

THE REVIVAL OF REGIONAL MUSEUMS AS KEEPER OF CULTURE IN POST-MAO CHINA (1976-1978)

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Abstract

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)¹ ushered a decade of civil unrest in China when the country and its people suffered serious setbacks and losses since the founding of the new China when China's cultural development was at a low ebb. As a record of Chinese socio-history and culture in the post-Mao era, the Regional Museum of China reflects some extent, the relationship between China (1976-1978) and immaterial cultural production and historical continuity under certain spatial conditions. It is a true example of China's socio-historical and cultural processes. Based on regional museums in China, this paper uses qualitative research and documentary analysis to explain China's historical evolution and cultural renaissance during the two-year hiatus following a decade of turmoil. Field visits to regional museums were conducted within the defined scope of the study, a wealth of information was collected for statistical analysis, and the impact of the New Deal on the construction of regional museums was discussed. This includes their contribution to the restoration and reconstruction of historical artifacts that have produced a revival of Chinese history and culture.

Keywords: Cultural Revolution, a decade of unrest, regional museums, new deal, reconstruction of historical relics

Introduction

Regional museums are based on a specific regional society, characterized by their unique exhibition content and local cultural collections. Their mission is to preserve the memory of specific regional societies and to collate, study and disseminate them². Regional museums in China are part of the overall historical memory of the post-Mao era. They serve as the 'historical soul' of this period and reflect the relationship between society at the time, the production of immaterial culture, and the continuation of history under certain conditions. They represent as examples of Chinese society's historical and cultural process.

The post-Mao era was a time of significant achievements in China's socio-historical evolution and cultural development. The period 1976-1978 was a turning point in China's post-Mao era³ and the most crucial two years in China's cultural evolution, inheriting from the ten-year Cultural Revolution and following China's Reform and opening-up⁴. This period saw the country hovering over a series of rectifications, learning from the experiences and lessons of the Cultural Revolution period, and establishing policies to restore China's historical and cultural development, which became the basis for China's drive to build its history and culture in the post-Mao era⁵. Although the Cultural Revolution brought disasters to China's cultural

endeavours, there were also 'oases' after the desert. The reconstruction and emergence of regional museums have overturned traditional historical perceptions of the Cultural Revolution. They have to some extent, influenced and contributed to the introduction of China's New Deal for Culture and the gradual recovery and revival of the country from its cultural ruins.

The End of a Turbulent Decade

In 1966, an extraordinary movement called the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out in China. This movement swept through China like a violent storm. In Chinese society at that time, one could see criticism meetings, struggle meetings, lecture meetings and denunciation meetings as well as large posters and slogans in government offices, schools, factories and rural areas. One could see the feverishness of young Chinese students in military uniforms, holding little red books in their hands, running around. One could see the sudden emergence of all sorts of mass organizations from the Chinese landscape. One could see the protests, debates, splits and even armed struggles within mass organizations. One could see the cultural institutions of the Chinese government and local museums being badly hit, battered and even destroyed. The historical wounds left by the unprecedented civil unrest are so deep and momentous that they are hard to heal and sometimes painful⁶. The Cultural Revolution and the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee⁷ are undoubtedly two of the most significant events in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. They profoundly influenced the course of China's history and culture in the post-Mao era, ending the immature period of exploration of Chinese socialism through the Cultural Revolution and a period of reform, opening up and socialist modernisation in China.⁸

The Cultural Revolution occupied more than a third of the republic's Maoist era and Mao considered it to be one of the two major events he did in his life⁹. Thus a proper understanding of the history of the Cultural Revolution is of significance for the study of the history and culture of the post-Mao era. The two years preceding the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (1978) and the historical turnaround after the Cultural Revolution, are both the history of the consolidation of Mao Zedong thought and its creative enrichment. In this history, many ideological and practical features of the two historical periods before the Cultural Revolution and after the Reform and opening-up coexisted and met head-on for the first time. The encounter of ideas led to the formation of the Thought Liberation Movement, which broke down the rigid and dogmatic understanding of Mao Zedong Thought and laid the ideological foundation for an opening for Reform and opening-up¹⁰. The two years period (1976-1978) following the end of the Cultural Revolution was the most crucial in China's social and historical process as the end of the Cultural Revolution was followed by the beginning of a new period of Reform and opening up. During this period, the country carried out rectifications of mistakes from the Cultural Revolution, learned from its lessons and explored and defined a socialist construction path suitable for China's national conditions.

