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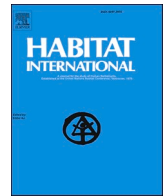
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Integrating heritage assets in large commercial complexes: de-contextualization and re-signification of memory in Shanghai

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ABSTRACT

Since early this century, multiple large-scale commercial projects in Shanghai and other Chinese cities incorporate heritage assets for the creation of new identities after de-contextualisation through demolition of complete city blocks. This tabula rasa approach resulted in a discontinuity of the meaning and use that local communities gave to these heritage buildings and a re-appropriation by new users in a context of consumerism. This paper studies two cases in Shanghai city center: Jing An Kerry Centre and Greenland Bund Centre, where heritage buildings related to the memories of Communism, trading societies and Christianity are incorporated into high-density high-end commercial redevelopment. As we argue, the study of heritage conservation methods and urban design approaches reveals profound discontinuities in the position and meaning of heritage assets, which respond to important political and economic performance requirements. This paper puts forward two main arguments. Firstly, that the choice of heritage conservation methods and design approaches aligns with the new official narrative of the desired image of Shanghai as a prosperous global city rooted in Communism. Secondly, that the de-contextualisation of heritage assets within a new corporate urban context motivates specific heritage-related landscape, urban and architectural design responses, that contribute to their re-contextualisation in a new sanitized urban environment.

1. Introduction

This paper studies the incorporation and appropriation of heritage-listed assets by iconic large-scale commercial real estate projects in Shanghai. It addresses political and entrepreneurial motivations for the use of heritage in urban redevelopment, which has received criticism from a scholarly perspective for the over-simplification of urban memory and the capitalization of heritage values (Zhu & González Martínez, 2021). China has witnessed a massive urbanization during the last four decades (Hsing, 2010). Frequently associated with poor living standards, old neighbourhoods were razed to the ground, regardless their heritage value, for the purpose of upgrading the overall life-standard, city branding, and economic stimulation.

Particularly since the last decade, stakeholders of urban redevelopment in China have started to cherish a re-connection with history. Selected historic assets act as conveyors of new narratives in urban regeneration, by referring to prosperity and progress; cultivated

lifestyles and wealth, in a dialectical context of globalisation and nationalism. This integration of heritage elements and creation of new narratives is not novel, but the process of isolation followed by de-contextualisation and re-signification on a large-scale is unprecedented.¹ This approach is likely to be followed elsewhere also beyond China due to rapid urbanisation especially in the Global South.

Another difference is the explicit call by China's core leadership for recovery of an "excellent traditional culture" in 2013 (Kubat, 2018). China's New Urbanization Guidelines followed up in 2016 by a focus on heritage and beautification, to emphasize local Chinese characteristics while "combatting the loss of identity" brought by fast modernization (Xinhua News Agency, 2016). Analysis of this phenomenon of massive redevelopment and heritagization constitutes a gap that this research aims to address. Urban regeneration processes in residential quarters are both historically as well as social-economical significant. Social aspects such as expropriation, displacement, and gentrification have been described by many scholars for similar situations (Arkaraprasertkul, 2019; Shao, 2013).

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¹ Described process has analogies with the incorporation of St. John's Cathedral (1849) in Hong Kong and St. Patrick's Cathedral (1878) in New York, both also components of large commercial complexes surrounded with towers and malls in the financial district of global cities, but differs in re-signification.

In our paper, however, we mainly focus on the less studied subsequent process of re-signification after de-contextualisation, thus in particular the spatial and cultural-historical significance of this phenomenon. As contribution to this open debate we analyse how the incorporation of heritage-listed elements in urban redevelopment requires specific heritage conservation methods and environmental design approaches that jointly support the radical re-signification of redeveloped historic areas.

As we will argue, once decontextualized from their original surroundings and users, heritage practitioners choose restoration methods that highlight the historic value of described heritage buildings. Developers turn this value into symbolic capital and economic profit through massive investment, which both benefits specific city branding purposes and political legitimization aims. We argue how designers and heritage practitioners reinforce the historic value by means of the isolation ('monumentalization') and adjustment of the heritage elements. As our research shows, the different stakeholders appropriate this historic value as profit; either by increasing the economic proficiency of the redevelopment or by branding the new image of Shanghai as a Global City rooted in the origins of Communism.

We study three listed heritage buildings in two case study areas in central Shanghai, in light of the goals expressed in Shanghai's latest master plan: "Striving for an Excellent Global City" (SPLRA, 2018a). We explore the connections between the fields of heritage conservation and urban studies, using heritage-led redevelopment as a vehicle. Our research raises the following questions: (1). How do these three heritage-listed buildings relate to the urban redevelopment schemes of the large commercial complexes that incorporated them? (2). How do involved stakeholders (re-) interpret the historical continuity of the sites and what is the new narrative or re-signification of their memories? (3). What is the contribution of these heritage elements to the desired new global image of Shanghai?

The choice of Jing An Kerry Centre and Greenland Bund Centre as case studies responds to a variety of reasons. Both cases incorporate heritage-listed elements that stood after the complete demolition of their surroundings. These elements were later subject to heritage conservation methods, and integrated in both large commercial complexes through heritage-inspired design strategies. Both cases are outside heritage-listed areas (Fig. 1), but their proximity to heritage-listed areas

is exploited in terms of branding. Historically, both areas played a role in the internationalisation of Shanghai, respectively in the former international concession and in the former port area of the old city. The two areas incorporate three major built heritage narratives developed by cultural planners of Shanghai in the last years, namely: (a) Shanghai as birthplace of Communism, identified with the residence of Mao Zedong in Jing An Kerry Centre; (b) Shanghai's cosmopolitanism represented by the St. Francis Xavier Church in Dongjiadu; and (c) Shanghai's ancestral entrepreneurialism represented by the Shang Chuan Huiguan (Merchant's Guild) in Dongjiadu.

