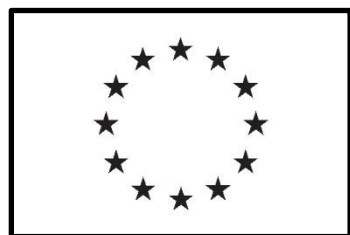




## Shanghai History Museum / Shanghai Revolution Museum Report #1

A City, its History, and its Museum(s):  
Making the Shanghai History Museum /  
Shanghai Revolution Museum

By: Laura Pozzi (University of Warsaw)



# *A City, its History, and its Museum(s): Making the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum*

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## **Introduction**

This report was developed within the Horizon2020 project *ECHOES: European Colonial Heritage Modalities in Entangled Cities* as part of its work package 3 on ‘City Museums and Multiple Colonial Pasts.’ This work package conducts in-depth, qualitative, comparative analyses of three city museums, each representing distinct positions within colonial history. The Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum (*Shanghai shi lishi bowuguan/Shanghai shi lishi geming lishi bowuguan*, 上海市历史博物馆 上海市革命历史博物馆) (SHM/SRM) is one of these three case studies. The aim of this report is to reconstruct the history of the museum and illustrate the current state of this institution. The permanent exhibition of the SHM/SRM, which re-opened in spring 2018, is the newest among those displayed in other city museums in the People’s Republic in China (PRC), and as such it provides us with valuable data on contemporary practices of heritage preservation and on the contemporary interpretation of colonial history in the country.

The SHM/SRM provides a case study from a city museum located in East Asia. The first reports on the Amsterdam Museum (Ariese 2019) and the Museum of Warsaw (Bukowiecki 2019) prepared in parallel present case studies of city museums from two different geo-political zones (Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe). The research on all three of these case studies is on-going and will result in two more sets of reports, which will jointly form a nine-part final report of the research conducted on city museums within ECHOES. The decolonial analysis, which is preliminarily discussed at the end of this report and will form the core of the second report, is based on the methodology developed within the ECHOES project, centered on four modalities for practicing colonial heritage: removal, repression, reframing, and re-emergence (Kølvraa 2018). As the research is still in progress, the results presented in this report should be treated as preliminary and may be changed or expanded due to new findings.

This report opens with an overview of the colonial history of Shanghai, followed by the presentation of the development of museums policies in China. The third and fourth sections focus on the case of the SHM/SRM, offering a reconstruction of its history and a preliminary analysis of the content of its permanent exhibition and its decolonial practices, subjects that will be further developed in the next two reports.

## **The Colonial History of Shanghai: An Overview**

This section provides a summary of the colonial history of Shanghai between the 1840s and 1949. Scholarship on the history of modern Shanghai is overwhelmingly large (e.g. Fogel 2001). There are several reasons which boosted historians’ interest for this city. Firstly, since it became an open port in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Shanghai started its ascent into what Jeffrey Wasserstrom calls a ‘global city,’ a neuralgic centre for economy and culture at a global level (Wasserstrom 2009). Secondly, despite or perhaps because of its semi-colonial status, in the nineteenth century Shanghai emerged as the main hub for Chinese capitalists, revolutionaries, academics, and artists. Finally, it is relatively easy to access historical sources about Shanghai compared to other cities in

China. The municipal archive is more accessible to foreign scholars than other institutions in the country and newspapers, magazines, and books in English, French, and Chinese, which were printed in the city, are easily available (Reed 2004).

Despite the large amount of literature available about the city, Western historiography tends to overlook the history of pre-colonial Shanghai. In the first few pages of *A Short History of Shanghai* (first published in 1927), F.L Hawks Pott declared that while Shanghai existed before it became an open port, compared to many other places in China the city was “insignificant from [a] historical perspective” (Pott 2009: 2). This opinion is much contested in Chinese public history, which sets the origin of the city during the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), more precisely in 1291 (Wasserstrom 2009: 2). The Shanghai History Museum frames the beginning of the city in an even earlier era, as discussed further below. While foreign scholars tend to disregard the history of Shanghai before the first Opium War (1839-1842), Chinese historians investigated the city’s pre-colonial past, without, however, denying that the growth of the city in the modern era was the result of its opening up to foreign commerce.

The first Opium War, a conflict between Britain’s East India Company and the Qing Dynasty, was the main cause of the transformation of the city from a county town in Jiangsu province into an international port.<sup>1</sup> The tension between Chinese and British powers grew as a result of the deterioration of the ‘Canton Trade,’ a system that allowed the Qing court to keep control over the trade between China and Europe between 1700 and 1842 (Van Dyke 2005). The Canton Trade system worked for more than a century, allowing Europeans to buy luxury products – such as tea and porcelain – from China only in Guangzhou 广州, paying taxes to the Qing dynasty in Beijing. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, opium from India was smuggled into China by foreign merchants, provoking a drain of silver in the country. Chinese merchants who had the exclusive right to deal with foreigners did not stop the smuggling of opium, until the loss of silver in China became so severe that in 1830 they were no longer able to pay taxes to the capital. At the same time, foreign powers became more eager to pursue the opening of other cities besides Canton to foreign business. The result was a series of wars which concluded with China opening concessions to Britain. As explain by Paul Van Dyke, the end of the Canton Trade was due not only to foreign aggression and smuggling of opium, but to global changes in the world economy which were overseen by Qing authorities (Van Dyke 2005: 172-176).

British troops entered Shanghai in June 1842 after a brief battle at Wusong 吴淞, where the Qing army fought the enemy without much success (Pott 2009: 8-9). The Treaty of Nanjing sealed the fate of the city, which was opened to trade in November 1843. In 1844, also the Americans and the French obtained the right to trade in the port (Pott 2009: 11).

The Treaty of Nanjing was the first of several ‘Unequal Treaties’ that defined the relations between China and several foreign powers for almost one hundred years, a period referred to in China as ‘the century of humiliation.’ The Unequal Treaties provided extraterritoriality, the opening of several ports to foreign trade, the demarcations of areas directly controlled by foreign powers (‘settlements’ or ‘concessions’), foreign control over the Chinese custom tariffs, the stationing of foreign troops, and the right of navigation on the coast as well as in the interior of the country (Chan 1977: 257).

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of the history of Opium Wars see Julia Lovell’s *The Opium Wars: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of China* (2015).

