Authenticity and Heritage Conservation: Seeking Common Complexities beyond the 'Eastern' and 'Western' Dichotomy

Corresponding author: Qian Gao

Division of History, Heritage and Politics, University of Stirling, Stirling, United Kingdom

Research Fellow in Heritage, Division of History, Heritage and Politics, Pathfoot Building, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA, UK.

Email: qian.gao@stir.ac.uk http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3021-7692

Qian Gao is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Heritage at the University of Stirling. She has a MA in Archaeology from Durham University (UK) and a PhD in Management of Culture and Heritage from the University of Barcelona (Spain). She is currently undertaking a three-year Anniversary Fellowship funded by the University of Stirling. Her research focuses on the inter-relationships between heritage and contemporary societies, and deals with topics including conservation, authenticity, value, heritage tourism, World Heritage in China, and rock art.

Siân Jones

Division of History, Heritage and Politics, University of Stirling, Stirling, United Kingdom

Professor of Environmental History and Heritage, Division of History, Heritage and Politics, Pathfoot Building, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA, UK.

Email: sian.jones@stir.ac.uk http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6157-7848

Siân Jones is Professor of Environmental History and Heritage and Director of the Centre for Environment, Heritage and Policy at the University of Stirling. She is an interdisciplinary scholar with expertise in cultural heritage, as well as on the role of the past in the production of power, identity and sense of place. Her recent projects focus on the practice of conservation, the experience of authenticity, replicas and reconstructions, approaches to social value, and community heritage.

Authenticity and Heritage Conservation: Seeking Common Complexities beyond the 'Eastern' and 'Western' Dichotomy

This article challenges the claimed gulf between 'Eastern' and 'Western' concepts and approaches to heritage conservation through an analysis of the common complexities surrounding authenticity. The past few decades have witnessed an important critique of 'Eurocentric' notions of heritage conservation, drawing on 'non-Western', particularly Asian, contexts. Authenticity has been a core principle and defining element in this development. Endorsed by a series of charters and documents, a relativistic approach emphasising the cultural specificity of authenticity has been introduced alongside the European-originated materialist approach in international policy and conservation philosophy. However, the promotion of Asian difference has also contributed to an increasingly entrenched and unproductive dichotomy between 'Eastern' and 'Western' approaches to heritage. This article reveals common complexities surrounding authenticity in two countries crosscutting this dualism – China and Scotland. Drawing on a number of ethnographic projects, our analysis identifies themes that characterise the experience of authenticity across different cultural contexts. It contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the evolving relationships between heritage conservation and contemporary societies with important implications for global heritage discourses and collaborative ventures crosscutting 'Eastern' and 'Western' contexts.

Keywords: authenticity; heritage conservation; dichotomy; China; Scotland

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed debates over the applicability of Western-derived paradigms of heritage conservation in Asia (and other parts of the world). Charters and declarations, mostly from within Asia, have been formulated to counteract the Eurocentrism of foundational documents, such as the *Venice Charter* (1964) and the *World Heritage Convention* (1972), which had come to define international conservation philosophy. Concomitantly, scholars have promoted and debated the existence of distinctive 'Asian approaches' to heritage and its conservation (e.g. Fong et al. 2012; Silva and Chapagain 2013; Winter 2014). These are important developments in global heritage discourse, counterbalancing prevailing Eurocentric ideas that had

been adopted as universal principles. However, there are signs of a new heritage orthodoxy characterised by a problematic dichotomy between idealised 'Eastern' and 'Western' notions and approaches to heritage conservation.

Tim Winter (2014, 123) has argued that a new 'discourse of difference has emerged, where Asia is claimed to be materially, culturally and historically different to the west'. According to Winter, such a discourse is born out of unease about the applicability of Western-derived conservation policies and practices, alongside the pursuit of a politics of recognition on the international stage. However, the result is an essentialist understanding of Asian culture and heritage in and across regions, set in opposition to the 'West'. Like Winter, other scholars have started to question a rigid division between 'East' and 'West' in heritage conservation. Akagawa (2016), for instance, points out the convergence between aspects of Japanese heritage practice and prescribed 'Western' principles. Taylor (2015) also challenges the perceived cultural differences in conservation philosophies and practices arguing that such differences are a product of context and practical application, rather than principle. Concerning conservation of architectural heritage, Gutschow (2017) and Forster et al. (2019) highlight similarities in ideas and activities crosscutting 'Eastern' and 'Western' cultural backgrounds. These discussions problematise the dichotomy, pointing towards the need for more nuanced, fine-grained understandings of the key concepts of heritage conservation across cultural contexts.

As a foundational concept of heritage conservation, authenticity has been the core principle and defining element in upholding a discourse of difference. In this article, we challenge this discourse through a comparative analysis, which reveals a number of 'common complexities' crosscutting 'East' and 'West' – as well as the diverse ways authenticity is produced and negotiated in specific local contexts. The discussion focuses on our respective research in China (Gao) and Scotland (Jones), drawing on a number of qualitative and ethnographic projects. First, we discuss the emergence of a 'discourse of difference' (Winter 2014, 123) with respect to Asian approaches to authenticity in more detail. This is followed by a comparison of recent developments in conservation policy and practice in Scotland and China, highlighting similarities and differences in institutional approaches and authorised discourses. Finally, we examine the experience and negotiation of authenticity and identify common themes relating to the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage places and objects, in particular surrounding their material transformation and dynamic social lives.

The identification of the common complexities of authenticity contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the evolving relationships between heritage conservation and contemporary societies. We argue that heritage policies and guidelines should embrace these dynamic relationships and avoid falling into traps created by a cultural dichotomy, which is in danger of becoming a new authorised heritage discourse.

