

THE HISTORICAL ROLE OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHINA: REFORM AND OPENING-UP (1978-1997)

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Abstract

Reform and opening-up is an essential part of the history of China in the post-Mao era, and its essence is a historical movement of consciously and actively merging Chinese civilisation with the currents of world history. The National Museum of China created the necessary cultural environment and conditions to promote China's Reform and opening-up (1978-1997). With the implementation and deepening of China's Reform and opening-up policy, the restoration and development of display art in the National Museum of China led to a second surge in the construction and development of local and private museums in China. They contributed to effectively circling the internal cultural environment of China's Reform and opening-up. Secondly, the National Museum of China went abroad to conduct foreign exhibitions, deepening the sense of identity in the field of Chinese history and culture, and to a certain extent opening up the external environment for the implementation of Reform and opening-up. This study uses qualitative research and documentary analysis to elucidate the context and background of the Chinese government's Reform and opening-up policy, and to analyse how the National Museum of China (1978-1997) built a bridge to Reform and opening-up. The study is supported by field visits to museum exhibitions, with the aim of filling in the gaps in the historical role of the National Museum of China in promoting China's Reform and opening-up (1978-1997).

Keywords : National Museum, Reform and opening-up, Integration, Circulation, Exhibition Excellence

Introduction

The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee¹ of the Communist Party of China, held in December 1978, was undoubtedly one of the most significant events in the history of the Chinese Communist Party.² It was a historic turning point, profoundly influencing the course of historical change in China's post-Mao era,³ ending the immature period of historical and cultural exploration by the Chinese government since 1976 (Two-year wandering period⁴). It was the beginning of a new period of Reform and opening-up⁵ and socialist cultural construction in China.⁶ As an important record of China's social history in the post-Mao era, the National Museum of China (henceforth CNM) is to some extent, a reflection of the relationship between policy exploration and historical and cultural continuity

by the Chinese government at the time, and a true example of the environment and historical and cultural evolution of China's Reform and opening-up. As there are very few studies on Chinese museums and the historical and cultural field of Reform and opening-up at this stage,⁷ it is not possible to judge the current state and level of development of a field, so this study explores and analyses the historical role of the CNM in the field of Reform and opening-up as a criterion to fill this research gap.

Many factors have influenced the process of China's Reform and opening-up, including the relevant economic and cultural policies introduced by the Chinese government during the same period, and the role of local governments and relevant cultural institutions in supporting the Reform and opening-up. However, the National Museum of China is more representative when analysed from the historical and cultural perspective of the Reform and opening-up. Firstly, the damage done to the country by the Cultural Revolution movement was far-reaching and long-lasting. Many cultural institutions were forced to suspend their work during this period. They only resumed at the end of the Cultural Revolution, so the institutions concerned were out of touch with reality in their assessment of China's Reform and opening-up policies. Secondly, the Chinese government was still wandering in the run-up to the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee. It needed to be more specific about the direction of China's economy and its historical and cultural heritage development. This had led to a halt in China's foreign cultural exchange between 1966 and 1978. As the only museum untouched by the Cultural Revolution, it played a catalytic role in the Chinese government's assessment of implementing the Reform and opening-up policy. On one hand, the National Museum maps out the patterns of social development in China during the Maoist era and on the other hand, it also provides the historical standard by which China could implement its Reform and opening-up, laying the foundations for a blueprint for China's external development. In particular, as a benchmark for Chinese historical and cultural institutions, its role in China's Reform and opening-up is historic.

The emergence of the national museum as a historical and cultural institution in China has been marked by a strong sense of purpose and topicality. It has taken on different forms in response to changes in social history.⁸ Through a chronological examination of China's Reform and opening-up, the period before the implementation of the Reform and opening-up, the period before the implementation of the Reform and opening-up, and the period after the deepening of the Reform and opening-up, reveal the distinctive features of the national museum's policy promotion, cultural development and foreign exchange. It is clear that Chinese society, history and culture have always been a part of the construction and evolution of the National Museum, and that they have evolved and changed at different stages of the Reform and opening-up process. The book *40 Years of China's Reform and opening-up*,⁹ compiled by the CNM, proposes an alternative path to understanding the phenomenon of Chinese museums. The book describes the contemporary Chinese national museum boom, the historical heritage movement and foreign affairs exchanges as broad derivatives whose construction complements the Reform and opening-up. The Reform and opening-up marked a

deep rational understanding of the laws of cultural construction and the historical evolution of socialism with Chinese characteristics. At the same time, the national museums contributed to the scope and depth of the implementation of the Reform and opening-up, thus contributing to its extraordinary achievement of creating a renaissance of Chinese history and culture.