Foreigners were not in control of the entire municipality of Shanghai, but only of ‘concessions,’ delimited areas outside the walled city built by the Qing to protect the locals from Japanese pirates (Wasserstrom 2009: 2). This system of concessions is often referred to as ‘semi-colonialism’ (*ban zhimindi*, 半殖民地), a concept introduced by Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) and supported by Mao Zedong (1893-1976) to describe countries which despite preserving their juridical independence were dominated by imperialist powers. For Lenin, semi-colonialism was a transitional form of imperialist control on the path to fully-fledged colonialism (Osterhammel 1986: 296). The use of this term to describe the political and economic conditions in China is problematic, as it implies that the Chinese experience of colonialism was different from other colonies. Was this the case? Scholars are divided on this issue. According to Tani Barlow, the term ‘semi-colonialism’ downplays the colonial experience in China, making it look more benign than it really was. Nevertheless, Barlow also acknowledges the fact that this concept is useful to distinguish the condition of China, which maintained its political independence, from those of other countries (Barlow 1993). Other scholars, such as James Hevia, claim that the division between semi-colonialism and colonialism is useless (Hevia 2003). According to Jürgen Osterhammel, the idea of semi-colonialism is a label applied to China “without much regard for its potential theoretical implication” (Osterhammel 1986: 296), nor does it grasp how imperialism worked in the region.

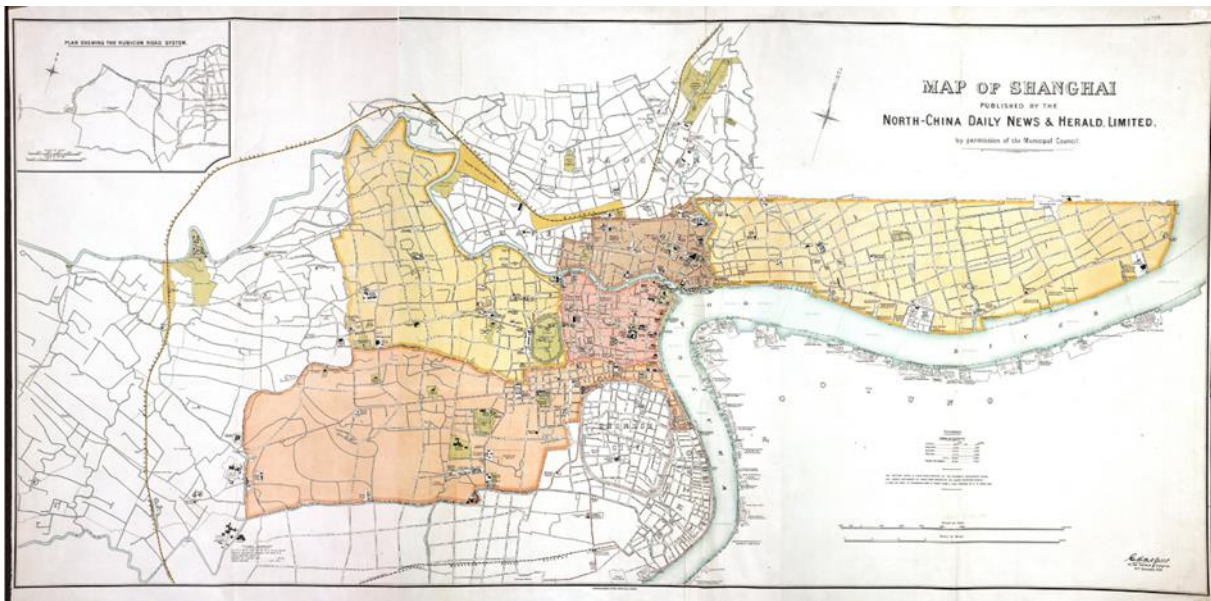


Figure 1: Map of Shanghai 1914. Image: Virtual Shanghai,  
<https://www.virtualshanghai.net/Maps/Source?ID=191>

While Western scholars are still debating the appropriate terminology to define the China’s interaction with colonial powers, the term semi-colonialism is well-established in contemporary Chinese scholarship. In the 1930s, this concept was employed by Chinese scholars to explain the condition of Chinese society, described as “semi-colonial and semi-feudal” (Osterhammel 1986: 296-297). Mao Zedong employed this same terminology in his ‘*The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party*’ (1939), explaining that while imperialist forces imported capitalism to China, they collaborated with Chinese feudal forces to block the development of capitalist economy in the country, allowing only a few, namely warlords and the bourgeoisie, to prosper (Mao 1939). Since Mao’s definition of Chinese pre-revolutionary society as “semi-colonial and

semi-feudal” remains unchallenged in China and is also widely used in the exhibition of the Shanghai History Museum, I will use this terminology in my reports.

After Shanghai became an open port, settlers rented agricultural land outside the Chinese walled city. As more land was allotted to settlers and more foreign powers gained access to the treaty-port system, the sizes, shapes, and even names of the concessions changed to accommodate the new needs of the foreign communities (see Figure 1). All the changes in the rent of the concessions had to be approved by the Taotai, the imperial official that supervised the circuit of Shanghai.<sup>2</sup>

The population of Shanghai rapidly increased during the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), a peasant uprising lead by Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), a self-proclaimed “brother of Jesus” (Platt 2013). The rebellion started in the South, but rapidly spread to the rest of the country, including Shanghai and its neighbouring areas (Yeh 1996: 51). The walled city of Shanghai was occupied by the Small Swords, a group connected with the Taiping, but the insurgency – more a coup of Cantonese rebel secret society than an uprising – lasted only seventeen months (1853-1855) (Goodman 1995: 72-83). As prosperous cities nearby fell into the hands of the Taiping, people moved to the foreign concessions in Shanghai, together with their financial assets (Yeh 1996: 55-56). By the end of the Taiping rebellion, more than 110 000 Chinese had moved into the foreign concessions (Lu 2008: 139). Population growth stimulated the business of building and renting houses. Between 1853-1854 more than 800 two-story row houses were built in the British Settlement; by 1860 there were more than 8740 houses owned by the British and Americans but inhabited by Chinese (Lu 2008: 139-140). In the years which followed the end of the war, a more regulated real estate market started emerging. In 1869 the Shanghai Municipal Council was established to govern the International settlement and taxes were imposed on owners, most of them Westerners, but also rich Chinese landlords and bureaucrats who had decided to invest in the real estate business (Lu 2008: 141-142). At the beginning of the Taiping Rebellion the Shanghai Taotai had forbidden Chinese from living in the settlements, since Qing authorities were scared that they would not pay taxes. But the Chinese did not want to move, and the settlers built even more houses to accommodate the newcomers. In the end, the right of Chinese to live in the settlements was established by usage (Pott 2009: 41). Regarding the taxation of Chinese subjects, it was agreed that half of the taxes would go to the International Settlement and half to the Chinese government (Pott 2009: 67).

