

Exhibiting the Past: China's Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum 過去を展示する 南京大虐殺記念観

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The Development of Museums in China

When the CCP came to power in 1949, it proceeded to nationalize all culture industries and cultural institutions, including museums, and to develop them in ways that would align them with the new ideology of state socialism. National, provincial, and local governments promoted, funded, and constructed many new museums. Not long after the liberation of Beijing, the Central Committee sought to establish a Museum of the Chinese Revolution to present an official view of party history, and in the early 1950s, the state started building memorial halls dedicated to sites of significance to revolutionary history, to important revolutionary leaders, and to cultural figures such as the writer Lu Xun. In terms of exhibitionary style, the types of museums built, and the veneration of revolutionary heritage, these early PRC museums were deeply indebted to the Soviet influence.¹ It was not until the Great Leap Forward that a more systematic state effort to build museums was instituted. In general, it is useful to see museum development in the PRC as occurring in three dynamic bursts: the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), the early post-Mao period (1980s), and the post-Tiananmen period (1990s- present).



Figure 1. The Military Museum, one of several major museums built during the Great Leap Forward. Photograph courtesy of Stefanie Thiedig, Kulturgut.

During the Great Leap Forward, the state sponsored a program to rapidly expand all manner of cultural institutions, including museums. One of the many slogans of the day was “a museum in every county, an exhibition hall in every commune” (*xianxian you bowuguan, sheshe you zhanlanshi*). According to one report, by 1958 there were 865 county museums and 85,065 commune exhibition halls, although these figures may be exaggerated, and many of these institutions did not endure. At the same time as it expanded the growth of museums into the Chinese hinterland, the Great Leap Forward also gave rise to some of Beijing's major national museums, including the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and the Military Museum. These two museums were built in preparation for the 1959 celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. Their resulting exhibits presented a narrow, party-centered vision of modern history and forced

the ancient past awkwardly into Marxist historical categories and stages. The Maoist view of history was, of course, constructed by excluding details and events that did not conform to the official narrative and by suppressing alternative ways of looking at the past.

Like most other cultural institutions, museums came under severe attack from radicals during the Cultural Revolution because they were seen as “black” warehouses for the culture of the “four olds” (customs, culture, habits, and ideas). Yet some of these museums, and the people who worked for them, continued to be active in various ways. For example, the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, though officially closed in the fall of 1966, helped organize in June of the following year An Exhibition of the Battle Successes of the Capital Red Guard Revolution and Rebellion (*Shoudu hongweibing geming zaofan zhanguo zhanlanhui*), and Red Guard art exhibits were held at the National Museum of Fine Arts.² One could argue, though, that the Cultural Revolution was ideologically opposed to the very notion of the museum, to the ossification of history and of the revolution that the museum seemed to embody. Mao Zedong’s famous phrase from 1966, “I don’t like being treated as a dead ancestor,” captures this antipathy for the reverence of things past that the museum represents.³ The Cultural Revolution was motivated in part by a desire to revive the fading memory of the revolutionary past, indeed to incorporate that memory into the very thoughts and actions of Chinese citizens who had become increasingly distanced from the revolution. Pilgrimages to sacred revolutionary sites (Mao’s home in Shaoshan and Jinggangshan being only two of the more popular) and the imitation “long marches” to Yan’an were instigated not so much as ways of learning about the revolutionary past as they were to relive that past and make it meaningful and alive in the present. Indeed, the CCP has since 2003

revived revolutionary tourism (marketed as red tourism) to sustain the memory of the revolution in an active, participatory way, though with a nostalgic and commercial dimension that is markedly different from the revolutionary pilgrimages of the Cultural Revolution.

The early post-Mao period—the second burst of museum construction—saw a profusion of new museums, many of which are museums of revolutionary history or memorials to revolutionary martyrs.⁴ This state-sponsored construction of museums was initially a response to the Cultural Revolution and the collapse of cultural institutions and state control over historical memory. Reopening established museums and revising their exhibits marked what could be called a state reinstitutionalization of memory of the past. For Donghai Su (1995), a former curator at the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and a leading figure in the Chinese museum world, among the important values for museums in the post-Mao period were to “verify” history and to extol such moral virtues as patriotism and self-sacrifice.

With the death of Mao and the advent of Deng Xiaoping-style liberalism, the Maoist master narrative of modern history began to erode.⁵ Historiography of the 1980s humanized Mao and made him much less the central protagonist of the narrative of modern history than he had been; political figures purged under Mao were rehabilitated. These sorts of changes in historiography were then reflected in new museums and revamped museum exhibitions. For example, in 1982 the “old home” (*guju*) of Peng Dehuai, who was purged during the Great Leap Forward and severely tortured during the Cultural Revolution, was restored as a memorial site. Chen Yun, Liu Shaoqi, and Deng Xiaoping were also rehabilitated, and large-scale memorial halls were built to commemorate each. These museums restored faith in the party after its

legitimacy had been so undermined by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Despite these important changes, however, many of the basic elements of the Maoist master narrative of modern history—the temporal tale of liberation from darkness and oppression, the central role of the CCP, the contribution of revolutionary martyrs—are retained in early post-Mao museums of modern history.