This study uses the CNM as a lens to analyse some of the issues of development and change in history and culture during China's Reform and opening-up (1978-1997).¹⁰ Firstly, it discusses the need for national museums to promote the implementation of the China's policy of Reform and opening-up in terms of the internal and external environment and context in which it was carried out. Secondly, the implementation of the Reform and opening-up gave impetus to the restoration and development of display art in the National Museum, which in turn led to a second surge¹¹ in the construction and development of local museums, allowing the internal cultural environment of the Reform and opening-up to be effectively circulated. Thirdly, the National Museum's ongoing foreign cultural exchanges and transnational exhibitions, which began in 1979, further opened up the identity of Chinese history and culture and built a harmonious external environment, which built a bridge to Reform and opening-up. Finally, the first significant stage in the historical and cultural evolution of China's Reform and opening-up was from 1978 to the introduction of the Exhibition Excellence policy¹² (1997), and the National Museum's implementation of the Exhibition Excellence policy is of great significance. It is a further testament to the overall development of Chinese museums in the historical movement of Reform and opening-up.

This study uses the relevant historical materials from the Chinese Communist Party Historical Archives in Beijing (the Historical Records of the Great Cultural Revolution of China and the Historical Records of Reform and Opening-up 1976-1997) as the primary research criteria. The historical records of the Great Cultural Revolution of China were obtained through the Beijing Party History Museum - New Democracy Construction Period Collection, and the historical records of Reform and opening-up were obtained through the Beijing Party History Museum - China's New Era Collection. This was aided by using documents relating to China's Reform and opening-up and the development of Chinese history and culture as references. The fieldwork provides examples of China's foreign cultural and foreign affairs exchanges through fieldwork related to the collection of cultural artifacts at the National Museum of China during the Reform and opening-up period, 1976-1997. Overall, the study of the historical role of the National Museum of China concerning China's Reform and opening-up is significant in that, on the one hand, it enables an assessment of the impact of the significant historical events of the National Museum in the post-Mao era i.e the development of ideas on the role of the National Museum in the history and culture of society as an essential mission in the field of museum building. On the other hand, it provides a valuable reference for future research in the field of national history and culture, and as a basis for constructing new ideas suitable for implementing a national strategy of cultural evolution and historical continuity.

National Museum of China

In 1917, the Ministry of Education decided to designate the area from Duanmen to Wumen in the Forbidden City as the site of the National Museum of History, which was moved in July 1918. The main building of Wumen, the Yanyin Building and the four corner pavilions were divided into ten exhibition rooms, three offices in the east and three in the west, and storage rooms in the east and west, totalling more than 150 rooms and over 50,000 objects. The museum was officially opened to the public on August 1, 1924, and was named the National Museum of History of the Republic of China in 1926. After the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, it was renamed the National Museum of Beijing History, under the Ministry of Culture of the Central People's Government.¹³

The Chinese Revolutionary Museum was formerly known as the Preparatory Office of the Central Revolutionary Museum in March 1950. In October 1958, the Party Group of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Culture set up the Preparatory Group of the Chinese Revolutionary Museum and the Chinese History Museum to take charge of the preparatory work of the two museums. On 31 August 1959, the new building was inaugurated as one of the top ten buildings for the 10th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and on 1 October, the "General History of China" exhibition was opened for preview. In August 1960, the Beijing History Museum was officially renamed the Chinese History Museum and the Central Revolutionary Museum was officially renamed the Chinese Revolutionary Museum, and on 1 July 1961, the Chinese History Museum and the Chinese Revolutionary Museum were officially opened to the public. In September 1969, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum and the Chinese History Museum merged to form the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum. In early 1983, the two museums reverted to independent status, and on 28 February 2003, they merged again to become the CNM.¹⁴

The history of the CNM is closely linked to the history of China's policy and cultural development. It indirectly reflects the face of China's social evolutionary process as it underwent Reform and opening-up. As the most important national cultural institution, the National Museum also preserves, to a certain extent, the achievements of the social civilisation of the time and measures the historical history and cultural writing of China's Reform and opening-up.

