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CHINESE HERITAGE WITH EUROPEAN CHARACTERISTICS

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC DIMENSIONS OF THE CHINA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE POLITICS

ABSTRACT The discussion on Chinese cultural heritage started to emerge as a result of inspiration coming from foreign travels of Chinese scholars-officials and as protective measures against looting of artifacts in the 19th and 20th centuries. The most spectacular robberies were carried out by Anglo-French forces in the Old Summer Palace (Yuanming Yuan) during the Second Opium War in 1860. That event became one of the cornerstones of the “century of humiliation” (*bainian guochi*) in the Chinese historical narrative. Even though the Communist Revolution classified historical sites as remnants of feudalism, today the Communist Party of China has assumed the role of a defender of the Chinese heritage. In contemporary China, its cultural heritage is a phenomenon of both domestic and international significance. The Chinese emphasize the antiquity of the Chinese nation, pointing to the origins of Chinese civilization as early as five thousand years ago. In contemporary China, recovering cultural treasures is important for the political legitimacy of a government and for erasing the national humiliation.

Keywords: China, Chinese culture, Chinese heritage, Chinese nationalism

In contemporary China, its cultural heritage is a phenomenon of both domestic and international significance. While in the internal dimension, it is used for strengthening national identity and patriotic attitudes, on the international arena, it has become a useful tool applied in moral or symbolic contexts. This tool has been, to some extent, forged by the West. The discussion on its own cultural heritage started to emerge in China as a result of Western appreciation of historical objects as well as after numerous cases of looting Chinese cultural, religious, and archeological sites by Europeans and Americans in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Communist Revolution classified cultural heritage sites as remnants of feudalism, and therefore many of them were either neglected or destroyed. Nowadays, however, the Communist Party of China has assumed the role of a defender of the Chinese heritage, trying to recover Chinese historical artifacts from abroad and emphasizing the lack of moral virtues in foreign institutions.

The aim of this article is to show the process of changing the Chinese approach to the importance of cultural heritage, the recognition of its value both in itself and as a component of the image of the party and the state as well as an element of international politics.

The awareness of the value of cultural heritage and the necessity of its protection appeared relatively late in China. It occurred at a similar time with the building of national consciousness and a modern state, i.e. at the turn of the 20th centuries. The Chinese term for cultural heritage was coined even later, and it is the English translation of cultural heritage *wenhua yichan*, where *wenhua* means 'culture' and *yichan* means 'heritage, inheritance.' It is a relatively new concept that has only been used in literature since the 1980s. This does not mean there were no similar ideas before. There functioned such expressions as *wenwu* (cultural monument), *guwu* (antiquity, literally: ancient object), *guji* (ancient place), *shiji* (historical place), or *guobao* (national treasure).¹

For hundreds of years, imperial courts had gathered rich collections of items related to religion and rituals. Those items, such as bronze vessels, jade objects, clothes and headgear, imperial seals, had a practical or symbolic meaning in worship and in confirming the legitimacy of power, i.e. the Mandate of Heaven. Astrological charts, population registers, and other documents were passed down from generation to generation within the dynasty or acquired by the next dynasty. Over time, some of the emperors began to collect art for the sake of its beauty, and some of them became famous and generous patrons of art. For instance, Emperor Wudi (reigned 141–87 BCE) of the Han dynasty ordered the construction of an art gallery where he collected portraits of ministers and generals.² The greatest art collection among all Chinese rulers was amassed by Emperor Qianlong, who was spending a lot of energy and money on

¹ Lai Guolong, "The Emergence of 'Cultural Heritage' in Modern China: A Historical and Legal Perspective", in Akira Matsuda, L.E. Mengoni (eds.), *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia*, London 2016.

² J. Shambaugh Elliott, D. Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures*, Seattle–London 2005, pp. 9-10.

expanding his collections for 64 years after his accession to the throne. Qianlong supported the painting academy and employed artists to decorate his residences.³

The intellectual and political elite of ancient China consisted of scholars-officials, who, from the Han dynasty on, received a humanistic education in the spirit of Confucianism. Starting with the Song dynasty until 1905, the officials were elected for their positions according to a meritocratic criteria, results of examinations where knowledge of classical literature was more important than practical knowledge of science or law, and culture (*wen*) was valued higher than the art of war (*wu*). All scholars-officials not only had comparable education, but also led a similar, sophisticated lifestyle. Fine arts such as painting, calligraphy, music, poetry, and the art of garden-designing were its essential elements. Members of the elites themselves created poetry, paintings, and calligraphies and played musical instruments, but also admired works of art in their collections.⁴ Therefore, like emperors, private persons collected paintings, calligraphies, bronzes, porcelain, and books. Private bibliophiles owned famous collections of thousands of valuable and rare manuscripts, such as Lu Xinyuan's Beisong Tower in Huzhou, the Bronze Sword Tower of the Qu family in Changshu, the Haiyuan Pavilion of the Yang family in Liaocheng, and the Eight Thousand Volumes Tower of the Ding family in Hangzhou.

Despite these collecting traditions, not all historical items were of interest to scholars-officials, aristocrats, or imperial courts. Oracle bones with ancient Chinese inscriptions are an example of a lack of awareness of the value of historical items. For ages until the early 20th century, they were unearthed by farmers and sold in herbal stores regarded as a traditional Chinese medicine. In 1899 in Beijing, scholar Wang Yirong realized that "dragon bones" were the oldest examples of Chinese writing.⁵ What is more, many of these bones were sold by Chinese peasants to foreign antique dealers and collectors before the Chinese themselves began regular archaeological excavations, such as at the Yinxu site in Henan Province in 1928, where the remains of the last Shang capital had been preserved. Not surprisingly, significant private collections of oracle bones sprang up outside China. Canadian missionary James Menzies has amassed the largest private collection of 4,700 oracle bones. Apart from China and Taiwan, most oracle bones are found chiefly in Japan and Canada, but also in the Great Britain, the United States, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and France.⁶

Legal protection of antiques in China was nonexistent, and so apart from oracle bones, many other valuable items were also taken overseas without the need of any authorities' consent. They enriched foreign collections mainly in Europe, America, East and South Asia. This often happened in a morally dubious way, for example, bought

³ Kohara Hironobu, "The Qianlong Emperor's Skill in the Connoisseurship of Chinese Painting," *Phoebus: A Journal of Art History*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1988), pp. 56-73.

