

The Museum Exhibited: Shaping China's 21st Century National Museum

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In March 2011, the National Museum of China, which is a union of the former Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution, opened to the public at Tiananmen Square, the heart of the Chinese Nation. Its transition to a modern museum was fast and ambitious. Expanding on a gigantic scale from 65,000 square meters to almost 192,000 square meters, it constituted the largest museum in the world. This article presents the transformation of this major cultural institution of the People's Republic of China. It casts light on the project development and on the decisions for the exterior and interior architecture, and examines the museum's current interpretation of the role as a representative of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: People's Republic of China, museum studies, architecture, national identity, Tiananmen Square

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Introduction

In March 2011, the National Museum of China, a union of the former Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution, opened to the public at Tiananmen Square, the heart of the Chinese Nation.¹ The transition to a modern museum complex was fast, ambitious, and, to a certain extent, drastic: Only 20% of the original building was kept and 80% is new structure. Thus the museum expanded on a gigantic scale from 65,000 square meters to 191,900 square meters, currently constituting the largest museum in the world. Furthermore, with its construction costs of 2.5 billion Yuan (approximately US\$ 380 million)² the project can be considered to be one of the most important museum projects undertaken within the last decade.

¹ Parts of this paper are extracted from the author's PhD thesis, "The National Museum of China: Building Memory, Shaping History, Presenting Identity" (University of Heidelberg, 2013). I would like to thank Francesca dal Lago and John Finlay for reviewing the manuscript of this article.

² Gmp 2011, National Museum of China, Beijing, brochure from the architects von Gerkan, Marg and Partners (gmp), Public Relations and Communication, Hamburg 2011, "Facts and figures" n.p.

It all began with the National Museum of China launching an international bidding process for the new design of the museum in 2004. The intentions were as follows:

The museum building has not developed in parallel to the public's daily increasing demand for culture. Moreover, the Olympics of 2008 further stimulate the requirements of the National Museum. Therefore, it was decided to re-build the former museum, extending it to the east and building over the courtyards. The museum as 'world state-of-the-art' National Museum should correspond with the dynamic development of China and the increasing cultural demand of the people.³

The main task formulated by the National Development and Reform Commission in charge of the project was to enlarge the building on the east side, reinforcing the historical structure while keeping the structure of 1959 effectively intact.⁴ The architects were requested to build a museum "which would serve as a display window of the 5,000 year long history of China, one that would accommodate one million objects and 20,000 visitors at the same time," and, furthermore, "the building should be cautiously and respectfully altered."⁵

From February until September 2004, an international public bidding for the new design of the National Museum of China took place. An expert committee selected eleven outstanding national and international architects out of the thirty-six candidates and invited them to submit their proposals.⁶ The National Museum of China and its board of

³ "Wettbewerbsaufgabe" [Specifications of the competition], in *Gmp wettbewerb aktuell* 12/2004. Gmp Public Relations and Communication (Hamburg, gmp: 2004), 29. Here translated by the author.

⁴ Susanne Beyer, Martin Doerry, and Nora Reinhardt, "Weltfremd und unglaubwürdig" [Unworldly and implausible], interview with Meinhard von Gerkan, *Spiegel*, April 11, 2011.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Organized by the Beijing Gaojin Consultant Co. in cooperation with the Beijing Project

directors were directly in charge of the project. Furthermore, the museum was subordinate to the Ministry of Culture and the Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Major decisions in the project development were made by the National Development and Reform Commission; the final go-ahead of the project, however, was given by Li Changchun, a member of the nine-man Standing Committee of the Politburo and the chief of propaganda of the CCP.⁷ Although the winning design by the German architectural firm von Gerkan, Marg and Partners (gmp) working with the China Academy of Building Research (CABR) was selected in 2004, serious alterations in the design were made in the following years until the final reopening in 2011.⁸

The project and its development, however, have prompted critical questions concerning the current significance of the building, its cultural role, and the form of representation which was chosen for its expression. What was being pursued besides size and grandeur? Do continuities or changes dominate the new design of the museum? Do these two aspects give clues about the self-image, which was aspired by the National Museum of China, and about the official presentation of its history, memory, and identity? With an analysis of the reconstruction project, the development of the outer appearance, and the inner structure of the museum, this article seeks to provide some answers to the questions raised above. The analysis will examine how the project evolved and how the final form was found. First, the National Museum of China, its

Consultants Company; cf. Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural designer, gmp, Berlin, January 19, 2006.

⁷ Ian Johnson, "At China's New Museum, History Toes Party Line," *The New York Times*, April 2011, 1.

⁸ As required by Chinese regulations, foreign architects must team up with Chinese partners. However, only a few very large and influential institutions possess an official license, therefore constituting possible partners for foreign companies. Cf. Eduard Kögel, "Zur Lage junger Architekten in China" [On the situation of young architects in China], *Archplus* 168, no. 2 (2004: 2), 71.

institutional role, and its development as a national museum are presented. Then, the setting of the museum in the center of the Chinese capital is analyzed, examining the decision for the location of the museum building of 1959. In order to define the changes the museum has experienced and what these changes mean in terms of self-identification and museum presentation, the comparison of the façade and the interior design implemented in 2011, with the original building of 1959 and the 2004 winning proposal, forms the core of this essay.

The Museum as National Institution

The National Museum of China is one of the most important museums of the People's Republic of China, whose current presentation is the result of historical developments. Its origins can be traced to two different roots, the foundation of the Preparatory Office of the National History Museum set up in 1912 by the government of the newly established Republic of China, and the Preparatory Office of the National Museum of Revolution established in 1950 after the founding of the People's Republic of China. These roots still constitute the institutional basis of the museum today.

From its early beginnings, the museum had been a venue of identification and legitimization. Since the nineteenth century, the concept of modern museums has been introduced to China from the West. On the one hand, foreigners living in China established their own culture and opened the first museums in cities such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chengdu.⁹ On the other hand, Chinese delegations interested in learning about Western culture and technology traveled to Europe, the United States, and Japan,¹⁰ where they visited and learned about the institution of

⁹ Wang Hongjun 王宏钧, *Zhongguo bowuguanxue jichu* 中国博物馆学基础 [The Basis of Chinese Museology] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1990), 100.

¹⁰ Although there were ambivalent feelings about Westernization and an increasing Japanese influence in China, from the mid-nineteenth century on, Japan nevertheless served as an

the museum, at times bringing back innovative ideas. It is claimed that the first modern museum founded by a Chinese was established in Nantong, Jiangsu Province in 1905, going back to the private initiative of the industrialist Zhang Jian (1853-1926).¹¹ However, the late Qing Dynasty made the establishment of museums a governmental task, mainly under control of the Department of Education.¹²

With the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and its particular worldview, the concept of the nation-state gained recognition.¹³ During the first years of the Republican Era (1912-1945), several public museums were established throughout China, most importantly in the capitals of Beijing and Nanjing.¹⁴ As in the west, these museums played an important role in the process of nation building in China. One major task of the Ministry of Culture of the newly established Republic of China was safeguarding the national treasures, thereby continuing the dynastic tradition of legitimizing the empire by means of the imperial collection. During the first years of the Republic, parts of the Imperial Palace were made accessible to the public for the first time in history. Its content was regarded as public property and the essence of the cultural tradition, the roots of the newly established nation-state.¹⁵ The subsequent opening of

instrumental shortcut to Westernization.

¹¹ The history of Nantong Museum and its founder Zhang Jian are well documented in Qin Shao, "Exhibiting the Modern: The Creation of the First Chinese Museum, 1905-1930," *The China Quarterly* 179, no. 9 (September 2004), 684-702.

¹² Wang Hongjun, *Zhongguo bowuguanxue jichu*, 84.

¹³ C. X. George Wei and Liu Xiaoyuan, eds., *Exploring Nationalism of China: Themes and Conflicts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 121. Modern nationalism stemming from Western thought had already been adopted in China during the late nineteenth century, mainly among the intelligentsia, and became a forceful weapon in politics.

¹⁴ Joanna Capon, *Guide to Museums in China* (Hong Kong: Orientations Magazine, 2002), 8.

¹⁵ Shih Shou-Chien, "Die kaiserliche chinesische Sammlung und das Nationale Palastmuseum" [The Chinese imperial collection and the National Palace Museum], in *Schätze der Himmelssöhne. Die Kaiserliche Sammlung aus dem Nationalen Palastmuseum, Taipeh. Die Großen Sammlungen. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der BRD* (Bonn: Hatje Cantz, 2003), 17.

the Palace Museum starting in 1925 focused on the enduring traditions of the country. In addition, it was deemed necessary to create another modus to enable the population to identify with the new nation-state. With the founding of the Preparatory Office of the National History Museum in 1912, the new Republican government established its own museum project, after a proposal made by Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), then Minister of Education. At that time, the Palace Museum housed the best collection of Chinese artifacts in the world, while the Museum of Chinese History, with its universal approach, obtained its collection from nationwide archaeological excavation. Despite the humble beginnings of the collection in 1912, the Museum of Chinese History became one of the first and most influential museums and, most importantly, a symbol of the new Republic of China.