The Eleventh Plenary Session of the Third Central Committee: The End and Beginning of an Era

The road of China's historical and cultural exploration has gone through a history of over seventy years, experiencing twists and turns in its development and evolution. Although it has not all been smooth sailing, each historical stage has different experiences and lessons, and the

path that the wheel of history has traveled has left profound and long traces. It is also the most valuable experience of China's historical and cultural construction for more than seven decades¹⁵.

The Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CPC, held in December 1978, is undoubtedly one of the most significant events in the history of the Communist Party of China. This conference is a historic event with a turning point in nature, which profoundly influenced the process of China's post-Mao Zedong era history, ended the immature period of the Chinese Cultural Revolution's¹⁶ exploration of Chinese socialism¹⁷ since 1966, and opened up a new era for China's reform, opening up, and socialist modernization construction. According to the historical archives of the History of the Chinese Communist Party¹⁸, during the 20 years before and after China's Reform and opening-up, many ideological and practical characteristics coexisted in this transitional period (Reform and opening-up), and for the first time, a frontal confrontation took place. The confrontation resulted in the ideological confrontation leading to the ideological liberation movement's formation and broke China's rigid and dogmatic understanding of Maoism¹⁹. The most important ideological foundation has been laid for opening the door to Reform and opening-up: the practical confrontation is to summarize and digest the experience and lessons learned from China's exploration and construction of socialism in the past, while making it a prerequisite and condition for Reform and opening-up.

One of the significant changes brought about by the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, a pioneering meeting for Reform and opening-up, was to bring China and the world closer together.²⁰ As a new beginning of social development transformation for the Chinese people, its occurrence was by no means historically accidental, but had a profound international and domestic background. It existed in the midst of a two-year hovering period²¹ between 1976 and 1978 and was an excellent start to China's historical and cultural evolution. In terms of internal developments in China at the time, the decade-long Cultural Revolution had wreaked havoc on the Communist Party, the Chinese government and the people. It had seriously undermined the socialist process underway in China.²² This historical event began in the cultural sphere and was particularly devastating to history and culture. Numerous cultural heritages of the Chinese people were destroyed, large numbers of museums and cultural institutions were destroyed; a large number of cultural relics and paintings were burnt; a large number of intellectuals with expertise were brutally persecuted, and the cultural process in China encountered the most severe crisis in its history.²³ In terms of the external environment, after the 1950s and 1960s, the new technological revolution²⁴ that flourished worldwide pushed the world economy forward faster and accelerated cultural integration.²⁵ As multiculturalism and interculturalism emerged, the gap between China's economic strength, technological strength and cultural interaction power and that of the world widened significantly, and China faced enormous pressure from international competition. Complex domestic dilemmas and severe external pressures have forced the Chinese government to pursue a path of comprehensive reform, including radical changes in politics,

economy and culture. The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee was a forced choice, yet it was the only right choice for that era, and it opened up a tremendous journey of Reform and opening-up in China.

The role of the National Museum in China's Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee is incalculable. As a historical space of considerable capacity under the transitional period before and after the Mao era, the National Museum not only meets the cultural needs of the people to a certain extent under the orientation of China's market economy, but also maps the historical lineage of the development and evolution of China's contemporary socialist cultural policy movement,²⁶ and is influenced by politics.

Firstly, the National Museum reflects the continuation of China's historical and cultural development from 1976-1978, which drove the successful convening of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the People's Republic of China in 1978 and the historical journey towards the implementation of reform and opening-up decisions. The new set of cultural policy directions put forward at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee was a new way of thinking about cultural policy and cultural governance in China that was being generated.²⁷ It may be a way of remedying the consequences of past social transformations that the Chinese government sought after the Cultural Revolution, or a policy compromise in response to social contradictions and the cultural needs of the people. In the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, the Chinese government began to take stock and reflect on the situation and once again established a policy-making approach to vigorously develop Chinese history and culture, a highly characteristic turning point in contemporary Chinese cultural policy, and cultural work began to diversify.²⁸ The state encouraged cultural institutions to use public cultural facilities to carry out services and business activities to spread cultural education and better carry out cultural services.²⁹ The National Museum, however, was able to carry the transformation of cultural policy through a series of cultural changes in 1978, embracing the cultural interpretations of government representations and promoting the beginning of China's transition from 'class struggle as a programme'³⁰ to economic and cultural construction, from rigid and semi-rigid thinking to comprehensive reform, and from cultural closure and semi-closure to openness to the outside world. This is a historic transformation.