This research applies a grounded theory approach based on interviews, document analysis, and site observation. The authors performed 15 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders: developers, real estate agents, project architects, landscape designers, heritage conservation architects, current end-users of the renovated heritage assets, local government officials, and local scholars with deep expertise on the history and heritage of Shanghai. Interviews were developed in English and Chinese, and lasted between 1 h and 3 h each. Additionally, the authors studied relevant policy documents, historic images, and maps. Both sites have been visited multiple times, especially between mid 2019 and early 2022, performing field observations, taking notes and pictures, and analysing promotion materials.

2. Heritage and redevelopment: conflict and conciliation

Recurring terms in recent discourses on urban redevelopment in China are 'beautification' and 'harmonization'. Beautification involves the promotion of heritage architecture, amidst a wider ecological civilization campaign promoted by the government (Hansen et al., 2018). The analogous concept of harmonization involves state control over spatial production and aims to improve the life quality by establishing principles of social guidance (Ludwig & Walton, 2020, pp. 15–36; Zhu and Maags, 2020). Beautification and harmonization are deemed possible in a context of strongly centralized power, which directs action towards derelict historic areas officially deemed as 'ugly', 'unhealthy', or 'unsafe'. Beautification and harmonization became tools of urban governance (Oakes, 2019; Zhu, 2016), implying the sanitization of urban life and the exclusion



Fig. 1. Cultural and Historical Listed Areas in the Central City of Shanghai, with Jing An Kerry Centre in the Former French concession and Greenland Bund Centre in Dongjiadu between the Old Town and the Huangpu River (Image by Shanghai Heritage Bureau, adjusted by authors).

of informality (Janoschka et al., 2014; Jou, Clark, & Chen, 2016).

The means for beautification are diverse. Authors like Den Hartog (2010) have studied how urban planners and designers incorporated foreign architectural elements for this purpose in new residential complexes and in new town areas. This has raised the discussion on the notion of authenticity, which is notoriously stretched in China to create status, identity and add value to a project (Den Hartog, 2010; Piazzoni, 2018). This conceptual stretching is due to the speed of urban development in China, giving little time for thorough research in situations where heritage elements are included in the development (Xie & Heath, 2018). The consequences of beautification are also loosely interpreted: the highly controversial effects of gentrification, spatial cleansing or urban cleansing that authors from the Global North identify in international contexts (Lees, 2012; Herzfeld, 2006; Appadurai, 2013), receive little critical evaluation in China, from an official, academic and popular perspective (Ley & Teo, 2014 and 2020).

Public and private stakeholders have not considered heritage buildings as assets for redevelopment in China until recently (He, 2007; Ley and Teo, 2014, 2020). Authors like Wang and Lau (2009) and Zhong (2015) point towards a change in the early 2000s, which saw new orientations in the consideration towards the historic environment and the adoption of new management approaches (Li et al. 2019, 2020), even if as Shao (2013) has signalled, this came as a too late move. Such 'heritage turn' is related to a wider socio-political aim of building 'self-confidence' through cultural policies (Svensson & Maags, 2018, pp. 11–38), as well as to the aim to stimulate the economy with the global paradigms of tourism and the creative city (Florida, 2006; Scott, 2006). These purposes motivate the de-contextualisation and re-use of heritage elements for the production of sanitized versions of the past and economic profit (Sassen, 2014). The re-use of industrial heritage in the generation of Shanghai's waterfronts (Den Hartog, 2019), or the re-creation of history in traditional neighbourhoods (González Martínez, 2017a, 2019), show how the 'cultural distinction' of heritage aesthetics is the outcome of a shift in value, from the cultural and historical to the economic and political (González Martínez, 2019; Zhu, 2015; Zhu & González Martínez, 2021).

A variety of authors have addressed the incorporation of heritage assets as branding elements for redevelopment projects in Shanghai, focusing on management perspective (He & Wu, 2005; Ren, 2008; Wang, 2009; Wu, 2003, 2004), but an important gap appears in the analysis of architectural conservation methods and urban/architectural design strategies in the process. We consider that this needs to be addressed, especially due to the growing number of non-listed urban areas in China which incorporate heritage-listed buildings to new

commercial and residential schemes, with examples in Shanghai like Raffles City Changning, Taikoo Hui at Nanjing West Road, Suhe Creek, and Fuxing Longyu at Laoximen. In the highly experimental context that constitutes Shanghai, the inquiry on 'appropriation' of historic buildings is yet to be critically assessed.

3. The creation of identities in large-scale commercial urban complexes, two cases in Shanghai

3.1. Case 1: Jing An Kerry Centre

3.1.1. Site description, position and historical meaning

Kerry Centre is located in the central Jing An district. The 450,000 square-meter Jing An Kerry Centre comprises retail, offices, hotel, residential and parking space. The main stakeholders for the site were Kerry Properties Ltd. as developer, Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) and Design Land Collaborative (DLC) were in charge of the architecture and landscape design respectively (Kohn Pedersen Fox, 2021). The District Government of Jing An was responsible for the conservation project of the residence of Mao Zedong.

The character of this part of the city is embedded in the memories of affluence of the former international concessions. But surprisingly, the Shanghai Municipal Planning Bureau left this residential block of high historic significance out of the listings when passed in 2003. According to a top cultural heritage official of Jing An district, the reason for not listing this block had been the complete disappearance of its context after demolition already in the 1990s. Only the former residence of Mao Zedong, heritage-listed by the Shanghai municipality since 1959, and its two contiguous houses in Anyi Road, were spared from demolition due to their historical significance (personal communication, 16 September 2020).