It was in the 1860s that some of the most important institutions were established. On 13 May 1862 the Municipal Council of the French Concession was formed. All the decisions were approved or vetoed by the French Consul. Not much trade took place in the French Concession, which survived mostly on opium dens and brothels. In 1863 the American Settlement (in Hankou) was merged to the English Settlement (Pott 2009: 67). In 1864 Mixed Courts to try Chinese and foreigners without consular representation were established together with a police system (Wakeman 1996: 70). A modern banking system supported the construction of new businesses, especially cotton factories, in the city. New roads and a tramway were built. The establishment of banks, associations, administration, etc. fostered the construction of new edifices, built according to the most recent European architectural trends (Denison & Guang 2014). While the city was not

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<sup>2</sup> An account of the changing size of the concessions and the debates about the building of infrastructure can be found in Pott’s *A Short History of Shanghai* (2009). The Virtual Shanghai website provides live maps showing the changes of the concessions overtime: <https://www.virtualshanghai.net/Maps/Live>.

immune to economic crises, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had become the indisputable economic centre of the country, if not of all of East Asia.

Economic success was matched by flourishing culture and arts. During the Taiping Rebellion several established intellectuals and artists moved to Shanghai and started trading their work to new patrons in the city (Wue 2017). After the abolishment of the Imperial examination system, Shanghai started attracting literati who, having lost the opportunity to work for the Imperial system, looked for work in companies and publishing houses (Zarrow 2006: 29-32). New schools, both public and private, were opened to cater to young people's needs. Art schools, technical schools, translation schools, etc. mushroomed. The establishment of new schools, and the availability of translations of Western philosophical, economic, and political works contributed to the formation of a politicized environment in Shanghai. Social Darwinism, democracy, liberalism, and Marxism soon became widespread concepts among young intellectuals (Zarrow 2006: 128-144 & 170-189).

Students and intellectuals employed new ideologies to make sense of the unstable political situation of their country, which spurred them to get involved into politics (Zarrow 2006: 128-144 & 170-189). Shanghai was not the only city to live under a colonial system, other major urban centres – Canton, Tianjin, Xiamen, and Qingdao, just to mention a few – were also under the partial control of foreign powers, a condition that the politicized youth considered shameful. While the 1911 Revolution succeeded in transforming China into a Republic, it failed to make the country a stronger player in the global political arena. After a few years under the control of the military official Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), in 1916 China lost its political unity, as several military strongmen – the so-called warlords – took control of different regions and fought against each other to gain control over the country (Ch'i 1976). The Warlord Era lasted from 1916 until 1928, when the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) managed to take control of most of the country establishing a new capital in Nanjing, not far from Shanghai (Zarrow 2006: 230-247).

The political weakness of China, caused by both predatory foreign powers and internal struggles between warlords, became evident in 1919. Chinese authorities, which supported the Allied Powers during the First World War, expected the province of Shandong, a German colony, to be returned to China. Instead, during the Versailles Conference, the province was given to Japan. As a result, on 4 May 1919, hundreds of students protested in Beijing, and later in Shanghai, where also workers became involved in the political protests called the 'May Fourth Movement' (Mitter 2010: 41-65). The participation of workers in the May Fourth Movement marked the emergence of nationalist feelings among the city's working class, which until then had been mostly divided among regional networks (Smith 2002: 92-115). Besides the rise of nationalism, the May Fourth Movement also spurred the emergence of a discourse of class which became entangled with nationalist ideas (Smith 2002: 116-132).

After the May Fourth Movement, Shanghai emerged as China's political laboratory. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in the city in 1921. Chinese Marxist historiography finds the origins of the CCP in the events of 1919, claiming that the May Fourth Movement was socialist in nature and that the future leaders of the party were the main activists of the protests in Beijing and Shanghai. This explanation, however, is far too simplistic, as the May Fourth Movement was not explicitly associated to any party or ideology of nationalism. Certainly, Shanghai remained an important political centre for the CCP, even after the systematic purges of communist elements organized by the Nationalist Party in 1927 (Wakeman 1996: 122-127).



The Nanjing Decade (1927-1937), which is the ten years of Nationalist control over the country, is considered a prosperous age for the city (Cochran 2004; Lee 2001; Yeh 2007). However, despite its outwardly grandeur, Shanghai was haunted by social, economic, and political problems. Criminal gangs infiltrated the police forces both in the concessions and in the Chinese controlled area. Powerful individuals with strong connections to the Nationalist government and the foreign community controlled prostitution and the smuggling of opium (Wakeman 1996: 97-131 & 260-275). The power of these criminal organization and their links with politicians and entrepreneurs contributed to make Shanghai one of the most violent cities in world. Meanwhile, the nationalist feelings of students and workers, fostered also by the underground propaganda of communist and leftist elements, led to strikes and violent protests. The rage of the masses was mostly directed against Japan, as its expansionist plans in China were becoming difficult to ignore. Between 1931-1932 Japan occupied Manchuria, in the north of the country, provoking the anger of Chinese citizens in Shanghai. In January 1932, after strikes, boycotts of Japanese products, and attacks against Japanese citizens took place in the city, the Japanese army bombed the Chinese district of Zhabei resulting in 14 000 casualties and the transfer of 230 000 refugees to the International Settlement (Zarrow 2006: 264-270).

A fully-fledged war with Japan started in 1937, the year which marked the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War (also known as the War of Resistance against Japan) which ended with the victory of the Chinese in 1945 (Mitter 2014). Shanghai fell to the Japanese in November 1937 after four months of battle (Fu 1993: 4-5). The Nationalist Government moved to the city of Chongqing, 重庆, and during the war collaborated with the Allies and the CCP to fight against Japanese expansion in China and Southeast Asia. During the years of occupation, Shanghai was administered by the collaborationist Reorganized National Government of China headed by Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) and based in Nanjing. The story of occupied Shanghai is still understudied, mostly for political reasons, as to admit that many Chinese continued living in Shanghai after Japanese occupation is still considered a taboo subject in China. The economy of the city suffered during the war, infrastructure was damaged, the concessions were overwhelmed by refugees, and intellectuals and artists left the city.

