Jianchuan Museum Complex

Memory, Ethics and Power in Chinese Private Heritage Entrepreneurship

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I, Lisheng Zhang, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Abstract

This thesis delineates and reflects upon an emerging phenomenon of private heritage entrepreneurship in China, through the examination of the Jianchuan Museum Complex (JMC), the country’s largest private museum project.

Adopting an ethnographic approach, I seek to offer critical insights into how, in the context of state dominance of social remembrance, difficult and contentious histories are addressed through ambiguous and evocative narratives at the Jianchuan Museum Complex. One of my core concerns is to critically understand how different interests, powers, relations and moral commitments are involved and mobilised in this enterprise, and what is implied about the social and political role of the museum, in a relationship with the state that it maintains through constant adjustments and changes.

In doing so, I explore the complexity of the project through multiple aspects of its design and operation. By tracing the personal history of Fan Jianchuan, the founder and director of the JMC, I consider the different social personas he occupies to unpack the moral ethical discourse surrounding a ‘historical responsibility’ to collect and remember ‘national memories’ that he professes through the museum project, as crystallised in the construct of himself as a charismatic public figure.

I present my analysis of the museums in a historicised framework that I call a genealogy of the JMC from its establishment in 2003 to 2015, which demonstrates significant shifts over the course in both its curation and strategical focus. I also draw on my ethnographic experience to address the consulting business which has become a crucial sector in the project’s operation. And I attend to the social life within the JMC pertaining particularly to the tensions between the museum’s position as an ethical project of remembering and a shifting dynamics of power relations in the museum’s management of labour.
Impact statement

This research is an interdisciplinary practice situated at the conjuncture between critical heritage studies, museum studies and Chinese studies. Through investigating the Jianchuan Museum Complex, China’s largest nonstate museum project, this research describes and critically explores an emerging phenomenon of museum-making in China.

China’s recent museum boom has generated an abundance of interest for both academics and museum practitioners. While the existing studies are predominantly focused on the state-led museum and heritage work, this research presents an exemplary yet unique case of nonstate museum practice, and a grounded and detailed scrutiny of the aspects of its design, curation, operation and management. The discussions presented in this thesis provide original insights into the Chinese museum world that will benefit both academic and operational purposes. This research also pursues a critical understanding of the shifting social role of museums and the moral and political implications of museum-making in general. From a methodological point of view, this research suggests both reflections and ways forward for conducting cross-cultural ethnographic study in the fields of heritage and museum studies.
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Notes on translation, consent, measurement and anonymisation

Translation
The quotations in this thesis, if not otherwise specified, are drawn from conversations and interviews conducted during my fieldwork, and their translation, my own. Chinese terms and phrases are romanised via standard pinyin in italicised form, with the exception of Chiang Kai Shek, Kuomintang, and Lien Chan which are presented in their more commonly found versions via Wade-Giles.

Consent
My interviews were only recorded when consent was explicitly given. Informal conversations and discussions were memorised and noted down afterwards.

Measurements
The Chinese currency renminbi is given in the ¥ sign with numbers or as yuan as a word. Pound sterling is given in £ sign. I used the sterling to renminbi exchange rate of one pound to nine yuan. The measurement of the JMC is given in the Chinese unit of Mu 亩. And one mu equals roughly one sixth of an acre.

Anonymization
I used pseudonyms for all my interlocutors referred to in the thesis, except for Mr. Fan Jianchuan. Place names are not anonymised.
Fig. 1 Sichuan Province (Chengdu and Wenchuan)

Fig. 2 Sichuan Province (Chengdu, Yibin, Chongqing and Zigong)
‘We do our best to change what can be changed; but can only adapt to what cannot be changed.’

Fan Jianchuan, Weibo post, 16th November 2019
Chapter 1: Introduction

A visitor’s experience of the Jianchuan Museum Complex (JMC), China’s largest private museum project, begins with an enormous red gantry crane. Acquired from a devastated automobile factory in an earthquake-stricken southwestern city in 2008, the 20-by-12-metre gantry crane serves as an arch, in its overwhelming immensity, that bears the name ‘Jianchuan Museum Complex’ (Jianchuan Bowuguan Juluo), in the handwriting of its founder and director, Mr. Fan Jianchuan. The sheer scale of its entrance distinguishes the JMC from the landscape of its locale, a historic town called Anren in Sichuan Province, southwestern China. Through the gate stands a statue of a gun-holding soldier, standing on top of a 40-ton Second World War Japanese bunker shipped brick by brick from Tianjin, a northern port city some 1850 kilometres away. Behind it, a one-kilometre driveway, lined with giant bamboo towering exuberantly over a narrow footpath on each side, leads further into the inner gate.

Walking along the bamboo-shaded footpath, with nothing but bamboo in sight for approximately ten minutes, conjures a feeling similar to, if not pilgrimage, definitely moving into a separate zone, a compound of 500 mu (82.3 acres)\(^1\), so self-contained and so different from its surroundings that it has been referred to by many as Fan Jianchuan’s ‘independent kingdom’. One of the most enduring memories of my fieldwork is walking through the bamboos into the complex every workday morning, as the ten minutes prepared me, the ethnographic researcher, for my other role as a temporary member of the JMC staff.

At the other end of the shady driveway stands another arch, cast-iron, heavily built, and on each of its four pillars are eight robust Chinese characters protruding from the surface, presenting the motto of the JMC project: ‘Collect war for peace; collect lessons for the future; collect disaster for safety and collect folklore for continuity’ (weile heping shoucang zhanzheng, weile weilai shoucang jiaoxun, weile anning shoucang zainan, weile chuancheng shoucang minsu), which corresponds to the themes of the 30 or so individual

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\(^1\) Mu 

Mu (亩) is a Chinese measurement unit for area. One mu equals roughly 1/6 of an acre.
museums and memorials housed in the complex: the Resistance War against Japan (1931-1945), the Mao Era (1949-1976), the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake and Chinese folk culture in the past hundred years.

As one reaches further into the museum complex, more military symbols come into view, a retired fighter jet sitting not far from the cast iron arch and the tip of a 28-metre long missile emerging just over the complex’s skyline. So do the words and images of director Fan Jianchuan, as he appears on large outdoor advertising billboards, standing in black Mao-style suit with a bright red scarf around his neck, next to the line ‘develop museums with greater, faster, better, and more economical results’ (duo, kuai, hao, sheng de jianshe bowuguan), quoting a Maoist slogan2; or in a close-up portrait, aiming a rifle with the tagline ‘Jianchuan museum plans, crack-shot design’ (Jianchuan cehua, baifabaizhong).

The visitor centre is an enormous tall-ceilinged single-storey building in light grey brick, with a six-by-three-metre screen on the exterior wall looping an introductory film about the JMC. Adjacent to its entrance is a refreshment bar with an indoors display of a collection of cartoon portraits of Fan Jianchuan created and donated by his followers on Weibo, one of China’s largest social media platforms, where he keeps an active and popular profile. Stepping into the visitor centre, one faces the striking presence of a Director’s Manifesto, printed in bold characters in black onto an eight-metre-high white wall:

The idea of the museum complex means to combine museums and related businesses. This is the way of grassroots development and innovation. The museum is the result of a tolerant society and liberal politics. We are the product of our time. Building the museum is difficult, and it is even more difficult to run it. I wish for full support from all the people. A person lives for a hundred years, a piece of paper a thousand, and materials like stone, jade, gold, bronze for ten thousand years. People pass and objects/things stay, forever. Viewing objects at leisure appeases both body and mind. Objects tell stories and let them tell the future.

2 ‘The slogan in question is ‘to go all out, aim high, and build socialism with greater, faster, better, and more economical results’ from the Great Leap Forward campaign led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from 1958 to 1960.’
The strong presence of Fan Jianchuan’s images and thoughts, before the actual museums, is one of the unusual features of the way the JMC is designed. The museums themselves, in their sheer number, size, and hence the amount of time it would take to visit, demonstrate the project’s grandiosity in another dimension. Fan Jianchuan’s claim that it takes at least three days to see all the museums is not an exaggeration, so a ticket to the whole complex, which costs ¥60 (roughly £6.5) is valid for three days. As an entrepreneur, Fan finds that the museum complex should be a ‘supermarket’, one which provides both ‘spiritual and cultural products’ and material products. The idea of a complex (juluo) is therefore that it combines museums, shops and recreational amenities to allow visitors to ‘review history and enjoy life’ (bowu, xiuxian) at the same time. To this end, there are two restaurants, a hostel, a cafe, several shops, and a boating service on the lake within the complex. Whilst the museums charge for their admission, the park itself is free and open to everyone.

Developed since 2003, it is now China’s the most visited and best-known nonstate museum project, which is heavily influenced yet not completely controlled by the government. The JMC is one of the very few museums that have ever been able to address China’s most politically contentious histories and the only one that has done so while achieving economic success and nationwide popularity, including having the town of Anren officially branded the ‘Museum Town of China’ in 2009.

The development of the JMC and Anren is a small but significant segment of China’s ‘explosive’ museum boom and ‘fever’ for cultural heritage over the recent decades, a country boasting its 5354 museums by the end of 2018 (Xinhua 2019), and the world’s highest number of enlisted items of both UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Intangible Cultural Heritage. The development and ramifications of China’s ‘museum boom’ will be treated more fully in Chapter Two, but it should be pointed out here that the ‘boom’ is a highly politicised phenomenon. Its political nature lies not only in its character as an instrument for the state’s promotion of its ‘ideological mainstream’ (zhu xuanlù), as shown by a number of recent researches (Denton 2014; Varrutti 2014; Fiskesjö 2015; Evans and Rowlands 2015; Wang and Rowlands 2017), but also in the ways in which it has become a space where non-official ways of telling the history of the nation have been made possible.
Thesis overview and research questions

With over eight million objects in its collection, from airplanes, missiles, tanks, to Cultural Revolution suicide notes, personal diaries, photo albums; over one million visitors every year to its 30 museums in Anren and over 20 in other places in China dedicated to the 14 years of Resistance War, the 27 years of Mao era and now the 70 years of the People’s Republic, it can seem impossible to define what the JMC is about. It is perhaps best to take its own definition as a point of departure:

As stated on its website, the Jianchuan Museum is a project that claims to restore ‘national memory’ (minzu jiyi) and transmit a sense of ‘patriotic sentiment’ (guojia qinghuai). Its founder Fan Jianchuan claims that it is his ‘dream and duty’ to preserve memories for ‘the nation (minzu), for the country (guojia) and for himself (2013, 3).

It is clear that minzu and guojia are core concepts in the JMC’s narrative. Minzu, on its own, can translate as both nation and ethnicity. The JMC’s usage is associated more closely with the idea of Zhonghua Minzu, or the ‘Chinese nation’ as a united collective subject, under which the other ethnicities in China are subsumed. Evoked by the historian and philosopher Liang Qichao in 1902, the term ‘zhonghua minzu’ portrays China as a single people, and has been used to convey a strong sense of national unity against foreign aggressions from the beginning of the Opium War in 1839 to the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, a period termed officially as the ‘century of national humiliation’ (Carlson 2009). Minzu as a collective subject supposedly transcends political regimes, so the Resistance War history under the rule of the Kuomintang and the Red Age of the PRC are both parts of ‘national memory’.

Combining ‘guo’ – country – and ‘jia’ – home or family – guojia is a highly generic term in its current usage which encompasses, and confuses, as anthropologist Xiang Biao points out, the idea of ‘country’ in a territorial sense, ‘nation’ in terms of ethnic unity, ‘state’ as sovereign polity, ‘government’ as a bureaucratic system and ‘family’ as shared history and a sense of belonging (2010). In a dominantly Han context, ‘minzu’ would sometimes be used interchangeably with ‘guojia’ to indicate an imagined Han Chinese unity.
Both minzu and guojia are also what China’s party state claims to represent. The central tenet of the Communist leadership has been the ‘great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’ (zhonghua minzu weida fuxing), which the General Secretary Xi Jinping places at the heart of his political philosophy of the ‘Chinese Dream’. Since the early 1990s, the top-down patriotic education campaign has worked to enforce the ‘symbiotic relationship’ between the communist party (dang), government (zhengfu), the nation (minzu) and the country (guojia) formed by the state (Carlson 2009, 23).

The National Museum of China’s permanent exhibition since 2010, the Road to Revival, articulates most officially, the ideological construct of the state’s narrative of the nation’s memory\(^\text{3}\). The exhibition focuses on presenting the Chinese Communist Party’s central role of leading the nation through the ‘century of national humiliation’, as stated in its introduction:

> The explorations made by the Chinese people from all walks of life who, after being reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society since the Opium War of 1840, rose in resistance against humiliation and misery, and tried in every way possible to rejuvenate the nation. The exhibition also highlights the glorious history of China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, in which all the ethnic groups joined forces to achieve national independence and liberation and strove to build a strong and prosperous country for the well-being of the people. (Denton 2014b)

This sets the tenor for the official narrative of China’s 20\(^\text{th}\) century history which has been extolled by the vast and still increasing number of state museums across the country. These somewhat ‘staid and stodgy’ institutions form a notable contrast with the rapidly changing Chinese society, which has produced a growing number of private heritage initiatives with diverse collections, narratives and curatorial practices (Denton 2005, 566). Museums are therefore a contested terrain where the right to collect and present national memories is being negotiated.

\(^{3}\) Located right on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the National Museum of China is described as ‘the most official of official spaces’ that articulate the historical narratives by the party state. Apart from the prestige of its location, the Road to Revival exhibition also served as the context where in November 2012, the newly appointed General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Xi Jinping gave the speech where the notion of Chinese Dream, which has been made the ‘ideological core of his administration’ (Denton 2014b).
As its motto suggests, the purpose of the JMC is to evoke an ethical awareness to remember in order to draw lessons from the past for future generations. In Fan Jianchuan’s own words, what he does is ‘sounding the alarm bell’ (qiaozhong) for the nation by salvaging ‘missing’ parts of China’s modern history that have been overlooked and suppressed in the official historical narratives. This is best demonstrated in the museums developed in the early years of the JMC, that are dedicated to memories including the Nationalist Army (rival of the Communists) and war prisoners in Resistance War, different aspects of the Mao Era, including the Cultural Revolution, and controversial issues in the 2008 earthquake. These museums provide spatialised representations of personal, local and national narratives of these histories, relying emphatically on the notion of the ‘objectivity’ of material things, or in other words, the objects’ power to tell history.

All this was made possible by Fan Jianchuan’s industrious collecting in a nongovernmental capacity during the post-Maoist period. Fan views his enterprise as motivated by a sense of ‘historical responsibility’ (lishi zeren) to restore collective memory against the eroding forces of rapid social transformation. The moral impetus originates from his personal experience growing up in Maoist China, which is common among other private collectors and heritage advocates of his generation. Fan started collecting soon after the end of the Cultural Revolution, impelled to remember what the period had brought to himself and his family. Among the early beneficiaries of the economic reform, Fan found success in the business of real estate, yet eventually devoting himself to building museums.

The notion of ‘historical responsibility’ in China’s museum context was first voiced by writer Ba Jin in his famous 1986 essay that calls for a ‘Cultural Revolution museum’ to memorialise the event, an endeavor, he argues, for which ‘every Chinese should take responsibility’ (1988, 381). Ba Jin’s call has evoked a wide and enduring resonance amongst collectors and scholars of the Cultural Revolution. Yang Caiyu, manager editor of the journal Shoucang, (Collecting), reiterates this point in his article in the 2006 special issue on Cultural Revolution collecting, by distinguishing what he calls the ‘red collections’ from the ‘grey collections’ (2006). By ‘red collections’, Yang means the official objects reflecting the ‘positive parts’ of the Cultural Revolution, while the ‘grey collections’ reveal the ‘dark and evil elements’ (Yang 2006). For Yang, ‘grey collecting’ is morally desirable for being able to
pursue an ‘objective take’ on the both the positive and problematic sides of the past (Coderre 2016, 432), which echoes Fan Jianchuan’s emphasis on ‘letting the objects speak’ as one of his curatorial tenets. The value of a collectible, be it rare or mass-produced, therefore lies in the ‘historical meaning’ (lishi yiyì), or ‘historical significance’ (lishi jiazhi) it carries, as the ‘supporting evidence to history’ (lishi de pangzheng).

Collecting the Mao era, however, is seen to involve a certain level of moral ambiguity. China scholar Laurence Coderre, for example, discerns a ‘morally disquieting’ quality of Mao Era collectibles, for to collect, trade, or invest in these artefacts would turn them into subjects of consumption and private ownership, and therefore obliterate their status as evidence or emblems of historical suffering and trauma (2016, 431). The conflation of consumerism and memory also concerns social theorist Michael Dutton, who warns that the emergence of a ‘Mao industry’ could be another example of the ability of the unbeatable and inescapable ‘commodity form’ to ‘transform even an event such as the Cultural Revolution into an item that can be enjoyed’, a commodified simulacrum that ‘makes the past unthinkable as a horrendous event by remembering it nostalgically and by offering it to moderns as a light-hearted form of distraction’ (2005).

And yet Fan’s discourse of ‘historical responsibility’ could nonetheless be justified by ‘a shift from the logic of private ownership and consumption to one of addressing and informing an audience’ (Coderre 2016, 434). In this sense, it is precisely the duty towards the nation, as a generic collective of ‘the Chinese’, that grants moral eminence to Fan’s endeavour. In the meantime, this is accentuated by Fan’s claim of his personal devotion to honour his father, a Resistance War veteran, through his museums, which resonates strongly with the notion of filial piety, another essential moral tradition in China. Here, the fact that the collections and the museums are privately owned only adds to the moral gravitas as it means that the collector-owner is doing it for the public good at the cost of his own wealth. Fan’s promise to posthumously donate all his museums and collection to the local government finally reaffirms the nature of his enterprise as a service to the country. Therefore, the more collection the museum acquires and the more visitors it attracts, the greater its contribution is. Here, the ‘moral problematic’ of private ownership are not only palliated by the founder’s historical responsibility, but also reworked to provide positive connotation of self-sacrifice and altruism.
My attempt to understand the JMC begins with this discourse of historical responsibility, which I argue to be its moral cornerstone that makes it both politically acceptable and ethically admirable. Fan engages a role that shares with the state the responsibility to safeguard and transmit China’s modern and contemporary history by highlighting the notions of *guojia* and *minzu*, whereas the more political-sounding term *zhengfu*, ‘government’, is notably absent from the JMC’s narrative. The alliance with *guojia* and *minzu* and the distance from *zhengfu*, can be seen as an effort to purify the project’s moral cause, by rhetorically minimising the involvement of political power and thus connoting a stance of independence as nonstate enterprise. Meanwhile, its discourse of ‘serving the nation’ coheres, at least at first glance, with the state’s rhetoric of national rejuvenation and patriotism, and therefore moderates the difficulty of some of the alternative memories that Fan has chosen to address and has earned government recognition and support from the very beginning.

My ethnographic experience affords me the knowledge to critically engage the JMC’s professed discourse of ‘historical responsibility’ by exploring the grounded realities in its process of development, which involves various commitments, interests and changes. My intention, however, is not to suggest that the notion of historical duty is a facade or stunt, but to show precisely that the picture is far more complex and fluid. Rather than asking why Fan started the project (though a highly popular subject for speculation and gossip among employees and commentators), my central concern is how it has been developed and how it works. I believe from the ‘how’ questions the ‘why’ question could be illuminated.

For this purpose, a key component of my work is to compile a ‘genealogy’ of the JMC, by exploring the museums in the context of their own history of coming into being. Being aware of the concept of genealogy’s association with the work by Michel Foucault, I choose the term to evoke the transformative quality of the JMC project, both in the way it presents alternative narratives of Chinese history, and also the changes the project itself has undergone over the years. Fan Jianchuan is the central character of the genealogical narrative, as the transformative energy of the JMC derives mainly from his political-economic power and charismatic authority, which makes him a *renwu*, a person-thing, somebody who is important enough to be treated as a phenomenon or a distinctive entity (Feuchtwang, Rowlands and Wang 2010, 913). Anthropologist Wang Mingming calls *renwu* ‘larger human
containers of socio-cosmological universes’, who distinguish themselves from ‘everybody’ and become protagonists of history (Feuchtwang, Rowlands and Wang 2010, 915).

The idea of genealogy also has to do with my own participation and the transformation I witnessed of my role from a stranger at the beginning to eventually being accepted as a member of the museum team. My involvement in the JMC as a genealogical agent allowed me to observe and engage a set of themes and issues that best manifest the JMC’s transformative potential and reflect wider socio-political changes in China today.

One crucial theme has been the moral-ethical aspect of museum practice, as manifested in the decisions about what historical subjects to address and what particular items to collect and display, which concerns the purpose of museum and the motivation for transmission. With its earlier museums on the Resistance War and the Cultural Revolution, the Jianchuan Museum initially built its reputation by recognising and commemorating neglected or suppressed pasts as a moral project about truth-telling and historical justice. The fact that the project’s early museums have received highly positive responses and acquired, in the words of a former employee, abundant ‘moral resource’ (daoyi ziyuan) from the public, to the extent that the museums and memorials have been treated as spaces of an efficacious or enchanting quality, as I will show in Chapter Four, that is, able to make peace with loss and bring about moral wellbeing (Butler 2016; Byrne 2004).

Adding another layer to its moral complexity, the JMC presents itself in a narrative of the redemption-rescue of national memory, depending very much on the public image of one self-sacrificial individual, Fan Jianchuan. Since the early years of the JMC, Fan has been held as an advocate for the public, or the vernacular for showing memories that are alternative to the official narratives (Huang 2006). The political contentiousness implied in the subjects of the JMC’s early museums made the Wall Street Journal go so far to call Fan a ‘challenger’ ‘taking on Beijing’, who keeps pushing boundaries to test the censors’ tolerance (2016). Yet a discourse of heritage morality like this must have both its ‘benevolent and malevolent’ sides, as Beverley Butler points out by using Jacques Derrida’s notion of the ‘pharmakon’ as both cure and cause of illness (2011). Therefore, questions should be and will be asked about this moral rhetoric of historical duty the JMC project advocates.
Nevertheless, in the context of a nationwide top-down heritage boom, the JMC has demonstrated that a non-state initiative could exist and even prosper. When we look closely at its trajectory, as the chapters will show, the boundaries between ‘state’ and ‘nonstate’ and ‘government’ and ‘private’ are blurred, and the two spheres have never been separate from the beginning, but tightly brought together into a social space of the *minjian*, ‘people’s realm’, which, as I shall argue, the JMC occupies and, to an extent, defines, where alternative heritage moralities and justices could be pursued by mobilising evocative nonofficial narratives of history.

Over the years, and within a shifting political and economic context, both the JMC’s museum practice and other operations have undergone significant changes. As noted already the project began by addressing some politically sensitive memories in its museums built in the early period from 2005 until around 2010. Its development since then, however, has displayed a more explicit conformity to the official narrative in curation and deeper entanglements in business with government agencies. This was accompanied by acts of adulation and self-censorship. Certain exhibits were withdrawn, and previous museum plans abandoned due to change of political environment. The shift culminates in the 2018 construction and opening of the Chongqing Jianchuan Museum, a co-invested venture with the local government that I will introduce in Chapter Six.

As a cultural economic enterprise, the JMC involves not only Fan Jianchuan, but also the staff of the museum, the population of a museum town, and Fan’s over three million followers on social media, the over ten million visitors who have set foot into the museums, and many more who have read or heard about it. In geographical terms, it started off by transforming the locality of a small town in southwest China and has continued mapping its influence onto different sites of memory across the country and reaching out for a wider global stage (so far Europe and the United States). While its motivation derived, at least partially, from Fan’s filial relation with his parents (particularly his father), its realisation has depended on his wealth and increasingly upon his political connections with different levels along the government hierarchy, that now reach all the way to the very top of China’s political authority, President Xi Jinping.
The development of the JMC as a cultural and commercial enterprise presents new configurations of heritage, politics and commerce, which further complicates the role of heritage in creating a market for a cultural economy which is largely sustained by clients who are local governments and recipients of state money. To understand this, we have to see the JMC as embedded in a broader social process where, as Jing Wang argues in her exploration of China’s post-1992 construction of ‘leisure culture’, ‘political, cultural and economic capital’ ‘emerge as interchangeable terms of value’ (2001, 70). Here, not only ‘the cultural is becoming economic and the economic is becoming cultural’ (Jameson 2000), this ‘collapse and convertibility of cultural capital into economic capital’ has been inflicted and sustained by the state’s political power through the ‘discursive construct’ and ‘the burgeoning policies of cultural economy (wenhua jingji)’ (Wang 2001, 71).

The museum is a significant component of the cultural industry. If this is an economy that includes the production of museum knowledge, the question of who actually produces the knowledge and how, are worthy of inquiry. While the role of the director is crucial, the museum workers are all too often anonymised and represented collectively, so we do not get to see the issues of labour and management behind the scenes. I believe, and will show why, that the labour relations in the JMC matter as much as its curatorial philosophy. The two together, and probably their discrepancies, may provide a much more grounded and comprehensive understanding of its operation.

In light of the above issues, I use the term ‘Jianchuan Museum Complex’ to denote the project’s unusual degree of hybridity of interests, commitments and heritage logics. It is intended to convey the double meaning that the Jianchuan Museum is a compound of museums and other undertakings, and that it is a still unfolding process that involves a dynamic variety of interests, relations and strategies across different locations. Following Sharon Macdonald’s concept of ‘memory complex’, I use the word ‘complex’ with reference to the idea of assemblage, to stress the active and evolving status of the JMC, an ongoing process of assembling, ‘made up, variously, of constituent practices, affects and materialisations’ (2013, 7). Though this assembling is largely yielded by the museum director Fan Jianchuan, and yet there are also external (or ‘magical’, in the assemblage terminology) agencies, and contingent factors at play (Latour 2005, 68).
I therefore begin my journey to critically understand the complexity of the JMC, by considering the following sets of questions:

1) What kinds of heritage value and morality does the JMC profess and how are they constructed and transmitted?

2) What resources, powers and techniques have been mobilised to sustain the JMC project, morally, economically and politically? And how could the project’s social role be understood in the context of its strategical changes over the course of its existence?

Additionally, Iris Zhang, in her MA dissertation based on her observation of the early development of the JMC from 2005 to 2008, proposed the question, that whether the JMC is a painstaking endeavour by a ‘hero of China’ to safeguard the nation’s past, or, yet another profit-oriented enterprise plotted by a cultural entrepreneur. This enigmatic complexity of the JMC and Fan Jianchuan, has given my research a riddle-solving quality from its beginning. This question stayed with me throughout my fieldwork and for a fair bit of my writing-up period. I found my view of Fan constantly in oscillation between the two possible understandings, while also being influenced and reconfigured by the new voices and perspectives I encountered.

**Methodology**

The questions I outlined above require a grounded and bottom-up approach, which necessitates the ethnography as the main methodology of my research. Participant observation and ethnographic interviewing were the primary methods for data collection, complemented by a survey of primary textual materials and secondary literatures. Anthropologically informed methods have been widely applied in understanding local conceptualisations of cultural heritage (Butler 2011; MacDonald 2013). Becoming closely involved in local heritage practices through frequent interactions with leading individuals provides a valuable opportunity to gain contextual information and make sense of the ethical reasoning of the participants. Having consulted a number of studies on the workings of museums (Schneider 1998, Burnett and Reeve 2001), two texts in particular have provided
invaluable inspiration for my fieldwork: Richard Handler and Eric Gable’s study of Colonial Williamsburg *The New History in an Old Museum* (1997) and Sharon Macdonald’s *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum* (2002). Handler and Gable’s work, with its excellent use of the museum’s archives and other sorts of documents demonstrated the power of discourse analysis in uncovering an institution’s character and ethos, and inspired me to pay attention to and pursue persistently textual materials from the museum which enabled the chronological structure of my ‘genealogy’ chapters. Sharon Macdonald’s detailed and honest account of her following the making of the ‘Food for Thought’ exhibition at the Science Museum set a great model for me to cut through the ‘familiar and mundane’ office life and engage the museum as a social world on a deeper level (2003, 10).

My own research started in the end of 2014 and early 2015, with two brief visits to the site where I discovered an initial group of local contacts. Building on that, a period of preliminary fieldwork was carried out in Anren from April to August 2015, with the intention to acquire general information of the museum project in terms of its history, locality, operation, and map out key stakeholders related to the project and local tourism development. During this period, through previous contacts I managed to work as a voluntary worker in the curatorial team of the museum which enabled me to interact with staff members on a routine basis and meet Mr. Fan Jianchuan on different occasions. Interaction with guides and visitors was another important source of information. My position as a PhD researcher provided me with certain convenience and opportunities to have access to information. As I will present in greater detail in Chapter Three, some local people I met respected me as a research student and showed interest in what I was doing. I also interviewed local residents, entrepreneurs, officials and journalists. The interviews were mainly kept in open-ended and semi-structured forms so as to allow contingent discursive interpretations and accommodate topics and questions that arose under specific circumstances.

The preliminary fieldwork also revealed certain limits and challenges for my ethnography. As an institutional ethnographer, I took work activities as my ‘entry point’ to the museum’s social life (Devault 2006). To gain access to the museum’s work processes, the first challenge was establishing trust and rapport with the staff members and Mr. Fan and letting my status evolve from an ‘accepted outsider’ to a ‘trusted outsider’ (Bucerius 2013). This proved to be a daunting experience which involved a great deal of sitting in the office, hoping
to be given something to do without knowing what to expect. Over that few months, my engagement with the museum work progressed slowly from proofreading captions in English to sitting in weekly staff meetings. Mr. Fan acknowledged my presence by allowing me to have lunch and supper with the staff members in the museum canteen during the week, and even offered me a room in the complex. However, I did not get to see Fan much apart from in staff meetings and public events throughout this period and was not granted any opportunity to interview him. My ‘colleagues’ treated me politely while maintaining their distance over this period. Given Fan’s influence and power, most staff members I interviewed chose to give me nothing but complementary remarks about him, which was not a surprise and concurred with the result of my preliminary survey of published interviews, articles and books about him. Most staff members would talk carefully and self-consciously about Fan and the company even in private conversations, while visitors or local residents’ opinions were largely shaped by the public image Fan has quite successfully created. As will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three, it was not until I changed my strategy and tried to engage my colleagues in their off-hours that I began to hear different opinions and narratives.

The second challenge concerned studying visitor response with quantitative methods such as questionnaire survey, which I made two attempts, one in May 2015 and the other in May 2016, during my second period of fieldwork. The difficulty derived not only from the sparseness of the complex but also the mobility of its visitors, which made collecting questionnaires difficult. Secondly, my involvement with the museum’s curatorial work meant that my presence was expected at the meetings that took place in the staff office and Fan’s office, which made it impossible for me to conduct surveys regularly. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, was that most of the visitors that I approached were not familiar with the act of research in a museum and appeared confused and some suspicious by a request for filling out a form from a self-claimed ‘researcher’, who could not, at either time, provide proof of his identity as a staff member. For each of my two attempted surveys, I handed out 200 questionnaires and less than 100 were recalled on both times. The recalled forms were filled selectively.

Retrospectively, it would not be impossible to improve my survey method, if I were able to get more assistance from the museum’s staff in the ticket office and the guides/interpreters.
However, my involvement with the museum’s made it clear to me that ethnographic work was my priority and a visitor survey was neither practical nor the focus of my study, which I therefore did not pursue any further. But my unsuccessful attempt at quantitative visitor survey was itself an interesting finding, which provided insights into the way the design and function of the JMC and suggested that ‘visiting a museum’ may mean something different to many, and possibly the majority of JMC’s visitors, than in Euromerican societies. Also, the museum had its own visitor survey method, in the form of ‘visitor feedback’ books by the exit of every individual museum, which proved to be more practical and effective. These books of feedback were collected monthly, and important ones would be picked out and reported to Fan, and then circulated among all members of staff. These selected feedbacks were a main source for my understanding of visitors.

After my PhD upgrade in March 2016, I started my second period of fieldwork in May 2016 for eleven months. Fan took my return as a sign of commitment and involved me further in the museum’s work as a member of the curatorial team and let me participate in making a few exhibitions and consulting projects. Following a more ‘emic’ perspective (Geertz 1973) I adjusted my methods according to these changes and shifted my focus onto the JMC’s consulting business and the internal dynamics of its operation, main themes explored in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, which proved to be worthwhile and meaningful perspectives that allowed me to move beyond the museum’s professed moral discourse, and get into the grounded reality of the heritage practice, which is something that I have aimed for from the beginning of this research.

This deeper level of engagement also meant that my role as a PhD student from a UK university continued to be something of interest. My job moved from not only proofreading of English captions, interpreting for Fan when he met foreign guests, which happened regularly, almost monthly, to representing the JMC in the 2016 Best in Heritage Conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia, and giving a talk on Fan’s behalf when he could not make it. My PhD identity was also exploited symbolically, as I was brought on business meetings for consulting projects where Fan would introduce me as ‘Dr. Zhang’, or ‘a PhD that works for me’.

My analytic approach to the museums combines focused examination of a selected number
of museums, narrated in a historicised account of their development. As already noted, I call this a genealogical approach, which was made possible by my textual research into documents and archival data acquired from the museum. Among these, two internal documents were particularly useful: the Jianchuan Chronicle (*Jianchuan dashiji*), an internal record of the museum’s key events from 2003, and the JMC work brief (*gongzuo jianbao*), a monthly summary of the museum’s events sent to a number of provincial, municipal and county government officials and agencies as well as the United States Consul in Chengdu, other museums and research institutions.

Another extremely useful material was the museum’s monthly internal work reports (*shuzhi baogao*), that all employees were required to submit to get feedback from Fan and senior management, then internally circulated. Reading the work reports proved to be a great way to learn about the museum’s history, and also its corporate culture and management style. At the beginning I was only allowed to read the reports as they were circulated at the end of every month. When I asked Mr. Wang, the museum’s Director of Administration, if I could look at the previous years’ work reports, my request was met with hesitation. Wang did not say no but said instead he had to ‘look for them’. I mentioned this casually a couple of times soon afterwards and was told that the ‘search’ was still in progress. After I had been working full-time with the museum team for a few months, I tried again, and this time he simply took a pile of previous reports from one of the filing cabinets behind his desk and handed them to me, without saying anything else.

Above was one of the things that made me realise, that the process of positioning myself in the ‘field’, in my case the museum office, was one of establishing a relationship of trust and reciprocity with the employees. Here, the strangeness or unfamiliarity did not manifest itself in explicit difference in race or language, but in unspoken rules and a rigid politeness from my ‘colleagues’. In my preliminary fieldwork, and the first couple of months of the second period, though being physically there, I felt isolated as outsider by a sense of secrecy in whatever everyone else was doing. Thankfully, because Anren is a very small town and many of my colleagues lived locally during the week, we did have much time to spend together, both on and off work, so that I learned to laugh at people’s jokes and began to know my place at the lunch table.
This process of settling in provided me with abundant opportunities for conversations with my co-workers. As I realised soon enough, before I had even made myself known to them, it was silly to ask for their comments on the JMC and Fan Jianchuan, or invite them to engage with me in an ‘interview’, cailang, which in Chinese most people would associate immediately with journalism. Employees were cautious about saying anything other than compliments about Fan because of their dependence on him. I tried to create an informal environment for conversation out of workplace, by inviting a few of my co-workers to tea or drinks at my place after work. I maintained the casual atmosphere of the conservations and let my guests lead the talk. Interestingly the topics were never far from Fan Jianchuan and the museum, which they felt less restrained to talk about in a more relaxed environment. My knowledge of the details of the museum exhibitions, curatorial logics and stories behind the choice of displays and the design of the space, were mostly gathered from this process through my conversations with the museum staff and the internal materials, including exhibition outlines, photographs and administrative records and so on that they provided, usually with implicitly granted consent.

They also showed a curiosity about what I wanted to do, asking me about my research plans and methods, and more difficult questions like ‘what exactly do you want to do?’, to which I could only quite honestly give rather vague and unsatisfying answers. My life as a student abroad also interested them, and they seemed keen to compare the aspects such as social welfare, education, food and politics in China and the UK. These evening rendezvous in my small rented courtyard helped me establish a relationship of certain level of friendliness and trust with my colleagues and reaffirmed my belief that the social world of the museum is of crucial importance and something that my research should reflect upon. While the majority of my interviews were done in conversations, loosely-structured and informal, there were also formal ones, longer, structured and recorded, that I did towards the end of my second period of fieldwork, with people I had grown to know quite well, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In terms of textual material, in addition to what I mentioned already, Fan’s 2013 autobiography, Slave to the Great Museum (Da Guan Nu), has been an invaluable source of information about Fan’s personal history, particularly his childhood during the Cultural Revolution and his years as a soldier and later as the vice mayor of Yibin, his hometown. In
addition to that I consulted his speeches, published writings, and the texts he wrote for the exhibitions, which resourced his understanding of history, museum making and China’s cultural industry.

After my second period of fieldwork from April 2016 to May 2017, continued research was carried out from a distance based principally on interviews via WeChat, China’s most popular social media and messaging app. These follow-up interviews verified unclear issues during my fieldwork and kept me up to date about the development of the JMC. In 2018, I paid two follow-up visits to the opening of the Chongqing Jianchuan Museum in June, and the Museum of the Economic Reform in September.

**Thesis structure**

Following this introduction, in Chapter Two I seek to situate my research in the socio-political context along with the academic discussions on museum and heritage in China. I do so by examining a series of themes and concepts, including the three keywords, memory, ethics and power, that have been my theoretical parameters since the research’s beginning, as well as the themes of complexity and the minjian, the people’s realm, which have been identified from my ethnographic data.

From Chapter Three onwards I unpack the Jianchuan Museum ‘Complex’ by presenting and discussing the data I gathered from textual research and fieldwork. Chapter Three is concerned with the beginning of my fieldwork and the way I came to know Fan and the museum team. In Chapter Four and Chapter Five I provide a genealogical account of the development of the JMC from its construction in 2003 to 2015 when I began my fieldwork and discuss in detail a set of museum projects that I select as the most relevant to my research questions. The genealogical approach informs a longer historical perspective from which the changes and dynamics in the project’s relationship with the state authoritative power could be seen.

Extending from the genealogy, in Chapter Six, I rely largely on my ethnographic experience of working with the museum team as participant observer on a series of consulting projects.
I demonstrate how consulting work has become a crucial sector of the JMC’s operation by unpacking the museum planning and making processes. This also addresses how the consulting business model, which relies heavily on government agencies as clients, has been applied inwards in the latest projects within the JMC. Chapter Seven then shifts to engage the employees’ narratives. Focusing on the issue of museum labour, I seek to shed light on the power dynamics within the social world of the JMC and in particular, the changing relationship between the museum’s curatorial team and Fan Jianchuan. After reiterating the main arguments of this thesis and outlining possible orientations for future research, I conclude by exploring further the idea of minjian as an evocative social space.

Original contribution to knowledge

This research is situated at the conjuncture between critical heritage studies, museum studies and Chinese studies. Through exploring an emerging phenomenon of museum-making in China, I engage the museum and heritage literatures and draw on work from other areas of anthropology, history and philosophy, which is true to the interdisciplinary nature of the three research fields I contribute to.

China’s recent museum boom has generated an abundance of research interest, but the existing studies tend to focus predominantly on state museums and exhibitions. As arguably the most distinguished non-state heritage project in China, the Jianchuan Museum has attracted media and scholarly attention, and has appeared in a number of news articles, academic journals and museum surveys. And yet, a holistic study of the project itself has yet to be informed. This thesis therefore makes an original contribution to existing knowledge about China’s museum practice, as well as to the broader study of the social roles of museums and museum-making in the contemporary world.

The JMC presents an extremely complicated assemblage of different memories, narratives and objects, as well as economic interests, political powers and moral commitments. As such, it is both unique but also emblematic of the ongoing dynamics of the Chinese museum world in general, in that it addresses how remembering and commemoration as a form of social justice is achievable and possible, in highly commercialised terms mediated both by
state top-down construction, and by unofficial initiatives. It is the tension between these two dimensions of the JMC which my thesis is set to explore.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Following an overview of the key themes and the structure of this thesis, this chapter is designed to situate the Jianchuan Museum Complex in the context of the tendencies and developments of museum and heritage in China, alongside broader academic discussions on relevant theoretical issues, including the dynamics between the official and nonofficial representation of memory and the politics and ethics of remembering. Drawing on literature from anthropology, museology, history, cultural heritage, memory studies and Chinese studies, I examine the three keywords of this thesis: memory, power and ethics that formulate my analytical framework and address the key themes that have stemmed out of my ethnography. As a cross-cultural study of cultural heritage, however, it is necessary for me to begin by examining how the concept of cultural heritage is articulated in the Chinese context both linguistically and institutionally.

The ideas of ‘museum’ and ‘heritage’ in China have a not long yet idiosyncratic trajectory of development. Through a recourse to the traditional (pre-modern) Chinese sense of the past, I will demonstrate how this concept, as a fairly recent European import, has been translated, interpreted and re-appropriated, resulting in salient transformation in the ways people conceive and behave toward the past and its material embodiment. That established, I contend that the Chinese heritage conception and practice are presently caught in a situation orchestrated by two concomitant movements: the nationalistic project of cultural development and the expansion of a market-oriented economy. The former, by exploiting the UNESCO’s universalist formulation of heritage value, supports the state’s political legitimacy. The latter, driven by the state economic strategy, has bred a dawning cosmopolitanism embraced by the Chinese nouveau riche and middle class, incorporating China into the global process of consumerism and commodification of heritage. Non-state actors involved themselves in response to the domestic and global tendencies.
Articulating heritage in China

The distinction between the traditional Chinese culture of antiquity and its counterpart in European (Western) societies has received abundant scholarly attention. It is well accepted that the Chinese way of preserving and transmitting values of the past depends much more on literacy and documentation than physical remains, which results in a peculiar phenomenon that the culture’s spiritual continuity is paralleled by a relative scarcity of material (monumental) manifestation. Some attribute this to a different sense of historicity by pointing out that the ‘common Western defiance of mortality’ by ‘erecting monumental buildings meant to last forever’ has hardly been attempted in China (Buruma 2013). Mote draws on the 11th Century and early 20th Century foreign visitors’ writings on Suzhou city to illustrate the absence of ancient ruins in the urban landscape and that the place’s ‘statue of antiquity’ had been in constant reparation, destruction and rebuilding (1972, 49). His contention is that China has ‘a different attitude toward the ways of achieving the enduring monument’ and that the Chinese ‘link’ with its past is to be found in ‘words’ rather than ‘stones’ (1972, 20).

In lieu of abiding monuments and architecture, objects of certain categories were treated as carriers of moral value and medium of social relations in China’s rich history of antiquarianism beginning in the 11th Century and Wenwu (literally meaning ‘cultural objects’) is the term that has been commonly (mis)used as the equivalent of ‘cultural heritage’ in Chinese until this day.

The term wenwu has its origin in Zuo Zhuan, or the Chronicle of Zuo, an ancient narrative history written in the fourth century BCE, in which it referred to ‘the ritual system in the imperial court and the maintenance of a hierarchical relationship among people’; its meaning was later extended to ‘objects that were used in the ritual system to maintain the permanence of social relationship’, such as jade and bronzes, symbolise ‘the political power of the emperor’. In Tang and Song dynasties (seventh through thirteenth centuries) the meaning of wenwu was ‘expanded to cover ancient objects’ (2007 266).

When ‘museum’ was introduced into China by Western missionaries and governments in the 19th Century, it is a profoundly modern concept as in its Western context (Cheng 2010,
Claypool 2005, Puga 2012). Most notably, early entrepreneurs and philanthropists (usually from the background of gentry class or literati) pioneered China’s museum movement. In 1905, the first domestically conceived museum was established by the industrial entrepreneur Zhang Jian, after his previous petitions for national and provincial museums to be built by the imperial government had failed (Claypool 2005), (which points towards the struggle between reform and revolution faced by Zhang Jian and many of his contemporaries in the early decades of 20th Century). Nevertheless, the museum was recognised by both reformists and revolutionaries as a vital instrument for the civilisation of the public, and a site of technical/scientific enlightenment where the future of China as modernised nation could be envisioned (Claypool 2005, 570).

During the Republican Era (1912-1949), the term guwu (ancient objects) replaced wenwu as the official term for cultural heritage, officially including the first formal legislation on cultural heritage, the 1930 Law on the Preservation of Ancient Objects (Wang and Rowlands 2017). After 1949, all cultural properties and institutions were nationalised under the communist leadership and wenwu was brought back to be the official term for historical remains. In 1949 the Bureau of Cultural Relics (Wenwu Ju) was established on the Ministry of Culture (Wenhua Bu) as the highest administrative agency of cultural heritage. During the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the agency languished amidst the nationwide campaign against the ‘Four Olds’ - ‘old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits’ - which led to a massive destruction of historic objects, built heritage and cultural traditions. In 1973, the agency was resurrected as the State Cultural Relics Enterprises Management Bureau (Guojia Wenwu Shiye Guanli Ju) and in 1988 renamed as the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (Guojia Wenwu Ju), or SACH.

In 1982, the state issued the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Wenwu Baohu Fa) and in 1985, China ratified the International Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. It was in this process, that the term wenhua yichan, a more literal translation of ‘cultural heritage’, was introduced, with government’s effort to promote its cultural heritage on the global stage by further subscribing to the UNESCO standards. Therefore, the term wenhua yichan is adopted predominantly in policy and legislative terminologies, for instance, ‘intangible cultural heritage’ (fei wuzhi wenhua yichan), and also translates ‘cultural heritage’
as a subject of academic study, as in cultural heritage studies (wenhua yichan yanjiu). Whereas wenwu, is used widely in the contexts of museum, antiquity and archaeology, to refer to physical remnants of the past and material evidence of memory (jiyi).

**Official memories and authorised heritage discourse**

In the JMC (jiyi), memory is the most unequivocally highlighted of the three key concepts I have laid out. As I noted already, the JMC’s aspiration to ‘safeguard national memories’ indicates an understanding of memory in a collective sense. The term memory (jiyi) permeates the museum’s exhibitions, publications and by Fan Jianchuan himself, hence a much more favoured trope than history and heritage in the museum’s discourse. Considering the issue of social memory presents two imperatives for this study, which are the need, first, to view memory as a practice of meaning-making instead of a thing; and second, to situate the understanding the memory-making process of the JMC in a broader memory-scape of China. Drawing mainly on memory and heritage studies literature, I begin with a conceptual overview of ‘memory’ as an analytical category and focus particularly on the shift towards the view of memory as productive practice. In so doing, I mobilise these theoretical constellations to delineate the broader memory-scape(s) of China the JMC is embedded in. I will introduce the emerging practices, changing policies and ongoing dynamics in memory-making in the Chinese society, to provide a socio-cultural context for the emergence and development of the ‘historical responsibility’ discourse I identified previously.

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the notion of ‘collective memory’ has been abundantly explored not only as a topic of research but also a broad and versatile analytical category by scholars from a number of social science disciplines. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is widely regarded as the founding father of collective or social memory studies, who connected the Durkheimian idea of collective memory with social groups, arguing that collective memory is ‘socially framed’ (Misztal 2003, 51). In his landmark work *Social Frameworks of Memory*, Halbwachs makes the distinction between ‘autobiographical memory’ – the recollection of an individual's lived experience – and ‘historical memory’, which refers to public representations of shared events, pertaining
closely to the formation and continuation of a collective identity (157).

The expansion of memory studies was propelled by the momentum of widespread practices of preservation, commemoration and other forms of memory work in the late twentieth century, guided by ‘a feverish obsession with not forgetting’ (Harrison 2013; Huyssen 2003). Richard Terdiman traces its origin to an enduring ‘memory crisis’ since the beginning of modernity, an ‘abyss in time’ in Western culture that has ruptured its involvement with its past (1993, 3). The late-modern period in Euro-American societies is marked by this increasing anxiety caused by the fear of amnesia, of the failure of cultural transmission, that has brought about a flourishing variety of heritage projects, sufficient to have turned Europe into a ‘memoryland’ or ‘a set of memorylands’ (Macdonald 2013). Concerned scholars have posed the question whether there is a ‘surfeit of memory’ in the West or an obsession with heritage preservation (Maier 1993; Holtorf 2006; Ricoeur 1999).

Arguments have been made that at the heart of the matter is the instrumentalisation of memory and heritage by dominant powers for present interests (Appadurai 1996; Schwartz 1982; Olick 2008). Sociologist Barbara Misztal identifies this perspective as the ‘presentist’, or ‘constructivist’ approach to social remembering, alongside the other two strands of theoretical engagement: the popular memory approach and the dynamics of memory approach (2003). A key text here is The Invention of Tradition (1983) whereby Hobsbawm and Ranger famously demonstrated that many traditions which supposedly form people’s historical understandings are not inherited but ‘invented, constructed and formally instituted [through] repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (1983, 1). Heritage critic Laurajane Smith famously coines the term ‘authorised heritage discourse’, or the AHD, the ‘aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations “must” care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generations for their “education”, and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past’ (2006, 29). The AHD is embodied not only in the ‘lieux de mémoire’, the concrete ‘spaces, gestures, images and objects’ where memory crystallises (Nora 1989, 9), but also in ‘bodily practices’ and performed rituals that facilitate remembrance in a society (Connerton 2008). As most of memorialising devices are constructed by ‘official’ agencies, vis-a-vis political authorities, there is a significant overlap between the AHD and what anthropologist Jing Jun calls ‘official memory’ (1996). The politics in the representation of
the past is a key issue in memory and heritage studies that has been abundantly discussed, and the way in which a ‘social autobiography’ – how a society remembers itself – is constructed and mediated involves a politics of remembering that is inexplicably related to power (Schmidt 2008, 197).

Official, or authorised, remembering has been a dominant force in China’s mnemonic landscape. As I noted in the previous section, since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese state has embarked on a national movement to commemorate the revolutionary past and made systematic efforts to restore cultural heritage through policies and legislation. From 1978 to 1985, China’s museum number grew at average annual growth rate of 11.8% (Li 2006). Despite the growing concern with the rapidity of museum development and calls for improvement of quality in the late 1980s, the Ninth Five Year Plan and Long-term Prospect for Museum Development set the goal of 2500 museum for 2010 (2006). After acceding to the International Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1985, China enlisted in 1987 its first six world heritage sites.

Since the 1990s, China entered a period of rapid development of state museums and memorial sites to express the official narratives of history (Denton 2014a, 21). Over the past 15 years or so, the country has had around 200 new museums open every year. All Chinese museums are under the oversight of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH). As the main authority in the field of heritage, SACH also supervises thousands of historical sites, memorials and landscapes registered as ‘key cultural relics protection units’ (zhongdian wenwu baohu danwei). The official heritage and museum projects are implemented in a top-down manner by local authority with the endorsement of, and in collaboration with their corresponding local level SACH branches. By the end of 2018, the number of museums in China totalled 5354, over 70% of which were developed by the state (Xinhua 2019). To expand its global influence, China continues to embrace UNESCO’s ‘world heritage’ campaign, while vigorously exporting Chinese cultural heritage through the channel of institutions such as Chinese Language Council International. By June 2019, China has 55 enlisted UNESCO World Heritage Sites, ranking top in the world alongside Italy.