The residence of Mao Zedong stands at the centre of the redevelopment, linked to an intensively used open square with waterworks. Anyi Road is frequently pedestrianized during weekends, hosting open-air markets and other leisure activities. Around the residence of Mao Zedong, the Kerry Centre shopping mall is a first-class commercial venue, where the most expensive international fashion brands have flagship stores, and which also gathers first-class restaurants. Four high-rise towers complete the scheme: Tower 1 with offices (1998); Towers 2 and 3; built in the second phase from 2009 to 2013, incorporate offices and the exclusive Shangri-La Hotel. A smaller tower with service apartments next to Tower 1 is the only residential building here (See Fig. 2).

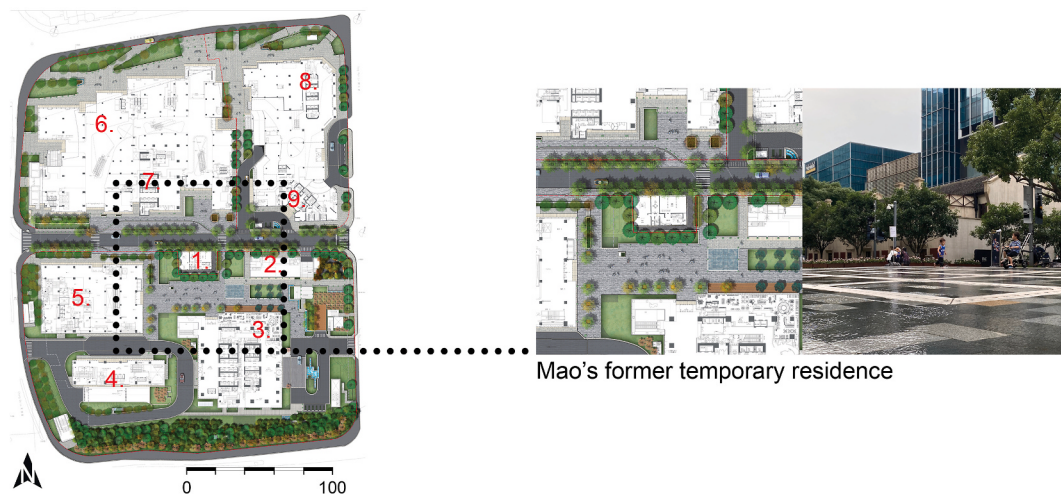


Fig. 2. Plan of Jing An Kerry Centre, indicating the position of (1) restored former temporary residence of Mao Zedong; (2) restaurant designed by Pritzker Prize winning architect Shigeru Ban; (3) super-tall hotel and office tower, and (4, 5 and 6) exclusive retail and food, and (7) office tower 2 all designed by KPF; (8 and 9) office tower and serviced apartments tower built mid 1990s. Source: DLC, adapted by the authors.

3.1.2. Heritage strategies in place

The heritage strategies consist of both built heritage conservation and museumization measures. The architect commissioned by Jing'an District for the conservation plan of the residence of Mao Zedong and contiguous houses mentions how due to the statutory protection of the residence since 1959, it was restored to its original state, requiring minimal actions of consolidation (personal communication, September 16, 2020). Restoration works started in 2012, once the second phase of urban redevelopment was nearing completion, in order to avoid interferences from the construction of the neighbouring shopping mall and towers. By means of restoration, the conservation architect aimed to recover the 'originality' of the heritage asset as a key feature of its authenticity. The intervention strategy for the two contiguous houses followed a more transformative adaptive reuse approach. Thereby, the conservation architect aimed to provide support spaces for dissemination activities, which required the demolition of the original wooden structure and a completely new spatial arrangement, including a two-floor high space.

The museumization measures in the residence of Mao Zedong vary depending on the private or public character of each space. Indicated as the place where Mao Zedong was inspired by principles of Marxism, the District government cherishes this house museum due to its significance for the birth of Communism in China. The main living room and the master bedroom are used as exhibition space and conference room respectively.² The conservation architect adopted a sober approach to the restoration of structural and decoration elements, strengthening the symbolism of the humble origins of the residence. For the more intimate spaces, this idea is reinforced through the display of vintage furniture, particularly showcased in Mao's bedroom located in the mezzanine. Not coincidentally, this space known in Shanghai traditional architecture as the *tingzijian* has a special aura in official narratives as rental room for people of modest means, left-wing artists and writers (González Martínez, 2020). The curators of the house museum also established links to the surrounding public space. They incorporated a standing statue of a young Mao Zedong on the roof terrace that is accessible from the bedroom; to be contemplated exclusively from outside of the museum: Mao faces north, his gaze oriented towards the surrounding high-rise towers.

The stakeholders involved in the heritage strategies agree on the important significance of the site, and do not highlight any conflicts between the heritage site and the new buildings, particularly in light of the commercial gentrification of the area.³ According to the official from Jing'an District, there is a historical consequential relation between Mao Zedong's struggle and its current outcome, which is the prosperity of Shanghai as birthplace of Communism in China, and, with it, of the People's Republic. When asked about the impact on the global image of Shanghai, the same official refers to how the international rise of China has a beneficial global effect, meaning that the site enjoys a worldwide significance now (personal communication, September 16, 2020).

3.1.3. Architectural and urban strategies

According to the CEO of KPF, in charge of the overall design of the second phase of the development, the design process unfolded without specific design determinations from the District Urban Planning and Land Management Bureau for the site regarding the residence of Mao Zedong. The only exceptions were that excavation under the heritage-listed building was not allowed, and a 'red lining' around the heritage

asset had to be respected leaving a distance of 25 m (personal communication, July 17, 2020 and September 7, 2020).