As repository of historical materials derived from the different evolutionary periods of Chinese society, Chinese regional museums form a bridge between the past and the future of China's post-Maoist history, and an intrinsic part of the development of socialist science and culture in China. With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the convening of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, the development of Chinese history and culture was restored and China's regional museums began to flourish.

The Impact of the Cultural Revolution

In 1966, the "Gang of Four", led by Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan, launched the "Cultural Revolution" that led to a decade of civil unrest¹¹. During the Cultural Revolution, the country and its people suffered serious setbacks and losses since the establishment of New China. Cultural undertakings were also devastated by the turmoil. Against the backdrop of society, the people's spiritual quest was far from keeping pace with the times. It was a time of severe downturn in the development of Chinese history and culture. The death of Mao Zedong in 1976, and the subsequent downfall of the Gang of Four formally ended the Decade of Catastrophe that usher in the beginning of the post-Mao era.¹²

The "Breaking the Four Olds"¹³ movement was the most direct loss of the post-Maoist era as a result of the Cultural Revolution. This was a complete negation of the achievements of socialist literature and art in the 17 years since the founding of the new country and the tradition of revolutionary literature and art since the 1930s. Declaring the need to uphold the "continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat", the Chinese literary and artistic scene was devastated as never before, turning mass cultural activities into a political movement of the masses. Public libraries and museums were almost shut down, public cultural facilities were used for other purposes, and a large number of precious cultural heritage and books were swept away and destroyed as the "Four Olds" and cultural dregs. Artistic work with foreign countries was severely damaged, institutions were abolished, cadres were disbanded, the usefulness of foreign cultural excellence was totally rejected, and cultural agreements and annual exchange programmes with foreign countries were all interrupted. During this decade, cultural authoritarianism was rampant in China, and the confinement of ideas became a mental prison that bound people's minds at the time. The "garden of culture" withered and suffered an unprecedented catastrophe.¹⁴

The "Breaking the Four Olds" movement left a profound lesson in the history of China's historical and cultural development. It also led to the most direct loss and impact of the Cultural Revolution on museums in the post-Mao era. However, it led to the emphasis on the direction of historical and cultural development at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978 and to the implementation of several cultural policies. Since the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, China's regional museums have also seen a new opportunity for development and a new surge in the revival of Chinese history and culture.

Regional Museums and Cultural Policy

As essential element of the political system, cultural policies are also time-sensitive. At a particular stage of social development, when cultural policies are formulated and implemented, adapted to the current cultural situation, and to meet the development of new cultural relations and needs of public cultural life, they inevitably achieve the desired goals linking a series of cultural effects. This is the most significant expression of the scientific nature of cultural policies¹⁵. When social development, particularly cultural construction, enters a new phase, the corresponding cultural policy needs to be updated from the directions of the new phase of cultural development. The expected result of the policy may slow down the pace of cultural progress, and even cause some confusion in the public cultural life. The cultural policy provides regional museums a critical role that has a specific regulatory and reshaping effect on culture and the public. Furthermore, a regional museum is not merely a public building for a region: it is linked to the relevant cultural institutions as a response to a particular time and society.

Cultural policy is an important tool in the development and construction of China's historical culture, providing a political guarantee for the development and prosperity of culture in the post-Mao era beside the key to advancing reform of China's cultural system and the innovation of cultural content thereby better meeting the cultural needs of the people. Regional museums, on the other hand, are a spatial reflection of the material dimension of public culture. The development of public space is a tangible manifestation of the evolution of public culture, which often responds to cultural policies of a particular period. After the founding of New China, the Communist Party began to lead the Chinese people in the construction of socialist culture. A series of new cultural policies emerged that reflected the times. They evolved at different stages of social construction, thus forming an evolving path¹⁶. With a long history of civilisation, China has not explicitly proposed the concept of a cultural policy to be used to regulate and standardise the cultural life of society and to educate the minds of the people that led to the emergence of cultural boom and decline at a certain time due to policy mistakes. Corresponding regional museums too had experienced similar downturn or decline along with the cultural evolution of the period.

