CHAPTER 5

Heritage and Memory

5.0 Introduction

Giulio Verdini

Memory is crucial in the process of heritage making, and is 'vital for individuals, groups and communities in forming collective identities' (Apaydin 2020, 1). The negotiation around its meaning, however, is by no means easy. In critical heritage studies this is addressed as the 'problem of memory', given that such a process can generate forgetting, manipulation, appropriations, contrasting visions around commemorations, or even destruction or removal of heritage objects for the sake of eliminating those memories (Harrison 2013). It is worth reminding ourselves of the fortunate definition by Laurajane Smith that heritage is not (only) an object but rather 'an active process engaged with the construction and negotiation of meaning through remembering' (Smith 2006, 66).

As the four articles in this section demonstrate, heritage is deeply ingrained in policy making and shaped by evident, or relatively hidden, economical interests and agendas. It is for this reason that the process of heritage-making, alongside the selective memory that this implies, might be quite controversial in contemporary China, and therefore worth investigation.

Harriet Evans introduces the increasing conflicts between top-down practices of cultural heritage in China and a variety of grassroots voices. The aim is to highlight the interesting emergence of creative practices around heritage, beyond 'a binary relationship between state and locality', and to understand a multiplicity of heritages on the ground. This sheds light into the exceptional

How to cite this book chapter:
Verdini, G., Evans, H., Demgenski, P., Kendall, P. and Zhang, L. S. 2021. Heritage and Memory. In: Kehoe, S. and Wielander, G. (eds.) *Cultural China 2020: The Contemporary China Centre Review*. Pp. 85–102. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/book58.f. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

dynamism of localities in China (including commercial enterprises, tourism and local communities) in claiming their heritage, while also questioning their approaches to heritage reinvention and authenticity.

Philipp Demgenski focuses on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practices, showing the increasing attention around this in China, since the country joined the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2004. As also argued in the previous post, the government plays a central role in heritage production, in this case in the process of identifying and listing ICH, which remains pretty much a matter of the state. On the other hand, this is often seen as an opportunity for local communities to engage actively with ICH, not least for the legitimate attempt to improve their livelihood.

Paul Kendall focuses instead on an interesting case of memory's omission, using as a case study the park created to commemorate the Third Front, a 1960s Maoist military industrial project in Kaili, Guizhou. Here, the process of heritage-making around this industrial legacy has been unpopular leading to the closure of the park, given the recent rebranding strategy of the town around its ethnic Miao and Dong minorities. It remains to be seen whether this failed attempt was originally motivated by genuine, or more instrumental, intentions to give visibility to the industrial workers' history.

The final piece from Lisheng Zhang introduces the Jianchuan Museum Cluster, China's largest non-state museum, in Chengdu, Sichuan. The collection is a material culture repository of China's twentieth century history, which includes objects of controversial periods, such as the resistance war against Japan and the Cultural Revolution, representing contentious memories of a recent past yet to be fully disclosed.

In bringing together these pieces a sense of unresolved tension between official and other memories, and similarly, between state-led and more spontaneous forms of heritage-making, emerges. One might therefore legitimately ask whether this is a typical trait of contemporary China or part of a more general, and international, discussion around heritage.

Indeed, the grand narrative of modern nation states, and the monumentality of their heritage, has been associated with a self-referential and dominant 'authorised discourse of heritage' (ADH) (Smith 2006), as opposed to 'everyday heritage', a people-led practice of heritage-making that shapes ordinary, yet no less important, historic landscapes and places (Mosler 2019). ADH, however, has historic roots in the western practice of material heritage classification and preservation (Choay 1992), which, being so pervasive and widespread, has actually been prevented for a long time from appreciating a variety of unorthodox approaches emerging in other contexts (Verdini 2017). Asian countries, Japan *in primis*, has struggled since the early 1990s in the recognition of other notions of immaterial authenticity, and they have played an important role in challenging the dominant western discourse, resulting in the affirmation of

alternative and intangible forms of heritage more suitable for their tradition (Taylor and Verdini, forthcoming).

Moreover, this is not the only arena of renegotiation around heritage in the international debate. A similar role has been played by emerging landscape approaches to heritage, such as on the cultural landscapes and, more recently, on the historic urban landscape (Taylor 2018). In essence, there has been a broad shift of attention from the monumental to the ordinary, from the tangible to the intangible, from objects to processes, and this emerging discursive practice, no longer shaped by monolithic identities or fixed memories, has found hostility everywhere.