The state and the party placed more importance on museums in the 1980s than ever before (Wang Hongjun 2001, 109). They promoted the role of museums in fostering “spiritual civilization” and passed laws enhancing the protection of cultural artifacts and regulating museums.⁶ Museums were even mentioned in the 1982 constitution, where their public service role was emphasized.⁷ This period saw the building of the Memorial Hall of the People’s War of Resistance against Japan, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, and the Yuhuatai Martyrs Memorial Park commemorating those executed by the Guomindang in the White Terror after its 1927 coup. At the same time, of course, many new museums dedicated to facets of premodern history were also built, suggesting a changing relationship to the prehistoric and imperial pasts.

The third period of rapid museum development followed the crackdown on the Tiananmen movement of 1989 and continues to this day. This renewed state emphasis on museums and memorial sites was motivated by several factors: a perception that a decline in socialist values, especially among the young, had led directly to the expression of mass discontent in 1989; a need to fill the ideological void left by the party’s own promotion of the market economy; the collapse of socialist states throughout Eastern Europe; and the rise of a leisure economy associated with the economic reforms and rapid urbanization of the 1990s.⁸ As people lost faith in socialism and competing forms of identity arose, the state was acutely

concerned that Chinese not forget both the humiliations and heroism of China’s past.⁹ The state promotion of nationalism must be seen as one of the most significant factors behind museum growth during this period.¹⁰ In exhibiting the magnificence of the ancient past and the glorious rise of the modern nation-state, museums inherently projected this nationalism to their visitors and sought to forge a sense of cohesion among a population that was being splintered into economic classes by the market reforms. It is not that revolutionary ideology has disappeared altogether and has been replaced by nationalism, as Suisheng Zhao (1998) argues; rather, as they always have, nationalism and the socialist ideology coexist in state rhetoric and in museum exhibits.

Museums were an important dimension of the larger patriotic education program carried out by party organs in the early 1990s. In a March 1991 letter to education officials, Jiang Zemin launched the program by declaring that the country needed to enhance its education of “early modern and modern Chinese history, and current events,” with the goal of instilling in young people a “sense of national pride, national confidence, and preventing thoughts of glorifying the West and fawning on the foreign.”¹¹ A circular in the same year issued by several state bureaus emphasized the importance of cultural artifacts, museums, and memorial sites in stimulating patriotism among the young and of using fresh techniques to increase the “attractiveness” (*xinyinli*) and “influence” (*ganranli*) of exhibits so that history could be perceived “directly through the senses” (*zhiguanxing*) and have a greater “sense of reality” (*zhenshi gan*).¹² The circular also suggests that the values of self-sacrifice embodied in the revolutionary tradition should not be forgotten.

In 1995, as part of the millennial and centenary fever, and as a way of drawing attention to the pedagogical potential of museums and

memorial sites, the Ministry of Propaganda approved the 100 Patriotic Model Sites to promote patriotism and knowledge of China's past.¹³ Although sites of ancient culture and premodern history—such as the Yellow Emperor's tomb, the Great Wall, and the Dunhuang caves—figured significantly in the list, most are revolutionary sites, and their nationalist and political roles are manifest. Also in the 1990s, older museums, such as the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and the Military Museum, revamped their exhibits and published patriotic books based on materials in their collections.¹⁴ The state also promoted major revolutionary history exhibitions in the capital, such as the Red Crag Spirit exhibition in 1996.

An important dimension of this rising nationalism was, and continues to be, a renewed interest in the imperial past and China's ancient philosophies, most prominently Confucianism. As Arif Dirlik (2011, 2) has put it with regard to the recent emergence of "national learning" (*guoxue*), "economic and political success has transformed China's relationship to the world, reinforcing confidence in national identity and with it, pride in a past that has been degraded by liberals and repudiated by revolutionaries." Put differently, China's emerging status as a global powerhouse relies heavily on memories of dynastic glory and the Confucian ethical system that undergirded the imperial state. This changing relationship with China's imperial past has found expression in new museums and new kinds of exhibitions.

Museums and exhibitions are given much play in the Chinese mass media. For example, when the special exhibits on Xibaipo (at the National Museum of China), the Yan'an Spirit (Military Museum), and Deng Xiaoping (National Museum of China) were put on in the summer of 2004, print and broadcast media lavished attention on them. State propaganda organs, the mass media, and museums and

exhibitionary spaces join in propagating official narratives of revolutionary history.



