

Redefining Heritage Values in Urban Regeneration The Creation of New Identities in the Context of Shanghai's Quest for Globalism

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ABSTRACT

Since early this century multiple urban regeneration projects in Shanghai and other Chinese cities incorporate heritage assets as landmark or attraction by means of de-contextualization and restoration, frequently after rebuilding or even relocating them. Based on a tabula rasa approach, by clearing up almost all pre-existing structures and context, the restored buildings are re-used. This means a discontinuity of the use that local communities gave to these heritage buildings and a redefinition and re-appropriation by a group of new users in a new context of consumerism. This paper studies the cases of Jing An Kerry Centre and Greenland Bund Centre in Shanghai, where heritage buildings related to the memories of Communism, trading societies and Christianity are incorporated into high-density high-end commercial redevelopments located in central areas of the city. At first sight it seems to be a tabula rasa approach, but beyond the heritage buildings there are other continuities in the urban design and architecture on this site that we will also discuss in this paper. The paper will study architectural restoration methods, heritage designation policies, urban design approaches and real estate strategies. By using a grounded theory and approach that incorporates interviews, site visits and data analysis this paper puts forward two main arguments. Firstly, that restored buildings are re-signified according to new narratives in the context of large-scale commercial real estate complexes that surround them and offer new interpretations of the past that contributes to the desired image of Shanghai as a global city. Secondly, that restoration brings the heritage assets to a new pristine state for new users, contributing to the outplacement of low-income groups in the central areas where new values and lifestyles dominate. The cultural capital of these assets re-formulates its authenticity into new political or economic capital for the key stakeholders.

Keywords: Authenticity, City branding, Gentrification, Heritage policies, Narratives, Tabula rasa, Urban regeneration.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper studies the relationship between large-scale commercial real estate projects and their incorporation of heritage-listed assets. It addresses the motivations of city branding and image building, and the consequence of gentrification and outplacement. This relationship has received criticism from a scholarly perspective, particularly against the over-simplification of the memory of cities capitalization of heritage values. Spared from wholesale demolitions, heritage-listed assets are incorporated into the design of iconic urban redevelopments and re-signified accordingly to

dominant authorized heritage discourses. The analysis of this phenomenon in China constitutes a gap that this research aims to address. As a hotbed for urbanisation in the last 40 years, China has witnessed the massive demolition of historic areas. Frequently associated with poor living conditions, central urban locations were razed to the ground to improve living and working conditions, while there was less consideration of potential heritage values. Since the turn of the century, stakeholders of urban redevelopment have started to cherish a re-connection with history. History acts as a new legitimization of change and a guarantee for continuity. The new narratives refer to prosperity and wealth, aiming on a lifestyle filled with luxury and comfort in a context of globalisation.

This paper examines how heritage elements are preserved and contribute to the historical continuity of the site and its urban context. The case studies of Jing An Kerry Centre and Greenland Bund Centre incorporate heritage-listed elements, which could not be demolished or displaced, and which required restoration and integration in the redevelopment design schemes. Both cases are outside of heritage-listed areas, therefore not subject to urban heritage protection constraints. Even though, they are located next to heritage-listed areas, from which they benefit in terms of image. The two cases complement each in the memories of local Shanghainese: Jing An Kerry Centre relates to the prestige of the former international concessions, villas and parks and a wealthy desirable lifestyle. On the contrary, the area around Greenland Bund Centre has especially since the Opium Wars been perceived as an unattractive slum area for the working class located in the “muds and reeds” along the river Huangpu, despite its previous rich history. Furthermore, the two cases incorporate three major built heritage narratives developed in Shanghai in the last years, namely: (a). the political struggle of the origins of Communism, identified with the residence of Mao Zhedong in Jing An Kerry Centre; (b). the sophisticated international cultural hybridation of Shanghai represented by the Church in Dongjiadu; and (c). the ancestral entrepreneurial spirit of the city conveyed by the Shang Chuan Hui Guan (Merchant’s Guild) in Dongjiadu.

