



**Cultural heritage as a socio-cultural construct: a contextualised trajectory in China**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Heritage Studies</i>
Manuscript ID:	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	cultural heritage, socio-cultural construct, conceptualisation, China, wenwu

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

## Cultural heritage as a socio-cultural construct: a contextualised trajectory in China

The intangible turn in cultural heritage studies over the last three decades has featured a growing recognition of socio-cultural constructivism. In responding to the constructivist approach, the paper extends the discussion of cultural heritage in the context of China from joint comparative and evolutionary perspectives. On the one hand, by situating the reception of the cultural heritage concept from a socio-cultural construct dimension, the paper reveals the unique dialogism between the two divergent epistemological and methodological paradigms of *wenwu* (cultural relics) and *wenhua yichan* (cultural heritage) that underline the appropriation and practice of cultural heritage in China, and implicates the issue over authenticity in the debate of heritage tourism, heritage conservation and urban development. On the other hand, the Chinese experience promotes the dual mission of constructivism as both a socio-cultural and a discursive enterprise. A cross-cultural dimension is added as to see if the East-West difference in conceptualisation is mutually influenced, in a hope to enrich cultural heritage studies in its content as well as its global understanding.

**Keywords:** cultural heritage; socio-cultural construct; conceptualisation; China; *wenwu*

### Introduction

Over the past decades, cultural heritage studies have been highlighting a strong constructivist tendency in both its epistemological as well as methodological paradigms, and have greatly affected the field on the level of research, practice, and policy-making, both locally and internationally.

As a socio-cultural construct, cultural heritage, though a universal phenomenon, depends on contextualised cultural interpretations. East and West, the two cultural hemispheres, have developed relatively independently from each other in history, generating remarkable cultural differences. China, as one of the four ancient civilisations with unique cultural continuity (Yan and Zhuang 2006), derives its own way of understanding and dealing with the past heritage throughout history. The expanding knowledge not only provides

1  
2  
3 insights into the current heritage practices in China, especially in their relation with heritage  
4 tourism and urban development, but also helps to enrich cultural heritage conceptualisation in  
5 general.  
6  
7  
8

9  
10 Concerning cultural heritage scholarship, the past decades have witnessed growing  
11 interaction and cooperation between the two cultural hemispheres. The bilateral knowledge  
12 transfer has resulted in the dynamism and evolution of cultural heritage conceptualisation  
13 both worldwide and in China, a process believed to continue in the future. This cross-cultural  
14 communication is believed to deepen the understanding of social constructivism in the  
15 cultural heritage field.  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22

23 This paper aims at contributing to the discussion on cultural heritage conceptualisation  
24 from a non-western perspective, focusing on the research question ‘how is the cultural  
25 heritage concept socio-culturally constructed?’, by taking into account both cross-cultural and  
26 contextual dimensions which implies space, society, values and politics. The paper begins  
27 with a review on the notion of cultural heritage as a socio-cultural construct, presenting the  
28 trajectory of scholarship on the cultural aspect of construction. It proceeds to historicise the  
29 East-West cross-cultural negotiation process from the pre-2000 and the post-2000 phases, and  
30 as a result the conceptual evolution of cultural heritage in general. The discussion then  
31 addresses the unique evolution and negotiation between the two paradigms of *wenwu* (cultural  
32 relics) to *wenhua yichan* (cultural heritage) in China, which further illustrates the interactive  
33 dynamics in an opposite (West to East) direction. It’s followed by a comparison between the  
34 two alternative concepts and their practical implications. This cross-cultural dimension  
35 reveals the dynamism of and negotiation on cultural heritage in general as well as in China  
36 through East-West cross-cultural interaction necessitated by globalisation. Parallel to this  
37 horizontal comparative approach, a vertical contextual and longitudinal dimension is added to  
38 pinpoint several seminal turning points as well as recent trends in heritage perception and  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 practice in China that still have their influences today, in a hope to untangle the complex  
4  
5 relation between heritage and society and to pinpoint the current status quo of such a relation.  
6  
7 The pertinence of the joint comparative and evolutionary perspectives in the Chinese context  
8  
9 may relativise the debate over authenticity in cultural heritage, relevant to the research of  
10  
11 tourism and urban development in contemporary China.  
12

### 13 14 15 **Heritage as a socio-cultural construct** 16

17  
18 Despite the heterogeneous normative approaches to heritage, the consensus has been reached  
19  
20 upon the social constructivism (Brett 1996, Lowenthal 1998, Avrami *et al.* 2000, Harvey  
21  
22 2001, Graham 2002): not only is heritage concerned with the past, but about how the past is  
23  
24 adapted by the present. An ‘evolution in concept-making’ and the shifted attention from  
25  
26 ‘what’ to ‘how and why’ (Pearce 1998, 1) to ensure heritage studies in its own right is  
27  
28 unanimously endorsed, and has been widely theorised from cultural, economic, and political  
29  
30 perspectives (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, Harvey 2001, Throsby 2001, Bendix *et al.*  
31  
32 2012).  
33  
34