⁴ A. Zemanek, "Wprowadzenie," in A. Zemanek (ed.) *Estetyka chińska. Antologia*, Kraków 2007, pp. VI-XII.

⁵ J. Shambaugh Elliott, D. Shambaugh, *The Odyssey...*, p. 5.

⁶ Liu Zuozhen, *Repatriation of Cultural Objects: The Case of China*, Singapore 2016, p. 42.

for a fraction of their real value. According to Chinese estimates, since the Opium Wars more than 10 million Chinese relics were scattered globally, of which a million was ranked as the first and second class categories of Chinese historical objects of great importance for Chinese culture, history and science according to the Chinese Archeological Society. According to UNESCO statistics, over 200 museums in 47 countries have 1.64 million Chinese antiques, while private collections worldwide contain at least ten times more. The British Museum itself has over 23,000 items, and the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington 1,200 paintings.⁷

The first official central measures for the protection of national monuments and cultural sites were taken at the end of the Qing dynasty and in early Republic of China. On the one hand, they were a result of the large-scale robbery of relics by foreigners. On the other hand, similar to Japan, Chinese laws were inspired by Western patterns, visible e.g. in Chinese journalism of the turn of the century. In 1908, Qing dynasty official Luo Zhengjun of Shandong recommended the efforts to preserve the remains of Babylon, Ancient Greece, and Rome to be followed in China, and blamed local officials for deficiencies in protecting Chinese historical monuments.⁸ Simultaneously, the protection of extant historical remains was necessitated by the disturbing scale of their destruction, e.g., the reuse of building materials from historic buildings by peasants. At that time, international regulations regarding the protection of cultural monuments, even those belonging to enemy countries defeated in war, were noticed by Chinese intellectuals.⁹

LOOTING HISTORICAL MONUMENTS BY FOREIGNERS AS AN INCENTIVE TO PROTECT THEM IN CHINA

In addition to the inspiration coming from foreign travels of Chinese scholars-officials, an important reason for protective measures was the looting of Chinese relics by foreigners and Chinese themselves. The most spectacular robberies were carried out by Anglo-French forces in the Old Summer Palace (Yuanming Yuan) during the Second Opium War in 1860 and by the Eight-Nation Alliance in the Forbidden City after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.

The burning of the Old Summer Palace came to be one of the cornerstones of the “century of humiliation” (*bainian guochi*) in the Chinese historical narrative. The period began with the Opium Wars, when China symbolically fell from the pedestal of a great civilization. Chinese reformers at the turn of the 20th century expressed their feelings of national shame when witnessing the treasures being looted from the Old Summer Palace: Liang Qichao in 1893 in New York, Kang Youwei a few years later

⁷ “How Many Chinese Cultural Treasures ‘Lost’ Overseas?”, *People’s Daily*, 30 January 2007, at http://en.people.cn/200701/30/eng20070130_346095.html#, 30 March 2021.

⁸ Li Chuanbin, “Shixi ‘Baocun guji tuiguang banfa zhangcheng’”, *Chengshi Xuekan*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2018), p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*

in Paris. Liang wrote about ‘feelings of shame’ (*hanyen*) and Kang about ‘mourning and a wounded heart’ (*shangxin*).¹⁰ The phrase ‘from humiliation to glory’ (*cong quru zouxiang huihuang*) often appeared in the titles of historical studies, such as *China: From Humiliation to Glory 1840–1997* (*Zhongguo: Cong quru zouxiang huihuang 1840-1997*), *Atlas of the Century of National Humiliation in Modern China* (*Jindai Zhongguo bainian guochi dituji*) or *Never Forget National Humiliation: Recreating Glory* (*Wuwan guochi: Zaichuang huihuang*). The slogan “Never forget the national humiliation” has been recalled on many occasions and repeated during many historical exhibitions in the People’s Republic of China.

Among the most important events of the century of humiliation cited by William A. Callahan after Chinese historians¹¹ many were related to the actions of Europeans in China, such as the loss of sovereignty as a result of the First Opium War (1839-1842), the Second Opium War (1856-1860) with the act of plundering and burning of the imperial Old Summer Palace, massacres by the Russians in Manchuria in 1856, Eight-Nation Alliance invasion to suppress the Boxer uprising in 1900 and 1901, foreign domination in international concessions in Chinese cities, associated with colonialism or hypo-colonialism as it was called by Sun Yat-sen.¹² All these were carried out by a specific perpetrator: a foreign imperialist assisted by corrupt Chinese authorities. This imperialist was initially associated simply with the epithet “Western,” but since the First Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese imperialist became even more important due to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-1945 with the Nanjing Massacre.

Most of the buildings of the Old Summer Palace were built in the 18th century, mainly during the reign of emperor Qianlong, i.e., at the peak of the Qing dynasty. Some of the buildings were designed in the European architectural style by European artists, such as Giuseppe Castiglione. So spectacular was the palace that the elements of its architecture, popularized in the engravings by Jesuit Jean Denis Attiret in the mid-18th century, became models of oriental aesthetics for Europeans and were reproduced in gardens or painted on porcelain, all in line with the chinoiserie style in European art and decoration. The splendor and beauty of the palace was also a delight to the British and French military commanders who entered the imperial palace in 1860. The accounts of the invasion of the Old Summer Palace reveal both an admiration for the palace as a testimony of the unimaginably sophisticated culture of China, inspired by French architecture,¹³ and a contempt for the weakness of the Chinese state, evidenced by the emperor’s escape from a mere few thousand foreign soldiers, disapproval for the absolutist political system, and disdain for Chinese civilization, which

¹⁰ J.L. Hevia, “Loot’s Fate: The Economy of Plunder and the Moral Life of Objects ‘From the Summer Palace of the Emperor of China’”, *History and Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1994), pp. 319-345.

¹¹ W.A. Callahan, “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism”, *Alternatives Global, Local, Political*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2004), pp. 199-201.

¹² Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, Shanghai 1927, pp. 38-39.