The Evolution of Authenticity and the 'Eastern'/'Western' Dichotomy

Authenticity is a key concept in the theoretical and philosophical constitution of heritage conservation. Many scholars have reviewed the early thinking surrounding this notion in various European traditions (see, e.g., Gendinning 2013; Muñoz Viñas 2012). During the twentieth century, European conservation principles were consolidated and came to constitute the tenets of international best practice. Propagated by international heritage institutions such as ICOMOS and UNESCO, authenticity gained a pivotal status as the fundamental rational and touchstone for heritage conservation. The 1964 *Venice Charter*, considered a foundational framework for modern conservation, pointed out 'our duty' to hand on ancient monuments as common heritage 'in the full richness of their authenticity' (*Venice Charter*, preface). Through UNESCO's 1972 *World Heritage Convention*, authenticity became an essential qualifying criterion for the inclusion of sites on the World Heritage List. Increasingly sophisticated scientific techniques for analysing material fabric reinforced the emphasis on materiality, giving the problematic impression that the authenticity of historic objects and monuments can be measured in some way (Jones 2010, 184; see also Muñoz Viñas 2012). By the late twentieth century, the notion of authenticity, with its focus on the 'true' nature of things rooted in origin, provenance, fabric, and the intention of makers, has been entrenched as part of a doctrine of international best practice.

The late twentieth century saw the introduction of a more relativistic approach, underscoring the cultural specificity of authenticity (Jokilehto 1995). This was primarily triggered by the recognition that in many non-European contexts intangible, often spiritual, qualities are as important as material ones, if not more so (Akagawa 2016). The 1994 *Nara Document on Authenticity* thus recognises that authenticity is a relative criterion contingent upon specific socio-cultural contexts. This document was therefore hailed as a milestone, marking a move away from the Eurocentric interpretation of

authenticity to the relativisation of the overarching international principles and guidelines on heritage conservation (McBryde 1997).

In the post-Nara era, the conceptual and methodological particularity of Asian perspectives on authenticity has been further advocated by a series of charters, protocols and declarations, mostly from within Asia. The 2005 *Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia*, for instance, argues that the rigorous and methodical western approach to authenticity needs to be tempered with the abstract and metaphysical concepts which characterise Asia. Meanwhile, studies of UNESCO and the operation of the World Heritage Convention have also elaborated on how Western analytical approaches to authenticity are problematic in calibrating the non-European field of heritage governance (e.g. Labadi 2013; Meskell and Brumann 2015). Arguments that claim the existence of 'Asian approaches' in heritage conservation have further reinforced a perception of Asian uniqueness in consideration of authenticity (e.g. Chung 2005). Therefore, although the relativisation of authenticity has promoted a recognition of cultural diversity and contextual specificity, it has also accentuated the perceived divergence of 'Eastern' and 'Western' approaches to heritage.

As Winter (2014, 134) has discussed, the resulting 'discourse of difference' represents 'Western' approaches as overtly materialist and scientistic in contrast to the proclaimed non-materialist and spiritual character of 'Eastern' heritage approaches. Geopolitical interests and agendas also reinforce this discourse of difference, such as the desire of Asian nation-states for international prestige in heritage governance. These initiatives represent a response to a particular history of conservation practice in which certain methodologies and ideologies are labelled and perceived as a 'Western' approach (ibid., 128). In practice, however, in both 'Eastern' and 'Western' societies the consideration of authenticity in heritage contexts has been complicated, not least because 'a secular, rationalist discourse of heritage emerged as part and parcel of modernity in China and South-east Asia' (Byrne 2014, 53). In what follows, we draw on our research in China and Scotland to discuss the common complexities and parallels often overlooked as a result of this dichotomisation.

Authenticity in Heritage Conservation: Recent Developments in China and Scotland

In this section, we compare approaches to authenticity in authorised heritage

conservation in Scotland and China, as a means of critically reflecting on the discourse of difference framing 'Western' and 'Eastern' heritage. We have conducted extensive research in these two countries (Jones in Scotland and Gao in China), which have both witnessed significant changes in terms of conservation philosophy and practice. Each is also culturally and geographically diverse and consequently faces a range of conservation issues associated with different forms of heritage. However, whilst not wishing to downplay their cultural heterogeneity and specificity, we argue that there are a number of parallels. In the following two subsections, we discuss authorised heritage practices surrounding authenticity and conservation in each country in order to highlight common themes transcending different political and cultural settings. In doing so, we are conscious that both countries have sanctioned and deployed heritage discourses in distinct ways during the process of modern state formation. They also have complex relationships to regional and global conservation instruments and the power relationships in which these are embedded. Whilst we attend to this wherever possible, a detailed analysis of these relations is beyond the scope of this article (see Byrne 2014 for further discussion regarding Asian contexts).

Authenticity in heritage conservation in Scotland

In Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK and much of Europe, the modern conservation movement has been dominated by materialist conceptions of authenticity (Jones 2010, 184; Muñoz Viñas 2012). An authentic historic object, building or monument is one that is 'true to its origins in terms of its date, material, form, authorship, workmanship and, in many cases, its primary context and use' (Jones 2010, 184). Early campaigners such as John Ruskin stressed the importance of recognising and preserving subsequent phases in the life of a building and this was taken up in conservation policy and practice, manifested in the notions of preservation as found, minimal intervention and reversibility of conservation interventions. By the mid- to late-twentieth century, a more materialist and scientistic approach emerged, leading to increasing emphasis on original materiality and evidence-based conservation (see Douglas-Jones et al. 2016). Conservation policy and guidance in Scotland at the start of the twenty-first century continued to reflect these authorised conservation principles (e.g. Historic Scotland 2001, 2009).

Conservation practice, however, is both highly regulated and simultaneously underdetermined (Jones and Yarrow 2013; Lamprakos 2015). Every conservation project has to develop a methodology and philosophy that responds to the particular issues regarding a historic monument, its materials, stakeholders and competing demands. As Jones and Yarrow (2013) show in their ethnographic research focusing on Historic Scotland's conservation campaign at Glasgow Cathedral, specific interventions are the result of measured procedures, inflected by distinct forms of expertise and involving sometimes painful negotiations and compromises. In the process of negotiation, factors such as health and safety, the maintenance requirements for historic buildings in use, and the impact of tourism and associated expectations, play an active role in shaping decision-making leading to prioritisation of some concerns over other considerations. For instance, at Glasgow Cathedral the need to keep the building watertight and safe for ongoing religious worship and tourism has led to greater replacement of historic fabric than would usually be the case with the conservation of ruined monuments. Interestingly, Jones and Yarrow (2013) found that whilst scientific analysis of the stone and other evidence-based approaches underpinned the work, the intangible craft traditions embodied by Historic Scotland's stonemasons played a key role in negotiating the authenticity of new stonework (something we discuss further in later sections).