Entrance to the 2004 Deng Xiaoping exhibit at the National Museum of China, Beijing

Not all memorial sites that emerged in the 1990s were state sponsored. Peasant volunteers from Leiyang in Hunan, for example, built with private donations the Sanyuan Temple (Sanyuan si), a temple devoted to Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De (Cong 1997, 46). While state museums resurrected revolutionary heroes as a means of restoring the tarnished image of the party, for these peasants the temple was an "indirect form of protest against corruption and the widening gap between the rich and the poor" (46). In Chongwu, Fujian, a temple was erected to commemorate and worship soldiers who died in the 1949 battle over the island of Jinmen, a battle that is memorialized in many Taiwan museums as a great victory over the communist

bandits. Such memorial sites, with their religious overtones, are far removed from, though by no means alternative to, more official state remembrances of the revolutionary past.¹⁵

The recent museum expansion in China cannot be explained solely in political or ideological terms; it is also part of a global rise in museums caused by growing consumer markets for culture.¹⁶ As part of this process of making themselves more marketable, museums have also internationalized in the past two decades, forging links with Western counterparts and hiring foreign design firms to make their exhibitions modern, sophisticated, and high-tech.¹⁷ Cultural capital is a significant factor in urban economies; it helps to “brand” a city, making it more identifiable and competitive in the global marketplace. Museums and memorial sites have become an important element of this municipal marketing in the Chinese postsocialist economy. In 2002, for example, the city of Wuhan reconceptualized its Wuchang Uprising Memorial Hall into a Xinhai Revolution Museum, a move that contributed to a self-conscious branding of the city as the center of “culture of being the first to revolt” (*shou yi wenhua*), a reference to Wuhan’s role in initiating the revolution that overthrew the Qing dynasty.¹⁸ To celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the revolution in 2011, Wuhan built a Xinhai Revolution Monument in the First to Revolt Park, which is part of the First to Revolt Cultural District of Wuhan.¹⁹ In Beijing, the expansion and renovation of the National Museum of China were motivated by a desire to give the capital the cultural institutions commensurate with its new status as a “global city.” Even small cities are getting into the branding act. Anyang, once the capital of the Shang dynasty and famously the site where oracle bones were first excavated, has branded itself as the place of origins of the Chinese writing system with the opening, in 2009, of the Chinese Character Museum (*Zhongguo wenzi bowuguan*). City branding, economic

competition, and tourism are important factors in the dramatic growth in museums in the market reform era.

One significant trend in museum development in the past decade has been diversification. History and culture museums are just a small part of the total picture of museum culture in China. Big, so-called “comprehensive museums” (*zonghexing bowuguan*) continue to be built at the national, provincial, and metropolitan levels, but a growing number of museums could be described as specialty or niche museums. These include local culture and history museums, corporate museums that exhibit the history of a private or state enterprise, industry museums (e.g., tea, coal, railroad, aviation, cartoons), and science and technology museums. Because of their topical focus, these museums are less explicitly political and ideological than the kinds of museums that are my main concern, but they are not without political meanings. The Qingdao Brewery Museum, for example, presents a positive image of the company brand by displaying its long history, its global market penetration, and its “green” consciousness, but the museum also strongly buys into the corporate and commercial ideology of the present Chinese regime, suggesting that the brewery’s rise would not have been possible without the CCP’s market reform program. Science museums, which are among the most popular museums in China, indirectly reflect the state’s emphasis on the material transformation of China and its economic rise in the world, propagating powerful notions of the positive role of science and technology in building a great modern nation. They also reflect a society’s scientific attitude and its level of “civilization.”²⁰ The Shanghai Science and Technology Museum (*Shanghai keji guan*) building, for example, has a sleek modernist design and is situated on New Century Square in the heart of Pudong. The building itself is futuristic, and its location points to the role of science and technology in moving China toward

the future, a future that is technologically modern and culturally civilized.



The Shanghai Science and Technology Museum

In this new economic climate, even revolutionary history museums are looking for their niche in the cultural marketplace. In 2006, the Without the CCP, There Would Be No New China Memorial Hall was opened in the rural area of Fangshan district outside of Beijing. Built on the site of the composition of the song “Without the CCP, There Would Be No New China” (Meiyou gongchandang jiu meiyou xin Zhongguo), one of the most popular and omnipresent propaganda songs of the Mao era, the museum tells the story of the foundation of New China through the prism of this quintessentially Maoist song.²¹ This museum perfectly exemplifies the diversification and specialization of museums in the leisure economy.

Local museums are being built at a frantic pace. These museums proudly exhibit the culture and history of their local region, though not in a way that could be construed as threatening to the hegemony of national identity; these museums present local culture as a manifestation of the great diversity that is

Chinese national culture and contribute to the construction of the idea of a multicultural, multiethnic state. One can find museums, or basic exhibits within museums, devoted to the culture of Qi (northern Shandong), Lu (southern Shandong), Ba (eastern Sichuan), Shu (western Sichuan), Yue (Guangdong), Liaoh (Liaoning), Suzhou, and Hangzhou, to name but a few.

To give a sense of the variety and extensiveness of museums in China, take for example a city like Nantong. Located not far from Shanghai, Nantong is, by Chinese standards, a middle-level city, with seven million inhabitants. It has some twenty museums and memorial halls, including museums devoted to textiles, architecture, folk arts, kites, sports, old age, water technology, and the abacus, as well as more general museums such as the famous Nantong Museum and its neighbor, the Nantong City Museum. Nantong may not be typical of cities of its size in terms of the number of museums because it brands itself as the birthplace of the Chinese museum, but it gives us a sense of the proliferation of new kinds of museums and the important role of museums in forging a city identity and accruing cultural (and economic) capital.