Secondly, the National Museum, as the only cultural institution not seriously affected by the Cultural Revolution during its time,³¹ took on the responsibility of collecting and recording the history of the decade 1966-1976 and led the development of local museums. It was able to function properly while taking on the cultural will of the state, particularly with regard to the large-scale exhibitions oriented by state policy. It played a leading role in the use of public facilities for the dissemination of cultural aspects. Since 1978, various local governments in China have followed the example of the National Museum in building local museums.³² The National Museum can also serve as historical material for drawing lessons from China's wandering period after the end of the Cultural Revolution 1976. The direct

leadership of China's central government over cultural heritage and cultural institutions at a time when social order and most industries were still in disarray led to an early recovery of China's museum business in the face of adversity, thus laying the foundation for the full recovery and rapid development of heritage work after the end of the Cultural Revolution.³³ The displays and exhibitions of the CNM were also created in response to the demands of the political, economic and cultural policy during a specific period and are the product of the collaboration of all sectors of society under the post-Maoist Chinese government.³⁴

The CNM, as a civilisation of values evolving from different periods of Chinese society, is a bridge that can link the past, present and future of Chinese history.³⁵ 1978 saw the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee mark the end of one era in China,³⁶ while opening the door to another.³⁷

The Collection of Cultural Objects and the Restoration of the Art of Display

After Reform and opening-up became China's basic national policy, various industries have ushered in new development opportunities. In 1979, the Symposium on the Work of Chinese Social Museums was held in Anhui Province, where the central issue of museum display work was re-discussed. It was clarified that museums should focus on strengthening primary display and scientific research work, summarizing the experience and lessons of museum work since the founding of the People's Republic of China (New China)³⁸, and brainstorming museums' working methods and principles in the new era.³⁹ At the meeting, the "Regulations on the Work of National, Provincial, Municipal, and Autonomous Region Museums"⁴⁰ were also discussed and passed, mainly fine-tuning the "Three Characteristics"⁴¹ principle of museums established in China in 1956. It is believed that museums are the main collection institutions, propaganda and education institutions, and scientific research institutions for cultural relics and specimens. Articles 8, 10, and 15 of these regulations state that exhibition is the central link of museum work and should be based on the museum collections. All business activities of museums should be carried out on the basis of scientific research. The regulations clearly point out the direction for museum display after the Reform and opening-up, believing that scientific research achievements should not be limited to academic monographs. Display is also a form of museum scientific research achievements, and should be designed according to the museum's own tasks and characteristics. The promulgation of the Regulations on the Work of National, Provincial, Municipal and Autonomous Region Museums formally incorporated the development of museums into the national long-term development plan. It made the development of the CNM enter a new stage. It also ushered in the second climax in the history of museum construction in New China.⁴²

The Chinese Revolutionary History Museum (National Museum), at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, clarified the strategic requirements for the historical revival of Reform and opening-up, and strengthened the collection of cultural relics,

pointing out the collection of historical and cultural exhibits as a phase of museum-wide importance.⁴³ The museum's display department and group work department can combine the collection of cultural relics and pictures with the preparation of displays and thematic studies on the revival of Chinese culture. Between 1978 and 1982, the collection collected a considerable amount of cultural relics by organising commemorative exhibitions of Zhou Enlai, Zhu De and Liu Shaoqi. For example, in 1978, Deng Yingchao donated many pieces of precious cultural relics such as Zhou Enlai's composition when he was a student at Nankai Middle School in Tianjin and his diary when he studied in Japan; in 1979, Kang Keqing donated 701 pieces of cultural relics including Marshal Zhu De's uniform and medals; in 1980, Wang Guangmei donated Liu Shaoqi's cultural relics, and Peng Meikui donated many pieces of Peng Dehuai's cultural relics.⁴⁴ During this period (1978-1982), due to the concerted efforts of various operational departments, and flexible and diverse collection methods, the collection has increased significantly. By the end of 1982, the museum's modern cultural relics amounted to 96,774 pieces, including 3,183 pieces of first-class cultural relics.⁴⁵ The collection work was carried out to open up the country to the restoration of lost traces of history in the past, but also to trace the recovery and revival of Chinese history and culture to make sufficient preparation.