Demands relating to nation-building, tourism, regeneration and sustainable development have fostered a tolerance of contingent interpretations of authenticity in discourses that can be generalised as heritage stewardship, resulting in more controversial conservation practices. At times this has involved significant reconstruction and restoration, such as in the case of a number of Scottish Castles (Fawcett and Rutherford 2011). One of the most prominent examples is the late twentieth-century restoration of the Great Hall and Palace at Stirling Castle, which, whilst authenticated through meticulous research and traditional craft practice, was ultimately conceived as a state project recognising the intangible national significance of this iconic site (Breeze 2001, xi).

The relativisation of authenticity at a global scale has triggered reflections on the perception of authenticity and consequently increased attention to the intangible dimensions of heritage, such as craftsmanship, rituals and customs. Traditional arts and crafts have played a central role in Scotland's conservation endeavours since the mid-19th century. The authenticity and 'living spirit' of historic buildings have depended on

regular maintenance using traditional craftsmanship, something that has long been recognised in the Scottish conservation sector, but which is receiving renewed emphasis (Jones and Yarrow 2013, 7; also Hassard 2009). The influence of more relativist approaches to authenticity and an increasing emphasis on intangible heritage are also evident in Scotland's evolving authorised heritage discourses. Recently published official documents, such as *Our Place in Time* (2014), *What's Your Heritage?* (2017), and the new *Historic Environment Policy for Scotland* (2019), all demonstrate a significant shift in emphasis from 'things' to 'people'. Furthermore, the growing appreciation of the cultural specificity of authenticity and significance has led to official recognition of heritage sites of minority groups, such as the Travellers, whose cultural embodiments are believed to be relatively non-monumental and intangible. One notable example is the scheduling of the Tinkers' Heart of Argyll – a site made up of quartz stones positioned in heart shape in a field known as the Gypsy Wedding Place – as a nationally important monument in 2015. As we write, Historic Environment Scotland, the national agency responsible for Scotland's historic environment (Historic Scotland's successor) is preparing a new Intangible Cultural Heritage Policy that will stress the importance of addressing intangible aspects of the built heritage in conservation practice.

Authenticity and heritage conservation in China

China also reveals a dynamic situation in dealing with authenticity in heritage conservation. As a country with a long and complex history, it is known for the diversity of its ethnicities and cultures. Historically much Chinese architecture was made of perishable materials that required frequent renovation, and the material fabric of buildings and monuments was generally not valued for its age and originality. Indeed, in many popular religious contexts, rebuilding and restoration practices were (and in many cases still are) important in maintaining the numinous qualities of shrines and temples, along with their spiritual efficacy (Byrne 2014). The attitudes and activities towards tangible heritage properties that inform state-sponsored conservation emerged in China around the 1930s, led by Liang Sicheng, a highly influential pioneer and rule-maker in Chinese authorised heritage discourses (Zhu 2017). Liang established conservation principles for Chinese architecture, such as 'preserving or restoring the original state (保存恢复原状)' and 'restoring the old as it was (整旧如旧)' (Liang 2007a, 355-370; 2007b, 440-447), which became foundations of Chinese policies and

instructions on heritage protection. These principles synthesised indigenous conventions in an attempt to develop standardised state heritage institutions, at the same time adopting international ideologies and other agendas such as nation-building. Therefore, there has been significant interaction and resonance between Chinese conservation notions and the Western conservation movement. Such notions have resulted in conservation projects focused on maintaining material fabric as testimony of the past, whilst often compromising spiritual qualities. A striking example concerns the Sutra in Stone at Mount Taishan. Starting from the 1960s, a series of projects managed to physically preserve the Chinese characters of the Diamond Sutra, chiselled at the granite runway of a babbling brook, by consolidating the rock base of the scriptures and completely diverting the water path to avoid erosion. What the projects neglected was that the spirit of the place lay in the water running across the characters as if reading the texts, and the chiselled characters were intended to wear out and eventually perish over time (Gutschow 2017, 14).

During the first 30 years of the People's Republic, many heritage sites including temples and religious monuments, regarded by the state as the relics of a feudal system or products of superstition, were severely damaged (or converted to secular functions). Since the 1980s, however, the open-door policy, economic reform, and public sentiments towards culture and history have resulted in the rehabilitation of cultural sites representing China's state-sponsored national identity, which emphasises the unity of 56 officially recognised ethnic groups. The term authenticity was first introduced in relation to tangible heritage sites after the country ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1985. Along with the development of Chinese heritage discourses and increasing transnational communications, the term has been continuously reinterpreted to suit international, national and local agendas and demands.

Chinese scholars have translated authenticity in two main ways, both valid in academic contexts and government policies (Zhu 2017). The two translations, '原真性 *yuanzhenxing*' and '真实性 *zhenshixing*', represent two understandings of the concept, with the former emphasising the significance of an original status, and the latter highlighting the cultural biography of any heritage property. Nevertheless, the official policies and guidelines on heritage conservation, including the *Law on Protection of Cultural Relics* and the *China Principles*, in their various revisions, prioritise the notion 'original state (原状)' as an overarching framework to guide the application of

authenticity. The notion itself is highly flexible. According to the *China Principles* (2015, Article 9), the original state of a site can refer to its condition prior to any conservation intervention, its condition after having been subjected to interventions, the reinstated condition after the restoration elements were damaged where the originals still exist, and the condition of a setting that is of significance to the site.

The adaptive nature of the concept helps to justify various interpretations of authenticity in conservation practices deemed controversial by some Chinese scholars/policy-makers/practitioners, whilst supported by others. For instance, some Chinese scholars argue that traditional structures that have been scientifically restored with original materials and techniques should not be seen as 'fake antiques'. This school of thought has endorsed many reconstruction projects, including the rebuilding of the Yongding Gate in Beijing in 2004, half a century after the demolishment of the ancient monument. The debate in the early 2000s over whether the imperial palaces of the Forbidden City should be restored to their historical splendour is another example of the divergence in understanding 'original state' and authenticity. Beyond these major state-sponsored projects there are also countless regional and local rebuilding initiatives, many of which are associated with the resurfacing of popular religious practices more or less under the guise of 'heritage' (see Byrne 2014, 103-107).

