraging factor for cultural exchange.

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With these two case studies I continue the focus on museum change, with policy influence as a particular concern. Ethnic policies and the nation's strategies relating to border areas, and how these policies and strategies influence museums in the two regions will be a special focus. In a slight departure from the last set, instead of one, I chose two museums – one ethnic museum and one comprehensive museum – in each region of this set. For Yunnan province, I chose Yunnan Ethnic Museum (*Yunnan Minzu Bowuguan*) and Yunnan Provincial Museum (*Yunnan Sheng Bowuguan*), and for Guangxi, Guangxi Ethnic Museum (*Guangxi Minzu Bowuguan*) and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum (*Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu Bowuguan*). Including both an ethnic museum and a comprehensive museum into the study of each region allows the continuation of the general exploration into the influence of economic and political changes on regional museums.

The relationship between the ethnic museum and the comprehensive offers the opportunity to look more closely at museum development as influenced by a variety of policy changes – including contemporary ethnic minority policy – and by regional characteristics. The influence of cultural tourism will remain one of the foci of discussion as it was in the last set particularly in the case of Shaanxi. Yunnan is a pioneer in developing local cultural tourism in China. Its turning ethnic cultures into tourist resources so as to boost the local economy has been defined as the “Yunnan Model” and has inspired other regions including Guangxi, the second half of this set. The emergence of “ethnic theme parks” as a result of increased cultural tourism offers a further comparison to study museum representation on ethnic diversity. The newly built Guangxi Ethnic Museum, a flagship for urban development in the region, also offers a window to look at the influence of ethnic policies, regional development strategies and regional identity representation and construction on museums.

What is particular to the Guangxi case is their practice of creating ecomuseums as a way to combine museum practice and heritage conservation involving community participation beyond the physical scope of a museum. Conceptions and practices related to ecomuseums will therefore be included in the discussion in the following chapter.

This chapter follows a similar pattern to the previous two chapters. I start the

chapter with a description of the province looking at geography, population demographics, economics, and cultural and political history. I then move to look at the history of the specific museums – the reasons for their establishment and the relationships between political change and museum development. In addition, I will also take a close look at the specific exhibitions in the museums. Similar to the last set, unity and diversity, and nationalism and regionalism represented in the museum exhibitions will be explored and discussed in detail.

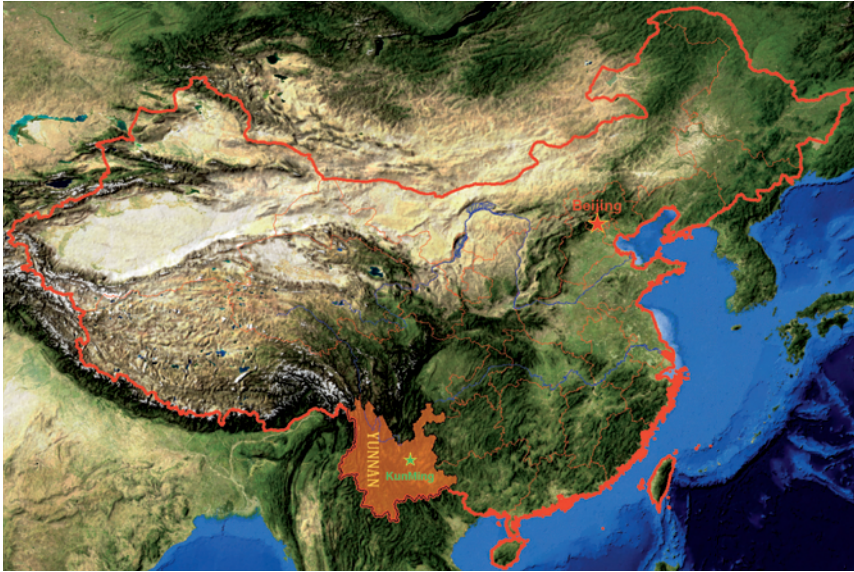
## **Yunnan Province**

### **Specifications<sup>17</sup>**

Yunnan province is located in the southwest of China covering an area of 394,000 square km. The Tropic of Cancer runs through Yunnan's southern part. Yunnan neighbours Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Guizhou province in the east, and Sichuan province in the north. In its northwest lies the Tibet plateau which means that Yunnan is also one of the entrances leading to Tibet. As noted earlier Yunnan is the southwest border area of China. It connects with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam in the south. It is also close to, although not directly adjacent, Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh and India. Throughout history Yunnan has been a passage to connect China with Southeast Asia (see *Figure 35*).

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<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise clarified, the basic facts regarding the region covered in this section is based on the information offered by Yunnan Provincial Government at its official website, see <http://www.yn.gov.cn/yunnan,china/72057594037927936/index.html>



**Figure 35. Map of Yunnan province.** (Made by author.)

Located in a low-latitude area, most parts of Yunnan have no typical summer and winter. It is spring-like all year round. Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, is also known as “city of spring” (*chuncheng*).

There are diverse topographic forms in Yunnan. Mountainous areas are the major form while basins, valleys and hills are also found in Yunnan. The highest altitude is 6,740 m while the lowest 76.4 m, leaving a huge gap in between. Diverse topographies may be one accounting factor for the diverse ethnicities in this region.

As mentioned previously, Yunnan holds the widest ranged ethnicity in the PRC with a total of twenty-six ethnic groups including the Han.<sup>18</sup> According to data from the fifth national population census, of its total population of 42.879 million, the minority population makes up 33.41% (Yunnan Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Among these minority groups, except for the Hui, Manchu and Shui who speak the Han language, the other twenty-two minority groups have their own languages. Some of them even have more than one language. The Jinpo, for example, has two and the Nu has three. In total, twenty-seven languages including the Han language are spoken

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<sup>18</sup> These minority groups are: Bai, Hani, Zhuang, Dai, Miao, Baoliao, Hui, Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Yao, Tibetan, Jingpo, Boyi, Pumi, Nu, Achang, De’ang, Jinuo, Shui, Mongolian, Bulang, Dulong, Manchu, and Yi.

by people in Yunnan.

Diversity also lies in religious belief. Many of the indigenous religions or religion-like beliefs of these minority groups have historically intertwined with Taoism and Buddhism which are the two major religions of the Han people. It is also common for some groups to practice more than one religion or beliefs at the same time.

## **History**

In the chapter of Shaanxi (Chapter 5), I have noted that Shaanxi History Museum launches the starting point of Shaanxi history at around one million years ago, to which time the fossil remains of Lantian-men can be dated back. Archaeological research has shown that the fossil remains of Yuanmou-Man, discovered in the county of Yuanmou, north of Yunnan, were from 1.7 million years ago, much earlier than that of Shaanxi, and in fact Yuanmou-Man has been regarded as the earliest hominid discovered in China (Li et al., 1976; W.-S. Yan, 2002). Early pre-history, however, is not covered in the current representation in Yunnan Provincial Museum.

In the perspective of the national history of China, Yunnan could be a special regional case amongst the others due to its tenuous attachment to the central plains empire. Scholars such as Charles P. Fitzgerald (1972) have used Yunnan as a case to investigate the process of Chinese cultural and political expansion, while Bin Yang (2005) approaches the case of Yunnan from the perspective of Chinese incorporation and has investigated “how the Chinese empire [...] transformed an external area into a periphery” (p. 33). As my goal here is to set a historical macro environment so as to look at the museum change including the museum representations in Yunnan, I will therefore cast more light on strands such as the historical incorporation of Yunnan to China, and the Han immigration in addressing the history of Yunnan.<sup>19</sup>

The early history of Yunnan had been little referenced in early Chinese

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<sup>19</sup> The following account, unless otherwise clarified, draws on works by Bin Yang (2005; 2008), a scholar specialized in Yunnan studies, however with my own focus.

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documents. In his grand historiography work *Shiji* (Historical Records), Sima Qian, the historian of the Han Dynasty, had some records regarding the relationship between Yunnan and the central plains (Sima, 2000), based on which, we may sketch a rough outline. During the Warring States time (475-221 BC), while several states co-existed in the central part of today's China, the area of present Yunnan was inhabited by diverse indigenous ethnic groups, tribes or kingdoms. General Zhuang Qiao of the Chu State marched into present Yunnan and conquered the area around the Dian Lake, which is within present Kunming, capital of Yunnan. While the central part of present China was suffering from the wars during Qin's unification, Zhuang Qiao settled down in the local area and established the Dian Kingdom. Sima Qian particularly noted that Zhuang Qiao "adopted native dress, following the customs of the people, and acting as their chief" (translation by B. Watson, 1961, p. 291). *Dian* is now still used as a short name to call Yunnan.

Due to the scarcity of historical references, the historicity of the Dian and even of the figure Zhuang Qiao was sometimes questioned (W. Watson, 1970).

Archaeological excavations and discoveries within Yunnan after the 1950s seem, however, to offer evidence of not only the presence but also the advanced degree of the Dian, which was, as Francis Allard (1998) puts it, "neither politically simple nor a simple offshoot of earlier or coexistent historical dynasties centered in northern China" (p. 322). Now the Dian Kingdom and its bronze culture has become one of the major exhibitions in Yunnan Provincial Museum (I will return to it later in this chapter).

Sima Qian also noted the construction of a five-*chi*-wide (about 1.7 m) pass connecting present northern Yunnan to Sichuan, and the dispatch of officers by the Qin court (Sima, 2000, Vol. 116), which has often been used, particularly by Chinese government, to show the inclusion of Yunnan into the regime of *China* since the first national unification (see, for example, Yunnan Provincial Government, 2009), although the degree of the Qin's administration over Yunnan is uncertain.

The confirmed Chinese rule over the area of Yunnan came in the Han Dynasty

(202 BC – AD 220)<sup>20</sup>, which has been called by Bin Yang (2008) as “the first Chinese conquest of Yunnan”. It was from the Han time that Yunnan got its current name (Yang, 2005). The name *Yunnan* literally means the “south of clouds”, which, as argued by Yang “implies the Chinese considers the place remote” (Yang, 2008) and is a word “imposed on local peoples by Chinese authority” (Yang, 2005, p. 34). The Han conquest made an end to the about 150-year-long rule of the Dian Kingdom (Yang, 2008), which is noted in Yunnan Provincial Museum as the incorporation of Yunnan to the Han civilization (I will come back to this point later).

During the long period from the early third century when the Han regime collapsed to the mid-thirteenth century when the Mongol rule was established, Yunnan seemed out of Chinese central control with numerous local tribal powers co-existing. As Yang (2005) notes, “the peoples of Yunnan nominally submitted to central Chinese states or to states centred on Sichuan. In practice, however, local rulers managed their own business and Chinese states were hardly able to intervene” (p. 34). To remind the reader, this millennium long period includes one of the golden ages of Chinese Empire – the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) (see Chapter 5 for more information regarding the Tang Dynasty). In other words, during this grand unification of China under the Tang, the “Chinese identity” of Yunnan could be argued.

In the mid-seventh century a power regime called *Nanzhao* imposed unification on most parts of Yunnan and existed as, in one sense a tributary to the Tang court, in the other – particularly in the later time of the Tang – a “neighbour” (Ebrey, 1996) or a “competitor”, a “threat”, or “one of the factors that led to the fall of the Tang” (Yang, 2005; 2008).

Nanzhao and the Tang both collapsed at the start of the tenth century. In AD 937, a regime Dali Kingdom (AD 937-1253) was established in Yunnan contemporary with the Chinese Song Dynasty (AD 960-1276). The political tie between Dali and the central court of China during the Song Dynasty was loose and the Song court seemed

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Allard (1998) includes a listed of the historical documentation referring to the situation of Yunan under the Han regime.



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having no intention to put Dali under the rule (Yang 2008). Economic communication between the two, however, was prominent particularly in horse trading as Dali horses were badly needed by the Song court for the wars in the northern frontier (Ibid.). Economic connections were likely to bring them other forms of communication including cultural exchange.

Despite the political unity of Yunnan imposed by Nanzhao and Dali, ethnically, great diversity still existed in the region. Due to the contacts with the Chinese court at the time, Han influence on the local cultures of Nanzhao and Dali was prominent, as having been noted by many studies (see, for example, Yang, 2009; Zhang, 2002; Duan, 2003). Buddhism was popular during Nanzhao and Dali times, leaving abundant Buddhist heritage sites and items in Yunnan. Both Nanzhao and Dali are represented as “Kingdoms of Buddhism” in Yunnan Provincial Museum today.

In 1253, the Mongols destroyed Dali Kingdom and occupied Yunnan, settling over 50,000 soldiers and their families there (Ebrey, 1996), which was likely to be a strategy of the Mongols to lay the siege of the Song court as about twenty years later the Mongols conquered all over China and established the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) in Chinese territory. In this sense, Yunnan served as a base in the Mongolian conquest over China. The Mongol conquest seemed to be a turning point to Yunnan as from then on Yunnan has continuously been a part of China in an administrative sense.

Some scholars after the Song Dynasty have credited the conquest of the Song by the Mongols to the Song’s isolationist policy to Yunnan (Yang, 2008). The later emperors seemed to have taken a lesson from this policy. Soon after its taking over the rule of China from the Mongolians, the Ming court (1268-1644) conquered Yunnan and imposed massive settlements of military households in Yunnan. According to Ebrey (1996), by the sixteenth century, at least 700,000 government-sponsored settlers were migrated to Yunnan and Guizhou (neighbour province of Yunnan) from widely separated Han people inhabited regions, while Yunnan and Guizhou had only three million population in the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, half of whom were non-Han (p. 195). In addition to officially sent settlers, farmers, exiled officials and merchants came to settle down in Yunnan as well. According to Yang

(2008), by the end of the Ming Dynasty, the Han Chinese had become the largest ethnic population in Yunnan. A certain degree of ethnic mix and trans-cultural interchange or integration could be naturally assumed.

To administrate this remote, peripheral and ethnically diverse region, while introducing the Chinese institutions into the local, the central imperial states developed the native chieftain system (*tusizhi*) initiated in the Yuan Dynasty and strengthened in the Ming Dynasty (Yang, 2008). The native chieftain system seemed to be a double-edged sword: one edge helped the central court to administrate the local area with assistance of the native chieftains; the other supported the growth of local powers. The Qing court (1644-1911), successor of the Ming, gradually altered and weakened this system in favour of a tighter central control. The formal abolishment of this system was, however, conducted by Nationalist government who was in power between 1912 and 1949 (Solinger, 1977).

From the above introduction, we may sketch out the historical figure of Yunnan in one dimension of its peripheral location which made it an arena of testifying the power relationship of central and peripheral; and in another dimension of its characteristic of diverse ethnicities which made it a ground of ethnic mix and cross-cultural interchanges, assimilation and integration, experiencing the process of, in Yingshi Yu's (1967) terms, "sinicization and barbarization", or in Bin Yang's (2008) terms "sinicization and indigenization".

The establishment of the PRC in 1949 affected Yunnan similarly to many of the other provinces. Particularly pertinent, however, was the shift in ethnic policies and approaches to dealing with ethnic affairs. A most remarkable endeavour the CPC and government embarked on was to identify and categorize the national *minzu*-s (identities, ethnic groups. See Chapter 2 for more discussion on *minzu*), which resulted in the identification of fifty-six ethnic groups with the Han as the majority and others as officially registered minority groups. It was in this national identification project that Yunnan was defined as a province housing the Han and other twenty-five minority groups, in spite of over 260 groups claiming their unique ethnicities and applying for the status as national minorities (Lin, 2005, p. 281).

In terms of economic development, in the early period of the People's

Republic, as a geographically marginalized region, Yunnan seemed to have been economically *marginalized* as well by the national development strategies at the time when inland regions were regarded as priorities – to remind the reader, both Gansu and Shaanxi were selected at the time as the key regions to develop national industries (see Chapter 4 and 5).

The national strategy of Reform and Opening-up launched in the end of the 1970s (see Chapter 3 for further information regarding the Reform and Opening-up policy) seemed to be a good turn for Yunnan’s economic development. According to Xiaolan Zhao (2008), under the macro environment of Opening-up, border trades that were blocked during the Cultural Revolution was conditionally allowed and then further encouraged. Yunnan Provincial Government, Zhao further argues, made good use of this policy, resulting in border trades being fully developed by 1990 (Ibid.).

Admitting that economic development is the result of multiple factors, I would argue that a further powerful and effective policy stimulus to Yunnan’s development came with the national promotion on *culture*. As repeatedly noted in previous chapters, in 1997, “culture” replaced “spiritual civilization” to appear in the guideline from the Party and government regarding the national development announced in the Fifteenth National Congress of the CPC (see also Chapter 3). This move created a national policy atmosphere of promoting culture in its broad sense.

In the year of 2000, Yunnan Provincial Government (2000) announced their strategy of building Yunnan as “a province of great ethnic cultures” (*minzu wenhua dasheng*) and issued the implementation outline. The national policy shifting as a major driving force for the formulation of this regional strategy is clearly stated in the outline:

Building Yunnan as a province of great ethnic cultures is a significant strategic goal developed by the Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Government based on the principles of the Fifteenth National Congress of the CPC combining the actuality of Yunnan of colourful ethnic cultures. (Yunnan Provincial Government, 2000)

Originally in Chinese:

*Jianshe minzu wenhua dasheng, shi shengwei, shengzhengfu genju shiwuda jingshen, jiehe Yunnan minzu wenhua fengfuduocai de shiji suo queding de yige zhongda zhanlue mubiao.*

The outline listed out a range of specific measures and plans regarding the implementation of this strategy, amongst which, the need to develop museums was also included under the item “to build a batch of iconic cultural facilities with rich ethnic characteristics” (*jianshe yipi fuyou minzu tese de biao zhixing wenhua sheshi*) (Ibid.). The regional government particularly noted their intention to construct Yunnan Provincial Museum in their future work (Ibid.). How the policy change has eventually influenced the museum change, I will leave to further discussion in the next sections where I take a close look at the two specific museums.

This strategy may be seen as a prime example of adopting the national policy by combining regional characteristics. We might call it a regionalized national policy. In fact, the idea of the provincial government to build Yunnan as a province with great ethnic cultures was, according to Zhongshu Yang (2007), firstly generated in 1996 (p. 52). In other words, the regional government had resorted to the region’s ethnic culture resource for regional development before the national promotion on culture. With the change in national policy, the regional government placed their strategy under the title of implementing the Party and Government’s guideline. This may be interpreted as their tactful use of the national policy to facilitate regional policy. The national policy shift offered in this way regional policies with more sense of authority.

The practices in Yunnan to embrace ethnicity in local development started even earlier in the beginning of the 1990s, particularly in the form of ethnic tourism. *Ethnic tourism* is a term initiated by Valene L. Smith (1989) in 1977, according to whom, “ethnic tourism is marketed to the public in terms of the ‘quaint’ customs of indigenous and often exotic peoples” (p. 4). In parallel, Smith gives his definition of *cultural tourism*, which “includes the ‘picturesque’ or ‘local color,’ a vestige of a vanishing life-style that lies within human memory” (Ibid.). Referring to my discussion on *cultural tourism* in Chapter 5 where I interpret cultural tourism in the sense of the broadness, looseness and inclusiveness of the concept of *culture*, apparently, my interpretation departs far from Smith’s definition. I would argue here, given the loose use of the concept of culture in China particularly with the governmental promotion on culture in general, cultural tourism has also become a

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broad and inclusive category. With this regard, ethnic tourism could be seen as a type of cultural tourism in the sense that ethnicity is a form of culture.

Yunnan's ethnic tourism was developed in line with the regional tourism development in general. As He & Zhang (1991) argue, tourism was identified by the provincial government as a major industry in the rehabilitation of Yunnan's less-developed rural areas (p. A1). One major strand of ethnic tourism development in Yunnan was the booming of ethnic tourist parks or villages. In 1992, the tourist site Yunnan Ethnic Village (*Yunnan Minzu Cun*) was established in Kunming. In the "village", the cultures and life styles of 13 minority groups are shown through the presentation of dwellings with people living in. By 2007, 12 more minority groups were included in the village, thus all the 25 minority groups of Yunnan are presented there (Yunnan Ethnic Village Website), which sets an interesting contrast to the representation of ethnic cultures in Yunnan Ethnic Museum, located in the opposite side of the village (more discussion on this contrast to come).

Following the establishment of Yunnan Ethnic Village, a series of ethnic theme parks or folk villages were established throughout the province in the ensuing years, including those well studied ones focusing on the Dai minority group in Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture of Yunnan (see, Luo & He, 2006; Cable, 2006; Yang, 2007).

Yunnan's campaign of incorporating ethnic culture into the regional development lies not just in the form of ethnic tourism, but a wide range of fields including films, performances, crafts and so on, as so called "cultural industries" (*wenhua chanye*). The provincial government took cultural industries development as the first step in building Yunnan as a province of great ethnic cultures (Wang & Sun, 2006). In the international academia, "cultural industries" has become a hot topic of studies since 1990s (Hirsch, 2000). The definition seems dynamic and evolving and subject to individual national context (see, O'Connor, 2000; Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005; Garnham, 2005). In the national context of the PRC, "cultural industries", like cultural tourism that has been previously noted, is relatively capacious and tolerant including a wide range of items, not only museums but also ethnic tourism. In the regional context of Yunnan, ethnic culture seems to be a core of cultural industries, as

Tianxin Zhang (2008), Head of Propaganda Department of Yunnan Provincial Government, argues, “In a poor, ethnic, and border region as Yunnan, to develop cultural industries must not copy the model from those developed regions, but utilizing our distinguishing ethnic features” (*xiang Yunnan zheyang de bianjiang minzu pinkun diqu, fazhan wenhua chanye juebuneng zhaoban fada diqu de moshi, er bixu dahao minzu tese pai*) (p. 1).

Yunnan’s high profile in developing cultural industries and the satisfying results – the annual output of cultural industries took up 4.01% of the total output in 2002 and the rate grew to 5% in 2005 (Wu & Wang, 2006) – was soon recognized nationwide as a “Yunnan Phenomenon” (*Yunnan xianxiang*) and as a “Yunnan Model” (*Yunnan moshi*) followed by other regions (Wang & Sun, 2006).