The “China’s Heroes” display at the Jianchuan Museum Cluster

Another trend in recent years has been the establishment of private museums.²² Whereas in Taiwan and Hong Kong private museums have a relatively long history,²³ in the PRC they started appearing only in the early 1990s. As of 2006, it was estimated that China had some 200 private museums, out of a total of 2,200 (Song Xiangguang 2006, 6). Private museums tend to emerge from the personal interests and collections of the *nouveau riche*, who wish to display their new cultural and social status, and they developed in conjunction with the appearance of private entrepreneurship in the 1980s and 1990s (Song Xiangguang 2008, 41–43). In Gujia Village, Sichuan, the Liu family, one of the richest in China, has created a museum to itself, a kind of testimony to the family's entrepreneurial success story.²⁴ Private museums tend to be fine arts museums, but there are also a few private history museums, such as the Jianchuan Museum Cluster (Jianchuan bowuguan juluo), located outside of Chengdu in the town of Anren. Private museums with a social conscience are also popping up here and there. The Culture and Arts Museum of Migrant Labor (Dagong wenhua yishu bowuguan), which opened in 2008 and which is situated in a migrant residential community in the suburbs of Beijing, draws attention to the hardships faced by migrant workers in China but also to their "heroic" contribution to the miraculous modernization of the past thirty years.

Since the late 1980s, museums in China have faced a sometimes painful and difficult transition from the ethos of the planned economy to that of the socialist market economy. Some curators and museum directors have resisted the change. Modern history museums in particular have been slow to respond to new economic conditions and the changing society and culture beyond their walls, and many have, in their exhibits, continued to emphasize the centrality of self-sacrifice to the grand narratives of socialist nationhood and the communist revolution. In contrast to China's vibrant popular culture,

museums and their exhibitions have often appeared staid and stodgy. These museums are now showing both subtle and substantial transformations, but that they have been slow to respond to this changing world is not surprising given that they have been and continue to be primarily state funded and thus more closely associated with the state cultural bureaucracy than many other cultural forms and institutions. Some museum workers and scholars have embraced the socialist market economy by popularizing their exhibits for mass consumption. Lu Jianchang (2005, 8–9), who not only sees the inevitability of this trend for museums, also welcomes it as an opportunity and chides those who fear it or resist it. Either way, it is clear that the market economy, which has created a thriving mass culture and competing forms of entertainment, has been an important factor in the present proliferation and diversification of Chinese museums and the changing content and style of their exhibits.

The Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall: Remembering Horror

One new type of museum to emerge in the post-Mao museum boom is that devoted to the memory of atrocities committed by the Japanese imperial army during the War of Resistance. The view of the war period presented in Mao-era museums tended to downplay atrocity and victimization in favor of a more heroic narrative in which the CCP was the driving force. In the post-Mao era, as the Deng economic reform program ushered in profound social changes, including the emergence of new class divisions, forms of memory that emphasize national unity through shared suffering served the state well: depictions of Japanese atrocities are morally unambiguous and could direct divisive class resentment toward an external other. One of the most important of these museums is dedicated to the Nanjing Massacre.



Sculpture of the Unknown Martyr at the Longhua Martrys Memorial Park, Shanghai

The Memorial to Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Army Invaders should be understood in the larger context of post-Mao liberalization and the emergence of new narratives of national identity and nationalism. The idea for a museum dedicated to the Nanjing Massacre dates back to 1983 and was clearly the result of interest in the topic at the highest levels of state government.²⁵ Qi Kang, a Nanjing-based architect who has made a name for himself designing museums and memorials, was the principal designer of the site. The first part of the museum was completed in 1985 and included the main exhibition hall and the “graveyard grounds.”²⁶ In 1995, the site was expanded to include a new L-shaped entranceway that created a southern-facing gate and added several impressive sculptures. The site underwent a \$59 million expansion in 2007 to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the massacre. The expansion included a new exhibition hall, a grand new entranceway, and a peace garden (Kingston 2008). My analysis in what follows is based primarily on visits made to the site in 2004–2006, before the 2007 expansion,

supplemented by several observations about the monumentalization of trauma that is reflected in the transformation from Qi Kang’s original design through the 2007 expansion.

Qi Kang (1999a, 7) sought to create what he calls a “holistic environmental design” (*zhengti huanjing sheji*) rather than a conventional museum building filled with historical artifacts. His goal was to use a “solemn language” (*shenchen de yuyan*) to elicit emotion, and he states that the design was meant to create an “emotional space” (*you ganjue de kongjian*) (7). At the same time as he was working on the Nanjing Massacre memorial, Qi was designing the Yuhuatai memorial, also in Nanjing. Whereas the latter memorializes heroic fighters for a noble cause (Communists resisting Guomindang oppression), the former remembers helpless victims of atrocity and thus required a very different aesthetic (Qi 1999a, 7–8). The symmetry and grand design of the Yuhuatai site convey a strong tenor of the heroic that is typical of memorial sites for martyrs. By contrast, the Nanjing Massacre site was asymmetrical and, at least until the 2007 renovation, was without any towering steles or structures that soar heroically to the sky. The design was minimalist and self-consciously avoided grand architectural gestures of the sublime.