The diverse ways of implementing authenticity reflect the complex negotiations in current Chinese practices to safeguard and utilise heritage, in response to multilateral concerns and requests, among which the needs of nation-building and tourist pressures play significant roles. Consequently, debatable conservation practices, such as archaising, replication, creative reconstruction and restoration through beautification, have become commonplace at various heritage sites. Nevertheless, there have been increasing discussions among both the professions and the public regarding proper ways of conserving heritage sites, triggering significant reflections on authorised practices and official guidelines. These reflections are shown in the 2015 revision of the *China Principles,* which officially recognise the concept of 'social value'. In recent years, new voices advocate for making heritage 'alive' and the importance of public emotions and participation in decision-making, representing a gradual shift from 'things' to 'people' in China's heritage conservation discourses.

Common complexities of authenticity in China and Scotland

A comparison of authorised approaches to authenticity in Scotland and China thus reveals some surprising commonalities despite their specificities. The overarching principles and guidelines for conservation activities are not fundamentally different, with both emphasising material authenticity and the importance of craft practices. In practice, however, material authenticity only operates as a guiding framework. Actual conservation decisions are achieved through negotiations and compromises, reflecting the juxtaposition of different expertise and value systems, as well as the changing economic, social and cultural pressures and influences. In both countries, diverse ways of understanding and implementing authenticity have led to tolerance of controversial conservation activities. Moreover, intangible heritage, including spiritual sensibilities, are not exclusive to Asian cultural practices, as demonstrated by a growing recognition of the intangible aspects of heritage in conservation strategies, policies and guidance in Scotland. Therefore, although the heritage conservation discourses of the two countries are diverse, there are common complexities in the institutional consideration of authenticity. What then of the wider experience of authenticity in Scotland and China, in the broad sense of people's understandings of the genuineness or truthfulness of heritage objects and places? What kinds of properties, qualities and relationships render them genuine or true to themselves? And to what extent can we identify common elements crosscutting the much vaunted 'East'/'West' dichotomy?

The Experience of Authenticity in Heritage Settings: ethnographic insights

In what follows, we present a comparative synthetic analysis of people's experience of authenticity based on our own research at specific heritage sites, with reference to that of others. Specifically, we draw on qualitative social research conducted by the two authors in Scotland (Jones 2004, 2009, 2010, 2016; Jones and Yarrow 2013; Jones et al. 2017; Douglas Jones et al. 2016; Foster and Jones 2019) and China (Gao 2013, 2016, 2017). Broadly speaking, this body of research adopts an ethnographic lens, but involves a spectrum of methods ranging from qualitative semi-structured interviews to participant observation, sometimes incorporating participatory community elements. Importantly, it encompasses a wide range of sites including rock art, sculptured monuments and historic buildings, as well as a palatial complex reconstructed in the form of an archaeological park. Whilst we do not underestimate the diversity and

specificity of these case studies, there is not the scope here to discuss each in detail. Instead, we highlight the main results and key themes. To explore common complexities in more depth, we also weave in a number of case study sites: the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab (Scotland); Glasgow Cathedral (Scotland); Daming Palace national heritage park (China); and Huashan rock art area (China). All these sites have been subject to active conservation, maintenance and/or restoration/reconstruction. The comparative analysis reveals three common themes that play a pivotal role in influencing the experience of authenticity crosscutting different cultural settings: (1) the social and spiritual lives of historic things; (2) the role of material transformation; (3) the impact of intangible elements. Even though the discussion underscores the commonalities that transcend cultural particularities, we do not underestimate the contextual specificity of authenticity. Indeed, the analysis is built upon nuanced understandings of this contextual specificity within the social, cultural and political settings of each site, of which detailed accounts have been published elsewhere.

Authenticity and the lives of 'old things'

It has become commonplace in the literature on various forms of Asian heritage to stress the ways in which it is animate, vibrant, numinous and performative (Byrne 2014, 3; Karlström 2005, 2015). Furthermore, this active agency and personification are one of the characteristics frequently mobilised in the discourse of difference that has emerged between 'Eastern' and 'Western' approaches to heritage, which in turn supports critiques of globalising forms of management and conservation (Winter 2014). However, we argue that this distinction is far less clear-cut than it might initially appear. Whilst in 'Western' contexts popular religion might play a less obvious role, 'old things' also have active, vibrant social and spiritual lives and these are important in people's experience of authenticity. Furthermore, historic objects, buildings and monuments are variously seen as experiencing birth, growth, ageing, rejuvenation, and ultimately death, from the moment of creation, through their constant remaking by natural and human forces, to the end of their physical and metaphysical existence. The social and spiritual life of an object is informed by both modifications to its material fabric and the changing values attributed to it. Moreover, it is its social and spiritual life that bestows an object with both personality and authenticity.

In China, sentiments concerning the social and spiritual lives of historic remains are pervasive in many contexts. While modernity and rationality take a firm hold on contemporary understandings and attitudes to the material past, metaphysical beliefs still contextualise the relationship between people and old things. The efficacy of *Fengshui*, for instance, is deeply entrenched in people's cosmological perceptions of their physical surroundings. Although often devalued as superstition, popular religion with its emphasis on spirituality and the supernatural still influences people's views of, and interactions with, the material world (Byrne 2014, 75). In this context, many historic artefacts, places and landscape features are perceived as numinous and in possession of divine powers, which can be accessed through specific practices ranging from money tossing at sacred sites, ritual reverence for ancestors and deities, to participation in pilgrimage *kora* in Tibetan areas.