To put it bluntly, what is found in China is common in many other parts of the world, especially when centralised systems of heritage management still persist, or new nationalistic discourses surge (see the brilliant *Heritage and Brexit* of Pendlebury and Veldpaus 2018) with the results of minority voices and memories being marginalised and silenced in the heritage arena. Yet, the question of what is different about China remains. This would not serve the purpose for backing a supposed Chinese exceptionalism, which is increasingly used as an annoying rhetoric of greatness in the new Chinese nationalist discourse (Ho 2014). Rather, this will be used, in the final notes that follow, to highlight a few points to contextualise Chinese approaches to heritage, and to suggest the idea that every scholarly judgment about China should take into account various aspects of its complexity, not least the scales of the phenomena observed. These points are about: cultural soft power, cultural heritage and economic development, and authenticity in heritage making.

Let's first address cultural soft power. China's efforts to revert, in a few years, an image of polluted industrialising 'world factory' into an advanced economy, investing in culture, innovation and creativity is probably unprecedented. Heritage, both tangible and intangible, has played a major role in this (Zhu and Maags 2020). The list of Chinese world heritage sites has exponentially increased; and similarly the support to all kinds of UNESCO programmes. The number of culture and creative-led conservation projects promoted literally in every city, as well as museums, events, and cultural performances within them, is countless. For a country that has modernised very fast at the expense of its traditional culture, let alone the still painful memory of the Cultural Revolution, it is a remarkable achievement that could serve as a model for other fast urbanising countries of Asia and Africa.

When it comes to cultural heritage and economic development, there is a sense of a certain instrumentalism in every project of heritage conservation or promotion in China. It is part of a very effective entrepreneurial governance, accompanied by ad hoc city branding strategies that push localities to compete and to seek for economic gains at all levels, implying large scale heritage regeneration, and aggressive promotion and marketing of cultural resources. However, as some pieces have explained (Evans and Demgenski in particular),

this often finds local communities allied in this process, given the promise of an improved livelihood. It is nevertheless hard to distinguish in China whether projects are motivated by genuine intention to bring benefits to communities or by pure economic calculus, in the hands of few, due to the lack of accountability of policy-making.

Finally, when it comes to authenticity in heritage-making, the process of selection of memory, and material objects, behind any heritage-making process (see for example Kendall and Zhang) is often unclear. So is the question of whether heritage represents the multiplicity of existing voices or, on the contrary, it is subject to a process of authentication which lacks inclusion and diversity, under the diktat of the state's propaganda.

In dealing with China, even after many years, I am always hesitant to reach any black or white conclusion. In respect to heritage and memory, one might argue that China is no different from many other countries, in the ever-present negotiations or clash between dominant and emerging discourses around heritage. When looking at the big picture, and in observing how much the country has evolved in recent years, one can simply appreciate such endeavour. Where the analysis becomes more granular there is no doubt that some controversies arise.

References

Apaydin, V. 2020. Introduction: Why Cultural Memory and Heritage. In: V. Apaydin (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction*, pp. 1–9. London: UCL Press.

Choay, F. 1992. *L'allegorie du Patrimoine*. Paris: Editions du Seuil [The Invention of the Historic Monument, 2001]. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Harrison, R. 2013. *Heritage. Critical Approaches*. London: Routledge.

Ho, B. 2014. Understanding Chinese Exceptionalism: China's Rise, Its Goodness, and Greatness. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 39 (3), 164–176.

Mosler, S. 2019. Everyday Heritage Concept as an Approach to Place-Making Process in the Urban Landscape. *Journal of Urban Design*, 24 (5), 778–793.

Pendlebury, J. and Veldpaus, L. 2018. Heritage and Brexit. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 19 (3), 448–453.

Smith, L. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.

Taylor, K. 2018. Connecting Concepts of Cultural Landscape and Historic Urban Landscape: The Politics of Similarity. *Built Heritage*, 2, 53–67.

Taylor, K. and Verdini, G. Forthcoming. *Cultural Heritage Conservation. Planning and Management Processes*. London: Routledge.

Verdini, G. 2017. Planetary Urbanisation and the Built Heritage from a Non-Western Perspective: The Question of 'How' We Should Protect the Past'. *Built Heritage*, 1 (3), 73–82.