The top-down heritage construction has resulted in a wider national and global resonance.
Traditional culture and scholarship that were formerly attacked as ‘four olds’ during the Cultural Revolution have been resurrected as best articulation of the ideological claims of the new leadership. Mainstream TV series no longer depict the pre-communist China as the dark abyss of ‘the old society’ (jiu shehui) but convey a nostalgic sentiment towards the traditional moral values of filial piety and respect for ancestry preserved in the past. A striking example is the revival of Confucius, who was a major target of criticism in the ‘four old’ campaign. In the 1980s, official discourses restored Confucius as the model of education, and soon ‘through an extraordinary sleight of hand’, turned him into ‘an advocate of profit and economic growth’ in 1990s (Mitter 2004, 295). Since China ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2004, traditional culture was embraced by the government as an important source of social and economic development, resulting in deep penetrating processes of heritage institutionalisation and commodification at local levels.

Underpinning such a phenomenal wave of memorialisation and heritage-making has been the urge to resume and sustain a Han-centred Chinese civilisational and governmental framework of tianxia, ‘all under heaven’, derived from the longevity and continuity of the Chinese civilization (Wang and Rowlands 2017, 259; Feuchtwang 2012; Wang 2013, 2016). In this sense, the seemingly drastic U-turn of cultural policy from total rejection to renewed enthusiasm towards the past marks a re-positioning, or in other words, re-casting of heritage, both tangible and intangible, as the evidence of a ‘long-term cosmological continuity’ that allows for ‘periodic ruptures and revitalisation’ (Wang and Rowlands 2017, 260). For this purpose, international heritage discourses and various forms of cultural entrepreneurship have been effectively ‘internalised’ and appropriated by the Party State for the representation and performance of ‘China’ (Wang and Rowlands 2017; Wang 2017).

Similarly, China scholar Marina Svensson identifies a ‘Chinese AHD’ that orchestrates China’s memory-making in the context of ‘an authoritarian/Communist market economy with global aspirations’ (2016, 32). Manifested in the museums, heritage sites and historical education, the Chinese AHD articulates ‘a more culturally based patriotic narrative that is becoming an increasingly significant constituent of the ‘cultural confidence’ that Xi Jinping
added to the ‘confidence doctrine’ in 2016 (Svensson 2016, 36; Feng 2016; Xi 2016).

As Ann Anagnost observes, the state’s ‘fevered search for a national subjectivity’ to restore ‘a sense of historical agency to China’ seems at the same time ‘a striking departure from the Maoist era’ and in other ways ‘strangely continuous with it’ (1997, 8). This ‘strange continuity’ may be best manifested if we juxtapose Denise Ho’s 2017 book *Curating Revolution* and the 2014 book *Exhibiting the Past* by Kirk Denton. Ho’s research on the exhibitionary culture during China’s Mao era (1949 - 1976), examines the practice of exhibition making as a powerful tool for mass education and mass mobilisation; and Denton’s survey of the Chinese state museums constructed in the recent decades demonstrates that they still play a significant role in staging the official ideology and propaganda. The war memorial museums and battlefield sites, which Denton’s research focused particularly on, present selected aspects of the revolutionary past through narratives that emphasise socialist values such as patriotism, heroism and self-sacrifice, thus a significant space for the nationwide ‘patriotic education’ campaign since the early 1990s (Zhao 1998; Wang 2008; Denton 2005; 2014). The state’s promotion of cultural heritage has been diagnosed by concerned scholars as ‘a contested project of governance and social ordering’ (Oakes 2012, 381). It has been argued that the official heritage programmes are ‘profoundly political activities’ by which ‘a modernising regime sought to assert links with historical past to boost its own political legitimacy’ (Shepherd and Yu 2013, 24).

Another aspect of this ‘continuity’ is the state’s effort to control memory by silencing unwanted, or ‘bad’ history of certain time period or groups of people. For instance, Neil Diamant denotes a ‘conspicuous silence’ from the veterans in post-war China. Despite the exceptional quantity of cultural products (notably TV dramas) and propaganda materials that lavish their official valorisation, veterans’ ‘ability to tell authentic stories and contribute to a more realistic memory of China’s wars has been highly constricted’ (2011, 434). This is due, Diamant argues, to the veterans’ ‘marginalised’ social and political status that ‘borders powerlessness’, and the consequential ‘muting’ of their voices to allow space for

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1 The ‘confidence doctrine’ refers to a signature political theory of Xi Jinping consisting of the confidence ‘in our chosen path, in our political system, and in our guiding theories’. The fourth component, the ‘confidence in our culture’ was added at the ceremony marking the 95th anniversary of the founding of the CCP in 2016 as a ‘more fundamental, broader and deeper form of self-confidence’.
propagandist renderings of China’s twentieth-century war memories (2011, 435). This is particularly true among members of the Kuomintang, or Nationalist, army, who remained in the mainland after their defeat in the civil war (1945-1949), and were positioned on the wrong side of history, denied recognition of their service to the country, and subjected to trials and prosecutions during the Cultural Revolution (Taylor 2015). Those who survived these campaigns are well in their 90s and many are living in poverty. Their wartime contribution remained unrecognised until 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, when Hu Jintao, for the first time, officially acknowledged the Kuomintang’s credit in the Resistance War and invited Kuomintang veterans to join the ceremony (Shirk 2007, 208).

In a similarly precarious, or even worse state were the memories of the generation who lived through the first three decades of the People’s Republic, the revolutionary period referred to as the Red Age in the JMC, including events such as the Great Leap Famine and the Cultural Revolution.

Public engagements with unwanted topics, narratives and versions of history have continuously been prohibited by the government. Michael Schoenhals depicts the political context for researching and publishing on the Mao Era in his review of official and unofficial accounts of the Cultural Revolution in its immediate aftermath (1989). In 1979, the CCP Central Propaganda Department gave the explicit instructions to editors and publishers nationwide to censor commemorative writings regarding the Cultural Revolution, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

‘… When readers in China and abroad read such things and get to know all the concrete details of the merciless struggles we waged internally during the “Great Cultural Revolution”, it will have adverse consequences. Some people who from the outset had their doubts about our party and about our socialist system will become even more discontented. Very many people may possibly end up feeling extreme resentment toward the people who committed errors, and this may make those people panic-stricken and weary. When the editorial boards of journals and newspapers are confronted with articles like these, they should make a point of subjecting the relatives and comrades concerned to ideological work and convince them of the need to make the necessary textual
In 1981, the ‘Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’ was passed in the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh CCP Central Committee, the key document that set officially the ‘golden rule’ for historical representation of the Cultural Revolution, as Yang Guobin vividly interprets: ‘Let it be known that the Cultural Revolution was a ten-year disaster and leave it like that - above all, do not be nosy about the details’ (Yang 2005, 14).

Consequently, many attempted compilations of the history or stories of the ten years did not get published and only a small number made it to the readers through illegal channels (Schoenhals 1989). It is worth noting that the most serious/valuable of these ‘unofficial’ attempts came from individuals with positions or connections within the government, hence privileged access to archival records and other forms of materials, (for instance Yu Haocheng’s Chunfeng Huayu Ji Michael Schoenhals writes about in his paper).

Writing more recently, Song Yongyi, historian and editor-in-chief of the Chinese Cultural Revolution Database, writes

‘[the Cultural Revolution] claimed the lives of several million people and inflicted cruel and inhuman treatments on hundreds of million people. However, 40 years after it ended, the total number of victims of the Cultural Revolution and especially the death toll of mass killings still remain a mystery both in China and overseas. For the Chinese communist government, it is a highly classified “state secret,” although they do maintain statistics for the so-called “abnormal death” numbers all over China. Nevertheless, the government, realizing that the totalitarian regime and the endless power struggles in the CCP Central Committee (CCPCC) were the root cause of the Cultural Revolution, has consistently discounted the significance of looking back and reflecting on this important period of Chinese history.’ (Song 2011)

The control over memory has been exercised through restriction on archival resources, censorship of media, public education, and personal intimidation and punishment (Jing 1999,
Concluding a survey of the museums and memorials of the Mao Era published in 2016, historian Jie Li writes: ‘given the communist party’s persistent reluctance to break the taboo on its traumatic past, it may seem quixotic to hope for a plurality of public memorial sites where different memories of the Mao era could be shared, acknowledged, and reconciled’ (2016, 349).

Since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, evidence has suggested a tightening grip over the governance of social remembrance and forgetting. Louisa Lim points out that ‘[Xi’s] dream of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” depends on the correct understanding of history, which is being imposed in an increasing coercive fashion’ (2018, 9). In a 2017 interview, Qu Qingshan, head of the Party History Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, claims that the Party is ready to ‘declare war’ on the thoughts of ‘historical nihilism’ (China Daily 2017). Qu states that historical nihilism is of ‘strong political tendencies and intentions’ that seek to ‘distort the history of modern China’s revolution, the CPC and the armed forces under the guise of “reevaluation”’ (China Daily 2017). In the same year, state legislation was passed against ‘historical nihilism’ which would essentially reduce the space for questioning or independent rendering of the official history. Recent changes have been made to the chapter on the Cultural Revolution in middle-school history textbooks. The sentence ‘Mao Zedong wrongfully believed that the central leadership of the party had the problem of revisionism and the party and the country were facing the risk of the restoration of capitalism’ in the original version, has been moderated, with the term ‘wrongfully’ taken out and rephrased as ‘Mao Zedong believed that the party and the country were facing the risk of the restoration of capitalism’ (South China Morning Post 2018).

**Popular memory and non-official heritage**

In critiquing the power-saturated notion of ‘official memory’, memory scholars have foregrounded the notion of ‘popular memory’ as an alternative to the ‘manipulation and control’ of memory from above, that is constituted from the ‘bottom up’ (Misztal 2003, 61). For anthropologist Johannes Fabian, ‘popular memory’ should operate as a counter-memory, which is ‘popular as long as it is not collected, canonised, or promoted by institutions or political entities’, so as to ‘maintain its counter position to governmental – or academic –
claims to control and dictate memory’ (2007, 104-105). As such, non-official remembrance carries a sense of resistance against political and ideological dominance, particularly by recognising and commemorating marginalised and suppressed elements of the past.

The connection between memory and popular resistance is expounded by Michel Foucault, who views memory as a significant means for social contestation. For him, popular memory is constructed by people who are ‘barred from writing, from producing their books themselves, from drawing up their own historical accounts’ but ‘nevertheless do have a way of recording history, or remembering it, of keeping it fresh and using it’ (Pearson 1999, 179). More importantly, he points out that popular memories are subject to being ‘reprogrammed’ by the authority’s appropriating force through different discursive and technological apparatuses (Foucault 1996). There is therefore never a neat dividing line between official and popular memories. Instead, the boundary is constantly negotiated and redefined, often in contestation.

Over the past ten years or so, China has witnessed a remarkable increase in non-governmental collecting and memorialisation. Partly due to the damage and dislocation caused during the revolutionary periods, large amounts of cultural relics had been circulated in private hands. From the late 1990, the trade of antiquity began to sprout across the country, developing from roadside stalls to well-regulated marketplaces. Animating nationwide (and even global) mobility of objects, the marketisation process engendered a new trend of private collection, that is not limited to the traditional realm of antiquity, but open to more recent objects from 20th Century Chinese history. According to historian Zhu Jiangguo, from 1992 to 1999, there were about 5000 collector-traders of Cultural Revolution artefacts in China and over 70 million people collecting them (Zhu 2006).

China’s first private museum in the post-Mao era was registered in 1996 by the Beijing collector Ma Weidu. In 1998, the State Council issued the Interim Regulations on Registration Administration of Private Non-enterprise Units whereby private museum was recognised as a ‘private non-enterprise unit’ (minban fei qiye danwei)5. The 2002 Cultural Relics Protection Law devotes a chapter on ‘civil collecting’, which explicates a distinction

5  http://mjzx.mca.gov.cn/article/zcfg/201304/20130400437169.shtml
between ‘state collecting units’ (guoyou shoucang danwei) and ‘non-state collecting units’ (feiguoyou shoucang danwei), and hence provides the legal basis for private collecting, trading and displaying of cultural relics, or wenwu. Since 2005, the state’s officially claimed encouragement for ‘entry of non-public-owned capital into cultural industries’ has led to the proliferation of privately funded museums and cultural enterprises across the country (State Council, 2005).

By early 2016, over a quarter of all the museums in China are non-state, or minban, ‘organised by the people’. In February 2016, the China Private Museum United Platform (CPMUP) was launched, a non-profit organisation dedicated to connecting ‘non-state museums, individual collectors and collecting institutions’ in China. Later that year, the CPMUP issued a Chinese Private Museum Industry White Paper which provides an overview of China’s private museum scene from the perspective of the relevant policies, status quo and investment prospects. The document shows that the number of private museums underwent a rapid increase in number, from 315 in 2008 to 1110 in 2015 (CPMUP, 7). Categorically, the White Paper observes, private museums form a ‘strong supplementation’ to official museums. On the private side, the largest categories are thematic (those dedicated to one particular topic or subject), art, and scientific museums, taking up altogether 68.3% of the total number (CPMUP, 9). In contrast, the vast majority of official museums serve the functions of commemoration and historical education (Denton 2014a). Whilst recognising the private museum as ‘a significant means for preserving, transmitting and promoting national culture, and a new emblem of the civilisation of a country’, the White Paper also makes it clear that private collecting is an enterprise ‘endorsed by state strategy’ (CPMUP, 1). As the document’s title suggests, private collecting and museum building is becoming a rapidly developing area for investment and business. The entrepreneurial motif is fused with a discourse of patriotism, surrounding the notion of serving the state (guojia) and the nation (minzu). Therefore, it would be misleading to assume that non-state initiatives necessarily formulate ‘popular memory’ as alternative to [resistant against] the authorised discourse. In fact, a vast number of Chinese ‘minban’ museum initiatives still rely upon the recognition and subsidy of the state authority, and thus present narratives that help facilitating the state’s mnemonic dominance.

As noted above, coercive controls are exercised over public remembrance in contemporary
China. The rapid transformation, destruction and dislocation brought about by development projects also create daunting feelings of cultural rupture and historical transience. Despite the spectacular proliferation of museums through state and private channels, and China’s rising status as a country of the world’s greatest numbers of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, ‘crisis’ remains an enduring trope in depicting the memory-scape of the country. For this reason, art critic Jiang Jiehong had his edited volume of contemporary Chinese photography between mid-1990s and 2014 boldly titled *An Era without Memories* (2015).

Yet within the small fraction (7%) of the private museums that are dedicated to commemoration, considerable efforts have been made to bring public awareness to some of the ‘persistent’ memories that are less encouraged or accepted by the state (Thaxton 2016, 14). Important here to note is that the JMC is neither the only nor the first attempt to put the Cultural Revolution on display. Collector Liu Zongxiu from Shenzhen was the first person who set out to build a museum of the Cultural Revolution. Liu claimed to possess over ten tons of Cultural Revolution documents and wanted to set up a museum at his home. But the initiative was unsuccessful. In an interview Liu refers to the Cultural Revolution history as China’s important cultural heritage. Zhu Jiangguo also wrote an essay calling for the recognition of the ‘*Wenge Wenhua*’ (Cultural Revolution Culture) as China’s intangible cultural heritage (Zhu 2006).

Since the 1990s a nostalgia has been displayed by the generation of ‘sent-down youth’, or *zhiquing*, those who were born in the 1940s and 50s and participated in the *xiaoxiang*, or Down to the Countryside Movement between 1968 and 1980 (Yang 2003; Bonnin 2013). The collective memory of *zhiquing* has been the most widely documented and publicly acknowledged element of the Cultural Revolution, and the efforts of commemoration is seen as a pursuit of identity by members of a ‘lost generation’ whose memory has been ‘restricted, distorted but alive’ (Bonnin 2016).

In 2005 China's first private memorial museum of Cultural Revolution was built in the southeastern city of Shantou in Guangdong, by the retired deputy mayor Peng Qi’an, on a deserted graveyard where over 70 people persecuted during the revolution were buried. During the nine years of preparation, Mr. Peng together with several other retired officials managed to obtain endorsement from local governments and amass over ¥10 million
(approx. £1 million) funding through official and personal donation. During the Cultural Revolution, Peng himself had been interrogated in over 400 ‘struggle sessions’ (pidou), a form of public meeting designed to criticise, humiliate and even execute ‘class enemies’ that was widely adopted by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. The victims of these sessions would be forced to admit their crimes and verbally and physically abused by a crowd of people (Thurston 1990). In Peng's own words, the local persecutions were ‘more fascist than the fascists’ and ‘even worse than hell’. The aim of the museum, according to Peng, was to uncover the local history during the revolution and commemorate its victims. The cultural revolution would be remembered as ‘the cruelest, darkest and most humiliating event in Chinese history’, as inscribed on a memorial in the museum, and ‘ought never be forgotten’.

Also in 2005, Mr. Duan Shengkui launched in Tengchong the Museum of Resistance War in Western Yunnan. His museum was dedicated to the memories of local resistance against Japan, with objects he collected over more than twenty years. Growing up locally, Duan had family members who had fought against the Japanese invaders and witnessed their crime. His task is to save local conflict memories from oblivion and bring them into the future.

China’s first privately funded Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum was established a year later in Nanjing by a local entrepreneur Wu Xianbin. Neither a massacre survivor descendant, nor having personal heritage related to the Resistance War, Mr. Wu established the museum after achieving business success for his long-term interest in the massacre history since moving to Nanjing in his early twenties. Sustaining the project solely with his own income, Wu insists on free admission for it to the public. He says he merely does what he feels obliged to do, and that running the museum is ‘a source of happiness’ for him.

In quite different regional and socio-economic conditions, these three cases above are examples of a shared sense of moral responsibility among a group of Chinese private collectors towards salvaging the collective memories of trauma, violence and suffering. Yet without government support, privately conceived commemorative projects are not only faced

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with the financial challenges but also political risks. Mr. Duan, formerly the vice-president of a local bank, became heavily indebted for several years after launching the museum before was forced to interrupt his project. The Tayuan Cultural Revolution Museum in Shantou was forced to close on 15th June 2016, the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Whilst the official museum narratives of China’s twentieth century emphasise heavily notions of heroism and self-sacrifice, they are based upon a highly selective representation of historical events focusing primarily on the positive legacy of the communist party. The major contribution made by the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang, in the resistance war against Japan from 1931 to 1945, has not been fully recognised and represented in China until today. Certain events in the history of the People’s Republic also remain ‘sensitive’ subjects. For instance, despite the official recognition as ‘utterly wrong’ and ‘a decade of calamity’, the space for critical scholarship, media or commemorative engagements with the memories of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is extremely limited. Another example of the ‘political sensitive’ histories is the Great Leap Forward movement (1958-1962), with its resulting famine of 1958-1961, one of the deadliest events in the twentieth century. Anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang refers to it using the term ‘caesurae’, the ‘cutting-off’ points in chronology, ‘discontinuities marked by major events, principally those of mass dislocation and major changes of political regime’ (2011, 10).

**Between the state and the nonstate**

From above, we see that the Chinese ‘memory-scape’ (Basu 2013) is a contested arena of a plurality of memory-makings, where power and ethics are two crucial themes. The majority of these undertakings, in the form of official museums, memorials and other forms of ‘site of memory’, are state-subsidised enterprises which narrate a mainstream political and historical ideology. Meanwhile, there are a growing number of private initiatives that are engaged with the difficult and controversial historical events, professing diverse and original discourses of moral and historical consciousness.

And yet, as the state maintains the ability to mobilise policy, resources and coercive power against unwanted historical narratives, private collectors and museum owners invariably have to rely on affirming to some of the state-promoted values. Patriotism is one of such
values that private museums and collectors commonly connect with, and a key component in the sense of historical morality they convey. Many private historical museums, including the JMC, have attained the status of Patriotic Education Base (\textit{aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi}).

The possibility of multivocality in the Chinese museum scene is sustained through constant negotiation between the state and the nonstate, to the extent that they are intertwined and mutually infiltrated. Zongjie Hu questions the premise of a ‘reified entity and actor called "state" hover[ing] above’ that ‘monitors, threatens the existence or undermines the another reified entity called (civil) “society.”’ and calls for ethnographic probing of what the state really is (2012, 133). Helen Siu uses the term ‘involution of the state’ to illustrate ‘how the power of the socialist state, if not its ideology, has been internalised and diffused in everyday life in the last three decades to the point that negotiating and maneuvering around it has become almost a cultural given’ (1989). Therefore, the relationship between the state and nonstate presents certain nuances that defy a dominance-resistance model. Rather we have to consider a set of relevant Chinese concepts for further understanding.

The notions of ‘state and private’ are often held to be corresponding with the Chinese concepts of \textit{gong} and \textit{si}. Traditionally, the idea of ‘\textit{gong}’ holds a crucial position in the imperial cosmology and patrimonial moral order, encompassing, ‘(1) the cosmological principle of order; (2) the moral principle of order among human beings; (3) the principle of the political order in which the emperor rules by consent of heaven’ and (4) ‘landownership: public land is the land of the emperor and imperial realm’ (Wang, Lee and Fischer 1994, 600). During the early modern period (late nineteenth and early twentieth century), \textit{gong} was used in contrast with ‘the central state’s intrusive power (\textit{guan}) over local communities and their resource; as well as self-interested claims to tradable market assets and private accumulation (\textit{si})’ (Pia 2017, 110).] After the communist revolution, the idea of \textit{gong} was ‘subsumed’ into the Party’s ideology and used to justify the government’s increased control over the local society (Day 2017, 938 in Pia 2017, 110). In the Land Reform movement and the Cultural Revolution, \textit{gongshe} was the term for commune, and \textit{gongyou} for collective ownership. Pia remarks that ‘the most profound legacy of Maoism is its ambivalent representation of public interest: something in which all socialist citizens were expected to partake but the attainment of which was ultimately considered only within the Party’s reach’ (2017, 110). One could argue that in this context, \textit{gong} refers to both state ownership and
public ownership, and the two completely coincide with each other. In the post-Mao era, the two meanings of *gong* again became differentiated.

Efforts have been made by academics to connect *gong* with the Western ideas of ‘civic’ and ‘public’, through the translation of ‘civic society’ as *gongmin shehui*, and ‘public sphere’ as *gonggong kongjian*, as separate and independent from the state realm (Wang, Lee and Fischer 1994, 601). Nevertheless, as preeminent items in the communist vocabulary, *gong* and *si* still carry a distinctive connotation with collectivism and the Maoist past, and are carefully avoided in the official terminology for museum categorisation. The official term for state museums is *guojia bowuguan*, a museum of the country, and for nonstate museums, *minban bowuguan*, a museum organised by members of the people (*renmin*). In everyday usage, *gong* and *si* are still widely applied in this context and used interchangeably with the official pair, *guojia* and *minban*, which is rendered more often as *guojia* versus *minjian*, ‘among the people’, a term I will return to later in this chapter. Private museums are quite commonly called *siren bowuguan*, or *minjian bowuguan*, and private collectors *siren cangjia* or *minjian cangjia*.

In the post-Mao era, the state-nonstate binary has been increasingly articulated by the pair of concepts *tizhinei* and *tizhiwai*, literally ‘inside and outside the system’ (Howell and Pringle 2019). The term *tizhi*, meaning ‘the system’, is commonly used to refer to the ‘public sector’, or ‘the establishment’. To be *tizhinei*, inside the establishment, would generally mean to work for the government or state-owned corporations. *Tizhiwai*, on the other hand, does not necessarily mean autonomy from the state. As Bruce Dickson observes, despite the rise of a market (and arguably capitalist) economy in post-Mao China, most private corporations and entrepreneurs ‘do not seek autonomy but rather closer embeddedness with the state’ (2003, 19). Being ‘outside the system’, Dickson argues, is recognised as ‘powerless’, and ‘being part of the system (*tizhinei*)’ would therefore be the best way for private businesses to ‘better pursue their interests and maximise their leverage’ (2003, 19). Conflation of the *tizhinei* and *tizhiwai* happens most significantly in the class of the elite. In his study of China’s ‘new rich’, China anthropologist John Osburg suggests that ‘the moral economies’, consisting of ‘overlapping and intertwined kinship ideologies, repetitious economies, and gift economies’, constitute ‘elite guanxi networks’ that provide protection and opportunities for the accumulation of wealth and status for both state and non-state elites, and they are
also the networks through which the state-driven goals of economic growth are achieved’ (2013, 32).

Crucial here is that the relationship between the tizhinei and tizhiwai is not perceived as fundamentally antagonistic, despite the implicit or explicit expressions of dissatisfaction towards the state and violation of its formal rules in the private sector. And the state’s control over private individuals and groups, is exercised not only through coercive power, but just as much through the appeal and promise of political protection, insider access, and government privileges. Meanwhile, censorship in China today, as China scholar Perry Link points out, operates not so much on direct punishments, but on self-censorship out of the fear of such punishments (2002). The fear involved in censorship is not ‘a clear and present sense of panic’, Link argues, but ‘a dull, well-entrenched leeriness that people who deal with the Chinese censorship system usually get used to, and eventually accept as part of their natural landscape’, an experience he describes vividly as if living with ‘a giant anaconda coiled in an overhead chandelier (2002). Foucault has distinguished explicit dominance (what he terms as ‘capacity’) from power in personal relations (Laidlaw 2013). The ‘relational’ understanding of power is termed by Foucault as ‘the conduct of conducts’, which Laidlaw explicates as ‘to structure the possible field of action of others, to orchestrate their conduct’, ‘action carried out not directly on an object or a person-as-object, but on the action’, ‘the irreducibly reflective, conscious, and to-some-extent free conduct of other subjects’ (Laidlaw 2013). This study on the Chinese private museum phenomenon aims precisely to explore the relational dynamics on the borderline between the state and private, tizhinei and tizhiwai, and what significant implications they might have for China’s social, cultural and moral landscapes.

**Constructing a moral-historical consciousness**

The tension between the state and nonstate (or tizhinei and tizhiwai) agencies of social remembrance, lies in not only what to remember, but also why people should remember.

After the 1989 mass protests, the state has strengthened its patriotic propaganda, as Deng Xiaoping asserted the imperative to ‘seize with both hands, with both hands holding tight’,
meaning to develop ‘both the material civilisation of economic prosperity and the spiritual civilisation of political loyalty’ (Callahan 2009, 32). National memory is crucial for the building of ‘spiritual civilisation’, particularly histories of conflict and trauma. Appropriating China’s long tradition of ‘referring to history as a mirror’ (yishi weijian), meaning that ‘History was a moral mirror that reflected back to the present the past’s paragons of virtue and epitomes of evil’, the official historical education extols the patriotic duty to remember the revolutionary pasts, and ‘never forget national humiliation’ has become an essential doctrine (Denton 2014a, 30).

Meanwhile, memories that fall outside the official historiography still loom in the society. As Liu Xin writes:

‘the current economic and technological development of China is the offspring of a longue durée evolving movement whose beginning lies in the Maoist revolutionary struggles, a past no longer favourably viewed but transplanted into the hearts of a new generation who, unfortunately, do not recognise their own forefathers anymore. The modern, industrial countenance today’s China assumes, nevertheless, carries a disquieting past that has gone into its present pleasure-seeking activities. Maoist slogans or policies are no longer apparent but beneath the rise of a new mass culture, popular and menacing, one could not refrain from feeling a resemblance of certain old pleasures, which exalted the Maoist masses’ (Liu 2017, 16).

Here, again, we are reminded of the ‘strange continuity’ between the revolutionary and reform eras (Anagnost 1997, 8), and Wu Yiqing’s argument on the complexity of post-socialist transition (2013).

It has been argued that the growth of market economy could lead to an expanding public sphere to accommodate these memories and draw moral lessons from them. In her 1999 paper, Mary Mazur identifies four events as signals of the emergence of a public space ‘beyond state control’: a memorial meeting for four CCP officials condemned during the Cultural Revolution in May 1996; the establishment of a private publishing house that published a biography of Wu Han, one of the four commemorated officials; a launching event
for this biography where the participants ‘openly and critically’ expressed their opinions about past and contemporary politics; the publishing of an article discussing Mao’s attack on Wu Han in the prestigious magazine Yanhuang Chunqiu (China’s Past) (Mazur 1999). None of these events had the endorsement, nor even the approval from the government, and therefore took place in a public space not controlled by the state (Mazur 1999, 1026). In this instance, the emergence and expansion of ‘public space for memory’ were driven by members of the political elite, particularly retired cadres who by ‘keeping to time-honoured moral values’ (Mazur 1999).

These cases exemplify the public yearnings for historical justice in the post-Mao era. They come from the minjian, ‘people’s realm’, or ‘among the people’, and fulfilled or facilitated often by resourceful individuals with backgrounds in the officialdom. Since the beginning of China’s ‘modernisation’ process, scholars have been pursuing a Chinese counterpart for the Western ‘civil society’ or ‘public sphere’. In the aftermath of the political turbulence in 1989, abundant discussion on the formation of a Chinese ‘civil society’ that was ‘independent forms of social life from below, free from state tutelage’ (Taylor 1990, 95) and could counterbalance the totalising control of the Party state, became a heated subject among Western, particularly U.S.-based China scholars (Yang 1994, Wakeman 1993). To avoid the ‘dangers of imposing one interpretive framework on a different social and historical context (Wakeman 1993), Mayfair Yang used the term Chinese ‘minjian’ to indicate ‘an autonomous realm of social activities’ that is ‘non-governmental or separate from formal bureaucratic channels’ (1994, 288). Yang’s theorisation of minjian underlines the distinction between the official and non-official realms in China. Similarly, anthropologist Hans Steinmuller argues that a ‘tension’ exists between the ‘official’ and ‘vernacular’ representations of society, the former, ‘those discourses in standard Mandarin that are enunciated in schools, government offices, and in the state-oriented media’, and the latter, alternatively, expressed in ‘local dialects’ and ‘take place in face-to-face communities’ (2015, 22).

Mayfair Yang shows that a self-organised social space outside state bureaucracy existed in China’s late-imperialistic period, consisting of various forms of social institutions such as ‘gentry management and local self-self-government; guilds; neighbourhood and religious organisations; clans and lineages and teahouses and native-place associations’ (1994, 292). These minjian social cooperates preserved the moral significance of inheritance and
remembering by a variety of cultural practices, from performing rites, etiquette and rituals, to compiling genealogies, building temples and nourishing historic sites. As Jing Jun puts it, ‘a worthy Chinese is supposed not only to remember a vast amount of information related to the past, but to draw on this past as a basis of moral reasoning’ (1996, 17). Yet the Communist Revolution, and particularly its extension through the 60s and 70s ‘swept out’ most of the above forms of nonofficial social organisation and therefore the tradition of nonofficial self-governance experienced a ‘sharp historical rupture’ (Yang 1994, 292 - 293).

Since the beginning of the Economic Reform in 1978, many scholars have speculated about the return of the non-official social space. For some it meant the establishment of Chinese civil society, a demoncratising step, and for Mayfair Yang that ‘the minjian is emerging in the aftermath of extreme state penetration of the social order and state appropriation of the public sphere’ (1994, 310). She argues, ‘it is possible to speculate that at the height of the Cultural Revolution, when the eclipse of the social realm by politics and by the state was the most totalising, there occurred a reaction-formation in the social body. It took the form of private and personalistic relationships of mutual aid and obligation which implicitly challenged the universalistic ethics of self-sacrifice, national identity, and state loyalty internalised in each citizen’ (297).

It should be noted that Yang’s work belongs to a particular moment in history when China was undergoing rapid transformations and Western scholarship was searching keenly for a model of a democratising civil society forming in China. While history of the past few decades has testified otherwise, the minjian is still recognised by scholars as a social space alternative to the officialdom, only with distinctive characteristics than the Western liberal democratic notions of civil society or public sphere. Studying the recent promotion of Confucius in the post-Mao period, Billioud and Thoreval observe how the minjian, which they term ‘the space of the people’, accommodates bottom-up pursuits of the self-cultivation and alternative approaches to Confucianism revitalisation, outside the governmental efforts ceremonial spectaculars (2015; Feuchtwang and Rowlands 2019, 170).

The boundary between the minjian and the official is porous and blurry space of interaction and negotiation. Problematising the one-way relationship between the museum and indigenous cultures in the North America, anthropologist James Clifford argues ‘when museums are seen as contact zones, their organising structure as a collection becomes an
ongoing historical, political, moral relationship—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull' (1997, 192-3). The museum, he proposes, could be ‘rethought’ in this way as a dynamic and contested terrain where different voices, interests and moral and political pursuits can be communicated and negotiated. Here, the concept of ‘contact zone’ can be borrowed to rework the relationship between the top-down and the ‘minjian’ mnemonic practices, one that has long been seen in a dominance-resistance model.

I understand the minjian as a mediating zone between the state and the individual where the state’s didactic formulations of historical consciousness and ‘moral duty to remember’ could be challenged and reconfigured with consideration of different interests, pursuits and commitments, with what Paul Ricoeur refers to as a grounded ‘practical wisdom’ (289).

The notion of ‘practical wisdom’ is traceable to the Aristotelian virtue of phronesis (otherwise translated as ‘prudence’). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines the nature of phronesis as being able to ‘deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous’ (1976, 1140a25-1140b11). Different from science (episteme) and art (techne), phronesis is not instrumental reason serving ‘an end other than itself’, but a form of practical reasoning that ‘implies the exercise of good judgment in particular circumstances (Lambek 2000, 316, Flyvbjerg 2001, 56). The Aristotelian notion of ‘practical wisdom’ has been a crucial source of inspiration for the development of the theory of virtue ethics in late 20th Century moral philosophy. Bernard Williams makes the influential differentiation between the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ based on their distinct origins. Ethics, according to Williams, answers questions that are more general than those addressed by morality; for morality is a matter of choice, in response to rules and demands, while ethics is concerned with how one could ‘most generally and comprehensively direct one’s life in accordance with certain principles through practices of inquiry, reflection and self-conduct’ (Pandian & Ali 2010, 3).

Re-theorising the ethical in everyday practice and action has been a major concern for the anthropology of ‘ordinary ethics’ (Lambek 2000, 2010; Faubion 2001; Laidlaw 2002; Das 2012; Robbins 2013). Here, ‘ordinary’ means that ethical judgments are demanded not only in morally challenging situations, but also in the common, even sometimes trivial everyday interactions (Lambek 2010; Stafford 2013). Building on virtue ethics philosophy, Lambek suggests that ‘the substance of a virtue is never fixed but is a function of contingent
circumstances; virtues are attributions in context, not things in themselves. Whether a specific act is to be described as virtuous is matter not of adherence to a rule but of the quality of judgment it exhibits’ (Lambek 2010b, 61-62).

**Action, practice and change**

The ‘ordinary ethics’ approach is particularly valuable to memory and heritage studies because it gives priority to the lived experiences and grounded reality.

Since the late 1990s, social memory studies have been marked by a shift of critical attention from the tangible embodiments of memory - monuments, archives - towards the practice of their construction and the process of knowledge making. Sociologist Jeffrey Olick suggests that the concept of collective memory encompasses ‘a wide variety of mnemonic products and practices’ (2008, 158). Upon this distinction he stresses the importance of viewing memory as diverse and dynamic ‘processes’, by arguing that ‘collective memory is something — or rather many things — we do, not something — or many things — we have’ (Olick 2008, 159, italics original).

The view of memory as a productive act resonates strongly with critical considerations of the passing down of memories across generations. In his comparative study of how the three atrocious events, the Holocaust (1933-1945), the Great Leap Famine (1959-1961) and the White Terror (1947-1987) were remembered in respectively the societies of Germany, China and Taiwan, Stephan Feuchtwang foregrounds the notion of ‘transmission’ over ‘memory’ as it ‘draws attention to the activity and stresses the social nature of both individual recall and public narrative and commemoration’. The ‘strands of transmission’ are, as he demonstrates, ‘a number of linked activities and resources and occur in different modes’ (2011, 13). Also engaged with the transmission of loss, Marianne Hirsch (1997; 2008; 2012) explores how the descendent generations of Holocaust survivors actively form their ‘postmemory’ of the traumatic events with photography and other means of cultural reproduction.

In the context of heritage studies, reframing the ethical in practice coincides with the view
that heritage should be understood as a verb instead of a noun (Harvey 2001; Maags 2018), meaning that the politics and ethics of heritage-making should be reconsidered through examining ‘the roles played by the personal, the ordinary and the everyday, within spaces of heritage, whether they are physical, discursive or affective’ (Waterton and Watson 2013: 551). This, to my mind, echoes in a broader sense with what has been foregrounded as the ‘assemblage approach’ in heritage and memory practices. Sharon Macdonald holds that the ‘memory complex’ is ‘an assemblage of practices, affects and physical things’ (2013, 6).

From ‘contact’ to ‘assemblage’, we get to consider the practical specificities of the museum-making process, and how these constituent elements, affective, material and relational, are mobilised in the flux of the forming and transformations of different relationships in the realm of people, or the minjian. The importance of thinking in terms of action and assemblage is to get to the moral and political complexity of the museum as a process, the very point that can take us beyond the dominance-resistance model that has been deployed to interpret the JMC in majority of media coverage by Western outlets (Wall Street Journal 2014, 2016; Makinen 2012).

The core of this complexity is the hybridity of Fan’s interests and values, with which he is able to construct a framework of moral unity that accommodates both patriotic values promoted by the state and yearnings of the public for commemoration and historical justice. And my journey to the JMC, both physically and intellectually, began from getting to know Fan Jianchuan and understanding his discourse of morality.
Chapter 3: Fan Jianchuan

My attempt to know and understand Fan Jianchuan has run through the two years of my fieldwork and has shaped my subsequent analysis. I therefore have decided to start my analysis of the JMC with Fan Jianchuan. I demonstrate how the different personae Fan has been labelled as - the collector, museum director, soldier, entrepreneur, author and more - work to create a charismatic public figure. It is through this charismatic prism of his various personae that Fan conveys to his museum audience, including his employees and the public, a ‘moral framework’ articulating a certain set of values that he professes to be the components of the ‘correct’ historical consciousness, despite its shifting relationship with the state’s ideological orthodoxy.

By deploying the term ‘moral framework’, I draw from Hans Steinmuller’s theorisation of the notion in relation to his idea of ‘everyday ethics’, which he summarises as the ‘discourses and actions’ that could form ‘consistent articulations of strong evaluations’, and ‘gut feelings about questions like dignity, meaningfulness, fulfilment, “the good life”, and ‘involve claims about nature and the status of humans’ (2013, 8). Fan professes a historical consciousness that calls for a national moral unity towards recognising and commemorating the nation’s past, as something highly endangered, even in crisis. Can Fan Jianchuan’s stated self-sacrificial position to salvage national memories be seen as in a gift-economic relationship with the state authority, that, as Mayfair Yang identifies, is always in a dynamic balance maintained through the classic reciprocity of sacrifice or service (1994)?

I consider the above issues through narrating my trajectory of getting into the JMC and knowing Fan Jianchuan, and along the way, attending to the social and historical conditions of this research’s setting, the ‘Museum Town’ of Anren. I begin here, therefore, with my initial encounters with Fan to show how my knowledge of him has developed. Some of the themes emerge from this process will feed through into the following chapters.
First meeting

I visited Jianchuan Museum Complex for the first time with Mike Rowlands and Iris Zhang in late November 2014. We took a taxi from Chengdu city to Anren, a historic town about an hour’s drive to the city’s southwest. The entrance of the museum complex on a major road that runs through the town, marked by an enormous billboard. Through the red gantry crane and the bamboo-shaded driveway, we were dropped off in front of the cast iron arch the four columns of which were inscribed the museum’s motto: collect wars for peace, collect mistakes for the future, collect disasters for safety and collect folklore for heritage.

Before the visit I had heard about Fan Jianchuan and had looked at his social media profile on Weibo and some of his interviews. Two things stuck in my head: his wealth, and his look. Before becoming a museum builder, Fan was a multi-billionaire in real estate. According to the Hurun China Rich List founded by Rupert Hoogewerf, Fan was among the 500 richest people in China in 2007 and 2008 and his wealth was estimated as ¥2 billion. Yet his public image contrasts with those of most wealthy entrepreneurs in their business suits or luxury brands. Fan is captured in media as a middle-aged man, stout in build, with a clean, short military haircut, dressed in military-style outfit and T-shirts with the museum’s logo.

It was a grey day with a slight drizzle. In the vast complex there were scarcely any visitors in sight. Due to our meeting appointment with Fan, we went directly to the see the Chinese Heroes Square, a group of 201 larger-than-life cast iron sculptures of Resistance War heroes placed on a virtual map of China. Fan Jianchuan’s office is on the opposite side of the square, a two-store building in a walled garden. Fan named it Zhongyi Tang (Hall of Loyalty and Righteousness) to commemorate his father, Fan Zhongyi.

Fan’s office was designed like a bunker. A small outer door on the right-hand side leads to an entrance corridor, decorated with a collection of framed old land certificates from late Qing Dynasty and Republican Era, through which we were taken down to the ground floor where Fan usually sees his guests. The oval-shaped meeting room is exceptionally spacious, with an enormous floor-to-ceiling window on one side that frames a beautiful view of the wooded garden outside. The walls are covered with Fan’s calligraphy works, in his own distinctive style, featuring words such as ‘death’, ‘blood’ and others that do not belong to the
conventional calligraphic repertoire.

Fig. 3 Outside (left) and inside (right) of Fan Jianchuan’s office (fieldwork photos, 2015)

We sat down by the window around a large nan wood tea table while his assistant Mr. Gu Qiang, hurried to serve us tea. We were introduced by Iris Zhang, a private restauranteur in Chengdu, who had previously worked in Anren from 2006 to 2014 on the town’s tourism renovation project invested by the Sichuan Daily Press Group (Sichuan Ribao Baoye Jituan), the biggest official state-owned news agency of Sichuan Province, nicknamed the Sichuan Paper (Chuan Bao), and a powerful investment company. The Sichuan Daily partnered with the JMC in the tourism renovation project and Iris knew Fan well through working for several years together.

Acknowledging my intention of doing field research at the museum complex, Fan granted me his support and introduced me to his assistant Mr. Gu Qiang as the person I needed to be in contact with. Gu was a quiet man in his late-30s, who had been Fan’s assistant for nine years after leaving the army. After a brief discussion with Mike and me about the research, Iris asked Fan to write a piece of calligraphy work for her restaurant, to which Fan delightedly obliged. Then Fan invited us to join him for lunch, which was a simple but pleasant meal served in his office. Fan was a fast-paced talker and we went quickly from one topic to the next. Our conversation was led fast yet smoothly under his direction, jumping from one topic to another. When lunch was finished, Fan’s daughter came to the office with his son-in-law and granddaughter. The couple had both spent years studying abroad and
introduced themselves in fluent English. Fan asked his granddaughter to play a tune on the grand piano for the guests, which she did superbly. Then we thanked Fan again, and he walked us to the door. Fan bid each of us goodbye with a handshake and I was the last one to shake hands with him. As I took hold of his hand, or rather, he took hold of mine, I felt being pushed by his strong grip towards outside as if he was brusquely trying to get me out of his sight. It was so subtle yet clear an action that I was unsure what to make of it. A mere sign of arrogance might be too simplistic. As I was to find out after I began my fieldwork, that handshake was a gesture to indicate, either intentionally or habitually, a distance between him and me in the sense of a social relation or guanxi hierarchy, that I had to go through in order to engage him again in a conversation, which I did not fully comprehend then at the meeting of introduction.

**Entry to the field**

Stephan Feuchtwang and Wang Mingming once remarked that to do ethnographic fieldwork in China one usually has to start from the top-down, that is, seeking official endorsement (2001). This was true, as I got my initial formal introduction to the JMC through Iris Zhang, but so was the opposite.

Two months later I returned to Anren on my own planning to meet Mr. Fan for a preliminary interview. I called Fan’s assistant Gu several times and sent a few text messages to the number he left me but received no response. After spending two days in the museum complex, I walked into Gu by chance outside Fan’s office. I reiterated my plan of research and my hope to interview Mr. Fan, but Gu appeared reluctant and answered very briefly that Fan was a very busy man. When I tried to carry on our conversation, Gu started looking down at his phone and then briskly excused himself. I had the impression at that time that his hesitation was to do with the political sensitiveness of Fan’s collection and my doing research there as a student from foreign university, but later on I realised it was the general attitude of the company towards ‘irrelevant affairs’. As a young student I did not have much leverage in the negotiation. When I tried to talk to the guides, security and other staff in the museums, they also appeared rather impatient about my questions.
The ‘gate’ closed, I decided to make my way through the only other person in town that I made acquaintance with on my initial visit, Mr. Li Changzhi, a former colleague of Iris Zhang, who was the manager of a local hotel developed by Sichuan Daily. With his two local business partners, Li also ran a hostel where I stayed during my second visit in January. After getting his MA degree in ethnology in a northern university, Li went to Anren in 2012 out of admiration for Fan Jianchuan’s project. Li wrote a long letter to Fan, hoping to work for the museum complex and study its collection. He did not get the job but got a meeting with Fan’s deputy Ms. Han, who gave Li a reference for work at the local tourism company invested by the Sichuan Daily. Li had then met Fan on different occasions and described him as a ‘brilliant and friendly’ person, the ‘honorary mayor of the town’ who would stroll around the streets from time to time and talk to visitors. Meanwhile, Li also warned me, speaking clearly from personal experience, that Fan was extremely cautious about his collections, and would only allow ‘his people’ to deal with them.

Through Li I became acquainted with several other people who came from different backgrounds to do business in Anren. Mr. Peng Yu was one of them. Peng and I met in a beautiful courtyard he rented next to the ‘old street’, the town’s main tourist attraction. A successful e-merchant, Peng moved to Anren from Chengdu in 2014 to get away from big cities. Thinking that Anren was a better place to bring up his children, he bought a house adjacent to the JMC. He became also the patron of a dyeing studio ‘Qinghongran’, set up in the courtyard where we met, where a small group of young designers and artisans worked on traditional craft arts such as embroidery, woodcraft and dyeing.

Peng described the motivation for what he was doing in Anren with the concept of qinghuai, a popular rhetoric among China’s noveau riche, or new ‘middle class’ that connotes a sense of nostalgia and public good sentiments. He spoke very highly of Fan Jianchuan, whom he identified as someone who also did things out of qinghuai. The term qinghuai describes the strong feelings and attachment someone develops or possesses often related to tradition or origin. What distinguishes it from similar terms such as qinggan (feelings/emotion) is its emphasis on the degree of attachment and a sense of self-awareness and pride. Also, qinghuai usually refers to collective feelings and shared responsibilities, as in the aforementioned notion of ‘patriotic sentiments’, jiaquo qinghuai, while qinggan is used mostly in the personal context. Over the recent years there have been criticisms of the term
due to its appropriation by business and patriotic discourses. In some ways qinghuai has become a catchphrase for emotional marketing, to the extent that some intellectuals would avoid it in their academic work, due to its ambivalent connotations. That said, the reluctance towards the term in academia is not shared by those who use it in colloquial contexts. Quite a number of JMC visitors I spoke with used it to show their appreciation of Fan and his enterprise.

For the remainder of my visit, I spent time with people I met at Qinghongran. Yi Xiaoman, a young graduate from Chinese Academy of Art set up the studio in 2014. In her undergraduate years, Xiaoman travelled to ethnic villages in the southwestern provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou to learn techniques of dyeing with natural plant sources. Through Peng’s connections, she was soon joined by a few others with similar interests in traditional arts and crafts. They rented the courtyard, which belonged to Fan Jianchuan, and turned it into a showroom for their products, mainly organically dyed clothing, and the space for dyeing workshops and lessons.

Over the several days I spent ‘outside’ the museum complex, I came to know a small group of local and non-local people living in Anren, who provided me with some knowledge about the history and political geography of the place that has become branded as China’s Museum Town.

**Making the Museum Town of China**

Anren is a historic place. Founded in 620 in Tang Dynasty, it was named after the Confucian phrase *renzhe anren*, ‘the virtuous rests in virtue’. During the 1920s, a local Liu family rose to prominence since two of its members, Liu Wenhui and Liu Xiang became Sichuan’s strongest warlords. With their military influence, Liu Wenhui’s brother Liu Wencai became the dominant local landowner in Anren and enlarged his power through trade, usury and organised crime. At the peak of its prosperity, the Liu family funded the town’s major road construction, built several grand mansions and donated a modern style middle school.

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9 I owe this observation to Mike Rowlands and Wang Mingming.
After 1949, the Liu’s were soon crushed during anti-landlord campaign of Land Reform (1949 - 1953). In 1958, the former residence of Liu Wencai was converted into the Landlord Manor Exhibition Hall (dizhu zhuangyuan chenlieguan), the first ‘museum’ in Anren. Covering an area of 20,000 square metres, it housed an extensive collection of over 2,700 items in its more than 500 rooms. Opened in early 1959, the Exhibition Hall attracted 22000 visitors during the first ten days. Most notable was the 1965 work ‘Rent Collection Courtyard’, a collection of 114 life-sized clay sculptures, portraying Liu Wencai as the epitome of evil landlordism in ‘old China’ (Dutton 2015). The Landlord Manor Exhibition Hall made Anren nationally well-known. It used to accommodate thousands of visitors daily coming from across the country to see the landlords’ extravagant lifestyle and also their exploitation of the peasants. During the Cultural Revolution, it was renamed ‘Anren Class Education Hall’ (jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan). In 1976, Yuan Hongwei, a 20-year-old young man got a job as an interpreter at the Education Hall. Yuan, who became its director in 1990 and worked for the museum for 25 years, recalled that in the 1970s, there was a banner at the entrance reading ‘Devil’s Palace’ (Mogui Gongdian) and the manor was re-designed to demonstrate the horror of the landlord’s evils, with special units such as ‘execution room’ and the infamous ‘water dungeon’ (see Haiyan Lee 2013; Ho and Li 2015). In 1978 it was changed back to the Landlord Manor Exhibition Hall and after two years became re-enlisted as a provincial level heritage site.

In the Economic Reform period since 1978, the Education Hall began to lose its class-education purpose and was gradually deserted. In 1994, Anren became listed as a provincial level historic town and in 1996, the Landlord Manor Exhibition Hall was listed as a Key Heritage Site under State-level Protection (quanguo zhongdian wenwu baohu danwei) and renamed ‘Dayi10 Liu Family Manor House Museum’ (Dayi Liushi zhuangyuan bowuguan), with the notable omission of the term ‘landlord’, concurring with the abandonment of the class struggle element of its history in the museum’s narrative.