¹³ E. Ringmar, “Liberal Barbarism and the Oriental Sublime: The European Destruction of the Emperor’s Summer Palace”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2006), pp. 920-921.

borrowed architectural solutions from Europe, but unwisely refused to purchase European weapons.¹⁴

It is estimated that before 1860, there were 1.5-2 million valuable items in the Old Summer Palace. After capturing the palace, the soldiers, given the permission by their commanders, began to steal valuables, including clocks, sculptures, figurines, vases, silk (including official imperial dragon robes), porcelain, lacquer boxes as well as jade, coral, and ivory ornaments. Armand Lucy reported that many items were destroyed because the invaders did not understand their value and did not appreciate the Chinese art; this was the lot of Chinese painted and calligraphy scrolls, cloisonné vases or porcelain in a style differing from the then fashionable in Europe.¹⁵ Most of the loot was transported to Great Britain and France, some to India and Hong Kong, where they were put up for sale and landed in museums or became part of private collections of oriental art while several most splendid items were presented to Queen Victoria, Emperor of the French Napoleon III, and Empress Eugenia.¹⁶ To this day, the Old Summer Palace artifacts can be seen not only in the largest museums, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum, but also in institutions such as the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham¹⁷ or The Rifles Berkshire and Wiltshire Museum in Salisbury,¹⁸ as a kind of sentimental reminiscence of British military power and greatness.

When the plunder was finished, British High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin, in retaliation for the imprisonment and killing of some of the British delegates, ordered the whole place to be completely burned down. In England, military action was generally considered to take precedence over the preservation of cultural heritage. In France, vandalism was more widely criticized, condemned, among others, by Victor Hugo, who described the structure as a *wonder of the world*, a *tremendous unknown masterpiece*, and a perfect marriage of Chinese and European art. Condemning the actions of Europeans, Hugo called England and France *two bandits and thieves*.¹⁹ For the Chinese, the burning of the Yuanming Yuan gained a symbolic meaning; in Chinese historiography, it is considered today one of the earliest and most important events of the “century of humiliation”²⁰ and referred to in patriotic campaigns.²¹

¹⁴ G.M. Thomas, “The Looting of Yuanming and the Translation of Chinese Art in Europe”, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), at <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn08/93-the-looting-of-yuanming-and-the-translation-of-chinese-art-in-europe>, 30 March 2021.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J.L. Hevia, *The Afterlives of Ruins: The Yuanmingyuan in China and the West. A Lecture*, The University of Chicago, 21 May 2013, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAiLsuk_gLo, 30 March 2021.

¹⁷ Royal Engineers Museum website, at <https://www.re-museum.co.uk/>, 30 March 2021.

¹⁸ The Rifles Berkshire and Wiltshire Museum website, at <https://www.thewardrobe.org.uk/collection>, 30 March 2021.

¹⁹ V. Hugo, *The Sack of The Summer Palace*, Letter to Captain Butler, 25 November 1861, at <http://archive.is/EekF#selection-553.0-553.29>, 30 March 2021.

²⁰ W.A. Callahan, *National Insecurities...*

²¹ J. Wardęga, *Chiński nacjonalizm. Rekonstruowanie narodu w Chińskiej Republice Ludowej*, Kraków 2014, pp. 249-250.

The plundering of the Forbidden City in 1900 was also an act of retaliation against the Chinese. A rebellion, known as the Boxer Uprising (1898-1901), broke out against growing foreign influence. After defeating the rebellion by Eight-Nation Alliance,²² the foreigners' goal was to humiliate China and the emperor himself. Though there appeared an idea of destroying it, the residence survived, but the imperial space was desecrated. Foreigners entered the palace of the Son of Heaven, made photos of themselves on the imperial throne, invaded the privacy of the empress's apartments. In February 1901, a mourning ceremony dedicated to the late Queen Victoria was held in the Chinese emperor's palace. The name plaques of imperial ancestors were removed from the Forbidden City and brought to the British Museum.²³

The looting lasted several weeks and besides imperial palaces, it also affected mandarins' residences and houses of ordinary Chinese in Beijing, Tianjin, and surrounding towns and villages. The looted items were easily sold abroad, especially since there were already a well-developed Chinese art market, auction houses, and museums.²⁴ Some types of Chinese art were not attractive for European and American looters, however they appealed to the Japanese who were able to choose items to be taken to the Japanese emperor or for exhibitions in Japanese museums and schools.²⁵ In addition to soldiers of the eight armies, civilians from foreign countries took part in the looting as well, including women such as Lady Ethel MacDonald, the wife of a British diplomat, and Georgina Smith, a British missionary.²⁶ Chinese religions were blamed for the anti-Christian crimes of the Boxers, so Taoist and Buddhist temples were destroyed in retaliation, holy books were burned, and sacred places, such as the Temple of Heaven, were desacralized. Blowing up a pagoda at the Lingguang Temple was justified by the British commander, general George Barrow, as a necessary retaliation for the destruction of Christian churches by the Boxers as well as making clear to the Chinese that their local deities were helpless to protect their places of worship.²⁷ It was a kind of war on symbols, and so cultural objects came to be counted among victims of the war, not for the first and not the last time in history.

The turmoil of the end of the Qing dynasty and the Warlord Era turned out to be a golden age for collectors, who could easily increase their collections of Chinese art. Some collections of valuable volumes were sold overseas by the heirs, after the death of the bibliophiles, for instance, most of the collection of 150,000 volumes from the Bisong Tower sold in 1907 to the Seikado Library in Iwasaki. In various places in the country stone steles, sculptures, manuscripts, and paintings attracted attention of

²² The Eight-Nation Alliance was a coalition of Japanese, Russian, British, French, American, Italian, Austro-Hungarian and German troops to rescue foreigners besieged by the Boxers.

²³ J.L. Hevia, *English Lessons. The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, Durham 2003, pp. 197-199.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

²⁵ J. Sand, "Was Meiji Taste in Interiors 'Orientalist'?", *Positions: Asia Critique*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2000), pp. 653-654.

²⁶ S. Hoe, *Women at the Siege: Peking 1900*, Oxford 2000, pp. 196, 322.

²⁷ J.L. Hevia, *English Lessons...*, p. 223.

foreign collectors and were taken abroad. From 1850 to 1940, foreigners ran at least 151 archaeological excavations in Dunhuang, Heishui Cheng, the ruins of Loulang, Niya, Gaochang, Kucha grottoes. Most of them were led by Russians and the British, but also Swedes, Germans, Japanese, and French.²⁸ For most of this period, there were no legal regulations concerning archaeological excavations in China, so the uncovered items were relatively easily taken abroad.