At the end of the war with Japan, the Nationalists regained power over the city. European and American influence in Shanghai was in decline. In 1943, Britain and the United States agreed to abrogate extraterritoriality. In the same year, the Vichy Government decided to give up the French Concession to the Wang Jingwei's government. By 1944, all the foreign concessions in the city were abolished. The end of the Second Sino-Japanese War did not bring peace to China; conversely, the hostilities between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party resumed. During the Civil War (1945-1949) the Nationalist Party lost credibility in Shanghai, which was plagued by famine, housing shortages, chaos, and corruption. The political elite was accused of seizing the properties of collaborators, of mismanaging the country's economy, and of being increasingly authoritarian (Pepper 1993: 42-95). Strikes and protests resumed and were often violently shut down by the police. The People's Liberation Army takeover of the city on 2 June 1949 anticipated the final victory of the CCP, which in October 1949 established the People's Republic of China (PRC). The story of the peaceful entrance of the People's Liberation Army in Shanghai is one of the events often celebrated in CCP's mythology to perpetuate the myth of the good Communist Army against the evil Nationalists (Braester 2005).

The history of Shanghai does not end in 1949, of course. Shanghai has continued to be one of the most vibrant cities in China. It is relevant to note that throughout the one hundred years of

history presented in this summary, Shanghai was a multicultural city: people came from different provinces of China bringing with them their own cultural practices, foreigners from Europe and the U.S. made Shanghai their home, Sikh soldiers were often employed in the settlements as policemen, White Russians emigrated to the city during the Bolshevik Revolution, and during the Second World War thousands of Jews found refuge in Shanghai (Ristaino 2003; Eber 2008). This aspect of city life is often lost in historiography, especially in Chinese scholarship, which privileges a nationalist approach.

Much more could be said about the history of the city of Shanghai. The growth of its complex banking system, the development of infrastructure, its role as an international shipping hub, the development of factories, the changing social roles of women, the making of a cinema industry, etc. are not discussed in this report, but they will appear in future papers in relation to the content of the Shanghai History Museum's permanent exhibition.

### **The Museum Landscape in the Country and in the City**

In the last ten years, the number of studies on Chinese museums has been rising sharply. Based on the most recent scholarship, this section proposes a brief outline of the history of museums in China, and it sketches the contemporary situation in the country, focusing mostly on the case of Shanghai.

Chinese literature distinguishes between pre-modern and modern museums. Chinese scholars claim the first museum in China was established as early 478 BC, when the house of Confucius (551 BC-479 BC) was transformed into an ancestral temple to protect the philosopher's scriptures, becoming the first museum in the history of the country (Duan 2017: 1). Chinese and Western scholars agree to set the establishment of the first modern Chinese museum at the beginning of the twentieth century (Claypool 2005). The development of Western-style museology in China is parallel to the establishment of treaty ports in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when colonial powers imported to China their institutions, among which the colonial museum (Bennett 2014). Even the Chinese term for 'museum' – *bowuguan* 博物馆 – originated in these years. It was imported from Japan and became widely used after the 1867 International Exposition in Paris (Varutti 2014: 9).<sup>3</sup>

Two museums were established in Shanghai: in 1868 the Musée de Zikawei or Siccawei Museum (*ziran lishi bowuguan*, 自然历史博物馆) by Jesuit Pierre Heude (1836-1902) in the French Concession; and in 1874 the Shanghai Museum (*Shanghai bowuyuan*, 上海博物院) by the North China Branch of the Venerable Royal Asiatic Society (Claypool 2005: 573-574). These two projects catered to two different political needs: the Siccawei Museum used 'science' to advance the religious purposes of the Jesuits in China, while the Shanghai Museum aimed at ordering the knowledge of China's natural environment according to British colonial knowledge (Claypool 2005: 575).

Chinese authorities soon understood the importance of creating autochthonous museums to fight against the colonial appropriation of the country's nature and tradition. During the Hundred Days Reform (1898), the political thinker Kang Youwei (1858-1927) was the first to launch the idea

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<sup>3</sup> The term *bowuguan* was not the only one in use. A more detailed discussion on the origin of the term *bowuguan* can be found in Denise Ho's *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China* (2018: 7). *Bowuguan* is the most widely used term in contemporary China.



of establishing modern Chinese museums (Qin 2004: 689-690), but it was thanks to the entrepreneurial energy of the industrial magnate Zhang Jian (1853-1926), that the first modern Chinese exhibition hall, the Nantong Museum, was built in 1905 in Jiangsu Province (Claypool 2005). This project attracted the attention of scholars, who discussed the hybrid nature of this institution as an attempt to save the study of Chinese patrimony from foreigners, but also to solidify the positions of industrialists such as Zhang Jian and his circle as a new modern elite able to produce and control modern knowledge in China (Claypool 2005; Qin 2004).

The Nantong Museum was the first of a series of other museums established soon after, such as the Palace Museum in the Forbidden City (1925), an institution aimed at changing the political thoughts of people about imperial history by exhibiting the belongings of the emperors (Varutti 2014: 27-29). The museum institution as a maker of modern knowledge, however, was not accepted without a fight: in fact, young activists participating in the May Fourth Movement described them as storehouses for “old tools, old objects, and old classics” (Ho 2018: 214).

Despite criticism, the Nationalist Government was quite active in establishing museums. For instance, in 1930 it issued the *Law on the Preservation of Ancient Objects*, the first of its kind in China (Bollo & Zhang 2017: 28). Under the Nationalist government, China witnessed its first museum-boom: the National History Museum (*Guoli lishi bowuguan*, 国立历史博物馆), the Central State Museum (*Zhongyang bowuguan*, 中央博物馆), and the Natural Museum (*Ziran bowuguan*, 自然博物馆) (Chen 2011: 117-118). The Nationalists also built the Shanghai Municipal Museum, which focused on Shanghai and Chinese History as part of the Great Shanghai Municipal Centre. The Shanghai Municipal Museum, which opened in 1935, closed its doors just one year later because of the beginning of the War of Resistance against Japan (Ho 2018: 8-9). War, economic recession, social issues, and the political division of the country did not provide a fertile environment for the development of museums and galleries in China: by 1936 there were 77 of them, but only 21 survived war (Chen 2011:118).

