

**IMAGING CHINA:
CHINA'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH LOAN
EXHIBITIONS TO BRITISH MUSEUMS**

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Abstract

Imaging China: China's cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions to British museums

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China's worldwide cultural promotion has attracted considerable attention in the past decade. Art exhibitions sent out by the Chinese government, as an important part of such initiatives, have been ever more visible in Western museums. How and why the Chinese government uses such exhibitions, however, has rarely been explored.

This study examines how such exhibitions have contributed to China's cultural diplomacy, through shaping the image of China in the British media. It demonstrates how China's loan exhibitions contribute to an advanced and civilised, democratic and humanist (with Chinese characteristics), innovative and creative, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, open, collaborative and peaceful image of China, and how such image is consistent with China's cultural diplomacy in the new century.

This study examines the factors which have an impact on the media interpretation of such exhibitions, namely the image of China in the media. It explores the involvement of the Chinese government and the influence of museum professionals on both sides (China and the UK) in producing and delivering these exhibitions, and the relationships between them. It demonstrates that the Chinese government plays a vital role in delivering loan exhibitions, but the role is more bureaucratic and facilitating, rather than didactic or propagandistic. The Chinese government is aware of the value of loan exhibitions for cultural diplomacy, but still allows the museums involved enough freedom in shaping the exhibitions.

This study also considers the operation of China's current system of managing loan exhibitions, and their implications for China's cultural diplomacy and Chinese museums. It concludes that the Chinese government should reform the current system to encourage Chinese museums on all levels to actively engage in international collaboration, without intervening in their professional independence.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 2008 the Chinese government increasingly has recognized the importance of its international image and building ‘soft power’ as part of the nation’s “comprehensive power” (综合国力, zònghéguólì). Since then, the various government and Communist Party agencies have been prioritizing this effort and pouring billions into various activities abroad - ramping up Chinese media presence overseas, cultural exhibitions, student exchanges, Confucius Institutes, corporate branding, and public diplomacy. This has been a global effort. In a short time, China has managed significantly to increase its “cultural footprint” overseas.

But, the question remains: is all the investment producing dividends? Thus far, the answer must be “no.”¹

David Shambaugh
George Washington University

China is a failure when it comes to soft power - or so we’re told. A giant in the hard-power leagues of money and military strength, China is often portrayed as a minnow swimming against the global tide of ideas and perceptions. Unloved and misunderstood, the country can only get things done through the use of carrots and sticks, not by capitalizing on the warm sentiments of others. Foreigners, in the end, pay heed to China only because they have to, not because they want to.²

Trefor Moss
Independent journalist based in Hong Kong

¹ ‘Can China do soft power?’ *ChinaFile*, 11 April 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/04/can-china-do-soft-power/274916/>, accessed 3 November 2014.

² T. Moss, ‘Soft power? China has plenty’, *The Diplomat*, 4 June 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/06/soft-power-china-has-plenty/>, accessed 3 November 2014.

The reason China is having such problems with soft power is that it's simply not something that can be ordered up on command by political leaders.³

Donald Clarke
George Washington University

There's a large question, specifically, when we talk about China's soft power efforts. It is how soft power is generated. I think it's very problematic, maybe ... the reason that's not very effective in China's case is that, much of it is generated...through the government. It's a very top-down kind of model ... but ... in these days, the generation of soft power, the exercise of soft power is increasingly at the bottom-up model, at the grass roots level, I don't think that has been done very well in the China's case.⁴

Jay Wang
University of Southern California

...

In the past decade, the Chinese government's desire and efforts to strengthen its soft power and polish its international image has attracted increasing global attention. Such ambition has been delivered in innovative as well as traditional formats, including, for example, publicizing the current first lady's personal charm,⁵ refining domestic and foreign policies, providing foreign aid, increasing economic investment overseas, promoting international communication and publicity, and hosting the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo. Amongst all these

³ 'Why is Chinese soft power such a hard sell?' *ChinaFile*, 4 November 2013, <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/why-chinese-soft-power-such-hard-sell>, accessed 13 January 2015.

⁴ *The World Tonight*, radio programme, BBC Radio 4, London, 3 October 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04jmd8j>, accessed 3 November 2014.

⁵ J. Gewirtz, 'New idea for Sino-American relations: first-lady diplomacy', *The Atlantic*, 4 June 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/06/new-idea-for-sino-american-relations-first-lady-diplomacy/276511/>, accessed 13 January 2015.

efforts, the Chinese government's cultural promotion overseas has generally been recognised as China's cultural diplomacy.

These activities have helped China to gain a certain degree of reputation and appreciation.⁶ However, as the quotes given above demonstrate, the efficacy of such endeavours is often doubted by international scholars and commentators. One of the main reasons for this, as these quotes highlight, has been attributed to the deep involvement of the Chinese government in initiating and delivering those efforts. That is to say, 'much of China's poor international image and lack of soft power has to do with its government propaganda machine',⁷ as Shambaugh has argued. How about China's cultural diplomacy as part of the overall soft power and image building strategy? Is it strictly dictated by the Chinese government? Does it make a positive contribution to China's international image?

Cultural diplomacy can be delivered through different forms of cultural activity, such as dance,⁸ music,⁹ film,¹⁰ and field archaeology.¹¹ But it is art exhibitions that are arguably the most powerful, according to British cultural diplomat John Matthew Mitchell's opinion. He contends that:

It is a reasonable generalization to say that the visual arts have tended to be most successful in making a striking impression or, in the language of cultural relations, 'a big splash'. A major exhibition lasts for some weeks, appeals to anyone with cultural awareness (whereas orchestras and theatre companies have a more limited public), announces itself through prominent posters, which are part of its total effect and seen by many more than the exhibition itself, and leaves a tangible legacy in the

⁶ J. Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2007; see also J. C. Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2004.

⁷ D. Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p.216.

⁸ N. Prevots, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 1998.

⁹ L. E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 2009.

¹⁰ K. Gluszak, 'Film - a strong tool in American soft power', *Cultural Diplomacy News*, 4 February 2013, <http://www.cd-n.org/index.php?film-a-strong-tool-in-american-soft-power>, accessed 15 January 2015.

¹¹ C. Luke and M. M. Kersel, *U.S. Cultural Diplomacy and Archaeology: Soft Power, Hard Heritage*, Routledge, New York and London, 2013.

form of catalogues and reproductions. So far as the wider, rather than the specialized, public is concerned, an exhibition can touch the sensitivities with more enduring effect. For this reason the visual arts are perhaps the most potent means of putting across a national image or a changing that image.¹²

Given this, art exhibitions have always been valued and utilized by the Chinese government as a traditional but effective tool of cultural diplomacy.¹³ In the last few years, in particular, art exhibitions from China have been seen around the world with increasing frequency. Many of these have been hosted on a large scale in prestigious spaces and have triggered widespread discussions and debates on China in the media and amongst the general public. They have been recognised as an important element of China's cultural diplomacy by international scholars.¹⁴

These observations have prompted me to link China's loan exhibitions and cultural diplomacy together, to think generally about how such exhibitions contribute to China's cultural diplomacy and, more broadly, to soft power and image building. More specifically, are those loan exhibitions sent by China as instruments of cultural diplomacy directly shaped by the Chinese government? How does the Chinese government contribute to the production and realisation of such exhibitions? Does the Chinese government intend to deliver or propagate any specific messages through these loan exhibitions? How do these exhibitions impact on the image and perceptions of China in the West? What are the roles of those Chinese museums involved? What are the relationships between the government and museums? Do Chinese museums realise government policy when they produce the exhibitions and communicate with their counterpart institutions overseas? How do these Chinese museums balance their roles as professional institutions and 'mouthpieces' of the government? What can the Chinese government and museums do to improve the

¹² J. M. Mitchell, *International Cultural Relations*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1986, p.180.

¹³ Ministry of Culture of the PRC, 'shiqida yilai duiwai wenhua gongzuo chengjiu xinwen fabuhui' 十七大以来对外文化工作成就新闻发布会 [The Achievements of External Cultural Work since the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China], press conference, 14 May 2012, <http://59.252.212.5/culture/seedSpaceN.do?basicId=129&guestId=129&seedType=talk&seedTypeNew=seed>, accessed 15 January 2015.

¹⁴ See Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*; I. d'Hooghe, *China's Public Diplomacy*, Martinus Nijhoff, Leiden, 2014, p.171.

impact of such loan exhibitions? These fundamental questions have driven the research contained in this thesis.

Aim and objectives

The aim of this thesis is to understand the role of museums and the Chinese government in the production of Chinese loan exhibitions and to evaluate their impact on China's image in the British media.

The following objectives have been designed to achieve this aim:

1. Locate the place of cultural diplomacy in Chinese academic and political thinking and explore what the Chinese government is eager to achieve through cultural diplomacy and why.
2. Understand if, and if so how, the Chinese government instrumentalises its loan exhibitions for cultural diplomacy and how different types of loan exhibition are arranged and negotiated under the framework of cultural diplomacy.
3. Investigate the role of museum professionals, both in China and the UK, in producing and delivering loan exhibitions.
4. Evaluate how these loan exhibitions contribute to China's cultural diplomacy by impacting on the image of China in the British media.
5. Examine the operation of China's current system of managing loan exhibitions and the relationships between the official agencies and museums under this system.

Research Context: soft power and cultural diplomacy

American political scientist Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*,¹⁵ and further developed the concept in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.¹⁶ Thereafter, the idea of soft power has become increasingly popular and has been extensively discussed worldwide in international politics, as well as in other fields. According to Nye:

¹⁵ J. S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, Basic Books, New York, 1990.

¹⁶ J. S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004.

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries - admiring its values, emulating its examples, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness - want to follow it. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change by threatening military force or economic sanctions. This soft power - getting others to want the outcomes that you want - co-opts people rather than coerces them.¹⁷

He explains that:

Soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument ... It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence. Simply put, in behavioral terms soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft-power resources are the assets that produce such attraction.¹⁸

A country's soft power, as Nye argues, is closely associated with its international image and reputation.¹⁹ Simply put, if a country has positive image and reputation, it owns the soft power and is easier to win the support of other countries through attraction or persuasion, rather than 'carrots and sticks'. In such an interconnected and multi-polarised world today, such power is strongly emphasised and highly valued by almost every country. To some extent, building soft power is building a country's image and reputation. Culture is highlighted by Nye as one of the three main resources of a country's soft power. The other two are 'political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad)' and 'foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)'.²⁰ In particular, Nye emphasises that 'cultural diplomacy is an important soft power tool'.²¹

'Cultural diplomacy', defined by American political scientist Milton Cummings as 'the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations

¹⁷ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.6.

¹⁹ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*.

²⁰ Ibid., p.11.

²¹ J. S. Nye, Jr., 'Soft power and cultural diplomacy', *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, University of Southern California, 1 January 2010, <http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/soft-power-and-cultural-diplomacy/>, as of 14 April 2015.

and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding’,²² has actually existed as a practice since the start of human civilisation.²³ However, not until the concept of soft power had been extensively discussed did cultural diplomacy really start to gain currency in international politics. Cultural diplomacy, since the end of the Cold War, under the influence of soft power rationale, has been increasingly examined and practiced with new concern and emphasis.

The first concern is regarding who initiates and delivers cultural diplomacy. In his 1986 book, Mitchell argued that cultural diplomacy ‘is essentially the business of governments’,²⁴ which encompasses two levels of meaning. The first refers to ‘the agreements, whether bilateral or multilateral, which are made between governments to permit, facilitate or prescribe cultural exchanges’.²⁵ These constitute ‘the inter-governmental negotiation of cultural treaties, conventions, agreements and exchange programmes’.²⁶ The second refers to ‘the execution of these agreements and the conduct of cultural relations flowing from them’ which ‘may be seen either as the extended responsibility of governments or as something delegated by governments to agencies and cultural institutions’.²⁷

In such arguments, cultural diplomacy mainly refers to the practice of those international cultural activities conducted or commissioned by a government, with the aim ‘to impress, to present a favourable image’.²⁸ However, in the information age, ‘government cultural work has been diminished in scope ... as trade in cultural products and Internet communication has increased the complexity and informal character of cross-cultural communication’.²⁹ Therefore, the value of non-governmental actors and the private-public partnership have been increasingly emphasised.³⁰ Governments are no longer the exclusive actors of cultural diplomacy.

²² M. C. Cummings, Jr., *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington, D.C., 2003, p.1.

²³ R. T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Potomac Books, Washington, D.C., 2005.

²⁴ Mitchell, *International Cultural Relations*, p.3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p.4; Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, p.xviii gives a similar interpretation.

²⁸ Mitchell, p.5.

²⁹ H. F. Hurlburt and B. Ivey, *Cultural Diplomacy and the National Interest: In Search of a 21st Century Perspective*, The Curb Center at Vanderbilt, Washington, D.C., 2008, overview.

³⁰ Ibid.

The private sector can not only be commissioned by a government to deliver cultural projects, it can initiate international cultural exchanges for its own purposes, which then contribute to governmental agendas, intentionally or by accident.

The second concern is regarding what should be the aim of cultural diplomacy. This has been widely explored by scholars and practitioners in juxtaposition with another term, 'public diplomacy', which was coined by an American career diplomat, Edmund Asbury Gullion, in 1965. Based on his original definition:

“Public diplomacy” deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications. “Central to public diplomacy is the transnational flow of information and ideas”.³¹

Summarizing the new trends in America’s cultural diplomacy in the twenty-first century, Juliet Antunes Sablosky of Georgetown University, a former Foreign Service Officer of the United States government, has argued that:

Cultural diplomacy is related to public diplomacy, but whereas the latter addresses both short-term policy needs and long-term interests, cultural diplomacy’s emphasis is on long-term interchange among nations. In promoting mutual understanding, it seeks to provide a context within which our national interests and policies can be understood. By their nature cultural diplomacy activities involve long-term investments in our relations with people in other countries.³²

³¹ ‘What is public diplomacy?’ The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, *Tufts University*, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy>, accessed 8 March 2015.

³² J. A. Sablosky, *Recent Trends in Department of State Support for Cultural Diplomacy, 1993-2002*, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington, D.C., 2003, pp.1-2.

Here it can be observed that cultural diplomacy is supposed to have the aim of shaping a favourable environment for a country's policy, rather than promoting the policy directly. If public diplomacy aims to win the support of a foreign public through an explanation of policy, then cultural diplomacy aims to promote cultural understanding through cultural means. For cultural diplomacy, the result does not have to be an immediate agreement. As Ljuben Tevdovski, Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia to Canada has argued:

Cultural diplomacy promotes the spirit, ideas and ideal of the nation, in [sic] the same time promoting openness and diversity. The audience is given opportunity to entirely disagree with the policies of a state, and still appreciate, cherish or enjoy segments of its culture.³³

Nevertheless, this cultural understanding will have political benefits for a country in the long term. That is to say, the fundamental rationale for cultural diplomacy is that if a foreign public or government understands a country's culture and its way of thinking, then it is more likely to understand, agree with or even support that country's policies and actions.

The comparison with public diplomacy also provides a way of understanding the third concern of cultural diplomacy: what the practice of cultural diplomacy should constitute. Margaret J. Wyszomirski and others argue that public diplomacy consists of two major components, 'information policy' and 'cultural/educational programs'.³⁴ The latter refers to cultural diplomacy. In their opinion, effective cultural diplomacy should avoid information manipulation by a government. This is also emphasised by Richard Arndt, in his evaluation of America's cultural diplomacy during the Cold War.³⁵

Tevdovski has argued that the main concerns about cultural diplomacy, in essence, 'represent the place and role of cultural diplomacy in contemporary conduct of international relations, reflecting also upon the wide-ranging activities and capacities, as well as the multi-layer [sic] structure of actors, and shared

³³ L. Tevdovski, *Cultural Diplomacy: An Essential and Creative Component in the Toolkit of Contemporary Diplomacy*, Macedonian Information Centre, Skopje, 2009, p.24.

³⁴ M. J. Wyszomirski, C. Burgess and C. Peila, *International Cultural Relations: A Multi-country Comparison*, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington, D.C., 2003, p.1.

³⁵ Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*.

responsibilities'.³⁶ In the information age, international communication is no longer subject to the absolute control of individual governments. The public has access to diverse sources of information and is no longer limited to official messages, which are often related to propaganda. In the Western language system, 'propaganda' is generally regarded as 'some kind of lying as a legitimate tool of political power'.³⁷ The main concerns about cultural diplomacy, which refer to but are not limited to the inclusion of non-governmental actors and the exclusion of information/policy dissemination and manipulation, partly reflect endeavours made to reduce the risk of it being interpreted as propaganda. This is probably one of the advantages of cultural diplomacy in international politics. As one of the general diplomatic toolkits, cultural diplomacy can never be separated from governments and political intentions. However, generally speaking, cultural diplomacy, particularly in the new century, emphasises how governments facilitate cultural exchanges with the aim of promoting cultural understanding and shaping favourable images and perceptions, rather than directly delivering propagandistic messages.

It is apparent that the principal concern about and criticism of China's soft power - the deep involvement of the government - is consistent with the key concerns about cultural diplomacy of international scholars and practitioners. Partly this reflects the fact that Western scholars still examine China from Western perspectives without fully considering the Chinese situation. But on the other hand, if China wants to make impact through cultural diplomacy, particularly in the West, first of all it will have to think about what the international community generally likes and dislikes. In this thesis, China's cultural diplomacy will be examined against this understanding of cultural diplomacy, in the context of Chinese situations and characteristics.

Research Context: exhibitions as instruments of cultural diplomacy

This research looks into a specific type of exhibition: those that are the instruments of or have implications for cultural diplomacy. Such research is not uncommon in the academic literature, where it tends to reflect the concerns of scholars or practitioners in the field of international politics.

³⁶ Tevdovski, *Cultural Diplomacy: An Essential and Creative Component in the Toolkit of Contemporary Diplomacy*, p.22.

³⁷ Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, p.28.

Examples of loan exhibitions seen as contributing to cultural diplomacy, the British Museum's *Forgotten Empire: the World of Ancient Persia* (9 September 2005 - 8 January 2006) and *Shah 'Abbas: the Remaking of Iran at the British Museum* (19 February - 14 June 2009) are seen as exemplary examples of how museums 'keep doors open for political negotiations',³⁸ particularly when the bilateral relationship is in jeopardy.³⁹ In the latter exhibition, a reciprocal agreement resulted in the London institution borrowing objects from Iran in return for the British Museum sending the Cyrus Cylinder to Iran. Similar museum and exhibition exchanges which have acted as 'symbolic gestures of political goodwill' have also been reported between national museums in Singapore and France.⁴⁰ Similarly, Roland Flamini has examined how Italy and Greece have used exhibitions of their glorious pasts 'to counter the negative image of [their] struggle for economic survival' in the US⁴¹ and American political scientist Timothy Luke has investigated how exhibitions were used by Japan to deliver a desired self-image in the US in the 1980s.⁴²

Generally speaking, exhibitions can be used as instruments of cultural diplomacy to "normalize" political relations',⁴³ serve as 'bona fides of trust',⁴⁴ promote nations, or shape a desired image. Sometimes these are initiatives of a government and museums are commissioned to send specific exhibitions. Sometimes they represent the museums' own plans, but are generally consistent with a government's political agenda. In much current research, the emphasis has been on the symbolic meaning of exhibitions as the result of cultural negotiation between different countries or

³⁸ L. Hoogwaerts, 'What role do museums and art institutions play in international relations today and specifically in the development of what Joseph Nye called "soft power"?' paper presented to the Arts as Cultural Diplomacy Conference, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, London, 14 August 2012, <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/pdf/participant-papers/2012-08-acd/what-role-do-museums-and-art-institutions-play-in-international-relations-today-leanne-hoogwaerts.pdf>, accessed 18 August 2014.

³⁹ See K. Bound et al., *Cultural Diplomacy*, Demos, London, 2007; W. L. Adams, 'The art of museum diplomacy', *TIME Magazine*, 19 February 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1880606,00.html>, accessed 10 November 2014.

⁴⁰ Y. Cai, 'The art of museum diplomacy: the Singapore-France cultural collaboration in perspective', *International Journal of Politics Culture and Society*, vol. 26, Issue 2, June 2013, 127-144, pp.128-129.

⁴¹ R. Flamini, 'The art of diplomacy: exhibitions and national promotion', *World Affairs*, January/February 2014, 69-76, p.70.

⁴² T. W. Luke, 'Japan - the shaping of Daimyo culture, 1185 -1868: the ironies of imperialism in the empire of signs', in T. W. Luke, ed., *Shows of Force: Power, Politics, and Ideology in Art Exhibitions*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1992, 107-118.

⁴³ J. H. Balfe, 'Artworks as symbols in international politics', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, The Sociology of Culture, Winter 1987, 195-217, p.213.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

governments rather than on the exhibitions themselves, or their contents and curatorship. This reflects the background of researchers, who care about the final impact of cultural diplomacy on political agendas, rather more than the process and tools that have been used.

The current literature also includes the evaluation of such exhibitions in terms of cultural diplomacy. Sponsored by the Japan Society, Robert Bower and Laure Sharp, for example, conducted an evaluation of a travelling exhibition sent by Japan as a 'good-will gesture' to Washington, D. C., New York, Seattle, Chicago and Boston in 1953-4,⁴⁵ to examine the exhibition's 'success in affecting the political attitudes of its American audiences'.⁴⁶ They conducted around 6500 questionnaires and 700 interviews with audience members in the four cities before and after their visits to the exhibition. They found that the exhibition challenged 'derogatory stereotypes of the Japanese',⁴⁷ even though this was, to some extent, achieved through reinforcing previously held positive attitudes toward Japan and its people.

Susan Reid and Tomas Tolvaisas respectively, conducted evaluations of American exhibitions sent to the USSR in 1950s and 1960s, which were aimed at 'combating anti-American Soviet propaganda',⁴⁸ and 'sow[ing] seeds of dissent and dissatisfaction in order to undermine and gradually destabilize the USSR'.⁴⁹ Reid conducted the evaluation through interviewing guides and specialists who had first-hand experience of the exhibition and direct engagement with the Soviet audience. She argued that the effects of the exhibition 'were very complex and contradictory',⁵⁰ and that it had not been as influential as the governmental sponsors had claimed. Tolvaisas analysed audience comments written down in the comment books which had been collected and lodged in official archives. He believed that the exhibition made a huge contribution to America's cultural diplomacy, that is, it:

⁴⁵ R. T. Bower and L. M. Sharp, 'The use of art in international communication: a case study', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1, Special Issue on Studies in Political Communication, Spring 1956, 221-229, p.222.

⁴⁶ Balfe, 'Artworks as symbols in international politics', p.199.

⁴⁷ Bower and Sharp, p.228.

⁴⁸ T. Tolvaisas, 'Cold War "bridge-building": U.S. exchange exhibits and their reception in the Soviet Union, 1959-1967', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, Fall 2010, 3-31, p.7.

⁴⁹ S. E. Reid, 'Who will beat whom?: Soviet popular reception of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 9, no. 4, Fall 2008, 855-904, p.861.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.903.

... advanced Soviet citizens' understanding of American daily life, increased popular good will toward the United States, and stimulated Soviet consumerist desires...enabled the guides and their government to learn more about everyday life in the Soviet Union...both sides had broader, more accurate views of each other.⁵¹

As these evaluations demonstrate, the result of using exhibitions as instruments of cultural diplomacy can be positive but that such outcomes are far from certain. However, these evaluations put most emphasis on the reception of the exhibitions, particularly on how the visitors responded to them rather than how museum professionals impacted on the shaping and reception of the exhibitions. Indeed, the three cases mentioned above were all sent during the Cold War as all governmental initiatives with the museums themselves complying with government demands. Today, it could be argued that museums have more initiative and 'voice' in their international communications and thus it is increasingly important to evaluate the intentions and professionalism of museums themselves.

There is research on the impacts of relevant professionals in delivering exhibitions for cultural diplomacy. For example, Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan have explored how international fairs and exhibitions contributed to shape America's image during the cultural Cold War, as counter-propaganda towards Soviet Union. They mainly focus on the individual architects' and designers' roles in the process, even though the exhibitions were commissioned or sponsored by the United States Information Agency (USIA).⁵² Bound and others also emphasise the value of museums for the UK's cultural diplomacy.⁵³ However, the main focus of current literature is still on the role and intention of governments, which are typically exemplified by research on how the American government instrumentalised exhibitions for Soviet audiences during the Cold War. Eve Cockcroft⁵⁴ and Frances

⁵¹ Tolvaisas, 'Cold War "bridge-building": U.S. exchange exhibits and their reception in the Soviet Union, 1959-1967', p.30.

⁵² J. Masey and C. L. Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and Their Role in the Cultural Cold War*, Lars Müller Publishers, New York and London, 2008.

⁵³ Bound et al, *Cultural Diplomacy*.

⁵⁴ E. Cockcroft, 'Abstract expressionism, weapon as Cold War', in F. Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, Harper & Row, London, 1985, 125-133.

Stonor Saunders⁵⁵ have explored how the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States' federal government used art exhibitions, particularly art exhibitions of abstract expressionism, to project an image of the US as a country of democracy, freedom and diversity. Even though many of those exhibitions were delivered by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the focus is still on the role of the CIA in the process. Partly, this insufficient attention to museums is due to the fact that during the Cold War cultural diplomacy was accompanied by direct cultural propaganda. Judith Huggins Balfe has argued that travelling exhibitions of artworks can be used as 'mediators of politics' for propagandistic and economic, political, even secular and religious agendas.⁵⁶ But they take effect 'only if the art remains, in some measure through its own qualities, transcendent'.⁵⁷ Based on Robert Bower and Laure Sharp's evaluation, she also argues that:

If propagandistic intentions are to be realized through art exhibitions, greater efforts would be needed to anticipate the possibly indeterminate and differing responses of different audiences, and hence to control the effect in the planning of any future art exchanges, whether targeted at elite or mass audiences.⁵⁸

Professionalism is of critical importance in guaranteeing the artistic value and audience engagement necessary for successful cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions but this is largely absent from the current literature.

All the examples discussed here have touched upon the subject of my research: how loan exhibitions are used as instruments of cultural diplomacy, what their impacts are, the role and intention of governments, and their relationship with other actors including museums. However, the most recent research has been conducted from the perspective of international politics, which has not fully considered the museological and professional aspects of the exhibitions themselves from production and negotiation through to delivery and reception. Curator, Brian Wallis, has warned of the particular risks of using large-scale, blockbuster, exhibitions as instruments of

⁵⁵ F. S. Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, New Press, New York, 2000.

⁵⁶ Balfe, 'Artworks as symbols in international politics', p.195.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.215.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.200.

cultural diplomacy, which aim to ‘transform negative stereotypes into positive ones and, in the process, to improve the political and economic standing of their country’,⁵⁹ because this ignores the complexity of contemporary society and ‘narrow our view of a country to a benign, if exotic, fairy tale’.⁶⁰ However, such voices from the museum perspective are rare.

International exchanges are not new for museums at all, as Tony Bennett has observed:

It [is] ... not true that only recently have museums become parts of global networks organizing flows of things, people, and expertise. This has been an important aspect of their constitution and functioning from the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶¹

During international exchanges, museum professionals have become aware of where areas of their practice overlap with international relations but, as Christine Sylvester has argued, their ‘writings can be naive about international power and politics, largely because it has not taken on board relevant theories or ideas of IR [International Relations]’.⁶²

Some, however, continue to mistakenly believe that museums’ role in cultural diplomacy is a new phenomenon:

Not long ago, our top national art collections were focused primarily on the custodianship of objects in their care, on scholarship and on exhibitions. Today, our museums are also politically engaged, globally connected, and incredibly skilled in the arts of international cultural

⁵⁹ B. Wallis, ‘Selling nations: international exhibitions and cultural diplomacy’, in D. J. Sherman and I. Rogoff, eds., *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, 265-281, p.267.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.279.

⁶¹ T. Bennett, ‘Exhibition, difference, and the logic of culture’, in I. Karp et al., eds., *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006, 46-69, p.48.

⁶² C. Sylvester, *Art/ Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It*, Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, 2009, p.4.

diplomacy, their reach sometimes extending beyond that of governments.⁶³

Such misunderstanding is partly due to the fact that museums and other professional actors were not really conspicuous powers in international relations until the end of the Cold War. Nowadays, an examination into this relationship between museums and cultural diplomacy from a museological perspective may provide new dimensions to understanding cultural diplomacy. It is also helpful to provide solutions for the concerns of cultural diplomacy in the new century, as discussed above, such as diversifying the actors of cultural diplomacy, reducing the risk of information manipulation and so on. In turn, examining exhibitions from the perspective of cultural diplomacy - who organises and sponsors the exhibition, why they get involved to which degree, what messages they want to convey via the exhibitions, how they want to convey the messages, and so on - also provides a theoretical perspective for a better and more comprehensive understanding of the exhibitions themselves, museums' functions and professionalism, and their relationship with the outside world. It is possible to enlighten museums about how they can use this opportunity of cultural diplomacy to benefit their own missions as well.

China's use of exhibitions in cultural diplomacy has been little studied. Its distinctive history, political system and trajectory of development, as well as its internal and external relations make it a unique object of study in this regard. China has a long history of using cultural exchanges, including loan exhibitions, for political purposes. Aurora Roxas-Lim at University of the Philippines has explored how the *Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China* was instrumentalised for China's cultural diplomacy.⁶⁴ The exhibition travelled around the world between 1973 and 1978, attracted 6.5 million visitors and had a huge impact on the perceptions of the People's Republic of China, particularly in the

⁶³ C. Ruiz, 'Curators as Kissingers: can museums repair diplomatic relations?' *New Republic*, 17 October 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119884/how-museums-became-diplomatic-fixers>, accessed 3 November 2014.

⁶⁴ A. Roxas-Lim, 'China's diplomacy through art: a discussion on some of the archaeological and art finds in the People's Republic of China', *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on China*, vol. 11, no. 3, December 1973, 54-82.

West.⁶⁵ Lu Jiansong of Fudan University has conducted a historical review of China's loan exhibitions since 1949 and has categorized these exhibitions into three groups: official exhibitions, semi-official exhibitions, and public exhibitions. He insists that 'loan exhibitions are one of the most influential and effective means of China's external cultural exchanges' and 'organizing exhibitions in coordination with China's diplomatic affairs and international public exchanges is an important mission for Chinese museums'.⁶⁶ He argues that such exhibitions are helpful in: shaping a responsible image of China on the international stage and fighting against Western far-right parties' attacks on Chinese human rights and ethnic policies; promoting understanding, communication and friendliness between peoples of different nations; strengthening cohesiveness and patriotism between Chinese people at home and abroad; promoting economic collaborations and attract tourism; and promoting the development and internationalisation of Chinese museums.⁶⁷ Lu provides an early and quite comprehensive framework for understanding the value of loan exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy.

In the twenty-first century, with its economic rise, China is becoming a globally influential power. China is of growing interest to the West but understandings of this new China is still quite preliminary and still struggling to escape Cold War conceptions. Not until Culture Minister, Sun Jiazheng, highlighted cultural diplomacy in 2004, along with China starting to pay attention to its international images and soft power, as the third pillar of Chinese diplomacy after political and economic diplomacy,⁶⁸ did Chinese scholars really start to pay attention to this particular subject. It is a significant and timely matter to examine how China is projecting itself through cultural diplomacy, and in the case of this research, through

⁶⁵ Li Meng 黎萌, 'zhongguo wenwu waijiao zhenhan shijie' 中国文化外交震撼世界 [Chinese arts diplomacy shocking the world], *CRI Online*, 1 February 2011, <http://gb.cri.cn/27824/2011/02/01/5311s3143490.htm>, accessed 15 January 2015.

⁶⁶ Lu Jiansong 陆建松, 'zouxiang shijie: lun xinshiqi bowuguan duiwai zhanlan de zhongyao yiyi' 走向世界: 论新时期博物馆对外展览的重要意义 [Going global: the importance of overseas exhibitions in the new period], in *wenhua yichan yanjiu jikan (2)* 文化遗产研究集刊 (2) [Research on Cultural Heritage (Series 2)], Department of Cultural Heritage and Museology, Fudan University, Shanghai, 2001, 407-418, p.407.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Sun Jiazheng 孙家正, 'buduan tigao jianshe shehuizhuyi xianjin wenhua de nengli' 不断提高建设社会主义先进文化的能力 [Continuously improving the ability to construct advanced socialist culture], *Qiushi* 求是, Issue 24, 2004, 5-8.

loan exhibitions. Vivian Yan Li⁶⁹ and Guo Zijie⁷⁰ has explored China's loan exhibitions to the West in the 1930s, in particular, their implications for China's cultural diplomacy and impacts on the perceptions of China in the West. Han Yiling's master's thesis (Fudan University, Shanghai) reflects on the problems that exist in China's current system of managing loan exhibitions, which hinder more effective coordination with China's soft power strategy.⁷¹

Research about China's loan exhibitions and cultural diplomacy, however, remains at a preliminary stage. Yet, in parallel with China becoming a global power it is developing its museum sector and seeing new potential in its material culture. It is timely and meaningful to consider this as unique moment in Chinese history when cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions is of great political significance.

It is noteworthy that the subject matter of national museums enormously appeals to European museum professionals and academia in the past decade. As early as 2002, 'international dimensions' have been identified as a crucial part of British national museums' future priorities by the National Museum Directors' Conference (NMDC), to make them 'more widely recognised by government and the private sector as a significant contribution to the UK's presence in the world'.⁷² It is evident that national museums in the UK have already had a conscious awareness of their relations with cultural diplomacy since then.⁷³ The multi-cultural collections drive these national museums, as well as many other Western museums to work internationally.⁷⁴ However, majority of Chinese museums collect Chinese material cultures only. This thesis will provide another perspective to understand the motivations for museums to engage with international work.

⁶⁹ V. Y. Li, *Art Negotiations: Chinese International Art Exhibitions in the 1930s*, master thesis, The Ohio State University, Columbus, 2006,

http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1209143379, accessed 10 March 2015.

⁷⁰ Guo Zijie 郭子杰, *qiantan minguo shiqi de yishupin waijiao* 浅谈民国时期的艺术品外交 [The Cultural Diplomacy - The Role of Artworks in China's Republican Period's Foreign Policy], master thesis, Nanjing University, Nanjing, 2013, <http://www.cnki.net/>, accessed 1 November 2014.

⁷¹ Han Yiling 韩翎翎, *tisheng woguo bowuguan duiwai zhanlan duice yanjiu* 提升我国博物馆对外展览对策研究 [Research on Enhancing Chinese Museums' International Touring Exhibitions], master thesis, Fudan University, Shanghai, 2011, <http://www.cnki.net/>, accessed 15 November 2014.

⁷² National Museum Directors' Conference, 'International dimensions', 26 June 2002, http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/resources/press_releases/pr_international02/, accessed 22 July 2015, p.5.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Additionally, along with the expansion and development of the European Union, national museums as ‘one of ... [the] most enduring institutions for creating and contesting political identities’,⁷⁵ as well as an important component in nation- and state making have been extensively investigated in the Western context.⁷⁶ The relationships between museums, nations, governments and politics are crucial to such discussions,⁷⁷ which provide reference for my research into the relations between Chinese government and its museums. Equally, even though this thesis does not aim to focus on the concept of ‘national museums’ in the sense of European museological scholarship, it will contribute to current literature by providing a non-European perspective to understand the role of national and wider public museums, and their interplay with politics.

Methodology

Cultural diplomacy is usually examined by nation or time period. My research will focus on China’s cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions to the UK in the twenty-first century. First of all, this thesis aims to investigate China’s cultural diplomacy at a transformative age. The present international environment, China’s international strategies and its international ambitions, are all different from those in the last century when China and other nations were bound up in Cold War ideologies. The reason why these two nations - China and the UK - have been chosen is because these two countries have different political rationales and approaches to their cultural diplomacy: the UK is a democracy with an arm’s length attitude to its cultural institutions; China is a one-party state with a more authoritarian approach to its cultural institutions.

The focus here is on those exhibitions sent out by public museums. Private museums, as well as individual artists, have definitely had huge impacts on the image of China in the West but this is not the focus of the present study, which seeks to understand the role of governments. One case-study chapter will, however, consider an exhibition that was a non-governmental initiative and negotiation.

⁷⁵ P. Aronsson, ‘Forward: a European project’, in P. Aronsson and G. Elgenius eds., *Building National Museums in Europe 1750-2010*, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, 1-4, p.1.

⁷⁶ See also: D. Boswell and J. Evans eds., *Representing the Nation: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, Routledge, London, 1999; R. Mason, *Museums, Nations, Identities: Wales and its National Museums*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2007.

⁷⁷ For the relation between museums and politics, see also T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, Politics*, Routledge, London, 1995.

The research methods used to study these loan exhibitions can be understood as being composed of four elements: firstly, a policy and literature review has been undertaken in order to locate the place of cultural diplomacy in Chinese political and academic thinking. This is helpful to understand why cultural diplomacy is so valued by the Chinese government in the new century and what specific objectives the Chinese government is eager to achieve through cultural diplomacy. This information is useful as the basic framework against which to evaluate the impacts of loan exhibitions on China's cultural diplomacy.

Secondly, in order to understand how the Chinese government uses its loan exhibitions as instruments of cultural diplomacy and how different types of loan exhibitions are arranged and negotiated for cultural diplomacy, a comparative analysis of different types of exhibition, using case studies, has been conducted. Within the time period of this research, exhibitions of different scales (in terms of number of exhibits and visitors, as well as media impact), different loaning institutions (in terms of their size and position in the hierarchy of the Chinese museum system), and different hosting museums (in terms of their positions in the UK and reputation among British museums) have been chosen. The key events that occurred between the two countries around the time of a particular exhibition, and that may have had an impact on loan negotiations, have also been considered. These elements have allowed me to understand the range of deployments of exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy, thus increasing the likelihood of penetrating China's various institutional bureaucracies.

Thirdly, semi-structured qualitative interviews with museum staff and relevant cultural officials have been undertaken. This is helpful to investigate the roles of the Chinese government and museums in producing and delivering exhibitions, as well as their relationships in the process. These interviews are also useful to identify the problems and difficulties that existed in the exchanges, which is helpful to understand the operation of China's current system of managing loan exhibitions. Interviews have been conducted with parties on both sides of the loan arrangements. The opinions provided complement each other and have helped me to gain a comprehensive picture of what has happened. It is also necessary to evaluate the

museum profession in both China and the UK, and its influence on China's cultural diplomacy.

It should be emphasised that the interview were designed to provide a general context to understand how the Chinese government engages in sending exhibitions abroad and its interplay with museums (A basic list of the interview questions can be seen in the Appendix 1), rather than extract personal, even institutional opinions. Meanwhile, due to the political sensitivity of this research, some interviewees requested to be anonymous. Therefore, most of the interviewees will not be directly quoted in the thesis. Nevertheless, it is the information provided by them that shapes the direction of the main arguments of this thesis.

Lastly, in order to evaluate the impacts of loan exhibitions on China's cultural diplomacy, particularly the image and perceptions of China in the UK, media reports collected from museum archives have been analysed. Audience research is a typical method of evaluating exhibitions in museum studies. However, the majority of the case-study exhibitions had closed before this research commenced. No archives of the audience responses to the exhibitions were available. This research is mainly focused on how loan exhibitions impact on China's cultural diplomacy through shaping the image of China as recorded in the press, rather than on the exhibitions' impact on visitors. The media reports are effective at catching the political implications of cultural phenomena, which, in turn, have a broad impact on wider understandings of the exhibitions and of China.⁷⁸ Media impact is often used to assess the effectiveness of soft power and cultural diplomacy.⁷⁹ Museums care about the media impact of their exhibitions too and use it as an indicator of their success and so often commission the collection of press coverage for certain exhibitions. I have gained access to this material for certain case-study exhibitions. Museums have collected and archived this material, but only rarely do they analysis it. Rather than a quantitative analysis to extract certain trends or themes from the media reports through counting the frequencies of certain words, this research has pursued a more impressionistic qualitative narrative analysis to explore how the media has 'imaged' China and interpreted its cultural diplomacy through exhibitions. As a museum

⁷⁸ See Balfe, 'Artworks as symbols in international politics'.

⁷⁹ See C. Bellamy and A. Weinberg, 'Educational and cultural exchanges to restore America's image', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2008, 55-68.

studies thesis, media analysis has been conducted in combination with exhibition analysis, which is vital for understanding the museum professional's impact on China's cultural diplomacy.

It must be acknowledged that the perception of one country can change slowly or rapidly. It is difficult for a country to rid itself of certain stereotypes. But equally some international events can change a country's image overnight. It has to be emphasised here that the media analysis of this research is trying to put the exhibitions and their impacts on China's cultural diplomacy in the context of the time in which the exhibitions were on display. Therefore, such impacts are probably more immediate rather than long-term. The perception of China might change thereafter. Such immediate influence may or may not accumulate and contribute to qualitative transformation in the longer term. One country's image can be influenced by many factors: political, economic, military, cultural, and so on. This media analysis of loan exhibitions' impact only provides one cultural dimension.

In total, 35 semi-structured qualitative interviews (including six email interviews) with museum professionals, including exhibition curators, museum directors, programme leaders, and cultural officials, have been conducted, all of whom have been involved in loan exhibitions between the two countries: 21 in the UK and 14 in China. Table 1 lists interviews with individuals directly involved in the production of the exhibitions studied. Table 2 lists supplementary interviewees who provided more general, contextual or organisational information. Press coverage for four relatively large-scale exhibitions have been collected from museum archives, and include long exhibition reviews as well as brief listings. Eight exhibitions, held at seven museums in the UK, between 2005 and 2012, were chosen as case studies.⁸⁰ Table 1 lists these exhibitions. They were chosen to reveal the wide range of different types of collaboration, political context and subject matter. This will be discussed in more detail in the case study chapters.

⁸⁰ There are several other exhibitions, such as *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700 - 1900* at the V&A from 26 October 2013 to 19 January 2014, and *Ming: 50 years that changed China* at the BM from 18 September 2014 to 5 January 2015, which are relevant to my research subject. However, they opened too late to be included in my fieldwork.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of nine chapters in total. Chapter 2 presents a review of Chinese policies and public speeches by members of the Chinese leadership, which show how cultural diplomacy has developed in China over the past decade and what the Chinese government aims to achieve as a result of its deployment. This will help to locate my research in the practical and specific concerns of the Chinese situation in the twenty-first century. At the same time, the impacts of relevant governmental policies and institutional bureaucracies on museums, in terms of sending exhibitions abroad, will be investigated, in order to understand the government's support for, and restrictions placed on, public museums' involvement in international exhibitions, which has relevance for the whole thesis. Through reviewing Chinese, as well as international academic thinking on China's cultural diplomacy, Chapter 3 will further explain the reason why cultural diplomacy is so desired by the Chinese government. These two chapters form a general framework to examine the case-study exhibitions. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 8 are each devoted to a case-study exhibition, each representing a different context and type of exhibition. Media analysis has been conducted for each of these four case-study chapters, as press coverage material had been collected by each of the host museums. In Chapter 7, four smaller-scale regional exhibitions are discussed. Even though these exhibitions had relatively low national media coverage, it has been determined that they have special implications for China's cultural diplomacy. All five case-study chapters work together to demonstrate that China's cultural diplomacy has taken place in a multitude of ways and via different institutional bureaucracies. The concluding chapter answers the question set at the beginning: what roles do the Chinese government and Chinese museums play in sending loan exhibitions overseas as instruments of cultural diplomacy and their inter-relationships? It also reflects on the operation of China's current system of managing loan exhibitions, which has an impact on China's cultural diplomacy and Chinese museums, therefore providing a helpful reference for foreign as well as Chinese scholars and practitioners to understand China's cultural diplomacy more comprehensively, for China's cultural diplomacy practitioners to use loan exhibitions more efficiently, and for Chinese museums to engage in international collaboration more actively and more professionally.

Table 1: An overview of the fieldwork conducted for this thesis

Time	Exhibitions	Host institutions	Sending Institutions	Interviews		Press coverage ⁸¹	Case studies
				UK	China		
26/04 – 14/07/2002	Return of the Buddha: The Qingzhou Discoveries	Royal Academy of Arts (RA)	State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH)	Cecilia Treves, Curator (16/05/2013)	N/A		
6/07 – 15/09/2002	Treasures of Qianlong Emperor	National Museum of Scotland	Palace Museum, Beijing	David Caldwell, Programme Director (17/05/2013)	N/A		
12/11/2005 –	China: The	RA	Palace Museum	Cecilia Treves,	N/A	Yes	Yes

⁸¹ Some of the large-scale exhibitions attracted national as well as international media attention. This research focuses on those in English, particularly British reports. For those exhibitions marked as being without press coverage, it does not mean there are no media reports available. Their media impacts have not been analysed simply because the host museum had not commissioned the collection of comprehensive press coverage for them or because there are not enough exhibition reviews available to produce a deep analysis. The number of reports analysed, including simple exhibition listings and long reviews, mainly depends on how many reports have been collected for museum archives, excluding non-English language reports and duplicates.

17/04/2006	Three Emperors, 1662 - 1795			Curator (16/05/2013)		(around 234 reports analysed)	
30/03 – 10/06/2007	The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China	Tate Liverpool	N/A	Simon Groom, Programme Director (17/05/2013)	N/A		
13/08/2007 – 6/04/2008	The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army	British Museum (BM)	Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center, Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, etc.	Jane Portal, Curator (01/2013); Hiromi Kinoshita, Exhibition Assistant (03/2013); Hannah Boulton, Marketing Officer (02/2013) ⁸²	Exhibition Organiser (5/09/2013); ⁸³ Li Xiuzhen, Curator of the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum (6/09/2013)	Yes (around 660 reports analysed)	Yes
15/03 – 13/07/2008	China Design Now	Victoria and Albert Museum	N/A	Zhang Hongxing, Curator (16/01/2014)	N/A	Yes (around	Yes

⁸² These three interviews were conducted via email.

⁸³ Anonymity at request of the interviewee.

		(V&A)				305 reports analysed)	
19/07 – 2/11/2008	Guardians to the King	Colchester Castle Museum	Xuzhou Museum	Tom Hodgson, Programme Director (31/05/2013)	Li Yinde, Museum Director (28/08/2013); Exhibition Technician (28/08/2013) ⁸⁴		Yes
30/01 – 27/03/2009	Treasures from Shanghai: Ancient Chinese Bronzes and Jades	BM	Shanghai Museum	N/A	Zhou Yanqun, International Officer (16/09/2013)		
7/12/2010 – 27/02/2011	Imperial Chinese Robes from the Forbidden City	V&A	Palace Museum	Ming Wilson, Curator (16/07/2013)	N/A		

⁸⁴ Anonymity at request of the interviewee.

26/01 – 3/04/2011	From Steep Hillsides: Ancient Rock Carvings from Dazu, China	National Museum Wales, Cardiff	The Art Museum of Dazu Rock Carvings	Mark Richards, Deputy Director General (Feb 2013); ⁸⁵ Stephen Howe, Programme Director (20/03/2013)	Chen Xiaoping, Deputy Director (9/09/2013)		Yes
30/06/2012 – 6/01/2013	Treasures from China	Colchester Castle Museum	Nanjing Museum	Tom Hodgson, Programme Director (31/05/2013)	Wu Heng, International Officer (14/09/2013)		Yes
31/03/ – 16/09/2012	Living in Silk: Chinese Textiles through 5000 Years	Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery	China National Silk Museum	Deborah Dean, Curator (13/05/2013); Tristram Aver, Curator (4/04/2013)	Deputy Director and Programme Director of the China National Silk Museum (18/09/2013) ⁸⁶		Yes

⁸⁵ This interview was conducted via email.

⁸⁶ Anonymity at request of the interviewees; two people were interviewed together. This has been considered as a single interview.

5/05 – 11/11/2012	The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China	Fitzwilliam Museum	Art Exhibitions China (AEC); Xuzhou Museum; Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King	James Lin, Curator (20/06/2013); Tao- Tao Chang, International Officer (23/04/2013)	Li Yinde, Director of Xuzhou museum (28/08/2013); Wang Wenjian, Curator of the Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King (12/09/2013)	Yes (around 221 reports analysed)	Yes
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Table 2: Supplementary interviews

Date	Name	Affiliation
6/03/2013	Ana ĩ Aguerre	Head of National and International, V&A
6/03/2013	Louise Mengoni	Curator, Asian Department, V&A
11/04/2013	Jan Stuart	Keeper of the Department of Asia, BM
25/04/2013	Mark Jones	Former Director, V&A
04 – 07/2013	Kate Best	Curator, Photographs, V&A
1/07/013	Jane Weeks	Museum and Heritage Adviser to the British Council, London
09/2013	Duan Xinyu ⁸⁷	Senior Wales Affairs Officer, Wales Government Office in Chongqing
10/09/2013	Deputy Director ⁸⁸	Curatorial & Development Department, Three Gorges Museum, Chongqing
23/09/2013	Yuxi Lu	Senior Project Manager Arts, British Council, Beijing
12/10/2013	Cultural official ⁸⁹	AEC, Beijing
14/10/2013	Zhao Gushan	Head of Exhibition Department, AEC

⁸⁷ This interview was conducted via email.

⁸⁸ Anonymity at request of the interviewee.

⁸⁹ Anonymity at request of the interviewee.

Chapter 2: Cultural diplomacy in China: policy and process

The fundamental task and basic goal of China's diplomatic work at present and a certain period in the years to come is to maintain the important development period featured by strategic opportunities and strive for a peaceful and stable international environment, a good-neighborly and friendly surrounding environment, an environment for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, and an objective and friendly publicity environment so as to build a fairly well-off society in an all-round way.⁹⁰

Hu Jintao

Since this statement by President Hu Jintao,⁹¹ made at the Tenth Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad, held in Beijing in 2004, shaping favourable external environments has become the paramount objective and guiding principle of China's overall diplomacy.⁹² At the same occasion, President Hu pointed out that strengthening soft power was the key way to achieve this. Actually, before this public statement, the Chinese leadership had already adopted the 'Peaceful Rise [heping jueqi 和平崛起]' policy in 2003 - the title of which was later changed to 'Peaceful Development [heping fazhan 和平发展]' - which emphasises that China's development will never threaten and obstruct other countries. Against this background, Cai Wu, Deputy Minister of the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee,⁹³ Director of the International Communication Office of the CPC, Head of the Information Office of the State

⁹⁰ Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of Turkey, 'The 10th Conference of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys Stationed Abroad held in Beijing', 3 September 2004, <http://tr.chineseembassy.org/eng/xwdt/t155745.htm>, accessed 18 January 2015.

⁹¹ Hu Jintao was the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPC and the President of the PRC between 2002 and 2012.

⁹² Y. Wang, 'Public diplomacy and the rise of Chinese soft power', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World, March 2008, 257-273, p.263.

⁹³ The English translation for this department was officially changed to the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee around 2007.

Council of China between 2005 and 2008, and Minister of Culture between 2008 and 2014, stressed, in 2006, that,

In recent years, China's economy has sustained rapid growth and its economic strength and comprehensive national strength have grown significantly. China has become an important force to promote regional and global economic development, and an important factor in influencing international politics and economy. Some scholars argue that China is a regional power having global influence and the largest and fastest-growing developing country. Countries are generally optimistic about China's prospects and strategically value their relationship with China. However, there are still some lacking a comprehensive understanding of China's development. They have suspicions and misunderstandings, and even think that China's rapid development, particularly the rapid expansion of China's share in the international market, will damage their benefits. Some people even regard China's development as a threat and a challenge, therefore making and advocating various versions of the 'China threat theory'. Some anti-China forces make use of this and hype it up to make chaos in order to disturb and retard China's development. It is noteworthy that this situation exists not only in some developed countries, but is also expanding to some developing countries. This requires us to ... keep a modest and prudent image on the international stage ... In external publicity, we should strengthen communication, build trust and resolve doubts, make use of all possible opportunities and methods to clear up suspicions, misunderstandings and prejudices, and minimize the negative impacts.⁹⁴

This statement clearly demonstrates the rationale and priorities of China's external publicity strategy in the new century. That is, cultivating favourable images to

⁹⁴ Cai Wu 蔡武, 'nuli chuangzao youliyu woguo fazhan de guoji yulun huanjing' 努力创造有利于我国发展的国际舆论环境 [Work hard to create a favourable environment of public opinions for our development], *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*, 29 March 2006, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zxbd/nd/2006/Document/309213/309213.htm>, accessed 10 October 2014.

‘defuse the mounting external concerns over a rising China’.⁹⁵ Then what specific image does the Chinese government desire to shape? How does such political intention impact on China’s cultural system, particularly its museums? These are the questions this chapter aims to answer, and which will lay a foundation for the discussion on specific exhibitions as instruments of China’s cultural diplomacy in later chapters.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) is the sole governing political party of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), although it implements a multi-party cooperation and political consultation system with eight other political parties.⁹⁶ The party leaders of the CPC generally take central positions in the government including the State Council and different ministries. The CPC’s policies are generally the guiding principles for China’s development on all aspects and, therefore, can be referred to for the direction and focus of China’s development, within any given period of time. Generally speaking, the CPC and the government maintain a consistent public voice, and their policies complement each other and demonstrate the overall rationale of the Chinese leadership. In the first part of this chapter, the official policies or documents released by the CPC and the Chinese government, and those public speeches by the Chinese leadership that are relevant to cultural diplomacy, will be examined in order to see how China’s pursuit of fostering particular self-image internationally, has evolved in the past decade and what specific image China aims to promote. Then, it investigates how the cultural system, including the Ministry of Culture and particularly the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), which manages China’s museum system, has responded to the CPC and government’s ambition for cultural diplomacy. This is achieved through an analysis of relevant cultural policies made by these cultural departments. After the document and policy review, the government’s mechanism to manage loan exhibitions will be

⁹⁵ H. Lai, *China’s Cultural Diplomacy: Going for Soft Power*, East Asian Institute, Singapore, 2006, p.i.

⁹⁶ These eight parties are the China Revolutionary Committee of the Kuomintang, China Democratic League, China Democratic National Construction Association, China Association for the Promotion of Democracy, Chinese Peasants’ and Workers’ Democratic Party, China Zhi Gong Dang, Jiusan Society and the Taiwan Democratic Self-government League. Under this system, ‘the CPC is the only party in power’ in the PRC ‘while under the precondition of accepting the leadership of the CPC, the eight other political parties participate in the discussion and management of state affairs, in cooperation with the CPC’. See ‘China’s political system: The system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation’, *China.org.cn*, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/Political/29034.htm>, accessed 18 January 2015.

discussed. Overall, this chapter will demonstrate what the CPC and the Chinese government expect of Chinese museums, in terms of their external exchanges, which will become the standard by which to examine, in later chapters, if Chinese museums have met these expectations, how they have contributed to China's cultural diplomacy, and what the relationships between the government and museums are.