The best example of the way foreigners were acquiring their collections was the case of the Buddhist Mogao grottoes in Dunhuang. The most treasured cave No. 17, the Library Cave, was discovered in 1900 by the Taoist monk Wang Yuanlu. There were about 50,000 well-preserved Buddhist, Taoist, Manichean, and Nestorian manuscripts in various languages, written on silk, paper, and wood. In addition to religious texts, there were also scrolls of literature as well as historical, astronomical, and astrological records. Local authorities failed to secure the discovered antiques. In 1907, the British archaeologist Aurel Stein appeared in Dunhuang and persuaded Wang to sell him 8,082 valuable manuscripts, 500 painted scrolls and other items. Among them was the Chinese copy of the precious *Diamond Sutra*, the oldest printed text (from 868). In 1908, French orientalist Paul Pelliot came to Dunhuang and bought 3,000 manuscripts, 200 Buddhist paintings and other items.²⁹ Some of the scrolls were stolen, but undeniably, most of the items were bought, albeit for amounts inadequate to their value: Stein spent £ 130, Pelliot £ 90, or – according to the current value – around 16,000 and 11,000 British pounds respectively.³⁰ Most of these objects belong now to the British Library in London and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

Wang Yuanlu later sold other scrolls to the Japanese and Russians, and eventually only about 30 percent of Dunhuang manuscripts remained in China. They were left only because Pelliot showed his manuscripts to some Chinese scholars in Beijing, who, outraged by the loss of the national treasure, alarmed the Qing authorities. As a result, over 8,000 manuscripts and scrolls were brought to the National Library in Beijing in 1911.

In addition, American collectors of Buddhist art removed valuable Tang dynasty frescoes from the walls of the Mogao grottoes.³¹

POSITIVE INSPIRATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Apart from the obvious and immediate threat to antiques due to the actions of collectors, the motivation to protect heritage was derived from observing already existing solutions practiced in modern societies. From the end of the 19th century, many Chinese scholars and reformers traveled to Europe, the United States, and Japan in search of

²⁸ Liu Zuozhen, *Repatriation...*, p. 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

³⁰ According to CPI Inflation Calculator, at <https://www.in2013dollars.com/1907-GBP-in-2019>, 30 March 2021.

³¹ Liu Zuozhen, *Repatriation...*, pp. 39-40.

models of modernization for their country. Although the idea of collecting historical and artistic objects was not new for the Chinese intellectual elite, making the collections available to the public in museums was a novelty.

One of those seeking inspiration abroad was a high-ranking Manchurian official and art collector, Duan Fang. Upon his return, he started building cultural institutions open to the public in Hunan, Hubei, and Jiangsu provinces. By the end of the Qing dynasty, many representatives of the Chinese elite experienced financial difficulties and sold their collections, which were often bought by foreigners. Watching the outflow of valuable collections abroad, Duan Fang began to buy them back himself. He acquired great collections of valuable books, e.g., in 1908 he purchased manuscripts from the Tower of Eight Thousand Volumes for the Jiangnan public library in Nanjing.³² He was also the first Chinese to collect foreign artifacts, mainly Egyptian ones. Unfortunately for the Chinese heritage, following Duan Fang's death, his children sold off his collections, including the most valuable Shang bronzes, which were then purchased by John C. Ferguson for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Appreciation of China's past was at the heart of legislation and institutions which were created at the time. It resulted from the philosophy of the New Culture Movement and the discussion on the need for modernization and some level of westernization. At that time, some Chinese intellectuals who published in *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*) were fascinated by both material and spiritual culture of the West, and some even believed in the superiority of Western civilization both on material and spiritual level. Radical modernizers and supporters of full westernization, often having very superficial knowledge of the West themselves, advocated the erasure of the Chinese culture through actions such as the liquidation of all temples in the country to stop the "spread of ignorance and superstition" or the replacement of the Chinese language with English or Esperanto.³³ Happily for the Chinese heritage, more moderate views on modernization prevailed. The scholar Feng Guifen and the reformer Zhang Zhidong advocated the *ti-yong* principle (*Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*),³⁴ that is, preserving the Chinese essence (*ti*) while adopting Western methods of practical action (*yong*). Therefore, it was necessary to appreciate, protect, and present the achievements of Chinese culture, and this was to be achieved by legislation on the one hand, and cultural institutions on the other.

A special department was established in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Minzheng Bu*). It was responsible for the cataloguing, research, protection, and management of museums, Buddhist and Taoist temples, and ancient tombs.³⁵ In 1909, the ministry is-

³² Cui Yao, *Duan Fang: Luanshi zhi neng cheng wan Qing shouchang di yi ren*, 6 July 2018, at <http://collection.sina.com.cn/cjr/2018-07-06/doc-ihexfcvk5924157.shtml>, 30 March 2021.

³³ K. Gawlikowski, „Formowanie się społeczeństwa obywatelskiego w Chinach w XX wieku”, in K. Tomala, K. Gawlikowski (eds.), *Chiny. Rozwój społeczeństwa i państwa na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, Warszawa 2002, p. 16.

³⁴ Tze-Ki Hon, „Ti-Yong Theory”, in Wang Ke-wen (ed.), *Modern China. An Encyclopedia of History, Culture and Nationalism*, New York–London 1998, pp. 354–355.

³⁵ Li Chuanbin, *Shixi...*

sued the earliest Chinese law on the protection of monuments from the Zhou and Qin dynasties: Measures for the Protection of Ancient Sites (*Baocun guji tuiguang banfa zhangcheng*). The preamble stated that the purpose of the new law was to protect ancient sites against foreigners who buy antiques and take them abroad. It said that consent to such actions not only contradicted the spirit of the ancient Chinese, but also meant the loss of the dignity of the nation, even though the concept of the nation was still something new in China. The actions of other governments that protect their own historical objects were given as a model in the document. The principles of international law were also mentioned: in the case of armed conflicts, prohibition of the plundering of museums, and in the case of their destruction, the obligatory payment of damages.³⁶ The document encouraged establishing regional museums to collect and catalogue works of art and providing owners of such items with the opportunity to donate or temporarily place their collections there. One of the purposes of the museums was to raise the awareness of the value of historical objects in the Chinese society and educate it about the need to protect them.