Zhu, Y. and Maags, C. 2020. *Heritage Politics in China: The Power of the Past*. London: Routledge.

5.1 Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China

Harriet Evans

What is cultural heritage in China today? Dominant top-down practices of cultural heritage in China are accompanied by the massive construction of museums, competition for UNESCO recognition, and projects of heritage tourism increasingly associated with the One Belt One Road initiative and designed to boost regional and local incomes. But how do local communities both implicated in these large-scale projects and their discursive effects approach the issue of what to preserve? How do local people's memories of their past cultural experiences inform local projects of cultural preservation?

Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China is a collection of papers that emerged out of a three-year research grant awarded by the Leverhulme Trust, for a project titled 'Conflicts in Cultural Value: Localities and Heritage in Southwest China'. The papers in this volume move beyond the southwest to include areas stretching from Tibet, northern Yunnan and Anren, Sichuan, to Huangshan in Anhui and Quanzhou on the south-eastern seaboard. Together they offer an ethnographic exploration of diverse places and practices, undertaken largely by young Chinese scholars. The overall aim is to foreground the local as a site of negotiation between state, entrepreneurial and local community interests in an economic, political, and cultural context in which heritage practice in China has been transforming local social, economic, and cultural life and reshaping domestic and global notions of China's national identity.

We approach the local not as a fixed spatial definition of place but as a shifting arena of everyday life and belonging underpinning ordinary social interactions. Heritage emerges as a series of creative practices and possibilities that by definition are multiple. Given the pervasive power and appeal of the state's ambitious projects of museum building and world heritage recognition, a dominant heritage discourse of '文化遗产' (*wenhua yichan*) has percolated through to local people's experience of how they negotiate ideas about preservation and conservation of local cultural value. The complex picture of heritage across our different sites cannot be explained by a binary relationship between state and locality, particularly if the latter is inscribed with ideas of resistance and subversion of state power. Rather, multiple heritages are operating at different levels and through different modes of encounter and memory between state, commercial enterprise, tourism, and local communities. Potential sites of conflict between locality and state lead to negotiated redefinitions of heritage—to heritage alternatives—to accommodate desires both to maximise economic

Fig 5.1.a: Baishuitai, Yunnan. Photo by the author.

benefit from heritage construction and to preserve locally-centred ritual and cultural practices. It would be mistaken to think that the local is not concerned with economic benefit; the desire for material well-being is locally as well as centrally defined. Rather than see the economic as contrasted with local ritual/cultural practices, it is a matter of accommodating the varying desires and hopes whose political, economic/material, spiritual, and ethical implications come into contact with each other, leading to a redefinition of heritage and the remaking of the local. Crossing our different sites of enquiry this volume shows a diversity of 'locals'—the remote rural, the urban neighbourhood, the sacred mountain, mainstream heritage sites, and the museum town—as different and alternative heritage practices spanning Han and ethnic minority practices.

From powerful centres of national heritage value, such as Quanzhou, through to small Naxi communities off the beaten track in northern Yunnan, *wenhua yichan* has thus brought a new focus to people's ideas about what they think is valuable, and what then becomes a value of loss. It has brought a precision to local questions about what people need/who people are that may be under threat and therefore in danger of losing. It also redefines tradition in light of the new heritage projects that have been emerging across the sites of our research and beyond, leading to what can be thought of as 'the newness of tradition'.

One crucial dimension of the alternatives that are emerging in this process is the framing of moral/ethical ideals and realities, often around claims, explicit

Fig 5.1.b: Baishuitai, Yunnan. Photo by the author.

or implicit, to authenticity. Some scholars argue that the 'authentic' (*yuansheng-tai* 原生态) may be best understood as a component of a national discourse of cultural authority shored up by tradition. In conditions where cultural heritage offers substantial economic returns, the evocation of 'authentic traditions' may cement a subjective and collective sense of belonging and memory that paradoxically both reproduces and seeks to resolve possibly violent competition for resources. Such competition is also fed by the state's increasing interest in asserting control over 'cultures' by investing more and more in heritage building projects. Again, claims to authenticity may be prescribed by appeals to the outside, in the form of bringing in expertise of local intellectuals and heritage practitioners, or of appealing to diasporic yearnings of belonging. In the process of such appeals, the local becomes separate and assumes a distinct identity. Elsewhere, such claims may be associated with practices of what some might term the 'deep rural', or increasingly marginalised landscapes and places linked to ancestral legacies of a deep past which exists in memories and fragments of ritual practices retrieved from recent decades of violence and destruction.