Yunnan could be seen as a successful example in utilizing its ethnic cultural diversity for the regional development in contemporary times. My question is: how has this strategy influenced the regional museums and museum representations? In the sections to follow, I will take a close look at the two selected museums with policy change as a primary concern. Meanwhile, I would also link this contemporary policy and museum change to the historical context of Yunnan, where, as previously noted, Yunnan had been a peripheral region both in political and cultural sense, to see how the representation of issues such as regional identity, national identity, ethnic cultural diversity and national unity has changed.

## **Yunnan Provincial Museum**

With a slight departure from the structure of Chapters 4 and 5 where I detail the historical development of the museum, the introduction to the history of Yunnan Provincial Museum will be relatively brief since I will analyze two museums in this chapter.

### **A Brief Introduction: A Regional Museum and the Region**

Yunnan Provincial Museum is located in downtown Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province, surrounded by business facilities. The visitor coming to Yunnan Provincial Museum will encounter a Soviet Union styled architecture: A grand axis-

symmetric building with a two-story steeple standing over the main body in the middle and twelve stone pillars standing in the façade. A red five-point star hangs at the top of the building, delivering an obvious socialist implication (see *Figure 36*). The visitor may easily reason out the age of the museum, at least of the museum building as that of the 1950s, a time permeated with Soviet Union influence.

The museum was formally established in 1959 while the preparation works as well as the archaeological excavations and research started in 1951 (J.-C. Li, 1983). Chinese museums in general in the 1950s were marked by the central government encouraging the construction of chorography museums (*dizhixing bowuguan*) in each region (see Chapter 3). Yunnan Provincial Museum, like Gansu Provincial Museum (see Chapter 4), could be seen as a reflector of that historical trend.



*Figure 36. Yunnan Provincial Museum building. (Photo by Gary L. Todd.)*

As one of the many museums of this category – of a region, comprehensive, born in the 1950s, Yunnan Provincial Museum would be expected to follow a similar track as the others with new development taking place in the 1990s when the second round of museum construction boom took place nationwide. The driving force of that boom, as noted previously, came in part from the central government’s emphasis on “spiritual civilization” as well as “material civilization” to national development in the 1980s and particularly the promotion on cultural development in general in the

1990s, and the regional governments' consideration to embrace culture into their development strategies in which museums could be a resort.

Yunnan province was not immune to these trends and the motivation from the regional governmental level to promote museum development may be seen as even stronger than the other regions due to the intention to develop cultural industries. However, the priority by the provincial government was given to Yunnan Ethnic Museum, newly built in the mid-1990s, instead of Yunnan Provincial Museum. The role as the representative museum of Yunnan, which in other regions would have been played by the provincial museum was eventually taken by Yunnan Ethnic Museum (Further discussion on Yunnan Ethnic Museum is to be made in next section).

The regional government's preference to the ethnic museum over the comprehensive museum may be seen as resulting from the region's promotion on ethnic tourism, and ethnic cultural industries in general (see previous section) of that time. In some way, I would argue, it also reflects the fact of ethnic diversity being accepted as a major part of the regional identity. This point will be further elaborated in the following section on Yunnan Ethnic Museum.

I have noted previously that in the campaign to build Yunnan as "a province of great ethnic cultures", the regional government of Yunnan included the regeneration of Yunnan Provincial Museum into their plan for support. This was executed in 2007, when the regional government decided to invest in a new site for Yunnan Provincial Museum (Yunnan Provincial Cultural Department, 2009). In 2008, the construction work of the new museum started (Ibid.).

A further emphasis on cultural development from the national policy level, marked by President Hu Jintao's appeal for the "vigorous development and prosperity of socialist culture" (see Chapter 3), may have acted as a stimulant to Yunnan Provincial Government's action, a more powerful driving force, I would argue, may come from the regional level, the provincial government's further embracing of the merit of culture into its regional development strategy, as can be seen from the project overview.



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The new Yunnan Provincial Museum (under construction during the writing of this thesis and expected to be completed by 2011) is located outside of downtown Kunming where a cultural zone dedicated for Yunnan's cultural facilities is planned. The new museum will neighbour Yunnan Culture and Art Centre (Yunnan Grand Theatre) and Yunnan Artists Hub, both under construction (Ibid.). According to Wendou Ma, Director of Yunnan Provincial Museum, the other facilities to be constructed in the area around the new museum include cinemas, a sport centre, book shopping centre, animation centre, as well as restaurants, cafes and bars, thus a "culture-sports-arts-zone" (*wenhua tiyu yishu quan*) is to be formed in the future (cited by Li, 2008). It can be seen, in fact, with the new museum, a whole new suburban and tourist area is to be formed. The similar situation is also seen in Guangxi, another case region of this thesis, which I am to discuss in the next chapter.

It is unclear whether the need to re-build Yunnan Provincial Museum elicited the plan to develop a new cultural zone or whether it was due to the demand for a cultural centre that elicited the idea to re-build the museum. What we may conclude is that there exists an interrelation between a regional museum and broader regional governmental policies, which may add some strands to a question debated by scholars such as Patrick J. Boylan (2006): Are museums targets or instruments of policies? The case of Yunnan seems to offer an answer that museums could be both targets and instruments of governmental policies, and that museums could even elicit new policies.

### **Change of the Permanent Exhibitions**

While the provincial government was planning a new Yunnan Provincial Museum, the museum made a renovation of its permanent exhibitions in 2006, resulting in the current three exhibitions in the museum: *The Dian Kingdom: Yunnan Bronze Civilization (Dianguo: Yunnan Qingtong Wenming)*; *Nanzhao and Dali: Kingdoms under Buddhist Shine (Nanzhao yu Dali: Foguang Puzhao de Guodu)*; *Gold and Jade: Selected Fine Collections of Yunnan Provincial Museum (Jinyu Mantang: Yunnansheng Bowuguan Guancang Zhenbao Zhan)*.

The intention was, according to the director Wendou Ma, to save the museum being “socially marginalized” (*shehui bianyuan hua*) (cited in Ma & Wen, 2006). By socially marginalized, Director Ma may mean that it is not popular among the populace and not in line with it, as he had another comment on this: “It was not the populace that alienated the museum, but the museum itself betrayed the society” (*bushi shimin shuyuan le bowuguan, shi bowuguan ziji beipan le shehui*) (Ibid.).

Director Ma’s comments may be more meaningful if we position them into an overview of the changes that have been made to the museum’s permanent exhibitions.

The available material regarding the early permanent exhibitions in the museum is very limited. The response I received from the museum to my inquiry into the past permanent exhibitions notes that they are only able to offer information regarding exhibitions after 1973 according to their presently available materials (E-mail correspondence with Lingling Duan, curator of the museum, between September 17 and October 9, 2009). The only relative reference I can find is an article by Jiakai Li published in 1983. This article is a general introduction of Yunnan Provincial Museum and in the article Li briefly notes that during 1964-1966, *Display of the Primitive Society of Yunnan (Yunnan yuanshi shehui chenlie)*, *Display of the Slavery Society of Yunnan (Yunnan nuli shehui chenlie)*, and *Display of the Fuedal Society of Yunnan (Yunnan fengjian shehui chenlie)* were held in the museum (J.-C. Li, 1983, p. 101). No further details regarding the three exhibitions could be reached. The exhibition titles, however, suggest for the social evolution ideology behind the creation of these exhibition. Further discussion of social evolution theory and its influence on the museum representation of ethnic minorities is to be made in the next section with the discussion of Yunnan Ethnic Museum.

According to the materials I received from the museum via Lingling Duan (L. Duan, personal communication, September and October, 2009), from 1973, the museum held one main exhibition: the *Display of Historical Cultural Relics (Lishi Wenwu Chenlie)*. In 1984, the museum added a new permanent exhibition: *Ethnic Objects and Customs of Yunnan (Yunnan Minzu Fengwuzhi)*. Both of the two exhibitions were removed in 1986 and replaced by two new permanent exhibitions:

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*Display of Ancient Bronze Vessels of Yunnan (Yunnan Gudai Qingtongqi Chenlie)* and *Display of Ancient Buddhist Art of Yunnan (Yunnan Gudai Fojiao Yishu Chenlie)*. In 1992, a new exhibition *Ancient Bronze Drums of Yunnan (Yunnan Gudai Tonggu Zhan)* was added. The three exhibitions remained as the museum's permanent exhibitions until 2006. In other words, the permanent exhibitions were unchanged for two decades. That the exhibiting equipment and technologies became antiquated could be assumed. With this regards, it is more understandable that the museum became "socially marginalized" as the director noted. A minority of visitors would be interested in seeing exhibitions on a regular basis which he or she had seen starting twenty years ago. With the rapid growth of museum numbers and a new surge of museum exhibitions in the past decade (see Chapter 3), I may also argue that the museum's eagerness for renovation could also be partly accounted for by the competitive threat from its fellow museums in other regions and the museum's goal to stand out. According to Li Li (2008), Chief Designer of the museum, the director wanted the new exhibition to be designed as "completely different from exhibitions in other domestic museums" (*he qita guonei bowuguan wanquan butong de chenlie*). The case in a way also reflects a growing trend of Chinese museums of their pursuit of individuality or uniqueness, which was previously frowned upon.

Among the factors that have accounted for this renovation, which Lingling Duan and her colleagues list out in responding to my inquiry, in addition to those regarding the out-of-dateness of the exhibitions such as the new archaeological discoveries being excluded, and the disqualification of exhibiting facilities, they also mention "the influence of the new director and the change of the way of thinking regarding running the museum" (*guanzhang de gaibian he juece siwei fangshi de gaibian*) (L. Duan, personal communication, September and October, 2009). It could be argued that to which degree that the personal influence of a director could assert to the museum. I also agree with the crucial role that a director can play in altering the road of a museum. I would also like to add that the personal view and thoughts of a director may also be greatly influenced by the macro social context he or she is situated in, for example, the above mentioned competition with other museums, or the training they received. However, policy, often implemented through economic

stimulus, still seems primary in these cases, combined with changes in the museological field and changes in broader sociological views, in this case on ethnic minorities.

### **The Current Representation: Taking *The Dian Kingdom: Yunnan Bronze Civilization* as an Example**

As I note above that the renovation in 2006 formed three permanent exhibitions in the museum: One is pertaining to the Dian Kingdom and its bronze culture; one is focused on the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms and their Buddhist culture; and the third one is a display of the selected gold and jade collections in the museum. Among the three the most promoted is the exhibition *The Dian Kingdom: Yunnan Bronze Civilization*. This exhibition has been selected as the representative exhibition of Yunnan Provincial Museum for the competition of the Nation's Top Ten Fine Exhibitions in 2007 and won the award (Li, 2008). In fact, in December 2009, the other two exhibitions were replaced by a new exhibition *Memory of Yunnan: Exhibition of Intangible Cultural Heritage – Traditional Crafts (Jiyi Yunnan: Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan Chuantong Jiyi Zhan)* (Yunnan Provincial Museum Website).

In the following, I will focus on *The Dian Kingdom: Yunnan Bronze Civilization* as it has remained the primary exhibition within the contemporary museum. Similar to the previous two cases, particular concern will be given to topics regarding diversity, unity, regional and national identities.

**Highlighting the Dian.** The museum has a rich collection of bronze wares from the Dian Kingdom (Yunnan Provincial Museum, 2008). It is therefore natural to include it as one of the museum's permanent exhibitions. In the overview of the previous permanent exhibitions noted in last section, bronze had been one of the themes of the museum's permanent exhibitions previously – for example, the *Display of Ancient Bronze Vessels of Yunnan (Yunnan Gudai Qingtongqi Chenlie)*. What is new is this time the bronze relics are represented as attached to the Dian Kingdom rather than the more general “Yunnan”. (A similar case is with the museum's exhibition regarding the Buddhist art of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms, periods in

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which Yunnan had tenuous attachment to the empires of the central plain). By highlighting the particular periods there is a subtle reference to kingdoms independent of the Han.

In addition to the title, the visitor to this exhibition is made aware through a variety of visual and narrative means that the Dian – the kingdom, the people and the culture – is the core of the exhibition.

The story is developed along a line closely centred on the Dian Kingdom composed of four major sections respectively named as “Discovering the Dian Kingdom” (*Faxian Dianguo*), “Entering the Dian Kingdom” (*Zoujin Dianguo*), “Exploring the Dian Kingdom” (*Tanmi Dianguo*) and “Touching the Dian Kingdom” (*Chumo Dianguo*). The display of a large number of bronze vessels is organized according to the four section themes. The objects are likely to be the same as in previous versions of the exhibition, maybe only with a larger quantity. The representation, through the attached texts however, has been fine tuned to highlight the Dian. The above mentioned section titles could be seen as an evidence.

As noted in the previous part of this chapter, during the time of the Dian Kingdom, parallel to the Warring States, Qin and the early part of the Han times, Yunnan had not been completely incorporated into the Chinese regime in the central plain yet. To highlight the Dian is likely to set a challenge to the balance between regional identity and national identity. A conservative approach would be to emphasize the bronze objects but soften the identity of the Dian, as the museum had done before. A high profile of the Dian represented in the exhibition, on the one hand, reflects the museum’s intention to highlight the regional characteristics of Yunnan, although these characteristics are not in strict line with the conventionally conceived authentic “Chineseness”. What is implied is that the regional identity has received more awareness and attention. On the other hand, the new approach of Yunnan Provincial Museum, particularly as it was highly valued in the state organized national competition, also reflects an increased tolerance of the central level to the local.

Contemporary Yunnan has been a relatively less developed region in China. The high percentage of minority ethnicities, and policies towards them, strengthened

a stereotyped image of Yunnan as a *less-civilized* region in the majority people's mind. While the authenticity of the Dian civilization has been verified by archaeological research, the long-rooted stereotype takes time and efforts to be corrected. In this sense, to give a high profile to the Dian could be seen as an effort to correct the biased public image of Yunnan.

This confrontation with stereotype and readjustment of regional identity is reflected in the narrative of the exhibition. For example, in the prelude of the exhibition, it poetically reads:

Time passes and space transforms. The little reference in historical records had faded out from people's memory, burying the history of the Dian Kingdom in obscurity. Had the Dian ever existed? Sima Qian's records of the Dian had been long frowned upon and Yunnan had always been perceived as a barbarian frontier land until one day in March 1955. (Exhibition texts)

Originally in Chinese:

*Douzhuang xingyi, shikong bianhuan, gudai dianguo liaoliao shuyu de jizai, zaoyi yanmie zai manman de lishi changhe zhong, zhen you yige gudai dianguo de cunzai ma? Shiren dui Sima qian de jizai zaojiu buyiweiran, Yunnan, ye yizhi bei shizuo bianjiang huangman zhidi, zhidao 1955nian 3yue de yitian.*

The appeal to right a wronged image of Yunnan is even clear in the texts appearing in the section introducing the archaeological discovery of the Dian remains:

A vanished civilization which was little noted by historical literature appeared in front of the public impressively with its richness and splendid civilization. Yunnan was not a barbarian land but owned an advanced ancient civilization. (Exhibition texts)

Originally in Chinese:

*Yige wenxian yinyue jizai de xiaoshi wangguo heran zhanxianzai renmen mianqian, renmen bei gudianguo de caifu he ta cengjing de huihuang wenming jingdan le, Yunnan bingfei huangman zhidi, ta cengjing yongyou gaodu fada de gudai wenming.*

Additionally, to represent Yunnan's bronze civilization or ancient civilization in the title of the Dian, I would argue, is also helpful in building and branding Yunnan's regional identity. *Dian* is the short name conventionally used to call

Yunnan in present China. Once a connection between a present convention and a historical civilization is made by museums that for many people are still ivory towers of high culture, the Dian part of Yunnan's regional identity could be more persuasive and impressive.

Taking an active role in regional identity construction, and sometimes in regional history narration are inherent tasks of a regional museum. This role could be included in the broad debate about the social responsibility of museums in general (see, for example, Chappell, 1989; Janes, 2007).

Yunnan Provincial Museum tuned up a voice which was relatively quiet due to, perhaps, its lack of fit with the national track of history and identity. This choice of voice could also be regarded as their awareness of the social responsibilities, which is reflected in the museum director's comments regarding the new Yunnan Provincial Museum going to tell the "full history of Yunnan" (*Yunnan de zhengge lishi*):

Yunnan Provincial Museum is different from those who are influenced by the central part of China. The ancient Yunnan was the Dian Kingdom, not the central Chinese court. If we don't tell, nobody else would tell. The young generation would then know nothing about Yunnan's history. (Cited by Li, 2008).

Originally in Chinese:

*Yunnan sheng bowuguan yu zhongyuanwenhua yingxiang de bowuguan buyiyang, Yunnan de gudai shi Dian guo, bushi zhongyang wangchao, ruguo women bujiang, jiu meiren jiang, yejiu meiyou nianqingren zhidao Yunnan de lishi.*

**Diversity vs. Unity.** As a provincial museum in a region with diverse minority ethnicities whose cultures are exotic to the majority culture of China, Yunnan Provincial Museum is an interesting case to investigate the representation of diversity. The exhibition *The Dian Kingdom: Yunnan Bronze Civilization* offers a good channel. In representing the culture of the Dian Kingdom, foreign influences and cultural integration is in focus. A major motif which can be concluded from the representation made in the exhibition is that the Dian culture had been influenced by various cultures around it. In the section "Exploring the Dian Kingdom", the texts tell the visitor: "We can notice elements of diverse cultures from bronze objects of the Dian Kingdom. To include and absorb merits from a wide range of cultures is

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essential for the Dian Kingdom to have high advanced bronze culture” (*zai dianguo qingtongqi zhong women keyi kandao fengfuduocai de wenhua yinsu, guangqubocai, jianrongbingxu shi dianguo yunyu fazhan chu gaodu fada qingtong wenhua de zhongyao yuanyin*) (Exhibition texts).

The representation of such diverse cultural influences to the Dian culture lies in, I argue, two levels. The first is what we may call *domestic* – domestic in the sense of present China. The exhibition particularly lists out some cultures which are (or partly are) within present Chinese territory including the northern nomadic culture (currently around Inner Mongolia), the central plain culture (currently around Henan province), the Bashu culture (currently around Sichuan province) and the Chu culture (currently around Hubei province). With the display of proper objects, similarities between these cultures and the Dian culture are sought. For example, with the display of objects decorated by animal figures such as tiger, deer, and horses, the panel texts tell the visitor that these are the representative motifs of grassland arts and similar motifs are abundant in the Dian bronze objects (see **Figure 37**). From the displayed “Bronze Bell Set of the Dian King” (*Dianwang Bianzhong*) (see **Figure 38**), the visitor may see some traces of the traditional Chinese ritual customs as bell sets are a common instruments used in ritual ceremonies in ancient China.





Figure 37. The section regarding the nomadic cultural influence to the Dian culture. (Photo by author.)



Figure 38. Bronze bell set. (Photo courtesy of Yunnan Provincial Museum.)

The similarities between the Dian and these cultures imply a cultural exchange between Yunnan and the Chinese court at the Dian Kingdom time. In other words,

although the Dian Kingdom was not a part of China, the connections and cultural exchanges between Yunnan and the Chinese court had long existed.

The representation of the diverse cultural influences to the Dian lies also in the *international* level. In a section called “Exotic Cultural Influences” (*yuanyu laifeng*), the exhibition notes the cultural influences to the Dian bronze from “foreign nations” (*yiyu*), by which, it means those in “Southeast Asia, South Asia and West Asia” (Exhibition texts). What we may interpret here is that the Dian culture – although the Dian Kingdom was not politically part of China at the time – is part of Chinese culture. A cultural unity with the “domestic” cultures is created.

This sense of unity is strengthened through the representation made in the section regarding the Dian Kingdom merging into China in the Western Han Dynasty (see also the previous part of this chapter regarding the history of Yunnan). The English title of this section offered by the museum is “So long, Dian Kingdom”. The original Chinese title “*Dianguo Gui Han*”, however, is more self-evident. *Dianguo* is for the Dian Kingdom. *Han* could refer either to the Han regime of China at that time, or to the Han civilization which is the major part of Chinese civilization. The verb *gui* originally in Chinese means “going (home), return” or “belong to, incorporated in”. It reflects a sense of belonging and appreciation. The sense of unity is also shown in the panel introduction, which, after noting the takeover by Emperor Wudi (r. 141-87 BC) taking over, states, “the cultural features of the Dian Kingdom was rapidly changed and Yunnan was incorporated into the greater and unified civilization of the Han Dynasty” (*gudianguo de wenhua mianmao xunsu gaibian, Yunnan bingru handai dayitong de wenming tixi zhong*) (Exhibition texts).

**Historical diversity vs. Contemporary diversity.** The exhibition uses the term “the Dian people” to call the people of the Dian Kingdom in the narration. This term doesn’t show any information related to ethnicity because no ethnic group in today’s China is called Dian or Dian-like. The exhibition makes almost no links between the Dian people and the current ethnic people in Yunnan.

The only places making this link, yet very brief, are in a compact section at the end of the exhibition where further materials about the Dian Kingdom is offered through texts and photographs on bulletin boards. After a detailed introduction on the

Dian people's religious practices including animal sacrifice, it is noted in the end, "the ox-slaughtering and sacrifice remains an important part of life for the present minority ethnic groups in Yunnan" (*piaoniu yu jisi jintian yiran shi Yunnan shaoshu minzu richang shenghuo de zhongyao neirong*) (panel texts). Following the texts is a photograph, in which people in colourful costumes stand in a circle with several men butchering a cow in the centre. The photograph caption reads "ox-slaughtering of contemporary minority ethnic groups in Yunnan" (*Yunnan xiandai shaoshu minzu piaoniu changmian*), however, without specifying which ethnic group these photographed people come from.

Similarly, in introducing the economy of the Dian and referring to the spinning and weaving by Dian women, a photograph of two women in ethnic-looking costumes weaving with the loom on the waist is shown, however without any caption.