Besides the Museum of Chinese History, the Preparatory Office of the National Museum of Revolution represented the second foundation of the National Museum of China. Set up in March 1950, this office immediately moved to the premises of the Hall of Military Glory (Ch. *Wuyingdian*) in the Forbidden City.¹⁶ For the establishment of the People's Republic of China, once again, the founding of new museums, especially the Museum of Chinese Revolution, was of vital importance. As early as May 1949, the Committee to Control Cultural Affairs issued an announcement through the Museum of Chinese History to collect revolutionary documents and artifacts, emphasizing two areas: the Communist Party and Communist martyrs. In February 1950, a nationwide collection campaign commenced as announced by the Bureau of Cultural Relicts, focusing on relicts starting with the Opium War of 1839-1842, but accentuating the time after May Fourth when the CCP

¹⁶ Kirk A. Denton, "Visual Memory and the Construction of a Revolutionary Past: Paintings from the Museum of the Chinese Revolution," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2000), 208.

progressively ascended to a position of leadership.¹⁷ In order to establish the Museum of Chinese Revolution, the Soviet museum model was consulted, supported by Russian advisors, the translation of Russian museum accounts and field trips to Moscow's museums. In the autumn of 1950, a Chinese delegation led by Wang Yeiqu (1909-1987) traveled to Moscow to visit several museums dedicated to the new regime. The delegation was especially impressed by the Central Lenin Museum, the Red Army Museum, and the rich collection of the National Museum of the Revolution on Gorki Street, which displayed the glorious path of the Bolshevik Revolution and highlighted the central role of Lenin and Stalin in the establishment of Soviet Russia.¹⁸ If the task of the first Western museums emerging in the eighteenth century during the time of the Enlightenment was to educate free citizens, the Soviet museums were established to educate the public in the Socialist ideology.¹⁹

In the newly established People's Republic of China, a new master narrative, which was based on Soviet Russian models, the Marxist-Leninism doctrines,²⁰ and Mao Zedong's thought, dominated the interpretation of modern Chinese history and was implemented in the

¹⁷ Hung Chang-tai, "The Red Line: Creating a Museum of the Chinese Revolution," *The China Quarterly* 184 (December 2005), 920.

¹⁸ Wang Yeiqu 王冶秋, "Sulian guoli geming bowuguan" 苏联国立革命博物馆 [The Soviet National Museum of the Revolution], *Wenwu cankao ziliao* 文物参考资料 10 (1950:10), 66-77.

¹⁹ Boris Groys, "The Struggle Against the Museums; or, The Display of Art in Totalitarian Space," in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture, History Discourse, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994), 144.

²⁰ In 1924, Marxism-Leninism, a combination of Marxist historical materialism and a practical guideline for establishing Communism and Socialism, was made the official state doctrine of the Soviet Union. Cf. Ma Xueping. "Observations on the Life of Marxist History in East and West," *Chinese Studies in History* 38 (Spring/Summer 2005), 53. In Soviet Russia Marxism-Leninism was most powerful and served for the legitimation of the newly established dictatorship. It was the basis for further social historiography; cf. Georg G. Iggers, *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert: ein kritischer Überblick im internationalen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 31.

public museums.²¹ Following the materialist interpretation of Marxism that defines all history as a class struggle, in which different groups of society strive for the means of production,²² “the dynastic history of China was reinterpreted as a conflict between feudal power, the emperor, and the imperial bureaucracy on one side, and the anti-feudal forces, the peasant rebels, on the other.”²³ Furthermore, the new historical approach defined the CCP as the guiding force of the sequence of revolutionary events, leading to the foundation of New China. Like Stalin before him, Mao Zedong (1893-1976) recognized both the importance of an ideological historical concept and the legitimizing power of its interpretation as being urgently needed for the newly established nation, and in order to stabilize his own position.²⁴ The new Museum of Chinese Revolution provided a platform for the display of the Chinese Communist master narrative, forging and controlling collective memory and monopolizing the writing of history.²⁵ The CCP continued to exercise tight control over the museum display, especially via its Propaganda Department. Therefore, the Museum of the Chinese Revolution was not only a cultural space, but also a political institution to serve the interests of the party²⁶ and to display history as a means of legitimizing party leadership and contributing to the self-image that was to be created.

In 2003, the Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese

²¹ Cf. Jin Qiu, “History and State: Searching for the Past in the Light of the Present in the People’s Republic of China,” *Historiography East & West* 2, no. 1 (2004), 13; John E. Schrecker, *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 213.

²² William H. Shaw and Charles Saumarez Smith, “Marxism,” in Jane Turner, ed., *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 20 (New York: Grove, 1996), 525.

²³ Jin Qiu, “History and State,” 28.

²⁴ Matthias Middell, “Marxistische Geschichtsschreibung” [Marxist historiography], in Joachim Eibach and Günther Lottes, eds., *Kompass der Geschichtswissenschaft: Ein Handbuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 70.

²⁵ Hung Chang-tai, “Revolutionary History in Stone: The Making of a Chinese National Monument,” *The China Quarterly* 166 (June 2001), 914.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Revolution were unified into the National Museum of China. To combine the major collections of early and recent Chinese history, which had already shared one building since 1959, seemed only reasonable.²⁷ Furthermore, the newly established and unified National Museum of China appeared much more capable to fulfilling the double function of a storage place for national monuments and of a memorial of the nation-state. Its primary task remained one of representing the People's Republic of China, its legacy and recent development on a national and international scale. Following the 2003 unification, the National Museum of China became the largest comprehensive history museum in the country, holding some of its most significant historical objects.²⁸ It is under the direct guidance of the Ministry of Culture and is operated under dual leadership of a director-general, and a deputy director who is a representative of the Communist Party.²⁹ In the course of the unification process, major parts of the administration were combined. However, separate curatorial departments and storage facilities from the former museums remained, mirroring the original structure of the two institutions.³⁰ When the National Museum of China closed for renovation in 2007, it defined the following future goals:

When the revamping project is completed, the National Museum of China will be the supreme hall of culture and art for the Chinese nation in the 21st century. As a window showcasing the long history and brilliant culture and art of the Chinese nation, it will be a comprehensive museum that will feature a more forward-looking vision, a concept better in line with the development of the era, the latest theory of

²⁷ The idea of unification, however, was not new. Between 1969 and 1983 the two institutions were already unified and only separated again thereafter. Hung Chang-tai, "Revolutionary History in Stone," 931.

²⁸ Li Xian Yao and Luo Zhewen, *China's Museums*, trans. Martha Avery (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2010), 68.

²⁹ Correspondence, staff member A, exhibition department, NMC, September 12, 2009.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

museology, the latest cultural relics collection, preservation and research means, the most advanced display mode and the most reliable cultural relics security and safeguarding measures.... By the 100th anniversary of its establishment in 2012, the NMC is expected to become the best museum in China and one of the best in the world.³¹

With its unification and the reconstruction project, the National Museum of China has set itself the task of being a “global player”; it has also exposed itself to being measured by the standards and criterion of the international museum environment. As a state institution it corresponds to the official view of the nation and its presentation serves to shape the perception of history, memory and identity. The following analysis will seek to identify how the new National Museum of China pursued the above stated self-imposed goals by comparison of the successive architectural designs of the museum and its development over time.

The Setting

At the inception of modern museums, private and public collections were housed in rededicated buildings such as palatial structures of princely proprietor or in cabinets of wealthy private owners (for example, British Museum 1753, Hermitage 1764, Louvre 1793, and The Palace Museum 1925). These rededicated buildings were seldom modest but generally monumental in nature and mainly occupied a central position in the city. As interim solutions, however glamorous, they were rarely best fit for the purpose of a museum, and the development of genuine building type seemed logical. The purposefully erected museum buildings of the nineteenth century continued to occupy a central position in the city and often served

³¹ National Museum of China, “News.” http://www.nationalmuseum.cn/en/news/news_id_364.jsp (accessed April 18, 2007).

important structuring functions. Especially in cities which were designed from the outset as capitals, for example, Washington, D.C., Canberra, or Brasilia, museums assumed a key role as part of the overall city outline.³² There, governmental museums provide a dual function of presenting national memories and national or even world history in correspondence to the official story line and serving as a key part of the official self-representation of the nation-state.

The National Museum of China also followed this general development pattern. Before the museum building adjacent to Tiananmen Square was erected, the Preparatory Office of the National History Museum was housed in various interim locations, all of which were of political and historical importance, and monumental in appearance. However, through the change of the political system, these buildings had lost their function and were open to new use. The museum's collection was initially housed at the site of the former Imperial College of the Qing Dynasty. In 1917, however, due to the remote location and to insufficient space, the museum moved to the Meridian Gate of the Imperial Palace.³³ For the establishment of a new museum building in 1959 and also for the reconstruction of the museum in 2011, the decision for and the handling of the central position in the city was of vital importance.

1959 – Determining the Location

The newly established Museum of the Chinese Revolution required an adequate building to serve as a memorial and a place of recollection for the Chinese people. Together with the Museum of Chinese History, the

³² Andrew W. Daum and Christof Mauch, eds., *Berlin, Washington, 1800-2000: Capital Cities, Cultural Representation, and National Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3 ff.

³³ The Gate tower was used as exhibition venue, while the continuously growing collection was stored in the buildings situated between the Meridian Gate and the Duan Gate. Cf. *Zhongguo Lishi bowuguan 90 nian* (Beijing: Zhongguo lishi bowuguan, 2002), 140.

Museum of the Chinese Revolution was integrated in the overall building program of the capital known as the “Ten Great Buildings.” This program was implemented by the Chinese government in preparation for the tenth anniversary celebrations of the People’s Republic of China in 1959. It focused on the erection of ten representative landmarks along with a massive reshaping of the capital. Besides the two museums, which were unified into one building compound, the scheme included the Great Hall of the People, the Chinese People’s Revolutionary Military Museum, the National Agricultural Exhibition Hall, the Nationalities Cultural Palace, the Beijing Railway Station, the Worker’s Stadium, the Nationality’s Hotel, and the Overseas Chinese Hotel.³⁴

However, during the 1950s, the idea of erecting museum buildings at Tiananmen Square [Figure 1] was contentiously discussed along with the expansion of the square. On the one hand, several experts argued for the erection of a new political center to the west of the city; on the other hand, some argued to continue using the traditional political center, adjusting it for the new needs of the nation.³⁵ A proposal of the influential architects Liang Sicheng (1901-1972) and Chen Zhanxiang (1916-2001) was for the new governmental center to be established in the west of the city, whereas the Soviet advisors suggested the city center, stating technical reasons.³⁶ The Chinese leadership decided for the central solution: Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, remained the core while being enhanced and transformed to an important symbol of New China³⁷ and its leadership. The plan in favor of the central location was

³⁴ Julia F. Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 228.

³⁵ Wu Hung, “Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments,” *Representations* 35 (Summer 1991), 96 ff.

³⁶ K. Shizheng Fan, “A Classicist Architecture for Utopia: The Soviet Contacts,” in Jeffrey W. Cody, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Tony Atkin, eds., *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 102.