The Manor House Museum’s state-level recognition brought Anren the opportunity to undergo, as one of the 200 selected ‘pilot sites’ across the country, an ‘old town renovation

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10 Anren is under the jurisdiction of the rural county of Dayi.
programme’ (guzhen gaizao gongcheng) led and supported by the central government. From 1996 to 2002, Anren entered a period of infrastructure construction, farmland resumption, rural urbanisation, and, ironically, since the result of an ‘old town’ renovation, destruction of heritage properties. Consequently, most of farmland in surrounding villages (which were formerly owned and managed by the village ‘production teams’, shengchandui, a Maoist production unit) was resumed by the town and county governments, and as compensation, the majority of former villagers and some town residents were relocated into government-developed apartment blocks on the rural-town fringe \(^{11}\) and offered a discounted price to purchase the ‘social and public health insurances’ (shehui baoxian, yiliao baoxian) from the government to be able to receive a monthly allowance in unemployment, which became the main source of income for many of them.

With the resumed land, the town and county governments keenly invited external investments in local tourism. Launched in 2003, the JMC was the first tourism investment project. The museum complex was developed in an area on the town’s southeastern outskirt that was formerly a village of six ‘production units’ which had about 1,000 people. After the Dayi county government sold the land to Fan in 2003, the villagers were forced to move to a residential area on the other side of the town. The first case of relocation happened within the town, the project caused confusion and dismay in the local communities. A retired town official told me that the negotiation between the government and the villagers were difficult and the result unsatisfactory. Each villager received a compensation of ¥14,500 which included what they were supposed to buy social and health insurances and build their new homes with. A former villager told me that the amount was hardly enough to cover the cost of the house, and some became indebted and could not afford the insurances\(^{12}\). Both Fan

\(^{11}\) In the middle of the town there were a few families remain in their old pre-renovation houses. These dwellings had been kept invisible behind the streets, and the residents were required by the local government to maintain the current form of their houses and await further notice of planning.

\(^{12}\) As for those who did buy the social insurance, it became their major source of income. The price rose from ¥4,000 in 2003 to ¥12,000 or even ¥15,000 in 2015 as land expropriation continued. Typically, a person could receive slightly more than ¥1,000 per month at the age of over 55 in the case of men, or over 50 in the case of women. The policies had been changing since the JMC came and varied greatly in different cases. In general, one-off package of social insurance became available only to specific age groups, and younger generations were offered the '15-year' scheme (or some similar deal), for which they had to pay an annual fee for the first 5 years and the government promised to pay the rest, while its price kept going up. Land compensation and social insurances were crucial matters in the town’s ‘renovation’ process and also highly contentious and controversial. After the 2008 earthquake, relocated farmers could no longer get compensation payment to build their houses, but had to give up their land in exchange for housing in government-developed apartment blocks (for the sake of their own 'safety'), sometimes with extra fees to pay. The process was fraught with
and a vice-director told me in interviews that the museum provided jobs for over 100 of those relocated, but according to the few former villagers I talked to who were employed by the JMC, the figure was much smaller.

The launch of the JMC marked the beginning of the town’s touristification and rebranding. From 2003 to 2005, the town and county governments completed an initial planning of the town. In 2006, the Sichuan Daily News Group set up a local subsidiary in Anren in partnership with the JMC to collaborate on developing tourism-based businesses. Iris Zhang represented the Sichuan Daily in this partnership. Fan Jianchuan contributed to this venture the 13 Republican Era mansions built by local landlords from 1900s to 1940s which he acquired together with his purchase of the land for the museum complex from the local government. This joint company was thus named the Old Mansion Company (Lao Gongguan Gongsi) and it mainly operated to renovate the mansions into boutique hotels, restaurants, shops and museums, mainly along one street which was referred to, quite typically, as the ‘old street’ (lao jie). It was at Fan Jianchuan’s suggestion that the Old Mansion Company and the local government agreed to make museums the core of Anren’s branding and development strategy, with an overall vision to turn Anren into a place of quality life and high culture. The government subsequently introduced preferential policies that attracted a few other private collectors to set up their museums. In 2009 Anren was successfully granted the title of China’s Museum Town (Zhongguo Bowuguan Xiaozhen).

Land resumption continued during this process, peaking after the 2008 earthquake. In 2009, the Chengdu Culture and Tourism Company (CCTC) (Chengdu Wenhua Lüyou Gongsi), a state-owned company managing major tourist sites in and around Sichuan’s provincial capital city Chengdu, came to invest in Anren and acquired from the local government in total 15 square kilometres of land, 45 times of the size of the JMC. The Old Town Company, after a few years of operation, had yet been able to recoup its sizable investment in renovation. In 2011, Fan decided to sell his stake in the Old Mansion project, the mansions, to the CCTC. And the CCTC and the Sichuan Daily formed a renewed joint venture, named fittingly the New Mansion Company (Xin Gongguan Gongsi), and began a series of developments of new ancillary buildings and facilities on a larger scale, bringing corruption. People with strong guanxi played ‘nail households’ (dingzi hu) to get a better deal, while some were moved by force.
greater transformations to the town’s landscape. Consequently, the town was divided into two parts by a notorious tram track on which the CCTC spent reportedly around ¥27 million (roughly £3 million) to build.\textsuperscript{13} The north side of the town was where the local schools, hospitals, police station, banks and residential blocks were located and where local people lived and run their businesses, and on the south side were tourism businesses developed by nonlocal investors – hotels and restaurants owned by New Mansion Company, an international School, a new cinema – creating two worlds out of the same place, one for the local and the other for outsiders.

The vicissitudes of Anren’s tourism development speak of the significant issue of scale. At both town and county levels, it developed following the hierarchical order of the state administrative structure, seeking both official recognition and investment from higher administrative levels, in a process tightly governed by state authority. Yet the impetus for this development seems to have been the failure of the previous venture. Whilst the JMC also climbed the administrative ladder, in terms of seeking approval and support from the authorities, it was conducted in a rather different way. As I will show in greater detail from the next chapter onwards, the development of the JMC has not been constrained by the bureaucratic power of its locality, but transcends the geographical boundaries, making the museum itself the centre of its own network, that attracts people from all over China and the world to visit, to go on a pilgrimage to view memories that have been swept out elsewhere.

‘Slave’ to the Great Museum

After learning about my intention of doing ethnographic research on the museum, Xiaoman suggested that I get in touch with Fan Jianchuan’s executive assistant, Mr. Liao Jianguo. I met Liao on the last evening during my second visit while I was having dinner in the Qinghongran courtyard and Liao walked in with a takeaway box in hand. He was greeted as ‘Brother Liao’ and introduced to me as Anren’s ‘brand ambassador’. Having worked for Fan for over twelve years as a ‘cultural consultant’, Liao came across as very friendly and

\textsuperscript{13} The notoriety of the tram track derived from not only the incompatibility between its huge cost and rare use, but also the inconvenience it brought to cycling and driving, causing many accidents including the severe case where a pregnant woman fell from her bike and had a miscarriage.
sociable person who had good connections with local entrepreneurs, intellectuals and government officials.

Liao Jianguo suggested that I start with Fan Jianchuan’s autobiography, *Slave to the Great Museum: Memories and Dreams of Fan Jianchuan*, published in 2013. Based on oral history interviews, the book provides a fairly detailed account of the key periods of his life. The ethos of the book is crystallised in its title. It tells how Fan’s trajectory in life has entailed his fulfilling his dream by voluntarily enslaving himself to building a ‘great museum’. Fan’s notion of self-enslavement encapsulates the virtue of ‘self-sacrifice’ that fits the JMC rhetoric of ‘historical responsibility’ and is a key element of Fan’s public image, or personal branding.

Fan Jianchuan was born in 1957 in Yibin, Sichuan. Both his parents had their careers in military. Fan Jianchuan’s father had fought in the Anti-Japanese War, the Civil War (1947 - 1949) and the Korean War (1950 - 1953) and since the age of 13, had a great influence on his son’s life. Fan Jianchuan inherited from his father a set of strong moral values and military qualities.

Fan’s family suffered great losses during the successive socio-political movements in the early decades of the PRC. His mother was from a landlord class family. In the 1950s, his maternal grandfather died in the labour camp building railway tracks, and grandmother was killed, while pregnant, during a struggle session (*pidou*), the hallmark form of public humiliation and torture used against class enemies in political campaigns in Maoist China. Fan grew up during the Great Leap Famine (1959-1961), referred to in the book as ‘the period of difficulty’ (*kunnan shiqi*), the official term for the famine, and the feeling of hunger was etched in his mind. A few sweet potatoes would be the only meal for his mother, brother and himself. His father barely had anything to eat. Growing up without ever having any socks to wear, ‘we were doing pretty well compared to other families’, he writes (2013, 39).

During the Cultural Revolution, Fan’s father was condemned as a ‘capitalist roader’ which made him aware of politics from a very young age, or in his words, ‘politically precocious’ (*zhengzhi zaoshu*). As the son of a class enemy, Fan was not able to take part in the Red Guards movement but witnessed the astounding violence of the *wudou*, ‘armed struggles’, between different Red Guard factions at its highest intensity during the last 1960s. These
experiences shaped Fan’s understanding of Mao Era, a period of pain and suffering, which sparked his idea of collecting material things to preserve his memory. At the age of 18 Fan joined the nationwide ‘Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside’ (shangshan xiaxiang) movement like millions of his peers and was ‘sent down’ as an ‘educated youth’ (zhiqing) to live and work with peasants in a poor village near his hometown. Hunger and impoverishment were his most enduring memories of his time as a zhiqing. In the museum he built later to commemorate the generation, he put the words ‘as a zhiqing, I fainted twice out of starvation’.

In January 1977, Fan enlisted as a soldier in a defensive division of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) close to China’s northern border with Mongolia. The two years and eight months Fan spent there featured cold weather, harsh conditions and ‘extremely high-intensity labour’. In addition to training, soldiers had to work on defense construction project which was so ‘unbelievably hard’, in Fan’s own account, that he used to cough up blood. But Fan thrived and was awarded for his meritorious performance, which made his father very proud. His years as a soldier became a defining period which emboldened the military bearing he inherited from his father which he continuously manifests in his museums and his public character.

In 1979, Fan Jianchuan became a student at Xi’an Academy of Politics, majoring in economics. He started collecting things from everyday use objects, such as teacups and washing basin, to materials of documentation, which were being rapidly abandoned and destroyed in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. As he points out in his autobiography, collecting for him became a way to deal with what happened to himself and his family during the period and a way to preserve personal memories.

After graduation Fan took a teaching job at a military academy in Chongqing, and in 1987, left Chongqing to return to his hometown, Yibin, to work as a policy researcher for the municipal government. A capable researcher and daring supporter of the economic reform, Fan published several articles about the ongoing policy reform in economics in high-profile journals, including the Red Flag, a CCP-published theoretical political journal. He was promoted quickly and with his father’s reputation and connection, became the city’s youngest vice-mayor.
Fan’s talent in handling matters tactfully was evident in his years as an official. He recounts the story during his term as vice-mayor when he accompanied a Mr. Yang, then central government official and CCP Central Politburo member, on his visit to the Yibin countryside. On the way to their designated village, Yang asked the driver to change route and went to a poor peasant’s home. The family were cooking corn, and Yang asked them if they could afford rice. When the peasant said they could not, Yang asked if they had at least enough corn for the winter. The peasant, for fear that it would get himself into trouble if his answer reflected badly on the local officials present, lied and said they did. Yang, however, insisted that the peasant show him how much corn they had got. The peasant said it was stored upstairs in the attic and Yang asked for a ladder to see it himself. At that point, Fan volunteered to climb up instead. When he got up, he looked at the empty attic and assured Yang that there was enough corn in store. As such, he spared the local officials and himself the blame and afterwards made sure that each household of that village get enough food for the winter.

Fan remained a keen promoter of reform policies and voiced his thoughts diligently. In 1993 he published an article calling for a change in rural land contract system\(^\text{14}\) to allow private ownership. Bold as it was given the context, the publication led to an experiment in a Chongqing village. The experiment was thwarted and claimed illegal by the central government in 1998. But Fan believes that his article has influenced the following change of policy which extended the contract term from 15 years to 30 years.

In 1993, Fan quit his job as the vice-mayor because, as he states, it did not pay enough. He moved to Chengdu and soon joined a Hong Kong-invested real estate company as the office manager and soon moved on to become the general manager. His monthly salary soon increased to ¥8,000, while his salary as vice-mayor was ¥300. With his background in economics, Fan learned quickly about the real estate business on the job, grasping the key issues such as the land prices, other costs, land purchase, property sale, taxation, and how to negotiate with the government.

\(^\text{14}\) Under the 1982 constitution rural land was under ‘socialist public ownership’ as the means of production, which takes two forms- state ownership and collective ownership. Since 1982, the use right of land could be held by an individual household that contracts a piece of land.
In 1994, with a startup fund of ¥1 million, Fan set up the Jianchuan Housing Development Company. Yang Li, Fan’s oldest business partner, co-founder and CEO of the company, remarked in an interview with me that in the early 90s, whoever had the nerve to do business in real estate was able to profit from the booming market. The company developed its first project in west Chengdu which was sold to the city’s airport company. Fan could not afford a professional cleaning service, so the eight people of the company cleaned the property themselves before the launch. But it paid off. By 2001, Jianchuan was among the top real estate companies in Sichuan Province. As Liao Jianguo, who joined Jianchuan in 2003, told me much later in my fieldwork, Jianchuan’s strategy as a private company was to ally itself with bigger and more resourceful, generally state-owned corporations. In 2003 when Jianchuan’s real estate business was at its zenith, it had around 40 employees and was developing over a million square metres of property at a time. All the real estate projects Liao worked on were joint ventures. Jianchuan’s advantage lay in its executive effectiveness and marketing creativity. The company’s growth benefited from some of Fan’s successful business strategies, including low profit margin pricing, minimal investment in advertising and an insistence on ‘being the first instead of the best’, all of which later became long-standing principles that were still adhered to after the company moved its business into museum development.

With his financial success in real estate, the range of categories of his collecting expanded significantly. Over his 40 years as a collector, Fan claims to have amassed more than eight million items, from Japanese army bunkers, aircraft and artillery, to a vast number of objects for everyday use since 1900, including hundreds of thousands of posters, tens of thousands of badges, mirrors, tea pots, clocks, tons of letters, diaries and photo albums and so on. His collection touches on a wide array of aspects of Chinese social and political life in the 20th century. Fan is particularly proud of his collection of over a hundred items that have been recognised by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) as ‘state-level first-grade national cultural relics (guojia yiji wenwu)\(^\text{15}\).

\(^{15}\) Under the Cultural Relics Protection Law, all registered items of tangible ‘cultural relics’ (wenwu), according to their value, are graded into hierarchical framework, which divides into two categories: historical cultural relics (lishi wenwu) and revolutionary cultural relics (geming wenwu). In both categories there is the distinction between ‘ordinary cultural relics’ (putong wenwu) and ‘valuable cultural relics’ (zhengui wenwu) and the latter is further graded following a three-tier system into ‘first-grade’, ‘second-grade’ and ‘third-grade’ cultural relics. In
Collecting insanity

Yet these numbers are nowhere near able to convey the sheer scale of the physical...
presence of Fan’s collection. Being in the collection’s storage warehouse is a formidable experience. One is immersed in long lines of shelves, holding Mao busts, clocks, teacups, and radios. Mirrors made during the Cultural Revolution, are piled up against the wall. Huge piles of posters reach up to the high ceiling of the warehouse.

As one goes deeper, one comes across lines of closed bookshelves with A4 signs noting ‘Cultural Revolution Materials’ in bold characters. These shelves are stuffed full with documents wrapped in plastic bags, containing personal profiles, trial records, reporting letters, self-criticism letters, application forms, complaint documents, rehabilitation documents and so on. Mostly handwritten, these yellowish, crisp, poor quality sheets of paper were items that had the power to leave people imprisoned and persecuted, their families broken. Their mundane fragility when appearing in such quantity, make it near impossible to believe that they were things of life-and-death importance. In close proximity to something of such power, that I was aware of but had never seen before, I found myself breathing heavily when walking among the lines of shelves pondering the number of individuals being documented here by what was lying so quietly and banally in front of me. The number eight million became more difficult to grasp as the documents appeared simply uncountable. And the question that really mattered seemed to be ‘how many people were being recorded here?’ and then, inevitably, ‘who were they?’ and ‘where are they now?’.

Equally worth considering as the destiny of their authors is the destiny of the documents themselves. Upstairs, there are six rooms full of shelves of photo albums and diaries Fan collected during home clearances in the 1990s. These images of total strangers, and brief or lengthy accounts of their days, are of the most ordinary hence familiar contents: trip to the park on a sunny day, family gathering, the first day back to school after holidays, significant moments in a relationship. I refrained from photographing these diaries and photographs, for I found them simply too private, too intimate for some random spectator like myself. These are images and texts by the authors for themselves which were never meant to go beyond their families. Even opening and reading them made me feel as if I were breaching their privacy, peeping into places I was not supposed to.

The Cultural Revolution collection stored downstairs and the diaries and photo albums upstairs present two very different attitudes towards the past. The former were gotten rid of
hurriedly in the aftermath of Mao’s death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, dumped and destroyed with systematic, concerted efforts, with a collective ‘dread and disgust’, in the view of Fan Jianchuan, and for many, perhaps a sense of fear of looking back. The latter, on the other hand, were left behind, by families of moving from their old inhabitant to new flats, in very different time, of rapid change, urbanisation, and technological development. By the 1990s, film cameras and diary notebooks were soon to be replaced by newer models, video cameras, phones and personal computers as people embraced new excitement. Yet they both ended up here to testify a genealogy of China’s transformation over some 30 years.

The warehouse is located in a discreet corner of the museum complex, well out of visitors’ way. It is housed in a gated courtyard, guarded by a coded lock and a fierce dog. On the ground floor of the warehouse building is the office of the Collection Department consisting of five staff members. Cataloguing the collection and scanning the Cultural Revolution are their main tasks. Given the quantity and miscellany of the collection, the cataloging process has never been able to keep up with the speed of acquisition, as the department head, Cao Fang told me. Only about 15% of this enormous collection have been cataloged by 2017. The other task of the Collection Department is to scan documents page by page for a collaborative project the JMC launched with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2015, in aid of the latter’s research into the early decades of People’s Republic.
As a collector, Fan prioritises the symbolic value of an object over its material and aesthetic aspects, hence most of his collections are themed around significant historic events. Some of his collection were purchased in the early 1990s in the semi-legal, underground antique markets, and some, as noted above, collected as they were thrown out by people moving homes in the 80s and 90s. Fan cultivated a network of collector-dealers who supply his collections. One night in 2001 he made phone calls to over 20 of his contacts to collect Cultural Revolution mirrors in villages in different areas of China. Fan had them arrange people going through villages in lorries with loudspeakers looping the voice message ‘there is a crazy guy from Sichuan who wants to trade new mirrors for your old ones and give you five yuan’. Soon, over 50,000 mirrors were sent to Chengdu in cargo containers. ‘I must have been either drunk or bewitched to spend money like that,’ Fan once said half-jokingly recalling his decision. In 2008, right after the Wenchuan earthquake, Fan went to the disaster area and collected relics from the ruins. His museum of the earthquake was opened after only 30 days. Among the many collectors and heritage activists in the country, Fan is one of the few who have continued doing this with sustained and still expanding magnitude. Within the small portion of the catalogues I had the opportunity to look at, there are original
documents, books and archival materials of events from the Cultural Revolution to the Tiananmen Square protests and then the more recent public scandals and cases of corruption.

Fig. 7 Inside the JMC collection (fieldwork photo, 2015)
Fig. 8 Mao Era newspapers and posters in the JMC collection (fieldwork photo, 2015)

Fig. 9 A page from the catalog record for Cultural Revolution documents (fieldwork photo, 2017)
The affective power of the historical objects derives from the historical atrocity to which certain items bear witness. Museologist Paul Williams calls these ‘primary artefacts’ that ‘exist as tangible proof in the face of debate about and even denial of what transpired’ (2007, 25), which echoes the way Fan refers to them as ‘supporting evidence of history’, *lishi de pangzheng* (Fan 2013).

‘Explosive’ is another word Fan uses to describe the affective power of his collection, particularly a large number of files and documents during the Cultural Revolution, including leaflets, tabloids, diaries, letters of accusation, letters of self-criticism, suicidal notes, family correspondence and so on. One suicidal note from the 1970s, for instance, has many yellow stains left by the putrefaction liquid from the person’s dead body. A piece of newspaper with the portrait of Mao, which was collected as evidence in the file of someone condemned as a ‘Bad Influencer’ (*huaiifenzi*)\(^\text{16}\), because it was used by this person as toilet paper and carried remains of the person’s excrement. Another notable example is the file of a ‘rebel’ *zaofanpai*, a Red Guard in the ‘Rebel Faction’\(^\text{17}\), who committed suicide after he was found reversing the slogan ‘attack Liu Shaoqi and protect Chairman Mao’, into ‘attack Mao protect Liu’ (*da Mao bao Liu*). The file consists of over a hundred accusation letters, photographs of his slit wrists and dead body after his suicide jump, and also documents of his rehabilitation process, and the solution of his child’s employment.

**Duoye: Fan as a Paoge master**

As noted above, a military bearing, and particularly virtues such as dutifulness and self-sacrifice feature strongly in Fan Jianchuan’s public character. Another key aspect of this character is his charisma as a self-fashioned *Duoye*, a master of the secret society *Paoge*. The *Paoge*, or Gowned Brotherhood, was an active underworld organisation in the Sichuan region during the Qing Dynasty, whose legacy has become an important part of Sichuan’s popular culture\(^\text{18}\). Born and brought up in Yibin, a port city along Yangzi River with a rich

\(^\text{16}\) During the Cultural Revolution, ‘Bad Element’, *huaiifenzi*, is one of the Five Black Categories, *heiwllei*, of people who were considered enemies of the Revolution.

\(^\text{17}\) For more on Red Guard factions during the Cultural Revolution, see Yin 1996; Walder 2002; Heaslet 1972, and Fox 2012.

\(^\text{18}\) For more on *Paoge* culture, see Wang 2008 and Wang 2018.
Paoge culture, Fan strongly identifies with the Paoge ethics which emphasises loyalty, fairness, candidness and courage. Fan likes to refer to himself as ‘duoye’, meaning the helmsman, the term that means a chief master in the Paoge argot, someone who used to act as a legitimate mediator of social justice and order in late-Qing and Republican Era rural societies outside the control of the government (Wang 2018). The righteous and ‘down-to-earth’ character of paoge master fits perfectly with Fan’s identity as a daring collector and his Internet persona as an outspoken commentator on social issues in his blog, and since 2010, his Weibo profile, a major social media platform in China.

Moreover, these two aspects of Fan’s public image also match with the historic features of the museum’s locale, the town of Anren. On the one hand, Anren is known as the hometown of numerous military leaders during the Resistance War. On the other, Anren’s infamous landlord Liu Wencai, before disgraced, was a respected paoge master who acted as a protector of Anren and funded a local high school and led an irrigation project.

From the above, I intend to show how Fan presents, through stories about himself, his collection and social media, an array of different personae – as a son, a soldier, a collector, a businessman and a contemporary reincarnation of Republican Era vernacular local leader19 and so on – which constellate to construct a charismatic figure, a righteous and self-sacrificial ‘museum slave’, who is serious, respectable but has also grounded, practical, with a nonchalance to speak of his mind so not at all difficult to connect. Harriet Evans, the Principle Investigator of the project that my research belonged to, once described Fan as ‘a very entitled man’. Fan’s entitlement could be understood by considering Stephan Feuchtwang’s theorisation of ‘charismatic authority’ as ‘a leadership and following brought about through a new revelation or a new vision, but always necessarily also derivative from what is already authoritative’ (2008, 93). What makes Fan’s public character charismatic and attractive is precisely that it blends values both old and new, established and innovative. I argue that this construct works to make Fan the personification of the moral discourse of ‘historical responsibility’ that the JMC project articulates.

19 Fan is really fond of the character of Paoge leader to the extent that he for a project he did in 2016, he made a short film and played the role of one in it.
Alternative voices

On 15th April 2015, after a break of three months, I returned to Anren and checked again into Li Changzhi’s hostel. Planning to stay for a longer period, I contacted Xiaoman to help me look for a rented place. The next day I met Liao Jianguo, who came together with Mr. Yuan Hongwei, the former director of the Liu Family Mansion Museum who had been working as a vice-director of the JMC after retirement.

They both welcomed the idea of me working as a researcher at the museum and agreed to ask Fan about it. On 27th April 2015, I was ‘arranged’ to ‘help out’ in the museum’s ‘cultural development department’, with Fan’s consent, which I assumed as there was no formal announcement. The office was on the first floor of a building behind the visitor centre. It was marked, though, at the foot of the staircase by a sign that reads ‘complaint centre’. There were four vice directors and three departments working on that floor, administration, finances and ‘cultural development’, which, I soon learnt, was responsible for museum research and curation. The vice directors had their private offices, and the rest of the space was divided by tall bookshelves into three areas for the three departments, where staff members work in cubicles.

Liao introduced me to Qin Hua, who is the head of the ‘cultural development’ department, which was, as I shall refer to interchangeably from here onwards, the curatorial team. In her early thirties, Qin had worked for the JMC for over 10 years. She joined the museum right after getting her undergraduate degree in museum and archaeology from a local university and was one of the earliest staff members who took part in the founding of the JMC. The other members in the curatorial team included two researchers, Mr. Song Wu and Mr. Xu Dongming who were responsible for gathering information for exhibitions and writing outlines and captions, and two graphic designers, Ms. Cheng Xue and Mr. Guan Sheng. As the vice-director leading the museum curation and research, Yuan Hongwei was Qin Hua’s line manager.

Though physically being in the museum’s office, its operation was far from transparent. As my supervisor, Qin would give me small tasks, mainly translating captions and searching for images for the exhibitions. All staff members were required to clock in at 8:30 in the morning
and out at 6:00 in the afternoon. The museum provided accommodation during weekdays for employees who did not live locally. Though not officially a member of staff, I went to work the same time with the others and ate together with them twice a day for lunch and supper. Breakfast was also provided early in the morning so only those who lived in the complex would be able to make it.

Everyone was polite and avoided talking to me more than necessary. Meanwhile, I found a one-bedroom flat in an apartment block (xiaoqu) through Xiaoman and moved out of Li’s hostel. After the first few days, I started getting to know a couple of my ‘colleagues’ in the curatorial team who took an interest in who I was and what I was doing there. In his mid-fourties, graphic designer Guan Sheng was originally from Sichuan but had spent ten years working various jobs in the city of Shenzhen. Without achieving what he wanted, he grew tired of the competition, instability and high expense of living in Shenzhen and moved back to Chengdu in 2009. Guan had a reputation among the coworkers for his ‘three ins and three outs’ (san jin san chu) of the museum, as he had quit the job three times over six years and returned each time. Despite the fact that his three ‘returns’ to his museum job were all results of him failing to get a new one, Guan was rather proud of himself, as being ‘the one who had the nerve to go against the boss’. When asked about his opinion of Mr. Fan, he showed his distaste towards the idea that people saw him as a hero. ‘He is a businessman after all’, Guan told me, and that ‘it is money that he is after’.

When I started fieldwork in April, the museum had just completed developing two museums for the local government of Lizhuang, a historic town near Yibin, Fan’s hometown. On 7th July 2015, the Museum of Japanese War Crime was opened in the complex to mark the 78th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937. A few weeks later, three new museums were completed in another town, on a contract with the local government. Given such a tight schedule, it is not surprising that a few members of the curatorial team, including Mr. Guan, expressed to me in private their concerns about the quality of the museums. Pressed for time, curation was done in a rather hasty manner. The selection of material was far from careful and the staff hardly had time to have the texts proofread, about which Guan

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20 The Marco Polo Bridge Incident, or Lugouqiao Incident (Lugouqiao Shibian) was a conflict between Chinese and Japanese troops near the Marco Polo Bridge (Lugouqiao) outside Beiping (now Beijing) on July 7th, 1937, which finally led the two countries into war.
said that he felt ‘irresponsible’ to the visitors.

Feng Wei was the first one who I talked with outside the curatorial team. Two years older than me, Feng was in his late-twenties and had worked as a human resource administrator for the museum for two years. Holding a master’s degree in tourism management from a Chengdu college, he got the job with a reference from his supervisor, who knew Fan Jianchuan on a personal level. Feng told me most of the staff got their jobs through guanxi, personal relations, as either friends or relatives of Fan’s family. Fan put his own retired brother to work at the museum, who was ‘practically doing nothing’, Feng told me. Zhao Jun, another vice-director, knew Fan from the army, and his wife was working at the collection. In Feng’s words, hiring friends and relatives was Fan’s way of ‘taking care’ of them. In his view the company was run like a family. Naturally, those who came from guanxi and those merely employed were treated quite differently. Fan’s ‘trusted ones’ worked at the company’s lucrative positions such as construction, purchase and the restaurants, while enjoying a rather flexible timetable. The other employees, especially the design and curatorial staff I worked with, were to his eyes rather alienated from that privileged circle. Apart from the mandatory staff meeting every Monday evening, my curatorial colleagues did appear rather reluctant to meet Mr. Fan, which seemed to concur with Feng’s view.

Feng and I were neighbours in the local apartment block of my rented apartment, so we would often walk back together after work. As we grew familiar, our conversations on the way home became longer and more relaxed. A diligent and ambitious young man, Feng had enjoyed working closely with the director. He believed in Fan’s enthusiasm about museums and admired his knowledge and devotion. Yet to his eyes, the museum enterprise was far from successful. While Fan boasted about his plan to build 100 museums, Feng said that the company was in decline and would not last for more than another five years. He believed that the museums would then be handed over to the local government, as it was unlikely that Fan’s only daughter would inherit it.

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Rather than straying away from the central theme of this chapter, Fan Jianchuan, the purpose of the above descriptions is to present the new perspectives that I encountered as
my fieldwork progressed, as possible ways to learn about Fan. These comments from the handful of museum workers who were willing to share their views with me at that stage, differed drastically from the textual materials I had previously consulted, namely Fan’s autobiography and some published speeches and interviews, which were all produced from Fan’s viewpoint. Unlike the elaborately constructed, as I argued before, neat and convincing narratives the previous texts provided, my colleagues’ comments appeared biased, sometimes emotional and communicated in very fragmented but always contextualised ways. I should note that at that point, five months had passed after the initial meeting with the ambivalent handshake and I had yet to have the opportunity to engage Fan in a formal conversation. These two kinds of information with contrasting perspectives, forms and attitudes deepened the enigma of the character of Fan Jianchuan and brought out more tensions between the different personae he occupied, which contested his professed moral values and charisma.

In this chapter I have introduced my experience of getting to know Mr. Fan Jianchuan, the creator and owner of the JMC, over the process of finding my way in and familiarising myself with the museum. Through textual materials, stories and comments from people I met in and outside the museum, I ventured to develop an understanding about Fan’s personal background, public image and moral character, but found that opinions were very divided and the picture far more complicated.

As my fieldwork continued, however, I came to have more time and opportunities to explore Fan’s character in the context of the museum complex he created, both in the sense of the museums themselves, and the history of their development. As well as being the central protagonist of the story of his project, Fan has always placed himself at the very centre of its operation and management. And most importantly, he has personally led the curation of each and every one of his museums, from decisions about the theme, the architecture all the way to forewords, epilogues, colours, lighting, exhibits and every detail involved. If not all would go as far as Tracey Lu (2014) to state that Fan built the museum complex ‘single-handedly’, there appears to be a consensus among the commentaries on the JMC that he is an extremely ‘hands-on’ director. As a result, throughout the museum complex, Fan’s personal touches are eminently visible. Such personalised exhibitionary elements form a significant contrast with the curatorial ethos of museums developed by the state. Fan’s
museums are closely integrated with his publications and public activities. Together they form a holistic and multi-faceted way of meaning-making, through which Fan’s moral discourse of historical responsibility and historical justice is professed.

Concluding their ethnography of charismatic local leaders in a Chinese village, Stephan Feuchtwang and Mingming Wang argue that

‘charisma is the expectation of the extraordinary. It is the expectation of finding an agency through which a turn of fortune towards utopia will be brought about in historical time. Utopia can be modest, an idea of social justice and the personal realisation of promises unfulfilled in the history of the present. Or it can be grand, the flash of a reality beyond the consensual acceptance of what is possible’ (2001, 172).

Their definition of utopia could be borrowed to describe what Fan professes to provide, a historical justice that one could hope from extraordinary ways of history making, by constantly testing and negotiating the limits of reality, set by the acceptance of the state; a process of contestation and changes, as I will explicate from next two chapters that follow in the form of a genealogy of the JMC’s development.
Chapter 4: Genealogy 2003-2007

In this chapter, I outline a genealogy of the JMC during its early period from 2003 to 2007 and examine the museums and memorials developed to commemorate the memories of the Resistance War, the Red Age and Chinese cultural tradition.

Different from official ‘places of memory’ in China’s twentieth century, these early museums in the JMC feature an originality in both themes and aesthetics. Its museums dedicated to the Resistance War shows an explicit intention to recognise the memories of those who had been on the margins of existing historical narratives, and those about the Red Age focus on the real everyday experience of people’s lives. The representation of China’s twentieth century in these early museums contests the official narrative, both in the selection of histories and ways in which the histories are told. As already noted, the development of these museums was not a simple task. Instead, it was a complicated trajectory that requires and deserves a historicised understanding.

This genealogy is driven by two aims. The first is to understand the logic of history-making in the JMC, that is to say, what histories are selected and how are they told. The second concerns the ramifications of its history-making. Do they constitute a counter discourse to the official narratives of history? What do they tell us about remembering and forgetting as contested practices in the context of power relations between what agencies and practices?

By adopting a ‘genealogical approach’, I seek to present not simply an analysis of the museums in a chronological order of their creation, but a history of their creation, an effort, in other words, to reconstruct the significant events that happened before, during and after the museum-making processes, pertaining to the contextual factors, curatorial decisions, tactics, techniques, and subsequent changes, which will ultimately inform a dynamic relationship between the museum and the state authority.

These two aims are framed with reference to the notions of museum ‘poetics’ and ‘politics’, foregrounded by Henrietta Lidchi as two parameters for museum analysis (1997). Lidchi
defines museum poetica as ‘the practice of producing meaning through the internal ordering and conjugation of the separate but related components of an exhibition’ (1997, 168). In the case of the JMC, the poetica could be explored both within individual museums and at the level of the project as whole. Following this vein, I address the selection of themes, the narratives and exhibitionary styles and techniques, and aim to demonstrate how the museums articulate the moral historic consciousness that Fan Jianchuan sets out to profess. I focus in particular on how different curatorial methods and exhibitionary styles are deployed in the treatment of different historical subjects.

The curatorial decisions are inexplicably linked to the politics of museums, ‘the role of the exhibitions/museums in the production of social knowledge’ (1997, 184), with close and significant relation to power. As Lidchi, among others, rightly point out, ‘museum collections do not simply “happen”’ but rather are ‘historical, social and political events’ (1997, 185). Of crucial importance here is therefore to historicise the process and contents of the museums’ construction.

These concerns prompt the imperative to consider the people employed to construct, administer and manage the museum complex, and Fan Jianchuan, of course, as the central figure. He is not only the one who initiated and funded the museum project, but also the one who made the final decision on every matter of the project. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Fan was a well-known collector by 2003 but still a layman to the museum world. Without any formal training in design, narrative or collection, he described his impression of museums as ‘sacred’ and ‘elitist’ but had made up his mind to change the status quo (Fan 2013).

From the very beginning, Fan has been controlling the direction of the project, from all levels of the overall planning to the wording of the captions and choices of historical themes. ‘Everything has to be the way I imagined’ were his exact words (Fan 2013, 148). Iris Zhang, who had worked with Fan on Anren’s renovation project, describes the JMC as ‘the material and spatial expression of Fan Jianchuan’s personal ideology and values’ (Xiong 2008). That said, the JMC could not have been possible without the contribution of others as it has been widely recognised that the authorship of museum work is collaborative in nature (MacLeod and Duncan 2015; Piehl and Francis 2018). Fan did benefit greatly from working with
designers, architects and museum experts in the early years of the JMC to develop a curatorial style of his own which he used in later JMC museums and consulting projects. While architects designed the buildings, historians provided the facts and artists visualised the displays, Fan Jianchuan retained the role as the mastermind of the museum. It was precisely because of his layman-ship that made it possible for him to build something he envisioned. The development of the project was a process of disputes and negotiations throughout which Fan has managed to maintain the main voice.

In September 2003, Fan invited architects Chang Yung Ho and Liu Jiakun to Anren to discuss the overall planning of the JMC. Chang is a Chinese American architect and the founder of China’s first private and independent architect firm Atelier FCJZ. Liu Jiakun is a friend of Fan’s and award-winning architect working in Chengdu. Fan gave the two three key requirements: first, interspersed location of museums of different themes, second, the overall layout design of a park, and third, the integration of museums and commercial amenities.

After two months the architects came up with an initial planning, with the Resistance War series and the Cultural Revolution (later named the Red Age) series forming two intersecting lines in the shape of a cross.

In November 2003, Fan invited a group of 19 architects from top universities and national and provincial architectural design and research institutes to discuss collectively the spatial an architectural layout of the museum complex. The architecture of a museum is designed to match symbolically with its subject. The Museum of Flying Tigers, for example, resides in a building of the shape of a battleship. The Museum of Anti-rightist Campaign, which did not materialise eventually, was initially designed to be in the shape of the Chinese character for ‘right’ 右. As I was to learn, and the rest of the genealogy will show, the link between architecture, design and content is a key feature that runs through the JMC’s way of meaning-making.
Fig. 10 Early illustrations of layout plan for the JMC by Chang Yung Ho and Liu Jiakun (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

Fig. 11 Illustration for the design of the Anti-rightist Campaign Museum (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)
Museum of the Kuomintang Army (Resistance War Front Battlefield)

In August 2005, after merely nine months of construction and curatorial preparation, the JMC opened its first five museums of the Resistance War series, which are the Museum of the Kuomintang (Nationalist) Army, the Museum of the Communist Army, the Museum of the Sichuan Army, the Museum of U.S Military Aid to China, and the Museum of the Unyielding War Prisoners. All of the museum buildings were designed by nationally renowned architects handpicked by Fan Jianchuan, and the museum outlines were prepared by a team of historians and researchers from Sichuan University, the Sichuan Provincial Museum and the Chengdu Party History Research Office (Dangshi bangongshi). Completed at the same time was the Chinese Heroes Square, a group of 101 larger than life cast-iron sculptures of prominent military figures during the Resistance War, 50 from the Kuomintang and 51 from the CCP. The Chinese Heroes Square needs separate analysis both for its content and its intersecting of different political affiliations and for the fact that it was temporarily closed down at one stage.

Fig. 12 The JMC under construction in 2004 (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

Ground-breaking with this series was the comprehensive representation of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) in the Resistance War history which had been generally down-played by the party-state in official histories. Though joined in alignment in the
Resistance War against Japan, the Nationalists and the Communists turned antagonists after 1945 and engaged in a civil conflict which resulted in the Nationalists’ defeat on the mainland and retreat to Taiwan in 1949. Hence, the Chinese Nationalist Party has been excoriated in dominant historical and political discourses during the Mao era, and the Nationalist army’s major contribution to the resistance against the Japanese aggressions had long been denied and only began to be included, marginally, in the official narratives since the late 1980s (Denton 2014b). Four of the five JMC Resistance War museums opened in 2005 show the war efforts from the side of the Nationalists, with one being unprecedentedly dedicated solely to the Kuomintang army.

Engaged with a politically delicate history, the timing of the construction of these museums is a crucial issue. The year 2005 marked a turning point in the Nationalist-Communist relationship. In April 2005, Mr. Lien Chan visited Mainland China from Taiwan in his capacity as the Kuomintang Chairman and met with Hu Jintao, then CCP General Secretary. This was the first meeting of the leaders of the two parties since 1945. Later in September, Hu Jintao delivered a commemorative speech for the 60th anniversary of the victory of the Resistance War, which was generally regarded as an official recognition of the Kuomintang’s contribution. Hu Jintao announced that

‘Resistance forces under the leadership of the KMT and the CCP were engaged in operations against Japanese aggressors on frontal battlefields and in the enemy’s rear respectively, forming a strategic common front against the enemy. As the main force on frontal battlefields, the Nationalist army organised a series of major campaigns, particularly the Shanghai, Xinkou, Xuzhou and Wuhan campaigns during the initial phase of the War, which dealt heavy blows to the Japanese army.’ (Zhang and Weatherley 2013, 226)

This certainly did not happen overnight. In his review of the post-Mao revisions to the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, Kirk Denton shows that the historical representation of the Resistance War has been ‘broadened’ to include other components/social forces than the CCP. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, there was an increase of Kuomintang presence in state museums, which could be seen as a preamble to the ‘official recognition’ in 2005, under a broader tendency towards a new understanding of China’s twentieth
century history as ‘centred more on the nation-state and less on the party and the revolution it led’ (Denton 2014a, 64). Rana Mitter also discerns a shift in the official narrative of the Resistance War against Japan put forward after the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1985, showing a ‘downgrading of the fierce attacks on the Nationalists and Chiang Kai-shek that were commonplace in the Mao era (2000, 280).

However, building a museum specially for the Nationalist army was unprecedented, let alone having the majority a group of Resistance War memorial museums focusing on Nationalist army. The value of the unity of the Chinese nation (Zhonghua minzu tuanjie) serves as the ideological base for the JMC’s representation of the Resistance War. From the selection of themes to exhibitionary styles, the early museums put heavy emphasis upon the suffering and sacrifice of the Chinese people as a whole, which is at the core of the nationwide campaign of patriotic education since the 1990s and the ‘century of humiliation’ rhetoric.

With such a curatorial approach, the JMC received considerable official support during its preparation, evidenced by visits from city, provincial and central government officials in 2004 and 2005, including Li Chuncheng, then mayor of Chengdu, Shan Jixiang, director of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) and Wang Zaixi, deputy director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of CCP Central Committee. Prior to its opening, Fan Jianchuan had a consultancy meeting about the contents of the Resistance War museums with a group of experts from the provincial government and Party History Research Office. Their feedbacks were generally positive: Mr. Hui, a former vice director of the Provincial Party Committee Publicity Office believed that the Museum of the Kuomintang Army was ‘basically in line with historical reality’ and was of ‘practical significance to pave the way for the current Nationalist - Communist cooperation again’ (JMC internal document). It was also made clear that the central role of the Communist Party remained the bottom line. Mr. Liu, Director of the Party History Research Office of the Chengdu Municipal CCP Committee, stressed that ‘the language/narrative [of the exhibitions] should be carefully considered and consistent with the history of the CCP’ (JMC internal document).

The opening of these five museums took place on 15th August 2005, on the basis of what Fan Jianchuan called a ‘preview’. Two days later, the People’s Daily, the CCP’s official newspaper, published a commentary article on the JMC, titled ‘From History to the Future’,
calling the museum project a remarkable ‘virtuous deed’ (yiju).

However, less than a month later in early September, the JMC was informed that an inspection team was arranged to start an ‘examination’, or ‘investigation’ (shencha) by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CCP (CCPPD). The team consisted of officials from the State Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Central Party History Research Office, the SACH and the National Museum. No one was quite sure why the sudden change of attitude, particularly given the previous endorsement from the local and regional authorities and especially the article on the CCP’s mouthpiece the People’s Daily. Some said that the investigation was triggered by an anonymous letter to the CCP Central Committee, claiming that ‘someone in Sichuan was building museums for the Kuomintang’ (Xiong 2008, 20). The investigation culminated in a document of rectification advice that went over a hundred pages, which, though I persistently put requests to the museum to have a look, was doomed to remain ‘unfound’. The rectification process went on for three months, until the museums were reviewed and approved by officials from the Chengdu Municipal Publicity Department and Culture Department in early December. The Museum of the Kuomintang Army was renamed ‘Museum of the Resistance War Front Battlefield’ (Zhengmian zhanchan guan), following the aforementioned passage in Hu Jintao’s ‘official recognition’ speech, and the Museum of the Communist Army, accordingly, became the ‘Museum of the Resistance War Mainstay’ (Zhong liu di zhu guan). On 27th December 2005, the Jianchuan Museum held an official opening ceremony for these museums, with the presence of the head of the Chengdu Municipal Bureau of Culture and other government officials.
Fig. 13 Exterior of the Museum of the Resistance War Front Battlefield with the sculpture 'Mourning Soldier' (fieldwork photo, 2015)

Fig. 14 Museum of the Resistance War Front Battlefield under construction with the original label 'Museum of Nationalist Army in the Resistance War' (top left) (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)
The Museum of the Resistance War Front Battlefield is housed in a vast building with 1299 square metres of exhibition space. The museum label, composed of emboldened black characters, is displayed on the left side of the building’s front wall. Benefit them, traces of removed characters of the original label were still visible. Staff members told me that Fan kept the traces purposely as evidence of the change of the museum’s name. Square-shaped with white walls, the museum building stands as a solemn and understated memorial. In front of the museum is a five-metre-tall cast iron sculpture, ‘The Mourning Soldier’, depicting a lone soldier in Nationalist army uniform standing with a rifle in hand as if guarding the museum. Referencing the Chinese idiom ‘a mourning troop must win’ (ai bing bi sheng), the sculpture speaks of the rage of the Chinese people under Japan’s aggression and humiliation, and the hardship and brutality of the War of Resistance.

The statue stands in a paddy field, which was Fan’s design to symbolise the alliance between the people and the army. In the initial plan by the museum’s commissioned architect, Peng Yigang, an internationally renowned master whose works include the Nanjing Massacre Museum and London Chinatown, the open space was to be a water pond to create the visual effect of moving water waves being reflected on the museum’s exterior walls. But Fan insisted on his idea. ‘It is very practical and very productive’, Fan writes with pride in his autobiography, ‘besides, we can also eat what we grow and save a lot of money’ (2013, 153).

A smaller wooden label of the museum’s original name, ‘Museum of the Kuomintang Army in the Resistance War’, handwritten by Lien Chan, hangs outside the entrance to the museum. Through this, one ascends a staircase with walls on both sides displaying black-and-white portraits of the 256 martyred Nationalist generals printed on porcelain plaques, echoing the popular tradition of worshiping porcelain portraits of ancestors in Chinese funerary rituals.
Fig. 15 Wooden label with Lien Chan’s handwritten ‘Museum of Nationalist Army in the Resistance War’ (left) and staircase at the museum’s entrance (right) (fieldwork photos, 2016)

Fig. 16 Wall of martyred Nationalist generals (left) and quote from Chiang Kai-shek (right) (fieldwork photos, 2016)

The staircase ends after 45 steps at a wall-sized display board with the image of Chiang Kai-shek delivering his declaration of war against Japan in Mount Lushan on 17th July 1937, besides the quote: ‘Once the war breaks out, no matter from the north or the south, old or young, one has the responsibility to take part in the resistance war, with the determination to sacrifice everything’ (my translation). This image was replaced by an excerpt from Hu Jintao’s ‘official recognition’ speech during the 2005 ‘investigation’ of the museum, and later changed back.
Light dims as one enters the exhibition area to the left side from the display board on the first floor. The dominant hue of the interior is silver grey, the colour of gunmetal, creating a somber and weighty atmosphere. Maps, photographs and texts are etched in black on aluminium display boards. The exhibition is structured in three units. The first unit, ‘Origin of the Resistance War’, shows the military resistance of Kuomintang troops from Japan’s occupation of Manchuria in 1931 until Chiang Kai-shek’s war declaration in 1937. The second unit, ‘Front Battlefield’, showcases the 22 major battles the Kuomintang army fought against Japan between 1937 and 1945. Following a chronological order, each battle is described in one of the subunits arranged along the wall with maps, images and texts displayed on the walls and object in glass cases, and some with dioramas.

Noteworthy of these is the subunit on the Battle of Yenangyaung, that took place in April 1942 in Burma during the Second World War. The 113th Regiment of the Republic of China Expeditionary Force into Myanmar defeated the Japanese army in this battle and rescued more than 7,000 British soldiers besieged by the Japanese army, and more than 500 British and American missionaries, journalists and civilians. The central figures in this operation
were Colonel Liu Fangwu, Head of the 113th Regiment, and General Sun Liren, commander of the Chinese 38th Division who made the decision to rescue the besieged British troops and personally commanded the battle. After the end of the war both men were honoured by the Nationalist Party and the UK, but Sun Liren was accused of conspiracy by the Nationalist government in Taiwan in 1955 and put under house arrest. Due to the controversial arrest of Sun, the Yenangyaung Battle was denied publicity and Liu Fangwu was implicated and dismissed from his post. After Sun’s rehabilitation in 2001, Liu Fangwu’s youngest son, Liu Weimin, a Chinese American entrepreneur, worked actively to repair his father’s reputation. Liu Weimin got in touch with Fan and donated his father’s personal items to the museum. The exhibition, in turn, adopts a narrative that highlights emphatically the role of Liu Fangwu, displaying a video interview of Liu Weimin on his father and a larger-than-life statue of Liu Fangwu mounted on a horse, while Sun Liren’s name appeared only once in a caption.

This treatment raises interesting questions about the idea of truth in history-telling in museums. Whilst it is widely recognised that situations where ‘the appeal to popular sentiment is privileged over historical accuracy’ pose ‘a challenge to academic values’, they are far from uncommon in memorial museums (Williams 2007, 123). Here, however, what could have been a more comprehensive and balanced account of the battle is sacrificed for
the aim to avoid controversy and present a narrative that could be easily understood and accepted by the audience.

Displays of the first two units were predominantly wartime objects produced by the Nationalist army, including a set of desks, chairs and stools of the Chengdu school-based department of the Huangpu Military Academy donated by the Sichuan Huangpu alumni association; a ‘Zhongzheng sword’, also known as the ‘soldier’s soul’, a carry-on dagger that Chiang Kai-shek gave to Huangpu students; a set of porcelain teacups, saucers, bowls, and dishes made in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, in April 1938, bearing the words ‘saving the nation with iron and blood, fighting the war to the end’ (*tiexie jiuguo, kangzhan daodi*).

Downstairs, the third unit is dedicated to the China Air Force set up during the Resistance War. It highlights the role of Song Meiling, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, in developing the air force through liaising with the United States and later acted as the head of the Force. On display is a cheongsam worn by Song Meiling donated by Jiang Xiaoming, Chiang Kai-shek’s grandniece, to Fan Jianchuan on his visit to New York in 2008.

The exhibition ends with a mosaic figure of Robert Capa’s portrait of a young KMT soldier of probably no more than 15 years of age, gazing with his head turned towards the exit as if seeing the visitors off. The wall-sized mosaic is made out of porcelain cap badges of the KMT army. Using historical artefacts as part of a visual installation is one of Fan Jianchuan’s unconventional curatorial techniques. Original historical images and artefacts are synthesised to create completely new artworks that speak more powerfully than either of them alone. Here, the power of the new assemblage comes from neither the authenticity, nor the material or aesthetic features of the artefacts, but what they symbolically represent.
From the above case of the cap-badge mosaic, we see that the objects not only simply speak, but speak in orchestrated ways. These visual arrangements of artefacts are a creative process, which aids the museums’ purposefully economic and self-disciplined narrative strategy and allows the historical content compromised by the risk of censorship to be remedied by the affective power of artefacts. Examples like this are found across the museum complex.
Museum of the Communist Army (Resistance War Mainstay)

If the key word of the Kuomintang Army Museum (Front Battlefield) is solemnity, that of the Communist Army Museum (Mainstay) would be glory. This is best manifested by the strong visual contrast between the architecture and interior design of the two museums, the former featuring white and grey, the latter red and golden. The Communist Army Museum, though slightly smaller in size, has a spacious Red Plaza attached to its side, with a wall of red-coloured relief depicting CCP military leaders Mao Zedong and Zhu De standing on the Great Wall. It is obvious that the purpose of the Front Battlefield Museum is to recognise the long-overlooked sacrifice and suffering of the Nationalist army, and the Mainstay functions to celebrate the CCP’s role in initiating and maintaining the ‘Second United Front’, of the alliance between the Communist and Nationalist armies in resisting the Japanese aggression.