How sentiments regarding the social and spiritual lives of historic remains influence the experience of authenticity is illustrated by Gao's work on the Huashan rock art area (2013, 2017). The area consists of eighty-one rock painting sites located in what is today a sparsely populated region of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Distributed along the Zuojiang River Valley, most of the sites are located on cliffs near the river bends, with painted motifs highly standardised in style. It is generally believed that the images were created between the Warring States Period (403–221 BCE) and the Eastern Han dynasty (26–220 CE), by an ethnic group named Luo Yue, ancestors of the present-day Zhuang people (Gao 2013, 23). Gao's research shows that local Zhuang people see the area as a 'living' entity linking past and present, which constitutes their unique ethnic identity and responds to cultural practices and activities (Gao 2017, 87-88). When asked to describe what the rock art means to them, residents are inclined to use anthropomorphic expressions, such as 'watching', 'hearing', 'speaking', 'responding', 'hurt' and 'angry', to characterise the painted mountain cliffs. To many of the residents, Huashan is not just a cultural reference intricately associated with local history, folklore and cosmological beliefs, but also symbolically functioning as an ancestor in itself, embodying divine spirits and commanding universal respect (Gao 2013, 26-31). The various sites in the area are also bound up with numerous memories and recollections of local residents' personal, family and communal activities in the past and present. The metaphysical, ancestral and societal feelings and connections generated by the painted landscape are woven into webs of relationships, which inform the negotiation and experience of its authenticity. To the local people who have lived

adjacent to the rock art area for generations, its authenticity is fundamentally associated with its social and spiritual life, as a numinous legacy related to ancestry and cosmological beliefs, and an essential reference point in constituting identities, memories and activities.

The personification of historic remains in China is not restricted to ethnic minorities, but is also evident in majority cultures. For instance, to the Han Chinese, the West Lake of Hangzhou is metaphorically known as a living 'beauty' that entices personal feelings by integrating people into a cultural landscape that has inspired the creation of literary and artistic works appealing to both elite and popular tastes for over a thousand years (Zhang 2017, 226). Many Chinese heritage sites are also consciously conserved in specific ways due to considerations of their social and spiritual lives. For instance, the recent renovation of the thousand-hand bodhisattva statue of Dazu, an 800-year-old Buddhist rock carving, challenged conservation conventions by restoring the gilding of the statue with new materials. Such a decision was made partially due to social expectations from local residents, who for generations have perceived and worshipped the statue as a significant religious icon that deserves a dignified and untarnished appearance (interviews between Gao and members of the Dazu Rock Carvings Research Institute, 2018-19).

Research in Scotland also reveals a proclivity to see heritage objects as living things with active social and spiritual lives. Sites associated with minority cultures and popular religion are often singled out, such as the Tinker's Heart, an example of Scottish Traveller heritage (Hill 2017) linked to intangible ceremonies and kinship ties, or holy wells, rag trees and coin trees, such as the 'wishing tree' of Isle Maree and its modern-day recreation on the shores of Loch Maree (Houlbrook 2015). For many people, religious buildings like Glasgow Cathedral (Jones 2016) and Dryburgh Abbey (Douglas-Jones et al. 2016) are also animated by their social and spiritual lives. Seen as embodiments of communities of faith, they connect people across time and space, regardless of the Reformation and other religious schisms. As one of Jones' interviewees at Glasgow Cathedral put it, 'I know it's just stone, but I think it absorbs things, it's like it's alive […] It's absorbed the presence of the people who've been here in the past […] Just remember, stone speaks' (2016, 130).

To illustrate the relationship between authenticity and the social lives of heritage objects in a little more depth, the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish-symbol bearing cross-slab offers a particularly striking Scottish example. Hailed as one of the most exquisite and

significant examples of early medieval sculpture in Scotland, the cross-slab originated in Easter Ross in north-east Scotland, where it was erected and re-erected at the medieval chapel of Hilton of Cadboll. However, following fragmentation, the upper section of the cross-slab has been relocated a number of times in the last two centuries, first to Invergordon Castle in the 1860s and then in 1921 to London and Edinburgh in quick succession. After unsuccessful requests for the return of the stone to the village, a full-size replica was carved in stone and erected adjacent to the ruins of the medieval chapel on the edge of the village in 2000. The following year, an archaeological excavation at the chapel site unearthed the missing lower-part of the cross-slab, reigniting debates over the ownership and conservation of the divided monolith (Jones 2004, 2006).

Jones' ethnographic research in the early 2000s revealed that the dynamic social life of the cross-slab has a noticeable impact on local residents' experience and negotiation of authenticity. In response to the rediscovery of the lower section, many residents talked of the monument 'being born', 'growing', 'breathing', having a 'soul', 'living' and 'dying', animating this supposedly lifeless stone. Indeed, for many in the village, the stone is not merely conceived as a living thing but also a living member of the community; its authenticity negotiated through its relation to place in both a social and material sense. Conceived as a living, breathing thing, it has an intimate relation to the material elements that constitute place, such as soil, air and water (Jones 2006, 109). Forms of attachment and relatedness between people were also extended to the cross-slab. Several residents expressed a sense of kinship towards it, recounting the actions and experiences of their parents and grandparents who had interacted with the monument (ibid., 117). But more importantly, these putative kin relations facilitated the negotiation of authenticity and belonging. Just as people 'belong' to each other and to place, so the cross-slab belongs.

The experience of authenticity is therefore intimately connected to networks of relations between people, places, and 'old things' in the past and present (Jones 2010). However, in the case of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, this also extends to the modern full-scale carved replica. Carved in the village over a number of years, the replica is seen by many local residents to have been born and grown there, accruing a network of social and material relationships authenticating its relationship to community and place (ibid., 196-7). More recent research on replication and restoration in a variety of Scottish contexts further reinforces this, illustrating how authenticity is produced and

negotiated in the context of complex, 'composite biographies' (Foster and Curtis 2016). For instance, despite its modern materiality, the authenticity of the 1970 concrete replica of the St John's Cross on Iona is also produced and negotiated in reference to the craftsmanship involved in its production, alongside its wider material and social relationships to people and place (Foster and Jones 2019, 1184).

Tangible biographies: the role of material transformation

The material transformation of various objects, buildings and sites is another vital element informing people's experience and negotiation of authenticity. Material transformation refers not only to ageing, weathering and resulting patina but also to restoration, reconstruction, relocation and replication – consequences of natural and human forces that physically impact on the materiality of heritage. In the discourse of difference between 'East' and 'West', a materialist approach is generally associated with Western heritage, while Eastern heritage is believed to correlate primarily with spirituality and transmission of knowledge. However, we argue that this opposition has been over-simplified, ignoring the common complexities of people's responses to material transformation. Empirical evidence reveals that material transformation plays an important role in shaping aesthetic and cultural demands towards the tangible biographies of heritage objects and sites in both Scotland and China.