Empirical evidence for this research comes mainly from interviews, document analysis and site observation. The authors performed 15 semi-structured interviews. The interviewees included the developers, real estate agents, project architects and landscape architects, local government officials, end-users of the renovated heritage assets, and local historians. Interviews were developed in English and Chinese, and lasted between 1 hour and 3 hours each. Chinese interviews required assistance for translation and interpretation. Additionally, the authors studied relevant policy documents, and historic images and maps in local archives. Both authors live in Shanghai, respectively since 12 and 6 years, and are very familiar with the context of both sites and professional discourse.

As we will argue, once de-contextualized from their original surroundings and users, the historic value of heritage buildings in both sites is turned into symbolic capital and economic profit by means of redevelopment. We will argue how the different stakeholders appropriate this capital and profit, either by increasing the economic proficiency of the redevelopment or by branding the new image of Shanghai as a Global City.

2. THE CREATION OF IDENTITIES IN LARGE-SCALE COMMERCIAL URBAN COMPLEXES

Recurring terms in the discourse of city branding in China are ‘Beautification’ and ‘Harmonization’. Beautification involves the promotion of heritage architecture in China, as resulting from a wider ecological civilization campaign promoted by the government (Hansen, 2018). The analogous concept of harmonization involves State control over spatial production and aims to improve the life quality of inhabitants and to establish principles of social guidance. This beautification and harmonization are deemed possible in a context where power is strongly centralized, and where redevelopment appears as the solution for historic areas that are deemed as ‘ugly’, ‘unhealthy’, or ‘unsafe’. Beautification and harmonization discourses, therefore, imply the sanitization of urban life and the exclusion of informality under official regulations (Janoschka et al. 2014; Jou et al. 2014). Therefore both beautification and harmonization become tools of urban governance (Oakes, 2019; Zhu 2016). Discussions raised mainly from a Western perspective have

pointed out at the conceptual stretching of what is 'authentic' or 'fake' as a mean to create status and identity, and as a tool to add value to a project (Den Hartog 2010, Piazzoni 2016). Authenticity becomes the key concept to address, as its use has leaped from the heritage conservation to other fields like city branding and urban sociology (Zukin 2010). As authors like Herzfeld (2015) have argued, authenticity enables for spatial cleansing and gentrification, provoking the discontinuity of the local characteristics of historic urban areas. In this process, redevelopment stakeholders shift the value of heritage, from the cultural and historical to the economic and political (Zhu 2015; González Martínez 2019, Zhu & González Martínez 2021).

Heritage buildings have not been considered assets for redevelopment in China until recently (He, 2007; Ley & Teo 2014; Ley & Teo 2020). The presence of listed heritage assets was considered a liability rather than an opportunity, motivating their demolition or physical displacement. Authors like Wang & Lau (2009) and Zhong (2015) point towards a change in the early 2000s, which saw new orientations related to the new role of China in the international order and the development of 'self-confident' new cultural policies. The aesthetics of heritage conveys a 'cultural distinction', that appears in the recovery of sanitized versions of the past in the regeneration of former industrial waterfronts into new public spaces (Den Hartog 2019).

A variety of authors have addressed the incorporation of heritage assets as branding elements for redevelopment projects (He and Wu 2005; Ren 2008). The main argument for this tendency has been to stimulate the economy with the paradigms of tourism and the creative city, which frequently de-contextualizes urban heritage assets for economic profit (González Martínez 2017). Even though, these approaches have predominantly focused on a management perspective, without paying attention neither to the urban/architectural design strategies, nor to the heritage conservation means that make historic buildings add a distinction of culture and international atmosphere to redevelopment. In light of the rapid spread of this practice in recent years in cities like Shanghai, with examples like Raffles City Changning, Taikoo Hui, and Fuxing Longyu, the inquiry on its origins and evolution is yet to be critically assessed.

