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Urban (R)evolutions: Museums, Spectacle, and Development in Reform Era China

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*URBAN REVOLUTIONS: MUSEUMS, SPECTACLE,
AND DEVELOPMENT IN REFORM ERA CHINA*

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CHINA

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Abstract

Over the past thirty years, China's museum sector has experienced exponential growth with the expansion of thousands of new museums, both public and private. This paper seeks to understand this growth as an urban phenomenon that is simultaneously reconfiguring urban space and citizen subjectivities by framing the emergence of new and increasingly spectacular exhibitory institutions in China within the context of political, economic, and cultural policy shifts. Through the examination of the evolution of the museum in China and its symbolic relevance from its origins in an era of semi-colonialism into the contemporary period and recent trends of property-led redevelopment, I argue that museums have come to represent assertions of power and modernity built into the urban landscape. As a result, I assert that these institutions have emerged as critical influences on the configuration of the contemporary Chinese city and national identity, guided by and ongoing legacies of domestic policy and the pursuit of global recognition through culture, spectacle, and urban development.

Urban (R)evolutions: Museums, Spectacle, and Development in Reform Era China

It is 2011 in Shanghai, China. The city is a bustling and growing metropolis, home to a booming economy and rising cultural industries. At the city's northern edge in a largely unremarkable industrial district, the factors of economy and culture have converged in the form of large black box of a building off Changjiang Road (Kang 2011). The building is striking, owing to its dark façade, severe geometry and the contrast of hundreds of glass-related words in multiple languages that illuminate the structure at night and allude to its new institutional occupant, the Shanghai Museum of Glass (SHMOG). Opened in May 2011, the building reflects a shift in the character of Shanghai and the development of China. The site, once home to a state-owned glass company, has been redeveloped and repurposed in recent years (SHMOG 2014a). The Shanghai Museum of Glass represents a cornerstone of a multistage development — a culture and business park complex scheduled for completion in 2018 (SHMOG 2014c). This will join Shanghai's other large-scale urban (re)developments and megaprojects such as Xintiandi [Footnote 1] (He and Wu 2005). Though easily viewed in isolation, SHMOG is a part of an emerging trend in which the role of museums has been reconfigured in the urban landscape, serving a dual purpose as a culturally-oriented exhibitory entity and an economic driver.

[Footnote 1]

Conducted by Hong Kong's Shui On Group from 1997 to 2001, the redevelopment of Xintiandi has been considered an exemplary model, which required the cooperation of private investors and municipal government (He and Wu 2005). Among a multitude of commercial spaces and high-end housing, the development is also home to the site of the first National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party preserved as a museum as part of an agreement between Shanghai's municipal government and the Shui On Group (He and Wu 2005; Denton 2005). For a more detailed discussion of the processes of property-led redevelopment in Shanghai, see He and Wu 2005.

In recent decades, the number of museums in China has risen to over 4,000 (Si 2014), illustrating sociocultural and economic shifts in the reform era that have facilitated the growth of cultural institutions and museums, which has enabled them to become critical players in the nation's urban transformation. As of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, museums in China numbered about twenty-one, a figure that rose to approximately 500 in 1985 (Lengyel 1985). By 2013, the number had risen exponentially to 4,165, nearly 20% of which were privately owned (Si 2014). Such dramatic growth over the course of sixty-five years has been enabled by the establishment of official, state-sponsored museums that emphasize patriotic education and national narratives and the reemergence of private collecting (Song 2008; Yim 2005; Vickers 2007; Denton 2005). Additionally, through the combination of property (re)development, creative enterprise, and official policy, cultural industries have exploded in China over the last two decades, manifesting in a growing number of cultural institutions such as museums and other creative enterprises (Zheng and Chan 2013; Keane 2009). This reflects not only the economic shifts of the reform era, but a shifting emphasis onto culture as industry and collecting as a sign of class status (Song 2008; Yim 2005; Vickers 2007; Denton 2005).

Increasingly, museums are understood as much more than warehouses of objects and ideas as they have been categorized as in the past. Within the urban context, they are active agents, configuring and exhibiting nationalism, resistance, modernity, and urban economic promise (Qin 2004; Claypool 2005; Ong 2011; Pred 1995). In the reform era, museums have built upon these initial functions,

becoming integrated into Chinese society as vehicles of patriotic education, urban economic development, and cultural meaning in the process (Denton 2005; Song 2008; Kong 2007). Linked to this shift has been the emergence of the socialist-market system, which has fuelled a dramatic growth in the private museum sector and private collecting (Song 2008). As such, museums have become significant components of Chinese urban growth both as reflectors of time and space and as institutional shapers of nationalism, subjectivity, and culture.

In the Asian context, the rise of cultural (also known as creative) industries has yielded new, specific terminologies that describe not only the industry, but denote historical legacies tied to cultural policy in China and Hong Kong (O'Connor and Gu 2006). As such, this language has come to distinguish both political-economic policy and place (Keane 2004; O'Connor and Gu 2006). Though the term "cultural industries" is favored in mainland China, "creative industries" is preferred in other East Asian nations, such as Taiwan and South Korea, as well as in Hong Kong (Keane 2004). For the purposes of this paper, which focuses on museums and culture in the People's Republic of China, I will use the term "cultural industries" rather than "creative industries" to explore the integration of new kinds of exhibitory space and spectacle into the Chinese urban landscape and the implications of these integrations on urban society and the formation of the subject.