35  
36 The socio-cultural construct perspective enforces concepts such as cultural diversity  
37  
38 and cultural value on heritage interpretation and practice: ‘It is us - in society, within human  
39  
40 culture - who make things mean, who signify. Meanings, consequently, will always change,  
41  
42 from one culture or period to another.’ (Hall 1997, 61) A concept may render differently in  
43  
44 different cultures, bringing about the danger of misunderstanding among them. The cultural  
45  
46 comparative approach is thus pertinent in deepening the understanding of social  
47  
48 constructivism, an epistemological endeavour to understand meaning production in socio-  
49  
50 cultural settings. The early comparative perspective (Wei and Aass 1989) in heritage  
51  
52 conservation usefully argues for a material/spiritual dichotomy between the West and the  
53  
54 East, with the West valuing the material aspect of cultural heritage, and the East, the ‘genius  
55  
56 loci’. This dualism of material/spiritual has been consistently pursued in the later researches  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 of Lowenthal (1998) and more recently by Taylor (2004), Munjeri (2004), Smith (2006),  
4  
5 Carman and Sørensen (2009), and Fairclough *et al.* (2010), with the later vehemently  
6  
7 questioning the naturalisation of traditional western mania for physical conservation by  
8  
9 UNESCO and ICOMOS. The emerging challenges and revisionism to the western voice  
10  
11 highlights a ‘compelling direction of progress in our field’ (Tunbridge *et al.* 2013, 369), while  
12  
13 the detailed research of cultural heritage in non-western contexts just begins. Therefore, an  
14  
15 attempt is made in the following two sections to investigate if and how western and eastern  
16  
17 constructs and interpretations tend to diverge or encounter.  
18  
19

### 20 21 22 **Development of cultural heritage scholarship and cross-cultural convergence** 23

24  
25 A brief historical review may help to profile the two-phase development in cultural heritage  
26  
27 scholarship: the pre-2000 phase and the post-2000 phase. The pre-2000 phase features a  
28  
29 strong western voice exemplified through and disseminated by instruments like UNESCO and  
30  
31 its advisory body ICOMOS, the ‘authorized heritage discourse’ in Smith’s (2006) term. This  
32  
33 phase commences from the Athens Charter (1931), the first international document on  
34  
35 historical monument drafted by European countries. It was not until 1964 that three non-  
36  
37 European countries, Tunisia, Mexico, and Peru were convened to the Venice Charter, the  
38  
39 most influential reference on heritage conservation till today, which, together with other  
40  
41 charters and regulations that followed, are applied and greatly promoted by UNESCO and  
42  
43 ICOMOS since then. The first cultural turn in heritage studies was heralded by a local  
44  
45 initiative, the Burra Charter (1979) by Australia ICOMOS. It is echoed by the UNESCO Nara  
46  
47 Document on Authenticity (1994), the first international move to promote cultural diversity  
48  
49 and relativity of the authenticity concept in heritage conservation. In line with the actions by  
50  
51 UNESCO and ICOMOS at the international level, national initiatives had been taken to  
52  
53 promote the sensitisation and preservation of cultural heritage. As early as 1950s Japan has  
54  
55 distinguished cultural heritage between tangible and intangible, and similar engagements are  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 seen in the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, etc. The Nara Document on  
4  
5 Authenticity can be seen as a result of concerted non-western national efforts (Kurin 2004,  
6  
7 Munjeri 2004, Bortolotto 2007). In this pre-2000 phase of cultural heritage studies, however,  
8  
9 except few researchers (Bowdler 1988, Layton 1989, Ryckmans 1989, Wei and Aass 1989,  
10  
11 Lowenthal 1998), issues on the dominance of the western voice and the cultural relativity had  
12  
13 not been duly raised and taken into consideration.  
14  
15

16  
17 The post-2000 phase has seen increasingly manifest critical cultural analysis in  
18  
19 heritage studies worldwide. Culture-sensitive heritage consciousness becomes prominent in  
20  
21 such conventions as China Principles (2002) and Hoi An Protocols (2005)<sup>1</sup> and in literature  
22  
23 (Avrami *et al.* 2000, Graham *et al.* 2000, Taylor 2004, Smith 2006, Fairclough *et al.* 2010).  
24  
25 On the one hand, the identification of the authorised historical, institutional and political  
26  
27 discourses of the West is regarded highly useful for the discovery and revaluation of ‘certain  
28  
29 understandings about the nature and meaning of heritage (that) have been excluded in heritage  
30  
31 practices’ (Smith 2006, 42). On the other hand, the intangible shift commenced by the Nara  
32  
33 Document on Authenticity and finalised by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the  
34  
35 Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereinafter the 2003 UNESCO Convention)  
36  
37 constitutes an evolution in western thinking that goes beyond the obsession for tangible  
38  
39 heritage and goes into the eastern approach focusing on a construct of the mind (see the later  
40  
41 section).  
42  
43  
44

45  
46 UNESCO’s conceptual evolution towards intangible cultural heritage, heralded by  
47  
48 Asia-Pacific countries like Japan and Bolivia, has been well documented (Aikawa 2004,  
49  
50 Kurin 2004, Bortolotto 2007, Schmitt 2008, Vecco 2010). Since the formal acknowledgement  
51  
52 of intangible cultural heritage, efforts have been made, especially in Asia (Winter 2014), in  
53  
54 search of non-western approaches to cultural heritage conservation both in the academia and  
55  
56 through the instruments like UNESCO and ICOMOS. What is under-exposed in this  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 intangible turn is the understanding of the dynamisms of cultural heritage as a construct.  
4  
5 Cultural heritage is a socio-cultural *process* in constant negotiation with different norms and  
6  
7 realities across time and space. 'It [The cultural heritage concept] is the result of a cultural  
8  
9 process that must be thought through and carried out not just on a European but world basis'  
10  
11 (Vecco 2010, 324). Undoubtedly, interaction features two-way. The western notion of cultural  
12  
13 heritage has taken a more intangible turn influenced by the East. In the same way, the  
14  
15 following session shows how China is influenced by the world at large towards embracing the  
16  
17 western notion of cultural heritage and the continuity and inheritance idea inherent within.  
18  
19