Shaping the image of China

On the same occasion when he made the statement as above, Cai Wu emphasised that the external publicity should 'shape China as a responsible power in international affairs', to demonstrate China's pursuit and determination for peaceful development.⁹⁷ He clarified that this overarching peaceful and responsible image could be achieved by shaping five specific images: a 'civilized and advanced China' by promoting China's splendid culture and long history, particularly the developing process under the CPC's leadership, the CPC's principles and governing philosophy, and the good character of Chinese people and their efforts to maintain stability, unity and prosperity; a 'democratic China governed by law' by promoting China's legal and democratic systems with Chinese characteristics and China's struggle and effort to improve these systems;⁹⁸ a 'reformed and innovative China' through promoting the Chinese government's and the people's struggle and efforts to promote theoretical, institutional, technological, cultural and other innovations, reforms and development; an 'opening-up China' by promoting China's active cooperation with the international community in all respects; a 'peace-loving China' through the promotion of China's effort and contribution to maintain international peace, trust and mutual benefits.⁹⁹

Such images are about China as a country, they are also propaganda for the CPC as China's ruling party. However, they can also be understood as counter-propaganda

⁹⁷ Cai Wu 蔡武, 'nuli chuangzao youliyu woguo fazhan de guoji yulun huanjing' 努力创造有利于我国发展的国际舆论环境 [Work hard to create a favourable environment of public opinions for our development].

⁹⁸ Such legal and democratic systems with Chinese characteristics, in Chinese official understanding, mainly refer to the system of People's Congress, the system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation, and the system of Self-government of Ethnic Autonomous Areas, for more details about these systems, see 'China's political system', *China.org.cn*, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/Political/25060.htm>, accessed 18 January 2015.

⁹⁹ Cai Wu 蔡武.

to mounting external concerns over a rising China, as well as those popular international criticisms of China. Thus China's image building has a clear defensive purpose. The image of a 'democratic China governed by law' is obviously a response to those opinions regarding China's unique political and ideological system as a challenge to the democratic systems prevalent in the West. This will be discussed further in the next chapter. Cai's statement was probably the Chinese government's first systematic clarification of the specific international image it wanted to shape. This defensive position would continue to affect China's official thinking on external publicity, including cultural diplomacy, through the early years of the twenty-first century.

Before Cai's statement, Meng Xiaosi, China's Vice-Minister of Culture between 2003 and 2008, had specifically highlighted the value of cultural diplomacy in 2005, by claiming that:

Presently, some countries advocate the 'China threat theory' on purpose. We should respond to this groundless nonsense with powerful facts, but also use cultural exchanges, the timeless Chinese culture, the Chinese people's vast and extensive mind and heart, the charm of oriental philosophy and wisdom, to communicate with hearts and minds, to eradicate the contradictions due to ignorance and prejudice, and to promote our pursuit of peace, development and cooperation.¹⁰⁰

She emphasised that:

[Cultural diplomacy] allows people to see China's sea change in the past twenty years since reform and opening-up, and to see the fact that China is still a developing country with a relatively falling-behind GDP [Gross domestic product] per capita. It allows the foreign public to understand the real China and Chinese people's thinking and spirit. It demonstrates that China is fully concentrated on development. It shows China's sincere desire to maintain world peace and to seek common development. China's development is for Chinese people and it will

¹⁰⁰ Meng Xiaosi 孟晓驷, 'wenhua waijiao xian meili' 文化外交显魅力 [The charm of cultural diplomacy], *renmin ribao* 人民日报 [People's Daily], 11 November 2005, p.7.

never threaten any country, but bring opportunities for their economic development and social advancement.¹⁰¹

She called for China's cultural diplomacy to promote the image of 'a developing China, an opening-up China and a civilized China' to the world, and become the pioneer and vanguard of China's peaceful development by shaping an image of 'Cultural China' to eliminate 'China threat theory' and other anti-China publicity.¹⁰²

If Cai's statement was about China's overall external publicity strategy, including media campaigns, policy explanation, economic dialogue, cultural diplomacy and the like, Meng's declaration was specifically about cultural diplomacy. Together, these statements reflect the broad consensus between the CPC and the Chinese government on the rationale of China's cultural diplomacy in the new century. That is, shaping a favourable external environment for China's development, through the promotion of a positive image with cultural methods, to mitigate concerns and misunderstandings over China's rise, particularly the 'China threat theory', which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. If their speeches just reflected the official thinking on cultural diplomacy, the CPC's formal resolution, the *Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Socialist Culture* (The Decision),¹⁰³ which was released at the end of 2011, has formally raised and confirmed image building through cultural diplomacy as China's national and international priority.

The CPC holds a National Congress every five years. The General Secretary of the CPC reports on China's development in the intervening five years at each national

¹⁰¹ Meng Xiaosi 孟晓驷, 'zhongou wenhua jiaoliushi shang de chuangu' 中欧文化交流史上的创举 [Pioneer work in the history of China-Europe cultural exchanges], *wenhua zhengce tushuguan* 文化政策图书馆 [Cultural Policy Library], 1 February 2005, <http://www.cplli.cn/new5956.shtml>, accessed 18 January 2015.

¹⁰² Meng Xiaosi 孟晓驷, 'zhongguo heping fazhan shidai de wenhua shiming' 中国和平发展时代的文化使命 [The cultural mission in the era of China's peaceful development], *renmin ribao* 人民日报 [People's Daily], 27 July 2004, p.9.

¹⁰³ Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth CPC Central Committee, 'Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Socialist Culture', 18 October 2011, officially translated by the English Section of the Central Document Translation Department of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, Beijing, China, <http://www.cctb.net/bygz/wxfy/201111/W020111121519527826615.pdf>, accessed 24 May 2012.

Congress and clarifies the core guidelines and principles for China's development on all aspects for the next five years. When the National Congress is not in session, the Central Committee of the Party, which is elected by the National Congress for a term of five years, works on its behalf. The Central Committee meets at least once per year in plenary session.¹⁰⁴ Generally, the annual plenary session releases the CPC's specific resolutions on certain themes, which reflect the CPC's specific attention on certain fields at any given time. The Party's official documents, including the quinquennial reports and the annual resolutions, have become the foundation for state government to make more specific and detailed policies.

The Decision, which was passed at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth CPC Central Committee on 18 October 2011, has sparked a new focus on China's internal and external cultural policies around the world, as it was the first time that the CPC had set out 'its dominant agenda on culture'.¹⁰⁵ It is the natural result of the CPC and the Chinese government's continuously increasing recognition of the value of culture internally and externally in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As Li Changchun, member of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC, explains the rationale for passing *The Decision*:

Nowadays, a prominent feature in competition for overall national strength lays in the fact that culture has come to assume a more significant position and role. More and more countries view the development of cultural soft power as an important strategy. To some extent, whoever seizes the initiative in cultural development and possesses strong cultural soft power will gain the upper hand in fierce international competition. Under such a situation, we must energetically foster the fine cultural traditions of the Chinese nation, pursue an advanced socialist culture, constantly increase the international influence of Chinese culture, develop cultural soft power compatible with China's

¹⁰⁴ Eighteenth National Congress of the CPC, 'Constitution of the Communist Party of China', revised and adopted on 14 November 2012, *Xinhua News*, 18 November 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/special/18cpcnc/2012-11/18/c_131982575.htm, accessed 18 January 2015.

¹⁰⁵ D. Wu, 'Made in China: the recent rise of Chinese culture in public diplomacy', *CPD Monitor*, vol. 2, Issue 9, Assessing China's Charm Offensive, November 2011, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/pdin_monitor/article/made_in_china_the_recent_rise_of_chinese_culture_in_public_diplomacy/, accessed 24 May 2012.

international standing, firmly grasp the initiative in the field of ideological and cultural struggle, and safeguard cultural security.¹⁰⁶

It is quite clear from Li's official explanation that *The Decision* has a strong international dimension, as China aims to 'gain the upper hand in fierce international competition' by strengthening cultural soft power.¹⁰⁷ As an important 'means of soft power',¹⁰⁸ cultural diplomacy has been confirmed as China's international priority, one which is fully supported by the government. *The Decision* stresses that:

We will develop multi-channel, multi-form and multi-level cultural exchanges with the outside world; broadly participate in dialogue on world civilization; encourage cultures to learn from each other; enhance the appeal and influence of Chinese culture around the world; and help safeguard cultural diversity. We will be innovative in our external publicity methods, strengthen the right of free expression in international discourse; properly respond to external concerns; enhance the international community's knowledge and understanding of China's basic national conditions, values, development path, and domestic and foreign policies; and display an image of China as being culturally advanced, democratic, open and progressive.¹⁰⁹

In essence, the desired images emphasised in this document have no difference from those stressed by Chinese officials earlier, which reflects the fact that China's pursuit to promote positive international image has been kept consistent in the past decade. However, it was not until *The Decision*, that it was formally confirmed in the CPC's formal documentation, and has become the guiding principles for all

¹⁰⁶ Li Changchun 李长春, 'guanyu "zhonggong zhongyang guanyu shenhua wenhua tizhi gaige tuidong shehuizhuyi wenhua dafazhan dafanrong ruogan zhongda wenti de jue ding" de shuoming' 关于《中共中央关于深化文化体制改革推动社会主义文化大发展大繁荣若干重大问题的决定》的说明 [Explanation concerning the 'Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Socialist Culture'], *renmin ribao* 人民日报 [People's Daily], 27 October 2011, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ H. Kim, 'Cultural diplomacy as the means of soft power in an information age', *Institute for Cultural Diplomacy*, December 2011, http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/pdf/case-studies/Hwajung_Kim_Cultural_Diplomacy_as_the_Means_of_Soft_Power_in_the_Information_Age.pdf, accessed 3 November 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth CPC Central Committee, 'Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Socialist Culture'.

Chinese cultural policies ever since. The most immediate and visible influence is the *Ministry of Culture's Cultural Reform and Development Plan during the 12th Five-Year Period*, which was passed on 10 May 2012.

Five-year plans are blueprints which map out overall objectives and goals as well as implementation plans for China's development on all aspects at all levels of government in five-year cycles.¹¹⁰ China has implemented five-year plans since 1953 and before 2011, 11 five-year plans had been implemented, except for a three-year break in 1963-1965.¹¹¹ The CPC normally publishes general guidelines every five years which cover all aspects of development internally and externally. More specific plans based on these are formulated later in the year or the following year by different ministries or governmental departments, such as the *National Fitness Plan (2011-2015)*, the *Western Development Plan (2011-2015)*, the *National Modern Agriculture Development Plan (2011-2015)*, and the *Production Safety Plan (2011-2015)*.

Based on *The Decision*, the *Ministry of Culture's Cultural Reform and Development Plan during the 12th Five-Year Period*, which is the guiding policy for China's cultural development internally and externally between 2011 and 2015, emphasises that 'the unique value of culture in China's overall diplomatic work should be strengthened'.¹¹² It clearly points out that China should shape an image of 'Cultural China' by developing multi-channel, multi-form and multi-level cultural exchanges with other countries. In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry of Culture plans to carry out a key project named 'Cultural China' in the next five years, which includes a "Cultural China" image building scheme, cultural exchanges and dialogue, a research and collaboration scheme, cultural good-neighbourly and aid scheme, and a

¹¹⁰ 'China's 12th Five-Year Plan: how it actually works and what's in store for the next five years', APCO Worldwide, 10 December 2010, http://www.export.gov.il/UploadFiles/03_2012/Chinas12thFive-YearPlan.pdf, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹¹¹ See 'lici wunian guihua' 历次五年计划 [Reviewing the entire five-year plans], *zhongguo gongchandang xinwen wang* 中国共产党新闻网 [News of the Communist Party of China], <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/151935/204121/index.html>, accessed 21 May 2014.

¹¹² Ministry of Culture of the PRC, 'wenhuabu "shierwu" shiqi gaige fazhan guihua' 文化部“十二五”时期文化改革发展规划 [Ministry of Culture's cultural reform and development plan during the 12th Five-Year Period], *zhongguo xinwen wang* 中国新闻网 [China News], 10 May 2012, <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/2012/05-10/3879721.shtml>, accessed 10 October 2014.

cultural visitors' scheme'.¹¹³ In fact, the concept of 'Cultural China' has been accepted and discussed by Chinese scholars for almost 30 years.¹¹⁴ Even in official governmental contexts, it has been mentioned, given that the Vice-Minister of Culture Meng Xiaosi highlighted it in 2004.¹¹⁵ However, the culmination of 'using culture to explain China to the world and demonstrating China's calm and confident cultural tolerance' in the CPC and the government's authoritative documents, has guaranteed that image building through cultural diplomacy has become China's strategic mission for its international development.¹¹⁶

The most recent official and authoritative emphasis on China's image building through cultural diplomacy was made at the Twelfth Group Study Session of Members of the New Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, by President Xi Jinping, who took office in March 2013. These group studies, usually called the 'Politburo collective study sessions', were an initiative of China's fourth generation of leaders presided over by Hu Jintao soon after he became President in 2002. At these sessions, top Chinese experts or scholars are invited to deliver speeches on an issue in which the members of the Politburo specialise. Usually, these sessions are held every month. Yiyi Lu at the University of Nottingham, has argued that:

The study sessions no doubt serve as opportunities for members of the Politburo to obtain information, analyses, and policy recommendations on specific issues from leading experts in China ... they also serve a number of other objectives, including:

Symbolic and demonstrational effect: setting an example for lower-level officials and sending out signals about the current policy focuses and intentions of the central leadership.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ibid., this document does not specify what each scheme includes.

¹¹⁴ Zhang Hongmin 张宏敏, "wenhua zhongguo" gainian suyuan' "文化中国"概念溯源 [Retracing 'Cultural China'], *Shenzhen daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 深圳大学学报 (社会科学版) [Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanities and Social Science)], vol. 28, no. 3, May 2011, 56-59.

¹¹⁵ Meng Xiaosi 孟晓驷, 'zhongguo heping fazhan shidai de wenhua shiming' 中国和平发展时代的文化使命 [The cultural mission in the era of China's peaceful development].

¹¹⁶ Zou Guangwen 邹广文, 'jianshe "wenhua zhongguo" de jidian sikao' 建设"文化中国"的几点思考 [Several thoughts on building 'Cultural China'], *zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi yanjiu* 中国特色社会主义研究 [Studies on the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics], June 2012, 72-76.

¹¹⁷ Y. Lu, *The Collective Study Sessions of the Politburo: A Multipurpose Tool of China's Central Leadership*, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, 2007, p.2.

She claims that the sessions are always interpreted by social forces in China to ‘legitimize their own agendas’ as they symbolically indicate ‘the leadership’s endorsement of policies or principles which they espouse’.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the ‘Politburo collective study sessions’ have become the focus of all sorts of people internally and externally who are concerned with China’s politics.¹¹⁹ The theme of the Twelfth Politburo Collective Study Session of the new leadership, which was held on 30 December 2013, was to promote China’s cultural soft power.

At this session, President Xi Jinping emphasised that ‘efforts are needed to build China’s national images’.¹²⁰ He stressed the key points of China’s image building strategy:

China should be portrayed as a civilized country featuring rich history, ethnic unity and cultural diversity, and as an oriental power with good government, developed economy, cultural prosperity, national unity and beautiful mountains and rivers ... as a responsible country that advocates peaceful and common development, safeguards international justice, and makes contributions to humanity, and as a socialist country which is open, amicable, promising and vibrant.¹²¹

In order to achieve these desired images, he called for ‘more publicity for modern Chinese values, or socialist values with Chinese characteristics’, as well as the dissemination of the ‘charm of Chinese culture’ through ‘accommodating Chinese cultural inheritance with contemporary culture and a modern society’.¹²²

First of all, the symbolic meaning of this group study session fully demonstrates that China’s new generation of leadership continues to value cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, President Xi’s speech demonstrates the paramount position of shaping image in China’s cultural diplomacy. Finally, it re-emphasises what image China wants to shape through cultural diplomacy. Compared with the image mentioned

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.3.

¹¹⁹ Yang Taoyuan 杨桃源, ‘tisheng zhongguo ruanshili’ 提升中国软实力 [Improving China’s soft power], *liaowang* 瞭望 [Outlook], Issue 23, 2004, 15-16.

¹²⁰ J. Huang, ‘Xi: China to promote cultural soft power’, *Xinhua News*, 1 January 2014, <http://english.people.com.cn/90785/8500899.html>, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

earlier, Xi's emphasis does not seem too new. There seem to be new elements under the image of a responsible China, such as China's contribution to international justice and humanity. They will be discussed further in the next chapter. The core - an advanced, civilised, democratic, innovative, open, peaceful, and responsible China - is still the same.

As an important element of China's overall cultural exchanges with the outside world, loan exhibitions, as well as museums' international work, have been required by the Chinese government to serve the overarching goal of image building. Li Changchun, member of the CPC's Sixteenth and Seventeenth Politburo Standing Committee (2002-2012), delivered a speech when he visited and investigated the Henan Museum in November 2009. He emphasised that Chinese museums should be promoted as an important window for China's external cultural exchanges. In order to achieve this goal, he stressed that:

[Chinese museums should] organise exhibitions of cultural relics with plans, objectives, and targets; collaborate with international well-known museums to organise specialised travelling exhibitions of cultural relics, in order to demonstrate the glorious and splendid achievement of Chinese civilisation and the cultural philosophy of peace and harmony worldwide, and promote the understanding and recognition towards Chinese civilisation. We should intensify the publicity for Chinese public museums overseas to extend their international impact.¹²³

Li has officially highlighted the shaping of a civilised and peaceful image for China as an important objective for Chinese museums' international collaboration. Later, the similar point was re-emphasised in Li's speech celebrating the Fifth Chinese Cultural Heritage Day on 12 June 2010, with a particular focus on the value of exhibitions of cultural relics. He stressed that 'exchange of cultural relic exhibitions between countries is an important way to disseminate history and culture, and an

¹²³ Henan Museum, 'zhonggong zhongyang zhengzhiju changwei Li Changchun zai henan bowuyuan kaocha shi de jianghua' 中共中央政治局常委李长春在河南博物院考察时的讲话 [Li Changchun's speech at Henan Museum], 18 December 2009, http://www.chnmus.net/wbzs/2009-12/18/content_47309.htm, accessed 10 October 2014.

effective means to show national image and improve cultural soft power'.¹²⁴ After his speech, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), China's official institution to manage museums and cultural relics, required the whole museum and cultural relics system at all levels to systematically learn his speech.¹²⁵ Chinese museums are expected to be familiar with the government's requirements or expectations on what loan exhibitions should aim for.

In fact, as early as 1996, the general principles for China's external cultural work had already been highlighted by Li Tieying, State Councillor between 1988 and 1998, at the Ministry of Culture's meeting for external cultural work. One of the principles is that cultural exchanges should be subject to China's overall diplomacy.¹²⁶ This principle has been adhered to ever since by all sorts of China's external cultural work, including museum and exhibition exchanges. It can be seen from the SACH's annual reports, which always highlight coordinating with China's overall diplomacy as an achievement in the previous year and an important target for the next year.¹²⁷ The 2006 report even declared that 'the international work of cultural relics has become an important part of China's cultural diplomacy'.¹²⁸ The SACH's most recent guiding policies for Chinese museums - *The Twelfth Five-Year*

¹²⁴ Li Changchun 李长春, 'baohu fazhan wenhua yichan jianshe gongyou jingshen jiayuan' 保护发展文化遗产 建设共有精神家园 [Protect and develop cultural heritage and build a common spiritual home], *guojia wenwuju* 国家文物局 [State Administration of Cultural Heritage], http://www.sach.gov.cn/sach_tabid_1188/tabid/1191/Default.html, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹²⁵ SACH, 'guojia wenwuju yinfa Li Changchun tongzhi zhongyao wenzhang, gedi wenwu bumen jijuzuzhi xuexi guanche luoshi' 国家文物局印发李长春同志重要文章各地文物部门经济组织学习贯彻落实 [SACH distributes Li Changchun's important articles and all cultural relics departments organise learning and implementation actively], 5 July 2010, http://www.sach.gov.cn/sach_tabid_1188/tabid/1189/InfoID/25276/Default.html, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹²⁶ 'duiwai wenhua gongzuo yuanze' 对外文化工作原则 [Principles for external cultural work], *Chinaculture.org*, http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/cn_law/2004-06/28/content_49700.htm, accessed 10 October 2014; see also Xin Huashe 辛华畲, 'wenhuabu caiqu cuoshi cujin duiwai wenhua gongzuo' 文化部采取措施促进对外文化工作 [Ministry of culture taking actions to promote external cultural work], *zhongguo wenhua bao* 中国文化报 [China Culture Daily], 19 August 1997, p.1.

¹²⁷ See the SACH website for more details about the reports, <http://www.sach.gov.cn/>, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹²⁸ Shan Jixiang 单霁翔, 'Shan Jixiang zai 2006 nian quanguo wenwu juzhang huiyi shang de jianghua' 单霁翔在 2006 年全国文物局长会议上的讲话 [Shan Jixiang's report on the 2006 national meeting for directors of cultural bureaus], *State Administration of Cultural Heritage*, 25 December 2006, http://www.sach.gov.cn/art/2006/12/25/art_1634_93719.html, accessed 10 October 2014.

Plan for Museums and Cultural Heritage,¹²⁹ released in June 2011, and the *Outline of Middle to Long-term Development Plan for Museums (2011-2020)* released in February 2012, consistently call for more systematic promotion of Chinese museums' international collaboration and enhancement of their international impact. In particular, 'Displaying Chinese Civilisation Project' and 'Displaying World Civilisation Project' have been listed as two key projects in the latter document. These projects encourage exchange exhibitions and collaborative exhibitions between Chinese and foreign museums, in order to show Chinese culture overseas and improve the international impact of Chinese civilisation, as well showing foreign culture in China.¹³⁰

The SACH always mentions at the beginning of its policies that they are the responses to the most recent cultural policies released by the CPC and the government. Even though the SACH's policies never clearly identify the specific images of China loan exhibitions should aim to shape, those promoted by the government are implicitly there. So do Chinese museums really put such political requests, the shaping of desired image through loan exhibitions, into their professional work, and if so, how do they do this? Do they tailor their professionalism in delivering loan exhibitions to achieve the desired aforementioned image? What image of China do these loan exhibitions shape in reality? These will be the central concerns of this thesis.

Legal system for loan exhibitions

Before starting to explore the answers to these questions, the Chinese government's main legal mechanisms to manage and instrumentalise loan exhibitions will be introduced. This shows how loan exhibitions have been instrumentalised and the impact on the professionalism and the daily operation of Chinese museums.

Article 62 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics* states that:

¹²⁹ SACH, 'guojia wenwu bowuguan shiye "shierwu" gui Hua' 国家文物博物馆事业“十二五”规划 [The Twelfth Five-Year Plan for museums and cultural heritage], June 2011, www.sach.gov.cn/Portals/0/.../zhwgk110706101.doc, as of 10 April 2015.

¹³⁰ SACH, 'bowuguan zhongchangqi shiye fazhan gui Hua gangyao (2011-2012 nian)' 博物馆中长期事业发展规划纲要（2011-2020年） [Outline of middle to long-term development plan for museums (2011-2020)], 2 February 2012, <http://www.sach.gov.cn/tabid/343/InfoID/31749/Default.aspx>, accessed 24 May 2012.

Cultural relics to be taken out of the country for exhibition shall be subject to approval by the administrative department for cultural relics under the State Council;¹³¹ and if the number of Grade One cultural relics exceeds the quota fixed by the State Council, the matter shall be subject to approval by the State Council. The only existing or fragile relics among the Grade One cultural relics are prohibited from being taken out of the country for exhibition.¹³²

Several points from this article are vitally relevant and will be discussed throughout the whole thesis and therefore need to be further explicated here.

Firstly, as the title of the law shows, this article mainly applies to those loan exhibitions of cultural relics. As the law clarifies, ‘cultural relics’ mainly refer to those art objects produced before 1949,¹³³ when the PRC was founded.¹³⁴ Those official exhibitions of artefacts or art produced afterwards are mainly regulated by the *Administrative Provision of Foreign-Related Culture-and-Art Performances and Exhibitions of the Ministry of Culture*, which is, generally speaking, much less strict than the law.¹³⁵ As the SACH is the Chinese government’s specialized agency on cultural relics and museums, this legal system decides on those loan exhibitions of cultural relics that are managed by the SACH directly, while those loan exhibitions of contemporary art are mainly managed by the Ministry of Culture directly. Even though the SACH is an administrative agency subordinated to and managed by the

¹³¹ It generally refers to the SACH.

¹³² Standing Committee of the Ninth National People’s Congress of the PRC, ‘Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics’, Order of the President of the People’s Republic of China, no. 76, 28 October 2002, *Chinaculture.org*, http://www1.chinaculture.org/library/2013-11/21/content_496584.htm, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹³³ In the law, ‘cultural relics’ also include archaeological sites, historical monuments and so on. As they usually cannot be sent abroad for exhibitions, this section focuses on the movable, tangible and presentable objects.

¹³⁴ See also SACH, ‘guanyu guanche shishi “wenwu rending guanli zanxing banfa” de zhidao yijian’ 关于贯彻实施《文物认定管理暂行办法》的指导意见 [Guidance on the ‘Temporary Managing Regulations on the Identification of Cultural Relics’], *The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China*, 20 December 2009, http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2009-12/20/content_1492067.htm, accessed 18 January 2015; SACH, ‘wenwu chujing shenhe biaoqun’ 文物出境审核标准 [Criteria on assessing cultural relics going abroad], 14 October 2008, http://www.sach.gov.cn/sach_tabid_369/tabid/311/InfoID/13737/Default.html, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹³⁵ Ministry of Culture of the PRC, ‘Administrative provision of foreign-related culture-and-art performances and exhibitions of the Ministry of Culture’, Order 11 of the People’s Republic of China, 2 June 1997, *Chinaculture.org*, http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_artists/2003-09/24/content_42144.htm, accessed 10 October 2014.

Ministry of Culture nominally, generally they are practically and financially independent from each other. Therefore, this legal and bureaucratic system has artificially separated the exhibitions of cultural relics and contemporary art, which poses obstacles for exhibition exchanges between Chinese and foreign museums and impairs the effectiveness of China's cultural diplomacy to some extent. This will be discussed further in later chapters. In addition, as in China the majority of cultural relics have been collected in public museums, this article is mainly applicable for Chinese public museums, while the majority of contemporary Chinese art is in the hand of private collectors or public art galleries. Therefore the legal system, to some degree, hinders effective communication between ancient art and contemporary art,¹³⁶ as well as between public museums, art galleries and those private ones. As the law and the provision are quite similar in essence, and this thesis mainly focuses on Chinese public museums, this part will mainly focus on analysing the system to manage loan exhibitions of cultural relics, which will hopefully provide a glimpse into the overall system.

Secondly, applications for loan exhibitions of cultural relics are submitted by Chinese museums to the SACH's local branches first - generally the cultural bureaus in each city or province - and are first assessed there; and then transferred to the SACH centrally. The SACH will make a second and complementary assessment based on the former's opinions and grant the final approval. Both the local cultural bureaus and the SACH may require museums to make some amendments before the application is finally approved. According to the *Provisions on Administration of Cultural Relics to be taken out of the Country for Exhibitions* released by the SACH, the application materials should include at least the invitation letter for the exhibition from counterpart museums, object list, estimated price and insurance for every single object, and draft contracts.¹³⁷ In addition, as can be seen from the guidelines for approving and assessing loan exhibitions of cultural relics released by the SACH in 2012, the SACH requires the relevant experts and governmental

¹³⁶ In Chinese museum system, 'ancient art', more specifically, refers to the art of dynastic China (pre-1912). The understanding of 'contemporary art' will be discussed in later chapters.

¹³⁷ SACH, 'wenwu chujing zhanlan guanli guiding' 文物出境展览管理规定 [Provision on the management of cultural relics to be taken out of the country for exhibitions], Cultural Heritage Office 2005, no. 13, 27 May 2005, http://www.sach.gov.cn/sach_tabid_369/tabid/314/InfoID/6230/Default.html, accessed 10 October 2014.

departments to particularly assess the ‘exhibition plan, curatorial outline, object list, security, the qualification of the counterpart institutions, draft contracts, estimated price of the cultural relics’ and provide definite opinions.¹³⁸ This shows that the SACH does control the messages conveyed by the exhibitions through assessing the exhibition plans and curatorial outlines.

The SACH does not clarify how it assesses the exhibition plans or curatorial outlines in any public document. The *Administrative Provision of Foreign-Related Culture-and-Art Performances and Exhibitions of the Ministry of Culture* can be used as a comparative reference here to see how the message control has been achieved. Its Article 16 points out that:

The following items of culture-and-art performances and exhibitions shall be encouraged to export:

Those carrying forward the outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese Nation;

Those publicizing achievements of Chinese modernization;

Those embodying today's Chinese culture-and-art levels;

Those maintaining national integrity and ethical unity;

Those benefiting the friendship between Chinese people and other peoples around the world.¹³⁹

Article 17 points out that:

The following items of culture-and-art performances and exhibitions shall be prohibited from exporting:

Those harming national interests and image;

Those violating national diplomatic guidelines and policies;

Those going against Chinese ethical unity and national unification; those preaching feudal superstition and silly folk customs;

¹³⁸ SACH, ‘guanyu guifan wenwu churujing zhanlan shenpi gongzuo de tongzhi’ 关于规范文物出境展览审批工作的通知 [Notice on standardizing the assessment of outbound and inbound exhibitions of cultural relics], 20 April 2012, <http://www.gdww.gov.cn/UserFiles/20120620171027.pdf>, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹³⁹ Ministry of Culture of the PRC, ‘Administrative provision of foreign-related culture-and-art performances and exhibitions of the Ministry of Culture’.

Those impairing nationhood or selfhood on performance or appear coarse and inferior on art;
Those going against the religious beliefs and fold [folk] customs of the guest country;
Those maybe impairing the relationship between China and other countries;
Other contents prohibited by laws and administrative regulations.¹⁴⁰

Even though these regulations mainly apply to loan exhibitions of contemporary art, the principles can be presumed to be applicable to those loan exhibitions of cultural relics as well, as all China's external cultural affairs should be subordinated to the overall diplomacy as discussed above. It is reasonable to assume that when the local cultural bureaus and the SACH assess the exhibition plans and curatorial outlines, they would encourage exhibitions which are favourable to China's image and cultural diplomacy, and restrict exhibitions which may damage China's image or violate the government's agenda. If the official agencies would engage in suggesting any curatorial themes is another concern of this thesis, which will be discussed later through the case studies. However, this approval system definitely allows the government to maintain certain control over the messages delivered through loan exhibitions, therefore the finally approved exhibitions can be used to identify the government's preferences, in the concern of this thesis, the preferences for what international image it wants to project to the world.

Thirdly, there is the quota of the grade-one objects. According to the Article 3 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics*:

Movable cultural relics, such as important material objects, works of art, documents, manuscripts, books, materials, and typical material objects dating from various historical periods, shall be divided into valuable cultural relics and ordinary cultural relics; and the valuable cultural

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

relics shall be subdivided into grade-one cultural relics, grade-two cultural relics and grade-three cultural relics.¹⁴¹

The *Regulations for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Projection of Cultural Relics* clarify that:

It shall be reported to the State Council for approval if there are more than 120 pieces (sets) of grade-one cultural relics to be exhibited or the number of grade-one cultural relics to be exhibited takes up 20 percent of the total exhibits.¹⁴²

This means that, in addition to the approval of local cultural bureaus and the SACH, the permission from the State Council is also necessary, if the number or percentage of grade-one objects is over certain amount. The percentage of grade-one objects in a loan exhibition is certainly an important indicator of the Chinese government's encouragement for certain exhibitions, and therefore a useful index to interpret the government's preference for certain messages and concern for cultural diplomacy.

Finally, there is the matter of 'fragile relics' mentioned in the law. According to Article 49 of the *Regulations for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics*:

The only existing or fragile relics among the grade-one relics are prohibited from being taken out of the country for exhibition. The catalogue of cultural relics prohibited from being taken out of the country for exhibition shall be made public on a regular basis by the competent cultural relics administrative department of the State Council.¹⁴³

Until now, the SACH has published three lists of such objects, which were respectively released in 2002 including 64 pieces (sets), in 2012 including 37 pieces

¹⁴¹ Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress of the PRC, 'Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics'.

¹⁴² State Council of the PRC, 'Regulations for the implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Projection of Cultural Relics', 13 May 2003, *State Administration of Cultural Heritage*, 29 October 2007, http://www.sach.gov.cn/sach_tabid_369/tabid/311/InfoID/384/Default.html, accessed 10 October 2014.

¹⁴³ State Council of the PRC, 'Regulations for the implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Projection of Cultural Relics'.

(sets) and in 2013 including 94 pieces (sets).¹⁴⁴ Exhibition of these objects abroad, for any reason, is forbidden. The lists have been made as a result of the government's concern for the protection of cultural relics. In principle, the whole bureaucratic system is supposed to have a consensus on this issue. But in practice, the State Council which is concerned with the overall picture, and the SACH and Chinese museums, who are more concerned with the security of cultural relics, may have some contradictions in lending these objects. To some extent, the balance and contradiction are not exclusive to those objects which are legally forbidden to be exhibited abroad, but also applicable for those fragile objects which are not listed but still not suitable to be taken abroad on a long journey for any reason. The control on grade-one objects is also highly relevant. How do museums and the government balance this contradiction between serving diplomacy and protecting cultural relics? This issue will be developed further later in the thesis.

Institutional system for loan exhibitions: Art Exhibitions China

In addition to the legal system, the use of loan exhibitions for China's cultural diplomacy has also been institutionally guaranteed, which can be typically represented by the Art Exhibitions China (AEC), an institution under the SACH. Its historical trajectory and evolution demonstrates how loan exhibitions have been an all-time favourite of China's cultural diplomacy. Its existence has a huge impact on China's cultural diplomacy as well as Chinese museums' international work nowadays.

According to Zhao Gushan, Head of the Execution Department at the AEC, at the beginning of 1970s, along with the development of the Cultural Revolution at home and the change of China's relations with the Soviet Union and Western countries, the Chinese leadership started to look for possible ways to break the political deadlock with the Western world. During the Cultural Revolution, everything in China was highly ideological and communist. Antique objects and ancient arts might be one of the few things the West could accept and favour, therefore they were

¹⁴⁴ For more details about the objects on the lists, see Zhang Yan 张艳 and Zhao Yu 赵钰, 'wenwu: jinzhi chujing' 文物: 禁止出境 [Cultural relics: forbidden to be going abroad], <http://www.wenwuchina.com/News/zhuanti/2013ForbidOutbound/index.html>, accessed 10 October 2014.

regarded as some of the most powerful and effective tools to open windows for China onto the outside world.¹⁴⁵

Against this backdrop, a proposal from the French Parliamentary Delegation to China, about organizing an exhibition of unearthed archaeological objects from China, was naturally approved by Premier Zhou Enlai in July 1971. A working team was soon established to prepare the exhibition. In January 1973, the State Council approved the establishment of the Working Committee on Exhibitions of Unearthed Objects of the People's Republic of China and a general office under the Working Committee was later set up to conduct daily works. From 1973, the first exhibition organised by this committee - *Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of People's Republic of China* - travelled around 15 countries in the West and attracted more than 6,500,000 visitors in total. This exhibition has been honoured in China as the most successful 'antiques diplomacy' in that difficult time.¹⁴⁶ The Committee, the predecessor of the AEC, was established for one single travelling exhibition but has become a permanent institution and has sent exhibitions abroad on behalf of Chinese government ever since.¹⁴⁷ The institution commenced with exhibitions of ancient Chinese art and, thereafter, has hardly changed focus, which is blamed more or less for the imbalance between exhibitions of ancient and contemporary Chinese art and culture sent out by the government today. This will be discussed further in later chapters.

In November 1979, under the approval of the State Council, the institution was re-named the 'China International Antique Exhibition Company'. Before that time, the Chinese government had covered almost all the costs incurred in sending out loan exhibitions. However, along with the huge interest in and high demand for ancient Chinese art following the huge success of the *Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of People's Republic of China*, the institution started to charge fees for lending objects. The convention of charging high fees for loan exhibitions has not changed since. This has been repeatedly denounced by foreign museums who want to borrow

¹⁴⁵ Zhao Gushan 赵古山, interview with the author, Beijing, 14 October 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Li Meng 黎明, 'zhongguo wenwu waijiao zhenhan shijie' 中国文化外交震撼世界 [Chinese arts diplomacy shocking the world].

¹⁴⁷ AEC, *Art Exhibitions China*, material provided by Zhao Gushan 赵古山 during interview with the author, Beijing, 14 October 2013.

objects from Chinese museums through them, which will be discussed further in later chapters.

In 1987, the Ministry of Culture formally regulated that the institution was in charge of inter-governmental cultural exchange projects. In addition, any exhibition intending to borrow objects from museums located in two or more Chinese provinces should negotiate with it, and the institution should take sole responsibility throughout the process on behalf of those Chinese museums providing objects.¹⁴⁸ In another way, the museums on both sides were not able to negotiate directly, even though they could still talk specifically about the objects, usually with staff from the institution in presence. This has existed in China's museum system ever since as an unspoken rule and gradually became an obstacle for foreign museums wanting to work with Chinese museums, which will be discussed further in later chapters.

Changing titles and affiliations several times since then, the institution was finally officially inaugurated in February 2007 with the title of 'Art Exhibitions China' under the direct supervision of the SACH, due to the Chinese government's increasing emphasis on cultural diplomacy since 2004. Its duties have been expanded to meet the need of China's cultural diplomacy in the new century, which include:

Organizing or coordinating exhibitions on archaeological discoveries and ancient arts, including planning and hosting outbound Chinese exhibitions and inbound foreign exhibitions; initiating or coordinating international cooperation and exchange events on cultural heritage; providing information and consulting services; hosting cultural heritage-related conferences and seminars, launching professional training programs; managing and developing the sales of exhibition-related replicas and souvenirs; and organizing cultural heritage study tours; entrusted by SACH ... pre-checking application documents of cultural

¹⁴⁸ 'Guangrong shiming, renzhong daoyuan' 光荣使命, 任重道远 [Honourable missions and heavy responsibilities], *zhongguo wenwu xinxi wang* 中国文物信息网 [China Relics News Online], 8 June 2011, <http://www.ccrnews.com.cn/a/wenwuyanjiu/wenwu/baohukexue/2013/0107/38526.html>, accessed 27 January 2014.

heritage exhibitions submitted to SACH by exhibition organizers, as well as arranging and coordinating visits of SACH's foreign guests ...¹⁴⁹

The principle of 'serving for the interest of the general diplomatic situation, serving for the international cultural communication, serving for the cause of cultural relics',¹⁵⁰ has been repeatedly emphasised and strictly implemented by the AEC. The evolution of the AEC's duties from sending exhibitions only to sending out and bringing in exhibitions, reflects the Chinese government's sophistication on cultural diplomacy, which is, learning from other cultures and promoting Chinese culture hand in hand instead of one-way promotion.

Even though the history of the AEC demonstrates that China has engaged in cultural diplomacy for a long time, the institution is definitely much more active since 2007. Currently, in addition to sending or receiving regular exhibitions, the AEC also curates and organises exhibitions in coordination with the government's important diplomatic agendas, such as state visits, anniversaries of the establishment of full diplomatic relations, cultural years, and cultural festivals and so on.¹⁵¹ For example, the AEC sent the *Treasures of China* exhibition (November 2012 to September 2013) to Turkey for the Chinese Cultural Year in Turkey in 2012 and brought in the *Anatolian Civilizations: From the Neolithic Age to Ottoman Empire* exhibition (November 2013 to February 2014) to the Shanghai Museum for the Turkish Cultural Year in China in 2013.¹⁵²

Along with the development of China's international relationships, the government has signed a number of bilateral or multi-lateral cooperation frameworks, which include cultural exchange. The AEC is usually commissioned by the government to conduct exhibition exchanges under such frameworks. This can be exemplified by the *Treasures of Ancient India* exhibition (December 2006 to October 2007) sent to China by the Indian government, and the *Treasures of China* exhibition sent to India by the AEC, which were under the cultural cooperation framework between the two

¹⁴⁹ AEC, *Art Exhibitions China*.

¹⁵⁰ AEC, *zhongguo wenwu jiaoliu zhongxin 2010* 中国文物交流中心 2010 [Art Exhibitions China 2010], provided by Zhao Gushan 赵古山 during interview with the author, Beijing, 14 October 2013.

¹⁵¹ 'Guangrong shiming, renzhong daoyuan' 光荣使命, 任重道远 [Honourable missions and heavy responsibilities], *zhongguo wenwu xinxi wang* 中国文物信息网 [China Relics News Online].

¹⁵² Zhao Gushan 赵古山, interview with the author, Beijing, 14 October 2013.

governments.¹⁵³ In such situations, the AEC can get specific funding from the Chinese government and therefore does not charge anything from the counterpart governments or museums, although each side is responsible for their own costs.¹⁵⁴

The AEC also takes the initiative to do some projects that are relevant to the country's overall diplomacy and international relationship. According to Zhao Gushan, around 2007, the AEC started to re-consider Chinese loan exhibitions and two things were especially raised. First of all, until then, most of Chinese loan exhibitions had been seen in developed countries in Western Europe, the US and Japan, mostly because they could afford the high loan fees and meet the strict requirement for infrastructure facilities to display ancient Chinese art. Most of the developing countries in Africa, as well as those Asian countries which were highly influenced by Chinese civilisation in ancient times, did not have the ability or budget to host Chinese exhibitions of high quality. Many such countries are very friendly to China and have close relationships with the Chinese government. Therefore, the AEC has started a project titled 'Exhibitions Exchange with Developing Countries'. Under this project, the *Treasures of China* exhibition travelled to South Africa from March to June 2008 and Tunisia from May to August 2009.¹⁵⁵

Secondly, many East European countries which had full-diplomatic relations with China from a very early stage had received almost no Chinese exhibitions after 1989 and the collapse of the USSR. So the AEC planned to send exhibitions to this region. The AEC tried out this initiative with Romania, a country that hosted Chinese exhibitions in the 1970s and a long-term friend of China, by sending the *Treasures of China* exhibition from April to August in 2013.¹⁵⁶ These projects are still at the initial stage and there are still many problems that need to be resolved, such as poor exhibition media campaigns locally, inadequate facilities and so on. Even though these projects were initiated by the AEC, they can still get funding from the Chinese government to put them into practice.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ministry of Finance of the PRC, 'guojia wenwuju danyi laiyuan caigou "yu fazhanzhong guojia wenwu zhanlan jiaoliu" xiangmu zhengqiu yijian gongshi' 国家文物局单一来源采购“与发展中国家文物展览交流”项目征求意见公示 [Public notification on the collected comments on SACH's

As Zhao Gushan has claimed, the institution was a vanguard of China's opening up to the outside world in early 1970s and it did make huge contributions to the promotion of Chinese culture and the improvement of China's international image. However, along with the development of international cultural exchange and museum collaboration, the institution cannot properly adapt to new trends and, therefore, today faces serious dilemmas. The historical legacy, as discussed above, means that it is often denounced, not solely by foreign museums, but also by Chinese museums.¹⁵⁸ As an official institution which is able to see the overall picture, it has made irreplaceable positive contributions to China's cultural diplomacy through identifying gaps in current situations and allocating resources more efficiently, which cannot be achieved by any single museum. However, on the other hand, it also makes an undoubtedly negative impact on the smooth, professional communication between museums, and on the efficiency of China's cultural diplomacy in the longer term. This two-fold impact will be discussed further in later chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, through reviewing the CPC and the Chinese government's policies and official speeches concerning cultural diplomacy, it can be summarised that China has consistently pursued an advanced, civilised, democratic, innovative, open, peaceful, and responsible image in the past decade and cultural diplomacy is a vital tool for this image building ambition. It is also reasonable to predict that such ambition will last for a while in the near future and cultural diplomacy will be more actively and strategically encouraged and supported. In principle, such ambition has a huge impact on Chinese museums and their loan exhibitions, as they are subordinate to overall diplomacy. Then, the question is, if Chinese museums are completely subordinate to the government's instructions in practice, how do Chinese museums negotiate their professionalism and the government's instructions, and how do the loan exhibitions, as a result of such negotiations, contribute to the desired image? These questions run throughout this thesis.

single-source procurement for the 'Exhibitions Exchange with Developing Countries' Project], 1 June 2012, http://www.ccg.gov.cn/eadylnotice/201206/t20120601_4625195.htm, accessed 18 January 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Zhao Gushan 赵古山, interview with the author, Beijing, 14 October 2013.

The Chinese government has set up certain legal and institutional mechanisms - the exhibition approval system and the AEC - to manage Chinese public museums' loan exhibitions, particularly those loans of cultural relics, in order to guarantee that they are in line with the government's overall arrangement for cultural diplomacy. These mechanisms had been set up before 2004, but are highly active and influential today. They, on one hand, guarantee the government's intention and ambition for cultural diplomacy is properly executed. On the other hand, their existence has posed some challenges for exhibition exchanges and museum collaboration between China and the outside world nowadays, which does harm to China's cultural diplomacy in the long term. This two-fold impact will be relevant throughout the thesis.

In China, public museums are almost fully funded by the local or central government, which means they are governmental actors when they are involved in cultural diplomacy through sending exhibitions abroad. At the same time, they are still cultural and professional institutions in essence. When individual artists, professionals and academics are involved in an international exhibition, the situation is even more complicated. Compared with them, the AEC, the SACH and even the State Council, which have a huge impact on museums' loan exhibitions, are administrative and political agencies. When they all serve cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions, how to negotiate their relationships and roles will be a key issue. From museums' perspective, how do Chinese museums balance their nature as governmental agents and professional institutions? From the government's perspective, how does it instrumentalise exhibitions and how does it value the museum profession? In addition, how effective is the current system, and is there any problem in the current system which needs to be improved for China's cultural diplomacy and Chinese museums' development in the long term? Through discussing the case-study exhibitions in later chapters, this thesis will provide some answers to these questions.

This chapter has located cultural diplomacy in Chinese official thinking to explore the dominant objectives of China's cultural diplomacy in the new century and examined the official mechanisms to deliver the thinking. The next chapter will start to investigate why such objectives have been confirmed through locating cultural diplomacy in Chinese as well as international academic thinking.

Chapter 3: Cultural diplomacy in China: academic debate

In recent months ... China's surprise, unilateral declaration of an Air Defense Zone, the oil rig anchored in contested waters off of Vietnam, the dispute with the Philippines, the island dispute with Japan and cyberspying for commercial secrets have raised doubts that China's words are matching its deeds ... None of this is to say that China is singularly at fault or that some of its claims are not legitimate and that others, especially Japan, are not culpable in raising tensions ... But it is to say that much of the rest of the world perceives a new confrontational tone in Beijing. China must be careful not to fall into another more modern trap: letting its hard power undermine the soft power capital it has built up over decades. This is what happened to the U.S. ... American might, both hard and soft, was diminished, not strengthened, by its Iraq adventure - and that is still coming back to haunt it.¹⁵⁹

Nathan Gardels

Editor-in-chief of *THEWORLDPOST*

In the wake of the invasion of Iraq, the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib, and the controversy over the handling of detainees at Bagram and Guantánamo Bay, America is viewed in much of the world less as a beacon of hope than as a dangerous force to be countered. This view diminishes our ability to champion freedom, democracy, and individual dignity - ideas that continue to fuel hope for oppressed peoples everywhere. The erosion of our trust and credibility within the international community must be reversed if we hope to use more than

¹⁵⁹ N. Gardels, 'Is China's hard power undermining its soft power?' *THEWORLDPOST*, 16 June 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nathan-gardels/china-power-confrontation_b_5496816.html, accessed 25 January 2015.

our military and economic might in the shaping of world opinion.

Culture matters.¹⁶⁰

United States Department of State

In the past decade, China's economic, political and military rise has caused mounting external concerns and a crisis of trust and credibility just as the US did after its 2003 invasion in Iraq. In both cases, cultural diplomacy has been pursued to repair damaged reputations and shape a favourable image. China's distinctive political systems and institutional bureaucracies, specific strategic demands, and its unique cultural resources, give China's cultural diplomacy its own characteristics, which have a huge impact on the deployment of loan exhibitions. This chapter will explore these characteristics. In addition, it will further explain, from an academic perspective, why the image identified in last chapter - an advanced, civilised, democratic, innovative, open, peaceful, and responsible China - has been eagerly and consistently pursued by the CPC and the Chinese government. Together with the previous chapter, this will provide a general framework for understanding China's cultural diplomacy and provide the theoretical basis for the analysis of the case study exhibitions in later chapters.

Cultural diplomacy vs. Cultural propaganda

China has its own understanding of cultural diplomacy, though it is not materially different from that discussed more generally in the introduction to this thesis. A couple of definitions have been widely referred to within China. One is provided by Meng Xiaosi, former Vice-Minister of Culture, who defines it as 'international public relation activities targeting certain audiences at certain times which take cultural expressions as a vehicle to attain certain goals around foreign relations and diplomatic arrangements'.¹⁶¹ She complements the definition with four essential standards to check if an activity falls within the category of cultural diplomacy:

¹⁶⁰ Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, *Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*, US Department of State, Washington, D.C., 2005, p.1.

¹⁶¹ Meng Xiaosi 孟晓驷, 'wenhua waijiao xian meili' 文化外交显魅力 [The charm of cultural diplomacy].

If it has explicit diplomatic goals; if the practitioners are official or supported and encouraged by the official; if it targets certain audiences at certain times; if it is a public relation activity carried out through cultural expressions.¹⁶²

If Meng's definition represents the official understanding of cultural diplomacy with a strong political tone, the definition provided by Li Zhi of the Communication University of China, whose book *Cultural Diplomacy: An Interpretative Mode of Communication* (2005) was the first in Chinese specifically devoted to this subject, represents Chinese academic thinking. He defines the term as 'diplomacy developed through cultural transmission, exchange and communication' and 'a sovereign state's utilization of cultural approaches in order to achieve certain political goals or external diplomatic strategy'.¹⁶³ It is not difficult to identify from these two definitions that China's cultural diplomacy emphasises the role of government, particularly as practitioners or commissioners.

In the past few years, the initiatives of China's cultural diplomacy that have attracted most international attention and debate are probably those with a strong official background. This can be typically represented by the international debate on the Confucius Institute (CI) as an 'ambitious and aggressive initiative' of China's cultural diplomacy.¹⁶⁴ CIs are affiliated to the Ministry of Education and overseen by Hanban (officially the Office of Chinese Language Council International) in Beijing. Generally speaking, CIs are Chinese language and cultural promotion organisations based at educational institutions around the world. Their financing is shared between the host institutions and Hanban. Since the scheme's launch in 2004 in Korea, there have been 1,086 affiliates (440 institutes and 646 classrooms) in 120 countries around the world, up to the end of 2013.¹⁶⁵ CIs are often regarded as the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Li Zhi 李智, *wenhua waijiao: yizhong chuanboxue de jiedu* 文化外交：一种传播学的解读 [Cultural Diplomacy: An Interpretative Mode of Communication], Peking University Press, Beijing, 2005, p.24.

¹⁶⁴ R. S. Zaharna, J. Hubbert and F. Hartig, *Confucius Institutes and the Globalization of China's Soft Power*, Figueroa Press, Los Angeles, 2014, p.7.

¹⁶⁵ 'baogao cheng quanqiu yi jianli 440 suo kongzi xueyuan he 646 ge kongzi ketang' 报告称全球已建立 440 所孔子学院和 646 个孔子课堂 [It is reported that China has established 440 Confucius Institutes and 646 Confucius classrooms around the world], *zhongguo xinwen wang* 中国新闻网 [China News], 17 April 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com/hwjy/2014/04-17/6075747.shtml>, accessed 20 January 2015.

‘recognizable Chinese equivalents of the British Council, the Goethe Institute and the Maison Française’.¹⁶⁶ However, as Jian Wang at the University of Southern California has argued:

Among similar cultural organizations, only the Alliance Française has more than 1,000 classrooms or institutions, and only the Alliance Française and the British Council are in more than 100 countries. But the Francophone organization was established more than 120 years ago, and the British Council is 80 years old.¹⁶⁷

CIs are important contributors to ‘selling abroad the image of a benign China’.¹⁶⁸ They are also valued as China’s contribution to the international understanding of cultural diplomacy by offering ‘an illustrative case of the opportunities and challenges facing cultural diplomacy organizations in contemporary times’.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, they also receive harsh criticism and trigger fierce debate both at home and abroad. In particular, international concerns that the Chinese government would seek to interfere with the academic freedom of host institutions or conduct political censorship are representative,¹⁷⁰ even though Chinese officials, as well as some international scholars and commentators, do refute such accusations.¹⁷¹ There is no intention here to contribute to this debate. However, it is apparent that the active engagement of the Chinese government in delivering its cultural diplomacy initiatives does increase the risk of them being linked to propaganda,¹⁷² thus

¹⁶⁶ G. D. Rawnsley, ‘A survey of China’s public diplomacy’, *CPD Blog*, 2 May 2007, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/070502_a_survey_of_chinas_public_diplomacy, accessed 25 January 2015.

¹⁶⁷ Zaharna, Hubbert and Hartig, *Confucius Institutes and the Globalization of China’s Soft Power*, p.7.

¹⁶⁸ Rawnsley.

¹⁶⁹ Zaharna, Hubbert and Hartig, p.8.

¹⁷⁰ See Zaharna, Hubbert and Hartig; P. Foster, ‘US professors urge Western universities to end ties to China’s Confucius Institutes’, *The Telegraph*, 18 June 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10907971/US-professors-urge-Western-universities-to-end-ties-to-Chinas-Confucius-Institutes.html>, accessed 25 January 2015.

¹⁷¹ E. A. McCord, ‘Confucius Institutes: hardly a threat to academic freedoms’, *The Diplomat*, 27 March 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/confucius-institutes-hardly-a-threat-to-academic-freedoms/>, accessed 25 January 2015; T. Branigan, ‘Chinese ambassador attacks “cold war” fears over Confucius Institutes’, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/15/confucius-institutes-universities-chinese-ambassador>, accessed 25 January 2015.