Within the context of reform era China, museums have emerged as a new kind of urban institution that is significant through the physical representations of modernity it conveys and its status as transmitters of ideology. The relevance of these institutions is constituted on multiple levels by convergent influences and newfound aspirations through which urban spaces and identities are molded, including institutional spectacle and economic reform. Through economic reforms in the post-Mao era, new op-

portunities have emerged for private accumulation, investment, and redevelopment in the urban context, a shift that is reflected in dramatic surges of development in cities such as Shanghai over the course of the last several decades. The corresponding emergence of institutional and architectural spectacle through buildings such as SHMOG, the Ordos Museum, and the China Wood Sculpture Museum [Footnote 2] (see Images 1-7) illustrates ongoing transformations and transitions as the institutional spaces themselves become sites of dynamic synergies of development, culture, and ideologies of nationalism. These dramatic and visually arresting constructions represent a kind of "spectacular space" that is similar to the spectacular spaces of World's Fairs and Expositions, though they remain subtly differentiated by their permanence and targeted cultural emphasis (Pred 1995; Ong 2011). The World's Fairs — the Stockholm Exhibition of 1987, in particular — have been described as "a public space designed to manufacture private desires" (e.g., consumption; Pred 1995, 37). This remains true of institutions such as SHMOG, which itself represents a space of consumption as well as a space of culture (see SHMOG 2014c). However, while spectacle remains tied to practices of consumption, I seek to understand the rise of spectacle and "spectacular productions" in China as related to the conceptualization of the nation, the production of space, and the construction of national identity through the site of the museum and the emergence of new types of institutions and urbanisms.

[Footnote 2]

I selected these institutions specifically through several electronic image searches of Chinese museums, which returned each of these museums in multiple instances based on their appearance on websites, particularly architecture platforms and blogs.

Within the post-Mao period, museums have been evolved and adapted to become physical and symbolic spaces that represent emerging visions of China's urban realities and aspirations that are made legible through spectacular constructions imbued with nationalism and promises of economic development. In this paper, I will argue that museums have evolved over the course of the last century, facilitating the emergence of a new kind of urban institution that simultaneously produces and reflects new modernities while constructing and reaffirming power relations through exhibitory narratives and built form. I will begin by examining the history of the museum in China as a beacon of power, resistance and modernity forged in the colonial era. I then trace the evolution of the institution into the reform era through the emergence of new nationalistic narratives, practices of collection, and the museum as spectacle, which I argue have reconstituted the role of museums in contemporary China. Building on this argument, I subsequently examine the reconfiguration of China's urban landscape around museums and cultural institutions through economic and cultural policy shifts. I argue that within the context of these developments, museums have come to represent assertions of power and modernity built into the city itself. As such, they have emerged as critical influences on the configuration of the urban landscape and Chinese national identity, guided by legacies of political, economic, and social policy and the ongoing pursuit of global recognition through culture, spectacle, and urban development.

Spectacle and Symbolism in the Chinese Urban Economy

As the Chinese museum sector continues to expand, the role and influence of museums as "spectacular space" engaged in both economic and cultural sectors become increasingly relevant to the emergence of new urbanisms and the (re)construction of urban space. This expansion has been facilitated by a new emphasis on cultural indus-

tries and creativity, which in combination with property-led development, has elevated the museum and allowed the expansion of cultural institutions (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Zheng and Chan 2013). In the reform era, the emergence of new museums has been a particularly important and dynamic shift within the context of cultural production and the symbolic representation of China's growing urban environment, yet remains grounded in century-old legacies of "exhibitory modernity" and power relations (Qin 2004).

Over the course of the reform era, cultural industries have emerged as key components of China's long-term economic goals, including building local economies and urbanization while bolstering the country's gross domestic product (O'Connor and Gu 2006; He and Wu 2005; Zhen and Chan 2013). This is indicative of not only an evolving economic structure — one which is increasingly focused in urban space — but also of new cultural and economic relationships between individual and society, mediated in part through urban spectacle (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Hubbert 2010). Whereas the economies of China's high socialist past were rooted in industrialization guided by Mao's vision of an "ocean of smokestacks," China's economic policies have shifted in the post-Mao era to include creative and cultural industries as well as property-led redevelopment (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Meyer 2012; He and Wu 2005). Included in these policy shifts have been the emergence of specific discourses and practices surrounding creativity, urban development, and global city status (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Kong 2007; Fung and Erni 2013). These discourses are played out in the urban context as cities are configured to house and support cultural institutions such as museums that feed into long-term goals for urban and national development.

Since the development of new economic policies, property-led urban development in the reform era has reconfigured urban space, part of a nationally-driven push to urbanize and modernize over the past two decades (He and Wu 2005; Zheng and Chan 2013). The city has become an emblematic and increasingly spectacular representation of modernity and development through which the collective is conceptualized and mediated (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Kong 2007; Hubbert 2010). As economic development has shifted toward cultural and creative industries, the presence of cultural institutions such as museums has become increasingly important within the urban space (Kong 2007). Cities such as Shanghai have sought to establish themselves as global cities through rapid building and development that has produced architectural icons such as the Oriental Pearl Radio & TV Tower (Kong 2007; Hubbert 2010). Such cultural icons and institutions have been largely privately funded but speak to the city's aspirations to become an epicenter of national and global culture and fall in line with urban planning schemes that situate cultural institutions both literally and figuratively at the city's heart, illustrating both a spatial and symbolic focus on culture and cultural transformation (Kong 2007).