### 20 21 22 **From *wenwu* to *wenhua yichan*: the Chinese trajectory**

23  
24 In heritage academia, terminologies of other languages are seldom discussed in the literature  
25  
26 (Tunbridge *et al.* 2013), nor are their impacts on heritage practice and conservation. 'Many  
27  
28 cultural objects and ideas have been diffused in connection with their terminology, so that a  
29  
30 study of the distribution of culturally significant terms often throws unexpected light on the  
31  
32 history of inventions and ideas' (Sapir 1929, 210). The conceptual development of cultural  
33  
34 heritage from *wenwu*, to *wenwu guji*, and to *wenhua yichan* illuminates both the internal and  
35  
36 the cross-cultural dialogic dynamics of cultural heritage as a construct, and the spread of new  
37  
38 interpretation as well as misunderstanding.  
39  
40  
41

42  
43 The shift from *wenwu* to *wenwu guji* highlights the first conceptual shift in scope from  
44  
45 individual objects to buildings and sites. It formulates the first conceptual change out of a  
46  
47 deeper understanding through the domestic Chinese heritage practice. The word of *wenwu*,  
48  
49 literally cultural (*wen*) objects (*wu*), was first recorded in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Since  
50  
51 around mid-1930s, the concept has already been extended from movable objects only to  
52  
53 include immovable relics (Xie 1993). To echo this wider denotative scope, *guji*, literally  
54  
55 ancient (*gu*) relics (*ji*), was affixed to *wenwu*. However, in practice *wenwu guji* is often  
56  
57 abbreviated as *wenwu* (as a broadened concept), referring to valuable physical remains from  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 the past (Xie 1993). The English version of the Heritage Conservation Law translates *wenwu*  
4 as cultural relics, yet in the bilingual China Principles, ‘heritage sites’ or ‘sites’ is employed  
5 instead, as the former is ‘deemed outmoded’ (China ICOMOS 2002).<sup>2</sup> In the same document,  
6  
7  
8  
9 it is made clear that *wenwu* is used for tangible heritage, whether movable or immovable.

10  
11 The second conceptual shift from *wenwu guji* to *wenhua yichan* was realized officially  
12 in the Notice of the State Council on Strengthening the Protection of Cultural Heritage in  
13 2005 (hereinafter the 2005 Notice). In this state conservation document, *wenhua yichan* is  
14 presented as the key word. *Wenhua yichan*, literally ‘cultural heritage’, is not new, being  
15 used in many documents to strengthen the importance of *wenwu* since 1950s (Zhong 2009).  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

The 2005 Notice is important for the recognition and inclusion of intangible heritage on the one hand, and the enhancement of its public character on the other. The Cultural Heritage Day initiative to promote public awareness and involvement in heritage conservation is a clear outcome. Since then, *wenhua yichan* has enjoyed popularity, used alternatively with *wenwu*.

The shift from *wenwu* to *wenhua yichan* reflects a cross-cultural negotiation on the concept of cultural heritage. Undoubtedly, the intangible heritage turn in both the world and China helps to promote the concept of *wenhua yichan* as the *wenwu* concept fails to embrace the increasingly important intangible scope. A general consensus exists in regarding *wenwu* as an important part of *wenhua yichan*, with a tendency regarding *wenwu* as tangible heritage. However, this simple equation is not helpful in understanding and evaluating heritage and conservation practices in China for the subtle but fundamental connotative differences between them. Therefore, in the following section, a rigorous distinction between *wenwu* and *wenhua yichan* (cultural heritage) is to be deciphered in terms of temporal scope and social attribute, so as to allow for a better understanding of the negotiation between the two concepts in China.



### Comparison between *wenwu* and cultural heritage (*wenhua yichan*)

In terms of temporal scope, *wenwu* focuses on things left from the past, while cultural heritage focuses on past things in relation to the future. *Wenwu* is defined in the Encyclopaedia of China as objects and sites of significant historic, aesthetic and scientific value in the history of human development (Xie 1993). In the Heritage Conservation Law, the aim is explicitly stated as ‘strengthening the protection of cultural relics, *inheriting* (italics ours) the splendid historical and cultural legacy of the Chinese nation’ (SCNPC 2002). The link to the future is not clearly mentioned. In contrast, making rational use of heritage as part of the national conservation principle is clearly stated in the Heritage Conservation Law, therefore entailing more readiness for contemporary engagement. The origin of heritage can be traced back to Ancient Greece, representing a family’s land that could neither be traded or sold, but *transmitted* from one generation to the next (Zouain 2006). The concept of cultural heritage in the West experiences changes, but its future orientation is nevertheless consistently obvious and decisive. In China, the difference between *wenwu* and cultural heritage in this aspect is translated into their different focus on either conservation or use – an inherent dissonance of the concept.