¹⁷² See also Cui Xiao 崔潇 and Peng Jing 彭景, ‘cong “kongzi xueyuan” kan zhongguo de wenhua waijiao’ 从“孔子学院”看中国的文化外交 [See China’s cultural diplomacy through ‘Confucius Institute’], *Xianning xueyuan xuebao* 咸宁学院学报 [Journal of Xianning University], no. 1, 2008, 7-

impairing the effectiveness of such endeavours and ultimately the image of China, which can be seen from the fact that several educational institutions in Canada and the US severed ties with CIs in 2014.¹⁷³

Such suspicions or concerns over China's cultural diplomacy, as being too political or even propagandistic;¹⁷⁴ the international trend to bring private sectors and individual actors into cultural diplomacy, as discussed in the introductory chapter to this thesis; the rigidity and inflexibility of the official bureaucracies in the practice of delivering cultural programmes;¹⁷⁵ in addition to many other factors, promote Chinese scholars to reflect upon the role of the Chinese government in cultural diplomacy and call for the involvement of non-governmental and professional actors.¹⁷⁶ The experience of American and British cultural diplomacy programmes, with their long-established relationships with the private sector, have frequently been examined to provide reference for China.¹⁷⁷ But such research is still at its

8; Wu Youfu 吴友富, 'duiwai wenhua chuanbo yu zhongguo guojia xingxiang suzao' 对外文化传播与中国国家形象塑造 [External cultural communication and China's image building], *guoji guancha* 国际观察 [International Review], no. 1, 2009, 8-15; Zhu Lumin 朱陆民 and Liu Zihong 刘梓红, 'cong kongzi xueyuan de xingjian kan zhongguo wenhua ruanshili de tisheng' 从孔子学院的兴建看中国文化软实力的提升 [Looking at the rising of the soft power of Chinese culture from the founding of Confucius Institutes], *Heze xueyuan xuebao* 菏泽学院学报 [Journal of Heze University], no. 4, 2009, 76-79.

¹⁷³ A. Minter, 'China's soft-power fail', *Bloomberg View*, 7 October 2014, <http://www.bloombergvew.com/articles/2014-10-07/china-s-soft-power-fail>, accessed 25 January 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Peng Xinliang 彭新良, 'cong "zhongfa wenhuanian" kan woguo de wenhua waijiao' 从“中法文化年”看我国的文化外交 [China's cultural diplomacy from the perspective of 'Sino-French Culture Year'], *Shandong keji daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 山东科技大学学报 (社会科学版) [Journal of Shandong University of Science & Technology (Social Sciences)], vol. 8, no. 3, September 2006, 84-90.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ See Zhang Dianjun 张殿军, 'gaige kaifang hou de zhongguo wenhua waijiao qianxi' 改革开放后的中国文化外交浅析 [Analysis of China's cultural diplomacy since the reform and opening-up], *Heilongjiang shehui kexue* 黑龙江社会科学 [Heilongjiang Social Sciences], no. 1, 2012, 35-38; Wei Min 韦民 and Deng Kai 邓凯, 'yi wenhua waijiao suzao zhongguo guojia xingxiang' 以文化外交塑造中国国家形象 [Using cultural diplomacy to shape China's international image], *xuexi yuekan* 学习月刊 [Study Monthly], no. 13, 2012, 16-17; Li Hanxi 李晗曦, *zhongguo feizhengfu zuzhi zai wenhua waijiao zhong banyan de juese jiqi zuoyong* 中国非政府组织在文化外交中扮演的角色及其作用 [The Role of Non-governmental Organization in China's Cultural Diplomacy], master thesis, Chinese National Academy of Arts, Beijing, 2014, <http://www.cnki.net/>, accessed 29 July 2014.

¹⁷⁷ See Huang Cheng 黄成, "'feizhengfu zuzhi yu meiguo wenhua waijiao" yantaohui zongshu' "非政府组织与美国文化外交"研讨会综述 [Summary of the 'Non-governmental Organizations and American Cultural Diplomacy' seminar], *meiguo yanjiu* 美国研究 [American Studies Quarterly], no. 1, 2008, 155-156; Tang Hong 唐虹, 'feizhengfu zuzhi he duiwai wenhua jiaoliu: yi yingguo faguo he deguo de jingyan weilu' 非政府组织和对外文化交流: 以英国、法国和德国的经验为例 [Non-governmental Organizations and international cultural exchange: in the case of the UK, France and Germany], *ouzhou yanjiu* 欧洲研究 [Chinese Journal of European Studies], no. 2, 2009, 51-60; Wen

embryonic stage and the Chinese government is just starting to recognise the value of those non-governmental and professional actors. This research on Chinese (public) museums, as governmental actors and professional actors in their international collaboration, is possible to provide implications for the diversification of the actors and practitioners of China's cultural diplomacy.

Cultural soft power and ancient China

Chinese academic research on soft power is based on Joseph Nye's theory, but has its own characteristics, which have a huge impact on China's cultural diplomacy. China's earliest publication on soft power was the article, *Culture as National Power: Soft Power*, written in 1993 by Wang Huning, at Fudan University in Shanghai and now a member of the CPC Central Politburo and Chief of the CPC Policy Research Office. Wang's main argument in the paper - culture is the main source of a country's soft power - has been followed by Chinese analysts ever since.¹⁷⁸

In the *Annual Report on China's Cultural Soft Power Research (2010)*, Zhang Guozuo of Hunan University, argues that:

It is worth noting that culture is both the framework that supports soft power and the soul that gives it life. Consequently, soft power would be short-sighted if it lacks cultural breath, superficial if it lacks cultural depth, and narrow if it lacks cultural inclusiveness ... From a fundamental point of view, cultural soft power is the reason why soft power as a whole is so closely related to a nation's prosperity, decline, strength, and wealth.¹⁷⁹

He contends that compared to Nye's inclusion of the attractiveness of culture, the appeal of political values and the ability to shape international rules and set political agendas as equal resources of soft power, Chinese scholars tend to regard culture as

Lipeng 温利鹏, *yingguo wenhua waijiao jiqi zai zhongguo de yunyong* 英国文化外交及其在中国的运用 [The United Kingdom's Cultural Diplomacy and Its Practice in China], master thesis, China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, 2009, <http://www.cnki.net/>, accessed 14 July 2014.

¹⁷⁸ M. Li, *Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospect*, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 2008, p.6.

¹⁷⁹ Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, ed., *zhongguo wenhua ruanshili yanjiu baogao (2010)* 中国文化软实力研究报告 (2010) [Annual Report on China's Cultural Soft Power Research (2010)], Social Sciences Academic Press, Beijing, 2011, abstract.

the heart and soul of soft power.¹⁸⁰ From another perspective, the communist political system makes China's political values and foreign policies - the other two resources of soft power as argued by Nye - less influential than its cultural resources, and this more or less intensifies China's dependence on cultural promotion. This overriding preference for 'culture' is noted by international scholars as well.¹⁸¹

In Nye's theory, 'culture' mainly refers to popular culture, which includes, in the case of the US, Hollywood films, pop music, celebrities, fashions and so on.¹⁸² For Chinese scholars, 'culture' is a general concept which can include political values, ideology and so on. This inclusive understanding of 'culture' can be identified as having existed since Wang's 1993 article. He argued then that 'generally speaking, political systems, national morale and culture, economic system, historical development and legacy, science and technology, and ideology could be regarded as culture'.¹⁸³ Most Chinese scholars agree.¹⁸⁴ As a result the term 'cultural soft power' has gradually replaced 'soft power' in China. This 'culture' can include every aspect if only it has characteristics rooted in the Chinese cultural system. It could include localised Marxism in China, socialism with Chinese characteristics, even Western culture adopted by and transformed within the Chinese cultural system.¹⁸⁵

China's inclusive understanding of 'culture' and its different political and cultural system has led to a concept of 'external publicity of Chinese culture [wenhua

¹⁸⁰ Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, '2009 nian zhongguo wenhua ruanshili yanjiu taishi fenxi' 2009 年中国文化软实力研究态势分析 [The Chinese cultural soft power research of 2009], in Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, ed., 2011, 1-49, p.7.

¹⁸¹ See Lai, *China's Cultural Diplomacy: Going for Soft Power*; Li, *Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospect*; B. S. Glaser and M. E. Murphy, 'Soft power with Chinese characteristics: the ongoing debate', in C. McGiffert, ed., *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 2009, 10-26.

¹⁸² Guo Jiemin 郭洁敏, 'dangqian woguo ruanlilang yanjiu zhong ruogan nandian wenti jiqi sikao' 当前我国软力量研究中若干难点问题及其思考 [Several difficulties in the present research on China's soft power and its reflection], in Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, ed., 2011, 227-240, p.234.

¹⁸³ Wang Huning 王沪宁, 'zuwei guojia shili de wenhua: ruanquanli' 作为国家实力的文化: 软权力 [Culture as national power: soft power], *Fudan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 复旦学报 (社会科学版) [Fudan Journal (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], no. 3, 1993, 91-96, p.93.

¹⁸⁴ Guo Jiemin 郭洁敏, p.235.

¹⁸⁵ Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, '2009 nian zhongguo wenhua ruanshili yanjiu taishi fenxi' 2009 年中国文化软实力研究态势分析 [The Chinese cultural soft power research of 2009], p.24.

waixuan 文化外宣]’.¹⁸⁶ Different from cultural diplomacy in the new century, which emphasises the ‘politically neutral, non-confrontational and non-ideological’ cultural exchanges instead of ‘pushing a policy position’,¹⁸⁷ external cultural publicity means ‘explaining China and its internal and external policies to the international audience in the forms of culture in order to win understanding and respect for China, and create a peaceful and friendly environment for China’s development’.¹⁸⁸ Simply put, external cultural publicity uses culture to explain, promote and defend the Chinese government’s policies, as opposed to cultural diplomacy which aims to achieve mutual understanding. However, distinguishing between these cultural approaches is very difficult in practice. Delivering information and specific messages can, for example, sometimes be an important part for China’s cultural diplomacy. Information dissemination depends on mass media, therefore the international expansion of Chinese media in the past few years, represented by the Chinese state broadcaster China Central Television, is globally visible.¹⁸⁹ This is one reason why much of the Chinese academic research on cultural diplomacy has been conducted by scholars in the field of mass communication.¹⁹⁰ Rumi Aoyama of Waseda University has argued that China’s external publicity has gradually moved away from propaganda since the Cold War.¹⁹¹ However, as Arndt has argued, the fatal weakness of America’s cultural diplomacy during the Cold War was the close relationship between cultural promotion and information dissemination.¹⁹² This ambiguity between cultural

¹⁸⁶ Liang Yan 梁岩, *zhongguo wenhua waixuan yanjiu* 中国文化外宣研究 [On the External Publicity of Culture of China], Communication University of China Press, Beijing, 2010.

¹⁸⁷ R. Albro, ‘Aspiring to an interest-free cultural diplomacy?’ *CPD Blog*, 25 April 2012, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/aspiring_to_an_interest-free_cultural_diplomacy/, accessed 18 August 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Liang Yan 梁岩, p.10.

¹⁸⁹ T. Branigan, ‘Chinese state TV unveils global expansion plan’, *The Guardian*, 8 December 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/08/china-state-television-global-expansion>, accessed 18 August 2014.

¹⁹⁰ See Li Zhi 李智, *wenhua waijiao: yizhong chuanboxue de jiedu* 文化外交：一种传播学的解读 [Cultural Diplomacy: An Interpretative Mode of Communication]; Zhao Qizheng 赵启正, *gonggong waijiao yu kuawenhua jiaoliu* 公共外交与跨文化交流 [Public Diplomacy and Communication between Cultures], China Renmin University Press, Beijing, 2011.

¹⁹¹ R. Aoyama, ‘China’s public diplomacy’, paper presented to the Comparative Public Diplomacy in the Asia Pacific Region Conference, Australian National University, Canberra, March 2007, https://crawford.anu.edu.au/pdf/ajrc/conferences/public_diplomacy/Aoyama.pdf, accessed 18 August 2014.

¹⁹² Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*.

exchange and information promotion also creates suspicion and concern about China's cultural diplomacy from time to time.¹⁹³

Additionally, in recognition of the fact that political values can be transmitted in cultural forms, Chinese scholars and the leadership are very sensitive about other countries' cultural diplomacy towards China. Cultural security and cultural sovereignty, which stress the independence of one nation's culture and pay attention to other countries' cultural infiltration, are very important concepts for Chinese scholars and cultural diplomacy practitioners. It is worth noting that cultural diplomacy is regarded in China as an indispensable strategy to offset the cultural hegemony of Western countries and balance cultural modernisation and Westernisation within China.¹⁹⁴

Li Ming-Jiang at the Singapore Nanyang Technological University has argued that within Chinese culture, traditional Chinese culture 'in particular, is singled out as the most valuable source of Chinese soft power on the premise that it boasts an uninterrupted long history, a wide range of traditions, symbols and textual records'.¹⁹⁵ Wang Yiwei at Renmin University of China has also argued that 'the Chinese assume that China should be respected by the world for its long history and splendid civilization'.¹⁹⁶ In his speech at Harvard University in December 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao strongly emphasised the value of Chinese ancient culture by arguing that:

¹⁹³ See Cui Xiao 崔潇 and Peng Jing 彭景, 'cong "kongzi xueyuan" kan zhongguo de wenhua waijiao' 从“孔子学院”看中国的文化外交 [See China's cultural diplomacy through 'Confucius Institute']; Wu Youfu 吴友富, 'duiwai wenhua chuanbo yu zhongguo guojia xingxiang suzao' 对外文化传播与中国国家形象塑造 [External cultural communication and China's image building]; Zhu Lumin 朱陆民 and Liu Zihong 刘梓红, 'cong kongzi xueyuan de xingjian kan zhongguo wenhua ruanshili de tisheng' 从孔子学院的兴建看中国文化软实力的提升 [Looking at the rising of the soft power of Chinese culture from the founding of Confucius Institutes].

¹⁹⁴ See Li Aihua 李爱华 and Sun Hongxia 孙红霞, 'lun woguo jiaqiang wenhua waijiao de biyaoxing' 论我国加强文化外交的必要性 [On the necessity of strengthening China's cultural diplomacy], *lilun yuekan* 理论月刊 [Theory Journal], no. 5, 2007, 83-85; Sun Hongxia 孙红霞, 'zhongguo jiaqiang wenhua waijiao de teshu yiyi' 中国加强文化外交的特殊意义 [The special significance of cultural diplomacy for China to strengthen], *Shandong jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 山东教育学院学报 [Journal of Shandong Education Institute], no. 2, 2009, 82-85; Zhang Dianjun 张殿军, 'guanyu wenhua waijiao ruogan wenti de tantao' 关于文化外交若干问题的探讨 [Discussion on several issues concerning cultural diplomacy], *Tianjin xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* 天津行政学院学报 [Journal of Tianjin Administration Institute], no. 6, 2010, 28-34.

¹⁹⁵ Li, *Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospect*, p.6.

¹⁹⁶ Wang, 'Public diplomacy and the rise of Chinese soft power', p.261.

The traditional Chinese culture, both extensive and profound, starts far back and runs a long, long course ... the traditional Chinese culture presents many precious ideas and qualities, which are essentially populist and democratic. For example, they lay stress on the importance of kindness and love in human relations, on the interest of the community, on seeking harmony without uniformity and on the idea that the world is for all.¹⁹⁷

It is clear from this statement that the Chinese government tries to explore and make use of universal notions taken from ancient Chinese culture to demonstrate that China respects what the wider international community respects, in spite of China's communist ideology being so distinctive from the dominant democracies currently worldwide. Chinese scholars are also passionate about exploring universal values from ancient culture, which can be utilized by cultural diplomacy.¹⁹⁸

Premier Wen continued by claiming that:

China tomorrow will continue to be a major country that loves peace and has a great deal to look forward. Peace loving has been a time-honored quality of the Chinese nation. The very first emperor of the Qin Dynasty commanded the building of the Great Wall 2,000 years ago for defense purposes. The Tang Dynasty opened up the Silk Road one thousand years ago in order to sell silk, tea and porcelain to other parts of the world. Five hundred years ago, Zheng He, the famous diplomat navigator of the Ming Dynasty, led seven maritime expeditions to seek friendly ties with other countries, taking along China's exquisite products, advanced farming and handicraft skills. The great Russian

¹⁹⁷ 'Remarks of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao: "Turning Your Eyes to China"', *Harvard Gazette Archives*, 10 December 2003, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/2003/12.11/10-wenspeech.html>, accessed 25 January 2015.

¹⁹⁸ See 'Sun Tzu and the art of soft power', *The Economist*, 17 December 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21541714>, accessed 25 January 2015; Zhu Hanmin 朱汉民, 'zhongguo gudai "wenhua" gainian de "ruanshili" neihan 中国古代"文化"概念的"软实力"内涵 [The connotation of 'soft power' in the concept of 'culture' in Ancient China]', in Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, ed., 2011, 193-199.

writer Leo Tolstoy once called the Chinese nation the oldest and largest nation, and, the most peace-loving nation in the world.¹⁹⁹

Here, ancient culture is referred to in order to demonstrate the peaceful characteristics of the Chinese nation throughout history, which is in concert with the ‘Peaceful Rise/Development’ policy. It is reasonable to say that the emphasis on ancient culture in China’s cultural diplomacy is not only the result of pride in China’s long history and advanced civilisation, but also driven by strategic and diplomatic needs.

The display of ancient Chinese culture has been seen overseas frequently in the past decade. It seems indispensable for any kind of Chinese cultural events abroad. However, Wang Yiwei has doubted whether this ‘historical significance’ can automatically convert into contemporary influence.²⁰⁰ Joshua Cooper Ramo, a former senior editor of *TIME Magazine* and now Vice-Chairman of Kissinger Associates has also argued that:

China’s vital, compelling contemporary culture is drawing fans from around the world ... Yet Chinese officials generally take the path of least resistance when presenting the nation’s culture, falling back onto old and unsurprising clichés of opera, martial arts and tea instead of turning to China’s vibrant, new cultural leaders.²⁰¹

He questions if traditional China can meet needs of cultural diplomacy when the world is eager to know modern China, ‘a fresh and emerging China’.²⁰²

The questions are, therefore: is ancient culture really not helpful at all for understanding contemporary China? Why is contemporary China less representative? Is it simply a matter of political preference? Or are there other reasons leading to this imbalance? How is this situation embodied in Chinese museums and exhibition exchanges with other countries? I would argue that the museum experience can provide a glimpse into the rationale behind this asymmetry

¹⁹⁹ ‘Remarks of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao: “Turning Your Eyes to China”’, *Harvard Gazette Archives*.

²⁰⁰ Wang, ‘Public diplomacy and the rise of Chinese soft power’, p.261.

²⁰¹ J. C. Ramo, *Brand China*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2007, p.16.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p.18.

between ancient and contemporary China, and provide answers to the questions posed above.

Another characteristic of China's development with regards to Nye's conceptualization of soft power is an understanding of it as two-tier. According to Zhang Guozuo, it is generally agreed within Chinese academia that strengthening soft power is not only for international political competition; it is also for 'socialist spiritual civilisation' and cultural construction aimed at improving comprehensive national power. Simply put, soft power is crucial to strengthen national cohesiveness internally and expand cultural attractiveness externally.²⁰³ Compared to Nye's theory, Chinese scholars' understanding of soft power has a strong internal dimension. The two-layer understanding of soft power determines internal cultural development and external cultural promotion as two equally important components of China's cultural diplomacy. It guarantees the two-way, or mutual, principle of China's cultural diplomacy. This mutuality is vitally important in helping to mitigate criticisms that China's cultural diplomacy is one-way propaganda.

In the museum field, this two-level understanding of soft power shapes a favourable environment for Chinese museums to exchange with foreign museums on an equal basis. To clarify, it encourages Chinese museums to send out as well as bring in exhibitions. Even though this research will only focus on one side of this exchange, it is definitely true that in the past few years, there has been an increase in the numbers of foreign exhibitions coming to China, which was something rarely seen in last century. These exhibitions have included: *The Ancient Olympic Games* in 2008; *Britain Meets the World 1714-1830* in 2007; *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum* and *Treasures of the World's Cultures*, both in 2006, all organised by the British Museum.²⁰⁴ The V&A has organised: *Splendours of India's Royal Court*, in 2013; *Water into Art*, in 2012 and; *A Century of Olympic Posters* in 2008.²⁰⁵ In the bilateral communication process, Chinese museums have

²⁰³ Zhang Guozuo 张国祚, '2009 nian zhongguo wenhua ruanshili yanjiu taishi fenxi' 2009 年中国文化软实力研究态势分析 [The Chinese cultural soft power research of 2009], p.8.

²⁰⁴ BM, 'British Museum exhibitions in China', http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/museum_activity/china.aspx, accessed 18 August 2014.

²⁰⁵ V&A, 'V&A working in and with China', <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/v-and-a-in-east-asia/>, accessed 18 August 2014.

experienced a considerable growth in all aspects by learning from their counterparts overseas.

China threat theory

China's emphasis on cultural diplomacy in the new century has been largely driven by its strategic need for image building. An overview, in this section, of China's international image, is vital to understand why China focuses its cultural diplomacy on shaping the image discussed in the previous chapter.

Ross Munro has claimed that 'since Napoleon, westerners have been predicting that once the Chinese dragon awoke, the world would shake'.²⁰⁶ Actually, how the world views China has always evolved along with changes in China itself and changes happening all around the world.²⁰⁷ The 'Yellow Peril', which is, in essence, a racial fear that the mysterious Chinese would barbarically invade the civilised West, gained currency in the West during the nineteenth century.²⁰⁸ During the Cold War, communist China and the USSR were viewed as an ideological threat.²⁰⁹ Since the 1990s and China's rise, contradictory and complex responses to China have always existed in the West culminating in the 'China threat theory'.

The 'China threat theory' appears in different places in different versions, according to the political context of the time, as the 'economic threat theory', 'military threat theory', 'natural resources threat theory', 'geopolitical threat theory', 'spy threat theory', and 'association with "evil countries", and so on.²¹⁰ Some versions may be more emphasised in certain areas than others. This section of the thesis will demonstrate how China is viewed against this framework by exemplifying the first two versions of the 'China threat theory'.

²⁰⁶ R. H. Munro, 'Awakening dragon: the real danger in Asia is coming from China', *Policy Review*, no. 62, Fall 1992, 10-16, p.10.

²⁰⁷ D. M. Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought*, Palgrave, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York, 2001.

²⁰⁸ A. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997, p.42.

²⁰⁹ P. Wolfowitz, 'Remembering the future', *The National Interest*, Spring 2000, 35-45, p.42.

²¹⁰ Zhou Lijuan 周丽娟, *duiwai wenhua jiaoliu yu xinzhongguo waijiao* 对外文化交流与新中国外交 [Cultural Exchanges and New China's Diplomacy], Culture and Art Publishing House, Beijing, 2010, p.142; see also Chen Yue 陈岳, "zhongguo weixie lun" yu zhongguo heping jueqi - yizhong "cengci fenxi" fa de jiedu "中国威胁论"与中国和平崛起 - 一种"层次"分析法的解读 ['Chinese threat' and China's peaceful rising - an interpretation based on level-of-analysis], *waijiao pinglun* 外交评论 [Foreign Affairs Review], no. 82, June 2005, 93-99.

First of all, the ‘economic threat theory’ will be exemplified. As Hugo de Burgh at the University of Westminster has claimed, ‘the scale of the Chinese transformation is much greater, the speed unparalleled and the implications unnerving’.²¹¹ The fastest-growth economy in history has not only ‘lifted 300 million people out of poverty’ within 30 years, which can be seen as a ‘historical accomplishment’,²¹² but has also hugely influenced the world market. Some manufacturers and labour unions in the US believe that ‘a large portion of the more than two million factory jobs lost in the United States’ around the year of 2003, could ‘be blamed on the rapidly rising bilateral trade deficit that the United States has with China’.²¹³ In the UK, almost 60 per cent of the Engineering Employers’ Federation members said, in 2005, that they viewed China as a threat, according to an article in *The Guardian*.²¹⁴ China is even thought of as ‘building up a kind of China lobby inside the decision-making structures of the EU’, which means China is translating its investment and trade superiority into political influence, even intervention.²¹⁵

Additionally, China, as ‘a major global production base for the labor-intensive manufactured goods’ is also regarded as posing a huge challenge to other labour-intensive countries, especially in Asia.²¹⁶ It is even argued that this can make it more difficult for those African or Latin American countries, which have not entered the global market yet, to ‘take the advantage of the demand of labor-intensive manufacturing products’.²¹⁷ It is also contended that China, as the number one destination for direct foreign investment, may reduce the growth prospects for other countries, such as Mexico, South Korea and the like.²¹⁸ Furthermore, China’s growing demand for raw materials is often blamed as a major factor for international

²¹¹ H. de Burgh, ed., *China and Britain: The Potential Impact of China’s Development*, The Smith Institute, London, 2005, p.5.

²¹² Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, p.11.

²¹³ N. R. Lardy, ‘The economic rise of China: threat or opportunity?’ *Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland*, 1 August 2003, <http://www.clevelandfed.org/Research/commentary/2003/0801.pdf>, accessed 17 November 2012.

²¹⁴ H. Stewart, ‘Why Mr Brown went to China?’ *The Guardian*, 27 February 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2005/feb/27/politics.china>, accessed 25 January 2015.

²¹⁵ T. G. Ash, ‘Europe’s crisis is China’s opportunity: no wonder nice Mr Wen is on his way’, *The Guardian*, 22 June 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jun/22/europes-crisis-is-chinas-opportunity>, accessed 25 January 2015.

²¹⁶ Lardy.

²¹⁷ M. Smith and A. Prakash, ‘China makes new friends in the developing world’, *International Herald Tribune*, 13 January 2004, p.B3.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

rising commodities prices.²¹⁹ As China's economy developed according to the Extensive Growth model, China has persistently been criticised for 'the volume of pollutants China emits into the atmosphere, in particular the major greenhouse gas carbon dioxide'.²²⁰

There are certainly some commentators who refuse to see China as an economic threat. Nicholas Lardy believes that 'China's economy is now so large that it is beginning to serve as an engine of growth not only in Asia, but even globally'.²²¹ Those countries with rich natural resources, which China needs, also significantly benefit from business with China. Jane Perlez has pointed out that Austria is China's main supplier of liquid natural gas, iron ore and aluminium. Indonesia exports large quantities of liquid natural gas and oil to China, which helps to mitigate against hostile reactions toward China there.²²² In addition, it has been argued that 'airplanes from Brazil, soybeans from Argentina and seafood from Malaysia' have boosted economies on both sides and have led to new political alliances between China and those countries.²²³ With the largest population in the world, China has a market with limitless potential, which is not yet fully developed. This makes China 'a new source of income for the developing economies of South America and Asia', as 'Chinese consumers are now the biggest alternative for commodities and goods from Latin America and Asia'.²²⁴

The enormous appetite of the Chinese market not only provides developing countries with considerable opportunities, but is also irresistible for the developed countries. China seems to have been held up as a model to 'inspire greater competitiveness' in the US for years.²²⁵ It is also the fastest-growing export market for US companies.²²⁶ China is also regarded as playing a vital role for the UK's economic competition with the other two powers in Europe, namely, France and

²¹⁹ Ramo, *Brand China*, p.32.

²²⁰ C. Tickell, 'Environmental problems: how big is the footprint?' in de Burgh, ed., 2005, 41-49, p.45.

²²¹ Lardy, 'The economic rise of China: threat or opportunity?'

²²² J. Perlez, 'The charm from Beijing', *The New York Times*, 9 October 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/09/world/the-charm-from-beijing.html>, accessed 25 January 2015.

²²³ Smith and Prakash, 'China makes new friends in the developing world'.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ M. Macdonald, 'Obama gives China the business', *The New York Times*, 25 January 2012, http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/25/obama-gives-china-the-business/?_r=0, accessed 25 January 2015.

²²⁶ Lardy.

Germany,²²⁷ and stimulating Britain ‘to move toward higher margin, more sophisticated products’ to invest on ‘education and training, and science and technology’.²²⁸ It is also predicted that China’s economic influence will cause ‘a complete restructuring of the industrial economies of the US, France, Germany and the UK’.²²⁹

Secondly, China as a military and political threat will be exemplified. Economic achievement gives China the ability to pursue military modernisation. The national humiliation for 150 years since the Opium War, ‘when China found itself helpless in front of the British battleships’,²³⁰ always reminds China of the importance of maintaining strong military power for protecting its sovereignty and border security. The Taiwan issue and the territorial disputes with Japan over Diaoyu Island, and with some Southeast Asian countries over the South China Sea in the past few years, have also motivated the Chinese government to continuously expand its military investment, which causes concern that China may be a threat to the peaceful world order. Actually, ‘China threat theory’ originated from the military quarters in the US as early as 1992 and then developed into other fields.²³¹ Since 2002, the United States Department of Defense has submitted annual reports on the PRC’s military to Congress,²³² which have generally argued that the expansion of Chinese military power may threaten the US’s security and benefits in Asia and the security of other Asian countries.²³³

An emerging China with rapid economic growth, growing political influence and military capability drove Paul Wolfowitz, former President of the World Bank, to

²²⁷ R. Eisel, *Britain’s China Policy from 1949 to 2005: From an Idealistic Approach to Return to a Focus on the Economic Factor*, University of Munich, München, 2007.

²²⁸ Stewart, ‘Why Mr Brown went to China?’

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, p.43.

²³¹ Yuan Peng 袁鹏, “zhongguo weixie lun” de lishi yanbian ‘中国威胁论’的历史演变 [The evolution of ‘China threat theory’], *huanqiu shibao* 环球时报 [Global Times], 1 August 2002, p.3.

²³² For more details on the reports, see United States Department of Defense, ‘Annual report to Congress: military power of the People’s Republic of China’,

<http://www.defense.gov/pubs/china.html>, accessed 17 November 2012.

²³³ Wu Yingchun 吴迎春, ‘mei xinban “zhongguo junli baogao” zhuzhi shi xuanyang “zhongguo weixie lun”’ 美新版“中国军力报告”主旨是宣扬“中国威胁论” [The essence of the new version of America’s ‘China’s military report’ is to advocate the ‘China threat theory’], *renmin ribao* 人民日报 [People’s Daily], 25 July 2005, p.3.

compare China, in the late twentieth century with Wilhelmine Germany before the First World War.²³⁴ He argued that:

In the case of China, there is the ominous element of its outsider status. To hark back to the last turning of a century, the obvious and disturbing analogy is the position of Germany, a country that felt it had been denied its “place in the sun”, that believed it had been mistreated by the other powers, and that was determined to achieve its rightful place by nationalistic assertiveness.²³⁵

Even though he agreed with many other scholars that the history of China was relatively non-aggressive and that China’s ‘real sense of grievance’ was much deeper than nineteenth-century Germany’s,²³⁶ he still believed that China’s authoritarian system would drive it to become ‘more likely to try to impose its will on its neighbors’.²³⁷ Wolfowitz’s argument was made quite early. He might still have been influenced by Cold War ideology, therefore his opinions, at that time, seem to be extremist. However, his argument can still find followers today. Territorial disputes between China and the Philippines in the South Sea, between China and India around the Himalayas, the Taiwan issue, amongst others, led to Timothy Garton Ash’s comment in *The Guardian* that:

The geopolitics of Asia increasingly resemble those of [the] late 19th-century ... Restless sovereign powers vie for supremacy, building up navies and armies, disputing control of land and sea. National interests and passions trump economic interdependence.²³⁸

Ash contends that such conflicts force China’s neighbouring countries to take a harder line on China’s rise and military expansion and he believes ‘it would be very surprising - on all historical precedent[s] - if China’s rise were not accompanied, at

²³⁴ P. Wolfowitz, ‘Bridging centuries: fin de siècle all over again’, *The National Interest*, Spring 1997, 3-8.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Wolfowitz, ‘Remembering the future’, p.42.

²³⁸ Ash, ‘Europe’s crisis is China’s opportunity: no wonder nice Mr Wen is on his way’.

some point over the next decade or two, by armed conflict with one of its smaller neighbours'.²³⁹

The potential for war between China and other countries, especially the US, is also highlighted by the Chicago realist international relations theorist John Mearsheimer, who asserts that:

The mightiest states attempt to establish hegemony in their own region while making sure that no rival great power dominates another region. The ultimate goal of every great power is to maximize its share of world power and eventually dominate the system.²⁴⁰

Even though he agrees that it is nearly impossible to 'achieve global hegemony in the modern world', he still insists that China is likely to become a regional hegemony, which would cause constant conflicts with neighbouring countries. He concludes:

If China continues its impressive economic growth over the next few decades, the US and China are likely to engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war. Most of China's neighbours, to include India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Russia and Vietnam, will join with the US to contain China's power.²⁴¹

Not all scholars or commentators who hold with the 'China threat theory' are so pessimistic about the future. Political reform and democratization are often referred to as ways to mitigate China's threat.²⁴² Wolfowitz insists that 'China's neighbors and the United States will be more likely to trust it and accept its growing influence if it becomes a democracy'.²⁴³ He argues that the US, its allies and friends, should facilitate and promote China's democratization by continuing normal trade relations with China rather than restrict it or 'use human rights as leverage' and the like.²⁴⁴ However, to some extent, these opinions, in essence, view China's political system

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ J. Mearsheimer, 'The rise of China will not be peaceful at all', *The Australian*, 18 November 2005, <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/P0014.pdf>, accessed 10 March 2015.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² See de Burgh, ed., *China and Britain: The Potential Impact of China's Development*.

²⁴³ Wolfowitz, 'Remembering the future', p.42.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

and the CPC's leadership as a political threat to the current world order. In the opinion of Steve Tsang of the University of Nottingham, the CPC's leadership is the source of China's threat. He argues that:

If the nature and disposition of the Communist Party leadership and the political system remain essentially unchanged when China reaches a state of development that enables it to assert its "rightful" place in the world, such a turn of events will almost certainly not be as peaceful as Chinese propaganda today portrays.²⁴⁵

However, there are some Western scholars who favour China's political system and strongly oppose treating China as a threat to world peace and stabilisation. Joshua Cooper Ramo has argued that Chinese military expansion has been due to its humiliating history, its obsession with border control, and the threat from America. He argues that China's military investment is only 'an attempt to acquire the power to avoid conflict',²⁴⁶ and a pursuit for 'true self-determination',²⁴⁷ rather than an ambition for 'territory or hegemony'.²⁴⁸ Ramo believes the 'China military threat' is reconcilable.²⁴⁹ He also contends that even though the Chinese political system is not democratic, this does not mean that it is a threat or a destabilising factor. On the contrary, the 'coercive "power tools"' in the hands of the CPC are necessary to control the unprecedentedly rapid change in China.²⁵⁰ From Ramo's point of view, the so-called 'democratic peace theory', 'which argued that the universal presence of democratic capitalism was a salve for conflict', is no more than the imaginary achievement of the end of the Cold War.²⁵¹ He argues that the US-led democracy, which won the rivalry with the communist Soviet Union, seems not omnipotent any more. He believes that the Chinese political system may provide another effective way to deal with some global issues.²⁵² In addition, he claims that it is the unprecedentedly rapid change and the following unpredictability of the future that causes anxiety and fear, namely the 'China threat theory'. He defends China by

²⁴⁵ S. Tsang, 'Geopolitics: China's place', in de Burgh, ed., 2005, 19-28, p.25.

²⁴⁶ Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, p.39.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.50.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.42.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

arguing that even the Chinese themselves are confused and take pains to cope with change. Therefore, he calls for the world to understand China rather than treat it as a threat. Like Ramo, Peter Nolan has also argued that China's path of development and its political system is 'the choice of no choice' for its survival.²⁵³ He agrees that China has to insist on its own way and strengthen its current system for further development and prosperity, rather than follow democracy blindly, even though it should learn some useful experiences from democratic capitalism to resolve some internal problems.

In essence, the 'China threat theory' reflects a complex and contradictory anxiety and fear over the rising China. The majority of the extreme arguments were made at the early stage of China's rise, which have become out-of-date as time has gone on. However, such complex and contradictory feelings about China go even further, as manifested in the recent popularity of 'China responsibility theory'. Following the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games and the continued high-speed growth of the Chinese economy despite the world economic crisis in 2008, this theory has gradually gained currency and has begun to replace the 'China threat theory'. Generally speaking, this is an international expectation of China to take on more international responsibility. 'Responsible stakeholder' has become the popular term to describe China in the international media.²⁵⁴ In the words of former US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, who began 'China responsibility theory':

China has cemented its place, with the United States and Europe as one of three principal engines of the global economy. That means that the world increasingly looks to China as well, to help power global growth, to reinvigorate global demand, to rebalance its own economy, and in doing so, help rebalance global investment flows and ultimately help speed up the global recovery.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ P. Nolan, 'A third way: China at the crossroads?' in de Burgh, ed., 2005, 108-119, p.116.

²⁵⁴ Jin Canrong 金灿荣, 'cong "zhongguo weixie lun" dao "zhongguo zeren lun"' 从“中国威胁论”到“中国责任论” [From 'China threat theory' to 'China responsibility theory'], *guandian zhongguo* 观点中国 [Opinion China], 28 August 2010, http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_25_1625.html, accessed 17 January 2015.

²⁵⁵ 'Paulson: world needs China-US ties', *CNC World*, 26 October 2011, http://cncworld.tv/news/v_show/19290_Paulson:_world_needs_China-US_ties.shtml, accessed 28 January 2012.

Simply put, under this framework, China is regarded as powerful enough to be the superpower after the US in the international community. It has the ability to contribute to the resolution of international problems, from economic crisis, terrorism and helping to protect the environment. Chinese scholars have summarised the essence of the ‘China responsibility theory’ into two sentences: China is emerging, but it is not a responsible country; China should bear the responsibility compatible with its power and become a responsible member of the international community.²⁵⁶

In terms of China’s response to the ‘China threat theory’, even though there are some Chinese scholars and commentators attributing it to certain countries’ conspiracy mongering, or regarding it as the entirely groundless continuity of Cold War thinking and a typical reflection of American hegemony,²⁵⁷ many of them have still tried to examine the reasons for its emergence in an objective and rational way. Zhou Qi and Peng Zhen at Xiangtan University has argued that:

The formation of “China threat theory” is complex, but Western’s “evil humanity”, geopolitics, the interest of American hegemony, the culture difference between China and foreign countries, western international relations theory are the main causes of forming “China threat theory”.²⁵⁸

Sun Jiazheng has also argued that the basic reason for ‘China threat theory’ is that China is not fully understood by the outside world.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Jin Canrong 金灿荣, ‘cong “zhongguo weixie lun” dao “zhongguo zeren lun”’ 从“中国威胁论”到“中国责任论” [From ‘China threat theory’ to ‘China responsibility theory’].

²⁵⁷ See Luo Huijun 罗会钧, ‘xifang renzhi zhongguo de jizhong lundiao jiedu’ 西方认知中国的几种论调解读 [Interpreting several Western views on China], *gaoxiao lilun zhanxian* 高校理论战线 [Theoretical Front in Higher Education], no. 2, 2012, 65-69; Ma Shiling 马世领, ‘yetan zhongguo weixie lun zhi wangdao yu badao’ 也谈中国威胁论之王道与霸道 [Discussion on China threat theory: benevolence and hegemony], *guandian zhongguo* 观点中国 [Opinion China], 18 August 2010, http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_26_1326.html, accessed 25 January 2015.

²⁵⁸ Zhou Qi 周琦 and Peng Zhen 彭震, “zhongguo weixie lun” chengyin tanxi “中国威胁论”成因探析 [On the reasons of ‘China threat theory’], *Xiangtan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 湘潭大学学报（哲学社会科学版） [Journal of Xiangtan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)], no. 3, 2009, 130-134, p.134.

²⁵⁹ Wu Xin 吴歆, ‘Sun Jiazheng: zhongguo weixie lun chansheng de yuanyin shi waiguoren buliaojie zhongguo’ 孙家正：中国威胁论产生的原因是外国人不了解中国 [Sun Jiazheng: the basic reason for China threat theory is that China is not fully understood by the outside world], *zhongguo xinwen wang* 中国新闻网 [China News], 7 January 2009, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2009/01-07/1518170.shtml>, accessed 17 November 2012.

In terms of response to the ‘China responsibility theory’, Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University has argued that the Chinese government is breaking the ‘principle of keeping-low-profile’ set by Deng Xiaoping since the reform period and opening up of China in the late 1970s, and has, in the past few years, taken a more assertive role.²⁶⁰ He agrees that China is much more involved in international matters and plays a more active role and takes more international responsibilities. He even argues that China ‘needs to be more bold and assertive in international affairs in a way that matches China’s newfound status as a major world power’.²⁶¹ Even though they have not been as positive as Yan, some Chinese scholars still call for a rational approach to the ‘Chinese responsibility theory’ and advocate a proper balance between China’s internal development and international responsibilities.²⁶² On the contrary, as Yan has argued, the Chinese mainstream still argues that ‘the international calls for China to take on more international responsibilities is a conspiracy by Western countries intended to exhaust our economic resources by saddling it with more obligations abroad’,²⁶³ which is, in essence, ‘another version of “China threat theory”’.²⁶⁴

Compared to the response to the ‘China threat theory’, Chinese scholars’ attitude to the ‘China responsibility theory’ is more active and positive. Shi Wenlong of Shanghai Normal University has even argued that the former can be totally ignored or firmly opposed, while the latter should be actively responded to as it has positive and reasonable contents.²⁶⁵ However, it can be seen from Chinese responses to the ‘China responsibility theory’ how influential the ‘China threat theory’ has been on Chinese academia’s approach to China’s international image. Even though the

²⁶⁰ X. Yan, ‘How assertive should a great power be?’ *The New York Times*, 31 March 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/01/opinion/01iht-edyan01.html?_r=0, accessed 17 November 2012.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Jin Canrong 金灿荣, ‘cong “zhongguo weixie lun” dao “zhongguo zeren lun”’ 从“中国威胁论”到“中国责任论” [From ‘China threat theory’ to ‘China responsibility theory’].

²⁶³ Yan, ‘How assertive should a great power be?’.

²⁶⁴ ‘shangwubu: “zhongguo jingji zeren lun” shi “zhongguo jingji weixie lun” de fanban’ 商务部: “中国经济责任论”是“中国经济威胁论”的翻版 [Ministry of Commerce: ‘China economic responsibility theory’ is the reproduction of ‘China economic threat theory’], *China Daily*, 27 July 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/dfpd/2010-07/27/content_11052625.htm, accessed 17 January 2015.

²⁶⁵ Shi Wenlong 石文龙, ‘zhongguo zerenlun: guojifa shang de youxian he youxuanze’ 中国责任论: 国际法上的有限和有选择 [China responsibility theory: limitations and options under international law], *guandian zhongguo* 观点中国 [Opinion China], 29 June 2008, http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_78_1278.html, accessed 17 January 2015.

extreme ‘China threat theory’ has gradually become more moderate and subtle as time has passed, it still has a persistent impact on China’s image building and diplomatic strategies today. Therefore, the ‘Peaceful Rise/Development’ policy adopted at the beginning of this century, when ‘China threat theory’ was most rampant is still current today. What has changed is in the way China is dealing with the ‘China threat theory’ and other negative frameworks of viewing China. Chinese scholars and the leadership have gradually recognised the fact that ‘what China thought about itself didn’t matter so much. What mattered was what the world thought of China’.²⁶⁶ Rather than blindly refuting the nonsense and groundlessness of these negative images, China has started to recognise the value of image management and has invested in shaping counteractive images. As Li Zhi has argued, ‘positive international image can be used as diplomatic resources which a country can directly depend on and utilize, which can create, maintain and improve a country’s external influence, and which can achieve a country’s strategic interest effectively’.²⁶⁷ In recognition of the value of China’s international image, in recent times, many Chinese researchers have been devoted to investigating China’s international image,²⁶⁸ and passionate about looking for methods to shape favourable image, particularly through cultural diplomacy.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, p.11.

²⁶⁷ Li Zhi 李智, *wenhua waijiao: yizhong chuanboxue de jiedu* 文化外交：一种传播学的解读 [Cultural Diplomacy: An Interpretative Mode of Communication], p.61.

²⁶⁸ See Liu Jinan 刘济南 and He Hui 何辉, *Zhongguo guojia xingxiang de guoji chuanbo xianzhuang yu duice* 中国国家形象的国际传播现状与对策 [China’s Image by International View], Communication University of China Press, Beijing, 2006; the series of 9 books on China’s international images edited by Zhou Ning 周宁, including Jiang Zhiqin 姜智琴, *meiguo de zhongguo xingxiang* 美国的中国形象 [China’s Images in the United States], People’s Publishing House, Beijing, 2010; Sun Fang 孙芳 and Chen Jinpeng 陈金鹏, *eluosi de zhongguo xingxiang* 俄罗斯的中国形象 [China’s Images in Russia], People’s Publishing House, Beijing, 2010, and so on.

²⁶⁹ See Li Zhi 李智, ‘shilun wenhua waijiao dui guojia guoji weiwang shuli de zuoyong’ 试论文化外交对国家国际威望树立的作用 [On the role of cultural diplomacy in establishing a nation’s international prestige], *taipingyang xuebao* 太平洋学报 [Pacific Journal], no. 3, 2005, 71-76; Zhou Ling 周翎 and You Yue 游越, ‘wenhua waijiao yu guojia xingxiang de suzao’ 文化外交与国家形象的塑造 [Cultural diplomacy and the construction of national images], *Yunnan xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* 云南行政学院学报 [Journal of Yunnan Administration College], no. 2, 2012, 140-143; Wei Min 韦民 and Deng Kai 邓凯, ‘yi wenhua waijiao suzao zhongguo guojia xingxiang’ 以文化外交塑造中国国家形象 [Using cultural diplomacy to shape China’s international image]; Hu Wentao 胡文涛 and Zhao Chunxiu 招春袖, ‘wenhua waijiao yu guojia guoji xingxiang: yizhong wenhua weidu de jiangou’ 文化外交与国家国际形象：一种文化维度的建构 [Cultural diplomacy and the country’s international image: a construction from cultural dimension], *guoji xinwenjie* 国际新闻界 [Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication], no. 8, 2013, 6-15; Kang Fu 康甫, ‘wenhua waijiao yu

Along with China taking an increased role on the international stage, in particular, in response to the ‘China responsibility theory’, ‘a collaborative and responsible China’ has been gradually developed.²⁷⁰ However, this has made no intrinsic difference. Considering the different versions of the ‘China threat theory’ as a general background, it is quite understandable that the image the Chinese government desires to shape in the past decade, as discussed in last chapter - an advanced, civilised, democratic, innovative, open, and peaceful China - as well as a collaborative and responsible China, are, in essence, responses to those negative images held by the international community, just as Vice President of the China Foreign Affairs University, Zhu Liqun has argued: ‘China’s perception of its own international role is driven to a great extent by outside factors’.²⁷¹ Therefore, by and large, China ‘is focusing on the passive explanation of “What China is not”, without any mention to “What China really is”’, as Rumi Aoyama has argued.²⁷²

Along with the changes happening in China and around the world, there are new images being attached to China all the time, positive and negative. Whether the defensive response will continue to be appropriate in the future, and how China can explain itself to the world, are critical and timely issues for China’s cultural diplomacy, which is also a concern running through this thesis. This thesis will investigate if the desired image as defensive response is effectively achieved through loan exhibitions. On the other hand, it will also touch upon whether and how museums and loan exhibitions can provide new dimensions for viewing China, which will provide insights into China’s cultural diplomacy by reflecting upon the image building rationale.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the rationale and characteristics of China’s cultural diplomacy in the new century, mainly through investigating academic thinking in China and abroad. Joseph Nye’s soft power laid a theoretical foundation for the

zhongguo guojia xingxiang de suzao’ 文化外交与中国国家形象的塑造 [Cultural diplomacy and China’s national images building], *lilunjie* 理论界 [Theory Horizon], no. 2, 2014, 48-51.

²⁷⁰ Y. Wen and F. Yan, ‘Leaders greatly emphasize cultural exchange’, *The 60th Anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, 1949-2009*, http://www.chinaculture.org/focus/2009-09/14/content_348505_2.htm, accessed 25 January 2015.

²⁷¹ L. Zhu, *China Foreign Policy Debates*, Institute for Security Studies, European Union, Paris, 2010, p.39.

²⁷² Aoyama, ‘China’s public diplomacy’, p.20; see also Glaser and Murphy, ‘Soft power with Chinese characteristics: the ongoing debate’.

popularity of cultural diplomacy in China. The Chinese understanding and development of soft power theory has decided the characteristics of China's cultural diplomacy, mainly manifest as the heavy involvement of the government and the inclusion of information dissemination, which increase the risk of China's cultural diplomacy being interpreted as propaganda. Additionally, traditional cultural resources have been given unparalleled importance. If soft power laid the theoretical foundation for China's cultural diplomacy, the 'China threat theory', and other negative images, provided practical drive and urgent need. They have decided what specific images - counteractive images - the Chinese government aims to shape through cultural diplomacy.

This chapter and the one that came before it, have worked together to provide a general framework against which to understand the specific concerns of China's cultural diplomacy and examine the effectiveness and operations of those loan exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy. From the next chapter, by exploring specific case-study exhibitions in detail, this thesis will explore the impacts of China's cultural diplomacy on Chinese museums and their loan exhibitions, how loan exhibitions are instrumentalised by cultural diplomacy, and how loan exhibitions contribute to China's image building.

Chapter 4: *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795* and a state visit

This is the first of five case study chapters which explore how loan exhibitions have been used as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy and how such exhibitions have impacted on the image and perceptions of China in the UK in the past decade. It will begin with *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, shown at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) in London from 12 November 2005 to 17 April 2006. During this period of time the 'China threat theory' was prominent in the Western media and the Chinese government had just started to care about its international image. At this time, cultural exchanges between China and the UK were not as active as they are today and knowledge about China, in the UK, was still quite old-fashioned. *The Three Emperors* made a significant impact on the UK's understanding of this new, rising, China, casting it in a new light.

Featuring the largest and most comprehensive loan to date from the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City in Beijing,²⁷³ this exhibition 'present[ed] 400 works illustrating the artistic and cultural riches of imperial China',²⁷⁴ including 'paintings and painted scrolls, jades and bronzes, porcelain and lacquer ware, previous robes, palace furnishings, scientific instruments, weapons and ceremonial armour' produced during the reign of three of the country's most powerful emperors:²⁷⁵ Kangxi (1662-1722), Yongzheng (1723-1735) and Qianlong (1736-1795). These were grandfather, father and son, and members of China's last imperial dynasty, the Qing (1644-1912). Ninety percent of the highest quality art works were borrowed from the Palace Museum.²⁷⁶ These were complemented by objects from public and private collections including from the British Museum (BM), the Victoria and Albert

²⁷³ M. Bailey, 'The negotiations behind the Royal Academy's Chinese show', *The Art Newspaper*, no. 163, November 2005, p.22.

²⁷⁴ RA, 'Royal Academy holds landmark exhibition, China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795', press release, RA's archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, accessed 11 April 2013.

²⁷⁵ RA, 'China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795', press release, RA's archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, accessed 11 April 2013.

²⁷⁶ The Chinese media reported that over 95 per cent of the exhibits were lent by the Palace Museum, see National Art Museum of China, "'shengshi huazhang" lundun zhanchu' 《盛世华章》伦敦展出 ['China: The Three Emperors' is displayed in London], 26 January 2006, http://www.namoc.org/xwzx/yjdt/yj2006y/201304/t20130420_239948.htm, accessed 15 January 2015.

Museum (V&A) and the British Library.²⁷⁷ The exhibition was regarded as a ‘headline-grabbing exhibition’,²⁷⁸ ‘the most important exhibition of Chinese art in London since the great historic exhibition of 1935, which generated a huge level of excitement and introduced a new generation of collectors to the splendours and opportunities of Chinese art’.²⁷⁹

Such a media sensation was not without reason. Many of the exhibits were ‘not only unique for the West’, but had been ‘kept in storage for more than three centuries’ and ‘have never even been seen in modern China’.²⁸⁰ Among the exhibits borrowed from the Palace Museum, more than 50 per cent were grade-one objects, according to Louise Jury’s report in *The Independent*,²⁸¹ which means the State Council of China approved the loan. The Chinese government’s normal maximum was 20 per cent grade-one items. A survey of the Palace Museum’s loan exhibitions between 1974 and 2004 shows that most of the 33 exhibitions ‘featured between 70 and 120 items’.²⁸² The RA’s exhibition was, on these bases, extraordinary. This chapter will analyse why this exceptional loan was possible, how this exhibition was instrumentalised for cultural diplomacy, what images of China were shaped by this exhibition in the British media and how they fit with China’s objectives.

Exhibitions and state visits

The British Prime Minister Tony Blair visited Beijing on 5-6 September 2005, accompanied by a large cultural delegation. The implication of this event for bilateral museum exchanges will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Even though it is difficult to identify a direct tangible impact on *The Three Emperors* as negotiations had started much earlier before this, the *Bridge Times* suggested that

²⁷⁷ RA, ‘China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795’, press release.

²⁷⁸ E. Crichton-Miller, ‘RAs get a high from a dose of Chinese medicine’, *The Times*, 21 December 2005, p.23.

²⁷⁹ R. Cumming, ‘London’s greatest Chinese art since 1935’, *International Herald Tribune* (World Wide edition), 29 October 2005, RA’s archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795*, accessed 29 March 2013; see also L. Jury, ‘Forbidden City’s treasures in London exhibition’, *The Independent*, 18 May 2005, p.14.

²⁸⁰ J. Fenby, ‘Chinese whispers’, *RA Magazine*, Autumn 2005, <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/text-only/ra-magazine/autumn-2005/features/chinese-whispers,102,RAMA.html>, accessed 13 March 2013.

²⁸¹ Jury, ‘Forbidden City’s treasures in London exhibition’. Chinese media reported the grade-one objects was over 30 per cent, see National Art Museum of China, “‘shengshi huazhang” lundun zhanchu’ 《盛世华章》伦敦展出 [‘China: The Three Emperors’ is displayed in London].