Though demonstrated in urban space, the emphasis on cultural institutions is two-fold, guided in part by a national emphasis on culture as a cornerstone of China's economy and by the aspirations of cities to achieve global city status. In both cases, cultural industries represent integral components, giving rise to new urban forms such as the cultural industrial cluster and cultural complexes that are largely privately funded, yet play into governmental ambitions and goals for development (Zheng and Chan 2013). As such, the rise of cultural industries and property-led redevelopment represent two critical shaping influences on contemporary Chinese cities. These influences are felt simultaneously by both developers and urban residents economically and through everyday geographies as they

(re)configure urban space and create new conceptions of community (Pred 1995).

Writing about the rise of the "urban lifestyle" in the American urban realm, Sharon Zukin specifically examines cultural consumption and its impacts on urban economies and development, a phenomenon that has become increasingly relevant in Chinese cities over the course of the reform era (Zukin 1998). In the wake of shifting urban economies, new consumption-based spaces have formed, transformed by the evolution of a "symbolic" economy (Zukin 1998). From production-based spaces to consumption-based spaces, cities have undergone a critical economic shift that is based on "new patterns of leisure, travel and culture," which sees culture as a competitive economic advantage (Zukin 1998, 825). As these consumption patterns shift, new meanings are created and destroyed that inform the way in which everyday life is navigated (Pred 1995). Urban economies, both in the U.S. and around the globe, have subsequently been restructured around the consumption of lifestyle and culture through development and redevelopment, including historic preservation and the establishment of new cultural institutions such as museums. This restructuring has been the product of epochal shifts and evolving patterns of consumption over the past sixty years that have facilitated an economic refocusing onto "cultural resources," including museums and theaters (Zukin 1998). Such resources include museums and theaters that have built the "urban symbolic economy," based on cultural consumption and are linked to the production of distinctive and attractive urban lifestyles (Zukin 1998). As cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and other less well-known metropolises become increasingly competitive with one another in the global sphere,

culture and cultural institutions represent important and influential components of contemporary urban development through which global relevance can be achieved and maintained through “spectacular space,” which “can be viewed as leveraging practices that anticipate a high return not only in real estate but also in the global recognition of the city” (Ong 2011, 209; Pred 1995). As such, the concept of spectacle is useful as it acknowledges the presence of symbolic meaning and value evidenced through Zukin’s “symbolic urban economy” within the context of social and power relations (Zukin 1998; Pred 1995; Ong 2011; Hubbert 2010).

In the context of urban development, the reform era has seen the dramatic rise of property-led (re)development, which has yielded new types of commodity spectacle across the Chinese urban landscape (He and Wu 2005; Zheng and Chan 2013; Hubbert 2010). These new development strategies stem from practices pioneered in the United Kingdom that harnessed private capital, but have been adapted to the Chinese political and economic context (He and Wu 2005; Zheng and Chan 2013). Factors such as land-use reforms and the privatization of housing created new opportunities for enterprise and urban (re) development in the reform era that facilitated surges in urban real estate markets, economically reinvigorating cities such as Shanghai that continue to strive for global recognition (He and Wu 2005). These events were enabled by the development of reform era economic hybridities that allowed for the infusion of private capital to redevelop aging or dilapidated areas where the state was unable to (He and Wu 2005). Such infusions have in turn transformed urban space, replacing low- to middle-income housing with more lucrative developments such as luxury housing or offices, reconfiguring the distribution of people in space and growing urban property values in the process (He and Wu 2005). As such, property-led (re)development constitutes an important factor in the (re)creation of urban space that is driven by consumption and rooted in the cultivation

of economic growth (He and Wu 2005). Facilitated by the economic hybridity of the reform era, new types of hybrid exhibition spaces have subsequently emerged through private financing as opposed to public support (Wu 2001). Within the context of the museum and its rapid proliferation in the reform era, such economic processes become increasingly pertinent as they rearticulate the value of the institution in an economic arena as well as in cultural and political ones.

Hybridized cultural spaces such as museums built into large-scale commercial developments such as SHMOG are thus entrenched as cornerstones of economic growth, yet remain culturally-oriented in programming and operation (SHMOG 2014b). This type of contemporary Chinese museum is, therefore, engaged in the constitution and reflection of cultural modernities as they are (re)articulated in new urban and economic contexts. As a result, the emergence of such spaces and complexes is particularly important in understanding the ways in which cultural industries have become key economic drivers, and the effects of this shift on the construction of urban space and the formation of culture itself.

Museums, Power, and Modernity

Although museums have existed in China for over a century, the concept remains a Western import introduced through colonization as a means of establishing “order” in semi-colonial territories (Qin 2004; Claypool 2005). As a result of the institution’s distinctively Western origins and legacies of Western domination, museums throughout the world have often expressed Western-dominated perspec-

tives in their exhibitions and exhibition styles, alienating non-Western groups and imposing Western concepts of culture and development (Belting 2007; Qin 2004). These often subtle processes through which power is constituted and reaffirmed have been historically contested (Qin 2004). Through this contestation, museums have been reconstituted in national and local contexts, synthesizing and reinforcing visions of modernity. Over the course of the past century, museums in China have transitioned from instruments of colonialism to complex and multidimensional sites that serve as physical manifestations of power, modernity, and capital (Ong 2011; Kong 2007; Qin 2004). Rather than a distinct end-product, museums in China represent institutional foundations for growth and development and are thusly embedded into the global and national aspirations as symbolic venues through which the city and the citizen are defined (Ong 2011; Hubbert 2010).