In terms of social attribute, *wenwu* stresses the non-public and material quality, while heritage implies a public and cultural character. Starting from the first imperial collection in the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC) and the first wave of private collection in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) to New China (1949) national conservation practice, *wenwu* is practiced away from the public. Throughout the Chinese history till very recent, heritage conservation bears two parallel lines. One is state-led conservation initiative for historic (and to a lesser extent, artistic and scientific) purpose. The public awareness in heritage conservation and sense of ownership in heritage hardly exists. The other is the private collection for artistic interest and later economic interest along the commercial line. *Wenwu*

1  
2  
3 collectors become more diversified from purely art-lovers to money-makers after the founding  
4 of New China. The *wenwu* market and auction market have grown more and more active and  
5 publicised since 1990s when the former was legalised and the latter was open. Amazingly,  
6 cultural awareness and responsibility have hardly existed in the public domain for this  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12 ‘cultural object’ - *wenwu*.

13  
14 It is argued that the promotion of *wenhua yichan* with its cultural value is not only  
15 caused by the denotative failure of *wenwu* discussed previously, but also its connotative limits  
16 to meet the current socio-cultural requirements, which will be elaborated later. As Shan  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
It is argued that the promotion of *wenhua yichan* with its cultural value is not only  
caused by the denotative failure of *wenwu* discussed previously, but also its connotative limits  
to meet the current socio-cultural requirements, which will be elaborated later. As Shan  
(2008, 65) rightly notices, from *wenwu* to *wenhua yichan*, public involvement and continuity  
have been emphasised. Shan (2008) further recognises that cultural inheritance and  
development is of significance for China in the globalising world where cultural diversity is  
crucial to the development of the state and the world as a whole.

### **Heritage conservation in China: historical evolutions and recent trends**

33  
34 This part builds up a narrative from the vertical/historical dimension, elaborating the  
35 evolution of heritage conservation in its interaction with society. It first focuses on the pre-  
36 contemporary history (before 1840), revealing how the awareness and outlook on history  
37 shape understandings of spiritual/material value, past/present, and old/new, and conservation  
38 practice in the Chinese cultural tradition. The contemporary history witnessed drastic socio-  
39 cultural ups and downs and the same with cultural heritage and its conservation. By  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
This part builds up a narrative from the vertical/historical dimension, elaborating the  
evolution of heritage conservation in its interaction with society. It first focuses on the pre-  
contemporary history (before 1840), revealing how the awareness and outlook on history  
shape understandings of spiritual/material value, past/present, and old/new, and conservation  
practice in the Chinese cultural tradition. The contemporary history witnessed drastic socio-  
cultural ups and downs and the same with cultural heritage and its conservation. By  
pinpointing important shifts, it shows how the role and evolution of conservation are  
negotiated in contemporary China.

#### ***Between spiritual value and material value***

55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
Heritage destruction and reconstruction are common in different countries in varied degrees.  
In China when old regimes are overthrown, historical buildings and imperial palaces,

1  
2  
3 considered as the outdated and the historic draft of these regimes, more often than not  
4  
5 encounter the same fate. However, this does not mean no conservation efforts have been  
6  
7 made. The massive iconoclasm goes hand in hand with a historiographical tradition in  
8  
9 conservation. The earliest recorded are the royal collections of books and paintings since the  
10  
11 Han Dynasty (202-8BC) (Xie 1993). The important progress started from the Northern Song  
12  
13 (960-1127) when epigraphy was developed.<sup>3</sup> Taking the long history of China into  
14  
15 consideration, this is of course not very early. Since Northern Song, the collections have been  
16  
17 extended to bronzes and other categories, and the interest of private collections developed as  
18  
19 well. However, the value of bronzes is directly linked with whether they have epigraphs  
20  
21 (Ryckmans 1989). This historiographical tradition is much influenced by the historical  
22  
23 awareness displayed in the 'respect to heaven and ancestors' ideology. The past is from the  
24  
25 very start valued out of its historicity, different from the aesthetic value bred in early western  
26  
27 conservation (Xie 1993). Books, paintings, calligraphy, historical records have always been  
28  
29 the first items for conservation, which is 'a different attitude toward the way of making the  
30  
31 monumental achievement' (Mote 1973, 49-50) in the West. It explains why China  
32  
33 distinguishes itself with the large collection of historical documentations, in contrast with  
34  
35 tangible historical remains. What sustains the Chinese culture is not the material object, but  
36  
37 the immaterial symbol exemplified (Wei and Aass 1989, Ryckmans 1989, Taylor and  
38  
39 Altenburg 2006, Conan 2009). This can be seen through the fact that the constant destruction  
40  
41 and reconstruction of historical buildings throughout history neither receives disputes nor  
42  
43 weakens the significance of those buildings.  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48

49  
50 Two points deserve special attention in this spiritual/material discussion. For one  
51  
52 thing, the traditional practice and the contemporary economic-driven reconstruction have to  
53  
54 be discriminated. Second, the heritage value indicates both material as well as spiritual  
55  
56 concerns, but in varied degrees and importance across time and space. Just as the growing  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 acknowledgement of the intangible importance of cultural heritage in the West, architectural  
4 concern has been raised high in China recent years, especially in face of mass destruction in  
5 the process of urban development.  
6  
7  
8

9  
10  
11 ***Between past and present; between old and new***  
12

13  
14 The historical thinking embedded in the traditional Chinese culture shapes the Chinese  
15 perception of the past and the present. The past can be looked at from the present, and the  
16 present refers to the past as a reference. Mao Zedong in 1964 formally proposed the guideline  
17 of ‘making the past serve the present and the foreign things serve China’, which had its  
18 embryonic form already in 1942 (Deng and Feng 2013). Though originally a guideline on  
19 dealing with history and culture, this thought reflects the general view on the past and the  
20 present. Both in the Heritage Conservation Law and China Principles, rational use of heritage,  
21 though not detailed, is clearly stated as part of the guideline in heritage conservation.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