The reason for making little links between the Dian and the contemporary ethnicities in Yunnan could be a lack of research to demonstrate such links. Even with qualified research demonstration, it would, I argue, be challenging to represent such links as the stereotyped representation on ethnic minorities used to be *less civilized* (more discussion on this will be made in the next section about Yunnan Ethnic Museum) while their ancestors two thousand years ago had already had such advanced civilization, which was no less than that of the Han people.

Not only in this exhibition, but in the entire Yunnan Provincial Museum, little representation of contemporary ethnic diversity of Yunnan can be found. The other two exhibitions – one about the Buddhist art of the Nanzhao Kingdom and another about the golden and jade collections of the museum – are more approached from an artistic perspective. That present Yunnan is a region with diverse ethnicities can be hardly learnt from a visit to this museum in its current form. In the new Yunnan Provincial Museum which is still under construction, however, this gap is likely to be filled. From a draft outline published on the museum's website regarding the new exhibition to be held in the new museum, we can see all the periods from pre-historical times to modern including the six decades in the People's Republic of China will be covered.

In the 1990s and the first decade of this century, however, this blank has been filled by Yunnan Ethnic Museum, the topic of the next section.

## **Yunnan Ethnic Museum<sup>21</sup>**

### **A Background: Ethnic Policies and Ethnic Museums in the PRC**

Before looking into the historical development of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, it may be beneficial to firstly have an overview of ethnic policies and ethnic museum development in general in the PRC, as it may offer a broad and contextual view for a better understand of the changes of Yunnan Ethnic Museum.

As one type of museums, ethnic museums in China basically followed the path of the development of Chinese museums in general, as outlined in Chapter 3. In addition to the cultural policies by which all the museums were influenced, ethnic museums, however, are also subjected to another policy source – the policies regarding ethnic issues.

As I have noted in Chapter 2 with my discussion regarding “who are Chinese” that the PRC defines Chinese as all the ethnic groups – the Han and non-Han – within the country (see Chapter 2). This has been a keynote of governmental policies regarding minority ethnic groups in present China. Modulations, however, have also existed during the six decades’ practices of the regime. Roughly, we may conclude there have been three waves of policy.

The first wave was during the first years of the People’s Republic, when the equal status of the minority people was emphasized and their rights were protected. The government also implemented regional autonomy for ethnic minorities and established a series of ethnic autonomous areas (more to be discussed in Chapter 7). The reason for the Party and government to have these policies in these first years, as James C. F. Wang (2002) argues, is “primarily for the purpose of a united front to consolidate control of the nation immediately after the civil war” (p. 178). The

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<sup>21</sup> The Chinese name of this museum is *Yunnan Minzu Bowuguan*. The English name the museum gives to itself is Yunnan Nationalities Museum. I however chose to use “ethnic museum”, see my discussion in Chapter 2 regarding “*minzu*”, “nationality” and “ethnic groups”.

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previously noted state project of identifying the national ethnic groups (*minzu-s*) was at this time. By that identification project, the minority ethnic groups became the “younger brothers within the large Chinese family in which the Han Chinese have dominated” (Yang, 2008). In the museum field, the establishment of ethnic museums were proposed. According to Chengzhi Yang, the drafter of *Twelve-year Plan of Chinese Ethnic Museums (Zhongguo Minzu Bowuguan Shiernian Yuanjing Guihua)*, the establishment the Central Ethnic Museum in Beijing and one regional ethnic museum in each of the five minority autonomous regions was proposed (Tang, 2007, p. 166).

Initially from 1956, and particularly through the period of the Culture Revolution, the policies regarding ethnic minorities shifted to, as Wang (2002) describes, “radical assimilation” (p. 178). The damage of the Cultural Revolution to Chinese museums in general has been noted in Chapter 3. Here I would like to add those related to ethnic minorities as they have also greatly influenced ethnic museums. During the Cultural Revolution, ethnic policies and work, as Xiaohua Wu (2000) argues, was devastated in all aspects (p. 23). According to Wu, at that time, to note ethnic characteristics and distinctions was regarded as to create conflicts between ethnic groups and an antithesis to national unity. Minority languages, religions, and their customs and traditions including their dress styles, music and dancing, and traditional festivals were prohibited, and the ethnic regional autonomy policies, which were legitimized by Constitution were removed in the newly issued constitution (Ibid.). Given such political environment, it is not hard to imagine the negative effects to ethnic museums at the time, which we can also see from the experience of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, to be noted in next section.

This radical assimilation of minority people and their cultures came to an end after the Cultural Revolution. In the 1982 issued Constitution, equal power and rights of minority people and regional autonomy were again provided. The 1982 Constitution particularly noted the necessity to avoid “big-nation chauvinism, mainly Han chauvinism”, and “local national chauvinism” (*Constitution*, 1982, “Preamble” [official English version]). The 1982 Constitution also safeguarded the minority

people's "freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs" (Ibid., "Article 4").

Particularly in the museum field, in 1984, a national working conference on ethnic cultural relics was co-held by the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs and the Ministry of Culture in Beijing. Participants came from different regions of the country but all were working with ethnic cultural relics. One of the themes of the conference was to circulate the situations regarding the collection, preservation, deconstruction and loss of cultural relics in each region (Tang, 2000, p. 169). The macro policy shift brought rapid development to Chinese ethnic museums. According to Landong Tang (2000), since the 1980s, ethnic museums had sprung up in China, not only in provincial ethnic regions, but also in ethnic counties and prefectures (p. 168).

This developing trend seems further strengthened in the recent years. I will leave this to my discussion with Yunnan Ethnic Museum in the following as well as with Guangxi Ethnic Museum in the next chapter.

### **General Introduction of Yunnan Ethnic Museum**

Yunnan Ethnic Museum also lies also in the capital city Kunming. It is located within a tourist resort outside downtown Kunming and is opposite to the popular tourist site – Yunnan Ethnic Village (*Yunnan Minzu Cun*) – as I have noted previously.

The visitor to Yunnan Ethnic Museum will firstly encounter a big square extending from the front of the museum. The square is used for holding celebratory activities such as the traditional festivals of the ethnic groups. By the main entrance is a wall decorated with symbols from various ethnic groups (see *Figure 39*).

According to the introduction offered at the museum's website,<sup>22</sup> the museum holds a collection of 38,000 objects of various categories, among which, the most reputable is the full collection of ethnic costumes and ornaments. The ethnic origin of

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<sup>22</sup> The facts of the museum covered in this section, unless otherwise clarified, are from the museum's website <http://www.ynnmuseum.cn/Release/1.asp?id=1>.

these collections covers all of the twenty-six ethnic groups of Yunnan. The Han group is also included by the museum. In other words, by “ethnic” (*minzu*) in name, the museum does not mean only the ethnic minorities – a reflection on ethnic equality.

Ethnic diversity is also reflected in the composition of museum staffs. According to data from 2005, the then total of 81 staff members were from 17 different ethnic groups and the non-Han staff made up 63% (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 42). The leadership of the museum (director and vice directors) is also made up of diverse ethnicities (Ibid.).

According to the data from 2005, the current total of 81 staff members are from 17 different ethnic groups and the non-Han staffs make up 63% (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 42). The leadership of the museum (director and vice directors) is also made up of diverse ethnicities (Ibid.).



Figure 39. *Yunnan Ethnic Museum building.* (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

## Historical Development

**Proposal and establishment.** Regarding the initiation to its establishment, Yunnan Ethnic Museum website and historical records refer to a visit by the then Premier Zhou Enlai in 1955 to the exhibition *Cultural Relics of Minority Ethnic Groups of Yunnan* held in Yunnan Provincial Museum (Yunnan Ethnic Museum,

1995; 2005, p. 1). During that visit, Premier Zhou gave instruction to investigate and collect ethnic minority cultural relics and to develop exhibitions promoting ethnic equality and unity and traditional cultures (Ibid.). According to Yunhong Du, Head of Office of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, Premier Zhou's comments "left a deep impression to the accompanying ethnic cadres" (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009).

There exists a blank from this initiation to the actual establishment of the museum, the preparation work of which started in the mid 1980s. It is easier now to understand such historical blank with the background information offered in the previous section, a result from the exclusive policies during the Cultural Revolution regarding ethnic minority people and their cultures.

According to the museum's historical documents, the project to build Yunnan Ethnic Museum was officially registered in 1986, the construction work started in 1993 and the museum was open to the public in 1995 (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 1-7). Regarding the museum's establishment, the roles by government, both the central and the local, are prominent.

**Governmental roles.** From the central government level, the national ethnic policy returning to inclusivity and pluralism after the Cultural Revolution was undoubtedly one premise. As Yunhong Du describes, "There was a requirement to re-promote ethnic cultures, to rebuild and re-construct those which were destroyed or damaged. [...] At that time, the state had a great regard on ethnic culture in general. Yunnan was invited to Beijing to present some exhibitions on ethnic cultures. In order to curate these exhibitions, ethnic relics and materials were collected" (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009).

The local government of Yunnan has also played an active role. The collecting work before the museum's establishment was a part of a government process. According to Du, "It was under the 'planning system' at that time. So the main way was through the governmental branches in local areas where they did some planned purchasing and collecting. Some were even donated" (Ibid.).

More significantly, the finance to build the museum was fully provided by the regional government and it was listed as one of the key projects for construction in



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the provincial Eighth Five-Year (1992-1995) plan (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 4).

I have noted previously in the introduction to Yunnan province that Yunnan's practice to embrace ethnic culture into its regional development, particularly through ethnic tourism, started in the 1990s. The provincial governmental decision to invest the ethnic museum in the early 1990s, on the one hand, reflected the local response to the national policy shifting regarding ethnic cultures from the mid-1980s. On the other hand, it could also be seen as an endeavour to promote the ethnic tourism so as to stimulate regional development. Eventually, the provincial government did particularly instruct the museum "to combine tourism with its construction" (*jianshe yu lvyou xiang jiehe*) (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 4).

The tourist orientation of Yunnan Ethnic Museum could be seen from its location, which was chosen, according to Du, "completely by the government" (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009). The museum is positioned within Kunming Dianchi National Tourist Zone, which was newly planned and developed by the local government after the successful operation of Yunnan Ethnic Village (see the first part of this chapter). Li Yang, Head of Exhibition Department of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, explains that the government was able to have this influence as "all the funds came from the government. There were some other locations under consideration. It was finally decided to build here because it was expected to add some cultural atmosphere to this tourist and holiday zone" (L. Yang, personal communication, February 20, 2009). In other words, Yunnan Ethnic Museum has been incorporated into the local development strategy since its birth.

Otherwise, the regional government's performance may also have been partly driven by competition from other regions. This was the time of major museum development on a national scale (see Chapter 3 and the part of Yunnan Provincial Museum in this chapter). As Du notes, "Another maybe more important reason was that all the other regions at that time were building some iconic [museum architectures]. So Yunnan then confirmed to build this museum" (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009)

**Other influential sources.** In addition to governmental roles, there seemed also to be driving forces from within the minority people. Du particularly notes the influence of an “ethnic upper-class” (*minzu shangceng*). According to Du, “Ethnic up-class included the aristocracy, headmen of the ethnic groups, those who were of political or religious importance in their groups, and those who had been in charge of the local political management” (Ibid.). Scholars such as Bin Yang (2009) and Xiaotong Fei (1980) have used similar terms – “ethnic elites”, or “ethnic representatives” – when referring to these people when discussing their roles in Chinese ethnic issues. Representatives of this ethnic upper-class and scholars doing ethnic studies, Du argues, “had been wishing to have such a museum all the time” (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009).

Du particularly notes the influence from the then governor of Yunnan He Zhiqiang, who was from the minority group Naxi. “He had strong feelings about ethnic cultures. It was in his term of office that this project was officially registered” (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009). Additionally, the fact of the minority background in local leadership itself is indicative of the national ethnic policy trend.

**The museum and the regional development.** In the above I have noted that Yunnan Ethnic Museum has been incorporated into the local governmental development strategy since its establishment. The later practices after its establishment may also be reflective of the governmental intention to use the museum as an instrument in promoting regional development.

For example, the museum often receives official delegations from other regions or from the central government sent by the local government, who are one of the museum’s “target groups” (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009). The museum has been accepted by the local government as “a window to present publicly the cultures of Yunnan” (Ibid.). This activity and role, Du argues, is very important. In another sense, we may also say that ethnic diversity has been accepted and even celebrated as a major part of the regional identity.

Additionally, the museum has been used as an important instrument by the provincial government to present and *sell* Yunnan, particularly with its cultural

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industry development strategy (see also the part regarding Yunnan Province in this chapter). As recorded in the museum's documents, in the event arranged by Yunnan Provincial Government in Shanghai in 2004 to promote its cultural industries, the exhibition *Yunnan Ethnic Costumes* developed by Yunnan Ethnic Museum was included as a highlight to show to the investors from other regions. Clearly, ethnic diversity represented by these ethnic costumes is regarded as a regional tag to market Yunnan (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 37).

In some sense, we may say that since the establishment of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, it has been appointed the role of representative museum of the region, which, as noted previously, in many other regions is played by "the Provincial Museum". I have briefly noted the relative neglect to Yunnan Provincial Museum by the regional government. This certainly has much to do with the regional identity as an ethnic region. However, as we have seen from the previous discussion, Yunnan provincial government has relocated its attention and investments to Yunnan Provincial Museum under a furthering of the regional strategy of building Yunnan as a province of great ethnic cultures. Regarding this regional strategy, both Du and Yang have acknowledged the indirect advantage of this strategy in the sense of publicizing ethnic cultures but both note that it has not brought any direct beneficial such as funding. Given resource limitation, it seems a dilemma adhere to regions with ethnic identity for the regional government to choose between the Provincial Museum and the Ethnic Museum for priory supporting. What could also be a dilemma is the content balance between the two museums. For example, the new Yunnan Provincial Museum would also include the content regarding contemporary ethnic diversity of Yunnan, which has not been included in the current Yunnan Provincial Museum but is represented in Yunnan Ethnic Museum. Would the collections of Yunnan Ethnic Museum be moved to the new Provincial Museum? If not, would it cause some repetition or overlaps in exhibition content between the two museums? The same challenge has also been encountered in Guangxi, to be discussed in the next chapter. To explore some new forms or approaches of ethnic museums would then likely to be desirable.

## Representation of ethnic identities in the exhibitions

With its opening in 1995, eight permanent exhibitions were held in Yunnan Ethnic Museum covering a wide range of aspects of the ethnic minorities. These exhibitions were: *Social Forms, Reform and Development of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities (Yunnan Shaoshu Minzu Shehui Xingtai, Gaige yu Fazhan)*, *Ways of Life and Production in Yunnan (Yunnan Shengtai Shengye)*, *Textile Technologies and Costume Art of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities (Yunnan Shaoshu Minzu Fangzhi Gongyi he Fushi Yishu)*, *Festivals, Music and Dancing of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities (Yunnan Shaoshu Minzu Jieqing Yuewu)*, *Handicrafts of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities (Yunnan Shaoshu Minzu Shougongyipin)*, *Folk Fine Arts of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities (Yunnan Shaoshu Minzu Minjian Meishu)*, *Ancient Literatures of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities (Yunnan Shaoshu Minzu Guji Wenxian)*, *Rare Stones (Qishi Zhenbao)* (Yunnan Ethnic Museum, 2005, p. 108).

Changes and adjustments have been made to these permanent exhibitions during the one and half decades after the opening. The most significant change, in my view, was the removal of the exhibition *Social Forms, Reform and Development of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities*, which was the first primary permanent exhibition of the museum. In this section, I will therefore focus on, but not be limited to, this exhibition and its removal to investigate the representation of ethnic minorities in the museum and its changes.

**The exhibition *Social Forms, Reform and Development of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities*<sup>23</sup>: The political dimension of ethnic representation.** This exhibition told the stories of ethnic groups in Yunnan regarding their past and present, specifically, how they have transformed from their previous social forms to socialism after the PRC was established.

The exhibition started with a prelude section with a brief introduction on Yunnan's ethnic minority groups regarding their distribution and populations. In the

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<sup>23</sup> This exhibition was still open during my first visit to Yunnan Ethnic Museum in November 2005. The facts of these exhibition covered in this section is based on my personal visit and an article introducing this exhibition when it was opened written by the Profession Team of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, published in the journal *Minzu Gongzuo* (Ethnic Work), 1995 (Special Issue). The journal has changed its name to *Jinri Minzu* (Ethnic Today).

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first section entitled “The Sun Shining on Yunnan” (*Yangguang Puzhao Yunling Gaoyuan*), graphs showing the ethnic groups’ social forms and languages were displayed. The displayed materials also included the definition of nationality (*minzu*) by Stalin, documents from Yunnan Provincial Government regarding ethnic unity, and photographs and paintings of party and government leaders visiting minority areas in Yunnan.

Then, the exhibition, through three sections, presented how the minority groups transformed from primitive society, slavery society and feudal society into socialism with particular attention given to cases of the Dulong group of the Nujiang area, the Yi group of Xiaoliang Mountain area, and the Dai group of Xishuangbanna.

Symbolic features which were normally used to label a certain social form, for example, the “slash and burn” cultivation method for primitive society, instruments of torture used by owners on slaves, labour working for landlords were represented through the display of objects, historical photographs and figures.

Throughout the exhibition, the permeation of social evolutionary theory was evident. Chinese social science after the PRC was founded was greatly influenced by social evolutionary theory, particularly that of Henry Morgan (see Yang, 1992). In his *Ancient Society*, a book well known in China, Morgan (1985 [1877]) described the progress of human society through a series of stages from savagery to barbarism and to civilization. According to Enzheng Tong (1989), due to the esteem of Marx and Engels for Morgan, there had been a tendency among Chinese scholars to equate Morgan’s views with that of Marx and Engels and even with Marxism. The representation in the exhibition *Social Forms, Reform and Development of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities* was evidently reflective of such a tendency.

In addition to showing these minority groups’ past, another major theme of the exhibition was to show their present. The juxtaposing of past and present was overwhelming in the exhibition. For example, in the section of the Dulong group, the scene of the cave-living mode that Dulong people practiced in the pre-PRC time was juxtaposed to the photographs showing their life in the PRC. The trend to show the contrast between past and present was not peculiar to the representation of ethnic minorities but to Chinese historiography in general after 1949 (Wang, 1975).

Through the contrast between the past and the present, what could be concluded from the exhibition was the superiority of the present – through the introduction of socialism led by the CPC. This presentation suggested what Stevan Harrell (1995) has described regarding the practices towards ethnic minorities in the PRC as “the civilizing project” (p. 4) conducted by the CPC to “transform them, to make them more like the transformers or, in the parlance of the transformers themselves, to ‘civilize’ them” (p. 9). In the representation, the Party and government’s role as the transformer was not only implied but to much degree represented directly through repeatedly referring to the Party and party leaders. There were a number of photographs showing the Party and government leaders visiting ethnic areas or conducting works related to ethnic affairs. Included also was a red banner (see **Figure 40**), on which, it read “To our great leader Chairman Mao Zedong: We follow you forever” (*Xiangei women de weida lingxiu Mao Zedong: Women yongyuan genzhe ni zou*). The words were in Han characters but with some non-Han looking characters under. In front of the banner was a sculpture showing the good relationship between the Party and the local people.



**Figure 40.** A banner to Chairman Mao Zedong and a sculpture showing the Party members were talking with the local people. (Photo courtesy of Yunnan Ethnic Museum.)

To show the achievements of the “civilizing project” was also a focus in the exhibition. In the last second section, an overview of the present development of all the ethnic groups in Yunnan was presented. The items covered included infrastructure

construction and tourism development. The purpose was, according to the Profession Team of Yunnan Ethnic Museum (1995), “to show to the public that to promote the common development of all the ethnic groups, improve the cultural qualities of all the peoples, and build a rich and civilized social environment has become the important indicator of the social civilizing degree of Yunnan” (*xiang shiren biaoming: tuijin ge minzu de gongtong fazhan, tigao ge minzu wenhua suzhi, chuangjian fuyu wenming de shehui huanjing, chengwei Yunnan shehui wenming chengdu de zhongyao biaozi*) (p. 23).

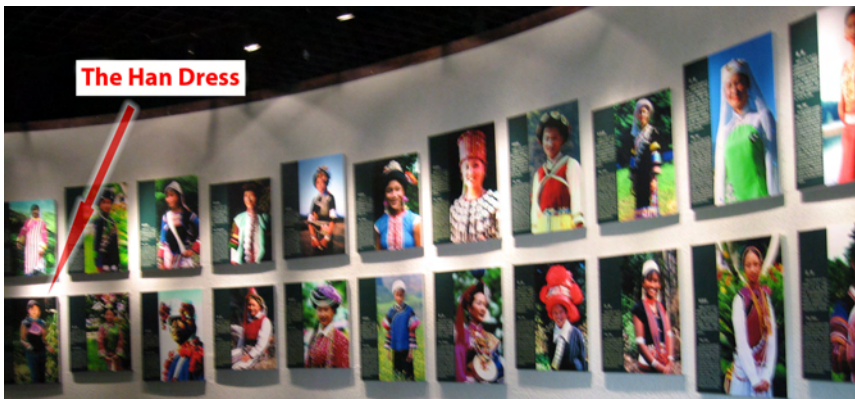
Through the comparison of the past and the present of the minority groups by positioning their past in the social stages which were perceived as less civilized than the one that of the present, a celebration of the political victory – the establishment of socialism in the country – is implied. The representations made in the exhibition may also reflect the intention to show the contentedness of minority peoples with the present political regime so as to emphasize the image of a stable society.

This exhibition was removed in 2006. Other exhibitions were reworked with the concept of *social evolution* either removed or downplayed. The exhibition about ethnic costumes provides an example. The old version of this exhibition arranged the costume collections in an evolutionary order from the most simple and crude to those that were made with more complicated patterns and fine craftsmanship. For example, in the first section entitled “Primitive Clothes” (*yuanshi fushi*), early forms of clothes made from materials such as tree-bark and animal-skin were presented. In the current version (2009), however, the evolutionary order has been abandoned. Instead, the displayed costumes and ornaments are arranged in categories such as “Daily wear and Ceremony wear” (*Richangzhuang yu Shengzhuang*), and “Religious and Ritual Wear” (*Zongjia Jisi Fushi*). The tree-bark and animal-skin clothes are also presented but in the category of “Early Clothes” (*Zaoqi Fushi*). The word *primitive* (*yuanshi*) has been avoided.