³⁷ The term “New China” defines the People’s Republic of China since its foundation in 1949 and is



Figure 1. Photomontage of the new design of the National Museum of China situated at the northeast corner (right) of Tiananmen Square, rendering, courtesy of gmp 2006

finally approved by the Capital Planning Committee,³⁸ and in 1958, the mayor of Beijing, Peng Zhen (1902-1997), recognized the Great Hall of the People as well as the Museum of Chinese Revolution and the Museum of Chinese History to be the most important buildings at Tiananmen Square,³⁹ shifting the significance from the old political order (Imperial Palace, Tiananmen Gate) to the Communist rulership (Great Hall of the People, Monument to the People's Heroes, and Museum of Revolutionary History and Chinese History).

To understand the impact of the decision to build the museum at Tiananmen Square and its significance for the contemporary reconstruction, it is necessary to closely examine its historical importance as a symbol of national identity.⁴⁰ For centuries, the Tiananmen Gate

frequently applied by the CCP and writers outside China.

³⁸ Hung Chang-tai, "The Red Line," 920; Wang Zhengming 王争鸣, ed., *Qiji shi zenyang chuangzao de—renmin dahuitang jianshe shihua* 奇迹是怎样创造的—人民大会堂建设史话 [How a miracle was created—history of the construction of Great Hall of the People] (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian 中国书店, 2001), 16-17.

³⁹ Wang Zhengming, ed., *Qiji shi zenyang chuangzao de—renmin dahuitang jianshe shihua*, 16-17.

⁴⁰ Rubie Watson, "Palaces, Museums, and Squares: Chinese National Spaces," *Museum Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (September 1995), 8.

served as the primary and exclusive entrance to the Imperial Palace⁴¹ as part of the sacred central axis that runs through Beijing, where the imperial throne in the Hall of Supreme Harmony is located.⁴² During the Qing Dynasty, high court was held twice a year in front of Tiananmen Gate and imperial announcements were read to the subjects.⁴³ It continued to be a site for official political announcements of the ruler,⁴⁴ but later also became a platform for expression of political will for the subjects as well. By the end of Imperial China in 1911, the space in front of Tiananmen Gate had developed into an anti-government protest site. Its political significance continued during the Republican era, when the May Fourth Movement (1919), the Patriotic March (1926), and the Anti-Japanese Demonstrations (1935) were held in front of Tiananmen Gate. The significance of the square as a place for political expression and collective memory was also apparent to foreign powers. In 1900, for example, allied troops marched there victoriously, establishing diplomatic quarters at the southeast corner of the Square.⁴⁵ In 1937, Imperial Japan proclaimed its “New East Asian Order” at Tiananmen Square.⁴⁶

The Communist government chose not to break with the established political tradition but rather to further develop the existing powerful

⁴¹ This entrance was restricted to the imperial ministers, officials, and staff, as well as the imperial family only.

⁴² Watson, “Palaces, Museums, and Squares,” 12.

⁴³ Wu Hung, “Tiananmen Square,” 93.

⁴⁴ Lothar Ledderose, “Die Gedenkhalle für Mao Zedong. Ein Beispiel von Gedächtnisarchitektur” [The Chairman Mao Memorial Hall: An Example of Memorial Architecture], in Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher, eds., *Kultur und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 311-339; Jeffrey F. Meyer, *The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 47.

⁴⁵ Today these buildings are protected as a cultural heritage site by the government of the People’s Republic of China. Interview, gmp, Matthias Wiegmann, project lead Beijing, gmp, April 10, 2009.

⁴⁶ The political significance of the square continued during the time of the Cultural Revolution, its annulment in 1976, during the protests of the Democratic Movement in 1989, and up until today. Cf. Wu Hung, “Tiananmen Square,” 84-85.

image of imperial rulership and the revolutionary traditions of the square to serve their own legitimacy and claim to power: On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong proclaimed the foundation of the People's Republic of China from Tiananmen Gate, establishing it as memorial site and birthplace of New China. Thus, the Gate also became a symbol of the newly established state and a universal architectural emblem found on official documents, stamps, and banknotes.⁴⁷ Over the years of Communist rule, Tiananmen continued to be carefully employed as a Communist icon.⁴⁸ In order to adapt and recreate this powerful symbol for the purpose of the new rule, it was necessary to change and redesign the surroundings to express one coherent ideology.⁴⁹

After 1949, the systematic extension of the square to forge a cultural and political center began. Many buildings were torn down to create an open area in the center of the capital. This genuinely Western concept⁵⁰ of an open square in the center of the city blended perfectly with the People's Republic of China propaganda. The open area in front of Tiananmen Gate was to become the central square for the Chinese nation just as every small town establishes its own center for gatherings and events.⁵¹ As was to be expected with many architectural decisions in Beijing, the upcoming 10th anniversary of the People's Republic of China became crucial for the design of the square. By 1958, Chairman Mao finally ordered the square to be enlarged, and, after the redesign in 1959, it could accommodate

⁴⁷ Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square," 88.

⁴⁸ Watson, "Palaces, Museums, and Squares," 12.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Wagner, "Reading the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall in Peking: The Tribulations of the Imperial Pilgrim," in Susan Naquin and Chun-fang Yu, eds., *Pilgrim and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 378-423; Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ Ledderose, "Die Gedenkhalle für Mao Zedong. Ein Beispiel von Gedächtnisarchitektur," 325.

⁵¹ Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square," 90.

400,000 people.⁵² The original physical center of power shifted from the Imperial Palace to the newly erected buildings.⁵³ The Monument to the People's Heroes (1958) at the center, the Great Hall of the People (1959) to the west, the Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution (1959) to the east, and finally the Mao Mausoleum (1977) on the southern part of the square. Considering the concentration of important governmental buildings, it seemed suitable for the Museum of Chinese History and the newly established Museum of Chinese Revolution, which served to display the official interpretation of history of the new government, to be erected at the municipal city center. The museum building was constructed on the northeast side of Tiananmen Square, symmetrically located opposite the Great Hall of the People.

The Twenty-first Century: The Impact of the Location

Tiananmen Square has remained the cultural and political heart of China, a place of political expression for the ruling elite as well as the public, a site of pilgrimage and a strong symbol for the nation. Since unification in 2003, the National Museum of China has continued to play a vital part in the symbolic ensemble of the Chinese nation. Furthermore, since the opening-up policy, the reforms under Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997) and the introduction of a socialist market economy have caused fundamental changes in Chinese society. The role of the National Museum of China as an entity preserving and creating identity seemed to have attracted further notice, which has become particularly evident by the governmental decision for its reconstruction in 2004. Due to the importance and

⁵² Until Republican times the space between Tiananmen in the north and Zhengyangmen in the south was just a narrow strip, which could only accommodate about 70,000 people; cf. Ledderose, "Die Gedenkhalle für Mao Zedong. Ein Beispiel von Gedächtnisarchitektur," 325.

⁵³ For further discussion of the monuments of Tiananmen Square, see Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square," and Denton, "Visual Memory and the Construction of a Revolutionary Past."

prominence of the location, however, a high level of sensitivity had to be applied in redesigning the museum. This concern became extremely apparent after the establishment of the National Grand Theater (Paul Andreu, 2007) at the rear of the Great Hall of the People, in close vicinity to the square, which caused nationwide public debate. Some praised the approach, by which “for the first time Beijing introduced modern ideas of urban redevelopment and broke with Chinese neo-classicism.”⁵⁴ Many intellectuals and architects, however, criticized the design of the huge, round, translucent glass bubble, located just behind the Great Hall of the People. It was viewed as an unsuitable contrast to the rectangular, stone-clad neighboring buildings of the ensemble at Tiananmen Square.⁵⁵ Moreover, Beijing citizens no longer approved of the new architecture that changed their cityscape without recognition of the historical context. They perceived that foreign architects would use their city as a playground for fanciful ideas. Subsequently, the impact of the public debate challenged the practice of allowing foreign avant-garde and star architects to build national landmarks.⁵⁶ The government itself became sensitive and extremely alert to these concerns.⁵⁷ As a direct consequence of this controversy, the winning design of 2004 for the National Museum of China did not escape criticism, and was finally discarded. In October 2005, a change in leadership of the museum took place and by the end of the year, the original intention of making a visible distinction between the old and new architecture, a counterpoint design, was abandoned. The new

⁵⁴ Zheng Shiling, “Chinese City and Architecture in Transformation between Yesterday and Tomorrow,” in *Luchao—Aus einem Tropfen geboren*, Architecture for China von Gerkan, Marg und Partner. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, ed. (Hamburg: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, 2003), 16.

⁵⁵ Charlie Q.L. Xue, *Building a Revolution: Chinese Architecture Since 1980* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2006), 41-42.

⁵⁶ Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, June 2, 2006.

⁵⁷ John Finlay pointed out that this debate was, in addition, sparked by the collapse of Terminal 2E at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, designed by Andreu in 2004.

director-general, Lü Zhangshen, an architect by training, became actively involved in the change of design and placed even greater weight on preserving and enhancing adaptation of the museum to the general architectural environment of Tiananmen Square. The architects of gmp were urged to synchronize the museum's exterior impression with the surrounding architecture of Tiananmen Square and to integrate the new building harmoniously into the existing context.

In summary, in 1959 as well as in 2011 the urban setting exerted an important influence on the placement and the reconstruction of the museum. In 1959, the building developed as an integral part of the design of Tiananmen Square, applying the instituted forms of the newly established People's Republic of China. In 2011, the design of the museum directly responded to the setting in the sense that the design had to adjust and dialogue closely with the traditional elements of Tiananmen Square. To a great extent, the setting was a determining element in the development of the museum's external design. The shape the museum actually took will be addressed below.

The Façade

The first and most sustaining impression that an observer receives from a building is that generated by the façade. This outer shell serves as the figurehead of the museum. In the case of the National Museum of China, it was of major importance for the museum building in 1959, in the 2004 winning design, as well as for the executed redesign of 2011. In this section, the outer designs will be analyzed in order to understand the development in form, as well as help to trace the client's search for the most suitable design. A special focus is laid upon the application of international, national, and local forms, which can be described as follows: approaches to international design use museums worldwide as models, independent of local forms. Chinese features, on the other hand, define building characteristics, materials, and forms, which are taken from



Figure 2. The original West Façade (1959), from *Beijing shida jianzhu sheji*, 2002, 166

Chinese traditional architecture. Local features help to align the form of the original building within the context of Tiananmen Square.