Throughout its institutional evolution, the museum has continued to serve as an important site through which power and modernity are expressed. Within the Chinese context, museums have become both participants in the configuration of China's new modernity and purveyors of cultural meaning (O'Connor and Gu 2006). Recent literature has probed the role of contemporary art museums in particular in relation to globalization, cultural heritage and modernism (Belting 2007). This is the consequence of historical legacies of exhibition and exhibition practices within the Western context, establishing a precedent of isolating people from their cultural heritage (Belting 2007). [Footnote 3] As such, non-Western museums — including

[Footnote 3]

This has been challenged by the fissure between art museums and ethnic museums (Belting 2007). However, in the contemporary age, this split has become increasingly problematic as the history of modernism and the Western avant-garde is tethered to linear conceptualizations of progress based in the West, creating an environment in which local cultures and contexts are masked by overarching frameworks of Western cultural development (Belting 2007).

those in former colonial territories such as Hong Kong — are tasked with the unique challenge of offering programming that “clarifies the constellation and local meaning of modern, contemporary, and global” (Belting 2007, 23; Kong 2007).

Since their earliest inception, museums in China have come to represent vehicles of ideology, values, and sociocultural sensibilities. These include patriotic values and state histories that are conveyed within the public context (Vickers 2007; Denton 2005). However, museums also represent critical components of emerging modernities and economic expansion in the private context (Kong 2007). As such, the contemporary museum in China has become a multifaceted cultural institution often simultaneously engaged in processes of culture formation and economic development within national and global contexts as well as the formation of a national identity. In this capacity, contemporary museums build on legacies of early Chinese museums, though they remain heavily influenced by factors such as post-Mao liberalization, the rise of creative enterprise, and evolving ideological hybridities (Song 2008; Gu and O'Connor 2006; Denton 2005). However, I argue that the contemporary Chinese museum sector is not only the product of amalgamated legacies, but rather is constructed through the navigation of interwoven factors of nationalism and urban aspiration.

As an institutional category, the Chinese museum has existed since 1905, beginning with the Nantong Museum — a private institution founded by a nationalist citizen nearly sixty miles outside of Shanghai (Claypool 2005; Yim 2005). In the following century, China's museum sector has continued to grow, experiencing the most dynamic

period of growth in the reform era. This growth has been attributed to the increasing availability of capital and the social and cultural associations attached to collection, such as middle- and upper-class status, “civic pride,” and rising standards of living (Yim 2005, 28; Song 2008; Hubbert 2006). However, the rapid expansion of the museum sector in China during the reform era is also highly complex, building on social, cultural, and political legacies of the past that in turn inform the relevance of cultural institutions in the present.

As an institution, China’s first museum was both functional and symbolic, based in the desire of local elites to “modernize their community in reality and reputation,” and as push-back against Western colonial domination (Qin 2004, 685; Claypool 2005). This represented a departure from colonial museums — institutions operated by European groups such as the British Asiatic Society and French Jesuits — which excluded non-Europeans from museum development and operations with the exception of menial labor tasks (Claypool 2005). While these institutions sought to institute new forms of order in China through the reinvigoration of scientific study and the establishment of the scientific museum, the Nantong Museum represented an assertion of Chinese nationalism (Claypool 2005).

The museum demonstrated a mounting resistance against Western domination and a desire to regain power from China’s colonial occupiers while manifesting the ambition of urban elites for a modern community (Qin 2004; Claypool 2005). Though no longer entangled by a colonial era struggle for power, museums in China today retain this assertive and representative quality as spectacular institutions that manifest and project power and urban aspirations of globalness. As such, the establishment of the Nantong Museum represents a critical historical moment in which a new kind of institution emerged in China that was based in Western institutional models but incorporated local urban and nationalistic interests.

The emergence of the museum as a symbolic institution in the late Qing dynasty marked the birth of “exhibitory

modernity” in China, a phenomenon that would carry into the twenty-first century. In the reform era, this manifests in globally-visible urban spectacle through events such as the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Expo held in Shanghai as China struggles to be recognized by Western powers as an equal on the global stage through economic and cultural displays (Qin 2004; Ong 2011). By examining China’s first citizen-organized museum within the context of modernization and urban elites, Qin provides a basis from which to conceptualize contemporary forms of “exhibitory modernity,” as demonstrated by new forms of urban spectacle in China through urban events and exhibitions (Qin 2004). These early displays, such as the Nantong Museum, were used to illustrate not only a key cultural transformation occurring in China, but also visualized a desire for global validation of China’s claims to modernity (Qin 2004). At the same time, expositions became increasingly a part of emergent “cultural technologies,” through which populations are governed and hierarchies are established (Qin 2004, 686). Such technologies, which in the twentieth century were linked to the rise of urban Nantong through cultural institutions, have been reinvigorated in the reform era, yielding a new iteration of modernity in China (Qin 2004; Claypool 2005).

Institutional Evolution in the Reform Era

While republican era museums were established and overseen by local urban elites, 40 years later in the Maoist era, museums became important sites of state-sanctioned education (Denton 2005). Within the context of the subsequent post-Mao era, museums have become sites not only of nationalistic expression but of formative patriotic

education (Denton 2005; Vickers 2007). Contemporary history museums, in particular, have become vehicles of new narratives that legitimize a “contemporary ideology of commerce, entrepreneurship and market reform (Denton 2005, 567). This reform era shift represents a departure from the preceding Mao era, in which museums depicted narratives of “revolutionary struggle,” indicating a marked shift in the pedagogy of patriotic education (Denton 2005, 657). However, these shifts are not limited to the realm of patriotic education; museums and the narratives they convey are products of the social, political, and cultural transformations of the reform era that embrace the market hybridity of the contemporary Chinese state while simultaneously upholding and reinforcing Communist values (Denton 2005; Vickers 2007). [Footnote 4] This transformation has been similarly addressed by scholars who have suggested that museums and memorials have evolved to become critical components in the formation of national identity and a sense of nationalism among Chinese schoolchildren (Vickers 2007). This emergence has been understood as the product of political and economic shifts that have transformed the country as well as the conceptualization of nationalism and national identity (Denton 2005; Vickers 2007).