The above mentioned removal and adjustments may reflect a tendency of focus shifting from political dimension to cultural dimension. It may also reflect an intention to make the representation regarding ethnic minorities less easy to cause controversy and in line with current academic thinking and policy.

**Representation of diversity and unity.** Given the diverse ethnicities in Yunnan and the museum's role as an ethnic museum, ethnic diversity is expected in the museum. The visitor will not feel disappointed because he or she will see diverse cultural aspects such as fine arts, customs and traditions, or poetry and literature. I will, however, argue that such ethnic diversity is represented in a strong sense of political unity. The representation of unity appears to me as primarily made through the following two approaches.

***The Han-inclusion.*** While the Chinese term *minzu* contains the sense either at national level, or at sub-national (ethnic group) level (see the discussion in Chapter 2), it also contains a connotation – particularly when it is used as an adjective – with single reference to minorities. So it is not surprising if a *minzu* (ethnic) museum only covers representation of minority groups. This was not the case in Yunnan Ethnic Museum, or I should say not any more to be specific, because a minority-focus seemed have existed in the early practices of the museum. In a review of the earliest permanent exhibitions, they were all entitled with the attaching word “minority”. Apparently this view has been altered since all the current exhibitions have included the Han. For example, in the exhibition *Ethnic Costumes and Processing Skills* (*Minzu Fushi yu Zhizuo Gongyi*), the Han costumes are starkly juxtaposed with those of minority groups (see *Figure 41*).



**Figure 41.** *Costumes from the twenty-six ethnic groups of Yunnan including the Han.* (Photo by Author.)



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Such a Han-inclusion approach is likely to show an equality in treatment to different groups. What is implied is national unity in the sense that China is a unified multi-ethnic family.

In addition to the inclusion of the Han, the connection between the Han and the minority groups is also prominent. For example, in the exhibition *Human Being's Memory: the Cultural Heritage of Ancient Ethnic Literatures of Yunnan*, what is displayed includes not only the literatures written by people from the minority groups in their own languages, but also those written by people from the minority groups but in the Han language, even those about the minority groups but written by the Han people and in the Han language. A historical close relationship between the Han and the minorities is likely to be noted, which may strengthen the sense of national unity.

The curators of the museum have argued, however, that it is the real interrelations between the groups that have led to the presentation of similarities above differences. As Yunhong Du notes, "The ethnic groups of Yunnan, due to their distribution situation and their living styles [...] do have their distinctive characteristics, but their integrity is very strong. The inter-ethnic neighbourhood is very common. So the exchanges and cultural influence between groups are quite common. So it is not possible to show their complete distinctiveness" (Y. Du, personal communication, February 20, 2009).

Curator Yang also supports the argument for compatibility over distinction: "We all mingle. Yunnan holds the important geographic location. The ethnic cultures here, on the one hand, have their own characteristics. On the other hand, they also hold the openness and compatibility. They received influences from ethnic groups in other areas" (L. Yang, personal communication, February 20, 2009).

Clearly similarity is chosen in part due to the collections themselves which lend themselves to seeing similar patterns and interrelations. Without doubt, however, reigning ethnic policy has influenced the forms of presentation. To repeat a quote from curator Yang and extend it: "When we were developing exhibitions, above all was to emphasize the ethnic policy and to emphasise that all the ethnic groups are equal. [...] in our presentation, we tried to take all the ethnic groups into account while presenting their characteristics" (L. Yang, personal communication, February

20, 2009). This striving for balance between distinction and similarity is one that was also prevalent in other museums (see, for example, Chapter 4).

***Soft character of diversity.*** In my view, the representation of ethnic diversity in the museum has a soft character rather than hard. The themes selected to present the diverse ethnicities are mostly within the *soft* areas such as dancing, music, costumes and fine arts, those that may be included in the big umbrella of *culture*. *Hard* areas such as economy, education or beliefs, which may have possibilities to cause controversy, are given little voice. With the removal of the exhibition *Social Forms, Reform and Development of Yunnan Ethnic Minorities*, the traces of the socialist transformation imposed by the Party and government on these minority groups is not able to be found any more.

A preference for a soft character instead of hard character – although the latter may bring the museum more potential to stretch further in discipline – is most likely a reflection of the present national ethnic policies that promote cultural diversity with a firm premise of a national unity.

In the above I have discussed the representation of ethnic minorities as well as its changes in Yunnan Ethnic Museum. We have noted that minorities had been represented as ancient and uncivilized requiring salvation and civilizing. This strong political ideological influence to the museum representation has faded out. What is focused now is the areas that could be safely positioned under the broad umbrella of culture, the diversity of which is what the present national polity of China is promoting. To emphasize the cultural dimension of *diversity*, which at the same time dilutes the other dimensions such as economic or political, is in fact an emphasis on national unity.

Dru C. Gladney (1994) has focused on the counterpart relationship of minority and majority and argued the crucial role that the representation of minority identities could play in constructing the majority identity, as he asserts, “it is through reading the representation of minorities in China that we can learn much, perhaps more, about the construction of majority identity, know in China as the ‘Han’ nationality” (p. 93).

I am enlightened by Gladney’s idea, however, I would also like to argue that in the case of Yunnan Ethnic Museum, the representation of minority identities is not

for building the majority Han identity, but an identity of *China* and *Chinese*. Both of the two concepts are constructed in China with great efforts by the current polity as inclusive of all the ethnic groups, all the cultures, and all the civilizations within the country. This construction is also clear within this museum.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed museum development in Yunnan province with two museums as examples. Through the analysis we can see that, though under the same national environment, museum development in Yunnan took a different track from that in Gansu and Shaanxi. Ethnic diversity as the main characteristic of the region not only influences the museum representation but also the development strategy and policy of the local government. This governmental thinking also has had profound influence on the museum development. The interrelationship between the museums and their local context can be fully seen in the case of Yunnan. In this chapter I also started the discussion of ethnic museums. This discussion will be carried over in the next chapter through the discussion on Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and its two museums.

## **Chapter 7. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum**

This chapter is dedicated to Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and its two museums: Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum. Guangxi shares some common features with Yunnan. Guangxi also has diverse ethnicities and Guangxi is China's border region as well. These common features made Guangxi eligible for similar preferential national policies. Guangxi also has distinctive features. Guangxi is not only an ethnic region but defined as one of China's five autonomous regions. Additionally, Guangxi is not only China's border, but the coastal border connecting China to Southeast Asian countries by sea. These distinctive features led Guangxi on a different track to Yunnan in terms of local development which also led to different situation with regards to local museum development. Particularly, Guangxi has been developing new practices of ethnic museums by embracing the concept of ecomuseums. Guangxi is therefore an interesting case not only as a comparison but also as a supplementation to the case of Yunnan in the discussion of museums and political change in China.

The structure of this chapter follows the previous chapter. First I offer an introduction on the general information and historical development of Guangxi as a region. Then I focus on Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum to look at museum change and how national and local policies have influenced the local museums. Similarly to previous chapters, special attention will be given to the representation of diversity and regional identity.

### **Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region**

#### **Specifications**

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region lies in the south-western coast of China with an area of 23.67 square km. It faces the Beibu Gulf in the south and shares a border with Vietnam in the southwest. It neighbours Guangdong province in the east,

Hunan province and Guizhou province in the north, and Yunnan province in the west (see **Figure 42**). This location makes Guangxi the meeting point of three economic circles – Southern China, Western China and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)<sup>24</sup>. The location also affords an easy outward marine route for the inland areas in the western and even north-western China. This geographical feature of being a coastal and a national border has had a strong influence on the development of Guangxi, particularly with the establishment of the China-ASEAN Free-trade Zone. Guangxi, as the only province of China which has geographical connections both on land and across sea with ASEAN, became more active in the national development strategies. This seems to have influenced the regional museums in Guangxi as I will note later in this chapter in the discussion of the two museums.



**Figure 42. Map of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. (Made by author.)**

Lying on the margin of Yungui Plateau, Guangxi is covered in large part by mountains and hills. Limestone predominates over more than half of Guangxi. A typical example of this landform is Guilin, a city of Guangxi and one of the most

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<sup>24</sup> ASEAN was established in 1967. The member nations include Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia.

popular tourist places in China. Guilin's beautifully shaped mountains, caused by the erosion of limestone, have attracted tourists from within China and abroad. The tourism of Guilin has boosted the tourism in Guangxi in general. It is Guilin, instead of Nanning, the capital city of Guangxi, that is well known by people from the other parts of China and in some sense plays the role of the representative of Guangxi. Nanning, as the capital city, however, holds the major museums for the region. The two case museums that I discuss later in this chapter are both in Nanning.

According to the Statistics Bureau of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (2006), Guangxi had a total population of 46.55 million in 2005, of which, the Han made the majority with a percentage of 61.46%. The rest are mainly composed of eleven major ethnic groups – the Zhuang, Yao, Miao, Dong, Mulao, Maonan, Hui, Jing, Yi, Shui, and Gelao, who are generally referred to as the ethnic minorities of Guangxi. Of these minority groups, the Zhuang is the largest. As the data from 2005 shows the Zhuang people account for 84.57% of the total non-Han population in Guangxi (Ibid.). This percentage in part explains why Guangxi is named the Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Zhuang is also the largest of China's 55 minority groups. Nationwide the Zhuang make up a population about 15.5 million and most of them live in Guangxi (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1990b). Although both Guangxi and Yunnan have diverse minority ethnicities, what differs the two is that Guangxi holds China's largest minority (non-Han) population while Yunnan holds the most minority groups. In other words, Yunnan is more diverse in ethnicity while Guangxi's minority population is dominated by one major group – the Zhuang. Similar, however, is the fact that the presence of diverse ethnicities plays a vital role in the development of both regions in multiple ways. It is in its place to ask how museums in Guangxi are affected by this feature. This concern will be dealt with in the second half of this chapter. First, however, I offer a description of the development of the region.

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## Guangxi Before 1949<sup>25</sup>

Guangxi has always been a region with multiple ethnicities. Before the unification of China by Emperor Qin Shihuang, Guangxi, as well as the other southern regions of China, was inhabited by various aboriginal peoples, so called “barbarians” (Fairbank & Reischauer, 1979; Gernet, 1996). These groups were called *Bai Yue*. *Bai* means “one hundred” in Chinese. *Yue* was the word used to describe the southern aboriginal people. Among the *Bai Yue*, there were two big groups called *Xi’ou* and *Luoyue*, generally referred to together as *Ou-Luo*, who mainly lived in the area of today’s Guangxi. These groups were the two main origins of the current Zhuang ethnic group. Many of the lifestyle and cultural features of the Ou-Luo people such as rice growing and diet and the bronze drums were inherited and kept by the Zhuang people until today (Fan & Gu, 1989). These Ou-Luo heritages are represented today in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum in a permanent exhibition called *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People (Ou-Luo Yicui)*. The collection of drums was one of the main characteristics of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum and is today central to the Guangxi Ethnic Museum.

Shortly after Qin’s unification of China, Emperor Qin Shihuang sent armies south and set the prefecture system there thus incorporating the “barbarian” peoples into the Chinese empire (Fairbank & Reischauer, 1979; Gernet, 1996). The main part of present Guangxi territory was under the administration of Guilin prefecture at the time. “Gui”, the first word of “guilin”, is still used today as a short form for Guangxi. In other words, Guangxi had become part of China shortly after the first Chinese unification, although the ethnicities and cultures of the aboriginal people here were different from that of the central part of China. Unlike Yunnan which was outside of *China* during some periods in history, Guangxi was almost all the time under the rule of the central Chinese court in subsequent history.

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<sup>25</sup> This part is basically based on the facts offered in *Guangxi Tongzhi* (Guangxi Chorography) which covers a range of aspects of Guangxi, available from Guangxi Diqingwang (Guangxi facts and information) <http://www.gxdqw.com>. I have also consulted works by western scholars such as Fairbank & Reischauer (1979) and Gernet (1996) regarding the history of Guangxi.

The rule of the Chinese court over Guangxi led to vast Han immigration. After Qin's conquer, Emperor Qin Shihuang arranged 100,000 Han migrants to the local places in the south including present Guangxi (Wang & Lei, 1992). According to the Ethnic Affairs Association of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (2008a), these Han migrants "vigorously spread and promoted the advanced economy, culture and technologies of the Han" (*dali chuanbo hanzu de xianjin jingji wenhua he jishu*). The Han officials "actively carried out the feudal system of the central part of China so as to reform the Ou-Luo social system and set up schools to promote the feudalist ethics and spread culture" (*jiji de tuixing zhongyuan diqu de fengjianzhi, dui Ou-Luo ren de shehui zhidu jinxing gaige, jianli xuexiao, xuanchuan fengjian de lunli diode, chuanbo wenhua*), which led to the integration or assimilation of part of the Ou-Luo people integrated into the Han community while others presumably formed later ethnic minorities (Ibid.).

In the ensuing over two thousand years after the Qin, with some disparity in different periods, the Han migration into Guangxi continued, particularly in the Ming Dynasty (AD 1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (AD 1616-1911) when massive Han migrations took place (Ethnic Affairs Association of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2008b). During the historical process of ethnic exchanges and interactions, not only were the aboriginal peoples greatly influenced by the Han, but vice versa so that the Han people in Guangxi also bear a great diversity in terms of languages and customs and traditions (Ibid., see also Fan & Gu, 1989).

### **Guangxi in the PRC**

During the regime of the PRC, one of the major milestones Guangxi experienced was its being defined as a Zhuang autonomous region. This political feature of the region has also brought great effects to the museums of Guangxi, which I will discuss later in this chapter. First, however, there is a need to offer a brief background to the regional autonomy system of China.

**China's Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities.** The policy of Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities was applied by the CPC right after it took power in China, which enabled minority ethnic groups to practise regional autonomy in areas



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where they lived in compact communities with the establishment of organs of self-government (Information Office of the State Council of the P.R.C., 2005). The government sees the policy as “critical to enhancing the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among different ethnic groups, to upholding national unification, and to accelerating the development of places where regional autonomy is practiced and to promote their progress” (Ibid.). This policy was included in the PRC’s first Constitution issued in 1954 and has been reaffirmed by the subsequent revisions to the Constitution.

The autonomous areas are divided into three categories: autonomous regions, prefectures and counties according to the population of the ethnic group and the size of the area (Ibid.). Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was established in 1958 and is within the first category.

During the Cultural Revolution, however, the policies of autonomy were abolished. The negative effects of the Cultural Revolution to China in general have been noted previously and the devastating influence to ethnic minorities has been specifically noted in Chapter 6. Similar to the other autonomous areas, the autonomy of Guangxi regional government was removed and the Revolution Committee (see also Chapter 4) took administrative power (Ma, 1998).

After the Cultural Revolution, when national policies of ethnic minorities gradually reverted to that of before the Revolution, the system of regional autonomy for ethnic minorities was recovered. Administrative power was returned to the Guangxi autonomous regional government from the Revolution Committee in 1977 (Ibid.). The following year, in 1978, Guangxi celebrated its twenty year anniversary of being an autonomous region despite the upheavals caused by the Cultural Revolution.

In 1984, the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy* was issued. This law stipulates that the system of regional autonomy for ethnic minorities is a basic political system of the state. It provides specific stipulations for the implementation of this policy (Information Office of the State Council of the P.R.C., 2005).

By the end of 2003, in the PRC one hundred and fifty-five ethnic autonomous areas had been established, of which five are provincial-level autonomous regions. Guangxi is one of the five.<sup>26</sup> These ethnic autonomous areas, as guaranteed by the Constitution and laws, enjoy the following rights, as listed in the governmental White Paper *Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China*:

Independent management of the ethnic group's internal affairs in its autonomous region; Formulation of self-government regulations and separate regulations; The use and development of the spoken and written languages of the ethnic groups; Respect and guarantees of the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities; Retainment of the folkways and customs of ethnic groups; Independent management and development of economy; Independent development of the educational, scientific, technological and cultural activities. (Information Office of the State Council of the P.R.C., 2005 [official English version])

In addition, the Constitution and the Law also stipulated it a governmental duty to provide special support and assistance to ethnic autonomous areas, for which the central government has adopted a series of measures including allocating special-purpose funds, building transport infrastructures, implementing the nine-year compulsory education system, establishing institutions of higher education, and giving priority to students of these regions to access higher education in developed areas of China (Ibid.).

**Economic development of Guangxi.** In the early period of the PRC, most large scale industrial projects were set up inland (see also Chapter 4 and 5). As noted by Zhaorong Yi (1997), of the total 156 national key industrial projects planned by the central government in the 1950s, none were in Guangxi. Yi further argues that “little investments in infrastructure, [...] and few large or medium scaled [industrial] projects being constructed had affected the potential of Guangxi's economic development, which was one of the key factor that led to Guangxi's development far

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<sup>26</sup> The other four are: Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region established in 1947, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region established in 1955, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region established in 1958 and Tibet Autonomous Region established in 1965.

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behind the national average level” (*jijian touzi shao, ... jiancheng de dazhongxing xiangmu shao, yingxiang Guangxi jingji jinyibu fazhan de houjin, yeshi Guangxi tong quanguo pingjun shuiping chaju jiaoda de yige zhongyao yuanyin*).

As a border and coastal region, the national Reform and Opening-up campaign, launched in the end of 1970s, had some influence to Guangxi. Guangxi’s coastal city Beihai was one of China’s first 14 coastal cities to be opened-up in 1984, and was able to enjoy a series of preferential policies and practices such as looser control on foreign investments (Yi, 1997). In the ensuing years, a series of cities in Guangxi were gradually opened as part of a “Coastal Economic Development Zone” (*yanhai jingji kaifaqu*) (Ibid.). These “open areas” did boost the economic development of Guangxi. However, it was not until the early 1990s that Guangxi economy began to take a turn for the better when Guangxi adopted development policies oriented towards the opening-up of the economy and promotion of foreign trade and the introduction of foreign investment became the focus of Guangxi’s economic policies (Chao, 1998). This regional development strategy was further driven by the central government’s inclusion of Guangxi into the national development strategy in the 1990s that planned to fully develop Guangxi as the sea passage of Southwest China to overseas. Guangxi was thus, as Su-cheng Chao argues, “given a decisive role to play in the economic development of southwest China” (Ibid., p. 44) In other words, the local account of Guangxi has been taken into the national account of China in China’s international exchange.

This trend was strengthened during the PRC’s campaign to build partnership with ASEAN countries, which started in earnest from 2003 (ASEAN, 2009). Guangxi, due to its geographical location as the gate of China to Southeast Asia, was chosen as the pioneer of this campaign. The most influential event is the annual China-ASEAN Expo to be held in Nanning, Capital of Guangxi, since 2004. The Expo is mainly aimed at promoting economic cooperation between China and ASEAN countries. This event, however, seems to have greatly boosted the regional economy of Guangxi. According to the Secretary Board of China-ASEAN Expo (2008), the total import and export value of Guangxi increased three-fold from 2003 to 2007.

One of the major fruits from the China-ASEAN Expo is booming tourism in Guangxi. Tourists to Guangxi from ASEAN countries numbered 455,000 in 2007, far doubled that of 2003 (Ibid.). The booming of tourism not only brought income for the region but also has asserted an influence to museum practices in Guangxi. Further discussion will be made later with the analysis on Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum in the section to follow.

## **Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum**

### **General Introduction**

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum (hereafter as GZARM) lies in the capital city of Guangxi, Nanning. The location of the museum is quite “central”. It neighbours the regional government office building and is at the east side of Nanning’s central square “Ethnic Square” (*Minzu Guangchang*). On the square, the visitor can see a wide painting with portraits of the three generations of leadership of China – Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. The visitor can also see fifty-six flower beds on the square, setting a reference to the fifty-six ethnic groups of China. Each morning, a ceremony of rising national flag is held here. The square can be seen as a representation or symbol of ethnic unity offering a backdrop for GZARM.

The visitor coming to GZARM will be confronted with an “ethnic” styled architecture: the main body of the architecture is higher over the ground with piles as the supporters and the main entrance of the museum is on the second floor (see *Figure 43*). This may remind the visitor of a traditional house style – *Ganlan* – shared by many southern ethnic minorities including Guangxi’s major minority the Zhuang. In that kind of house, people live in the second floor while leaving the ground space for cattle and fowl.



Figure 43. *Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum building.* (Photo courtesy of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum.)

## Historical Development

**Early history.** This museum building was built in 1978. The institution, however, can be traced back to the 1930s during the first boom of Chinese museum development (see Chapter 3). As introduced on its website, the museum was firstly established in 1934 as Guangxi Provincial Museum. Similar to many museums established at that time, Gansu Provincial Museum for example (see Chapter 4), the establishment and focus of Guangxi Provincial Museum seemed closely related to education. As recalled by Weifeng Wu, Director of GZARM, the establishment of the museum was initiated by the then director of Guangxi Education Department, and was under the administration of the Education Department and housed in the Department's office building (personal communication, February 18, 2009). During the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), the museum was moved to Guilin and the museum's collections were saved in different places in Guangxi to avoid being destroyed during the war (Ibid.).

After the establishment of the P.R.C, the museum was taken over by the Guangxi Provincial Government. Despite the protective measures taken in the wartime, there were still major losses. As the stocktaking conducted by the museum

in 1952 shows, more than 19,000 pieces were lost or damaged, which was 77.66% of the total collections. (GZARM, 2004).

