# Chronicles of Resurgence: Exhibitions at the Chinese Museum of Revolutionary History, 1978-1992

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#### **Abstract**

A national museum serves as a visual tableau, offering a panoramic narrative of the nation's journey through time, and serves as a nexus for intercultural dialogue and understanding. Museums serve as custodians of history, presenting a window into the past, a reflection of the present, and a glimpse into the future. Unswayed by transient political or cultural currents, they endeavor to capture the essence of historical events with unwavering fidelity. At its core, the museum serves the fundamental functions of collecting, curating, and studying cultural artifacts. Since its inception, it has assumed the noble mantle of safeguarding humanity's cultural heritage, providing invaluable reservoirs of knowledge for the public, and offering lifelong learning opportunities. Indeed, it stands not only as a bastion of civilization's legacy but also as a catalyst for the advancement of societal progress. In the context of national strategy, the national museum transcends its conventional role as a repository of relics to become a potent symbol of a nation's cultural identity, shaping its future trajectory and collective destiny. This study endeavors to delve into the annals of history, tracing the evolution of cultural exhibitions in modern China through the prism of exhibits at the National Museum of China from 1978 to 1992. Employing qualitative research methodologies and documentary analyses, it seeks to unravel the historical tapestry, laying the groundwork for both theoretical discourse and empirical inquiry.

# **Keywords**

Chinese Revolutionary History Museum, The Nature of History, Cultural Icons, Displays and Exhibitions.

#### 1. Introduction

"The fate of a nation intricately weaves with the destiny of its culture, and the rhythmic beat of a nation's pulse resonates in its cultural expression. A cultural renaissance serves as the bedrock upon which national rejuvenation stands, representing a crucial benchmark for a nation's authentic ascent[1, 2]. The Museum of Chinese Revolutionary History stands as a revered sanctuary, dedicated to the preservation and exhibition of venerable traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary ethos, and progressive socialist ideals. It stands as a veritable repository of spiritual wealth, brimming with the quintessential essence of Chinese cultural heritage, and serves as a communal space where the tapestry of history and the canvas of art intertwine seamlessly.

As a comprehensive bastion of cultural heritage, the historical museum assumes the solemn duty of showcasing the richness of traditional Chinese culture, the valor of revolutionary spirit, and the strides of socialist advancement in a holistic, systematic, and exhaustive manner. It bears the weighty responsibility of fostering cross-cultural exchange and mutual appreciation, serving as a pivotal conduit for both internal cultural dialogue and external exposition of

China's profound civilizational allure. In so doing, it becomes a beacon illuminating the global stage with the splendors of China's historical and cultural legacy[3].

## 2. History of the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum

The Chinese Museum of Revolutionary History, formerly known as the Museum of Chinese History, is a national museum whose main tasks are to collect nationally important historical relics, to display China's long history and civilisation, to conduct archaeological research and study of Chinese historical artefacts, and to make use of the artefacts to carry out social education work. Its predecessor, the Beiping National Museum of History, was founded in 1912 at the National Academy of Sciences. The preparatory office located here was later moved on 10 October 1926 from Du'anmen to the Wumen area (north of Tiananmen Square).

The Chinese Revolutionary History Museum is located in Dongcheng District, Beijing along Donghuamen Street and Tiananmen Square East Road. Its predecessor was the preparatory office of the Central Revolutionary Museum. In 1959, its main exhibitions were arranged to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the National Day. The museum was designed by the Beijing Architectural Design Institute and Tsinghua University. Its construction began in October 1958 and was completed in August 1959.In 1960, the preparatory office was renamed the Chinese Revolutionary Museum and moved to a new location [4].

In the 1960s and 1970s, after many revisions and refinements, the Museum of Chinese History and Revolution held its first General History of China and History of the Chinese Revolution with some success. These two essential displays reached a new level of ideological, scientific and artistic excellence. They initially formed the exhibition system of the two museums and played a crucial role in promoting the development of museums and the Chinese museum industry[5]. At the same time, the series of thematic and temporary exhibitions organised through the pavilions had a relatively wide social impact in China. In September 1969, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum and the Chinese History Museum merged and were renamed the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum, but in 1983 the independent institution was restored and the name of the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum was abolished. The Museum of Chinese Revolutionary History became part of the National Museum of China, established in 2003. It is a source of historical evidence for the evolution of Chinese history from 1969-1983, and played an important role in the presentation of the history[6].

