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NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND KNOWLEDGE
PRODUCTION IN MUSEUMS: A CASE STUDY OF
THE *FIVE-THOUSAND-YEAR HISTORY AND
CULTURE OF CHINA* EXHIBITION HELD BY THE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY, TAIPEI, IN
1956



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National Consciousness and Knowledge Production in Museums: A Case Study of the *Five-Thousand-Year History and Culture of China* Exhibition held by the National Museum of History, Taipei, in 1956

Synopsis:

The National Museum of History was established in Taipei in 1955 on the orders of the KMT government, and after the Second World War and produced the exhibition The Five-Thousand-Year History and Culture of China. This article aims to take the exhibition as an example to show how the Museum created displays through the methods of knowledge production and was able to inform and influence the Taiwanese people in the 1950s.

**National Consciousness and Knowledge Production in Museums:
A Case Study of the NMH's *Five Thousand Year History and Culture of China*
Founding Exhibition in 1956**

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Abstract

The National Museum of History was established in Taipei Botanical Garden in 1955 on the orders of the government. Because of the urgency of the political needs of the country at that critical time, the Museum had to accept the mission to provide social education without an actual collection. Fully exercising its imagination and creativity it held the founding exhibition *The Five Thousand Year History and Culture of China*. The exhibition exerted a great social and educational function amid the difficult political situation of the ROC. The Museum also became the pioneer of educational display in Taiwan's museums after the war. This article, therefore, aims to take *The Five Thousand Year History and Culture of China* exhibition as an example to show how the Museum created displays through the methods of knowledge production in the 1950s.

Keywords

The National Museum of History, national consciousness, knowledge production, cultural China, *The Five Thousand Year History and Culture of China* Founding Exhibition

I. Introduction: The National Museum of History's mission and the background to its founding

On 25th October, 1945, the government of the Republic of China (ROC) formally accepted Taiwan back into its fold, ending Japan's 50-year rule over this island. At the time, as far as the ROC was concerned, Taiwan was simply a piece of its territory being recovered after eight years of the War of Resistance Against Japan, but, by 1949, this situation had brought huge, unexpected change because the ROC suffered defeat in the Second Chinese Civil War and was forced to retreat to Taiwan, very quickly and surprisingly rendering Taiwan the principal territory actually governed by the ROC (Yang Cong-rong, 1992). In Taiwan, the ROC opened a new chapter in history, striving to portray the important symbolic significance of "passing on Chinese culture and recovering all native territory." In order to convey the symbolic significance of this, during the 1950s, President Chiang Kai-shek and Minister of Education Chang Chi-yun began to construct post-war Taiwan's educational and cultural system and territory, for the purpose of presenting the ROC on Taiwan's national image of "cultural China;" to exert society's educational and cultural functions and commend to international figures a system of cultural Confucian orthodoxy to complement their own cultures (Allen Chun, 1999; Lin Guo-shian, 2005). Also, in order to achieve this end, the ROC, apart from bringing the national treasures from Beijing's Palace Museum, also used an even more effective channel, which was to establish museums to popularize social education: through national-level museums founded by the central government, serving as a part of a national mechanism, to transform Chinese culture as national consciousness, generating resonance and endorsement among the population, to strive together for the national policy of anti-communism. The National Museum of History (hereafter the NMH), therefore, emerged at the opportune time represented by the needs of this political situation.