The Cultural Revolution was an extraordinary phase in China's history. Various undertakings suffered setbacks in their development and deviated from the expected path¹⁷. The same is true of cultural evolution, which is guided and driven by highly distinctive policies influenced by major historical events. Prior to 1976, the Cultural Revolution was directed at the arts and culture resulting in the destruction of many cultural achievements, criticisms of intellectuals and cultural stagnation or even regression. Under the slogan of revolution, this class struggle, which in essence was waged from the cultural sphere and extended to the whole of society, inflicted unimaginable damage on China's intellectuals and cultural undertakings, especially the total negation and abandonment of the positive achievements in cultural transformation and construction in the 17 years since the founding of the new China¹⁸. Most of China's public libraries and regional museums were shut down, public cultural facilities were diverted for other uses, and much precious cultural heritage and books were swept away and

destroyed. External cultural work was severely damaged, institutions were abolished, the cadre was disbanded, the foreign cultural influence was rejected, and cultural agreements and annual exchange programmes with foreign countries were interrupted¹⁹. During the Cultural Revolution, cultural authoritarianism was rampant, intellectual confinement became a mental cage that bound people's minds, and China's "cultural garden" withered. The cultural policies that emerged after this period are essential for exploring the laws of cultural evolution in the post-Mao era and for developing historical and cultural prosperity in regional museums.

China's initial undertakings were also exploratory and uncertain after the end of the Cultural Revolution. This exploratory nature was largely reflected in the changes in state policy. Prior to 1978, the ideological confinement of cultural thought during the Cultural Revolution led central government and local governments still wander at the crossroads of cultural construction decisions, especially as the 'two things'²⁰ approach stalled the thinking of most people in the government. Some regions still continued to adopt the strategies of the Cultural Revolution and continued its tactics of the Cultural Revolution²¹. It was not until 1978, when China held the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, that the Communist Party began to formalise its policy of vigorously restoring and developing Chinese history and culture based on stocktaking and reflection²². Among other things, the State has re-implemented the "Double Hundred Approach"²³, encouraging cultural institutions to use public cultural facilities to carry out services and business activities as a means of spreading culture and education, and to better carry out cultural services, and encouraging localities to build independent museums and cultural institutions. Since then, local governments in China have come to build regional museums, partly to restore local history and culture through reconstructing local museums. This is a significant turning point in contemporary Chinese cultural policy, as artistic work began to diversify.

Moreover, the restoration and development of regional museums can be seen as responses to the cultural policy of the times. In the post-Mao era, cultural policy is still driven by political ideology while regional museums are unwilling to be passive beneficiaries or victims of top-down policy. They want to contribute to the development and implementation of policy through a precise assessment of the situation, as they are in the position to work with a wide range of cultural stakeholders. On the other hand, public projects that could take the cultural dimension of regional development must maximise the value of their functions, such as accessibility to the museum system for socially diverse cultural institutions which can also be understood as the 'empowerment'²⁴ of regional museums.

Regional museums have the advantage over national museums of being distinctive and rich in categories, a window for the individual expression and display of different groups, and a reflection of the long-term accumulation and collection of folk culture. It also turns individual collections into the commonwealth of society thus reflecting the cultural will at the national level. The development of regional museums can also be seen as a reflection of the evolution of cultural policy and culture during China's two-year wandering period, and their role in the history and culture of the region has, to some extent, deepened the distribution of the influence of cultural policy.

Redevelopment of Regional Museums

As an essential part of a country's historical and cultural development, regional museums have established a close relationship with society, not only by taking on the role of collecting, studying and interpreting regional memory carriers but also by relating them to the overall historical evolution of the period.²⁵ The collections of regional museums reflect to a large extent, the historical development of the local area from ancient times to the present day, as well as the political, cultural and economic nuances of the country in a historical context, where the local area both mirrors and differentiates itself from the mainstream in the ongoing evolution of history and culture. In China, regional museums are based primarily on administrative divisions and linked to national museums. They occupy the most significant proportion of the museum sector and have been the focus of national museum construction. The revival of history and culture required the development of local cultural institutions, which collectively built the overall cultural model of a nation, and determined the inherent advantage of massive reconstruction and prosperity of regional museums in post-Maoist China.