# 3. Display Revival and Achievement in Historical Narratives

The National Museum of Chinese Revolutionary History (NMRH), in order to clarify the strategic requirements of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee for cultural renaissance, and to meet the needs of the new situation of cultural development at home and abroad, has strengthened the collection of cultural relics since December 1978, and has pointed out that the collection of historical and cultural exhibits is an important task for the whole museum at this stage[7]. The display department and the group work department can collect the cultural relics and pictures in combination with the display and the special research of the Chinese cultural renaissance. In this period, due to the business departments to work together, collection methods are flexible and diverse, the collection greatly increased. By the end of 1982, the museum of modern cultural relics reached 96,774 pieces, of which 3,183 pieces of first-class cultural relics. United States, Mrs. Alexander donated international friends Edgar Snow in northern Shaanxi Province interview with the film camera, Peng Chienna donated Peng Youshi martyrs painted in 1931, 'Refugees line' painting, Jia Botao donated Huangpu Military Academy graduation certificate, Yang Yongkang and his family donated Dr Sun Yat-sen 'the world for the common good' banners, chapter guide donated Zhang Taiyan homemade Chinese character coat, Zhang Suyun donation of Huang Xing Fang Shengdong poem, as well as Beijing

Normal University of the abdication edict of the Qing Emperor. This phase of collection can further open up the lost historical traces of the country's past, and the aim of the work of the Revolutionary Museum in this period is to prepare for the pursuit of China's historical and cultural renaissance [8, 9].

In March 1982, the Ministry of Culture redefined the display policy of the Revolutionary History Museum: with scientific historical viewpoints and methods, the development of China's history is arranged and displayed according to the age, events, and people; the establishment of a material culture thematic display room, the development process of the material culture of the history of the tools of production, construction, and scientific inventions are systematically displayed, and archaeological materials are scientifically displayed; the display should be carried out in the scientific nature, Ideological and artistic. The Museum of History thus establishes the general history of China as the basic display, combined with the characteristics of China's historical development of the division of historical stages, each stage of the dynasty as the basic unit; physical objects based on scientific evidence of the special ancient excavation of cultural relics as the basic material; performance of the development of China's history of all times in the process of the characteristics of the economy, politics, and culture and their interconnections and developments[10]. In October 1983, the Chinese general history display began to preview, in November, officially opened to the public. The content of the display from the Yuanmou people about 1.7 million years ago to the eve of the Opium War in 1840, through the combination of physical objects, according to the stage of social development and the order of dynasties, systematically displaying the development of ancient Chinese society in general. There are more than 9,000 pieces of cultural relics, models, charts and other exhibits on display. and most of the cultural relics are archaeological excavations unearthed in different parts of the country after the founding of the People's Republic of China, with a display area of 8,000 square metres. During the period of building the museum, 77 units of the country supported the cultural relics, has called or borrowed more than 30,000 pieces of cultural relics, more than 500 pieces of information, more than 400 books; 33 units of manpower, including many famous experts, scholars. in August, the General History of China In 1984, China's general history of the Sui and Tang Dynasty to the Ming and Qing Dynasties part of the adjustment, modification, and compression of the display area of 800 square metres, opened as a temporary thematic display hall[10]. 1987 end, China's general history of the display began another comprehensive modification, enrichment, updating. The main points are: firstly, to maintain the system of display according to the phasing of social development and the sequence of dynasties, and to extend the end part to the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Secondly, it focuses on strengthening the economic development, social life, science and technology, culture and art, and the history of ethnic minorities in different historical periods, and realistically expresses the class struggles of ancient societies as well as Sino-foreign relations. Thirdly, make full use of the intuitive and graphic characteristics of historical relics, reduce the number of abstracts, book photographs, charts, texts and art works, and give full play to the advantages of the museum's language; and replenish and update a part of the relics. Fourthly, the art form of display should reflect the national style, improve the use of architectural space, and strengthen the different historical atmosphere of each stage of history[11, 12].