Measures for the Protection of Ancient Sites consisted of two main parts: the first indicated six spheres in which the actual list and status of monuments was to be described, and the second specified five points concerning their protection. Specially designated local officials were ordered to analyze stone blocks, steles, stone carvings, rock paintings and inscriptions and prepare documentation and reports on them; trace thefts of stone monuments and their sale to foreigners; examine wall paintings in temples in order to protect the historic ones; analyze the condition of the tombs and temples of previous dynasties emperors and other significant historical figures; as well as the regulate the archeological excavation. Unlike the earlier, sporadic cataloguing efforts, these were supposed to examine real objects, not just study existing documentation. The recommendations were made to protect monuments and stone blocks by relocating or fencing them to limit the practice of coping ancient inscriptions, which put them at a risk of erasure. The document encouraged private collectors to preserve artifacts of stone and precious metals, ceramics, calligraphy, paintings, and books for display in a planned museum in Beijing. It called for the preservation of imperial tombs and temples, and the restoration of the damaged ones. The regulations concerning paintings and sculptures were similar – attention was paid to their restoration, and in the case of technical difficulties, it was recommended to leave indistinct paintings as they were instead of repainting them freely,³⁷ which used to be the previous practice.

The first public museum in China was established in 1905 in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, about 100 km from Shanghai. It was created by a reformer and entrepreneur Zhang Jian as an “object study center/garden” (*bowuyuan*; the modern term is literally “object study hall”: *bowuguan* or “hall of fine arts”: *meishuguan*). The architectural design of the museum reflected traditional Chinese architecture combined with the style characteristic for the French concession in Shanghai. The museum exhibits natural

³⁶ Lai Guolong, *The Emergence...*, pp. 61-62.

³⁷ Li Chuanbin, *Shixi...*, pp. 10-11.

objects (collections of plants, minerals, butterflies, stuffed birds), historical objects (inscriptions, costumes, ritual objects), and arts (calligraphy, painting, porcelain and ceramics, cloisonné, embroidery, figurines, and jade ornaments). Zhang was encouraging donations to the museum by convincing collectors that donating the collection to the museum would protect it on the power of the international law in uncertain times. In addition to public exhibitions, the museum was also a space where semi-private exclusive exhibitions were held for connoisseurs. Due to its educational role, Zhang Jian postulated the establishment of similar institutions in various parts of the country, but he did not convince the imperial court to the idea.³⁸ The museum in Nantong continues to function today.

Public institutions began to collect ancient books as well, but the difficulty here lay in the lack of clearly defined competences of various bodies in this respect because their roles in the field of collecting antique books, described in the aforementioned Measures for the Protection of Ancient Sites and in The Regulations of Libraries in the Capital City and Provinces (*Jingshi ji gesheng tushuguan tongxing zhangcheng*, 1910), overlapped. Conflicts between institutions, coupled with a poor funding and high corruption in the final years of the Qing dynasty, were not beneficial to the protection of places and sites of historical importance. Due to the lack of funds for the erection of museums at the provincial level, exhibitions were often possible only in libraries. The preparation of the lists of monuments and reports on their condition was progressing slowly, too. Many relics were still being taken abroad, especially to Great Britain, the United States, France, Russia, and Japan.³⁹

THE DIFFICULT SITUATION OF CHINESE HERITAGE DUE TO THE WARS AND REVOLUTION

Many museums and private collections suffered during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War. When the conflict broke out, there were 37 major museums in China, but only 18 of them survived until the end of the war. Three-quarters of university museums and libraries were destroyed. During the war, the remains of the Peking man (*Homo erectus pekinensis*), discovered a little earlier (1929-1937) in Zhoukoudian near Beijing, were lost.⁴⁰ The most valuable items from the Forbidden City were evacuated to areas beyond the reach of the Japanese troops. After the war, the major part of the collections from the Forbidden City returned to Beijing, but at the end of the civil war, the most valuable collections were transported to Taiwan by Chiang Kai-shek.⁴¹ Today, the National Palace Museum in Taipei (*Guoli Gugong Bowuguan*) boasts

³⁸ L. Claypool, "Zhang Jian and China's First Museum", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2005), pp. 567-604.

³⁹ Li Chuanbin, *Shixi...*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Liu Zuozhen, *Repatriation...*, p. 35.

⁴¹ J. Shambaugh Elliott, D. Shambaugh, *The Odyssey...*, pp. 88-92.

one of the richest collections of Chinese art in the world. Meanwhile, during the Maoist rule in continental China, museum collections were not entirely safe.

The ideological campaigns that began in the 1950s led to the persecution of, among others, staff of cultural institutions, who were sent to the countryside for re-education through labor (*laodong gaizao*). During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), one of the goals was to make China a world power in steel production. Millions of people took part in the “battle for steel,” making steel in primitive backyard furnaces. This ideological and economic campaign resulted in a huge famine and deaths of tens of millions of people.⁴² In the course of mass collection of scrap, even fully functional items were melted, and antique bronze vessels and coins, whether found in the ground, private houses or in museums, were often thrown into the furnaces as well. It is impossible to estimate the size of the losses that took place then.⁴³

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Red Guards (*Hongweibing*), young activists who grew up in the cult of Chairman Mao, attacked everything and everyone who could be accused of “bourgeois taint” or sentiments towards feudalism. Chaos and destruction wreaked havoc throughout the country. Educational and cultural institutions ceased to function. Inspired by Mao’s *Red Book*, young people fought “four olds”: old ideas, old culture, old habits, and old customs. They destroyed cultural artifacts, items deemed unnecessary and harmful, such as books, Western clothes, musical instruments, chess, kites. The Red Guards demolished historical sites, stripping them of ornaments, and furniture that was considered bourgeois or foreign. In places of worship, the heads of figures were torn off. Museums and libraries were attacked, books and exhibits were thrown away and destroyed. Before Mao disbanded the Red Guard in July 1968 and sent young activists to rural communes, the losses suffered by Chinese culture were enormous. They would have been even greater had it not been for Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, who ordered the protection of the most important monuments.

The Palace Museum remained closed until 1971 and its collections were secured against the Red Guards, but the museum staff did not escape persecution in political campaigns. As in other cultural and educational institutions, they were persecuted as adherents of the old feudal order, deprived of their jobs, publicly humiliated, forced to self-criticize at struggle sessions (*douzheng dahui* or *pidou dahui*). Nevertheless, the special importance of this historical object for Chinese domestic and foreign policy was discerned even during the Cultural Revolution. When in 1971 as part of the so-called “ping-pong diplomacy,” a delegation of table tennis players and sports activists from the USA came to Beijing, the Forbidden City was one of the places they visited.⁴⁴ Successful delegations of American presidents, from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump, visited

⁴² F. Dikötter, *Wielki głód. Tragiczne skutki polityki Mao 1958-1962*, transl. by B. Gadomska, Wołowiec 2013, pp. 453-466.