1959 – Establishing a New Face

The museum complex of 1959 was built as a massive, rectangular structure in the monumental Soviet neoclassic style, ornamented with Chinese features. The building is located parallel to the central north-south axis of Beijing, which runs through Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. The museum's façade extended 313 meters from north to south fronting the square and 149 meters west to east along Chang'an East Road, altogether covering a floor space of almost 65,152 meters squared.⁵⁸ The main façade facing the square consisted of two symmetrical wings with corner projections, which were divided by a grand portico in the center [Figure 2]. Horizontally, three symmetrically arranged rows of windows structured the façade, with the windows in the

⁵⁸ *Beijing shida jianzhu sheji* 北京师大建筑设计 [Beijing Ten Prominent Buildings] (Tianjin: Beijingshi guihua weiyuanhui 北京市规划委员会, 2002), 166.

basement being noticeably smaller. Monumental grooved pilasters gave vertical order. A central staircase led up to the main portico, which was characterized by twenty-four square pillars arranged in two rows, connected by an entablature. This main entrance was framed by two immense pillars protruding over the roofline with an overall height of thirty-three meters. The emblem of a five-pointed star encircled by stalks of grain and flanked by eight red flags on each side was set above the entrance serving as a symbol of the Communist Revolution.⁵⁹ The eaves were ornamented with an overhanging, yellow and green tile cladding.⁶⁰ Their structuring in zones, the application of various tiles imitating a coffered ceiling and the use of wooden bracket-supports implied the traditional *dougong* wood architecture.⁶¹ The other three façades mirror the main façade, albeit, with slight variations.

The 1959 museum was built in the monumental forms of neoclassicism, which predominantly features rectangular building structures, a façade design with over-long columns, grid-like arranged windows, flat roofs, and an entrance emphasized by central projections.⁶² Classicist vocabulary stemming from the Western tradition was internationally and universally applied across political boundaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and served various governments in their expression of political ideology, requiring different codes of interpretation.⁶³ Some countries associated democratic traditions with this particular building style (for example, the Capitol in

⁵⁹ Hung Chang-tai, "The Red Line," 921.

⁶⁰ *Beijing shida jianzhu sheji*, 166.

⁶¹ The Chinese *dougong* 斗拱 architecture describes a unique building technique of interlocking wooden brackets, which join pillars to the frame of the roof. It is one of the most important elements in Chinese traditional architecture.

⁶² Gabriele Fahr-Becker, ed., *Ostasiatische Kunst* (Köln: Könemann, 2006), 244.

⁶³ Dietmar Schirmer, "State, Volk, and Monumental Architecture in Nazi-Era Berlin," in *Berlin, Washington, 1800-2000: Capital Cities, Cultural Representation, and National Identities*, eds., Andrew W. Daum and Christof Mauch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129.

Washington, D.C.).⁶⁴ In any case, neoclassicism suited many governments as an expression of enduring tradition, power, grandeur, and state authority.

In 1932, Soviet Russia turned to neoclassicism and developed the so-called “Socialist Realism” as their dominant form of artistic expression in literature, film, arts, music, and architecture.⁶⁵ For the Socialist government, the architectural style politically associated with the Greek democratic tradition was favorably employed for a dictatorship of the proletariat.⁶⁶ This style had the advantage of continuing traditional construction methods, without need for modern technology and material.⁶⁷ After World War II, steel-reinforced concrete allowed architects the continued use of neoclassical forms on high rise buildings by means of curtain-wall architecture. The new building standards were exported to Soviet satellite states and influenced the architecture of the People’s Republic of China. Soviet neoclassicism as encountered in the museum building as well as in the Great Hall of the People was, in fact, introduced to China by Soviet advisors, supporting local architects from 1950 until the end of the political alliance at the beginning of the 1960s.⁶⁸ However, even after Nikita Khrushchev’s proclamation of the end of Socialist Realism in architecture in 1955, and

⁶⁴ Winfried Nerdinger, *Geschichte der Rekonstruktion, Konstruktion der Geschichte* (München: Prestel, 2010), 254.

⁶⁵ Announced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party on April 23, 1932; Werner Huber, *Moskau-Metropole im Wandel: Ein architektonischer Stadtführer* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 55.

⁶⁶ The guidelines of Socialist Realism prevailed in Soviet architecture until 1955, when Khrushchev announced a reorientation to modern building style. At the 22nd Party Congress in 1961, the Soviet Union officially announced the revival of modern form. In the 1990s, Russia experienced a revival of Socialist Realism building style alongside Postmodernism. Cf. Alexej Tarchanow and Sergej Kawtaradse, *Stalinistische Architektur: Aus dem Englischen von Ursula Bischoff* (München: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1992), 9.

⁶⁷ Anders Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 52-54.

⁶⁸ Fan K. Shizheng, “A Classicist Architecture for Utopia: The Soviet Contacts,” in *Chinese Architecture and the Beaux-Arts*, eds. W. Cody, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Tony Atkin (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 92; Hung Chang-tai, “Revolutionary History in Stone: The Making of a Chinese National Monument,” *The China Quarterly* 166 (June 2001), 469.

the break between Mao and the Soviet Union, this building style remained influential for the governmental building practice of the People's Republic of China.⁶⁹ The introduction of neoclassicism helped to remodel Tiananmen Square with a completely new look as a symbol of the newly established People's Republic of China.

Although the first impression of the museum reveals the strong influence of the Soviet style, showing only few Chinese characteristics at first glance, the building, however, possesses several distinctly Chinese features. Including national and local forms corresponding to the cityscape was a well-established practice in Socialist building contexts and in the tradition of Socialist Realism itself.⁷⁰ This approach was followed not only in Russia but in many Soviet satellite states. For instance, it is to be found in the application of Polish building traditions and ornamentation at the Palace of Culture and Science (1952-1955) in Warsaw.⁷¹ In China, the Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution were part of the previously mentioned Ten Great Buildings, a group of ten landmarks, which were scattered throughout Beijing. Each of these buildings incorporated a different style, reaching from neoclassicism even to modernist form, for the most part, however, including traditional Chinese features. The building program itself was modeled after the so-called "Seven Sisters" in Moscow, a program of originally eight buildings which changed the outline of the Russian capital dramatically during the Stalin Era.⁷² In contrast to this program, which stressed the vertical line as an expression of the rising Soviet state, the

⁶⁹ Fahr-Becker, *Ostasiatische Kunst*, 244.

⁷⁰ Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era*, 4.

⁷¹ This building was a gift of Soviet Russia, executed with the help of Russian advisors and construction workers, and designed as a signpost of Soviet influence for many decades. Cf. Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era*, 90.

⁷² The scheme originally encompassed eight high-rise buildings, marking the eight centuries of the city's history. cf. Peter Noever, ed., *Tyrannie des Schönen: Architektur der Stalin-Zeit* (Wien: Prestel, 1994), 151.



Figure 3. National Museum of China, details of the old and new roofline, courtesy of Ben McMillan, 2011

majority of the Ten Great Buildings including the museum building are horizontal in orientation. Therefore, the museum is not only in harmony with the Chinese architectural tradition of low-rise buildings, but blends especially well into the context of Tiananmen Square and its surroundings, particularly considering its proximity to the Imperial Palace. In addition, the monumental size of the museum, which was evocative of Socialist large-scale building practice, also recalled the dimensions of the Imperial Palaces in the vicinity of Tiananmen Square.

One prevailing feature of the façade is the use of yellow and green tiles articulating the eaves,⁷³ which readopt the yellow glazed roof tiles of the Forbidden City. These were applied not only for the museum architecture, but also as a unifying band joining the museum with the Great Hall of the People, and later, even the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall. The use of yellow glazed tiles is among the most prominent architectural

⁷³ *Beijing shida jianzhu sheji*, 166.

features of Tiananmen Square. The structuring of yellow and green tile cladding in zones, the application of various tiles imitating a coffered ceiling, and the use of wooden bracket-supports recalled the traditional *dougong* architecture [Figure 3].⁷⁴ Further examples of the union of Soviet style with Chinese design and local features are visible in numerous decorative details, such as the yellow tiles themselves, some of which were further enhanced with Socialist ornaments of bundles of grain and stars.⁷⁵

The 1959 museum compound directly faces the Great Hall of the People, which was erected on the west side of Tiananmen Square with dimensions of 336 meters by 174 meters⁷⁶ and an overall floor space of 171,800 square meters encompassing a much larger scale than the museum. This discrepancy in size was historically rooted and politically intended: in October 1958, a draft version for the museum building was presented to Premier Zhou Enlai (1898-1976), who ordered that museum building could symmetrically mirror the Great Hall but should be smaller.⁷⁷ This statement ranks the museum second in importance after the Great Hall of the People. In summary, the museum building of 1959 was erected as part of an ensemble on Tiananmen Square, only secondary in importance, with the explicit goal of implementing the new Socialist design, which intentionally included some national forms as well as local building traditions.

2004 – Changing Faces

In the 2004 winning design by the architectural firm von Gerkan, Marg and Partners (gmp), the main façade was kept as required by the National

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Hung Chang-tai, “The Red Line,” 921.

⁷⁶ *Beijing shida jianzhu sheji*, 162.

⁷⁷ Wang Zhengming 王争鸣, ed., *Qiji shi zenyang chuangzao de—renmin dahuitang jianshe shihua*, 22.