The end of the Cultural Revolution witnessed the withering of local cultural institutions and the destruction of most cultural relics. Recognising the seriousness of this destruction, the Chinese central government began formulating policies and measures²⁶. In December 1978, the museum sector in some parts of China began to reorganise and develop, clearing up the confusion caused by the 'ten-year turmoil'.²⁷ In short, a new period of historical development began for regional museums. Soon afterward, the museum's department was separated, and the development of regional museums in China came under the control of the government. The government has been consistent in planning the construction and development of regional museums, making full use of the advantages of existing local buildings, restoring cultural relics, organising local exhibitions, strengthening the integration of culture and tourism, and revitalising the cultural resources of regional museums²⁸. Since the end of 1978, regional museums with local and ethnic characteristics were restored and built in various provinces, cities, districts, counties and ethnic minority areas. The creation of local museums has greatly relieved the pressure on large national museums caused by an eagerness to visit cultural relics. At the same time, regional museums quickly healed the wounds of the decade of turmoil, allowing the country's cultural institutions to be rebuilt with a new look. To a certain, this contributes to the recovery and development of Chinese culture.²⁹

In December 1978, the Third Central Committee of the Eleventh Central Committee of China put forward the decision to shift the focus of national work to socialist modernisation³⁰. Based on scientific research in museum-related fields, various systems of collection management were gradually improved, changing the face of the essential work of museums in China. Other aspects include the archiving of first-class items in the collections, the cataloging of general collections, and the shelving of the collections in repositories, which led to more scientific maintenance of cultural relics, materials and pictures. After 1978, books, magazines, pamphlets and other forms of promotional literature were summarised and published in various regions; tens of thousands of books, magazines, brochures and other forms of promotional literature were published in various regions.³¹ These publications and management manuals

were well received by the community. In order to raise the professional and academic standards of museums in the country, many museums organized seminars. Prior to 1978, there were many regional museums in the field of social history, as China had a long history and a wealth of historical sites and relics, which were the strength of China's regional museums. After the Third Plenary Session, China began to see the establishment of museums in various sectors and industries. State, departmental, collective and individual museums of various types have come to the fore, creating a large number of distinctive regional museums. The collections is no longer confined to the traditional concept of "historical" and "relics". It constantly expands to include new concepts of representative objects that reflect human society and history.³² This was an important trend in the construction of regional museums in 1978.

Taking museums in the Henan region as an example, in 1976, when the Cultural Revolution ended, 16 museums were established there including the Yellow River Museum, Zhengzhou City Museum, Luoyang City Museum, Xinxiang City Museum, Anyang City Museum, Tangyin Yue Fei Memorial Hall, Nanyang City Museum, Kaifeng City Museum, Jiaozuo City Museum and Hebi City Museum³³. After the Third Plenary Session, the museum sector received renewed attention from the government and society, and the value of museums was recognized and affirmed. The museum industry in Henan saw unprecedented development, with museums of all kinds springing up. From 1976 to the end of 1978, Henan had 30 museums opened to the public³⁴, and the development of Henan museums entered a golden age. The speed of its development, the scope of its range and the number of categories are incomparable to the past. The development of museums in Henan during this period has the following characteristics. First, the number of museums with unique content on various topics has increased dramatically, breaking the previous situation of absolute dominance of general museums of geography. Second, the layout of museums had changed considerably, with more than 20 museums at the county (city) level, more than three times before the Cultural Revolution.

On the one hand, this show that regional museums are becoming more and more popular and that museums are developing at the grassroots. On the other hand, it show the considerable potential of regional museums. Third, the types of museums have tended to diversify. After 1978, the categories of museums in Henan Province have become more complete. According to the content of collections and displays, there are ancient history, modern revolutionary commemorative categories, famous people of the past, light burial sites, books and arts, folklore teaching, water conservancy, earth shell, factory broadcast and garden. Other departments have also established professional museums. In addition, private collections and exhibitions began to emerge, which make the museum sector in Henan Province exceptionally active and showing strong vitality. In addition to the new museums, some of the old ones, such as the Kaifeng Museum, the Xinxiang Museum, the Nanyang Han Painting Museum, the Zhengzhou Museum and the Henan Museum premises have been expanded or rebuilt with new vigour and new lease of life.³⁵