All these alternative heritages converge in their concern for the right to preserve and conserve for the future. At one level this concern forms part of a shared yet contested discourse about how and what to preserve —what old things to preserve and what new things to construct. It is also present in an ethical value of remembering as a creative process involving the return of people to their hometown/village of origin to invest in honouring their ancestry. Ideas of preserving and remembering may also be associated with loss and fear of humiliation. They also have to distinguish between different things/entities that are being preserved and remembered at different levels in the relationships between people, things, ideas and places. All these create different heritage values that operate in different ways, with different meanings, creating differently embodied and spatialised notions of subjecthood and cultural value.

5.2 'When It Comes to Intangible Cultural Heritage, Everyone Is Always Happy': Some Thoughts on the Chinese Life of a UNESCO Convention

Philipp Demgenski

In early 2017, I joined the UNESCO Frictions Project (UNESCO Frictions n.d.) and set out to study how the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2016) is implemented in China. In this post I reflect upon some of my experiences and findings.

The 2003 Convention defines Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage' (UNESCO 2016, Article 2). Accordingly, cultural heritage is not (only) material, fossilised and monumental, but dynamic and subjective. Also, it is the so-called 'heritage bearers' and not experts who are to define heritage, imbue it with meaning and value and work towards its safeguarding and management. By focusing on heritage communities, on ideas of participation and self-representation, the founding fathers (Proschan 2018) of the 2003 Convention also particularly envisioned this convention as a tool for good governance and the protection of human rights.

China was among the first countries to ratify it in 2004. Since then, impressive amounts of ICH elements have been identified domestically, legal texts have been devised and the ICH concept has found much resonance in the media and among the general public. China was also quick in setting up its own administrative and institutional framework. It now has a comprehensive national inventory system for ICH elements at four administrative levels (national, provincial, municipal and district/county) and an additional four-tier inventory for so-called 'Representative ICH Transmitters,' (*daibiaoxing chuancheng ren*

Fig 5.2.a: Example of 'non-heritage' discourse. Photo by the author.

代表性传承人) (ihchina.cn). Locally known as *fei yi* 非遗 (lit. 'non-heritage,' see Fig 5.2.a.), ICH is indeed everywhere, especially when one actively looks for it. During fieldwork, I found it at airports, in train stations, shopping malls, on mobile APPs, in the media, in specially designed ICH expos, in academia and, above all, in political discourse. I heard many proud remarks about China being particularly rich in ICH. Bringing up ICH seemed like a cue for people to ascertain that ICH and China simply belong together. A Chinese folklorist who also advises the government on ICH matters once told me: 'Normally, it's always either the people that are not happy about the government or the government that is not happy about the people. Only in ICH, everyone is always happy: government, scholars, people'. As of early 2020, China has 40 elements inscribed in the UNESCO ICH lists, more than any other country (Zheng and Qing 2020).

There are a number of reasons for this 'ICH fever' (*fei yi re* 非遗热). The 2003 Convention and with it the ICH concept entered China precisely at a point when notions of 'traditional culture' (*chuantong wenhua* 传统文化) or 'folk customs' (*minsu* 民俗) re-emerged in the political and public discourse, after having been under attack during the Cultural Revolution and largely ignored during the early 'reform years'. In 2002, then President Jiang Zemin famously called for 'the protection of major cultural heritage and outstanding folk arts' (Jiang 2002) and hereby heralded the beginning of a new identity for cultural heritage as not being antithetical to, but very much compatible with the goals of economic growth and modernisation. ICH presented the state with a distinct value framework to appraise, control, but also to legitimise many cultural practices and traditions that were previously discarded as undesired superstitions. Under this newly gained umbrella of legitimacy, officially-endorsed ICH could then also be exploited for the growing domestic tourist industry and the increasing desire of people to travel and consume 'culture'. Especially in recent years, ICH transmitters have been urged to innovate and tailor their respective

products to market demands (Hu 2017); there now exist a number of mobile APPs that sell ICH products as luxury goods. Internationally, the introduction of ICH has allowed China to further engage in cultural diplomacy, consolidate its soft-power and to spread a specific image of 'cultural China' around the globe; being a member of an international legislation has also helped the state to legitimate policies at home.