In March 1982, the Propaganda Department of the State Council of China redefined the display guidelines of the Revolutionary History Museum: to display the development of Chinese history according to chronology, events and people with a scientific historical perspective and method; to set up a particular room for material culture, to display the development process of material culture in history such as production tools, architecture and scientific inventions in a systematic way, and to display archaeological materials scientifically; the display should implement Scientific, ideological and artistic.⁴⁶ The Museum of History has thus established the General History of China as its basic display, combining the characteristics of China's historical development into historical stages, with each stage being divided into dynasties as the basic unit; the objects are scientifically based on the excavated cultural relics as the primary material; the economic, political and cultural characteristics of the various eras in the development of Chinese history and their interconnection and development. The exhibition was officially opened to the public in November 1983. The exhibition covers the period from the Yuanmou people about 1.7 million years ago to the eve of the Opium War in 1840. It presents a systematic overview of the development of ancient Chinese society through the arrangement of objects and the sequence of social development stages and dynasties. More than 9,000 artefacts, models, diagrams and other exhibits are on display, the vast majority of which are archaeological excavations from all over the country since the country's founding, with an exhibition area of 8,000 square metres.⁴⁷ During the establishment of the museum (in 1983, the Chinese History Museum and the Revolutionary Museum resumed their independent establishment), 77 units from all over the country supported the cultural relics materials, calling or borrowing more than 30,000 pieces of cultural relics, more than 500 pieces of materials and more than 400 books; 33 units supported the manpower, including many famous experts and scholars. In order to protect the national cultural relics from further losses like the "Cultural

Revolution", the General History of China display was directly protected by the Central Ministry of Culture. 1984, the General History of China display from the Sui and Tang Dynasties to the Ming and Qing Dynasties was adjusted and revised, and the display area was compressed by 800 square metres and used as a temporary thematic display hall—1987 end.⁴⁸ At the end of 1987, the General History of China exhibition began to be revised, enriched and updated once again. The display was divided into four main areas: firstly, it maintained the system of staging social development and arranging the display in dynastic order and extended the closing section to the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Secondly, it focuses on economic development, social life, science and technology, culture and art, and the history of ethnic minorities in different historical periods. It presents the class struggles of ancient society and Sino-foreign relations in a realistic manner. Third, the full use of historical relics' intuitive, visual characteristics reduces the digest, book photos, diagrams, text and artworks, the advantages of museum language, supplement, and update part of the cultural relics. Fourth, the art form of the display should reflect the national style, improve the use of architectural space, and strengthen the different historical atmospheres of each historical stage.

During the nearly two decades of China's Reform and opening-up (1978-1997), the National Museum gradually improved and standardized various systems of collection management in the work related to the collection of cultural relics and the display of China's general history, changing the appearance of the basic work of domestic museums at that time. Firstly, it has basically completed the filing of first-class collections and the cataloging of general collections; Reasonable adjustments have been made to the shelving of warehouse collections, and significant results have been achieved in the scientific maintenance of cultural relics, materials, and images. Secondly, there are over a hundred types of books, magazines, introductions, and other forms of promotional materials edited and published by the Chinese Revolutionary Museum.⁴⁹ These publications and edited management manuals have aroused good responses in the society. In order to improve the professional and academic level of domestic museums, academic seminars on museums have been held many times to encourage and lead the construction of regional museums faster and better. Before 1978, there were many regional museums in relevant social and historical fields. This is because History of China has a long history, rich historical sites and relics, which is also the advantage of the development of Chinese museums. After China's Reform and opening-up, various industries and departments began to establish museums in various aspects. As a result, various types of museums have emerged, including national, departmental, collective, and individual ones, creating a large number of distinctive regional, diverse, and private museums.⁵⁰ Moreover, the connotation of collectibles is no longer limited to traditional concepts such as "historical" and "relics", but is constantly expanding new concepts to reflect representative physical objects of human society and history.