²⁸² S. Naquin, ‘The Forbidden City goes abroad: Qing history and the foreign exhibitions of the Palace Museum, 1974-2004’, *T’oung Pao* (second series), vol. 90, Fascicle 4/5, 2004, 341-397, p.364.

the preparations for this event, which involved museum professionals and cultural officials on both sides, shaped a favourable atmosphere for negotiations, enabling the loan of so many high-quality treasures.²⁸³

More significant, for *The Three Emperors*, was the visit of China's new President Hu Jintao to the UK from 8 to 10 November in the same year. This was the second state visit to the UK by a President of the PRC; the first one was by President Jiang Zemin in 1999. President Hu officially inaugurated *The Three Emperors* with Her Majesty the Queen and Tony Blair on 9 November 2005. The RA had originally planned to open the exhibition in January 2006, but was approached by the Chinese Embassy in London in March 2005 and asked to 'consider the possibility of bringing forward the opening date of the exhibition ... to November 2005'.²⁸⁴ Martin Bailey in the *Art Newspaper* observed that 'the change of opening date emphasizes the diplomatic importance of the event'.²⁸⁵ The early opening meant the exhibition was on show for five months, which is unusually long for the RA.²⁸⁶ Because of this, the original plan for another exhibition, *Edvard Munch: By Himself* (1 October - 11 December 2005),²⁸⁷ organised by Stockholm's Moderna Museet, had to be rearranged and it was ultimately divided into two parts on different floors,²⁸⁸ which was regarded as evidence of the RA's intention to 'please the Chinese' at the risk of 'offending the Swedes'.²⁸⁹

Deirdre Fernand, writing in *The Sunday Times*, reasoned that 'China eventually agreed to show' the collection, so as to coincide with President Hu's state visit.²⁹⁰

Michael Binyon, foreign correspondent and lead writer for *The Times*, went so far as to consider the exhibition a gift of President Hu sent ahead of his state visit.²⁹¹ He argued that 'there is no better way to buff up an image and inculcate respect than a

²⁸³ 'shengshi huazhang zhan lundun' 盛世华章展伦敦 [China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795 in London], *Qiao Bao* 侨报 [Bridge times], 26 November 2005, p.3.

²⁸⁴ RA, *Royal Academy of Arts Annual report 2006*, London, 2006, p.10.

²⁸⁵ M. Bailey, 'Royal Academy to open China show two months early', *The Art Newspaper*, no. 162, October 2005, p.3.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Cecilia Treves, interview with the author, London, 16 May 2013.

²⁸⁷ The exhibition had been displayed at the Moderna Museet, Sotckhom and the Munch-museet, Oslo before it came to the RA.

²⁸⁸ RA, *Royal Academy of Arts Annual report 2006*, p.10.

²⁸⁹ M. Glover, 'Sucking up to China', *Blueprint Magazine*, 1 November 2005, RA's archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795*, accessed 29 March 2013.

²⁹⁰ D. Fernand, 'Enter the dragon', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 30 October 2005, p.33.

²⁹¹ M. Binyon, 'From the land of a billion cheap toys: exquisite jade, maps and silken robes', *The Times*, 10 November 2005, p.19.

grand cultural exhibition'.²⁹² The RA confirmed in its annual report that due to the state visit, the exhibition 'benefitted from the Chinese government's support which secured the delivery of works of art of the highest calibre'.²⁹³ This gave the RA access to objects that would otherwise have been out of reach. *The Economist* stated that the 'requests were refused by the [Palace] museum, which then found itself overruled by the Department of Culture and Heritage, proving that at the highest levels there was an interest in making this exhibition a success'.²⁹⁴ Cecelia Treves, one of the five curators for the exhibition, also said that due to the alignment with the state visit, 'it was recognized [on both sides that] the quality of the exhibition [would] have to be very high, that it was an important international event'.²⁹⁵ She claimed that:

As the momentum grew, it became clear that the opening of the exhibition was going to coincide with the state visit then that would increase the profile of the exhibition. I think that the State Administration [of Cultural Heritage] recognized that they needed to do more to show the Palace Museum's treasures in the best light.²⁹⁶

As no museum staff from the Palace Museum were available for interview, it is difficult to confirm if there were any conflicting opinions between the Palace Museum and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. It was reported that Zheng Xinmiao, Director of the Palace Museum and China's Vice-Minister of Culture agreed this loan partly because that the year 2005 marked 'the 80th anniversary of the Palace Museum and the 70th anniversary of the RA's historic 1935 show of its treasures - the first overseas exhibition from the Forbidden City' considering 'such anniversaries still matter in China'.²⁹⁷ *The Three Emperors* was promoted as the RA's third great exhibition devoted to Chinese art. The first was the *International Exhibition of Chinese Art* in 1935-6, which 'presented Chinese art from the Neolithic to the eighteenth century',²⁹⁸ and is still regarded as one of the

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ RA, *Royal Academy of Arts Annual report 2006*, p.10.

²⁹⁴ 'Qing bling: Chinese treasures', *The Economist*, 5 November 2005, p.90; see also Fenby, 'Chinese whispers'.

²⁹⁵ Cecilia Treves, interview with the author, London, 16 May 2013.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ S. Greenberg, 'Enter the dragon', *RA Magazine*, Issue 89, Winter 2005, 55-57, p.57.

²⁹⁸ H. Wang, 'Scroll up for multicultural', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 December 2005, p.19.

top 20 exhibitions ever held in the UK by the *Asian Art Newspaper*.²⁹⁹ The second was the *Genius of China* in 1973-4,³⁰⁰ which ‘highlighted the important archaeological discoveries made since the founding of the People’s Republic [of China] in 1949’,³⁰¹ and attracted over 770,000 visitors. *Genius of China* remains the most popular show held by the RA to date.³⁰² As both Director of the Palace Museum and Vice-Minister of Culture of China, Zheng Xinmiao’s opinion of the exhibition reflected not only the Palace Museum’s ambition for collaboration, but also the Chinese government’s appreciation for the RA’s continual and historic role in introducing Chinese culture to the British public.

Prior to *The Three Emperors*, art exhibitions had been organised to coordinate with the state visits of Chinese presidents. Take President Hu’s state visits to four Latin American countries (Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Cuba) from 11 to 23 November 2004 for instance: the State Council Information Office of the PRC organised cultural weeks entitled *Experience China* in Brazil and Argentina in November and December of that year. In Argentina, one highlight of the cultural week was an exhibition sent by the Shanghai Museum, under the auspices of the State Council Information Office and the Chinese Embassy in the Argentine Republic. This exhibition of Chinese ancient bronzes was shown in Buenos Aires from 9 to 22 November; the President visited the country from 16 to 17 November. *The China Daily* claimed that the exhibition from the Shanghai Museum ‘help[ed] create a historical and cultural backdrop’ for the state visit.³⁰³ Li Chaoyuan, Deputy Director of the Shanghai Museum, commented that it was ‘the first time that the Shanghai Museum ... [had held] a show in Argentina or anywhere in South America’.³⁰⁴ Li said that Shanghai Museum had often sent exhibitions abroad but that most of them did not consist of more than 50 objects. The show in Buenos Aires featured 100

²⁹⁹ ‘China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795’, *Asian Art Newspaper*, 20 October 2005, p.20.

³⁰⁰ *Genius of China* is the title for the travelling exhibition - *Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of People’s Republic of China* - when it was displayed in the UK.

³⁰¹ Wang, ‘Scroll up for multicultural’.

³⁰² D. Alberge, ‘China moves mountain for exhibition of treasure’, *The Times*, 17 May 2005, p.20.

³⁰³ H. Zou, ‘Chinese bronze to amaze Latin America’, *China Daily*, 2 November 2004, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-11/02/content_387637.htm, accessed 31 March 2014.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

bronzes, ‘topping all of its previous overseas shows’,³⁰⁵ and including at least 20 items of the highest grade that had never been shown abroad.³⁰⁶

Four years earlier, when President Jiang Zemin attended the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000, the State Council Information Office and the Ministry of Culture co-organised a series of cultural activities under the umbrella of *2000 Experience Chinese Culture in the United States*, which highlighted a touring exhibition from the Palace Museum entitled *Secret World Of The Forbidden City: Splendors From China’s Imperial Palace*. This exhibition toured for twenty-six months from 2000-2002, to the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, the Oakland Museum, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem and the Phoenix Art Museum. The Palace Museum’s loan exhibitions typically last less than seven months.³⁰⁷ In 1999, in the year Jiang Zemin first became the President, he officially opened the BM’s show *Gilded Dragon: Buried Treasures from China’s Golden Ages*, with the Queen in attendance. This was an exhibition of ‘unearthed relics masterpieces from Shaanxi Province’, including the acclaimed terracotta warriors.³⁰⁸

President Hu’s state visit was marked in a number of conspicuous ways in addition to *The Three Emperors*. In what the media termed ‘China turns London red’, London’s landmarks, including the fountains in the courtyard of the RA, the London Eye and Somerset House were all illuminated with red light on the day Hu arrived in London.³⁰⁹ The socialist Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, or ‘Red Ken’ as the media liked to term him, thought the lightshow and state visit ‘a fantastic way to mark the opening of the exhibition’.³¹⁰ Rikesh Shah, Acting Director of the Somerset House Trust explained that the event had ‘no political intent’ and was ‘part

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Cao Yu 曹宇, “‘ganzhi zhongguo’ wenhua huodong zai agenting zhengshi qidong” ‘感知中国’文化活动在阿根廷正式启动 [‘Experience China’ cultural activities start in Argentina], *xinhua wang* 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 10 November 2004, http://news.xinhuanet.com/expo/2004-11/10/content_2198070.htm, accessed 31 March 2014.

³⁰⁷ Naquin, ‘The Forbidden City goes abroad: Qing history and the foreign exhibitions of the Palace Museum, 1974-2004’.

³⁰⁸ Embassy of the PRC in the United Kingdom of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland, ‘Backgrounder: Sino-British Relations’, 10 October 2003, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/wjzc/t27071.htm>, accessed 31 March 2014.

³⁰⁹ J. Mirsky, ‘A gangster comes to town’, *The Spectator*, 5 November 2005, p.22.

³¹⁰ P. Aspden, ‘The glittering fruits of diplomacy’, *Financial Times*, 8 November 2005, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4a8d85a2-4ffc-11da-8b72-0000779e2340.html#axzz2xbCHnH43>, accessed 31 March 2014.

of a celebration of the cultural richness of London and a demonstration of how leading organisations are able to work together to promote all that this city has to offer'.³¹¹ Helen Wang, the BM's Curator of East Asian Money remarked that it 'would have been inconceivable little more than fifteen years ago, at a time when we still associated red with Communism rather than the Chinese traditional colour of celebration'.³¹² Peter Aspden, writing in the *Financial Times*, also recognised this political change, joking that it would have had left-winger Ken Livingstone 'charged with treason at the height of the cold war'.³¹³ Writing in the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, Nigel Reynolds and John Steele even interpreted it as 'London's cultural elite' giving 'full support for China' 'in honour of the Communist regime'.³¹⁴ Across the political spectrum, the media seemed to locate a positive message from this cultural event.

In the next section, the image of China shaped by this exhibition and the implications of this for China's cultural diplomacy will be investigated.

Art patronage and a multi-ethnic and legitimate China

The RA's press release for *The Three Emperors* stated that:

The Qing dynasty, founded by the Manchus living in the north-east of the Eurasian continent, invaded and conquered China in the 1640s. During the period encompassed by the exhibition the Qing state stretched as far west as Tibet and Central Asia, north to Mongolia and Manchuria and south to Vietnam. As the Qing ruled territories that embraced a wide range of different peoples, they needed their authority to be respected across a wide constituency. This breadth is reflected in their patterns of court life, their palaces and the ritual banquets and journeys in which they engaged.³¹⁵

Jessica Rawson, Warden of Merton College at Oxford University, who led the curatorial team for *The Three Emperors*, argued that:

³¹¹ 'China celebration not political', *Evening Standard*, 15 November 2005, p.49.

³¹² Wang, 'Scroll up for multiculturalism'.

³¹³ Aspden, 'The glittering fruits of diplomacy'.

³¹⁴ N. Reynolds and J. Steele, 'Arts elite paints the town red for Communist leader', *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 November 2005, p.13.

³¹⁵ RA, 'China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795', press release.

While a concern with the historical achievements of the Manchu rulers has inevitably become increasingly important and the arts of the Qing have been recognized for their superlative quality, little has yet been made of the ways in which these arts were at the service of major political and ideological endeavours. Or if recognized, the means by which this was achieved have not been explicitly examined.³¹⁶

Given this, the curatorial team ultimately decided to focus the exhibition on telling a distinctive story of how the three Qing emperors achieved political legitimacy and glorified and perpetuated their power through art patronage. The exhibition was divided into 11 sections with an individual gallery for each: ‘Images of Imperial Grandeur’; ‘Qing Dynasty Court Painting’; ‘Ritual’; ‘Religion’; ‘Territories of the Qing’; ‘Diplomats, Jesuits and Foreign Inventions’; ‘The Kangxi Emperor (Horseman, man of letters and man of science)’; ‘The Yongzheng Emperor (Art collector and patron)’; ‘The Qianlong Emperor (Virtue and the possession of antiquity)’; ‘Silent Satisfactions (painting and calligraphy of the Chinese educated elite)’; and the ‘Auspicious Universe’.³¹⁷

Writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, Souren Melikian suggested that it was ‘against this background of multiculturalism and foreign dominance’ that the whole exhibition could be understood.³¹⁸ He even argued that the exhibition was about ‘the power of China, not art’.³¹⁹ It presented how the Qing rulers ‘harness[ed] art to the service of political power ... as a vehicle for political propaganda’,³²⁰ without imposing ‘uniform religious beliefs or political systems on their subject peoples’.³²¹ It seems that the curatorial intentions of the exhibition were largely understood by the media and that these shaped the resulting image and perceptions of China in the media.

³¹⁶ J. Rawson, “‘China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795’”, an exhibition from the Palace Museum, Beijing’, *Orientalism*, vol. 36, no. 8, November/ December 2005, 46-55, p.47.

³¹⁷ E. S. Rawski and J. Rawson, eds., *China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 2005.

³¹⁸ S. Melikian, ‘A show heavy on China, light on art’, *International Herald Tribune*, 18 February 2006, p.9.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ N. Pearce, ‘China: The Three Emperors. London’, *The Burlington magazine*, vol. 148, no. 1236, Works on Paper, March 2006, 213-214, p.213.

³²¹ A. Graham-Dixon, ‘China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 20 November 2005, 22-23, p.22.

First of all, by presenting the three emperors and the Qing Dynasty as an ethnic-minority, foreign to the Han Chinese, an interpretation which was repeatedly highlighted in media reports and exhibition reviews, the exhibition helped to shape a multi-ethnic image for China.³²² This can be seen from John Gulliver's remark in the *West End Extra*:

Most people in the West think of the modern Chinese as intrinsically a single race. In fact, the Qing dynasty turned China into a kind of melting pot of ethnic groups - the first ruling Qing emperors were of a north-east Asian people, the Jurchen, who, historically, culturally and linguistically, were poles-apart from the Chinese in the south.³²³

In the 'Religion' section, the Qing rulers' close relationship with Tibet through Buddhism was clearly demonstrated, exemplified by a thangka painting named *The Qianlong Emperor in Buddhist Dress, Puning Si* (see figure 3.1), described as 'one of at least eight surviving works that show the emperor with a multifaceted, spiritual identity as monk, bodhisattva and work ruler'.³²⁴ According to Rawson, 'the monastic robes and hat indicate a monk; the lotuses bearing a sword and a sutra display the attributes of Manjushri; and the assembly of eminent deities and monastic figures around the central image indicate dominance over the world'.³²⁵ The Emperor is portrayed as a supporter and protector of Tibetan Buddhism in the thangka. Such exhibits reminded art critics and journalists of the contemporary relationship between the Chinese government and Tibet, especially as Tibetan protests were going on in the UK during Hu's state visit. Susan Morris recognised the Qing rulers' particular interest in Tibetan Buddhism as 'a sympathy useful in keeping the Tibetans on side', which she thought was 'in contrast to the philosophy of more recent Chinese governments'.³²⁶

³²² See F. Wood, 'In the imperial image', *Art Quarterly*, Autumn 2005, 36-40; A. Harris, 'In a perfect world', *The Times Educational Supplement*, 25 November 2005, p.16; S. Kent, 'We three Qings of Oriental are', *Time Out London*, 21 December - 4 January 2006, p.56.

³²³ J. Gulliver, 'Three is the magic number', *West End Extra*, 27 January 2006, x-xi.

³²⁴ Rawson, "China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795", an exhibition from the Palace Museum, Beijing', p.50.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ S. Morris, 'China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795', *World of Antiques and Art*, Issue 69, February 2005 to August 2006, 44-46, p.45.

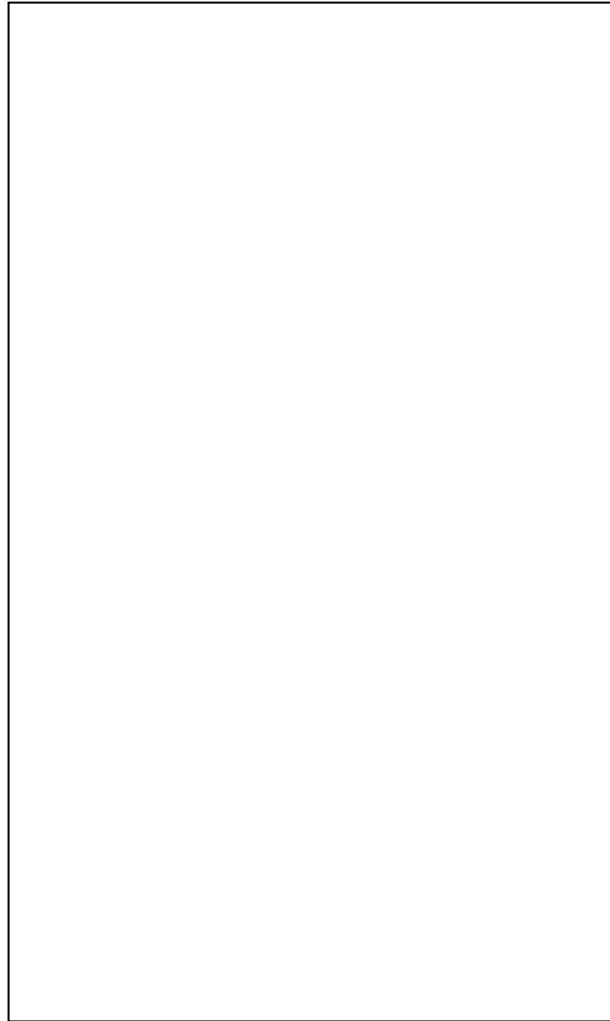


Figure 3.1: Anonymous, *The Qianlong Emperor in Buddhist Dress, Puning Si, 1758, thangka, colours on cloth, 108×63 cm, inscription in Tibetan, The Palace Museum, Beijing, Gu6485*

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

The PRC's territorial sovereignty over Tibet, Uyghur Xinjiang and Taiwan remained a contentious issue in the China-West relationship. For the Chinese leadership, multi-ethnicity is always linked with national unity and sovereignty. By emphasising China's history as one of different ethnic groups' struggle for the unification of the nation,³²⁷ the problems in such areas are officially defined as historical legacies and therefore internal rather than international issues. Shaping the image of China as a

³²⁷ Zhao Jian 赵健, 'ruhe lijie woguo shi gezu renmin gongtong dizao de tongyi de duominzu guojia?' 如何理解我国是各族人民共同缔造的统一的各民族国家? [How to understand China is a unified multi-ethnic country jointly created by its people of all ethnic groups?], *zhongguo gongchandang xinen wang* 中国共产党新闻网 [News of the Communist Party of China], 25 February 2010, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/68294/182630/11030554.html>, accessed 5 February 2015.

multi-ethnic nation has been regarded by the Chinese authorities as a way to justify the legitimacy of the PRC and the CPC's territorial and legal claim over these regions, where the majority populations are from ethnic minorities. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 6. In this sense, *The Three Emperors* did help to nurture recognition of the historical links between Tibet and China in the British media, as is quite evident in Martin Gayford's review of the exhibition:

In many ways their [the Qing rulers] real successors are the Chinese communist leaders of today ... It was in fact the Kangxi emperor who originally annexed that country [Tibet] in 1720. Indeed, the Manchus created the modern Chinese state: A multiethnic empire that comprises not only the ancient Middle Kingdom, but a large swath of Islamic central Asia and also Mongolia, now independent again.³²⁸

Thus the exhibition met the Chinese government's objective to shape 'a civilized country featuring ... ethnic unity' and 'an oriental power with ... national unity'.³²⁹

The theme of the exhibition - art patronage and political legitimacy - not only promoted a re-consideration of China's ethnicity and territorial legitimacy, but also provoked a discussion of the political legitimacy of the CPC as China's ruling party. Xiao Jia Gu argued in the *New Statesman* that by officially opening the exhibition, 'President Hu is, in effect, positioning himself as the legitimate heir to the country's imperial past'.³³⁰ Michael Backman argued that the exhibition said 'a lot about China's past' but that it also showed 'the present struggle for China's leaders to legitimise their power'.³³¹ He claimed that:

China's current leaders face a similar problem. Communism is finished: ideology no longer provides a source of legitimacy for their rule. Elections are held but they are not democratic; so China's leaders cannot be said to draw their legitimacy from the people either. Instead, their rule

³²⁸ M. Gayford, 'London's 'China' show proves globalization isn't new', *The China Post*, 11 November 2005, <http://www.fluktor.de/study/office/newsletter-mails/2005113012.htm>, accessed 17 March 2014.

³²⁹ Huang, 'Xi: China to promote cultural soft power'.

³³⁰ X. J. Gu, 'The emperor's new clothes', *New Statesman*, 5 December 2005, 38-39, p.38.

³³¹ M. Backman, 'China stays true to its history', *The Age*, 11 January 2006,

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/business/china-stays-true-to-its-history/2006/01/10/1136863239382.html>, accessed 31 March 2014.

looks somewhat naked; illegitimate. They are in power for no reason other than their control of the armed forces. To remedy this, they are assuming the role of protectors of the culture, just as the Qing emperors did. They are spending millions buying Chinese artworks from around the world and repatriating them.³³²

Thus, the Chinese government's cultural ambition was interpreted as a way to obtain political legitimacy on two levels, internally and externally. Internally, Peter Lewis argued in the *Museums Journal* that this exhibition demonstrates how the Chinese government has taken Qing art propaganda as 'a case study for government spin-doctors'.³³³ Helen Wang also touched upon the communist party's re-appraisal of the past for political legitimacy within China by claiming that:

Since the 1980s, [Chinese] revisionist scholars, probably with government sanction, have argued that the Qing dynasty imposed order, combined the best of the Ming and the Manchu, and embraced other cultures and religions to establish a multi-ethnic empire that was the forerunner to the modern Chinese state.³³⁴

Externally, it was suggested that through this exhibition, the CPC intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of the Chinese leadership to an international audience. Writing in *The Times*, Michael Glover questioned the Chinese government's intentions:

This show manages to be two things at once. It is an important contribution to our understanding of a great civilisation and it is also a significant political act. That so much has been lent for public display represents an important reaching-out by China. It seems to proclaim: the Qing dynasty emperors revered the past. They acknowledged that there was continuity between the past and the present which was a guarantor of the stability of Chinese civilisation. Does this mean that China is telling the world that the murderously destructive excesses of the Cultural Revolution, with its torching of T'ang temples, was a

³³² Ibid.

³³³ P. Lewis, 'Everything under heaven', *Museums Journal*, Issue 106/1, January 2006, 40-41, p.40.

³³⁴ Wang, Scroll up for multiculturalism'.

terrible aberration? That the continuities with its own great civilisation, even as it hurtles headlong into the future, have not been broken?³³⁵

Sarah Kent argued that,

A two-pronged charm offensive involved [in the exhibition], on the one hand, promoting the cult of the emperor and, on the other, presenting him as all things to all men ... Are the Communists borrowing ideas from the Qings? Is this part of a charm offensive, an attempt to woo us into believing that their rule is benign?³³⁶

From these discussions in the media, it can be seen that at this stage, when China was emerging on the international stage, there was still an ideological dimension to views of China, even though the Cold War had been over for more than a decade. As discussed in Chapter 3, at the early stages of the ‘China threat theory’, there were concerns that the authoritarian leadership of the CPC was a destabilising factor to international democracies. The media response to the exhibition seems to reflect the presence of a general framework for viewing China which centred on ‘communism’ and talked about ‘legitimacy’. The media comments were not absolutely positive about the Chinese government or the CPC. However, Rawson argued:

Unlike the China of Mao’s time, present China accepts the past. This is important. They have dropped the grey curtain that had covered all things and they are letting everything be redefined. It’s so exciting - the Chinese now view their past as their privilege.³³⁷

The exhibition did help to challenge old-fashioned understandings of China or observe that China had changed.

Tim Adams, writing in *The Observer*, touched upon the ‘China threat theory’ by arguing that:

They were the first of the Manchus and they drove the Ming dynasty from its seat of power. Still, it is their spirit of poetry and enlightenment

³³⁵ M. Glover, ‘Minted imperials’, *The Times*, 8 November 2005, p.20.

³³⁶ Kent, ‘We three Qings of Oriental are’.

³³⁷ S. Herdman, ‘On the trail of imperial China’, *Homes and Antiques Magazine*, January 2006, 74-79, p.77.

... that they wanted to be remembered for. It is also, happily, this spirit of the 'peaceful emergence' of a superpower, that Mr Hu and the investment bankers are keen to dwell on.³³⁸

Even *The Sun*'s Ian King concluded from this exhibition that 'China is not a threat to British business, but an opportunity'.³³⁹ Such voices were very valuable for China's cultural diplomacy.

East-West exchange and a multi-cultural, open, innovative and progressive China

Another key word for the exhibition was 'multiculturalism', which was not only about how the Qing rulers dealt with different cultures within its territories, but also about how they dealt with the West, especially with Europe through art and technology, thanks to the Jesuits. A whole section of the exhibition - 'Jesuits and Foreign Inventions' - was devoted to East-West contact through this religious order and its treatment in the Qing court. According to the RA's press release:

[This gallery] will show Chinese curiosity with foreign expertise and innovation. This gallery will also explore the courtly relations with Jesuits, who went to China to seek converts to Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These envoys remained important members of the Qing court, both in technical areas, as advisors on scientific instruments, and in providing painters who inspired Chinese court artists to emulate foreign styles.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ T. Adams, 'Imperial imperium', *The Observer*, 13 November 2005, p.13.

³³⁹ I. King, 'Hu's that guy?' *The Sun*, 8 November 2005, p.12.

³⁴⁰ RA, 'China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795', press release.

In addition to this section, many exhibits distributed in other sections also reflected East-West contact, the influence of Western art on Chinese art, and the Jesuits' contribution to and status in the Qing court, best exemplified by the painting *Qianlong Emperor in Ceremonial Armour on Horseback* (see figure 3.2), shown in the section 'Territories of the Qing' which concerned the Qing's military power and prowess.

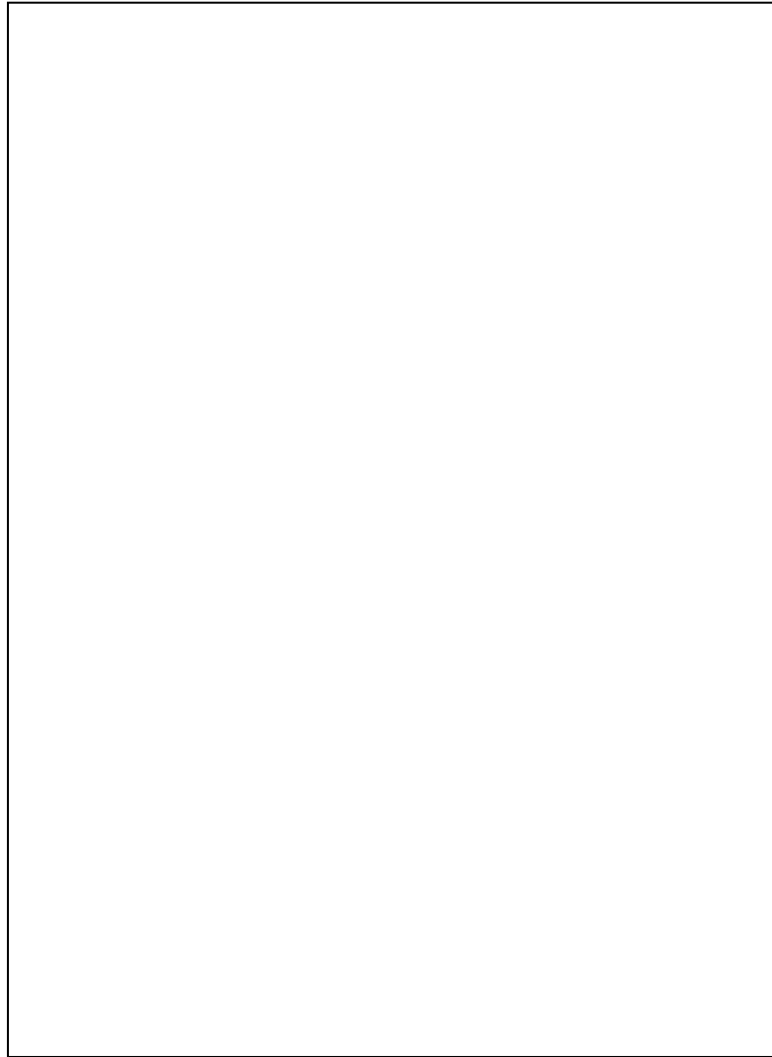


Figure 3.2: Giuseppe Castiglione, *The Qianlong Emperor in Ceremonial Armour on Horseback*, 1759 or 1758, hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, 332.5×232 cm, The Palace Museum, Beijing, Gu8761

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Painted by the Jesuit court painter, Giuseppe Castiglione (Chinese name: Lang Shining, 1688-1766), who was favoured by all three emperors and enjoyed a venerated position in the Qing court, it has been suggested that:

The artist produced a hybrid masterpiece, grafting the grand tradition of Western equestrian portraiture - shades of Marcus Aurelius on horseback and of Titian's Charles V mounted on a fiery charger - on to the tradition of Chinese horseman painting.³⁴¹

The eighth gallery was devoted to the Yongzheng Emperor, and displayed the *Album of the Yongzheng Emperor in Costumes*, which portrayed the Emperor in different roles, such as a musician playing a zither, a Confucian scholar, a Daoist and so on. One of the album leaves even depicted the Emperor as a European tiger-slayer dressed in a wig (see figure 3.3).³⁴² It reminded Tim Adams of the persistent appeal of Western culture in China today, which was exemplified by President Hu's Armani-suited appearance during his state visit to the UK.³⁴³ Such signs of China-West contact all contributed to present the image of a China open to Western influence.

The early contact between China and the West also helped to redress the perception of 'widespread persecution of Christians'³⁴⁴ in Qing-era China and contextualise a new understanding of China, as Anne Ozorio argued:

The Jesuits, unlike other Christians, were prepared to be in China on Chinese terms, adapting their faith to Chinese mores. The order venerated learning and knowledge, attitudes respected in China ... Because they accepted China, they were in turn accepted as favourites in Court ... The preponderance of Jesuit artefacts in this exhibition is deliberate for it raises provocative ideas on the relationship between China and the West.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Graham-Dixon, 'China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795', p.23.

³⁴² Rawson, "'China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795'", an exhibition from the Palace Museum, Beijing', p.51.

³⁴³ Adams, 'Imperial imperium'.

³⁴⁴ D. Silvester-Carr, 'China comes to town', *What's on in London*, 9 November 2005, RA's archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795*, accessed 29 March 2013.

³⁴⁵ A. Ozorio, 'China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795', *Seen and Heard Art Review*, RA's archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors 1662-1795*, accessed 29 March 2013.

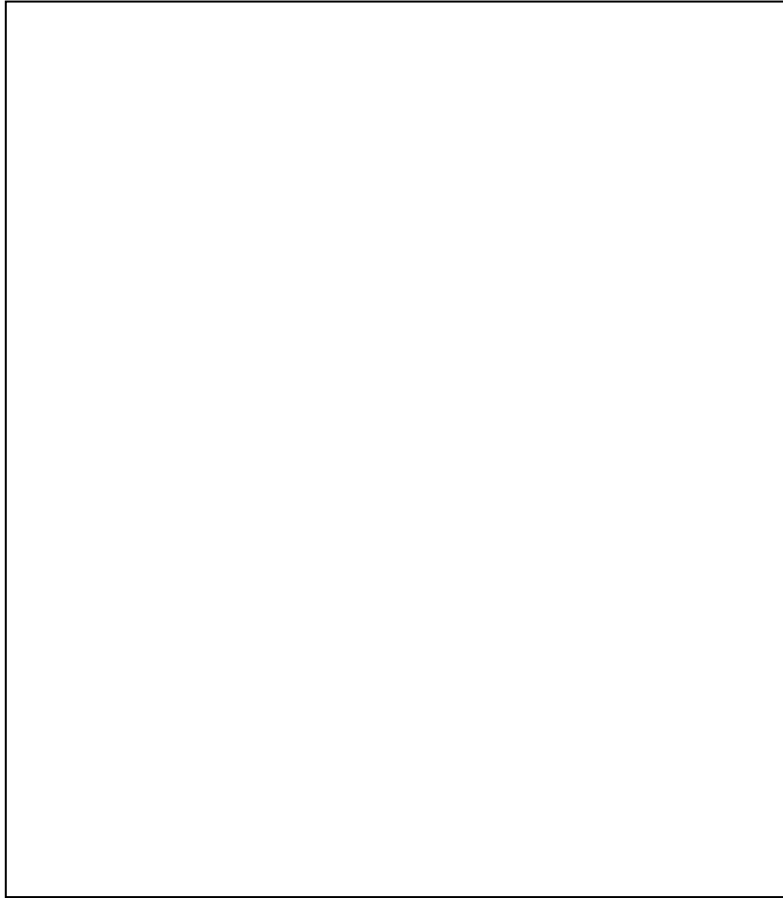


Figure 3.3: Anonymous court artist, the eighth leaf of the *Album of the Yongzheng Emperor in Costumes* (14 leaves in all; 13 portraits, plus a second version of the image with a white rabbit), Yongzheng period, album leaves, colour on silk, each 34.9×31 cm, The Palace Museum, Beijing, Gu6635, 1-14
Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

In this sense, the exhibition seemed to speak of how the British might deal with the topical but still unfamiliar new China. Peter Aspen, writing in the *Financial Times*, regarded this content about ‘China’s previous interaction with the West’ as fitting with the transformation and opening-up of China to the West.³⁴⁶ Similarly, Virginia Blackburn argued in *The Daily Express* that:

There, amid the splendour on display, is a rather interesting message about multiculturalism ... Admittedly the Jesuit presence was not a large one, but what stands out is this. Both sides acknowledged the other’s

³⁴⁶ Aspen, ‘The glittering fruits of diplomacy’.

differences, but sought to learn from them rather than automatically rejecting them. If we applied that approach today, multiculturalism might work.³⁴⁷

This content also showed that China had not been unsusceptible to outside cultural influence,³⁴⁸ forcing a reinterpretation of the Emperor Qianlong's refusal of the request of the British delegation led by Lord Macartney on behalf of King George III in 1793, to increasing trade links, by claiming that 'our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and within its own borders lacks no product'.³⁴⁹ Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, summarised how this had been traditionally interpreted:

It is a commonplace of historical debate that the seeds of China's decline were sown in the Qing years at the height of its civilisation, by a court and a country that turned their backs on a world they regarded with patronising contempt. Qianlong had begun his written reply to the letter from George III, carried to him by Macartney, with the most magisterial of put-downs: "Although your country, o king, lies in the far ocean, yet inclining your heart towards civilisation ...". And so the rebuff continued from a society "as self-contained", in Alain Peyrefitte's words, "as a billiard ball". So the conventional story is that China stood magnificently still while western vigour overwhelmed her static introversion.³⁵⁰

The exhibition drove Chris Patten to believe that 'other arguments deserve a look-in'.³⁵¹ Thus, the exhibition promoted a re-interpretation of the historic moment, China's engagement with the outside world and its attitude towards progress. James Collard, writing in *The Times*, argued that:

The British view of this exchange [1793 Macartney mission] has traditionally been that with this, China turned its back on engagement

³⁴⁷ V. Blackburn, 'Burning Paris and a shiver of terror', *The Daily Express*, 10 November 2005, p.16.

³⁴⁸ M. Glover, 'Rare booty from a visit to China', *Financial Times*, 12 January 2006, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f51fa288-8310-11da-ac1f-0000779e2340.html#axzz2xbCHnH43>, accessed 31 March 2014.

³⁴⁹ L. Tharp, 'Expert eye', *BBC Homes and Antiques*, Issue 157, February 2006, 95-96, p.95.

³⁵⁰ C. Patten, 'Sons of heaven', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2005, 12-13, p.12.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

with the west and with progress. But looking at the treasures brought over for the show ... including paintings, clocks, calligraphy, porcelain and jades - it's hard to escape the conclusion that the Emperor had a point ... for the early Qing weren't isolationists exactly. They even employed Jesuits at their court, taking what they wanted from them - mathematical, cartographic, astronomical, clock - and rejecting what they didn't: Catholicism.³⁵²

Neville Weston also argued that:

It was at this time that the huge cultural gulf between China and Europe widened. Although recent academic analysis has challenged many of the old assumptions about China's place in global economies, ideas of China being trapped in some time warp while the rest of the world surges ahead with radical changes, don't really tell the whole story of the complexities of history and society in China during the years of European expansion and technological development.³⁵³

From these comments, it can easily be seen that as early as 2005-6, the British understanding of China had remained old-fashioned, and that the exhibition successfully encouraged a reappraisal that had implications for present-day relations with China.

The exhibition even had an impact on the perception of China only as a producer of cheap goods. During the summer of 2005, a trade conflict - the so-called Bra Wars - broke out between the European Union (EU) and China, when at least '48m pullovers, more than 11m bras and 18m pairs of trousers, along with 8m T-shirts and other items' were detained 'in warehouses at EU ports', until a final deal was brokered on 5 September.³⁵⁴ It was a direct result of China's incomparable export of low-labour-cost products, which made the phrase 'Made in China' well known around the world. Although leading to Chinese prosperity, 'Made in China' was also regarded as a sign of China's inability to be creative and innovative. In his review of

³⁵² J. Collard, 'The emperors' old clothes', *TIME Magazine*, 22 October 2005, 28-35, pp.32-33.

³⁵³ N. Weston, 'China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795', *Craft Arts International*, no. 67, April 2006, 110-112, p.110.

³⁵⁴ M. White, 'EU and China in 'bra wars' deal', *The Guardian*, 6 September 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2005/sep/06/politics.europeanunion>, accessed 31 March 2014.

The Three Emperors, Denzil Stuart claimed that ‘Made in China will have a completely different connotation after visiting an enthralling exhibition’.³⁵⁵

Writing in *The Times*, Michael Binyon also argued that:

What is the effect [of the exhibition]? We see China not as a thrusting manufacturer of shoes, radios, bras and toys but the land where potters fashioned exquisite bowls, cartographers mapped the scenery of imperial journeys, craftsmen scooped landscapes out of blocks of jade and tailors stitched yellow silken robes for court occasions. Scrolls, thrones, vases and portraits add to the delicacy, poise and symbolism of a world where ritual, honour and grandeur predominated.³⁵⁶

A review published in the *Eastern Daily Press* also claimed that ‘a view of the fast-rising superpower as an undercutter of costs and standards is far from the whole truth ... [the exhibition] is a marvellous antidote to the idea that China is another word for cheap’.³⁵⁷ In this sense, through demonstrating the achievements of Chinese civilisation, the exhibition helped to redress a stereotype and contributed to an image of an innovative and creative China.

Conclusion

Naquin’s overview of the Palace Museum’s loan exhibitions between 1974 and 2004 suggests that many of the sub-themes displayed in *The Three Emperors* had been touched upon previously, including Tibetan Buddhism, Jesuits court paintings, ‘court robes, bells, seals, weapons, armor, porcelain, Southern Tour paintings and imperial portraits’,³⁵⁸ and so on. In the long-term collaboration between the Palace Museum and foreign museums, a formulaic interpretative framework for the Imperial collection has been gradually established to cast Chinese civilisation in a favourable light. The Palace Museum (based in the Forbidden City) and its collection have been projected as symbols of ‘China’s expanding sphere of

³⁵⁵ D. Stuart, ‘Treasure trove of history makes its first trip abroad’, *Lloyd’s List*, 25 November 2005, RA’s archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, accessed 29 March 2013.

³⁵⁶ Binyon, ‘From the land of a billion cheap toys: exquisite jade, maps and silken robes’.

³⁵⁷ ‘Art works reveal a great civilisation’, *Eastern Daily Press*, 6 January 2006, RA’s archive of the press coverage for *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, accessed 29 March 2013.

³⁵⁸ Naquin, ‘The Forbidden City goes abroad: Qing history and the foreign exhibitions of the Palace Museum, 1974-2004’, p.364.

connections and influence'.³⁵⁹ In this sense, *The Three Emperors* reinforced such traditions, as Nick Pearce argued, this exhibition explored 'a period of Chinese history that reflects confidence, expansion and political ambition'.³⁶⁰ However, it is not difficult to see from the media debates that the exhibition told more than just Chinese history. It was also taken as an opportunity to talk about contemporary China. This was not exclusive to *The Three Emperors*. It happened in all the case-study exhibitions of ancient Chinese art featured in this thesis. The media does not necessarily mention modern Egypt when it talks about the Tutankhamun exhibition, but it is passionate about talking about modern China when it comes to the exhibition of ancient Chinese art. To some extent, it reflects the fact that the understanding and knowledge of China is quite limited and a purely cultural interpretation is difficult. Meanwhile, how the media interprets Chinese exhibitions is highly influenced by the general publicity about contemporary China and interest in contemporary China. Everything Chinese can be used to talk about the aspects of contemporary China in which the international community is most interested.

At the time of the exhibition, the 'new' China was emerging onto the international stage, particularly as a result of its mass-production-driven economy. The world was trying to find ways to see China anew. The exhibition, as a cultural phenomenon, was interpreted using a political and topical lens through which to view this unfamiliar China. The exhibition provided a framework for understanding and approaching this new China. It contributed to the projection of an image of a legitimate China with multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, a friendly, open and approachable China, and a civilised, progressive and creative China, which are all in concert with the Chinese government's ambition for its image building abroad. Given general international media responses concerning China at that time, the exhibition did not always lead to positive comments on China. However, it did challenge the old-fashioned perceptions of China and thus sow the seeds for understanding of the new China.

The Three Emperors was a case of the Chinese government instrumentalising an exhibition for a state visit at an early stage in China's new emphasis on cultural

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p.362.

³⁶⁰ Pearce, 'China: The Three Emperors. London', p.213.

diplomacy. The next chapter will explore another example when the Chinese authorities instrumentalised a loan exhibition.

Chapter 5: *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army and the 2008 Beijing Olympics*

Along with the deepening of China's economic rise and global influence, as well as the development of the understanding of China in the UK, the cultural relationship between China and the UK started to enter a prosperous period after 2005, in addition to the economic partnership. After Beijing and London were confirmed to consecutively host the Olympics in 2008 and 2012, increased cultural cooperation was initiated between the two countries and exhibition exchange was an important element of this, and this hugely impacted on the way the British public understood China and the Chinese public understood the UK. *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, held in the British Museum's (BM) circular Reading Room from 13 September 2007 to 6 April 2008, took place against this background. It was arguably the most sensational exhibition of Chinese art in the UK for more than a decade, particularly in terms of the scale of the exhibition, visitor numbers and the media response.

To host this exhibition, the BM's Reading Room, located in the centre of the Great Court and where Karl Marx wrote much of *Das Kapital*, was temporarily converted to an exhibition space at a cost of around one million pounds.³⁶¹ Even though it turned out to be a permanent exhibition space thereafter, it was *The First Emperor* that first made use of this 'world famous centre of learning' as an exhibition space since its creation in 1857.³⁶² It featured 'the largest group of important objects relating to the First Emperor ever to be loaned abroad by the Museum of the Terracotta Army and the Cultural Relics Bureau of Shanxi Province in Xi'an, China', together with the most recent archaeological finds. It aimed to demonstrate the historical and cultural context of the most internationally famous archaeological finds made in China in the twentieth century, namely the terracotta warriors, and 'present a reassessment of the man who created China as a political entity':

³⁶¹ F. Nayeri, 'Morgan Stanley enlists first emperor's army in China expansion', *Bloomberg*, 4 October 2007, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=ad8Vmq2hsEi4>, accessed 10 February 2015.

³⁶² BM, 'Reading room', http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/the_museums_story/architecture/reading_room.aspx, accessed 10 February 2015.

Qinshihuang.³⁶³ Predicted, by the BM's Director Neil MacGregor, to be 'London's biggest attraction since Tutankhamun 40 years ago',³⁶⁴ it attracted 850,000 visitors, which was indeed the largest number since the first blockbuster exhibition, *Treasures of King Tutankhamen*, in 1972.³⁶⁵ *The First Emperor* also helped the BM to become the top cultural attraction and most visited museum in the UK in 2007-8.³⁶⁶ In order to meet the demand for tickets, the BM repeatedly extended its opening hours. Visitors even started to queue as early as 5:20 am in order to get one of the 500 tickets released each day.³⁶⁷ The museum even had to 'shut the main gates on Great Russell Street to prevent more people from coming in'.³⁶⁸ It was the first time the museum had done that 'since the Chartist riots of 1848 - although on that occasion the staff were actually on the roof, armed with stones'.³⁶⁹ The huge success of this exhibition triggered a worldwide interest in the First Emperor and his terracotta warriors, with a number of similar exhibitions travelling around the world including to Australia, Canada and the US.³⁷⁰

The exhibition's success was owed largely to the extensive publicity and marketing campaign conducted by the BM, which lasted almost a whole year before, as well as during, the exhibition. It triggered a media sensation. This factor makes this an important case through which to examine how loan exhibitions impact on the image and perceptions of China in the media. However, the active collaboration between the BM and Chinese museums with the bilateral support of the Chinese and British governments at that time, as well as the BM Director Neil MacGregor's close association with the British government's cultural diplomacy strategy, additionally made this exhibition an important case for exploring how museum professionalism impacts on the reception of loan exhibitions and perceptions of China. These issues will all be investigated in this chapter.

³⁶³ BM, 'The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army', http://www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press/press_releases/2007/the_first_emperor.aspx, accessed 10 February 2015.

³⁶⁴ N. Lebrecht, 'The British Museum's Chinese coup', *Evening Standard*, 27 July 2007, 36-37, p.37.

³⁶⁵ C. Higgins, 'Hadrian exhibition: historic year for British Museum as 6m make it favourite UK cultural attraction', *The Guardian*, 2 July 2008, p.9.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ N. Reynolds, 'Terracotta army put on 24-hour duty', *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 November 2007, p.14.

³⁶⁸ Higgins.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

China-UK cultural partnership

The First Emperor was another exhibition whose origin can be traced to the Blair visit to China with a huge cultural delegation including the BM's Director Neil MacGregor and the V&A's Director Mark Jones. During the trip, Tony Blair and the Chinese Premier Wen Jiaobao signed a cultural Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the Great Hall of the People situated at the western edge of Tiananmen Square, which opened the door for multifarious cultural exchanges between the two countries. Meanwhile, at the same occasion, in the presence of the Prime Minister and Premier, the BM and the National Museum of China (NMC) also signed a MoU,³⁷¹ which was the first cultural agreement between a British institution and the NMC.³⁷² This MoU promised a broad range of exchanges between the two museums, including exhibition and curatorial exchanges.³⁷³ It is noteworthy that Pan Zhenzhou, who signed the MoU with Neil MacGregor, was not only Director of the NMC, but also Vice-Minister of Culture at that time, which added another political dimension to this MoU.

By and large, the official setting for this agreement guaranteed that the MoU provided not only a cooperative framework for the two museums, but also a broad political setting for much wider museum collaboration between the two countries. It demonstrated the BM's strong willingness and open attitude to working with Chinese museums. Certainly, the BM has always enjoyed a good reputation among Chinese museums and the public. But this MoU brought the BM closer to Chinese museums and showed it to be an approachable partner. In addition, as Mark Jones, Director of the V&A at the time the MoUs were signed, commented on the meaning of such implicitly political agreements, that Chinese museums tend to think similar institutions have 'political credibility' in the UK.³⁷⁴ In Neil MacGregor's words, 'now in China that [the MoU] opened all the doors, and it required the presence of the British government and the British government endorsement that we would then

³⁷¹ The V&A also signed a similar MoU with the NMC at the same occasion.

³⁷² BM, 'The British Museum in China', 6 September 2005, http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/latest_news/the_british_museum_in_china.aspx, accessed 16 December 2013.

³⁷³ BM, 'Memorandum of Understanding between the British Museum and National Museum of China', signed on 6 September 2005, provided by the BM during emails with the author, accessed 7 June 2013.

³⁷⁴ Mark Jones, interview with the author, Oxford, 25 April 2013.

be able to do this much ambitious policy of exchange'.³⁷⁵ That is to say, Chinese museums tend to believe that it is easier to get support from both governments when working with the BM, and vice versa in the UK.

Thereafter, Chinese museums successfully hosted a series of high-quality exhibitions from the BM, including: *Treasures of the World's Cultures* at the Capital Museum (March - June 2006); *Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum* at the Shanghai Museum (July - October 2006); *Britain Meets the World 1714-1830* at the Palace Museum (March - June 2007); *The Ancient Olympic Games* at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (2 August - 24 November 2008) and the Shanghai Museum (1 May - 12 July 2008).³⁷⁶ These exhibitions fed into the need of China's cultural diplomacy to bring in foreign cultures. At the same time, these high-quality loans further demonstrated the BM's sincerity and openness with regards to Chinese museums, their professionals and ability to organise large-scale exhibitions, which ultimately helped it to win the support of the Chinese government and museums to make possible *The First Emperor*. Many media responses to the exhibition did make reference to this cultural partnership and even regarded the exhibition as 'the most dramatic result of a partnership signed between the two countries'.³⁷⁷

The cultural partnership on a governmental level also provided perfect publicity and marketing opportunities for *The First Emperor*. As Jan Stuart, Keeper of the BM's Department of Asia, commented:

It's the timing, it's that the two countries are saying let's build closer relations in the culture's sphere ... So it's the time when any cultural activity is going to take advantage of a political presence like a country's leader because that's when you get media support, that's when you know that the audience at home was watching the news and is going to hear about it. If you do something culturally separately from a big political

³⁷⁵ 'John Wilson in China', *Front Row*, radio programme, BBC Radio 4, London, 15 March 2007, http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts/frontrow/gallery_china.shtml, accessed 16 December 2013.

³⁷⁶ BM, 'British Museum exhibitions in China'.

³⁷⁷ L. Jury, 'China's ancient terracotta army set to march on British Museum', *The Independent*, 3 July 2006, p.5.

event, it's equally important, it's equally valid but you cannot get the same publicity in the newspapers.³⁷⁸

Beijing Olympics and China Now Festival

The 2008 Beijing Olympics was important to the timing of the exhibition. Stuart believed that:

[It] will ... get media attention to the event, the exhibition going on, because our goal is get the largest viewers as possible ... what better time, because it is going to be in the press ... you are trying to get reporters to look [at] museum exhibitions, but you also, if you can get political reporters, economic reporters, if you can get mentions in different places, you do increase your viewership.³⁷⁹

The exhibition took place between 13 September 2007 and 6 April 2008, just before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Beijing Olympics torch passed through the BM on the last day of the exhibition. It was quite clear for both sides that this would be the best moment to put on this exhibition. As Jane Portal, the exhibition's curator commented, 'China's rapid development and the international attention that is being paid to it because of next year's Olympic Games in Beijing make this an appropriate moment for the British Museum to present an exhibition'.³⁸⁰ The Beijing Olympics drove the entire world to focus on China and any exhibition relevant to China would, as a result, be highly likely to attract huge numbers of visitors. On the Chinese side, it was quite clear that this would be one of the best opportunities to promote Chinese culture abroad, especially at the well-known BM in cosmopolitan London. As a consequence, all the Chinese institutions and individuals involved provided considerable support for the exhibition and made their best efforts to meet the BM's needs.³⁸¹

'With the obvious hook being the Beijing Olympics and the fact that London is Beijing's successor as host city',³⁸² the UK launched its largest ever Chinese cultural

³⁷⁸ Jan Stuart, interview with the author, London, 11 April 2013.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ J. Portal, 'The First Emperor of China', *Apollo Magazine*, September 2007, 54-59, p.56.

³⁸¹ Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

³⁸² M. Kleinman, 'James Hughes-Hallett Chairman, John Swire & Sons looking at the bigger picture', *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2007, p.5.

festival, called ‘China Now’, which ran from February 2008 until the opening of the Olympic Games in August that year. It was initiated and organised by the Sino-British business community ‘with the explicit support of both governments’.³⁸³ Most of the sponsors and organisers were British who had business links with China and they took the opportunity of the Olympics to ‘make Britons aware of the cultural potential of China’,³⁸⁴ possibly in the expectation that this would strengthen their links with China and promote their businesses there and in the UK. The festival was comprised of around 800 cultural events and performances in towns and cities across Britain, including Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Brighton, Bath and London. It featured a wide range of cultural projects, exhibitions and performances encompassing ‘art, design, cuisine, culture, science, business, technology, education and sports’.³⁸⁵

Even though several exhibitions of Chinese art were included in this festival programme, comprised of objects on loan from China or using the host museums’ own collection, *The First Emperor* was the largest and most sensational. The media generally regarded the exhibition as one of the two highlights of the festival, the other being the *China Design Now* exhibition at the V&A, which will be discussed in Chapter 8. Cultural festivals and cultural years are a typical and traditional format of cultural diplomacy,³⁸⁶ not only for China, but also for many other countries. Art exhibitions always constitute a critical component of such cultural festivals or years.³⁸⁷ It is not unreasonable to claim that the Chinese authorities must have considered the ‘China Now’ Festival when they assessed the exhibition proposal, even though the festival was not initiated by Chinese side.

³⁸³ A. J. Barnes, *Museum Representations of Maoist China: From Cultural Revolution to Commie Kitsch*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2014, p.168.

³⁸⁴ ‘Celebration of China’, *The Times*, 16 January 2008, p.9.