Based on the remaining collections, the new Guangxi Provincial Museum was established and opened in 1956 in Nanning with a newly built building located in the city's People's Park (H. Wu, 1984) (a different location from the present one). When Guangxi became an autonomous region in 1958, the museum changed name from Guangxi Provincial Museum to the current Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum (Ibid.). Similar to many other regional museums established in the 1950s (see Chapter 3) the museum was also defined as a chorography museum for Guangxi (H.-M. Wu, 1998, p. 203). The Soviet Union influence on museum practices which had been a national trend seemed also inevitable in GZARM. As Director Wu notes, "Our museum at that time [1950s], like all the other museums in China, was influenced by the Soviet Union including the setting and the modes of display," (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

The Cultural Revolution, not surprisingly, also heavily affected the museum's activities. According to Huang (1994), during the Cultural Revolution, the museum practices came to a halt and the museum site became "a base of armed fight" (*wudou judian*) that "the walls of the storage room and the collection cases in the room were full of shot marks" (*wenwu kufang zhuanqiang, kunei wenwugui deng, doubei qiangdan dade danhenleilei*) (p. 91). Hui-Min Wu (1984) has also noted the detrimental influence of the Cultural Revolution to GZARM. According to him, around 20, 000 cultural relics were damaged and some of the museum professionals were forced to transfer to other careers (p. 102).

**The museum and the regional political feature.** A further major shift of the museum came in 1978. According to Director Wu, as a way to mark the twentieth anniversary of Guangxi being an autonomous region, both the central and provincial governments allocated special funds for the museum to develop a new site with a new building (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009) – the present site described previously.

Let me position this moment to the broad historical context of China and Chinese museums in general. In the year of 1978, the historical policy shift of

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contemporary China – the Reform and Opening-up – was yet to come (it came in the end of that year). In terms of the museum field, what I call “the new development” of Chinese museums (see Chapter 3) was yet to start. In this regard, GZARM was somewhat ahead of its time in comparison with other regional museums, including those discussed in other chapters. The apparent motivational power was the anniversary celebration of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. In other words, it was the political feature of Guangxi as an autonomous region that brought the change to the museum.

This major political feature came from a shift in the nation’s policy towards ethnic minorities, which could in turn explain why the central government agreed to allocate funds to the museum for rebuilding. GZARM, in other words, is a good example of how a regional museum is likely to be influenced by factors at both the regional and national level. The later development of GZARM further shows the degree to which the political feature of a region intertwined with national political policies and drove many of the changes of the regional museum.

According to Director Wu, ten years later in 1988, for the thirtieth anniversary, a garden – the Ethnic Cultural Relics Garden (*Minzu Wenwuyuan*) – was built and was attached to the museum, creating an open-air space for the museum’s exhibition (I will return to discuss this garden in the next section).

Another ten years later, in 1998, the museum renovated its permanent exhibitions with special funds from the regional government. Director Wu describes the top-down decision process: “It was the fortieth anniversary of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 1998. It was a big celebration. The provincial government offered money for the museum’s maintenance and renovation. [...] They requested that both the indoor and outdoor of the museum to be refurbished.” With this renovation, the former permanent exhibitions were replaced with two new ones. I will return to these exhibitions later in the analysis.

For the fiftieth anniversary, in 2008, the situation changed with the provincial museum losing somewhat its central place.

**The regional museum dilemma.** 2008 is the fiftieth anniversary of Guangxi as an ethnic autonomous region. A renovation to the museum as part of the

celebration of the region's decennial anniversary, as had always taken place before, did not happen this time. The grand celebration was held instead in the newly built museum Guangxi Ethnic Museum, in which the regional government had invested 20 million. In other words, the role as a leading museum with priority for government support was not played by GZARM any more but was superseded by Guangxi Ethnic Museum.

The effect to GZARM was a certain level of stagnation as Director Wu describes: "The museum has become quite old. We have had the idea to renovate it for long. But due to the establishment of the new ethnic museum, in which the local government invested 20 million yuan, the government set aside this museum for a moment" (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

This next-in-line situation of GZARM changed after the completion of the Ethnic Museum according to Wu: "Now the ethnic museum project has been completed. They would re-consider our project, to make this museum better. Because after all, we have many visitors every year and we are the provincial museum of Guangxi" (Ibid.).

In fact, the museum has been granted by the regional government a sum of special funding to be received later that year (2009) for maintaining and particularly creating the new permanent exhibitions in the museum, according to the director. Some governmental focus is transferring back to the provincial museum of the region.

As noted in the last chapter, a similar phenomenon took place in Yunnan. The provincial museum was relatively ignored by the local government in the 1990s when the ethnic museum was promoted while presently the provincial museum has been put back on the local governmental top agenda and a grand new modern provincial museum is under construction and soon to be opened. I would call this phenomenon "the regional museum dilemma", which means, when there is more than one major museum in one region, given resource limitation, there is some debate as to which museum to choose to develop as "the museum of the region"? In other words, which museum is to play the role as the representative of the region for which it will be endowed with the priority to enjoy local government support? This dilemma is more



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eminent in particular regions with particular distinctions. For example, both Yunnan and Guangxi could be identified by their diverse ethnicities, which have led to the ethnic museum becoming as crucial to the region as the authentic *regional* museum does.

This dilemma is limited to the museums that have a heavy dependence on governmental grace. In the case of Shaanxi, for example, Emperor Qin Shihuang's terracotta army holds a particular place in the economy and cultural makeup of the region. The Museum of Terracotta Army of Emperor Qin Shihuang is not caught up in this dilemma since the museum is at least partially financially independent and therefore not solely dependent on governmental support for further development.

The solution to this dilemma lies as always with resource limitations. If the regional governments expand the support to cover not only one museum, the dilemma disappears at the financial level but remains at the level of representation.

Director Wu argues that the recent funding in part comes from national moves "throughout the country" towards increased focus on culture: "Guangxi government is paying more and more attention on the cultural sector. They sense that museums are the appearance of the city. Our museum is located on the Ethnic Square, which is the front area of Nanning" (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). Director Wu's comments disclose the regional response to the national promotion on culture fuelled by the Party and governmental guidelines (see Chapter 3). He further notes that "only with the development of the public cultural facilities such as museums that 'the great prosperity of cultural development' called for in the Party Congress can be realized" (Ibid.).

In other words, the regional government's funding allocation is not only a return of focus to GZARM, but also an embrace of all museums for local cultural development, and local development in general. According to Wu, Guangxi government is considering to establish a series of museums to promote tourism including a museum of bronze drums, Nanning Art museum, Confucian Temple Museum and Guangxi Fine Art Gallery (Ibid.).

To embrace museums into local development seems to have become a national phenomenon in recent years in China, as we have also seen in other cases in this

thesis. “The appearance of the city” in Wu’s terms echoes what I have noted in previous chapters, for example, “an important platform of the local government”, “the indicator of the advancement of a country and a region” as in Chapter 4, or as in the case of Yunnan (Chapter 6) “a window to present publicly the cultures of Yunnan”, “an important instrument of the local government to present and sell Yunnan”.

The embrace of museums may also generate from the intention to develop local tourism, particular cultural tourism. The activities of Guangxi, a significant example of which is the China-ASEAN Expo held in Nanning each year, are likely to bring increased amount of tourists. The lack of natural tourist resources of Nanning makes, as Director Wu argues, “visiting museums the only choice” (Ibid.).

### **Exhibitions and Representations**

Previously in discussing the changes that the museum has experienced, I have briefly mentioned the changes to the permanent exhibitions. In this section I will start with a further look at these changes made to the permanent exhibitions with a main concern on the exhibition themes. Then, I will focus on the exhibition *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People* to take a close look at the representation of ethnic identities in GZARM.

**Change of the permanent exhibitions.** The earliest permanent exhibitions of the museum, based on a review of the museum’s history made by Qishan Huang (the former director of the museum), included the *Exhibition of Guangxi’s Revolutionary Relics over the Past Century* (*Guangxi Jinbainian Gemin Wenwu Zhan*), *Revolution History of Taiping Rebelling* (*Taiping Tianguo Geming Lishi Chenlie*), and one pertaining to bronze drums (Huang, 1994, pp. 90-91). Huang also notes that *Exhibition of Guangxi’s Revolutionary Relics over the Past Century* was revised into *Revolution History of Guangxi* (*Guangxi Geming Shi*) in 1959. He does not note the major differences between the two but did point out that the aim of the revision was to “celebrate the tenth anniversary of the PRC.” (Ibid.). It could be concluded, however, based on Director Wu’s recall that the revised exhibition was more focused on the revolutionary history from Xihai Revolution (1911) to the founding of the

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PRC (1949) (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). In other words, it was the revolution led by the CPC.

When the museum was moved to the newly built building (the current one) in 1978, according to Huang (1994), four permanent exhibitions were held in the new museums, three of which were of the same themes as the above mentioned three and the newly added one was pertaining to cultural relics excavated in Guangxi (p. 92). It is not hard to note that these early exhibitions were predominated by revolutionary themes. In other words, they were predominantly made up of a political nature.

These revolutionary or political colours seemed toned down after the thorough renovation to the permanent exhibitions in 1998. After the renovation, two exhibitions were held at the museum. One still centred on bronze drums, and the other was dedicated to the ethnic minority cultures of Guangxi entitled as *Exhibition of Guangxi Ethnic and Folk Customs (Guangxi Minzu Minsu Zhanlan)* (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). It seems that representation of ethnic diversity, instead of revolutions, became the main theme in the museum.

Bronze drums have always been a component of the museum's permanent exhibition themes. Still, however, the portion of bronze drums in the museum exhibition themes was increased.

Bronze drums, as argued by scholars such as Xiaorong Han (2004), are one of the most important archaeological artefacts to be found in southern China and Southeast Asia (p. 8). They are widely used by many of the local ethnic groups of these areas from pre-historic times to the present (p. 8). The Zhuang people, the biggest group in Guangxi, have also made extensive use of bronze drums. According to Jiang (1999), the two areas where the majority of bronze drums have been found are Southern China and Northern Vietnam. Within China, Guangxi and Yunnan have been particularly rich in finds of bronze drums (Ibid.). Chinese archaeologists such as You Wen (1957) even regards bronze drums as the most important ancient cultural relics of minority people in southern China.

There was a dispute between China and Vietnam regarding the origin of bronze drums in the later 1970s through the 1980s and till the early 1990s, which seemed not only an academic debate, but also, as Han (2004) argued, an issue related

to “nationalism and politics”. The origin of bronze drums, however, is not within the research scope of this thesis. What I would like to point out here is that bronze drums in present Guangxi have actually been regarded as an ethnic symbol. This point is agreed on by Kumchornmenakun, Yodmalee and Udomboonyanupap (2009) in their discussion on the Zhuang identity adaption in Guangxi.

The choice of bronze drums as a key exhibited content of the museum can be seen as a collection-driven decision as bronze drums are one major collection category of GZARM and research into bronze drums have been carried out extensively by the museum (H.-M. Wu, 1984; Huang, 1994). Their increased position in the museum with their iconic meaning as an ethnic symbol, however, also shows the inclusion of ethnic minority culture into the official representation of local identity of Guangxi, which could be seen as a reflection of the local and national governmental promotion of minority cultures.

The *Exhibition of Guangxi Ethnic and Folk Customs* was also a celebration of ethnic minority culture in the museum. According to Hui-Min Wu (1998), this exhibition presented the life and cultural features of the eleven ethnic minority groups of Guangxi, such as the brocade from the Zhuang, the architecture style of the Dong, and the various costumes from each group (p. 203). It can be seen that the Han was not included in the exhibition. That is to say, the word “ethnic” in the exhibition title was taken for granted to mean minority ethnicities. A line between the Han and the minority groups was somewhat implied. This situation was changed in the new Guangxi Ethnic Museum where the Han is treated as one of the ethnic groups of Guangxi, parallel to the minority groups (I will return to this later in the part of Guangxi Ethnic Museum).

Although this exhibition was developed in 1998, the presentation of ethnic cultures had been long planned and practiced before, which could be seen from the museum’s planning of the Ethnic Cultural Relics Garden. As noted previously, in 1988 the Ethnic Cultural Relics Garden (*Minzu Wenwuyuan*) was opened as an extension to the museum. This garden was actually planned when the museum was built in 1978. As Director Wu recalls, “When we built this museum in 1978, we got a land as big as 60 *mu* [1 *mu* = 666.66 square m]. The museum building occupies

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around 20 *mu*. The remaining 40 *mu* was designed as the extended part of the exhibition of ethnic and folk customs” (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). Apparently, the garden had been one decade delayed.

With its opening in December 1988, according to the introduction offered by Qishan Huang (1994), former director of the museum, copies of typical and traditional architectures of Guangxi’s ethnic minority groups were presented; traditional skills of these peoples such as sugar processing, paper making, and pottery making were displayed; traditional ethnic foods, were and still are, served; some celebration activities of traditional festivals of these groups are also held here (p. 93). Through this garden, visitors could “understand fully the production and life of ethnic minority peoples at one glance” (*dui shaoshu minzu qunzhong de shengchan shenghuo yimuliaoran*) (GZARM website, “minzu wenwuyuan”).

This Ethnic Cultural Relics Garden appears to me as a hybrid form of a museum and a tourist park. Director Wu’s comments regarding this garden have also such a reflection, as he notes, “The way to display through the ethnic garden was a kind of novelty at that time. It therefore attracted many visitors especially tourist groups. With this situation in mind, we took some measures particularly targeting at tourists so as to make more profit, for example, the ticket for the garden is higher than that for the museum” (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). Director Wu also notes a performing team in the garden: “We have a performing team who do shows four times a day at fixed time. The team also perform for the restaurant in the ethnic garden. The restaurant pays half of the salary and we pay half of the salary so as to keep the team working” (Ibid.). Regarding the management of this garden and their tourism-driven practices, Director Wu explains: “It is as a department of the museum and under the management of the museum. But it is more flexible in operating. For example, for the tourist groups, the price was a bit higher since it included some additional activities such as ethnic performance shows and ethnic foods tasting, so as to attract more visitors” (Ibid.).

The practice of GZARM to include this garden, on the one hand, could be seen as the museum’s exploration of new approaches to preserve and represent ethnic minority cultures. In a way, this ethnic garden is, I argue, like the primal or pre-form

of ecomuseums (I will discuss the topic of ecomuseums later in this chapter). On the other hand, it could also be seen as a trial to incorporate tourism into their practices.

The above two exhibitions – the bronze drums exhibition and the ethnic and folk customs exhibition were closed when most of the displayed objects were moved to Guangxi Ethnic Museum in 2008. GZARM then made two new exhibitions: *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People (Ou-Luo Yicui)*, and *Selected Porcelain Collections from the Ming and Qing Dynasty (Guancang Ming-Qing Ciqi Jingpin Zhan)*. *Selected Porcelain Collections from the Ming and Qing Dynasty* is mainly a display of the museum's porcelain collection and the representation is more art-emphasized, I will therefore focus on the exhibition *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People* in the following to analyze the diversity representation in this exhibition.

**Representation of diversity and unity: The exhibition of *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People*.** As noted in the introduction to the region, the Xi'ou and the Luoyue were two large ethnic groups inhabiting in the region of and around Guangxi over 2,000 years ago. This exhibition presents the Ou-Luo people's culture through three aspects: stone and jade, metal and porcelain and glasswares. These three aspects make up the three sections composing the exhibition.

The exhibition in part highlights the distinctiveness of these groups, as Director Wu notes: "We want to highlight the local ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. For example, many of our collected historical relics are unique to us "two-Guang" areas [Guangdong and Guangxi] and are not possible to find in the north, such as bronze drums, bronze barrels, stone spades with shoulders, and hand axes" (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

At the same time, the museum is careful to note similarities or the "cultural harmony" of the region: "For this exhibition [...] what we are mainly concerned with is the integration and development between the Han and the local ethnic groups. [...] So we focus on the characteristics of local ethnic groups, or say tribes, before the Qin period. Meanwhile, we also want to reflect the historical process of Emperor Qin's unifying over China, over *Lingnan* [including present Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan] so as to reflect the cultural exchanges and the integration of Chinese culture" (Ibid.).

The “exchange” and “integration” can be strongly felt through visiting the exhibition. Similarities, instead of the differences, between the two are in focus. To note the connections to the central plain is a general practice in the exhibition. For example, for the display of a bronze sword (see *Figure 44*), it is noted in the label that this model of sword was popular in the central part of China. In representing this cultural integration, however, the influence of the Han on the Ou-Luo people is more emphasised, as becomes clear through the texts throughout the exhibition. In the preface of the exhibition, for example, after noting the exchange between Ou-Luo and the Central Plain of China had long existed, it says:

In the exchanges, the Xi’ou and Luoyue gradually absorbed the cultural factors from the Central Plain of China, and enriched and developed their own ethnic cultures, hence becoming an important component of the splendid Chinese culture. (Exhibition texts.)

Originally in Chinese:

*Zai xianghu jiaoliu de guocheng zhong, xi’ou luoyue buduan xishou  
zhongyuan wenhua yinsu, fengfu he fazhan le ben minzu wenhua, zuizhong  
chengwei zhonghua minzu canlan wenhua de zhongyao zucheng bufen.*

In the section about the bronze wares, the introduction notes the Han migration since the Qin and Han times and pointed out, “Influenced by these advanced production technologies from the Central Plain of China, the bronze culture of Guangxi achieved prosperity (*Guangxi qingtong wenhua zai zhongyuan xianjin jishu yingxiang xia, zhujian jinru dingsheng shiqi*)” (Exhibition texts).



**Figure 44.** *The display of a sword excavated from the Xi'ou area. (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)*

It can be seen from these narratives that the Ou-Luo people are represented as *receivers* while the people of the Central Plain of China (the Han) *givers*. In addition to this representation of Han influence in general, in some places in the exhibition, the Han civilization is even represented as somewhat the *enlightenment* to the local. For example, with the display of the “bronze pot with iron feet” (see **Figure 45**) that was one piece of the vast iron excavations from the area of the Xi'ou people, the label explains that it indicates that the production technologies transferred from the central part of China to Guangxi was firstly popularized in Xi'ou area. The narrative is then followed by an argument that “The Xi'ou area therefore became the first area in the history of Guangxi that was *opened up* [my italics], and was also the first area that was integrated with the culture of the Central Plain of China” (*xi'ou jujudi youci chengwei Guangxi lishishang kaifa zuizao de diqu, ye chengwei zuizao yu zhongyuan wenhua ronghe de diqu*) (Exhibition texts). The phrase “opened up”, originally in Chinese as *kaifa*, which could also be translated as “to explore” or “to develop”, together with the other elements in the narrative in some sense, carries with it the image of an isolated people in need of civilization or enlightenment.





Figure 45. Bronze pot with iron feet. (Photo by author.)

Local characteristics are also noted in the exhibition sometimes in a tone that focuses more on cultural integration. For example, in presenting Ou-Luo bronze wares, two types of bronze wares distinctive to the local – the lacquered bronze wares and the engraved bronze wares – are introduced. The two types, however, are commented on as having “enriched and elaborated the bronze culture of the Mother land” (*fengfu he fanrong le zuguo de qingtong wenhua*) (Exhibition texts). Here it is important to note that the Ou-Luo were not only enriched by the culture of the “Mother land” but they *elaborated* it. In other words, there is some recognition of participation. Here the Ou-Luo and their artistic output are represented as something not just additional to *Chinese* culture or the culture of the *Mother land*, but also composite. A sense of unity is thereby produced.

With the emphasis on the Han influence and cultural integration – what is implied is a unity beyond diversity. The Ou-Luo are represented as having a different artistic form from the Han but their artistic output is emphasised as connected to the culture of the Central Plain of China and finally integral to *Chinese culture* – in line with current national policy of unity in diversity.

As noted, the Ou-Luo people were the ancestors of the present Guangxi people and the Ou-Luo culture is the historical form of the local culture of Guangxi. Through

the representation of the Ou-Luo culture as a “component of the splendid Chinese culture” – as stated in the preface, an implication is made that the local culture of Guangxi had been united in Chinese culture in history despite ethnic differences.

At the same time, regional difference remains emphasised by claims of uniqueness. The bronze drums, bronze spades with shoulders are seen to “highlight the local ethnic and cultural distinctiveness” to quote Director Wu once again (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). A balance is therefore negotiated between integration and distinctiveness.

**Future moves.** The current exhibitions in the museums are a temporary solution to fill the gap caused by part of the collections being moved to the Ethnic Museum. A full renovation of the museum’s exhibitions is on the way, as mentioned previously. According to Director Wu, after the renovation, the exhibition about Ou-Luo culture will remain but with some revision: instead of by themes, in the new version the displayed objects will be organized in an order more chronology-based as an attempt to present the history of the Guangxi (Ibid.).

The porcelain display will also remain. The added exhibition contents will include: The wars that Guangxi experienced due to its border location; the history of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) which was initiated from Guangxi; and the calligraphy and painting works collected by the museum (Ibid.). From this outline we can see that history and art will be the focus of the new exhibitions. This can be regarded as the museum’s adjustment of its position facing the fact that there is an ethnic museum existing in the same city and a few more new museums are soon to be established. In the director’s view, confronted with such circumstance, they must consider their work “in the general situation of museums in Guangxi” (Ibid.). Museum change is thus also about repositioning in relation to new museums as well as policy and finding a niche and a role that will attract funding and government approval.

The niche the director and his colleagues set for GZARM is “a comprehensive history and art museum” and their task is “to reflect the local historical development of Guangxi” (Ibid.).

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Regarding representing the history, the director has a concern about the different approaches that his museum, in a marginal region, may take, as he said, “telling the history of Guangxi cannot follow the conventional frame of telling history of China that starts from the Xia, Shang, Zhou, through the Qin, Han, to the Yuan, Ming, Qing. [...] Because Guangxi is located in the border area of China, in history, the central court had a relatively loose control over Guangxi” (Ibid.).

This special feature of Guangxi, according to the director, could be seen in the amount of bronze drums found in Guangxi: “You know why there were so many bronze drums in Guangxi? They were the symbol of power – ‘two or three bronze drums make the king’” (Ibid.). In other words, bronze drums not only represent the artistic output of the local people but also imply independence.

The relative marginal position – not only geographically but also politically – has led to few references to the region in the national mainstream historiographies. The director admits that they are not able to tell a full history of Guangxi due to lack of archaeological findings and studies and the according lack of collections for some historical periods. They will, therefore, “try to let the audience have some understanding about the history of Guangxi through some history fragments or historical periods” by “focusing on some key historical events” while “some aspects are avoided” (Ibid.).