It is clear: ICH matters in and to China and it is ubiquitous in everyday life. But looking at domestic understandings, both on the level of legislation and public discourse, there exists a rather stark discrepancy vis-à-vis the UNESCO definition described above. A scholar and ICH advisor to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism once even told me that 'ICH in China is not actually ICH'. Rather than defining ICH as something ephemeral, mobile, and spontaneous that belongs to the communities whose heritage is at stake, China's own ICH Law from 2011 (State Council 2011), for example, 'is formulated for the purposes of inheriting and promoting the distinguished traditional culture of the Chinese nation…' The law also refers to the idea of 'authenticity' (ibid., Article 4), which had deliberately been excluded from the 2003 Convention. Chinese ICH is, in fact, conceptually much closer to the World Heritage Convention from 1972 and allows for external actors (scholars, officials) to evaluate and authenticate heritage. The law is also largely void of the key ideas of community participation, merely stating that 'the State shall encourage and support its citizens, legal persons and other organisations *to participate* in the work concerning the protection of intangible cultural heritage' (ibid., Article 9, emphasis added). Someone closely working with the Ministry of Culture once stated half-jokingly that 'in China, if they don't control or regulate you, your participation is already quite significant', explaining that the idea of community participation is really only something understood and used by experts who have a good grasp of heritage terminology (Bortolotto et. al 2020). Generally and little surprisingly, Chinese ICH is essentially a matter of the state. In the absence of the political ideals of good governance and human rights that permeate the discourse at UNESCO, Chinese ICH is largely reduced to a general idea of 'culture' and even though many actors involved in the ICH field see the need to 'keep this culture alive', it is essentially the state that not only decides how this should be done, but also what ICH is and who it belongs to.

At the same time, recalling the above quote about everyone in ICH being happy, the introduction of this concept has also been an enabling and empowering force. For example, many practitioners and official ICH transmitters in China conveyed to me that they are indeed happy about the existence of the ICH framework, that they feel 'more recognised' and, most commonly-heard, that ICH has allowed them to earn money and make a livelihood from their cultural practices to a degree that was not possible before. So within the broader political economy of China, we may say that ICH has provided many practitioners with an opportunity to *participate* in and benefit from national economic development and modernisation. This form of participation may be different from that

envisioned by the 2003 Convention, but it would be erroneous to jump to the conclusion that China's 'take' on ICH is somehow wrong. After all, even though politics are often seen as standing in the way of genuine safeguarding and preservation work (ironically often by those who most passionately believe in the political potential of the 2003 Convention), ICH is by definition political and it is also never neutral. When cultural practices and traditions are 'diagnosed' as ICH (Hafstein 2015), they are subject to a new value system, which is inevitably also transformative, whether in China or elsewhere. How this transformation takes place and what it looks like can only be evaluated within specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts. Maintaining this degree of detachedness has, however, been the biggest challenge in my fieldwork as I was always treading the narrow path between 'UNESCO extremes' and 'China extremes'.

References

Bortolotto, C., Demgenski, P., Karampampas, P. and Toji, S. 2020. Proving Participation: Vocational Bureaucrats and Bureaucratic Creativity in the Implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Social Anthropology*, 28 (1), 66–82.

Hafstein, V. T. 2015. Intangible Heritage as Diagnosis, Safeguarding as Treatment. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 52 (2–3), 281–99.

Hu, Y. 2017. Plan to Revitalize Traditional Crafts. *People's Daily*, April 5. Retrieved from: https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201704/05/WS59bb4568a310d4d9ab7e20a2.html.

Ihchina.cn. 2018. Qing Dan 清单 [Lists]. Retrieved from: http://www.ihchina.cn/directory_list.html.

People's Daily. 2002. Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at the 16th Party Congress. November 18. Retrieved from: http://en.people.cn/200211/18/eng20021118_106983.shtml.

Proschan, F. 2018. Interview with Frank Proschan: Folklore, Folklife, and Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Asian Ethnology Podcast*, March 24. Retrieved from: https://asianethnology.org/page/podcastproschan.

State Council. 2011. Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo feiwu zhi wenhua yichan fa 中华 人民共和国非物质文化遗产法 [Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China]. Retrieved from: http://www.ihchina.cn/3/10377.html.

UNESCO. 2016. Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Decision of the Intergovernmental Committee: 11.COM 10.B.6. Addis Ababa.