³⁸⁵ ‘Britain launches largest festival of Chinese culture’, *People’s Daily Online*, 15 January 2008, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6338826.html>, accessed 28 June 2014.

³⁸⁶ Peng Xinliang 彭新良, ‘cong “zhongfa wenhuanian” kan woguo de wenhua waijiao’ 从“中法文化年”看我国的文化外交 [China’s cultural diplomacy from the perspective of ‘Sino-French Culture Year’].

³⁸⁷ Wallis, ‘Selling nations: international exhibitions and cultural diplomacy’.

According to Chinese sources, the BM borrowed 120 pieces (or sets) of objects in total and among these 51 pieces (42.5 per cent) were grade-one objects,³⁸⁸ which is far beyond the normal upper limit. This meant that the exhibition had been approved by the State Council. Additionally, according to fieldwork conducted into the Chinese side for this exhibition, the objects on show covered nearly all the best examples of the Qin Dynasty (221 - 206 BC) available within Shaanxi province, where the exhibition originated. These were the most exquisite and representative objects of the historical period, and reflected the most recent archaeological discoveries and academic research. This was the first time and probably the last time when all these objects would be present in one single exhibition, at home or abroad, according to the Chinese organiser.³⁸⁹

This exceptional loan was one of the key messages for the BM's marketing campaign and was repeatedly quoted in media reports, which became the biggest selling-point for this exhibition and laid the foundation for its huge success. For China's cultural diplomacy, this aspect was interpreted as evidence of China's friendliness and open attitude toward the UK. As Peter Aspden argued in the *Financial Times*, 'the opening up of Chinese society is reflected by the arrival in the west of important crowd-pulling shows that would have been inconceivable a decade ago'.³⁹⁰ That is to say, lending exceptional loans helped to shape the image of an open China, which is in line with the objectives of China's cultural diplomacy.

'Terracotta Diplomacy': democracy, human rights and mass production

Writing in *The Times*, Ben Macintyre called *The First Emperor* a 'diplomatic slant' and interpreted it as the Chinese government's 'terracotta diplomacy ... to demonstrate openness to the world by making its treasures and culture more accessible'.³⁹¹ In *The Guardian*, Madeleine Bunting regarded it as 'part of a careful and deliberate Chinese wooing of the West' by asserting that 'what modern China

³⁸⁸ Lie Wei 冽玮, "'zhongguo qin bingmayong zhan' jiangfu yingguo daying bowuguan zhanchu' 《中国秦兵马俑展》将赴英国大英博物馆展出 ['The First Emperor' going to be displayed at the British Museum], *zhongguo xinwen wang* 中国新闻网 [China News], 9 August 2007, <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2007/08-09/998021.shtml>, accessed 10 February 2015.

³⁸⁹ Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

³⁹⁰ P. Aspden, 'Culture's swagger is back', *Financial Times*, 28 December 2006, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/dfbfc798-96aa-11db-8ba1-0000779e2340.html#axzz3LYiBpYzR>, accessed 15 December 2014.

³⁹¹ B. Macintyre, 'Still waiting: the world's most patient army', *The Times*, 7 September 2007, p.19.

wants is proper recognition on the world stage - and the sophistication and the abundance of its historical legacy is a powerful tool to achieve it'.³⁹² It shows that around the time of the exhibition, the media had recognised the Chinese government's emphasis on culture and cultural diplomacy.

The Chinese side clarified its intentions and expectations for the exhibition as: 'emphasising our cultural identity. We are showing ourselves to the world. We are saying we are not only a young fast developing country but also an ancient cultural nation'.³⁹³ This is consistent with China's aim to shape a civilised image. The British media got this point. As MacMillan argued, 'the warriors are here to promote the new China, but they pointedly remind us too that China is new only in our perception'.³⁹⁴

An increasing enthusiasm for Chinese culture was triggered by this exhibition. For example, the three-day Nantwich Food and Drink Festival in 2007 featured hundreds of edible gingerbread terracotta soldiers (see figure 4.1).³⁹⁵ A series of books on Chinese themes beyond the subject matter of the exhibition were published alongside it and not only by the BM itself.³⁹⁶ Visiting the exhibition was listed by many newspapers as a social and cultural highlight. The exhibition also made a huge contribution to Chinese tourism. According to Britain's biggest long-haul holiday operator, Kuoni, its bookings for China went up by 60 per cent in the year of the exhibition.³⁹⁷

³⁹² M. Bunting, 'The immortals', *The Guardian*, 22 August 2007, p.28.

³⁹³ 'China's terracotta warriors to march to Britain', *Reuters*, 17 August 2007, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/08/17/uk-china-terracotta-idUKROB73064620070817>, accessed 15 December 2014.

³⁹⁴ D. MacMillan, 'China's terracotta army: eternal life from immortal clay', *The Scotsman*, 14 September 2007, 6-7, p.6.

³⁹⁵ R. Holt, 'Gingerbread men take on the Terracotta Army', *The Telegraph*, 25 September 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1564212/Gingerbread-men-take-on-the-Terracotta-Army.html>, accessed 16 December 2014.

³⁹⁶ See J. Keay, 'Tonnes of red', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 2 November 2007, <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/tlssearch.do?querysting=%22tonnes+of+red%22&x=0&y=0§ionId=1797&p=1>, accessed 3 April 2015.

³⁹⁷ T. Chesshyre, 'Go with the Show', *The Times*, 24 November 2007, p.18.

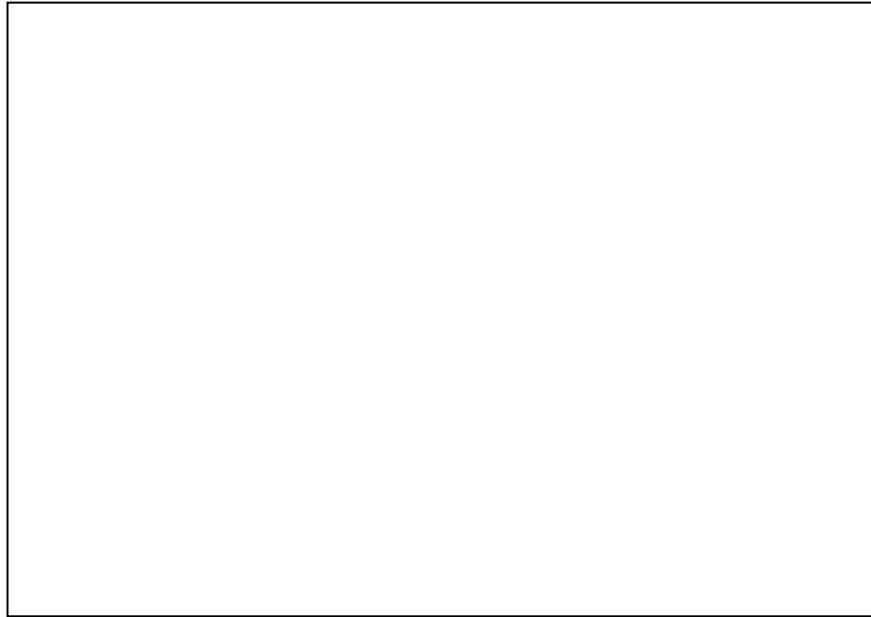


Figure 4.1: Gingerbread miniatures of the terracotta warriors

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Nevertheless, what strongly emerged from the media analysis was how this exhibition helped the British public to understand contemporary China and how the exhibition offered the media an opportunity to critique the politics of contemporary China.

The First Emperor, Qinshihuang, is a hugely controversial figure in Chinese history. He united China from seven warring states in 221 BC, unified the coinage, script, code of law, the width of axles and roads, started to build the Great Wall to defend against invasion by northern barbarian,³⁹⁸ established a highly centralised administration and laid the foundations for China's bureaucratic systems. Most of his initiatives have been maintained in China since, which has led to him being called the 'founding father of China'. On the other hand, he was also a despot, who massacred his enemies defeated in battle, murdered Confucius scholars and burned their books in order to maintain ideological unity, used excessive slave labour to build palaces and his own tomb complex, and so on. His achievements or despotism have been exaggerated or emphasised asymmetrically by later generations to meet their own needs. For example, Chairman Mao Zedong's preference for him was

³⁹⁸ This Great Wall is not the current one in China, which has been built since Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

interpreted by the media as Mao's image of himself as the founding father of the PRC.³⁹⁹

Jonathan Fenby argued in *The Guardian* that:

His [the First Emperor's] legacy of unity, despotism and the building of a centralised state is taken as a template for the way the nation is ruled, not only under the empire that lasted till 1912 but also in the communist regime which has held sway since 1949.⁴⁰⁰

Similarly, the First Emperor's political legacy for contemporary China was repeatedly emphasised in media reports and exhibition reviews. Journalists in search of an interesting angle for their exhibition reviews tended to locate it in contemporary issues associated with modern China. In the case of *The First Emperor*, China's democracy and human rights were issues which could be dated back to its founding father.

Roger Harrison, senior reporter for *Arab News* argued that:

There is certainly a discernible continuity and an uncomfortable resonance with modern Chinese social history in Qin Shihuangdi's determination for political unity and social order above ethnic and religious diversity and any thought of federalism or regional independence and the ruthless suppression of scholarship.⁴⁰¹

His argument was quite common in the press coverage for this exhibition. Even though the majority of critics mentioned both the First Emperor's achievements and taints; 'tyranny', 'despotism', 'ruthlessness' and 'cruelty' were the most commonly used words in nearly every single exhibition review. The despotic and ruthless rule of the First Emperor was often referred to as the foundation of the CPC's current highly-centralised, 'party-empire (dang tianxia)'⁴⁰² and non-democratic rule.

³⁹⁹ Macmillan, 'China's terracotta army: eternal life from immortal clay'.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Fenby, 'Continuity and change: Heroic founding father or heartless despot? What is the legacy of the first emperor of China in our globalised world?' *The Guardian*, 15 November 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/nov/15/morethantwomillenniaafter>, accessed 16 December 2014.

⁴⁰¹ R. Harrison, 'The power and the glory', *Arab News*, 8 November 2007, http://www.arabnews.com/node/305423?quickestabs_stat2=1, accessed 16 December 2014.

⁴⁰² G. R. Barmé, 'An empire built on clay', *The Times*, 8 September 2007, p.7.

Writing in *The Independent*, Adrian Hamilton contended that Qinshihuang was a highly controversial figure in Chinese history and only when Mao Zedong referred to him for propagandist reasons was his reputation restored. He argued that the current Chinese authorities have gone even further than Mao Zedong to use the First Emperor to support their ideological authority and legality. In his exhibition review, Hamilton claimed that:

His ruthless pursuit of unity and centralisation, and his suppression of intellectuals and ethnic minorities, certainly fitted in with Mao's view. And that has become even more so for the governments since Mao's death, who have stoked up nationalism as a replacement for the stained ideology of the Cultural Revolution. The first emperor has become a hero precisely because he put political unity and social order above all other virtues of artistic licence, ethnic diversity and local religion. Tibetan independence, Uighur rights and Taiwanese separatism would have received no more shrift under the First Emperor in Xian than his successors in Beijing today.⁴⁰³

Hamilton used the exhibition to satirise the CPC and the Chinese government's brutality and arbitrariness to impose its rule at the expense of individual and ethnic freedom. Another similar example was a visitor's comment which appeared in the *Evening Standard*:

Let us pour scorn on the First Emperor, and wonder at the modern day politicians who admire this man, who spilt blood to achieve unification of his country and the propagation of the stereotype of the subservient Chinese that so many Chinese people are still seeking to escape.⁴⁰⁴

Sun Shuyun, a Chinese film maker, also attacked contemporary China's democratic issue through the exhibition, by arguing in *The Guardian* that:

As we admire the Terracotta Army, can we say the same of the system of authoritarian government Qin Shihuangdi invented? It has remained largely intact until today, his most enduring legacy. China's rulers still

⁴⁰³ A. Hamilton, 'This exhibition scares me', *Arts & Book Review*, 24 August 2007, p.4.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Hail the army but bury the Emperor's legacy', *Evening Standard*, 17 September 2007, p.45.

have the ability to marshal the country's resources and carry out their designs at any cost. They can achieve wonders - or disasters.⁴⁰⁵

She claimed that 'perhaps the meaning of the emperor's legacy that we Chinese should look to is that absolute rule is not the best guarantee of stability'.⁴⁰⁶ Thus, she also indirectly negated the CPC's rule and called for a more democratic model in China.

The First Emperor's authoritarian and monopolistic rule, as well as 'the ruthless bureaucratic efficiency of a society in which human individuality was far less important than collective goals',⁴⁰⁷ also provided journalists with resources for attacking the communist government's poor record on human rights. Norman Lebrecht, cultural commentator and an award-winning novelist, described his encounter with the Terracotta Army in the *Evening Standard* as experiencing 'a mass grave of art makers, a massacre on a scale so vast and unfathomable that images of Hitler, Stalin and Mao Zedong spring irresistibly to mind'.⁴⁰⁸ He described Qinshihuang as 'a tyrant of almost modern monstrosity'.⁴⁰⁹ Niall Ferguson, at Harvard University, also criticised China's poor human rights record by claiming that:

At home, the authorities drum it into a population of 1.3 billion people that unity and order matter more than freedom. Abroad they have no qualms about doing deals with dictatorial regimes, regardless of their human rights records. Two-thirds of Sudan's oil output goes to China. I have even heard tell of Chinese restaurants in Darfur ... That too is Qin Shihuang's legacy. For the First Emperor was a tyrant who forcibly suppressed Confucianism and feudalism because, by their very existence, scholars and landlords challenged his claim to a monopoly on

⁴⁰⁵ S. Sun, 'The clay soldiers speak of the good and bad of absolute rule: the diplomatic foray of the Terracotta Army reflects the challenge of change for a nation built by a great, ancient ruler', *The Guardian*, 8 November 2007, p.34.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ T. Sutcliffe, 'Hard steel fist in a terracotta glove', *Arts & Book Review*, 14 September 2007, p.4.

⁴⁰⁸ Lebrecht, 'The British Museum's Chinese coup'.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

power. He imposed laws by diktat, sentenced hundreds to death and, by one account, ordered the burning of books.⁴¹⁰

These negative comments were definitely in opposition to the Chinese government's expectation of shaping a democratic China through cultural diplomacy. However, along with these criticisms, the exhibition also helped to redress the stereotype of China to some degree. The BM allowed visitors to appreciate the meticulousness in the creation of each single soldier face-to-face, which helped the media to capture the respect shown to individuals in Chinese history. As each terracotta warrior is unique, Tim Adams asserted in *The Observer* that the individuality of the statues 'challenges our notion of China, about our stereotypes of the country as a single body of people. Here is evidence from the very beginning of the culture that they were deeply interested in individuals'.⁴¹¹ Writing in *The Guardian Weekly*, Jonathan Jones was also 'awed by the democratic power of the terracotta army' through closely looking at the soldiers with a 'slight smile' and their 'long elegant fingers', which made him experience them as 'a father, a son, a husband'.⁴¹²

The individuality of the terracotta warriors on display was linked to another focus in the media - mass-production during the Qin Dynasty and its extension to modern China. It is estimated that there are 7,000 or so terracotta warriors in total on-site, among which only around 1,000 have been excavated to date. Even though each figure is unique, rather than portraits of real people, they are 'the product of ancient but tremendously effective mass-production'.⁴¹³ Different parts of the body were moulded and then joined together. Individual characteristics were finally added by hand, such as costume details, shoes, facial types, hair style and so on. The production line was quality-controlled and the calligraphic stamps of the makers' names on the torsos of the warriors provide strong evidence that the First Emperor was, as presenter and broadcaster John Wilson described him, 'a great

⁴¹⁰ N. Ferguson, 'China marches again, tyrannous and toxic', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 9 September 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3642553/China-marches-again-tyrannous-and-toxic.html>, accessed 10 February 2015.⁴¹¹ T. Adams, 'Behold the Mighty Qin', *The Observer*, 19 August 2007, p.12.

⁴¹¹ T. Adams, 'Behold the Mighty Qin', *The Observer*, 19 August 2007, p.12.

⁴¹² J. Jones, 'Warriors at the gates of paradise', *The Guardian Weekly*, 14 September 2007, 32-33.

⁴¹³ M. Gayford, 'Tomb raiders', *The Telegraph*, 28 July 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3666828/Tomb-raiders.html>, accessed 16 December 2013.

industrialist'.⁴¹⁴ In addition to the soldiers, many other objects on show, including the standardised crossbows, which were called the 'Maxim guns of their day - that helped give Qin archers their victories' by Neil MacGregor,⁴¹⁵ reminded people of mass production in modern day China. *The Sunday Times* reporter and art critic Waldemar Januszczak admitted that he could not 'resist the temptation to make outrageous connections between the Ying's China and the modern one' by highlighting aspects of the Qin weapons,⁴¹⁶ such as the crossbow mechanisms and arrowheads, which 'were designed to be easily interchangeable' in order to 'arrive at efficiency and ease of use'.⁴¹⁷ Thomas Sutcliffe regarded the arts on show 'as a triumph of mass production', because they were 'evidence of a logistical efficiency we generally identify only with the industrial revolution and after'.⁴¹⁸ This early version of mass production nurtured admiration for 'the technological supremacy of Chinese artisans at the time',⁴¹⁹ and 'early Chinese technical ability',⁴²⁰ therefore helping to shape an advanced and innovative image of China.

On the other hand, the mass-produced terracotta soldiers also reminded Niall Ferguson of the problematic plastic dolls made in and exported from China.⁴²¹ In 2007, there was a frenzied public debate in the UK and US about China's mass production, triggered by the recall of pet food and 19 million plastic dolls made in China found to contain lead paint.⁴²² *The First Emperor* prompted Ferguson to relate these mass-produced poisonous toys to the mass-produced terracotta soldiers of 2000 years ago and reflect on the problems of mass production within China's economic development model, that is, developing the economy at all cost.

There were many other contemporary resonances mentioned and debated in the media. For example, the Qin Dynasty is famous for its military capacities, which were represented by the terracotta army as well as weapons on show. It is not surprising to see commentators on the exhibition exploring the militaristic

⁴¹⁴ J. Wilson, 'Mortal combat', *New Statesman*, 10 September 2007, 38-41, p.41.

⁴¹⁵ N. MacGregor, 'A force of enlightenment', *The Sunday Times*, 26 August 2007, p.4.

⁴¹⁶ The First Emperor's name is Yingzheng, here 'Ying's China' means the 'First Emperor's China'.

⁴¹⁷ W. Januszczak, 'Madman or genius? The astonishing terracotta army proves that China's First Emperor was both', *The Sunday Times*, 16 September 2007, p.8.

⁴¹⁸ Sutcliffe, 'Hard steel fist in a terracotta glove'.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ 'Critics' choice', *Daily Mail*, 15 September 2007, p.44.

⁴²¹ Ferguson, 'China marches again, tyrannous and toxic'.

⁴²² B. O'Neil, 'Toxic toys: Is China poisoning your child?' *Spiked*, 30 August 2007, <http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/3772>, accessed 16 December 2014.

implications for modern day China. Richard Dorment claimed that ‘the sense you get of the Qin from this show is of a tough, warlike people with a militaristic culture, who had little time for the refinements of art’.⁴²³ Rachel Campbell-Johnston regarded the terracotta warriors as ‘testimony to the martial power of the emperor’.⁴²⁴ She linked it to contemporary China by arguing that ‘China, then as now, depended on administrative as much as martial strengths’.⁴²⁵

In fact, this connection between ancient and contemporary China was not invented solely by the media. The BM encouraged the public to make such link. Since Neil MacGregor took over the directorship of the BM, he has developed a moral role for the museum and held a theological belief in the ability of culture to transcend nationalism. That is, ‘the museum was set up to give people a chance to understand the world. The history we need to understand the world today is what the museum is about,’ in his words.⁴²⁶ He claimed that ‘the mission of the British Museum is to give the history that the world needs in order to understand itself and live properly today’.⁴²⁷ For *The First Emperor* particularly, Neil MacGregor emphasised that:

An exhibition like this lies, I believe, at the heart of the British Museum’s purpose. Set up in 1753, when the world was experiencing the first wave of economic globalisation, it was designed to allow the public to make sense of a new world order. Today ... we need new histories to make sense of our new present ... An exhibition like this allows us to think about China in the only way that might let us understand one of its central elements: its immensely long and complex history. It is part of what the British Museum is for.⁴²⁸

Curator Jane Portal also stressed that ‘it is of vital importance to the world that China’s past is better understood, in order to understand its present’.⁴²⁹ In order to inspire this alignment, the BM even organised a joint forum - *The new China: What*

⁴²³ R. Dorment, ‘Warriors march into town’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2007, p.30.

⁴²⁴ R. Campbell-Johnston, ‘First emperor rules again as his terracotta army storms London’, *The Times*, 10 February 2007, p.7.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ L. Jury, ‘Terracotta army marches in’, *Evening Standard*, 11 September 2007, p.3.

⁴²⁷ A. Marsh, ‘The director’s cut’, *Private Banking*, Winter 2007, 28-33, p.32.

⁴²⁸ MacGregor, ‘A force of enlightenment’.

⁴²⁹ Portal, ‘The First Emperor of China’, p.59.

does the First Emperor's legacy mean in a globalised world? - with *The Guardian* at its BP Lecture Theatre on 14 November 2007, to accompany the exhibition.⁴³⁰

The BM also repeatedly emphasised the importance of the First Emperor, not only for China, but also for the whole world by arguing that:

This exhibition is about a man who changed the world 2,000 years ago.

He was one of the great military leaders of the history - this is Alexander, this is Caesar, this is Frederick the Great - this is not Napoleon because he doesn't get defeated.⁴³¹

What you are left with is a sense that this was one of the most extraordinary human beings ever. He was able to make the world different in a way that no one else ever could.⁴³²

Partly due to the BM's positive alignment of ancient China and contemporary China, and the exhibition's emphasis on the positive aspects of the First Emperor's regime rather than his brutality, the exhibition was occasionally criticised as 'whitewashing an authoritarian ruler',⁴³³ and therefore of being 'political propaganda in the guise of past history'.⁴³⁴ The Curator refuted such accusations by arguing that the history of the First Emperor was written by later generations with their own agendas and 'may well have been added to the historical record much later'; therefore unreliable.⁴³⁵ She believed one of the contributions of the exhibition was to oppose those unreliable or exaggerated stories with archaeological evidence.⁴³⁶ Reviewing the exhibition in the *Museums Journal*, Peter Lewis agreed with Jane Portal's perspective of approaching the First Emperor by arguing that, 'the

⁴³⁰ J. Snow, 'The new China: what does the first emperor's legacy mean in a globalised world', radio programme, *The Guardian*, 15 November 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/arts/audio/2007/nov/15/first.emperor.british.museum>, accessed 15 December 2014.

⁴³¹ M. Kennedy, 'On the march: terracotta army aims for ticket office triumph', *The Guardian*, 8 February 2007, p.9.

⁴³² 'Marching out the grave', *Sunday Express*, 19 August 2007, 59-61, p.61.

⁴³³ J. Jones, 'New model army', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/sep/05/heritage.art>, accessed 15 December 2014.

⁴³⁴ S. Melikian, 'A Chinese emperor's cultural revolution', *International Herald Tribune*, 15 September 2007, p.19; see also F. Parrott, 'A terracotta version of history', *Evening Standard*, 11 October 2007, <http://www.standard.co.uk/arts/a-terracotta-version-of-history-7400050.html>, accessed 15 December 2014.

⁴³⁵ Harrison, 'The power and the glory'.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

curators have struck the right balance, taking pains to stress the limitations and partiality of historical sources and stressing instead the primacy of present and future archaeological evidence. To rely on the tangible shows integrity'.⁴³⁷

Curator Jane Portal was the first Western woman to study archaeology at Beijing University after the Cultural Revolution. It is interesting to note that the exhibition of Chinese archaeological finds held in London in 1973 inspired her desire to pursue studies in Chinese culture,⁴³⁸ which is a positive result of China's cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions. Her experience in China indicates that her perspective on the First Emperor was more or less influenced by Chinese historical education. And nowadays in China, the First Emperor is more often honoured as a symbol of China's solidarity and unification. However, from another perspective, no matter how museums approach the theme, when the exhibition is on display, they cannot control how the public and the media will interpret it. Museums' goodwill cannot prevent any misunderstanding, distortion, comparison or association in the media or among the visiting public. The controversial historical figure Qinshihuang provided considerable scope for such interpretations. Individual journalists as well as their newspaper's political positions, personal experience and understanding of China and many other factors may drive them to evaluate the exhibition and its implications for contemporary China from a particular angle. Therefore what they thought of as China may not have been the real China, or just an aspect of China. What they thought of as China may even not have been the China the museum wanted to present. Simply put, the BM did encourage the public and media to make links to contemporary China through *The First Emperor*. However, it could not control the direction of such comparisons.

Conclusion

To summarise, tyrannical and highly centralised rule, denial of individuality, militaristic ambitions are all inescapable tags for the First Emperor and his regime, which became the best platform for the media to attack the communist government's

⁴³⁷ P. Lewis, 'Temporary exhibition: The First Emperor', *Museums Journal*, Issue 107/11, 44-47, p.44.

⁴³⁸ Zhang Xue 张雪 and Ye Sheng 叶声, 'zhuanfang daying bowuguan yazhoubu zhuren Jane Portal' 专访大英博物馆亚洲部主任 Jane Portal [Interview with Jane Portal], *yingzhong shibao* 英中时报 [UK-Chinese Times], 7 March 2008, http://wxs.hi2net.com/home/blog_read.asp?id=3495&blogid=39150, accessed 10 February 2015.

non-democratic and one-party rule. In actual fact, it was doubted that such a contentious figure could be a suitable 'selling-point for Chinese culture and civilisation'.⁴³⁹ From this perspective, the exhibition was not consistent with what the Chinese authorities hoped the international community would view China.

But on the other hand, these issues surrounding China are always attacked by the international community, regardless of the presence of such an exhibition. It was due to the old-fashioned political and economic framework of viewing China, which will be further discussed in later chapters. In this sense, *The First Emperor* provided another platform for talking about China and for finding contemporary implications. The exhibition did help to nurture goodwill toward China and shape an image of a civilised, open and innovative China. To some extent, it reinforced the impression of China's non-democracy, but it also challenged the old-fashioned understanding of China's attitude on individuality.

Neil MacGregor claimed that:

The First Emperor exhibition was all about the control of the state and that state's acute sense of its own individuality ... And when we see how important and enduring this particular aspect of Chinese culture is it makes it much easier to understand things from the Chinese point of view.⁴⁴⁰

Michael Barr at the Newcastle University argued in his book, *Who's Afraid of China?: The Challenges of Chinese Soft Power*,⁴⁴¹ that one of the reasons why Western people are afraid of China is that they cannot see China from the Chinese point of view. He asserted that many values behind Chinese actions and development models are a combination of Chinese and Western political philosophy. But because Western people do not understand China from a Chinese point of view, anxieties over China will persist. This correlates with Neil Macgregor's intention for the exhibition. Michael Barr also insisted that Western

⁴³⁹ 'Visionary leader or cruel despot? The First Emperor revisited', *Chinatown Magazine*, Issue 26, November - December 2007, <https://archive.is/gH2N5>, accessed 3 April 2015.

⁴⁴⁰ J. Fenby, 'To understand the future of China, you must look into its past', *The Times*, 24 June 2008, p.26.

⁴⁴¹ M. Barr, *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenges of Chinese Soft Power*, Zed Books Ltd, London, 2011.

society is afraid of China because it is worried about its own development and uncertain about its future. The failure to deal with internal contradictions and stagnation pushes Western society to fix upon an external target in order to strengthen national identity and solidarity, and China is such a suitable target. He contended that the hostility towards China would not disappear until Western society can face up to its internal problems. This also correlates with Neil Macgregor's argument about museums and exhibitions' contribution to mutual understanding. He emphasised that museums and exhibitions 'enable us to understand aspects of others' identities and preoccupations, and emit self-delusion and self-worth that you can't know unless you think about the things and negotiate with history'.⁴⁴²

Jane Portal argued that sometimes it is more effective to promote Chinese culture and the understanding of Chinese culture with some objects with which Western society is more familiar.⁴⁴³ The terracotta warriors are certainly one such national symbol that will come to mind when most Western people think about China. In this sense, it is a good starting point to attract interest in Chinese history and development. In an era when blockbuster exhibitions are often criticised, this exhibition was appraised as a rare example of a perfect and intelligent blockbuster.⁴⁴⁴ And the exhibition did initiate huge interest in Chinese culture, as have so many other Chinese blockbuster exhibitions that have been staged by museums like the BM and V&A thereafter.

All in all, to some extent, it does not matter if the reception of the exhibition is critical or in agreement, what really matters is understanding; understanding the historical root of China and its legacy for contemporary China, and thereby understanding why China is taking the current political model. As Neil MacGregor claimed, '[the First emperor's rule] was a choice between central autocracy and warlord chaos - and that is central to our understanding of China in the modern world. There has been very little public thinking on this'.⁴⁴⁵ In this sense, the First

⁴⁴² 'John Wilson in China', *Front Row*.

⁴⁴³ Zhang Xue 张雪 and Ye Sheng 叶声, 'zhuanfang daying bowuguan yazhoubu zhuren Jane Portal' 专访大英博物馆亚洲部主任 Jane Portal [Interview with Jane Portal].

⁴⁴⁴ J. Jones, 'The curse of blockbuster', *The Guardian*, 28 February 2008, p.23; W. Januszczak, 'Is this what we should be looking at in our museums?' *The Sunday Times*, 27 April 2008, p.6.

⁴⁴⁵ N. Lebrecht, 'When the terracotta army marches in', *Evening Standard*, 12 July 2006, p.39.

Emperor could not have been more suitable to demonstrate the historical links and development trajectories between ancient and contemporary China. As argued in the *Asian Art Newspaper*:

This exhibition brings a new perspective for a large number of its audience - that modern China is far more complex and sophisticated than its recent turbulent history and rapid economic growth may have portrayed. It has built a bridge from the present to the past.⁴⁴⁶

As the majority of the media sensation demonstrated, critically or not, this exhibition did enable the public to understand how influential ancient China is on modern day China, how important it is to understand ancient China in order to understand contemporary China, how complex China has been throughout history, and how incorrect it is to judge China on an phenomenon or action only without referring to its history and complexity. As Fenby argued, ‘to understand the future of China, you must look into its past’.⁴⁴⁷ That might be the biggest contribution of this exhibition to China’s cultural diplomacy.

Finally, *The First Emperor* was a case of the Chinese government instrumentalising an exhibition for the 2008 Beijing Olympics at a time when the China-UK cultural relationship was very active. The next chapter will explore a case of the Chinese authorities’ instrumentalisation of an exhibition for the London 2012 Olympics.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘The first emperor’, *Asian Art Newspaper*, October 2007, p.9.

⁴⁴⁷ Fenby, ‘To understand the future of China, you must look into its past’.

Chapter 6: *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China and the London 2012 Olympics*

The previous chapter explored China's cultural diplomacy at a moment when China fully emerged on the international stage and when China had taken advantage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics to develop a systematic strategy to promote its culture and polish its image. The logical counterpoint to this was the London Olympics in 2012, almost a decade after China began to emphasise cultural diplomacy.

The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China, held at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge from 5 May to 11 November 2012, was co-organised by the museum in Cambridge, and China's Xuzhou Museum and Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King (Nanyue King Museum) under the auspices of the Art Exhibitions China (AEC). Featuring 'the largest and most remarkable collection of ancient royal treasures ever to travel outside China',⁴⁴⁸ this pioneering exhibition told 'the story of the quest for immortality and struggle for imperial legitimacy in ancient China's Han Dynasty [206 BC - 220 AD]',⁴⁴⁹ by comparing objects for the first time from 'the spectacular tombs of two rival power factions - the Han imperial family in the northern "cradle" of Chinese history and the Kingdom of Nanyue in the south'.⁴⁵⁰ Celebrated as 'one of the most glamorous and important exhibitions anywhere in Britain' in 2012,⁴⁵¹ it attracted 118,962 visitors to the Fitzwilliam, making it the second most visited exhibition in the museum's 164-year history.⁴⁵² It came close to beating the museum's blockbuster of the previous year, *Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence*, which attracted 130,000 visitors.⁴⁵³ Martin Gayford thought that *The Search for Immortality* was 'as spectacular in its way as *The First Emperor* at the British Museum a few years ago,

⁴⁴⁸ 'One hundred days until London 2012', *University of Cambridge News*, 18 April 2012, <http://www.cam.ac.uk/news/one-hundred-days-until-london-2012>, accessed 15 February 2015.

⁴⁴⁹ J. C. S. Lin, ed., *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, p.xi.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ S. Robbins, 'Fitzwilliam shows off China', *Localsecrets*, 6 May 2012, <http://www.localsecrets.com/ezone.cfm?ezineid=3003~fitzwilliam-shows-off-china+art>, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁴⁵² The Fitzwilliam Museum was opened in 1848 and had a history of 164 years until 2012.

⁴⁵³ 'Over 118,000 visit Fitzwilliam Museum's tomb treasures show', *The Art Collector Online*, 12 November 2012, <http://www.theartcollector.org/over-118000-visit-fitzwilliam-museums-tomb-treasures-show/>, accessed 27 January 2014.

and has a good deal in common with the *Treasures Of Tutankhamun* at the same museum in the 1970s'.⁴⁵⁴ Many factors, not least the 'outstanding assembly of objects',⁴⁵⁵ ensured the 'exceptional success' of this exhibition.⁴⁵⁶ 182 sets of objects were lent to the Fitzwilliam by the two Chinese museums, amongst which 68 (37 per cent) were grade-one objects.⁴⁵⁷ *The Times* observed that 'no exhibition has shown more Grade One artefacts than this'.⁴⁵⁸ Considering the host museum was the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge, rather than one of the big national museums in London, the percentage and number of grade-one objects seemed to be a powerful indication of the Chinese government's supportive attitude. There are, however, a number of other factors that make *The Search for Immortality* a particularly useful case study through which to examine the Chinese government's cultural diplomacy.

Loan exhibitions and diplomatic relations

The year 2012 marked the 40th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the PRC and the UK. The Fitzwilliam's Director, Timothy Potts, referred to this alignment of events merely as a 'nice accident',⁴⁵⁹ and the two Chinese museums sending the loan made nothing of it.⁴⁶⁰ However, it is still reasonable to believe that the Chinese government had been aware of this important anniversary when it had taken its decision regarding the loan.

The Chinese government's other loan exhibitions, which also coincided with such diplomatic anniversaries can be usefully referred to here. Take *China: Grandeur of the Dynasties*, which marked the 40th anniversary of the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the PRC and Japan, in 2012, for instance.⁴⁶¹ First shown at the Tokyo National Museum from 10 October to 24 December 2012, it then travelled to

⁴⁵⁴ M. Gayford, 'The immortals', *The Lady*, 11 May 2012, p.61.

⁴⁵⁵ N. Riley, 'Changing hands: ancient treasures', *Historic House Magazine*, June 2012, p.43.

⁴⁵⁶ C. Elliott, 'Han treasure at Fitz one of greatest hits', *Cambridge News*, 28 June 2012, p.3.

⁴⁵⁷ AEC, "'zhongguo handai dixia baozang zhan" zai ying shunli bimu' "中国汉代地下宝藏展"在英顺利闭幕 ['The Search for Immortality' finished successfully in the UK],

http://www.aec1971.org.cn/art/2012/12/28/art_430_32838.html, accessed 12 February 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ R. Holledge, 'Han tomb treasures on show in Cambridge', *The Times*, 23 June 2012, p.72.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Cambridge Fitzwilliam Museum: The Search for Immortality', *YouTube*, 3 June 2012,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kRB1hEXRRg>, accessed 27 January 2014.

⁴⁶⁰ Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013; Wang Wenjian 王文建, interview with the author, Changsha, 12 September 2013.

⁴⁶¹ Li Wei 李微, "'zhonghua dawenming zhan" jiagou zhongri wenhua jiaoliu xin qiaoliang' "中华大文明"展架构中日文化交流新桥梁 ['China: Grandeur of the Dynasties' builds up a new bridge for China-Japan cultural exchanges], *zhongguo wenwu bao* 中国文物报 [China Relics Newspaper], 17 January 2014, p.3.

the Kobe City Museum (2 February to 7 April 2013), the Nagoya City Museum (24 April to 23 June), and the Kyushu National Museum (9 July to 16 September). It attracted 360,000 visitors in total, including many from the Japanese social and political elite.⁴⁶² The exhibition was co-organised by the AEC, the Tokyo National Museum and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation NHK, and the organising committee had spent over three years collecting together 169 sets of art treasures from 29 institutions distributed in 11 Chinese provinces.⁴⁶³ More than 60 per cent of the objects were grade-one,⁴⁶⁴ which was almost unprecedented. Although the AEC indicated that it was the Japanese side who first proposed the exhibition, and the curator of the Tokyo National Museum claimed that the exhibition was totally independent of any political matters or messages on either side,⁴⁶⁵ it is definite that the exhibition was purposefully organised for the diplomatic anniversary and this historical landmark between these two countries made the incomparable loan possible. During the exhibition preparation period, particularly before the exhibits were due to be transported, the relations between the two countries deteriorated dramatically due to the escalation of the territorial dispute over Diaoyu Island in August 2012. The Chinese authorities still decided to send the exhibition on time to demonstrate their political commitment to dialogue with Japan.⁴⁶⁶ In some way, it was a message targeting the Japanese public, as well as the international community.

⁴⁶² SACH, 'Zhongguo wenwu jiaoliu zhongxin 2013 wenwu zhanlan gongzuo zongshu' 中国文物交流中心 2013 年文物展览工作综述 [An overview of the AEC's art exhibitions in 2013], 30 December 2013, http://www.sach.gov.cn/art/2013/12/30/art_2304_139477.html, accessed 22 February 2014; see also Li Wei 李微, "'zhonghua dawenming zhan' jiagou zhongri wenhua jiaoliu xin qiaoliang' '中华大文明'展架构中日文化交流新桥梁 ['China: Grandeur of the Dynasties' builds up a new bridge for China-Japan cultural exchanges].

⁴⁶³ Li Wei 李微, "'zhonghua dawenming zhan' jiagou zhongri wenhua jiaoliu xin qiaoliang' '中华大文明'展架构中日文化交流新桥梁 ['China: Grandeur of the Dynasties' builds up a new bridge for China-Japan cultural exchanges].

⁴⁶⁴ 'Tokyo to hold show on Chinese dynasties', *China Daily Online*, 27 June 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012btforum/2012-06/27/content_15525817.htm, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁴⁶⁵ C. B. Liddell, 'Treasures from China's rich tapestry of cultures', *The Japanese Times*, 12 October 2012, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2012/10/12/arts/treasures-from-chinas-rich-tapestry-of-cultures/#.UwOVhdJH534>, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁴⁶⁶ SACH, 'Zhongguo wenwu jiaoliu zhongxin 2013 wenwu zhanlan gongzuo zongshu' 中国文物交流中心 2013 年文物展览工作综述 [An overview of the AEC's art exhibitions in 2013]; Li Wei 李微, "'zhonghua dawenming zhan' jiagou zhongri wenhua jiaoliu xin qiaoliang' '中华大文明'展架构中日文化交流新桥梁 ['China: Grandeur of the Dynasties' builds up a new bridge for China-Japan cultural exchanges].

Similarly, the *Qin - Han and Roman Civilizations* exhibition in 2010 coincided with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Italy. The China Culture Year in Italy was specifically organised for the anniversary and Premier Wen Jiabao attended its opening ceremony.⁴⁶⁷ The exhibition was an important part of the overall cultural year programme. It was co-organised by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) and the Italian Ministry for Cultural Activities and Heritage, and delivered by the AEC. It travelled in China and Italy from July 2009 to February 2011 and featured 495 objects from over 70 institutions from both countries. The Chinese side contributed 217 pieces from 61 institutions in 19 provinces or cities.⁴⁶⁸ The percentage of grade-one objects was not revealed by any of the participating institutions or the media. But it can be predicted how much effort it took to collect objects from so many places considering the size and bureaucracy of China.

Last but not least, *The Foresight and Wisdom of Pioneer - The 50th Anniversary of Establishment of China and France Diplomatic Relations Exhibition* which opened at the National Museum of China on 27 January 2014, provides a further but rather different indication of how exhibitions have become a standard means of demonstrating or expressing diplomatic relations. It was jointly organised by the Chinese Institute of Foreign Affairs and the Charles de Gaulle Foundation. At the opening ceremony, the Chinese Vice-Premier, Liu Yandong, delivered a speech which spoke of the high importance of this exhibition for enhancing bilateral understanding and ties.⁴⁶⁹ The exhibition *Splendeurs des Han, l'essor de l'empire Cæste* (The Splendour of the Han Dynasty, the Rise of the Celestial Empire) was organised for the same anniversary and displayed at the Musée Guimet between 22 October 2014 and 1 March 2015. The new President of the PRC, Xi Jinping, and the President of France, François Hollande, jointly oversaw the exhibition and wrote

⁴⁶⁷ 'Wen Jiabao chuxi zhongyi jiangjiao sishi zhounian ji "zhongguo wenhua nian" kaimushi' 温家宝出席中意建交四十周年暨“中国文化年”开幕式 [Wen Jiabao attended the opening ceremony for the 'China Culture Year' in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between China and Italy], *The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, 8 October 2010, http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2010-10/08/content_1716940.htm, accessed 12 February 2015.

⁴⁶⁸ AEC, *zhongguo wenwu jiaoliu zhongxin 2010* 中国文物交流中心 2010 [Art Exhibitions China 2010].

⁴⁶⁹ National Museum of China, 'The 50th Anniversary of Establishment of China and France Diplomatic Relations exhibition opens', 27 January 2014, <http://en.chnmuseum.cn/tabid/521/InfoID/97344/ftid/500/Default.aspx>, accessed 22 February 2014.

introductions for it.⁴⁷⁰ The two exhibitions clearly demonstrate a consciousness amongst the Chinese leadership that exhibitions are an important means of marking political events, in this case, diplomatic anniversaries.

These four examples strongly suggest that the Chinese government would have considered the diplomatic significance of *The Search for Immortality* when it assessed the loan, even if this was not an aim of the three participating museums. This alignment was not emphasised by the British media or the Fitzwilliam Museum itself, but Chinese reporters,⁴⁷¹ and the AEC⁴⁷² did recognise and make mention of it.

China's contribution to the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad

The Search for Immortality also coincided with London hosting the Olympic Games, four years after the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The Olympics were seen by the British government as an opportunity to attract the world's attention to the UK, and one of its initiatives was a four-year national campaign known as the Cultural Olympiad, which culminated in the London 2012 Festival (21 June to 9 September 2012). In the beginning, the Olympics were not an important consideration for the Fitzwilliam; the museum had considered running the exhibition in 2011 instead. It did, however, recognise at some point during preparations that the Games might help to attract more visitors to Britain. As a result of certain organisational difficulties, the Fitzwilliam finally decided to put the exhibition on in 2012, to take advantage of the Olympics, particularly as this would aid publicity and open up funding opportunities.⁴⁷³

The exhibition as a consequence became Cambridge's contribution to the 2012 London Festival and Olympics, as well as 'China's main contribution to the 2012

⁴⁷⁰ Chang Ning 常宁, "'hanfeng - zhongguo handai wenwuzhan" zai fa kaimu, Xi Jinping zhuxi he aolande zongtong tixie xuyan' "汉风 - 中国汉代文物展"在法开幕 习近平主席和奥朗德总统题写序言 [*Splendeurs des Han, essor de l'empire Cæste* opens in France, President Xi Jinping and Hollande wrote introduction], *xinhua wang* 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 23 October 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/culture/2014-10/23/c_127130456.htm, accessed 12 February 2015.

⁴⁷¹ See L. Feng, 'The Search of Immortality Tomb Treasures of Han China displayed in UK', *China and the World Cultural Exchange*, June 2012, 26-29; "'Zhuiqiu buxiu: zhongguo handai muzang jinghua" tezhan "'追求不朽: 中国汉代墓葬精华"特展 [The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China], *xinwen chenbao* 新闻晨报 [Shanghai Morning Post], 24 July 2012, p.B15.

⁴⁷² Lin, ed., *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, p.xi.

⁴⁷³ Tao-Tao Chang, interview with the author, Cambridge, 23 April 2013.

Cultural Olympiad'.⁴⁷⁴ For the sake of the Olympics, both of the governments attached great importance to this collaboration. The British Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sports wrote a letter to the Director of the SACH, Shan Jixiang, and asked for support for this exhibition.⁴⁷⁵ The Vice-Chancellor of University of Cambridge, Leszek Borysiewicz, visited China in 2011, where he was met by Chinese state councillor, Liu Yandong, who subsequently became the Chinese Vice-Premier. It is not clear if any agreement on the exhibition was arrived at during their meeting but according to Wang Wenjian, the exhibition project's representative at the Nanyue King Museum, Liu Yandong did approach the Nanyue King Museum through the Ministry of Culture and the SACH at a later stage about one specific object, a jade rhyton (see figure 5.1).⁴⁷⁶ This jade rhyton has been officially prohibited from being taken abroad for any exhibition by the Chinese government since 2002 (see Chapter 2), but the Fitzwilliam was eager to borrow it and expressed their wish to Chinese officials. Even though the object was not ultimately loaned due to its extreme fragility, this episode does show that the Chinese government took this collaboration seriously.

The three Chinese institutions involved in this exhibition were fully aware of the importance of the Olympics for promoting Chinese culture. Li Yinde, Director of Xuzhou Museum, claimed, in the exhibition catalogue, that the Olympics were not only 'a celebration of sporting prowess', but also 'about the spirit of international understanding and co-operation'.⁴⁷⁷ He believed the alignment of this exhibition with the Olympic and Paralympic Games would 'raise widespread awareness of ancient Chinese civilization'.⁴⁷⁸ The Director of the Nanyue King Museum, Li Linna, contended that this alignment could represent the friendship between the two countries as the Olympic torch passed from China to the UK.⁴⁷⁹ Wang Wenjian revealed that the three Chinese institutions even compromised on the loan fee, as they decided, with the opportunity of the Olympics, the social impact of this

⁴⁷⁴ 'Chinese tomb treasure exhibition opens at Fitzwilliam Museum', *BBC News Cambridgeshire*, 9 May 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-17910197>, accessed 27 January 2014.

⁴⁷⁵ Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013. The interviewee did not name the Secretary. Based on the negotiation time for this loan, it was supposed to be Jeremy Hunt.

⁴⁷⁶ Wang Wenjian 王文建, interview with the author, Changsha, 12 September 2013.

⁴⁷⁷ Lin, ed., *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, p.xii.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p.xiv.

exhibition would be much more important than its economic income. She believed the AEC's compromise was probably a result of this alignment, as it represented the Chinese government's contribution to such an important international event.⁴⁸⁰ An AEC staff member also admitted that it was the London Olympics that helped the Fitzwilliam to get this exceptional loan, during a period when the Chinese government's control over art treasures, particularly of grade-one objects going abroad, was becoming ever firmer, mainly due to the need to protecting cultural relics.⁴⁸¹

In addition, it was presumed that Chinese officials recognised the potential influence of this exhibition on international students in Cambridge, as they would become the leaders of the next generation when they returned to their home countries after graduation, according to Director Li Yinde.⁴⁸² That is to say, even though Cambridge is not a metropolitan city like London, with its influential university, it is still a valuable target for cultural diplomacy.



Figure 5.1: Jade rhyton, second century BC, Western Han Dynasty, height: 18.4 cm, excavated from the tomb of the King of Nanyue, The Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

⁴⁸⁰ Wang Wenjian 王文建, interview with the author, Changsha, 12 September 2013.

⁴⁸¹ AEC staff, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Beijing, 12 October 2013.

⁴⁸² Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013.

These considerations for cultural diplomacy, as well as China's historic links with and special emotion for Cambridge,⁴⁸³ and the two Chinese museums' strong desire to learn through cooperation,⁴⁸⁴ helped the Fitzwilliam - a university museum in a small city - to get this exceptional loan from the Chinese government.

Chinese people and a civilised China

Director Timothy Potts commented on the subject matter of *The Search for Immortality*:

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Han Dynasty in the formation of a Chinese national culture and identity. At the time of the ancient Romans, the Han emperors were the first to unify a large part of the regions we now know as China under a sustained empire, which they ruled virtually unchallenged for 400 years. The Han Dynasty gave its name to the Chinese language, its script and the vast majority of the Chinese people. It was arguably the defining period of China's history and the point of genesis for the China of today.⁴⁸⁵

It is quite clear from this statement that the Fitzwilliam deliberately associated the exhibition with modern China by emphasising the profound and eternal influence of the Han Dynasty. This message, which was repeatedly emphasised by the Director and Curator in press releases,⁴⁸⁶ media interviews and academic papers,⁴⁸⁷ successfully influenced the media's view on Han culture and modern China.⁴⁸⁸ The

⁴⁸³ Lin, ed., *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, p.xi.

⁴⁸⁴ Tao-Tao Chang, interview with the author, Cambridge, 23 April 2013.

⁴⁸⁵ 'The search for immortality: tomb treasures of Han China', *University of Cambridge News*, 5 May 2012, <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/the-search-for-immortality-tomb-treasures-of-han-china>, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁴⁸⁶ Fitzwilliam Museum, 'The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China', <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/whatson/exhibitions/han/>, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁴⁸⁷ See J. Lin, 'In search of immortality', *Minerva*, May/June 2012, 50-53.

⁴⁸⁸ See 'The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures from Han China', *Art Quarterly*, Spring 2012, p.8; P. Kirkley, 'Treasure trove tells tale of imperial strife', *Cambridge News*, 3 May 2012, pp.20 and 37; B. Miller, 'The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China at Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum', *Culture24*, 8 May 2012, <http://www.culture24.org.uk/history-and-heritage/archaeology/art385236>, accessed 22 February 2014; 'The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China', *Past Horizons*, 9 May 2012, <http://www.pasthorizonspr.com/index.php/archives/05/2012/the-search-for-immortality-tomb-treasures-of-han-china>, accessed 22 February 2014; D. Moss, 'Groundbreaking museum show unveils the objects which helped mould modern China', *MasterArt*, 14 May 2012, <http://www.masterart.com/PortalDefault.aspx?tabid=149&PostId=7391&categoryId=501>, accessed 27 January 2014.

Art Newspaper called the Han Dynasty the ‘Golden Age’ of China.⁴⁸⁹ Writing in the *Financial Times*, Susan Moore even argued that to understand Han China ‘is to begin to understand modern China’ and she believed that this was yet another reason why ‘China has allowed more “first grade” cultural objects than ever before to be sent overseas for the landmark exhibition’.⁴⁹⁰ Her argument is validated by Tao-Tao Chang, Fitzwilliam’s International Officer, charged with negotiating terms for the exhibition with China. Chang said that the Chinese government hoped the exhibition would help ‘Western audience to understand how China has evolved’ and to ‘link China’s past with its present’.⁴⁹¹ In this sense, how the Fitzwilliam promoted *The Search for Immortality* was no different from what the BM did for *The First Emperor*. Both institutions tried to publicise the exhibition and attract attention by linking ancient China to modern and contemporary China. The Chinese authorities were also keen to see the associations as Chang reported. That is to say, no matter how the media views contemporary China through the exhibition, positively or negatively, to some degree, it is still in line with China’s cultural diplomacy, the same for *The Three Emperors* and *The First Emperor*.

If the connection between the Qin Dynasty and contemporary China inspired by *The First Emperor* was relatively neutral, if not negative, the link between the Han dynasty and contemporary China inspired by *The Search for Immortality* was mainly positive. This is due in part to the nature of Han culture. Curator James Lin argued that in contrast to the militaristic and legalistic culture of Qin Dynasty, Han rulers believed in the more peaceful Confucianism and Daoism, which penetrated their artworks as well as customs and formed the subject of this exhibition.⁴⁹² These positive associations were largely decided by the curatorial stance taken by Lin when shaping the exhibition. Rather than emphasising chaos or militaristic conflicts in the history of the Han Dynasty, he put the focus on examining how Han people treated death as life and pursued immortality after life. According to his explanation, Han people believed that they would continue their life in another world after death,

⁴⁸⁹ E. Sharpe, ‘Resting in comfort: the burial rituals of the Han Dynasty’, *The Art Newspaper*, no. 235, May 2012, p.82.

⁴⁹⁰ S. Moore, ‘Time raiders’, *Financial Times Online*, 2 May 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/e93dfff6-8aec-11e1-b855-00144feab49a.html#axzz2reC7hiaD>, accessed 27 January 2014.

⁴⁹¹ Tao-Tao Chang, interview with the author, Cambridge, 23 April 2013.

⁴⁹² James Lin, interview with the author, Cambridge, 20 June 2013.

so that they took everything used when they were alive into their tombs for the next stage of life. Thus how the tombs were structured and which objects were buried reflected the life and customs of Chinese people during Han era. As Richard Holledge wrote in *The Times*, ‘this rare display ... counter-intuitively, tells us as much about the actual, living, world of the Chinese royal court more than 1,000 years ago as it does about their rituals of death’.⁴⁹³ Compared to *The First Emperor* as well as *The Three Emperors*, the exhibition put more emphasis on presenting the Chinese nation and its people, rather than on Chinese politics, bureaucracies and its authorities.

The exhibits were deliberately chosen to provide a good mixture of exquisite artworks and everyday utilitarian objects, in order to achieve such intentions. The Chinese authorities had become used to lending and most of the loan exhibitions seen overseas are promoted by the host institutions and feature in the media as having the most exquisite craftsmanship and delicate artworks produced or used in the Chinese imperial court. This exhibition was no exception. As Timothy Potts noted:

The spectacular objects in this exhibition bring to Cambridge the finest treasures from the tombs of the Han royal family, the superb goldwork, jades and other exquisitely crafted offerings the kings chose to be buried with on their journey to the afterlife. For their artistry, refinement and pure beauty they rival anything from the ancient world.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹³ Holledge, ‘Han tomb treasures on show in Cambridge’; see also Moore, ‘Time raiders’.

⁴⁹⁴ ‘The search for immortality: tomb treasures of Han China’, *University of Cambridge News*.

The ‘amazing and exotic treasures’ on show,⁴⁹⁵ were exemplified by the two sets of jade burial suits (see figures 5.2 and 5.3) displayed side by side, never before seen even within China,⁴⁹⁶ and were highly appreciated by the media.