Figure 4. West Façade, rendering of the winning design of 2004, courtesy of gmp 2004

Museum of China in the bidding. A new roof design represented the core feature of the exterior look [Figure 4]. This bronze-colored roof was now to span the entire building. From the outside, the old and the new structures were only to be connected by a translucent glass front, giving a light impression of a freely hovering roof. Inside, the ceiling was to be supported by twelve monumental pillars. The color scheme of gold glimmering bronze panels for the free floating roof and monumental pillars from natural red stone⁷⁸ was purposefully chosen in reminiscence of Chinese building traditions and to enhance the local form. Although this selection seems to continue the former structure, with the design of the 1959 façade being kept, the 2004 blueprint can nevertheless be described as an addition, purposefully contrasting with the former style. This impression is well grounded on the dominance of the applied color scheme, the use of modern building material, and the introduction of glass and steel architecture. Therefore, the 2004 design presents a combination of reinforced traditions and modernity and can be labeled as a “counterpoint design”⁷⁹ to the surrounding architecture.

⁷⁸ “Peking / Die Hamburger Architekten von Gerkan, Marg und Partner bauen Chinas neues Nationalmuseum” [Beijing / The Hamburg based architects von Gerkan, Marg und Partners built China’s new National Museum]. *Rheinischer Merkur*, Nr. 45 (November 4, 2004); www.merkur.de/archiv/neu_rm_0445/ku_ku_044501.html (accessed November 30, 2004).

⁷⁹ Marc Treib, “Adding on,” in *A Modernist Museum in Perspective: The East Building, National*

Although the design was already chosen, a reevaluation of the project from the governmental side, including a change in the museum leadership, led to the refusal of the design in 2005. One of the major reasons given for the rejection of the approved design was the client's concern that the new roof structure would devalue the 1959 façade.⁸⁰ It was exchanged for a more harmonious solution, a design which retreats in favor of the existing situation, a somewhat “silent approach.”⁸¹

2011 – More than a Facelift?

In the 2011 executed design, the museum is divided into two main blocks: a reinforced U-shaped structure from 1959 facing Tiananmen Square and embracing a new, rectangular block on three sides. It is only to the east that the façade of the new core is visible, protruding beyond the northern and southern façades of the U-shaped building. The so-called “existing envelope”⁸² underwent considerable restoration and reinforcement procedures; however, the façade remained unchanged. The extended building runs 330 meters from north to south, fronting the Square, and 204 meters west to east along Chang’an East Road. The façade of the new building repeats the original structure with a simple, unornamented design. A newly implemented, staggered roof design crowns the building ascending from 26.5 meters at the eave along the front façade to forty-two meters at the center of the new structure [Figure 5]. The new roof design gives structure to the fairly massive, more or less solid building block, at

Gallery of Art, ed. Anthony Alofsin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 152.

⁸⁰ Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, June, 2, 2006. For further reference regarding the criticism of the proposal and the preservation of the original façade, see Lü Zhangshen 吕章申, *Zhongguo bowuguan jianzhu sheji fang'an tu ji* 中国国家博物馆建筑设计方案图集 [Collection of Architectural Design of the National Museum of China] (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe 中国建筑工业出版社, 2012).

⁸¹ Treib, “Adding on,” 152.

⁸² Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, January 12, 2010.



Figure 5. The restored west façade with the staggered roof of the new building, courtesy of Christian Gahl 2011

the same time lending it a somewhat lighter appearance. The yellow and green tiles on the eaves of the original façade were retained. On added roof lines, slightly curved bronze-colored metal plates clad the overhanging eaves, carried by an abstracted, minimized Chinese *dougong* system in white.

The increased elevation of the roof line to forty-two meters changed the outline of the museum to a considerable extent and with it the impression of the square. It helped to balance out the shortcomings of the former design, in that the discrepancy between the height of the Great Hall of the People (forty-six meters) and the museum was harmonized. The remaining four-meter difference preserves the original intention of a “perspective of importance” implemented in the 1959 design of the buildings. Furthermore, the elevated roof line obscures the roof of the Ministry of State Security at the rear of the National Museum, which had disturbed the view from Tiananmen Square for decades. In 2004, the architects had already considered the necessity of raising the height of the museum in order to compensate for the imbalance of the various buildings at the Square. In reviewing the 2004 design, the architect of the former Museum of Chinese History and of the Museum of Chinese Revolution of 1959, Zhang Kaiji (1912-2006), admitted that the adjustment in size would create a more harmonious look with the ensemble of the Great Hall

of the People.⁸³

The staggered roofline including several interconnected roofs is one of the most prominent features of the new façade. By breaking up the flat, austere single-roof structure and introducing a multifaceted roof landscape, a softer contour was created, echoing traditional forms of Chinese roof shapes. From afar, the ornamentation of the old and the new roof lines seem quite similar. However, instead of yellow glazed tiles, which were originally requested by the client,⁸⁴ the new architectural forms were enhanced with bronze-colored metal plates. The addition of roof lines not only creates an important visual feature for the museum itself, but it also lays strong ties with the surrounding buildings at Tiananmen Square, all of which use the yellow tile design for their eaves. Again, the repetition of former style elements, originally implemented to enhance the Chinese characteristics as well as the local form, can be found throughout the entire façade of the new building construct. The combination of pillars, entablature, and yellow glazed tiles of the main gate was intended, in 1959 as well as in 2011, to recall traditional Chinese palace architecture [see Figure 3, above].

The contemporary style of 2011 lent the impression of a sober, unornamented, universal look. From the far side of Tiananmen Square, the new design is almost indistinguishable, fitting in with the former structure. Only as one approaches the museum can the unornamented new style be clearly differentiated from the previous architecture of 1959, and it even seems to dominate the original form—an effect both intended and considered necessary by the architects. The changes can be viewed as an

⁸³ CCTV Interview, September 13, 2004. Xinhuanet.com: zhongyang dianshitai xinwenhui keting 9 yue 13 ri bochule guojiabowuguo jiekai shenmi miansha 中央电视台新闻会客厅9月13日播出了国家博物馆揭开神秘面纱 [CCTV news room aired on September 13, the National Museum unveiled]. Interview with Gao Congli, director of the National Museum of China; Meinhard von Gerkan, gmp; Xiu Long, director of the China Academy of Building Research. Translated by the author.

⁸⁴ Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, June 2, 2006.



Figure 6. National Museum of China, north façade, statue of Confucius, February 2011

improvement and as maintaining continuity in form, solving the shortcomings of the former design, creating a more monumental, but nevertheless restrained appearance. In this respect, the new façade was more than a facelift; it was also a subtle adaptation to contemporary times.

The short-lived erection of a 7.9 meter tall sculpture of Confucius in front of the north entrance of the museum in January 2011 was, as stated by director Lü Zhangshen, aimed to fill a void in the outer appearance of the museum following a Western tradition of placing sculptures in front of the museum entrance [Figure 6]. With its monumental form, static posture, and rough finish imitating the texture of carved wood or stone, the bronze sculpture suits the design of the façade, as intended by the sculptor Wu Weishan (b. 1962). The choice for Confucius, however, has to be seen as a bold move in the revival of China's most famous philosopher, who in the past was dismissed and criticized by Mao Zedong. Its unexpected overnight removal, only three months later, must be interpreted as a sign of the enduring controversy in the CCP-leadership

regarding the approach to the heritage of Confucius.⁸⁵

In summary, in all three façades of 1959, 2004, and 2011 the adaptation to international, Chinese, and local forms played an important role for the choices in design and for the understanding of the architecture as identity creating measure, however with different implementations. Although being an integrated part of the newly shaped Tiananmen Square and planned in accordance to it, the 1959 design introduced a new style mix creating a symbol for the recently established People's Republic of China. In the 2004 counterpoint approach, a statement for change was also included, making a clear distinction between the old and new façade without neglecting the former architecture. Due to the reevaluation of the project from the governmental side, this somewhat courageous approach was reversed. The executed 2011 design continues the original form most harmoniously and is in tune with the local setting. The façade was carefully amended to the local situation of Tiananmen Square, in 1959 as well as in 2011. In both cases, it was the client's aim to shape the first impression of the observer. The inner design of the building, however, called for a different approach.

The Interior Design

The interior design of the building could develop more independently from its symbolic surroundings. On the one hand, a considerable amount of freedom was claimed in the search for an appropriate form; on the other hand, functional necessities such as the guidance of visitor streams, display facilities, and safety and security measures played an important role in structuring the building. I will provide a short overview of the inner structure of the 1959 original museum, of the 2004 planned design

⁸⁵ For further reference, see Anne Hennings, "The National Museum of China: Building Memory, Shaping History, and Presenting Identity" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Heidelberg, 2013), 95-96.

and the executed architecture of 2011. Thereafter, the museum's gallery space and the main entrance hall, which provides the primary access to the museum and which serves a significant structuring function, are described.

1959 – Welcoming the New Nation

In the 1959 building, the Museum of Chinese History was located in the south wing and the Museum of Chinese Revolution in the north wing, each encircling a separate rectangular courtyard. The building had the capacity to accommodate 10,000 people within 65,152 square meters.⁸⁶ The gallery space of 23,472 square meters was equally distributed among the museums on the north and south wings, occupying the first and second floors.⁸⁷ In addition to the two wings, the structure included a main access building, a reception hall with a total floor space of 1,390 square meters, and a meeting hall with the capacity to accommodate 700 people in the center of the compound. Both museums were accessed via the main entrance gate by crossing the main courtyard, ascending an external staircase, and entering the lobby of the shared entrance at the center of the compound.

Although the clients could have chosen an interior design unrelated to the exterior, the 2011 design creates a sophisticated response to the original appearance of the building. In the 1959 design, in addition to a coffered ceiling, red marble pillars structured the relatively undersized hall in square sections [Figure 7]. This design shows similarities not only to Chinese interior divisions, but also to the stairwell of the Russian State Library (former Lenin Library, completed 1941) in Moscow, as well as to

⁸⁶ *Beijing shida jianzhu*, 166.

⁸⁷ For the numbering of the floors, the author adopted the system of “ground level,” “first level,” and “second level,” which was deployed by the National Museum of China for the publication of their floor plans. Cf. Lü Zhangshen, *Zhongguo bowuguan jianzhu sheji fang an tu ji*, 16-17.