The collection and display of the National Museum not only reflect the cultural relics of China's politics, economy, science and culture, famous historical figures, major historical events and ethnic groups in different historical periods, as well as precious works of art, arts

and crafts, but also drives the construction and development of regional museums and related cultural institutions. On the one hand, it has promoted the deepening and circulation of the historical and cultural development of China's Reform and opening-up, and opened up the internal cultural environment of China's Reform and opening-up. On the other hand, it has also promoted the exchange of foreign affairs in History of China and opened the way for the revival of Chinese culture.

Foreign Affairs Exhibition at the National Museum

The link between the national museum and policy is a need for the state to maintain its cultural identity.⁵¹ As an important part of the new Chinese socialist project, its construction is closely linked to society's historical and cultural development and needs, especially as a carrier of history and culture. Of course, the National Museum has been constantly called upon to change in the course of its development. This reflects not only the policy rationality of the evolutionary model of the National Museum, but also the evolution of the National Museum in line with the demands of the development of Chinese history and culture during the same period. As the materialisation of official historical and cultural forms,⁵² the National Museum played an essential role in the process of Reform and opening-up, and a focus on the construction, narrative and foreign exchange practices of the National Museum during this period also provides a glimpse into the cultural aspirations and evolution of the state at the external level.

The Reform and opening-up was a significant adjustment in national policy centred on economic development in the new situation in China and the first attempt by the new China to conduct cultural and foreign exchanges in large numbers. In the early days of Reform and opening-up, the building of a regular mechanism for Sino-foreign cooperation and exchange became the new task of the times. The National Museum responded positively to the country's policy of Reform and opening-up, particularly by revolutionising the traditional model for exhibitions abroad and expanding new ways of spreading Chinese history and culture⁵³. As more archival material on the National Museum's exhibitions abroad is unpacked, it becomes increasingly clear that the National Museum's role in the history of Reform and opening-up is being studied.

Before China's Reform and opening-up, museum exhibitions abroad had already begun. Overall, the exhibition theme is relatively grand, with exhibits focusing on representative and precious cultural relics. The demand for holding exhibitions focuses on promoting the national image, emphasizing exhibition scale and displaying national treasures, but there are few foreign affairs exhibitions.⁵⁴ Despite attempts by the country to establish new models of cultural exchange between China and foreign countries, the exhibition still continues the traditional concept of a "National System"⁵⁵ due to the closed political framework. After 1979, China's Reform and opening-up policy opened the door to foreign exchanges, and cultural exchanges between China and other countries were strengthened and promoted. Holding more cultural

exhibitions abroad became a new goal of the National Museum.⁵⁶ From 1979 to 1997, the CNM was in the initial stage of exhibition transformation. In terms of type, it still focused on historical and cultural relics exhibitions, and the corresponding overseas exhibitions were mostly cultural relics. The "Great Chinese Bronze Age Exhibition", which went to the United States in 1980, showcased bronze artifacts from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. The "Exhibition of Ancient Chinese Art Treasures" that went to Denmark and other countries in the same year still focused on cultural relics. However, there have been detailed requirements for specific exhibition themes, and there has even been a shift from "cultural relics exhibition" to "cultural exhibition". During this period (1979-1997), the National Museum began to attempt to present the theme of exhibitions abroad with clear areas of cultural relics. For example, the National Museum went to France for the "Confucius Cultural Relics Exhibition", "China's National Treasure - Journey to France", "China's Jin, Qin, and Cultural Relics Exhibition", Canada for the "China Jade and Cultural Relics Exhibition", the UK for the "China Cultural Relics Exhibition", the "Shaanxi Bronze and Cultural Relics Exhibition", and Brazil for the "Eternal China -5000 Year Civilization Exhibition". Politicians from various countries attended the opening ceremony or visited the exhibition one after another, Received a warm welcome from audiences from various countries.⁵⁷ News newspapers and television outlets from various countries have conducted extensive coverage, praising China's rich and colourful history and culture, further strengthening the understanding and friendship of relevant countries towards Chinese culture and the Chinese people. Under the leadership of the National Museum, some provincial and municipal museums fully utilize the rich resources of regional museums and join the national museum's team of overseas exhibitors. The diversification of exhibition organizers has enabled more unique local cultures to be presented in overseas exhibitions. In 1983, Shanghai Museum went to the United States to hold the "Shanghai Museum Treasures Exhibition -6000 Years of Chinese Art Exhibition". This is the first overseas exhibition organized by a local museum in the early stages of Reform and opening-up. The exhibition exhibits include furniture, bronze ware, jade, calligraphy, painting, etc. Afterwards, it toured various parts of the United States, with an audience of 820000 and won the Special Achievement Award in Art.⁵⁸ At that time, some critics believed that this exhibition deepened foreign understanding of the formation process of the Chinese nation's history.⁵⁹