Figure 1: Reconstruction of Henan Museum in 1977



Source: Regional exhibition gallery of National Museum of China

The post-Mao era has seen a surge in the development and construction of regional museums in China. Since 1978, the regional museum sector has developed rapidly in all parts of China, with the number of small and medium-sized regional museums growing at an alarming rate. In addition, museums of all types, with the exception of history museums, cover almost all subjects and operate in many different ways. By the end of 1978, the number of regional museums in China had exceeded 1,000 and was still growing³⁶. The process of reconstruction of regional museums has provided a constant source of historical resources and standards of change in the overall historical and cultural evolution of China. This illustrates that the development of regional museums in China has gone hand in hand with the cultural recovery and evolution of the country.

The Restoration of Heritage and Historical Materials

Artifacts and historical materials are the products of a specific social history. In material form, cultural relics are precious cultural heritage handed down through long periods of history, with historical, educational, artistic and scientific value, and are a valuable historical and cultural heritage of humanity. By its very nature, heritage has the unique characteristic of being non-renewable, a testimony to the history of humankind. Still, it possesses significant historical, scientific and artistic value in the wash of time³⁷. Regional museums are the best place to preserve China's local natural and cultural heritage. They are also the central collection units for China's regional heritage, responsible for preserving the region's precious historical materials. The preservation of the intrinsic roots of the Chinese nation lies in the integration of local historical relics and materials, so regional museums not only contain the historical and cultural connotations of each region, but also served as a profound historical reflection of the regional focus on the centre.

Modern historians often have the simple idea that since the Cultural Revolution was a cultural revolution, cultural relics should be the object of this so-called revolutionary movement, which aimed to break down the old and create the new.³⁸ The 'Four Olds' movement³⁹ of 1966, in particular, caused considerable damage to China's cultural heritage, yet today many important heritage sites can still be found intact throughout China. How much damage was done to cultural relics during the Cultural Revolution? What are the reasons that so many cultural relics have survived the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution? Looking at five provinces and cities in northern, northeastern, eastern, southern and northwestern China as examples, three of the 39 municipal cultural relic protection units in Beijing were destroyed namely the ruins of Changping Hancheng, the Bronze Buddha of Yanshou Temple and Sheng'an Temple, and 49 of the 155 provincial-level protected cultural heritage units in Hebei were completely destroyed. The Iron Bodhisattva of the Song dynasty in Dongguang County was smashed as the 'Four Olds' during the early years of the Cultural Revolution, 51 of the 342 cultural heritage units were destroyed in Jiangsu province. These include the Song Dynasty Miaofeng pagoda in Kunshan, the Ming Dynasty Enemy Tower in Wuxian, and the Ming Dynasty Sheng'en temple. In Guangdong province, 12 of the 63 protected cultural heritage units were withdrawn due to serious damage, such as the Hai Rui tombstone in Haikou C and the Nirvana Stone pagoda in Yangshan County. In Heilongjiang province, four of the 13 provincial cultural heritage units were completely destroyed, including the Guangyue temple in Yilan County, and Ning'an County mosque were destroyed. In Qinghai province, in addition to the Tar temple and Qudan temple, 13 other sites were severely damaged or lost their protection value after comprehensive archaeological excavations were withdrawn, and the remaining 47 sites were re-published.⁴⁰ Cultural relics have suffered varying degrees of destruction in all regions of China.

In December 1976, the Chinese Ministry of History and Culture issued a document entitled "Opinion on the Protection of Key Cultural Relics in the Cultural Revolution Movement"⁴¹, requesting that destroyed and abandoned cultural relics be housed in revolutionary history museums for unified placement, and then to distribute them to all regions after inventorying and consolidating them so as to prevent manufactured destruction. This "Notice" make clear the principle that all protected cultural relics should be protected while those that cannot be identified should be temporarily sealed and disposed properly. General temples "with no heritage value" are required to be dealt with appropriately under a central government decree, with restrictions placed on Cultural Revolution fanatics who destroyed them. In 1977, regional museums took on the responsibility of locating lost local historical artifacts or restoring those that had been damaged. Local governments at all levels invested increasing amounts of human, material and financial resources to recover and restore cultural relics in local museums⁴². In Xi'an, for example, several local regulations and policies for protecting cultural relics were introduced between 1977 and 1978. The Xi'an Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics carried out a 'Cultural Revolution Cultural Relics Loss Record' for all cultural relic management offices and museums in the area, as well as for the historical and cultural city. In September 1978, the construction p for the heritage conservation base of the Xi'an Museum was formally approved by heritage experts. They began in the fourth quarter of 1978. Although the programme for the recovery of lost cultural relics and the protection of cultural