The CEO of KPF points at two main design strategies aimed to resignify the memory of the site (personal communication, July 17, 2020). The first one is the location of the freestanding, 2-floor structure of a restaurant in Anyi Road, designed by Pritzker Prize winning architect Shigeru Ban. Ban harmonized the position and height of this building with that of the residence of Mao Zedong and the preexisting traditional neighbourhood, echoing its modest scale. The second relationship is an abstract one, and speaks of the fragmentation of the volumes of the shopping mall and towers, according to the CEO of KPF this refers to the Fibonacci sequence, and recalls the vibrancy of the historic façades in the area. According to the CEO of KPF and the principal of DLC, the former residence of Mao Zedong certainly brings added value into the project, but the lack of communication with the architects in charge of its restoration avoided any alternatives for its integration into the overall scheme (personal communications, July 17, 2020 and September 7, 2020).

3.2. Case 2: Greenland bund centre

3.2.1. Site description, position and historical meaning

Greenland Bund Centre, also named Dongjiadu Financial City, is a 1,200,000 square-meter development at Shanghai's South Bund in the Huangpu district along the Huangpu River. It comprises retail, offices, a five-star hotel, residential compounds, and cultural spaces (Kohn Pedersen Fox, 2021). The firm Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) did the master plan and architectural design, while Design Land Collaborative (DLC) was in charge of the landscape design. The local government and the China Minsheng Investment Group (CMIG) developed the project, but in 2019 CMIG sold its 50% share to the state owned Greenland Group (The Paper, 2019), thus giving full control back to the local government of Shanghai. Other stakeholders in the project are Zhang Ming, renowned heritage conservation designer in Shanghai, and the Catholic Diocese of Shanghai, which holds the property rights of St. Francis Xavier Church.

Dongjiadu used to be a very significant part of Shanghai. Located outside the protective city walls, the area was the primary connection between Shanghai's Old City and the Huangpu River. The earliest embankments and piers of the city were to be found here, and during the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) the area started to attract national and international trade. After the Opium Wars and the start of the foreign concessions, the port function moved to the current Bund, and Dongjiadu fell into decay. Due to its poor state of conservation and despite its historic and cultural relevance, the Shanghai Municipal Planning Bureau did not include Dongjiadu among the 12 municipal heritage listed areas in 2003. Much as for the case of Kerry Centre, it is located in the immediate vicinity of two listed areas: Laochengxiang, which corresponds to the old city of Shanghai, and Waitan (the Bund), which encompasses the economic downtown of Shanghai during its heyday in times of the foreign concessions. A heritage scholar of Tongji University referred to how Dongjiadu is a reflection of the historical spirit of entrepreneurship of Shanghai, as the main access point of western civilisation into the city, and by extension, to the whole of China (personal communication, September 28, 2020).

As part of the recent municipal plans to reconnect the city with the river, the bustling port-related neighbourhood Dongjiadu was torn down between 2009 and 2012. The CEO of KPF explained: "from practical point of view it is sometimes not possible to preserve, because of subsidence. That's why there was not a huge effort to preserve buildings." (personal communication, July 17, 2020). Only two heritage-listed buildings located at the core of the redevelopment were spared from demolition thanks to their statutory municipal protection: St. Francis Xavier Church (see Fig 4 and 10) and the Shang Chuan Huiguan (see Figs. 3 and 8–10). The church stands on a central and preeminent position due to its larger scale, whereas the Shang Chuan Huiguan occupies a more modest location about 190 m to the south of the church. Around

² According to a top cultural heritage official of Jing'an district, particularly since the 100th anniversary of Mao Zedong's stay at the house in 2020, it became a privileged spot of Red Tourism circuits (personal communication, 16 September 2020).

³ The continuity of residential uses is limited to the serviced apartments next to Tower 1 with rental prices starting from monthly 31,000 CNY for one-room apartments.

both buildings, a total of nine office towers up to 300-m tall frame the central open space, which is also occupied by a mixed commercial and cultural centre connected to Zhongshan South Road. A total of eight high-rise residential buildings located in the southwest corner of the development complete the scheme.

3.2.2. Heritage strategies in place

The heritage strategies applied to the St. Francis Xavier church and the Shang Chuan Huiguan consist of structural consolidation and restoration. St. Francis Xavier Church, a building in Spanish Baroque style dating from 1853, has a historical significance as the first cathedral of Shanghai, yet, it shows a contentious history. Besides its discontinued use since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the structure was deprived of its significance during the Cultural Revolution, when it was used as storage space of a lightbulb factory, and only listed in 1993. The main challenge for the restoration was the low resistance of the soil in this former swampy area, which had already experienced catastrophic episodes of subsidence with the collapse of buildings and a metro tunnel in 2003 (China Daily, 2003; Tan et al., 2012). The church foundations were thus consolidated through a concrete "plate" to realize equal subsidence (personal communication, September 7, 2020).

The conservation architects in charge of the restoration of the church aimed to bring it back to the establishment of the first international communities in Shanghai, ignoring other contentious stages of this building's recent history.⁴ According to our direct observation, restoration works inside the church are still ongoing in 2022. Either its functional structure and interior decorations remain unaltered. The position of significant movable elements, such as the altar and the ornamental lamps, has not been subject to change, implying the future recovery of its original function. The adjacent service building, which is not listed, is scheduled for demolition, and its functions transferred to a new service building next to the new shopping mall (personal communication, December 23, 2020). Following guidelines from the central government (personal communication, September 7, 2020), a fence must surround the church, yet the fence design, both in height, materials and transparency, enables the integration with the surroundings.

