

Fostering Chinese Nationalism at the Hong Kong Palace Museum

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Abstract

Museums have always been interwoven with identity politics, and have been commonly utilised to disseminate nationalistic ideologies and foster national unity. We looked into seven opening thematic exhibitions of the Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM), which opened in July 2022, to explore the Chinese nationalism conveyed in its narrative. Having analysed the objects displayed, the textual evidence from labels and panels, and the spatial arrangement of the exhibitions, we argue that the HKPM involves in the standardised version of Chinese cultural nationalism and, simultaneously, tailor-make nation-building for Hong Kong, a former British colony that witnessed a rise of localism in the 2010s.

The HKPM follows the typical museum discourse in mainland China, depicting the Chinese civilisation as thriving, culturally diverse, Confucian-centric, uninterrupted, and progressive. These features not only defines the ‘Chineseness’ but also glorifies the nation’s past. By instilling cognitive awareness as well as sense of pride and cultural confidence to Hong Kong visitors who are culturally Chinese, the museum narrative attempts to construct, reconstruct, and strengthen their sense of belongings to the Chinese nation.

We also observed customised nation-building specifically for Hong Kong. The HKPM legitimates Hong Kong’s unity with China using various strategies. It assimilates Hong Kong’s past into the Chinese civilisation while depicting its inferiority to the orthodox Chinese history. Highlighting Hong Kong collector-donors and artists’ endeavour to safeguard and advocate Chinese traditional culture and arts, the museum amplifies the national identities of Hong Kong people to

profess the public support to Hong Kong's reunification with China. It also engenders a sense of obligations to invite visitors perform their national identities.

Keywords: Identities, Chinese nationalism, Hong Kong Palace Museum, Hong Kong