The basic display of the Chinese Revolutionary Museum in this period also includes the 'History of the Chinese Revolution (1840-1949)' and the historical display of the socialist revolution and construction period, as well as the 'Road to Revival', which is currently open. In an exhibition hall of more than 4,000 square metres, it presents the development of modern Chinese society and the glorious history of the people's heroic resistance to imperialist aggression and feudal oppression, and their eventual victory under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, with more than 4,500 exhibits of physical objects, documents, photographs, charts, drawings, sculptures, models and other exhibits. The display is divided into 11 parts: the first part is the

beginning of China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The second part is the emergence of modern industry. The third part is the frontier crisis; the deepening of the national crisis. The fourth part is the Hundred Days Reform. The fifth part is the struggle in defence of the republic[13, 14]. The sixth part is the rise of the New Culture Movement. The seventh part is the May Fourth Movement in China, the beginning of the new democratic revolution. The eighth part is the National Revolution, which overthrew the rule of the Northern Warlords. The ninth part is the Agrarian Revolution, the development of the Anti-Japanese Democratic Movement. The tenth part is the War of National Resistance, which defeated the invasion of Japanese imperialism. The eleventh part is the War of Liberation, the victory of the democratic revolution. The display vividly reflects the combination of imperialism and Chinese feudalism since the Opium War, which gradually reduced China to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society; and reflects the tragic struggle of the Chinese people against imperialism and feudalism before the establishment of the Communist Party of China. The display is based on physical objects, focusing on the selection and combination of exhibits, giving full play to the characteristics of the museum's intuitive education and speak with cultural relics. Humen anti-British cannons, Lin Zexu's report to the Daoguang Emperor on the elimination of cigarettes, Hong Xiuquan's jade seal, the hat worn by Sun Yat-sen when he commanded the Zhennanguan Uprising, the printing press used to print propaganda during the May Fourth Movement, the first Chinese translation of The Communist Manifesto, the gallows used by the warlords to kill Li Dazhao, the bulletin issued by the General Political Department of the Red Army on the Long March and the Battle of Taierzhuang, one of the fiercest places of fighting. The bullet-hole wall of the mosque, one of the fiercest battles in the Battle of Taierzhuang, the warships of the Battle of the Crossing of the Yangtze River, the first five-starred red flag raised at the Founding Ceremony, and the posthumous writings and artefacts of the martyrs of the revolution, etc., are all the finest items in the display. In the display of the jingshi university hall school gate, sun yat-sen, li dazhao talks, wu thirty movement, the rise of peasant movement, the red army bamboo slogans, baiyangdian guerrillas on the water of the wooden boat, the anti-japanese war years of victory and the founding of the grand ceremony of the cultural relics of the combination or the landscape, have a strong infectious force. The Chinese Revolutionary History Exhibition' adhere to the principle of seeking truth from facts, with its distinctive theme, unique display system, a wealth of physical objects, vivid and varied display methods, concise display text, attracting a wide range of domestic and foreign audiences, in order to expand the propaganda, but also organised mobile exhibition tours around the world, the issuance of complete sets of exhibition pictures, to provide the local museums, exhibition halls, cultural halls to hold exhibitions, was welcomed. In addition, it also undertook some international cultural exchange activities, successively organising exhibitions on the history of the Yugoslavia, Romania, Japan and other countries, and editing exhibition pictures to some countries in Europe and Africa. At the same time, it also arranges exhibitions in China for the corresponding countries. The Chinese Revolutionary Museum is the largest collection of modern cultural relics in China. There are 120,000 pieces of cultural relics in its collection, and 2,224 pieces are classified as first-class relics. There are nearly 100,000 photographs, many of which are original photographs, is one of the largest collection of modern Chinese historical photographs. Also has a collection of various books since the opium wars, newspapers and periodicals 240,000 pieces, of which more than 2,200 kinds of rare books more than 50,000 copies. Over the years, it has provided numerous reproductions of cultural relics, photographs and photocopies of information to sister museums and other relevant units[15].

In addition, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum collection of oil paintings, national surface, prints, drawings, sculpture and other works of art, including oil paintings, 'Founding Ceremony', 'Rectification Report', 'Yan'an Torch', drawings, 'Blood Clothes', national paintings, 'Battle of Shaanbei', sculpture, 'hard times' and so on, has become a heirloom of the treasures of art[16].