The National Museum's overseas exhibition showcases the openness of Chinese museums. Especially in the context of the Reform and opening-up era, it is of great significance for domestic museum practitioners to learn from their experiences, update their professional concepts, and enhance the international influence of Chinese museums. At that time, the China International Cultural Relics Exhibition Organization alone sent more than 70 cultural and museum workers from various regions, with over 200 personnel,⁶⁰ to hold overseas exhibitions. When cooperating with foreign museums, these cultural and museum workers closely observe and learn from the experience of museums in the exhibition area, which has virtually improved their business capabilities. These have opened up a convenient channel for Chinese people to understand the world and broaden their horizons. They are one of the important cultural

measures for China to implement Reform and opening-up and move towards internationalization.

The National Museum's exhibitions abroad have actively conveyed China's genuine willingness to engage in friendly relations with other countries, becoming an important window for the international community to get to know China, and the willingness of more countries to engage with China has increased.⁶¹ These have undoubtedly increased the international influence of Chinese culture, opened up the cultural environment outside China's Reform and opening-up, and further built bridges between Reform and opening-up.

National Museum and Display Excellence Policy

Reform and opening-up is the most distinctive feature of the development and evolution of the new China. Over the past 40 years, China's Reform and opening-up have created achievements in the field of Chinese history and culture, showing in highly concentrated form the formation of a new era in history and the rise of a great cultural power in the East. As the cultural construction of China's Reform and opening-up progressed, some institutional and structural contradictions became increasingly prominent. Beginning in the early 1980s, the Chinese government, through a series of step-by-step measures, promoted the reform of the system of art performance groups and the cultural management system, fostered the socialist cultural market, gradually established a cultural market management system, and promoted the construction and innovation of advanced socialist culture.⁶² The Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) went on to propose, "Deepening the reform of the cultural system, liberating and developing the cultural productive forces." Since then, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee has further explicitly called for further deepening the reform of the cultural system with the central link of stimulating the vitality of cultural creativity of the whole nation.⁶³ For example, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 14th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1997 called for the introduction of a policy of "establishing a sense of excellence in the cultural field", and the National Museum was in urgent need of an exemplary role in displaying fine exhibitions. Against this backdrop, the National Museums Top Ten Exhibition Excellence Competition, organised by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and undertaken by the China Heritage News Agency and the China Museum Association, was launched (1997).⁶⁴

At the beginning of 1997, Zhang Wenbin, then Director of the China Cultural Relics Bureau, proposed at a conference on cultural relics and culture to organize and implement the "boutique project" in the national cultural heritage system, and to conduct an evaluation of the top ten display and exhibition boutiques in the country⁶⁵. The "Top Ten Exhibition Products" policy is a national regional museum exhibition selection activity based on the CNM. Its unique creativity, innovative design, and multiple aspects of promotion introduced new concepts and tried new models, which were accepted and loved by the people at that time. It has high ideological and artistic value, scientific and ornamental value. It is a microcosm of the

development of China's cultural and museum industry in the past two decades of Reform and opening-up. It also represents the highest level of exhibition display in China after the Reform and opening-up.⁶⁶