2.1. Case 1: Jing An Kerry Centre

Kerry Centre is located in the central Jing'an district, comprising one block between the historic Nanjing West Road to the north, the Yan'an elevated road to the south, Tongren Road to the East and Changle Road to the west. 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, and the firms of Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) and Design Land Collaborative (DLC) in charge of the building 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 (see Fig. 1). The redevelopment stands at the confluence of three Cultural and Historical Listed Areas of Shanghai, which are Nanjing West Road; Yuyuan Road, and Hengshan-Fuxing Road. Surprisingly, this block of high historic significance was left out of the listings when passed in 2003. According to a top cultural heritage official of Jing'an district, the reason argued for not including the area had been the loss of architectural and urban values after the demolition of the historic buildings in the site at the end of the 1990s. Only the residence of Mao Zedong, a listed heritage element by the Shanghai municipality and the two contiguous houses in Anyi Road, were spared from demolition (personal communication, 16 September 2020). 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, incorporating offices and the exclusive Shangri-La Hotel.

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 for the site regarding the presence of the residence of Mao Zedong. The firm KPF was not responsible for the intervention works on the heritage site. KPF was only required not to excavate under the listed



Figure 1. Former temporary residence of Mao Zedong. (Source left: Retrieved from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2979158. Accessed 30 January, 2022; Source right: The authors, 2020).

building, and to respect the ‘red lining’ around it leaving a distance of 25 metres between the residence of Mao Zedong and the new buildings (personal communication, 17 July 2020). The principal of the company DLC in charge of the landscape design confirms this extent (personal communication, 7 September 2020): proof of this is that the main open-air space with the waterworks is located at the back of the residence of Mao Zedong, with a limited connection.

The heritage narratives on site are supported by the exhibition display and the conservation strategy in the residence of Mao Zedong in Anyi Road. A listed heritage element since 1959, the exhibition held in the first floor displays photographs, texts and objects related to the memory of the site as the place where Mao Zedong became inspired by the principles of Marxism, therefore a key for the birth of Communism in China. 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, the house is a privileged spot of Red Tourism circuits in Shanghai (personal communication, 16 September 2020). The architect in charge of the conservation works developed in the site mentions how the residence of Mao Zedong was restored to its original state in 2012, requiring minimal actions of consolidation (personal communication, 16 September 2020). The intervention on the two contiguous houses aimed to provide support spaces for the exhibition and dissemination activities of the residence of Mao Zedong. According to our observations, the intervention in these two houses was much more invasive: it required the demolition of the original wooden structure, in order to leave a two-floor high space that corresponds to the full volume of the house. The evaluation of the significance of the site by all stakeholders agrees on its importance, and do not highlight any conflicts between the heritage site and the new buildings. Even if the architecture and landscape designers involved refer to how there was no cooperation with the conservators in charge of the heritage site (personal communications, 17 July 2020 and 7 September 2020), this does not contradict the prevailing narrative about the site. 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 now a worldwide significance (personal communication, 16 September 2020).

2.2. Case 2: Greenland Bund Centre

Greenland Bund Centre, also named Dongjiadu Financial City, is a 1,200,000 square-meter development at Shanghai’s South Bund along the Huangpu River. It comprises retail, offices, a five-star hotel, residential compounds, and cultural spaces, all together promoted as an “integrated mixed use community around a “central landscaped park” (Kohn Pedersen Fox 2021). The firm Kohn



Figure 2. St. Francis Xavier Church. (Source: the authors, left 2014, right 2022).

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 (CIMG) developed the project, but in 2019 CIMG sold its 50% share to the state owned Greenland Group (The Paper, 2019), thus giving full control back to the local government of Shanghai. From socio-economic historical perspective it is a very significant part of the Shanghai, on the swampy marshes along the Huangpu River we could find the earliest embankments and piers of the city. During the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) the area started to attract national and international trade. Located outside the protective city walls the area used to be the primary connection between Shanghai's Old City and the Huangpu River. After the Opium Wars the port function moved to the current Bund and the area came in decay. It was torn down quickly between 2009 and 2012. Only two heritage-listed buildings remained after the demolition of the neighbourhood: St. Francis Xavier Church (see Fig. 2) and the Shang Chuan Hui Guan (see Fig. 3). Greenland Bund Centre is as part of the wider key functional area of the South Bund redevelopment project, and part of the strategy to re-connect the city with the river, and develop Shanghai into a global city of excellence (Shanghai Planning and Land Resource Administration, 2018). Its alternative name Dongjiadu Financial City refers to the ambition to fill the South Bund with financial services as a continuation of Shanghai's historical Bund. According to the chief designer of the Greenland Group (personal communication, 23 December 2020) and in line with guidelines of Shanghai's urban planning bureau, the design incorporates a 750 metres-long elevated pedestrian platform, running from east to west through the central landscaped park. This axis reconnects the historical Old City with the Huangpu River. According to the urban designers and architect of KPF the aim was to "preserving the human scale of its traditional urban vernacular" (personal communication, 17 July 2020). According to our observations, the new streets are indeed narrower and more walkable than elsewhere in new Shanghai.