Surprisingly, nostalgia for the historical ties between the church and the demolished neighbourhood is absent for its main users. As in the case of Mao Zedong's residence, stakeholders support the re-signification of the heritage assets through the connection with the new environment. According to St. Francis Xavier's serving priest, planners and conservation designers have satisfactorily acknowledged the physical building, and redevelopment appears as an opportunity to attract people to the community. This seems to be particularly welcome after years when the neighbourhood disappeared and attendance to religious service decreased dramatically: "The new development can bring the existence of the church (and "the spirit") under attention to a wider audience, and especially also to Shanghai's young people of the new middle class". The demolition of the surrounding neighbourhood does not seem to be of particular concern for the priest, who omits any agency in the spatial cleansing justifying it due to the poor living conditions (personal communication, September 11, 2020).

Built in 1715, the Shang Chuan Huiguan was home to the Commercial Boat Association, one of the first merchant guilds of wholesale

traders in Shanghai. During the late Qing Dynasty, guilds were key elements of the city's economy and social organization, with more than a hundred *huiguans* in Shanghai, representing different provinces or trade associations (Denison & Guang, 2006; Knyazeva, 2015; Moll-Murata, 2008).⁵ Surprisingly, the main structure of the Shang Chuan Huiguan, consisting of two pavilions sharing an open courtyard, survived through the years despite its re-use as housing and small factory, and its occupation with informal structures during the second half of the 20th century. Despite the fact that the Shanghai Municipality listed the *huiguan* in 1987, involved stakeholders and even researchers were not aware of the building (Abbas, 2002), since it completely disappeared from sight behind other buildings and informal structures.⁶

Conservation architect Zhang Ming aimed to restore the building to its past glory, re-signifying it as centre for entrepreneurship and omitting any references to other controversial episodes of its recent history.⁷ The conservation architect recovered the building typology of the guild, with the courtyard and the two main buildings to the east (a theatre stage) and the west (the assembly hall). The restoration project removed the shanty structures that occupied the building, and consolidated the brick walls and wooden roofs. Conservation scientists of the team analysed the rich polychrome of wooden elements, which were restored according to original techniques. Other elements that had been destroyed throughout the years required reconstruction: First, the conservation architect designed the roof gables according to available historic photos of the building. Furthermore, the architect added an important element of the theatre stage, its missing dome, without direct evidence, but finding inspiration in similar buildings of the area (observation and personal communication, November 13, 2020). Its golden polychrome is representative of its connections with memories of sophistication and wealth.

Overall, the conservation architects of both St. Francis Xavier Church and the Shang Chuan Huiguan contribute through their designs to reinforce and recover lost symbolic ties with cosmopolitanism and trade. The stakeholders at play acknowledge this, dismissing any potential conflicts regarding the relocation of the former inhabitants and its new-build gentrification,⁸ or the demolition of its historic environment.⁹ Moreover, they align with developmental narratives of Shanghai for the South Bund, which are present in the promotional materials from the local government-owned developer that describe the project as important financial and trade centre that continues the historical commercial character of the area.

3.2.3. Architectural and urban strategies

According to the Shanghai's "14th Five-Year Plan" (2012–2025), the Dongjiadu Financial Cluster appears as the southward extension of the Bund Financial Concentration Belt,¹⁰ functionally continuing the

⁵ Huiguans functioned as base for traders from a specific region, usually with their own dialect and collective cultural background. Larger ones comprised functions such as warehouses and wharves, but also community functions, e.g. a school, medical post, stage or shrine (Denison & Guang, 2006; Moll-Murata, 2008).

⁶ According to the developer, it was thanks to the initiative of local activists that they got aware of this valuable heritage (personal communication, 7 September 2020).

⁷ In 1937 the Japanese bombed the area. Red Guards destroyed most of the remaining guilds during the Cultural Revolution (Denison & Guang, 2006; Knyazeva, 2015). The central component of the Shang Chuan Huiguan survived through the years when the building became a public housing.

⁸ A visit to the luxurious sales office of Greenland on site confirms these aspirations: apartments cost on average 150,000 CNY per square meter (Personal communication with a sales representative, June 2020).

⁹ Surprisingly, the appreciation of the building and its historical connections with the neighbourhood do not stand among the priorities of its main users.

¹⁰ Together with the Lujiazui Financial Cluster this will form "One City Belt" alongside the Huangpu River. By 2035 Shanghai must be a financial world player where its financial industry will at least contribute 18% to the city's GDP.

⁴ During the Cultural Revolution concrete slabs were erected around the church to hide it from public view. It accommodated a range of non-religious functions, e.g. a light bulb factory, and finally reached a state of decay. After it was refurbished in 1996 (Knyazeva, 2015), religious service in the church resumed, but stopped again due to the redevelopment process.



Fig. 3. The former residence of Mao Zedong before and after the redevelopment, notice the disconnection with the urban plaza on its backside. Source left: Retrieved from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2979158. Accessed 3 June 2021; Source right: The authors, 2021.



Fig. 4. Plan of Greenland Bund Centre, indicating the position of (1) St. Francis Xavier Church; (2) Shang Chuan Huiguan; (3) 240-m super-tall office tower, and (4) 300-m super-tall office tower and 5-star hotel, designed by KPF; (5 and 6) malls along 750-m long elevated pathway with underground connections; (7) elevated platform crossing the Zhongshan Road; (8) extended bund promenade with ferry terminal; (9) exclusive high-rise residential compounds. Source: DLC, adapted by the authors.



Fig. 5. St. Francis Xavier Church, left prior to restoration in 2014, and right after re-contextualisation in 2022. Source: The authors.