The situation changed after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. While the country still faced enormous economic and social troubles, the construction of a legal framework for the preservation of ‘cultural relics’ (*wenwu*, 文物) and the establishment of museums at national, provincial, and city level was high on the CCP’s agenda.<sup>4</sup> The 1950s were a little golden age for Chinese museums. For instance, during the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) – Mao Zedong’s grand plan to surpass the industrial output of Great Britain and re-launch the Chinese economy – two national museums were built in Beijing: the National Museum of China and the Military Museum of the Chinese People’s Revolution. These institutions served the construction of a political culture that legitimized the Communist’s rule after 1949 (Hung 2011). Since their opening in 1960, their permanent exhibitions have undergone several changes, which have been well-documented by scholars (Denton 2014).

The CCP also financed the construction of new museums in Shanghai. Firstly, however, the new government formed organisations that could supervise the management of cultural relics, such as the Shanghai Cultural Relics Commission, established 17 September 1949. In 1950, the

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<sup>4</sup> The term *wenwu* is widely used in legislation and scholarship on heritage and museum studies in China. Its translations in English vary greatly. Varutti defines *wenwu* as “cultural relics are all the objects produced before 1949” (2014: 10). Bollo & Zhang translate it as “movable heritage object” or “cultural relics” (2017: 28), while Ho defines them as “cultural relics” (2018: 5).

Shanghai Municipal Government also funded the Shanghai Bureau of Culture, the institution which supervised the Shanghai Museum (*Shanghai bowuguan*, 上海博物馆), which opened in 1952. This institution had a collection of 7000 objects, half of which came to Shanghai in two trucks together with the future mayor of the city Marshal Chen Yi (1901-1972) (Ho 2018: 216). The Shanghai Museum was under the patronage of the mayor, who allotted to it one third of the city's budget for culture. Many of the people working in it were previous workers of the Shanghai Municipal Museum (Ho 2018: 217-218). Besides the cultural relics brought to Shanghai by Chen Yi, the Shanghai Museum also absorbed the items collected by the Royal Asiatic Society (Ho 2018: 219). By 1959, the museum possessed 70 000 objects and 270 000 books and it still remains one of the main cultural institutions in China (Ho 2018: 220).

The 1950s were also the years in which the CCP consolidated its control over the art markets and through political campaigns co-opted connoisseurs to collaborate with the new government. Private collections were 'donated' to the state and became part of public exhibitions (Ho 2012). During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), curators fought to save cultural relics, books, and historical sites from the iconoclastic violence of the Red Guards, enriching at the same time the collection of the Shanghai Museum (Ho 2011).

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government invested heavily in the construction of new museums: in 1980 there were 365 of them in the country, while by 2016 China counted 4873 registered museums, hosting 30 000 temporary exhibitions (Bollo & Zhang 2017: 28). This boom was supported by the creation of legislation for the protection and management of cultural relics and the financial support of the state. In 1982 the government issued the 'Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics,' which was revised in 2002, 2007, and again in 2015 (China National Cultural Heritage Administration, China National Museum Association 2010: 228-254). Several societies were created, such as the Chinese Society of Natural Museums (1980); the Chinese Society of Museums (1982), and the Chinese Society of Agricultural Museums (1984). Furthermore, in the same years China opened up to Western and international museology, becoming a member of the International Committee of Museums (ICOM) in 1982 (Varutti 2014: 30).

In China museums can be national (subordinated to a branch of the Central government), provincial, or local. Central institutions, such as the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (*Guojia wenwuju*, 国家文物局) under the Ministry of Culture, try to keep control over the narratives in museums, but provincial, regional, and private interests have a say on public history displays (Bollo & Zhang 2017). The State Administration of Cultural Heritage is also in charge of the approval of new museums, exchanges between institutions, the training of personnel, formulating new policies, and deciding what constitutes as heritage (Varutti 2014: 50-52). It is relevant to point out that all the museums based in large cities – such as Shanghai and Beijing – can fall under the direct administration of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (Varutti 2014: 44). While the organization of the museum system – from the administration at national or local level, to the assessment of their quality – seems very well defined, scholarship reveals that the management of these institutions is not always clear. For instance, in their investigation of the management of archaeological sites and museums in the city of Luoyang 洛阳, Luca Zan and Sara Bonini Baraldi discovered that there were serious problems of coordination between national, provincial, and local levels of administration (Zan & Baraldi 2012: 456-481).

Both cultural relics and museums are classified into three categories: Grade I, Grade II, and Grade III. Grade I artefacts are considered the most precious and are in turn divided into fourteen sub-categories. With the exception of “rare and ancient Chinese books” and a few other categories, most of the Grade I items are those that can confirm the Marxist-Leninist vision of linear human development and the personal belongings of historical figures connected to the history of the Communist Party (Zhongguo guojia wenwuju, Zhongguo bowuguan banhui 2010: 300-303).

The ‘Law of the PRC on the Protection of Cultural Relics’ also states the purposes of museums, which must “inherit the splendid historical and cultural legacy of the Chinese nation, [...] conduct education in patriotism and in the revolutionary tradition, and building a socialist society with cultural, ideological and material progress” (Zhongguo guojia wenwuju, Zhongguo bowuguan banhui 2010: 228). Furthermore, they must “help enhance publicity and education in the splendid history and culture and the revolutionary tradition of the Chinese nation” (Ibid. : 241).

The educational and patriotic nature of exhibitions is made obvious by the legislations that regulate museums in China. It is also apparent that Marxist-Leninist theories are applied to the preparation of permanent exhibitions in China. According to Marzia Varutti:

*Maoism and Marxism–Leninism have exerted such a deep, co-extensive and synergic influence on Chinese museology that it is hard to separate the former from the latter. Maoism has led museums to emphasise historical figures whose lives could be considered exemplary. As a result, Chinese museums represent a case in point in the creation of ‘ideal types,’ models of social, political and intellectual engagement.*

Varutti 2014: 36

While ideology influences the content of historical narratives in Chinese museums, through the analysis of several exhibition and monuments Denton Kirk proved that “state narratives and official memory are not monolithic and unchanging; indeed, they adapt continuously to changing economic and political demands” (Denton 2014: 4). The rise of provincial museums and the new legislation which emphasizes the necessity for institutions to finance themselves have fostered the emergence of provincially-centred, sub-narratives that promote a localized and increasingly commercialized interpretation of the past which stands in opposition to the nationalist vision of Chinese history promoted by the state (Flath 2002). Nevertheless, I would not overestimate the autonomy of museums in creating their narratives: while it is possible to find contradictions between national and local narratives, the interpretation of history remains solidly Marxist-Leninist and Maoist.