The Chinese Revolutionary Museum attaches importance to the collection of cultural relics, at present it collects the paradigm has been from a single Chinese life cultural relics information, hit the big to the whole of China's modern history of cultural relics information, is trying to build to become a collection of China's modern history of the richest collection of cultural relics information of the museum's goal of moving forward, as at the end of 1990, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum of the basic displays and temporary exhibitions attracted the majority of the audience, the daily average number of visitors about The average number of visitors per day was about 1,000, with a maximum of 8,000. The average number of visitors per year was about 1 million, with a maximum of 1.5 million. It plays an important role in the mass education of culture by using revolutionary cultural relics. These exhibitions not only meet the needs of the society, but also promote the museum's collection of cultural relics, collection appraisal, thematic research and other business[17]. The collection of the Museum of Chinese History not only reflects the cultural relics and materials of China's different historical periods in terms of politics, economy, science and culture, famous historical figures, major historical events and various ethnic groups, as well as precious artefacts, arts and crafts, but also opens the way forward for the great revival of the culture of the Chinese nation.

# 4. Heritage and Continuity: Exploring the Intertwined Narratives of Tradition and Progress

Chinese history and culture has a long history, accumulated the deepest spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation, represents the unique spiritual identity of the Chinese nation, for the Chinese nation to provide a rich nourishment for the survival, development and growth. Cultural relics carry the splendid civilisation, inherit the history and culture, and maintain the national spirit. As a strong physical evidence of history and culture, cultural relics are not only the valuable cultural heritage of a nation, but also an important carrier of a country's cultural soft power[18]. Throughout the ages, all the peoples of the world have been deeply influenced by the literary and artistic masterpieces and masterpieces of literature and art produced at various stages of historical development without exception. In every period of history, the Chinese nation has left behind countless immortal works. From the Book of Poetry, Chu Ci, Han Fu, to the Tang poetry, Song lyrics, Yuanqu Opera, Ming and Qing novels, etc., together they have forged a splendid star of Chinese literature and art history, and provided valuable resources for the inheritance of the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. It is important to retain the cultural roots and guard the soul of the nation.

The main role of the National Museum is to collect and protect precious historical and cultural relics, therefore, the National Museum has the sacred mission to pass on the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation and carry forward the spirit of Chinese tradition. The collections in the National Museum best reflect the evolutionary development of the history society, reflecting the course of history and culture at different stages of China's history and culture, and are of great significance to the inheritance and continuation of Chinese history and culture[19]. While the National Museum protects and maintains the historical precious relics, it also continues to broaden the channels of collecting relics. At present, the National Museum of China, after a long period of development, has a very large scale and perfect infrastructure configuration, and has very good achievements in terms of architecture, collections and exhibition activities. As the process of implementing national museums and cultural policies continues to accelerate, more and more people have a deeper understanding of national museums, and at the same time lay a solid foundation for the inheritance of outstanding traditional Chinese culture[20, 21].

From the official opening of the National Museum of Chinese History and the National Museum of the Chinese Revolution to their merger, the two museums, in accordance with their