31 Under this historical development outlook, the same logic applies to the relation  
32 between the old and the new, leading to the natural embrace with the new without breaking up  
33 with the old. This old/new harmony was first challenged from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the  
34 early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the western thoughts and sticks found their ways to China.<sup>4</sup> It has  
35 been gradually transformed into an old/new dichotomy with China and the West on both ends.  
36 The New Culture Movement of the 1910s and 1920s campaigned against the old feudalist  
37 culture and tradition and brought this harmonious unity into utmost confrontation. The ancient  
38 concern for the old and heritage had given way to the new and modernity.  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48

49 The founding of Communist China (1949) has triggered the debates over the  
50 conservation in the 1950s around ‘what to conserve and how to conserve’ in the struggle  
51 between the old and the new (Lai *et al.* 2004). Chen (1957) argues that the cultural objects are  
52 easy to be conserved, for only several rooms are needed for exhibition. However, historical  
53 buildings demand financial, human and technical resources that are badly needed in  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 developing new China while some of them are even in the way of the new life. Therefore, he  
4 insists prioritizing the necessary ones and the ones that can still play a role in reality. Apart  
5 from this, Chen advises to preserve maps, photographs and written records. Although  
6 different voices were heard, Chen's arguments represented the basic tone of the period in  
7 dealing with the old and the new.  
8  
9

10  
11  
12  
13  
14 The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) posed unprecedentedly drastic and detrimental  
15 challenges to the old tradition and culture. The study of the past was considered reactionary.  
16 The archaeological research came to a halt and certain archaeological and heritage sites were  
17 destroyed (Trigger 1984, Sofield and Li 1998). Through the eradication of the four old evils  
18 (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) and the persecution of intellectuals, culture  
19 and cultural heritage became taboo and the cultural spirit was greatly lost in the public.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

### 28 *Setting foot on the modernisation journey*

29  
30  
31 'The Cultural Revolution was so great a disaster that it provoked an even more profound  
32 cultural revolution, precisely the one that Mao intended to forestall' (MacFarquhar and  
33 Schoenhals 2006, 3). But this time, the political culture has been shifted to an economic one.  
34 The economic focus brought new hope to the Chinese people who had just experienced  
35 economic and cultural turbulences. As advocated by Deng in his southern tour in 1992,  
36 economic development was considered the only hard truth. Undeniably, the market-oriented  
37 economic reform since 1978 has brought China to rapid socio-economic development in its  
38 pursuit of socialist modernisations (in the fields of industry, agriculture, national defence, and  
39 science and technology). However, along with the rapid economic development, the socio-  
40 cultural problems also became more acute.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52

53  
54 In the culture and heritage field, the coin also has its two sides. Heritage conservation  
55 has made great progress since 1949. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage was set up  
56 immediately (1949). Provisional Regulations for the Conservation and Management of  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Cultural Relics was issued in 1961 before the first Heritage Conservation Law (1982) was  
4  
5 carried out. Three nation-wide surveys of cultural relics have been conducted, in 1956, 1981-  
6  
7 1985, and 2007-2011 respectively, to update inventories and improve management qualities  
8  
9 of the already existing sites. The financial and administrative support from the state is ever  
10  
11 growing. However, the lens of success at the same time spotlights its failures and frictions.  
12  
13 Led by the economic development and modernisation, China has witnessed mass destruction  
14  
15 of cultural heritage, especially historic buildings, in the name of urbanization and urban  
16  
17 renewal. According to Xie, a distinguished heritage specialist, throughout history heritage has  
18  
19 been the most seriously damaged since around the 1990s (Zhen 2009), though this period was  
20  
21 also the one with the most heritage conservation efforts. In addition, it's not only the forms  
22  
23 that are lost but also peoples' memory. Spurred by the market economy, the already weak and  
24  
25 vague cultural and heritage awareness in the public is decreasing, which, together with the  
26  
27 pursuit of a modern life, explains the public's neglect to heritage conservation.  
28  
29  
30

31  
32 In 2003, the concept 'scientific outlook on development' was proposed, which  
33  
34 assumes a 'people-centred' approach to a comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable  
35  
36 development. The shift on the thinking from economic to social development comes out of its  
37  
38 self-reflection on the development path in the changing national and global contexts  
39  
40 (Fewsmith 2004, SOD 2010). In the field of cultural heritage, the idea of integrating heritage  
41  
42 conservation into social development has been practiced through the development of ruins  
43  
44 parks, which aims not only for conservation, but also for neighbourhood regeneration and  
45  
46 improvement of living environment. Daming Palace National Heritage Park in Xi'an was such  
47  
48 an example. Daming Palace, four times the Imperial Palace in Beijing by size, was once the  
49  
50 imperial palace complex of the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD), the most prosperous dynasty in  
51  
52 China's history. It served as the royal residence for more than 220 years and was damaged  
53  
54 and later burned down in wars at the ending years of the regime. Daming Palace was  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 protected by the state in 1961. The Daming Palace National Heritage Park was constructed  
4  
5 from early 2008 and was finished and opened to the public in late 2010. Concerning social  
6  
7 benefit, it provides public space and improves the neighbourhood environment. However,  
8  
9 many other voices are also heard, like the gentrification of the area and the threat of the  
10  
11 heritage from over-commercialisation. Nevertheless, the ruins park model is being practiced  
12  
13 in many other cities. Through trial and error, China is searching its own way of balancing  
14  
15 heritage conservation and all kinds of benefits, be it social, cultural and economic.  
16  
17  
18  
19