⁴³ J. Shambaugh Elliott, D. Shambaugh, *The Odyssey...*, pp. 128-129.

⁴⁴ T. Boggan, *History of the U.S. Table Tennis*, vol. V: 1971-1972, Part I, at <https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Table-Tennis/History/History-of-USATT/Volume-V>, 30 March 2021.

the Forbidden City, too. However, it took a long time for the PRC to appreciate its cultural heritage fully and openly.

INCREASING APPRECIATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Authentic or imaginary stories of travelers, missionaries' accounts, and legends about the splendor, riches and exoticism of the East aroused a fascination with the Orient in the West. However, knowledge of Chinese art in the West has remained limited and stereotyped for centuries. Objects, furniture, and decorations that were imported from the Far East in the 16th century or were later imitated in the wave of *chinoiserie* shaped the imagination of the European elite, artists, writers, and philosophers. The peak of *chinoiserie* came in the 18th century. Typically, Europeans did not distinguish whether the objects came from China, Japan, India or Middle East. When paintings and fabrics modeled on the aesthetics of the East were created in Europe, elements from various cultural codes and social and aesthetic orders were mixed together. The goal was to meet the aesthetic needs of European audiences, and not to preserve the authenticity of Eastern art.⁴⁵

The items looted from the Old Summer Palace and the Forbidden City and later exhibited in Europe contributed to the revival of the admiration for the richness of Chinese art and the aesthetics of the East,⁴⁶ at the turn of the 20th century and prompted the development of research in this area. Nevertheless, the brutal removal of these objects from their cultural context (e.g., related to the symbolic position of the emperor or to religion) meant a degradation to them, reducing the treasures of Chinese culture to their aesthetic dimension or even simply their exoticism, or, worse, to a symbol of military triumph over another civilization. To this day, those artifacts are to be found in the latter form in military museums, such as the Royal Welsh Fusiliers Museum in Caernarvon Castle, the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham, and the United States Military Academy in West Point.⁴⁷ The looted items were advertised during auctions as trophies taken from the exotic imperial palace, and buyers did not care about their historical value for China or their original aesthetics.⁴⁸ At that time, Chinese art, based on a different canon of beauty than in Europe, was not appreciated, which was manifested, for example, in the destruction of calligraphy and painting scrolls during looting or in difficulties with finding a buyer for the Qianlong Emperor's album with paintings depicting the Summer Palace.⁴⁹ Even in large museums, Chinese antiques were

⁴⁵ D. Zasławska, *Chinoiserie w Wilanowie: Studium z dziejów nowożytnej recepcji mody chińskiej w Polsce*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 20-30.

⁴⁶ G. Pauthier, "Des curiosités chinoises exposées aux Tuileries", *Gazette des beaux-arts: la doyenne des revues d'art*, vol. 9, no. 6 (1861), p. 366.

⁴⁷ J.L. Hevia, *English Lessons...*, p. 327.

⁴⁸ J.L. Hevia, *The Afterlives...*

⁴⁹ G.M. Thomas, *The Looting...*

recontextualized when put in the common space containing oriental exhibits from other Asian countries.

The first foreign exhibition of Chinese art on loan from the Beijing Palace Museum was the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, held in 1935-1936 at the Royal Academy of Arts in Burlington House in London. During the negotiations preceding the event, the Chinese side concluded that Westerners would not appreciate the sophistication of Chinese art and therefore it was unreasonable to lend the most valuable artifacts. The Chinese did not send the best works abroad possibly also due to safety concerns. During the negotiations, differences of opinion between Chinese and British experts regarding the authenticity of some scrolls and the dating of others occurred.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the exhibition was successful in initiating the modern era of Chinese art research in Europe and besides contributed to increasing knowledge about China and the sympathy of the British towards the Chinese during the conflict with Japan.⁵¹

In the first decades of the People's Republic of China, exhibits from the Palace Museum in Beijing were made available mainly to the countries of the Eastern Bloc, only in the 1970s to Japan, and in the 1980s and 1990s the collections were loaned to Western European countries, the USA, and Australia.

Whereas the Cultural Revolution proclaimed and carried out the warfare against the old culture which resulted in many ancient monuments being destroyed, after Deng Xiaoping started his policy of modernization and opening, there was a shift towards appreciating the ancient China. Nowadays, the Chinese emphasize the antiquity of their nation, pointing to the origins of Chinese civilization as early as five thousand years ago. This would mean that Chinese civilization is as ancient as Egyptian or Mesopotamian, but unlike them, it has continued its interrupted existence.

Recovering the cultural treasures taken out of the country is important for the political legitimacy of a government, for confirming effectiveness of the authorities, and for erasing the "national humiliation." The so-called "century of humiliation" was a period in which the Chinese people were defeated by foreign forces; it began with the opium wars, when China was degraded from a powerful civilization to the position of "the sick man of Asia." This national humiliation and the process of its erasing has become an essential element of both Chinese historiography and politics. In contemporary Chinese rhetoric, China's dream of great rejuvenation, there is nostalgia for a historic power and appreciation of the potential of a five thousand years old civilization.

Apart from evoking victories and triumphs, the nation cannot do without martyrdom.⁵² "Chosen glories and chosen traumas" shared by the nation are passed down from generation to generation. The significance of these chosen glories, such as victorious battles or the figures of eminent leaders, is not as great as the significance of

⁵⁰ J. Cahill, *London 1935/36 Exhibition: "Early" Paintings from China*, at <http://jamescahill.info/the-writings-of-james-cahill/london-193536-exhibition-early-paintings-from-china>, 30 March 2021.

⁵¹ J. Shambaugh Elliott, D. Shambaugh, *The Odyssey...*, pp. 82-83.