UNESCO Frictions. N.d. Retrieved from: https://frictions.hypotheses.org.

Zheng, H. and Qing, Y. 2020. China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Goes Online, Gains New Vitality. *People's Daily*, June 24. Retrieved from: http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0624/c90000-9703648.html.

5.3 Ruins on Ruins: Forgetting, Commemorating, and Re-Forgetting the Third Front

Paul Kendall

During 2011 and 2012, I did fieldwork in the small city of Kaili studying—among other things—its branding as a tourist destination of singing and dancing ethnic minorities. Branding turned out to be pervasive in this autonomous prefectural capital of southeast Guizhou, including the physical imprint of ethnic minority motifs upon nearly all official leisure spaces (see Kendall 2019). I was therefore surprised in 2013 to learn that a small park had been built in Kaili to celebrate not ethnic minorities but the Third Front, a 1960s Maoist military–industrial project constructed in response to the threat of nuclear war amid some of China's most inhospitable terrain, including the mountain valleys around Kaili. On a further trip in 2018, I returned to find the park in ruins. In the following paragraphs, I analyse the park's rapid rise and fall as a manifestation of tensions between recent nationwide efforts to repackage the Third Front as industrial heritage and a city brand that stresses rural minority culture rather than Maoist industry.

During the 1960s and '70s, 11 Third Front factories were constructed at a distance of around 5–10 km from the (then) small town of Kaili in accordance with a central directive that these war factories should be dispersed, hidden and located in mountain valleys. During the post-Mao era, in contrast, the municipal government has marketed Kaili as a tourist destination of exotic minority culture, while all but one Third Front factory has relocated or gone bankrupt. City brands are synecdoches (following Massey 2007, 41–2 on London's 'strategy of synecdoche'), in the sense that a preferred part (or 'unique selling point') provides a simplified representation of a complex whole. In the branding of Kaili, the preferred part has been the exoticised cultural practices of the Miao and Dong minorities, while the Third Front has been almost entirely overlooked. Indeed, there is a tension between images of industrial spaces—with their contemporary associations of homogeneity and pollution—and Kaili's brand as a place to escape the stress of the big city and experience untainted rural minority culture. Monikers attached to Kaili, such as the 'homeland of 100 festivals' (*baijie zhi xiang* 百节之乡), refer to the festivals of minority groups who have long been associated with the rural and the primitive, rather than with industrial production. There is also a certain hostility towards the Third Front in Kaili, with some local residents remembering factory workers–many of whom came from big cities—as aloof and arrogant.

I was therefore surprised in 2013 to come across a couple of online articles which described the ongoing construction of a Third Front park in Kaili. Later that year, I visited this unexpected commemoration to industrial heritage. The small park was located far outside the city centre next to the ruins of a former Third Front factory. A towering, renovated Mao statue visually dominated the

Fig 5.3.a: Third Front park. Photos by the author.

park, with visual support provided by mock tanks and guns as well as commemorative plaques. The park was deserted, difficult-to-reach, and only occasionally depicted in local media, in contrast to ethnicised spaces such as the Nationalities Stadium which have featured heavily alongside pictures of Miao villages in touristic representations of Kaili. Nevertheless, the park's mere existence fascinated me, given the lack of representation that the Third Front had previously been accorded within the built environment of the city.

Looking beyond Kaili, this neglect of the Third Front has not been representative of recent governmental approaches in southwest China. In fact, many local governments and businesses have come to regard the Third Front as exploitable heritage, given its visually striking combination of industrial architecture and picturesque rural surroundings, as well as its narrative of heroic patriotic workers. Discourse is always on the move, and understandings of the Third Front have become intertwined with the rampant production of national heritage, as it extends even to include Maoist industry. Thus, the municipal government of neighbouring Duyun in south Guizhou has transformed one former factory site into a Third Front museum. And in the suburbs of Guiyang, another former factory site has been shaped into a variation on the 798 Art Zone theme, as a site of consumption and commemoration including museum, art gallery, shopping mall and cinema.

A city brand typically stresses the unique selling point of a place. It shapes and promotes a tamed, managed form of difference. However, there is also a defensive, hedging quality to many city brands, so that a unique selling point may be complemented—or even contradicted—by emulations of other cities' unique selling points. So if Guiyang has been developing its reputation as a big data city, then Kaili develops its own big data centre. And if multiple cities in Guizhou have Third Front commemorative sites, then it would be best for Kaili to avoid being different, even if difference is what makes a city brand stand out.