### 20 ***Cultural development and the development of cultural value in heritage***

21  
22 With more in-depth economic development and exchange with the world, the question on  
23  
24 how to carry on its culture and promote its cultural identity has become more and more urgent  
25  
26 for China in the new century. As an important cultural resource, heritage's cultural value has  
27  
28 been redeveloped, especially with tourism development. In 2009, the National Tourism  
29  
30 Administration and the Ministry of Culture jointly issued the Guide for the Integrated  
31  
32 Development of Culture and Tourism, outlining ten initiatives including Year of Cultural  
33  
34 Tourism and China International Cultural Tourism Festival. In line with this first policy  
35  
36 document on cultural tourism, heritage consumption and heritage tourism development have  
37  
38 been greatly promoted (IDCT 2009). The recognition of heritage's economic value has  
39  
40 strengthened awareness and conservation efforts, but at the same time pushed heritage into the  
41  
42 economic logic, as reflected in recent massive construction of antique-style buildings.  
43  
44 Although criticized by experts, the practice is still going on in one place or another. The fact  
45  
46 that the economic motive in heritage tourism development prioritizes heritage appreciation  
47  
48 and conservation further intensifies the frictions between conservation and use of cultural  
49  
50 heritage.  
51  
52  
53  
54

55  
56 As mentioned earlier, the 2005 Notice officially promotes the concept of *wenhua*  
57  
58 *yichan*. Through emphasising the public character of cultural heritage, the sense of ownership,  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 in terms of both right and responsibility, is hopefully to be raised in public. The setting up of  
4 the Cultural Heritage Day in 2006 is a follow-up initiative to publicize cultural identity in  
5 heritage and enhance public awareness and involvement. These efforts are believed to  
6 promote direct public protection on the one hand and indirect public supervision in the long  
7 run on the other hand. Public involvement in heritage conservation as a bottom-up initiative  
8 has the potential to counter-balance the side effects of the top-down state or municipal ones  
9 that often tend to put economic interest above cultural concerns.  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 Cultural development has become an important theme in China in the new century, as  
19 illustrated from the above-mentioned state initiatives. The recent development of cultural  
20 industries since 2002 has witnessed a cultural turn, but also a double-edged sword for heritage  
21 conservation. It promotes conservation awareness, while at the same time prioritizes the  
22 economic value to the detriment of heritage conservation. In those waves of thoughts and  
23 practices, how can heritage and culture find their own way out is the question to be addressed  
24 in this new century for China.  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

### 35 **Conclusion**

36  
37 The consensus on cultural heritage as a socio-cultural construct has been reached and  
38 deepened over the past three decades. This paper responds to this issue and investigates into  
39 the conceptual construction of cultural heritage in general, and that in China *per se*. It displays  
40 the dynamic nature of cultural heritage from the lens of East-West cross-cultural negotiation,  
41 showing how both approaches have evolved into a more hybrid conceptual thinking of  
42 valuing both the material and the immaterial aspects. The Chinese case within the global  
43 framework sheds light on the construct of the cultural heritage concept and its consecutive  
44 dealing with and evaluating heritage conservation and commodification as an example of the  
45 Eastern approach. The understanding of the present Chinese cultural heritage scenario is  
46 crucial not only in dealing with heritage issues in China, especially in the current context of  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 rapid urban development, but also in global negotiations based on international charters.  
4

5 The horizontal dimension examines the conceptual evolution from the perspective of  
6  
7 East-West interaction and comparison. The intangible turn towards a constructive infill by the  
8  
9 present society and the symbiotic relationship between the tangible and intangible aspects can  
10  
11 be set against the background of constant negotiation about the material object. The consensus  
12  
13 contributes not only to the embracement of the immaterial value in the West, but also to the  
14  
15 consideration of the very physicality that is being gradually recognised by legislation but  
16  
17 nevertheless still under threat in the rapidly developing eastern countries. The second layer of  
18  
19 cross-cultural comparison and interaction is based on different interpretations of cultural  
20  
21 heritage in China and the West. As one of the four ancient civilisations with unique cultural  
22  
23 continuity, China continues its own heritage perception and practice over the history as has  
24  
25 been embodied in the *wenwu* concept. The trajectory of the conceptual development from  
26  
27 *wenwu* to *wenhua yichan* implies a constant negotiation with, and appropriation of, the  
28  
29 western notion of cultural heritage and conservation. The simultaneous employment of both  
30  
31 *wenwu* and *wenhua yichan* is characteristic of the *status quo* of cultural heritage perception,  
32  
33 practice and conservation in China.  
34  
35  
36  
37

38 The vertical dimension shifts the discussion on cultural heritage and its conservation  
39  
40 along the socio-historical development in China. The first problem in cultural heritage  
41  
42 conservation comes from the economic priority from both the state and the people, which is  
43  
44 worsened by the lack of heritage conservation awareness. The state has started to recognise  
45  
46 and address these issues at the levels of policy and legislation in the culture and heritage fields  
47  
48 since around the new century. Undoubtedly, public involvement is essential to heritage  
49  
50 conservation, with its potential to counterbalance the top-down state or municipal initiatives  
51  
52 which often tend to prioritize economy over culture. However, the cultivation of such  
53  
54 awareness and the formation of a public involvement mechanism are still to be further  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 developed in China. The threat from rapid urban development cause a second harsh issue.  
4  
5 State efforts have been made to integrate heritage conservation into urban regeneration  
6  
7 through the lens of so-called heritage tourism, like the ruins park practice. Yet questions  
8  
9 concerning the potency of heritage tourism in a broader and more international manner and its  
10  
11 conditions are still to be researched in depth.  
12