Figure 7. Entrance hall of the original building of 1959, courtesy of Wang Yi 2007

the Great Hall of the People and the Military Museum, which were both erected in 1959 as part of the “Ten Great Buildings” program. The extensive use of white, and the sequencing of square shapes, marble floors, and pillars, which can be encountered in the main entrance hall as well as throughout the museum, resembled key characteristics of the Soviet building tradition. The galleries were distinguished by the alternation of pillars and monumental, floor-to-ceiling windows, also common to Soviet architectural style. These windows, however, proved unsuitable for displaying works of art. On the one hand, they allowed only limited wall space for the installation of artifacts such as paintings, illustrations, and three-dimensional objects. On the other hand, the exposure to too much light also constituted a real danger for the preservation of the majority of exhibits. The regulation of light quantity, which is necessary for reasons of conservation, becomes extremely difficult when relying on natural sources. In addition, varying natural light can hinder the visitor’s view of the objects. As a result, curtains were

installed on many galleries and would remain permanently drawn. Furthermore, specially built display panels were installed in front of the lower portions of some galleries.

The structuring units of the coffered ceiling in connection with the marble pillars in the entrance hall can also be read as reminiscent of traditional Chinese palaces architecture. The introduction of red pillars to the entrance hall is an especially clear reflection of traditional palace architecture. In addition, the illusion of an open wood structured ceiling is continued into the galleries. As with the exterior design, Chinese building traditions were also integrated into the interior. Yet, this particular use is limited to only a few significant features.

The construction of the 1959 building included a comprehensive program, which encompassed the commissioning of history painting and sculptures to be displayed in the History and Revolutionary Museum as well as in the Military Museum and the Great Hall of People.⁸⁸ These artworks would illustrate important events and specific turning points of Chinese history, such as uprisings, combat, conventions, and decision making events, and would help to establish a specific historical outlook legitimizing the party's access to power. To implement this program, the Ministry of Culture held a conference in 1958 consulting artists and architects regarding how to depict the ancient traditions and culture and how to establish an artistic program that could reflect the current situation of the people.⁸⁹ The model for this approach was again provided by Soviet Russia. Material, themes, and schemes of the oil paintings originated in the nineteenth century French tradition of history painting in the revolutionary and heroic style, for example, that of Jacques-Louis David, and were primarily transmitted via the artistic practice of Soviet Russia.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Andrews, "Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979," 227.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Denton, "Visual Memory and the Construction of a Revolutionary Past," 206; Andrews, "Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979," 236 ff.

A copy of “Lenin Proclaiming the Founding of the Soviet Government” of 1947 by Vladimir Serov (1910-1968), included in the display of the Museum of Chinese Revolution in 1961, portrayed the establishment of Communism in Russia. Style, material, and content of this work were prefiguration models for Chinese history paintings. The first series of oil paintings of this program was predominantly executed by Chinese artists who were influenced by or even trained in Russia.⁹¹ Nevertheless, these images incorporated many elements of traditional Chinese painting, for example, to be encountered in Dong Xiwen’s “Founding Ceremony of the Nation” of 1953. Here the artist applied a scheme of pure colors and introduced Chinese patterns in reminiscence of traditional Chinese New Year’s paintings.⁹² This picture, featuring Mao Zedong’s proclamation of the People’s Republic of China, formed a climax of the display of the Museum of Chinese Revolution. Just like the other paintings and sculptures of the program, this painting was incorporated in the chronological display enhancing the exhibition galleries and adding to a story line which emphasized the historic success of the People’s Republic of China.

The incorporated design program makes it clear, even with the limited planning time, how sophisticated and detailed the interior design program was staged, serving as an expression of New China. Just like the exterior design, the 1959 interior design incorporated international, local, and Chinese forms, amending the form to reflect the will to display the legacy of the People’s Republic of China.

⁹¹ Andrews, “Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979,” 238.

⁹² Feng Linggang, Description of the painting “The Founding Ceremony,” The National Museum of China, <http://www.chnmuseum.cn/english/tabid/549/Default.aspx?AntiqueLanguageID=2421> (accessed October 20, 2012).

2004 – Planning “A Public Square”

The substantial addition of gallery space as well as the enlargement of the entrance building constituted the major tasks in the redesigning of the museum in 2004. The necessary alterations of the main building part were described as follows:

The current building offers generosity and dignity by the building’s high colonnades but at the same time it lacks openness and transparency inside, because it is blocked by the central entrance building.⁹³

The German architects criticized the pristine entrance hall as separating the two U-shaped museum sections from one another. The replacement of this former core in order to gain the necessary floor space and correct an “unsuitable” solution for the National Museum of China was a crucial element in the decision of architects, institutional managers, and political leaders. More than one-half of the eleven bidding participants to this project, including the three finalists, took the same step towards changing the former core design by incorporating a light glass and steel architecture in the new central building. In their winning design [Figure 8], the architects from von Gerkan, Marg and Partners (gmp) focused on the replacement of the inner building, as well. The main concept was to integrate a central hall covering the entire core of the former building, which would have been even larger than the hall which was finally implemented in 2011. Twelve monumental red pillars would have carried the roof which was designed to give a free-floating impression. Light was to be channeled through the newly designed glass walls and floor

⁹³ Gmp 2004. “The National Museum of China: design proposal 2004,” Gmp Public Relations and Communication, Hamburg 2004; Gmp 2011, National Museum of China, Beijing, brochure from the architects von Gerkan, Marg and Partners (gmp), Public Relations and Communication. Hamburg, n. p.

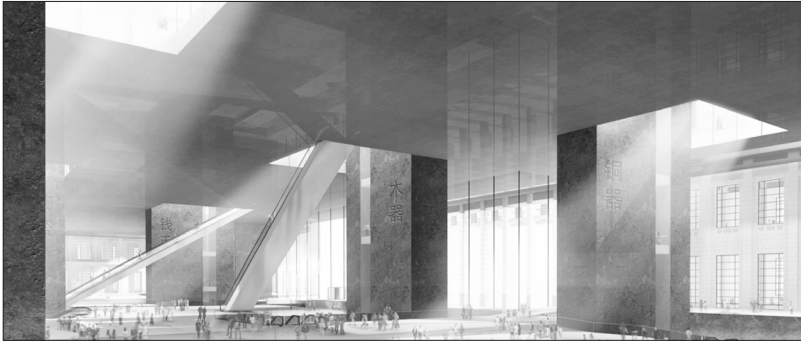


Figure 8. Grand Forum, winning design of 2004, rendering, courtesy of gmp 2004

openings from the second story to the central hall.

The plan of the architects with their “human-orientated concept of the museum” was to create a forum which would function as a “public square,” not only enabling access to the exhibition galleries but also inviting people from all walks of life to stay, even after museum opening hours.⁹⁴ Similar to the entrance hall in the Centre Pompidou in Paris (by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, 1977), which was at that time praised for its sense of welcoming openness,⁹⁵ the entrance hall was to serve as a central meeting point, offering a cafeteria, neighboring gardens, ticket counters, and information counters. Furthermore, it was to allow visitors a first glance into the galleries on the upper levels. The visitor could then reach the exhibition galleries via steep, airy, free-spanning escalators and elevators integrated into the supporting pillars.

The 2004 blueprint made an obvious argument for contemporary design and the use of Chinese building characteristics: The application of twelve red, monumental pillars carrying a cantilevered roof, the abundant

⁹⁴ CCTV Interview, September 13, 2004.

⁹⁵ Victoria Newhouse, “Pei, Painting and Sculpture: The Perception of Art in the East Building,” in *A Modernist Museum in Perspective: The East Building, National Gallery of Art*, ed. Anthony Alofsin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 65-79.

use of a traditional Chinese red color scheme, and a bronze-colored roof were adopted as references to Chinese palatial architecture.⁹⁶ At the same time, the light glass and steel structure, the giant ceiling hovering above, the free-swinging escalators, and even the application of abstracted Chinese features in large scale such as pillars and roof design gave the building a contemporary look. Even more, the ground-breaking idea of the open public square, first implemented at the Centre Pompidou, should be considered as an equalizing, non-hierarchical approach in international museum design.

In 2004, an extension of the exhibition space from ca. 24,000 square meters to 58,000 square meters was targeted. The museum demanded that the new gallery space should be equally distributed between the exhibitions of the former Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution.⁹⁷ The architects considered a primarily administrative function for the former galleries of the original building, in order to avoid the difficult transformation of the facilities to contemporary exhibition space, which had to fulfill modern requirements and museum standards. In the restored historical wings, only temporary exhibitions including international loan exhibitions and Chinese painting galleries were envisaged. The majority of the exhibition halls were to be situated in the new core building, in the basement and above the major access hall in the west, the so-called Grand Forum.⁹⁸

A preliminary exhibition plan foresaw theme exhibitions featuring groups of archeological objects such as jade, bronze, and earthenware in the basement. They would be displayed in a cave-like setting which was artificially illuminated to allow visitors' eyes to focus on the artifacts. To

⁹⁶ CCTV Interview, September 13, 2004.

⁹⁷ Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, June 2, 2006.

⁹⁸ The term "Grand Forum" for the main access hall was created by the German architects during the planning process. Officially, it acquired the name West Hall (Xi Da Ting) by the National Museum of China.

achieve the allusion of archaeological excavation sites, the German architects had the idea of presenting some exhibits in display cases buried in the floor.⁹⁹ On the level above the Grand Forum, an exhibition entitled “A Path through Chinese History” was planned, integrating the original sites of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City via an observation terrace within the exhibition tour.¹⁰⁰ Just as the Great Hall of the People dedicates one hall to each Chinese province, in an early stage curators also suggested establishing thirty-three exhibition halls to represent the Chinese provinces and their artifacts as well as a permanent gallery for The Palace Museum.