Fig. 6. The theatre stage of Shang Chuan Huiguan prior to restoration (left) and afterwards with golden-dome inside and surrounded by, but not connected with, its new urban context (right). Source: Zhang Ming Studio, 2015 and 2020.



Fig. 7. Comparison of the current state of redevelopment and the visualization offered by the developer. Source left: photo of promotion billboard by Greenland; Source right: drone image by the authors Autumn 2021.

Bund's historic financial services. This municipal strategy aims to “protect and utilize the Bund's historical and cultural features, reshape its functions, and dig deeper into the carriers with financial history and financial cultural atmosphere to gather financial institutions” (SPLRA, 2018b). Accordingly, the new Dongjiadu will be “a balance between past and future, development and decline, modernity and tradition, change and preservation, global influence and local culture” (as written on sales brochures by the state-owned Greenland Group; own observation 2020).

According to the urban designers and architect of KPF, they defined the street layout with the purpose to “preserve the human scale of its traditional urban vernacular” (personal communication, July 17, 2020). Our observations show how the new streets are indeed more human scale and walkable compared to similar large-scale developments elsewhere in Shanghai. The Dongjiadu Road still follows its original path and – according to the designers – adds to historic continuity (personal

communication, July 17, 2020), even if it has become an internal road of the new layout and skyscrapers have replaced the traditional residential buildings.¹¹

The chief designer of the Greenland Group mentions how the main urban design strategies of the redevelopment operated in the abstract level of two main axes, defined by Shanghai's urban planning bureau.

¹¹ A document by the local authorities of the Huangpu District in 2014 underlines that “development and change of the city is inevitable, but old buildings, streets and lanes that have recorded the prosperity of Dongjiadu in the past, will be revitalized and will continue to witness the prosperous future of Shanghai” (These documents have been removed from the official Huangpu District website, but still circulate online, e.g.: https://tieba.baidu.com/p/3156648799?red_tag=2802657405#/; Accessed on 3 June 2021).



Fig. 8. The two heritage assets after demolition of their urban context (left) and during the process of re-signification (right). Source left: Katya [Knyazeva, 2015](#); Source right: The authors, drone photos September 2020.

The first is a ‘cultural axis’ parallel to the waterfront, a 400-m-wide zone that integrates the St. Francis Xavier Church and the Shang Chuan Huiguan as key elements (personal communication, December 23, 2020). The second axis symbolically connects the historical Old City with the Huangpu River, highlighting the historical significance of Dongjiadu Road and former waterway, and stretches in east-west direction along a 750 m-long elevated pedestrian platform.

The developer intensifies these strategies by means of the marketing strategies put in place. According to most recent observations in 2022, the global architecture of the new shopping mall appeals to the international influenced origins of the site, both symbolic and real. As part of a branding event, the management of the shopping mall hanged massive pictures of querubins covering the building volumes closer to the church. The management also have favoured an accumulation of Italian retail and F&B brands, appealing by these non-explicit means to the geographic origins of Christian culture. The developer also offers ubiquitous historical information about the site: displayed in the floor of public spaces as well as in public furniture, it provides the narrative supporting the significance of the site after the disappearance of its built context.

4. Discussion

The emerging trend of re-using historic buildings as assets for redevelopment in large-scale commercial projects is exemplary of the instrumentality of heritage for governance in China ([Oakes, 2019](#)). Selected by the municipal and district government, restored by conservation architects, and re-signified by designers and developers according to dominant heritage discourses, heritage buildings cater to official purposes of political legitimacy, urban beautification and social harmony. The study of this process in Shanghai adds a layer of cosmopolitanism that corresponds to the city’s global aspirations. According to [Sassen \(1991\)](#) global cities are co-defined by world-class cultural assets,

which explains the wish of stakeholders to use heritage in an emblematic way. We analyse this in four different levels: (1) the selection of heritage assets; (2) their de-contextualisation and (3) re-signification, plus (4) design approaches.

4.1. Selection of heritage assets: selective memory at the base of new narratives

The former residence of Mao Zedong, the St. Francis Xavier Church and Shang Chuan Huiguan reflect a history of national and international interactions which supports the competitive scenario of Shanghai as global city. Their original signification refers to the physical memory of workers, merchants, and sailors, and the lively streets of their neighbourhoods. As formal centres of communities, the church and the huiguan surpassed their architectural appearance; they also had a strong social function. Yet, their selection as assets for redevelopment responds to official listing criteria that reflect on dominant heritage discourses ([Smith 2006](#)). We analyse it in light of changes in their significance throughout history, and particularly since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. In this sense, the residence of Mao Zedong has received continuous appreciation as heritage of Communism since it was listed by the State in 1959,¹² whereas the appreciation of the church and the *huiguan* has been a more contentious one. Not coincidentally, official regulations after 1949 discontinued their functions, and the Cultural Revolution brought important changes that deprived them of their original values. Consequently, they were not listed by the Shanghai Municipality until 1993 and 1987, respectively. The fact that the church was the last element among our case studies to be listed speaks of the difficult character that religious buildings, particularly those of foreign

¹² Other important Red heritage buildings like the Fouding Site of the Communist Party of China in Xingye Road were also listed on 1959.

origin, have for their recognition as heritage in China (Coomans & Xu, 2017; Vermander et al., 2018).

Furthermore, their incorporation as cores of the new commercial redevelopments responds to new official narratives of Shanghai's history. Our analysis of restoration and museumization strategies, and the testimonies of officials and designers, together with promotion materials, show how their significance is harmonized complementing each other. This confirms the key role that Ashworth and Karavatzis (2011, pp. 25–38) gave to heritage elements for the construction of a competitive city image. Consequently, the historical gaps between them are filled and given full coherence for the presentation of Shanghai as a Chinese global metropolis: open to the World, with a long tradition of entrepreneurial spirit, and strongly rooted in the origins of Communism. Heritage elements, therefore, cater to higher purposes of power and become tools for political legitimization.