When I visited Kaili in 2018, I found that the park—a commemoration to ruined factories—had itself fallen into ruin. Grass and flower beds were untended while plaques were faded or broken. The Mao statue also seemed to

Fig 5.3.b: Mao statue and residential complex, Kaili. Photo by the author.

be facing in the opposite direction to how I remembered. In 2013, Mao's face and upraised hand could be seen from the road that passed in front of the park, with the factory's ruins to the rear of the park. In 2018, the road provided a view of Mao's backside in one direction and a view of a new luxury residential complex in the other direction. It eventually dawned on me that the road had been moved so that it now cut through where part of the park had previously been located, while the residential complex stood where the ruins of Factory 210 had been located. On the residential side of the road was an impeccably tended space of greenery, in contrast to the semi-abandoned Third Front park.

In 2013, a huge billboard close to the park had advertised the impending arrival of this residential complex, whose name 'Mountain and City' (*shan yu cheng* 山与城) encapsulated a tricky PR balancing act of depicting the complex as not only surrounded by greenery but also close to urban amenities. Fortuitously, a park constitutes both greenery and urban amenity, and the complex's profile must have been enhanced during initial advertising by the presence of the new park at its main entrance. In 2015, the residential complex's profile was further boosted by the announcement—covered by *Kaili Online* (*Kaili wang* 凯里网) —that the existing 58-mu park would be expanded into a 260-*mu* park including Third Front-style buildings, a museum, underground car park and, of course, ethnic minority architecture. It would be 'constructed according to the AAAA standards for scenic sites', although, as of 2019, it did not feature in the Guizhou Government's official directory of AAAA sites.

In 2016, *Civilised Kaili Online* (*Kaili wenming wang* 凯里文明网) reported that work on the first stage of this new Third Front commemorative project was 80% complete. On my 2018 trip, work looked nowhere near complete. In 2020, the promoters have seemingly gone not so much for a soft business opening as a silent opening, with no online indication that the new park has formally opened. Regardless of physical realities, Kaili is now frequently mentioned when online articles on the Third Front provide lists of cities that have Third Front commemorative sites. However, it remains to be seen to what extent the project will represent a genuine branding attempt to recognise the complexities of Kaili's urban development, as built not just on the brand of ethnic tourism but also the construction efforts of Third Front workers.

References

Kaili wang 凯里网 [Kaili Online]. 2015. Kaili jiang jianshe 'sanxian jianshe' bowuguan 凯里将建设 "三线建设"博物馆 [Kaili Will Build Third Front Museum]. Loupan.com, September 19. Last Retrieved from: http://kl.loupan.com/html/news/201509/2009558.html.

Kaili wenming wang 凯里文明网 [Civilised Kaili Online]. 2016. Kaili shi dazao Zhongguo sanxian jianshe jungong dianzi zhuti gongyuan 凯里市打造中国三线建设军工电子主题公园 [Kaili Builds Third Front-Themed Park]. December 19. Retrieved from: http://gzkl.wenming.cn/toutiao/201612/t20161219_2658128.shtml.

Kendall, P. 2019. *The Sounds of Social Space: Branding, Built Environment, and Leisure in Urban China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Massey, D. 2007. *World City*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

5.4 Complex Collections, Contentious Memories: Reflections on the Jianchuan Museum Cluster

Lisheng Zhang

The first item visitors see in the Jianchuan Museum Complex (JMC), China's largest non-state museum, is a red gantry crane. In its overwhelming immensity, the 20 x 12 metre steel structure, acquired from a city stricken during the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake, serves as the museum's entrance gate, bearing the name 'Jianchuan Museum Complex' (*Jianchuan Bowuguan Juluo* 建川博物馆聚落), in the handwriting of its founder and director, Mr. Fan Jianchuan. The sheer scale of its entrance distinguishes the JMC from the landscape of its locale, a historic small town called Anren, just outside Chengdu, in Sichuan Province, southwestern China. Through the crane stands a statue of a gun-holding soldier, erected on top of a 40-ton Second World War Japanese bunker shipped from Tianjin, a northern port city some 1850 kilometres away. Behind

Fig 5.4.a: Entrance to the Jianchuan Museum Complex. Photo by the author.

it, a 1000-metre drive, lined with giant bamboo towering exuberantly over a narrow footpath on each side, leads to the main compound of over 82 acres, housing 30 individual museums, each dedicated to a specific theme related to the memories of the Resistance War against Japan (1931–1945), the Mao Era (1949–1976), the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake and Chinese folk culture in the past hundred years.