To maximize the pedagogical impact of these institutions, entrance to most of the history museums in China is free of charge. According to a circular in 2008: “opening museums and memorial halls to the public for free is a practice to boost the development and the booming of socialist culture, the effective measures to strengthen the socialist core value system building, the citizens’ ethics and morality cultivation, the important action deed in realizing and guaranteeing the basic cultural rights and interests of the masses” (Zhongguo guojia wenwuju, Zhongguo bowuguan banhui 2010: 337-338).

City museums occupy a central role in the development of the Chinese museum environment. Two volumes based on two CAMOC-CSM conferences which took place respectively in 2013 and 2014 shed light on Chinese scholars’ and authorities’ vision of the mission of city museum in the

country (China Museums Association City Museums Special Committee and the Shanghai History Museum 2013-2014). The Shanghai History Museum figures prominently in the volumes as a model city museum able to protect the city's heritage, but also to change its society (China Museums Association City Museums Special Committee and the Shanghai History Museum 2014-2015: 98-102). The SHM, therefore, emerges as the 'city museum par excellence' in the metropolis, which hosts a total of 78 state-owned museums.<sup>5</sup> Besides these state museums, in 2016 Shanghai also has 30 non-state-owned museums, but the list is constantly updated. The state-owned museums are routinely evaluated to confirm their state as museums of Grade I, II, or III, and this evaluation impacts the future budget of each institution.

### Evolution of the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum

The history of the establishment and development of the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum is quite tortuous to reconstruct. Official publications, such as the *Commemorative Book of the Opening of the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum* are quite informative, but they tend to repress the problems, issues, and setbacks that shaped the collection and the function of the museum from the 1950s to today (SHM/SRHM 2018). This section attempts to reconstruct the history of the SHM by merging the official information provided by the museum with other historical sources.

Plans for the construction of the Shanghai History and Buildings Museum (*Shanghai shi lishi yu jianshe bowuguan*, 上海市历史与建设博物馆), the first project for a local museum in the PRC, originated in the 1950s. On 20 January 1958, the Shanghai History and Buildings Museum opened its exhibition in Shaanxi South Road, on the West side of Culture Square. It covered 3700 m<sup>2</sup> and displayed 1252 objects. Just a year later, however, the development of the museum came to a halt. On 21 May 1959, the Propaganda Department of Shanghai municipality officially revoked the plan for the development of its organizational structure, but it allowed the gathering of regional artefacts to be continued. The end of the project led to changes at structural levels. The 60 people working in this museum were transferred to the newly established Shanghai Regional History Research Group. These experts, mostly historians, soon became associates of the Shanghai Museum with the mission to study relics and artefacts of Shanghai's history. In 1960, the preparatory office of the Shanghai History and Buildings Museum (the antique section) and its storage were merged into the Shanghai Municipal Cultural Relics Management Committee, itself later incorporated into the Shanghai Museum (Chen 2011: 161). In other words, the Shanghai History and Buildings Museum was absorbed into the Shanghai Museum, and the collections of the two museums became intertwined.

Despite these problems, the idea of establishing a history museum in Shanghai continued to circulate, as proved by the sketches by exhibition designer Fei Qinsheng 费钦生, who in 1960 designed a new exhibition plan for the Shanghai History and Building Museum which was supposed to be set up in Culture Square (see Figure 2). It is not clear if this exhibition ever took place or if it remained only a plan (Fei 2012: 14).

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<sup>5</sup> For a list of all the state museums in China divided by provincial jurisdiction, please consult: <https://archive.is/o/Ek4IK/www.sach.gov.cn/module/download/downloadfile.jsp?classid=0&filename=1801091048478071079.xlsx> (Accessed: 11 January 2019).



Figure 2: Proposal for the entrance of the Shanghai History and Buildings Museum by exhibit designer Fei Qinsheng, 1960. The proposal was for the Museum to be based in Culture Square (Fei 2012: 14).

The Cultural Revolution caused deep changes in the structure, exhibition methods, and the collections of Chinese museums. In her recent book, Denise Ho reconstructs the strategies employed by cultural workers to protect the collections of the Shanghai Museum from the Red Guards, but also how authorities used the chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution to appropriate precious objects and books from private owners (Ho 2011). Some cultural relics now exhibited in the SHM, such as the famous bronze lions of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank (HSBC), entered the collection of the Shanghai Museum during the Cultural Revolution, when museum workers saved them from an attack of the Red Guards (Ho 2018: 229).

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, the idea of building a history museum in Shanghai resurfaced. In December 1982, the Shanghai Culture Bureau declared that they were preparing plans for a Shanghai History Cultural Relics Exhibition Centre (*Shanghai lishi wenwu chenlieguan*, 上海历史文物陈列馆), which would use the collections of the previous Shanghai History and Buildings Museum as its foundation and employ the specialists of the Shanghai Regional History. It was temporarily established in the fifth pavilion of the Shanghai Agricultural Exhibition at Hongqiao Road 2268 and it was officially re-opened on 27 May 1984. The exhibition included cultural relics, documents, and pictures for a total of 1300 items covering a temporal arch from antiquity to 1949. It was closed in 1990 when the rental period for the exhibition centre expired.