Disaster in the Ancient City sculpture at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall

The memorial's aesthetic was somber and purposefully bleak and lifeless, unlike any other memorial in the PRC at the time it was built.²⁷ Much of the space—walls, ground, and steps—was done in cinder block, creating a uniformly drab color. Qi says he sought to convey the feeling of “entering a tomb.” The unique aesthetic of the design may of course be the product of the topic being commemorated: heroic designs commemorating resistance or grand sacrifice, so commonly heralded in revolutionary history museums and memorials to martyrs, are not appropriate for a memorial devoted to atrocity, and Qi Kang strove to find an appropriate aesthetic to capture the horror.²⁸ Perhaps influenced by Holocaust memorials in the West, Qi subtly conveyed a sense of tragedy and horror through a bleak and desolate aesthetic that was powerful and moving.

The original memorial space, elements of which have been retained in the 2007 renovation, consisted of three main sections: the L-shaped entranceway (added to the site in the 1995 renovations), the graveyard grounds, and the history exhibit. As you entered the square, a long courtyard led to the site's most impressive work of art, *Disaster in the Ancient City* (*Gucheng de zainan*), which is still part of the site. Its background is an ancient city wall riddled with holes (as if from bullets and bombs). In the foreground lies the half-buried body of a victim, his head severed from the rest of his body, of which only an arm and hand are visible. Above his head looms a Japanese knife, red with the blood of the victim below. Though the figure recalls similar sculptures at other memorial sites, for instance the unknown soldier at the Longhua Martyrs Memorial Park, it is a more despairing aesthetic.

Cutting across the buried body of the statue is the “bridge of history,” which symbolizes both the horrors inflicted on China by history and a passage out from the burden of that history, as

well as the idea that remembering the past will lead to a better future, a constant theme in PRC history museums and memorial sites. The bridge leads to a courtyard with a sculpture titled *The Footprints of Witnesses to History* (*Lishi zhengren de jiaoyin*), which consists of bronze footprints of survivors of the massacre. To the right is a wall on which is inscribed in bronze a long narrative poem about the massacre titled “Mad Snow” (*Kuang xue*), written by Wang Jiuxin. The sculpture and poem were added to the memorial site in 2002 and 2003, respectively.



***Footprints of Witnesses to History* sculpture at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall**

The most powerful part of the site is the graveyard ground, which has also been retained in the 2007 renovation. Although the entire site has a bleak look, the graveyard ground is especially so because of its uniform grayness and lack of greenery (the only greenery appears along the edges of the grounds, which Qi says is meant to offer hope within despair). It has something of a Zen garden aesthetic to it. Entirely walled in and invisible from the entrance square, the graveyard ground is entered by mounting some stairs, above which is a sign that reads “300,000 Victims,” and by walking through an

elbow-shaped passageway formed by cinderblock walls to each side. At the end of the enclosed passageway, a vista slowly opens to reveal a landscape of scorched pebbles interrupted only by a few leafless trees and the statue of a mother who appears to be searching for her child.²⁹ A statue of a mother holding a child figures prominently at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan and another, called *War Widow With Children*, is in the courtyard at Yasukuni Shrine. Qi Kang may be responding to these Japanese memorials, but the trope of mother and child has long figured prominently in leftist artistic discourse, both in the West and China.³⁰ Along the edge of the field of stones, the visitor follows a long stone relief, which forms a wall between the graveyard and the city, depicting moments of horror suffered by Nanjing residents during the massacre. After a memorial wall inscribed with names of victims, the path then leads through two separate “bones” rooms— exhibits of the bones of massacred victims found on the site. With its open space and relative absence of explicit signifiers, the graveyard grounds is the most contemplative and humanist section of the site. Rather than direct the spectator’s ire at a specific agent of atrocity, it provokes a more generalized feeling of the endemic nature of human cruelty and suffering.



Statue of a mother searching for her child in the graveyard ground part of the

Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall

Now housed in a grand new triangular structure, the historical exhibit of the original design was in a half-underground building and gave an overview of Japanese imperialism in China and of the massacre itself. The original exhibit opened with a statue titled *Mother and Child*, which showed a mother holding the limp body of her dead child, a sacrificial victim of the slaughter, and harked back to the mother figure in the graveyard ground. Behind the figure was a large photographic mural of dead bodies, above which loomed the number “300,000.” Clearly, the use of mother and child as the opening image of the exhibit was meant to suggest the innocence of the victims and reinforce the barbarity of the Japanese for severing the most fundamental of all human relations.