⁵² E. Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", in J. Hutchinson, A. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford-New York 1994, pp. 17-18.

national trauma. Selected traumas concern those events that are associated with lost battles, great human losses, loss of territory, independence, and national humiliation.⁵³

The sites of tragedy and humiliation suffered by the Chinese people are often preserved – either in the original form or transformed into museums. This was the case at the places connected with the Second Sino-Japanese War, such as the site of the Nanjing Massacre, as well as at places reminiscent of the national humiliation associated with Europeans. The Old Summer Palace, after being burnt down in 1860, was not rebuilt; only Western-style stone buildings ruins (Dashuifa ruins) have survived. In the 1980s, the Chinese government turned the Yuanming Yuan grounds into a museum. The information board describing the object states that *they continued to stay there for over a century, reminding people of the national humiliation*. Another example is the Nanking Treaty Museum in Nanjing. The exhibits are presented that point to the cruelty of the European invaders – such as handcuffs, whips, and clubs, *used in British-controlled docks on Chinese workers*, or the photos of residents of Chinese cities starving due to hardships following the foreign invasion. On the other hand, it shows a kind of contempt for Europeans, who lack culture but admire Chinese civilization and steal Chinese artifacts.

The theme of national humiliation and the need to remember it also appeared in patriotic educational campaigns. In 1994, the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League (*Zhongguo Gongchanzhuyi Qingnian tuan*) published a series of four posters titled *Patriotic Education Propaganda Poster Set*.⁵⁴ It was a graphic representation of the typical elements that appeared in the patriotic campaigns propagated in China: a reference to the glorious past and achievements of the great Chinese culture. At the same time, it showed how China lost its rightful position in the world through the insidious actions of the great powers, and the belief that only Communist Party could ensure China's prosperity. In all these posters, a monument took the central place, four smaller pictures were placed around it, with the Great Wall and a propaganda slogan at the bottom. The first poster was related to history and showed the great inventions of China: papermaking, printing, compass, and gunpowder. The second poster was about the century of humiliation, with the slogan "How could we forget?" (*Women zen neng wangdiao*) and an image of the remains of a column from the Old Summer Palace. The smaller images depicted four moments of the "century of humiliation": the image of the destroyed Chinese ship during the Opium War, the unequal treaties, the armies of Eight Allies, and the Nanjing Massacre. The caption raised the question: *Why were the descendants of the dragon reduced to the 'sick man of the East' and subjected to endless bullying and humiliation?* The third poster showed the path of the Chinese revolution from Sun Yat-sen to Mao Zedong. The fourth one was related to the period from Deng Xiaoping and the policy of modernization and reform. The message ended with a call to restore China's greatness in the

⁵³ V.D. Volkan, *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*, Boulder, CO 1998, pp. 19-28.

⁵⁴ S. Landsberger, *Patriotic Education Propaganda Poster Set (1994)*, at <https://chineseposters.net/themes/patriotic-education-1994>, 30 March 2021.

21st century. Nowadays, the Chinese have a stronger sense of national pride, but some international situations are prone to be interpreted by them as a result of a deliberate action and a continuation of humiliations inflicted on China by foreign powers since the mid-19th century.

Bearing in mind the growing national pride in the country, it is worth looking at the process of recovering some Chinese antiques from abroad. The return of stolen works of art is possible in practice by forcing owners to return them, repurchasing or encouraging collectors to donate them to museums. Chinese efforts in this area intensified in the 21st century, but regulations and institutions had already existed for over half of a century. The plunder and burning of the Old Summer Palace not only symbolically began a century of humiliation, but also serves as a link between the early cases of the plunder of the Chinese cultural heritage and the attempts to recover the objects from abroad at the beginning of the 21st century. Interestingly, the greatest emotions connected with Chinese relics appearing at auctions in recent decades were not caused by the precious artifacts belonging to the emperor or religious objects, but by the bronze animal heads of the Chinese zodiac. They used to be a set of twelve bronze figures from a water clock in the Old Summer Palace in front of the Seafood Banquet Hall (*Haiyantang*), designed by Giuseppe Castiglione.⁵⁵ They were not the most outstanding works of art and did not belong to the most valuable imperial collections, but were simply the decoration of the fountain in the most European-style part of the palace. Perhaps this great interest should be related to the fact that they were extremely characteristic of and unique to the Old Summer Palace. They were, therefore, convenient objects for political goals – showing the success of communist China in regaining the national treasures lost during the imperial era to the imperialist powers.

Although the first auctions took place in the 1980s, the public discussion of the Old Summer Palace bronze heads auctions took place in 2000 at the Christie's auction in Hong Kong. China's Cultural Relics Bureau described it as *insulting and deeply painful to the Chinese people to have these things sold before their eyes*.⁵⁶ The first elements of the zodiac – the tiger, ox, and monkey heads – returned to China in 2000, purchased by the state-owned Poly Group company, which saw its operation as a patriotic duty to *rescue the national treasures*.⁵⁷ The heads were sent to various cities for triumphant exhibitions: to Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Chengdu, Tianjin, and, along with 120 other relics, were included in a large exhibition in Taiwan in 2001.⁵⁸ Eventually, they got a dedicated place in Beijing; the Poly Group founded the Poly Art

⁵⁵ R. Kraus, "The Politics of Art Repatriation: Nationalism, State Legitimation, and Beijing's Looted Zodiac Animal Heads", in P. Gries, S. Rosen (eds.) *Chinese Politics. State, Society and the Market*, Abingdon 2010, pp. 201-221.

⁵⁶ M. Landler, "Christie's Auctions Relics Despite China's Objection", *The New York Times*, 1 May 2000, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/01/arts/christie-s-auctions-relics-despite-china-s-objection.html>, 30 March 2021.

⁵⁷ R. Kraus, "The Politics...", p. 204.

⁵⁸ "National Treasures to Be Displayed in Taiwan", *People's Daily*, 28 November 2001, at http://en.people.cn/200111/28/eng20011128_85473.shtml, 30 March 2021.

Museum (*Baoli Yishu Bowuguan*),⁵⁹ where the zodiac heads are the main attractions. There are four of them in this museum now after a Chinese billionaire Stanley Ho from Macau donated the pig head in 2003. Four years later, he also purchased the horse head at a Sotheby's auction in Hong Kong and sent it to the Beijing Capital Museum (*Shoudu Bowuguan*).