respective nature of running the museums, their guidelines and the eventual clarification of their tasks, have carried out a series of work to keep up with changes in the situation and meet political needs, and have organised a series of temporary displays and exhibitions, which have played a key role in the inheritance of history and culture through the evolution of basic displays. The name and main content of the modern basic display of the National Museum of China have been changed many times. Firstly, the main content of the modern basic display can be roughly seen as the alternating and recurring process of the Chinese Revolution, and modern and contemporary history. Since the founding of the Chinese Revolutionary Museum in 1950, more than 60 years ago, the modern basic display has gone through the iterative and evolutionary process of the history of the Chinese Revolution (New and Old Democratic Revolutionary Period), and the Road to Revival (1840-2011). This involves the differences and connections between the evolution of Chinese history, the history of the Chinese Revolution, modern Chinese history and modern Chinese history. Therefore, the changes of the modern basic display in different periods are not only the change of name, but also the time span, width range, display theme and object of its exhibition content. Secondly, the several iterations and modifications of the modern basic display are neither simple mutual negation nor mechanical restoration or recovery. The preparation and modification of each display gathered famous scholars and relevant research units in the modern history field in each period, and condensed the efforts of a large number of researchers in modern history. The basic display of modern history has grown from nothing to something, from a simple list to a detailed examination, with different scopes, frameworks, systems and themes for each display. In the process of repeatedly revising the display, some newly collected cultural relics have been continuously added to the exhibition, the display system has become clearer, the ideology has been gradually improved, and the presentation and artistry of the display have become more and more perfect[22]. Thirdly, the modern basic displays are distinctly political and propagandistic, and the contents of the displays bear obvious signs of the times, fully reflecting the propagandistic and educational functions of the national museums. Because of its strong political and propaganda role, each display was revised over a long period of time, repeatedly reviewed and approved by a wide range of people at a high level, and the revision of the displays was guided by leaders of the Party and the state on many occasions. Because of its close connection with reality, the modern basic display bears the distinctive imprint of the times, and changes in the political and social environment are clearly reflected in the revision process and content of the display. For example, the display of the history completed in 1979 during the process of rectification was a restoration of the original appearance of history under the guidance of the ideological line of seeking truth from facts, which was not only welcomed by the society, but also made a contribution to the museum in terms of public opinion to the rectification of the country at that time. This fully embodies the propaganda and connecting function of national museums, and is also a peak of the political function of national museums. It is for this reason that the discussion on the political and scientific, propaganda and academic nature of the modern basic display has never been interrupted over the years. It is still worth discussing and thinking deeply about how to express history in modern basic displays, and how to deal with and grasp the issues of politics and publicity while pursuing academic rigour. The richness of the practice of national museums has also led to the development of the theory of museum construction in the region; over the past 30 years, with the modification and evolution of the modern basic display, the National Museum of China has formed a more mature display system, and has discussed many macro and specific issues such as the ideological, scientific, artistic, and interrelationships of the display, which has enriched the content of museology and led to the in-depth development of the theory of museums[23].

During the period of parallel development, the two museums, in addition to the further enrichment and improvement of their basic work, but also in the process of completing the

identification and cataloguing (labelling) of first-class collections[24]. At the same time, the Chinese Revolutionary Museum also began to establish a preliminary collection of custody system, to carry out the collection of cultural relics, custody and protection of the work, and actively carry out scientific research and exploration, and achieved a lot of academic results. During the historical process, the Museum of Chinese History and the Chinese Revolutionary Museum merged to form the Museum of Chinese Revolutionary History, which, although its work was blocked, also served to cooperate with political campaigns and propaganda, preserved traditional Chinese history and culture to a certain extent, and promoted the restoration and reconstruction of local cultural institutions and regional museums at a later stage[25]. In the 1980s, with the shift in cultural policy and national priorities, the operational work of the two museums (national museums) was strengthened. Various thematic and temporary exhibitions were gradually increased, with richer and more varied contents, and foreign exchanges gradually increased, promoting the development and transmission of Chinese history and culture[26].

### 5. Conclusion

Through the corridors of time, history unfolds, weaving together the intricate tapestry of a nation's identity and cultural essence. The Chinese Revolutionary History Museum stands as a venerable repository of this rich legacy, a testament to the enduring spirit of a people and the timeless narratives that have shaped their destiny.

For millennia, the history and cultural fabric of China have been forged through the crucible of time, each epoch leaving its indelible mark on the nation's collective consciousness. The museum serves as a sacred sanctuary, a sanctuary where the relics of yesteryears are meticulously curated and proudly displayed, offering visitors a glimpse into the annals of history and the cultural ethos of bygone eras. As custodians of this priceless heritage, the museum bears the solemn duty of safeguarding and perpetuating the legacy of the past. Through its exhibitions and artifacts, it not only educates and enlightens but also inspires reverence and awe, fostering a deeper appreciation for the historical journey that has led to the present moment. Indeed, the display of cultural relics serves as a poignant reminder of the vibrant tapestry of human experience, each artifact a testament to the ingenuity, resilience, and creativity of generations past. It is through such encounters that history comes alive, resonating with the echoes of the past and illuminating the path forward for generations yet to come.

In essence, the Chinese Revolutionary History Museum is more than a mere repository of artifacts; it is a living testament to the enduring spirit of a nation, a beacon of hope and inspiration for all who seek to understand and celebrate the rich tapestry of Chinese history and culture.

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