The exhibit was presented, as are the vast majority of museum exhibitions in the PRC, in chronological order and was clearly framed with the nationalist message of China’s struggles against imperialism, creating an interesting tension with the muted aesthetic of the more humanist graveyard outside. This schizophrenic quality of the memorial as a whole is expressed in the site’s name. The term “victim” (*yu’nanzhe*) gives a humanist sense of universal victimization and suffering, but the use of “compatriot” (*tongbao*) suggests that the memorial is still firmly within a nationalist paradigm. And although Buruma (2002, 9) criticizes it for demanding “piety of the Japanese and patriotism from the Chinese” and for not offering an “atmosphere in which dispassionate historical inquiry can thrive,” the memorial marked an important attempt to move away from socialist monumentality toward a more humanist vision of the suffering of war.

Museums in China are often used as active sites for memorialization. This is especially true

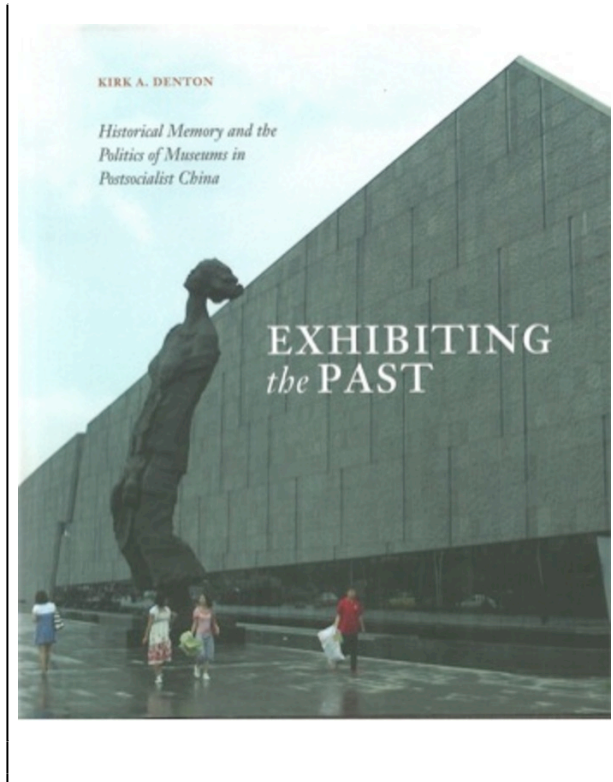
of the Nanjing Massacre memorial. I visited the museum on July 7, 2004; needless to say, special ceremonies were held, including personal oral narrations by living witnesses. The memorial hall has also been used as a site for exhibitions not directly related to its mandate. In 2009, it put on the Japanese War Manga Exhibit, an exhibit of 130 manga by Japanese artists depicting aspects of the Japanese experience during the war (Ishikawa 2010) that sought to find common ground through a sense of shared suffering for Chinese and Japanese with regard to the war. Plays have been performed on the site, and in 2012 a display of 6,380 pairs of shoes filled the memorial plaza to commemorate the Chinese workers who lost their lives doing forced labor in Japan during the war.³¹ These active appropriations might suggest that the site is more than just an empty shell embodying state-imposed memories, but it should be stressed that public commemorations at the site are highly regulated by the museum.³²

prominently broken and cracked walls, mother-child imagery, and the number 300,000³³—but they also altered the contemplative nature of Qi Kang's original design, which had already been undermined by the 1995 renovations and additions. The 2007 renovation, by adding an additional 20,000 square meters to the previous space, making the total area 74,000 square meters, gave the site a grandeur and monumentality it never had before. Whereas the original site was barely visible from the street, the 2007 renovation gave it a much more prominent street presence. The facade of the new exhibition hall now faces the street and forms a kind of walkway that leads to the main entrance. The walkway is referred to as the sculpture plaza and is lined by a reflecting pool dotted with sculptures of victims. Some of the sculptures depict victims fleeing the invading Japanese troops, but the most prominent—it dwarfs the others and is nearly as tall as the wall of the exhibition hall that serves as its backdrop—shows a mother carrying the limp and lifeless body of her child.³⁴ The sculpture, which alludes to similar images inside the site, sets the moral tone by emphasizing the breaking of the bond between mother and child.



Sculpture walkway and the new exhibition hall at the renovated Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall. Photo courtesy of Florian Schneider

The 2007 renovation and expansion reinforced many of the leitmotifs in the original site—most