The implementation of the Fine Arts Exhibition Project is of great importance and positive significance to the continuity of Chinese history and cultural innovation in the context of Reform and opening-up. The first aspect is that it is conducive to the continuity of China's historical and cultural endeavours. Its introduction of fine work with a perfect unity of content and form can better attract audiences and give them a greater sense of acceptance and reward; the second aspect is that it can promote the building of professional capacity and talent in museum exhibitions. The promotion campaign places great emphasis on industry and professionalism. It focuses on the professional aspects of the exhibition, including whether the exhibition itself conforms to professional academic standards, whether it is highly regarded in terms of ideological and cultural values, history, art and science, and ultimately the high and low judgement given by the professional standards. In this way, the event is a good test of the level of professional development of museum exhibitions. Also, it promotes building the professional capacity of museum exhibitions through evaluation and promotion. Thirdly, this activity also objectively promotes the cultivation of museum exhibition talents and the construction of exhibition teams. It can improve the overall business level of cultural and museum workers, allowing them to conduct in-depth research on cultural relics and collections, rigorously conceptualise and carefully design exhibitions and displays, as well as vividly publicise and explain them and set the mood for the environment. The fourth aspect is that it enables national museums to link up with local museums for exploration and innovation. Each edition of the campaign brings together the latest practices of museums and cultural and museum institutions in display exhibitions from around the world, and in the selection process, whether they have new ideas, new models, new technologies, new trends, etc., these become an essential basis for judging. In addition, the activities to implement the policy of fine displays enable the rational use of rich heritage resources, which have a historical role in inheriting, passing on and promoting the historical and cultural traditions of the Chinese nation and consolidating the cultural field of Reform and opening-up.

The museums' "Ten Best Exhibitions" campaign has well grasped the core orientation of museum displays and exhibitions, echoing the mission of the times and responding to the needs of society. Under this orientation of always respecting the roots in history and serving the basic cultural orientation of the country, continuous adjustment and innovative development, this activity has flourished step by step. It has brought down the curtain on implementing China's Reform and opening-up in the wonderful field of history and culture.

Conclusion

This study examines the contribution of the CNM in the field of Chinese history and culture. It explains the place of the CNM as a repository of Chinese history and culture in promoting the cultural revival and historical legacy of China's reform and opening-up period (1978-1997). The aim is to fill in the gaps in the historical role of the CNM in promoting the implementation of China's state policy of Reform and opening-up.

As an important item in the category of museums, national museums are driven by the state; they are also created by history and culture. The definition of a national museum must be variable, adaptable and sufficiently inclusive. It recognises and incorporates the differences in terms of the country, and the cultural mainstream and adapts its operations to these differences. In general, a national museum represents the dominant cultural order or core values recognised by the state's power. Specifically, the national museum is also a tool and symbol of the state's efforts to build cultural identity and to claim an external identity; it not only represents the country's dominant cultural consciousness, but also has the closest contact with the public and its day-to-day management and practices are influenced by national politics and the dominant cultural direction it promotes.

This study analyses the environment and conditions in which the CNM helped to create China's Reform and opening-up. Over the past 40 years of China's Reform and opening-up, socialist culture with Chinese characteristics has developed rapidly. While the people have thoroughly enjoyed the cultural fruits of Reform and opening-up, the quality of their culture has improved dramatically, and their spiritual and cultural life has become more affluent. As the physical institution of the official political and cultural form, the National Museum has played an essential role in this process. As a witness and participant in the Reform and opening-up, the CNM has promoted the integration and identification of Chinese and global cultures by facilitating exchanges and cooperation between China and the International Council of Museums and museums in other parts of the world, while at the same time passing on traditional Chinese culture. Secondly, with the implementation of China's policy of Reform and opening-up, the National Museums have made a significant contribution to the cultural and historical spheres of the new era, accelerating to some extent the process of China's Reform and opening-up. For example, the CNM provided the historical basis for China's socialist cultural agenda in 1997, when China first promoted the 'Excellence in Display' policy, and provided the technical support and standards for the introduction of the Exhibition Excellence policy. It was also the basis for the 1997 Chinese socialist cultural agenda and provided the technical support and field standards for introducing the Exhibition Excellence policy. It was, in part, given as an intrinsic motivation for the development of culture within the framework of China's reform and opening-up policy. While strengthening and perpetuating political perceptions and cultural identities, it also responds to social, cultural and policy changes. It thus adjusts the museum's narrative strategies and technical (exhibition) tools. The National

Museum has played a historic role in China's Reform and opening-up, ushering in a new era⁶⁷ in the evolution of Chinese history and culture.

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