Fig. 20 Entrance and interior of the Museum of the Resistance War Mainstay (fieldwork photos 2018)

The building of the Museum of the Resistance War Mainstay consists of two parts, symbolising the two army forces under the leadership of the CCP: the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army. Visitors go through a narrow entrance in the middle – symbolising the precarious role of the Communist force at the beginning of the Resistance War – guarded by statues of Mao Zedong and Zhu De, Commander-in-Chief of the Eighth Route Army, into a spacious hall where stands a pillar of 1.8 meters in diameter and 18 meters in height, with an inscription of the full text of Mao Zedong’s essay ‘On Protracted War’.
The reason for this particular essay to be singled out is that the idea of the ‘protracted war’ or the ‘people’s war’ set the strategic principle of the Communist Army in the Resistance War, and later was used to define the CCP’s military contribution. This text, therefore, has been to an extent mythologised in the exhibition. The museum’s interpreters are instructed to tell visitors with the following clearly novelised anecdote about Mao Zedong’s ‘On Protracted War’, as explicated in the interpreter’s manual: ‘Do you know how Chairman Mao finished this immortal work? In early May 1938, the season had entered early summer, but the caves in Yan’an were still chilly. Mao Zedong waved his writing brush and wrote ‘On Protracted War’ on coarse straw paper. He wrote continuously for days or nights without sleeping. When he was too tired and sleepy to write, he asked the guards to bring him water to wash his face or walk around in the courtyard to clear his mind. Otherwise, he would rest on his chair for a while, and continue to work. He did not even know when his cotton shoes were burning. It took him eight days and nine nights to finish this masterpiece.’ (JMC 2007)

The idea of the exhibition, as the museum outline document makes clear, is not ‘presenting a chronological, comprehensive party history’ but instead ‘to let artefacts tell stories’. The exhibition is thematically structured into three main sections. The first section, ‘Backbone of the Nation’ (minzu jiliang), consists of two subunits, one tracing the formation of the Second United Front from 1931 to 1937, focusing in particular on the Xi’an Incident on 12th December 1936; and the other introducing seven key CCP military leaders in the Resistance War, including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Peng Dehuai, Ye Jianying, Deng Xiaoping and Nie Rongzhen. Images and texts are printed on red-coloured display boards, and each of these figures has a brass-etched portrait of the size of the wall.

Again, it is worth noting here the meaning of the different materials chosen to represent Nationalist generals and the Communist military leaders, the former porcelain and the latter brass. In the Communist Army Museum, the brass board not only represents a more ‘glorious’ visual aesthetic but carries another message that this is a memorial to honour and celebrate rather than to mourn. The materials are chosen in adherence to the political status of the subjects that they are used to represent.

The second section, ‘Years behind the Enemy Line’ (dihou suiyue), tells the story of how
under the collaboration with the Nationalist Party, the Communist armies were adapted into
the Eighth Route Army (Balujun) and the New Fourth Army (Xinsijun) and took various forms
of guerrilla warfare to fight against the Japanese. This follows into the last section,
‘Development of Revolutionary Base’ (genjudi jianshe), which demonstrates the various
campaigns the CCP led behind the enemy line to sustain ‘the protracted war’. The exhibition
ends, predictably, on a celebratory note, and credits the CCP for uniting the whole of the
Chinese nation in winning the war.

The two museums of the military history of the Resistance War form an interesting
comparison. The focus of display rhetoric in the CCP museum is on the war heroes, and
particularly military leaders, instead of battles, as is the case of the KMT museum.

![Chinese Heroes](source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

The emphasis on heroes extend to the two memorials opened together with the museums
in 2005. The Group Sculpture Plaza ‘Chinese Heroes’, as mentioned before, is a group
sculpture of Resistance War military leaders, with the Nationalist and Communist members
put side by side, intended to commemorate the collaboration between the two political
parties which enabled the unity of the nation during the period of the Resistance War Front.
Because his father served first in the Nationalist Army and then the Communist side, this is a point of particular importance to Fan. Fan put at the entrance to the Plaza a 1.5 life-size sculpture of himself as a young soldier, to be the ‘guardian’ to the heroes.

After the 2005 ‘investigation’, the memorial plaza was closed to the public, and statues of some problematic figures such as Lin Biao\(^1\) and Dai Li\(^2\) were removed from the memorial. In an online article, a local historian recalls his visit to the Chinese Heroes Plaza in October 2005 during the ‘investigation’, when the plaza was enclosed by bamboo fences and the statues were not allowed to be inscribed with names. The historian was told by the officials from the provincial CCP Publicity Department who were present, that the JMC was given two options, to either change the names of all the museums, regardless of themes, to Hall One, Hall Two and Hall Three, or be handed over to the government completely (Tan 2006).

![Sculpture removed from the Chinese Heroes Plaza (fieldwork photo 2017)](image)

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21 Lin Biao (1907-1971) was a Communist military leader and politician, who served as PRC Vice-Premier and CCP Vice Chairman. He was named Mao’s designated successor before died in a plane crash in Mongolia with his family on the way of fleeing the country after having allegedly plotted a coup against Mao. His death is also known as the ‘Lin Biao Incident’.

22 Dai Li (1897-1946) was the head of KMT Military Intelligent Service and known for his cruel suppression of the communists during the 1930s and 40s.
Names are indeed crucial in this configuration. The power of the names is only released when the textual comes together with the imagery. It is for this reason precisely that the names became an issue of contestation. Disallowing the inscription of their names obliterated the identities of these figures and hence diminished their commemorative capacity. While the shrine-like quality of the Chinese Heroes Square did entail the risk of being shut down, it also helped it survive official restrictions. The order to close was finally lifted in 2007 after Fan Jianchuan invited a group of ‘Red Princelings’ – descendants of senior Communist Party officials – including Mao Zedong’s daughter and Zhou Enlai’s nephew, to pay tribute to the sacrifice made by their parents’ generation, which put pressure on the authorities to allow the JMC to reopen it. Fan recalled being very nervous when accompanying Li Min, Mao’s daughter to the memorial because the statue of his father was made to stand together with Chiang Kai Shek, his biggest rival. But Li Min reassured him by saying ‘they are all our seniors after all’. In this instance, the memorial did manifest a repairing and efficacious quality to heal and reconcile (Butler 2016).

As such, the Chinese Heroes Plaza as ‘site of memory’ became a ‘site of mourning’, a place, as Jay Winter argues, ‘where people could mourn, and be seen to mourn’ (1995, 93). The function contains a performative element. The publicity generated from the public act of mourning was used by Fan to legitimise the memorial. Wang Cangbai uses Clifford Geertz’s
concept of theatre state to discuss the ritualisation in China’s heritage making (2017). He argues that state heritage construction follows a ‘culture of spectacle’ where ‘a set of texts or a series of public acts [enable] the state authorities [to] release and mobilise ‘imaginative energies’ (2017, 198). A similar mechanism operated in the JMC at this stage, where histories were selected and stories told on the basis of their potential to generate publicity and political protection for the project.

While the China Hero Plaza primarily commemorates the political elite, the Veteran Handprints Square was designed to honour ordinary soldiers. Launched in January 2006, the Handprints Square is composed of over 100 framed glass boards arranged to stand in the shape of the letter ‘V’, in an open space of 3,000 square metres. Each glass board shows the handprints of 50 veterans who fought in the Resistance War, with each individual’s name, rank and army unit. This site also seemed to entail an enchanting effect for individual visitors and become milieus of memory for personal commemorations. During my fieldwork, the museum was receiving donations of handprints from visitors almost every week, becoming truly a repository of memories. There were often flowers left in front of a handprint or a sculpture by visitors.

Fig. 24 The Resistance War Veteran Handprint Square (left) and a stone tablet with the words: fellow citizens, please bow and pay respect when you are here. (right). (fieldwork photos. 2016)
Museum of the Unyielding War Prisoners

Dead heroes are a crucial symbolic device for the state to extol the social and moral values of patriotism. In his assessment of the memorial museums in Maoist period, Kirk Denton argues that ‘martyrdom is central to Maoist representations of modern history and to the legitimating myths of the PRC ideology’ (Denton 2014a, 104). Not only have martyrs (lieshì) became a social category, memorials to martyred heroes are ubiquitous in Chinese cities. Probably the best-known of these is the colossal obelisk, the Monument to the People’s Heroes (renmin yingxiang jinianbei) in Tian’anmen Square, about which Wu Hung has written at length in Remaking Beijing (2005).

The Museum of the Unyielding War Prisoners (Buqu Kangfu Guan) presents a counter narrative to the official system of martyrdom, by recognising the voiceless ‘other’ in revolutionary history. The word ‘unyielding war prisoners’, kangfu, was coined by Fan to refer to the martyrs who were captured by the Japanese.

Fan writes that the war prisoners had to suffer a threefold ordeal: the ‘physical torture and humiliation from the Japanese, the misunderstanding and denouncement from their fellow countrymen, and the endless shame and remorse from themselves’ (2003, 164). In his autobiography, Fan tells two stories to illustrate the degree of the misperception of and unfair judgement towards the Resistance War captives in today’s China. Once, a ministerial-level official from Beijing visiting the JMC asked Fan after seeing the War Prisoners Museum, ‘why did they [the prisoners] not commit suicide [upon being taken captive]?’ (Fan 2013, 164).

The other story tells of an official who, upon seeing the image of the communist martyr Zhao Yiman in the War Prisoner Museum, asked Fan whether she was a captive. Fan told him that Zhao was captured twice and executed by the Japanese, which the official found difficult to believe, ‘but she is a national hero! How could she have been a captive?’ (Fan 2013, 164).

Fan was frustrated by these experiences. As he admits in his book, though exasperated by the above remarks of apathy and ignorance, he had to suppress his feelings to keep on good terms with his guests. Fan understands how cruel and unfair war captives could be
treated in a society because his father was once taken captive during the civil war and he grew up entrapped in the shadow of humiliation. As such, the memories of war prisoners in Resistance War have long been expunged in official accounts of history due to their precarious moral position created by the shame of surrender, encapsulated by the Chinese proverb ‘a man would rather be a broken piece of jade rather than an intact roof tile’ (*ningwei yusui, buwei waquan*). The ‘broken jade’ symbolises a martyr, meaning that it is better to die than be dishonoured. In this sense, Chinese Resistance War prisoners are what Rubie Watson calls ‘nonpersons’ – people without official recognition – and their memories, likewise, ‘non-events’ (1994, 67). The prefix ‘non’ suggests a denial, a state in which ‘without a vocabulary to name, classify and so analyse their experiences, victims and victimiser alike remained confused and fundamentally isolated in the aftermath of their ordeal.’ (Watson 1994, 67).

For this reason, rather than celebrating the value of self-sacrifice, this museum for the war prisoners addresses a much more complicated moral issue in writing and understanding history. The exhibition begins with a foreword in the tone of a humble suggestion: ‘These war prisoners fought for the rescue of our nation but were buried into the depths of history for a long time. Today, can we temporarily push aside the hustle and bustle in front of us and pause for a moment to just go and see them, OK?’

The exhibition begins in a long and narrow corridor, and on both sides of the wall hang hundreds of portraits of war prisoners taken by the Japanese printed on brass-framed porcelain plaques, as noted earlier, a recurring method. The ground of the museum is paved with steel plates, which when stepped upon, making a ‘honk honk’ sound, like entering a prison, creating an immersive atmosphere. The tangled state of mind of the prisoners is conveyed visually by the tortuous shape of the museum’s architecture. The designer, Cheng Taining, academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, originally wanted to embed marble tiles on the wall but Fan Jianchuan insisted that the raw concrete surface fit better with the idea of a prison. To showcase the handcuffs and shackles used for the Chinese prisoners by the Japanese, Fan had them displayed in a copy of the kind of cage with which the war prisoners.
In a small open-air atrium modelled on a prison exercise yard, displays another Fan’s visual installation, named ‘Ringing the Bell’ (Qiao zhong). It is made of seven artillery shells hanging from a cast-iron frame, next to a monument with inscription that reads ‘Turn swords into plowshares and missiles into bells; Dang! Wish the heroic war prisoners
peaceful rest. Dang dang! Wish the Chinese nation eternal happiness. Dang dang dang! Wish the world a long-lasting peace.'

Fig. 27 Ringing the Bell (fieldwork photo, 2016)

The exhibition shows a collection of extremely compelling original photographs, all from Japanese wartime propagandist pictorials Fan collected in Japan. One of the most memorable of these depicts Cheng Benhua, a female resistance fighter captured in Anren, standing arms crossed in front of Japanese soldiers, with a contemptuous smile. The grim-faced, resolute and straight-chested young soldier was Ji Wanfang, 15 years of age when he was arrested in Zengcheng, Guangzhou. When his photo was taken by the Japanese, he stood at attention in a standard posture, solemn and firm, eyes wide open.
'If it weren't for the old photos collected from Japan, you wouldn't know what kind of life the prisoners of war were living,' Fan wrote in reflection on the museum in his autobiography, ‘so the simpler the way they are presented, the more they can create a solemn and weighty atmosphere’ (2013, 168).

The last session of the exhibition is a wall display of lawsuits filed by Chinese captives who
had been forced to work as labourers and ‘comfort women’ during the war, who to this day, still endure the helplessness of being rejected their lawful rights and much deserved justice for their claims against Japan. After the exhibition ends, one walks into what was named the ‘still water courtyard’, an open space with an oval-shaped water feature, designed for visitors to adjust their emotions before leaving the museum. And yet by the side the exit, stands again a relief figure of Cheng Benhua, the unyielding female prisoner who bids goodbye to visitors with her smile. To return to an earlier point about the spatial and architectural language of the JMC, Fan relies on how the use of space could create time to think, feel and reflect.

The museum therefore has an almost shrine-like capacity for these ghostly memories to be justified, contained, and transformed into positive forces (White 1997; Giebel 2001). Relating to my earlier point about the importance of family lineage in the Chinese understanding of guojia, the nation-family, it is a way for the mistreated ancestors to be granted the recognition and respect that they rightly deserve.

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Despite the fact that Anren is not a battlefield site, the construction of these museums proves to be a place-making process that has created a destination for people from all over the world to pay tribute to past heroes. These memorial spaces, especially the plazas continued to function as venues for commemorative rituals. On 5th April 2017, I participated the JMC's first Qingming Festival or the Tomb-Sweeping Day memorial ceremony for the war heroes at the Chinese Heroes Plaza. Fan led the museum team offer wine and flowers to the war leaders and martyrs by placing a flower and pouring a libation of rice wine on the ground in front of each of the 201 statues. Before the ceremony, while I was helping out with the preparing the rice wine, I overheard a staff member asking Fan: ‘do we have to use real wine? It is going to be a lot’, suggesting that as it was for ceremonial purpose and they could reduce cost by mixing wine with water or using just water instead. ‘Obviously it has to be real wine!’ Fan shot him with a stern look, ‘Do you dare mess with these people?’

As such, the above museums and memorials possess an ‘efficacious’ quality which could be mediated through not only the act of visiting, but ‘ritual possessional acts’ and ‘sacred
dramas’ on a ‘heritage quest’ (Butler 2016, 113). This fits also what Byrne has called ‘enchanted’ memory-spaces (Byrne 2004). Visiting these museums and memorials is not so much of an educational experience as primarily an ethical experience like ancestral worship, a way to come to terms with the past, to repair, both what one or one’s family has suffered and also the sufferings and ordeals of the guojia, the nation.

These themes are true also to the other two of the first group of museums, and they also feature some of Fan’s favoured visual tropes and curatorial techniques. The Sichuan Army Museum commemorates the soldiers who left Sichuan to fight on the frontlines of the Resistance War, and the Flying Tigers Museum is dedicated to the pilots from the United States who fought in China against Japan as the ‘First American Volunteer Group’ of the Chinese Air Force in 1941-1942.

Displaying the names and portraits of martyred Nationalist generals, war prisoners and members of the Flying Tigers in such a way suggests that the museum is not only a space for them to be known and learned about, but also to be mourned. In China, the practices of mourning and commemoration are deeply linked. Mourning, as Rubie Watson argues, offers ‘an arena within which justice could be sought, grievances aired, and moral blame apportioned’ (1994, 65). The act of exhibiting these names and images and the generosity in the allocation of space serve a moral purpose of recognising the figures whose historical significance has been previously downplayed. These porcelain portrait plaques thus appear as a form of redeeming reparative justice.

This recognition is reinforced by the scale, quantity and unitary repetition of the plaques. Indeed, scale, quantity and repetition, as we will see in many other examples in the JMC, play a significant role in the museums as a whole. The numerous larger than life sculptures in the China Heroes Square, the walls of porcelain portraits, the Handprints Square all follow the same exhibitionary logic, where the constellation of hundreds of the same images, figures and names convey a powerful moral statement: the figures invoked in these images ought to be recognised and remembered. Here the moral act of museum building invokes the moral acts of mourning and reconciliation. To use another funerary metaphor, these displays conjure the souls of those whose deaths were long unrecognised and serve as a locus where they can rest. There are, however, also manipulations of this technique in the
JMC, and we shall return to this theme in the discussion of the Earthquake Museum in the next chapter.

Fig. 30 Wall display of porcelain portraits of martyred Flying Tiger pilots in the Museum of Flying Tigers (fieldwork photo, 2016)
Fig. 31 2017 Qingming memorial ceremony at the Chinese Heroes Plaza (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

Fig. 32 2017 Qingming memorial ceremony at the Chinese Heroes Plaza (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)
Red Age Museum Series

In 2006, the JMC started building the ‘Red Age’ museum series, which is engaged with the history of the PRC from 1949 to 1976, or what could be referred to as the Maoist period. It derived from what was originally the ‘Cultural Revolution Artwork’ series in the initial 2004 planning by Chang and Liu, which included the following ten museums and a memorial square,

Museum of Cultural Revolution Porcelain Artworks;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Mao Badges;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Ration Tickets and Certificates;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Mirrors;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Clocks;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Posters;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Everyday Objects;
Museum of Cultural Revolution Audio and Video Products;
Museum of Sent-Down Youth (zhiqing);
Memorial Museum of Feng Zhe;
Cultural Revolution Memorial Square;

The change from ‘Cultural Revolution’ to ‘Red Age’ happened after the 2005 investigation by the authorities. The museum consciously avoided the explicit use of the term ‘Cultural Revolution’, which though not banned, was highly sensitive. Fan Jianchuan wrote the following passage explaining the idea of the Red Age, which was later put on a display board outside of the Museum of Red Age Everyday Objects opened in 2007:

The few decades from the founding of the People’s Republic of China to the beginning of the Economic Reform, is what we call the Red Age. The Red Age is not far from us and its historical pulse extends into people’s everyday life today. The Red Age is idealistic, vehement, special, complex, and for ordinary people, it is also plain and simple. The collective life experience of several hundreds of millions of people bears a unique significance as a historical specimen. We try to preserve the real memory of that period through real
This passage summarises some key elements of the historiographic and the curatorial ethos of the Red Age museums. First, the historical frame of the museums has been extended to encompass the Cultural Revolution without the explicit articulation of the politically charged term; secondly, it is clearly stated that the emphasis is on representing the ‘plain and simple’ side of the everyday experience during the Maoist period. However, the elements of violence and trauma were marginally indicated, as I will show in the sections to follow, in a de-contextualised way of presenting objects and information. This approach casts a clear contrast with the much more mournful and reflective ethos adopted by the aforementioned Tayuan Cultural Revolution Museum in Shantou, China’s first public memorial of the event, particularly with its poignant display of large black and white portraits of victims of the Cultural Revolution.

**Museum of Red Age Porcelain Artworks**

The first museum of the Red Age series, the Museum of Red Age Porcelain Artworks (*Hongse Niandai Ciqi Guan*), was opened in August 2006. In a space of 696 square metres, it showcases over 4000 items of porcelain artwork created during the 1950s to the 1970s mainly for propagandist purposes.

Fan Jianchuan started developing the Red Age series from this particular subject because his collecting of this period began with porcelain artworks. Among all his Red Age collections, porcelain artefacts are the ones that he has been engaged with for the longest time and hence takes most pride and confidence in. Fan calls collectibles from the Maoist period ‘strange fruits grown on the vines of thousands of years of civilisation’, for they ‘departed from the traditional values, life experiences and artistic requirements, took a big detour and stopped moving forward’ (2013, 114). The Red Age porcelain artworks perfectly illustrate his judgement. In the preface Fan wrote for the museum, he summaries the three characteristics of the Red Age porcelain art as such:
First, they had to serve politics. They were used to propagate policies, annotate revolution, and to put people in the revolutionary atmosphere at any time as much as they could have been. Second, they fit the political environment at that time and reflected current affairs. They were used to inspire people and mask the material deficiency with lofty, optimistic and healthy figures and warm colours. Third, due to the prevalence of the ultra-left ideological trend and the confinement of people’s thoughts, their figures are simple, and subjects monotonous. Artists and artisans dared not go one step beyond the prescribed limit for fear of violating politically law, resulting in the monotony of the subjects of these works, and the loss of traditional contents and techniques.

Upon entering the museum, visitors are greeted by a 1.4 metre Mao bust statue, that sets the tone for its revolutionary atmosphere. Inside, the interior is dominantly red, with revolutionary songs looping in the background and Mao’s quotes and political slogans, on the walls and stairs.

![Fig. 33 Displays at the Museum of Red Age Porcelain Artwork (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)](image)

The 4000 or so porcelain artefacts on display are organised chronologically into two sections: 1949-1966 and 1966-1976. The exhibits cover a wide range of forms from statues and decorative items to everyday use objects such as pots, cups and bowls. Though without much textual narrative of the historical context, the distinct styles and contents of the exhibits reflect some of the key political events of the time of their production, as well as their
contemporary cultural and social phenomena. For instance, the first session includes porcelain ornaments made to commemorate the early PRC’s alliance with the Soviet Union, China’s aid to the Korean War in 1950, and political campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962) and agricultural collectivisation.

The second session is focused on the Cultural Revolution. A special case is dedicated to a collection of statues of Mao, which present the different images of him in various periods — as a young student, leading the workers’ movement in Anyuan, with the Red Army in Jinggangshan, commanding the national liberation war, and meeting with the Red Guards — demonstrating the scale and intensity of the personality cult of Mao.

One notable item in the Cultural Revolution period is the ‘big-character poster vase’. Big-character posters (dazibao) were handwritten, wall-mounted posters using large-sized Chinese characters, one of the most iconic means of public expression used for propagating Mao Zedong Thought and attacking enemies. This particular vase has a big-character poster made onto it, which reads ‘XXX is obsessed with private interests and lets out ducks to eat public food. Which way should we go?’ It is illustrated by a drawing of several young people leading a ‘struggle session’ against a duck because it ‘stole’ public food. The struggle session was really against the duck’s owner who let his ducks out to eat public food. At the back of the vase is the quote from Mao: ‘all wrong ideas and poisonous weeds should be criticised and must not be allowed to overflow freely.’ Fan again made the historical artefact bear marks of the present, but this time invited a group of his friends – liberal-minded intellectuals and artists – to leave comments on the vase. Novelist Zhang Xianliang wrote: ‘laugh until I cry’. Ethnologist and writer Feng Jicai’s message was: ‘Don’t laugh, this is the reality of our generation’. Writer Deng Xian wrote: ‘I am like this duck’. Historian and philologist Liu Shahe remarked: ‘it is too difficult to conduct oneself’. Writer Shu Yi’s message was: ‘the solemnest farce’. Here, an item that was designed for propagandist purpose, has been turned on its head through artistic re-invention to ridicule its original message. The vase speaks of how humourising and ironicising heritage can be ways to engage, reflect and overcome difficult pasts (Holtorf 2010)
Whilst most exhibits are arranged neatly in glass cases according their chronology, there is one exception. On a column around the far corner on the first floor is a display board that tells the story of Sun Weishi (1921-1968), theatre director and adopted daughter of Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the PRC. Having received her training in Soviet Moscow, Sun was a talented dramatic artist and later became China’s first female director of *huaju* or ‘spoken drama’. On the account of her proximity to and entanglements with power, she became the target of the animosity of Mao’s wife, Jiang Qing, the leading member of the Gang of Four, the most powerful political faction during the Cultural Revolution. In 1968, at the height of domestic political turmoil, Jiang Qing had Sun arrested, sentenced without trial, tortured and then persecuted in a secret prison. The tragic story of the ‘Red Princess’ — how Sun is referred to in the text on the display board — had no direct link with the Red Age porcelain artwork at all. Sun has merited her place in the exhibition, as one of the curatorial staff members told me, because she was born in Sichuan. Fan’s loyalty to Sichuan, where he grew up and considers his homeland, as we shall see in other museums to follow, is a recurring theme that runs through the creation of the JMC. Yet even with the local connection considered, Sun’s presence seems abrupt, and stands inconspicuously but stubbornly out
of the context. It gives hints towards the violent and atrocious aspects of the Cultural Revolution, without further specification, that has been left out in the rest of the exhibition.

Fig. 35 Display about Sun Weishi at the Museum of Red Age Porcelain Artwork (fieldwork photo, 2016)

**Museum of Red Age Everyday Objects**

Following the Porcelain Artwork Museum, the JMC opened another two Red Age museums in 2007: the Museum of Red Age Everyday Objects (*Hongse Niandai Richang Shenghuo Yongpin Guan*) and the Museum of Red Age Badges, Clocks and Seals (*Hongse Niandai Zhang Zhong Yin Guan*).

The Museum of Red Age Everyday Objects presents the living conditions and experiences during the Red Age, with over 24,000 items of everyday use objects displayed and several sets of life-sized dioramas depicting the household environment of families of different
occupations and status.

The museum is housed in a minimalistic building with plain white walls. In front of the building are a front garden filled with pebbles and a koi pond. The pebble garden depicts symbolically people’s austere material life during the Red Age, and the koi pond, in contrast, suggests the affluence and prosperity brought by the Economic Reform afterwards.

White is the thematic colour of this museum, symbolising the ideological monotony and material scarcity during the socialist period. The metaphoric use of colour is a significant element in the JMC’s aesthetic work, from the different colouring of the exhibitions on the Resistance War museums and the Porcelain Artwork Museum discussed earlier, to the zhiqing, or sent-down youth that will follow in the next chapter. The architectural design also needs to be in consonance with the museum’s theme. The commissioned architect Zhu Yimin had the idea of conveying the tumult and disarray of the Cultural Revolution via a slanted shape of the museum building, which was turned down by Fan as being ‘too narcissistic’, as he commented in his memoir, ‘showing off of architectural skill but not befitting the collection’ (Fan 2013, 148). To Fan, the central purpose of this exhibition is to showcase the lived experience of the Red Age. Its banality of the museum’s white box building thus symbolically reinforces the ideological monopoly and material simplicity of the Red Age over its political dynamic.

And yet reference to the political tumult was present in the exhibition. Through a small door at the right side of the white wall, one first enters a tall and narrow corridor, painted red from floor to ceiling, wall to wall. Walking down the corridor, one steps on red light boxes on the floor marking the years 1966, 1967, 1968 up until 1976, leading towards the other end, where a high screen is installed, rotating a 40-second long video clip of Mao receiving Red Guards in Tian’anmen Square. The sound of the crowd chanting ‘sailing seas depends on the great helmsman, carrying forth revolutions depends on Mao Zedong thought’ reverberates through the space.

I was told that the high screen at the end of the ‘red corridor’ was initially installed tilted at a 90-degree angle, which was to symbolise the disorderly state of things, being ‘upside down’ during the Cultural Revolution. This shows at least some degree of Fan’s incorporation, or
appropriation, of Zhu’s architectural metaphor of the slanted building. In 2007, when Li Min, Mao Zedong’s daughter, visited the museum with a group of other Red Princelings, Fan straightened the screen for fear that it would upset her.

Through the exit of the corridor, one enters a hall of four sets of life-size dioramas, depicting the household scenes of workers, peasants, soldiers and cadres. The sequence reflects the hierarchy of social classes during the Maoist period. Workers constituted the most politically advanced social class of the proletariat under Mao, and therefore the first diorama is a recreation of the ‘worker’s home’, a red-brick-walled room with frayed traditional Chinese wooden furniture, where a young and energetic-looking man, dressed in factory workwear, stands with one foot on a stool, lacing up his canvas shoe. Simply decorated with a collection of photos and a few award certificates, the room otherwise contains some clothes, a clay
pot and a sewing machine.

The second diorama shows a peasant family of five sitting around the table each holding Mao’s Little Red Book. The room has a typical rural decor, mud walls covered with yellowed newspapers and a wheelbarrow and some farming implements stored in the corner. On the wall hang a portrait of Mao, a Chinese couplet and posters of Revolutionary Opera. The third diorama, the ‘Soldier’s Home’ (shibing zhi jia), where a young soldier sitting alone in the barrack reading a copy of Mao’s Little Red Book, is modelled on Fan’s own dormitory and displays photos of Fan Jianchuan as a soldier. The ‘Cadre’s Home’ (ganbu zhi jia) a distinctly higher level of material affluence, evidenced by a complete set of the ‘Three rotations, one sound’ (san zhuan yi xiang) - meaning a wristwatch, a bicycle, a sewing machine and a radio - that were objects of great desire in the Red Age and considered the mark of a modern life. The tea, cigarettes and biscuit boxes on the table were also luxurious items in the time of heavy food rationing. The ‘cadre’ is a middle-aged man in a navy Mao suit, sitting in the comfort of his living room reading a newspaper.

Fig. 37 Diorama of the ‘soldier’s barrack’ in the Museum of Red Age Everyday Objects with a photo of Fan as a young man in military uniform (source: Jianchuan Museum)

Along the stairs leading down to the next hall, a series of old newspapers on the walls show
news of the events from the 1950s to the 80s. Downstairs, the area is divided into three sections, a long and narrow space that houses another four dioramas, of a Red Age clinic, radio station, library and nursery. The wall around the corner to the dioramas displays copies of ten different newspapers, the New Year’s Day editions of the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, each carrying Mao’s portrait on the front page. They display a notable change in the size the Mao’s portraits which grew from the 1966 edition to cover the whole page in 1968, 1969 and 1970 when China was at the height of his personality cult, and then decreased towards the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Fig. 38 Interior of the Red Age Everyday Object Museum (fieldwork photo, 2017)

Fig. 39 Trial record document in the Red Age Everyday Object Museum (fieldwork photo, 2017)
One then descends a staircase and enters the main hall, where ration tickets, textbooks, pictorials, biscuit boxes, wallets, cups, textiles, chopsticks, radios and so on are on display in vast quantities in large glass showcases. More artefacts from the period are hung on the wall up to its very high ceiling. These objects, all bearing explicit revolutionary images and/or slogans, were the absolute household essentials during the Cultural Revolution. They testify the degree to which the most intimate and mundane parts of people’s everyday were saturated with socialist ideology and Mao’s personality cult.

In an interview, Fan refers to this technique as ‘warehouse-style exhibiting’ — the idea of putting lots of the same type of object on display — designed to highlight the ubiquitous presence when they were used by ordinary people in the course of their everyday lives and could be found in each and every household.

Fig. 40 Interior of the Red Age Everyday Object Museum (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

Tucked in the corner of this hall is a section dedicated to Feng Zhe (1921-1969), a famous film actor who died in Anren during the Cultural Revolution. In 1969, Feng participated in a Mao Zedong Thought Study Class (Mao Zedong Sixiang Xuexiban) for Sichuan ‘cultural and artistic professionals’ in Anren Middle School. The exhibition displays a letter from Li Jiajing, who witnessed the struggle session against Feng, where he was forced to ‘do the airplane’, a notorious position devised for public humiliation during the Cultural Revolution, by having
a person bent over from the waist into a right angle, with both arms, elbows stiff and straight, behind one’s back, one hand grasping the other at the wrist. On 2 June 1969, Feng was found dead after hanging himself in the toilet, leaving a note of two famous lines by the Song Dynasty poet Li Qingzhao ‘One has to be a hero in life, and a king of ghosts after death’ (sheng dang zuo renjie, si yi wei guixiong). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the initial idea was to build a memorial museum specially for Feng Zhe. But Feng’s sister, who was the source of most of the exhibits, did not approve of the idea.

Fig. 41 Feng Zhe exhibition in the Red Age Everyday Object Museum (fieldwork photo, 2016)

Like Sun Weishi, Feng Zhe had a connection with Sichuan. After marrying his wife, who was from Sichuan, he moved to work at the E’mei Film Production Company in Chengdu. Compared to Sun, his tie with the locality of JMC is even stronger as he died in Anren. Fan recalls in his autobiography that he had dreams about Feng Zhe while living in Anren. In the meantime, the Feng Zhe unit stands out for the specificity of its historical narrative which contrasts with the rest of the exhibition, like an exceptionally clear spot on a low-resolution image.
At the corner to the staircase to the last hall stands an installation which projects scanned pages of hand-written self-criticism letters and personal files during the Cultural Revolution onto a horizontal screen in the shape of an opened book. The ephemeral appearance of these documents best exemplifies what Denise Ho and Li Jie call Fan Jianchuan’s “guerrilla exhibits” of sensitive, unapproved materials that take semi-permanent and impermanent forms’ (2016, 31). The power of real objects (shiwu) derives from their political sensitivity and through re-arrangement, the ‘objects take on new rhetorical powers’ (Ho and Li 2016, 31). The number of the guerrilla exhibits, objects that speak of sensitive aspects of history, is very limited. Despite their highly fragmented presence, they carry the significance as ‘a counter-narrative’ that disturbs and even potentially challenges official historiography. These too are a barely hidden reference to the violence of the period.
**Museum of Red Age Badges, Clocks and Seals**

The second Red Age museum opened in 2007, the Museum of Red Age Badges, Clocks and Seals, focuses on the three most ubiquitous and significant objects during the Cultural Revolution, showing over 75,000 exhibits in total.

Liu Jiakun, the architect and also one of the planners of the complex, placed the museum at the intersection of the crossing lines of the Resistance War museum series and Red Age museum series, effectively at the centre of the museum complex, which shows his evident partiality for this museum.

The Museum of Red Age Badges, Clocks and Seals is the compressed version of what were initially three individual museums on the three objects. It takes up one third of the architecture, a redbrick block designed by Liu Jiakun, originally to house three museums of the same size. The rest of the building has now been transformed into a restaurant, the People’s Commune Canteen (*Renmin Gongshe Dashitang*), a hostel, the Worker Peasant Soldier Hostel (*Gongnongbing Kezhan*), a shop for Red Age newspapers (*Hongse Niandai Baozhi Ting*) and a coffee bar. Though the museum space significantly shrunk, these commercial spaces, as their names suggest, display a thematic and aesthetic consistency with the museum and are themselves imbued with some degree of exhibitionary quality. The People’s Commune Canteen, in particular, features a Maoist style dining hall, where visitor have their food seated on ascending rows, like in a theatre, all facing a large Mao bust, with a decorated character for ‘loyalty’—‘Zhong’—on its base. Fitting the theme of Red Age food experience, a number of framed propagandist posters of the Great Leap Forward Campaign (1958-1962) are displayed on the walls of the dining hall and along the corridors, depicting utopian visions of innovation and productivity of collectivised agriculture, with no reference, however, to the three-year Great Leap Famine it entailed from 1959 to 1962 (Feuchtwang 2012).

On the redbrick parapet surrounding the Museum of Red Age Badges, Clocks and Seals, extruded bricks are arranged into the sentence ‘Revolution is no crime and rebellion is
justified' (*Geming wu zui, zaofan you lì*), the quintessential slogan of the Cultural Revolution. Behind, a two-and-a-half-metre statue of Mao stands on a terrace beside the entrance on the first floor, as if casting his gaze upon the incoming visitors.

Fig. 43 Redbrick parapet outside the Museum of Red Age Badges, Seals and Clocks with the sentence ‘Revolution is no crime and rebellion is justified’ (fieldwork photo, 2015)

Mao badges were the most iconic and ubiquitous artefact during the Cultural Revolution, and also the most popular among the collectible Maoist memorabilia over the recent decades. The earliest Chairman Mao badges appeared in the 1930s and 1940s. During the Cultural Revolution, billions of Mao badges were manufactured, and the number was estimated to be around five billion during the period of most intensive production from 1966 to 1971 (Wang 2005, xi). Wearing Mao badges was one of the most popular expressions of one’s loyalty to the great leader and a specific glossary of honourifics were introduced. For instance, producing Mao badges was expressed as ‘respectfully manufacturing’ (*jingzhì*), wearing ‘respectfully wearing’ (*jingdài*) and to buy Mao badges, one had to use the term *qing*, an honorific used in the context of acquiring deity figures.

The Badge Craze (*Xiangzhang rè*), this nationwide phenomenon of wearing, collecting and
worshiping the Mao badges, died down after the Lin Biao Incident in 1971. In 1980 the central government issued an official call-back for the Mao badges to be recycled, but a great number remained in their owners' hands and later in the late 1980s, became the most circulated Mao memorabilia in China and around the world. The JMC has a collection of over 100,000 badges of around 40,000 different designs.

The first section of museum showcases around 4,800 badges. The majority of these items were displayed in glass cases, organised into different categories according to their content, size, material and period of production. Apart from the common designs featuring revolutionary slogans, sites and important events, there are also ones that are more 'special' because of their content, material size, or something else. One example is a badge with Mao's head facing right, while in the standard design it always faces left. This badge was reported to Jiang Qing, who condemned it immediately on the basis that it suggested that Mao support the rightists. As a result, the designer was put into prison, the badges confiscated and destroyed, and the factory shut. This reflects general political climate at that best captured in the popular phrase 'better left, never right' (*ning zuo wu you*).

![Image](image-url)

**Fig. 44** Display of Mao badges (left) and the installation 'Four Seasons' made of Mao badges (right) (fieldwork photo, 2015)
The badges display also includes two visual installations. One is titled ‘Four Seasons’, which I mentioned earlier in the chapter, composed of 10,113 Mao badges arranged into four large portraits of Mao in the ‘four seasons’ of his life, from young to older age.

In the other installation, Mao badges arranged to depict an image of Mao holding a ‘big-character poster’ (dazibao), titled ‘Bombarding the Headquarters: My first Big Character Poster (Paoda silingbu: wode diyi zhang dazibao), a short document he wrote on 5th August 1966, during the Eleventh Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and published on the party’s official newspaper People’s Daily a year later, on 5th August 1967. It was believed to be directly targeted the then President Liu Shaoqi and senior leader Deng Xiaoping and marked the beginning nationwide campaigns and after the official launch of the Cultural Revolution on 16th May 1966.

The next session showcases Mao badges made with different materials and the most prodigious was the porcelain badges, introduced by the caption that reads:

‘At that time, a living person could be beaten to death in public, thousands of years of historical sites could be destroyed instantly, the city could be turned upside down, but one could not accidentally break such a porcelain badge. The owner of the porcelain badge does not even dare to wear it easily, lest it be damaged in the “conflict” or inadvertently in daily life. One would always keep it as a rare treasure and only wear metal or plastic ones.’

A rare mentioning of the violence and destruction during the Cultural Revolution, this passage owes its appearance in the museum to its tactful avoidance of ‘sensitive terms’ (minganci). The violent ‘struggle sessions’ (wudou) were expressed with the equivocal term ‘conflict’ (chongtu).

The badges section finishes with a lime relief named after the popular song during the Cultural Revolution, ‘We Walk on the Great Road’ (Women zou zai da lushang), depicting a group of people in high revolutionary spirit, all bearing Mao badges.

Downstairs, the second section showcases hundreds of seals of different ‘revolutionary
committees’ (*geming weiyuanhui*) across the country. The Revolutionary Committee, supposedly based on Mao’s idea of the ‘three-in-one combination’ between the Red Guards, the Party and the army (PLA), was a new form of government to break and replace the existing political structures. On 30th March 1967 the *Red Flag Magazine* (*Hongqi*), a theoretical political journal published by the CCP during the Cultural Revolution, published an editorial, stating that ‘in those places and organisation where power needs to be seized, the policy of the revolutionary “three-in-one” combination must be carried out in establishing a provisional organ of power that is revolutionary and representative and has proletarian authority. This organ of power should preferably be called a revolutionary committee.’ (Schoenhals 1996, 59). Seals were then an emblem of the revolutionary authority, and now became the most direct and powerful evidence to this political innovation during the Cultural Revolution.

The last section starts with a scroll of images in black and white, including propaganda photos, the ‘big character posters’ (*dazibao*) and scenes of mass struggle sessions. The scroll leads to a narrow winding corridor, where 448 ticking clocks are displayed on both sides of the wall. Clocks were a symbol of affluence and decency in Maoist China as only those of higher social status – cadres, for instance – could afford them, as shown in the diorama in the Red Age Everyday Object Museum. Red Age clocks were also endowed with the function of propaganda as their design bears explicit ideological imprint such as slogans and revolutionary imageries. And now, as Fan wrote in the introduction to this section, ‘The clock displayed here is no longer a clock for timing, but a warning clock. Time is flowing, but the alarm bell is ringing!’

With the reverberating sound of the ticking of the clocks, one enters suddenly into the last hall named ‘Echoes of History’, an un-ceilinged cylindrical space with a standing microphone at the centre. The photo scroll continues to go around the wall. The floor of this hall is paved with enlarged steel replicas of Cultural Revolution seal marks, and visitors would be reminded by interpreters that they are treading on what used to be the most powerful revolutionary symbol. The gesture is provocative but is only ephemerally brought to visitors’ attention through the words of the interpreters.
As we have seen in the previous Red Age museums, Fan would slip unsanctioned and ‘sensitive’ objects – what Ho and Li called ‘guerrilla exhibits’ – into the exhibitions, as another way of provoking the audience’s thoughts. The Badges, Seals and Clocks Museum is no exception. In 2013, Fan added 11 documents to the exhibition, including Premier Zhou
Enlai’s speech on the struggle session against the then Foreign Minister of China, Chen Yi; the records of the investigation against the then President of the People’s Republic, Liu Shaoqi and his wife, Wang Guangmei; a speech given by Kang Sheng, member of the CCP Politburo of Standing Committee and the key ally to the Gang of Four, on the violent struggle sessions in Yunnan, and a news report on two deaths during violent struggle sessions in the city of Yibin, Fan’s hometown. These documents testify the scale and intensity of violence and cruelty of the political struggles in the Cultural Revolution from the very top of the Party leadership, to towns and cities across the country. Shortly before 16th May 2016, however, with the approaching 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Fan had these items taken out and replaced by old textbooks.

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Be it a historical event or a group of people, the commemorated subjects of the Resistance War museums were made relatively clear, despite the setback brought by the 2005 ‘investigation’, in the naming of the museums and their exhibition narratives. The themes of the early Red Age museums, however, were formulated very differently, as the museums were centred around different categories of objects. Accordingly, one very distinctive feature of the curation of the three Red Age museums is the heavy reliance on the materiality of the exhibits, and very restricted amount of text.

Fan once told me in an interview that the aim of Red Age museums was to restore memories of the collective lived experience in that period, which were soon thrown into oblivion after the death of Mao Zedong by organised destruction of the material remains of the Cultural Revolution. Fan describes his personal experience of the Cultural Revolution as characterised by ‘poverty, oppression and chaos’, and remembers the strong and widely-shared negation and criticism of the Cultural Revolution in its immediate aftermath, which led to a movement of vehement destruction of its remnants. The purpose was to forget ‘personal traumas and unethical conducts’ through the erasure of material things.

Michael Dutton witnessed this movement in 1984 as a student at Beijing University, when the ‘official de-Maoification programme was at its height’, and Mao statues were being torn down across the country. Dutton and his friend discovered at the back of the university
campus, a dump for hundreds of discarded Mao statues, ‘taken down from their exalted positions in the administrative offices and unceremoniously dumped into piles awaiting rubbish collection’ (2005, 155-156). Dutton writes ‘[i]t was not the burial ground of Chairman Mao but the graveyard of his symbolic power’ (2005, 156).

But he was wrong about the demise of Mao’s symbolic power, which soon made a comeback in the early 1990s in the form of a nationwide ‘Mao Craze’ when the material remnants of the Mao era, became highly sought-after collectibles (Barmé 1996). Fan was one of the first pursuers of this trend, focusing initially, as mentioned before, in porcelain artworks. ‘Wherever there was news about Cultural Revolution porcelain, I’d fly over immediately’. Such was the level of demand. Fan likes telling two anecdotes that testify to the symbolic power, or rather, efficacious potency these Maoist artefacts still possess.

Fan once carried a life-size Mao statue on flight and placed the statue on an empty seat at the back of the plane. He noticed that the passengers would touch the statue on their way to the bathroom. The other tells of a Mao statue Fan found in a small family restaurant. The owner did not want to sell but Fan left him the money and took the statue away. The business went sour soon afterwards over a fallout between the owner and his business partner.

The shift from being the sacredly untouchable to possessing talismanic efficacy reflects the change in the symbolic status of the Mao statues and other Maoist artefacts alike. They became collectibles, commodities, gifts, gaining new values and meanings. In her study of Cultural Revolution posters, Harriet Evans points out the ‘ambiguity of address’ of the regained appeal of the material remnants of the Maoist Era (2016). She describes the paradox presented by these objects

‘as reworked in contemporary art and commercial advertising, they reappear in an environment that, on the one hand, condemns the Cultural Revolution as “ten years of Chaos” and a “tragedy for the Chinese people” and, on the other, still hails its main instigator—Mao Zedong—as a great revolutionary leader’ (2016, 89).

She argues that ‘the enduring appeal of Cultural Revolution posters for diverse audiences
across place and time lies in their ambiguities in a visual hierarchy that not uncommonly subordinated Mao’s figurative and symbolic status to other themes and interests’, and ‘their ambiguities lie not only in their viewers’ reception but also in their different registers of address, both then and now’ (2016, 90). The changing status of Maoist material culture from ‘totemic objects of veneration and emblem of social collectivity’, to tradable commodities with a price, and then museum exhibits, reflects the complexity and ambiguity that they carry which defies any overall narrative.

Fan acknowledges the moral ambivalence of his Red Age collections, calling them ‘deformed fruits on China’s thousand-year-old civilisational vine’ that represent ‘poverty, insanity, repression’. He highlights the significance of the documents, in particular, leaflets, gazetteers, diaries, wills, letters of exposition and self-criticism, photographs, receipts for home raids (*chaojia*) and so on that bear most direct witness to the violence and atrocity. They fit what anthropologist Graeme Were calls ‘difficult objects’ that reject conventional definition of collectibles for posing ‘political and ethical challenges’ (Were 2019, 4). By relating themselves to these objects, assembling and mobilising them to the public eye, the collector must deal with the challenges, in the relationship that is ‘not only ownership of a commodity form but also of a history and a way of attending to that history, providing the owners of the objects a rhetoric with which to express and, indeed, create meaningful subjectivities’ (Hubbert 2006, 146).

It should be noted that the term ‘Red Age’ is not a mere synonym coined for tactic reasons to replace ‘Cultural Revolution’ in the 2004 initial plan, but is clearly defined to refer to a longer, hence different, time period. Therefore, the assumed equation between the Red Age and the Cultural Revolution, as found commonly in the writings by Western journalists and academics on the JMC is historically incorrect. The name change from ‘Cultural Revolution museums’ to ‘Red Age museums’ is therefore already indicative of Fan’s curatorial approach, at least in the first three museums addressed so far, which is to focus quite strictly on the materiality of the artefacts and the memories of the everyday, in the whole of the Maoist period. In other words, it is the artefacts that are the protagonists of the museums, not people or events.

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23 I am indebted to Harriet Evans for this insight.
Fan believes that real objects can provide a ‘close-up’ type of view of history and conveys vivid and affective experience of memory (2013, 238). Rather than telling the audience about the ubiquity of Maoist ideology, Fan wants them to feel being physically surrounded by the exhibits which are themselves the evidence of the excessive indoctrination, personality cult and political tumult of their time.

Museologist Christopher Whitehead has argued that the museum display is ‘a political, public production of propositional knowledge intended to influence audiences and to create durable social effects’ (2016, 2). The detachment from narrative can be seen as the reactive approach deployed when the museum’s ‘propositional knowledge’ cannot be made explicit. This certainly has to do with the politics of the museum, in the context of the pressure from potential state intervention and the subsequent adoption of self-censorship. The museums’ influence on the audience, therefore, had to be realised in a different way.

In discussing the preparation for the official Museum of the Chinese Revolution in the 1950s, Kirk Denton draws on Roland Barthes to argue that ‘there is no room in propaganda for ambiguity, for the grey spaces between good and evil; propaganda relies on clarity and simplicity’ (2014, 55). However, the clear and straightforward ideological messages of these propagandist objects have been transformed, in a changed social and symbolic context, and become ambiguous and difficult to define. So, we have here the exact opposite of the logic in Barthes’ insight. By minimising narrative, the Red Age museums purposefully harness spaces for ambiguity, letting viewers develop their own responses instead of imposing judgements.

A 2018 Economist article admires Fan's curatorial savviness, calling his museums ones ‘that show, rather than tell’ (2018). This remark captures the significance of materiality in the JMC, which fits the overall curatorial strategy, epitomised in the signs placed throughout the museums that read ‘We don’t speak. Let the object speak’. The question is then, if not in narratives on textboards, how do these objects speak?
The force of the materiality is brought out not only in their seminal quantity, but in alignment with the spatial and sensory – visual and acoustic – design of the museums. The exhibition spaces are saturated with symbols, images and objects, and the visual intensity generated by the vastness of the space and density of displays contrasts with a contextual void, which Sally Price calls the ‘silences’ of museums, the untold parts of the story muted due to their political sensitivities (2008).

Despite the richness of symbols, artefacts, imagery and audio-video elements, the absence of any contextual information about the scale and intensity of this profound political upheaval - which turned China’s towns and cities into a lawless, chaotic state where ‘local leaders were paraded through the streets in dunce hats by youthful Red Guards who drew their inspiration from Mao’s electrifying injunction – ‘to rebel is justified’ (MacFarquhar in Wu 2013, 200) – constitutes the overwhelming silence in the JMC Red Age museums.

Such museological ‘silences’ abound in the JMC’s representation of the Red Age. For many, particularly those with personal experience of or general interest in that history, the silence is obvious, yet understandable and quite likely even assumed. The 1981 Resolution\(^\text{24}\) that

\(^{24}\) Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China’ was adopted by the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 27th June 1981. It is the key document that expresses the party’s official assessment of the Cultural Revolution.
deemed the Cultural Revolution responsible for ‘the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic’, remains the orthodoxical assessment of the event. It has played the role of an ‘pact of forgetting’ for the event, to the effect that only state-sanctioned historical accounts are allowed and in complete conformity with the official discourse, allowed to use only materials from official sources25.