relics was introduced in Xi'an just a year ago⁴³, the city has already made significant progress in recovering and restoring cultural relics. Several colourful regional heritage sites have been rediscovered, protected and restored, allowing the heritage's historical and cultural value to be highlighted in a whole new way.

Cultural and historical relics are the basis for all regional museums, which need to be replenished and enriched constantly so as to enhance their quality. In 1978, the collection of new artifacts by regional museums was the core of China's regional heritage restoration⁴⁴. With the growing importance of cultural relics and museums after the Cultural Revolution, many new and expanded museums were built in various provinces and regions. The issue of cultural relics collection has become more crucial as too many of them were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, resulting in a serious shortage of cultural relics in various regions while some regional museums are unable to hold complete exhibitions using their existing collections. To further strengthen the collection of cultural relics in regional museums, in 1978, China's provincial cultural relics authorities succeeded in introducing in 1978 the "Local Museum Cultural Relics Collection Measures"⁴⁵. These museums detailed supporting policies related collection of cultural relics put in a sound system for reviewing and filing the collection process, and established a system for evaluating transaction creditworthiness. The funding for the collection of cultural relics became part of the local government budget to pay for the purchase of cultural relics. According to the museum's regional characteristics and resources, the development of a sustainable and feasible heritage collection programme requires review by competent departments for funding.

For example, the Tangshan Museum in Hebei Province is a relatively young museum with a fragile collection base. Since 1978 it has received 581 donations of cultural relics. The Tangshan government collected cultural relics through a variety of channels, in addition to official collections. At a symposium held on the occasion of the opening of a new museum, the donors were invited to the museum and were welcomed by the Party Secretary and Mayor of Tangshan. Every year, during the Spring and Mid-Autumn Festivals, the museum bureaucrats sent staff to visit the hometown of donors and to get feedbacks and suggestions on the work of the museum⁴⁶. Other regional museums are also making progress in their collection of cultural relics.

Heritage remains central to the work of regional museums and a valuable historical and cultural asset for the country. The regional museums' efforts to recover and develop local heritage and historical materials by pursuing cultural relics, and collecting and preserving them are an essential part of the country's recovery of historical and cultural development in the post-Mao era. The collections in the regional museums aptly reflect the evolutionary development of post-Maoist society and are of importance to the transmission and continuity of Chinese history and culture. At present, China's regional museums have well-equipped infrastructures, with outstanding achievements in terms of architecture, collections and organisation of exhibition activities⁴⁷. As the process of implementing regional museums and Chinese cultural policy continues to accelerate, more and more scholars are gaining a deeper understanding of regional museums and, at the same time, laying a solid foundation for the transmission of

Chinese traditional culture.

The Mission of Regional Museums - Heritage and Renewal

As a virtual memory of China's post-Maoist phase of history, the China Regional Museum could evolve into valuable evidence of historical material under China's two-year hovering period. The reflection of the different stages of China's history after the end of the Cultural Revolution movement maintains the historical integrity and cultural continuity of each stage in a specific dimension.

The development of regional museums in China is closely linked to the country's social, historical and cultural processes, and it directly reflects the social development process of the time. As an integral part of the socio-political, historical and cultural reflection of a particular period in China, regional museums preserve to a certain extent the achievements of regional civilization; they also measure the transmission and writing of the history of the post-Maoist era. In the context of the Cultural Revolution that broke out in 1966, China's regional museums, to some extent, reflect the relationship between immaterial cultural production and historical continuity in Chinese society at that time under certain spatial and temporal conditions. It also serves as a reflection of the beginning of historical and cultural development in the post-Maoist era. The regional museum needs to constantly reflect on its content and give it new concepts and possibilities in the context of a particular phase of society. In 1976, the reconstruction of regional museums, the first step in China's recovery of history and culture, was intended to emphasise the museum-like nature of history and culture itself, as a representation and manifestation of the interrelationship between different stages of historical and cultural evolution in the post-Mao era and regional museums. Regional museums have been constructed alongside the development of Chinese social history and have become an intrinsic motivation for clarifying the national cultural identity of a region or even a country. China underwent socio-historical changes in 1966, 1976 and 1978, and Chinese regional museums truly reflect and embody the evolution of these socio-historical and cultural changes. In short, Chinese regional museums have also become, to some extent, the basis for the evolution of China's historical and cultural development.