What can be seen here is the allowance, and interest by the museum staff and their local funders, to narrate “Chinese history” with regional nuances. What can also be seen is a rising sense of regional identity, or regionalism, in museum representation. The emphasis on regional identity is more evident in the representation made in Guangxi Ethnic Museum, the focus of the next section.

## **Guangxi Ethnic Museum**

The discussion of Guangxi Ethnic Museum is structured slightly different from the previous ones. Due to the short history of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, the introduction to the museum is focused on the driving forces behind the establishment of the museum. The discussion of the exhibitions and representations of the museum

will be mainly concerned with issues of regional identity, diversity and unity, similar to the previous cases.

### **General Introduction**

Guangxi Ethnic Museum is located out of downtown Nanning near Mountain Qingxiu, a famous scenic spot of Nanning. The visitor coming to the museum is confronted with an astonishing piece of architecture shaped like a huge drum (see *Figure 46*). I have noted previously that bronze drums in present Guangxi have been chosen as an ethnic symbol. The drum-shaped museum architecture is a strong reflection of the symbolic role of drums to Guangxi. Similar to GZARM, the museum also has an ethnic garden attached to it that was still under construction during my visit. The aim of the garden is to present ethnic architectures and provide live performances, according to Xuejian Nong, Head of Research and Development Department of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, formerly Head of Exhibition Department of GZARM, who has also participated the establishing of Guangxi Ethnic Museum from the start (X. Nong, personal communication, February 17, 2009).



**Figure 46. Guangxi Ethnic Museum building.** (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

As noted, Guangxi Ethnic Museum is quite young. It was formally opened to the public in May 2009 but the project started much earlier in 2001 on the initiation

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of the regional government (Guangxi Ethnic Museum, 2009a). The regional government of Guangxi is also the major funding supplier to the museum's construction project. According to Zhidong Mo, Vice Director of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, of the total 230 million input, 150 million were from the regional government and 80 million from the central government (Z. Mo, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

The decision to establish this museum can be related to a number of issues including cultural salvage, regional development, national environment and discipline development.

**Cultural salvage.** Xuejian Nong points to cultural salvage as the first major driving force of the establishment of the museum, as he notes, "We feel that, particularly since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the development of the times, the extinguishing of traditional ethnic culture has become increasingly serious. Under this circumstance, we feel that to have an ethnic museum will be helpful" (personal communication, February 17, 2009). This concern or intention seems to lie not only within the discipline but also from the regional government who, according to Zhidong Mo, thinks "it was very necessary to have a museum specializing in ethnic culture protection" (Z. Mo, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

The concern with the demise of ethnic cultures in minority areas is echoed in Nong's comments on the populace of the Han culture in the Zhuang areas, "But now the Han culture is quite popular in the Zhuang areas. Generally all the young people of the Zhuang group can speak the Han language" (X. Nong, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

To salvage ethnic culture, however, could also be done through the existing museums without necessarily having a new museum established. In fact, GZARUM, as Nong notes, has also taken "studying, protecting and presenting ethnic cultures" as one of its major tasks (Ibid.). It then elicits the issue of the niche of a museum.

**Niche of the museum.** Xuejian Nong, who had been working in GZARM for two decades was the Head of Exhibition Department of GZARM before transferring to the current museum, explains, "Through so many years of practice, we feel that the function of a comprehensive museum is limited in dealing with ethnic cultures. So we

need a museum specializing in ethnic cultures” (Ibid.). The Director of GZARM Weifeng Wu has emphasized the position of GAZRM as a comprehensive museum while Guangxi Ethnic Museum is positioned as a themed one (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009; see also the previous part). Weifeng Wu has argued that as a comprehensive museum they are supposed to reflect the historical development of Guangxi (Ibid.). This would then bring a possible challenge regarding representing contemporary minority cultures alongside exhibitions of ancient artefacts such as fossils and rocks. While this reason was not clearly stated as part of the reasons for the establishment of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, the “freezing” of cultures is a problem facing all museums presenting ethnic minorities. Katherine Goodnow (2006), for example, has studied the political debates over the representation of indigenous populations in Australia’s and South Africa’s museums.

**Regional development.** As previously noted, the regional government was not only an initiator but also the major funder to Guangxi Ethnic Museum. In addition, the regional government also positioned this project on top of its agenda from 2003 and listed the construction of Guangxi Ethnic Museum as the key project of the public cultural facilities construction of Guangxi, and the key project of the grand celebration for the region’s fiftieth anniversary (Guangxi Ethnic Museum, 2009b). In other words, the regional government has included this museum project into its strategy for local development, which can be seen from the following three aspects.

**Urban planning.** The regional governmental intention to use the museum as an instrument, or part of the instrument, to boost local development seems evident, which could firstly be seen from the location selection for the museum. As noted in the beginning of this part, the museum is located near one of Nanning’s scenic spots Mount Qingxiu, far from downtown Nanning. Mount Qingxiu had been a famous summer resort in history and remains a tourist resort today. While noting the difficulty to find an area in downtown Nanning big enough to hold the museum, Xuejian Nong also notes that the area around the museum is going to be developed into a “cultural zone” (X. Nong, personal communication, February 17, 2009). It is actually not only a cultural zone, but a sub-downtown, as Mo notes, “In a few years, a new sub-downtown will come into being here. High rises will appear” (Z. Mo,

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personal communication, February 17, 2009). The facilities to be built around the museum will include Guangxi Art Museum, Museum of Confucian Temple, an art centre and a sport stadium (Ibid.). The museum, in other words, was the first on the scene and its local community will be brought in later.

To include the museum into local urban planning is not peculiar to Guangxi. A similar case has been seen in Yunnan that the new Yunnan Provincial Museum was built in a newly developed *cultural zone*.

**Official presentation.** I have noted in the discussion of GZARM that regional museums are tended to be taken as an official window for the local government to present the region to the outside. A manifestation of this role took place when GZARM was renovated as part of the official celebrations of the region's political status as an ethnic autonomous region. This role as an official presentation was transferred to Guangxi Ethnic Museum after its establishment. During the region's fifty years anniversary Guangxi Ethnic Museum was one of the main sites to hold the celebration activities and received a delegation from the central government even though it was not yet opened at the time (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

The will to "catch up" with other regions may also have contributed to the government's decision to have the ethnic museum established. Nong, for example, noted in his discussion of early planning of the museum that ethnic museums had been established in regions such as Yunnan, Hainan and Heilongjiang (personal communication, February 17, 2009). That is to say, regions of similar characteristics – ethnic diversity – as Guangxi had already got their own ethnic museums. This development in a way set a challenge to Guangxi. In this regard, to create a separate museum specially dedicated to ethnic cultures instead of mixing this part with other themes in the comprehensive museum is a way to meet this challenge or competition from the fellow regions. In this sense, the new museum has been regarded as an official presentation of the region's comparative power.

**Diplomatic role.** The museum being included into the regional development is also reflected in the diplomatic role it was assigned during the participation of Guangxi in China-ASEAN relationship-building. I have noted in the first part of this

chapter that Guangxi has been chosen as a pioneer or an activist in China's campaign to develop relations with ASEAN countries, one result of which is the annual China-ASEAN Expo being held in Nanning. While the first of the two major functions Guangxi Ethnic Museum has been set with is "to present ethnic cultures of Guangxi", the second is "to present cultural exchange between China and ASEAN countries", which, as the Vice Director says, "is kind of at the national level" (Mo, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

In the new museum, two large halls are assigned to the gallery of China-ASEAN. Both were still under development during my visit in February 2009. According to Zhidong Mo, upon completion the gallery is to include two major parts: One is used to archive and show all the previous China-ASEAN Expos particularly through multimedia methods; the other part is to present the culture of the host country of each China-ASEAN Expo which is altered each year (Ibid.). At the time of my visit (February 2009), this section of the gallery was used to display of gifts from ASEAN countries to Chinese government and the local governments of Guangxi and Nanning as well as the social associations. It is unclear whether the decision to assign these huge spaces was the initiative of a museum-only planning group or whether this was the result of negotiations with the provincial government. Either way, it shows a close relationship and reaction to central and provincial politics. A further indication of this is the fact that part of the exhibits – those gifts sent by ASEAN countries to the Chinese government – are on loan from the Friendship Museum, a museum which is, as emphasized by Mo, "under the administration of the central government" (Ibid.).

**Policy environment.** By emphasizing the initiative role of the regional government in the creation of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, Zhidong Mo ties the initiation to a regional policy document: *Regulations on Safeguarding Ethnic and Folk Traditional Cultures of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region* (Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu Minzu Minjian Chuantong Wenhua Bohu Tiaoli), issued in 2005 (Guangxi Regional Government, 2005). Mo also notes that the *Regulations* have been taken as a primary reference in the formulation of the *Law of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China (draft)* (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan Fa (Cao'an)*) (The National People's Congress of the P. R.



C., 2010). Guangxi is not alone in making regional regulations regarding local ethnic and folk cultures. Similar action has been seen gradually since 2000 in regions such as Yunnan, Guizhou, Fujian, Ningxia, and Xinjiang, many of which have diverse ethnicities other than the Han.<sup>27</sup> These regional actions are indicative of a policy trend in promoting local ethnic and folk cultures emerging from the beginning of this century. The creation of Guangxi Ethnic Museum can be placed within this trend.

In addition to this policy environment directly related to ethnic cultures, the establishment of this new museum, and other museums in the city, can finally be related to the local economy which developed to a large extent not only due to the Reform and Opening-up behind the ASEAN collaboration but also to the earlier policy of Developing-the-West. This is confirmed also by Weifeng Wu: “The policy of Developing-the-West is focused on economic development. [...] The establishment of Guangxi Ethnic Museum could [however,] be regarded as a product of the influence from Developing-the-West. The developing economy makes it even more important to protect, carry forward and disseminate ethnic cultures” (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

### **Exhibitions and Representations**

There are currently two permanent exhibitions held in Guangxi Ethnic Museum: One is about bronze drums entitled *Drumbeats Reverberating through Time and Space: Bronze Drum Culture (Chuanyue Shikong de Gushing: Tonggu Wenhua)*, and the other is about the ethnic cultures entitled *Guangxi, a Land of Colourful Ethnic Cultures (Wucai Bagui)*.<sup>28</sup> In this section I will take a close look at the two exhibitions respectively.

As noted previously, bronze drums and ethnic cultures were formally two permanent exhibitions of GZARM before the handover to the ethnic museum. According to Xuejian Nong, 90% of the collections of the new ethnic museum are

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<sup>27</sup> All these regional regulation documentations are available from the web *The Intangible Cultural Heritage in China* under the item “Regional Documentations” at [http://www.ihchina.cn/inc/faguiwenjian.jsp?submenu=13\\_01\\_03](http://www.ihchina.cn/inc/faguiwenjian.jsp?submenu=13_01_03)

<sup>28</sup> The English titles are offered by the museum.

transferred from GZARM including the entire bronze drums collections (X. Nong, personal communication, February 17, 2009). So the current two exhibitions in Guangxi Ethnic Museum could be seen as the second design or the re-telling of stories from the old exhibitions. Due to little access to the materials about the removed exhibitions in GZARM, it is not possible to make a full comparison of the old and new versions of the two exhibitions. Some comparisons, however, have been gleaned from my interviews that will be noted at intervals in my following discussions.

**The exhibition of *Bronze Drum Culture*.** This exhibition is very impressive in the sense of the large quantity and wide variety of the displayed bronze drums, particularly the astonishing sizes of some drums including the so called “King of Bronze Drum”, which is 165 cm in diameter and 300 kg in weight and is displayed spaciously (*Figure 47*). As noted previously, Guangxi has been well known for its big storage of bronze drums. Bronze drums had been a solid part of exhibition contents in GZARM. Now it is even promoted as one of the two exhibition themes in a newly built museum specialized in ethnic cultures. What seems to be implied is that bronze drums are the region’s pride and the intention is to promote this pride. In other words, the museum (or the regional government) intends to strengthen the regional identity through bronze drums. This is done in the exhibition by emphasizing two points: The peculiarity and continuity of bronze drums; and the close connection of Guangxi to bronze drums. The impression of the close connection of Guangxi to bronze drums may have been left in the visitor’s mind at the first glance when he or she comes to the museum confronted with the huge drum-shaped museum building. In the exhibition, such connection is also made through texts introducing Guangxi as “the land of bronze drums” (*tonggu zhixiang*), “the base camp of bronze drums” (*tonggu dabenyang*), and “one of the major distributing areas of ancient bronze drums” (*gudai tonggu de zhuyao fenbu diqu zhiyi*). In the following I will analyze how the peculiarity and continuity of bronze drum culture are represented in the exhibition.



Figure 47. *King of Bronze Drum*. (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

**Peculiarity.** The peculiarity of bronze drums is partly approached through the toning down of the influence from other cultures, particularly the Han. Throughout the exhibition, the influence from other cultures, particularly the Han, is rarely mentioned. The lack of commentary is in contrast to the focus on integration in the exhibition *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People* in GZARM. The only place I can find among all the texts of the exhibition noting the Han influence is in the introduction of the second section “The Journey of Bronze Drums” (*Tonggu Zhilu*), which states: “Although bronze drums are distinctive to ancient southern ethnic groups, they were also influenced by the Han culture in the Central Plain of China” (*Tonggu suiran shi gudai nanfang minzu teyoude qiwu, dan ye shoudao zhongyuan han wenhua de yingxiang*) (Exhibition texts). This indicates the existence of Han influence to the drum culture of Guangxi. The following presentation, however, doesn’t offer further illustration to present such influence. For example, in the subsection introducing the casting techniques of bronze drums, the introductory texts comments that these bronze drums “fully show the intelligence, wisdom and great historical contributions of the ancient ethnic groups in southern China” (*chongfen tixian le woguo nanfang gudai minzu de congming caizhi he weida de lishi gongxian*) (Exhibition texts). The influence on casting technologies from the central part of

China is not voiced at all. This is quite a difference from the exhibition *The Heritage and Essence of the Ou-Luo People* in GZARM, where the influence of the “advanced production technologies from the Central Plain of China” is repeatedly mentioned in presenting the metal wares including the bronze wares in the ancient Guangxi (see previous section).

**Continuity.** The representation of the continuity of bronze culture is made mainly by making links between historical bronze drum culture and the present life of minority people who are still using bronze drums. Such links are provided both at the start and the end of the exhibition. In the first section called “Drumbeats in Mountain Villages” (*Shanzhai tonggu sheng*), the ethnic groups of Guangxi who are still using bronze drums and their particular ways of using drums – for example, the Zhuang group using bronze drums in their traditional Frog Festival (*Maguaijie*) (see **Figure 48**), the traditional bronze drum dance of the Yi group, the special performing way of the Yao group, and the custom to use bronze drums for both happy occasions and funerals of the Miao group – are respectively presented.



**Figure 48.** A replicated scenario of the Zhuang people using bronze drums in their traditional Frog Festival at the present time. (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

Following this is a section called “The Journey of Bronze Drums” (*Tonggu Zhilu*), in which the two thousand year long history of bronze drums is introduced.

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The section also includes a sub-section particularly dedicated to the ancient bronze drums of Guangxi, in which the continuous two thousand year long history of bronze drums in Guangxi is emphasized, as clear in the introductory texts: “from the early Warring States period in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. to the later Qing Dynasty in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the casting and using of bronze drums in Guangxi area continued for over 2000 years” (Exhibition texts [in English]).

This historical section is followed by the last section of the exhibition called “Contemporary Transmitting and Developing of Bronze Drum Arts” (*Dangdai Tonggu Yishu de Chuancheng he Fazhan*) in which the contemporary applications of bronze drums in areas are presented – such as celebrations and ceremonies or stage arts.

Through this contemporary – historical – contemporary structural line, a historical continuity of bronze drum culture of Guangxi is created. This ties a proposed historical “glory” to today’s Guangxi. In other words, the representation of the regional identity of Guangxi is achieved through the exhibition of bronze drums. Creating links between past and present communities, however, is fraught with tension in that these links may be interpreted as showing that people have not “developed” but remain caught in past ways of life.

The contemporary political view of their lifestyles is not in line with that of the early PRC with its categorising of ethnic lifestyles along a trajectory from primitive to developed. Instead, in line with current political thinking, their diversity or the cultural aspects of their lifestyles, at least, are now seen as adding further “colour” to a united national identity. They are, in the current correct terms used by Mo, the “wisdoms” of the ethnic populations (Z. Mo, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

**The exhibition of *Guangxi, a Land of Colourful Ethnic Cultures*.** As the title suggests, the general representation emerging from the exhibition does create a *colourful* impression. Such colourful impression lies in two levels. First is the visible level, which may hit the visitor first. Objects such as costumes and paintings essentially have colourful features. Real-sized objects and figures are presented composing the scenarios of different aspects of daily life of different ethnic groups

such as cooking, raising animals, fishing, and running retail shops. Festivals and ritual ceremonies such as weddings and new-year celebrations are one major part of the exhibition content. These themes tend to create a colourful image. The visitor of this exhibition is very likely to feel that they are positioned in the real life of the local people.

Behind these colourful visions that the visitor can directly receive upon visiting is *diversity*, the other level of the colourful implied by the first level. The presented diverse life styles, arts, traditions and customs, and so on suggest, rather than document or categorise, the diversity in Guangxi.

This diversity, however, is represented in the exhibition more as cultural phenomenon instead of an ethnic one if it is at all possible to separate the two. This presentation of objects as divorced from specific ethnic groups is not limited to this exhibition but to the exhibitions of Guangxi Ethnic Museum in general. For Zhidong Mo, for example, the bronze drums used by various ethnic groups is a “cultural phenomenon” and they exhibit bronze drums “just to show this cultural phenomenon of Guangxi, not the ethnic groups who are using them” (personal communication, February 17, 2009). This cultural perspective is well reflected in the exhibition of *Guangxi, a Land of Colourful Ethnic Cultures*. Boundaries between ethnic groups are deliberately softened or blurred. Similarities between ethnic groups rather than differences are emphasized.

***Cultural similarities rather than ethnic boundaries.*** In the exhibition, in other words, ethnic groups are not presented one by one, but take part in common themes. The whole exhibition is divided into four major sections respectively dedicated to four themes: the ways of living, costumes and ornaments, fine arts, and folk customs. Under a common theme the different phenomena of different ethnic groups are presented. This organization is understandable presenting ethnic groups one by one is more easily to lead to unequal treatments. This concern is acknowledged by the Vice Director Zhidong Mo who explains that the reason for them to choose this “cultural themes” approach is “to avoid problems such as: What position to stand to tell the story? What groups to be highlighted and what groups to be shadowed? We try to avoid ethnic discrimination” (Ibid.). Mo’s argument is echoed by Xuejian Nong who

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has been in chief charge of the content design of the exhibition. While noting that there would be not enough space if presenting the twelve ethnic groups of Guangxi one by one since “each group has its own culture”, Nong explains that the cultural theme approach also avoids the problem of “big group versus small group” (personal communication, February 17, 2009). Nong further argues that “it is through these themes that we try to reflect the broad cultural background of Guangxi” (Ibid.).

By organizing the exhibition by cultural themes, the sense of ethnic boundaries is accordingly toned down. Instead, connections and similarities of different groups rather than separations and differentiations tend to be sought. Evidence of this is easy to find. Let me take the first section of the exhibition “Home” (*Jiayuan*) as an example.

This section is dedicated to show different living ways of people in Guangxi. As introduced through the panel texts in the beginning of the section, Guangxi has diverse geographic forms and each of the ethnic groups of Guangxi has formed their own ways of living in line with the different geographical conditions and respective ethnic traditions. The exhibition does not follow a regular way categorising each group and their distinctive ways of life but focuses on broad “types” of ways of living. From these diverse ways of living, it generalizes four typical types, with each category as an individual sub-sections, respectively entitled as “Mountain Life” (*Shandi Shenghuo*), “Rustic Smoke” (*Tianyuan Chuiyan*), “Boat Dweller” (*Shuishang Renjia*) and “County Fairs and Market Towns” (*Xuzhen Maoyi*).

The concept of group boundary is therefore blurred in the sense that people of the same group may have different living ways. For example, there are Han people living in mountain areas while there are also Han people living in flatlands. The same case is with the Zhuang and Dong groups. That is to say, overlaps exist between ethnic groups and types of ways of living. In the exhibition, it is only noted at the beginning of each sub-section through panel texts as to which groups used to follow this way of living. In the illustrations of the architectures or productions tools of one certain type of living way, there are no specific instruction pointing out which group the displayed objects is belong to. For example, **Figure 49** and **50** shows the life-sized reproduction of one of the common house styles and the production tools of

people living in flatlands, displayed in the sub-section “Rustic Smoke”. It does not specify which group this house and the tools are of although one of the photographs hanging on the wall (the leftist in **Figure 50**) is about the Zhuang people feeding a cow in their Cow Soul Festival (*Niuhuijie*), according to the caption. The visitor may thereby assume that this house is of the Zhuang group.



**Figure 49.** *One of the common house style of people living in flatlands.* (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)





Figure 50. *The production tools displayed out of the house.* (Photo by Emily Goodnow Bjaalid.)

The approach to emphasize similarities rather than differences of the different groups is affirmed by Zhidong Mo. Mo also adds that “even more emphasized is their wisdom” (personal communication, February 17, 2009). In other words, ethnic cultural differences have been represented in the unitary theme of “wisdom”. The boundaries between ethnic groups are accordingly less sensed.

***Treatment of the Han and the Zhuang.*** The intention to soften the boundaries between groups is also reflected in the Han-inclusion. As noted previously, one of the major differences between this exhibition and its precursor in GZARM is that the Han is also included amongst all the ethnic groups of Guangxi. No special treatment is made to remind the visitor of its “majority” position. For example, in representing the different ways of living in Guangxi, the Han is presented in the category of people living in flatlands, together with the Zhuang and the Dong who share the same living style. In presenting the fine arts of Guangxi, the skin painting from the Han group is introduced accompanied by the other art forms such as the peasant painting of the Dong group, the paper cutting of the Zhuang group and the religious painting from the Yao group. The representation of the Han group as at the same level is a sign symbolising equality rather than as benefactors bringing enlightenment to ethnic minorities.