4.2. De-contextualisation from the physical and social environment

These three main narratives motivate the de-contextualisation of the heritage elements, which is achieved from scratch by means of the physical removal of their original urban environment. According to the testimonies of stakeholders involved and on our own site observations, these historic neighborhoods were in a poor physical condition. Wholesale demolitions would appear like the preferred solution from a maximalistic, top-down perspective as analysed by Ley and Teo (2014) or Tomba (2017). Yet, demolitions obviate the important tangible and intangible heritage attributes and fine-grained urban fabric with a rich patina and vibrant streetlife, which in the case of Dongjiadu, was one of the most popular urban imaginaries of Shanghai, attracting both locals and international visitors. Demolitions brought the three assets to a new spotless state for completely different new users. Surprisingly from the perspective of Western urban heritage conservation paradigms, the connections with the older neighbourhoods were not missed or longed by key stakeholders in the process, as the testimonies of the official from Jing'an District and the serving priest of St. Francis Xavier church showed. Therefore, the Residence of Mao Zedong, the St. Xavier Church and the Shang Chuan Huiguan are monumentalized and made substantive elements of official dominant discourses, and consequently, isolated and distanced from former everyday experience (Smith, 2006).

All interviewees agree with the importance of preserving and integrating the heritage assets, and underline the added value for the redevelopment projects as a whole. But in light of the methods used, we may argue how in similar situations in other global cities in the Western hemisphere, municipal governments have aimed to strengthen historic continuity by establishing limits to the relocation of residents. Other means have included implementing regulations for the design of new surrounding structures in analogous scale or style, and the incorporation of other morphologic and architectural references to suggest historic continuities (González Martínez, 2017b). In Shanghai an extreme development speed resulted in a scale-jump primarily for economical purposes (Den Hartog, 2021) and functional change in our studied cases, which made the urban regeneration disconnected from its historical context. Even if we may detect a testimonial continuity of residential uses in both areas, according to the rental and sales prices in both the Kerry Centre and the Greenland Bund Centre, the new inhabitants belong to a completely different social class. Yet, this poses no contradiction from the usual top-down perspective, which considers 'residents' as an exchangeable group of citizens, regardless their roots or connections with the site (Zhu & González Martínez, 2021).

4.3. Re-signification: restoration and juxtaposition

The re-signification of heritage is stressed by the choice of heritage conservation methods that play a key role in the new narrative. Our on-site analysis of the heritage interventions in place, and the testimonies from conservation architects in both the cases of Kerry Centre and

Dongjiadu demonstrate the purpose of returning the heritage assets to an 'original' state. This refers to the Chinese notion of *yuanzhenxing* (原真性), that applies to heritage authenticity when it refers to an ideal past situation. Such approach means not acknowledging the layering of time that would apply to the alternative Chinese notion of *zhenshixing* (真实性) (Zhu, 2015). Material restoration strategies imply this return to the origins of the building; whereas the functional adaptation requires the adjustment of floor plans and heights. In some cases, conservation architects and curators add architectural details, furniture and ornaments to reinforce the re-signification. This happens to convey a message of modesty in the appliances of Mao Zedong's residence, as well as one of wealth in the luxurious golden dome of the Shang Chuan Huiguan. Furthermore and in the case of Dongjiadu, the marketing campaign of the new shopping mall builds upon the idea of *yuanzhenxing* by means of enhancing invented 'original' symbolic connections – Italian luxury brands and expressive decorations – with the church. Beyond the interest that Italian brands arise among Shanghaiese customers, this incorporates an additional dimension of re-creation that appeals to the experience of visitors, rather than to an academic evaluation of the heritage values of the site.

The strategy of monumentalization is reinforced by the physical isolation of the new assets: the fence around St. Francis Xavier Church and the tree barriers in the landscape design around the Shang Chuan Huiguan and the residence of Mao Zedong. Designers and developers re-signify the restored buildings according to new narratives, influenced by the upscale image of commercial redevelopment in a new global context of massive real estate investment. Clamped now between massive glass generic skyscrapers and malls, they offer a historic continuity according to official promotional materials and become landmarks for new communities of consumers. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995) characterizes this re-signification as a 'startling juxtaposition' in heritage, whereby the straightforward connection between the heritage asset and its new context appears almost consequential. By means of 'juxtaposition', designers, restorers and curators establish new global ties between Kerry Centre and the residence of Mao Zedong, assuming official discourses on the new key role of the People's Republic of China in the world, and the leadership of the Communist Party. In the case of Dongjiadu, designers and restorers strengthen these ties by references to Shanghai's international connections represented by St. Francis Xavier Church, and the scent of entrepreneurialism in the Shang Chuan Huiguan. This happens particularly in relationship to major projects like the new riverbanks of the Huangpu, which the Shanghai municipality is massively regenerating since the last decade (Den Hartog, 2019). The new narratives justify the complete replacement of their surroundings and welcome its gentrifying impact, which fully embraces the positivistic interpretation of urban cleansing that applies in developing economies (Appadurai, 2013) as far as it contributes to the desired image of Shanghai as "Excellent Global City".