In examining this transformation, Denton describes two waves of museum development in the post-Mao period that responded to the dynamic and traumatic events of the Cultural Revolution and the Beijing Spring (Denton 2005). These waves of development reframed existing exhibitions and established new narratives that legitimized the current regime through institutional representations (Denton 2005). As cultural institutions, Chinese museums enable both the nation and individual cities to demonstrate their

cultural heritage through artifacts, architecture, and exhibition techniques that reflect the nation’s prominence and emerging global status (Denton 2005). Though Denton emphasizes the importance of such capacities within the context of the state, others have argued that the representational power of museum-based patriotic narratives in the construction of a unified national identity and cultural relations are relevant beyond the national context in areas such as modernization and urbanization, though such areas comprise an important element of the Chinese Communist Party’s national goals (Vickers 2007, 374). Whereas China’s public museums once portrayed a socialist history, these institutions have since reframed their exhibitions and programming and reconceptualized China’s development within this nationalistic context (Vickers 2007).

In recent decades, Chinese museums have emerged as important sites through which tensions between ideology and consumption are negotiated and as such they are actively engaged in the representation of the nation. The reemergence of private museums in the aftermath of the Mao era is thus tied to the economic and cultural policy shifts by virtue of their role as economic stimulators and as products of evolving practices of collection that have emerged in the wake of new economic and cultural hybridities.

Museum-based narratives have shifted to incorporate more nationalistic histories that reflect economic policy, which has become increasingly hybridized to incorporate a more liberal and capitalist market (Vickers 2007; Denton 2005). However, museums themselves have also become part of this liberalization as spaces tied not only to the representation of the city and the nation but to the representation of economic strength and vitality through spectacle (Ong 2011).

[Footnote 4]

For a more detailed discussion of contemporary history museums and their relevance in urban space through exhibitory practices, see Denton 2005.

(Hubbert 2006, 146).

Museums as “Spectacular Space”

As public museums have experienced a shift in framing and focus over the course of the reform era, private museums have simultaneously experienced a reinvigoration driven by private collecting (Song 2008). The reemergence of private museums was initially encouraged by the Chinese government, viewed as a positive reflection of popular interest in national heritage (Song 2008). However, it was later curtailed in the 1990s by the introduction of new government regulations and financial shortfalls that forced many smaller institutions to close, selling their collections to larger, more established institutions (Song 2008). However, following the enactment of new regulations on the private museum sector in China during the 1990s, new legislation and language illustrated the return of governmental support for private museums (Song 2008). In the twenty-first century, private businesses were encouraged to support non-governmental museums, creating new opportunities for urban development and thus helping to preserve and protect the Chinese cultural heritage and reiterating a commitment to national narratives in reform era culture (Song 2008; Vickers 2007).

In the 1980s, non-governmental collecting rose dramatically as the result of increased access to economic resources by private citizens and the prestige that accompanied the ownership of a private collection (Song 2008). However, the practice of collecting in China is neither unique to the reform era nor ideologically exclusive, deriving its significance from specific social, political, and cultural frameworks through which meaning is created (Hubbert 2006). This is distinctly embodied by the Mao badge, which harken back to high socialism, yet through emerging practices of collecting based on monetary exchange has become integrated into the socialist market economy (Hubbert 2006). Through their collection and display in museums, these badges illustrate the complex and evolving tensions between revolutionary ideologies and “burgeoning commodity capitalism” with which the nation, its citizens, and its cultural institutions grapple

In China’s contemporary urban institutions, architecture and image have become increasingly important components of urban development as it has embraced spectacle and reshaped the urban environment. Buildings such as Shanghai’s Oriental Pearl Radio & TV Tower have captured the imagination of spectators, acting as illustrations of prominence, power, and prosperity made possible by economic reform in the post-Mao era (Ong 2011). Through “spectacular spaces,” both state-orchestrated and otherwise, citizens are educated via specific narratives about national identity and consumption (Pred 1995; Krupar, forthcoming). As Krupar argues, spectacle represents an important governing apparatus that “structures possibilities for life” (Krupar, forthcoming, 232; emphasis in original). Within the urban setting, spectacle provides an impetus for the formation of a collective grouping and a foundation for the development of social solidarity through which “possibilities for life” are disseminated and realized (Krupar, forthcoming, 232; Hubbert 2010). In the context of the 2008 Olympics, this occurred through the bridging of commodity and collective spectacle through culture (Hubbert 2010). Within this context, commodity spectacle represents the supplanting of “social relationships in everyday life” with “commodities and representations of reality,” while collective spectacle is defined as “moments of experience that establish the possibility for people to unite in social solidarity” (Hubbert 2010, 120; emphasis added). In the Olympic example, culture played a critical role as a medium through which official ideology and “representations of reality” — including national pride and Olympic

spirit — were translated into possibilities for the formation of new solidarities (Hubbert 2010). As such, the experience of spectacle both in events and spaces represents an important vehicle through which ideology is conveyed and social relationships are constituted (Hubbert 2010; Pred 1995).