Ageing and patina have been considered central factors producing aesthetic qualities of beauty and harmony in the European context (Glendinning 2013, 119-121), as well as a sense of 'pastness' (Holtorf 2013) integral to the experience of authenticity. Research in Scotland confirms that people's experience of authenticity is strongly influenced by the materiality of heritage (e.g. Douglas-Jones et al. 2016). However, rather than a scientific concern with material attributes, for most people the significance of material transformation is more to do with 'the look of age' and the *feelings* this produces (Jones 2009, 142). That is to say, people's experience of authenticity in relation to material transformation is more concerned with the ineffable sensations created by physical clues of age and ageing, than with the rationalistic, scientific attentiveness of conservation works to historical accuracy. Affective responses to the physical signs of ageing and patina create a sense of 'pastness' (Holtorf 2013) and evoke connections between people, objects and places across space and time (Jones 2010). So, in the case of Glasgow Cathedral, the most intact medieval Cathedral in

mainland Scotland, the wear and tear on the building materials are vital to visitors' experience of authenticity, providing people with a palpable sense of connection to those who have passed through the place as a site of faith. It is the imprints and marks left on the substance of the building that enable the supposedly voiceless stones to 'speak' to their audience (Jones 2016, 130).

Conservation often aims to stabilise processes of material transformation, selectively preserving the signs of ageing and ruination, whilst simultaneously arresting them (Jones 2006; Jones and Yarrow 2013). Correspondingly, restoration, reconstruction, relocation and replication are regarded with caution, but they are nevertheless regularly deployed framed by specific circumstances. In such contexts, people's experience of authenticity is often more closely associated with the extent to which these interventions deliver meaningful narratives activating networks of relationships between things, people and places. For instance, in dealing with the structurally unsound remains of a gargoyle at Glasgow Cathedral, conservation efforts rested on reconstruction of the sculpture in a sympathetic contemporary style, instead of reconstruction of an original form (which in this case was fully decayed). For the architects overseeing the project, the method was justified by the involvement of masons as embodiments of a craft tradition (Jones and Yarrow 2013, 16). Continuity of craftsmanship was also an idea explicitly passed on to visitors through display boards, aiming to aid the experience of authenticity by bringing out connections between people, things and places in the past and present (ibid., 3).

Another example is how residents of Hilton of Cadboll perceived the relocation and replication of the cross-slab. Since dislocation of people and places due to the Highland Clearances is still a prominent aspect of social memory, sentiments about displacement and marginalisation are strongly reflected in local residents' perceptions of what makes the monument authentic. To some residents, the rediscovered lower-section would lose its authenticity if it were taken away from its 'birthplace', whilst the reconstructed replica acquired authenticity through the connections forged during the process of its construction (Jones 2010, 195-196). Focusing on community co-production of 3D records and models, the ACCORD project provides empirical evidence of how authenticity can even migrate from original materials to their digital replicas, through the meanings, values and attachments informing the latter's design and creation, embodying networks of relationships between objects, people and places (Jones et al. 2017).

More counterintuitively, if current orthodoxies are accepted, the tangible biographies of historic things also influence people's experience of authenticity in various contexts of China. It is generally held that Chinese traditions were indifferent to patina, in favour of renewed, pristine surfaces and structures. However, the public's aesthetic and cultural preferences towards heritage and its conservation have evolved in recent decades. In Chinese antiquarianism, the term '包浆 *Baojiang*' is loosely equivalent to patina – referring to the coating layer naturally developed on the surface of objects through processes of chemical reactions in response to age and human touch. The significance of *Baojiang* is rooted not only in its materiality, as a testimony to antiquity, but also in its transcendent richness concerning past owners, as well as cultivated spirituality over time (Zhao and Sun 2017).

The Chinese heritage sector has never officially applied this concept in conservation, but the word has been increasingly used in a broader sense (e.g. *the 'Baojiang' of a city*) to indicate both tangible and intangible accretions of vicissitudes. The broader use of the term reflects a transformation of public aesthetics, with a growing appreciation of the attractiveness of oldness, decay and roughness in historic environments. However, authorised heritage practices in China still harbour a bias towards removal of patina in conservation. Deterioration and damage are generally designated as '病害 *binghai',* the same word used for diseases in biological terms. The bias indicates an over-emphasis on evidence and over-reliance on conservation science in assessing authenticity, representing the heritage sector's adoption of international rationalist heritage discourses alongside obsolete assumptions about the public's aesthetic and cultural demands.

Ethnographic research further reveals that in various circumstances people's experience of authenticity regarding the tangible biographies of historic remains is determined by the extent to which meaningful and emotive relationships are established between people, things and places. The Daming Palace heritage park, located in the northern suburb of Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, provides an in-depth, if controversial, example. The park comprises the archaeological remains of a royal palatial complex of the Tang Dynasty (CE 681-907). Covering an area of 320 hectares, the park was transformed from a mixture of urban and rural spaces, generally referred to as the 'Daobei' region with a large population descended from domestic refugees during the Second World War. The construction of the park took place between 2008 and 2010,

with approximately 100,000 people relocated from the site (Gao 2016, 217-219). The architectural materials were primarily rammed earth and timber, leaving little more than rammed earth foundations, something that is neither easily apprehended nor aesthetically appreciated by the general public (ibid., 229). To address this issue, the design of the park includes many modern features such as archaised décor and artistic sculptures, whereas the archaeological remains are protected and displayed through *in situ* preservation, partial restoration, museum presentation, reconstruction with modern materials, and replication by scale models. Some building remnants, such as remains of the Hanyuan Hall and Linde Hall, are preserved with protective layers of brickwork and concrete enveloping the original fabrics too fragile to be exposed.