4.4. Design approach and management

Beyond these evident global references, designers establish tangible and symbolic connections to heritage listed areas (West Nanjing Road, Yuyuan Road, and Hengfu for Kerry Center; and Waitan and Laochengxiang for Greenland Bund), aiming to add substantial prestige and symbolic capital to the two developments. Yet, the overall design strategy in Kerry Center remains too abstract to evidence the pretended connections with the history of the surrounding city, whereas in Dongjiadu the designers applied much clearer principles towards the achievement of this new relationship. Supported by the fact that both projects have been designed by the same firm, we argue that this different approach reflects the heightened awareness for heritage in Shanghai in the recent years. Yet, for the case of Dongjiadu, there is a selective choice referring to which areas are re-connected. Testimonies from both developers and designers emphasized the aims to connect with Shanghai's master plan linking Dongjiadu with the riverfront. This

includes making it part of the overall waterfront redevelopment and creation of before mentioned Financial Belt, and ignoring the historical connection with the now derelict Laochengxiang (Shanghai's Old Town).

Last but not least, the management of the overall design adds a remarkable factor. The companies in charge of architectural and landscape design are foreigners, whereas the specialists in charge of intervention in the heritage buildings are Chinese professionals. According to their testimonies, both parts did not communicate with each other during the design and construction process. As we argue, developers guarantee an efficient iconic connection with international projects elsewhere by means of the commission of global corporate design firms. On the other hand, commissioning Chinese specialists for the direct intervention on the heritage assets guarantees the contribution to the construction of 'cultural self-confidence' (Kubat, 2018). As we argue, such divide diverges from international agendas, such as UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape recommendation, which calls for an integrated approach and sees urban heritage as a social, cultural and economic asset for the development of cities and the realisation of meaningful place-making (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012; UNESCO, 2011; Van Oers, 2010).

Furthermore, it is unclear how many of the residential units will keep their use value, as many of these properties are traded as investment assets, where residents would not so frequently move in. We argue that this purpose of social substitution is indirectly the result of the ambitions in Shanghai's Master Plan to have a maximum population cap and an urban growth limit (SPLRA, 2018a), which pushes real estate values due to limiting the offer and because this stimulates the densification of expensive locations in the central city, while preserving relatively cheap fertile agricultural land at the urban fringes. During the interviews it became clear that most interviewees agree with a positive interpretation that the replacement of complete neighbourhoods contributes to economic progress and improves living conditions, which is similar to other examples in the Asian contexts where a positive understanding prevails (Ley and Teo 2014, 2020; Matsuda & Mengoni, 2016). Even though, it may also be argued that the greatest share of this new prosperity is distributed among a relative small group of stakeholders, which are not the original inhabitants; thus increases local social-economical gaps; and overlooks stages of history of proletarianization which also constitutes a part of Shanghai's success story.

5. Conclusions

With this paper we do not aim to establish a comparison between China and other social and political systems like those in the Global North. We acknowledge the exceptional circumstances of development in China and the different appreciation of its consequences. As said by local interviewees, Shanghai's urban regeneration is urgently needed, to improve the general quality of life. Life in old residential neighbourhoods like those we have studied is usually far from physically comfortable, with residents suffering the consequences of overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of privacy. This explains the positive interpretation of redevelopment, which appears to offer fewer contradictions than in similar cases in the Global North. It also explains the difference in de-contextualisation and especially in re-signification.

Different contexts also result in a different appraisal of the value of heritage according to new official narratives. Writing and rewriting history with urban planning and architecture is timeless, whereby the new story generally favours power. In both cases the previous historical narrative had already been contested, namely a story of concessions and colonial influences: thus power creates new discourses replacing one narrative by another. Redefining the values of urban heritage in both discussed cases leads us to the conclusion that, although restoration architects and designers have handled the listed buildings with great care and precision, their authenticity is based on an idea of 'returning to an assumed original state', whose pristine image and physical isolation

favours the connection with the brand new appearance of the surrounding environment, making the juxtaposition become more 'didactic'. Furthermore, their isolated treatment makes these landmarks miss an opportunity of meaningful connections with their environment, which is only deemed possible after re-signification. The cultural capital of the analysed assets is shifted here by this re-formulation of authenticity, to become a new scenic, political and economic capital for the key stakeholders. The new narrative is about an upheaval of systems, from Maoist communism, where built heritage was not considered as relevant, towards state-led capitalism where heritage has gained significant economic and political significance. By means of de-contextualisation and changes in material appearances and functionality, all involved stakeholders contribute to the adjustment of the narratives.

This bold integration of the three assets in their new context represents the *zeitgeist* and common practice in booming Chinese cities, where discourses on economic progress, social harmony and political stability merge to inform beautification strategies. This prioritization of showcasing heritage together as images of prosperity and wealth, in the context of exclusive brands aiming for a high-end lifestyle, with skyscrapers and malls designed by international architects all contribute to the desired global image that Shanghai wants to convey. Furthermore, the incorporation of heritage elements related to the history of Communism is supposed to cater Chinese citizenship, as a means of internal political legitimization that ultimately can reach the international audience showing China as a powerful and cultivated actor in the global world.

Even though, our study has limitations. Not all stakeholders were able to speak. The complexity of the subject requires further study. For instance, our approach has focused on active agents of change from the entrepreneurial and design perspectives. Future inquiries on how new users appreciate the assets and how they feel connected with the past will provide a more complete picture of the process. We can conclude that the three restored heritage elements are in sharp contrast with their surrounding commercial urban redevelopment schemes. They are enclaves, aesthetically not unattractive with scenic qualities to satisfy the tourist gaze. Functionally and spatially there is no connection with their new context, which strongly differs from possible alternatives that would acknowledge the different layers of history in heritage interventions, and where at least parts of the previous built and social context could have been conserved after improvements, while accommodating residents.

Author statement

The two authors, Harry den Hartog and Plácido González Martínez, made an equal contribution to the drafting of the original manuscript and the revisions. Both authors made equal contributions in all stages of research, including fieldwork; interviews, and data analysis. Drone pictures were taken by Harry den Hartog.

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