In recent years, museums have become integrated into the cultures and economies of contemporary urban spaces and have helped build and reconstruct Chinese cities into spectacular manifestations of global aspirations, capitalist relations, and new urbanism. These institutions have subsequently emerged as a new kind of “spectacular space,” which is engaged not only in the exhibition of ideas and objects, but in the formation of national identity through culture and commodity spectacle (Prior 2003; Pred 1995; Message 2006; Hubbert 2010). Over the course of their history, museums have become engaged not only in the (re)production of culture, but also in political and social discourses, rendering them as active rather than passive institutions. As such, Chinese museums have emerged as contemporary iterations of “spectacular space” described by Allan Pred (1995). In analyzing the evolution and progression of Swedish modernities, Pred targets three specific “spectacular spaces,” including the Stockholm Exhibition of 1897, which represented “a site of cultural struggle as well as a site of commodity promotion” (Pred 1995, 19). In this way, Pred illustrates the ways in which “spectacular spaces,” both past and present, extend beyond simple reflection, functioning as “[crucibles] in which the new crystallized out of the ongoing” (Pred 1995, 19).

Writing in the 1990s, Pred argues that Europe’s capitalist societies experienced multiple modernities in succession culminating in hypermodernity (Pred 1995, 21). These transitions overlapped one another and were contingent upon “geographically and historically specific conditions” and helped shape “nationally distinctive capitalisms, political circumstances and forms of collective consciousness”

(Pred 1995, 21). China cannot be classed among capitalist societies, nor will the nation experience modernity in the same way. However, Pred’s perspectives remain useful in constructing an analysis of “spectacular spaces” within the Chinese context through his examination of space itself as a contributor “to the transformation and reconstitution of situated practices, power relations and forms of individual and collective consciousness” (Pred 1995, 19). Through conducting spatial analyses of the nation’s new museums, we can understand these institutions as engaged not only in the transformation of the urban landscape, but also the constitution of power and identity in urban spaces (Pred 1995; Krupar, forthcoming).

In the case of the 2008 Olympics, the experience of spectacle occurred in part through architecture that was “embedded in a set of symbolic relationships” tied to culture and consumption (Hubbert 2010, 129). This embedding was demonstrated best by the National Stadium (also known as the Bird’s Nest), which referenced fengshui and the traditional bird’s nest soup (Hubbert 2010). As such, the emergence of urban spectacle in China in the reform era represents a complex articulation of modern aspirations, official policy, and historical legacies that “undergirds official constructions of Chinese modernity that pose commodity capitalism as the antidote to the underdevelopment of the Mao years” (Hubbert 2010, 120). Museums such as SHMOG, the China Wood Sculpture Museum, and the Ordos Museum have all garnered international recognition, not as institutions but rather as cutting-edge architectural structures that visualize the emergence of new urban modernities both domestically and internationally (Ong 2011). As visual spectacles, the three have gained the attention of international spectators from architecture

professionals and amateur enthusiasts alike. All three represent dramatic counterpoints to their surroundings, standing like modern-day monoliths against the backdrop of mundane, utilitarian developments. Designed by MAD Architects, the Ordos Museum and the China Wood Sculpture Museum represent monumental explorations of organic line and space cloaked in reflective metallic skins, while SHMOG illustrates a minimalistic study of glass and geometric form (see Images 1 and 4-6).

As fixtures of the built environment and products of urban development, these spaces have become articulations of culture and modernity through the aesthetics of the avant-garde (Hubbert 2010; 2013; Ong 2011). The spectacle of urban architecture, such as the museums mentioned, are imbued with aspirations, both of the city as a competitor among its established peers and of global status more directly tied to the nation itself (Ong 2011; Hubbert 2010; 2013; Denton 2005). These spaces, therefore, not only serve to house culture but also “play an aesthetic role in promoting future values and new political orientations” (Ong 2011, 209). As such, the expansion of museums in China during the reform era reflects not only economic and ideological shifts but is also a key component of the nation’s urban transformation both within the visual context and the political, economic, and cultural.

In the last several decades especially, spectacle and “spectacular spaces” have become increasingly visible through large-scale events such as the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo, and as prevalent fixtures in urban space through the phenomenon of “hyperbuilding” (Pred 1995; Hubbert 2010; Ong 2011; Krupar, forthcoming). These events and the spaces they create are steeped in collective and commodity spectacle through which social relations and subjectivities are shaped (Hubbert 2010; Ong 2011). “Spectacular spaces” within contemporary urban developments are subsequently not mere products of capital, but engrained in the articulation of emerging modernities

defined by interlacing urban, national, and global relationships and aspirations in the urban context (Pred 1995; Ong 2011). Spectacle becomes a symbolic representation of urban ambition and development in which institutions become beacons of modernity, national sovereignty, and power (Ong 2011; Pred 1995; Hubbert 2010).

Within the contemporary urban setting, spectacle has become an increasingly common fixture, facilitating shifts within the contemporary Western museum that accommodates public desire for spectacle and propels the institutions into a state of “hypermodernity” that represents not an end of modernity but rather “an extension, acceleration, and radicalization of it” (Prior 2003, 68). As such, these spectacular museums represent active “agents of social and cultural change” while simultaneously reflecting sociocultural shifts around them (Prior 2003, 52). Though similarly active in the configuration of change, Chinese museums are distinguished by the country’s unique political, cultural, and economic hybridities that facilitate the emergence of new kinds of spaces that respond to these influences and through which power and culture are mediated (Qin 2004). As cultural entities, museums are tools not only of cultural expression but of governance through which national image is constructed and affirmed and populations are othered (Message 2006; Qin 2004; Pred 1995). Museums are engaged in “(would-be) hegemonic discourse,” and as such represent critical components of China’s emerging urban landscape and national image (Pred 1995, 19; Denton 2005).