Regarding the material transformation of the park, qualitative social research reveals that local residents' experience of authenticity primarily concerns *feelings* elicited by the material biography of the park. One major dissatisfaction amongst local residents relates to the loss of 'antique tastes', referring to conservation approaches that deprive people of the physical traces of 'vicissitudes', failing to offer an atmosphere of antiquity and nostalgia (ibid., 225). A study of tourist perceptions of the park reveals similar frustrations from its visitors (Li and Qian 2017, 388). In contrast, local residents generally respond positively to conservation approaches that physically maintain some elements of the old Daobei neighbourhood as part of the material biography of the archaeological site (Gao 2016, 226). To some residents, the trees at the Imperial Path Square, intended to function as coordinates for displaced villagers to locate their former homes, offer a sense of belonging and therefore render the park more authentic. Since dislocation and nostalgia are prominent elements of social memory among local residents, authenticity is accrued through conservation practices that help to foster attachments between things, people and places.

A growing unease towards the progress of heritagisation in China further illustrates how material transformation impacts on the experience of authenticity of historic things. Criticism from the public and professions targeting authorised (and unauthorised) conservation practices has significantly increased in recent years, triggering heated discussions over social media surrounding projects deemed controversial. Notable cases include the repainting of the Buddhist rock sculptures of Anyue, the renovation of the Xiaohekou session of the Great Wall, and the stylistic restoration of the Datong City of Shanxi. Debates surrounding these interventions bring to light the fraught relationships between authenticity and material transformation,

pointing to heterogeneous understandings and expectations regarding the material biographies of historic environments, informed by diverse relationships between people, things and places in different contexts. Regarding the controversy of the Datong case, for instance, research shows that behind local residents' support of their mayor Geng Yanbo's ambitious project to re-create the city through stylistic restoration are shared values, identities and agendas in relation to a collective sense of victimisation and a desire for cultural and economic rehabilitation (Cui 2018). Since interventions that dramatically modified the material biography of the city maintained and even bolstered established connections, these practices do not prevent many residents from seeing the transformed city as authentic.

The impact of intangible elements

Intangible aspects of heritage also play a significant role in informing the experience of authenticity. The development and ratification of the UNESCO *Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003 was in large measure a response to critiques of the Eurocentrism of the 1972 *World Heritage Convention*. Greeted with enthusiasm in many non-Western countries, it was met with wariness in the West (Smith and Akagawa 2009). The two UNESCO Conventions are therefore integrally connected with the discourse of difference, where intangibility is associated with Asian, indigenous and other non-Western forms of heritage, whereas Western heritage is considered monumental and material-focused. Accordingly, the study and inscription of intangible traditions, customs and performances have received greater emphasis in non-Western contexts, although there is a growing body of research focusing on European intangible heritage, such as culinary traditions, folklore and festivals (e.g. Kockel et al. 2019). Research relating to intangible traditions and customs has often highlighted the ways in which they are 'staged' and commodified in tourist contexts, rendering their authenticity questionable (after MacCannell 1973). However, as Macdonald (2013, 119 and 135) argues, such research often fails to recognise the active negotiation of authenticity through touristic practices and performances that both reproduce and transform authenticity. Here, we develop this argument emphasising the importance of relations between the intangible and the material in respect to the experience of authenticity.

We have already discussed how traditional craft practices, and the intangible traditions associated with them, play a key role in producing authenticity in the face of material renewal and replication in both Eastern *and* Western contexts. At Glasgow Cathedral, this is conveyed to tourists and members of the congregation through Historic Scotland's information boards (Jones and Yarrow 2013, 4). Yet, ethnographic research reveals that a more complex array of intersecting tangible and intangible elements are involved in the production and negotiation of authenticity at the Cathedral (Jones 2016, 130). For members of the current Protestant congregation, the building embodies a community of faith that transcends space and time, such that 'faith seeps from the walls' (ibid.). For a Historic Scotland heritage manager with an archaeological background, the authenticity of the Cathedral is embodied in each stone, imbued with the labour of those involved in its construction. Whereas for stonemasons removing decayed stonework and replacing it with newly cut indents, the authenticity of their work is underpinned by the unchanging principles of cutting stone, as distinct from the symbolism of hand tools as signifiers for a continuous craft tradition (Yarrow and Jones 2014). Thus, the intangible and metaphysical presence of practices, skills, knowledge and faith accumulated during the long existence of the building is integral to the experience and negotiation of authenticity.

Intangible practices and knowledge are also integral to the experience of authenticity in relation to the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab. The performance and transmission of oral histories, genealogical connections, community activities and events produce a rich web of relationships connecting the monument to people and places (Jones 2010, 193-195). These intangible values, stories and attachments, intimately associated with the fragmented monument, inform the experience and negotiation of authenticity for those who can situate themselves in relation to this network of relations. Similarly, the modern replica of the cross-slab acquired authentic qualities through its relationships to people, and places. During the reconstruction of the monolith, the sculptor's studios became regular haunts for local residents who called in to see the cross-slab 'grow' and to pass the time of day in conversation and conviviality (ibid., 196). Moreover, community events such as céilidhs, processions led by pipers, and ceremonial unveilings marked key phases of the replica's biography, in a manner not unlike rites of passage in a person's life (Jones 2004, 35). Thus, activities, stories and performances involved in the life of the monument forge attachments between objects, people and places, facilitating the negotiation of authenticity.

In China, intangible elements are also essential in facilitating people's experience of authenticity, creating and strengthening values and attachments between things, people and places. For instance, the Daming Palace heritage park represents the 'golden age' of ancient Chinese history, which produced significant literary legacies and inspired artistic creations. People's experience of authenticity is substantially informed by this literary and artistic resonance, as well as their historical imagination, often mediated by modern representations and performances. An IMAX 3D movie named 'Legend of the Daming Palace' was specially produced for the park and routinely shown at its affiliated cinema. Featuring a love story between a Tang dynasty princess and a foreign prince at a time when the Palace was at its peak, the movie has been favourably received, despite its highly fictional nature. Many local residents proclaimed the impact of the story on their interaction with the site, referring to the ways it renders the distant, lifeless archaeological remnants more approachable and comprehensible. A survey focusing on tourists of the park also shows that an overwhelming majority of its visitors find the movie most enjoyable among all the features and approaches employed to display the archaeological heritage (Li and Qian 2017, 388).