In 1955, Minister of Education Chang Chi-yun, in order to implement the above-mentioned political application of "cultural China," requested of the National Palace Central Museum Joint Management Office that the museum's artifacts, securely locked away in Wufeng Township, Taichung, be brought to Taipei to be opened and observed, so that a plan for history education and international exchanges could be carried out for the people. This way of thinking, however, was not agreed because of the Joint

Management Office's consideration of the security problems involved in transporting Taiwan's artifacts during the confrontation in the Taiwan Strait at the time. Minister Chang therefore decided to set up a museum in the Taipei's Botanical Garden, and appointed Bao Zun-peng to plan its founding. As a result, Director Bao, without a collection, financial resources or human resources, brought together three people—He Hao-tian, Wang Yu-ting and Yao Meng-gu—to plan the National Historical Artifacts and Fine Art Museum (later renamed National Museum of History in 1957). Wang Yu-ting (1995:26) recalled:

At the time, we were short of funds and human resources. We had only NT\$50,000 to start operations, and a damaged old wooden building left behind by the Japanese. As far as time was concerned, we had only 99 days before the announcement that the museum was open for visiting.

Bao Zun-peng (1956:34) explained the significance of the founding of the NMH:

Inherent in the establishment of most museums is an extensive range of social educational tasks. At this time and place, the founding of a historical artifacts and fine art museum had particularly real epochal significance. It had a direct connection to the war being waged at the time to defend history and culture, and had an effect of boosting and edifying the people's spirit.

From this we learn the urgency of the national policy of the time. As a result, the NMH was founded under the requirements of national policy, becoming Taiwan's first post-war, national-level, social educational institution, striving with all its strength throughout the 1950s to achieve the epochal mission with which the nation had entrusted it, and shouldering several tasks of the utmost importance, including: (1) Handling the education of the people; (2) Supplementing school education; (3) Assisting with research work; (4) Showing films and holding lectures; (5) Preparing to build factories for duplicating artifacts and printing photos (Bao Zun-peng, 1956: 4).

The NMH, in order to assist the ROC in constructing a blueprint for national policy, with hardly anything amounting to a collection, adopted a strategy of "producing from nothing" using imagination and creativity to accomplish its mission. When the Museum

was first opened, the founding exhibition *The Five Thousand Year History and Culture of China* presented Chinese civilization, succeeding in raising the general public's awareness, and exerting a certain effect on the society of the time. This exhibition also became an important beginning in the course of development of post-war Taiwan's national museums, possessing a high degree of historical significance. This article, therefore, takes as an example the founding exhibition, *Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture*, held by the NMH early after its establishment in 1956. It looks back and explores how the museum, in the 1950s, used knowledge production to hold a museum display to proclaim an experience in national consciousness. (Figures 1.-3.)



Figure 1. 12th March, 1956, the National Historical Artifacts and Fine Art Museum (later renamed the National Museum of History in 1957) formally opens.



Figure 2. The Minister of Education of the time, Chang Chi-yun (center) cuts the ribbon. Director Bao Zun-peng (right) hosts the opening ceremony.



Figure 3. Four founding fathers of the NMH, standing from left: Yao Meng-gu, He Hao-tian, Wang Yu-qing and Bao Zun-peng. Seated at the front is the highly renowned calligrapher Yu Yuo-ren.

II. Principles and Methods of Knowledge Production by the NMH in the 1950s

1. Principles of Knowledge Production

In the educational and cultural policy put into effect in the ROC on Taiwan in the 1950s, the highest guiding principle was rooted in the content concerning the people's psychology, peace and happiness of President Chiang Kai-shek's 1953 publication on national construction, *On Education and Leisure: Two Addenda to the Principles of People's Livelihood*, which offered conclusions to supplement those in *The Three Principles of the People* by Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the nation (Bao Zun-peng, 1956:20):

As far as psychological health and happiness are concerned, a government of the people's livelihood must encourage literary and artistic creation, make full use of the characteristics of purity, authenticity and grace that literature and art express, and then actively encourage literary and artistic work, fully exerting the people's

cultural spirit. As for music, song, fine art, film, broadcasting, religion and the like, they must all pay attention to the stirring of popular feeling, the expression of emotion, the advancement of wisdom and virtue, and harmony of the mind and body.