According to a heritage scholar of Tongji University, Dongjiadu is a reflection of the historical spirit of entrepreneurship of Shanghai, acting also as the main point from which Western civilisation started to enter the city, and by extension, the whole of China (personal communication, 28 September 2020). The redevelopment project aims to explode both narratives through the conservation of its two listed heritage assets; namely, the Shang Chuan Hui Guan and St. Francis Xavier church. St. Francis Xavier Church was built in 1853 in a Spanish Baroque style, and is significant for the establishment of the first Western communities in Shanghai. During the Cultural Revolution concrete slabs were erected around the building to hide it from public view, and accommodated a range of non-religious functions; among them, a light bulb factory and a market, culminating in a state of decay. After it was refurbished in 1996 (Knyazeva, 2015), religious service in



Figure 3. Shang Chuan Hui Guan in 2013 (left) and after restoration in 2020. (Source: Zhang Ming Studio).

the church resumed in 2000, but was later stopped due to the redevelopment process, falling into a second stage of decay. The main concerns regarding the St. Francis Xavier Church are the unstable foundations in this former swampy area. Therefore, the church foundations were consolidated through a concrete “plate” to realize equal subsidence, and following guidelines from the central government, a fence will surround the church, so strategies of landscape design become especially relevant for its integration in the overall scheme (personal communication, 7 September 2020).

Surprisingly, the appreciation of the building and its historical connections with the neighbourhood do not stand among the priorities of its main users. According to its serving priest, the meaning of the Dongjiadu Catholic Church is mainly spiritual, a community and a place to gather. Even though, the physical building is acknowledged as its architecture and symbolic appearance may 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” (personal communication, 11 September 2020).

The intervention on Shang Chuan Hui Guan, built in 1715, aims to the recovery of its ‘original’ state and the reactivation of its symbolism as centre for entrepreneurship. The building was home to one of the first merchant guilds, which are business associations of wholesale traders. Surprisingly, the central component of the Shang Chuan Hui Guan survived through the years. But despite the fact that it was listed by the Shanghai Municipality since 1987, it was unknown by involved stakeholders. Even other researchers were not aware of the huiguan (Abbas, 2002), since it completely disappeared from sight behind other buildings and informal structures. According to the developer we spoke it was thanks to the initiative of local activists that they got aware of this valuable heritage (personal communication, 7 September 2020). The intervention works developed by architect Zhang Ming aimed to bring back the building typology of the guild, recovering the courtyard and the two main buildings to east and west; a theatre stage and the assembly hall. Studies on the wooden elements revealed details of its rich polychromy, which was restored with original techniques. The roof gables were remade according to available historic photos of the building. An important element of the theatre stage, its missing dome, was added without direct evidence, but finding inspiration in similar buildings of the area (observation and personal communication, 13 November 2020). Its golden polychromy is representative of its connections with memories of sophistication and wealth.

As a potential new financial centre, Dongjiadu reflects its economic-historical position, and emphasises the importance of its place along the Huangpu River. The splendid image of the high-rises from the city fit in the new image of Shanghai, and both Dongjiadu’s church and Shang Chuan Hui Guan reflect a history of national and international interactions. However, the continuation of the

line-up of financial icons along the waterfront and the absence of (affordable) housing can be explained as a tribute to neo-liberal tendencies that prioritize the interests of a selective upper-middle class (Den Hartog, 2021), increasing social-economical gaps. As formal centres of communities, both buildings surpass their architectural appearance, and both should once again become more active places of encounter. Urban encounters are real sources of reflection, creativity and innovation, more than the surrounding generic towers and malls.