For some, this conspicuous, glaring absence of historical account, this obvious ‘elephant in the room’ is perhaps the most significant and poignant message in the Red Age museums, especially when it is hinted by the presence of ‘guerrilla exhibits’ and Fan’s curatorial gestures, for instance, the saturation of red in the entrance corridor of the Red Age Everyday Objects Museum, or the more subtle ones, such as placing the Mao bust with a small angle at the entrance to the porcelain artwork museum, implying the slight deviation in the Great Helmsman’s leadership.

And yet, the ‘silence’ and these evocative gestures would hardly be intelligible to viewers without considerable pre-knowledge of that history, which poses a great curatorial challenge and raises a crucial concern over the museum’s role of transmission. This was evident from the comments on the Red Age museums in the visitor books, which were collected regularly and read carefully by museum staff and some by Fan himself. Shortly after the Museum of Red Age Badges Seals and Clocks opened, some visitor feedbacks suggested that some of them were getting the ‘wrong idea’ about the museum, taking it as a celebration of the Maoist Era and Mao’s personality cult. It was for this reason that Fan had the photo scroll added to the last section of the exhibition, but that did not completely solve the problem. During my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 there were still visitor comments like the following being picked out by staff and reported to Fan: ‘I hope that the exhibition can show more of the side of the violence and persecution during the Cultural Revolution’ and ‘the tone of this museum affirms the ideology of the Cultural Revolution, and is against the 1981 Resolutions of the CCP Central Committee on Some Historical Issues!’

25 There are nonofficial historical accounts in and outside China, including notably the Cultural Revolution Database edited by Song Yongyi, memorial and museum, and artistic and creative forms, and self-published and unpublished accounts whose scale is difficult to estimate. For more see Li 2016.
Such direct criticism, however, does not dominate the visitors’ professed views. If we follow Carol Duncan (1995) who famously foregrounded the approach of treating museums as scripts that direct viewers’ behaviour and response, the Resistance War museums would be unequivocally emotional and provocative, while the limited narratives in the Red Age museums show a high degree of curatorial restraint and self-discipline. This also accordingly characterises the visitors’ response.

Most of the visitors I accompanied to the Red Age museums were restrained about their feelings. Xia Jifang, the former JMC publicity chief shares this impression. ‘The guests that I accompanied were mostly intellectuals and media professionals. They were reserved about their articulation of emotion and cautious to avoid superficial criticism to certain individuals. Therefore, even though they had opinions, it would not be necessary for them to express them.’ Xia himself believes that the violent and emotional forms of expression are remnants from the Cultural Revolution. He told me ‘these [emotions] are not necessary if one tries to pursue an objective representation of history. It still needs time.’

What Xia said about withholding emotions resonates with Fan’s view on building a ‘Cultural Revolution museum’, which he expressed on many different occasions, and I find articulated most clearly in his autobiography in 2013:

‘The Cultural Revolution is a movement that involved hundreds of millions of people in this country. Although it has been over 30 years since its end, to seriously sum up and clean up this special history, which involves a huge area and can only be left for future generations to study in depth. As for now, we should try our best to leave objects that bear witness for future generations. The time is not yet ripe to set up a museum that reflects the Cultural Revolution in all its aspects, but the reason and historical data for setting up a museum about arts and daily life during the Cultural Revolution, or the socialist period are sufficient. Therefore, I took the lead in a not-so-radical way, to show that the people have begun to face up to and record this history.’

Fan’s attitude towards building a Cultural Revolution museum is quite straightforward — the time is not ripe. This was articulated in 2013 after his repeatedly claimed but eventually
unsuccessful attempt to build a museum of the ten years of the Cultural Revolution. Instead of the political context, which he does not comment in the book, he gives another, seemingly simple reason, that the perpetrators of violence are still around. Here, Fan’s charismatic authority or entitlement is again discernible in the way he identifies with ‘the people’. By stressing the scale of the Red Age history’s impact, Fan seems to be arguing that museums can only be made available for individual pursuits of justice and reconciliation with that history when the whole of the people are ready for it. To preserve material to the max but show only the amount that is safely allowed, may best describe Fan’s approach to the Red Age in general.

Some would agree with Fan’s approach to celebrating the ordinary, or the everyday. As historian Jin Dalu argues, it is important to ‘look for the ordinary in the extraordinary (the ways in which social life carried on in tumultuous politics) as well as the extraordinary in the ordinary (the ways in which the era did transform everyday life)’ (2011). And yet the purpose of examining the history through the lenses of the ordinary is to gain a more comprehensive or acute understanding of the extraordinary, to address the multiplicity of history and in other words to understand how the same events were experienced and interpreted differently depending on positionality and power. But this cannot work in a museum without a basic historical context. The objects and images with their rich details and deep symbolic meanings would just be mind-boggling for viewers, myself included, when I first entered the field, who had not sufficient knowledge about the relevant history. It was over my repeated visits to the exhibitions, that the guerrilla exhibits became ‘guerrilla exhibits’ as I learnt the history behind the objects. This was almost something of a decoding process, a luxury not shared with ordinary visitors to the museums.

The representation of the Red Age raises a salient question about the idea of historic truth, which occupies a central position in the self-professed moral mission of the JMC. Fan claims to ring the alarm bell for the nation by bringing out the ‘true face’ of China’s twentieth century history, stressing on ‘neutrality and objectivity’ as key principles of his historiography. We see in the Red Age museums that this is being achieved by ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ artefacts (shiwu), but does that mean that authenticity is sufficient for ‘historical truth’? The idea of authenticity is not unproblematic in the first place. Tony Bennett famously argues in The Birth of the Museum: ‘No matter how strong the illusion to the contrary, the museum visitor
is never in relation of direct, unmediated contact with the “reality of the artefact” and, hence with the “real stuff” of the past. Indeed, this illusion, this fetishism of the past, is itself an effect of discourse’ (1995, 146).

Then how should we understand Fan’s idea of ‘neutrality and objectivity’ in material things, in the context where providing a narrative of the basic facts about the Mao Era and especially the Cultural Revolution is itself a daunting task.

Writing on the history-making in socialist Mongolia, Caroline Humphrey develops the idea of the ‘evocative transcript’, a text ‘ambiguous by design’, that is ‘intended to elicit or evoke a particular interpretation beyond the surface meaning’ (1994, 23). She points out the limited applicability of an oppositional model in understanding the dominance-resistance relation in societies under state socialism, such as Mongolia under the Soviet Union, and, I would add, today’s China. ‘Evocative transcripts’, Humphrey argues, work instead as a channel of alternative knowledge in these societies with strong state control. Unlike the unapproved private memories, they rely on superficial conformity to the authorised discourses that allow them to be publicly circulated, while carrying an implicit and coded evocation of values alternative to the state ideology (Humphrey 1994).

It could be argued that the Fan’s Red Age museums share this quality of evocative transcripts. His museums evoke what Foucault termed ‘subjugated knowledges’, referring to the memories and forms of remembering marginalised and subdued by dominant official discourse (Foucault 1980). Recognising and evoking these memories and experiences means to produce ‘insurrections of subjugated knowledges’, which carry a critical force. The potential of criticality and emancipation derives from bringing alternative perspectives to the established frameworks of historical understanding.

However, it would be simplistic to label Fan Jianchuan as critical or subversive on the basis that his museums showcase the history of the Mao Era and the Cultural Revolution. Their critical function lies in Fan’s way of addressing these sensitive pasts through the material and visual object which informs new possibilities of understanding as a kind of resistance.

The Red Age museums are designed to conjure memories or evoke emotions and
sentiments, that varies according to different viewers. A place of changes and becoming is termed by Massumi as an event-space (2002), which enables and contains what Massumi calls ‘event-transition’ and ‘communication’. While the museum is a space of transited events in the past, it is also an event in transition and transduction itself. As an event-space for heritage practice, it proposes questions concerning what social, cultural and political effect and ‘affect’ is it going to generate, and how might these effects be viewed and reviewed differently in terms of intensity, transitivity and communicability?

Fan did not build a museum against the state, but one that was for the people. The JMC could not exempt itself from the practice of state control but in its early years at least managed to open up a space for expression, commemoration and negotiation. The space unfolds between the private and the state, and towards the ordinary people, and therefore it is their sentiments it appeals.

The decision to minimalise historical context was not purely the result of state prohibition; it reflected, at least partially, Fan’s idea of how the history of the Mao era and the CR should be passed on. In other words, Fan would probably not have built a memorial museum like the Shantou Tayuan Museum even if the state had allowed him to. So his museum was not ‘silenced’ by coercive forces but by an internalised awareness of ‘self-discipline’, a complicity with the broader ‘silence’, that chose to keep quiet.

In the conclusion of his recent article on the JMC, Kirk Denton laments that ‘in the present political climate in China, Fan cannot create the kind of museum that Ba Jin envisioned, one that would not only display the broad history of this traumatic period of China’s past, but that would directly and explicitly address issues of moral responsibility (2019, 105).

However, I find it limiting to regard the JMC’s Red Age museums as a castrated version of what could have been Ba Jin’s Museum of the Cultural Revolution, because this again, would presuppose that a ‘private’ museum of the Cultural Revolution should present a critical account of the event, and be in other words the material manifestation of resistance to the state-enforced obliteration.

While there are other forms of remembrance contentious to the official ideology that operate
or try to operate away from the control of the authorities²⁶, the JMC demonstrates that alternative or even counter narratives of history happen, if anywhere, within the state political structure. They are internalised, to the extent of sharing some of the authorised discursive frameworks such as patriotism and national identity.

The Red Age museums, in particular, represent a new role of the museum in history making, with a unique museological language conditioned by its political context. They testify how memories such as those of the Cultural Revolution might be presented and transmitted even under conditions of centralised state power.

**Museum of the Lotus Feet**

At the end of 2007, the JMC opened the Museum of the Lotus Foot as the first museum in the ‘folk culture’ museum series. The ‘lotus foot’ (*San cun jin lian*), meaning literally ‘three-inch golden lotus’, is the laudatory term for the bound foot. Foot binding was the practice of binding the feet of girls at a young age to restrict their growth and make them look as small as possible. The effects of the process were painful and permanent and caused numerous health problems. But as small and slender feet were regarded as an attractive quality, foot-binding remained a popular custom among Han Chinese women from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) until the early 20th century. The lotus shoe was therefore an important piece of attire closely associated with a woman’s femininity and with her prospects for marriage (Ko 2007).

Housed in a two-floor traditional Sichuan-style building, the museum exhibits about 500 pairs of ‘lotus shoes’ (*lianxie*) and over 400 items of domestic ornaments, furniture, female garments and accessories from the Qing Dynasty (1616-1912) and Republican Era (1912-1949). The exhibits belong to the personal collection of Yang Li, the CEO of the Jianchuan Group Company and Fan’s longest business partner. In an interview with me, Yang insisted giving Fan all the credit by saying that she acquired the collection for the museum under Fan’s request and Fan is the curator of the museum.

²⁶ As nonofficial memorials and archives shown in Jie Li’s survey noted in Chapter Two (Li 2016).
The preface of the exhibition introduces foot-binding as a ‘bad custom of feudal China’ representing ‘an abnormal aesthetic taste of the patriarchal feudal society’. Beginning with an illustration of an x-ray of the maimed bound-foot, it states that ‘the history of foot-binding for over a thousand of years was a history of women’s blood and tears’ and invites the visitors to ‘approach this cultural spectacle of over a thousand years of history in [a] peace[ful] mood to experience both the misery and talent of women in premodern China’. Fan also stated in an interview with Harriet Evans and myself in January 2017 that the Museum of the Lotus Foot is in fact a museum that ‘speaks about women’s liberation in China’ since it tells the story of Chinese women freeing their feet.

However, the acclaimed focus on structuring a story of women’s liberation is in contrast with the visual experience of the museum. The aesthetics of the museum implies little about the gruesome aspects of foot binding, but emphasises almost entirely the exquisiteness, eroticism and feminine quality of the lotus shoes. With the walls and floors all painted...
purplish red, the space is segmented into smaller units with semi-transparent gauze veils of the same reddish colour. The design of the exhibition is clearly inspired by traditional Chinese decor, with dark wood-framed octagonal windows, display cases designed in the form of Qing-style sandalwood tables, and texts printed on vertical hanging scrolls for works of calligraphy and painting. All these evoke a sensuous and aesthetically alluring atmosphere which indeed corresponds with treating foot-binding as a ‘cultural spectacle’, as the preface suggests, but fails, in the meantime, almost entirely to relate to the pains and suffering it brought to women, let alone to tell a story of women’s liberation. The only exception, in this regard, is the uneven surface of the floor which moves across slight mounds of different sizes, in a gesture meant to give visitors a feeling of walking with bound feet.

The main exhibition content begins with a copy of *Classics for Girls (Nü’er Jing)*, an anonymous work created between the 14th and 16th centuries that became the quintessential text about ‘female virtues’ in the Ming and Qing dynasties, emphasising the four virtues women should possess: morality, features, speech, and needlework. Shown here, however, is a revised version by He Ruilin, a mid-Qing Dynasty scholar who added the sentence ‘What is binding up the feet for? Not for looking pretty as a bow, but for fear that [a woman] would walk out of the door, so [you need to] wrap it up in thousands of ways to make her stay at home’. This comment recognises the purpose of foot binding as constraint on women’s social activity.

With a series of hanging scrolls around the walls, the exhibition on the ground floor introduces the foot binding practice, including its historical origin, an X-ray of the twisted bone structure of bound feet, and an illustration of how foot-binding is performed. On display is a Qing Dynasty foot-binding chair, a low stool with backrest and a drawer beneath to store the tools for binding feet. The exhibition goes on to identify the various types of lotus shoes, showing photographs and displays of lotus shoes of different regional styles, made with different material and embroidery techniques and for different occasions. This extends to displays of female attire, accessory items and everyday use objects. The narrative then moves on to address the culture of bound feet, especially its association with marriage and sexuality. It quotes the Dutch sinologist Robert Hans van Gulik, who wrote ‘[Chinese] women’s small feet came to be considered as the most intimate part of her body, the very
symbol of femininity, and the most powerful centre of sex-appeal’ (1961, 218). Henceforth, having a pair of perfectly shaped ‘three-inch golden lotus’ was a desirable quality that could improve a woman’s marriage prospects. On display in the museum is a Qing Dynasty bridal sedan chair, elaborately decorated, a donation by sculptor Zhu Cheng, the interior designer of the Nationalist Army Museum and one of the creators of the China Heroes sculpture. A replica Ming Dynasty model of a sandalwood ‘spring chair’ (chunyi), designed specially to facilitate sexual intercourse, is enclosed in a two-metre-tall golden-coloured cage. Fan named this installation ‘glamorous imprisonment’, suggesting that foot binding caused the confinement of women, especially in wealthy families, to the household environment and encouraged their objectification as a spectacle for the male gaze.

Onto the upper floor, visitors see first a large photograph of a young woman with bound feet lying in bed smoking opium. The blurred eyes of the woman in picture adds onto her indolent and fragile quality. The exhibition continues to showcase the different kinds of needlework that women were supposed to master in premodern China, including knitting and embroidery.

The last small section moves onto the abolition of foot binding, beginning from the early attempts made by missionaries and intellectuals in the late Qing and Republican Era as part of social reform, which led to the establishment of the Foot Emancipation Society (or Anti Foot Binding Society) in Shanghai in 1897. It finally showcases a number of pioneering figures in women’s liberation, in particular the canonised Qiu Jin (1877-1907), the martyred feminist and revolutionary against the Qing Dynasty who rejected having her feet bound and campaigned actively against foot binding. The Republican Era (1912-1949) witnessed wider and more effective efforts to ban foot binding from both government and civil groups, which the exhibition illustrates with a display of vintage photographs of ‘new women’ in Qipao, high-heels and Western short hairstyles.

As such, the exhibition moves rather abruptly from an aesthetic and implicitly eroticised representation of the culture of bound feet, to briefly celebrating the great achievement made in the anti-foot-binding movements. It gives no space, however, for the vicissitudes of the process, for instance its localised and often contested implementation, not to some ‘unexpected consequences’ as indicated in the digital exhibition on lotus shoes by the Textile Research Centre in Leiden:
‘Many bound women were abandoned by their husbands who wished to be perceived as modern. Some men, especially young students, for example, would only marry women with a modern education and natural feet (tianzu). Women with bound feet started to feel ashamed of their appearance and at times were publicly ridiculed. In a relatively short time foot binding had gone from a deeply established and time honoured tradition to one against which public hostility was increasing.’ (Vogelsang-Eastwood 2018)

Details such as the ordeal the ban on foot-binding brought to bound women are not present in the JMC museum. Banning foot-binding is taken undoubtedly as a successful step in the socialist women’s liberation. Yet the link between this and ‘women’s liberation' under the CCP is far from clear. The exhibition comes to an end with a display of photographs of exemplary female figures, scientist, intellectuals, athletes, artists and so on. The last set of exhibits is several pairs of ballet shoes from the 1950s, arranged into the shape of blossom, that according to Yang, the collector, symbolise the beauty, freedom and youthful spirit of women in modern China. By the exit is an installation comprising two large two-metre-tall pink-coloured character ‘xiu’ 休, meaning 'stop'. The epilogue reads, correspondingly, that ‘there are very few women with bound feet left now. Small feet that used to spread all over the country are rarely found today, just like the remaining clouds after a rain that would soon be blown away…’.

Both the epilogue and the ‘stop’ installation enunciate emphatically the disappearance of lotus feet and the end of foot binding. This reveals what underlies the museum’s approach to foot binding history, a widely shared formula where the lotus shoes are viewed as the material remnant of the feudal ‘old society’ (jiu shehui) that testify the advance from the cruel and oppressive past to the liberated present.

Dorothy Ko begins her book on foot binding, Cinderella’s Sisters, by engaging this problematic narrative about its end, which she finds best manifested in the remarks from a curator of the Heilongjiang Museum of Ethnography, upon receiving the donation of eight pairs of wooden lasts used for making lotus shoes from Zhiqing Shoe Factory in Harbin, the
last factory to produce shoes for bound feet:

‘The three-inch golden lotus is a historical testament to the bodily and psychological damage that women suffered in feudal society. The sad songs of small feet would never be sung again’ so much pain and tears are etched on the wooden lasts’ (2005, 9)

Upheld as a testament to evil feudalism, the lotus shoes serve an important role in building a modern China, and therefore, as Ko astutely points out, have to be ‘present, displayed, and reiterated as modernity’s Other’ (2005, 9-10). ‘The bound foot remains a shorthand for all that was wrong with traditional China: oppression of women, insularity, despotism, and disregard for human rights’, she goes on, ‘such reflections on the past are grounded in the present, affording a progressive view of history: things are getting better; our lives are freer than theirs’ (2005, 10).

This is not the only museum where history is presented to give evidence to the progress from the past to the present. The Museum of the Sichuan Army, and the Museum of Japanese War Crime have also taken a similar logic. The purpose of commemorating the wars is to better appreciate the peace that they brought today. It is precisely because of this historiographical, or rather, ideological presumption that the JMC museum allows itself to treat the foot binding as a cultural spectacle, long bygone, suitably condemned and now somehow even bearing a strangely exotic allure.
Fig. 49 Inside the Lotus Shoes Museum (photo taken by Harriet Evans, 2017)

Fig. 50 Wall of distinguished modern females (photo taken by Harriet Evans, 2017)
Chapter 5: Genealogy 2008-2015

Having critically engaged in the previous chapter the JMC’s development from its planning and construction in 2003 and 2004 to opening the first folk culture museum in 2007, I carry on with genealogy to trace the vicissitudes from 2008 earthquake to when I began my fieldwork in 2015. As I shall demonstrate, this later and longer period speaks of a gradual change in the ethos of museum making from being more pluralistic and creative in the early phase, to displaying a more explicit conformity, in both aesthetics and content, to the official narrative. In dealing with the histories of the Resistance War and the Red Age, the museums constructed in the earlier phase, from 2005 to 2007, display groundbreaking perspectives and a distinctively original exhibitionary style, by, for instance, addressing memories of the Chinese captives in the Resistance War, with authentic artefacts and photographs in a museum that is architecturally designed to resemble the environment of a prison. The later museums, however, begin to show a lack of thematic consistency and a greater proximity to the state museums both in content and aesthetics. I find this change indicative of the shifting relationship between Fan Jianchuan and the state authority in a context in which the political interests of the central and provincial leaderships were also shifting.

Quaking Diary: Museum of Wenchuan Earthquake

On 12th May 2008, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake hit Wenchuan, a county 80 kilometres northwest of Chengdu. According to official statistics, over 69,000 people in Sichuan and nearby provinces lost their lives, and over 18,000 people were missing. When the earthquake occurred in the early afternoon of May 12th, Fan was at the Chengdu airport ready to board the plane for his trip to the United States for the award of his honorary doctorate degree at Bryant University. He immediately returned to Anren and postponed his departure to the 19th. After returning from the United States two employees suggested to Fan an exhibition about the earthquake which he immediately approved and led the museum team to the disaster area to collect objects. A temporary exhibition, titled the Quaking Diary, was completed in eight days and opened on the 12th June 2008 in a museum building still
The Quaking Diary was the country’s first commemorative exhibition in the earthquake’s aftermath and had quite understandably a sensational social impact. Visitors flooded in on the day of its opening, and many were moved to tears. The exhibition showed photographs and objects from the stricken area, many of which had been reported on the news. ‘Media from all over China, and all over the world were here in Sichuan’, Xia Jifang, then head of publicity of JMC, recalled. News reports on the earthquake exhibition, and the famous ‘strong pig’ (Zhu jianqiang) Fan purchased won the museum nationwide fame (New York Times 2008). Therefore, Fan decided to expand the exhibition into a permanent museum, hence the fourth theme of the complex. The Quaking Diary Museum opened on 12th May 2009, the earthquake’s first year anniversary.
As its name suggests, the museum is a record of what happened from 12th May to 12th June 2008. It begins, however, with objects, whose sizes are unusual to a museum display. Opposite the museum entrance are an assemblage of a cash carrier, a fire engine and a train cart deformed in the earthquake. Through the entrance, one walks into an atrium that shows an assault boat and a parachute used in the rescue. The traces of damage these large objects bear demonstrate compellingly the power of the earthquake.
Rebar, the steel wire used as concrete reinforcement, is a key material motif of the museum’s decor, because of its visibility amongst the rubble and broken walls in the stricken area. Inside the building, the museum’s name is fixed on a white wall in four enormous rebar-made characters. Underneath is the forward written by Fan Jianchuan:

On 25th August 1933, a 7.5-magnitude earthquake hit Diexi, Sichuan.
On 14th April 1955, a 7.5-magnitude earthquake hit Kangding, Sichuan.
On 16th August 1976, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake hit Songpan, Sichuan.
In a period of 75 years, our homeland was devastated four times by earthquake.
It was unfortunate that no museum was built to tell the world about them.
We know that our country has suffered greatly.
We also know that we can only prosper by overcoming the adversaries.
But keep in mind: remember disasters and draw lessons from them.
It is notable that the foreword puts the Wenchuan Earthquake in the context of a series of earthquakes in the 20th century that occurred along the Longmenshan Fault, which runs along the Longmen Mountain in Sichuan Province. What is implied is clear — it is likely that there will be future earthquakes in the area, and hence the museum serves not only a commemorative role but shoulders a greater social responsibility, to educate and raise awareness for better precautions for earthquakes.

A black staircase leads onto the main exhibition space on the first floor of the building, each of its steps bearing the exact time the earthquake occurred ‘14: 28, 12th May 2008’ in bold white characters. This significant moment is further highlighted by a floor standing pendulum clock that broke as the earthquake took place and stopped at 14: 28, and henceforth starts the earthquake ‘diary’.

Fig. 54 The preface to the Quaking Diary Museum (left) and a staircase marked with 14: 28, 12th May 2008 (right) (fieldwork photos, 2016)
Fig. 55 A standing pendulum clock from the stricken area that stopped at 14:28 hours (left) and a diorama of the interior of an earthquake-damaged building (right) (fieldwork photo, 2016)

The exhibition unfolds following a linear route that records the daily events from 12th May to 12th June 2008. Over 2000 original artefacts collected from different cities, towns and villages in the earthquake-stricken area are crammed into a low and narrow space, together with photos and text boards. The exhibition space is left purposefully unfurnished to create a visual semblance of brokenness and destruction. Every ten metres or so there are holes in the wall which are filled with rubble, bare bricks, exposed rebars and broken furniture, producing a mixed sense of dust and rust. Key statistics of the day — death and injury toll, donations raised — are printed on the ceiling, and glass display cases are installed into the floor.
The objects that testify the loss of lives are the most poignant and effective among the exhibits, each telling a heartbreaking story. On display is a house number plaque from a mountain village in Wenchuan that was buried by a debris flow during the earthquake. Those who survived the debris flow wrote ‘relatives, rest in peace’ on the plaque with chalk, lit incense sticks and left. Fan picked the plaque up on his visit to the village. Other exhibits, just to give a few examples, include the body bags used for storage and transport of corpses during the relief; a blood-stained wedding dress of a newly married bride who was killed during her wedding photo shoot; a soldier’s note to his wife before a high-risk rescue mission which he did not survive.
Zhang Tijun, a member of Department of Collection, was one of those who went to Yingxiu Town to salvage these objects. Zhang, a Sichuan native, could never forgot what he saw in Yingxiu Town: rubble piled high into mountains. He didn't dare to cross those 'mountains' because he felt that there were still lives buried under the ruins. He shuttled between the aftershocks and the ruins, and brought out things like license plates, braziers, roller skates and notebooks. What struck him most were the faces of the locals in the disaster-stricken area. They were blank, emotionless, 'like mangzi (meaning a fool in Sichuan dialect)', Zhang told me, 'you call him and there's no reaction, that is, the feeling of having lost everything'. Aftershocks could still happen any moment, and he was never sure whether he would ‘be done for’ (die) in the disaster area, but he was determined to take with him as much as he could, so that ‘those who were buried in the ruins would not have completely nothing to leave behind them’.

For about two weeks, a team of male staff members went off to the disaster area to collect objects during the day and a female team worked in the evening to disinfect, catalog and store the collected items. A member of the team, Miss Meng, recalled those evenings: 'sometimes when the we were all busy working in silence, someone would suddenly start
Zhang Tijun avoided going into the Earthquake Museum for several years after it opened, as he realised that all those things he had collected, carried back and worked to install became an ‘emotional knot’ (xinjie) for him. The emotional difficulty was shared by the museum’s interpreters. Miss Wang, who worked for eight years at the JMC, told me that taking visitors into the Earthquake Museums meant ‘to restrain my emotions again and again’, but she could never completely control it. Many Sichuan visitors would politely ask her to finish the tour in the earthquake museum quickly, finding the traumatic memories unbearable, and some would simply skip it, saying apologetically, ‘we’ll pass the earthquake museum … we have all been there.’ Nevertheless, it is the impression of the museum’s ticket inspectors I spoke to that roughly 70% of visitors would go in, and the museum would welcome over a thousand visitors daily during the holidays.

Vice-director Yuan Hongwei first suggested the idea of ‘diary’ as the curatorial motif for the museum, to avoid ‘grand narratives’ and keep the exhibition ‘authentic’ (zhenshi) and ‘objective’ (keguan). While the official line of the state’s risk management and the unity of the country is still present – in exhibits such as the airline seat the then premier Wen Jiabao used on the day he flew to the stricken area after the earthquake took place, and the looping tribute songs and video clips from the official relief documentary – the majority of the exhibits, however, represent bottom-up memories.

For instance, the letter a Chengdu citizen, Li Peifang, wrote to the then mayor, Ge Honglin, after the earthquake. In her letter Li made the following suggestions for ‘a precautionary rather than reactionary approach to future disasters’, including 1. Urge all grass-roots units to set up anti-seismic and shockproof institutions; 2. Carry out a general survey of the built houses, buildings and important equipment and facilities, and reinforce the undefended and substandard buildings; 3. Strengthen the fortification management.
The exhibition also touches on some of the more sensitive and controversial issues, the most significant of which concerns the mass casualty at public schools. During the earthquake, thousands of school children died due to the shoddily constructed school buildings, that are figuratively referred to as tofu-dregs construction projects (doufuzha gongcheng). At least 7,000 school buildings throughout the province collapsed. According to Tan Zuoren, a Chengdu writer and human right activist who coined the term ‘tofu-dregs project’, 5,600 pupils were dead or missing from the 64 schools he investigated in the quake zone. In 2009, Tan was detained for publishing this figure and later trialed for charge of crime of ‘incitement to overthrow state power’, which did not sustain. Non-governmental
investigation into details of school casualties continued by volunteers, including the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, who had been constantly posting updates on his blog since March 2009. The official number of 5,335 student casualties, was released on 7th May 2009, almost a year after the earthquake.

Towards the end of the exhibition, there is a space that specially commemorates for the dead students, featuring a wall-size photograph of a small hand still holding a pencil sticking out of the rubbles, and a display of 20 schoolbags dug out of the ruins covered with dust. The most visually compelling is a wall mural of photographic portraits in black and white of parents holding the pictures of their children whom they had lost in the earthquake. This two-by-six metre mural runs from the first floor down to the ground floor. On a closer look, however, one finds that the mural presents not different portraits of the breaved parents but a composite image comprising six repetitions of the same set of portraits.
This was first pointed out by a young Chinese anthropologist whom I accompanied on a visit to the museum. Upon this discovery his first reaction was feeling ‘cheated’. In the Red Age museums, we have seen the usage of real artefact in fabricated visual arrangements. Far from the claimed ‘objective’ or ‘realistic’ presentation of historical materials, this approach to the photographic display of bereavement (which is much more dynamic and creative) serves to maximise its evocative quality while risking crossing the boundary between artistic treatment and manipulation. Here, in the composite photograph of the young victims of the earthquake, the pursuit of affective impact of the exhibition again prevails at the cost of compromising the truthfulness of the information, and, as my anthropologist friend’s
response suggests, possibly giving rise to a sense that the subject matter had not been
given the serious attention it deserved.

A similar way of using these thematic and material motifs is found in the series of
commemorative artworks Ai Weiwei created after the Wenchuan Earthquake. Ai’s 2009
exhibition in the Royal Academy of Art, London, includes the installation Straight comprising
200 tons of steel bars from Wenchuan. The students’ names, ages, schools and classes
collected by Ai Weiwei and volunteers from the ‘512 Wenchuan Earthquake Citizen Survey’,
were displayed on one vast wall. Beside the name of the last child in the far lower right
corner of the wall, is the number 5196. In his 2009 exhibition in Haus der Kunst, Munich, Ai
created Remembering, an installation made of 9,000 schoolbags pieced together into the
sentence in Chinese characters ‘She lived happily in this world for seven years’ (Ta zai
zhege shijie shang kaixin de shenghuo guo qinian), fixed on the facade of the museum.

These pieces have been read as being highly critical of the Chinese state in its questioning
of the government over its negligence for the poorly built schools which cost the school
children’s lives (Grube 2009). For Ai, remembering the earthquake was an act of dissent,
and it was particularly the work Remembering that marked a ‘high point’ in his ‘struggles
with the authorities’, making him the country’s ‘most dangerous person’ (Ai 2018). I asked
Fan about whether Ai Weiwei was a source of inspiration for the museum and he denied. It
is clear that Ai’s works, staged mostly in Western contemporary art spaces in the single-piece form, address a very different group of audience than the JMC. In the context of a domestic private memorial museum, the critical edge of these themes and motifs had to be more cautiously balanced with the exhibition’s overall commemorative ethos.27

The exhibition ends with a shrine-like space. Behind a round arch on the right side of the museum’s exit stand three tall memorial walls. They form a rectangular space of about 30 square meters, which looks like a burial area in a cemetery. On the walls are 3D printed images of the victims, donated by their friends or families, each with a metal plate marked with the name, date of birth and place of death. There are still many empty spaces on the wall for those without photos. A short track leads from the arch to the memorial wall, engraved with the number 69,227 in large Chinese characters, the official toll of the earthquake by 2013. At the end of the passage are three cedar saplings, like three unlit incense sticks.

27 The JMC did have issue with the government, however, over a separate memorial designed by Liu Jiakun. Covered in the shade of tall bamboos next to the Quaking Diary Museum, the memorial is dedicated to Hu Huishan, a 15-year-old girl killed in the earthquake. Definitely the smallest museum in the JMC and probably the world as well, the Hu Huishan Memorial is a 19-square-metre, pink (her favourite colour) space modelled on Hu’s bedroom with the girl’s favoured personal belongings. This was forbidden to open to the public by the authorities and Fan put a glass window on the door for the visitors can see the interior.
From the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, 1998 Yangtze River floods, to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, disaster relief has been an arena for moral performance of the Chinese state (Xu 2016). In September 2008, the Military Museum of the Chinese People’s Revolution in Beijing housed an official exhibition on the Wenchuan earthquake rescue, ‘All united as one; Unity is strength’ (Wanzhong yixin, zhongzhi chengcheng), commissioned by the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCPPD), and the General Politics Department of the PLA. In 2009, the CCPPD decided to turn the temporary exhibition into a museum and selected the JMC as its location. Distinct from any other museum in the complex, the building of the official ‘512 Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue Memorial Museum (512 Kangzhen jiuzai jinianguan) shows a striking resemblance to the Great Hall of the People (Renmin Dahuitang), one of the ‘Ten Great Buildings’ constructed in 1959 in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the PRC, located on the west side of Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Facing a square of 7,000 square metres, this state-sponsored earthquake museum is a two-storey building, with a 40-metre high portico
of 56 tall concrete columns, symbolising the unity of the 56 ethnic nationalities of the country. The portico leads to a grand foyer and then the exhibition spaces. Using primarily photographs, the exhibition presents a standard official account of the earthquake relief, highlighting the state leadership and the heroic sacrifice of the PLA.

Fig. 62 512 Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue Memorial Museum (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

A palpable incongruity exists between the museum’s architectural grandeur and its limited number of exhibits. With a floorspace of 8,900 square metres, it showcases a selection of 135 objects (including 40 pieces of commemorative artwork), while the Quaking Diary museum, in contrast, has over 2,700 items from the disaster zone on display in a space of less than 3,000 square metres.

The 512 Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue Memorial Museum is typical of the official gigantism and political vanity evident in the state-funded museum construction over the past decades. The Chinese Museum Boom has been criticised as mainly an architectural one with star architects commissioned to create buildings with little thought being made for the local context, the museum’s collections or the exhibition’s narrative (Ho 2018). This architectural
critique has been made more broadly within the development of urban spaces in China resulting in President Xi Jinping’s ordering a ban on ‘weird’ buildings in 2016. Contrasting the architectural newness and scope of state museums, their narratives and exhibitionary styles have been described as stodgy and homogenised (Denton 2014; Huang 2014). Typically, a large national-level museum like the Chinese National History Museum provides the archetype in terms of narrative and design-style, which regional level museums then seek to emulate. The juxtaposition of the two earthquake memorial museums best manifests the significant contrast between the JMC’s and the official curatorial approaches, as the Quaking Diary hails the power and potency of quantitative ‘real objects’, while the official exhibition appears flimsy and insubstantial.

Fig. 63 Inside the 512 Wenchuan Earthquake Rescue Memorial Museum (fieldwork photo, 2017)

Moreover, the two earthquake museums not only put the JMC on nationwide news, but also marked a turning point in the project’s development. The establishment of a state level museum, telling the story of how Chinese people were united under the Party leadership to
confront a national crisis, signaled the recognition from the state authority of the JMC’s influence and position, and led to a noticeable shift in its relationship with the state, that is, from one involving contestation – Fan ‘playing the edge ball’ and testing the safe boundary – to one of potential collaboration. This may not be something Fan had foreseen, but an understanding between the museum and the state authority appeared to have been formed after the Quaking Diary exhibition made a success, one that, starting from the tactic accommodation of the official earthquake memorial, has led to the JMC’s strategic change towards more active engagement with central and provincial governments, in both the creation of new museums and memorials, and the shift to consulting business soon afterwards.

Following the landing of the state earthquake memorial museum, another notable new direction of the JMC’s development was the incorporation of new themes into the museum complex. The other museum opened in 2009, the Museum of Weapons and National Defense, which showcases the history of weapons in the world from their prehistorical origin to latest developments in the 21st century, indicates such a strategic move to balance the commemorative museums with ones that are more informative and educational. ‘Think of it as preparing a banquet’, Fan likes using one of his favoured analogies, ‘it should be a mix of both meat and vegetables, lighter and heavier dishes, so as to cater to guests with different taste and appetite. Triple-cooked pork (huiguou rou) is a great dish but you cannot have just that. The same goes with the museums.’ Fan decided he had to build museums that would attract visitors of different age groups and backgrounds.

**The Great Leaders Plaza**

2010 was a transitional year for the JMC. With his growing fame as a museum curator and cultural entrepreneur, Fan began to receive invitations from town and city governments in other regions to provide consultation on museum planning and exhibition making, which he took as an opportunity to expand the JMC’s operation into the area of heritage consulting. As noted already and as will be addressed more fully in Chapter Six, this expansion marked a shift in the museum’s strategic focus from developing new museums in Anren to projecting its influence outwards in the form of heritage consulting business. Within the first six months
of the year, the team completed the first two consulting projects in Shandong and Shanghai.

Due to this shift, the only addition to the JMC in 2010 was a new memorial space called the Great Leaders Plaza (Lingxiu Guangchang). As a belated tribute to the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic, the memorial was designed to honour the four generations of Party’s leadership of the People’s Republic, by displaying nothing but four two-metre tall white marble statues of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, each in front of a marble plaque inscribed with a key text of their thoughts. On 24th June, the museum held a ceremony for opening the memorial, attended by a number of invited local and municipal government officials and journalists from official media outlet such as Xinhua.

![Fig. 64 Fan Jichuan unveiling the statue of Mao at the launch ceremony of the Great Leaders Plaza (source: Xia Jifang, 2010)](source: Xia Jifang, 2010)
The launch, however, took an unexpected turn. After the ceremony, Xia Jifang, who was at the time still the museum’s publicity chief received a phone call around six o’clock in the afternoon from the Chengdu Municipal Publicity Department informing him that the news article about the opening, which Xia himself had prepared and sent prior to the launch to Fan’s selection of newspaper, would not be published. The reason given was that the central government strictly prohibited non-official statues of the leaders, especially ones who were still alive. Soon after the incident, the square was closed to the public and the statues were packed up in wooden boxes. The JMC, subsequently, was censored from most provincial and city-level official media outlets for three years.

On 23rd June, the day before the launch of Plaza, Fan held another ceremony, which was for laying the cornerstone for the Cultural Revolution Museum. This was a private event involving only a small group of historians, the museum’s commissioned architect, Yung Ho Chang. The event was not pre-publicised but Fan did post a photograph of the cornerstone and behind it, a billboard with the quote from the Party’s 1981 ‘Resolution on
certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China’, which is regarded as the official verdict of the event: ‘The “Cultural Revolution”, which lasted from May 1966 to October 1976, was responsible for the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic’. With the photo Fan wrote: ‘It was sunny for more than ten days, and last night it rained. I am laying the cornerstone for a new museum. It has to be done, even if there were knives raining down from the sky. Tears of Heaven! Tears of Heaven! Tears of Heaven! Tears fall down like rain, tears fall down like rain.’

At the ceremony, Fan was given Wang Youqing’s newly published book The Victims of the Cultural Revolution, and that evening Fan wrote a note on the front flyleaf of the book: ‘on 23rd June 2010 the cornerstone of the Cultural Revolution museum was laid’.

The two consecutive events encapsulate the complexity and contradiction that characterise the transition of the JMC and Fan Jianchuan. 2009 was also the year when the JMC was designated as an aforementioned ‘Patriotic Education Base’ (aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi), and the Great Leaders Plaza was its first tribute project after taking on the role, for which the Chengdu government made a contribution to the cost. The incentive for Fan to ingratiate himself with the authorities therefore came not only from the need for political legitimisation, but also the economic calculation to use ‘patriotic projects’ to gain funding from the government. Another example is the Plaza of the Chivalrous Foreign Friends (Yuanhua yishi guangchang) opened in 2016, that commemorates 40 foreigners who made outstanding contributions to China during the Resistance War including key figures in the American aid to the Nationalist Army such as Joseph Stilwell and Claire Lee Chennault and prominent communists like Norman Bethune.

The JMC’s 2009 breakthrough in both publicity and income, and the subsequent move to consulting business and patriotic educational role, did bring great changes to the project, including deeper and more frequent interactions with the government. And yet it did not entail, at least immediately, a deviation from Fan’s commitment to developing more museums about memories from the Red Age and specifically the Cultural Revolution, which remained a risky and sensitive subject to address. Fan seemed to be pursuing different and seemingly contradictory goals: the economic benefit of a growing dependence on the
government on one hand, and the resilient ideal of mnemonic justice in more Red Age museums on the other. And this was manifested in the JMC’s development in the years to follow.

Fig. 66 The cornerstone ceremony for the Museum of the Cultural Revolution on 23rd June 2010 (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)
In February 2011, the JMC opened the Museum of Red Age Mirrors (*Hongse niandai jingjian guan*), the fourth in the Red Age series. The mirror is a classic trope with deep roots in the traditions of Chinese historical understanding. The Chinese words *jing* and *jian* both translate as ‘mirror’. The former refers to the mirror as an object and the later commonly denotes ‘the mirror of history’, as in the classic proverb ‘yi shi wei jian,’ (to use history as a mirror). Through engaging with the past one can better understand the present, just as looking in the mirror facilitates reflection on oneself.

The museum builds upon this synonymity. It starts with a wall sculpture of the character *jing* 鏡 and ends with one of the character *jian* 鉴. Mirrors from the Red Age are in a special position to reflect the political turmoil of their time, since they bear explicit visual elements of revolutionary iconography. The museum’s foreword claims, ‘throughout the ages, mirrors were used for dressing ourselves properly, and only during the Red Age it became a political tool.’ In the typical design of a Red Age mirror, revolutionary images and slogans cover a
considerable portion, and sometimes more than half of the space, to the effect that when looking at one’s own image in a mirror, one has no option but to simultaneously absorb ideological messages.

The Red Age Mirror Museum displays in total 2781 such mirrors produced from 1949 to 1976, organised categorically according to their contents into nine units, which are Chairman Mao quotes, Chairman Mao’s poetry, tributes to Mao, revolutionary sacred sites, slogans, scenes from the Model Operas (Yangban Xi)\textsuperscript{28}, memorials, everyday life scenes, and couplets and plaques.

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\textsuperscript{28} The Model Operas or the Revolutionary Operas were a series of shows planned and engineered by Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution. They were created to tell the story of Chinese revolutionary victory against both foreign and class enemies, hence essentially political works of art.
The entire space is painted white, which signals, like in the Museum of Everyday Use of Objects, the ideological monotony of the time. The mirrors are exhibited closely together along narrow corridors. As in the previous Red Age museums, the power of the materiality of objects is acutely felt. Again, the regular and repetitive juxtaposition, minimal contextual information and of course, the seminal quantity of exhibits all contribute to a perpetual presence of the Maoist imageries. Moreover, with the mirrors facing one another at different angles, it is easy to find oneself in an illusion of an infinitely expanding space. A ‘labyrinth of reflections’, Fan claims that the museum is intended to bring the visitors back to the experience of deception, illusion and false visions of the Mao period, especially the Cultural Revolution, by being misled by their own reflections in Maoist mirrors. The original plan by the designer of museum’s architecture Li Xinggang, was even more complicated, involving revolving doors of mirror installed at the intersections of different corridors, which Fan dismissed in the end due to safety reasons. ‘There already have been people who got lost in that museum, calling our office for rescue,’ Fan told me in an interview, ‘we cannot afford to have a museum where visitors could not get out just so that the architect has his ideal design’.

Fig. 69 Installation in the Red Age Mirror Museum. Photo courtesy of the Jianchuan Museum Complex.
Fan describes the curatorial approach for the Red Age Mirror Museum as ‘conceptual’ (gainian de) and ‘metaphysical’ (xingershang de), which I take to mean that rather than the material culture of the mirrors themselves, it focuses on the creation of an experience based on the metaphorical extension of the (Red Age) mirror as a historicised concept. Its power lies in the synergy between the material and iconographical qualities of these objects, which implies Fan’s belief in the capacity of the things themselves to evoke meaning and affect without recourse to text or voice.

Like the previous Red Age museums, the mirror museum is also used to contain also guerrilla exhibits not directly relevant to its theme. A small segregated space along the route showcases a collection of documents related to the Campaign to Suppress the Counterrevolutionary (zhenya fangeming or zhenfan) from 1951 to 1953. It was the first campaign launched by the PRC government against the former members and associates of the Kuomintang who were seen as a threat to the newly established communist authority. The campaign was implemented vehemently with the notorious ‘killing quota’ initiated by Mao, meaning that the number of counterrevolutionaries to be executed, or ‘impose death sentence’ upon in a place was set based on a certain proportion of its whole population (Li 2005). The official estimate of the total number of deaths is 712,000 while according to Li Changyu’s calculation it is at ‘two or three million’ (Yang 2008; Li 2005). The collection includes name lists, profiles and ‘wanted circular’ for counterrevolutionaries prepared by ‘revolutionary committees’ (geming weiyuanhui) in different regions. In 2016, right before 16th May, the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the display was self-censored and replaced by 1960s primary school textbooks permanently.
**Fig. 70** The ‘Enemy and Counterrevolutionary Archive’ (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

**Fig. 71** Some of the documents from the Campaign to oppress the Counterrevolutionary on display (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)

**Deng’s Words**

June 2011 saw the opening of ‘Deng’s Words’ (*Deng Gong Ci*), a memorial museum for Deng Xiaoping, China’s paramount leader after Mao’s death in 1976 until his retirement in 1992, who led the rehabilitation work for many who were purged during the Cultural Revolution and later masterminded the country’s market economic reform from 1978. The word *ci* 詞 in the museum’s name which is translated as ‘words’, is a homophone with *ci* 祠,
the word for ‘shrine’, which is a clear venerating gesture. Housed in a traditional Western Sichuan residential architecture – a donation from a Resistance War veteran from Sichuan, shipped to the museum and rebuilt brick by brick in 2008 – the museum features a life-sized wax statue of Deng Xiaoping placed at the centre of the space of about 20 square metres, surrounded by 100 quotations by Deng printed on wall scrolls, including his famous comment, ‘It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice’, which is taken to mean that no matter whether it is a planned or a market economy, as long as it works, it is a good economy.

Fig. 72 The Deng Xiaoping Memorial Museum (fieldwork photo, 2017)

Enshrining Deng Xiaoping could certainly be interpreted as a continuation of the commemoration of state leaders, and at the same time, an expression of Fan’s personal sentiments towards Deng, a fellow native from Sichuan, and towards his policies of the economic reform. Fan attributes both the success of his own business and what he has been able to accomplish with the JMC to this far-reaching national programme. In this sense, Deng’s Words may be seen as a debut museum of a new theme, namely the history of economic reform. Collecting contemporary history and building museums about the more recent events are things Fan always claims to pursue. His major take on the subject, a museum of the 40 years of the economic reform finally came about in 2018.
Museum of the Educated Youth (Zhiqing)

In June 2011, Fan started posting on his blog old photographs from the Cultural Revolution. These include, most significantly, a series of posts about the violent struggle sessions (wudou), with the images and stories of the victims. The 28th June post, for instance, tells the story of a couple, Deng Ronglie and Liu Sufang, both workers at the Chongqing Air Compressor Factory, who were killed on 18th August 1967, after being captured by an opposing faction of Red Guards from the same factory. Liu Sufang, the wife, was pregnant at the time and Deng tried to defend her but in vain. They were both shot after Deng had his right eye poked out and Liu her hands cut off. Fan remarked with the post ‘it was truly inhuman. How could [the situation] have led to such deep hatred amongst coworkers of the same factory?’

These posts are compelling testimony to the cruel and violent memories from the Mao Era, and carried a more direct and expressive critical force that the Red Age museums could not afford. Their timing made them appear as a statement of commitment to developing more museums about the Red Age and particularly, the Museum of the Cultural Revolution, in light of Fan’s previous post about its cornerstone ceremony.

These posts certainly paved the way for the forthcoming Museum of the Lives of Educated Youth (Zhiqing Shenghuo Guan) which opened in December 2011 as the fifth Red Age museum in the JMC. Zhiqing, is the abbreviated term for Zhishi Qingnian, literally meaning ‘educated youth’, referring to the nearly 18 million urban young people, mostly with elementary to high-school education, who were sent to live and work in the rural areas by joining, willingly or not, the country’s ‘Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside’ (shangshan xiaxiang) movement from 1968 to 1980. The movement is therefore also referred to as the ‘rustication movement’ and the zhiqing as the ‘rusticated youth’ or the ‘sent-down youth’ (Bonnin 2016; Yang 2003).

The ‘Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside’ movement began in 1968 at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Over ten years, millions of urban ‘educated youth’, or
zhiqing, were sent to be ‘re-educated’ in collectivised farms in remote towns and villages and often faced with hunger, intense labour and other difficulties. Many eventually had families in the villages and stayed, while others began to return to the cities when the movement came to a halt in late 1970s after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Michel Bonnin famously describes the zhiqing as a ‘lost generation’, for they were deprived of ‘their youthful illusions and the pure idealism on which they were raised as children’ and ‘the opportunity to study at the age of study’ (2016, 756). However, in contrast with Bonnin’s argument, that did not prevent some of them from moving on afterwards to become well-known politicians, entrepreneurs, artists and intellectuals in the reform era. It is this group who, due to their urban and often elite backgrounds, that had the social and intellectual resources to publish their accounts of life in the Cultural Revolution, making the zhiqing ‘probably the most active group in the realm of collective memory in Chinese society today’ (Bonnin 2016, 756). Indeed, compared to the ‘Red Guards’ (hongweibing) movement, which the zhiqing movement coincides with but is distinct from, the latter does appear less politically ‘sensitive’ and its commemoration more tolerated. And yet, it should be noted that, as Bonnin has warned, ‘it would be incorrect to assume that the memory of the rustication experience was not and is not restricted by the authorities’ (2016, 756).