Today, Chinese fine art and music have fallen into serious crisis. Magnificent architecture has been threatened or damaged by war. This is a tangible loss. Such arts and crafts as pottery, weaving, sculpture, and casting, in line with the decline of handicrafts, still face a trend from which they cannot be rescued. This is a matter that pains us.

After the thinking of President Chiang Kai-shek had enabled Chang Chi-yun in 1954 to become Minister of Education, it was decided to treat *On Education and Leisure: Two Addenda to the Principles of People's Livelihood* as the highest guiding principles in strengthening Taiwan's culture and education, and also to prepare to establish a museum that would embody Chinese history and culture. The following year, Bao Zun-peng received orders to make preparations, and he planned a founding exhibition under the theme *The Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture*, which served as an important means for putting into practice the national policy requirements of the 1950s, displaying the cultural achievements of our ancestors, and realizing the policy's social educational functions (Bao Zun-peng, 1969).

The objectives of *The Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture* founding exhibition were: "To create a systematic display of the Chinese people's long history and culture, huge and majestic engineering works, and the profound achievements of their scholarly discoveries" (Bao Zun-peng, 1969:25). Under this principle, Bao Zun-peng was to adopt the approach of knowledge production to present comprehensively the Chinese people's history and culture and forge a national image of cultural China. First of all, he set out from Minister Chang's core thinking about founding the NMH—"History, artifacts, fine art"—naming the museum the Historical Artifacts and Fine Art Museum. The true implication of this name was, "Not to divide history, artifacts and fine art into three departments, but to string the three together with the gradual forward progress of history at the center, blending history, artifacts and fine art together in one furnace, through the techniques of fine art and concrete manifestations of all kinds of artifacts" (Bao Zun-peng, 1958:1). We learn from the

above that the magic of “producing from nothing” that Bao Zun-peng used involved making history the core of the museum exhibit and then utilizing the techniques of fine art to manufacture and produce imitation “artifacts.”

While the NMH completed this set of “knowledge production” processes, it was officially necessary from time to time to request instructions from Minister Chang Chi-yun as final judgments. Minister Chang was the principal instructor, from the objectives in founding the museum, its purposes, name and the details of preparation for its establishment. His doctrine was that the museum must exhibit “the glorious traces of five thousand years of history.” The ritual objects should be placed in the first display hall as a metaphor for “the spirit of the founding of the nation taking precedence.” Among the exhibits in the portrait halls, there “should be extremely large painting and calligraphy,” “massive and brightly colored,” and the explanations about all exhibits must be “systematic and concise, so that women and children might understand them” (NMH archives, 1956:400001). The NMH therefore became the first national museum directly guided by the authorities to possess the characteristics of “cultural China,” so, in its early period, it carried heavy political implications, which distinguished its founding mission from those of other museums.

2. Methods of Knowledge Production

In order to carry out the epochal task which the nation had entrusted to him, Director Bao Zun-peng invited together historians, archaeologists, artists and architects of particular accomplishment to form a museum construction team to take part in the NMH’s knowledge production and construction project (Figure 4.). The members of the museum construction team included such figures as Liang Zai-ping, Chuang Shang-yen, Chang Da-shia, Fang Hao, Shih Chang-ju, Tan Dan-jiong, Guo Yan-chiau, Chang Lung-yan, Wang Zhuang-wei, Lao Kan, Lu Yu-chun, Chiang Fu-tsung, Liang Ding-ming, Xu Jiu-ling, Qian Zhao-ru, Lo Chi-mei, Huang Chun-pi, Lang Jing-shan, Yang Ying-fong, and Hu Ke-min. They completed the mission out of a moral and righteous strength and an intellectual awareness aroused by a historical and cultural crisis. This museum construction team worked around the clock throughout many rounds of research and discussion, and decided to conduct an arduous experiment in “knowledge production.” Bao Zun-peng (1969:25) said, “Apart from a few original objects, the majority of the items in the exhibition displays were recreations, imitations, in

accordance with the results of extant scholarly research, of our ancestors’ creative inventions and cultural legacy, reconstructions of the magnificence of this ancient, 5,000 year old nation.” Through diligent, tentative research in fine art and arts and crafts, therefore, they attempted to preserve and develop the “long family traditions” of President Chiang Kai-shek’s instructions, including the crafts of architecture, pottery, weaving, sculpture and casting.