The designers of the expansion sought to create some spaces for public and private contemplation and commemoration.³⁵ The main square, now called the Memorial Square, is much larger than the original and includes a new memorial wall. The wall is a recurring motif at the site, and walls with fissures are used to suggest the physical destruction inflicted by the Japanese invasion, but also the deep psychological rupture suffered by the Chinese. The new memorial wall also recalls walls in other commemorative sites, such as Jerusalem's Wailing Wall and Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The contemplation room (*mingsi ting*), an immense darkened box with candle-like lights and a pool of water, offers a quiet and somber space for spectators to ponder the horror of the massacre and the suffering of its victims, as well as the meaning of this horror and suffering to the present. Another space—the ceremonial courtyard (*jidian tianyuan*)—is used for official commemorations, usually carried out on key anniversaries such as December 13, the date of the beginning of the massacre, or July 7, the

date of the beginning of the war. At the center of the courtyard is an eternal flame, where flowers are often laid as an act of commemoration. Despite these efforts to respond to Qi Kang's original design, the new space, with its huge triangular exhibition hall and vast, open square, gives the site a scale that transforms the original modest space into something monumental, ramping up its visual rhetoric and magnifying the victimization narrative. As Adrian Parr (2008, 7–8) puts it, “monumentalizing the past immobilizes the social vitality of memory, defining and demarcating a limit-interpretation to it.” The vast scale of the memorial might actually serve to distance visitors from the suffering and trauma of history, making their relationship to the past less intimate and therefore less powerful. This monumentalization of trauma may also be motivated by the market economy, which turns memory of past suffering into a commodity to be consumed in the Nanjing tourist scape, a phenomenon Parr, in reference to 9/11 memorialization, has called the “reification of trauma” (166–180).

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For full bibliographic entries of sources referred to in this essay, you can download the bibliography for Denton's book [:here::](#)

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Notes

¹ Just as Moscow had its Museum of the Revolution, Red Army Museum, and Gorky Museum, Beijing followed with the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, the Military Museum, and the Lu Xun Memorial Hall. Wang Yeqiu, who would go on to develop the exhibition at the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, traveled with a delegation to Moscow in 1950, during which time he met with Alexander Gerasimov, the leading Soviet proponent of socialist realist oil painting, and visited revolutionary history museums such as the Lenin Museum (Wang Yeqiu 1997, 261-272).

² Museum activities resumed more vigorously in the latter half of the Cultural Revolution. As is well known, the early 1970s was a prolific period for archaeology work, undertaken in many cases by museums and their staffs. For general information on museums in the Cultural Revolution, see Lü Jimin 1998, 89-100.

³ For Mao's phrase, see Schram 1974, 267. This tendency to focus on the present rather than on an objectified past existed already during the Great Leap Forward, when one of the slogans in the museum field was "Stressing the present, not the past, and making the past serve the present."

⁴ To put post-Mao museum growth in perspective, in 1949 China had around twenty museums. By the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, there were 160. From 1980 to 1999, the number of museums rose from 365 to 1,357 (Wang Hongjun 2001, 114). Donghai Su (1995) writes, "Over approximately the last ten years, museums have developed considerably in terms of number, quality and type. The statistics show that more than 1000 museums have been established since 1980. . . . Up to the end of 1993, the number of museums funded

and supervised by the Chinese governments at different levels reached 1130."

⁵ For a discussion of post-Mao changes in historiography, see Weigelin-Schwiedrzik 2006.

⁶ For a collection of state laws and official proclamations regarding cultural heritage, see Wang Hongjun 2001, 493-559. For the reference to "spiritual civilization," see *ibid.*, 511.

⁷ Article 22 of the 1982 Constitution of the PRC reads, "The state promotes the development of literature and art, the press, broadcasting and television undertakings, publishing and distribution services, libraries, museums, cultural centres and other cultural undertakings, that serve the people and socialism, and sponsors mass cultural activities. The state protects places of scenic and historical interest, valuable cultural monuments and relics and other important items of China's historical and cultural heritage" (<http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>).

⁸ By the year 2000, the PRC ranked seventh in the total number of museums, well below the United States (more than 8,000), Germany (more than 4,500), and Italy (just less than 3,500) (Wang Hongjun 2001, 129-130). In the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics, museum construction and renovation continued at a fast past. According to Donghai Su (1995), in the 2000s China entered a new peak in museum construction. Some project that by 2015, China will have half again as many museums as it does today.

⁹ Paul Cohen (2002) has shown that the 1990s cultural field was replete with texts that sought to recall China's history of national humiliations at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialists, the *China Can Say No* (*Zhongguo keyi shuo bu*) books being the most obvious examples.

¹⁰ Studies of the emerging nationalism of the 1990s are too numerous to mention. See, for instance, Guo Yingjie 2004.

¹¹ See *Renmin ribao*, June 1, 1991. Jiang's call for enhanced patriotic education was generally referred to as "two histories, one situation" (*liang shi yi qing*), a condensation of the quotation cited above.

¹² See Wang Hongjun 2001, 522-525. The language of this state document reveals, to my mind, a strong, unspoken self-consciousness about the dangerous appeal of popular culture forms in distracting youths away from revolutionary history.

¹³ See Wang Maohua 1998 for a complete listing of the one hundred sites, as well as a detailed description of each. A second list of one hundred was later added to the original.

¹⁴ The Museum of the Chinese Revolution, for example, edited a four-volume pictorial history of modern China—using photographs and images of artifacts from the museum collection—titled *China: Moving from Humiliation to Glory* (ZGGM BWG 1997).