#### 13 Acknowledgements

14  
15 We would like to thank Bright Adiyia, Katarzyna Janusz, Arie Stoffelen, Marilena Vecco, Egbert van  
16  
17 der Zee and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of the paper.  
18  
19

#### 20 Notes

- 21 1. The full titles are: Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China and Hoi An Protocols  
22 for Best Conservation Practice in Asia. The Nara Document on Authenticity has ushered waves  
23 of charters and declarations on heritage conservation in Asia. See Kwanda (2009) and Winter  
24 (2014).  
25  
26
- 27 2. The full name for the Heritage Conservation Law is the Law of the People's Republic of China on  
28 the Protection of Cultural Relics (Wenwu Baohu Fa). It was first passed in 1982, and underwent  
29 revisions in 1991, 2002, and 2007. China Principles was co-compiled by China ICOMOS, the  
30 Getty Conservation Institute and the Australian Heritage Commission in 2002. These are the two  
31 major legal references for heritage conservation in China.  
32  
33
- 34 3. Epigraphy, the study of inscriptions or epigraphs, provides valuable historical records. Epigraphy in  
35 China values the evolution of those items and has greatly promoted the scientific study of  
36 heritage. See Xie (1993) for further information.  
37  
38
- 39 4. China has entered into the contemporary phase, a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society, since the  
40 1840 Opium War. In face of foreign invasions, some Chinese began to reflect upon their culture  
41 and society, while others simply put blames on it without critical analysis. The struggle has never  
42 stopped since then.  
43  
44  
45

#### 46 References

- 47 Aikawa, N., 2004. An historical overview of the preparation of the UNESCO international  
48 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Museum*  
49 *International*, 56 (1-2), 137-149.  
50  
51
- 52 Avrami, E., Mason, R., and de la Torre, M., eds., 2000. *Values and heritage conservation:*  
53 *research report*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.  
54  
55
- 56 Bendix, R.F., Eggert, A., and Peselmann, A., eds., 2012. *Heritage regimes and the state*.  
57 Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen.  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Bortolotto, C., 2007. From objects to processes: UNESCO's 'intangible cultural heritage'.  
4 *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 19, 21-33.  
5  
6 Bowdler, S., 1988. Repainting Australian rock art. *Antiquity*, 62 (236), 517-523.  
7  
8 Brett, D., 1996. *The construction of heritage*. Cork: Cork University Press.  
9  
10 Carman, J. and Sørensen, M.L.S., 2009. Heritage studies: an outline. In: M.L.S. Sørensen and  
11 J. Carman, eds. *Heritage studies: methods and approaches*. London and New York:  
12 Routledge, 11-28.  
13  
14 Chen M., 1957. A second debate on what to conserve and how. *Wenwu References*, 4, 66-70,  
15 in Chinese.  
16  
17  
18 China ICOMOS, 2002. *Principles for the conservation of heritage sites in China*. Los  
19 Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute.  
20  
21 Conan, M., 2009. Gardens and landscapes: at the hinge of tangible and intangible heritage. In:  
22 D.F. Ruggles and H. Silverman, eds. *Intangible Heritage Embodied*. New York:  
23 Springer, 53-78.  
24  
25  
26 Deng, C. and Feng, Y., 2013. Significance of Mao Zedong's thought on making the past serve  
27 the present and foreign things China. *Guangming Daily*, 22 December. Available  
28 from: [http://news.gmw.cn/2013-12/22/content\\_9885422.htm](http://news.gmw.cn/2013-12/22/content_9885422.htm), in Chinese [Accessed 14  
29 February 2014].  
30  
31  
32  
33 Fairclough G., Harrison, R., Jameson Jr., J.H., and Schofield, J., eds., 2010. *The heritage*  
34 *reader*. London: Routledge.  
35  
36  
37 Fewsmith, J., 2004. The Third Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee. *China*  
38 *Leadership Monitor*, 9, 1-9.  
39  
40  
41 Graham, B., 2002. Heritage as knowledge: capital or culture? *Urban Studies*, 39 (5-6), 1003-  
42 1017.  
43  
44  
45 Graham, B., Ashworth, G.J., and Tunbridge, J.E., 2000. *A geography of heritage: power,*  
46 *culture and economy*. London: Arnold.  
47  
48  
49 Hall, S., ed., 1997. *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices*. London:  
50 Sage/Open University.  
51  
52  
53 Harvey, D.C., 2001. Heritage pasts and heritage presents: temporality, meaning and the scope  
54 of heritage studies. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7 (4), 319-338.  
55  
56 IDCT (Integrated development of culture and tourism to a new level), 2009. *Economic Daily*,  
57 01 January. Available from: [http://paper.ce.cn/jjrb/html/2009-](http://paper.ce.cn/jjrb/html/2009-11/01/content_85816.htm)  
58 [11/01/content\\_85816.htm](http://paper.ce.cn/jjrb/html/2009-11/01/content_85816.htm), in Chinese [Accessed 13 November 2013].  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Kurin, R., 2004. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention:  
4 a critical appraisal. *Museum International*, 56 (1-2), 66-77.
- 5  
6 Kwanda, T., 2009. Western conservation theory and the Asian context: the different roots of  
7 conservation. Paper given at *International Conference on Heritage in Asia:  
8 Converging Forces and Conflicting Values* 8–10 January 2009. Available from:  
9 [https://www.academia.edu/1285432/Western\\_conservation\\_theoryand\\_the\\_Asian\\_Co  
10 ntext\\_The\\_Different\\_Roots\\_of\\_Conservation](https://www.academia.edu/1285432/Western_conservation_theoryand_the_Asian_Context_The_Different_Roots_of_Conservation) [Accessed 26 February 2014].
- 11  
12  
13  
14  
15 Lai, G., Demas, M., and Agnew, N., 2004. Valuing the past in China: the seminal influence of  
16 Liang Sicheng on heritage conservation. *Orientations*, 35 (2), 82-89.
- 17  
18 Layton, R., ed., 1989. *Conflict in the archaeology of living traditions*. London: Unwin  
19 Hyman.
- 20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60
- Lowenthal, D., 1998. *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacFarquhar, R. and Schoenhals, M., 2006. *Mao's last revolution*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Mote, F.W., 1973. A millennium of Chinese urban history: form, time, and space concepts in Soochow. *The Rice University Studies*, 59 (4), 35-66.
- Munjeri, D., 2004. Tangible and intangible heritage: from difference to convergence. *Museum International*, 56 (1-2), 12-20.
- Pearce, S., 1998. The construction and analysis of the cultural heritage: some thoughts. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 4 (1), 1–9.
- Ryckmans, P., 1989. The Chinese attitude towards the past. *Papers on Far Eastern History*, 39, 1-16.
- Sapir, E., 1929. The status of linguistics as a science. *Language*, 5 (4), 207-214.
- Schmitt, T.M., 2008. The UNESCO concept of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: its background and Marrakchi roots. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 14 (2), 95-111.
- SCNPC (Standing Committee of the National People's Congress), 2002. *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics*. Available from: [http://english.gov.cn/laws/2005-10/09/content\\_75322.htm](http://english.gov.cn/laws/2005-10/09/content_75322.htm) [Accessed 15 May 2013].
- Shan, Q., 2008. *From the protection of cultural relics to that of cultural heritage*. Tianjin: Tianjin University Press, in Chinese.
- Smith, L., 2006. *Uses of heritage*. London: Routledge.