In the case of the Huashan rock art area, Gao's (2017) research shows that the rock art sites distributed along the Zuojiang river valley are intimately associated with Zhuang cosmological beliefs, spiritual traditions, family and communal activities, anecdotes, as well as practices and performances reinvented in recent years. The memories, beliefs, stories and activities weave networks of relationships, linking the past to the present and providing a sense of belonging and continuity for the current Zhuang people – an ethnic group with a strong sense of ethnic identity and cultural pride. For example, to a local Zhuang villager whose family has lived adjacent to a cave with painted images for generations, the authenticity of the rock art area lies in memories of paying homage to the cave with family and community members twice a month ever since his childhood until he was too fragile to do the climbing (ibid., 88). Whereas for a non-Zhuang resident who moved to the area for family business, the rock art area provides a sense of connection through witnessing and participating in a memorial ceremony for *Baeuqloegdoz*, the god of ancestors in Zhuang mythology, close to the painted mountain cliffs. During the period when authorities were preparing the area for UNESCO World Heritage designation, a series of (re)invented cultural festivals, events and activities emerged as a result of both government organisation and grassroots

initiatives (ibid., 86). When asked about their perceptions of these activities, such as the 'Huashan martial art' and the 'frog dancing', residents are inclined to refer to traditional rituals that have been practised in different Zhuang regions, as if to "authenticate" the contemporary reinventions. For instance, the frog dancing is compared to the dance moves from the Maguais Festival of Tian'e and Donglan. Through the making, transmission, and authentication of intangible values, memories and attachments, these practices generate genuine connections between things, people and places, and it is these connections that underpin the authenticity of the Huashan rock art area.

Conclusion

In this article, we argue that non-Western critiques of international conservation discourses have provided an important corrective to 'Eurocentric' notions of heritage, bringing about important shifts in global heritage governance. Many of these critiques have derived from, or drawn on, Asian heritage contexts and have called for greater emphasis on the cultural specificity of heritage and its intangible, spiritual and metaphysical character. These are all positive shifts in and of themselves, but as we have discussed, they are accompanied by a new discourse of difference, which can mask complexity and 'become inscribed in various national and geopolitical agendas' (Winter 2014: 135). There are of course many in-depth, nuanced studies revealing the specificities and complexities of approaches to Asian heritage and its conservation in particular local contexts (e.g. Akagawa 2016; Byrne 2014; Cui 2018; Karlström 2005, 2015), and likewise for Western heritage contexts. However, there has been very little critical comparative discussion of the common complexities transcending the 'East'/'West' divide of the kind we engage in here.

In this article we have used our research in China and Scotland as the basis for a novel comparative analysis crosscutting this established dichotomy. In the process, we have been at pains to emphasise cultural heterogeneity and specificity. Furthermore, we do not claim that these two countries are representative of 'Eastern' and 'Western' contexts more generally. More comparative research embracing other national/cultural settings needs to be carried out to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between authenticity and heritage conservation in an increasingly globalised world. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis presented in this article has resulted in a number of important insights and arguments, which challenge the

increasingly entrenched discourse of difference.

In terms of authorised heritage conservation, it is clear that international conservation instruments and global heritage governance have impacted on heritage management in both China and Scotland, creating a shared emphasis on material authenticity, albeit in complex ways. In China, a conservation framework focusing on material heritage and associated discourses of authenticity can be traced back to the 1930s and now plays a prominent role in the nation-state's management of heritage, as it does in Scotland. There is also evidence that this framework has impacted on popular understandings of heritage in China, but at the same time the efficacy, spirituality, and metaphysical significance of 'old things' retain a powerful hold in a wealth of popular religious contexts. Pressures relating to economic development and tourism also impact on conservation practice, alongside practices of replication, reconstruction and rebuilding. In a not unrelated fashion, the demands of tourism, popular culture and sustainable development increasingly mediate heritage conservation in Scotland, and recent studies suggest that the numinous, spiritual and intangible qualities of 'old things' remain more important in people's lives than previously assumed.

Traditional craft practices, and the intangible traditions associated with them, constitute an arena of debate that has been central to challenging ideas of material authenticity. Post-Nara, the extensive use of wood and the regular restoration, reconstruction and rebuilding of historic buildings and monuments, has been heralded as distinctively Asian in contrast to Western conservation. Yet, despite the widespread use of stone in Western contexts, historic buildings and monuments also undergo regular maintenance and material renewal in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK and Europe. Furthermore, in undertaking such maintenance, traditional building skills and craft practices usually play an important role as guarantors of authenticity regardless of mechanisation and industrialisation. The Chinese situation can also be qualified, because although religious belief and craft practice continue to inform widespread rebuilding and renewal of fabric, there are also contexts in which original/historic material fabric is highly valued and contributes to the negotiation of authenticity. Furthermore, dislocation and transformation of craft traditions are also commonplace in Asian countries, not least in China where modernisation processes and political movements such as the Cultural Revolution disrupted the complex relationships between traditional craft skills, spiritual beliefs and sacred sites.

Above all, our comparative analysis has sought to identify common complexities in the experience and negotiation of authenticity, and more generally the relationships between people and things. What emerges is a strong sense of the intangible aspects of the experience of authenticity and the role of networks of relations between historic objects, people and places over time. Our research shows that in both Scotland and China the dynamic social and spiritual lives of 'old things' play an integral role in people's experience and negotiation of the real, the genuine, or authentic; albeit in diverse, culturally specific ways. The relationship between the social and the material is key to the negotiation of authenticity and hence intangible meanings, values and practices sit in complex and dynamic relation to forms of material transformation.

On the basis of this analysis, we argue that there is a need for a new approach to heritage conservation in both Asian and Western contexts that centres on the *experience* of authenticity. Rather than primarily locating the authenticity of heritage in its material origins, we need to consider the unfolding relations between people and 'old things' over time, with particular attention to present and future relations. Furthermore, we need to recognise that conservation involves active interventions in the lives of 'old things' and that it sits in complex relation to other ways of investing in, relating to, and deploying these things. Such an approach would open up dialogues across the 'East'/'West' divide about the common complexities that frame heritage conservation and facilitate more nuanced and productive approaches to the creation of shared heritage futures.

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