Cautiousness, however, can still be seen in the treatment of the Han-inclusion. For example, in the beginning of the exhibition, brief introductions about the 12 major groups of Guangxi are offered through twelve panels on the wall. They are in a descending order according to the population except for the Han group. The Han population is the biggest in Guangxi. However it is set in the second position while the Zhuang whose population is the second largest is positioned first. An avoidance to unintentionally make a *Han-dominance* representation is obvious, which echoes the museum's concern noted by Xuejian Nong of "big group versus small group", as noted previously.

Similarly to the caution used with regards to Han-inclusion is the dilution of the representation of the Zhuang as the major minority group in Guangxi. Guangxi is, as noted, defined as the Zhuang Autonomous Region. In fact, according to Zhidong Mo in my first interview with him in 2007, the initial idea was to establish a Zhuang Ethnic Museum in Guangxi instead of the current one (personal communication, July 2007). This idea was rejected by the regional government because, as Mo quotes Zhaozhuo Li, Chairman of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, "Guangxi can not only make [a museum] for the Zhuang. Guangxi has diverse ethnic groups. What should be highlighted is the spirit of ethnic unification and cooperation" (Mo, personal communication, July 3, 2007).

This stress on the equal treatment of all the ethnic groups is reflected in the exhibition. Without pre-knowledge, it is not easy for the visitor to form the opinion that the Zhuang is the dominating minority group of Guangxi, or that Guangxi is the "Zhuang" autonomous region. Direct narration of Zhuang's major position in Guangxi is hardly found. Even in the introduction to Guangxi's general ethnic situation, there is only one sentence referring to the 33% percentage that the Zhuang people take in Guangxi's total population. The visitor may assume, based on this seemingly high percentage, that the Zhuang is the biggest minority group of Guangxi. For the representation on specific themes in the rest of the exhibition, the Zhuang receives exactly the same treatment as the other groups.

Interesting also is the fact that the Zhuang language has not been included in the texts within the museum. The reason for this, given by Mo, is that the language

was at least initially only an “oral language” though there were “ancient Zhuang characters” used at some point of time in history. In the 1950’s a written version of the language was developed with the support of the Soviet Union to ensure “the equality of ethnic groups” (X. Nong, personal communication, February 17, 2009). This written language has recently been much more broadly promoted, as Nong says, “Now, we have the Zhuang language newspapers and magazines. In each county where the Zhuang people live, there is a Zhuang language school” (Ibid.).

The decision to not include the language instead is most likely to first of all keep down the number of languages needed to be included. (English is included for international guests with the ASEAN link, Mandarin for domestic tourists). Secondly it is perhaps also related to the above-mentioned avoidance of giving too much emphasis to the Zhuang. Mandarin is the common language for ethnic minorities in the region, including the Zhuang. According to Nong, “Generally all the young people of the Zhuang group can speak the Han language because from the elementary school to middle school they have the full access to the Han language” (Ibid.). So while Han “culture” is treated equally in the museum as a colorful predominantly rural way of life, their language is privileged as the national language.

Not all the ethnic minorities have a fully fledged language – an issue that arises also in relation to the ecomuseums developed in relation to the Guangxi Ethnic Museum.

**Harmony.** To represent the diversity through cultural entries instead of ethnic entries, to highlight the similarities rather than differences of these groups, and to avoid the sense of separation between groups could be interpreted as the museum’s intention to create a harmonious ethnic atmosphere. Just as the preface of the exhibition says:

In the long span of history, various ethnic cultures have been coexisting and developing in Guangxi. While having their own characteristics, they are also exchanging and integrating and advancing in harmony. (Exhibition texts)

Originally in Chinese:

*Zai lishi de changhe zhong, Guangxi geminzu wenhua bingcun fazhan, geju tese, tongshi ye xianghu jiaoliu ronghe, hexie gongsheng.*

This narration and representational strategy is well in line with the current Chinese policy of promoting social harmony and ethnic unification. The photograph showing the celebration of the establishment of the Zhuang Autonomous Region in 1958 (see **Figure 51**) displayed at the start of this exhibition offers a clear visual example of this policy.



**Figure 51.** A photograph displayed at the start of the exhibition. The caption says: All the ethnic groups celebrate the establishment of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. (Photo by author.)

### **Ecomuseum Practices: “1+10 Model”**

In terms of museum practices and development, Guangxi has recently become well known for its innovative practice in ecomuseums. To study the ecomuseum practices in Guangxi Ethnic Museum, a background knowledge about ecomuseums and the practices in China is needed.

**Ecomuseums and the practices in China.** The emergence and development of ecomuseums was in line with the museological moves of “community museology” or “the integrated museum”, and more broadly, “the postmodern new museology” (Davis, 2000; see also Boylan, 1992). While the term *ecomuseum* was coined by Hugues de Varine in 1971 (de Varine, 1985), the definition and concept of ecomuseums have been discussed and moulded since its birth (Davis, 1999; 2005;

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2008). Rene Rivard (1988) provided one approach to define ecomuseums (= territory + heritage + memory + population) in 1988 by comparing them to traditional museums (= building + collections + experts + public). Peter Davis (2007) has, in one of his recent works, regarded the ecomuseum as “a community-driven museum or heritage project that aids sustainable development” (p. 199). At the same time Davis (2008) also concedes that the ecomuseum is “a flexible concept” with “limitless diversity” (p. 402).

In the international conference “Communication and Exploration” held in Liuzhi, Guizhou Province of China in 1995 which gathered many of the major figures within the field worldwide, some principles – called *Liuzhi Principles* – regarding ecomuseums were summed up by the participants. One of the principles states, “There is no bible for ecomuseums. They will all be different according to the specific culture and situation of the society they present” (Su, Zhang, Davis, Varine & Maggi, 2005).

Ecomuseums today have been broadly practiced and also studied worldwide (Maggi & Falletti, 2000; Amareswar, 2002; Rivard, 2009; Mieri, Freidenberg, Tracey & Qin, 2007).

In China, the ecomuseum is specially dedicated to minority ethnic groups and closely related to the government’s attempts to promote the local economic and social development in the minority regions. According to Donghai Su (2008), one of the initiators and activists of Chinese ecomuseums, ecomuseum practice in China started late in the 1990s through a cooperation project between China and Norway. The project resulted in a set of ecomuseums established in rural areas of Guizhou (Ibid.).

Regarding the context of China to adopt the concept and practices of ecomuseum at the time, Su notes the driving from two aspects. One is the museum development in China in general started in the 1980s: “This was amid a period of revival in the fortunes of China’s museums” (Ibid., p. 34) – a trend I have also noted in Chapter 3. This also elicited the other driving sources from within the discipline, as Su puts it: “the growth of new museological ideas” (Ibid.).

To preserve and even salvage the traditions and cultures of indigenous people seemed to be the primary concern in the establishment of the early Chinese

ecomuseums, as Donghai Su (2005) notes: “These extraordinary cultures could become extinct if their peoples are assimilated into mainstream civilization. Therefore it is an urgent task in China to help residents of the ecomuseums to have the essence of their traditions and cultures preserved and recorded” (p. 2). Poverty relief, however, did appear to be an active factor since these indigenous peoples “at the time were seeking to break the bonds of poverty” (Su, 2008, p. 35). So in the practice of the establishment of the first ecomuseums in Guizhou, constructions of roads and water and electricity supplies were given the priority in the use of the funds (Ibid.).

Following Guizhou, a series of ecomuseums have been built in various regions in China including Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, as well as Guangxi (Pan, 2007).

**The Guangxi model: “1+10”.** Guangxi’s practice in ecomuseums, known as the “1+10 Model”, reflects and contributes to the diverse nature of ecomuseums. According to Zhidong Mo, “1” stands for Guangxi Ethnic Museum and “10” refers to the ten ecomuseums in different ethnic areas of Guangxi (personal communication, February 17, 2009). The ten ecomuseums function as the workstations and research bases of Guangxi Ethnic Museum (Ibid.). The “1+10”, Mo argues, “implies a relationship between the expertise support from our museum and the local participation including the local governments of every level and the local residents” (Ibid.).

The ecomuseum project of Guangxi, however, was not originally designed to be tied with the practice of Guangxi Ethnic Museum. According to Pu Qin (2007), Chief of Guangxi Cultural Bureau and also Director of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, Guangxi’s ecomuseum construction started in 2002, when a delegation team composed of party and government officials, including those in charge of cultural affairs from certain counties and prefectures, was sent by Guangxi Cultural Bureau to Guizhou to study and investigate the ecomuseum practices. The primary purpose was to “cope in all aspects with the pressing situation of relics and traditional culture salvage and preservation” (*duofangmian yingdui wenwu qiangqiuxing baohu he chuantong minzu wenhua baohu de poqie jumian*) (Ibid., p. 351). A major concern of them was to find an ecomuseum model which “fits the factual situation of Guangxi as

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well as bearing ‘Chinese characteristics’” (*ji “zhongguo tese” you shihe Guangxi quqing*) (Ibid., p. 351).

From 2003 to 2005, three ecomuseums – Nandan Lihu Baikuyao Ecomuseum, Sanjiang Dong Ecomuseum and Jiuzhou Zhuang Ecomuseum – were established as a trial, based on which, the “1+10 Model” that tied the Ethnic Museum and the ecomuseums together was formed (Ibid.).

It can be seen that the initiation to bring ecomuseum practices to Guangxi came from the regional governmental level instead of generating from within the discipline. The museum, however, through its staff, have driven the project and supported the common goal of ecomuseums and the regional Ethnic Museum in cultural salvage and preservation (cultural salvage as one of the motivations to the establishment of Guangxi Ethnic Museum has been noted in the previous section). The regional government during the process has been crucial by providing funds but also by coordinating with administrative entities throughout the region.

The main difference between the ecomuseum practice of Guangxi and those of the other regions such as Guizhou and Yunnan, according to Zhidong Mo, is “sustainability” (personal communication, February 17, 2009). Such sustainability is guaranteed by the participation of Guangxi Ethnic Museum, as Mo describes, “We, a museum specializing in ethnic cultures, hold a long-term relationship with the ecomuseums. We take the ecomuseums as our working stations. So it is sustainable” (Ibid.). Mo’s view is in accordance with Weifeng Wu’s, who has also participated in implementing the ecomuseum project of Guangxi. Wu notes also the financial support from the Ethnic Museum as well as knowledge dissemination: “They [ecomuseums in Guangxi] are receiving continuous financial support and expertise guidance from the Ethnic Museum, which Yunnan and Guizhou are not able to do” (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009).

Sustainability has been included into Davis’s (2007) criteria for evaluating a successful ecomuseum project. Sustainability remains, according to both Wu and Mo, the major problem the ecomuseums in other regions confronted with.

Mo describes, “After these ecomuseums were established, only some staffs remained working there. It seemed that their main job was to open the museum doors

every day. The experts in charge of establishing these museums came once and left when the museums were established” (Z. Mo, personal communication, February 17, 2009).

Mo’s comment reflects my experience in Yunnan. In December 2005, I visited Baka-Jinuo Cultural Eco-village (*Baka Jinuozu Wenhua Shengtaicun*) in Yunnan. Baka is the name of the local village and the residents are Jinuo people. Although “cultural eco-villages” is not the same as “eco-museums” by name, they, as argued by Shouyong Pan (2007), “are ecomuseums by nature” (*qi xingzhi jiushi shengtai bowuguan*) (p. 338). The Jinuo Museum, housed in an architecture formed in the traditional Jinuo house structure, was set up as part of the eco-village project. I was surprised to find that the door of the museum was locked. Through the help of some villagers, I found Zimu La, the caretaker of the museum, who was busy building a house. After knowing my intention to visit the museum, Zimu La gave me the key to the museum and let me open the museum by myself. Through my chatting with him, I learned that the local villagers seemed have regarded the eco-village as a tourist resort and had been expecting tourists to come. Zimu La even asked me to publicize their village. “No people come,” he says.

Here comes a dilemma which seems to having confronted ecomuseums in general rather than being peculiar to China: The relationship between ecomuseums and cultural tourism. As noted previously in the establishment of the first ecomuseums in China, poverty relief also played a role. The *Liuzhi Principles*, noted previously, also states that “social development is a prerequisite for establishing ecomuseums in living societies” (Su et al., 2005). To improve the local people’s living condition, tourism could be an option. In his article *Ecomuseums and the Democratization of Cultural Tourism*, Peter Davis (2005) has argued that

Ecomuseum philosophy and theory suggests that this postmodern museological phenomenon should ensure the sustainable use of cultural and natural resources, and sustain the communities that are responsible for them [...] for most of them [local communities] the rewards come from establishing strong links between ecomuseums and regeneration agendas through enhanced tourist numbers (p. 45).



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Zhidong Mo, however, views tourism as counteracting with other goals of ecomuseums, as he notes: “Tourism is just for tourism. [...] In terms of sustainable development, we should get the point that the purpose of ecomuseums is not to improve the life standard of the local people through tourism. More important is for the safeguarding and developing of ethnic cultures, especially when they are confronted with modernization” (personal communication, February 17, 2009).

Mo’s opinion may represent part of the voices from within the discipline. It may also be confronted with pressure from other stakeholders of the ecomuseums such as the local government, the local community and even the local residents. The tension and compatibility of ecomuseums and tourism is still likely to exist but in line with the *Liuzhi Principles*, “when there is a conflict between tourism and preservation of culture, the latter must be given priority” (Su et al., 2005).

It would be interesting to see how this dilemma is coped with and how the stakeholders of ecomuseums negotiate during Guangxi Ethnic Museum’s “1+10 Model”. However, as the project is still new and under development, no actual results are available yet.

The networking approach of the “1+10 Model” which includes a leading museum (Guangxi Ethnic Museum) and a set of local museums seem to have inspired or influenced operations in other museums. For example, the National Ethnic Museum of China has initiated their practice of cooperating with local governments to build ecomuseums in local villages and with the Xijiang Qianhumiao zhai Ecomuseum established in a village of the Miao people in Guizhou (Wei, 2007). A national museum to start ecomuseum practice in indigenous ethnic areas in a way also reflects the broader change in attitude to minority culture from views of a people to be civilised through socialism to a people with “wisdom” has been primarily a government-led shift in the context of the PRC. These shifts in attitude were likely to also have been made within academia as the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology have changed, but within the closed-world of the PRC, government-sanctioned changes in perspective are necessary to allow for these broader shifts in attitude and result in changes in practice.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the museum development and practice in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Topics such as the role of policy, diversity, and regional identity have been the focus here as it has in my previous case studies. In the future, emerging practices and practices such as that of Guangxi Ethnic Museum in ecomuseums are likely to change again the strategies of museums of diversity. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I will return to these and previous cases to draw out some overriding concerns and note areas for future research.

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## Chapter 8. Museum and Change: A Review and Rethink

I have to acknowledge the existence of a strand in my initial impulsion to pursue this research that related to a sense of patriotism arising spontaneously when I noticed a silence about Chinese museums in international academia. During the process of the project, however, my predominant motivating factor was an increasing awareness of the importance and multiple facets of the research. Museums are experiencing rapid and dramatic changes in China at the same time as the country itself is experiencing rapid and dramatic changes. It is therefore highly meaningful, and perhaps also necessary, to have a concern in mind with the macro political and policy changes – particularly in this country where political authorities including the CPC and the government are still taking a significant role in the cultural sectors of the country. Regional museums, due to their intrinsic distinctive characters as a museum as well as a public representation of the region, take on new meaning by combining the micro and macro contexts as have been shown through the case museums in this research.

In the previous chapters, I have firstly looked at museum change in general in the PRC by positioning them within the broad political and policy changes in the country (Chapter 3). This offers a contextual and background view so as to gain better understanding about the changes and the driving forces in the specific museums. I have then, over four chapters, respectively discussed museum change – regional museum change, to be precise – within four regional contexts: Gansu, Shaanxi, Yunnan and Guangxi.

Throughout the investigation, I have had a particular concern regarding policy as well as representation: How have national and regional policies affected the museum? In other words, as a regional museum, what is the effect of its dual identity as both a regional museum and a Chinese museum? This is closely related to representations within the museum with museum reflecting to a greater extent regional characteristics and regional narratives rather than placing these predominantly within a national narrative.

In this chapter, I take a cross-regional view to attempt a summary regarding the influential factors to the museums I have studied in this thesis by drawing on the findings in previous chapters.

### **Museum Change and the National Government**

In the review of the changes and their driving forces of the case museums in this thesis, the Chinese national government, I argue, is a crucial influential stakeholder. Due to the inter-locking relationship between the CPC and the Chinese central government, I do not separately note them but have used the Chinese national government to refer to the Party and governmental authority of the national level in the PRC.

First of all, the shift of Chinese national government in 1949 from Nationalist to Communist has brought fundamental influence to the case museums (In fact, to Chinese museums in general).

Among the case museums I have studied in this thesis, except for the two ethnic museums, all of the four regional museums – the regional museum in an “authentic” sense in the form of the comprehensive museum of the region – were either newly formed or essentially transformed from existing ones. Yunnan Provincial Museum was newly established in the PRC while Gansu Provincial Museum, Shaanxi Provincial Museum (the name of the current Shaanxi History Museum before 1991), and Guangxi Provincial Museum (the name of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum before 1958) were inherited from their respective pre-PRC predecessors but with socialist reform. All four became then socialist museums under the new national government. That is to say, the change of the political regime in China in the middle of last century imposed an ideological attribute on these regional museums.

Being socialist museums, they were expected by the national government to provide “revolutionary and patriotic education” (*geming de aiguo zhuyi de jiaoyu*) (Ministry of Culture, 1951). The museum’s role to provide revolutionary education has been particularly obvious in the earliest exhibitions held in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum including *Exhibition of Guangxi’s Revolutionary*

*Relics over the Past Century* (Guangxi Jinbainian Gemin Wenwu Zhan), *Revolution History of Taiping Rebellious* (Taiping Tianguo Geming Lishi Chenlie) (Huang, 1994). Yunnan Provincial Museum's series of exhibitions curated in 1960s – *Display of the Primitive Society of Yunnan* (Yunnan yuanshi shehui chenlie), *Display of the Slavery Society of Yunnan* (Yunnan nuli shehui chenlie), and *Display of the Feudal Society of Yunnan* (Yunnan fengjian shehui chenlie) (J.-C. Li, 1983, p. 101) – is a good example to see how the museum at the time has tried to provide patriotic education as these exhibitions set a contrast between the present society and the past societies, suggesting the superiority of the present – as an enlightened socialist nation led by the CPC.

The museums' adoption of the Soviet Union model in their practices could also be seen as influenced by Chinese national government that at the time was following the Soviet Union in many aspects. Amongst the examples of their influence are: The Soviet architectural style of Gansu Provincial Museum and Yunnan Provincial Museum; the choice of Gansu Provincial Museum's location to build it in an area outside of downtown following the Soviet urban planning view (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009); and the “setting and the modes of display” in the earlier Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009) – all indicative of this national trend.

In addition, the national government advocated that they were defined as chorography museums and were supposed to present the local “natural conditions” (*ziran fuyuan*), “historical development” (*lishi fazhan*), and “democratic construction” (*minzhu jianshe*) (Ministry of Culture, 1951). Gansu Provincial Museum strictly followed this requirement and curated the three corresponding exhibitions: *Ten Years' Constructional Achievements of Gansu Province* (*Gansusheng Shinian Jianshe Chengjiu Zhanlan*), *Historical Cultural Relics of Gansu* and *Natural Resources of Gansu* (Gansu Provincial Museum, 2006b). It is not clear whether the other three have also followed this exhibition structure strictly due to little availability of the historical materials. What is clear, however, is the *local* character of chorography museums has been kept by all the four museums, and has

become more prominent in recent years – a point that I will return to in the next section.

The free-entrance policy issued by the national government with decent funding allocation is a recent example of how the national government could assert direct influence to specific museums. This policy has been called by Dr. Tianming Li from Gansu Provincial Museum as “the biggest support of the central government to so-called culture” and is “so powerful and practical support” (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009). According to Li, Gansu Provincial Museum is certainly a beneficiary of this policy with funding from the central government. In the case of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, this national policy has also strengthened their local focus since free-entrance has brought increased local visitors.

Museums are influenced by national government not only through policies directly pointed to museums but more often through those that are dedicated to more broad areas such as the national economy, politics as well as culture. For example, in the case of Shaanxi History Museum, its drawn out preparation process being able to make a substantial step forward in the late 1980s and the museum’s success in upgrading to a national level were backed by the national promotion of “spiritual civilization” (CPC, 1986) that brought with it more funding opportunities and governmental attention on museums.

The re-construction of Gansu Provincial Museum, the exhibition renovation in Shaanxi History Museum as well as the newly established Guangxi Ethnic Museum and the new Yunnan Provincial Museum project have all benefited from changes in the national policy environment in which culture and cultural sectors have been further promoted so that museums as public cultural institutions became more prior to governmental support.

There are, of course, other forces than changes in national policy – I will note these in the later sections of this chapter. Still, this policy support from a national level has set a general direction that allows and encourages regional governments and specific museums to change course.

Political policies of the national government have also greatly influenced the case museums. An extreme case is that of the Cultural Revolution. Affected by

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radical policies such as those aimed to get rid of the “four olds” (*sijiu*) – “old ideas, culture, customs and habits” (*jiu sixiang, jiu wenhua, jiu fengsu, jiu xiguan*), museum practices were devastated, as shown in the case of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, which became a base for armed fighting (Huang, 1994) with the result that about 20,000 items of collections were destroyed or lost (H.-M. Wu, 1984). In the case of Gansu Provincial Museum, it remained open but the museum became “a propaganda base” and the Revolutionary Committee took over the museum’s administration (T. Li, personal communication, February 25, 2009).

The four museums in Guangxi and Yunnan have also been affected by the changes in national policies towards ethnic minorities. For example, the celebration of Guangxi as an autonomous region – a result of the nation’s regional autonomous policy on ethnic minorities – has played a vital role in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum’s development. The establishment of the ethnic museum in each region in a way reflects the pluralism that the national government adopts towards ethnic minorities.