On 7 July 1991, the Shanghai History and Artefacts Exhibition was renamed Shanghai History Museum (*Shanghai shi lishi bowuguan*, 上海市历史博物馆) and moved to Hongqiao Road 1286, in a warehouse transformed into an exhibition hall in the Song Qingling Cemetery Park. It occupied two floors and covered around 1400 m<sup>2</sup>, while the offices were based in Huaihai Middle Road, much closer to the city centre. In October 1994, the main exhibition ‘Exhibition of the Development of Shanghai Urban Modern History’ (*Jindai Shanghai chengshi fazhan lishi chenlie*, 近代上海城市发展历史陈列) officially opened. It covered the story of Shanghai from 1843 to 1949 in 1500 objects. In 1997, this exhibition was chosen by the National Cultural Relics Bureau as “One of the ten best exhibitions” in the National Cultural Relics Museum System. In March 1993,



however, the rental period of the museum premises expired and the museum closed for lack of funds (Duan 2009). On the suggestion of the Shanghai City Council, some of the items of the museum were used in the Exhibition of the Development of Shanghai Modern History (*Shanghai lishi fazhan chenlie guan*, 上海历史发展陈列馆) mounted in the Pearl Tower in Pudong District. The curators, however, used this exhibition as a commercial initiative and not for research interest (Varutti 2014: 46-47). Commercial or not, the Pearl Tower exhibition contained more than one thousand items of the SHM's collection, among which were some of the most celebrated pieces, such as the HSBC's bronze lions, the wedding palanquin, and the cannon from the Battle of Wusong, just to cite some examples (Niu 2002). Still, to find a site for the Shanghai History Museum remained an unresolved problem. In the meantime, despite lacking an official location, the SHM continued to study, research, and collect artefacts, and collaborated with other museums in the organization of several exhibitions. The month of November 2015 marked a turning point for the destiny of the museum, as the municipal committee decided to open the SHM and Shanghai Revolution Museum under the same address in the former Shanghai Race Club (see Figure 3). The decision might have been an outcome of the new Five-Year Plan (2015-2020) in which 'Cultural Industries' are mentioned as the future pillars of the national economy (Bollo & Zhang 2017: 31).



Figure 3: The Shanghai Race Club, now the building of the SHM/SRHM. Photo by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.

Similarly to the SHM, the story of the Shanghai Revolution Museum (SRM) also started in 1950, when the building which hosted the first official meeting of the CCP in Shanghai was rediscovered and transformed into a memorial hall called the First Party Congress Site (Ho 2018: 25). The original idea was to transform the site into a museum, therefore a preparatory committee for the Shanghai Revolutionary History Memorial Museum (*Shanghai geming lishi*

*jinianguan*, 上海革命历史纪念馆) was founded in January 1952 (Ho 2018: 37). In 1959, the preparatory committee called for the collection of 20 000 revolutionary items, but the economic issues caused by the Great Leap Forward halted the project (Ho 2018: 37). In March 1968, the Shanghai Revolutionary History Memorial Preparatory Committee changed its name into the Chinese Communist Party First National Representative Assembly Memorial. In the meantime, the collection continued to grow, arriving to the astonishing number of 100 000 objects (Ho 2018: 46).

In 1986, the Shanghai Cultural Bureau announced that it “agree[s] to resume the preparation of a location for the Shanghai Revolutionary History Museum,” to make “two brands, but one piece” with the First Party Congress Site (SHM/SRHM 2018: 16). In 1993, the Shanghai Municipal Cultural Relics Management Committee and Shanghai Revolutionary Museum Preparatory Committee were ready to start the works for the establishment of the new exhibitions. On 13 May of the same year, the SRM was officially included in the list of 14 key social projects for the city, but only in 2015 the project became reality as a partner of the SHM.

The union between the Shanghai History Museum and the Shanghai Revolution Museum explains the double name of the institution. The two collections have been merged to create one permanent exhibition covering all the history of Shanghai.<sup>6</sup>

The reasons which pushed to the merger of SHM and the SRM are both ideological and financial. This topic will be discussed in future reports, but here it is worthwhile to briefly discuss the budget of this joint institution. The city of Shanghai yearly releases data about the budgets and finances of its major museums, including the SHM. While not extremely detailed, these documents are precious, as they allow us to understand how the museum is financed and how money is divided among different departments and offices (Shanghai Municipality 2018). The state financial contribution is very relevant, as from spring 2008, most state-run museums have no entry fees, a decision motivated by the wish to increase the numbers of museum visitors throughout the country (Varutti 2014: 34).

According to the public budget, the Shanghai Municipality Local Bureau of Finance is responsible for financing the museum, whose function is to provide academic research into Shanghai’s historical relics, people’s customs, human environment, city changes, and the development of museum studies. The museum is a second-tier institution under the PRC State Administration of Cultural Heritage. In 2018, the year of its reopening to the public, the SHM employed 110 workers on different kinds of contracts. They work in different departments and units: internal affairs offices, personnel department, a financial office, a research office, a display/exhibition unit, an education department, custodian centre, a document Centre, a communication centre, a cultural relics centre, a safety unit, a logistic/safeguard department, the Songze Historical Relics supervision groups, and the Yuan Dynasty Water Gate Historical Relics supervision group (Shanghai Municipality 2018).

In 2018, the total expenditure budget of the SHM was 77,4 million yuan (c. 10 million euro). The public budget was 75,44 million yuan and the great majority of this sum is employed to finance the cultural activities of the museum, although the budget does not provide more details about how the money is spent. This budget also covers the expenses of the Songze Historical Relics Museum (Qingpu district) & the Yuan Dynasty Water Gate History Museum (Putuo district).

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with a professor at the Department of Heritage and Museology at Fudan University and the main designer of the SHM’s permanent exhibition, 7 December 2018.



Besides the permanent exhibitions which are based in the main building, the museum can host at least three temporary exhibitions in its premises at the same time. During my visit in June 2018, the museums hosted several temporary exhibitions: ‘Memory of Shanghai’ (Chinese oil paintings); an exhibition on the life of Party leader and first Communist mayor of Shanghai Chen Yi; an exhibition about the history of the Race Club Premises; and an exhibition about silver works. During my second visit in November 2018, there was an ongoing exhibition about Sun Yat-sen’s wife Song Qingling (1893-1981); an exhibition about CCP’s leaders from Zhejiang; and one on Chaozhou woodworks.

### Colonialism in the Permanent Exhibition

The permanent exhibition of the SHM is divided into two main sections, called ‘Ancient Shanghai and ‘Modern Shanghai.’ The first section covers the history of Shanghai from its inception “6000 years ago” to the First Opium war (1839-1842). The ‘Modern Shanghai’ section deals with the colonial history of the city from the First Opium War to the establishment of the PRC in 1949 (see Table 1). The latter is by far the largest and it occupies two floors of the building. I will provide a more detailed analysis of this exhibition in future reports, here I will just outline its structure and some of its main features.