Museum commemoration of the zhiqing generation began from the early 1990s. The first exhibition, titled Our Spiritual Attachment to the Black Soil—A Retrospective Exhibit about the Educated Youth of Beidahuang (Hun xi heitudi – beidahuang zhiqing huigu zhan), was staged in 1990 at the Museum of Chinese Revolution in Beijing, organised by a group of former zhiqing in Heilongjiang who became government officials in Beijing. The exhibition was a seminal event and attracted over 150,000 visitors over two weeks. A few that followed History Testifies to Ordinary Life—A Retrospective Look at Educated Youth on the Military Farms in Hainan and Haibei in 1991, Youth without Regret: A Twentieth-Anniversary Retrospective Exhibit on the Life of Youth Sent from Sichuan to Yunnan in Chengdu in 1991 and Spring Flowers, Autumn Harvests: A Commemorative Exhibit of the Sent-Down Youth in Nanjing in 1993, all organized by former 'educated youths' with official background (Yang

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29 Established in 1959, the Museum of Chinese Revolution originates in the Office of the National Museum of the Revolution founded in 1950 to preserve the legacy of the 1949 revolution, and was merged with the National Museum of Chinese History, with which it had occupied the same building since 1959, with origins in both the Beijing National History Museum, founded in 1949, and the Preliminary Office of the National History Museum, founded in 1912, that showcases the broader Chinese historical legacy.
As their names suggest, these exhibitions show zhiqing’s recognition, embrace, and even proud identification with their collective experience in the movement which gave rise to a wave of nostalgia in the society.

This denotes, as Yang points out, a significant shift in the way the rustication movement had been commemorated since its end in 1980, when the educated youth were eagerly finding their ways back to the cities. In particular, the rise of the ‘literature of the wounded’ (shanghen wenxue) in the 1980s involved more mournful and critical reflections on the zhiqings’ rural experience which was characterised by ‘personal deprivation, suffering and fatigue’ (Yang 2003, 268). Yang argues that ‘this nostalgia emerged as a form of cultural resistance. At its centre was a concern for meaning and identity newly problematised by changing conditions of Chinese life. Nostalgia can help to maintain and construct identities by connecting the present to the past, by articulating past experiences and their meanings, and by directing moral critiques at the present’ (2003, 269).

In 2002, Chen Shuxin, a 50-year-old vice-mayor of a small city in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, was appointed to build a museum in Aihui, a historic district in China’s northernmost city, Heihe. Chen spent six years setting up the country’s first museum about the zhiqing generation, the Heihe Zhiqing Museum. On the day of its opening in August 2009, the museum in this small city on the China-Russia border attracted over 5000 visitors.

A zhiqing himself, Chen feels personally and strongly about the need to remember and honour that generation. ‘Many of us zhiqing had our feelings hurt’, said Chen in an interview, ‘having devoted our best years to the frontier villages and changed the local isolated environment, we need at least some sort of recognition’ (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013). When the opportunity presented itself, Chen prioritised highlighting the zhiqings’ contribution to the nation and the positive values they represented and made the patriotic red the dominant hue of the museum. Regarding the suffering and loss, Chen said ‘it [the museum] does not have to tell everything just because they happened. History is not a running account’ (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013). The Heihe museum was soon followed by an array of similar museums across the whole country, notable examples in Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian and Sichuan). On 1st July 2015, a ¥30-million exhibition titled Sharing a Common Destiny of the Republic opened in the Chinese National Stadium (the Bird Nest) in Beijing, created by
the Heihe Zhiqing Museum and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). The wave of commemorative exhibitions and museums predominantly highlights the positive elements of the rustication movement, extolling the idea of the ‘Zhiqing Spirit’, coined by the curator of the Bird Nest exhibition, Pan Zhonglin, characterised qualities with perseverance, self-sacrifice and patriotism. He Weifang, professor of law and a vocal social critic and democracy activist, criticised their sanctioned narratives as turning ‘crimes’ into ‘grand achievements’ that eulogises the Cultural Revolution (Zhen 2015).

I took a detour to contextualise the commemoration of the rustication movement to show how the JMC Museum of Educated Youth presents a rather distinctive approach to the zhiqing memories than these previous and mostly government-backed attempts. On 5th December 2011, as part of the launch for the zhiqing museum, Fan unveiled a memorial monument that commemorates ten female zhiqing from Chengdu who were killed in a fire in Yunnan on 24th March 1971. Placed right in front of the museum entrance, the monument, which Fan named Pink Remains (Fen Fen), comprises of the ten young women’s gravestones with a display of their zhiqing certificates. The ceremony was attended by over 300 former zhiqing from all over China, and yet not unanimously appreciated. Hou Juan, a ‘celebrity zhiqing’ during the Cultural Revolution who had the privilege of meeting Mao in person, told Fan Jianchuan quite directly that she felt that the sculpture was inappropriate as the tone was too negative. Fan, however, insists that the museum should address the deaths of zhiqing. ‘The lack of medical care and the various conflicts between peasants, cooperatives (hezuoshe) and zhiqing, all made it easy for young lives to perish under such harsh conditions’, said Fan Jianchuan in an interview at the opening, ‘in fact, they are us who died, and we are them who live. It is placed at the entrance so that everyone who enters the museum could at least greet them’ (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013).

Unlike the Heihe Zhiqing Museum, the entire exhibition space in the JMC museum is in a refreshing light green, the colour of youth, according to Fan Jianchuan, that makes the museum a ‘green box’ that stores the youthful memories of the zhiqing generation. Fan was himself a member of that generation. The very first exhibit displayed by the door is Fan’s zhiqing certificate issued in August 1975. The central piece in the entrance hall is a large oil painting titled Youth by Fan’s friend, famous Sichuan painter He Duoling. The painting depicts a young female zhiqing, dressed in green Mao suit, sitting alone in the field. The
expression on her face is blurred in the dazzling sunlight, which could be taken to symbolise
the animated revolutionary momentum in the society or the far-reaching power of Mao’s
personality cult. As if a mental image created in recollection, the figure of this solitary young
woman whose state of mind is unclear to the viewer as if lost in distant memory.

The exhibition preface makes it clear that the museum remembers both: ‘the passion and
frustration’, the ‘joy and pain’ that the zhiqing once engraved with their flourishing youth upon
that era. The exhibition is organised in four themes: history, life, tribulation and illustrious
zhiqing. Distinct from the earlier Red Age museums, the Zhiqing Museum has a much more
coherent and detailed narrative of historical background, which has to do with the context of
existing commemorative efforts. The exhibition traces the origin of the ‘Up to the mountains,
down to the countryside’ movement, a People’s Daily editorial published on 3rd December
1953, titled ‘Organising Senior High School Graduates to Participate in Agricultural
Production’. It came to be carried out on a nationwide scale when Mao’s instruction ‘let the
educated youth go to the countryside’ was announced in the 23rd December 1968 issue of
the People’s Daily, a copy of which is on display in the exhibition. Using original photographs,
documents, and everyday use objects, the exhibition introduces the key events of the
zhiqing movement from 1968 to 1978 and the stories of well-known model zhiqing figures.

As supported mostly by original propaganda materials, the tone of this unit conforms closely
to the official narrative. A former zhiqing in her 60s that I accompanied on a visit to the
museum shook her head while going through this unit and said ‘look at these young people
in all these photos with big smiles on their faces. It [being a zhiqing] was not that great. It
was actually a lot harder.’

Fan would agree with her. For many if not most zhiqing, the years in the countryside were
characterised by intense labour, constant hunger and perhaps more crucially, uncertainty
about the future. ‘Nothing better describes the zhiqing experience than the eternal and
repetitive physical labour’, Fan once said. He had the idea of using callus, rice and wheat
as symbols of the zhiqing memory but found it too ‘idyllic and romanticised’ for what it really
was (Southern Metropolis Weekly 2013).

Therefore, in the introduction to the second unit, ‘Zhiqing Life’, Fan writes ‘the life of
educated youth is a special phenomenon in the special era of New China. It is a powerful
and solemn symphony of fate played by millions of educated youth. They were all forged in
the fire of this special period.’ The ‘Zhiqing Life’ unit depicts the extremely harsh conditions
*zhiqing* faced in working, living and in private life such as marriage. In collectivised farms,
*zhiqing* worked to earn ‘work points’ (*gongfen*) instead of salary. Fan put his own ‘work points
record’ (*gongfen ben*) on display, which shows that in 1975, as an 18-year-old, able-bodied
young man, he was earning nine work points a day which could be converted into one *jiao*,
one tenth of a *yuan*. The average monthly salary of an urban factory worker then was around
30 to 50 *yuan* (Zhao 2019, 334). Such hardships of *zhiqing* were the same as those borne
by the farmers with whom they worked. Fan recalled in his autobiography that the only
source of meat he could get as a *zhiqing* was pork from pigs that died from swine fever. The
exhibition tells a gruesome anecdote about seven *zhiqing* convicted for eating an aborted
foetus in Yunnan in 1975.

The most powerful part of this unit is an installation titled ‘17.76 million’, the estimated
number of sent-down youths during 1962 to 1976, consisting of several thousand pieces of
broken mirrors scattered amidst rusty hoes and shovels that filled a central atrium. These
poignant symbols of hard labour and broken memory convey forcefully a haunting feeling of
abandonment and desolation that features the collective memory of the *zhiqing* generation.
The third unit, ‘Tribulation’, is engaged more directly with the violence and suffering during the rustication movement, including the physical and sexual abuse, safety hazards and political persecution that some zhiqing were subject to. A display along a long corridor shows a list of more than a hundred incidents of unnatural death of zhiqing, including work accidents, suicide, sickness and persecution. On one side a list of events is printed in wall-length vertical columns in black and white, with the name, gender and age of the zhiqing and the date, place and cause of their deaths. On the opposite side wall are black and white photo portraits of some of the listed zhiqing. These excruciating facts and images loom as inscriptions on the memorial of a mass grave.
Fig. 74 List of *zhiquing* victims (fieldwork photo, 2016)

Fig. 75 Captioned photographs of *zhiquing* victims (fieldwork photo, 2016)

Though in the countryside, the lives of *zhiquing* were also affected by the shifts of the political
environment during the Cultural Revolution. This is illustrated by a series of unjust cases (yuan’an) during the rustication movement. The exhibition shows in total six widely known cases of injustice and another eight incidents of controversy. Below are two examples.

One of these cases is the Communist Self-study University (Gongchanzhuyi Zixiu Daxue), a self-study group established in the northwestern city of Yinchuan in November 1969 by thirteen students (including five Communist Youth League members and three educated youths). The group had a journal where members published articles on the basic theories of Marxism-Leninism, and also made some critical comments on the ultra-left line. In March 1970, the group were arrested, and three of the thirteen youths were sentenced to death for ‘counter-revolutionary’ crimes and executed immediately. The others were imprisoned and criticised including a 22-year-old young woman driven to commit suicide. It was in 1976 that the original judgment was rescinded, and the case was rehabilitated.

Ren Yi, a zhiqing in a Jiangsu county, was another victim of injustice in the political tumult. In 1969, Ren Yi wrote a song titled My Hometown, a melancholic tune that expressed his longing for his hometown Nanjing and sorrow over his bygone youth. The song became widely spread among the educated youth. In August of the same year, it was broadcast on the Moscow Radio at a time when Sino-Soviet relations were most tense and hostile. In February 1970, Ren Yi was secretly arrested on charges of ‘writing counterrevolutionary songs, destroying the zhiqing movement, and interfering with Chairman Mao’s proletarian revolutionary line and strategic plan’. He was first sentenced to death, and later changed to imprisonment of 10 years and rehabilitated in 1979. As such, the JMC takes an unprecedented step in addressing the issues of death and the injustice that are carefully avoided in the other private zhiqing museums and exhibitions as I noted previously.

In the last section of ‘Illustrious zhiqing figures’, Fan juxtaposes the photographs of 32 former zhiqing who have become now distinguished figures in politics, business and arts, each with a line of comment and reflection on their zhiqing memories. These remarks show what Bonnin describes as a ‘wide spectrum’ of memories of the zhiqing experiences ‘between nostalgia and rejection, denunciation and approval’ (2016, 763). The Chinese president Xi Jinping and premier Li Keqiang were both among the sent-down educated youth. Born in 1953, Xi suffered from discrimination after his father Xi Zhongxun, a member of China’s first
generation of leaders, was purged during the Cultural Revolution. In 1969, the 15-year-old Xi was sent, as a “criminal’s son” (Heibang zinü) to Liangjiahe village in a poor county in the northern province of Shaanxi (Xi 2015). It was in a ‘strange environment’ and among ‘untrusting eyes’ that he started his seven years as a zhiqing (Xi 2015). ‘When I arrived at 15, I was anxious and confused. When I left at 22, my life goals were firm and I was filled with confidence’ is how he describes his transition (Gracie 2017). The museum selected ‘I’m forever a son of the yellow earth’, the title of the essay, as the quote from Xi. In contrast to the positive and grateful memories of politicians, others engage more explicitly the hardship of their time. Sichuan entrepreneur Liu Yonghao’s quote is simple, ‘I never wore shoes as a zhiqing. Steamed white rice was my greatest wish’. Artist Xu Chunzhong said ‘the Cultural Revolution and the Zhiqing Movement are a trauma for me. It pains to speak about it’. And Fan’s own line is brief and unequivocal, ‘I fainted twice out of hunger as a sent-down youth’.

Fig. 76 Quotes and images of Xi Jinping and other members of the CCP Central Politburo Standing Committee (Photo taken by Harriet Evans, 2017)

The exhibition ends with the sentence ‘Either wasted or regretless, it was our youth after all’. Running across a green wall in bold black characters, the words have such a strong visual presence as if resonating in the empty space. The polemic of ‘wasted or no regret’
recognises the existence of disparate views towards the *zhiquing* movement and the possibility of remembering and transmitting it in different ways. As Michel Bonnin notes, the slogan-like rhetoric ‘we have no regret for our youth’ (*qingchu wuhui*) is rejected by some former *zhiquing* in Sichuan who hold that the fact is that ‘we have no means to regret our youth’ (*qingchun wufa hu* ) (2016, 763). The JMC museum allows and tries to convey this kind of nuance. The second half of the sentence voices what could be taken as the museum’s stance, a vague and resigned gesture of reconciliation. This sense of resignedness resonates with, in Bonnin’s example, the Sichuan *zhiquing*’s claim that they *are not able* to regret their youths for it was an experience imposed upon them that they had no choice over.

![Fig. 77](image) ‘Either wasted or regretless, it was our youth after all’ (fieldwork photo, 2016)

In the meantime, it is fair to say that the *zhiquing* museum is the one that has gone the furthest to reveal the memories of violence and atrocity of all the JMC Red Age museums. Instead of relying on ‘guerrilla exhibits’ as we have seen in the previous Red Age museums, it addresses the tribulations of the *zhiquing* with an unprecedented (and so far, not succeeded) level of specificity by using explicit narratives of atrocious incidents and photo images of victims.
This has been possible partly thanks to the existing effort to commemorate this period in public. Yet it nonetheless quite understandably exposes the museum to a risk of censorship. Returning to the JMC for my second period of fieldwork in June 2016, I noticed an added item near the end of the exhibition which was not there when I left six months beforehand. It was a calligraphic work by Fan Jianchuan, a handwritten copy of the People’s Daily’s editorial on 17th May 2016 titled ‘Learning from history is to move forward even better (yi shi wei jian shi weile genghao de qianjin), the day after the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Stringently in line with the 1981 ‘Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People’s Republic of China’, the editorial negates the Cultural Revolution completely as ‘wrongly launched by the leaders and exploited by a counterrevolutionary clique’ and having caused ‘the grave disaster of internal turmoil to the party, country and people of every ethnicity.’ (Buckley 2016).

Fig. 78 Fan Jianchuan’s handwritten copy of ‘Learning from history is to move forward even better’ and an original copy of the People’s Daily on 17th May 2016 (fieldwork photo, 2016)

Created and added to the exhibition in timely fashion on the day of the editorial’s publication, Fan’s piece is a great example of what I call ‘talismanic exhibits’. If the guerrilla exhibits are
the sensitive and unapproved materials slipped in with the hope to bypass censorship, the
talismanic exhibits, such as the handwritten copy of the editorial, are put up purposely for
the censors’ eyes. As mentioned earlier some of the ‘guerrilla exhibits’ in the other Red Age
museums were taken off the exhibition before the 16th May 2016, the Cultural Revolution
anniversary, for fear that they might cause issues with the authorities in that ‘sensitive’ period.
The editorial copy was added immediately to ‘protect’ the zhiqing museum, which can be
seen as a more proactive form of self-censorship.

New Themes and the Museum of the Cultural Revolution (unbuilt)

From 2012 to 2013 the JMC continued developing new museums, and they began to show
a thematic miscellany. On 14th January 2012, the Museum of Old Manor Furnitures (Lao
gongguan jiaju guan) opened to the public. It showcases Republican Era furniture from
different parts of China, and in particular, a set of furniture from the Golden Ox State Hotel
(Jinniu Guobinguan) that was used by top members of the PRC’s first-generation leadership,
including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping.

On 13 October 2012, Fan unveiled the ‘Southwards Liberation Monument’ (Nanxia jiefang
jinianbei) that commemorates the ‘sent-south cadres’ (nanxia ganbu) from Shanxi who were
appointed to replace the local cadres in Sichuan in the early 1950s, of which Fan’s father
was a member. They were among the tens of thousands of northern cadres were sent down
to southern provinces after the founding the People’s Republic in 1949 to carry out the land
reform and other movements. Located at the back of the Museum of Resistance War
Mainstay (Museum of the Communist Army), the 7.5-meter-high monument comprises of
three cast-iron figures of communist cadres—two males, one female— in military uniforms.
Sponsored by the Sichuan Association of Shanxi Merchants (Sichuan Shanxi shanghui), its
launch involved more than 300 attendants, including leaders of the Sichuan Provincial
People’s Congress and the Provincial People’s Political Consultative Conference,
representatives of veteran Sichuan CCP cadres and PLA army leaders of Shanxi origin, and
representatives of the National Association of Shanxi Merchants. Son of a ‘sent-south cadre’
himself, Fan is among the children of sent-south cadre who have enjoyed the prestige of
their fathers’ generation. Apart from honouring his father, the monument clearly helps to
strengthen his connection with the Sichuan Association of Shanxi Merchants for which he serves the role of the honorary chairman.

However, the JMC website lists it wrongly under the Resistance War series, as the event it commemorates happened in 1949, after the Communist army’s victory in the Liberation War (Jiefang Zhanzheng). The Liberation War is the term used in the communist historiography to refer to the civil war between the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after their short-lived alliance during the Resistance War broke down in 1945. The civil war resulted in the Nationalist army’s defeat and retreat to Taiwan, which brought the mainland its ‘liberation’ from the Nationalist rule, hence referred to as the ‘Liberation War’ in the Communist rhetoric. As pointed out to me by a former JMC employee, it was the first time that the JMC celebrates the opposition rather than the alliance between the two parties. It ‘betrayed’, in the words of this former employee, Fan’s repeated claim that the JMC emphasis was on the ‘unity of the nation’ and not the conflict within. As the museums developed in 2013 show, this marks the transition of the JMC from a project of Fan’s own creation to a commemorative space that attract and accommodate histories and memories initiated by external groups.

In January 2013, the JMC opened the AVIC Industrial Aviation Third-front Museum (Zhonghang gongye hangkong sanxian bowuguan), another ‘collaborative project’, as announced on the museum’s website, sponsored by the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (Zhongguo gongye hangkong jituan) or AVIC, a state-owned aerospace and defense conglomerate.

The Third Front is a state-led massive geo-military programme that took place between 1964 and 1971 in the remote areas of western and southwestern China. Based upon a strategic consideration to defend the young republic against potential Western military aggression, the Third Front involved massive investment in industrial, transportation and national defence infrastructures. The Third Front covered a vast area of thirteen provinces and autonomous prefectures in China’s northwest and southwest and mobilised a tremendous amount of people and resources over decades. One of the greatest Maoist mega-projects, the Third Front has a complex history and far-reaching and enduring influences that has changed the lives of generations of Chinese people. Though there has been a growing
interest in the event since the early 2000s in the academia, cinema, and online\(^{30}\), many aspects of its history are unknown.

Housed in a vast building of more than 2,500 square-metres, one of the largest in the JMC, the AVIC Industrial Aviation Third-front Museum displays a collection of 200 exhibits donated by former AVIC employees. With contents and narrative provided by the AVIC, the exhibition traces the history of the company, following four sections: ‘destiny’, ‘sentiments’, ‘aspiration’ and ‘spirit’. The official-sounding narrative extols the virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice, as best manifested by the museum’s preface as follows: ‘The third-front construction army, with its love and loyalty to the party and the country, carries forward the fine tradition of hard struggle, defying difficulties and obstacles, works hard and selflessly, and many people have even sacrificed their precious lives.’

The simplistic and sanctioned narrative is supported by a meagre collection of no more than 100 displays with low resolution images and poor-quality mannequins, which leaves the museum practically empty. The JMC is the first to address the Third Front history in a museum setting, though from the perspective of the aviation industry\(^{31}\), but the exhibition, done clearly in a rushed and perfunctory manner, does not do the subject justice. The reason is the fact that the museum is more of a commission from the AVIC than a collaboration with it, in other words, a case where the JMC provided space for an external initiative.

So was the second museum opened in 2013, the Museum of the Yangtzi River Expedition (Changjiang piaoliu guan) that commemorates the expeditions in 1985 and 1986 led by Chinese rafters down the upper Yangtzi River. With the aim to beat the planned expedition led by the American explorer, Ken Warren, to make the Chinese be the first to descend the mighty Yangtzi, in June 1986, two teams of Chinese young people embarked on their adventure to raft through the most turbulent rapids on the river. Sparked by nationalist fervour, the rafting turned into a competition, and eleven people were killed in the process. In 2012, Fan was approached by two members of the Chinese expedition team and agreed to make the first museum about this event in the JMC, to showcase the over 300 objects

\(^{30}\) Films by director Wang Xiaoshuai

\(^{31}\) The first museum focused on the Third Front project was opened in August 2013 in Liupanshui, Guizhou, formerly a major Third Front city in the Southwest.
and 400 photographs donated by former team members and commemorate those who were martyred.

What is worth noting about this museum is that it took up the space of the basement of the building designed by Yung Ho Chang for the Ten Years of the Cultural Revolution Museum, the one that Fan held a cornerstone ceremony for and wrote a Weibo post about three years earlier in June 2010. In fact, he wrote a few posts about it after that, almost every time when Chang visited the JMC to supervise the construction. These posts, in Fan’s usual brisk and playful style, captured some anecdotal moments such as when Chang was taken for the first time to local street food and foot massage, and served, more importantly, as reminders to his followers of the forthcoming Museum of the Cultural Revolution that Fan had promised to build. The building, located at the centre of the whole complex, is designed to be a two-storey structure sitting on the river that runs across the JMC, hence nicknamed by Fan the ‘bridge museum’ (qiao guan). Upon the completion of its construction on 8th February 2012, Fan wrote the following blog post: I built a museum over the river, the ‘Museum of the Ten Years 1966-1976’, which serves as a bridge for the complex and also one that takes us from the past to the future. The exhibition, however, will not be ready very soon, as we all know why.’

The opening of the Museum of the Yangtzi River Expedition in the basement of the ‘bridge’ in June 2013, signaled a change of this agenda. Based on their interview with Fan Jianchuan in the summer of 2013, Denise Ho and Jie Li wrote:

‘In some ways, the guerrilla exhibits serve as placeholders for the museums Fan Jianchuan still wants to build. His sixth “Red Age” museum, a comprehensive permanent exhibition of the entire Mao era, is awaiting approval from central government censors. In the meantime, he envisions future museums centred on taboo topics: the house searches and the factional warfare of the Cultural Revolution, the post-Great Leap famine, and even a museum devoted to confessions and denunciations’ (2015, 31).

In their account, Fan is portrayed as operating with a certain degree of liberty and confidence, and ‘blithe about politics’ and sympathetic for the censors ‘who have no yardstick for his
museum project’ (Ho and Li 2015, 31). And yet, it is quite obvious that Fan was not being very clear to his interviewers about the history that the ‘sixth Red Age museum’ was to cover, that is, the ten years of the Cultural Revolution instead of the ‘entire Mao Era’, nor the fact that a part of its building had been used for another museum.

By 2014, Fan’s view about the prospects of the Museum of the Cultural Revolution seemed to have undergone further change. As he stated in an interview with the Canadian filmmaker Joshua Frank, he found that it was ‘not the right time’ to address issues such as armed struggle sessions in the Cultural Revolution, the reason being ‘simply that the perpetrators of the violence [during the Cultural Revolution] are still around, and there are a lot of them. They don’t want their children to get tangled up in the issue. The society doesn’t need that’ (Frank 2014).

In July 2016, the upper space of the ‘bridge museum’ was used to house a temporary tribute exhibition of calligraphy to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the success of the Long March, the legendary military retreat taken by the Communist army under the pursuit of the Nationalist army from 1934 to 1936. In February 2017, the Long March calligraphy exhibition was replaced by a permanent exhibition ‘The Red Army in Sichuan’, which marked that Fan’s long-claimed attempt to develop a museum about the ten years of the Cultural Revolution came officially to an end.

Fig. 79 The Museum of the Red Army in Sichuan (fieldwork photo, 2017)
A museum complex in transition

It is obvious that except for the continued development of the Red Age series, the JMC has developed a number of museums since 2010 that had not a previously thought-out agenda behind them but appeared to rely more on spontaneous opportunities such as donation or government subsidy. While the earlier museums, particularly the ones between 2005 and 2009, came across as highly object-based, well-grounded in collection and original in aesthetics, the later subjects appeared to have been treated less elaborately and seriously. Among the staff members I have talked to, the consensus seems to be that Fan is keen on adding new museums to the complex – the mercantile logic that it would increase the value of the money visitors pay for their tickets – yet his proclaimed aspiration to pursue the original themes of the Resistance War, the Red Age, and particularly the Cultural Revolution, was running out of steam.

I understand the reason to be twofold. First of all, the transition took place in the context of a changing political environment, particularly around 2012, when Xi Jinping came to power. Its most forthright effect, I would argue, are the self-censoring changes made in the Red Age museums, both in passively by replacing sensitive exhibits or actively by adding artefacts as ‘political talisman’.

Not unrelatedly, the second reason concerns the fact that the priority of the museum work during this period shifted significantly towards a form of consulting business, by providing museum planning and exhibition making services in other places. I list below a few examples of such projects based on the JMC chronicle’s records from 2012 to 2015.

On 9th May 2012, the Sichuan-Shaanxi Revolutionary Base Red Army Martyrs Cemetery Museum and the Fourth Red Front Army Hospital Museum designed and curated by the Jianchuan Museum team opened to the public.

On 7th July 2013, ‘Collecting Wars for Peace’: Jianchuan Museum Resistance War Exhibition opens at the Chinese People’s Revolutionary Military Museum in Beijing. And on 8th November, the Xiangcheng Long March Memorial Museum designed and curated by the Jianchuan Museum opened in Xiangcheng County, Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefecture,
Sichuan Province.

In 2014, the museum completed six planning projects in Sichuan, Shandong and Shanghai. And in 2015, the Jianchuan Museum launched a special exhibition on the Resistance War in the Pacific War Memorial Hall in San Francisco. It was the first overseas exhibition by a private museum commissioned by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage.

And the list goes on. By the time I started fieldwork in 2015, the JMC had completed 13 museum planning projects across China. I arrived, as an ethnographic researcher, at a transitional moment when the JMC was undergoing a significant structural change in its operational strategies, a shift that had underpinned the vicissitudes that I reviewed in the second part of the JMC genealogy. In the next chapter, based on my own experience of the consulting projects I was involved in, I engage ethnographically and critically how Fan’s consulting business operated, how it might transform the logic and ethos of the JMC as a heritage project, and contest the tenor of its professed morality.
Chapter 6: Consulting Projects

One significant turn that happened around 2009 is the museum’s expansion of operation to the area of heritage consultancy, by providing strategic planning (cehua) and museum building services for heritage projects in different places in China. During the course of my fieldwork, a considerable portion of the museum team’s work that I participated in was done on consulting business. In this chapter I present my ethnographic material based on my own experience of producing consultancy reports for projects with the JMC team which may or may not have been materialised.

The consulting business began after the 2008 exhibition and 2009 museum about the Wenchuan earthquake brought the JMC national fame, and also drew the attention of local governments. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the February 2010 issue of the JMC’s work journal Work Brief, titled ‘Expanded influence and increased soft power’, documented the visits of government officials from four cities in Sichuan, including the earthquake-stricken Wenchuan, to the JMC, sending invitations to Fan to advise on their museum planning projects. In February 2010 the mayor of the city of Zaozhuang from the northern province of Shandong visited the museum during the Spring Festival holidays and invited Fan to be leader of the advisory group for the planning of a memorial park at the site of the Battle of Tai’erzhuang in 1938, the first major Chinese victory in the Resistance War and a significant morale boost for the country. Fan immediately returned the visit with the museum team, and after another exchange of visits, the team delivered the planning within two months, the museum’s first project as a consultancy.

While the Tai’erzhuang planning was still underway, two other projects commenced almost simultaneously. The first was a commission from the government of Xinchang, a historic town near Anren. Within the space of a few weeks, the team made two exhibitions in the town’s newly developed museum spaces, one about the lotus shoes and the other about the underworld in imperial China, that were opened on 1st May. Less than a fortnight later on 12th May, the two-year anniversary of the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the JMC staged an exhibition at the Broad Pavilion at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, which commemorated
the Wenchuan earthquake as well as another major earthquake that struck the city of Yushu in northwest China barely a month before on 14th April, 2010. The Broad Pavilion was set up by the Broad Group, one of China’s leading sustainable building and air-conditioning manufacturing enterprises and the exclusive supplier of central air-conditioning, ventilation and air-purifying products for the Shanghai World Expo. The CEO of Broad, Zhang Yue, a friend of Fan’s, visited the JMC in 2009 and afterwards invited Fan to contribute an exhibition to his Expo pavilion. With Broad’s technological support, the exhibition incorporated an earthquake simulation device that imitated the strength, direction and length of the Wenchuan and the Yushu earthquakes, to give visitors a “real-life” feeling of earthquakes.

These three projects set the ground for the museum to launch its consulting business. Branding itself as a ‘museum developer and operator’ (bowuguan yunyingshang), the JMC operation comprises mainly three categories of services:

First, strategy consulting, meaning developing visions, strategies and plans for cultural and heritage projects, which could be either existing sites or new structures like the JMC itself. This was usually delivered in the form of a masterplan report, identifying potential elements to incorporate in the projects with feasibility appraisals. As not all projects would reach the stage of actual construction, visioning was the core of the masterplan, often demonstrated by computer-generated illustrations of what the project could be. Essentially the service would enable the rebranding of the locality, in aid of the respective official urban regeneration efforts and social ‘improvement’ schemes (Oakes 2012) realised by way of developing tourism. What the JMC has done for the re-branding of Anren as the ‘Museum Town of China’ has been to define a model that other local governments are seeking to duplicate.

Given the JMC’s specialty, museums usually feature heavily in the planning, hence the second main category. If the client intends to proceed with developing the museums, the JMC could provide a service of exhibition making, with exhibition content outlines, and aspirational visual renderings of the outcome. The specificity of the planning depends on the prospects of its materialisation. Naturally the more likely its prospects of being built the more details would be requested. The outcome ranged from simple ‘mood boards’ created with images sourced from the Internet, to detailed exhibition plans with contents, layout and visual design.
Finally, if it reached the stage of actually building the planned museums, the team would provide the whole service, from interior design, exhibition installation, even the supply or loan of exhibits from the museum’s collection, and the training of staff.

Twisting a Maoist ideological slogan\(^{32}\), the JMC’s branding campaign features the claim to ‘develop museums with greater, faster, better, and more economical results’ (duo, kuai, hao, sheng). A particular project could involve only one of these services to a package of all three. And the time period could range accordingly from 130 days to several months and in some cases even over a year.

By the time of my fieldwork in 2015, the JMC had completed thirteen consulting projects. The museum’s financial reports reveal that the consulting revenue made up over one third of the museum’s total income. This suggests that the JMC was undergoing a paradigm shift, with heritage consultancy becoming, in Fan’s own words, the museum’s ‘core business’ (hexin yewu).\(^{33}\)

The purpose of this chapter is to ethnographically show that the rise and success of the JMC’s consulting business has been based upon Fan’s ability to interpret and adapt to the policy trends and deliver what is best desired for a particular place. Underlying the museum and consulting projects is his increasingly skillful and willing compliance with the national political agenda and local developmental schemes, facilitated by his experience and knowledge in reading and reacting to signals of political trends.

In this chapter I present my engagement with the museum’s work during my fieldwork, both the development of new museums within the complex in Anren and consulting projects outside. I will present three planning projects, in Chongqing, Wenchang, Zigong, for each of which, I went with the museum team on one trip to the location and participated in

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\(^{32}\) The slogan in question is ‘to go all out, aim high, and build socialism with greater, faster, better, and more economical results’, from the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960).  
\(^{33}\) To the extent that the leader of the interpreter team once objected in a staff meeting, suggesting that museums should still be the company’s main focus of operation. Given the fact that the interpretation team never took part in the consulting domain of work, this incident reveals how much the consultancy has been kept exclusively to the curatorial team.
researching and drafting the consulting report. Through these experiences I was exposed to the concerns and decisions that illuminate the underlying logic of China’s heritage industry.

However, these are far from all the consulting projects the museum was engaged with from 2015 to 2017. Fan was constantly travelling across the country paying ‘inspection’ tours (kaocha) to different places. As the first three in 2010, the timelines of the projects I describe greatly overlap. It was common for the museum team to work on three or four of such projects at the same time. What this means for the museum’s staff in general is the focus of the final chapter on work and social life.

**Capital conversion and scale jumping**

The context for this is the expansion of government-led tourism development and place-branding. With tourism playing an increasingly significant role in the Chinese economy, China’s income from tourism has grown consistently at an average of 15% per year over the past decade and in 2019, tourism contributed 11% to GDP and more that 79 million jobs.

Red tourism, namely, tourism surrounding historical sites that record and reflect China’s revolutionary history and the Communist Party’s legacy, has become a crucial element in China’s tourism industry, expanding in close association with the state’s reinforcement of the patriotic education campaign. In 2018, red tourism destinations attracted reportedly 660 million domestic visitors, creating ¥425.8 million, accounting for 7.13% of total domestic tourism revenue (Paul 2019).

According to the China Tourism Academy, most of the domestic tourism activity to date has been to the big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzen, but the trend is towards an opening out to the rural and the southwest. This presents a huge opportunity for a number of new players in the market: second and third tier cities and towns who are prepared with the right offer and the right marketing. They are exactly the JMC’s focused client group. With its status as a patriotism education centre, and Fan’s well publicised

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34 World Travel Council 2019, Annual Research
military background, the JMC is well positioned to capitalise on this growing demand.

Therefore, the JMC’s consulting business is built upon Fan’s increasing reputation and credibility as firstly famous collector, cultural entrepreneur, and then now museum curator and heritage strategic planner. Occupying and switching between these roles requires tactical skills to mobilise economic, social and political capitals across different state administrative levels, which I call the JMC’s scaling strategy.

Here, two key concepts, scale and capital, come to the fore. A growing body of research on heritage making is looking into the stakeholders at local, national and international scales (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge 2000; Meskell et all 2014). Recently scholarly attention has been paid to the fluidity of scalar boundaries and the phenomenon of ‘scale jumping’ as a contested sociopolitical process in the world of cultural heritage (Zhu 2018). Following Neil Brenner, Zhu understands the practice of ‘scale jumping’ in China heritage world as ‘the production, reconfiguration or contestation both within one scale (the singular) and among different scales (the plural)’, meaning that it can take place both within a specific ‘boundary setting’ (‘such as a place, a locality, a region or a nation’) and through ‘hierarchisation among multiple spatial units through inter scalar transformation and mobilisation’ (Zhu 2018, 22).

China has witnessed over the past two decades systematic top-down heritage construction subsidised by government budgets, implemented in a hierarchical manner. As Zhu Yujie explicates:

‘The current administrative structure established a scalar fix to legitimate the national control over the heritage industry’s different heritage sites. In other words, the hierarchical power structure gives agency to state heritage institutions to transfer heritage concepts and values from international through national to lower levels. The top-down approach reinforces the capability of heritage governance to implement heritage practices such as inventorisation, the establishment of criteria for inclusion and heritage nominations as well as legal conservation and management’ (2018, 25)

Whilst heritage making is managed by an extremely hierarchical and state-dominated
structure, the involvement of agencies and capital from the private sector is significant. At the local level, the heritage landscape is shaped by wealthy investors and government authorities. Zhu puts forward the idea of ‘politics of scale’, meaning the process of ‘a continuous reshuffling and reorganisation of spatial scales for empowerment’ – here spatial scale corresponds with political scale in the state administrative hierarchy. The process of empowerment involves mobilising economic and more importantly symbolic and political capital across different scales. Pierre Bourdieu pioneered in extending the understanding of ‘capital’ beyond the economic, and foregrounds that capital exists in different forms: economic, cultural, social, symbolic and political. Bourdieu further theorises that these different forms of capital are interconvertible (Bourdieu 1986).

What I mean by Fan’s scaling strategy is his way of creating a scalar advantage through capital conversion. Through the development of the JMC Fan has managed to acquire not only fame and publicity, but also endorsement from state authorities. A part of this is displayed in front of the Museum of Resistance War Mainstay at the centre of the JMC, in a collection of photographs of celebrities and government officials visiting the museum. His fame and proximity to power in turn works as a method of empowerment to accumulate cultural and social capital in order to create opportunities for his consulting business.

Guanxi, or social connections, has been used to explore the engagements between the state and the private sector. The ‘art or science of manipulating and utilising guanxi’, or the guanxixue, which, as I mentioned before, has been regarded as the kind of social knowledge characteristic of the minjian (Mayfair Yang 1994). The ability to effectively form guanxi, forming social networks across the bureaucratic structure, is commonly regarded as essential for private enterprises to succeed in China. Existing studies of guanxi have shown how such ties are formed on a personal and often kin-related level between entrepreneurs and government officials, developed and maintained through exchanges of favours, gifts and spending extensive time together on convivial activities (Liu 2002, Wank 1996, Osburg 2013).

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35 During my follow-up visit in June 2018, I found that the board had been removed due to a new regulation that prohibits presenting the images of former government officials. See also p. 234.
In the projects that I participated, however, these sort of bonding interactions of guanxi cultivation were barely visible. Fan’s regularly and active social media presence brings across a certain image of his social life, which consists largely of eating in small family-owned restaurants or his hotel buffet, and being around intellectuals, veterans and his team members. A simple, down-to-the-earth lifestyle is a key element he focuses on creating for his public profile, and therefore his personal connection with the government is carefully deemphasised.

Fan’s political connections have not been manifested to me in personal ties with individuals but in the more symbolic and powerful emblems of political capital. The most prominent of these are the handwritten commentaries by Xi Jinping on two matters, one regarding the burial of the remains of Yu Dawei, a Kuomintang general, and the other the return of the body remains of American pilots that the museum team found with a crashed airplane in Tibet. These are not items of the museum collection but, as Fan’s assistant told me, are items that Fan would carry with him on business meetings to impress clients.

Fan’s relationship to the government may on the surface bear some similarities with the patron-client formula characterised by a strong dependence of the entrepreneur upon government authority (Wank 1996). Yet, in contrast with this, the premise of Fan’s consulting business suggests a different mode of accumulating power, since it depends on the mobilisation of power/capital, in order to get closer to the centre of state power. Fan cashes his political capital by subscribing to what the state wants remembered, and to support the government’s need for branding of place, through the production of commercial and propagandist space.

At the same time, he cultivates his own affective guanxi network as a way of boosting his cultural capital. This is clearly manifest in the Red Collectors Forum in which collectors and antique dealers draw on their brother-like bonds to acknowledge Fan as their leading authority.

What does all this tell us about power and value in heritage practice as exemplified by the JMC? First, that political and bureaucratic power is prioritised over professional or academic expertise. The proximity to power indicates the ability to understand government needs, by
acquiring a particular type of knowledge derived from personal experience of involvement
with government agencies. Fan’s background in politics as vice mayor and his connections
from his ongoing involvement with the government as member of the Standing Committee
of the Sichuan People’s Congress grants him a useful capacity to understand and react to
policy trends.

In the context of the deep-penetrating, top-down programme of place-branding, heritage has
become instrumentalised as a goal of developmental policies and objectives by local
governments, and the fulfillment of this goal has been the basis for further budgetary
advantage. Fan provides the expert knowledge to facilitate the realisation of this goal, and
in the process has been , building up his own brand of consulting expertise and networks.
To understand how the ties with the governments are used to develop actual business
projects we need to look into the activities where these ties are formed and enhanced, or in
David Wank’s term, how the business relationship between the government and
entrepreneurs is ‘institutionalised’ (1996).

**Chongqing Project: Regional Politics**

On the morning of 27th July 2016, I boarded a train from Chengdu to Chongqing with a team
of the museum’s curatorial staff. Chongqing is a provincial-level municipality 340 kilometres
to the southeast of Chengdu. Previously I had heard about an upcoming project in
Chongqing from conversations with the staff members. But it was only two days beforehand
that I was informed about the trip and my involvement in it.

The Chongqing project is a joint investment with the Jiulongpo District Housing
Administration, to develop a line of eight museums out of World War Two air-raid shelters.
Most of the shelters had been munition workshops since the war. The topics of the
museums include a history of weapons, Chongqing munition factories, Resistance War, Red
Age, Chongqing ports, Chinese medicine, wedding customs and popular beliefs/religions. A
Republican-era-style commercial street of shops, bars and cafes is also part of the plan. The
project will be the first branch of the JMC, co-managed by the museum and district
government after it is established.
Staff members told me that Fan’s initial plan was to sell the Chongqing project to the Jiulongpo government at the price of ¥3 million per museum and take part in the management of the project. After about six months’ negotiation, Fan agreed to a financial ‘support’ of ¥30 million from the Jiulongpo District government for developing the project as the JMC’s branch on the condition that the government took 20% of its admission revenue, and the District Bureau of Housing would develop and manage an adjacent commercial street.

At the station we were joined by Mr. Liu Ge and Mr. Lu Zhishan, two external designers Fan hired to work on the project with museum team. Mr. Liu is in his late 30’s, and always talks in a cheerful and sprightly manner. Trained as an interior designer, he and his wife run a designing firm of their own. The JMC is one of Liu’s major clients. Liu has worked on all of Fan’s planning projects since they met in 2008. Liu’s job is creating computer-generated illustrations of a project’s overall layout and the architectural design of museums. Liu told me that most of these planning projects were sold at the price of around ¥2 million each, more if it was constructed, and he would charge eight to ten percent for his service.

Mr. Lu has his background in interior decoration. In 2005, he did a placement as a master’s student at Jianchuan Museum and participated in the building of the first five museums. He is now a lecturer in architecture at Chengdu Aviation College and leads an interior design studio in his department. He brought with him three of his students to work on the project. On the train to Chongqing, we sat next to each other. He told me stories of the several months he worked on the construction site of Jianchuan Museum and described the period as exciting and ‘idealistic’. He spoke very highly of Fan and said that it was his keen understanding of the intention and ‘taste’ of the authorities that made his consultancy particularly palatable to the governments.

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36 Fieldnote 14/06/2016
37 Fieldnote 19/12/2016
38 It was my impression that Lu’s memory of the museum’s early days was important, so I tried to do an interview with him. But in the weeks after our conversation on the train to Chongqing, I met him only twice and both times he came to the museum to report on progress and had to return to Chengdu afterwards. Then I was told that he was no longer involved in the project, which made it more difficult to follow up. It was several months later, in February 2017 that I finally sat him down for an interview at his office. He told me again many stories about the several months he spent in Anren. When asked about the reason he stopped working on the
The next morning, we were taken to visit the project site in the Xiejiawan area in south Chongqing. The site was a group of 51 air raid shelters built during the Resistance War as manufacturing workshops for Chongqing No.1 Munition Factory. In 2013 it was enlisted as a national level heritage site. Located on the east side of the Xiejiawan Main Street, the shelters were built into one side of a hill that was tucked away under a towering multilayered roundabout flyover, part of which still being constructed.

Fan was already there when the team arrived. We were guided by a vice-director Mr. Chen and a section head Mr. Wang, from the District Housing Administration. We set off from the Xiejiawan Main Street and took a quiet and shady lane under the hill. The shelters were lined up on the hillside of the road, and were narrow rectangular units interconnected with tunnels. The first three shelters we saw were well still in use as workshops, and each had three or four technicians operating on imported machines from the U.S. made in the 1930s. There were areas designated as kitchen, storage and smoking room. It was a typical hot summer day, but the space inside the shelter was cool and damp, filled with noises from the old machines in operation. Director Chen told us that these technicians had worked there in these shelter workshops since the 1950s when the factory was nationalised and renamed the Jianshe (Construction) Machine Manufacturing Factory. The majority of the factory’s workforce had been moved to a new location since 2003 and the workers we met upon the launch of the renovation project were also due to be relocated. My immediate thought was that if at least one of these shelter workshops could be preserved, it would be a perfect display about the city’s industrial and war heritage. But apparently plans had already been made. The street we stood on would be owned and run by the Housing Administration and turned into a Resistance-War-themed tourist site. The shelter caves were likely to be used as commercial spaces such as bars, cafes and shops.

Chongqing Project, he answered vaguely that Fan ‘had his own arrangements of things’.
Towards the end of the street were the eight shelters that were planned as museums. Fan had obviously been to the site already and had some thoughts, and the purpose of the visit was really for the designers to get a sense of the space and Fan’s ideas. Unlike the ones along the street, these shelters were much bigger spaces of different structures. They had been abandoned for some years now, according to Mr. Wang, and a few had their entrances blocked by high piles of rubbish. Fan led the team to inspect the shelters one after the other. Walking around the space, Fan spontaneously gave his ideas of what could be done, which the team hurried to put down in their notes. Mr. Liu measured each space and took
photographs. We spent nearly the whole day at the site and took an evening train back to Anren.

The next day, Fan called for a meeting in the afternoon to assign work to the team. Mr. Liu had already prepared 3D renderings of the space of each shelter with his measurements the previous day. The aim of the meeting was to decide on the themes of the eight museums and match them with the shelters depending on their size, location and spatial layout. The museums had to adhere to the thematic categories of the JMC and also elements of Chongqing. After about an hour of discussion, mainly under Fan’s direction, the museums were planned as follows: for the theme of Resistance War, museums of the history of arms, the history of the Hanyang Arsenal, and Chongqing during the Resistance War; for folk culture, museums of Chongqing’s port culture, folk gods, Chinese medicine and Chinese Matrimonial Culture; and for the Red Age, a museum of Red Memories.

Once the themes were set, Fan assigned for each museum one person responsible for creating the content and another for the exhibition design. As there were four designers in the team, two internal and two external, they were assigned two museums each. I was not given any work but was encouraged to learn the way the teams worked. Fan explained his decision in the meeting in a half-apologetic and half-joking manner, by comparing a PhD's knowledge to the ‘dragon slaughtering’ skill (tu long shu), a Chinese idiom used to refer to sophisticated but unpractical theory that lacks grounding and applicability in reality. The training to slay a powerful mythical creature may not be useful when it comes to killing a chicken or a cow. Fan liked referring to his employees as his students. ‘If you have an undergraduate degree, working for me would be like doing your master’s; If you have a master’s it would be like a PhD’. Fan once said in a work meeting, referring to me ‘if you have a PhD already, this [working with me] would be your chance to actually learn to do something’.

Fan’s view certainly exhibits his pride in his own way of doing things. Fan was not concerned about whether I had any curating experience, about which he never inquired, but he was clear that I had to learn the way the JMC team worked. The curatorial knowledge Fan claimed catered to a particular group of clients, local governments. It was this a highly politicised form of curatorial knowledge.
Thanks to my rather awkward position in the project – involved but not really – the work process became increasingly transparent to me. Fan had meetings with the team regularly two or three times a week, reviewing their progress in making the exhibition design and content outline. The meetings proceeded with the team members presenting their work to the group and Fan giving comments to each one. As an entrepreneur, Fan’s enthusiasm towards the curatorial work, as manifested in the level of his involvement in it, was remarkable. He maintained hands-on control of almost every aspect of the curatorial process, from the selection of the contents, the design of the visit route all the way to the font of the captions and the colour of the wall. As a result, the meetings could last from a few hours, depending on Fan’s schedule, to the whole day, sometime leaving Fan exhausted. A few times when I returned with the team after a brief one-hour lunch break to the basement of Fan’s office, the enclosed, bunker-like, building which we access normally through the discreet backdoor, we found Fan taking a nap in his chair waiting for us.

Fan liked discussing the process of creating an exhibition with a set of personified metaphors. First of all, the exhibition needs ‘a face with clean-cut features’ (mei qing mu xiu), and then gets dressed (chuanyi daimao). The ‘face with clean-cut features’ means that the clarity of the outline is the basis and starting point of an exhibition, and the ‘dressing’, refers to the second step of visual and aesthetic colouring.

The curatorial process started with the content outline. The team worked on several drafts before submitting the outline for ‘examination’ (shencha) to the Chongqing authorities. This was a concerted effort between the Chongqing authority and a Chengdu-based private museum. However, building museums about Chongqing in Chongqing was a delicate matter, which required, in Fan’s words, a level of caution equivalent to that of ‘stepping on thin ice’ (ru lv bo bing). The staff were told explicitly and repeatedly in work meetings to avoid anything that might be controversial.39

The challenge came, first of all, from a long-term rivalry between Chongqing and Chengdu as historically the two largest cities in Sichuan. This intensified after Chongqing’s separation

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39 Fieldnote 17/01/2017
from Sichuan as a direct-administered municipality (zhixia shi)\textsuperscript{40} when it rose to an administrative status higher than Chengdu (Yu 2015, 141). The fierce competition was not only reflected in terms of economic performance but also in the realm of culture and history.

The emphasis was then placed on wartime history. Perhaps no other city is more symbolically important than Chongqing to be the locale of a Resistance War museum. It was not only the wartime provincial capital of the Republic of China, but also marked the union of the CCP and KMT against Japan. Meanwhile, the individual significance of Chongqing needs to be balanced with its historical unity with Sichuan.

Therefore, the Resistance War museum in Chongqing highlights the wartime unity of Sichuan and Chongqing. As one of the most important resistance forces, the Sichuan Army (Chuanjun) contributed more than 3.5 million soldiers to the forefront of the war making up to one fifth of the Nationalist Army in total (He 2019). Fan designed an installation depicting the two routes the troops took when they left Sichuan, one from Chengdu and the other from Chongqing. The two routes would be marked with straw shoes, what the soldiers had on their feet when they marched out of Sichuan, on a wall-size military map. When vice director Yuan Hongwei pointed out that there was another route which originated from Guizhou, Fan waved his hand and insisted that it should not be included because ‘the installation is for illustrating’ and ‘does not have to be taken too seriously’\textsuperscript{41}. Again, the intended ‘message’ of the exhibition was prioritised over historical accuracy.

The Museum of the Hanyang Arsenal celebrates the local military legacy by showing how Chongqing became the military base of the ‘Great Rear’ (dahoufang) after the Hanyang Arsenal was relocated there from Wuhan. The Museum of Resistance War covers the whole period from 1931 to 1945, in response to the official extension of the war history from eight to fourteen years. The exhibition consists of five units: the ‘mainstay’; the ‘front battlefield’; the Sichuan Army, American aid, and war prisoners and hence incorporates all the main themes that Fan Jianchuan had already shown in his Anren museum.