- 1  
2  
3 SOD (Scientific outlook on development), 2010. *China Daily*, 08 September. Available from:  
4 [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/cpc2011/2010-09/08/content\\_12474310.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/cpc2011/2010-09/08/content_12474310.htm)  
5 [Accessed 12 March 2014]  
6  
7  
8 Sofield, T.H.B. and Li, F.M.S., 1998. Tourism development and cultural policies in China.  
9 *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25 (2), 362-392.  
10  
11 Taylor, K., 2004. Cultural heritage management: a possible role for charters and principles in  
12 Asia. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10 (5), 417-433.  
13  
14 Taylor, K. and Altenburg, K., 2006. Cultural landscapes in Asia-Pacific: potential for filling  
15 world heritage gaps. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12 (3), 267-282.  
16  
17  
18 Trigger, B.G., 1984. Alternative archaeologies: nationalist, colonialist, imperialist. *Man*, 19  
19 (3), 355-370.  
20  
21  
22 Throsby, D., 2001. *Economics and culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
23  
24 Tunbridge, J.E., and Ashworth, G.J., 1996. *Dissonant heritage: the management of the past as*  
25 *a resource in conflict*. Chichester: Willey.  
26  
27 Tunbridge, J.E., Ashworth, G.J., and Graham B.J., 2013. Decennial reflections on A  
28 Geography of Heritage (2000). *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19 (4), 365-  
29 372.  
30  
31  
32 Vecco, M., 2010. A definition of cultural heritage: from the tangible to the intangible. *Journal*  
33 *of Cultural Heritage*, 11, 321-324.  
34  
35  
36 Wei, C. and Aass, A., 1989. Heritage conservation: East and West. *Icomos Information*, 3, 3-  
37 8.  
38  
39  
40 Winter, T., 2014. Beyond eurocentrism? Heritage conservation and the politics of difference.  
41 *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 20(2), 123-137.  
42  
43  
44 Xie, C., 1993. Wenwu. *Encyclopaedia of China: heritage and museum volume*. Beijing:  
45 Encyclopaedia of China, 1-17, in Chinese.  
46  
47 Yan, W. and Zhuang, L., 2006. Unremitting exploration: interview with Mr. Yan Wenming.  
48 *Relics from South*, 2, 6-14, in Chinese.  
49  
50  
51 Zhen, J., 2009. Xie Chensheng: I have determined to die on duty. *South Reviews*, 10, 66-69, in  
52 Chinese.  
53  
54  
55 Zhong, Y., 2009. About the concept of cultural heritage. *China Cultural Heritage Scientific*  
56 *Research*, 3, 6-7 and 31, in Chinese.  
57  
58  
59 Zouain, G.S., 2006. Cultural heritage and economic theory. Available from:  
60 <http://www.gaiaheritage.com/Admin%5CDownload%5CCH.pdf> [Accessed 20  
September 2013].