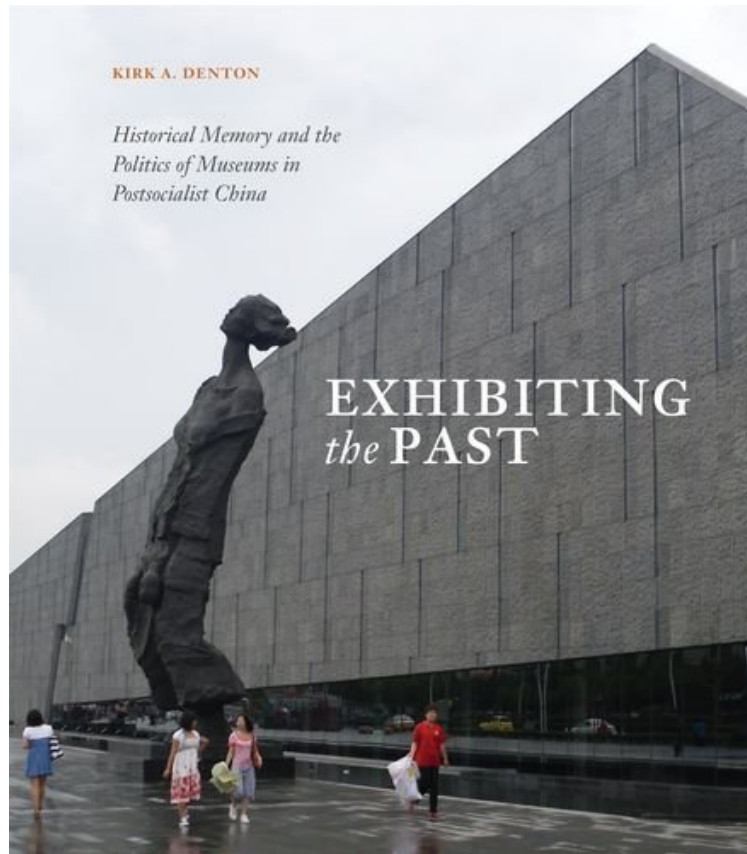


Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China

Kirk A. Denton

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Kirk A. Denton : Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China:

During the Mao era, China's museums served an explicit and uniform propaganda function, underlining official Party history, eulogizing revolutionary heroes, and contributing to nation building and socialist construction. With the implementation of the post-Mao modernization program in the late 1970s and 1980s and the advent of globalization and market reforms in the 1990s, China underwent a radical social and economic transformation that has led to a vastly more heterogeneous culture and polity. Yet China is dominated by a single Leninist party that continues to rely heavily on its revolutionary heritage to generate political legitimacy. With its messages of collectivism, self-sacrifice, and class struggle, that heritage is increasingly at odds with Chinese society and with the state's own neoliberal

ideology of rapid-paced development, glorification of the market, and entrepreneurship. In this ambiguous political environment, museums and their curators must negotiate between revolutionary ideology and new kinds of historical narratives that reflect and highlight a neoliberal present. In *Exhibiting the Past*, Kirk Denton analyzes types of museums and exhibitionary spaces, from revolutionary history museums, military museums, and memorials to martyrs to museums dedicated to literature, ethnic minorities, and local history. He discusses red tourism a state sponsored program developed in 2003 as a new form of patriotic education designed to make revolutionary history come alive and urban planning exhibition halls, which project utopian visions of China's future that are rooted in new conceptions of the past. Denton's method is narratological in the sense that he analyzes the stories museums tell about the past and the political and ideological implications of those stories. Focusing on official exhibitionary culture rather than alternative or counter memory, Denton reinserts the state back into the discussion of postsocialist culture because of its centrality to that culture and to show that state discourse in China is neither monolithic nor unchanging. The book considers the variety of ways state museums are responding to the dramatic social, technological, and cultural changes China has experienced over the past three decades.

Provide(s) well-thought-out discussions of the museum's role in shaping national identity, historical memories, and public discourse. . . . Denton's book analyzes with great clarity and focus the links between the state and the public maintained via museum space. . . . In sum, Denton successfully exposes the nuts and bolts of the state propaganda machine and the collective hypnosis that is its goal.-- "Art Bulletin" In *Exhibiting the Past*, Kirk Denton takes us to Chinese museums and memorial sites to show how the past is being constructed in these cultural spaces, which themselves have emerged in China since the 1980s as signs of a rapid growing market for cultural consumption. . . . *Exhibiting the Past* is an important contribution to the developing scholarship on contemporary Chinese commemoration and public memory. It also presents compelling evidence of how deep the ideological transformation in China has taken root.-- "China International" The writing is smooth, and the research effort that went into this book is impressive. . . . scholars of China, museums, and nationalism, will be happy to have this book. Denton offers a richly researched and thoughtful analysis of how officially sanctioned history-making and commemoration have fared in post-Mao China.-- "Pacific Affairs" Overall, this is a very rich book, a masterly survey of its chosen genre.-- "Museum Anthropology" Provide(s) well-thought-out discussions of the museum's role in shaping national identity, historical memories, and public discourse. . . . Denton's book analyzes with great clarity and focus the links between the state and the public maintained via museum space. . . . In sum, Denton successfully exposes the nuts and bolts of the state propaganda machine and the collective hypnosis that is its goal. (Art Bulletin) In *Exhibiting the Past*, Kirk Denton takes us to Chinese museums and memorial sites to show how the past is being constructed in these cultural spaces, which themselves have emerged in China since the 1980s as signs of a rapid growing market for cultural consumption. . . . *Exhibiting the Past* is an important contribution to the developing scholarship on contemporary Chinese commemoration and public memory. It also presents compelling evidence of how deep the ideological transformation in China has taken root. (China International) The writing is smooth, and the research effort that went into this book is impressive. . . . scholars of China, museums, and nationalism, will be happy to have this book. Denton offers a richly researched and thoughtful analysis of how officially sanctioned history-making and commemoration have fared in post-Mao China. (Pacific Affairs) Overall, this is a very rich book, a masterly survey of its chosen genre. (Museum Anthropology) In *Exhibiting the Past*, Kirk Denton tells an important and unfamiliar story filled with tasty and satisfying cultural nuggets. Through his exploration of how Chinese museums capture and represent the past the result of massive reading and extensive travel he helps us understand the current political cultural moment. (Richard Kraus, author of *The Party and the Arty in China: The New Politics of Culture*) *Exhibiting the Past* is an illuminating survey of China's most notable museums and memorial sites. By painstakingly analyzing museum exhibits and artistic representations, Kirk A. Denton reveals sharp tensions between Communist ideology and market economy, state domination and local interests, commanding official narratives and alternative historical memories. This well-researched book is a timely and informative introduction to an important topic in China's modern-day culture. (Chang-tai Hung, author of *Maos New World: Political Culture in the Early Peoples Republic*)