

Curating Revolution

Politics on Display in Mao's China

How did China's Communist revolution transform the nation's political culture? In this rich and vivid history of the Mao period (1949–1976), Denise Y. Ho examines the relationship between its exhibits and its political movements, arguing that exhibitions made revolution material. Case studies from Shanghai show how revolution was curated: museum workers collected cultural and revolutionary relics; neighborhoods, schools, and work units mounted and narrated local displays; and exhibits provided ritual space for both ideological lessons and political campaigns. Using archival sources, ephemera, interviews, and other historical materials, *Curating Revolution* traces the process by which exhibitions were developed, presented, and received. Its examples range from the First Party Congress Site and the Shanghai Museum to the “class education” and Red Guard exhibits that accompanied the Socialist Education Movement and the Cultural Revolution. With its socialist museums and new exhibitions, the exhibitionary culture of the Mao era operated in two modes: that of a state in power and that of a state in revolution. Both reflecting and making revolution, these forms remain part of China's revolutionary legacy today.

Denise Y. Ho is Assistant Professor of twentieth-century Chinese history at Yale University.

“A lucid and compelling history, *Curating Revolution* brings Mao-era exhibits to life in vivid, tangible, and deeply human detail. Ho’s thoughtful analysis of these ‘object lessons’ and the purposes they served illuminates as never before the profound relationship between ideology and materiality in Mao-era political culture. In the process, the familiar categories of revolution, history, culture, propaganda, and participation all take on new and rich significance.”

Sigrid Schmalzer, University of Massachusetts Amherst

“Exhibitionary culture was interwoven into the very fabric of daily life in Mao’s China. Ho tells a fascinating story about the people who shaped that culture – curators, collectors, workers, teachers, schoolchildren, docents, and urban residents – and she does it with exceptional scholarship and rich use of archival sources.”

Kirk A. Denton, The Ohio State University

“China under Mao tried harder than any state in history to inculcate a new consciousness in its citizens. *Curating Revolution* creatively bridges institutional studies of mass campaigns and oral histories to reveal how the use of objects and exhibitions narrated the past, explained the present, and awakened viewers to defend the revolution.”

Karl Gerth, University of California, San Diego

“A wonderful study, chock full of new information gleaned from impressive archival, documentary, and interview sources. The theme of using exhibitions to ‘make revolution’ is clearly and convincingly developed. *Curating Revolution* is destined to be an important book.”

Elizabeth J. Perry, Harvard University

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Yale University



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For my parents, Chee K. Ho and Chui-chu Lok

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Abbreviations

BMA	Beijing Municipal Archive
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
CCRG	Central Cultural Revolution Group
HPDA	Huangpu District Archive
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PSB	Public Security Bureau
SHWWBWGZ	Ma Chengyuan, Huang Xuanpei, and Li Junjie, eds., <i>Shanghai wenwu bowuguan zhi</i> (Gazetteer of Shanghai’s cultural relics and museums)
SMA	Shanghai Municipal Archive
SZYWBLj	Chen Qihui, ed., <i>Shen Zhiyu wenbo lunji</i> (Collected writings by Shen Zhiyu on cultural relics and museums)
WDGW	Song Yongyi, ed., <i>Zhongguo wenhua da geming wenku</i> (Chinese Cultural Revolution database)
ZBDA	Zhabei District Archive

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