\textsuperscript{40} Municipality under the direct administration of central government, is the highest level of classification for cities used by the People’s Republic of China. These cities have the same rank as provinces, and form part of the first tier of administrative divisions of China.

\textsuperscript{41} Fieldnote 20/12/2016
Another key issue that was repeatedly brought up in the Chongqing project work meetings is the city’s recent political history, which features its flamboyant mayor, Bo Xilai and his and his allies’ later downfall of him and his allies. During his tenure as the party secretary of Chongqing from 2007 to 2012, Bo Xilai launched two main political movements that drew nationwide attention, ‘to sing red songs and strike organised crime’, commonly known as ‘sing red’ and ‘strike black’ (chang hong da hei). The campaign against organised crime and corruption, dahei, was a large scale crackdown not only on petty criminals, but also business people and government officials, which targeted more than 5,000 people between 2009 and 2011 (Wang 2013). The campaign won Bo nationwide reputation as someone who ‘gets things done’ and helped to form locally his personality cult. It was propagated as an effort to restore ‘order’ and ‘safety’ in the crime-ridden city. But it was also criticised by scholars and legal professionals for eroding due legal procedures and was regarded as implemented chiefly to target Bo’s political rivals (He Weifang’s ‘open letter to Chongqing legal professionals’).

‘Singing red’ was the best-known part of Bo’s ‘red culture movement’, which included ‘singing revolutionary songs, reading classic books, telling stories and spreading mottos’. Public reactions towards the ‘red culture movement’ were mixed. Some welcomed the revitalisation of a Maoist-style revolutionary ethos, which helped to restore a sense of patriotism and national pride that had been ruptured by the increasing individualism and materialism bred in the economic reform. Some were concerned by the movement’s echoes the Cultural Revolution.

The campaign was endorsed by the central party authorities at the beginning. Xi Jinping, who was then serving as vice-president, publicly expressed support for Bo’s work in Chongqing. But soon after Bo was overthrown, in 2012, and the already controversial campaign was brought to a halt, condemned as a hazardous and backward rupture of the economic reform. ‘A major obstacle to reform is the remnant poison of the Cultural

42 http://chinamediaproject.org/2011/04/12/letter-to-my-chongqing-colleagues/
Revolution’, stated an article by the Southern Metropolitan News. On February 28th, 2012, the People’s Daily ran a commentary entitled ‘While reform carries risk, abandoning reform will bring jeopardy to the party’ (Lam 2012, 5).

During the preparation, the museum team was advised by the Chongqing authorities including the publicity department and party history research office) to minimise its content on the Red Age, and avoid ‘unnecessary interpretation’, both criticism and eulogy. In their feedback to the draft exhibition outlines, the Chongqing propaganda authority urged the museum to be cautious about ‘the Bo-Wang remnants of poison (Bo-Wang yidu)44. The message was clearly that any sort of overt celebration of Red Culture in Chongqing would be seen as political taboo.

Here the approved retelling of history in a ‘private’ museum becomes an increasingly affirmative branch of the official narrative. Nothing was said about the acute violence in Chongqing during the Cultural Revolution. While Chongqing is the site of the only Cultural Revolution cemetery, no attempt to ‘heal the scars’ could be tolerated (Zhang 2013). I shall return to the Chongqing project later in this chapter, with an ethnographic account of my visit to the completed museum branch in Chongqing in June 2018.

**Hainan Project: One-man show and curatorial assembly line**

A few weeks after the trip to Chongqing, the museum started a new project with the municipal government of Wenchang, a county-level city in Hainan, China’s southernmost province.

On the morning of 9th August 2016, I arrived in Wenchang with the JMC team. Over a simple ‘work lunch’ at the Changxi Town government canteen, we were briefed about the project and introduced to some of the local officials. The local government needed consultations for developing a Wenchang Cultural Historical Park, surrounding the memorial museum at the

44 ‘Wang’ here refers to Wang Lijun, who served as vice-mayor and police chief during Bo Xilai’s tenure in Chongqing, and his visit to the U.S. consulate in Chengdu on 6th Feb 2012 led to the downfall of Bo Xilai and himself.
family ancestral residence of Song Qingling, wife of Sun Yat-Sen and the honorary president of the PRC. A provincial level Historical and Cultural Site, the ancestral house of the Song family is located in Guluyuan Village, Changxi Town, about 30 kilometres from the city of Wenchang. The ancestral house was built by Song Qingling’s ancestor in Qing Dynasty, and rebuilt in 1985 and turned into a memorial museum. The Wenchang Cultural Historical Park was planned to be developed in an area of around 285,000 square-metre, encompassing the ancestral house, a complex of museums and commercial amenities. That afternoon, we were taken to the construction site of the Wenchang Cultural Historical Park. A half-complete building stood in vast empty land. In the preliminary planning, there were three museums, the Museum of the Song Family, the Museum of Overseas Chinese, and the Museum of Resistance War Generals from Wenchang.

After seeing the construction site in the afternoon, we were taken to our hotel and then to a wetland resort for dinner. Dinner was convened by the vice mayor of Wenchang, Mr. Wu. The banquet was undertaken in a mild and relaxed manner, no hard drinking or any other extravagance. Mr. Wu apologised for the absence of the party secretary of Wenchang, and expressed on the party secretary’s behalf, expressed the admiration towards Fan’s patriotism and the extraordinary contribution he had made to the country with the project of the JMC. Fan told the vice mayor that he had always been ‘a servant entrepreneur (to the government)’ (fuwuxing fuhao).

The next morning, Fan met the city’s party secretary for breakfast alone at the hotel. I single out this detail as it exemplifies how the interactions with the officials, business and convivial, have always been notably informed by an awareness of state administrative hierarchy. With his background as a deputy-mayor of Yibin, Fan selects governments of similar administrative level, second or third tier cities, towns or municipal districts. And on trips to these places, Fan is usually hosted by local officials of the administrative rank that matches his, the vice-mayor. Therefore, the party secretary, though keen to engage himself with the project, chose to meet Fan on a private occasion to avoid making an official appearance on his visit.

Yet his direct involvement did carry great weight. After the party secretary left, the museum team had a meeting at the Wenchang Tourism Planning Office, with the City Tourism and
Control Company and the Song Qingling Foundation, where Fan proposed his idea of developing six museums in the Wenchang Historical and Cultural Park. The museums are meant to present the cultural highlights of Wenchang, including the Song family, local figures of fame, Wenchang’s local history of Resistance War (Wenchang produced over 200 Kuomintang generals), history of overseas Chinese, and the two famous local agricultural produces of Wenchang: coconut and chicken. With the assumed blessing from the party secretary that morning, Fan’s proposition was embraced without much debate.

This vignette probably best illustrates what I meant by Fan’s scaling strategy. The interactions between Fan and local officials in my observation, were courteous and businesslike. This certainly has to do with the broader political context of Xi Jinping’s campaign against corruption. But the more important reason is probably that, as I have pointed out above, there is no obvious power-asymmetry between Fan and the local officials he does business with which would necessitate a ‘patron-client’ tie as Wank formulates (1996). In some projects, the case is even of a reversed power-structure.

It is really Fan’s status and clout that gave Fan the entitlement to be the advisor for government-run projects, and the convincing value to what he could be expected to deliver. Trust was established by means of the evidence of Fan’s proximity to power, as well as his own conscientiousness and enthusiasm. In the case of Wenchang, by gaining the endorsement of the party secretary, someone of a superior rank to his client, Fan secured his dominant position in negotiating the contract. Negotiation took place in a process involving the subtle weighing of political and symbolic capital. There was clearly a distinction between his practice and bureaucratic performance, since Fan claimed the mantle of being a humble servant to the country, represented by the local officials of Wenchang. Yet in the context of the project, it was clearly the influence and status of Fan that the government was seeking.

Unlike the Chongqing project, long-term and designed as a branch of the JMC, what was happening in Wenchang exemplifies the majority of the consulting jobs the team dealt with, with a strategic planning report completed in a two to three months. As indicated above, the gap between ‘research’ – visiting the site – and ‘engagement’ – the actual drafting of the report – was usually very little. Given the short amount of time, in most cases the
engagement began during the process of the research, and Fan was the one who decided on the overall approach to a particular project. On the evening of the first day in Wenchang for instance, Fan met the team after the welcome banquet to discuss his ideas about the generic strategy for his meeting with the party secretary the next day.

Back in Anren, the team met the next morning for a meeting. Fan broke down the work into specific tasks to assign to individual team members, according to a customary model for consulting report that the team had developed since 2010. Mapping the structure of the consulting report onto the material gathered from the trip to Wenchang, Fan identified its components which then became specific tasks for team members. The competed assignments were eventually synthesised into a PowerPoint slide deck.

The process began with the visioning of a holistic layout of the park demonstrated by software-generated images from a bird’s-eye perspective. This was developed by Mr. Liu Ge, the architectural designer I met on the Chongqing trip, who works regularly with the JMC as project-based associate. In the case of Wenchang Cultural Historical Park, Fan envisioned it as a gated area where visitors would come in through a block of buildings with elements of traditional Chinese architectural styles. The block, which Fan tentatively named ‘Wenchang Old Neighbourhood’, would include a visitor centre, a police station, shops, restaurants and a Museum of Wenchang Chicken and a Museum of Coconut. The layout plan would come with a tour route design with a number of transport nodes throughout the whole park, to enable visitors to view the sites in a prescribed order: the Museum of Illustrious Figures from Wenchang, the Museum of the Resistance War in Hainan, Song Qingling’s ancestral house and Museum of the Song Family, the Museum of Overseas Chinese.

The second component was the overall framing of the project, including analysis of its advantages and disadvantages, appraisal of feasibility, generic marketing strategy and a set of slogans. Fan usually left these in the hands of Qin Hua, head of the Cultural Development Department, one of the JMC’s longest employees and leader of the curatorial team.

Then it came to the main body of the report, exhibition outlines, or dagang, summaries of the exhibitions’ content with text and images. Fan would decide on the themes of the
museums and give the team clear directions on how to structure the exhibitions and what to do research on. The Museum of Illustrious Figures from Wenchang, for instance, would celebrate in total 100 individuals of four categories: illustrious persons in premodern Chinese history, Republic Era (including the 200 Kuomintang generals from Wenchang), the People’s Republic, and illustrious overseas Chinese figures from Wenchang. In addition, the exhibition would begin with a brief introduction to Wenchang’s history, the number of celebrities and other historical records, and end by envisioning the prosperous future of the city.

As such, each of the six planned museums was assigned to a researcher and a designer in the team, working respectively on the exhibition text and design. The pair were given specific guidance on both aspects and encouraged to work together. To ensure the ideological adherence to the central leadership, Fan would invariably handle personally every draft of the exhibition texts to the detail of every single word. Meanwhile, he also supervised the spatial planning, architectural design and decoration of the museums based on his experience from building the JMC.

As I showed in Chapter Four, from the very beginning of the JMC, Fan took an active role in designing the museum buildings by making adjustments to nearly all the architects’ proposals. In the case of the Museum of War Prisoners, Fan believed that his insistence on leaving the interior unfurnished won the museum a national architectural award.

In the Wenchang Project for example, Fan asked Guan Sheng, the designer for the Museum of Resistance War in Hainan, to include a small memorial square outside the museum entrance, with a wall of about six to seven metre’s high with Resistance Wall-themed reliefs, specifying that ‘the space should not be enclosed but accessible on both sides’. Fan had clearly a repertoire of his familiar and favoured architectural tropes, including the wall relief in this case, and structures such as sculpture groups and atrium statues, the latter used in the Museum of the Song Family in the Wenchang project.

My assignment was the exhibition outline for the museum of Wenchang chicken and the museum of coconut, which were to be located in the ‘Wenchang Neighbourhood’ block at the entrance. Fan’s idea of the block was a multifunctional but dominantly commercial area,
built on the basis of the layout model of the Huiwen Eighteen Lanes, a Qing Dynasty local neighbourhood in Wenchang. For my museums, Fan told me, ‘the structures are roughly the same, including the classification, their relationships with human beings, distribution of producing areas, nutritional benefits, multiple uses and so on’. Working at the same time on the Chongqing project, the team members, myself included, were asked to draft a preliminary outline in ten days.45

One of the things that struck me when I started sitting in the team’s work meetings was that Fan’s enthusiasm towards, or rather excitement about the projects was not shared with most of the team members. This was apparent in the earlier meetings for the Chongqing project and grew more evident after the Wenchang project started. Dialogues and discussions did not generally feature during these meetings. Instead, they were dominated Fan’s long and unscripted monologues, involving jokes, stories, and sometimes talking about ideas with exaggerated gestures. Seated in accordance to their ranks in the company – the higher the closer to Fan – most team members, including those in higher rank positions such as the vice-director, would listen attentively, take notes, laugh at Fan’s jokes but rarely speak their minds unless particularly asked to. Fan did invite the team to brainstorm but usually met with few responses.

Though the JMC team always completed consulting projects in a timely manner, this productivity was not driven by a dynamic and collaborative teamwork but instead was the result of a fast-paced environment sustained by Fan’s pressure. The apparent stagnation of the team was due, as I was later told by staff members, to both the lack of economic incentive and work overload. Such characteristics of the work meetings revealed as much about the corporate culture within the JMC – which is my focal point in the next chapter – as about the nature of the consulting business.

Ten days went by quickly. Following Fan’s instruction and colleagues’ advice, I did my research online and put together a draft with images sourced from the Internet. When the team met again ten days later, I was feeling rather nervous about the quality of my draft, not only because it was my first assignment, but because it was so rushed. The fact that Fan

45 Fieldnote 11/08/2016
appeared rather unsatisfied after going through the team members’ updates on the Chongqing project, was only making the situation worse. But when Fan took over my draft and skimmed it very quickly, he was pleased: ‘excellent, a PhD’s work indeed’.

I was bewildered about his reaction and surprised at my curatorial genius – all I did was summarise information I found online – but it soon occurred to me that Fan was in general far less meticulous about the Hainan project, especially the two least political ones he assigned to me, than the museums in Chongqing. The reason for this distinction was clearly that the latter was one of the museum’s own. Fan never asked me for a second draft for the two museums.

Shortly afterwards in mid-September 2016, the JMC embarked on another project with the government of Jinmen City, Hubei Province, to develop a tourism strategy for the Qujialing site, the origin of the Qujialing Culture, a major Neolithic civilisation centred around middle Yangtzi River region. The team took a research trip to the site while I was away in Dubrovnik, Croatia, representing the JMC at the Best in Heritage conference. When I returned to the JMC in October, the Qujialing project was already underway. Following a similar approach as in Wenchang, Fan made a plan for six museums for Qujialing to rebrand it as ‘China’s Agricultural Valley’. In addition to the Qujialing Culture, the museum themes covered more recent memories of the place, including the Resistance War history in Hubei and a local May Seventh Cadre School set up during the Cultural Revolution. Over the last three months of 2016, Fan had regular work meetings with the team two or three times a week working on the 20 museum exhibitions for the three ongoing projects at the same time. What I witnessed, and became part of, was a curatorial streamline for the production of the consulting reports, powered by Fan alone.

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46 The Best in Heritage was an annual conference that celebrates award-winning heritage projects around the world. The JMC was the first Chinese private museum that was invited by the conference.
47 The May Seventh Cadre Schools were farms set up in late 1968, in accordance with Mao Zedong's 7th May Directive released on 7th May 1966, to ‘re-educate’ cadres and intellectuals through agricultural labour and the study of Mao’s writings.
Zigong Project: Negotiating Values

At the break of dawn on January 5th, 2017, the museum’s curatorial team left Anren for a trip to Zigong, a prefecture-level city in southeast Sichuan. Zigong has long been renowned as the ‘Salt City’ for its brine extraction techniques and the attendant salt related culture. The project was centred around the tourism regeneration of the old town of Xianshi and a late nineteenth century mansion named the Wang’s Grand Courtyard (Wangjia Dayuan). Different from the previous two cases, where the main task was creating content and design for two tourism complexes yet to be built, the focal point of the Zigong project was making a strategic tourism marketing plan for the two existing heritage sites.

The Wang’s Grand Compound is formerly the family residence of a wealthy local salt merchant named Wang Shifu (1867-1930). Built between 1890 and 1896, the vast estate covered over 22,500 square metres including residential houses for Wang’s family and his four brothers’ and an ancestral hall. The site was bombed in the Resistance War and further damaged during the Cultural Revolution due to the purge of the Wang family. In the third national survey of cultural heritage in 2007, it was listed as a municipal level heritage site, and measured 7758.67 square metres, a third of its original size.48

About fifteen kilometres apart is the historic town of Xianshi. Meaning literally ‘Heavenly Market’, Xianshi has a history of more than 1,400 years. Sitting on the eastern bank of the Fuxi River that runs through the Zigong city, Xianshi once served as a transportation center for trade of well salt produced in Zigong. Given its significant salt transport centre in history, Xianshi attracted merchants from all over China to do business and they formed guilds of merchants to bring together people from the same region. Apart from administrative functions, the guild halls often served as centres for social activities and religious ceremonies. Most had shrines that honour common ancestors or protective deities as well as theatres for entertaining. The two surviving guild halls in Xianshi were founded by merchants from Guangdong and Fujian in the mid-nineteenth century. The Guangdong Guild Hall (Guangdong Huiguan), also named the Nanhua Palace, was built to honour the Taoist immortal Nanhua Zhenren. The Fujian Guild Hall (Fujian Huiguan), or the Tianshang

48 http://www.dili360.com/article/p5465bdd58f6d663.htm
Palace, was dedicated to Mazu, the Chinese sea goddess widely worshiped in the coastal province of Fujian. During the Maoist period, the two guild halls were used as offices by the town's government. In 1992, Xianshi was designated as a provincial level ‘historic town’. The government then moved elsewhere and permitted that the two buildings to be combined and turned into a Buddhist temple, under the request from a monk from Zhejiang, who named it the Golden Bridge Temple (Jinqiao Si). Despite its fairly short history, the Golden Bridge Temple has been a popular temple and a major tourism attraction of Xianshi.

The second morning the team had a meeting with local officials and historians at the district government.

For the Wang’s Grand Courtyard, the Zigong government had acquired the land and intended to restore the original scale and structure of the site. Fan, however, suggested another approach, that was to celebrate the Zigong salt merchants as a social group, without putting too much emphasis on the Wang family's legacy. This was because, as JMC vice director Yuan Hongwei explained to me, public commemoration of individuals without explicit state approval could be a risky matter. Yuan had served since 1990 for over ten years as the director of the Liu Family Manor House Museum in Anren and then the deputy director of the Dayi County publicity department before joining the JMC. ‘The families of these influential merchants often had a complicated history during the 50s’ and 60s’, Yuan told me, ‘and you do not want to honour people who had stains on their history’, insinuating the likely denunciation of the Wang family as landlords during the Land Reform movement (1949 – 1953) and later the Cultural Revolution. Obviously, celebrating the local salt merchants as a group, and the memories of their contribution to the local community, could lessen the risk. Therefore, Fan proposed a museum about the Zigong salt trade and a museum about the local history of the Resistance War, which was keenly embraced by the government.

When it came to Xianshi, however, the treatment of the Golden Bridge Temple became an issue of debate. The consensus among the team was that the temple should be preserved as it was with minimal intervention to its status quo, while it was actively functioning as both a ceremonial centre and communal space. Quoting the retired General Secretary Jiang Zemin who said that ‘the religious question is a great question’, Yuan Hongwei expressed his concern that interfering with the local people’s religious activities would make things
‘overly complicated’. Fan, on the other hand, seemed determined that the guild halls ought to be restored and turned into museums as they testified the heritage of Xianshi in the local history of salt trade, while the temple, with a relatively recent history, which Fan regarded as having ‘no root, and no value’[49]. What we witnessed on the day of our visit to Xianshi, however, seemed to suggest otherwise. The day was the Laba Festival[50] which was also celebrated in Buddhism as the enlightenment day of the Buddha, Shakyamuni. A group of about 100 local people were gathering for a celebratory ritual at the Shakyamuni Hall, which was turned from the main hall of the former Nanhua Palace. The Tianshang Palace is now the Guanyin Hall which enshrines Guanyin, the bodhisatva associated with compassion in Chinese Buddhism. It was kept in good condition and was undergoing maintenance work upon our visit.

Fig. 82 The Shakyamuni Hall of Jinqiao Temple (fieldwork photo, 2017)

[49] Fieldnote 06/01/2017
[50] The Laba Festival (腊八节) is celebrated on the eighth day of the twelfth month (the ‘La Month’ 腊月) of the Chinese lunar calendar. It corresponds with the Bodhi Day, the Buddhist holiday that commemorates the day that the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (Shakyamuni) was enlightened at the age of 35.
While Fan may have a point about Buddhism being a fairly recent implantation in Xianshi, but it is also obvious that turning the temple into two museums fitted more with the team’s strength in developing a ‘museum town’. In Fan’s view, this was the only way forward for Xianshi to become capable of attracting visitors ‘in leather shoes’ (chuan pixie de), meaning the wealthy, and more specifically ‘those from foreign provinces and even abroad with stronger purchasing power’.

The meeting ended with an agreement to Fan’s decision. Back in Anren the next day, Fan circulated the minutes of the meeting with his comment: ‘relocate the temple and get Buddhism out of Xianshi’. From guild halls to Buddhist temples, then to government offices and now museums, the Tianshang Palace and the Nanhua Palace in Xianshi reflect the trajectories of many surviving heritage buildings and manifest the dynamics of heritage being in constant making and remaking.

The key message that the Zigong project foregrounds is Fan’s confidence in his ability to frame the future of a locality in a way which accords with the official ideological orthodoxy, even when it means that such framing always follows the same pattern of maximising the
opportunity to develop museums, which could conflict with the local way of life. Fan’s confidence derives from his access to places where he can obtain first-hand information on the direction of relevant policies. Fan’s attendance at the National Conference Cultural Heritage Industry (quanguo wenwu gongzuo huiyi) is one example. A week after the trip to Zigong Fan attended the annual Sichuan Conference for Tourism (Sichuansheng Lüyou Gongzuo Huiyi) in Chengdu and returned with the purport of conference that the national tourism development should be led by ‘red tourism’ and supported by ‘green tourism’ and ‘traditional tourism’. Fan told the museum staff, ‘as long as Xi is in office, the leading role of red tourism will never change’.

Fan immediately put these insights into the Zigong project at hand, and decided to add another three museums, one linking with the two ongoing programmes, one commemorating the ‘one hundred martyrs’ and another celebrating the ‘one hundred people of outstanding contribution in economic reform’. On each list there was one person from Zigong. Fan believed that building two new museums about the programmes could secure government subsidy, and then generate revenue from the sale of the published catalogues to public libraries. Fan also proposed that the Chen’s Shrine built in 1862 be turned into a museum of the distinguished figures of Zigong. This again manifests Fan’s continued reliance on his proficient model of promoting a place’s legacy by way of celebrating illustrious individuals.

**Changing climates**

On January 8th, 2017, Fan went to the Monday meeting directly after his last day at the Sichuan provincial ‘two sessions’ (lianghui) in Chengdu. ‘This is the first time that it’s been so difficult to talk’, was the first thing Fan said as he sat down, looking unusually tired and distressed. ‘It is only going to be worse, and even more difficult to ask [the government] for money’, and ‘we have to be able to adapt to this new condition’. ‘The CCP is tightening its control’, Fan said, ‘but we have to go as far as possible before the door is fully closed’.

The annual ‘two sessions’ (lianghui) is an important occasion for Fan. It provides the

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51 Here the ‘two sessions’ refers to the annual Sichuan Provincial People's Congress session and the Sichuan Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) session.
opportunity to get the latest policy and to maintain/refresh his connections with officials. He usually attends with enthusiasm and often posts photos on social media. This is a telling incident that marks new changes in the relationship with the government. In early February 2017, Fan drafted a handwritten letter to the newly appointed Party Secretary of Chengdu, Tang Liangzhi, introducing the museum’s work plan that year:

‘In order to maintain our museum's leading position in national private museums, we will carry out a series of work this year. We will now report three of these projects to you, hoping to get your attention and support.

First, to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the PLA and respond to the Central Party Committee’s new formulation of the 14 year of Resistance War, we plan to expand and upgrade the Museum of Resistance War Mainstay;

Second, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Sichuan army’s joining the Resistance War against Japan,

Third, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Economic Reform, we plan to launch an exhibition of the brilliant achievement of the economic reform.’

As such, museum work has become predominantly aligned with the government political agenda, with Fan adapting to changes in policy and becoming a skillful player in the still expanding heritage industry. Fan sustains his guanxi connection with the government authorities via a material medium, a letter, created via the intimate form of handwriting with its length considerately kept to one page.

In May 2017 Fan circulated the official publicity guideline for commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Second War among the museum staff. In his remark he stressed that ‘the key is to highlight the leading role of the Chinese Communist Party’, which ‘has to be carried out through the curating and interpreting at the museum’.
In October 2016, in an editorial published by Xinhua, China’s official news agency, the author Guo Songmin wrote

‘The vital part of historical nihilism is to radically deny the leading role of Marxism and the historical inevitability of China’s socialist path, and to deny the leadership of the Communist Party of China. We should be on guard for the influence of historical nihilism, and … declare war on it.’ (Feuchtwang, Rowlands and Zhang 2019).

Though having been ‘saying things [one is] not supposed to say and doing things [one is] not supposed to do’ Fan has been trying to run the yellow light but never risked ‘jumping the red light’ (Wall Street Journal 2016). Now the campaign against historical nihilism ensured that any deviation from the party-line would be attacked as acts of betrayal to the socialist ideology and threat to the legitimacy of CCP’s governing role.

Fan displays a seemingly conflicted attitude towards the government, expressed in simultaneously a feeling of disappointment and frustration over the tightening ideological control and an ever more obsequious and compliant reaction. This captures the kind of ‘anxiety’ that permeates Chinese entrepreneurs originating from their relationship with the state power (Osburg 2013). Fan’s professed strategy – to go ‘as far as possible before the door is fully closed’ – sheds light upon his dependence upon the ties with the government in not only the consulting business but also the JMC project. The self-proclaimed role of a ‘servant billionaire’ best speaks of the level of instrumentality in his relationship with the government, translated into a language of patriotic sentiments and moral duty to serve the nation.

In the last two sections of this chapter I show how these shifts are reflected in the museum’s latest projects, on my follow-up visits to the JMC’s Chongqing branch, and the Museum of Economic Reform opened in 2018.
Chongqing Jianchuan Museum Complex

On 18th June 2018, I took an early morning train from Chengdu to attend the launch ceremony of the Chongqing Jianchuan Museum. Returning to see the outcome of after my brief involvement with it two years previously. I mistakenly looked for the entrance through the neighbourhood alley I vaguely remembered from the summer of 2016, only to be told, after getting lost amidst the intersecting lanes, that the entrance to the Jianchuan Museum Complex was on the Xiejiawan main road.

Fig. 84 Entrance to the Chongqing Jianchuan Museum on Xiejiawan main road (fieldwork photo, 2018)

Fig. 85 Digital rendering of the entrance of the Chongqing Jianchuan Museum (source: Jianchuan Museum Complex)
I hurried towards the direction I was given, and soon found a cast-iron-surfaced tower gate. The actual entrance looked smaller than was rendered in the initial illustration, but was still considerably eye-catching. Still in the process of construction, on the information board underneath the arch, some parts of the characters had already gone missing. The Republican Era Street featured newly built grey-brick buildings resembling the early 20th century architectural style; some were being used as souvenir stores, cafes and restaurants, and others were not quite completed. The street was bustling with visitors, waiting for the museums to open their doors. Due to the time lost in finding the entrance, by the time I arrived at the launch ceremony, which started at 9:30 am sharp in the open space under the Egongyan flyover, it was well underway.

Liao Jianguo saw me approaching and handed me the ceremony programme, a maroon-covered leaflet issued by the Jiulongpo District Party Committee General Office and the Jiulongpo District Government General Office. The museum had a press conference five days before, and had 15 officials from the Chengdu municipal government, 14 from the Chongqing government, and over 40 guests from officials from Chengdu and Chongqing, entrepreneurs, scholars and museum directors. The fact that the launch was a government-organised event with the high percentage of invited officials in the invitees was indicative of a greater level of integration of interests between the JMC and the district government.

The ceremony, scheduled from 9:30 to 10 that morning, included two ten-minute speeches from Fan Jianchuan and the party secretary of Jiulongpo District. I arrived after the speeches as the ceremony was moving into the last element, when the vice-director of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage announced the opening of the museum. It was kept brief to allow a one-hour private view of selected museums before they opened to the public at noon.

I followed Liao, who was the museum’s publicity chief and responsible for photographing the event, trying to keep up with Fan who was leading the most prestigious of the guests through the exhibition. My attempt was in vain and Fan’s loud and confident voice soon vanished into the group of nearly 100 guests who were moving faster than me. I turned instead to the visitor centre to begin my own tour. The admission fee was ¥50 for all the eight museums.
The same passage The Director’s Manifesto was displayed on the wall. The visitor centre had also a small display about the locality and the history of the museum complex itself. It began with a short note from Fan which reads: ‘From July 2017, we began to build museums in these air raid shelters. In just ten months, eight were completed. There were too many problems, such as the reinforcement of the shelter, drainage, ventilation, dehumidification, fire safety and so on. Many thanks for your interest and comments’. The humble tone and the stress on the technical challenges is consistent with Fan’s professed position as a minjian, or grassroots museum builder. It was followed by three photographs taken of the site in the summer of 2017 arranged horizontally. The original address of the place is ‘1 Hegao Village’, as shown by a blue address plaque, juxtaposed with the National Cultural Heritage Site plaque issued in 2013 when the place was recognised as the ‘Chongqing Resistance War Arms Industry Heritage Site’. This small display reveals the only trace left of the place. It is nevertheless a step forward from the Anren complex where no history about the Henxing Village, which was relocated to make space for the museum was acknowledged.

![Fig. 86 Fan’s note on the construction of the Chongqing JMC (left) and the original address plaque of the place (fieldwork photo, 2018)](image)

Another step forward is the recognition of the contribution from staff members by showing their names on the plaque at the entrance of each museum, showing the museum’s ‘chief planner’, Fan, and the names of the respective ‘content designer’ and ‘form designer’.
The complex is full of military tropes – retired cannons, statues of heroes of war, wartime slogans – and amidst the complex structures of the towering flyover stands a 25-metre plinth with a statue of a soldier standing atop.

Matching the four themes of the JMC, the eight museums in the Chongqing branch are:

Museum of Chongqing Port Culture
Museum of Vernacular Prayer for Blessing (qifu)
Museum of Ration Coupons and Certificates
Museum of Chinese Matrimonial Culture
Museum of Chinese Medicine
Museum of History of Arms
Museum of the Hanyang Arsenal
Museum of Resistance War

The Museum of Ration Coupons and Certificates (Piaozheng Shenghuo Guan) – originally, as noted earlier, the Museum of Red Age Memories – is the only museum that touches upon the memories of the Red Age by showcasing ration coupons used during the period of planned economy from the 1950s to the 1980s.

The museum preface in the original outline prepared in 2017 was:

The decades from the founding of New China to the rise of reform and opening up are called the Red Age. The Red Age is not far away from us. Its historical vein extends into today's daily life. The Red Age is ideal, exciting, special, complicated and plain to the people. The group life experience of hundreds of millions of Chinese for decades makes it of unique historical significance. We are trying to preserve the real-life memory of this era through real cultural relics.

In the museum, however, the preface has become much more focused on the ration tickets themselves:

After the founding of the People’s Republic, with the restoration of the national
economy in three years, the state began to ‘learn from Russia’, giving priority to the development of industries and national defense. The development of light industry and agriculture was relatively slow, leading to the lack of daily necessities. As a result, ration tickets (purchase certificates) were introduced. They were the certificates used to buy food and clothing and other necessities under planned supply, commonly known as the ‘second currency’, the ‘lifeblood’ and the ‘coupon of life’ of ordinary people. After the economic reform, with the rapid development of the national economy, ration tickets were gradually abandoned, and China’s nearly forty years of ‘ration era’ came to an end. As a common life experience of decades for millions of Chinese people, ration tickets have a unique meaning as a historical specimen. We try to save the true memory of the ration tickets through these real relics.

Fan’s idea was to use ration coupons as a prism to reflect the different aspects of everyday life under the planned economy, namely housing, food, transport and clothing. The exhibition also touches upon forms of popular entertainment in the Maoist era, including books, music, and cinema. In the Red Age, much literature was condemned as ‘poisonous weed’ (ducao). Books, mainly poetry and novels, were widely circulated in handwritten copies (shouchaoben). These copies could not be seen in public as reading or producing them were at the risk of punishments. And yet, as stated in the exhibition, ‘the thrill and excitement of reading these handwritten copies has become a common memory of that generation’.

In 2017, the JMC began to develop a museum about the 40 years of the Economic Reform (1978-2018). What is significant about this new museum is the fact that the JMC received in total $40 million from the Chengdu government that was paid via different departments, with half contributed by the Chengdu Municipal Publicity Department, the agency in charge of ideology-related work.

Therefore, though unlike the previous consulting projects which happened outside Anren, the museum of economic reform is a commissioned, or delegated project with funding from the government and space and resources of the JMC. This arrangement speaks of an internalisation of the consulting model, that Fan effectively uses to apply to this new museum within JMC. Through this voluntary ‘involution of the state’ (Siu 1989), this certainly means a higher level of the financial and ideological involvement of the government. However, this would obviously not be made acknowledgeable to visitors or the public, to whom the JMC shall maintains its professed stance of independence.

The exhibition adopts a chronological order, comprising 40 units, each about one of the 40
years from 1978 to 2018. The units follow the same structure: the ‘words of the year’, the most important expression in China the ‘key events of the year’ (niandu dashi) and ‘people’s memories’ (baixing jiyi). The former is focused on significant social political events and the latter changes in everyday life and keywords in popular culture. This linear and chronological order accords completely to the typical exhibitionary style of state museums, where visitors were provided with one prescribed route to go through the rooms that are created by dividing fake walls and all marked clearly into units (Denton 2014a, 57).

Four drafts of the exhibition outline were sent to the Party History Research Centre of Sichuan Provincial CPC Committee for ‘examination’ (shencha) before being finalised. Liao gave me the latest two drafts which were completed in February and March 2018. A comparison between the two reveals the criteria of the examination and decisions that were made.

First of all, the title changed from ‘Changes: 1978-2018’ in the February draft to ‘Magnificent Changes: 1978-2018’, taking on a much more celebratory tone. Entries not approved were marked with a cross, which resulted in a notable decrease in the number of entries in the March draft by nearly one quarter.

One challenge was how to display the images of former state and party leaders due to the recently introduced regulation that exhibitions can only include images of officials in service, otherwise it needs permission from the Party History Research Centre of the CPC Central Committee (Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi)52.

The team nevertheless managed to include the photos of former leaders by making the size of the current leaders’ images a lot larger than the those of the former one. The images of Xi Jinping used in the exhibition, for instance, are at least three time the size of the photos of Deng Xiaoping.

The entries rejected in the February draft are events of different degrees of negativity or political sensitivity, which fall into the following few categories, Cultural Revolution-related,

52 Liao Jianguo shared with me this information on my June 2018 visit.
First of all, entries related to the rehabilitation of wrongful convictions during the Cultural Revolution in its immediate aftermath were rejected. The 1978 unit in the February draft including the CCP Central Committee’s decisions to rehabilitate the Tiananmen Incident\(^{53}\) of April 1976, and two senior leaders, Peng Dehuai and Tao Zhu, who were purged during the Cultural Revolution, and the 61 Renegades Clique, a case of false convictions of senior communist cadres associated with Liu Shaoqi. All three entries were censored. Added was a section on Xi Jinping’s father Xi Zhongxun’s leadership in the early phase of the economic reform in Guangdong province.

Rejected entries related to protests and scandals included the first drug scandal in the Fujian pharmaceutical industry; the 1986 student protests; the June Fourth movement; the spread of drug abuse in the early 1990s and the 1994 Karamay fire, the biggest civilian fire in the history of the Republic, where over 300 schoolchildren were killed.

The final draft was thus completely sanctioned to meet the requirements of the government, who was technically the client. However, in the actual outcome of the exhibition, there were also notable additions of some controversial topics.

1989 is the shortest year of the museum’s account of the economic reform. In the outline there is no reference to the mass student protests in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in spring which led to what is officially termed the June Fourth Incident, when the protest was forcibly suppressed on June 4 as the government declared martial law and sent the army to occupy central parts of Beijing. It is, however, mentioned in the actual display of 1989, the briefest of the entire exhibition. The ‘words of the year 1989’ includes ‘China will not allow chaos’, a

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\(^{53}\) The Tiananmen Incident took place on 5th April 1976, at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China. The incident occurred on the traditional day of mourning, the Qingming Festival, after the Nanjing Incident, and was triggered by the death of Premier Zhou Enlai earlier that year. Some people strongly disapproved of the removal of the displays of mourning and began gathering in the Square to protest against the central authorities, then largely under the auspices of the Gang of Four, who ordered the Square to be cleared. The event was labeled as counterrevolutionary immediately after its occurrence by the Communist Party's Central Committee and served as a gateway to the dismissal and house arrest of then–Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, who was accused of planning the event, while he insisted that he came to Tiananmen Square only for a haircut. The Central Committee's decision on the event was reversed after the Cultural Revolution ended, as it would later be officially hailed as a display of patriotism.
quote by Deng Xiaoping in March 1989 that sums up the official attitude towards the protests. The display includes also two photographs about the incident, one of the flag-raising ceremony at Tiananmen Square on 9th June, the other of soldiers cleaning the square, captioned ‘June Fourth martial law enforcement and clearing the square’.

Fig. 88 Display unit of the year 1989, photograph of the flag-raising ceremony at Tiananmen Square after the June Fourth Incident (left) and photographs of Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary of the CCP (fieldwork photo, 2018)

Fig. 89 Display unit on chaiqian in Economic Reform Museum (fieldwork photo, 2018)

The year 1999 unit is dedicated to the urban housing demolishing and relocation (chaiqian)
in Chinese cities since the 1990s, a still ongoing process of demolishing usually older or slightly dilapidated structures (sheds single story houses) that are marked for demolition. Sometimes residents are given the opportunity to relocate to newly constructed buildings (usually high-rise style apartments) three sides of the wall and the ceiling are covered by address plaques of demolished homes. Across the country, the chaiqian practice was met with resistance from the residents from individual petitioning to organised protests and demonstrations. The display includes no texts but one enlarged photograph, with a man squatting in front of his home, smoking, after finding that the building has been spray-painted with the character ‘chai’, meaning ‘to demolish’.

In the display of the year 2012, a large space is devoted to the serious air pollution spread across Beijing and other major cities which became one of the most pressing social problems. 100 black and white photographs of people wearing face-masks for air pollution protection, are arranged on a wall, among which sixteen images of bright orange-colour flowers are inserted, making a forceful contrast between the freshness of the flowers and the deadliness symbolised by the contaminated air.

The critical edge of the display is balanced by two wall-size images of Xi Jinping. One with the quote: ‘To protect the environment is to protect productivity. To improve the environment is to develop productivity.’ And the other is a video clip of Xi stating ‘clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver’ (lūshuí qǐngshān jiǔshí jīnshān yínshān).

Fan was quick to fit himself and the JMC into the narrative of the economy reform. In a special thematic display traces the ‘rise’ of nonstate museums, as well as the fifteen years of the JMC.
The last few units present more explicit glorification of Xi’s era. The 2017 and 2018 ‘key annual events’ sections are almost entirely a record of Xi’s activities as head of the state, from his meetings with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to his visits to poor households in southwestern rural areas. The very last hall has a floor-to-ceiling display of over 100 editions of Xi’s book, *The Governance of China*, in different languages, bearing a striking resemblance to the treatment of Xi’s works in the National Museum of China’s economic reform exhibition, ‘The Great Chang’. However, about three metres away in the same hall lie two bottles of Hongmao Medicine Tonic, a popular tonic liquor produced by a major pharmaceutical company in the Inner Mongolia, and the subject of a 2018 scandal. Tan Qindong, a Chinese doctor from Guangdong, was the first to reveal Hongmao Tonic’s false claims of its benefits by describing the liquor as ‘poison from heaven’ in an essay in his personal blog. Within a month, Qin was arrested by police, under the direction of the manufacturer of the medical tonic, Hongmao Pharmaceutical, and detained and abused for nearly 100 days.

These two bottles of Hongmao Medical Tonic are a disrupting element that changes the whole ethos of the last section of the museum and almost ridicules its heavily sanctioned overall narrative. Juxtaposing President Xi Jinping, the most powerful man in the country, to the subject of a minor scandal involving an obscure individual who would soon be forgotten by the public, was a deeply evocative gesture, simply because the latter testifies not only
the issue of medicine security but also the abuse of governmental power.

Fig. 91 Display of Xi Jinping’s works (left) and the Hongmao Medical Tonic (right) in the JMC Museum of the Economic Reform (fieldwork photo, 2018)

Fig. 92 Display of Xi Jinping’s works in the National Museum of China’s exhibition about the Economic Reform ‘The Great Change’ (source: RADII)

A further understanding of the JMC museum of the economic museum might be informed if
we take into light the level of ambivalence manifested in the official celebration of its 40th anniversary in museums.

The Shekou Economic Reform Museum is one of the first and most discussed official museums, opened in December 2017 in Shenzhen, the forefront of the reform. Developed by a Chinese state-owned corporation, the museum is housed in the newly developed art centre, the Design Republic, in Shekou district, where the city’s first economic experiments began, in a striking white angular building designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Fumihiko Maki.

The exhibition originally featured a statue of Deng Xiaoping, the engineer of the reform, which was taken down after a period of closed ‘upgrading’ in early June 2018 which resulted in its replacement by ‘a beige wall adorned with a quote from President Xi Jinping’ (Wong 2018). As the report interprets as rewriting the history of the economic reform, which is widely credited to Deng, for Xi to gain ‘greater authorship’ over the legacy of the great transformation of China, by stating that ‘much of the state-backed fanfare has focused instead on Mr. Xi, playing up his economic credentials while diluting Deng’s prominence in party lore’ (Wong 2018). The report quotes Julian Gewirtz, a historian at Harvard University who has studied Chinese economic reforms, calling the exhibition ‘mythmaking in action’ (Wong 2018). At the end of 2018, however, the exhibition was ordered to close again. The reason, according to a former employee of the museum, who insisted on telling me in person instead of on WeChat, had to do with the museum’s pro-Xi changes which were seen as an inadequate ‘overcorrection’.

What is made explicit here is the political nature of museum making in China. If the JMC is an attempt to speak about/re-narrate Chinese history, Fan has been able to create a museum language that is both provocative and ambiguous. What underlies the engagement with the state is a language of power. Fan is able to converse with the authorities in this practical language, as it is what one does, more than the professed, that carries the message.

Chapter 7: Museum Labour

In this chapter I follow a shift of perspective and look at the JMC as a 'social world' and the experiences of its employees. Whilst I have introduced my key interlocutors, the previous chapters have told the story of the JMC emphatically from the point of view of Fan Jianchuan as the mastermind of the project. This chapter is engaged with the transition that I have identified in the previous chapters from the perspective of the museum workers, particularly the curatorial staff members who I spent most of my time working with throughout my fieldwork. I seek to tell the story from their experiences and narratives to see how the changes I have outlined affected the dynamics of their work in JMC. In this, I understand museum work as an embodied practice, involving not only the production of knowledge but also the material everyday concerns and emotions of the working individuals as well as the relations among them.

‘Work’ is not a new category in the study of heritage and museums. With the global expansion of the museum labour forces, museum work has become increasingly diversified, incorporating not only conservation, research, exhibition making, but also aspects such as marketing, management and public relations (Fyfe 2006). Sociology-influenced works have been carried out to investigate the change of and conflict between different visions of the organisational identity of museums (Zolberg 1981, Alexander 1996). MacDonald’s ethnography of the creation of an exhibition in the Science Museum in London explores what happens ‘behind the scenes’ to make sense of the changing ideology in the museum’s production of knowledge (2002). Engaging with the ‘social world’ of Colonial Williamsburg, Handler and Gable show how the museum’s egalitarian discourse ‘mystifies’ the reality of its corporate hierarchy, and how its employees simultaneously accept and criticise the ‘company line’ in their working lives (1997).

The notion of work in this chapter is considered in a critical relation with the concept ‘labour’, with an awareness of the ongoing discussions on the difference between the two categories. Labour, on the one hand, has been more associated in the Marxist tradition with ideas such as alienation, exploitation, wage and reproduction in the Marxist tradition; work, on the other
hand, has been conceptualised in a broader and more anthropological sense as a quintessential human practice (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013; Frayssé 2014). The two concepts, as I will demonstrate in greater detail, apply appropriately to different aspects of the museum’s social life.

To situate this discussion in the broader framework of this thesis, I place particular emphasis on the ethical domain of museum work. The reason is twofold. On the one hand, the Jianchuan Museum, as already noted, is, to a great extent, a morally charged project. A moral discourse permeates the ways in which it was conceived, developed and managed. At the same time, museum work in its constant negotiation with this moral discourse, is itself ethical.

The theoretical impetus for conceptualising a notion of museum ethics as exemplified by the JMC, draws on the concept of ‘ordinary ethics’, elaborated by anthropologist Michael Lambek (2010). By locating ethics in the mundane practices and circumstances of the everyday, Lambek argues that an investigation into the dimension of ethics ‘in selfhood, social encounter and action’ may provide a profound understanding of human social lives and activities (2010, 7) This critical vantage point has been adopted by Hans Steinmüller and Charles Stafford who also hold that much can be learned about ordinary ethics from ‘micro social exchanges’ (2013, 5). I therefore pay critical attention to both explicit expressions and the more implicit, tactical, circumstantial acts, reflections and remarks of the employees of the museum, to capture the ethical that is practiced every day, as distinct from Fan’s claims about the moral values of the museum.

A couple of weeks after I started working at the museum, one afternoon I walked into the office area hearing an extremely loud argument. The chief of security, Guo Changlin, was roaring and cursing at the administrator Zeng Yong, shouting ‘how dare you deduct a half-day amount of my salary?!’ An ex-commander in the People Liberation Army, six-foot-tall and phenomenally strong, Guo was intimidating when enraged. He was there raging for the loss of a half-day salary, which was approximately ¥100 (roughly £11), because he had missed a clocking-in. Guo said he had never missed a clock-in and it must the problem with the clock-in machine. Zeng Yong defended himself for simply doing the job calculating the salaries based on the machine’s record. The only thing Guo could do was to take it further
to the senior managers. It was this drastic incident in the very early stage of my fieldwork that brought me face to face with the ‘real-life’ mundanities of the museum work, including the most down-to-earth matters in employees’ everyday working lives, in contrast with Fan’s articulated visions and commitment, as the publicity surrounding the museum suggested. This approach enables an understanding of the museum as a plural and dynamic process of a group rather than simply the outcome of implementation of Fan’s great idea. It is crucial, therefore, to bring in the dimension of ethics. Consideration of the ethical level also complicates our understanding of the power relations within the JMC.

The moral and ethical complexity involved in this process, I argue, is embedded in the wider social political context, and resonates with some of the themes the museum itself addresses. It opens up a critical approach to understanding heritage work as a fluid, entangled series of ethical and instrumental/pragmatic experiences.

At the same time, despite evidence of contrasts between the employees’ experience and the museum’s public face, the museum team remains unified and still functions with high efficiency. But before I turn to the employees’ narrative, I would like to set the scene by describing the early emergence of the JMC project.

**Corporate identity of a moral project [2003-2005]**

As a starting point, I address the organisational status of the JMC. In 1999 Fan registered the ‘Jianchuan Museum’ as a ‘private non-enterprise unit’ (minban feiqiye), primarily in order to avoid legal risks in acquiring objects for his collection, since business companies were then not allowed to trade objects confiscated during the Cultural Revolution. According to the ‘Guidance Notes for Private Museums’, issued by the State Administration for Cultural Heritage (SACH) in 2014, all non-state museums in China belong to the category of ‘private non-enterprise units’, abiding by the ‘Interim Regulations on Registration Administration of Private Non-enterprise Units’ (1998). Due to its ‘private non-enterprise’ status, the JMC does not have to pay corporate income tax on its revenue from admission.

The JMC has a commercial side from the beginning. In 2003, Fan set up the ‘Anren
Jianchuan Cultural Industry Company' (Anren Jianchuan Wenhua Chanye Youxiangongsi) within the Jianchuan Industrial Group (Jianchuan Shiye Jituan) to manage the museum complex. The organisational status of the museum thus became simultaneously a ‘private non-enterprise unit’ (minban feiqiye) and a private company (minying qiye). Different from most state museums in China, which outsource certain parts of their operations, Jianchuan Museum is registered as a ‘private museum’ and operates primarily as a private company. As I shall demonstrate, this dual-nature of its organisational identity has had significant influence on its management and staffing.

The first example concerns the investment of the Jianchuan Museum. One story that I heard on several occasions about the establishment of the project is that in 2004 Fan sold the main official building of his real estate company to raise funds for the museum complex. But then I learned that the reason for sale was not simply Fan’s enthusiasm. As the vice-director Han Mei told me, the museum was initially a joint investment with two local state-owned corporates, the China Railway No.8 Group Company and the Sichuan Daily. These two companies then contributed up to 49% of the total investment and the Museum held the controlling interest. Yet shortly before the project was launched, the China Railway No.8 Company decided to withdraw its investment, claiming the ‘loss of state assets’. Fan was forced to sell an office building in Chengdu that was worth ¥40 million.

Therefore, from the very early stages of the project, state capital and interests were heavily involved, which raises questions regarding the museum’s claims to its ‘private’ position and moral motivation. Several informants saw Fan’s museum building as a strategic move from real estate into cultural tourism, stating two main reasons.

The first was the changing circumstances in the local real estate market around the millennium. In 2002, Hutchison Whampoa, the Hong Kong-based company owned by Li Ka-Shing (Li Jiacheng) started its investment in Sichuan. Together with several other local real estate companies, Fan raised over ¥2 billion to bid against Hutchison Whampoa in an auction for a block of land in South Chengdu but didn’t succeed. According to senior employees, that incident marked a turning point in the company’s change of strategy.

Second, since the early 1990s, the state had undertaken a series of legal and fiscal
measures to develop and propagate cultural industries and cultural consumption, including a subsequent lowering of interest rates in 1996 and 1998, and the introduction of income tax and other fiscal measures in 1994 (Wang 2001). Fan started becoming involved in the cultural scene by having his first exhibition in 1999 at the Sichuan Museum. Peng Jiankang, then director of the cultural industry office, recalled in a 2008 interview, that when meeting Fan Jianchuan in 2002, he encouraged him to invest in cultural industry by presenting his collection to the public (Xiong 2008, 19).

