

INTRODUCTION

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# Introduction: tourism and built heritage



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Built heritage, an important part of the cultural heritage of towns and cities, is always involved in both industry practices and scholarly discussions regarding tourism. As one of the original forms of heritage, built heritage enjoys a popular image; in the eyes of the public, built heritage represents one of the most conceivable heritage types. When discussing heritage tourism, appealing pictures can always be evoked in tourists' minds—ancient gardens where summer breeze blows, faded castles that spread fairy tales and mysteries, and labyrinthine streets in which traditional lifestyles are preserved. Visiting these sites is inspirational; built heritage sites encourage visitors to deeply enjoy themselves, appreciate the historical layers of the built environment, and sustain a strong sense of connectedness with places and belonging in our societies. Over the past decades, the world has observed these marvels and continues to promote this market.

Therefore, the demand for built heritage visitation is arguably increasing, as is the practice in which historic buildings serve tourism operations. Instead of merely acting as sightseeing resources, heritage houses, streets and towns more often host touristic activities and consequently function as the carriers of and venues for tourism. Opposing views then arise, debating whether touristification brings satisfying outcomes to all stakeholders or simply induces conflicts and demolishes conservation efforts. However, neither perspective effectively portrays the reality, where there is a tension between conservation and utilisation but one that can potentially be reconciled to achieve sustainability.

The search for such a balanced approach is predominantly a quest for understanding the complex dynamics that connect heritage and tourism, which can be

understood through the attempts to describe, explain and manage conflicts. Heritage and tourism have always shared a challenging relationship in which conflicts seem to be an inevitable by-product of their interaction. Moving beyond the idea of disagreement among individuals, here, the term 'conflict' encompasses such situations that arise in cultural exchange, resource usage, management structure, value recognition, legislation and law enforcement, the modernity-tradition divergence, and so on. Exploring conflicts helps decode the network that compromises or underpins tourism development in built heritage spaces. It then enables both practitioners and scholars to identify the challenges and develop solutions to ease the tensions between tourism utilisation and heritage conservation.

Some types of conflicts pose a more prominent threat to heritage tourism, and the divergence between modernity and tradition is one of the most fundamental. This conflict exists even without tourism when the traditional significance of built heritage sites is exposed to the contemporary world, which is an apparent carrier of modernity. With the intervention of tourism, these buildings increasingly entail certain degrees of change that again epitomise modernity. To accommodate tourism demands, heritage authenticity is in turn subjected to commercialisation, and protection efforts collapse under excessive commercial practice.

Another decisive set of conflicts arises within communities that share a connection with heritage. Local residents, governmental authorities, and built heritage owners, along with their interests, interact in a rather complex fashion once tourism develops in the region. In this process, stakeholders may become divided. Often, they first experience ontological conflict in which different groups interpret and emphasise distinct values of heritage. Then, they become overwhelmed by the further contradictions inherent in their power position and core

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interests, as well as other conflicts of legislation and governance etc.

Seeking to solve all conflicts simultaneously is indeed overoptimistic, but efforts to gradually tackle these challenges are undoubtedly meaningful. Researchers immerse themselves into heritage sites and communities, seek to understand the diverse perspectives, portray the complicated tensions and conflicts, and collect cases of both positivity and negativity. Collectively, we all progress towards a vision of comanagement, reflecting a sustainable future where the locals embrace and benefit from tourism and tourists respect and appreciate the built heritage. This comanagement relies on innovations of many kinds, and understanding conflicts is the most basic of these. This special issue of *Built Heritage* represents one of the many attempts to respond to these concerns and a unique opportunity to gather fresh insights and make contributions to the fields of both heritage and tourism. I am grateful to the Editorial Board of the journal and Tongji University for the chance to edit this special issue and for their support in making these papers available. My sincere appreciation also goes out to all the authors and reviewers who shared their knowledge and coproduced such high-quality work.

Fang Wang and her colleagues take a postcolonial approach and assess the conflicts centring around Kulangsu's interpretation. Their paper concerns the divergence between the authority discourses of the World Heritage application course and that of tourism communication and the divergence between authority discourses and tourist discourses. Unpacking these differences also unveils the intricate dynamics that shape interpretation practices and construct discourses. Their research also suggests that tourists are capable independent thinkers, but their lay discourses on Kulangsu's colonial history are often marginalised due to the power structure. The debate on what should be interpreted and the means of interpretation may never end, but this paper serves as a mindful reminder and a reflection on the selective interpretation of built heritage, its legitimacy, and knowledge delivery under power manipulation.

The exploration of Chin-Ee Ong criticises tourism intervention regarding a historic building. He adopts a Lefebvrian perspective and examines the adaptive reuse of the historic building as a modern café. The diverse means of interaction and negotiation between the authorities, café owners, workers, and consumers are delineated, and the modern space production resulting from such complex dynamics is presented. His findings enrich our understanding of the transformation from a historic building into a consumer space. It also stresses the contradictions within this process, i.e., the contradictions between commercialisation and preservation,

history and modernity. The success of modern space production and the loss of tradition in this historic building is a call to attention for preservation efforts and sustainability principles in the adaptive reuse for tourism.

The collected articles explore the intersection between tourism and built heritage, and the paper written by Mingming Su and her colleagues evaluates and identifies the different stages of tourism development in an ancient town. Notably, their findings add new insights to the creative destruction model, as they discover that in a heritage site, careful designs and strong support from the government and local entrepreneurs can sustain the development of tourism, balance host–guest conflicts and avoid degradation. The leading role of authorities and local elites in managing conflicts in heritage tourism is well acknowledged, and this work further illuminates several ideas for coordinating stakeholder benefits that may help address the challenges of many heritage towns. This has significant value in shaping industry practice and developing methods to ease conflicts in heritage tourism development.

The work of Ting Jiang maintains an even sharper focus on conflicts, looking at the intrinsic contestation within Chinese *qiaoxiang*. This work summarises the underlying causes of the conflicts within Chinese *qiaoxiang* in a conceptual manner. The idea of tourism centring around *qiaoxiang* is contradictory in many ways. The diaspora identity evokes the duality of the economic and cultural aspects of heritage, the liminality between traditions and modernity, and the oscillation between mobility and stillness. These three sources of conflict elicit three core questions: Whose heritage it is? What values does the heritage present? How are such values interpreted? Answering these questions, the work furthers the theoretical framework of intrinsic contestations. It may generate a new surge of reflection on diaspora heritage and its role in tourism development. Developing a means of carefully balancing and representing the sources of these conflicts may be a cornerstone of the next step forward.

The work by Yehong Sun provides another example of Digang Food Street, where tourism development can effectively promote the sustainable utilisation and adaptability of buildings. This paper outlines the innovation inherent in old buildings incorporating new functions involving commercials and education to better adapt to tourism development. Within such adaptation, it is encouraging that the locals willingly participate in the tourism industry and, more importantly, cultivate an awareness of heritage protection and inheritance. Fostering a healthy relationship between the locals and the tourism industry is always challenging; in this case of success, several premises should be underscored, including an aligned understandings of heritage values, a shared

agreement on heritage protection and sustainable development, and a supportive cooperation among all parties. These may inform future practice and theories of heritage street adaptive reuse.

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