In 2009, there was a big debate about two high-profile auctions of the rabbit and rat heads from the Yves Saint Laurent collection at Christie's. The Chinese side unsuccessfully tried to stop the auction in a French court. A Chinese citizen Cai Mingchao appeared to be a highest bidder with around 30 million euros, but refused to pay it, arguing that the heads should return to China, and he only staged a patriotic protest. In 2010, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Old Summer Palace burning down, a concert was held in front of the famous Dashuifa ruins, aimed at publicizing the campaign to collect signatures for a petition for the return of looted antiques and opposition to auctions. Actor Jackie Chan became the face of the action.⁶⁰ In 2012, Jackie Chan directed and starred in the movie *The Chinese Zodiac (Shier shengxiao)*, which is set around the recovery of animal heads robbed from the Summer Palace. Finally in 2013, the rabbit and rat heads were handed over to the National Museum of Beijing (*Zhongguo Guojia Bowuguan*) by French businessman, collector and owner of Christie's auction house, Francois Pinault. This gesture was described by the Chinese Vice Minister of Culture, Li Xiaojie, as an expression of *deep friendship with the Chinese people*.⁶¹

As part of the appreciation of Chinese heritage, Beijing has been seeking to include Chinese objects in the World Cultural Heritage List since 1987. By 2020, China has already caught up with Italy, previously the unquestioned leader, and have 55 Chinese objects on the list, 17 of them added in the last decade. China also has 42 intangible cultural heritage items on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and that is more than any other country. In the speech at UNESCO Headquarters in 2014, China's President Xi Jinping underlined that promoting Chinese traditional culture is essential to "making China great again" and a step to reinforce the concept of the "Chinese dream," that is, rebuilding lost national prosperity. The Chinese dream could not come true without continuation and development of civilization or the promotion of culture, as Xi Jinping said.⁶²

The period of appreciating Chinese heritage that began after the Cultural Revolution resulted not only in activities within UNESCO, but also in new Chinese national

⁵⁹ Poly Art Museum website, at www.polyartmuseum.com, 30 March 2021.

⁶⁰ "Summer Palace to pursue stolen treasures", *Global Times*, 19 October 2010, at http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2010-10/19/content_21152865.htm, 30 March 2021.

⁶¹ T. Yue Jones, "Two Bronze Animal Heads, Stolen 153 Years Ago, Returned to China", *Reuters*, 28 June 2013, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-sculptures-idUSBRE95R0HW20130628>, 30 March 2021.

⁶² *Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO Headquarters*, 28 March 2014, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1142560.shtml, 30 March 2021.

legal regulations, such as Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics (*Wenwu Baohu Fa*, promulgated in 1982 and amended in 2015) or Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (*Zhongguo Wenwu Guji Baohu Zhunze*, 2000). The State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH, *Guojia Wenwu Ju*), formed within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is the main agency of central government authority responsible for the protection of Chinese cultural heritage and the development and management of museums. Every few years SACH publishes the *List of National Cultural Protection Units*, with its 2019 edition including over 5000 objects of significant historical, artistic or scientific value. Cooperation between Chinese and Western museum institutions is constant nowadays, for instance, between the Tate Gallery and Pudong Museum of Art, Center Pompidou and West Bund Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum and Design Society in Shenzhen.⁶³ In the case of both China and Europe, the patterns of responses to the problems plaguing cultural institutions are often similar, such as opening specialized museums, like the industrial museums by former state-owned companies, science and technology museums, natural history, folk art, ethnology, intangible heritage museums, as well as transforming some natural or cultural environments or preserved traditional settlements into museum spaces. As in the West, in order to attract the young public, museums take recourse to modern technologies, like interactive games, mobile applications, and merchandise products inspired by museum collections or developed in cooperation with designers. China also has a policy of encouraging visitor attendance by free admission to the public.⁶⁴ Western architects are among the authors of innovative designs for museum buildings, like Rocco Design Architects in Guangdong Museum. Nevertheless, Chinese cultural heritage institutions seem to be at a different stage of cultural heritage management development than Western ones. The main mission of Chinese museums is celebration of Chinese history, revival of cultural nationalism, promoting Chinese heritage on a national level as an element of a patriotic education and as strengthening China's image on an international level.

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Four decades have passed since the People's Republic of China started its reforms. Since 1978, the world has been closely watching the changes in China's economic and social organization. The Middle Kingdom, that was the world's largest economy for two millennia, has the ambition to become a leader again, after "the century of humiliation." China is on the way to overtake the United States, becoming the largest economic power of the world. The Chinese are increasingly successful in various fields, be it space exploration, genetics or engineering. At the same time, they try to strengthen their position in supranational political structures and to influence international relations.

⁶³ "European Museums Defend Their Partnerships in China", *The Art Newspaper*, 1 September 2020, at <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/european-museums-defend-their-partnerships-in-china>, 21 May 2021.

⁶⁴ S. Bollo, Zhang Yu, "Policy and Impact of Public Museums in China: Exploring New Trends and Challenges", *Museum International*, vol. 69, no. 3-4 (2017), pp. 29-33.

Chinese diplomats are working on an image of China as a country peacefully growing in strength. Their activities in international organizations, the United Nations, World Trade Organization, World Bank, etc., are more visible than ever before. In the internal dimension, nationalist ideology has the function of uniting a wildly diverse society, replacing outdated communism. There is a powerful, top-down nationalism of the Communist Party of China, developed through the state apparatus, the socialization system, and state-controlled media. Top-down nationalism is also supported by symbolism, traditions, and national holidays. Along with the transformations that modernized China's economy and social system, this top-down nationalism provides the base of the CPC's legitimacy. However, Chinese nationalism is not limited to the CPC's constructivist nationalism. A grassroots response is the popular nationalism, based on a strong sense of national humiliation, which is also experienced today from the West. It is not so much about the historical injustice but, above all, about contemporary frustrations that the West has not noticed that China has changed and its importance cannot be underestimated as it used to be.⁶⁵ The popular nationalism is often a genuine sense of national pride, including five-thousand-year-old civilization and richness of the culture.

The Communist Party of China is trying to lead the wave of grassroots nationalism, arguably realizing that the expression of nationalist emotions is one of the few opportunities for making one's own views public in the PRC – and thus one of the few ways to mobilize the public, which can go in any direction, including potentially against the Communist Party. Thus, it would be the duty of the Communist Party of China to uphold China's cultural heritage. CPC is acting as a protector of Chinese heritage, is keeping the mandate of cultural nationalism and strengthens its legitimacy in the eyes of the people. It would not be the first time when the past serves the future in the Middle Kingdom.

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⁶⁵ Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, Qiao Bian, Gu Qingsheng, *Zhongguo keyi shuo: bu. Lengzhanhou shidai de zhengzhi yu qinggan jueze*, Beijing 1996.

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