However, the approved design of 2004 with the intention to create a “museum for the nation” rather than a “museum of the nation” was never implemented. Despite the positive feedback from the jury, which had selected the design, praising the plausibility of the overall design concept, other experts in the field of architecture expressed criticism. Due to the changing atmosphere, namely the rising criticism on the practice of international architects in Beijing which had emerged in the controversy related to the building of the National Grand Theater, just a few steps away from the National Museum, the government withdrew its approval to gmp design. The scheduled rotational change in museum leadership in 2005 further increased its influence on the actual design plans. The government intentionally chose Lü Zhangshen, an architect by training, as the new director. Under his leadership, the large public hall was regarded unsuitable, possibly jeopardizing the representative character and dignity of the National Museum of China; concomitantly, an open hall for unrestricted public access was no longer desired.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ “Peking: Die Hamburger Architekten von Gerkan, Marg und Partner bauen Chinas neues Nationalmuseum.” *Rheinischer Merkur*, Nr. 45 (November 4, 2004), www.merkur.de/archiv/neu/rm_0445/ku/ku_044501.html (accessed November 30, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Gmp, “The National Museum of China: design proposal 2004.” n. p.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, January 19, 2006.

2011 – A New Level of Grandeur

The 2011 design saw a further extension of the total floor space to 191,900 square meters. To allow for the tripling of museum space, the internal building structure was changed entirely. The new museum currently extends over two underground and five aboveground levels. From the main gate, a front courtyard leads to the central hall in the east and courtyards to the north and south [Figure 9]. The central hall, the so-called Grand Forum [Figure 10], represents the new core of the interior, creating shared access to the different areas of the museum. The historical north wing houses the permanent exhibition of the former Museum of Chinese Revolution now entitled “Road of Rejuvenation” which occupies over 6,000 square meters on two levels, as well as administration units on the first floor and in the basement. The south wing accommodates administration, logistics and technical units, a canteen, and a library on five floors. To the east, the new extension contains the

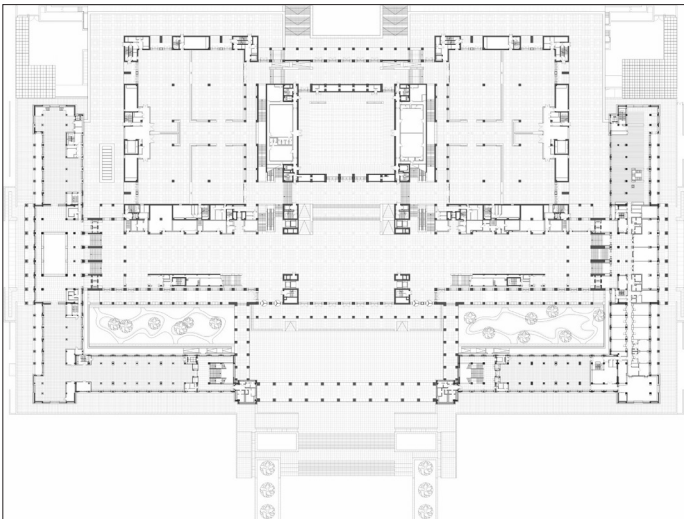


Figure 9. Floor plan (entrance level) of the reconstructed building of 2011, courtesy of gmp 2011



Figure 10. Grand Forum, courtesy of Christian Gahl 2011

majority of the exhibition space, including the permanent exhibitions of the former Museum of Chinese History, named Ancient China, displayed over 9,450 square meters, as well as making room for a theater, a cinema, and a broadcasting hall in the basement, a central reception hall surrounded by four VIP-rooms in Chinese style on the ground floor, and a banquet hall and a roof terrace on the top level. The two courtyards of the former building remain, even if scaled-down to one-third of their original size giving the building a denser, statelier character.

The Grand Forum forms the centerpiece of the new architecture, appearing in a somewhat classical, articulated design. One of the main features is its size stretching 260 meters by 34 meters from north to south and covering a total floor space of 8,840 square meters. Thereby the hall surpasses the size of the Tate Modern Turbine Hall by more than 50 per cent. From the center of the hall, two monumental staircases ascend evenly in opposing directions, leading to a spacious open gallery on the second floor. Four monumental pillars in each corner of the central entrance area of the Grand Forum accommodate elevators that allow

access to the top floor. The main building materials used throughout the new museum are Chinese granite, cherry wood, glass, and iron-colored steel. The western wall of the Grand Forum consists of a slender pillar structure with monumental window panes in steel frames. The decorative grille-work of the light-vent, incorporated into the heavy cast-bronze door, resembles traditional window shutters and casts ornamental shadows onto the floor.¹⁰² A white, coffered ceiling 27 meters high with square *oculi* seals the central hall. Local hand-sorted light-colored granite is used for the floor, the staircase, the gallery, walls, and pillars. The walls on the second floor are covered with panels made of cherry wood.

In the central hall, the segmentation of building units, the application of a coffered ceiling, as well as the use of pillars are reminiscent of traditional Chinese wood architecture, already visible in the original design. The famous architect Liang Sicheng, in his accounts on Chinese architectural history, identifies a three-part building outline with podium, main body, and pitched roof as being typical of Chinese building practices for exterior design. In 2011, a three-part Chinese building structure with a stone base, wooden center, and coffered ceiling was also introduced by the architects for the inner design of the Grand Forum.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the coffered ceiling, with its enormous dimensions, evolved as the dominant feature of the Grand Forum. The application of black cherry wood paneling recalls the use of traditional building materials. In general, the 2011 design of the Grand Forum refers to Chinese building traditions in subtle ways. However, the references seem more sophisticated than in either the 2004 design or even than in the original building.

Although the interior design could have evolved without taking the surroundings into account, the 2011 design nevertheless responds

¹⁰² Gmp, “National Museum of China, Beijing,” n. p.

¹⁰³ Ibid.



Figure 11. Central relief and bronze cast doors, courtesy of Cheng Qin 2011

sensitively to the original appearance of the building. It incorporates the original form into the new look by using a similar materiality, retaining the monumental windows and pillars as well as the color white, and by introducing the coffered ceiling as a main feature, all seeming integral to the design. The western wall of the Grand Forum with its window front and slender pillars recalls the main gate of 1959. Numerous features including the use of materials, the aforementioned design of the western wall, and even its monumental size seem to better correlate with the outer appearance of the museum than they did in the former entrance hall of 1959.

On the central axis immediately facing the main entrance, a giant relief 36 meters wide remains the only illustration in the hall [Figure 11]. It depicts the story of Yu Gong and his sons, who legendarily worked together to remove mountains from their doorstep. This relief was modeled after the famous painting “The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains” of 1940 by the French-trained artist Xu Beihong (1895-1943), originally painted as a metaphor of China’s apparently impossible

struggle during the war against Japan.¹⁰⁴ In his concluding speech of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in June 1945, Mao Zedong also referred to this story, identifying the two mountains blocking the path as feudalism and capitalism, which needed to be removed by the Chinese people.¹⁰⁵

The director-general of the museum, Lü Zhangshen, chose the motif of the relief,¹⁰⁶ which remains the only pictorial decoration in the hall, replacing earlier depictions of leading socialist figures, namely Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, which were previously placed in the entrance hall.¹⁰⁷ This illustration conveys a message on the timeless value of the Chinese people's sense of perseverance and cooperation, enabling the achievement of the impossible.

For a Chinese governmental institution, the reception of official guests represents an important aspect of its responsibilities. Consequently, the provision of reception halls of sufficient size and quantity had already been of major importance for the original design of the museum, but became especially so for its redesign. In 2011, the National Museum of China provided various venues for receiving guests, predominantly incorporating the same style implemented in the design of the Grand Forum. In addition, a small number of VIP-venues are designed in richly ornamented Chinese style, one of them even referring specifically to the museum collection by applying the bronze inscription of the "Da Yu Ding" bronze vessel to the wall. This inscription of 291 characters records

¹⁰⁴ The painting is currently located in the central hall together with other famous paintings of New China. Cf. Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop, (accessed October 30, 2012); Andrews, "Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979," 32.

¹⁰⁵ Mao Zedong, Concluding Speech of the 17th National Congress of the CCP, June 11, 1945, http://www.marxists.org/reference/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_26.htm (accessed October 30, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Stephan Schütz, architectural design, gmp, Berlin, October 26, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Hung Chang-tai, "The Red Line," 921.

the enfeoffment deed of minister Yu by King Kang of Zhou¹⁰⁸ and represents an important legacy of the Chinese calligraphic tradition. From this inscription of nineteen lines only eleven lines were partially quoted on the wall installation, thus stressing the importance of the calligraphy over the actual contents of the inscription.¹⁰⁹ The very same inscription is also applied as a recurrent cover design of all museum catalogues, creating a corporate identity by using the masterpieces of the collection. The idea of designing rooms in a Chinese national style brings to mind the concept of the Great Hall of the People, where for every province a hall was decorated in its own distinguished style, serving as a means of cultural identification. With the introduction of the additional VIP venues, the reception of guests, which is grounded deeply in the Chinese society and culture, can take place in a Chinese setting within the modern National Museum of China. The application of traditional artistic forms for the interior decoration of the VIP-venues parallels the adoption of traditional architectural form for the façade of the building.

The new museum accommodates forty-nine exhibition galleries with an overall exhibition space of approximately 65,000 square meters.¹¹⁰ The design as carried through in 2011 afforded for a more flexible, universal design of the exhibition space as that originally planned in 2004. The exhibition “The Road of Rejuvenation” returned to its original venue in the historical north wing and the Ancient China exhibition was installed in the basement, allowing for adjustable use of the other exhibition halls for theme exhibitions (jade, bronze, painting galleries), temporary exhibitions (Chinese painting galleries) and international loan exhibitions. In the

¹⁰⁸ *Exhibition of Chinese History*, National Museum of Chinese History, comp. (Beijing: National Museum of Chinese History, 1998), 46.

¹⁰⁹ Traditionally bronze inscriptions are linked to the legitimization of the ruler, and in this particular case it is documenting the emperor rewarding his minister Yu for his loyal services. Thanks to John Finlay, who made the suggestion that the application of an inscription in the VIP-room might therefore fulfil some admonition function to all VIPs to faithfully serve the state.

¹¹⁰ Gmp, “National Museum of China, Beijing,” n. p.