The JMC project thus had a Janus-face like character from the start, as a private museum on the one hand, and a cultural enterprise on the other. To the public, Fan ascribes his decision to move from the lucrative real estate business to the allegedly unprofitable world of the museum to a sense of moral duty towards the nation and his paternal family. ‘China can easily spare a real estate developer, which may not be a bad thing, but if there is nobody doing this [museums], there would be a serious problem’, he stated in a 2008 TV interview. He regarded commercialisation as ‘the way for a grassroots museum to survive’, to be able to generate income to sustain itself, and hence designed a ‘museum complex’ (bowuguan juluo), mixing museums with teahouses, restaurants, shops, hotels and boating service.

Fan has consistently striven to infuse his moral virtues into the management of the company. In 2004 Fan wrote to the museum’s initial team of eight people:

the Anren project is unique. It is unprecedented in China and the whole world. For its accomplishment, we have to be creative and face challenges. Of course, we all have different roles, so doing your own job well is the best way to take part in this great enterprise (Fan 2013, 140).

This passage encapsulates some of the recurring themes in the museum’s managerial discourse, particularly the notion of ‘challenge’ and the stress on the importance of abiding by one’s duty. Throughout my fieldwork, I found that Fan Jianchuan made a constant effort to reiterate these values through the interplay of the two notions of challenge and duty. The idea that the museum was faced with economic and political challenges, which required the diligence and sacrifice of its staff members, was a discourse that was repeatedly reproduced, and mediated through the structuring of the company and linked managerial programmes.
Idealism and sacrifice: the early stage [2005-2007]

Among the initial team of eight were the Han cousins, Han Mei and Han Zhiqiang; Han Mei was a senior manager in Fan’s real estate company and Zhiqiang was Fan’s assistant and driver. For the museum project, Han Mei specialised in administrative procedures and liaison with different governments, and Han Zhiqiang worked intensively with Fan on collecting and construction. The cousins were soon promoted vice-directors of the museum in charge of their respective lines of work.

For those involved in the early phase of the project, the creation of the museum complex was a challenging journey. Despite the openly expressed endorsement from the municipal and county-level governments, the museum team had a series of business banquets with government and military officials to settle the deal on the land and the mansions. [Fan was promised initially 3,000 mu of land but had to settle on 500 mu due to leadership change in the county government (Xiong 2008).] Because of the heavy drinking during these banquets, Han Mei recalled that Fan gave each of the museum employee involved a ¥10,000 cash bonus as ‘compensation for the damage to their health’.

In 2005, the museum also recruited a few younger college graduates to work on the construction of the first five museums in the complex. Lu Zhishan, an interior designer, was one of these. When we met in 2016, he described how the startup of the museum was ‘crisis-ridden’ right from the beginning.

There were about twenty of us in the company, and we worked on the site for about six months, with huge anxiety and pressure, political pressure, financial pressure, time pressure … All the buildings were designed by renowned architects, but we had little experience (in construction). … We were short of money as well. Every penny had to come from Mr. Fan’s pocket. He used to say that he would sell his office building if necessary. … At that time, it was uncertain if it would be approved. Before Mr. Fan left for Beijing to solve some political problems, he joked that he might not be able to come back to pay us.
The team of twenty employees, as Lu remembered, formed three departments: administration, construction, and the ‘decoration and display’ section that he was in. In all, it was a four-tier managerial structure, with each of the three vice directors overseeing one department.

Despite the structure, the actual operations were fluid and collaborative. The construction site was in constant disarray. ‘We were really ‘crossing the river by feeling the stones’ (mozhe shitou gouge).’ Lu told me. ‘There was a lot of overlapping and cross-working. Lots of things were done together, for instance administrators had to help with construction work from time to time. It caused some problems. But we had no choice.’

On his first day at work, Fan gave Lu an automatic camera to take photographs of the workers every day. These photographs were not for publicity use but rather for the museum’s self-documentation. From these photos, most of which taken between January and May 2005, we see construction workers drilling holes and plastering cement without effective eye or hand protection, some semi-naked in the summer heat. The living conditions were poor.

The employees lived adjacent to the construction site, in a four-storey house Fan rented from local peasants. The site was previously rice fields. Lu and his colleagues paved the muddy path to their dormitory with large wooden boards to walk across. Their bedroom walls were full of moths, and hot water was not available in the building. To have a shower, they had to be taken in a lorry to a public bath. ‘But we weren’t bothered,’ Lu told me, ‘we would sing revolutionary songs on our way to shower, just like the sent-down-youth. For the around 200 construction workers living on the site, the conditions were even worse. ‘When their family came to visit, they spent the night on the site sleeping under a mosquito net. It was really difficult.’
In retrospect, Lu said that the work experience was 'interesting and fulfilling'; 'probably more
interesting than working in the museum today’, he added. ‘It was interesting in the sense that people gathered from different places to cooperate on the same project; and fulfilling because one witnessed the whole thing being built from scratch.’ Lu fondly remembered that he attended the museum’s opening ceremony in August 2005, in a ‘clean white shirt’, feeling ‘enormously proud’. Lu concluded our interview by highlighting the role of Fan Jianchuan:

‘the museum was not built by one person, but by a group of people at the call of Mr. Fan. It took someone of his level of wealth and intelligence, to lead us with his dream, so that however difficult the process was, nobody lost faith, or got too concerned about personal gains and losses.’ (Interview 25/02/2017)

These remarks reflect a consensus view among the museum’s early-stage employees I interviewed, which resonates strongly with Fan’s idea about the unique moral significance of the museum project, namely that taking part in building the museum complex was doing something that had never been done before.

Fan sought to engage his employees in his sense of commitment and duty by setting himself up as a model for others. A colleague of Mr. Lu’s, who was one of the museum’s first frontline interpreters, described Fan as an endearing leader. ‘He trained us himself. The way he told the stories of the objects was so moving, because he had collected them, and nobody knew them better than he did.’ During the investigation into the first five museums from August to December 2005, Fan grew a beard to show his determination. He named a pavilion in front of the Chinese Heroes Plaza the ‘Pavilion of Disturbance’ (Fengbo Ting) to mark the difficult period. While the company was making financial sacrifices for the museum project, Fan had never failed to pay his employees on time. Meng Xin, the museum’s publicist, told me that when the museum was not making enough money Fan used to have his assistants bring large bags of cash from his real estate company on the payday to pay the museum staff. Through such embodied performance of his moral commitment during the early years of the museum’s establishment, the impression Fan Jianchuan left for most of the staff members was of a charismatic and inspiring leader.

After the official recognition of the museum’s opening in December 2005, restraints were placed on the museum’s publicity. A former employee, Mr Xia Jifang, who was working for
a local newspaper in 2006, told me that reporting on the newly founded museum was a delicate issue, particularly for official media outlets.

Publicising the Jianchuan (Museum) was difficult, as any information concerning the Cultural Revolution, or the Nationalist Party was strictly prohibited. But I found ways to do it. On the same page, I would put my article on ‘a museum in Dayi County’ on the top half, without mentioning its name, and the museum’s advertisement below it. The newspaper would examine the news, but not the advertisements. There was an advertisement for a summer camp, and I used a photo of a group of children standing inside the entrance hall at the Nationalist Army Museum. On the wall behind them was a large mosaic figure of Robert Capa’s portrait of the Nationalist soldier, made out of porcelain Nationalist army cap badges. Readers would be able to figure it out and find information (about the museum). Things like this I did a few times. (Interview 21/12/2016)

By the end of 2006, Xia Jifang had visited the museum sixteen times as a journalist to conduct interviews with Fan Jianchuan. When Fan made him the offer to be the museum's publicity chief, he took it. 'Working for the Jianchuan was a lot more meaningful than my job as a reporter', Xia told me in 2016. He felt that taking part in Fan’s enterprise would create more space for his own abilities.

There was a team of idealistic and enthusiastic young people, who really wanted to do something. Though the living and working conditions were a lot more difficult than nowadays, and there was nothing in the town, no shops, no entertainment, no streetlamps, and when we finished work at six o’clock, it was pitch dark outside. We always lived right next to the office. But we were full of drive and vigour. We treated it seriously and took the work as a career. There was this feeling that we weren’t there for the money. (Interview 21/02/2017)

Mr. Ren He was another member of this young team. In 2004 he was in the final year of his undergraduate studies in Chengdu. After hearing Fan’s public talk on the museum project at his university, he immediately applied for a job at the museum and worked there as an
administrator for three years.

By 2005, the museum was struggling financially with a total income of just over ¥78,000. Some were concerned that the admission fee of ¥100 (for three days) was set too high (Xiong 2008). Vice director Han Mei told me that there were days when the museum had not a single visitor, when she would buy a ticket with her own money before the day ended.

Despite of the revenue deficit in the opening months, further investment was continuously made into building the second museum series of the Red Age, including the Museum of Red Age Porcelain Artworks in 2006, and the Museum of Red Age Everyday Objects, the Museum of Red Age Stamps, Clocks and Badges in 2007. In 2006, Fan invited his old friend Zhao Jun to join the museum team to be the fourth vice director in charge of the maintenance and security of the complex. Fan and Zhao used to be comrades in the army in Inner Mongolia in their early 20s’. After Fan left for university, Zhao stayed in the army and became a professor in one of the country’s most prestigious military academies. The two kept in touch and Fan had previously made Zhao several offers to join him in business. It was Fan’s plan to build museums on the Cultural Revolution that made Zhao decide to take an early retirement from the military and join the museum team. ‘I was living the comfortable life of a professor at one of the country’s top military universities. Even now my pension from the military is much more than my museum salary’, he told me, ‘but I had to give that up because he [Fan] was doing this [building Cultural Revolution museums], which was something extraordinary’ (date). Zhao told me that he planned to do research on the Cultural Revolution history with the materials in the museum’s collection, but was reticent, understandably, about his personal experience of the period.

The above accounts of the museum’s early years fit well with the themes of challenge and duty. There was a sense of common purpose in the employees’ narratives of their work which they linked with Fan Jianchuan’s articulation of his personal dream and commitment. Working for a not-yet-profitable enterprise was rendered as an ‘idealistic’ endeavour, a collaborative and creative process of overcoming obstacles that entailed a sense of trust and hope, and, at the time, even a ‘voluntary abandonment of self’, to borrow the phrase from David Graeber, which was close enough to Fan’s favoured notion of sacrifice.
Commercialisation and bureaucratisation [2008-2015]

The year 2008 marked a turning point for the museum. In the immediate aftermath of the Wenchuan Earthquake on 12th May 2008, Mr. Xia and a colleague came up with the idea of an exhibition on the earthquake. Fan took it further and decided to build an earthquake museum. After 30 days they opened the country’s very first memorial museum of the earthquake on June 12th, showing images and objects from the stricken area, which made international news. Largely due to the increased media exposure, the museum’s income increased significantly from the previous year’s ¥3568177 to ¥5161762 and broke even for the first time that year.

The growth of the museum complex brought changes to its organisational structure. From the three departments in 2005, the museum’s division of labour gradually became more specialised. In 2008, the museum employed 319 people in total, almost half (149) of whom were hired that year. There were 28 regular employees in management posts (zhengshi yuangong) and the rest of them temporary employees (linshi yuangong) covering security, sanitation, maintenance and other services. The regular employees, usually referred to as ‘members of staff’ (gongzuo renyuan), or ‘members of management’ (guanli renyuan), worked across ten departments: administration, marketing, retailing, finances, security, publicity, display and decoration, cultural development, storage and acquisition, and hotel and restaurant. The four vice directors oversaw different sections of work, and each head of department reported to one of them. As such, the museum operated a four-tier management hierarchy as illustrated below.

Fan Jianchuan
— Vice directors [senior management]
— Department heads [middle management]
— Department members [lower management]
— Interpreters and temporary workers

By the time I started my fieldwork in 2015, there had been some changes in the spatial setting of the departments, but the overall managerial structure remained as described above. The company provided three meals a day and accommodation for management staff
during the working days of the week. The monthly salary for a department member varied from ¥3,000 to ¥6,000 depending on the post. In the cultural development department, for example, a senior designer earned more than a researcher-curatorial, although the respective posts were at the same level of the management. The temporary workers, including catering, security, cleaning and other services, were hired locally and earned around ¥1000 to ¥1500 per month.

At seven o’clock every Monday evening, all management staff would get together for a weekly meeting, provided that Fan was in the museum. Vice directors and department heads would sit with Fan Jianchuan around a long table, and the department members in rows of chairs around them. The meeting proceeded through a set agenda. The department heads would start by giving a summary of their department’s work in the previous week, followed by usually very brief comments from the vice directors. Then Fan would open up the floor to the department members sitting in the back rows and ask if they had issues to raise, which was usually answered by silence. Sometimes he would pick someone at random, and on most occasions that I was present, the picked person would respond with an embarrassed smile and a quick shake of head. Then Fan would take the floor, starting with his response to the issues just raised and almost invariably ending up with the narrative about the challenges faced by the museum and the importance of teamwork and sacrifice.

At the end of every month, staff members were required to submit a work report (shuzhi baogao), in a standard format, though some were handwritten, and others printed. These forms would be collected by Zeng Yong, the aforementioned administrator, bound into a volume and submitted to Fan for feedback. Fan would leave his general comment on the front page, and give each report individual remarks, and then pass them down to vice directors and department heads to review and leave their comments. The volume would then be returned to the employees to be circulated. The work report was a means to keep Fan informed about the employees’ work as well as a platform for the employees to present their ideas, queries and concerns.

These two mechanisms have functioned to facilitate communication within management since the museum’s early days. They serve as a prism reflecting the changing work ethos within the museum, becoming gradually more formal and standardised over the years. Fan’s
handwritten comments, in the meantime, preserve some playfulness and freedom. The contrast is illustrated in the image below of Yuan Hongwei’s April 2014 report, under Yuan’s neatly printed bullet points summary of his work of the month, Fan drew a stick figure portrait of himself pointing at the words: ‘for the Qingdao Project [a consulting project the team was working on], please show your best work as it relates to the company’s future expansion of consulting business, in other words, it is a battle of life and death!’

Fig. 95 Fan’s comments on vice-director Yuan’s April 2014 work report (fieldwork photo, 2017)
By the time of 2009, however, the income increase did not continue as expected but stagnated at ¥5847194. The Monday evening staff meetings started to last longer, according to Xia Jifang. To boost morale, Fan would talk for a few hours about the notions of sacrifice and duty. The reference Fan most often used was the battle of Tengxian in Teng County, Shandong, in March 1938, a crucial defence that paved way for the Taierzhuang Battle, the first major Chinese victory in the Resistance War. The Sichuan-born general Wang Mingzhang who led the defence in Tengxian, was killed together with his whole division of 3,000 soldiers (Co 2015). Mr Xia remembered Fan saying to the staff, ‘if I am to take Taierzhuang, what you need to do is defend Tengxian!’

Whilst the extreme extent of sacrifice in the brutal battle of Tengxian well symbolised the type of self-sacrificial quality Fan urged in his employees, the middle and lower tier staff were less keen to contribute their ideas. This formed a contrast with Lu Zhishan’s account of the Monday staff meetings in 2005, which were much shorter and ‘less formal’. The whole purpose of the meeting was to solve problems, according to Lu, and no one hesitated to raise them. A similar change was discernible in the managers’ work reports, where problems and suggestions were far less frequently raised after 2008.

This reflects a subtle change in the workplace ethos around 2008 and 2009, from one that was seen to be collaborative and problem-oriented to an increasingly authoritarian mode. The two mechanisms designed to encourage cross-level communication, in fact functioned to reinforce the managerial hierarchy.

On the one hand, this change reflected the shifting relationship between the museum’s corporate nature and its structuring framework. From 2005 to 2009, the expansion of the museum led to an increase of management personnel to include much more diversified operational jobs, for instance in marketing, retailing, hotel and restaurant management. When I started fieldwork, the museum complex had two restaurants, two hotels, a boating service and several shops selling refreshments, souvenirs, vintage newspapers and Fan’s calligraphy works. The addition of the new divisions of business, together with an increasing desire for profit, entailed a much stronger sense of the need for ‘proper’ and ‘scientific’ management, to use the words of the executive vice director. The ‘proper’ managerial
methods included more formal staff meetings, more frequent work reports, a rigid attendance checking system and so on. The commercialisation of the museum thus went hand in hand with its bureaucratisation, which by reinforcing the managerial hierarchy, hindered the efficiency and willingness to communicate amongst its employees.

On the other hand, the change in work ethos may also have suggested a more ideological shift relating to the collective understanding of work. Xia Jifang commented in an interview that it was the loss of a common purpose that brought the change in the attitude towards work. He said 'once the project started to make money, people began to get concerned with their own benefit. If you look at the work reports, there were fewer suggestions, and more self-criticism. Nepotism emerged, and corruption as well.' (date)

Xia’s remark concurs with the general awareness and tolerance of the practices of nepotism and favouritism in the museum that I observed and was informed about during my fieldwork. Not only did Fan give jobs to his relatives and friends. Xia Jifang also recalled that at one point there were around thirty employees connected to the Han cousins, Han Mei and Han Zhiqiang, to the extent that when Han Mei’s father passed away, all her relatives went on leave to attend the funeral, causing a conspicuous absence at work. From the gossip and informal exchanges among the employees, I got the sense that due to their long-term loyalty to Fan Jianchuan, the Han cousins were the ones with ‘real power’ (shiquan) among the vice directors, so some of the employees made a conscious effort to develop a good relationship with them. For instance, Han Zhiqiang’s sister ran a small restaurant outside the museum complex serving cuisine from their hometown in Anhui province. I had breakfast there regularly on weekday mornings as I lived outside the complex. Nearly every time I went there, I found other museum employees buying breakfast there whilst there were several other local eateries around. The museum’s designer, Guan Sheng, told me that Han Zhiqiang asked him to make the menu for his sister’s restaurant.

The nepotistic relations and practices created a hidden hierarchy outside the administrative structure of the museum, which was based on the members’ relational connections or ‘guanxi’ with Fan Jianchuan. In actual operation, this hierarchy could even take priority over the managerial structure. There were cases where employees prioritised tasks or errands from Han Mei or Han Zhiqiang over those from other vice directors. These vicissitudes of
internal politics and guanxi relations, speak strongly about the idea of power, and the forms in which it is exercised and channeled (Yang 2002). The rampant nepotism and the increased autocracy of certain managers brought consequential changes to the ethos of the company. In his 2008 annual report, vice director Zhao Jun expressed his concern about the skepticism and mistrust in the workplace. But the dismay was conveyed in the restrained form of self-criticism, of his own lack of drive and venturousness.

**Curatorial staff and curatorial work**

The politics and power relations noted above may not be unique to the JMC as a corporate institution, but as a museum project, it is worthwhile considering how the change of general work ethos has been reflected in the curatorial work, and whether it has affected the actual making of exhibitions and museums. Under the 2008 divisional structure, the curatorial work was undertaken mainly by the two departments of ‘cultural development’ and ‘decoration and display’. The cultural development department was then a team of three researcher-curators, whose job was to prepare the exhibition outlines and assemble texts, images and exhibits. The decoration and display department consisted of four graphic designers who were responsible for the museums’ interior design and other visual aspects of the exhibitions. A totally separate department dealt with the acquisition and cataloguing of the collections, and their work was more technical than scholarly. Due to a separation between the curatorial team and the ‘acquisition and storage’ personnel, there was little research done on the collections. Curatorial researches focused on the themes of the museums, hence were predominantly historical. Information about the exhibits generally came from the captions that accompanied the items upon their acquisition.

The first museums which opened in 2005, were curated by outsourced professionals, so when Wang Zhu joined the museum in 2006, he was technically the museum’s first exhibition designer. His initial response to the then inexpert designing team, drawing by hand, was that it was ‘completely shocking’.

The first project Wang was assigned to do was the Red Age Porcelain Artwork Museum. Not without difficulty, he managed to liaise with the curatorial and storage departments and
designed the showcases according to the measurement of exhibits, in order to highlight certain valuable artworks. And yet Fan was dissatisfied with the result, since he preferred a much ‘denser display’, which in his terms meant having the space ready first and filling it up with a large quantity of items. ‘That was the first and only time I was granted any freedom (to make decisions)’, Wang told me in an interview in 2017, ‘after that, I did every museum following his direction, which, to be honest, made my job easier.’

It is hence not surprising that Fan invariably referred to himself as the curator of all his museums in interviews and speeches. He indeed personally authored some of the texts and captions, though not all of them, as he occasionally claimed. During my fieldwork, Fan was closely involved in the curatorial work of the museum by making most of the decisions over matters ranging from architecture, layout and design to the selection of images and exhibits. Curatorial issues were discussed in work meetings in Fan’s office. Very different from the formalised staff meetings on Monday evenings, these meetings with curatorial staff were much more practical. I attended many of these work meetings with Fan and his team, in which Fan would have team members present their work and discuss in detail with them all of which fed into the specific instructions he eventually gave them to execute. Such meetings could last from a couple of hours to all morning and afternoon.

Wang regarded Fan’s control over curatorial matters as ‘inevitable’. ‘The point is that Mr Fan and his employees are not at the same level’, Wang said, ‘he hires people not to communicate ideas. He hires them to follow his orders and get things done. He gets his ideas from communicating with his friends, intellectuals, artists, entrepreneurs’. Wang once remarked on a different occasion, ‘there is, and can be, only one true talent (rencai) in the museum, and that is Mr. Fan himself’. In 2010, after working for the museum for four years, Mr. Wang chose to leave to start his own business. The ‘decoration and display’ department was merged into the ‘cultural development department soon afterwards.

While Wang was concerned with his personal career, other curatorial members were frustrated by the workload. In her 2008 annual work report, Ms. Qin, head of the cultural development department, expressed her concern over the time pressures for curatorial work. She wrote, ‘everything (of an exhibition), the content, the design, the installation, had to be done in a hasty manner. Though it is necessary to improve it in the
future, the outcome is far from satisfactory right now.’ It was also my observation during fieldwork that the selection of material was not always careful and there was hardly time to have the texts proofread. Some staff members told me privately that they felt that they were being ‘irresponsible’ to the visitors, and the museum was sacrificing quality for profit. a working style with the socialist ‘faster, better and more economical’ (duo kuai hao sheng) slogan, that I mentioned above.

Nevertheless, the company kept on building new museums at high speed, at least two or three every year. Moreover, in 2010, the museum embarked on its own heritage consultancy business. For the price of ¥2 million, the company would provide a package of overall planning design of a heritage site, visual renderings of museums, detailed exhibition outlines and a loan of collections. Each project would last around two to three months. By 2018, the museum had completed over 20 of such planning projects across a range of provinces and cities, contracting with different local governments and authorities. The planning projects were usually undertaken simultaneously with the preparation for new museums. At times, the curatorial team would work on two or three projects at the same time.

Yet despite the increased amount of work, the museum’s curatorial team shrunk. In 2008, there were altogether seven employees in the ‘cultural development department’ and the ‘decoration and display department’. When I started fieldwork in 2015, there were five people in the ‘cultural development department’ (already merged with ‘decoration and display’), and after Song Wu left in 2017 there were only four. Head of the cultural development department Qin Hua once made similar remarks about the workload in a staff meeting. Fan responded that every member’s duty was equally important, and it was selfish to claim that some worked more than others. Despite the lucrative museum planning business, Fan pleaded poverty and said explicitly that the museum could not afford to hire any more people, and staff therefore had to be keen to learn and do more. Yet it was one thing to encourage self-development among employees, and quite another to have nonprofessional staff do curatorial work.

Towards the end of my fieldwork in early 2017, a few members from the administration and publicity departments, and two vice directors were involved in exhibition preparation and planning projects. Some might well have argued that this reflected a different attitude
towards ‘expertise’, as Fan began to characterise himself as a ‘grassroots’ figure in the museum world, and his expertise as ‘vernacular’, ‘feral’ against ‘professional’ museums in officialdom. But in my analysis it had more to do with the nature of the work. Because while the ‘vernacular’, ‘alternative’ position seemed to suggest was an unbounded creativity, in fact, it was precisely the unprofessional that made it repetitive and mechanical. This could also be evidenced by comparing the first five museums, which are actually highly professional, and the later ones done by the museum team that were casted out with the same formula.

This is not to deny that creativity has played a significant role in the museum’s curatorial practice. It has done, and yet Fan Jianchuan seems to be the only source of it. The way he works with the team has prevented it from being taken further by other people. So the quality of the museum becomes dependent on the extent to which Fan is involved. Projects inside and outside the complex are therefore treated quite differently. Planning projects are usually assigned to staff members, with Fan only being concerned with the overall theme.

This led to a totally different understanding of work than that of the ‘creation phase’. The idealist and experimental ethos of the early years was replaced by concerns about the ‘overbearing’ and ‘repetitive’ management style of the museum, voiced not only by the curatorial team, but felt commonly among management. There was a shift in the employees’ self-identification from ‘museum builders’ to ‘employees’ (dagong de).

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Around 9pm on a Monday evening in February 2017, Xu Dongming and I were walking out of the weekly staff meeting. As we chatted about the meeting earlier on, Xu said that he felt pressured (you yali) and had to put some extra hours in on the planning project he had been working on.

Xu’s job was researching and writing outlines for exhibitions, which he shared with Song Wu, with advice from vice director Yuan Hongwei. When a new museum was conceived, Xu and Song were responsible for gathering relevant materials, from mainly books and online, to put together ‘an exhibition outline’, or ‘dagang’, with texts and images. Drafts would be read
by Fan and revised under his direction. Xu would usually work on a few and sometimes several drafts for a dagang before it was finalised. If the museum was to be constructed, its dagang needed to be submitted to the city-level or provincial-level publicity departments (xuanchuanbu) for ‘review’ (shencha) and revised again according to the ‘suggestions’ made by the authorities.

Despite his plan to work late, he invited me to his dormitory room in the complex after our stroll. It was an ensuite room that measured about ten square metres on the ground floor, next to the Worker Peasant Soldier Hostel, with a window facing the sidewalk. The window was covered by a wall of beer cans piled on the sill. The room was minimally furnished, with a single bed, a wardrobe, a desk and a chair, but with two people in it the place was almost full. Things were kept brief and tidy, as a temporary place, though Xu had spent at least five nights a week there since he joined the museum in 2009. Xu offered me a chair but I insisted on seating myself on a wooden stool, the only other piece of furniture in the room. Xu handed me a cigarette and lit one himself. It occurred to me that I had never seen him smoking at work.

Xu grew up in a Han family in Lhasa and did his undergraduate study in archaeology and museum studies at the Minzu University of China in Beijing. He worked briefly as a public servant in rural Tibet after graduation, but soon quit the job as he found the living and working conditions ‘too harsh’ and felt that ‘there was no hope’. By that time his family had moved to Chengdu, so he returned to the city and took the job at the JMC. When Xu joined the JMC in 2009, the museum was at the point where its financial situation was improving. Yet this was not quite the case for him as a curatorial researcher. He was the only other person with a background in museum studies apart from Qin Hua, but he felt sidelined and oppressed (bei daya) right from the beginning because of that. When I asked whether the oppression was a result of Fan Jianchuan’s undervaluation of expertise, he said that management was also a crucial reason.

In 2011, the company undertook the first planning project. Fan promised to share the profit with the team, but it was not fulfilled. With museum planning becoming the main business of the company, the curatorial staff were expected to take on much of the new work without getting paid more. ‘It feels as if I am doing two jobs at the same time’, Xu said. In a subdued
tone, he went on, ‘the whole thing around eight million items, the goal of building a hundred museums, is all a stunt’. Xu views the ambitious museum mission Fan projects outwards as a facade for the museum’s dealings with the government; some of the museums had been ‘sold’ to the government and the renovation of the Museum of the Communist Army in 2017 was also going to be state funded. Fan had also been selling digital photocopies of the Cultural Revolution archives and documents to the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS).

Xu’s remarks reveal a disjuncture between Fan’s moral ideology and the reality of working life at the museum. The purveyor of true history to some, is an exploitative capitalist to others. The experienced reality is in disjuncture with ideology, and the different ways employees dealt with this disjuncture reveals the shifting dynamics of their sense of ethics.

It is striking that over the course of the museum’s development, the professionalisation of its overall management has been accompanied by a de-professionalisation of its curatorial work force, despite that they are supposedly the core of the museum’s production of knowledge. One may find this unusual attitude towards ‘expertise’, as related to Fan’s self-characterisation as a ‘grassroots’ figure in the museum world. He refers his enterprise as being ‘vernacular’ (minjian) and ‘feral’ (yesheng), different from the ‘conventional’ museums in the officialdom (Fan 2013). While Fan’s notion of the ‘grassroots’ and ‘vernacular’ status seems to suggest an unbounded and undogmatic creativity of the museum, its curatorial practice from the staff’s accounts (and my participant observation), was often repetitive and mechanical. A comparison between the early phase museums and the more recent ones would support this argument as well.

In this chapter, by charting a brief organisational history of Jianchuan Museum, I addressed its managerial structure, staffing strategy, and the curatorial line of work. I demonstrated that the general work ethos underwent a shift from of an idealistic mission of museum building in the ‘creation phase’, to simply wage employment in the recent period. Delineating the vicissitudes of the changing conceptualisation and management of labour in the museum is a way to reiterate but from a different perspective, the long-term transition that emerged from the previous chapters and central for the understanding of the JMC.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

On 24th August 2017, a photograph of Fan Jianchuan taken at the Chongqing Railway Station went viral on social media. Wearing a green JMC T-shirt and black trousers rolled up to his calves, Fan sat barefoot on the floor with his back against the wall, two bottles of Coca-Cola beside him, checking his mobile phone. The photo was first posted by Fan on his Weibo page and soon spread by different social media influencers and WeChat official accounts, together with a photo of him eating a ¥14 bowl of noodles at a street food stall.

With propounding titles such as ‘This barefoot old guy sitting on the floor at train station is actually famous! Who would have thought that he was a billionaire, and moreover ...’, articles praised how someone of his wealth and status would maintain such a simple and down-to-earth lifestyle, having rejected extravagance in favour of spending his wealth on sustaining his museum endeavor.
Quite a few of my friends and acquaintances saw this news and had conversations with me about it. There were two kinds of responses. Some were indeed impressed by Fan while others regarded it as a publicity operation to build up hype for the upcoming Chongqing branch. When asked about my opinion, I could not decide. I know from fieldwork that the photos were the effort of the JMC’s newly recruited publicity advisor, but I also know that Fan is indeed someone who would walk around barefoot in the summer and enjoy cheap street food. He is proud of his down-to-earth lifestyle and not at all self-conscious about gaining positive publicity out of it.

This, again, captures the sense of complexity and ambiguity raised by Fan. To a great extent, understanding the JMC means understanding Fan Jianchuan. I have attempted in the previous chapters to do this through addressing his biographical background, his museums, the people who work with him and for him and my own experience as a participant-observer. And we have witnessed this complexity manifesting itself all along. From the very beginning, the project featured a hybridity of different interests and perspectives, some of which would seem contradictory to one another.

Changes evidently abound over the course of the JMC’s development, from the highly evocative and original curatorial style of early museums to the increased level of conformity and instrumentality in the project’s more recent dealings with the authorities, which are in many ways at odds with the tenets of Fan’s professed moral discourse. At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that the criticality of the early museums has not yet completely disappeared. The 2018 museum of the works of Li Zhensheng, the photographer famed for his documentation of the Cultural Revolution, is the only museum in the complex that is deliberately not registered; Fan continues posting frequently on his Weibo photographs from the Mao Era, while visiting different places for consulting projects and rendezvous with high-profile officials and entrepreneurs. All these suggest enduring remnants of a critique which has been all but totally obscured by the need to conform to official discourse.

Fan is someone who prefers happenings much more than fixation. ‘I do not want to be the best at doing something’, Fan said on many occasions, ‘I want to do something that no one has done’. From his youth he gathered different identities along his career, his endeavours are all about shifting positions and blurring boundaries.
In June 2019 the JMC launched an exhibition titled ‘We are marching on the big road’, commemorating the 70 years of the People’s Republic of China; in September, the same exhibition opened in the Chongqing branch, this time in museum form. The tenth museum in the JMC Chongqing, the Museum of Air-raid Shelters opened in December 2019.

Fan is busy getting things out there. The sheer rigour, scale and intensity of the way he engages history are extraordinary. He wants to build 100 museums. I remember in the early months of my fieldwork a museum employee remarked disparagingly in a conversation with me that it is ‘all just publicity stunt’. But by now Fan has got nearly 50 built already.

**Key arguments rephrased**

In this thesis, I have examined the JMC to delineate and reflect upon an emerging phenomenon of private heritage entrepreneurship, in order to offer insights into local heritage practice and to conceptualise this context as an alternative to both the state-dominated programme in China and the conservation discourses in the West.

I have taken Fan’s personal history as a starting point of my analysis of the JMC. What distinguishes the JMC from official museum work is that it affords a highly personalised discourse revolving around a sense of moral duty to remember through its engagement with histories that have been marginalised in official narratives.

By tracing Fan’s personal history, I have presented his proclaimed moral sentiments connected with his personal memories of his family and the fate of the collective memory of the nation. I have shown how this has been achieved through the construct and popularisation of a charismatic public figure constituted by the different personae Fan has occupied – son, father, soldier, entrepreneur, collector, museum director, and something close to a public intellectual figure – professed through not only the museums, but also Fan’s publications and activities in public and online.

Through interviews and primary resources such as internal briefs and staff work reports, I
have traced the genealogy of the development of the museums from 2003 up to 2015 when I began my fieldwork. Following Foucault’s theorisation of genealogy as a way to explore something ‘we tend to feel is without history’ (1980, 139), I have sought to present a historicised view of the museums, hence a counter-narrative to the thematic and ahistorical way they are introduced by both the museum itself, and most existing scholarly literature in this field. This genealogical account of the JMC includes the context and logic of the museums that were constructed, as well as those that were intended but not materialised, and those constructed but later abandoned, changed and closed. I have shown how in the early years, Fan Jianchuan exploited his relationship with the authorities to test the boundaries about what he was allowed to remember, and how this could be done. This proved to be a contested process with pressure and censorship from both local and central governments, in response to which Fan showed great originality and tactfulness in filling in ‘forgotten’ events and temporalities, largely absent from state museum displays.

The genealogy then followed through to 2015 when I began my research, to acknowledge a graduate shift in the JMC project, which has been increasingly defined by the state’s definition of what to remember and how that can be remembered.

This theme was further explored in Chapter Six on the JMC’s consulting business, an increasingly significant part of its operation, which has been made much less visible to visitors and the public. Drawing on my experience of working with the team on a series of projects as a participant observer, I have shown how Fan capitalises on his political connections and savviness by negotiating and balancing values and interests in order to create what was desired and expected by local governments.

This then brought me to the social life and the tensions of labour within the JMC. With my ethnographic material, I have delineated the changing direction of the museum from the employees’ viewpoints. In the context of the museum’s shifting relationship with the political centre, the change in its logic of remembering have been manifested through the entangled relationships over time between Fan and the museum staff members, involving the latter’s changing views about the project’s moral framework as Fan’s proclaimed principle. I have explored the tensions between the museum’s position as an ethical project of remembering intersecting with a shifting dynamics of power relations in the museum’s management of
labour as well as with the moral complexities in the everyday practices of the individual workers.

**The Minjian as the evocative space**

The recent years have witnessed a number of researches seeking to understand the Chinese state’s logic of exhibiting its past, as well as some previous anthropological work done on individuals and local groups in cases where difficult memories are contested and negotiated (Denton 2014; Lu 2014; Varutti 2014; Jing 1996; Watson 1994). Yet much remains unknown about nonstate heritage enterprises, particularly museums, in both operational and theoretical terms. The JMC provides a case where we can examine closely what is at stake in engaging with difficult memories, emotions, interests, expectations and restrictions.

The JMC is not unusual in the sense that it claims a moral-ethical cause –heritage projects always do – but because it opens, expands and sustains a space for evocative voices from the minjian, the people’s realm, through Fan’s adaptability to changing political climates and his ‘switchability’ among different roles. The complexity of the JMC is rooted in the Janus-face of Fan’s position as at the same time, a collector/curator, wanting to narrate an ethically based understanding of history, and as a consultant with a talent for maximizing his political and financial capital. Fan is able to operate in this intermediate space as he occupies both the official and nonofficial worlds and is able to communicate the two worlds. But these worlds are not evenly balanced and the imbalance between them has become increasingly evident in the shifting political context.

Whilst Fan’s approach has been more and more adaptive to the official ideology this has been paralleled by shifts in the range of themes and topics of his museums. The greater the restrictions on the freedom of curatorial practice, have been accompanied by Fan’s increasing entitlement to engage histories that are closer to representing the core of the political legitimacy of the CCP, such as the history of the economic reform and later on, the 70 years of the People’s Republic.

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55 I am indebted to Dr. Zhu Yujie for this term.
Here Fan presents a new museum logic to articulate heritage value, one characterised simultaneously by, first, a high-level of involution of state interest, ideological and economically; and second, a potency of being able to articulate meanings and messages or accommodate narratives and voices about the past, that would otherwise not be possible in an official rendering. Running parallel to the dominant authorised official discourse, they ‘must maintain a semblance of conformity in public’ (Humphrey 1994).

In this sense, what we are witnessing in the JMC is a paradigm shift in the way people understand what museums are supposed to do and what they can do – a new way of telling history and a new understanding of historical justice taking form.

By critically examining the entanglements between moral pursuit, political power and business interest in the JMC, my thesis unpacks how the opening of the minjian as a social space presents both opportunities and concerns. The concept of minjian is a valuable comparable with the Euro-American notions of the civil society, or public sphere, quite simply because it does not share the same degree of autonomy from the state that the two other concepts are based upon. This is not a claim of Chinese exceptionalism, rather of political structure. As demonstrated in my empirical chapters, state power permeates so deeply in minjian affairs to the extent that it defines the logic of how they are carried out. The minjian is a space of mediation, where interests assemble, mingle, and justice gets envisioned as well as compromised. To maintain a space as such requires support and understanding from both the two sides that get connected here, which means from the state’s perspective, government permission and endorsement, and from the public, in Xia Jifang’s words, moral resources or, daoyi ziyuan. In the case of the JMC, so far the maintenance has been dependent on Fan Jianchuan’s the moral sentiments (qinghuai) as well as political and business skills. Its sustainability remains to be seen, however, after his posthumous donation of the whole enterprise to the government as he states in his will.

**Directions for future research**

In many ways the JMC is a still unfolding process, full of unpredictability as it has been. One of potential directions is to situate the JMC in the broader scene of Red Heritage work in
China at present (Williams 2017). Fan’s relationships with the network of Red Collectors is a worthwhile subject for further exploration, which I introduced very briefly in Chapter Three, but did not manage to go beyond that given the scope of my thesis. This broader trend of red heritage, in the form of collecting, research, tourism, both within the officialdom and without, is a far-reaching process speaking strongly about the continuing rise of nationalism, in different forms, and the big looming question about being Chinese.

Relatedly, another context where a further consideration of the JMC could be informed is China’s growing ‘cultural creative economy’, which now operates with an increasing dependence on branding, in the way of creating the right kind of imageries on online social media platforms. As I noted in the chapters, but without expounding on, Fan Jianchuan acquired a media persona very early on, and has used it for promoting himself and the JMC (the two sometimes hard to distinguish) over the years. It needs to be investigated further how Fan’s public persona and values have evolved over the years, particularly in relation to the ideological and regulatory shifts in the Party’s governance of culture under Xi Jinping’s leadership. As my ethnography shows, from the addition of Xi’s father’s statue to the Chinese Heroes Square to the wall-sized display Xi’s books in the Economic Reform Museum, the impact of Xi’s rule on Fan Jianchuan’s enterprise is prominently evident in the museum complex. In the context of Xi’s enthused ‘re-legitimisation of the past’ and harsher attacks on ‘historical nihilism’, how Fan engages Xi Jinping’s new campaign for Chinese history and cultural heritage deserves to be explored further in a fuller and more focused fashion (Feuchtwang, Rowlands and Zhang 2019, 55).

More broadly, the materials and theoretical themes this research presents have huge potential for comparative studies. The reason this potential is not explored in this thesis is that I believe having a deep and thorough understanding of the specificities of a case is an imperative for comparing it with others. What makes comparison ‘risky’, as Stephan Feuchtwang remarks, is that it would otherwise not do justice to the rich and unique details of each case (2011, 3). Therefore, I regard the contribution of my current work as laying a solid foundation for a comparative project in the future and include here a few possible directions that it may take.

Using the Chinese concept of minjian, I have explored the intermediate positioning of the
JMC between officialdom and the so-called private sector. The way the JMC is funded and managed, with particularly its entanglement with state power, can be seen as comparable with cases in and outside China that have been challenging and expanding received notions of private museum. Mark Schuster, for instance, discusses a similar trend of hybridisation in American museums – ‘the creation of a variety of mixed forms of governance incorporating both public and private governing authorities’ (1998). This theme could be further explored by situating the JMC in the recent boom of nonstate museums in China, and examining the ramifications of their organizational and regulatory changes (Song 2008; De Nigris 2018, Wu 2014, An 2015, Kiowski 2017). Outside China, Georgina Walker’s seminal work The Private Collector’s Museum offers a wide range of update cases and insights regarding collecting, funding and public engagement (2019).

As a collector and museum-maker, Fan Jianchuan’s focus on collecting and exhibiting the Maoist everyday resonates strongly with the creation of museums of socialist life in East European countries as well as former Communist countries in Asia. A great example is Jonathan Bach’s research on German private museums that collect and present the everyday life in former East Germany (2015, see also Bach 2005, Arnold-de Simine 2005). Striking similarities can be found between these museums and the JMC in terms of their exhibitionary rationale and methodology: large quantity, intense display of everyday use objects, recreating domestic spaces with a combination of historic images and objects and so on. As Bach describes:

‘visitors encounter collections of clothes, cleaning supplies, bottle, bandages, blenders, radios and televisions, powdered pudding packets, and toasters, along with more overtly political remainders such as flags, badges, and old IDs from the mass organisations such as the Free German Youth. The famous East German plastic eggcup is ubiquitous, and nearly all museums contain a mock Konsum grocery store, often packed fuller than it ever was in reality’ (2015, 139)

The parallel runs deeper as Bach argues that these displays have a ‘double function’ as both ‘a form of nostalgia and an implicit comment on contemporary conditions’ (2015, 139). By allowing everyday objects to become ‘a subject of renewed interest as a revived form of anti-politics’, these displays ‘simultaneously engaged in, and disavowed, contemporary politics’
Compared to publicly funded history museums, Bach remarks that these private museums ‘assert authenticity not through provenance or expert interpretation, but through a re-embedding of the objects in an informal and apolitical context’, another significant parallel with Fan’s ‘guerilla exhibits’ strategy, regarding the tactics of museums and the power of provocative gestures over explicit resistance (2015, 140).

Following the same point, it would be beneficial for the JMC case to be read critically alongside researches on the transmission of difficult memories in other societies, and the ways of dealing with past violence and trauma including but not restricted to museum practice. For instance, Fan Jianchuan’s extensive and innovative use of the images of war prisoners and Wenchuan Earthquake victims in his museums is comparable with Michele Caswell’s account of how a collection of mug shots of prisoners taken by the Khmer Rouge continues to speak powerfully to people in Cambodia and the world today as ‘records’ – ‘persistent representations of activities that travel through space and time’ (2014, 6-7). By contrast, Fan’s restraint of public display and other forms of engagement with his collection of personal records such as diaries, photographs and suicide notes during the Cultural Revolution may be considered with Marianne Hirsch’s concept of ‘postmemory’ developed from her analysis images of the Holocaust and the cross-generational ‘after-effects’ of traumatic memory that they embody (2001, see also Hirsch 2008, 2012). On the politics and ethics of remembering, the way in which Fan uses his museums as a way to retrospectively honour and pay tribute to past events and individuals resonates strongly with Viet Nguyen’s work on the various cultural reworkings of the Vietnam-US war memories (2013; 2016). The transformative effects of the JMC’s telling of China’s revolutionary history should be read in parallel with Graeme Were’s work on the shifting museum narratives of national history in late-socialist Vietnam (2018). Particularly, the recurrent theme of the JMC museums having a shrine-like quality can be taken up further through comparison with works on significant memorial museums in other cultures, for instance memorials of the Holocaust and the 9/11, many of which are comparative themselves (Alba 2015; Sturken 2015; Young 2016a; Young 2016b; White 1997; Giebel 2001).
512 Kangzhen jiuzai jinianguan 512 抗震救灾纪念馆
aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi 爱国主义教育基地
ai bing bi sheng 哀兵必胜
Aihui 瑷晖
Balujun 八路军
baixing jiyi 百姓记忆
Bo-Wang yidu 薄王遗毒
Buqu kangfu guan 不屈抗俘馆
bowu, xiuxian 博物, 休闲
cehua 策划
chaiqian 拆迁
changhong dahei 唱红打黑
Changjiang Piaoliu Guan 长江漂流馆
Chengdu Wenhua Lüyou Gongsì 成都文化旅游公司
chongtu 冲突
chuan pixie de 穿皮鞋的
chuanyi daimao 穿衣戴帽
chunyi 春椅
Dayi Liushi Zhuangyuan Bowuguan 大邑刘氏庄园博物馆
Dizhu Zhuangyuan Chenlieguan 地主庄园陈列馆
doufuzha gongcheng 豆腐渣工程
ducao 毒草
E’gongyan daqiao 鹅公岩大桥
feiguoyou shoucang danwei 非国有收藏单位
Fen Fen 粉焚
Feng Zhe 冯喆
Fujian Huiguan 福建会馆
gainian de 概念的
ganbu zhi jia 干部之家
geming weiyuanhui 革命委员会
gong 公
Gongchanzhuyi Zixiu Daxue 共产主义自修大学
gongfen 工分
gonggong kongjian 公共空间
gongmin shehuigongshe 公民社会
Gongnongbing Kezhan 工农兵客栈
gongyou 公有
gongzuo jianbao 工作简报
guzhen gaizao gongcheng 古镇改造工程
guan 官
Guangdong Huiguan 广东会馆
guojia bowuguan 国家博物馆
guojia qinghuai 国家情怀
guojia rentong 国家认同
guojia yiji wenwu 国家一级文物
guoyou shoucang danwei 国有收藏单位
Heihe 黑河
Heibang zinü 黑帮子女
hezuoshe 合作社
Hongse Niandai Baozhi Ting 红色年代报纸厅
Hongse Niandai Ciqi Guan 红色年代瓷器馆
Hongse niandai jingjian guan 红色年代镜鉴馆
Hongse Niandai Shenghuo Yongpin Guan 红色年代生活用品馆
Hongse Niandai Zhang Zhong Yin Guan 红色年代章钟印馆
Hongweibing 红卫兵
huiguo rou 回锅肉
jiyi 记忆
Jianchuan Dashiji 建川大事记
Jianchuan Bowuguan Juluo 建川博物馆聚落
Jiefang Zhanzheng 解放战争
jieji jiaoyu zhanlanguan 阶级教育展览馆
Jinqiao Si 金桥寺
jingzhi 敬制
jingdai 敬戴
juluo 聚落
kangfu 抗俘
Lao Gongguan Jiaju Guan 老公馆家具馆
Laogongguan Gongsii 老公馆公司
lao jie 老街
lianxie 莲鞋
lianghui 两会
Lingxiu Guangchang 领袖广场
lishi de pangzhen 历史的旁证
lishi jiazhi 历史价值
lishi yiyi 历史意义
lishi zeren 历史责任
Lugouqiao shibian 卢沟桥事变
lushui qingshan jiushi jinshan yinshan 绿水青山就是金山银山
Mazu 妈祖
mei qing mu xiu 眉清目秀
minban fei qiye 民办非企业单位
minban bowuguan 民办博物馆
mingan ci 敏感词
minjian 民间
minjian bowuguan 民间博物馆
minjian cangjia 民间藏家
mogui gongdian 魔鬼宫殿
nanxia ganbu 南下干部
Nanxia jiefang jinianbei 南下解放纪念碑
Nanhua Palace 南华宫
Nanhua Zhenren 南华真人
niandu dashi 年度大事
ning zuo wu you 宁左勿右
ningwei yusui, buwei waquan) 宁为玉碎不为瓦全
Nu'er Jing 女儿经
Paoda silingbu — wode diyi zhang dazibao 炮打司令部 我的第一张大字报
Piaozheng Shenghuo Guan 票证生活馆
pidou 批斗
qiao guan 桥馆
qiao zhong 敲钟
qing 请
qingchu wuhui 青春无悔
qingchun wufa hui 青春无法悔
qinggan 情感
qinghuai 情怀
Renmin Dahuitang) 人民大会堂
Renmin Gongshe Dashitang 人民公社大食堂
Renmin Yingxiong Jinianbei 人民英雄纪念碑
renwu 人物
renzhe anren 仁者安仁
ru lv bo bing 如履薄冰
san zhuan yi xiang 三转一响
san jin san chu 三进三出
san cun jin lian 三寸金莲
shanghen wenxue 伤痕文学
shangshan xiaxiang 上山下乡
shehui baoxian, yiliao baoxian 社会保险 医疗保险
shengchandui 生产队
sheng dang zuo renjie, si yi wei guixiong 生当作人杰 死亦为鬼雄
shibing zhi jia 士兵之家
shiwu 实物
shouchaoben 手抄本
shuzhi baogao 述职报告
si 私
Sichuan Shanxi shanghui 四川山西商会
siren bowuguan 私人博物馆
siren cangjia 私人藏家
Ta zai zhe ge shijie shang kaixin de shenghuo guo qinian 她在这个世界上开心的生活过七年
Tianshang Palace 天上宫
tiexie jiuguo, kangzhan daodi 铁血救国，抗战到底
tu long shu 屠龙术
Wanzhong yixin, zhongzhi chengcheng 万众一心，众志成城
weile heping shoucang zhanzheng, weile weilai shoucang jiaoxun, weile anning shoucang zainan, weile chuancheng shoucang minsu 为了和平，收藏战争；为了未来，收藏教训；为了安宁，收藏灾难；为了传承，收藏民俗
wei minzu liuxia jiyi 为民族留下记忆
wenwu 文物
xingershang de 形而上的
xinjie 心结
Xin Gongguan Gongsi 新公馆公司
Xinsijun新四军
Yangban Xi 样板戏
yishi weijian 以史为鉴
yi shi wei jian shi weile genghao de qianjin 以史为鉴是为了更好地前进
yuan’an 冤案
Zhengmian zhanchan guan 正面战场馆
zhengzhi zaoshu 政治早熟
Zhiqing Shenghuo Guan 知青生活馆
Zhiqing 知青
Zhishi Qingnian 知识青年
zhixia shi 直辖市
Zhong’ 忠
zhongdian wenwu baohu danwei 重点文物保护单位
zhonghang gongye hangkong sanxian bowuguan 中航工业航空三线博物馆
Zhonghua minzu tuanjie 中华民族团结
Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi 中共中央党史研究室
Zhongguo Kexueyuan 中国科学院
Zhongguo Bowuguan Xiaozhen 中华人民共和国博物馆
Zhong liu di zhu guan 中流砥柱馆
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9%E9%A6%86%E5%BC%80%E6%B9%95%E8%B4%BA%E5%8D%AB%E6%96%B
9%E6%99%84%E7%8A%8A%E2%80%9C%E6%96%87%E9%9D%A9
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