Developed since 2003, the JMC is built upon the personal collection of Fan Jianchuan, a self-made multimillionaire and collector who has amassed over eight million items over the past 30 years. His collection ranges from retired tanks, missiles, and airplanes to suicide notes, personal diaries, and photographs from the Cultural Revolution. While the museums display only a small portion of the collection, the majority is stored in a huge warehouse that opens exclusively to invited guests and employees.

From 2015 to 2017, I spent 15 months as a voluntary worker at the JMC conducting fieldwork for my PhD research as part of the Leverhulme-funded project Conflict in Cultural Value: Localities and Heritage in Southwest China, and had the opportunity of visiting the museum warehouse a few times.

Being in the presence of the entire collection is a formidable experience. Stepping into the warehouse, one is immersed in long lines of shelves of Mao busts, clocks, teacups, radios, and mirrors from the Maoist period. Along the walls, huge piles of vintage posters and newspapers reach up to the high ceiling. Going further, one comes across lines of closed bookshelves with A4 signs noting 'Cultural Revolution Materials' in bold. These shelves are stuffed with

Fig 5.4.b: Fan Jianchuan's collection warehouse. Photo by the author.

documents wrapped in plastic bags, containing personal profiles, trial records, self-criticism letters, complaint documents, rehabilitation documents, and so on. Mostly handwritten, these crisp and yellowish pieces of paper were items that had the power to have people imprisoned, persecuted, and their families broken. I remember myself breathing heavily while walking amongst the shelves, pondering the number of individuals being documented here by what lay quietly and banally in front of me. Yet the questions that really matter seem to be 'who were they?' and 'where are they now?'

Equally worth considering as the destiny of their authors is the destiny of the documents themselves. Upstairs, there are six full rooms of photo albums and diaries Fan collected during home clearances in the 1990s. These images of total strangers, and brief or lengthy accounts of their days, are of the most ordinary hence familiar contents: trips to the park on a sunny day, family gatherings, the first day back to school after holidays, significant moments in a relationship. I refrained from photographing these diaries and photographs, for I found them simply too private, too intimate for some random spectator like myself.

With the earliest acquisitions made during and shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Fan's collecting took on momentum in the early 1990s with the emergence of antique markets across the country, where he travelled extensively and frequently. Over the years Fan cultivated a countrywide network of antique traders specialising in twentieth century collectibles. The museum's 50,000 Mao-era mirrors were acquired by 20 of his contacts going through villages in different parts of China with loudspeakers looping the voice message 'there is a crazy guy from Sichuan who wants to trade new mirrors for your old

ones and give you five *yuan*!' Since 2009, the JMC has been running an annual Red Collectors Forum (*Hongse shoucang jiaoliuhui* 红色收藏交流会) where these traders gather to showcase their collections, network, and most importantly, sell their items to the museum. Given the quantity and miscellany of its collection, the JMC's cataloguing process has never been able to keep up with its acquisition, and only about 15% of its collection were catalogued by 2017.

The JMC is one of the very few museums in the country that has ever been able to address some of its most politically contentious memories. The early museums in the complex, opened from 2005 to 2010, are engaged with 'sensitive' topics such as the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Guomindang* 国民党) and the Cultural Revolution that have been largely marginalised or completely obliterated in official museum narratives. Highlighting the power of 'real artefacts', which the JMC possesses abundantly and often displays in unusually large quantities, with contextual explanations kept to a minimum, these museums create uniquely affective and evocative experiences.

In the meantime, the project has also been developed as a profitable business since around 2010. It now welcomes close to two million visitors a year and has successfully branched out to museum planning and construction, working with local governments across the country. In 2018, it opened another group of eight museums in the nearby megalopolis, Chongqing. Therefore, though non-state, it is deeply enmeshed with government authority in political and economic terms.

The largest non-state material culture repository of China's twentieth century history, the JMC speaks amply of the moral and political complexities in remembering, collecting as well as understanding the museum and heritage industry in China today. And yet the vast majority of its collection remains unavailable for research or display, and the future of this unprecedented and gigantic project is still a story unfolding.