Finally, all the case museums in this thesis have benefited from the national government’s endeavours in the past three decades to boost the national economy through various policies including Reform and Opening-up and Developing-the-West. For example, the previously noted free-entrance policy that has brought with it generous funding to specific museums would not have been implemented without economic achievements. The two museums in Guangxi discussed in this thesis, particular the newly built Guangxi Ethnic Museum, have been greatly influenced by the national policies on China-ASEAN relations.

To sum up, for the changes taking place in the museums I have studied in this thesis, the Chinese national government and its changing policies have been highly influential on the developments for the case museums. The significance of this role consists in creating a policy environment and setting a general direction that advantaged (and sometimes disadvantaged) these museums.

## **Museum Change and the Regional Government**

Compared to the national government and its policy changes, the effect of the respective regional governments to the corresponding museums is generally more direct and specific. From the cases of the selected regions and museums in this thesis, I see a progression in the regional governments' involvement in the regional museums from one that was relatively passive to one that is quite active.

In the earlier periods of the PRC, with regards to the development of the regional museums, the regional governments in the cases of this thesis were more responding to and following the policy instructions from the national government rather than initiating individual policies. The very establishment of regional chorography museums was a response to the national government's appeal and requirement. Initially at least, the major impulsion of Guangxi regional government to invest in a museum came from its embracing the national policy towards ethnic regional autonomy rather than, at least more than, the desire to develop the museum. Subsequently, the regional government of Guangxi invested in a new building for Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum in 1978, provided funding for building an ethnic garden as the extension of the museum in 1988, and sponsored the renovation of the museum's permanent exhibitions in 1998 respectively for the twenty, thirty and forty year anniversary of the autonomous region (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). Clearly there was regional interest but also a response to the national government policy and expectations.

The later practices in the case regions and case museums, particularly in the past decade, have shown an increasingly active role of the regional governments. This increased involvement is seen, amongst others, from the regional governments including the regional museums into local development strategies.

Museums benefitting from, or at least being affected by, the regional government's strategies regarding regional development is clear in the cases of Yunnan and Guangxi. In Yunnan, for example, the regional government invested in an ethnic museum in the mid-1990s in line with its endeavour to promote local tourism by using the region's rich resource in ethnic cultures (their ways of life as



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presented “in situ” or in ethnic theme parks and their artistic output presented in museums).

Both of the regional governments of Yunnan and Guangxi have highlighted the museums in their urban planning. The new Yunnan Provincial Museum and Guangxi Ethnic Museum have both been positioned in areas outside downtown, where a new urban zone is planned. The two museums are the first on the site and their local communities, through the construction of housing, will be brought later. In both of the cases, the museum construction is closely related to a particular local development strategy. In Yunnan, it is the governmental strategy of building Yunnan as “a province with great ethnic culture” (*minzu wenhua dasheng*), while in Guangxi it is related also to the China-ASEAN Expo that is seen as an opportunity to boost local development.

In the case of Shaanxi History Museum, the regional government of Shaanxi allocated funding for the museum to renovate its permanent exhibition in 2006 – funds for which the museum had been waiting for almost one decade. In addition to the economic growth in Shaanxi in the past decade that increased the government’s ability to provide such funding, the intention to use the museum to boost local cultural tourism was part of the reasoning behind the regional government’s funding allocation. In this sense, the renovation in Shaanxi History Museum was also a result from the museum being included in local development by the regional government.

A similar situation took place in Gansu where the regional government of Gansu changed its attitude and finally provided funding for Gansu Provincial Museum’s reconstruction project. The museum project came to be regarded by the regional government as “a symbolic project of Gansu’s cultural construction” and was expected to facilitate “publicizing” the province (Ran, 2006).

These regional governments’ tendency to include the regional museums into its local development strategy is part of a more general trend carrying on from the 1990s, when, as argued amongst others by David S. G. Goodman (2002), many regions in China were attempting to “create a specifically provincial discourse of development” (p. 838). According to Tim Oakes (2000), one part of this revival of regionalism emerging in the 1990s is “the promotion of provincial cultural identities”

(p. 674). In this thesis, I have also discussed regional identity particularly through the exhibition and representation in the case museums with a concern regarding its relationship to national identity.

**Regional identity.** Through the examination of the exhibitions and representation in the case museums, one common trend can be found in the increased emphasis on a regional identity.

The emphasis on regional identity has been approached through highlighting the regional distinctiveness – often attached to a regional pride through narratives which were unlikely to be found in earlier exhibitions. This has been seen from the selection of exhibition themes (this is of course also heavily affected by the museum’s collections which I will return to in the next section) and the stressed points during the representation in the case museums. For example, in Gansu Provincial Museum, the selected three themes – the Silk Road, painted pottery, and paleontological fossils – are all able to identify and differentiate Gansu from other regions. Within the specific exhibition, for example the painted pottery exhibition, what is stressed is the representation of Gansu as one of the original sites of “Chinese civilization”. In the case of Guangxi and its two museums, the bronze drum, which has been regarded locally as part of their proud heritage, has always been an exhibition theme in the museums. The new exhibition of bronze drums in Guangxi Ethnic Museum has further stressed the peculiarity and continuity of its bronze drum production and use in Guangxi.

The emphasis on regional identity has been approached through adjusting a stereotyped identity and re-shaping a desired identity, as in the case at Yunnan Provincial Museum. Through a high-profiled representation of the bronze civilization of the Dian people, who lived in ancient Yunnan thus being assumed as an ancestor of the present Yunnan people, the stereotyped image of Yunnan as a barbarian land has been reconstructed. Distinctiveness is no longer tied to groups within the community previously at least being on the bottom tier of social development as was the case when the museum initially opened.

The emphasis on regional identity has been approached through choosing an approach that is more in line with regional history rather than fitting a regional story

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only into a national narrative that had periods that were stressed that did not include these regions. For example, in the case of Guangxi, due to its relatively marginalized position both geographically and politically that led to lack of historical objects from some historical periods, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum presents the regional history “through some history fragments or historical periods” by “focusing on some key historical events” (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009) – events that are now of regional rather than national importance.

A similar situation has been seen in the case of Yunnan, which is also a marginal region, where Yunnan Provincial Museum has now chosen the bronze culture of the Dian Kingdom and the Buddhist culture of the Nanzhao Kingdom as their focus. A contrast case, however, has been seen in Shaanxi, a historical “central” region. Shaanxi History Museum has chosen the “general history” (*tongshi*) approach – to cover all the historical periods – in representing the local history. While in the case of Gansu, a region historically close to the centre but contemporarily marginalized (both in a geographical and economic sense), Gansu Provincial Museum has also chosen to avoid a full history but focused on the Silk Road, painted potteries and paleontological fossils that have come to signal regional pride.

Finally, the emphasis on regional identity has also been approached through adopting special historiography practices, as in the case of Shaanxi History Museum. In its renovated exhibition *Shaanxi Ancient Civilization*, the dynasties in which Shaanxi was the national centre are presented with individual section while the other historical periods are addressed as groups. Additionally, through special approach to the Zhou and Qin – taking them as the name of the clan instead of dynasties as the normal way – the museum stresses the root of the two glorious dynasties in Shaanxi.

**Regional identity vs. National identity.** The museums’ practice in emphasizing their regional identities does not cause their denial or ignorance of national identity. Instead, what has been seen from the practices of these museums is a negotiation or even a conformity to national identity accompanying the highlight on regional identity. For example, in the case of Gansu Provincial Museum, the emphasis of Gansu’s historical prominence is made through emphasizing its close tie

with China and Chinese civilization, implying the regional identity and development is a central component of the national identity.

In the case of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum, while attempting to show the local distinctiveness through presenting the Ou-Luo culture as a different artistic form from that of the Central Plain, the influence from the Central Plain and the integration into Chinese culture has also been emphasized.

The case of Shaanxi History Museum seems a bit different as it has attempted to avoid a duplication of the national history in narrating the local history. The tendency to show the accordance of the two, however, can still be seen from some specific practices such as adopting the “general history” approach to cover all the historical periods. In addition, a sense of national unity has been stressed throughout the exhibition by means such as highlighting the times that China was in unification.

The representation in these case museums has shown that regional identity is neither exclusive nor opposing to national identity. Instead, there is a willingness shown in the representations to be incorporated into a broad “Chinese identity”.

While increasing the inclusiveness and diverseness of the national identity, the representation of distinctive regional identities reinforced the unity and harmony existing beyond the diversity and the consolidated Chinese national identity.

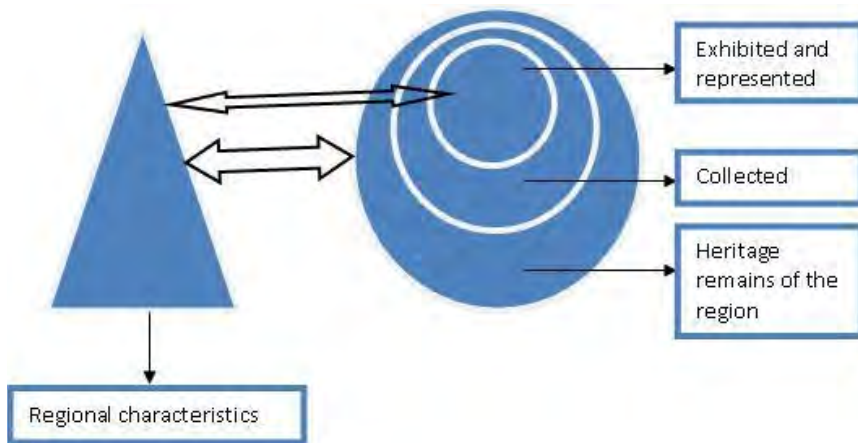
### **Museum Change and Internal Driving Forces**

In addition to the government of both the national and regional level, there has also been a driving force generated from within the museum and the discipline that have contributed to the change of the case museums.

This internal force partly lies in the museum’s collections. As previously noted, the choice of exhibition themes, in addition to reflecting an emphasis on regional identity, is first of all based on the museum’s collections. In each case of Gansu, Yunnan and Guangxi, for its permanent exhibitions, each of these museums has a rich collection to draw from. The choice of what to exhibit is made within the scope of what has been collected. The other influential factors such as the desire to highlight the regional identity take effect in the processing of restricting the exhibition of their collections. In these cases, no exhibition theme has been chosen in areas where the

museum has a limited collection. The availability of objects has had an effect. As in the museum director Weifeng Wu's words, "Museums, after all, are based on objects. It's not making a film, not TV series, not a book either" (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). Which objects from the collections are chosen and how they are presented, however, has changed over time in these museums.

What to collect is also an issue containing subjective choices. There is a tendency but not a simple equation between what has been collected by the museum and what has been available. I have not included the collection practices of the case museums into the discussion in this thesis due to limited space but I would like to draw the attention to the certain accordance between a region's relics or heritage remains and the region's characteristics (particularly in the historical and cultural dimension) that is increasingly highlighted in the museum representation. The relationship between what has been exhibited and represented in the museum, what has been collected by the museum, the heritage remains of a region, and the regional characteristics may be illustrated as *Figure 52*.



**Figure 52.** *Illustration of the relationship between what has been exhibited and represented in the museum, what has been collected by the museum, the heritage remains of a region, and the regional characteristics.*

With this regard, the intention to emphasize the regional identity in these regional museums is not just a result of political consideration regarding the local development, but also intrinsic to these museums attribution as regional museums.

The internal driving force of the museum towards change has also been seen as lying in the museum's goal of finding a "niche" for itself. This could be caused by some external changes, as in the case of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum. Due to the handover of the two major exhibitions to Guangxi Ethnic Museum, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Museum had to re-develop some new permanent exhibitions that led to reconsideration of the museum's "niche". The museum finally decided to reemphasize itself as "a comprehensive history and art museum" so the upcoming new permanent exhibitions will focus on local history and the museum's artistic collections (W. Wu, personal communication, February 18, 2009). The museum's goal of finding a "niche" could also be advocated by the museum's operators, as in the case of Gansu Provincial Museum. The director Jun E was eager to reform his museum to be a *good* one and advocated the museum's role, amongst others, to be "a place of cultural leisure" (J. E, personal communication, July 4, 2007). This has partly led to the adoption of some new practices in the museum, such as informationization and commercial practices.

The internal driving force of the museum towards change has also been seen as lying in the museum's desire to change its status from one that was "lagging behind", as seen in the exhibition renovation in Shaanxi History Museum and Yunnan Provincial Museum. The initiation of Shaanxi History Museum to renovate its permanent exhibition included a great concern of being left behind by their fellow museums in other regions (Cheng, 2008; Ma, 2008). Yunnan Provincial Museum's eagerness to renovate the exhibitions, despite the fact that a new building with new exhibitions was on the way, was to avoid being "socially marginalized" (*shehui bianyuan hua*) (Ma & Wen, 2006).

The influence from the discipline towards museum change is most evident in the ecomuseum practices of Guangxi Ethnic Museum. Ecomuseums in Guangxi was initiated by Guangxi Regional Government for cultural salvage purposes and was incorporated into the ethnic museum's operation by the "1+10 Model". Ecomuseums have been practiced throughout the world in line with museological moves towards "community museology" or "the integrated museum", and more broadly, "the postmodern new museology" (Davis, 2000; see also Boylan, 1992). Guangxi regional

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government, after investigating the ecomuseum practices in other regions, finally targeted ecomuseums as a major part of its cultural salvaging endeavours. In other words, the new development in the discipline – the concept and practice of ecomuseums – influenced the governmental choice that finally led to the practice of Guangxi Ethnic Museum becoming involved in ecomuseums.

Still, behind these internal forces is the macro policy environment created by the government towards an increasing promotion on museums and on culture in general. For example, cultural salvaging would never have been a regional government's concern – so that ecomuseums would never have been practiced – under the national policy environment in the Cultural Revolution time, when diversity – either ethnic or cultural – was strictly prohibited.

There are, certainly, a range of other factors or forces in driving these museums towards change – for example the museum visitors or historians, anthropologists, sociologists etc. outside of the museum – that I have not included in the discussion of this thesis but would like to do in future research.

## **Conclusions**

To sum up, through the observation on the changes and the driving forces of these changes in the case museums in this thesis, I found:

A) Most – though not all – of the changes happening to the specific museum can be sourced back to policies either at the national or regional level.

B) The regional policies that have influenced museum practices generally found their sources in the national policies or strategies, even though at times the national policies were not intentionally aimed at museums.

C) The regional museum, the regional government and the national government normally keep a hierarchical relationship: the museum is subjected to the local government and the local government is subjected to the national government. Crossovers – the national government exerts direct influence to the museum – however, also exist.

D) While there is a clear correspondence between the regional museum and the national policy, it is important to note that the same national policy does not

necessarily work the same way in different regions due to the regional government's interpretation and application of the national policies based on the specific situation of the region.

E) Regional museums are not just targeted by governments' cultural policies due to the demand to promote the cultural development of the region or the nation. Regional museums are, particularly more recently, often included into the regional government's strategies regarding the region's general development.

F) Regional governments are taking a more active role in involving the regional museums rather than adopting the instruction from the national government.

### **Limitations and Alternatives**

As is the case with most PhD students and academics in general, I wish I had been able to start the project with a better understanding and background knowledge of the area I intended to study. There was, however, little material available to work from and restricted access to some materials. The more I learnt about the topic and deeper I stepped into the field, the less confident I felt about my carrying out the project. There are so many related issues and topics that this thesis has not covered, and so many ideas and thoughts that I have not developed further, which if I had done may have helped address the research questions better and make this study more fruitful. In reviewing the whole process of this project, I have asked myself a set of questions:

**Regarding the selected cases: Are they capable of representing Chinese regional museums in general?** In order to understand Chinese regional museums, I selected four regions and six museums as the case studies. I have explained the reasons of such selection in Chapter 2 in presenting the methodologies of this project. There is, however, still a need to rethink and now in the end stage of the project now that I understand them better: Are these museums capable of representing Chinese regional museums in general?

Due to the vast size of the country and the long and complicated history the nation has experienced, there are great differences of both natural and social conditions existing between regions. In this sense, no regional museum would be the



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same in regards to museum change and the driving forces. However, it still makes sense to study some regions and their museums – when it’s not possible to do all – because similarities can be found among regions therefore ideas, lessons and references can be gained from the case museums.

Within the possible scope, I have tried to select the cases on a balance base. The case regions I selected include both ordinary provinces and ethnic autonomous regions with regards to the political status of the region as it could be an influential source to museum change. Some regions had been active in what is now considered the Chinese historical stage with rich cultural relics (according to the present mainstream criteria on “cultural relics”) while others had been relatively marginal both geographically and politically but with diverse ethnicities. The selected museums include comprehensive, historical and ethnic on the grounds that they are the representative museums of their regions. In terms of ages, the selected museums include the newly built, the old and the re-built. The selection, however, didn’t include municipality regions such as Beijing and Shanghai that are also of the provincial level, or the eastern regions such as Zhejiang province and Jiangsu Province where the regional economy is more developed.

I chose not to include museums of Beijing and Shanghai because they have been relatively popular in discussion compared to museums of other regions and they tend to be more eligible for international studies and discussions. The absence of a case from eastern regions, however, is a choice I took with sadness. The current case regions are all from the central or western part of China and their economies are all relatively less developed compared to the eastern regions. Their geographical and economic similarities, however, made them easier to compare.

It would be interesting to see how regional museums have changed in regions with stronger economies – particularly how they are treated by the local government in terms of local development. In the original plan, I included Zhejiang province and Zhejiang Provincial Museum in the case studies because Zhejiang is one of the richest regions in China and also because the local government of Zhejiang has made great efforts in promoting museum development in the region. For example, Zhejiang is the first region in China where free access to museums was implemented with the

financial support from the local government. This expanded plan with a greater number of cases was not able to be executed due to the limitation of time and funding. I hope, however, I will have the chance to fulfil it in a future study.

Another case that was dropped from the original plan is Tibet and Tibet Autonomous Region Museum. Due to the unstable political situation there, particularly the turmoil taking place in March 2008, which was right before my planned field trip to Lhasa, I did not manage the trip and therefore gave up the case, though I had done background research about the region and the museum and had also interviewed the director of the museum in 2007 by chance of a conference in Shanghai. I hope also I will be able to develop this case in the future.

Selection inevitably brings limitation. I still believe, however, that the selected cases studied in this thesis bring insight into Chinese regional museums as well as Chinese museums in general.

**Regarding approaches: What is missing?** I wish I could have included some Marxist theories because Marxism has been adopted in China since 1949 as the official ideology and has influenced all the aspects of Chinese society. I have covered related discussion such as the socialist influence to the museums. It would have been good to address this theory in a more systematic way.

I wish I could have included further areas of media theory into the thesis. Museums can be regarded as one type of media. Media theory is heavily affected by a concern with macro as well as micro contexts. Newspapers and television are often studied as affected by policy as well as by broader sociological changes. My research can thus be placed within the central tenets of media theory research.

As with other research projects within media theory, there are aspects of the medium studied that I could not include due to scope and time. Surveys of visitors and the application of reception theories were not dealt with due to funding affecting time spent in the regions.

The role of developments in media and web technology played in the museum change in the last decade was also only lightly touched upon. Due to scope limitation of a single thesis, I had to drop this part with pity. Museum change and technological developments could be in itself a separate thesis as it would cover a wide range of

issues including audience studies as well as different aspects of representation and the museum's marketing strategies.

Again, the necessity to limit a thesis is not exclusive to this thesis nor is it to media research in general. Not all media research can, or needs to, take on issues of social media and new technologies. I hope to have shown that studying economics and policies have had an effect on the physical exhibitions. A stronger effect, I would argue, than technological change. I did include a very brief discussion relating to media application in museums. For example in the case of Gansu Provincial Museum, I have noted the museum's adoption of information technologies in its striving to be "modern". I agree, however, that the thesis would have been strengthened if I had had the chance to increase my analysis on this part.

Despite the inability to include these areas for further research, I hope that this thesis – by studying museum change with a focus on political and policy change in the context of the PRC – might provide some groundwork for further studies of Chinese museums.

## Appendix 1.

### A Brief Chinese Chronology

<b>Xia Dynasty</b>	about 2070 BC-1600 BC
<b>Shang Dynasty</b>	about 1600 BC-1046 BC
<b>Zhou Dynasty</b>	about 1046 BC-221 BC
Western Zhou Dynasty	about 1046 BC-771 BC
Eastern Zhou Dynasty	770BC-256BC
Spring and Autumn Period	770BC-476BC
Warring States	475BC-221BC
<b>Qin Dynasty</b>	221BC-206BC
<b>Han Dynasty</b>	202BC-220AD
Western Han	202BC-8AD
Eastern Han	25AD-220AD
<b>Three Kingdoms</b>	220AD-280AD

Wei	220AD-265AD
Shu	221AD-263AD
Wu	222AD-280AD
<b>Jin Dynasty</b>	265AD-420AD
Western Jin Dynasty	265AD-316AD
Eastern Jin Dynasty	317AD-420AD
<b>Sixteen Kingdoms</b>	304AD-439AD
<b>Northern and Southern Dynasties</b>	386AD-589AD
Northern Dynasties	386AD-581AD
Southern Dynasties	420AD-589AD
<b>Sui Dynasty</b>	581AD-618AD
<b>Tang Dynasty</b>	618AD-907AD
<b>Five Dynasties and Ten</b>	907AD-979AD

<b>Kingdoms</b>	
<b>Song Dynasty</b>	960AD-1276AD
Northern Song Dynasty	960AD-1127AD
Southern Song Dynasty	1127AD-1276AD
<b>Liao Dynasty</b>	916AD-1125AD
<b>Western Xia Dynasty</b>	1038AD-1227AD
<b>Jin Dynasty</b>	1115AD-1234AD
<b>Yuan Dynasty</b>	1271AD-1368AD
<b>Ming Dynasty</b>	1368AD-1644AD
<b>Qing Dynasty</b>	1644AD-1911AD
<b>Republic of China</b>	1912AD-1949AD

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<b>People's Republic of China</b>	founded on Oct.1, 1949
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Source: *China Yearbook 2008* (Beijing: China Pictorialial Yearbook Agency), 39.

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