¹⁵ [A Temple to the PLA, Video & Article by Joel Martinsen at Danwei.ORG](#)

¹⁶ Museums have proliferated worldwide in the past three decades. According to one account, three quarters of all active museums in the world today were established after 1945 (Weil 2002, 31). In China, the percentage would be higher still.

¹⁷ Firms such as Ralph Applebaum Associates (RAA, New York), Gallagher & Associates (Bethesda), Jack Rouse (Cincinnati), and Lord Cultural Resources (Toronto) are all active in the PRC. RAA designed exhibits in the Capital Museum (Beijing) and the Deng Xiaoping Memorial Hall (Guang'an, Sichuan). Gallagher and Associates was involved in the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, and Jack

Rouse designed the exhibits for the Three Gorges Museum (Chongqing).

¹⁸ *Shou yi* is short for *shouxian qiyi*. See "Jian Xinhai geming bowuguan de zhongyao yiyi he zuoyong" (The important significance and function of establishing the Xinhai Revolution Museum). *Xinhai geming bowuguan zhuanli*. http://www.cnhan.com/gb/content/2002-12/26/content_232641.htm, accessed August 2, 2012.

¹⁹ See the Yifang website: <http://news.fdc.com.cn/lstzc/259166.htm>, accessed August 2, 2012.

²⁰ Zhang Yuteng (2003, 99-100) writes, without any apparent criticism, that the National Museum of Natural Science in Taichung, Taiwan, is motivated by a kind of "colonial" mentality in its desire to imitate the model of Western nations in building science museums. A history of the museum begins with the statement, "All civilized nations of the world have had large-scale science museums with long histories" (Zhang Yuteng 1993, 4), which suggests that science museums are symbols of a nation's advancement.

²¹ Cao Huoxing wrote the song in 1943 during the War of Resistance, well before New China had materialized.

²² There are an increasing number of privately owned and funded museums in China, but the vast majority of Chinese museums continue to be government funded. It is also true, however, that some state-run museums are forced to rely increasingly on non-state funding (donations and revenue from visitors). James Flath (2002, 54) argues that that frees them from the imposition of official statist narratives of history, though this is not necessarily the case. Funding is clearly a concern for Chinese museologists. Wang Hongjun, for example, devotes a chapter of his book on museum studies to the changing economic climate faced by museums in the West and China. He mentions the Shanghai Museum, which relied

heavily on outside donations for the construction of its new museum in the mid-1990s, as an example of how museums in general will have to cope in the era of the “socialist market economy” (Wang Hongjun 2001, 398–414). For a good overview of private museums in the PRC, see Song Xiangguang and Li Zhiling 2006.

²³ Her (2001) writes that in 2001 Taiwan had some one hundred private museums, almost one-third of the total (Zhang Yuteng 2003, 101).

²⁴ See story in the *New York Times*, Jan. 1, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/02/business/worldbusiness/02yuan.html>.

²⁵ Buruma (2002, 8) suggests that the idea for the memorial was Deng Xiaoping’s. Daqing Yang (2002) states that the memorial was a direct response to the textbook debates of 1982.

²⁶ The memorial is constructed on the site of a mass grave of victims that was unearthed in the early 1980s. For a detailed look at the excavation of this site, see Zhu 2002.

²⁷ Qi 1999a, 8. The memorial won the Liang Sicheng Prize for design in 2000. This was the first year of the prize, and it was presented to several architects for work done as far back as 1960.

²⁸ Qi (1999a) shows awareness of the difference of doing a memorial for Yuhuatai and the Nanjing Massacre memorial.

²⁹ The sculpture is apparently based on a shot in the American missionary John Magee’s documentary film footage of the atrocities.

³⁰ Käthe Kollwitz, a German leftist artist,

frequently used images of mothers separated from dead children or holding dead children in her etchings, woodblock prints, and sculptures. An enlarged version of her sculpture *Mother with Her Dead Son* was placed in the Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Tyranny in the famous Neue Wache in Berlin.

³¹ In 2009, the Nanjing Spoken Drama Troupe performed a play called *Fallen (Lunxian)*. See http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/dfpd/2009-12/14/content_9174415.htm, accessed July 31, 2012. On the shoe display, see <http://news.jxnews.com.cn/system/2010/08/15/011455548.shtml>, accessed July 31, 2102.

³² I do not mean to suggest that this and other memorial sites are not sometimes used by people for the expression of local and personal concerns that are at odds with official state policy, only that these uses are ultimately circumscribed by the state.

³³ The number appears in multiple places in the site, most prominently in the prefatory hall of the main exhibition space. It is the “official” number of people killed in the massacre, a number that may have been arrived at by upping the ante of the 290,000 thought to have died in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

³⁴ The artist Wu Weishan designed the sculptures. See Wang Wenzhang 2008 and Wu Weishan 2008.

³⁵ One of the design ideals the designers were working with in developing the plan for the renovation was to create a commemorative space (*jinianxing changsuo*). They also sought to integrate the new design with the original structures. See He, Ni, and Liu 2008, 11.