Cultural Industries in China

Since the emphasis on cultural industries began in the

1990s, the Chinese government has embraced a creativity-driven economy as a cornerstone of long-term economic and national development (Keane 2004; O'Connor and Gu 2006; Fung and Erni 2013). This is notable as it demonstrated a calculated embrace of a fundamentally Western concept based on the uniqueness of the individual embedded in understandings of creativity and cultural industries by extension (Keane 2009; O'Connor and Gu 2006). It also marked a shift between the Maoist and reform eras in which culture became an economic tool as well as a tool of propaganda (Wu 2001; Keane 2009). This occurred at a critical juncture and has facilitated the emergence of cultural institutions and culture itself as key components of the urban realm as cities become increasingly competitive on a global scale (Kong 2007), but also at a national level, cultivating a national image and reinforcing Communist values in the process (Denton 2005; Keane 2009).

As cultural industries have become increasingly prominent in China, they have given rise to new urban forms such as the cultural cluster, embodied by developments such as the GLASS+ Theme Park of which SHMOG is a part. The concept of the cultural cluster emerged out of the idea of industrial clustering in the early 20th century, usurping the basic geography of an industrial cluster and employing it to heighten opportunities for encounters between creative people, thus spurring the industry (Fung and Erni 2013). These clusters tend to “manufactured,” produced by developers and municipal governments as often as spectacular property-led development projects that aim to bolster innovation and creativity through industry networking (Zheng and Chan 2013). For example, China’s new hybrid exhibition spaces derive their legal status as “public exhibition space[s]” from municipal government while remaining reliant of private funding sources (Wu 2001). These new urban spaces, including the Chengdu Contemporary Art Museum and SHMOG, are made possible through the complex integration of state-regulation, market forces and project visions of modernity.

Built as part of a complex financed by Chengdu’s municipal government and an international joint venture firm, the Chengdu Contemporary Art Museum represents a new kind of space made possible by continued economic and cultural policy reform (Wu 2001). Though the successfulness of these developer-designed clusters is debatable (Zheng and Chan 2013), they represent an emergent kind of culturally-focused development that provides potential homes for new museums built into industrial complexes, such as the GLASS+ Theme Park in Shanghai which centers around the Shanghai Museum of Glass (see Images 2 and 3). This park aims to “not only show, explain, update and enrich the material and spiritual language of glass in a multi-level and multi-angle way, but also reveal, discover and explore future possibility of itself and urban context [sic]” while incorporating “foreign trade enterprises” that “will continue to bring a driving force to the park and promote trade and economic development of the park and even the entire region” (SHMOG 2014c). As components of these simultaneously culture-oriented and business-minded developments, museums have become important institutional and spectacular spaces as key components of emerging developments centered around the rise of Chinese cultural industries. As such, they become part of not only the reconfiguration of the city, but the reconstitution of cultural institutions as vehicles of ideology, aspiration, and nationalism through which urban landscapes and identities are shaped in the reform era (Denton 2005). Such shifts are important as they illuminate underlying shifts in economic, political, and cultural policy that have transformed urban life and society in China over the past thirty-six years.

In examining the development of new modernities in

China, it is important to understand these as linked to both the emergence of cultural industries and the rise of urban spectacle as they reflect and reconfigure realities of the cultural and economic hybridities (O'Connor and Gu 2006; Hubbert 2010; Kong 2007). This modernity is rooted in creative enterprise, emerging first in the interwar years and only reemerging in earnest in the 1980s after being suppressed during the Maoist period (O'Connor and Gu 2006). In this period, culture was under the strict control of the state, yet in the post-Mao embrace of the global market, it has become a "central platform" of development (O'Connor and Gu 2006, 275; Keane 2009). As such, China's new modernity is a distinctively cultural one that grapples with the appropriation of historic and budding cultural elements by simultaneous, though not necessarily exclusive, interests. Occurring at present, O'Connor and Gu argue, is "a renegotiation of the divisions of responsibility from a public sector dominated, ideologically and politically charged 'culture' to a more private sector, market-led field of leisure and entertainment consumption" (O'Connor and Gu 2006, 276). This renegotiation is of particular relevance in the consideration of not only how culture is created, but how it is displayed. Such culture is created by the state through large-scale undertakings such as the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo (Hubbert 2010). However, it is also constituted through practices of private collection in which nationalistic ideology and themes are reinforced and/or contextualized within reform era cultural and economic hybridities (Denton 2005; Hubbert 2006).