Figure 5.2: Jade suit, second century BC, Western Han Dynasty, length: 173 cm, excavated at Xianggangshan in 1983, The Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province

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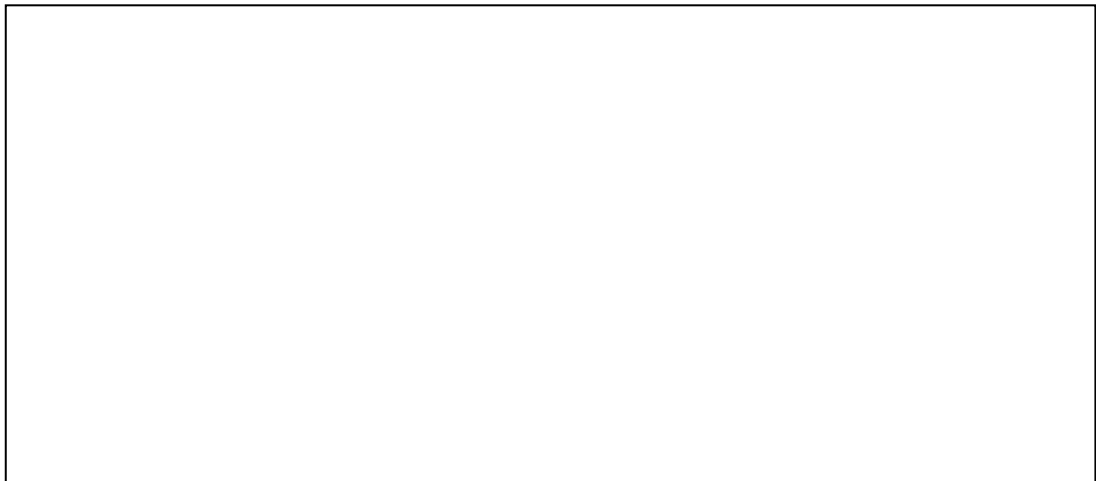


Figure 5.3: Jade suit, second century BC, Western Han Dynasty, length: 175 cm; width: 68 cm, excavated at Shizishan in 1994-5, Xuzhou Museum, Jiangsu Province

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

⁴⁹⁵ Fitzwilliam Museum, ‘The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China’.

⁴⁹⁶ ‘Chinese artifacts on display in Cambridge’s museum’, *CCTV English Online*, 7 May 2012, <http://english.cntv.cn/program/cultureexpress/20120507/105682.shtml>, accessed 22 February 2014.

Besides the most exquisite and delicate objects, Lin also chose some common objects which would reflect daily life in the Han period. They were regarded as quite unusual choices by the Chinese authorities. Indeed, the Chinese side was quite surprised by the Fitzwilliam's request for such objects without any artistic beauty, such as the stone squat lavatory (figure 5.4) and the ginger grater (see figure 5.5).⁴⁹⁷

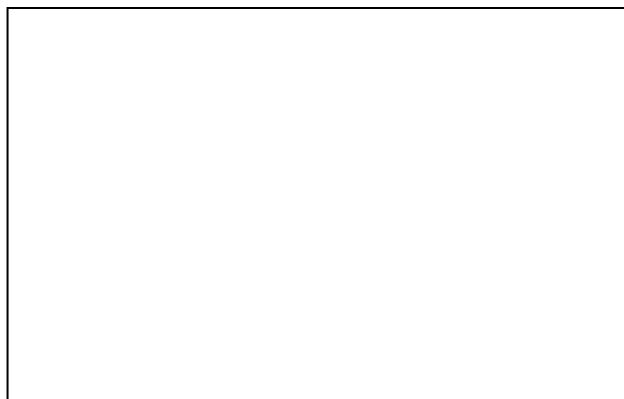


Figure 5. 4: Stone lavatory, second century BC, Western Han Dynasty, height: 150 cm, length: 149 cm, width: 115 cm, excavated at the tomb of the King of Chu at Tuolanshan in 1989-90, Xuzhou Museum, Jiangsu Province

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.



Figure 5.5: Bronze ginger grater, second century BC, Western Han Dynasty, length: 13.3 cm, height: 5.2 cm, excavated at Xianggangshan in 1983, The Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

⁴⁹⁷ Tao-Tao Chang, interview with the author, Cambridge, 23 April 2013.

The Fitzwilliam, however, was quite excited to have them and promoted them as highlights of the exhibition, in addition to the delicate jade burial suits, jades and goldwork.⁴⁹⁸ The Curator managed to bridge China of the past and present through ‘the most bizarre objects in the show’, as he described them.⁴⁹⁹ As he explained, similar examples to the stone squat lavatory, installed in a tomb more than 2,000 years ago, are still in use in some rural areas in modern China.⁵⁰⁰ He thought that such objects would remind visitors of their own experiences in China, and in fact, he did encounter such visitors.⁵⁰¹ Maev Kennedy, writing in *The Guardian*, remarked on the stone squat lavatory as the ‘humblest but most extraordinary object’.⁵⁰²

It was this combination of luxurious and ordinary objects that helped to bring a mysterious and exotic ancient China closer to the audience and, at the same time, won media appreciation for the exhibition.⁵⁰³ The statuettes, including the ‘pottery soldiers, dancers, musicians and servants’ were thought to provide ‘a human connection between this lost world and our own’.⁵⁰⁴ These objects were regarded as demonstrating not only splendour and magnificence and China’s ancient history and culture,⁵⁰⁵ but also the good qualities of the Chinese people. Souren Melikian argued in *The New York Times* that the statuettes on show ‘exude that kind of soft energy that is a specific trait of the Chinese temperament, from sports like Tai Chi to the

⁴⁹⁸ Fitzwilliam Museum, ‘The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China’.

⁴⁹⁹ ‘The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China’, *Explorer Magazine*, 7 May 2012, <http://www.explorermagazine.co.uk/2012/05/the-search-for-immortality-tomb-treasures-of-han-china/>, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁵⁰⁰ Wang Rong 王荣, ‘Zhuanfang: jianqiao ciweilian bowuguan cezhanren Lin Zhengsheng’ 专访: 剑桥茨威廉博物馆策展人林政昇 [Interview with Fitzwilliam’s curator Lin Zhengsheng], *yinglun wang* 英伦网 [BBC UK China], 2 May 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukchina/simp/entertainment/2012/05/120502_ent_iv_james_fitzwilliam.shtml, accessed 8 January 2015.

⁵⁰¹ James Lin, interview with the author, Cambridge, 20 June 2013.

⁵⁰² M. Kennedy, ‘Han dynasty “immortality suits” go on show’, *The Guardian*, 3 May 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/may/03/han-dynasty-immortality-suits-show>, accessed 18 December 2014.

⁵⁰³ R. Scanes, ‘Exhibition: The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China, Fitzwilliam Museum’, *Varsity*, 9 May 2012, <http://www.varsity.co.uk/reviews/4715>, accessed 22 February 2015.

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Treasures from the tomb’, *House and Garden Magazine*, July 2012, p.68.

⁵⁰⁵ See ‘Han treasures visit London’, *China Daily*, 11 May 2012, http://www.china.org.cn/travel/2012-05/11/content_25357064.htm, accessed 22 February 2014; Y. Wang, ‘“Search for Immortality” Tomb Treasures of Han China’, *Nee Hao Magazine*, 11 June 2012, <http://www.neehao.co.uk/2012/06/search-for-immortality-tomb-treasures-of-han-china-review-by-yinsey-wang/>, accessed 22 February 2014.

visual arts.’ He thought the terracotta dancers (see figure 5.6) were ‘lithe and graceful’ and ‘propelled by unstoppable dynamism’.⁵⁰⁶

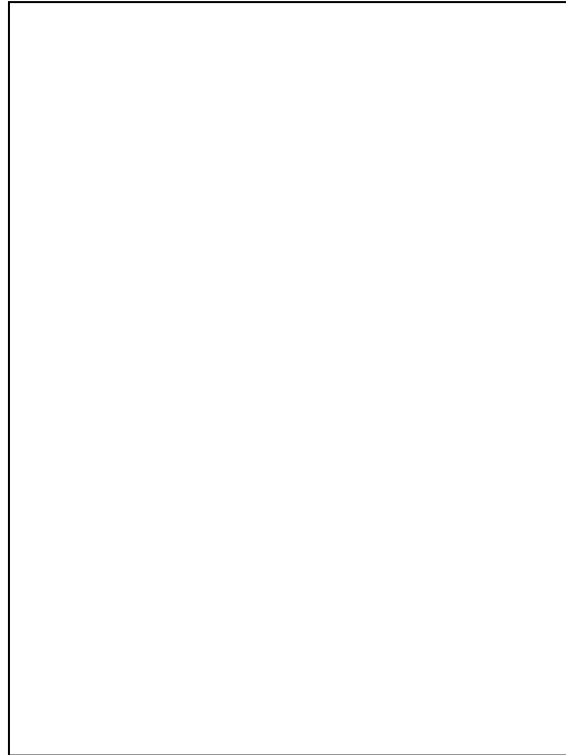


Figure 5.6: Earthenware dancing figure, second century BC, height: 47-9 cm, Western Han Dynasty, excavated at the tomb of the King of Chu at Tuolanshan in 1989-90, Xuzhou Museum, Jiangsu Province

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

Unlike *The Three Emperors* and *The First Emperor*, *The Search for Immortality* did not lead to political connections being made between ancient and contemporary China. Probably partly because of this, the exhibition did not get as much media coverage as the other two exhibitions. However, the curatorial interpretation did nurture sympathy for and understanding of Chinese people and Chinese culture, regardless of prevailing attitudes towards the Chinese government. It did contribute

⁵⁰⁶ S. Melikian, ‘Exhibition rewrites the history of Han civilization in China: museum opens window on one of the world’s most resilient cultures’, *The New York Times*, 8 June 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/09/arts/09iht-melikian09.html?_r=0, accessed 22 February 2014.

positively to the objective of China's cultural diplomacy to present a civilised China through promoting the good character of Chinese people. It is noteworthy that Lin was born in Taiwan and lived there until he went to college. The avoidance of politics in the exhibition may be partly due to his Taiwanese identity and the sensitivities between Mainland China and Taiwan.⁵⁰⁷ He certainly had a different understanding of Chinese culture compared to most British curators and had a pride in Chinese culture that his counterparts might not have had. Rather than suggest that he propagandised Chinese culture, it is still reasonable to argue that his presentation was probably closer to the Chinese understanding of China or the China the Chinese officials would prefer Western audiences to see.

A multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, open and progressive China

James Lin felt that it was 'immensely exciting ... to compare these unique discoveries from two rival kingdoms for the first time in Cambridge, as the archaeology allows ... to tell a story that textual evidence simply does not reveal'.⁵⁰⁸ This is another curatorial stance that made this exhibition pioneering and distinguished it from others. By 'bringing together two collections of tomb treasures that are normally displayed in museums thousands of kilometres apart', one is Xuzhou Museum in northern China and the other one is Nanyue King Museum in Guangzhou in southern China, the exhibition presented a story of a power relationship that had 'never been told before in this way, not even on the mainland'.⁵⁰⁹ The *Aesthetic Magazine* spoke highly of this curatorial stance by arguing that:

The exhibition is impressive not merely for the splendour and rarity of its artefacts, but also for the weight of its historical implications. By laying out the disparate tombs' contents side-by-side for the first time, the relationship between the Han Empire and its vassal, the semi-sinicised Nanyue kingdom, is made tangible.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ James Lin, interview with the author, Cambridge, 20 June 2013.

⁵⁰⁸ 'The search for immortality: tomb treasures of Han China', *University of Cambridge News*.

⁵⁰⁹ V. Finlay, 'Imperial dreams of afterlife', *Sunday Morning Post*, 21 August 2012, pp.10-11.

⁵¹⁰ 'The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge', *Aesthetica*, <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/blog/the-search-for-immortality-tomb-treasures-of-han-china-at-the-fitzwilliam-museum-cambridge/>, accessed 22 February 2014.

To engage visitors, Lin brilliantly replicated the tomb structure onsite in the gallery design, which provided an authentic context to understand the exhibits.⁵¹¹ He arranged the exhibits as per:

[the] layout of the funerary goods within the tombs, giving a sense of what it would have been like to walk through one of these tombs for the first time: being met by tomb guardians, progressing into the principal chambers with pottery servants, musical instruments and other treasures, and finally coming upon the inner sanctum with the burials of the kings themselves.⁵¹²

He made full use of the gallery space to compare the two kingdoms by allocating one single room to the Nanyue objects. Anna Judson, writing in *Res Gerendae*, said that ‘representing the two areas separately is meant to reflect the historical situation and provide a reflection on the relations between the two kingdoms, and certainly the texts do that very well’.⁵¹³

Rather than emphasising the militaristic conflict between the Han central government and its vassal state, Nanyue, Lin highlighted ‘the diplomatic game of cat and mouse, one to assert its supremacy, the other to preserve its autonomy’ between the two as well as the cultural influence of the former on the latter.⁵¹⁴ He explained his thinking as follows:

Through a direct comparison of the tomb treasures from the Han imperial family with those of the second king of Nanyue, Zhao Mo, the exhibition shows how the latter’s funerary splendour continued to be styled on that of the Han heartland, often reaching the same level of exquisite artistry ... This provides a new perspective on that Han period and how the imperial family continued to exert its influence, through arms and art, to maintain control of their vast empire.⁵¹⁵

⁵¹¹ James Lin, interview with the author, Cambridge, 20 June 2013.

⁵¹² ‘The search for immortality: tomb treasures of Han China’, *University of Cambridge News*.

⁵¹³ A. Judson, ‘The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China’, *Res Gerendae*, 20 June 2012, <http://resgerendae.wordpress.com/2012/06/20/the-search-for-immortality-tomb-treasures-of-han-china/>, accessed 22 February 2014.

⁵¹⁴ ‘The search for immortality: tomb treasures of Han China’, *University of Cambridge News*.

⁵¹⁵ Kirkley, ‘Treasure trove tells tale of imperial strife’, p.37.

The *Evening News* commented that, ‘having got past the soldiers and the bronze weaponry, we may note that art was as important as arms in maintaining Han power with all the mystiques of invincibility. This culture was a knockout’.⁵¹⁶

Souren Melikian argued in *The New York Times* that the artistry and refinement that showed through the objects from Nanyue, refuted the historian Michael Loewe’s description of the Nanyue as a backward minority which ‘lived naked in the tropical climate of Nanyue’,⁵¹⁷ and ‘had yet to learn the habit of pairing off in orderly forms of marriage’.⁵¹⁸ He contended that ‘if the Chinese sources that often project unflattering views of non-Chinese peoples are accurate on this score, this [exhibition] makes the Guangzhou [Nanyue] discoveries the more sensational’.⁵¹⁹ In comparison with the Han central government, the cultural distinctiveness and achievement of Nanyue as a non-Chinese community, as well as the cultural influences between them was apparently demonstrated, which projected the image of China as a multi-ethnic nation with cultural diversity.

It is useful here to discuss the Japanese equivalent of this exhibition, *China: Grandeur of the Dynasties*, mentioned above, to understand how Lin’s curatorship was, in essence, consistent with China’s cultural diplomacy. According to the Curator of that exhibition, Nobuyuki Matsumoto, Director of Curatorial Planning at the Tokyo National Museum, *China: Grandeur of the Dynasties* sought to project China as a ‘political and cultural plurality’, by ‘highlighting the variety in Chinese culture and history by focusing on interesting counterpoints within the conventional historical framework of consecutive dynasties’.⁵²⁰ C. B. Liddell, writing in *The Japan Times*, initially thought it was quite odd that the Chinese government would support such curatorship because ‘it seems out of kilter with the centralizing ethos of the Communist regime, which has earned a reputation for “Sinicizing” non-Chinese areas, such as Tibet and Sinkiang, through modernization, erosion of traditions, and

⁵¹⁶ [No title] *Evening News (Norwich)*, 10 August 2012, ROP section.

⁵¹⁷ Melikian, ‘Exhibition rewrites the history of Han civilization in China: museum opens window on one of the world’s most resilient cultures’.

⁵¹⁸ M. Loewe, ‘The Kingdom of Nanyue’, in Lin, ed., *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, 2012, 21-22, p.21.

⁵¹⁹ Melikian, ‘Exhibition rewrites the history of Han civilization in China: museum opens window on one of the world’s most resilient cultures’.

⁵²⁰ Liddell, ‘Treasures from China’s rich tapestry of cultures’.

encouraging an influx of Han Chinese'.⁵²¹ But the Curator's first-hand experience of negotiating with the Chinese side for the loan proved Liddell was wrong.

Matsumoto emphasised that:

From the earliest stages we [Tokyo National Museum] sought the consultation and cooperation of the Chinese in the planning, full consideration was taken of China's position as a multi-ethnic nation. From the moment we introduced the concept of 'pluralism,' no one asked us to change the contents. On the contrary, the contents of the original plan were consistent with the policy of the current Chinese government.⁵²²

Recognising this, Liddell commented that:

The key to this paradox is that the Chinese government is aware that over-centralization at home is counterproductive, and instead it conceptualizes Chinese unity as a "symphony of peoples and histories" that recognizes the contribution of the peripheral peoples as well as the majority Han Chinese.⁵²³

Liddell argued that China 'occasionally takes a heavy-handed approach in potential breakaway regions and projects an appearance of monolithic unity abroad'.⁵²⁴ But it can be seen from this example that the Chinese authorities would like to demonstrate the multi-ethnicity and cultural diversity of China from the past into the present, as long as this does not turn into separatist nationalism.

The Search for Immortality, like *The Three Emperors* and *China: Grandeur of the Dynasties* in Japan, demonstrated that 'China' should never be simplified just because it can be 'used to encapsulate a vast heterogeneous portion of the World's population'.⁵²⁵ They all helped to undo the myth that the Chinese are a single ethnic and cultural group and displayed the diversity of Chinese culture. *The Search for Immortality* thus provided a context by which to understand the Chinese

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

government's ethnic policies and actions, which contribute to China's cultural diplomacy and foreign policies.

Furthermore, the exhibition offered the audience an opportunity not only to learn about cultures in different regions of China during the Han Dynasty,⁵²⁶ but also to 'discover connections among ancient cultures from different parts of the world'.⁵²⁷ Some objects displayed in the show bore 'foreign influences in their designs, patterns, motifs, craftsmanship and technique',⁵²⁸ such as the silver casket (see figure 5.7) influenced by Parthian Persia,⁵²⁹ and the gold belt plaque (see figure 5.8) influenced by Iranian-style silver.⁵³⁰ Souren Melikian also imagined that the earthenware dancers (see figure 5.6), 'shaking the long sleeves of their gowns', were performing a 'Sogdian dance that likewise travelled along the Iran-China route via the then Sogdian oases of present day Xinjiang'.⁵³¹ By comparing these with other objects on display, he thought that such objects bearing foreign influence could 'reveal an assimilation process that was progressing fast', and which illustrates 'the Chinese prodigious aptitude at recasting foreign ideas and artistic models through their own world vision' and transforming them into 'utterly new creations'.⁵³²



Figure 5.7: Silver box (partly gilt, with stand of bronze and wood), third-second century BC, height: 12.1 cm, excavated at Xianggangshan in 1983, The Museum of the Western Han Dynasty Mausoleum of the Nanyue King, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province

Image removed due to copyright restrictions.

⁵²⁶ Feng, 'The Search of Immortality Tomb Treasures of Han China displayed in UK'.

⁵²⁷ 'Han treasures visit London', *China Daily*.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Moore, 'Time raiders'.

⁵³⁰ Melikian, 'Exhibition rewrites the history of Han civilization in China: museum opens window on one of the world's most resilient cultures'.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.



Figure 5.8: Gold belt plaque, second century BC, Western Han Dynasty, length: 13.3 cm, width: 6 cm, excavated at the tomb of the King of Chu at Shizishan in 1994-5, Xuzhou Museum, Jiangsu Province

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The two-day conference, *Life and Afterlife in Han China* organised by the Fitzwilliam, that accompanied the exhibition also devoted one of its four sessions to Han China's 'contacts with the outside world'.⁵³³ This was also discussed in the exhibition catalogue.⁵³⁴

When interviewed for the exhibition, Director of the Nanyue King Museum, Wu Lingyun expressed his great pride in the historical value of his museum's collection by claiming that:

We have also found ivory from Africa and mastic gum from west Asia ... We have always thought that such [a] place as Nanyue, which is far from central China, could be less developed. But traces of foreign trade

⁵³³ Fitzwilliam Museum, 'Conference - Life and afterlife in Han China', <http://www.tombtreasuresofhanchina.org/the-fitzwilliam-museum/conference/>, accessed 2 February 2014.

⁵³⁴ Lin, ed., *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*; see also J. Portal, 'Getting the spirits drunk', *Apollo Magazine*, November 2012, 106-107.

could be found there 2,000 years ago. Just imagine how powerful the Han could be.⁵³⁵

Thus, this exhibition challenged clichés by presenting an image of a progressive China through demonstrating its open attitude toward external influences and abilities to localise such influences. This is probably not unrelated to the Curator's identity as a Chinese cultural insider and his pride in his own culture. But this is definitely not the only reason, as *The Three Emperors*, curated by British curators, delivered similar messages. The most recent exhibition at the BM, *Ming: 50 Years that Changed China* (18 September 2014 - 5 January 2015), is another example. Any exhibition presenting China's exchanges with the outside world in earlier times has potential to project an image of an open, multi-cultural and progressive China. To a certain degree, while China's international role becomes ever more important, it seems that exhibitions dealing with China's historical international engagement with other cultures have become a trend.

Conclusion

By the time of this exhibition, China had a good deal of experience of using exhibitions for cultural diplomacy. *The Search for Immortality*, which showed China taking advantage of the media circus that surrounds international events, in this case the London 2012 Olympics, also revealed the country's increasing sophistication and confidence.

From the media analysis carried out in the past three chapters, it could be argued that: *The Three Emperors* in 2005-6 triggered discussion about the communist party; *The First Emperor* in 2007-8 triggered discussion on the Chinese government; and *The Search for Immortality* led to a discussion about the Chinese people. To some extent, this reflects a gradual decline in ideological perspectives in Western media's views of China and increasing knowledge and understanding of China. New perspectives on China have gradually been added to the old-fashioned political and economic views. How the host museums and curators approach China and Chinese culture has a huge impact on the media's interpretation of Chinese culture and impressions of contemporary China.

⁵³⁵ 'Cambridge's Museum tells story of ancient China', *China Daily*, 4 May 2012, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2012-05/04/content_15209622.htm, accessed 22 February 2014.

In the past decade, the majority of exhibitions of ancient Chinese art lent to the UK have been about the Ming and Qing dynasties. This is partly because the principal collection of the Forbidden City, almost a national symbol for China, with which the foreign public is interested and familiar, is made up of the imperial collections of these two dynasties, the last dynasties of China, which lasted until 1912. The BM introduced Qin Shihuang as China's first emperor and his Qin Dynasty to the British public in 2007-8 through *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*. Following the phenomenal success and huge interest in Chinese culture triggered by that blockbuster,⁵³⁶ the Fitzwilliam brought in another historical period of China - the Han Dynasty, which is regarded as a period even more important than the Qin Dynasty and much more influential for the Chinese nation throughout Chinese history, as noted by Curator James Lin.⁵³⁷ This was probably the first time when an exhibition wholly dedicated to the Han Dynasty had been mounted in the UK.⁵³⁸ It helped to present China's rich history and cultural complexities, which is in line with the objective of China's cultural diplomacy to shape an image of a civilised country with a long-standing history and splendid culture. And the specific stances through which the Curator approached the exhibition helped to demonstrate that China is humanist, open, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and progressive.

Another aspect arising from the media analysis is that most of the media reports on *The Search for Immortality* were largely based on the Fitzwilliam's press releases. Given the scale of this exhibition, critical exhibition reviews were far less than those for *The Three Emperors* and *The First Emperor*, even though many other factors should be considered. For example, this was a show in Cambridge rather than London; the Fitzwilliam could not afford a media campaign as widespread and effective as the BM's for *The First Emperor*. The media coverage, however, reflected a knowledge gap of Chinese history, not only about Han China, but also about many other historical periods, such as the Tang (618 - 907 AD) and Yuan (1271 - 1368 AD): periods of history that also witnessed extensive communication between China and the outside world. They have rarely been explored by museums in the UK. If China intends to demonstrate its complexity and multiculturalism, more episodes of Chinese history should be promoted. *The Search for Immortality*

⁵³⁶ 'Cambridge Fitzwilliam Museum: The Search for Immortality', *YouTube*.

⁵³⁷ James Lin, interview with the author, Cambridge, 20 June 2013.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*.

laid a solid foundation for introducing such a complex and multi-cultural China to British audiences.

So far in this thesis, all the three case studies have investigated loan exhibitions of Chinese ancient art instrumentalised for different occasions and their impacts on the image of China in the British media. All three exhibitions were ultimately endorsed by the State Council, indicated by the percentage of grade-one objects in each, therefore were all instrumentalised for China's cultural diplomacy on a national level to some extent. The next chapter will change the focus slightly to explore how loan exhibitions have been instrumentalised on a more local level.

Chapter 7: Twin cities and cultural diplomacy

The growing emphasis on globalization has brought the analysis of global cities into sharp focus. The countervailing trend emphasizes the significance of “the local”.

Rolf D. Cremer et al.⁵³⁹

Alongside the deepening of globalisation, local authorities have increasingly engaged in international issues actively and independently. They are either commissioned by central governments or take the initiative to do so. They usually have their own agendas and ambitions based on locality rather than nationality. International twin cities or sister cities, which are particularly widespread in Europe and the US since the Second World War, offer ‘formal and informal political, economic, social and cultural relationships between cities through the world’,⁵⁴⁰ and are one way in which towns and cities may play an international role.

The actions developed in this framework [“Twining Projects”] are classics in cultural diplomacy: organization of exhibitions and events with displays of cultural heritage, the creativity of contemporary artists, or joint celebrations of anniversaries or commemorations of common Europe culture.⁵⁴¹

It can be observed that twin cities and cultural diplomacy have an intrinsic correlation, which in recent years has meant that ‘the twining of cities has evolved from an international instrument of friendship and cultural exchange to a powerful tool for capacity building and economic development’.⁵⁴² Loan exhibitions are an important and typical element of the twin-city relationship. As longer-term

⁵³⁹ R. D. Cremer, A. de Bruin and A. Dupuis, ‘International sister-cities: bridging the global-local divide’, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol. 60, no. 1, January 2001, 377-401, p.377.

⁵⁴⁰ M. Jayne, P. Hubbard and D. Bell, ‘Worlding a city: twinning and urban theory’, *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, vol. 15, no. 1, February 2011, 25-41, p.25.

⁵⁴¹ T. La Porte, ‘City public diplomacy in the European Union’, in M. K. D. Cross and J. Melissen, eds., *European Public Diplomacy: Soft Power at Work*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2013, 85-112, p.101.

⁵⁴² J. C. de Villiers, T. J. de Coning and E. v. d. M. Smit, ‘Towards an understanding of the success factors in international twinning and sister-city relationships’, *South African Journal of Business Management*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2007, 1-10, p.1.

relationships, city twinning also guarantees the relative consistency of museum and exhibition exchanges over a period of time.

In China, local authorities actively engaging in international issues is a recent phenomenon, as China's overall diplomacy has been subject to the control of the central government and the CPC. It has only been in the past decade that local and provincial governments have been given the encouragement and support to work on an international level, though still under the supervision of the central government.⁵⁴³ It is, therefore, worthwhile investigating the influence of local governments as growing contributors to China's cultural diplomacy, particularly while central government is starting to recognise the importance of diversifying cultural diplomacy practitioners and resources. This chapter is going to explore how loan exhibitions have been instrumentalised for cultural diplomacy by Chinese local governments.

Generally speaking, such exhibitions have been on a much smaller scale, they have not included any objects prohibited or restricted for exhibition abroad by the central government or legal system, and the percentage of grade-one objects has been safely within the limit. The museums involved on both sides have not been national museums and are much smaller in scale, even rarely known outside their home country. Ostensibly, such international collaboration has been quite straightforward. But it is still possible to identify governmental involvement and political implications, in this case, on a local level. These implications and governmental involvement, mainly on the Chinese side will be analysed in this chapter to see how loan exhibitions contribute to China's local foreign affairs and cultural diplomacy.

Four case-study exhibitions will be examined in this chapter: *Guardians to the King: Terracotta Treasures from Ancient China* at Colchester Castle Museum from 19 July to 2 November 2008; *From Steep Hillside: Ancient Rock Carvings from Dazu, China* at National Museum Wales in Cardiff from 26 January to 3 April 2011; *Living in Silk: Chinese Textiles Through 5000 Years* at Nottingham Castle Museum from 31 March to 16 September 2012; and *Treasures of China* at Colchester Castle

⁵⁴³ For more details about the principles of China's management of foreign affairs, see Foreign Affairs Office of Fujian Provincial People's Government, 'zhongguo waishi guanli yuanze' 中国外事管理原则 [Principles for managing foreign affairs], 2 October 2012, http://www.fjfa.gov.cn/ztl/ktx/wszs/201210/t20121002_524989.htm, accessed 12 February 2015.

Museum from 30 June 2012 to 6 January 2013. Partly due to the scale and locality of these exhibitions, they were seldom reviewed by national and sometimes not even local newspapers. There was insufficient coverage to investigate their media impacts. But they are still critically important in order to get a full picture of the complexity of China's cultural diplomacy. This chapter will mainly use interviews conducted with relevant museum staff on both sides to inspect the organisation, negotiations and curation of these exhibitions under the city-twinning framework. It should be emphasised here that China's twinning relationship with other countries is not limited to cities. Some provinces or areas have been twinned with counterpart authorities overseas. Twin cities and twin provinces have no difference in essence and will be treated in the same way in this chapter.

Where to start a loan exhibition?

The two exhibitions at Colchester Castle and the one at National Museum Wales in Cardiff all started from a twinning relationship between China and the UK.

The *Guardians to the King* exhibition was one of the highlights of the 2008 Essex-Jiangsu Festival, which celebrated the 20th anniversary of the enduring relationship between Essex County Council and Jiangsu Province in China. The relationship was initiated in 1988 by education sector and up until the year of the festival (2008), 'over 60 schools in Essex [had] partner schools in Jiangsu and an increasing number of Essex school pupils [were] learning Mandarin'.⁵⁴⁴ In 1992, the two sides formalised the twinning relationship through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which included collaboration 'in the fields of trade, investment, education and culture'.⁵⁴⁵ The MoU has been continuously renewed thereafter and the bilateral partnership has gradually extended into new areas.⁵⁴⁶

The Essex-Jiangsu Festival was heralded by Essex County Council as the 'biggest international arts festival that Essex has ever experienced'.⁵⁴⁷ It covered hundreds of

⁵⁴⁴ Essex County Council, *The Essex · Jiangsu Festival 2008-2009*, Issue 1, June-November 2008, provided by Tom Hodgson during interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁴⁵ Essex County Council, 'ECC re-signs Memorandum of Understanding with the Vice Governor of Jiangsu to continue our 25-year relationship', 26 July 2013, <http://www.essex.gov.uk/News/Pages/Essex-County-Council-re-signs-Memorandum-of-Understanding-with-the-Vice-Governor-of-Jiangsu-to-continue-our-25-year-relatio.aspx>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ D. Webber, 'Landmark cultural festival', *Sunday Essex*, 27 June 2008, p.1.

cultural shows and performances across the county for the nine months between July 2008 and March 2009. *Guardians to the King* was specifically created for this celebratory festival.⁵⁴⁸ Miriam Stead, Head of Heritage and Arts at Essex County Council, spotted a reference to the terracotta figures at the Xuzhou Museum in a Rough Guide before the Essex delegation's research trip to Jiangsu Province in 2006, in preparation for the festival.⁵⁴⁹ As a city within Jiangsu Province's governance and administration, Xuzhou was naturally arranged as a stop on the request of the Essex delegation.⁵⁵⁰ The Essex representatives were amazed by the terracotta figures and showed huge interest in bringing them to the UK for the festival.⁵⁵¹ Then, in the following year, when the Jiangsu delegation visited Essex, the Chinese museum representatives provided more detailed information about the terracotta figures, as well as potential exhibition plans to their counterparts in the museum service and officers in the county council.⁵⁵² The communication between the museums on both sides, at early stage, was maintained through Essex County Council,⁵⁵³ the Foreign Affairs Office of Jiangsu Provincial People's Government, and the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture.⁵⁵⁴ Soon after the visit of the Chinese representatives to Essex, the exhibition project was formally confirmed. As the largest museum in the county, Colchester Castle was quickly selected to host the exhibition. Due to this unique twinning relationship and the anniversary celebrations, Colchester Castle, which at that point 'not [had] any connections particularly with China before',⁵⁵⁵ as the project manager Tom Hodgson noted, was able to stage this exhibition, which was regarded as 'a tremendous coup for Essex and for Colchester' by Jeremy Lucas, who was a county councillor and the Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Heritage, Culture and the Arts.⁵⁵⁶ He added that 'an exhibition of this significance is a rarity in the county' and that the 'strong

⁵⁴⁸ Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013.

⁵⁴⁹ A. Clarke, 'Ancient Chinese figurines go on display', *East Anglian Daily Times*, 15 July 2008, http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/ancient_chinese_figurines_go_on_display_1_200434, accessed 8 May 2014.

⁵⁵⁰ 'Guardians to the King tour', *YouTube*, 27 July 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ce8ulEk88w0>, accessed 12 February 2015.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013.

⁵⁵³ Tom Hodgson, interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁵⁴ Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013.

⁵⁵⁵ Tom Hodgson, interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁵⁶ Colchester Castle Museum, 'Prestigious agreement with China signed: "Guardians to the King", Terracotta Treasures from China', <https://csapps.norfolk.gov.uk/cssshared/ecourier2/fileoutput.asp?id=7735>, accessed 14 May 2014

partnership ... has led to a display of such magnitude'.⁵⁵⁷ Actually the exhibition was far from being particularly impressive among Chinese loan exhibitions in terms of the number of exhibits loaned to Colchester Castle. Only forty-three terracotta figures were ultimately displayed. To some extent, what made the exhibition culturally as well as politically important was its symbolism of the long-lasting twinning relationship between Essex and Jiangsu.

According to the exhibition evaluation undertaken by Colchester Castle, there were 54,000 visitors to the Castle during the period of the exhibition: an increase of 21,000 on the previous year. The exhibition contributed £838,977.00 (gross income) to the local economy and £688,839.00 to the regional economy.⁵⁵⁸ It was regarded as a huge success for the host museum. Following this success, Colchester Castle was able to host another exhibition titled *Treasures of China* from Nanjing Museum, the provincial museum in Jiangsu Province, which is one of the largest museums in China and enjoys a similar level of reputation to the Palace Museum in Beijing and the Shanghai Museum. Museum representatives of Essex County Council visited Jiangsu sometime after *Guardians to the King* on a regular cultural trip under the umbrella of the twinning relationship, during which they visited Nanjing Museum. It was naturally recognised by both sides that Nanjing Museum could be a potential partner for continuous museum exchange following on from *Guardians to the King*. Peter Berridge, the Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service Manager, heard of this opportunity from his museum colleagues in Essex County Council.⁵⁵⁹ He then approached Nanjing Museum with the idea to engage young people as curators to select key objects for an exhibition, as part of Colchester's contribution to the Cultural Olympiad.⁵⁶⁰ The plan was soon formalised and developed into a series of exchange exhibitions: Colchester Castle would host the exhibition from Nanjing Museum in 2012 and send an exhibition to Nanjing in the following year.

The successful *Guardians to the King* demonstrated to each side that the other was a trustworthy partner.⁵⁶¹ To some extent, it would be difficult to imagine how the two museums on such different scales were able to exchange exhibitions. Tom Hodgson

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Tom Hodgson, interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid; Wu Heng 吴衡, interview with the author, Nanjing, 14 September 2013.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

claimed that in 2006, he would not have believed that Colchester Castle would host an exhibition from China. Thanks to the twinning relationship and regular cultural exchanges under this framework, his museum gradually became a partner in a broader relationship.⁵⁶² The twinning relationship provides a platform for continuous exhibition exchanges and exhibition exchanges strengthen the relationship.

The exhibition *From Steep Hillside: Ancient Rock Carvings from Dazu, China* at National Museum Wales, Cardiff in 2011 was also a direct result of a twinning relationship. The Chinese government launched the ‘Western Development Programme’ in 2000, with the purpose of ‘utilizing surplus economic development capacity in the eastern coastal regions in improving economic and social development level of the western regions and consolidating national defense’.⁵⁶³ The programme includes six provinces, five autonomous regions and one municipality in western China. The Leadership Group for Western China Development was created in January 2000 by the State Council and led by Premier Zhu Rongji and Vice-Premier Wen Jiabao. When Wen Jiabao visited Wales in 2000, he recommended Chongqing - the only municipality in the programme - to Wales as a potential twinning partner,⁵⁶⁴ ‘given their similar histories and positions’, in hope that their experience, both as industrial areas, could inspire each other on solutions to developmental problems.⁵⁶⁵ Following this official recommendation, a MoU was signed by the Chongqing Municipal Government and the Welsh Assembly Government during First Minister for Wales Rhodri Morgan’s visit to Chongqing in March 2006. This document identified six areas of cooperation: economic and trade development, education and training, environment, culture, governance and agriculture.⁵⁶⁶ In September 2006, a Welsh Affairs Officer who was responsible for

⁵⁶² Tom Hodgson, interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁶³ Y. Yang, D. Yi and C. Xu, ‘Analysis of technological innovation capacity of equipment manufacturing industry in the early days of the development drives of Western China’, in E. Qi, J. Shen and R. Dou, eds., *The 19th International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Engineering Management: Management System Innovation*, Springer, Berlin and New York, 2013, 591-600, p.592.

⁵⁶⁴ ‘Wales-Chongqing relationship’, *Wales Cymru*, [http://www.wales.com/en/content/cms/English/International Links/Wales and China/Wales Chongqing/Wales Chongqing.aspx](http://www.wales.com/en/content/cms/English/International%20Links/Wales%20and%20China/Wales%20Chongqing/Wales%20Chongqing.aspx), accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁶⁵ ‘Wales-Chongqing dragon friendship’, *Wales Cymru*, https://www.ecrimewales.com/upload/pdf/dragon_relationship.pdf, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁶⁶ ‘Sacred rock carvings leave China for the first time’, *Wales Cymru*, [http://www.wales.com/en/content/cms/News/Dazu Carvings Snea/Dazu Carvings Snea.aspx](http://www.wales.com/en/content/cms/News/Dazu_Carvings_Snea/Dazu_Carvings_Snea.aspx), accessed 14 May 2014; ‘Wales-Chongqing relationship’, *Wales Cymru*.

the Chongqing-Wales relationship was appointed to the British Consulate General in Chongqing and another officer was added in September 2007. The relationship was further formalised by the signing of a cooperation agreement between Wales and Chongqing in March 2008. In January 2011 the Wales Government Office, which focused exclusively on the twinning relationship, was separated from the British Consulate General.⁵⁶⁷

Dazu, used to be a county but became a district of the Chongqing municipality in October 2011. Michael Houlihan, Director General of National Museum Wales, visited Chongqing on a regular cultural trip under the twinning framework in May 2009 and signed a MoU with the Three Gorges Museum in Chongqing, which built a broad framework for expertise, information, network, exhibition exchanges between the two institutions.⁵⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that the Three Gorges Museum has already hosted an exhibition from Wales called *Wales, Land of the Red Dragon* (4 March - 30 June 2013) under the MoU. During that trip, Houlihan visited the Dazu rock carvings, which was awarded World Heritage status by UNESCO in 1999. As the World Heritage Committee has described:

Dazu rock carvings ... are remarkable for their aesthetic quality, their rich diversity of subject matter, both secular and religious, and the light that they shed on everyday life in China during this period. They provide outstanding evidence of the harmonious synthesis of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.⁵⁶⁹

According to the fieldwork conducted with museum staff on both sides, it was difficult to identify who proposed the initiative for this exhibition at the very beginning, but it was quite clear that it was during Houlihan's trip that the original plan to display the rock carvings in Wales was informally raised and both parties were quite happy to promote this exchange.

In fact, before Houlihan's trip, the Cultural Bureau of Chongqing Municipality, the Department of Tourism, the Dazu County People's Government, the Art Museum of Dazu Rock Carvings, as well as other relevant organisations, had already jointly

⁵⁶⁷ 'Wales-Chongqing relationship', *Wales Cymru*.

⁵⁶⁸ Stephen Howe, interview with the author, Cardiff, 20 March 2013.

⁵⁶⁹ UNESCO, 'Dazu rock carvings', <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/912/>, accessed 14 May 2014.

submitted a proposal to the Chongqing Municipal Government to request support for sending the Dazu rock carvings abroad. Recognising that the Dazu rock carvings site was the only UNESCO World Heritage site in Chongqing, and probably the best known cultural attraction in the industrial city, the proposal was ratified by Mayor Wang Hongju. But plans had not been developed until the opportunity of the exhibition in Cardiff arose, as the Chongqing side had struggled to find out suitable opportunities and to work through other practical difficulties.⁵⁷⁰

Houlihan's trip, against the background of twinning relationship, provided the best opportunity and strongest motivation for the Chongqing side, not only the relevant cultural institutions, but also the Chongqing government. According to Deputy Director of the Art Museum of Dazu Rock Carvings, Chen Xiaoping, there was some tourism promotion about the Dazu rock carvings abroad before this exhibition, but it was simply some images and replicas. This exhibition was going to be the first time that the authentic Dazu rock carvings would go abroad in the form of cultural exchange, rather than as a commercial or tourism promotion. It can be predicted how eager the Chongqing side was to put on this exhibition as soon as possible.⁵⁷¹

After that trip, the Chongqing governmental departments pushed forward this collaboration very actively, as did the Welsh Assembly, which was also 'keen for the association with Chongqing to thrive' in as many fields as possible.⁵⁷² The Welsh Affairs Officer at the British Consulate General and the Chongqing Cultural Bureau made huge contributions to broker the initial contact between the two museums. Soon after that it became clear that the soonest available slot for National Museum Wales to put on the exhibition would be January to April in 2011,⁵⁷³ which would make the preparation time for the exhibition - less than one year - very tight.⁵⁷⁴ But the Chinese side, both the local authorities and museum, still hoped to take the opportunity rather than wait. And the two museums, under the support of bilateral local governments managed to open the exhibition on time. It can be assumed that the extent of this support was significant.

⁵⁷⁰ Chen Xiaoping 陈小平, interview with the author, Chongqing, 9 September 2013.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Stephen Howe, interview with the author, Cardiff, 20 March 2013.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ According to Stephen Howe, the project formally started since April/May 2010 when museum representatives from National Museum Wales went out to see what was on offer, talk about how to present the exhibition, and so on.

In all the three exhibitions discussed so far, the twinning relationship provided the best opportunity and platform for museum collaboration. The local governments on both sides were happy to develop these relationships into cultural fields, which included museum and exhibition exchanges. They were, therefore, very active to bridge the initial contacts and provide any possible support (mainly administrative and bureaucratic) to push forward the collaboration. Museums relied on the established network under such relationships and benefitted from resources available within this framework, such as identifying the right contacts.

Furthermore, in such relationships, it is difficult to clarify who proposed the initial idea for a specific exhibition project at the very beginning. But it is quite clear that the local authorities on both sides, with their own ambitions and expectations, actively pushed forward the exhibition exchanges. The Foreign Affairs Office of Jiangsu Provincial People's Government launched the *30th Anniversary Celebration for Dialogues with International Sister Cities: Friendship, Harmony, Cooperation, Development* campaign in 2008, which comprehensively celebrated its twinning relationship with 45 cities around the world.⁵⁷⁵ It was evident that the Essex-Jiangsu Festival, as well as *Guardian to the King*, were part of this overall local governmental agenda. For Essex County Council, *Guardians to the King* and *Treasures of China* 'provided the opening and closing of Essex's contribution to the Cultural Olympiad ... and add[ed] a new dimension to [its] long-standing relationship with Jiangsu Province', according to Jeremy Lucas.⁵⁷⁶ They helped Essex to demonstrate 'the county's many diverse and unique cultural strengths'.⁵⁷⁷ In the case of the Dazu rock carvings exhibition, it helped Chongqing to take the first successful step in promoting its cultural heritage and attracting tourism. The Dazu rock carvings travelled to Canada in 2012, after its show in Cardiff. For Wales, the exhibition helped to put the country on the international map and make it

⁵⁷⁵ Foreign Affairs Office of Jiangsu Provincial People's Government, 'Jiangsusheng guoji youhao chengshi jiaoliu 30 zhounian: youyi, hexie, hezuo, fazhan' 江苏省国际友好城市交流 30 周年: 友谊 和谐 合作 发展 [30th Anniversary Celebration for Dialogues with International Sister Cities: Friendship, Harmony, Cooperation, Development], <http://www.jsfao.gov.cn/yc2008.asp>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁷⁶ Essex County Council, 'The Essex Jiangsu Cultural Festival', press release, provided by Tom Hodgson during interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁷⁷ Essex County Council, *The Essex · Jiangsu Festival 2008-2009*.

better known to the outside world.⁵⁷⁸ Generally speaking, such two-way collaborations under the twinning framework usually have win-win outcomes.

Where to find funding?

Even though such loan exhibitions are conducted under the general framework of twinning relationships, this does not necessarily mean that they are commissioned by the local authorities. The local authorities often suggest the idea, bridge the contacts and provide administrative support, more than allocating the overall exhibition budgets. But museums are still able to get some financial support from their local governments from time to time, and once that happens, the local governments play a very instrumental, sometimes even instructive role in the exhibitions, which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. For *Guardians to the King*, Colchester Castle managed to get some funding from Essex County Council and Colchester Borough Council.⁵⁷⁹ For the Dazu rock carvings exhibition, National Museum Wales received sponsorship from the Welsh Assembly.⁵⁸⁰ This indicates that the local governments on the British side recognised the exhibitions as part of their broad relationships with their twinned counterparts in China. On the Chinese side, financial support from local governments was mainly via by the reduction of loan fees.

In respect of *Guardians to the King*, it was reported by Essex County Council that the cost of the exhibition, as well as the Essex-Jiangsu Festival, was ‘covered by the Governor of Jiangsu Province, who has agreed to provide approximately £150,000 of funding for the festival by providing cash, covering travel costs and waiving fees for visiting performers and exhibitions’.⁵⁸¹ According to Colchester Castle, Essex County Council allocated £25,000 for the exhibition,⁵⁸² which may have come from the £150,000 provided by Jiangsu. But this cannot be confirmed during fieldwork and it is impossible to say if the Jiangsu government allocated any funding directly to the exhibition. Tom Hodgson claimed that a loan fee was not required by Xuzhou

⁵⁷⁸ Stephen Howe, interview with the author, Cardiff, 20 March 2013; see also A. Wightwick, ‘Wales for sale - from NYC to Newtown’, *Western Mail*, 26 February 2011, <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/wales-sale---nyc-newtown-1854915>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁷⁹ ‘Guardians to the King: Renaissance case study’, provided by Tom Hodgson during interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁸⁰ Stephen Howe, interview with the author, Cardiff, 20 March 2013.

⁵⁸¹ Essex County Council, ‘The Essex Jiangsu Cultural Festival’.

⁵⁸² ‘Guardians to the King: Renaissance case study’.

Museum, which was unusual for loans from Chinese museums, given that the Chinese regulations on exhibitions of cultural relics going abroad demand the lending organisations to charge appropriate fees for exhibition preparation and object conservation, namely loan fees.⁵⁸³ This is consistent with Essex County Council's statement as mentioned above. But according to Director Li Yinde of Xuzhou Museum, Colchester Castle still paid some symbolic loan fees, even though it was far from enough to cover the museum's overall costs for the exhibition. Xuzhou Museum still needed to cover the cost from its general budget. No matter if Colchester Castle paid fees to Xuzhou Museum or not, it is certain that Xuzhou Museum did not attempt to gain any economic benefit from this exhibition and even bore a deficit. Director Li Yinde said this was different from their previous experience, even though this exhibition has not been the first for the museum.⁵⁸⁴

For *Treasures of China*, Colchester Castle did pay Nanjing Museum a loan fee. But Tom Hodgson claimed that this was quite a reasonable amount, rather than commercial fee.⁵⁸⁵ This exhibition was part of the exchange exhibitions between the two museums. When they planned this exhibition, the two museums agreed that Colchester Castle would host an exhibition from Nanjing Museum in 2012, and then send an exhibition to Nanjing in 2013.⁵⁸⁶ And this was clearly stated in the contract for *Treasures of China*.⁵⁸⁷ Nanjing Museum would pay exactly the same amount to Colchester Castle when they received the exhibition, which means the cost for the two exhibitions would ultimately be evenly shared between the two institutions.⁵⁸⁸

For the Dazu rock carvings exhibition, the financial support from the Chinese side is more evident. First of all, the Art Museum of Dazu Rock Carvings did not charge any loan fee from National Museum Wales, which was definitely agreed by the local government. Secondly, the Dazu Museum paid the cost of transporting the objects, which was particularly unusual for loan exhibitions. According to Deputy Director Chen Xiaoping, when the draft contract of the exhibition was submitted to the State

⁵⁸³ SACH, 'wenwu chujing zhanlan guanli guiding' 文物出境展览管理规定 [Provision on the management of cultural relics to be taken out of the country for exhibitions].

⁵⁸⁴ Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013.

⁵⁸⁵ Tom Hodgson, interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

⁵⁸⁶ The original plan to send an exhibition to Nanjing Museum was delayed for some reason, but the negotiation was still ongoing during the fieldwork for this research.

⁵⁸⁷ Wu Heng 吴衡, interview with the author, Nanjing, 4 September 2013.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.; Tom Hodgson, interview with the author, Colchester, 31 May 2013.

Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) for endorsement, the SACH did raise the issue about the fees and costs borne by Chinese side. The Dazu Museum and Chongqing local authorities explained their willingness to send the exhibition. Not only the museum itself, but all the relevant administrative institutions in Chongqing were eager to promote the Dazu rock carvings abroad and the exhibition in Wales was vital for taking the first step. Finally the SACH was persuaded by the strong motivation for the exhibition and allowed them to lend the exhibition for free, as well as to pay for transportation.⁵⁸⁹ It should be pointed out that when National Museum Wales sent its exhibition to the Three Gorges Museum in 2013, they paid for all the transportation costs, which were more or less the same amount that the Chongqing side paid for sending the Dazu rock carvings to Wales.⁵⁹⁰ Even though this arrangement involved two different Chinese museums as sender and host, on the local-authority level, the cost was still evenly shared between Chongqing and Wales, which re-confirms that such longer-term collaborations under the twinning framework on a local level are mutual and beneficial for both sides. In addition, the Dazu Museum managed to get a subsidy from the Cultural Bureau of Chongqing Municipality after the exhibition finished, thanks to the big success of this exhibition and the museum's over-expenditure. Even though it was not a big amount and far from enough to cover all the costs, it was a symbolic reward to the museum for its contribution to local foreign affairs.⁵⁹¹

The general budget for Chinese local museums mainly comes from local governments rather than the central government. How museums use their budget reflects their, as well as the local governments' agendas. Generally speaking, local governments can decide how to use their own money. When the money is spent on exhibition exchanges or when preferential treatment is given to host museums (in the form of waived loan fees, for example), it means that local governments are strongly conscious of the value of exhibitions as instruments of local foreign affairs and cultural diplomacy.

⁵⁸⁹ Chen Xiaoping 陈小平, interview with the author, Chongqing, 9 September 2013.

⁵⁹⁰ Stephen Howe, interview with the author, Cardiff, 20 March 2013.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

Locality vs. Nationality

All exhibitions of Chinese ancient art that are sent abroad by Chinese public museums need to be approved by the SACH, even the State Council. There is no exception for these local-level exhibitions. However, as these local-level exhibitions usually serve local agendas more than national agendas, the SACH will make certain compromises if the local government has a persuasive reason for making the loan. It has already been discussed in earlier part of this chapter that the SACH made some compromises on the loan fee and transportation costs for the Dazu rock carvings exhibition.

In addition, a compromise also took place for the *Treasures of China* exhibition, in terms of the bureaucratic procedure to get approval from the SACH. The project started in 2010 and the object list had almost been finalised by early 2011. But after that the collaboration was suspended for a relatively long period mainly due to budget issues on Colchester Castle's side. The contract, logistics and other practical issues were not resolved until early 2012, less than six months before the exhibition actually opened on 30 June 2012. When negotiations were re-started in 2012 after the suspension, it was already clear that there was not enough time to get approval from the SACH. According to the *Regulations for the Implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics*, 'where cultural relics are to be taken out of the country for exhibition, the unit organizing the exhibition shall, six months before the exhibition, submit an application therefore to the competent cultural relics administrative department of the State Council'.⁵⁹² The exhibition approval system requires that the exhibition plan to be assessed by the local cultural authority first of all before submission to the SACH. This means that the Chinese lending museum should generally submit the exhibition plan more than six months in advance and the normal length in Jiangsu Province is eight months ahead, to guarantee the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture has enough time to do the preliminary assessment. It was quite clear that there was not enough time when Nanjing Museum submitted the application, but they still submitted anyway. According to Wu Heng, Deputy Director of the Cultural Exchange Centre of Nanjing Museum, the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Culture did the first

⁵⁹² State Council of the PRC, 'Regulations for the implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Projection of Cultural Relics'.

assessment very quickly and helped to persuade the SACH that this exhibition was very important because: it was part of the twinning partnership; it coincided with the London 2012 Olympics, which was really a good opportunity to promote Chinese culture and Nanjing Museum; the involvement of young people as curators was a new learning experience for Nanjing Museum; and they did not submit the exhibition plan early enough because of the suspension in negotiations and financial issues on the counterparts side rather than purposeful delay. Finally the SACH was persuaded and the exhibition was open to the public on time.⁵⁹³

It is quite evident from *Treasures of China* and the Dazu rock carvings exhibition that the Chinese central government usually respects and supports local governments' arrangements for cultural diplomacy, as long as they do not harm the national interests. The three case-study exhibitions - *Guardians to the King*, *Treasures of China* and *From Steep Hillside: Ancient Rock Carvings from Dazu, China* - discussed so far in this chapter, were all conducted under the twinning framework and served China's cultural diplomacy on a local level. But on the other hand, local governments and local museums can be commissioned by the central government to serve China's cultural diplomacy on a national level. China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province in eastern China is such a museum typically playing this two-fold role through frequently sending exhibitions abroad.