Figure 12. Road of Rejuvenation, Tiananmen Gate installation with uncovered window and a copy of Dong Xiwen's famous "Founding Ceremony of the Nation"

galleries of the restored building, as before, the problematic monumental windows are closed and covered by the exhibition architecture of the Road of Rejuvenation display. Only one window, which faces Tiananmen Square to the west, remains uncovered. It serves to incorporate the view of the square into the exhibition itself, providing an authentic backdrop for the display illustrating the founding of New China and its proclamation from the height of Tiananmen Gate on October 1, 1949. As in previous displays, this event forms the climax of the exhibition, depicting a copy of Dong Xiwen's "Founding Ceremony of the Nation," and the original microphone on which Mao Zedong announced the Foundation of Communist China, all embedded in a replica of the original Tiananmen Gate [Figure 12]. The connection of authentic artifacts contained within a remodeled set juxtaposed against the view of the original site provides a new level of awareness within the visitor, or even individual identification, with the display of recent history of the People's

Republic of China.

In the new display of the exhibition “The Road of Rejuvenation,” the original set of sculptures and history paintings which had enhanced this display for more than fifty years, was restructured. In contrast, the Ancient China exhibition refrains from the original program, only including a sculpture of the Beijing Man but no history paintings in its display. The majority of the artworks originally commissioned for the founding of the museum in 1959 were integrated in the Masterpiece Exhibition at the Central Hall in 2011, as they have become the most recognized paintings of modern China and the icons of Chinese history. Here they are displayed as “works of art” in a gallery setting following the classic academic tradition. This clearly indicates a change of focus from the narrative and documentary function they served in the previous exhibitions in order to emphasize the iconic value of the object. This development demonstrates the new museum policy to now serve as both a history *and* an art museum.

When indispensable to the history display of the Road of Rejuvenation, reproductions of these classical paintings are presented such as Dong Xiwen’s “Founding Ceremony of the Nation” (1953), which is prominently displayed in the installation of Tiananmen Square, as discussed above. In addition, new sculptures and paintings were commissioned to illustrate recent events for the current Road of Rejuvenation exhibition thus pursuing the former policy of the museum. These artworks continued to be executed in an overly dramatic manner and with a narrative content, which in some cases are hardly distinguishable from the works of the former program.¹¹¹ The painting “Capitulation of Japan to China in Nanjing on September 9, 1945” (2003) by Chen Jian (b. 1951), for example, is executed with a photo-realistic style, but the composition follows the former history painting tradition.

¹¹¹ Andrews, “Painters and Politics in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979,” 238.



Figure 13. “Flesh and Blood Great Wall” by Ye Yushan at the Road of Rejuvenation exhibition

The majority of the sculptures were designed for the first reopening of the exhibition in 2009,¹¹² the most impressive being “Flesh and Blood Great Wall” (2009) by Ye Yushan (b. 1935) [Figure 13]. This bronze sculpture is an interpretation of the sculpture with the same title by Hou Yimin (b. 1930) executed for the so-called Modern China exhibition in 1989, and now displayed in the south courtyard of the museum. Compared to the 1989 classical relief style, the 2009 interpretation saw a return to the exaggerated and dramatic forms applied in sculpture as demonstrated by the statues in front of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall, which were established in a mutual effort by over 100 sculptors in 1976 and depict the revolutionary history of the Chinese people.

¹¹² In October 2009, the reinforced north wing of the museum briefly opened to the public with the exhibition entitled “Road of Rejuvenation.” Only a few weeks later it was closed again for necessary amendments. From then on, parts of the museum were always kept open, until March 1, 2011, when the entire museum building opened to the public.

In summary, the interior design of 1959 incorporated local, Chinese, and international forms, which can also be found in the selected design of 2004 as well as in the implemented design of 2011. The grandeur of the museum was expressed in the design of the Grand Forum. Although the Grand Forum evolved more independently from the original form of 1959, the blueprint nevertheless developed from a “counterpoint approach” in 2004, stressing the idea of a public square within the museum, leading to a much more restrained yet monumental outcome in 2011. The exhibition halls were designed according to the latest international technical standards, while with the VIP venues in Chinese style special requirements for the National Museum of China were met. Although the original sculpture and oil painting program was continued, it was only to be implemented for the Road of Rejuvenation exhibition.¹¹³

Conclusion

The National Museum of China is a showcase of Chinese culture and identity. Its building, located at the heart of China and its capital, on the east side of Tiananmen Square, represents an object of display in its own right. With the construction of the Museum of Chinese History and the Museum of Chinese Revolution in 1959, the newly erected building took up a vital position to officially represent the new political order, emerging as part of the newly established political center on the square. With the comprehensive reconstruction project launched at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the National Museum of China has evolved into a new entity. The architectural solutions of 1959, as well as those of 2011, were developed in accordance with the specific conventions of their time, displaying characteristics that spanned international, Chinese, and local

¹¹³ Due to the scope of the article, the new exhibition design cannot be discussed in detail. For further reference, see Hennings, “The National Museum of China: Building Memory, Shaping History, and Presenting Identity.”

forms. In this paper, I have compared the form of the original 1959 building with the intermediate and unrealized 2004 design and the implemented 2011 structure, considering the decisions underlying these choices and their consequences. The external design was examined on the basis of the analysis of the façade, while the interior design was considered on the basis of the distribution of gallery space and the design of the Grand Forum.

It has been made clear that the location of the museum, which the Chinese government decided in 1959 to be Tiananmen Square, was of vital importance for the development of the museum design. In 2011, the same setting played an essential role for the redesigning of the museum, which became evident in the failed implementation of the “counterpoint design” of 2004 and in the alteration of this design towards an approach more in harmony with the form of the original museum.

For the exterior design of 1959, the setting and the application of the local, Chinese, and international forms played a major role in integrating the building in the newly designed political center of Tiananmen Square which shifted the cultural and political center of the nation from the Imperial Palace. The 2004 design was more attuned to international styles while at the same time satisfying the requirements of keeping the design of the original façade largely untouched. The final design implementation of 2011 maintained the references to local, Chinese, and international features, and even further enhanced the Chinese and local style. The result was a more sophisticated look, to which the unornamented modernist forms of the new building parts became subordinate. All this served to develop an outer façade still in tune with the original 1959 design and with the local setting, but resolving the shortcomings of the former structure, such as an inadequate building height in relation to the other structures on Tiananmen Square. Even the enormous size of the museum, designed to be the largest museum in the world, remains obscured by the harmonious blending of the exterior design into Tiananmen Square.

Although this continuity of form also prevails in the interior, more

freedom was applied in the employment of modern elements and in the design of a state-of-the-art, functional museum building. The exhibition halls fulfill international museum standards and are designed as exceptionally flexible, neutral containers. Reception halls, by contrast, designed in Chinese style, pay tribute to Chinese culture and represent an important addition to the national museum. In the Grand Forum, the imposing size of the museum becomes immediately visible to the visitor. This museum developed from an independent glass and steel design of 2004 to a more conservative and monumental approach, which is in tune with the original design of 1959. The 2004 idea of an openly accessible public square within the museum had to make way for a much more restrained and dignified design in 2011. However, the idea of a lively square returned in the assignment of the Grand Forum as temporary exhibition space. The initial 2004 idea of an openly accessible public square within the museum, considered too mundane, had to make way for a much more restrained and “dignified” design in 2011. However, the mundane idea of a lively square returned in the occasional use of the Grand Forum as temporary exhibition space.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the National Museum of China had undergone great changes. In order to correspond with the “dynamic development of China,”¹¹⁴ the museum tripled in size, presenting itself as the largest museum building in the world. The process of finding the right design, however, was a long and ongoing effort negotiated between architectural and political needs. The choices polarized between a traditional and a contemporary approach, and between the interior revision and exterior presentation of the institution. It finally evolved from a counterpoint design to a design conceived to be more harmonious and responding to the representational needs of stately

¹¹⁴ “Wettbewerbsaufgabe” [Specifications of the competition], in *Gmp wettbewerb aktuell* 12/2004. Gmp Public Relations and Communication (Hamburg, gmp: 2004), 29.

power embodied by its symbolic location. In the implemented design the interior and the exterior of the building express a clear statement favoring the continuity of the original form; yet they do not repudiate modern architecture elements. The message this redesigned memorial of the People's Republic of China conveys is of continuity and stability, and of the selection of a modernization process which nevertheless does not present any clear break with former interpretations of the Chinese past. The removal of the Confucius statue from the north gate of the museum is a graphic example of the return to this conservative approach. However, the statue's initial placement shows that an intense debate regarding the interpretation of the past has taken place.

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“Flesh and Blood Great Wall” 血肉长城 (2009)

“Founding Ceremony of the Nation” 开国大典 (1953)

“Preparatory Office of the National History Museum” 国立历史博物馆筹备处

“Ten Great Buildings” 十大建筑

“The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains” 愚公移山 (1940)

Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940)

Central Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China 中国共产党中央政治局常务委员会

Chen Jian 陈坚 (b. 1951)

Chen Zhanxiang 陈占祥 (1916-2001)

China Academy of Building Research 中国建筑科学研究院

Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997)

Dong Xiwen 董希文 (1914-1973)

Dougong 斗拱

Duan Gate 端门

Hall of Military Glory Wuyingdian 武英殿

Hou Yimin 侯一民 (b. 1930)

Li Changchun 李长春 (b. 1944)

Liang Sicheng 梁思成 (1901-1972)

Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976)

Meridian Gate 午门

Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China 中华人民共和国文化部

National Development and Reform Commission 中华人民共和国国家发展和改革委员会

National Museum of China 中国国家博物馆

Peng Zhen 彭真 (1902-1997)

Preparatory Office of the National History Museum 国立历史博物馆筹备处

Preparatory Office of the National Museum of Revolution 国立革命博物馆筹备处

Propaganda Department of the Chinese Communist Party 中共中央宣传部

Serov, Vladimir (1910-1968)

Wang Yeqiu 王冶秋 (1909-1987)

Wu Weishan 吴为山 (b. 1962)

Xi Da Ting 西大厅 West Hall

Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿 (1895-1943)

Ye Yushan 叶毓山 (b. 1935)

Zhang Jian 张謇 (1853-1926)

Zhang Kaiji 张开济 (1912-2006)

Zhengyangmen 正阳门

Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898-1976)