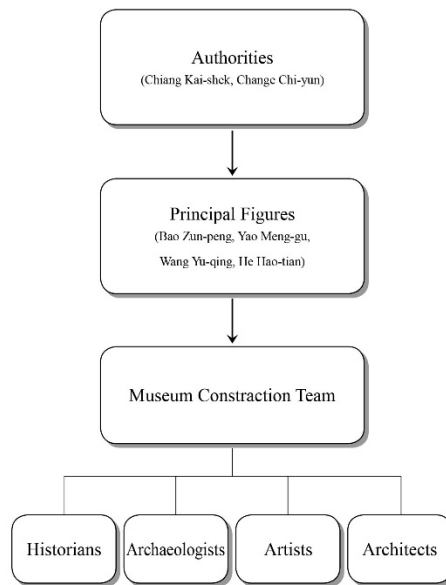


Figure 4. The NMH’s 1950s’ knowledge production process (by the author)

The museum construction team’s knowledge generation method was, together, to design models, make samples, collect images, and reproduce sketches photographically (NMH archives, 1956:400001), extensively collecting data for conversion and manufacture. To make up for the lack of historical artifacts from the Shang and Chou periods, for example, the museum’s principal figure Yao Meng-gu requested permission to photograph and replicate the National Palace Museum’s Cauldron of Duke Mao. Sculptor Yang Ying-fong modeled it into a manufactured imitation (Figure 5) and photographer Lang Jing-shan took a photograph which was magnified to be hung and displayed (NMH archives, 1956:100014) . Another example is that renowned ink and wash painter Hu Ke-min took charge of the Dunhuang Caves murals as principal artist (Figure 6), and his students, Gu-yi and Tao Ke-ding, on the basis of color, transparent photos and images of the Dunhuang Caves murals previously produced on-site by Lo Chi-mei, reproduced and magnified these on white walls, painting in the original colors (Su Ying-hui, 1978). The above two actual examples both explain in concrete terms

how to use fine art techniques to reconstruct artifacts from “nothing,” in the perfect context of *The Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture*.



Figure 5. Scene showing a Yungang Caves Buddhist statue by sculptor Yang Ying-fong.



Figure 6. Scene showing Dunhuang Caves murals deities by artist Hu Ke-min. (Right: Yao Meng-gu)

This article argues that the above historical process reveals the distinctive principles and methods of the NMH’s knowledge production in the 1950s: under the policy of direction by the authorities (the president and minister of education), actors in the museum field (principal figures and the museum construction team) created a set of manual work processes—“research, undertake textual criticism, design, collect, manufacture (recreate, imitate),” to create the overall context for the people’s history and culture, and forge a national image of cultural China. At the same time, the author has also seen a subjective preference that came from the authorities, as well as how the elites of the museum construction team chose their knowledge production methods. Their training, field of vision and skill even more directly influenced the interpretation and reconstruction of the artifacts, fulfilling Minister of Education Chang Chi-yun’s instructions: “It is designed to exhibit the glorious history of the last 5,000 years. Take this as the foundation, as a symbol, to arouse national consciousness and patriotic thought, as the fountainhead of the power of the nation’s anti-communist, recover the nation’s spirit” (Chang Chi-yun, 1956:59).

III. Founding Exhibition: *The Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture* (1956.3.12-6.30)

On 12th March, 1956, when the NMH opened, the displays of *The Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture* exhibition which it was holding, consisted of some original objects, samples, models and images serving as exhibits, supplemented by

corroboratory text; systematically introducing the audience to the Chinese people's history and culture, in light of the nation's founding spirit of Confucian education, in order to establish a sense of history on the part of the populace.