The *Living in Silk: Chinese Textiles Through 5000 Years* exhibition was lent by China National Silk Museum to Nottingham Castle Museum in 2012. As with the other three exhibitions, *Living in Silk* had similar implications for China's cultural diplomacy on a local level. Nottingham is famous for its historical lace industry and Nottingham Castle Museum has accumulated some Chinese silk and costume collections over the years, mainly through donation. Deborah Dean, project manager for this exhibition, claimed that when Nottingham Castle Museum discussed potential international collaboration for the *Stories of the World* project - part of the Cultural Olympiad - with the international team at Nottingham City Council it was

⁵⁹³ Wu Heng 吴衡, interview with the author, Nanjing, 14 September 2013.

quite natural that the city council and the museum service would focus on Chinese silk.⁵⁹⁴

Nottingham has been twinned with Ningbo, another city in Zhejiang Province since 2005 and has kept close cultural contacts with it thereafter. The University of Nottingham has a campus in Ningbo. Officially opened in 2006, it is ‘the first Sino-foreign university to open its doors in China’.⁵⁹⁵ In May 2009, Ron Inglis, Service Manager of Nottingham City Museums and Galleries and Dave Green, Nottingham Castle Museum’s site manager visited Ningbo Museum and negotiated for possible collaboration.⁵⁹⁶ The two sides worked together to open a photographic show titled *Nottingham Impression* in Ningbo in August 2009.⁵⁹⁷

Even though Nottingham and Hangzhou, where the *Living in Silk* exhibition came from are not twinned directly, they could make contact through the established twin-city network between Nottingham and Ningbo. Ningbo and Hangzhou are both cities under the administration and governance of Zhejiang provincial government. In actual fact, the initial contact between Nottingham Castle Museum and China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou was brokered by the international team at Nottingham City Council and in Ningbo, according to Deborah Dean.⁵⁹⁸ In this sense, this exhibition benefited from the twin-city framework.

Beyond this, *Living in Silk* was generally a commercial exhibition; Nottingham Castle Museum paid to bring in the exhibition to coincide with the London Olympics. The collaboration was quite straightforward and nothing out of the ordinary. What is more interesting and important for this research was the ‘life’ of *Living in Silk* before it came to the UK. In fact, similar versions of the exhibition, with slightly different foci had travelled to several countries before arriving in the UK in 2012. Based on the exhibition in the UK, the next section of this thesis will discuss in greater depth the China National Silk Museum’s contribution to China’s

⁵⁹⁴ Deborah Dean, interview with the author, Nottingham, 15 May 2013.

⁵⁹⁵ University of Nottingham Ningbo, ‘An international university in China’, <http://www.nottingham.edu.cn/en/about/index.aspx>, accessed 12 May 2014.

⁵⁹⁶ Mo Yida 莫意达, ‘Ningbo bowuguan jiaqi woshi guoji wenhua jiaoliu qiaoliang’ 宁波博物馆架起我市国际文化交流桥梁 [Ningbo Museum bridges the city’s international cultural exchange], *zhejiangsheng wenwuju* 浙江省文物局 [Zhejiang Cultural Bureau], 17 July 2009, <http://www.zjww.gov.cn/culture/2009-07-17/190983576.shtml>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁹⁷ See ‘Latest news’, *Nottingham Vision*, December 2009, <http://www.nottinghamvision.co.uk/latest-news.html>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁵⁹⁸ Deborah Dean, interview with the author, Nottingham, 15 May 2013.

cultural diplomacy in other countries on local and national levels. Even though it is away from the overall focus of this research on China's exhibitions loaned to the UK, illuminating information has been discovered during the fieldwork conducted for this thesis. The exhibition lent to the UK was a travelling exhibition. It is helpful to examine its long international journey. And it helps to demonstrate the complexity of China's cultural diplomacy through comparing the exhibition's 'life story' in the UK and other countries.

The earliest version of *Living in Silk* was *Du Ciel À La Terre: Collection du musée de la Soie du Zhejiang, Chine* (From Heaven to Earth: Silk Collections of Jiangsu, China), at Musée des Arts Asiatiques de Nice (17 October 2005 - 16 January 2006). This exhibition was commissioned by the Zhejiang provincial government for the Zhejiang Cultural Week in Nice, the capital city of Alpes-Maritimes, which has been twinned with Zhejiang Province since 2004. As an official commission, all the exhibition costs were paid by the commissioner - the Zhejiang provincial government.⁵⁹⁹ Thus, the exhibition was initially instrumentalised by the local government to serve local foreign affairs and cultural diplomacy under the twinning framework.

Then, re-titled as *Living in Silk: Chinese Textile Through 5000 Years*, the exhibition travelled to the Prague National Museum from 31 May to 31 July 2006 at the request of the Ministry of Culture of the PRC.⁶⁰⁰ Premier Wen Jiabao officially visited the Czech Republic on 8-9 December 2005 and Minister of Culture, Sun Jiazheng, was among the delegation that accompanied his visit.⁶⁰¹ Before this state visit, an exhibition from the National Taiwan Museum - *A Thousand Faces of Formosa: The Nature and Tradition of Taiwan* - had just closed at the same museum.⁶⁰² At that time, the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan was relatively sensitive and not as smooth as today. Chinese officials wished to send an

⁵⁹⁹ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Wen Jiabao leaves Beijing for five-state visits and to attend the ASEAN Plus China, Japan and ROK Summit and other meetings', 4 December 2005, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/wjbfw_665822/t224945.shtml, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶⁰² 'Thousand faces of Taiwan shine at Czech National Museum show', *Taiwan Info*, 8 July 2005, http://taiwaninfo.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=21421&CtNode=103&htx_TRCategory=&mp=4, accessed 14 May 2014.

exhibition to the Czech Republic, possibly in the hope that it would overshadow the influence of the exhibition from Taiwan, according to an interview conducted with China National Silk Museum.⁶⁰³ Against this background, the letter of intent was officially signed by the cultural ministers of the two countries during this state visit.⁶⁰⁴ The time between the state visit and the exhibition's opening was very short - only about half a year, which was definitely too short a time to organise international loans. But the Chinese government was keen to put on the exhibition as soon as possible, which confirms the assumption that the exhibition was to be an instrument to overshadow the influence of the exhibition from Taiwan. And because the time was too short to create a brand new exhibition, the Ministry of Culture of the PRC chose to use the China National Silk Museum's exhibition, which had already been well received abroad. The cost was ultimately shared between the Ministry of Culture and the Zhejiang provincial government.⁶⁰⁵

From May 2007 to January 2008, with another title - *Road of Silk: 5000 Years of the Art of Silk* - the exhibition travelled to three venues in Russia (the Far Eastern Museum of Fine Arts in Khabarovsk, the State Museum of Fine Arts of Tatarstan Republic in Kazan, and the Moscow State Historical Museum in Moscow) for the 2007 Year of China in Russia,⁶⁰⁶ which was one of the 'reciprocal China-Russia national theme years'.⁶⁰⁷ Starting in 2006, the Year of China in Russia included an intensive series of bilateral collaboration, covering economic cooperation, cultural exchange and technological cooperation. Kazan and Moscow were the places where President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao officially opened and closed the Year

⁶⁰³ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

⁶⁰⁴ China National Silk Museum, 'yong sichou zuo zhongguo de yizhang mingpian: zhongguo sichou bowuguan duiwai zhanlan gongzuo tihui' 用丝绸做中国的一张名片：中国丝绸博物馆对外展览工作体会 [Using silk as a business card for China: China National Silk Museum's reflection on loan exhibitions], *Zhejiangsheng wenwuju* 浙江省文物局 [Zhejiang Cultural Bureau], 11 March 2008, <http://www.zjww.gov.cn/magazine/2008-03-11/7123914.shtml>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶⁰⁵ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

⁶⁰⁶ China National Silk Museum, 'yong sichou zuo zhongguo de yizhang mingpian: zhongguo sichou bowuguan duiwai zhanlan gongzuo tihui' 用丝绸做中国的一张名片：中国丝绸博物馆对外展览工作体会 [Using silk as a business card for China: China National Silk Museum's reflection on loan exhibitions].

⁶⁰⁷ '2007 Year of China in Russia', *Xinhua News*, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2007china/>, accessed 14 May 2014.

of China in Russia.⁶⁰⁸ As this was a national initiative, the exhibition was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and the Zhejiang provincial government together,⁶⁰⁹ and was, therefore, paid by them.⁶¹⁰

From 15 March to 15 May 2009, as part of the 2009 Zhejiang Cultural Festival in Mexico, the exhibition, with the title of *From Heaven to Earth: Silk Collections of Jiangsu, China* was displayed in the Arts Centre of the State in Mexicali, the capital city of the Mexican state of Baja California. The cultural festival was under the auspices of the Zhejiang provincial government and the Baja California government. According to Yang Jianxin, Director-General of the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture at that time, the Baja California government and their cultural departments also provided part of the funding for this cultural festival, which was different from Chinese government's unilateral cultural promotion abroad before.⁶¹¹ But this funding from the Mexican side might have been intended more generally for the overall festival rather than for the exhibition itself, as the Chinese side still bore all the costs of transportation, commercial insurance and packing.⁶¹²

From 29 September 2010 to 9 January 2011, with a new name, *100% Silk: Story of Chinese Silk*, the exhibition was staged at the Espoo Museum of Modern Art in Finland to celebrate the Zhejiang Cultural Festival there and to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Finland and

⁶⁰⁸ China National Silk Museum, 'yong sichou zuo zhongguo de yizhang mingpian: zhongguo sichou bowuguan duiwai zhanlan gongzuo tihui' 用丝绸做中国的一张名片: 中国丝绸博物馆对外展览工作体会 [Using silk as a business card for China: China National Silk Museum's reflection on loan exhibitions].

⁶⁰⁹ Liu Yiding 刘一丁, 'eluosi, wei zhongguo sichou wenhua hecai' 俄罗斯, 为中国丝绸文化喝彩 [Russia, Cheers for Chinese silk culture], *Zhejiang zaixian* 浙江在线 [Zhejiang Online], 14 January 2008, <http://culture.zjol.com.cn/system/2008/01/14/009141247.shtml>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶¹⁰ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

⁶¹¹ Chen Yao 陈瑶 and Wan Houde 万后德, "'tianshang renjian": zhongguo sichou wenhua jingyan moxige' "天上人间": 中国丝绸文化惊艳墨西哥 ['From Heaven to Earth': Chinese silk culture stuns Mexico], *xinhua wang* 新华网 [Xinhua Net], 23 March 2009, http://www.zj.xinhuanet.com/website/2009-03/23/content_16026494.htm, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶¹² See SACH, 'guanyu tongyi zhongguo sichou bowuguan fu moxige juban "tianshang renjian - zhongguo Zhejiang sichou wenhua zhan" de pifu' 关于同意中国丝绸博物馆赴墨西哥举办《天上人间 - 中国浙江丝绸文化展》的批复 [Reply concerning the China National Silk Museum's exhibition 'From Heaven to Earth: Silk Collections of Jiangsu, China' to Mexico], *Chinese Government Public Information Online*, 20 January 2009, http://govinfo.nlc.gov.cn/gtfz/xxgk/bwgl/gjwwj/201010/t20101012_523633.htm?classid=428, accessed 14 May 2014.

the PRC.⁶¹³ This time, because China National Silk Museum was invited to send the exhibition by the Finnish side, the costs were paid by them and it was a commercial exhibition as the one that would ultimately appear in Nottingham.

This series of exhibitions took various titles in different countries. Because of the characteristics and preferences of each host museum, as well as the themes of different occasions, the focus of the exhibition was subject to change to a degree. For example, the first exhibition in Nice was in celebration of the twinning relationship, more on a local level, so that the exhibition focused more on introducing the status of Zhejiang Province in the history of Chinese silk.⁶¹⁴ Nevertheless, the basic structure and objects for all these travelling exhibitions were quite similar. The curatorship was undertaken by China National Silk Museum, with appropriate suggestions from the host institutions.⁶¹⁵ In most cases, the exhibition was instrumentalised by Chinese government, and whether local or central, the government paid all the associated costs. The host institutions only provided gallery space and appropriate receptions when the exhibition arrived.⁶¹⁶

The China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou has also collaborated with Chinese cultural centres abroad. Cultural centres are the Chinese government's initiative to promote Chinese culture abroad since 1988. The first was founded in the Republic of Mauritius in 1988 and up to 2014 there are 15 Chinese cultural centres around the world.⁶¹⁷ A current project of the Chinese cultural centres is working with provincial

⁶¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, “‘tianshang renjian: 5000 nian zhongguo sichou wenhua zhan” ji “fenlan 2010 · zhongguo Zhejiang wenhuajie” zai aisibao juxing’ 《天上人间- 5000 年中国丝绸文化展》暨“芬兰 2010 中国浙江文化节”在埃斯堡市举行 [‘100% Silk: Story of Chinese Silk’ and ‘Finland 2010 · China Zhejiang Cultural Festival’ held in Espoo], 29 September 2010, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/gjhdq_603914/gj_603916/oz_606480/1206_606920/1206x2_606940/t757311.shtml, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶¹⁴ Li Sha 李莎 and Zhang Dongsu 张冬素, ‘2010 fenlan · zhongguo Zhejiang wenhuajie kaimu’ 2010 芬兰 中国浙江文化节开幕 [Finland 2010 · China Zhejiang Cultural Festival opens], *Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture*, 29 September 2009, <http://www.zjwh.gov.cn/dttx/zjwh/2010-09-29/92866.htm>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶¹⁵ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ The 15 China cultural centres are in Port Louis, Mauritius (1988); Cotonou, Benin (1988); Cairo, Egypt (2002); Paris, France (2002); Valletta, Malta (2003); Seoul, Korea (2004); Berlin, Germany (2008); Tokyo, Japan (2009); Ulan Bator, Mongolia (2010); Bangkok, Thailand (2012); Mexico City, Mexico (2012); Moscow, Russia (2012); Sydney, Australia (2012); Madrid, Spain (2013); Abuja, the capital of Nigeria (2013). See Zhongguo wenhua zhongxin 中国文化中心 [China Cultural Center] website, <http://www.cccweb.org/>, accessed 10 March 2015.

and local governments to make use of their colourful cultural resources.⁶¹⁸ Under this project, China National Silk Museum, under the commission of the Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture and the Berlin Cultural Centre, created a brand-new exhibition, *Beyond the History and Material: Contemporary Silk Art*. The exhibition successively travelled to China cultural centres in Madrid (1 October to 31 October 2012), Berlin (25 May to 16 June 2013) and Moscow (25 December 2013 to 5 February 2014).⁶¹⁹

In 2014, China National Silk Museum worked with the Ministry of Commerce of the PRC to send another brand new exhibition, *Style in Silk: China Fashion Now and Then*, to the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C.. According to the fieldwork conducted with China National Silk Museum, during its communication with Chinese communities overseas, representatives from Chinese embassies and consulates in the countries where the museum's exhibitions have been held throughout the years, it was recognised that international audiences have a huge demand for Chinese silk products. When the museum's representative had the opportunity to participate in a meeting organised by the Ministry of Commerce, he reported this opportunity of promoting Chinese silk industry. The Ministry of Commerce was intrigued by this idea and therefore provided a special fund to support China National Silk Museum to organise a suitable exhibition, in cooperation with relevant commercial departments, to demonstrate the glamour of contemporary Chinese silk and promote the export of Chinese silk products.⁶²⁰

When China National Silk Museum went to the US on a scouting mission for suitable places to stage the exhibition, staff from the Chinese Embassy there expressed their interest in including this exhibition in the '2014 Happy Spring Festival' celebration and agreed to provide a space for the exhibition. The Spring Festival, also known as Chinese New Year, which is celebrated at the turn of Chinese lunar calendar, is probably the most famous Chinese traditional festival

⁶¹⁸ Gong Wen 龚雯, 'haiwai wenhua zhongxin jianshe tuidong zhonghua wenming zouxiang shijie' 海外文化中心建设推动中华文明走向世界 [The construction of China Cultural Centre overseas promotes Chinese civilisation to go abroad], *renmin wang* 人民网 [People's Daily Online], 30 May 2012, <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22226/244082/244102/18028606.html>, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶¹⁹ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013; see also the museum website for more details, China National Silk Museum, <http://en.chinasilkmuseum.com/>, accessed 14 February 2015.

⁶²⁰ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

worldwide. It is celebrated not only in China but also among Chinese communities all over the world. For more than ten years, the Ministry of Culture of the PRC has organised and sent countless cultural activities around the world to celebrate this festival. Such initiatives have gradually turned into a cultural brand, called ‘Happy Spring Festival’ since 2010. Collaborating with other ministries and local governments inside China, as well as Chinese communities and relevant organisations in the host countries, the Ministry of Culture has sent out a series of cultural activities to more and more countries on an ever greater scale, and this initiative is regarded as one of the most successful examples of Chinese cultural promotion and public diplomacy by Hou Xianghua, Director of the Ministry of Culture’s Bureau of External Cultural Relations.⁶²¹

The exhibition - *Style in Silk: China Fashion Now and Then* - was finally open from 31 January to 14 April 2014 at the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C., where the ‘2014 Happy Spring Festival’ celebration began.⁶²² Because of this project, China National Silk Museum has made plans to promote their exhibitions as part of the ‘Happy Spring Festival’ celebration in the future.⁶²³ This means that the museum will have increased opportunities to engage with China’s cultural diplomacy directly through working with the Ministry of Culture and Chinese embassies abroad. Initially commissioned by the Ministry of Commerce, this became a more complex collaboration between the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Embassy. Throughout the years of being commissioned by local or central government, China National Silk Museum has gradually formed its own insights into international loan exhibitions and actively taken the opportunity of cultural diplomacy to promote itself.

⁶²¹ Hou Xianghua 侯湘华, “‘huanle chunjie’: duiwai wenhua jiaoliu de liangli pinpai” “欢乐中国年”: 对外文化交流的靓丽品牌 [‘Happy Spring Festival’: a beautiful brand for cultural exchange], *gonggong waijiao jikan* 公共外交季刊 [Public Diplomacy Quarterly], no.10, 7 June 2012, http://www.china.com.cn/international/txt/2012-06/07/content_25592376.htm, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶²² ‘Meridian International Center joins with the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to host the 4th Annual Chinese Lunar New Year Celebration’, *Meridian International Center*, <http://www.meridian.org/component/k2/item/1271-meridian-international-center-joins-with-the-embassy-of-the-people%E2%80%99s-republic-of-china-to-host-the-4th-annual-chinese-lunar-new-year-celebration>, accessed 10 March 2015.

⁶²³ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

China National Silk Museum, although titled ‘national’, is a provincial museum and mainly financed by the Zhejiang provincial government. However, the majority of its loan exhibitions are commissioned by central or local government, even more so than other national museums. The main reason for this is probably the incomparable status of silk in Chinese culture. The Silk Road, also known as the Silk Route, is a series of routes where trade and cultural exchanges have taken place between China and the Mediterranean since the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD). It was named after silk, as that was the most important trade on the road. Silk, regarded as a symbol of Chinese culture by other countries, has also become a symbol of China’s long history of cultural exchanges with the outside world, thanks to the Silk Road. Given this, it is not difficult to understand why China National Silk Museum, as the ‘largest specialized museum on textiles’ and the ‘largest silk museum in the world’,⁶²⁴ has acquired so many governmental commissions. When the museum is commissioned, the central or local government pay all the costs, including for transportation and insurance. The commissioners would check the exhibition narrative. The museum might need to make some adjustments accordingly.⁶²⁵ For example, the exhibitions commissioned by the Zhejiang provincial government to celebrate the Zhejiang cultural festivals are often required to focus more on Zhejiang’s silk culture rather than the Chinese silk overall. The museum still has freedom and control over the exhibition overall and expressed their professional opinions. However, in such cases, the Chinese government, central or local, definitely plays a more clearly instrumental and even instructive role in delivering cultural diplomacy through exhibitions. As the commissioners change, the museum may serve China’s cultural diplomacy on a local level or a national level, or both. Such situations where the Chinese government, local or central, commissioned an exhibition and paid all the costs, while the host museum only provided gallery space and reception for the objects rarely occurred in the UK in the past decade, according to the fieldwork for this thesis.⁶²⁶ However, the trajectory of the *Living in Silk* exhibition before it came to the UK in 2012, as well its originating museum’s

⁶²⁴ China National Silk Museum, ‘Introduction’, http://en.chinasilkmuseum.com/overview/detail_1.html, accessed 14 May 2014.

⁶²⁵ Staff of the China National Silk Museum, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Hangzhou, 18 September 2013.

⁶²⁶ Here it refers to exhibitions of ancient Chinese art from Chinese public museums. The case of contemporary art exhibitions will be discussed further in later chapters.

colourful experience of serving the local and national cultural diplomacy, clearly demonstrates the complexity of China's cultural diplomacy and the deployment of loan exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy occurs in a multitude of ways via different institutional bureaucracies.

Conclusion

Twinning relationships (between cities, provinces, or a larger areas) provide good platforms for inter-cultural exchanges on a local level and, therefore, provide another dimension by which to analyse loan exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy. Based on longer-term relationships, such exhibitions usually aim to serve local agendas, and are, therefore, less subject to the changes of diplomatic relations between two national governments. Being associated with locality, they find it easier to get local support, procedurally and financially. The Chinese central government tends to respect and support such local collaborations, providing they do not damage national interests. On the other hand, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, along with the deepening of globalisation, locality is playing an important role in international cultural communication. Smaller-scale local museums and local governments are playing an important role on the international stage. Given China's need to diversify the practitioners of cultural diplomacy and the need to diversify the resources for cultural diplomacy, those museums on a local level, probably with a more specialized collection, supported by local governments' agenda, are highly likely to play an ever more important role. In this way, their contribution to China's cultural diplomacy is not limited to locality any more. They will ultimately contribute to China's cultural diplomacy overall.

In the past four case-study chapters, all the exhibitions discussed have been loan exhibitions of ancient Chinese art and have involved Chinese public museums and governmental departments on different levels. The next and last case-study chapter will change the focus to investigate an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art and will see how it helps to identify a gap in China's current system of managing cultural diplomacy and loan exhibitions.

Chapter 8: *China Design Now and Contemporary China*

The previous four case-study chapters have explored how loan exhibitions of ancient Chinese art have been instrumentalised by central or local Chinese governments. At some level it might thus be understood that such exhibitions have an official background and might be regarded as representing the voice of the Chinese government. This chapter is going to examine an exhibition of contemporary Chinese art,⁶²⁷ which is free from such official background, and its impact on the image of China.

Many contemporary Chinese artists, who are currently active and popular in the international art field, experienced difficulties during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and the struggles associated with China's rapid transition to market economy in the period afterwards. Their art tends to expose the darker side of Chinese society or satirise the communist party and the Chinese government; it is the opposite of any celebratory and propagandistic messages. Usually such voices tend to be consistent with the international community's general criticisms of and concerns about China and are, therefore, believed as true representations of the realities of contemporary China. The popularity of Ai Weiwei and his art in the West, as an icon and representative of China's poor record on human rights, is undoubtedly the most well-known example of this. This thesis does not intend to debate the contribution of such individual artists. It is undoubtedly true that they and their art do impact on the image of China in the West. When contemporary China is in the spotlight, these artists and their art provide another perspective from which to understand China, which publicly sanctioned art cannot achieve.

Zhang Hongxing, Senior Curator of Chinese Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) argued that, 'despite China's economic importance, its contemporary culture remains mysterious and remote in the West'.⁶²⁸ Stephen Green, then Group Chairman of HSBC and Chair of the 'China Now' Festival, also commented on this lack of understanding of contemporary China by claiming that 'of course people

⁶²⁷ Here contemporary Chinese art is a general concept, which includes installation, performance, design and any other possible art format popular in contemporary art field.

⁶²⁸ C. Byrne, 'New cultural revolution arrives in Britain on a wave of creativity and confidence', *The Independent*, 1 January 2008, p.2.

admire things like the calligraphy or the terracotta warriors. But what they may not appreciate is the effervescence and liveliness of what is happening in China today'.⁶²⁹ In this sense, such contemporary art is helpful to undo the mysteries of old China and present an unfamiliar but more relevant contemporary China, which exhibitions of ancient art cannot achieve.

Exhibitions borrowing contemporary art from China do not usually need the approval of the Chinese government (see Chapter 2). Such exhibitions, as well as the artists and their art works on show, are thus non-governmental actors impacting on the image and perceptions of China. Today, as the Chinese government is eager to diversify the practitioners and resources of its cultural diplomacy, such non-governmental actors and resources must be considered. However, partly due to the generally critical tone of contemporary art, it is still difficult for the Chinese authorities to use them effectively.

The host museum of such exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art usually works directly with artists or private art studios, which means no public museum is, generally speaking, involved.⁶³⁰ Even though this thesis focuses on the relationships between Chinese museums and the Chinese government in delivering loan exhibitions, such non-governmental actors will become of more significance for China's cultural diplomacy to reflect upon its current system of managing museums and loan exhibitions. Given this, the last case-study chapter is dedicated to an exhibition of contemporary China - *China Design Now* at the V&A in 2008 - to examine its impact on the image and perceptions of China and its implications for China's cultural diplomacy.

In the UK there have been many exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art in the past decade. The V&A's *China Design Now* in 2008 was chosen as the case study of this chapter partly due to the availability of research materials and access to museum staff for interviews. Additionally, compared to other exhibitions focusing on introducing one single or several artists, this exhibition was more inclusive, by focusing on identifying the common trends in contemporary Chinese design. It

⁶²⁹ P. Aspden, 'Great trawl of China', *Financial Times*, 12 January 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fd615fe8-c0af-11dc-b0b7-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz35VNSGpHy>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶³⁰ Simon Groom, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 17 May 2013.

should be emphasised here that, as can be seen from the title, the exhibition was more about contemporary Chinese design, rather than visual art. However, it still fell within the boundary of exhibitions of contemporary China. The aim was for it to be more influential in furthering a comprehensive understanding of contemporary China, rather than an understanding of any individual artist. What is more, due to the time and location of *China Design Now*, as well as many other factors which will be discussed throughout this chapter, the exhibition generated a lively discussion on contemporary China in the media. This media sensation is critical to an analysis of the impact of such exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art as non-official contributors for China's cultural diplomacy.

China Design Now took place at the V&A from 15 March to 13 July 2008. It was promoted by the V&A as 'the first [exhibition] in the UK to explore the recent explosion of new design in China and the first to attempt to understand the impact of rapid economic development on architecture and design in China's major cities'.⁶³¹ According to the V&A's press release, the exhibition was structured in three sections, which explored graphic design in Shenzhen, fashion design in Shanghai and architecture design in Beijing, as well as film, photography, product and furniture design, youth culture and digital media. Around 100 designers were featured by the exhibition and among them more than 95 per cent were Chinese. 'Placing the exhibits in the context of China's social, cultural and economic reforms over the last 25 years', the V&A intended to capture 'a dynamic phase as China opens up to global influences and responds to the hopes and dreams of its urban middle class', as well as providing 'both a critical survey and a narrative that enables visitors to see how China's new design and consumer culture has developed, what its driving forces are and where it is going'.⁶³²

This exhibition was featured in the media as one of the highlights of the 'China Now' Festival, which has already been discussed in Chapter 5. But the exhibition was the V&A's independent initiative, which had begun long before the festival. The festival got inspiration from the exhibition's title rather than the other way

⁶³¹ V&A, 'China Design Now', press release, http://media.vam.ac.uk/media/documents/legacy_documents/press_release/41846_press_release.pdf, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶³² Ibid.

around, according to Mark Jones, then Director of the V&A.⁶³³ However, it is noteworthy that the exhibition was fully sponsored by HSBC, which was also one of the main initiators and organisers of the ‘China Now’ festival, not to mention that the V&A and HSBC intentionally shared the publicity and marketing campaign, as Curator of the exhibition.⁶³⁴

In spite of this association, the exhibition was free from any financial or political support from the Chinese side, even though the China Central Academy of Fine Arts was consulted for background information, including the history of Chinese contemporary design. The V&A’s curatorial team worked directly with designers and design companies. No Chinese public museum or art gallery was involved and all the art works on display had been produced in the past decade or two, which meant that the exhibition did not need to deal with the bureaucratic procedure to get governmental approval.⁶³⁵ All in all, *China Design Now* is a suitable case study to explore the impact of exhibitions of contemporary China as non-governmental contributors to the image and perceptions of China in the West.

‘Made in China’ vs. ‘Designed in China’

Lucia van der Post argued in *The Times* that ‘the [contemporary] Chinese have mostly been known in the West for making cheaply what other countries have designed’.⁶³⁶ It has been widely acknowledged that China’s economic rise at the turn of the twenty-first century owed largely to its manufacture and export, as a result of low labour and production costs, which is generally stereotyped as ‘Made in China’. This has had a huge impact on the international image of China, which has already been touched upon in Chapter 5. Ellis Woodman claimed in *The Daily Telegraph* that ‘hear the words “Made in China” and the image that springs inescapably to mind is one of brightly coloured plastic goods, piled high on the shelves at Poundstretcher’.⁶³⁷

China did influence world design and taste in history, such as the fashionable *chinoiserie* in Europe, which had its heyday in the eighteenth century. However,

⁶³³ Mark Jones, interview with the author, Oxford, 25 April 2013.

⁶³⁴ Zhang Hongxing, interview with the author, London, 16 January 2014.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ L. van der Post, ‘The explosion of creativity in China has precious little to do with the past’, *TIME Magazine*, 8 March 2008, p.75.

⁶³⁷ E. Woodman, ‘China puts on a new face’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 2008, p.29.

such historical appreciation for Chinese style did not evolve as time passed. Just like Jessica Au claimed in the *Newsweek*, ‘the notion of Chinese design typically conjures up images of Ming furniture, blue and white ceramics and Mao suits’.⁶³⁸ Writing in the *Evening Standard*, Corinne Jurlius expressed similar confusion over Chinese design:

What is Chinese design? Is it the ubiquitous willow pattern found decorating plates and lacquer furniture? Is it peony-festooned porcelain vases set among menageries of red and gilded dragons, lions and birds? Or is there no real Chinese design, only cheap versions of essentially Western products?⁶³⁹

The impression of Chinese design and taste stays in history and contemporary China does not make any positive contribution. To some extent, this is the price that China has had to pay for its economic development model. On the other hand, it exposes the fact that there is a lack of understanding of contemporary China in the West.

Given this, *China Design Now* was interpreted by Alex Donohue as an ‘attempt to deconstruct stereotypical beliefs about the country by showcasing China’s modern design and art scene’.⁶⁴⁰ This was the objective of the exhibition, as Curator Zhang Hongxing argued, ‘this is a moment when you can start talking about things being designed in China, not just made in China’.⁶⁴¹

This intention seems to have been well received by the media. Ellis Woodman claimed that:

The show presents a thrilling panorama of the current spread of creativity, demonstrating that from fashion to photography, websites to furniture, the Chinese are now making work that rivals the best in Europe and America ... the extraordinary recent developments in

⁶³⁸ J. Au, ‘Not just made in China’, *Newsweek*, 13 March 2008, <http://www.newsweek.com/not-just-made-china-83751>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶³⁹ C. Jurlius, ‘Beijing bling’, *Evening Standard*, 10 March 2008, <http://www.homesandproperty.co.uk/home-garden/events/beijing-bling>, accessed 22 December 2014.

⁶⁴⁰ A. Donohue, ‘RMG unveils digital drive for HSBC-backed China exhibition’, *Brand Republic*, 14 March 2008, <http://www.brandrepublic.com/news/790873/RMG-unveils-digital-drive-HSBC-backed-China-exhibition/?HAYILC=RELATED>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁴¹ V&A, ‘China Design Now’, press release.

Chinese design look set to have an impact well beyond Chinese shores.⁶⁴²

Jessica Au also captured the liveliness of creativity and innovation happening in China as demonstrated by the exhibition, by arguing that:

The show makes one thing clear: this is not your Ming dynasty's China. Home to a tech-savvy generation of talented young designers, the country has come a long way in the past decade ... bolstered by runaway economic growth, China, as the show demonstrates, is no longer content with producing knockoffs and cheap foreign goods. It wants to renew its tradition of innovation, which included the advent of the printing press, silk and gunpowder.⁶⁴³

Writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, D'Arcy Doran argued that the exhibition 'reveals that although the country may not yet be ready to dominate the catwalks or consumer electronics shows, an exciting entrepreneurial design culture is stirring'.⁶⁴⁴

More broadly, this exhibition did also nurture a hope for what China will become in the future. Inspired by *China Design Now*, Stacey Duff concluded that:

Beijing and London both realise that while inexpensive manufacturing may jumpstart an economic engine, it nevertheless takes creative types and an all-consuming audience - in other words a culture industry - for an economy to reach the next level ... As a city's contemporary cultural scene grows, the rest of the economy follows. Something that London has managed to stay well abreast of in the last half a century, and something Beijing is finally catching on to now.⁶⁴⁵

The cultural diversity and creativity presented through the exhibition made her believe that a positive economic transformation was happening in China. Paola

⁶⁴² Woodman, 'China puts on a new face'.

⁶⁴³ Au, 'Not just made in China'.

⁶⁴⁴ D. Doran, 'Exploring China's march from manufacturer to designer', *The Times of Northwest Indiana*, 21 March 2008, http://www.nwitimes.com/entertainment/arts-and-theatre/exploring-china-s-march-from-manufacturer-to-designer/article_258ee8ed-7472-5c47-b7ad-9a3b90bbabf4.html, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁴⁵ S. Duff, 'The dragon's new pose', *Time Out English*, March 2008, p.21.

Antonelli was also hopeful for China's transformation in the near future by arguing in the *Art Review* that:

China is accomplishing what Japan did in the 1980s and 90s, but much faster. What both these countries initially did was to import design models from the West, while developing their own technological capacity. When Japan became much more assured in terms of its own design language, very quickly its design conquered the world. I think China is approaching the same point, but faster.⁶⁴⁶

Writing in *The Guardian*, Jonathan Glancey even predicted that 'perhaps, in the not too distant future, we [the UK] might even look to China to see how to develop parts of our old cities, build new towns and decrease our use of energy'.⁶⁴⁷

As Francesca Fearon claimed, the Western audience were 'brought up on the notion that China is where cheap products are manufactured in vast quantities to western specifications' and 'the fact the city [Shenzhen] has a burgeoning design industry is news'.⁶⁴⁸ China, as a conservative, low-cost and dull 'manufacturer', rather than a creative, innovative and inventive 'designer' was a deeply rooted impression in the West. It, of course, takes time and effort for any country to rid itself of certain stereotypes and build up new image. Just as Nicole Swengley asked in the *Financial Times*, 'altering western perceptions is one of the biggest challenges. Can a "made in China" tag - with implications of recent low-cost, cookie-cutter production - truly become an upscale "designed in China" label?'⁶⁴⁹ Nevertheless, as all these quotes demonstrate, *China Design Now* did help to challenge stereotypes of China and shape an image of an energetic and innovative China, which is in line with the objective of China's cultural diplomacy. It also provided another perspective from which to understand the 'Made in China' phenomenon as a necessary and preliminary stage of China's development, rather than a manifestation of the

⁶⁴⁶ P. Antonelli, 'Top five: what to see this month', *Art Review*, Issue 21, April 2008, p.32.

⁶⁴⁷ J. Glancey, 'From the high-rise to the hutong', *The Guardian*, 12 March 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/mar/12/architecture.chinaarts2008>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁴⁸ F. Fearon, 'Face of the future', *South China Morning Post*, 23 March 2008, <http://www.scmp.com/article/630900/face-future>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁴⁹ N. Swengley, 'China Design Now', *Financial Times*, 22 March 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/29c6f5d6-f7b3-11dc-ac40-000077b07658.html#axzz3MepHzKTQ>, accessed 22 December 2014.

nation's intrinsic lack of creativity and innovation, therefore helping to nurture a hope for China's economic development and social transformation in the future.

Modernity vs. Traditions

Along with the appreciation for China's creativity and innovation, a concern for China's ignorance of traditions in the speeding process of modernisation also emerged from the press coverage. Xiaolu Guo felt disappointed with the show by arguing that:

The sadness for me is discovering how these artists' approaches are based on a whole nation's eagerness to consume, and how impossible it is for past Chinese culture to transform itself into a practice with its own, individual voice. Another sadness is the unspoken political dilemma: while contemporary Chinese artists try to avoid communist idioms, they fall into a much deeper whirlpool of capitalist styles, and those styles have very few links with China.⁶⁵⁰

Similarly, Tom Dyckhoff observed China's blind adulation for capitalism in the exhibition:

What is dispiriting is not just that China's entire design output seems solely defined by rapid capitalism. It is how familiar are the products of this mysterious, oriental civilisation ... Chinese design has local twists, but most of the objects featured in the V&A show might have been made in any creative city, by any youth tribe from Rio de Janeiro to Reykjavik ... These are just early days. China, the exhibition suggests, aspires now not to make knock-offs for the West, nor to be able to afford the real thing. It wants its own brands. And only when a strikingly original voice emerges in design ... only then will China have arrived.⁶⁵¹

Peter Aspden argued in the *Financial Times* that the exhibition 'has been devised to impress the rest of the world through conformity and contemporaneity rather than stubborn difference' and therefore conveyed to the visitors 'homogenising

⁶⁵⁰ X. Guo, 'Commercial break', *New Statesman*, 27 March 2008, <http://www.newstatesman.com/arts-and-culture/2008/03/chinese-design-china-art>, accessed 10 March 2015.

⁶⁵¹ T. Dyckhoff, 'Mysteries of the East are looking all too familiar', *The Times*, 14 March 2008, p.40.

effects of modern life'.⁶⁵² In particular, the Beijing section of the exhibition, which introduced Beijing's landmark architecture designed by foreign designers, such as Rem Koolhaas's China Central Television headquarters, and Herzog & de Meuron's Bird Nest, the main stadium for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, was repeatedly criticised by the media as 'completely soulless' due to its lack of Chinese characteristics.⁶⁵³

All these criticisms exposed current dilemmas in the Chinese society, not exclusive to art and design. As Richard Carr pointed out in the *Arts Newspaper*:

As the exhibition and catalogue demonstrate, such has been the speed of social, economic and physical change in China during the past 30 years that the whole fabric of the country may be unstable. And this could be true of other parts of the world that are also trying to modernise at breakneck speed.⁶⁵⁴

Writing in the *Financial Times*, Lauris Morgan-Griffiths argued that:

Understandably, China is taking time to rediscover its cultural feet after years of being starved of outside influences, money, private enterprise and individualism ... It is difficult for the west to understand this culture - but the Chinese do not completely have a grasp on it either. While the west has had its cultural ruptures, it has not stood stock still for several decades as China did during the Cultural Revolution. Now is a time of picking up the threads in a different world, of the Chinese having to rediscover and reinvent themselves.⁶⁵⁵

Since China's reform and opening up in 1980s, China's economic development has been at unprecedented speed for more than 30 years, which brings China prosperity as well as political, social and cultural dilemmas. The sudden transfer from

⁶⁵² P. Aspden, 'Design for a superpower', *Financial Times*, 17 March 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/d432702e-f171-11dc-a91a-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz35VNSGpHy>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁵³ G. Gibson, 'China Design Now', *Crafts Magazine*, no. 212, 2008, 74-75, p.75.

⁶⁵⁴ R. Carr, 'Great things from China Now', *Artwork Newspaper*, Issue 149, May/June 2008, <http://www.artwork.co.uk/archives/ArtWork149/text/7.php>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁵⁵ L. Morgan-Griffiths, 'Making a modern legacy', *Financial Times*, 22 March 2008, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/78e0e990-f625-11dc-8d3d-000077b07658.html#axzz35VNSGpHy>, accessed 23 June 2014.

communism to consumerism and commercialism, even capitalism does bring confusion and disorder to all walks of life. It is not only an ideological struggle between communism and capitalism. Artists, designers, as well as other Chinese are all struggling between ‘a sense of modern style while retaining integrity’ with the past and traditions.⁶⁵⁶ In this sense, rather than sinophobic criticism, such concerns are reasonable and beneficial for China’s art and design, as well as the whole society, to better reflect on existing problems and future directions, not to mention a hope for the new generation’s awareness of being creative, innovative and Chinese-culture-rooted and have the initiative to make their own voice was nurtured by the exhibition.⁶⁵⁷ On the other hand, from this media debate, cultural diplomacy practitioners have to be aware of the risks of using such exhibitions of contemporary culture. Compared to ancient art, contemporary culture is often used to capture the materialistic rather than civilised aspects of the originating society, just like the Hollywood movie and Coca-Cola’s impact on America’s image.⁶⁵⁸

A complex China with democratising power

Jonathan Jones argued in *The Guardian* that *China Design Now* was badly timed, mainly due to the unrest in Tibet and nearby provinces in March 2008.⁶⁵⁹ Indeed, the exhibition only had 73,000 visitors, which might be a bit disappointing as one of V&A’s three headline exhibitions of the year.⁶⁶⁰ However, it did provide a ‘positive aspect’⁶⁶¹ to the understandings of contemporary China during such ‘bad timing’. As Rosella Frigerio claimed, ‘lately, China has been in the news for all the wrong reasons, but yesterday I discovered a fabulous side to this fascinating country which offers a sliver of hope amongst the current turmoil’.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁶ B. Farrow, ‘Building on success’, *CNBC European Business Magazine*, July 2008, <http://entheproduct.neriandhu.com/neriandhu/brand/sites/all/files/7/file/news/20080823004327-203065.pdf>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁵⁷ Swengley, ‘China Design Now’.

⁶⁵⁸ See R. Wagnleitner and E. T. May, eds., *Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, University of New England Press, Hanover and London, 2000.

⁶⁵⁹ J. Jones, ‘It’s time to question our cultural rage for China’, *The Guardian*, 10 April 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/artblog/2008/apr/10/chinatibet>, accessed 22 December 2014.

⁶⁶⁰ V&A, *Annual Report and Accounts 2008-2009*, 15 July 2009, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/229115/0790.pdf, accessed 22 December 2014, p.11.

⁶⁶¹ Fearon, ‘Face of the future’.

⁶⁶² R. Frigerio, ‘V&A Museum: China Design Now’, *Yoox.com*, 8 April 2008, V&A’s archive of the press coverage for *China Design Now*, accessed 26 April 2013.

William Wiles argued that:

The People's Republic is not the totalitarian state it once was, and the Party's grip on the minds of its subjects has dramatically loosened since the 1970s. But there is still a tendency in the West to see China in monolithic terms, ignoring the country's diversity and treating the state and its citizens as essentially the same thing. *China Design Now* is a useful antidote to this inclination, driving home China's plurality, as reflected in its creative output ... China's growing global power makes many people in the West nervous, even gloomy. In this context, *China Design Now* performs an incredibly valuable role: it show[s] us the optimism and dynamism of the country's new creative class, and the excitement that they are creating. The optimism is contagious, and gives us a view of China beyond the blue-tracksuited version that dominates the media.⁶⁶³

Wiles' argument shows that the traditional framework to view China as a totalitarian country was challenged by the exhibition. This is also validated by Peter Kelly. He argued that 'China Design Now is an impressive compendium of exemplary and expressive design in China. One appreciates the idea that China is not merely defined by totalitarianism'.⁶⁶⁴

In addition, the exhibition also helped to understand the current 'totalitarianism' of China in a positive light. As Peter Aspden argued in the *Financial Times*:

The idea that art might act as some kind of subversive or shadowy force in what is still, after all, a country with dubious democratic credentials, does not seem to arise. A new economy means new lifestyles, and new lifestyles demand new products, and new innovators. It is win-win. It may be the cleverest feat yet of China's leaders, to allow economic and

⁶⁶³ W. Wiles, 'China Design Now', *Icon Magazine*, June 2008, <http://www.iconeye.com/opinion/review/item/3480-china-design-now>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁶⁴ P. Kelly, 'China Design Now', *Blueprint Magazine*, 1 June 2008, V&A's archive of the press coverage for *China Design Now*, accessed 26 April 2013.

cultural liberalisation to flourish hand-in-hand while keeping a brake on the more challenging issue of political reform.⁶⁶⁵

The political framework for understanding China as a totalitarian country, to a certain degree, is not separable from the ideological framework for understanding China as a communist country. However, contemporary China is far from a pure communist authority, even though the communist party is still the only ruling party of the country. Curator Zhang Hongxing argued that China is ‘no longer under the rule of Mao ideology’,⁶⁶⁶ and there are no concrete ‘ideological underpinnings’ in Chinese society.⁶⁶⁷ He asserted that contemporary Chinese art and design in the search of Chinese identity, while heavily influenced by globalisation, reflect a ‘liberation and a break from the collective, Communist past’.⁶⁶⁸ The Curator’s intention to demonstrate such a complex China also seems to be well received by the media.

Writing in *The Observer*, Tim Adams argued that:

What is clear from this display is that the emergence of design in China is inseparable from the emergence of the self-consciousness, brand-aware individual ... the politics of all this is muted but insistent ... The Party’s response to this dismantling of traditional power structures has been to create new symbols of Chinese confidence.⁶⁶⁹

It can be seen that the exhibition publicised the ‘dismantling of traditional power structures’ that exist in contemporary Chinese society,⁶⁷⁰ which demonstrates China’s commitment to ‘transparency and change’ and ‘the new order of a rebranded China’ under ‘dynamic and youth values’.⁶⁷¹ As repeatedly emphasised in this chapter, through demonstrating the complexities of contemporary China, a hope for China’s future was nurtured by the exhibition. This hope was not only for

⁶⁶⁵ Aspden, ‘Great trawl of China’.

⁶⁶⁶ Fearon, ‘Face of the future’.

⁶⁶⁷ Swengley, ‘China Design Now’.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ T. Adams, ‘Look! It’s the brand new face of China’, *The Observer*, 9 March 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/mar/09/design.china>, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ N. Ryan, ‘China Design Now’, *Museums Journal*, Issue 108, May 2008, 52-53, p.52.

China's creativity and modernity, but also for China's social transformation and democratisation.

Hugh Pearman argued in *The Sunday Times* that:

This is the great unstated, underlying theme of China Design Now - we all knew they [the Chinese] could make stuff, but now they can design it, too, and this brings their tanks right onto our lawn. The tacit commercial understanding between East and West used to be simple: you make lots of cheap goods that we can import to keep our prices low, and we will export back lots of sophisticated, value added design work, along with the Rover 75 production line ... This is early days, because private design firms of all kinds have been tolerated only relatively recently, but it's clear where things are going ... nobody is pretending that what the V&A's director, Mark Jones, calls "an astonishing period of reform and growth" would have been tolerated during Mao's Cultural Revolution. China Design Now ... is what its name suggests: a snapshot of an interesting moment in the development of new global superpower. Interesting because, outside all this, the unmentioned political context has not gone away. It's the Olympics in Beijing this year, but just how rosy will things be looking by the time of the next great World Expo, in Shanghai in 2010?⁶⁷²

The positive elements for social changes existing in contemporary Chinese society, such as the rising middle class and private life, open attitude towards global influence and so on, were introduced to the Western audience through the exhibition. The exhibition helped to demonstrate to the Western audience that 'China is changing, and changing for the better', with a welcoming and open attitude towards outside influences.⁶⁷³ This challenged the stereotype of China as a static and fully-controlled society. It did provide contradictory voice to the criticism over China's non-democracy, which is particularly meaningful for China's image at the time of the Tibet unrest before the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

⁶⁷² H. Pearman, 'A cultural revolution against Mao', *The Sunday Times*, 23 March 2008, p.20.

⁶⁷³ Aspden, 'Great trawl of China'.

Exhibition propaganda?

Given the positive and even celebratory tone of the exhibition on Chinese contemporary design, *China Design Now* was accused, here and there, of being a propagandist exhibition. Nicky Ryan argued in the *Museums Journal* that:

The omission of political and social context raises concerns about the reproduction of Chinese state power in the guise of cultural diplomacy ... [The exhibition] fails to dispel the growing sense of unease generated by what appears to be a conflation of museum display and place-marketing propaganda. The uncritical celebration of Chinese progress is surprising, particularly as the exhibition catalogue does not shy away from tackling difficult issues and directly engages with the conflicts and contradictions.⁶⁷⁴

A similar criticism was made by Grant Gibson. He asserted that;

One of the flaws of the exhibition is that it feels more like an Expo rather than a critical exercise. The political and social context that all this work sits in is almost completely ignored. There's mention made of the country's dismal environmental record tucked in one corner of the Beijing area, and the last chapter of the accompanying book makes reference to the pitfalls of new consumerism but that's about it. Nor in the final analysis do you really get a sense of what it's like to live and work in any of the three cities. So, fascinating as much *China Design Now* is, I suspect the country itself will remain a mystery to most of the exhibition's visitors.⁶⁷⁵

Bernadette Buckley, a lecturer in International Politics at Goldsmiths College in London, also expressed her disappointment with the depoliticalisation of the exhibition.⁶⁷⁶ The exhibition was even scrutinised as 'desperately attempting to

⁶⁷⁴ Ryan, 'China Design Now', p.53.

⁶⁷⁵ Gibson, 'China Design Now', p.75.

⁶⁷⁶ B. Buckley, 'China Design Now', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 25, Issue 7-8, December 2008, 341-352.

ignore the now very public ethical and humanitarian doubts about the Chinese government'.⁶⁷⁷

It was unfair to expect the museum to contextualise the exhibition amid recent political events, as the exhibition had been in four years of preparation.⁶⁷⁸ It would not have been possible to alter the curatorial stances at the last minute, just to keep up-to-date with the political incidents. In addition, as a review of the exhibition argued:

There is an obvious tendency to discount subversive in favour of exhibits that demonstrate lavish progress ... This is by no means that fault of the exhibition, but it is not a surprise that China Design Now's significance could not escape scrutiny after the worldwide exposure of its subject's international wrongdoings.⁶⁷⁹

Neutral or not, this comment demonstrates that contemporary China is always viewed through certain perspectives by the Western media; generally speaking, economic and political. It was the curator's intention to avoid such framework and to approach China from a new perspective. Curator Zhang Hongxing thought the West has a tendency to understand China within a political context largely due to modern China's different social and political system, which works like a filter for the West to absorb information about China. He emphasised that during the filtering process, a lot of information is lost. Thus it is very difficult for the West to understand Chinese art and culture for art and culture's sake. In terms of *China Design Now*, he hoped to position the past and future of China's design in the design history of the world through the platform of the V&A as a museum dedicated to art and design.⁶⁸⁰ Indeed, Zhang Hongxing is also a Chinese immigrant, as is James Lin, Curator of *The Search for Immortality* discussed in Chapter 6. His experience in China might have possibly driven him to keep a distance from sensitive and complex politics. But this intention was not necessarily a disadvantage. On the contrary, it provided another perspective from which to understand China, which the old-fashioned political and economic framework cannot achieve, as the discussion

⁶⁷⁷ 'Designing the people's republic', *Kudos Magazine*, June 2008, 7-9, p.7.

⁶⁷⁸ Zhang Hongxing, interview with the author, London, 16 January 2014.

⁶⁷⁹ 'Designing the people's republic', *Kudos Magazine*, p.9.

⁶⁸⁰ Zhang Hongxing, interview with the author, London, 16 January 2014.

above has demonstrated. This subtlety may not be captured by Western curators of Chinese art. China needs to be understood and viewed with a different lens. Only when this complexity of China is understood, might China win empathy and support. In this sense, *China Design Now* was helpful, in that it demonstrated a ‘balanced and layered picture of contemporary China’.⁶⁸¹ It was the same with *The Search for Immortality*. This is what Chinese curators can contribute to China’s cultural diplomacy distinctively.

Additionally, as emphasised at the beginning of this chapter, *China Design Now* did not involve any official actors on the Chinese side. Probably, because of this, criticism was more directed at the V&A’s curatorship rather than the Chinese government. But China’s cultural diplomats must be aware that when contemporary art is used, there remains a risk that it will be associated with propaganda, as it is more relevant to modern Chinese history, the party’s history and the communist party’s current leadership and policies, in which the media is generally most interested. Therefore such exhibitions of contemporary art have to be dealt with sensitivity.

Conclusion

Taking *China Design Now* for instance, this chapter explored the impact of exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art as non-governmental contributors on the image and perceptions of China. Demonstrating what is happening in China right now, such exhibitions help to challenge stereotypes and provide new perspectives for understanding contemporary China, which ultimately contribute positively to China’s cultural diplomacy. Certainly the special curatorial stance of *China Design Now*, as well as the lower-controversy of the artists and artworks on show, compared to artists like Ai Weiwei, who hold a strong voice in opposition to the Chinese government, did put contemporary China in a more positive light, which more or less impacted on the media’s interpretation. The positive media impact of this exhibition may not happen to all exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art. However, this analysis of *China Design Now* does demonstrate that exhibitions of contemporary art can be an effective contributor to China’s image and China’s cultural diplomacy, if they are used properly. This probably cannot be equally

⁶⁸¹ Byrne, ‘New cultural revolution arrives in Britain on a wave of creativity and confidence’.

achieved by those exhibitions of ancient art. This does not mean that the Chinese government should interfere heavily in exporting contemporary art. What it means is that China's cultural diplomacy should not be deterred by those contemporary art and artists who expose the darker side of China, thereby avoiding sending exhibitions about contemporary China. The value of contemporary Chinese art demonstrated by *China Design Now* should be recognised and valued. How to use contemporary Chinese art is, then, another issue.