Regional museums have a special mission to pass on to succeeding generations the history and culture of China⁴⁸. In the development of regional museums, the historical and cultural heritage function will be reflected in the level of work on the preservation and transmission of local culture and the ability to reinterpret their cultural connotations and artistic values in the light of some very unique regional historical and cultural elements. Since 1976, when the country began to focus on preserving and transmitting local culture, the management of staff within regional museums has become increasingly important. Many local historians have been able to find some of the marks of a specific historical period in their local museums and carry out corresponding research and educational work from the perspective of preserving local history and culture.⁴⁹ Regional museums' historical and cultural heritage functions could cover the content and forms associated with constructing and conserving the local cultural environment. It can also be linked to other social and cultural functions. Many cities and

regions are rich in history and culture. They can also provide more historical information to present the full range of historical and cultural heritage values, which is conducive to the work of local cultural preservation and transmission. In particular, in the process of comprehensive conservation and management of local cultural elements and symbols, the collections and technical materials in many regional museums could be an effective channel for historical and cultural tracing, as well as for the promotion of China's outstanding historical and cultural elements and symbols and spirit, which is of significant benefit to the preservation and transmission of local culture.

The restoration of cultural objects is an integral part to pass on history.⁵⁰ It is one of the works that many regional museums do to perpetuate their local culture. Many local and grassroots museums have vibrant collections. They will also house some of the more ethnically distinctive collections, which can be gradually restored to the cultural landscape and scenes of a particular historical period in the course of restoration work. Not only is it possible to visualise the evolution of dynamic historical and cultural elements symbols for the community, but the interest and educational significance are also remarkable. Many regional history museums have opened some online tours and other sections with audio and video recordings and off-site interpretations of the restoration work of different categories of cultural objects in their collections⁵¹. The specific manifestations of heritage restoration work are more diverse and contribute to the quality of historical and cultural heritage and the dissemination efficiency of regional museums. For example, the Shenzhen Museum and the Guangzhou Museum are able to provide viewing services to domestic visitors in the process of restoring cultural relics, as well as showcasing China's excellent traditional culture to foreign friends⁵², which was one of the factors that enabled China to implement its Reform and opening-up policy in 1978 and to promote traditional Chinese culture effectively.

Regional museums also carry the mission of reviving Chinese history and culture. Firstly, it has a role in influencing a country's cultural policy and in the historical construction of a region's cultural image and social and cultural evolution. After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978, the Chinese government renewed its cultural policy and development objectives. Regional museums became the vehicle for the public to understand the direction of cultural development in this country, featuring local historical memories and historical events, and art exhibition activities as a form of expression, which have a positive catalytic effect on the vitality of the historical and cultural development of society⁵³. Secondly, regional museums represent the coordinates of local history and culture. As the primary carrier of the regional history and culture, they have the responsibility to protect, research, educate and disseminate the region's historical and cultural heritage, thus becoming a region's 'cultural hub'. Fundamental to the existence of this cultural nucleus is the contribution of regional displays of historical and cultural heritage to the evolving contemporary culture, thus influencing the cultural processes of the country as a whole.

The practice has proved that history has come from afar and that a country's historical and cultural connotations are formed by long-term precipitation and accumulation: it is the nation's soul and the root of the country⁵⁴. As a carrier of this culturally rich heritage, the

regional museum is a gathering place to crystallize distinctive national culture. It has the responsibility to discover, disseminate, pass on and puzzle out the traditional elements of a national culture through this heritage⁵⁵. Traditional Chinese history and culture have evolved over the course of five thousand years to reach their present pattern. Much of this history and culture is of great value and can also be considered the crystallisation and epitome of an era, with regional museums being the physical reality that mirrors this epitome.