<b>The Gallery of Modern Shanghai</b>	Unit One: A city in the city
	Unit Two: The rise of industry
	Unit Three: The rise of finance
	Unit Four: A sea of business
	Unit Five: Building the municipal administration
	Unit Six: Maritime rhythm
	Unit Seven: New trends in the metropolis
<b>The Gallery of Revolutionary History</b>	Unit One: The last years of the Qing and the fight against the foreign powers.
	Unit Two: The Xinhai Revolution
	Unit Three: The May Fourth Movement
	Unit Four: The establishment of the CCP
	Unit Five: The northern Expedition and the First United Front between CCP and the Nationalist Party
	Unit Six: The CCP underground
	Unit Seven: The War against Japan
	Unit Eight: The War of Liberation

Table 1: Representation of two galleries and their display units within the ‘Modern Shanghai’ section of the SHM/SRM.

The 'Gallery of Modern Shanghai' and the 'Gallery of Revolutionary History' occupy the third and fourth floors of the SHM. The narrative is Marxist-Leninist in nature: semi-colonialism was one of the obstacles that China had to confront on the way to achieve Communism. The narrative serves to convince the public that foreign occupation was a humiliation for the city. Nevertheless, it acknowledges that the economic development of Shanghai in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was due to its status of open port.

Documents about British plans to conquer Shanghai and memories of the Qing failed attempt to fight the British forces appear in the first room of the Gallery of Modern Shanghai. The exhibition proceeds with the establishment of the foreign concessions in the city. A digital map at the center of the room shows how the city was transformed over and over by the expansion of the foreign concessions (see Figure 4). In the same room one can see valuable historical documents which provide information about the agreements between the Qing authorities and the foreign powers on the establishment of the British, American, and French concessions. After introducing the history of the creation of the foreign settlements, the exhibition takes a thematic approach: the development of industry, banking, infrastructure, commerce, administration etc. are analysed through objects in different sections.

The Gallery of Revolutionary History is organized in a chronological fashion, and it follows the major political actors in the city and people's fight for independence from Western powers, Japanese invaders, and the Nationalist Party until the Liberation and the establishment of the PRC.



Figure 4: The map showing the changes of the size and borders of the foreign concessions in Shanghai. In the background it is possible to see one of the cannons used by the Qing army to fight against the British in Wusong. Photo by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.

## ECHOES Modalities

The exhibition's presentation of the city's colonial history is quite standard for a Chinese museum, but the application of the ECHOES modalities (repression, removal, reframing, re-emergence; Kølvråa 2018) to the case study of the SHM/SRM can allow us to deepen our understanding of how Chinese institutions practice, protect, and perform the city's colonial heritage.

Nowadays, objects and buildings from the colonial era are protected in China, but in the past they were attacked and considered unworthy of protection. The SHM justifies the preservation of some of its more controversial pieces by reframing their history and meaning. Steven and Stitt, the two bronze lions once placed at entrance of the HSBC Bank on the Bund, are a case in point. They welcome visitors in the entrance hall of the SHM and they are among the most popular attractions in the museum (see Figures 5-6). The audio guide shares information about their history: the two statues made their debut in 1923 during the opening of HSBC in Shanghai. In 1941, when the city was occupied by the Japanese Army, Japanese soldiers smelted several bronze statues in the city to produce new weapons, but they spared the two lions. The statues were given to the Shanghai Museum in 1966 and were stored in a warehouse until 1994, when they were exhibited for the first time in the Shanghai History Museum.

The audio guide does a good job at explaining the unique characteristics of these statues and to contemporary visitors the detail of the Japanese army's destruction of other statues sounds like an act of heritage vandalism. However, the audio guide fails to mention that during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) the lions became targets of the iconoclastic violence by the Red Guards. Before the Cultural Revolution, a poem published in a *Wenhui Daily* praised the lions as they "witnessed imperialism, but now belong to the people," but this explanation was not enough for the Red Guards, who wanted to destroy the statues as symbols of imperialist and capitalist forces (Ho 2018: 229). Workers of the Shanghai Museum managed to save the lions from the iconoclasm by storing them in warehouses. The audio guide represses information about the events of the Cultural Revolution, reframing instead the lions as survivors of the assaults of the Japanese army, now described in historiography and propaganda as China's nastiest enemy. The SHM engages in reframing to justify the protection of Shanghai's colonial heritage without necessarily glorifying the action of the colonizers. At the same time, however, it engages in act of repression to hide those historical events that do not fit the redemptive narrative from 'victimization' to 'Liberation' proposed in the exhibition.

This is just an example of the museum's attempt to reframe items to narrate the history of the city. The second report will provide a more detailed analysis of the exhibition through the lenses of the ECHOES modalities.



Figure 5-6: Steven and Stitt were once placed at entrance of the HSBC Building on the Bund, but now welcome visitors to the SHM/SRHM. Photos by: Laura Pozzi, 2018.

## Summary

This first report on the Shanghai History Museum/Shanghai Revolution Museum presented the preliminary results of one of the three case studies within the ECHOES project focusing on city museums and colonial pasts. It aimed at providing information about the colonial history of Shanghai and to introduce the main feature of the museum landscape in the People's Republic of China from the national to the city level. The report then presented the first findings about the history, work, and exhibition of the SHM/SRM, focusing mostly on the history of the development of this institution and the making of its collection. Finally, after an overview of the content of the permanent exhibition, this report also provided a brief example of how the ECHOES modalities can be applied to analyze the museum's reconstruction of the colonial past of the city.

As mentioned in the introduction, this report is written parallel to similarly framed and structured reports on the Amsterdam Museum (Ariese 2019) and the Museum of Warsaw (Bukowiecki 2019). In the following two years of the project, the researchers of ECHOES' Work Package 3 will focus in more detail on the museums and their use of decolonial heritage practices. The second set of reports will focus in greater detail on the various (dis)engagements with colonialism, based on critical assessments of the museums' collections, exhibitions, programs, and events. This second report series will also rely on interviews with museum staff. Finally, the third set of reports will engage predominantly with the receptions of the museums' displays and activities through various visitor studies. Naturally, all of these reports will continue to frame the case studies within a broader context of other heritage practices in the respective cities, at other museums, galleries, in ephemeral heritage events, and within the public space. Thus, the aim is to ultimately collect these nine reports into a qualitative, comparative analysis of the ways in which these city museums work through their cities' colonial pasts and thereby to identify diversified modalities and challenges for the representation of (de)colonial heritage in the contemporary world.

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