As economies become increasingly globalized, cities have become competitive entities. In recent decades, cities in Asia specifically have become sites of urban experimentation in which the "global" is continually reimagined within emerging global contexts and in which global ambitions and aspirations are embodied (Ong 2011). In seeking to assert their relevance and status within a global market, cities have turned to cultural capital developed through multiple avenues, including place-based strategies through

"the development of monuments dedicated to cultural use" (Kong 2007, 385; Zukin 1998). Within the Chinese context, Shanghai — like many other emerging cities of its kind — has sought to establish itself on the global stage through the coalescence of culture, property-led (re) development, and spectacle illustrated by the development of architectural icons (Kong 2007; Hubbert 2010). These icons articulate visually the desire of both city and nation to achieve global, competitive status that methodically reconfigures the built environment around new cultural centers (Kong 2007; Ong 2011; Hubbert 2010). These aspirations of globalism and cultural predominance are not simply urban, but are also rooted in a sense of nationalism (Kong 2007; Ong 2011). Even so, as Shanghai continues to strive for global city status, the achievement of this goal relies in part on the city's ability to become a cultural and economic center at a national level, competing with other mainland cities such as Beijing and Hong Kong as well (Kong 2007). As such, culture and cultural institutions have become increasingly important for urban development and reputation in both national and global contexts (Kong 2007; Keane 2009), facilitating the creation of new urban configurations based on the combination of urban, economic, and cultural development interests.

Spectacle, City, and Modernity

Over the course of the reform era, museums have emerged as a new type of cultural institution that builds on past legacies of power, politics, and culture. These institutions represent a confluence of reform era shifts that have transformed the urban landscape through property-led redevelopment via the assertion and affirmation of nationalistic narratives, power relations, and global aspirations.

Museums have become engaged in the constitution and representation of new modernities as “spectacular spaces” that speak to the aspirations of both city and nation alike through architectural and institutional spectacle. These spectacles employ an “avant-garde aesthetic” and through culture that affords new “[possibilities] for people to unite in social solidarity” (Hubbert 2010, 131, 120). In this way, the spectacle evident in the architecture of China’s museums helps shape the contemporary subject by reinforcing a sense of nationalism and cultural pride among citizens fostered within the institutions themselves (Yim 2005; Denton 2005; Krupar, forthcoming).

Though museums are often understood as passive institutions or glorified warehouses of culture, the “spectacular spaces” of post-Mao cultural institutions represent assertions of power and competitiveness that dominate the urban landscape as fixtures of emerging modernities and evolving economies (Ong 2011; Pred 1995). These spectacles serve as important symbolic structures, yet are also deeply embroiled in the constitution of sociopolitical relations (Krupar, forthcoming; Denton 2005). At stake in the rise of the urban Chinese museums is not only the proliferation of cultural institutions, but the dissemination of ideology and the exercise of power in the urban landscape. Operating across multiple scales of interaction, reform era museums serve to construct representations of national power and pride through spectacle while acting as economic anchors and vessels of ideology. In doing so, they legitimize the state and seek to realize aspirations of global-ness and competitiveness within the urban realm (Ong 2011; Denton 2005; Belting 2007).

Institutions such as the Shanghai Museum of Glass are no longer strictly cultural institutions, but are engaged in the construction of citizen sensibilities of national heritage and pride, the legitimization of state ideologies, patriotic education, and economic development (Vickers 2007; Denton 2005; Kong 2007; He and Wu 2005; Song 2008). Reform era economic policy shifts have facilitated

new strategies for economic (re)development and growth that have targeted cultural industries as primary sectors for expansion and have thus elevated the status of the cultural institution within the economic context (He and Wu 2005). These shifts have occurred in tension with traditional revolutionary narratives that have perpetuated Mao era ideology through revolutionary museums and historical monuments, a conflict resolved through the rearticulation of such sites through nationalist narratives that legitimize reform era economic and ideological hybridity through museum-based channels of patriotic education (Denton 2005; Vickers 2007).

Within the last several decades, the number of museums in China has skyrocketed (Si 2014). In this time, museums such as SHMOG have emerged as dynamic, multidimensional shapers of the contemporary urban landscape that simultaneously function as cultural centers and economic stimulators through the confluence of shifting political ideology, economic policy, and social relations. Such institutions employ spectacular constructions and visual commodity to reconfigure and represent emerging and evolving modernities in China’s urban and national contexts as well as on the global stage. As China continues to grow and expand as an economic and political force, these cultural centers play an increasingly relevant role as mediators of power. The rapid expansion of the museum sector in China subsequently signals an ongoing evolution of economy, culture, and society that continues to reconstitute and reimagine the urban landscape within new and evolving national and global contexts. These re-articulations of urbanism facilitate the formation of new national identities created through the integration of official narratives and expressions of power rooted in China’s contemporary ur-

ban museums. Such manifestations of power across space have created new and evolving landscapes and raise subsequent questions about the relevance of these processes of urban transformation on the formation of subjects in China's rapidly evolving and expanding urban society.

[Image 1]



Shanghai Museum of Glass, Shanghai, China. Architectural design by Logon. Image source: Logon (2011).

[Image 2]



Logon model of completed GLASS+ Theme Park in Shanghai, China. Image source: Shanghai Museum of Glass, “GLASS+ Theme Park” (2014b).

[Image 3]



The GLASS+ complex as of June 2014, including a working hot shop, detached exhibition space, and artist studios. Image courtesy of Lisa Hoffman.

[Image 4]



The exterior of the Ordos Museum in Ordos, China. Architectural design by MAD Architects. Image source: MAD Architects (2011).

[Image 5]



The interior of the Ordos Museum (shown left). Exterior details of the museum shown right; Ordos, China. Right: Architectural design by MAD Architects. Image source: MAD Architects (2011).

[Image 6]



The China Wood Sculpture Museum in Harbin, China. Architectural design by MAD Architects. Image source: MAD Architects (2013).

[Image 7]



Exterior details of the China Wood Sculpture Museum in Harbin, China. Architectural design by MAD Architects. Image source: MAD Architects (2013).

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