Conclusion

This study aims to illustrate the revival of China's regional museums as caretakers of Chinese history and culture in 1976-1978 with the aim of highlighting the mission given to regional museums as part of the historical construction of China's post-Mao era. In the face of the rapid development of society today, even the most glorious civilisations can be swept away by the dust of time, as shown by the phenomenon of historical absence and cultural discontinuity caused by the Cultural Revolution which affected the process of historical and cultural development in the post-Mao era. As part of the historical and cultural whole, regional museums have a responsibility to provide a constant source of resources and changing standards in the process of significant historical change and cultural development.

The salient issue in the two-year hovering period of Chinese history between 1976 and 1978 was the restoration and reconstruction of the historical and cultural sphere, including the evolution and renewal of cultural policy in the post-Mao era. The regional museum represents a constant field of Chinese history and culture; it had a significant impact on the problematic exploration and sharpening of the evolution of historical and cultural development in the post-Mao era and on the emergence and transformation of Chinese cultural policy direction after 1976. In the first place, regional museums have promoted the restoration and reconstruction of cultural relics and historical materials destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, providing sufficient historical materials and material evidence for the revival of culture and the transmission of history in the post-Mao era. Secondly, it promotes the construction and development of regional history and culture, enabling it to carry on and provide inexhaustible momentum for the entire post-Maoist process.

As a caretaker of Chinese history and culture, the study of associated regional museums is essential to the evolution and revival of Chinese history and culture. On the one hand, it enables an assessment of the impact of regional museums on the process of historical and cultural development in the post-Mao era. It also provides a valuable reference for future research in the field of Chinese history and culture in the post-Mao era by serving as the basis for constructing new ideas for regional museums appropriate to Chinese culture's evolution and historical continuity.

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Notes

¹ The Cultural Revolution, known as the "Proletarian Cultural Revolution" in full, took place from May 1966 to October 1976. It was a civil unrest that was wrongly launched by leaders and used by counter revolutionary groups, which brought serious disasters to the people of all ethnic groups in China. Refer: Society of Party History of the Communist Party of China 中共党史协会, *China in the Mao Zedong era (1949-1976)*(毛泽东时代的中国, Maozedong Shidai De Zhongguo), BeiJing: CPC History press (中共党史出版社 CPC ChuBanShe), 2003, p.157.

² Ibid., pp.158-159.

³ In 1976 China announced the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the 'post-Mao era' until 1978, on the eve of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, when the Chinese government reflected on the mistakes of the Cultural Revolution and re-established a new cultural policy. These two years are therefore known as a time of great breakthroughs in China's socio-historical development and cultural turnaround. Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the Cultural Revolution*(文化大革命简史 Wenhua Dageming Jianshi), Chinese Communist Party History Press (中共党史出版社 Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe), 2005, pp.136-137.

⁴ Reform and opening up was proposed and created by Deng Xiaoping, the second generation leader of the People's Republic of China, after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on 18 December 1978, when a series of economic-oriented reform measures were initiated, which can be summarised as "internal reform and external opening up". Data from the Chinese Wikipedia.

⁵ Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the Cultural Revolution*, p.17.

⁶ Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the People's Republic of China* (中华人民共和国简史 Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Jianshi), Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House(上海人民出版社 Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe), 1999, p.20.

⁷ Ibid., p. 28. The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the People's Republic of China broke through the mistakes and serious constraints of the Cultural Revolution and re-established the Party's ideological line of seeking truth from facts. The Plenum shifted the focus of China's work to socialist modernisation and set out the task of Reform and opening-up. The opening up of China's cultural doors has led to the further development of regional museums in China.

⁸ Cao Binwu 曹兵武, *Museum and Culture*(博物馆与文化 Bowuguan yu wenhua), Beijing: China Book Bureau (中华书局 ZhongHua Shuju), 2021, pp.25-26.

- ⁹ Society of Party History of the Communist Party of China, pp.75-76.
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- ¹¹ Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the Cultural Revolution*, p.2.
- ¹² Ibid., p.6.
- ¹³ The "Breaking the Four Olds" to the social movement of the People's Republic of China at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1967-1975), in which the Red Guards, mainly university and high school students, carried out a campaign to "break up old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits. Refer: Jin Chunming 金春明, *A Brief History of the Cultural Revolution*, p.26.
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²⁸ Ibid.

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