The specific content of the exhibition included 16 exhibition rooms as follows: (1) Ritual objects (models) (Figure. 7); (2) Opera (including costumes, stage props, scores, etc.); (3) Means of transportation (models of chariots and ocean-going vessels); (4) Utensils (rocks, pottery, jade, copper, lacquer, iron, porcelain, etc.); (5) Stationery; (6) Furniture (displayed indoors); (7) Tools (such as those recorded by the *Tian Gong Kai Wu*) (Figure. 8, Figure 9.); (8) Capital cities from national history (such as Xian and Beijing); (9) Places of interest (such as Wild Goose Pagoda and Marco Polo Bridge)(Figure 11); (10) Costumes (Han, Tibetan, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.); (11) Printing technology; (12) Travel art (entertainment contests); (13) Portraits (portraits of sages, enormous color paintings)(Figure 10); (14) Buddhist teaching devices (religious fine art); (15) Dunhuang Caves murals (Figure 12); (16) Calligraphy and paintings (Bao Zun-peng, 1956).



Figure 7. On 12th March, 1956, the NMH is formally opened. Director Bao Zun-peng vi (right) sits Room 1 (Ritual objects) with Vice President Chen Cheng, Minister of Education Chang Chi-yun and others.



Figure 8. An American Women's Association delegation to Taiwan and members of the Taiwan public separately visit Room 7 (Utensils), 1956.



Figure 9. Members of the Taiwan public visit Room 7 (Utensils), 1956.



Figure 10. Director Bao Zun-peng (right) guides Cardinal Thomas Tien Ken-sin around Room 13 (Portraits), 24th September 1957.



Figure 11. The Chief curator of the NMH's exhibition division (right), shows soldiers from Kinmen around Room 9 (Famous Places, Architecture), 1956.



Figure 12. A Korean delegation visits Room 15 (Dunhuang Caves Room) December, 1957.

From the above founding exhibition held at the NMH's opening, we can see very clearly that the museum, in the process of its knowledge production, introduced the context, development and categories of Chinese artifact history to the population of the Taiwan area in a single cultural manner in accordance with the form of the Chinese dynastic histories, again by having scholars and experts design each type of theme to cover each aspect of Chinese culture, and artists make all kinds of typical image and model, effectively demonstrating the pedigree of Chinese nationalism. This ambition was most concretely carried out in Room 1 (Ritual objects) and Room 13 (Portraits), and was explained as follows (NMH archives, 1957:100023) :

Room 1, first of all, created an opening scene of bronzes (Lang Jing-shan's magnified photographs and Yang Ying-fong's imitations) to announce the spirit of the founding of the ROC and its orthodox status. For the portraits in Room 13, portraits of sages were used to display the old portraits from the Palace Museum's Namhunjeon

Hall. From pictures of Fu Xi down to successive generations of monarchs, such as Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, the Duke of Chou, as well as pictures of successive generations of sages, such as Cang Jie, Confucius and Zhu Xi. There were also the *Painting of Lao Tzu Leaving Hangu Pass*, *Portrait of Wang Yangming*, painted by artist Liang Ding-ming, and *Portrait of President Chiang*, painted by Xu Jiu-ling. What was laid out in the portrait room was a series of monarchical figures—41 in total— from successive generations of Chinese history, starting with Fu Xi and concluding with Chiang Kai-shek (Bao Zen-peng, 1956; Lin Po-shin, 2004). This framework gave the audience—especially the native population of Taiwan, who had been subjected to 50 years of Japanese colonialism—a clear account of national history, in order to awaken the national spirit, to arouse national consciousness. Apart from this, the museum's purpose lay also in inspiring in the viewer—especially figures who had crossed the sea to Taiwan from China—an emotional resonance at their nostalgia for the culture that was the rock of their ancient nation, exchanged for the rivers and mountains of Taiwan. The places of interest in Room 2, for example, constituted a display of majestic architecture, famous mountains and great rivers, and famous scenic places from each province of China, and included a model of Marco Polo Bridge, accompanied by an old scene of the bridge photographed by Lang Jing-shan. Seeing the two together, those who had crossed the sea to Taiwan experienced a profound impression of how things had changed. Director Bao said that he had often observed scenes of homesickness as elderly people led their descendants around the museum and shed paths of tears.