Up to this point, all the case-study analysis have been achieved. Even though these exhibitions took place at different times and were instrumentalised for different reasons (excluding *China Design Now*), they reflect similar trends in China's cultural diplomacy and have had similar impacts on the image and perceptions of China in the media. These trends and impacts will be summarised and further discussed in the last chapter, which will help to clarify the relationship between the Chinese government and museums in delivering loan exhibitions, and further understand the operation of China's current system of managing such exhibitions.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Entering the twenty-first century, China has (re-)emerged on the international stage economically, politically and militaristically, which has caused mounting external concerns and uncertainties. These concerns and uncertainties have formed certain negative frameworks and unfavourable publicity for China's international image, typically represented by the popular 'China threat theory'. Under the influence of the soft power rationale, Chinese authorities and scholars have gradually recognised the importance and necessity of polishing China's international image, and cultural diplomacy has been increasingly emphasised and hugely invested in as one initiative. Against this background, China's cultural diplomacy in the new century has clearly defensive purposes, and one of its paramount objectives has been to shape an advanced, civilised, democratic, innovative, open, peaceful and responsible image. Chinese officials and scholars frequently emphasise that such an image is the reflection of China with Chinese characteristics. To explain, the 'democratic China' from the Chinese point of view may not be the 'democracy' of Western politics. That is to say, such an image may be the reality of China from a Chinese point of view, but perceived of as branding or even propaganda by Western scholars and commentators. Meanwhile, it is quite clear from such an image that the Chinese government intends to highlight the positive side of China to counteract more negative concerns. That is to say, even if such an image is a true reflection of China, it is just part of the reality. In this sense, an advanced, civilised, democratic, innovative, open, peaceful and responsible image is about branding and shaping the image of China. It is no matter if such an image is based in reality; it is the way that the Chinese government would like the rest of the world to understand and perceive of China.

International scholars and commentators often doubt the effectiveness of China's soft power strategy and image building efforts, and particularly attribute this to the heavy involvement of the Chinese government. In actual fact, the international image of China is influenced by many factors, some of which are on the Chinese side, and some of which are totally out of Chinese control.⁶⁸² On the Chinese side,

⁶⁸² See Barr, *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenges of Chinese Soft Power*.

China's external image is still influenced by many factors including its internal and external actions, policies and political positions. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate China's image building efforts case by case, even though it is still important to summarise the overall impact. To be specific, it is not appropriate to judge China's cultural diplomacy by its political actions only, even though it aims to support political dialogue.

This thesis has, until now, inspected the common presumption that China's image building efforts have limited impact, through investigating how loan exhibitions have impacted on the image of China in the British media. The influence of museum professionals on shaping such exhibitions, as well as the involvement of the Chinese government throughout the whole process, has also been examined. This chapter aims to discuss, more broadly, the factors which have impacted on the media interpretation of China's loan exhibitions and the image of China in the media, particularly the roles of museums (on both sides) and the Chinese government, to determine the relationships between them in delivering China's cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions. Some threads, on a larger scale, which have emerged throughout this research, in particular, some advantages and disadvantages of China's current system of managing loan exhibitions and their implications for China's cultural diplomacy and Chinese museums, will also be considered.

Imaging China vs. Imagining China

Three critical moments in the history of China-UK relationship and the developing trajectory of China's cultural diplomacy in the past decade represented by four case-study exhibitions, were chosen to evaluate the impact of loan exhibitions on the image of China in the British media. These were: the first state visit of the Chinese President to the UK in the twenty-first century, in 2005, represented by *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795* at the Royal Academy of Arts (RA); the 2008 Beijing Olympics represented by *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army* at the British Museum (BM) and *China Design Now* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A); and the London 2012 Olympics represented by *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China* at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. From a qualitative narrative media analysis of the four exhibitions, it can be concluded that

it would be over simplistic to presume that overall, China's soft power and image building efforts have failed or been ineffective.

As Trefor Moss argued:

It's also important to ask what soft power is to China. If we say that China has soft power, that means states and individuals do things China wants without any compulsion or inducement. So what is it that China wants them to do? We can safely assume that China's soft-power aims including being given face on the international stage: being shown respect, and being treated like a great country. It wants its policies and actions to be viewed sympathetically, and to conduct its affairs without foreign interference. It wants to draw less criticism and suspicion than it tends to today, and to attract friendly support on issues it cares about. It wants less bad press. And, of course, it wants to open up overseas markets for Chinese products and have freer access to commercial opportunities abroad.⁶⁸³

When China's cultural diplomacy is evaluated, it should be against the Chinese government's specific desires, based upon its ambitions for a specific international standing, rather than any universal framework. Given this, following the image framework outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, which explained what image the Chinese government has been particularly eager to shape in the new century and why, the media analysis has shown that such loan exhibitions impact on the image of China in the UK, and that this image is, in fact, generally positively consistent with the Chinese government's objectives for cultural diplomacy and image building. All the exhibitions of Chinese ancient art worked together to portray China as a 'civilized country featuring rich history, ethnic unity and cultural diversity'.⁶⁸⁴ China's connection with the outside world in historical times, featured by *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795* and *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, particularly challenged the stereotype of a mysterious and static China, indifferent and closed to outside influence and, therefore, projected an image of a progressive, advanced and open China. China's early contact with the outside world

⁶⁸³ Moss, 'Soft power? China has plenty'.

⁶⁸⁴ Huang, 'Xi: China to promote cultural soft power'.

through art and cultural exchange featured in these exhibitions was also helpful to project an image of a peaceful and collaborative China. What is more, China's cultural communication with the outside world, as well as the cultural exchange between different ethnicities within China projected an image of China as a country with ethnic unity and cultural diversity, which helped to explain the Chinese government's ethnic policies and contributed to the Chinese government's territorial claims for Tibet and other ethnic areas, which have attracted international attention. Discussion on China's democracy and human rights in the media particularly generated by *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, as well as the legitimacy of the communist party as China's ruling party, driven by *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795*, even the characteristics of Chinese people, touched upon by *The Search for Immortality: Tomb Treasures of Han China*, all challenged criticisms, mainly from the Western democracy, about the authoritarianism of the Chinese government and the Communist Party and contributed to an image of a democratic and humanist (with Chinese characteristics) China. Lastly, featuring China's creativity and cultural achievements from the past to present, *China Design Now* and the other three exhibitions of Chinese ancient art all challenged the stereotyped understandings of China as a hub of mass production and the concept of 'Made in China' associated with low-quality and cheaply-priced products, therefore projecting an image of a lively, innovative and advanced China. Combining these media impacts together over a longer period, all the exhibitions with different themes and subject matter made similar impacts and jointly contributed to the Chinese government's objectives for image building and cultural diplomacy. In this sense, loan exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy have been by and large successful, as they help to project China in a way that the Chinese government would like others to view the nation. However, along with these positive contributions, some of the exhibitions strengthened long-standing stereotypes and old-fashioned views about China. This is particularly clear in the analyses of *China: The Three Emperors, 1662-1795* and *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, both of which touched upon political subject matter. The former told the story of art patronage and political legitimacy in ancient China, and the latter looked back at the historical origin of China's bureaucratic administration and non-democratic political system. To a certain degree, all of the exhibitions

reinforced the typically Western impression of the Chinese government and the Communist Party as totalitarian authorities to the detriment of individualism. In this respect, it is not without risk for the Chinese government to use loan exhibitions for cultural diplomacy and image building.

Local media, journalists and art critics all have their own political positions when dealing with China and commonly try to insert their political views into the interpretation of Chinese exhibitions. The British media, for example, often tries to explore ‘contemporary resonances’ from the exhibitions of ancient Chinese art, by introducing an economic or political perspective.⁶⁸⁵ That is to say, the ancient China on display is frequently used to understand China’s contemporary economy and politics. On one hand, China’s rising economic power and political system are unique and therefore interesting and controversial aspects for the international community. An exploration of the historical root of these contemporary phenomena displayed through the exhibitions is definitely helpful to understand contemporary China from Chinese point of view. It has been repeatedly emphasised throughout the thesis that ‘a civilized country featuring [a] rich history’ is one specific image that China’s cultural diplomacy aims to project.⁶⁸⁶ Cai Mingzhao, Vice-Director of the International Communication Office of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the Director of the State Council Information Office, clearly explained the rationale behind this image by arguing that:

To tell China’s story well, we must elucidate Chinese characteristics well. We must make clear the difference in historical traditions, accumulated culture and basic national [conditions] between all countries and nations, and that their development paths have their own characteristics ... We must make clear that Socialism with Chinese characteristics is rooted in the soil of Chinese culture, reflects the desires of the Chinese people and is suited to the demands for development and progress of China and the times. We must make clear that our unique cultural traditions, unique historical destiny and unique basic national

⁶⁸⁵ C. Clunas, ‘At the Royal Academy: art of the emperors’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 27, no. 23, 1 December 2005, p.22.

⁶⁸⁶ Huang, ‘Xi: China to promote cultural soft power’.

conditions have decided that China inevitably must march a development path suited to its own characteristics.⁶⁸⁷

Here the CPC and the Chinese government's aim to use the past for the present could not be clearer. In another way, the meaning of ancient art for China's cultural diplomacy is more about promoting understanding rather than winning agreement. As demonstrated by the case-study analysis, the exhibitions of ancient China did work in this way and helped to develop understanding of and sympathy for contemporary China, not to mention those positive comments and challenged stereotypes. It refutes those arguments that suggest 'using ancient culture to promote [China's] soft power is a bad idea'.⁶⁸⁸ In this sense, the British media makes a huge contribution to building up the connection between China's past and present and helps China's cultural diplomacy to achieve its goal.

However, as Craig Clunas at the University of Oxford argued:

It is inevitable that this contemporary relevance will be gestured at by anyone trying to make the exhibition 'meaningful'. But this is the old Orientalist/Sinological trap, whereby anything Chinese stands for 'China' as a whole, and everything is connected to everything else ... Few of those who go down the road to see Rubens at the National Gallery will tease out the parallels between Rubens's diplomatic career and the European Union. His work does not have to bear that load.⁶⁸⁹

Such an 'Orientalist/Sinological trap' actually limits the impact of China's loan exhibitions. When the media is interested in contemporary China's economy and politics, exhibitions are interpreted from economic and political perspectives, even though the ideological perspective has gradually faded in the past decade. In another way, the general international publicity about China has had an impact on media

⁶⁸⁷ 'China's foreign propaganda chief outlines external communication priorities', *China Copyright and Media*, 22 December 2014, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2013/10/10/chinas-foreign-propaganda-chief-outlines-external-communication-priorities/>, accessed 28 February 2015, translated from Ma Kai 马凯, 'jianghao zhongguo gushi, chuanbohao zhongguo shengyin' 讲好中国故事, 传播好中国声音 [Tell China's story well, spread China's voice well], *People's Daily Online*, 10 October 2013, http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/1010/c1001-23144775.html?utm_source=The+Sinocism+China+Newsletter&utm_campaign=c994565df6-Sinocism10_10_131&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_171f237867-c994565df6-24571569, accessed 28 February 2015.

⁶⁸⁸ 'Sun Tzu and the art of soft power', *The Economist*.

⁶⁸⁹ Clunas, 'At the Royal Academy: art of the emperors'.

interpretations of China's loan exhibitions. Therefore, when China has been regarded as an economic or political threat, exhibitions just reinforce or challenge such impressions. It would be difficult to obtain new understandings of China from new perspectives. In this sense, exhibitions' impact on the image of China can change rapidly, as the media interpretation of exhibitions changes along with general international coverage about China. Here it should be re-emphasised that this thesis has examined exhibitions around the time of their display. Their longer-term impact on China's cultural diplomacy and the image of China still needs further research and more comprehensive consideration with other factors. However, it is not unreasonable to expect that such short-term impact will contribute to qualitative transformations in the long term, as *The First Emperor* Curator, Jane Portal's passion for Chinese culture was rooted in the *Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China in London* in 1970s.⁶⁹⁰ Additionally, it is argued that cultural diplomacy 'tends to get short shrift' because it 'constitutes a long-term, diffuse, and largely immeasurable solution to a pressing problem in an age of quick fixes'.⁶⁹¹ It is necessary for cultural diplomacy to be evaluated on a regular basis to achieve political support and funding. In this sense, this thesis has provided evidence for such immediate results. For example, in the general atmosphere of negative publicity for China in the UK due to the Tibet protest issues in 2008, the *China Design Now* exhibition still generated favourable discussion on China in the media, as discussed in Chapter 8.

These 'contemporary resonances' were not owed to the media only. The host museum also intentionally encouraged such connections. This is quite clear from the case-study analysis, particularly *The First Emperor* discussed in Chapter 5. Just as Clunas argued, 'contemporary relevance will be gestured at by anyone trying to make the exhibition "meaningful"',⁶⁹² and the host museum was definitely eager to 'make the exhibition "meaningful"' in all senses.⁶⁹³ The programmes accompanying the exhibition were painstakingly designed to promote such connections. More directly, the exhibition itself could be deliberately curated 'as the tribute of one age

⁶⁹⁰ Zhang Xue 张雪 and Ye Sheng 叶声, 'zhuanfang daying bowuguan yazhoubu zhuren Jane Portal' 专访大英博物馆亚洲部主任 Jane Portal [Interview with Jane Portal].

⁶⁹¹ Hurlburt and Ivey, *Cultural Diplomacy and the National Interest: In Search of a 21st Century Perspective*, overview.

⁶⁹² Clunas, 'At the Royal Academy: art of the emperors'.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

of prosperity to another'.⁶⁹⁴ The political subject matter on show, particularly in the case of *The Three Emperors* and *The First Emperor*, would make it easy and natural to see contemporary parallels. Such 'contemporary resonances' would be even easier to see when the host museum has a consistent policy to promote its exhibitions in this way and a close relationship with the government and cultural diplomacy, which is typically represented by the BM.

However, loan exhibitions could challenge old-fashioned frameworks by which to view China if the exhibitions were curated from new perspectives, even if the 'contemporary resonances' still existed. In another way, if curators could avoid the intriguing economic or political subject matter, it would be more possible that loan exhibitions would contribute to an understanding of China in a new light, and shape a preference for China, as discussed in chapters 6 and 8. As the case-study analysis has demonstrated, *The Three Emperors* and *The First Emperor*, which revolved around about political subject matter, were both curated by British curators. *The Search for Immortality* and *China Design Now*, which both tried to avoid politics and provided new perspectives by which to understand China was curated by Chinese curators working in British museums. It would be too simplistic to conclude that British curators still interpret China from an orientalist perspective. But the media analysis has shown that different styles of curatorship would lead to different perceptions of China in the media. Chinese curators have intrinsically different understandings of Chinese culture and therefore are more likely to present China from more comprehensive perspectives. This should be noted by Chinese museums and cultural diplomacy practitioners. This will be further discussed later in this chapter.

The influence of the media and the host museum (including the curatorship, media and marketing campaign, etc.) on the image of China, all came from the British side. All in all, this thesis has demonstrated that the effectiveness of China's image-building efforts has been decided by many factors, internally as well as externally. Therefore it is inappropriate to attribute all its successes and failures to the involvement of the Chinese government.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

The role of the Chinese government

Nevertheless, the Chinese government does play a role in sending loan exhibitions, particularly the loan exhibitions of ancient art.

Firstly, the Chinese government gets involved through the exhibition assessment and approval system. Any exhibition sent out by Chinese public museums needs to be approved by the Chinese authorities. The three case-study exhibitions of ancient art - *The Three Emperors*, *The First Emperor* and *The Search for Immortality* - represented the three most critical moments and important initiatives of China's cultural diplomacy aimed towards the UK in the past decade. However, the Chinese government did not instruct or commission any of these exhibitions and all of them were proposed and curated by the host museum. That is to say, even though the exhibitions had political implications, they all started as cultural collaborations on professional level. Yunci Cai has argued that museum exchanges are 'often apolitical in their initiation because museums seldom take their nations' political goals into consideration in selecting their prospective partners and the subject of collaboration'.⁶⁹⁵ Even though, as discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese museums are not totally independent in their international collaborations, this situation, as Cai has argued, does apply to China's loan exhibitions to the UK in most cases, no matter how consistent they are, in the final result, with the Chinese government's cultural diplomacy agenda.

Then the point is if the Chinese authorities, during the process of assessing and approving exhibition proposals, required to add or remove any subliminal messages from the host museum's original narratives. According to the fieldwork in both countries, this did not happen in the case of any of the exhibitions looked at in this thesis. Curator James Lin pointed out that the Chinese authorities required him to correct the maps used as panels in *The Search for Immortality*.⁶⁹⁶ Several other curators interviewed on both sides admitted that maps used in loan exhibitions could be an issue, due to the sensitivity of China's territorial claims, even though this was not particularly relevant to the case-study exhibitions discussed in this thesis. One of the Chinese interviewees admitted that the Chinese authorities did request that the

⁶⁹⁵ Cai, 'The art of museum diplomacy: the Singapore-France cultural collaboration in perspective', p.140.

⁶⁹⁶ James Lin, interview with the author, Cambridge, 20 June 2013.

BM should avoid the word ‘empire’ for *The First Emperor*, as they did not want the exhibition to be connected with China’s political ambition and territorial expansion, due to consideration of the ‘Peaceful Rise/Development’ policy. But he also claimed that the Chinese authorities did understand that museums could not control how the public and media interpreted exhibitions. The purposeful avoidance of anything has the potential to attract particular attention to it and even trigger criticism. The Chinese authorities did not want to negate the historical fact that Qin dynasty and the First Emperor was militaristic and cruel. They did not remove the weapons and torture equipment from the object lists proposed by the BM, which might have had subliminal implications for the image of contemporary China.⁶⁹⁷ Except for these issues, museum staff interviewed on both sides agreed that the negotiation for all the case-study exhibitions was generally on a professional rather than political level. In another way, even though the exhibitions were finally approved by the Chinese government with some minor corrections, they still reflected the curatorship and narratives of the host museum.

In addition to these logistical and legal issues, which are common for any international loan, the most crucial part of exhibition negotiations with the Chinese authorities has been about certain objects, particularly fragile objects, and the percentage of grade-one objects. Regarding the case-study exhibitions, the host museums’ request for certain objects might have been rejected, but mainly due to their availability or fragility, rather than for political reasons. The BM’s request for one terracotta figure with traces of pigment for *The First Emperor* was refused by the Chinese authorities. The BM negotiated several times with the Chinese authorities about this single object. But the Chinese authorities ultimately decided not to lend it, even after the exhibition catalogue with the object had already been sent for printing. According to the interview with the Chinese side, this decision was made after several consultations with museum professionals, because of the extreme fragility of the pigment on the terracotta figure. Even though the Chinese authorities would have liked to meet the BM’s request, particularly considering the occasion of

⁶⁹⁷ Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi’an, 5 September 2013.

the 2008 Beijing Olympics, they listened to professional suggestions and prioritised the security of cultural heritage.⁶⁹⁸

The similar situation happened to *The Search for Immortality* as discussed in Chapter 6. Curator James Lin was curious about why the Fitzwilliam did not get the jade rhyton, but Japan obtained the masterpiece painting *Along the River during the Qingming Festival*, which are both on the official list of objects prohibited from going abroad. He thought this was a symbol of the Chinese government's value placed on the China-Japan relationship, as the exhibition *Two Hundred Selected Masterpieces from the Palace Museum, Beijing* (2 January - 19 February 2012, Tokyo National Museum) where the painting was displayed, marked the 40th anniversary of the normalisation of relations between Japan and China in 2012.⁶⁹⁹ In fact, the official list of objects including the *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* was released on 26 June 2012, which was after the exhibition closed in Japan. In this sense, it is not appropriate to use the comparison between the two objects as a reference for the Chinese government's instrumental use of cultural heritage, even though it would be unjustifiable either to expect foreign museums to be fully aware of all the details of changes in Chinese regulations.

Generally speaking the fragile objects and grade-one objects are the most delicate, exquisite, rare and precious;⁷⁰⁰ the host museum would definitely like to get as many of them as possible. But foreign museums are not fully clear about the categorisation of each object and they often compile lists of objects from catalogues published by Chinese museums. When certain objects are removed from the proposed lists, they feel frustrated and disappointed. Particularly when exceptions seem to be made for other countries and museums, they might be interpreted as signs of direct governmental instrumentalisation of exhibitions.

In actual fact, this is a dilemma for the Chinese authorities and museums as well. Sometimes Chinese museums would like to lend more grade-one objects as a good

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Tokyo National Museum, 'Two hundred selected masterpieces from the Palace Museum, Beijing', http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/?id=1418&lang=en, accessed 27 February 2015.

⁷⁰⁰ For more details, see Ministry of Culture of the PRC, 'wenwu cangpin dingji biao zhun' 文物藏品定级标准 [Criteria on the Classification of Cultural Relics Collection], released on 9 April 2001, *The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, 21 August 2005, http://www.gov.cn/banshi/2005-08/21/content_25093.htm, accessed 10 October 2014.

way of promoting their institutions, but the Chinese government prefers to maintain the regulations. Sometimes the government would like Chinese museums to lend more to demonstrate its political support in certain circumstances, but the museum would like to prioritise the security of its collection. A disagreement between the governmental officials and the professional museums may occur. When a loan exhibition borrows objects from two or more Chinese museums, the situation is much more complex, as the percentage of grade-one objects applies to the whole exhibition rather than each museum. This requires the lending museums to negotiate with each other as well. This dilemma, in essence, reflects China's strong willingness to protect cultural heritage. In this respect, the Chinese government respects museum professionalism and would not sacrifice the safety of cultural heritage for political agendas, as can be seen from the BM and Fitzwilliam examples as mentioned above. But at the same time it also reflects a weakness of China's current system of managing museums and loan exhibitions. According to the fieldwork, even though the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) has general guidelines for categorising cultural objects, Chinese museums do the categorisation themselves. They can decide to categorise the objects into a lower grade if they want to have more opportunities to send their collection abroad. If one museum's collection is generally of a high level, then some objects might be categorised as lower grade, even though they would be considered grade-one in other museums. On the contrary, some objects would be categorised as grade-one if they are the best objects in one museum, even if they would not be considered of such quality in other museums.⁷⁰¹ Simply put, not all grade-one objects are fragile and unsuitable for lending abroad. Museums know their collections well. They can decide to lend more or less grade-one objects on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes the percentage of grade-one objects as a general yardstick seems too restrictive, even though it can help to restrict museums' intention to use their collections for economic benefits, namely lending more grade-one objects for higher loan fees. It can be assumed that both the Chinese authorities and museums are aware of this. Such ambiguity leaves space for negotiations which seem to revolve around the instrumental use of cultural objects. If the initiative to control grade-one objects is for the consideration of protecting cultural heritage, the standards of categorising

⁷⁰¹ Li Yinde 李银德, interview with the author, Xuzhou, 28 August 2013.

objects should be re-considered in order to facilitate smoother exhibition exchange between Chinese museums and the outside world. And when the categorisation is standardised, there will be fewer opportunities for misunderstanding. Meanwhile, it is better to keep the consistency of relevant regulations for a certain period, as foreign museums would not be able to keep update with all the changes to the regulations. But if changes do happen, it is better to explain them clearly and immediately to foreign museums in order to prevent confusion.

On the other hand, it seems that the Chinese authorities will allow more grade-one objects to be loaned than stated in the regulations as a symbol of the Chinese government's goodwill and political support for specific countries and specific occasions. *The Three Emperors*, *The First Emperor* and *The Search for Immortality* all enjoyed such exception, which was capitalised on by host museums and publicised in the media. Particularly considering the specific moment of the exhibitions, it would be too easy to presume that they were instrumentalised, even commissioned by the Chinese government. But to a certain degree, such 'generosity' of the Chinese government is more reflective of changes in regulations more than an indication of the direct instrumentalisation of loan exhibitions. Certainly, the host museums, lending museums and Chinese authorities would all need special opportunities and persuasive excuses for such loans featuring more grade-one objects, as discussed in the case-study chapters. However, even though the governmental control on lending grade-one objects is becoming ever more restrictive, there are still certain procedures for museums to gain approval.

Director Li Yinde of Xuzhou Museum claimed that nowadays the Chinese government is highly supportive of museums seeking to send exhibitions abroad. To some extent, the approval system is more of a bureaucratic procedure than an instrument of political control. If the security of cultural objects is guaranteed and exhibition narratives do not violate China's national interests, there is almost no reason to disapprove loan requests.⁷⁰² All in all, based on the work of this thesis, the Chinese government's exhibition assessment and approval system indicates a bureaucratic more than didactic or propagandistic use of loan exhibitions.

⁷⁰² Ibid.

Secondly, the Chinese government also plays a role in loan exhibitions through the Art Exhibitions China (AEC). In respect of this thesis, the AEC was principally involved with *The Search for Immortality*. As discussed in Chapter 2, any exhibition borrowing objects from Chinese museums located in two or more provinces needs to negotiate with the AEC, rather than with the lending museums directly. The two lending museums for *The Search for Immortality* was one in Jiangsu Province in northern China and one in Guangdong Province in southern China. Therefore, the Fitzwilliam had to negotiate the exhibition with the AEC rather than with the two museums directly. There were mainly two issues here: the first was about loan fees. As discussed in Chapter 2, the AEC tends to charge high loan fees. The Fitzwilliam's international officer Tao-Tao Chang did recognise the AEC's intention at the very beginning stage of the negotiation for *The Search for Immortality*.⁷⁰³ Disagreement over fees even suspended the negotiations for a period of time, as the Fitzwilliam could not afford such high amounts. Due to the considerations for cultural diplomacy discussed in Chapter 6, as well as the two museums' strong desire to cooperate, the AEC did ultimately compromise on the fees. To some extent, this compromise between the AEC and Fitzwilliam also reflects the compromise between the AEC and the Chinese museums, as the two museums would like to take up such opportunities without having to give too much consideration to fees.⁷⁰⁴ Today, the AEC, on behalf of the Chinese government, is not as autocratic. Museums' voices are respected. However, the negative impression of the AEC as a commercial institution stays. Another interviewee, Cecilia Treves, who was one of the curators for *The Three Emperors* and had several experiences of working with Chinese museums, also complained about the high loan fees charged by the AEC. *The Three Emperors* only borrowed objects from the Palace Museum. But her other experience with the AEC drove her to think that it was a 'dangerous situation because ... make money are not in the spirit of cultural exchange'.⁷⁰⁵ The AEC staff defended themselves by arguing that it is really expensive to collect objects from different museums in different provinces, considering the size and bureaucracy of China. Sometimes the fees were just enough to cover these costs.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰³ Tao-Tao Chang, interview with the author, Cambridge, 23 April 2013.

⁷⁰⁴ Wang Wenjian 王文建, interview with the author, Changsha, 12 September 2013.

⁷⁰⁵ Cecilia Treves, interview with the author, London, 16 May 2013.

⁷⁰⁶ AEC staff, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Beijing, 12 October 2013.

But they also admitted that the AEC has to generate revenue through charging loan fees, as it is a financially independent institution, even if it is a governmental agency.⁷⁰⁷ For the effectiveness of China's cultural diplomacy in the longer term, the AEC's financial issues must be considered.

The second main issue is the inadequacy of direct communication between museums on both sides, as everything was negotiated through the AEC. This is not beneficial for Chinese museums' development in a longer term. The AEC argued that some small museums do not have the experience to work with foreign museums and they need guidance from the AEC.⁷⁰⁸ This is true, but only in direct communication can Chinese museums learn and develop. And the development is not only about their international collaboration, but also about their ability to improve their curatorship and professionalism to serve the Chinese public. In addition, trust between museums cannot be built without direct communication. For *The Search for Immortality*, when the AEC stepped in and the two Chinese museums were not allowed to negotiate with the Fitzwilliam directly, the negotiations became much more complicated and went more slowly. The AEC tried to remove grade-one objects from the list in order to meet the general regulations. The Fitzwilliam was quite confused at that stage and not sure of the two Chinese museums' intentions, as they had already arrived at a certain agreement earlier. The Fitzwilliam could not negotiate with the two museums directly, so it felt that the two Chinese museums had become cooler about the collaboration.⁷⁰⁹ The Chinese museums were also confused about what had happened between the AEC and the Fitzwilliam. Because of this situation and along with other problems on both sides, the negotiations broke up at the end of 2011, several months before the opening of the exhibition. Only when a member of staff from Nanyue King Museum was entrusted by the AEC to take over all the negotiations, did the project re-start. She maintained a very good relationship with the Fitzwilliam and the AEC. Even at the time when the two museums had refrained from negotiations, and later when the negotiations were suspended, she still tried to keep a personal connection with the Fitzwilliam and the AEC going, in order to follow up on the project and provide feedback and suggestions. This made the AEC and the Fitzwilliam believe that she could help to continue the negotiations, not only

⁷⁰⁷ Zhao Gushan 赵古山, interview with the author, Beijing, 14 October 2013.

⁷⁰⁸ AEC staff, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Beijing, 12 October 2013.

⁷⁰⁹ Tao-Tao Chang, interview with the author, Cambridge, 23 April 2013.

on behalf of the AEC, but also on behalf of the two Chinese museums, in their best interests.⁷¹⁰ There were many other museum staff members like her on both sides pushing the project forward when negotiations were suspended. I do not mean to over-emphasise any specific individual's contribution here, nor to criticise the AEC. Instead, this situation highlights that the existence and involvement of the AEC, as a governmental institution, did hinder direct communication and trust between museums on both sides.

The BM's *The First Emperor* also met with a similar situation, even though fewer problems resulted. It borrowed from around ten museums and cultural institutions in total, widespread across Shaanxi Province, including the Museum of the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of Emperor Qin Shihuang, Shaanxi Provincial Archaeological Institute, Shaanxi Provincial History Museum, Baoji Municipal Bronze Ware Museum, Xianyang Municipal Museum, Fengxiang County Museum and Lintong County Museum.⁷¹¹ During the whole process, the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center, which is under the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Bureau and is responsible for negotiating all outbound loans from Shaanxi Province, was responsible for overseeing negotiations with the BM. No Chinese museum involved could directly negotiate with the BM and therefore had very limited influence on the scope of the exhibition. The Museum of the Terracotta Warriors and Horses of Emperor Qin Shihuang, which provided the largest percentage of exhibits, including the terracotta figures, did send a curator to talk directly with the BM about its collection. Other smaller museums made limited contributions aside from providing objects, a task allocated to them by the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center.⁷¹² Therefore, what they gained from the loan experience was also limited.

There is another dilemma between the AEC and the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center. As discussed in Chapter 5, whether the First Emperor and his bureaucratic, political and militaristic system was an appropriate symbol for the promotion of Chinese civilisation was doubted due to the controversial implications for contemporary China. However, according to the interview with Chinese side, what

⁷¹⁰ Wang Wenjian 王文建, interview with the author, Changsha, 12 September 2013.

⁷¹¹ J. Portal, ed. *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, The British Museum Press, London, 2007.

⁷¹² Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center's exhibitions can tell audiences about the Qin Dynasty is limited because of its relationship with the AEC. There is an unspoken rule between the AEC and the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center that the latter can only lend objects from collections within Shaanxi Province, as the former is responsible for exhibitions including objects from two or more provinces. The Cultural Heritage Promotion Center would be able to present a more diverse narrative about the First Emperor and the Qin Dynasty if it could collaborate with neighbouring provinces, particularly where the ancient Qin culture was distributed.⁷¹³ In this sense, the Chinese government's bureaucratic and administrative system restricts the image of China presented by loan exhibitions.

The Cultural Heritage Promotion Center in Shaanxi Province is the only such institution in addition to the AEC in China that has the power to negotiate loan exhibitions on behalf of museums. But they have many differences. The AEC brings exhibitions into China as well, whereas the Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center only sends out exhibitions. The AEC has its own curatorial team so it can send out a self-curated exhibition rather than only provide objects,⁷¹⁴ while the majority of the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center's exhibitions are curated by host museums.⁷¹⁵ But in essence, they are both governmental institutions. When they are involved in a loan exhibition, they both represent the Chinese government - the AEC represents the central government and organises exhibitions on a national level, while the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center represents a local government and usually organises exhibitions on a provincial level.⁷¹⁶ In these cases, the governmental involvement does make such loan exhibitions more complicated to some extent.

Museums are the direct suppliers of exhibits and the beneficiaries of collaborations. Their professionalism can help to build up mutual trust more easily, which is absolutely vital in any cultural exchange. Exhibition exchange, as an important element of cultural diplomacy, is not only about the image shaped or messages

⁷¹³ Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ AEC staff, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Beijing, 12 October 2013.

⁷¹⁵ Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

⁷¹⁶ The Cultural Heritage Promotion Center is also commissioned by the central government sometimes for sending exhibitions abroad, according to the interview with the Chinese Exhibition of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

delivered through exhibitions, but also about the people-to-people exchange during the whole process, particularly the exchange of ‘working styles, business practices, knowledge, and expertise between museum professionals’,⁷¹⁷ as well as the long-term development of Chinese museums through collaboration and learning. This is more important if considering the two-tier goal of China’s cultural diplomacy and soft power as discussed in Chapter 2. Of course, the value of the AEC and Cultural Heritage Promotion Center to balance resources and propose new initiatives in coordination with the government’s diplomatic strategy, as discussed in Chapter 2, is still irreplaceable. However, in the longer term, such bureaucracy should be reformed in order to make China’s cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions more efficient.

Today, the situation has improved more or less, as can be seen from the case of *The Search for Immortality*. When museums have enough expertise and a strong desire to mount a loan exhibition, the AEC will allow them to have certain freedom, which demonstrates the Chinese government’s respect for and trust in museums’ professionalism. This also reflects the increasing sophistication of China’s cultural diplomacy. It has already recognised the limits of governmental bureaucracies and the values of those professional institutions. Along with the deepening opening-up of China, increasing numbers of Chinese museums will have the opportunity to work internationally. If they can engage in such international collaborations more actively and more professionally, they will be allowed to play an increasingly important, even dominant role. In this sense, the involvement of the AEC and the Cultural Heritage Promotion Center, on behalf of the Chinese government, central or local, which seems to be a political action, is really an indication of a highly bureaucratic system.

In addition, Chinese local governments also play a role in delivering loan exhibitions, particularly under the twin-city framework. They have provided administrative and financial support for exhibition exchange on a local level. Such loan exhibitions have been more directly relevant to the relationship between local authorities on two sides. Local governments might request lending museums to coordinate exhibitions following their agendas, while still giving them sufficient

⁷¹⁷ Cai, ‘The art of museum diplomacy: the Singapore-France cultural collaboration in perspective’, p.139.

freedom and support. In this sense, loan exhibitions have been instrumentalised by local governments rather than by the central government. Where there have been conflicts between local agendas and national regulations, the central government would meet the expectations of local governments only if they do not harm the national interests.

Last but not least, the Chinese government does commission exhibitions for cultural diplomacy in certain circumstances as discussed in Chapter 2 (through the AEC) and Chapter 7 (through specific museums). But this was not the case for any of the case studies looked at during this research. It is difficult to say if the Chinese central or local government would use such commissions to deliver propagandistic messages or if such commissions would have a different impact on the image of China in the media. According to the fieldwork conducted with Chinese museums, even though they generally feel that today the Chinese government has a more supportive attitude than ever for museums' international collaboration and exhibition exchange, there is no concrete and tangible support. Chinese public museums get almost all of their funding from the central or local government. The government requires that the money must be used in certain areas, predominantly daily management, facilities maintenance, human resources and acquiring new collections. No regular funding is allocated for sending exhibitions abroad or bringing in exhibitions. Chinese museums, particularly those smaller museums working with a tight budget, take the opportunity of loan exhibitions to generate revenue. In the long term, this is not beneficial for Chinese museums' international collaborations, as museums would not be passionate about organising loans if they did not bring benefits. This does not mean that the Chinese government should allocate funding directly for museums' international exhibition exchange programmes. However, this situation should be re-considered, not only for the reason that the high loan fees are often complained about by those Western museums with prior experience of exchange programmes, but also for the efficiency of loan exhibitions as instruments of China's cultural diplomacy and for Chinese museums' professional development. From another perspective, even though the Chinese government has fully recognised the value of loan exhibitions for cultural diplomacy, it does not yet have a comprehensive and regular strategy for instrumentalising museums and loan exhibitions.

To summarise, China's cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions does happen in a multitude of ways through different institutional bureaucracies. The Chinese government does play a multitude of roles in delivering such exhibitions. In the case of the UK, to some extent the role of the Chinese government has been more bureaucratic and facilitative than instructive or didactic.

The role of Chinese museums

As discussed in Chapter 2, in principle, Chinese museums are the instrument, even the publicity/propagandistic tool of China's cultural diplomacy, as the institutional bureaucracies, legal system and official policies all require them to serve the overall diplomatic strategy. But according to the fieldwork and case-study analysis, even though the exhibitions sent abroad contributed to the understanding and positive image of China, their impact on the outlook and curatorship of exhibitions was quite limited.

As mentioned before, all the case-study exhibitions that had a media impact were initiated, proposed and curated by the host museum. It is certainly true to say that Western museums are commonly morally and professionally obliged to respect the loan country, its people and culture, let alone the fact that loans from China have to be assessed and approved by the Chinese government. It is quite clear from the media analysis that some of the case-study exhibitions were even regarded as host museums' 'exhibition propaganda' for China. It can be presumed that the Chinese lending museums agree with the host museums' narratives and curatorship, as one of the Chinese interviewees claimed that the Chinese museums and authorities would not agree the loan in the first place if the interpretative strategy went against Chinese history (Chinese history from the Chinese point of view).⁷¹⁸ Exhibitions should be the result of bilateral negotiations between museums. Because of the moral and professional obligation of museums on both sides, the negotiations between museums were on a professional level rather than a political level. And because of their obligations, the exhibition plan submitted to the Chinese authorities for assessment was already politically safe, which lowered the risk that the Chinese government would intervene or amend the exhibition plan. In this sense, the host museum and lending museum worked together to promote the understanding of

⁷¹⁸ Chinese Exhibition Organiser of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, anonymity at request, interview with the author, Xi'an, 5 September 2013.

Chinese culture in a positive light and contribute to China's cultural diplomacy. Neither the Chinese museums nor the host museums were instructed by the Chinese government or the British government to do so. The results owed largely to their professional and moral obligations. To a certain degree, these museums can be seen as non-governmental contributors to China's cultural diplomacy, as they use their professional rather than political voices to shape the image of China, even though they are still government-funded institutions.

However, as discussed above, Western museums and curators have a particular understanding of and interest in Chinese culture. And the pressure to win media and visitor support also drives them to emphasise certain themes, particularly those economic and political subject matters which have 'contemporary resonances' for China. In this way, they narrow down the perspectives to view and understand China. Given this, even though Western museums present China from positive perspectives, the curatorial abilities of Chinese museums still need to be developed to present China from the perspectives those Western museums and curators usually ignore, intentionally or not. As discussed in Chapter 2, China's loan exhibitions have been more frequently seen in Western museums as they can afford the high loan fees and meet the strict requirement for facilities and professionalism. In most cases the Western museums would like to curate the exhibitions themselves and Chinese museums generally provide objects to them. For years the curatorial skills of Chinese museums have progressed little. Of course there are many internal reasons for this as well. In the past few years, the SACH has gradually started to focus on improving Chinese museums' curatorial skills.⁷¹⁹ It will take a long time to develop Chinese museums' curatorial skills and regularly send their self-curated exhibitions to overseas museums. But in the long term, such improvements will definitely benefit China's cultural diplomacy externally as well as Chinese audiences internally.

It is probably the best to start with training curators collaboratively. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 8, the curators for *The Search for Immortality* and *China Design Now* are both ethnically Chinese and have lived in Chinese culture for a long time.

⁷¹⁹ Sun Peng 孙鹏, 'quanguo wenbo xitong zhanlan cehua peixunban juban' 全国文博系统展览策划培训班举办 [Curatorial training for museums], *State Administration of Cultural Heritage*, 7 May 2014, http://www.sach.gov.cn/art/2014/5/7/art_722_10579.html, accessed 27 February 2015.

They have more sensitivity to Chinese culture and therefore are able to present exhibitions of Chinese culture from different perspectives than might British Sinologists. Meanwhile, having lived in the UK for many years, they are also familiar with local audiences and the museum sector. They can present the exhibitions in a language which the local audience finds easy to understand.⁷²⁰ In this way, these curators with sensitivity and sympathy for Chinese culture, who can also navigate Western museums and culture, are able to make a particular contribution to China's cultural diplomacy. This suggests that if sending self-curated exhibitions to Western museums is a long way off for Chinese museums, curatorial exchange and collaborative training should be a priority in the meantime.

It is noteworthy that those smaller-scale exhibitions organised on a local level, as discussed in Chapter 7, reflected more of Chinese museums' curatorial contribution. All the host museums were smaller in scale and resources compared to the big national museums like the BM and V&A. They did not have significant Chinese collections or expertise in Chinese culture, therefore had to depend a lot on the Chinese lenders. For the *Living in Silk* exhibition in Nottingham, not only was a lack of expertise on Chinese culture, but also on Chinese silk as a specialised type of material. China has so many types of material culture, including bronze, lacquer, paintings, ceramics, jade, across many historical periods. Even for museums as big as the BM and V&A, they do not have expertise on everything. For Chinese museums wishing to make a bigger impact on or benefit from cultural diplomacy, they can try to use their specialised expertise to fill in knowledge gaps at the host museum and develop more areas and partners to work with. This would definitely help to present a more diverse image of China from different perspectives. In addition, cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange emphasise long-term relationships, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. If those blockbuster exhibitions only take place to coincide with special occasions, such smaller-scale exhibitions, happening between smaller museums, can keep the rate of exhibition exchange regular. According to the fieldwork conducted with museums in the UK, all the host museums for these smaller exhibitions thought the exhibitions were a success and intrigued their visitors. In this respect, even though they were not as

⁷²⁰ Ming Wilson, interview with the author, London, 16 July 2013; Zhang Hongxing, interview with the author, London, 16 January 2014.

influential as those big museums and blockbuster exhibitions, the value of these smaller museums for China's cultural diplomacy should not be ignored.

Along with the changes in China's international standing as well as changes in global politics and economies, the international understanding and perceptions of China have evolved. China's international strategies are no longer passive or defensive responses to international concerns only. The Chinese government would like to take a leading role in certain areas of international issues. This requires that the image building should not be defensive responses to international publicity only. China's cultural diplomacy and international publicity should take the initiative to present China in the way that China would like the world to view it. For loan exhibitions, as an important element of China's cultural diplomacy, improving museums' curatorial skills and diversifying cultural resources to present China from new and different perspectives are very important.

Ancient China vs. Contemporary China

The last main issue arising from the case-study analysis and fieldwork is about the juxtaposition of ancient art exhibitions and contemporary art exhibitions. As can be seen from the case-study analysis, the most sensational exhibitions with an official background were exhibitions of Chinese ancient art. These have been deliberately chosen depending on the institutions involved. But it is also a natural result of the fieldwork conducted for this thesis. In the UK in the past decade, the most successful and influential exhibitions sent out by Chinese museums and the Chinese government are exhibitions of Chinese ancient art.

The Chinese government's intention to present a 'civilized country featuring rich history' has been repeatedly emphasised throughout the thesis.⁷²¹ It is quite understandable why exhibitions of ancient Chinese art were the majority of loan exhibitions sent out by China. However, the result of fieldwork does demonstrate that the Chinese government has an asymmetrical emphasis on exhibitions of ancient China and contemporary China. As discussed in Chapter 7, exhibitions of contemporary China can keep the audience up-to-date with China's most recent developments and social phenomena. The audience is directly informed of what is happening in China, rather than understanding contemporary China through a

⁷²¹ Huang, 'Xi: China to promote cultural soft power'.

historical perspective. Exhibitions of contemporary China can present perspectives on China that exhibitions of ancient China cannot achieve. In this sense, exhibitions of contemporary China are indispensable in promoting a comprehensive understanding of China. Certainly exhibitions of ancient China are necessary to contextualize the understanding of contemporary China. Therefore, the two types of exhibitions must be supported hand-in-hand so that they can collaborate with each other on shaping a 'balanced and layered' image of China.⁷²²

However, China's current bureaucratic, administrative and legal system hinders the synchronous development of these two types of exhibitions. Simon Groom, Programme Director for Tate Liverpool's *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China* exhibition in 2007, shared his experience of working on contemporary Chinese art. He worried that Chinese public museums are not able to facilitate exhibition exchange of contemporary art on a grand scale because of the lack of public collections of contemporary art in China.⁷²³ It is definitely true that the majority of Chinese public museums only have collections of ancient Chinese art. This is part of the reason why despite there having been so many exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art in the West in the past few years, most have been direct collaborations with artists or private galleries, rather than with Chinese public museums.

On the contrary, according to Zhang Hongxing, who has considerable experience of working on Chinese exhibitions, both comprising ancient and contemporary art, exhibitions of contemporary art sent abroad by Chinese official institutions are, in actual fact, as numerous as exhibitions of ancient art. He did not think that the Chinese government and cultural agencies have a clear policy showing preference for ancient or contemporary art. But such official exhibitions of contemporary art are usually less successful in attracting visitors as well as media attention and are, therefore, less visible, at least in the UK. According to him, there were mainly three reasons for this situation. First of all, British audiences have a preference for ancient Chinese art, which is different from other countries such as Italy, where exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art are more visible and successful. Secondly, Chinese authorities have a different understanding of and preference for contemporary art,

⁷²² Byrne, 'New cultural revolution arrives in Britain on a wave of creativity and confidence'.

⁷²³ Simon Groom, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 17 May 2013.

which differs from mainstream avant-garde art in the global art history.⁷²⁴ This is quite clear from Chinese policies on collecting contemporary art. According to the recommendations on collecting contemporary art published by the SACH, most of the valuable and collectable contemporary artworks reference China's modernity, communist revolutions and reforms.⁷²⁵ Such art is generally ideological, sensitive and controversial, and is, therefore, rarely used for international exchange, at least official cultural exchange. The third reason is that official exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art are not properly organised. Chinese officials usually organise the exhibition and hire a gallery in the UK for one or two weeks.⁷²⁶ In this case, sufficient communication and negotiation between the Chinese lenders and the host cannot be guaranteed. To some degree, from the interpretation to marketing, such exhibitions do not usually match the needs and tastes of local audiences.

Ink China: Group Exhibition of Chinese Ink Painting Masters at the Henry Moore Gallery, Royal College of Art in 2013, and *Ink Painting - Olympic* at the Gallery in Cork Street in 2012 are typical examples. Such exhibitions of contemporary Chinese art (contemporary art from the view of the Chinese authorities) are usually organised and sent by the China International Exhibition Agency under the China Arts and Entertainment Group, which is a national enterprise under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Culture. Even though the agency has its own curatorial team, it is not a professional museum or gallery and does not have its own collection. Its exhibitions are less compatible with museums' standards. Of course the institution has a unique value and makes an irreplaceable contribution to China's cultural exchange, especially in the sphere of the performing arts. It is not my intention to discuss this institution further here. What I do want to emphasise is a system in China which separates the management of exhibitions of ancient art and contemporary art bureaucratically - generally speaking, ancient art exhibitions under the SACH and contemporary art exhibitions under the Arts and Entertainment Group. Zhang Hongxing strongly argued that art should not be separated by any bureaucratic division. The rights should be given to researchers and professional

⁷²⁴ Zhang Hongxing, interview with the author, London, 16 January 2014.

⁷²⁵ SACH, 'Jinxiandai wenwu zhengji cankao fanwei' 近现代文物征集参考范围 [Modern and contemporary objects collecting recommendations], 28 October 2007, http://www.sach.gov.cn/sach_tabid_369/tabid/314/InfoID/6242/Default.html, accessed 23 June 2014.

⁷²⁶ Zhang Hongxing, interview with the author, London, 16 January 2014.

institutions.⁷²⁷ Additionally, legally and bureaucratically, as discussed in Chapter 2, compared to the control on official exhibitions of contemporary art in the exhibition assessment and approval system, the control on exhibitions of ancient art are much stricter, which in fact distinguishes the qualities of these two types of exhibitions as well. In this sense, even though Zhang argued that the Chinese government does not clearly promote ancient art over contemporary art, the official effort and resources put into the promotion of these two types of exhibitions are, in fact, unbalanced.

The guiding policies, bureaucratic division, and legal system all hinder Chinese public museums in producing a systematic plan to promote ancient art and contemporary art hand-in-hand. Cummings has argued that ‘programs in cultural diplomacy are often strongest if they have a firm institutional base, grounded in legislation, and when they have strong support at the top of the ... government’.⁷²⁸ The asymmetrical ‘institutional base’ and ‘legislation’ between contemporary art and ancient art decide the asymmetry between the promotions of the two types of exhibitions. A structural reform is urgently required to change the current situation and provide a long-term drive for Chinese museums’ international collaboration and exhibition exchange. Only in this way can Chinese public museums really project a more ‘balanced and layered’ image of China.⁷²⁹ But as discussed in Chapter 8, contemporary art is often powerful, as it represents a different voice from the official norm. In another way, in China’s current bureaucratic system, exhibitions of contemporary art can be non-governmental actors for China’s cultural diplomacy. Even though they have the potential to cast the Chinese government in a negative light, when they work, they tend to be more trustworthy and influential. As non-governmental actors, such exhibitions can touch upon those issues that official exhibitions find it difficult or inconvenient to discuss. Therefore, supporting such contemporary art exhibitions is not a simple matter of investing money or nationalising the art. It should be dealt with more sensitivity. This is definitely an issue that deserves future research.

Finally, to conclude this thesis, after almost a decade of trial and error, today China’s cultural diplomacy has become much more complex and sophisticated.

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, p.13.

⁷²⁹ Byrne, ‘New cultural revolution arrives in Britain on a wave of creativity and confidence’.

Every possible opportunity has been taken and cultural diplomacy has been practiced in a multitude of ways. Exhibitions are still commissioned in coordination with the government's political and diplomatic agendas. But this is absolutely no longer the exclusive or dominant way. Cultural diplomacy through loan exhibitions has gradually developed from the highly political commission to a more regularly professional collaboration. Museum professionalism on both sides is respected by the Chinese authorities. Local governments and local museums have been given much more freedom to tailor exhibitions to local needs, which has expanded China's cultural diplomacy beyond the capitals and metropolitan cities, particularly through the twin-city framework, and diversified the available cultural resources for cultural diplomacy. All in all, at least in the field of loan exhibitions, it is true to say that China's cultural diplomacy has gradually moved from the mode of one-sided state propaganda and transformed into a much more comprehensive and sophisticated approach. The government keeps certain controls over the exhibitions, but still allows the museums involved considerable freedom in shaping them. Certainly, there are still many problems with the current system of managing loan exhibitions. It is still fair to conclude that China's cultural diplomacy is operated through a complex and distanced bureaucracy, rather than through direct instruction, as Western commentators often assume, even though the political and diplomatic dimensions remain.

Approaching the end of my research, the British government announced £300,000 of funding to facilitate China-UK museum exchange, which is a result of the sixth Economic and Financial Dialogue between the two governments held on the 12 September 2014.⁷³⁰ Presumably, the Chinese government should provide equal support as well, even though no specific figure has been disclosed. This clearly reflects the two governments' strong agreement that museum exchange is a powerful instrument of cultural diplomacy. And this thesis does prove that loan exhibitions can contribute to the image and understanding of China which is consistent with the Chinese government's objectives for cultural diplomacy and image building, even though this is not without conditions. At a time when the Chinese government places unparalleled emphasis on soft power, image building and cultural diplomacy,

⁷³⁰ Department for Culture, Media and Sports, 'UK takes Shakespeare to new audience of one billion people in China', *GOV.UK*, 12 September 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-takes-shakespeare-to-new-audience-of-one-billion-people-in-china>, accessed 27 February 2015.

Chinese museums will definitely benefit from such initiatives by engaging actively in international collaboration, not only for China's cultural diplomacy, but also for their own development.

To make full use of museums and loan exhibitions for cultural diplomacy's sake, the Chinese government should fully respect museum professionalism and avoid using loan exhibitions for propaganda, while at the same time, reforming the current system to provide infrastructural and legal foundations for Chinese museums' international collaboration and exhibition exchange. Until now, the success of such exhibitions and their impact on China's image and cultural diplomacy is partly due to this good balance between political support and museum professionalism. If this principle can be firmly retained, it is not unreasonable to expect that such exhibitions will ultimately contribute to the transformation of the image and perceptions of China in the West in the future.

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

- Exhibition planning stage
 1. Where did the initial idea to organize the exhibition come from or under what special circumstances?
 2. Who took the initiative, or who led the conversation, the Chinese or the British? If it is China take the initiative, then who? Is it diplomats, particular organizations or persons?
 3. Why did the museum want to organize the exhibition and what factors drove the museum for this international partnership with China? How the exhibition fit into the museum's strategic plan or development agenda?
 4. What specific aims did the museum want to achieve through the exhibition?
 5. Is there any specific contact or organization facilitating the conversation?
 6. How the specific theme (focus) of the exhibition was confirmed? Why did the museum decide to focus on it?
 7. Were there any specific obstacles you had imaged for the partnership which might influence your decisions?
- Negotiation stage
 1. Is there any formal document or specific contract signed for this exhibition?
 2. How did the museum come into contact with relevant Chinese museum? Was it through formal contact, organizations, Chinese specific governmental department or any others?
 3. Was there any challenge during the negotiation process?
 4. Was the result of negotiation same with the original plan? How did the things change with the original plan?
- Preparation stage
 1. How the objects were chosen? What criteria and who chose the objects?
 2. Who provided the interpretation, what were the criteria and who set the criteria? Was the interpretation tailored specifically for the host museum?
 3. What was the theme of the whole exhibition and what the exhibition aim to reflect? Who set the narrative?
 4. What did Chinese museum provide for the exhibition (budget, objects, interpretation etc.)? Was it a whole exhibition or parts of it?

5. Where did the budget come from? How to use it?
 6. How to promote the exhibition to the public? Who was the target audience? What did the marketing aims to achieve? Who was responsible for the marketing, the British or Chinese?
 7. How about the media response about this exhibition? Do you think the media get what you want to promote?
- Exhibition results
 1. The composition of the audience, number, demographics (mainly local audience or British Chinese?)
 2. Did the museum do any evaluation throughout the exhibition? What was the main result?
 3. What was the main achievement of the exhibition for the museum?
 4. How was Chinese museums' involvement in the activities accompanying the exhibition (Such as training, family events, education programmes etc.)?
 5. Was there any follow-on partnership after the exhibition?
 - General questions
 1. Is there any documentation/archive about the exhibitions which I can gain access to?
 2. The involvement of Chinese government in the whole process (planning, negotiation, preparation, final exhibitions), did it pose any challenge for museum's work? Or did it have any influence on museum's decision?
 3. The role of the British government in the whole process
 4. Was there any challenge throughout the cooperation posed by cultural difference? (How easy is it to come into contact with Chinese museums through the bureaucracy?) The bilateral museums have different institutional cultures and the two countries have different cultural systems, are they pose any challenge for the cooperation? Was there any difference of working styles in bilateral museums posing challenge for the cooperation?
 5. Was there any other main obstacle in the cooperation?

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