3. DISCUSSION

In this paper we have analysed the emerging trend of the re-use of heritage buildings as assets for redevelopment. This happens at the cost of de-contextualisation and discontinuity of the use that local communities gave to these assets. In this process, heritage buildings are intervened by the stakeholders and re-appropriated by new users. Furthermore, they become placed in a new global context of massive real estate investment, without clear aesthetical, spatial, cultural, social or economic links to their surrounding environments prior to redevelopment, a perfect *tabula rasa*.

The joint action of urban redevelopment and heritage interventions produces important changes in the heritage assets. Our analysis of the interventions 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*, that applies to heritage authenticity when it refers to an ideal past situation, not acknowledging the layering of time that would apply to the alternative Chinese notion of *zhenshixing* (Zhu 2017). Accordingly, modern materials replace authentic materials, and also floor plans and heights are adjusted. Even some architectural details and ornaments are added to fulfil the desire for beautification, like the dome in the Shang Chuan Hui Guan.

This paper also argues that the described restored buildings are re-signified after de-contextualization and follow new narratives, influenced by their new context with commercial redevelopment. The outcome is a straightforward juxtaposition to the new environment, where organic relationships are cancelled aiming for a new orientation. New narratives contribute to a gentrification of their surroundings and contribute to the desired image of Shanghai as an "Excellent Global City". In the case of Kerry Centre, the new global ties of the residence of Mao Zedong assume the new key role of the People's Republic of China in the world, due to the leadership of the state in China's fast track of development. In the case of Dongjiadu, the ties are strengthened through the references to the origins of the Westernization of Shanghai in St. Francis Xavier Church, and the connections with the traditional spirit of entrepreneurialism represented by the Shang Chuan Hui Guan.

Both urban redevelopment projects symbolise (economic) progress and globalism, as expressed in massive glass generic volumes, which adds to Shanghai's global pretention. It also accommodates the supposedly desired lifestyle of white-collar workers and new middle class. The removal of the original context and usage brought the three assets to a new spotless state for new users. In short, history is rewritten selectively, by conserving heritage buildings that play a key role in the new narrative. The redevelopment brings an aura of internationalism with foreign architects, brands, and with generic skyscrapers and malls as the new landmarks and centres for (consuming) communities. Although most interviewees agree that the redevelopment contributes to the economic progress, and lifting of people out of poverty, the greatest share of this new prosperity is distributed among a relative small group of stakeholders, and overlooks the working class who made this city great.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As isolated objects, as well in appearance as in use, the three restored heritage elements are in sharp contrast with their surrounding urban redevelopment schemes. They are enclaves, aesthetically not unattractive. But functionally and spatially there is no connection with the new context. The heritage elements and their position within the urban master plan in general do relate and contribute to the historical continuity of the site. However, their narratives are adjusted by de-

contextualising them, by changing their material appearance, by changing their functionality, and by disconnecting them from their new context both spatially as well as functionally. The bold integration of the assets in their new context represents common practice in booming Chinese cities, where economic progress and materialism rules, thus it represents the zeitgeist.

Redefining the values of heritage in both discussed cases, as well as in many similar cases in China, leads us to the conclusion that their authenticity is based on an idea of 'returning to an assumed original state' which favours lack of connection with the new surrounding environment. Furthermore, their isolated treatment makes these landmarks miss an opportunity of meaningful connections with their environment. The cultural capital of the analysed assets is shifted by this re-formulation of authenticity, to become new political and economic capital for the key stakeholders.

Our study has some limitations because not all stakeholders were able to meet or speak, also due to sensitivities, especially in the first phase of the development process of the Dongjiadu project. We acknowledge the exceptional circumstances of development in China and the different appreciation of its consequences. As said by local interviewees Shanghai's regeneration is urgently needed, to improve the general quality of life and lift people out of poverty. Life in old Dongjiadu was not that comfortable, with lack of space, moisture, hygienic and privacy problems, and cracks in the wall. This explains the progressive interpretation of redevelopment, which appears to offer fewer contradictions under stakeholders, users, and critics than those that arise in similar cases in Western countries. The complexity of the subject requires possible continuation of our study.

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