It can be seen from the above that Bao Zun-peng, through the joint creation of the museum construction team, succeeded in forging for the ROC in a timely manner a narrative space that represented the national image, in order to: (1) Exhibit Chinese culture and convey its orthodoxy to international figures; (2) Narrate national history to Taiwan figures, to awaken the national spirit and arouse national consciousness; (3) Inspire those who had crossed the sea to Taiwan with the noble aim of exchanging the cultural rock of their ancient nation for the rivers and mountains of Taiwan. At the same time, the NMH greatly supplemented school education. From elementary school to university, teachers brought students to provide them with material evidence to consult about 5,000 years of history and culture. With the opening of the NMH, the outcomes that Director Bao hoped to achieve were not only the commendation of China's glorious past, but also to arouse in the people a visualized community, to

consolidate national consciousness, to hearten this great people as, together, it forged its future (Bao Zun-peng, 1958) .

Public figures' views of the NMH's founding exhibition, however, seemed to amount to half commendation and half condemnation. There was, perhaps, high praise for its timeliness in expressing a positive judgement of Chinese civilization and enlightenment, for example, "The presentation of Chinese civilization in the form of an exhibition has successfully raised the knowledge of the people and had enormous effects, even enabling the NMH, during this period—before the National Palace Museum has completed its construction and opened in 1965—to become the only place where our compatriots and foreign guests alike can enjoy and become acquainted with Chinese artifacts" (Wu Xiang-xiang, 1973: 48). There was also severe criticism from the media, however, in each room there were just a few samples, models, pictures, accompanied by a few so-called "original objects," like "vacuum museum" (Chang Chi-yun, 1973:43). Even on the day of the opening ceremony, it was written that, "Two big shots of the domestic academic community hardly gave it a glance, just looking with an air of contempt, turning around and leaving" (Chang Chi-yun, 1973:45). This author believes that regardless of whether the society of the time's judgement of the early days of the NMH was that of "a self-made success," or a "vacuum museum," as far as forging an image of cultural China and expressing the traditional spirit of the Chinese people was concerned, it was the first post-war experiment by a Taiwan museum in completely constructing the sources and development of Chinese culture, and its knowledge generation principles and methods were rich in distinctiveness and creativity.

IV. Conclusion

In 1955, Minister of Education Chang Chi-yun, in order to carry out President Chiang Kai-shek's educational and cultural policies and develop the people's minds, entrusted Bao Zun-peng to continue with the task of making preparations for the NMH. At its start, the entire museum was established from nothing, but was actually able, within 99 days, to organize *The Five Thousand Years of Chinese History and Culture* founding exhibition, consolidating national consciousness and articulating to overseas figures the orthodox status of the ROC. This author also believes that this exhibition truly represented a perfect example of a museum—in order to fulfill an epochal task

conferred on it by the nation, using knowledge production principles and methods, and through the collective creativity of scholars and experts, and by means of displays of original objects, models, pictures and everyday text—itsself forging “cultural China,” conducting commentary and reconstruction, and enabling the audience to gain systematic knowledge of the history and culture of the nation’s people. The course of this early period also enabled the NMH to become a post-war pioneer in educational exhibits, exerting a definite impact on the coming together of Taiwan’s people and communities at the time and revealing how the NMH, in the 1950s, used historical imagination to deliver a unique experience in knowledge production. It is of deep historic significance.

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