INTERVENTION

Comments on 'historical imaginaries, historic urban branding, and the local state in China: rejuvenation discourse, manufactured heritage and simulacrascapes' by Andrew Malcolm law

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Andrew Malcolm Law's intervention article, 'Historical imaginaries, historic urban branding, and the local state in China: rejuvenation discourse, manufactured heritage and simulacrascapes', presents an interdisciplinary discussion on the construction, in terms of imaginaries and branding, of Chinese historic cities through an investigation of the development and interpretation of the discourse of Chinese national rejuvenation. This article closely examines heritage in Xi'an, China, although the findings and implications may also be relevant to other historic cities/towns in China, which would invite additional studies on both the discourse and practices related to heritage cities in China and across the world.

The most obvious contribution of this article is that Law applies a critical discourse analysis of the origin, development and implications of the discourse of rejuvenation through the lens of historical imaginaries and branding. Critical discourse analysis is a basic analytical method adopted in the emerging field of critical heritage studies worldwide over the past 20 years or more (Smith 2006; Winter and Waterton 2013). In the seminal work by Laurajane Smith (2006), the concept of 'authorised heritage discourse' (AHD) was proposed to reveal and critique the existence of a powerful discourse held by international professional organisations regarding the recognition, authentication, protection, interpretation, and commodification of heritage. AHD has therefore become a popular theoretical frame in critical studies on the making of heritage in various social aspects.

In the present article, 'the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' can be understood as an AHD that has been manipulating the policies, practices and assessments of heritage enterprises in China since the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017. Law elaborates on the origin and development of the discourse of rejuvenation, which evolved from an idea of the literati to a nationwide political agenda and then to a political discourse with great influence on heritage policy-making (Svensson and Maags 2018). In this way, rejuvenation can be understood as an AHD. Nevertheless, the idea of AHD, as well as the influences of the discourse of rejuvenation on heritage policies/politics in China, have not been discussed.

Additional research is needed on AHD in China, as some investigations there indicate that that the country's AHD is diversified and stratified from the national to the local level (Su 2020). This means that the implementation of the discourse of rejuvenation can also be accommodated and therefore localised in China. More research is needed to determine how the national discourse on rejuvenation has been understood and implemented in local heritage discourses and practices. Within critical heritage studies, practice is another key concept to look at, as practice and discourse are interrelated. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the implications of the

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discourse of rejuvenation will require the investigation of the practices of the 'local state'. As suggested by Law, further research could examine the response and reconciliation of the local state with the top-down discourse of rejuvenation. These bottom-up reactions to the national discourse are key to understanding the formation of AHD in China (Ludwig and Walton 2020).

Following the concept of AHD, the concept of heritagisation, or heritage-making, can be introduced to further analyse the phenomena of the making of simulacrascapes and brandscapes in historic cities such as Xi'an. The article advances the discussion on the concepts of simulacra and branding in the development of simulacrascapes and brandscapes. The findings regarding the city construction of Xi'an in recent years, particularly in the Qujiang district, reveal how heritage is being constructed into simulacrascapes and brandscapes, connecting the imagined past, present, and nostalgic future. The making of simulacrascapes and/or faux heritage space, in a critical heritage studies approach, can be further discussed through the concept of heritagisation, in which the 'remote past' is continuously being made by the local state under the context of China's rejuvenation and pragmatic local economic and social development.

Here, the concept of heritagisation can be used to better describe and analyse the continuity of the imagined glorious Chinese Han and Tang Dynastic cultural heritage from the remote past to the present and the future. Continuity is a key concept for examining living historic cities/towns. Continuity provides a diachronic dimension for understanding the dynamic meaning making of the past in the present, while other conventional concepts, such as authenticity and integrity, encounter problems in the discussion of tangible heritage attributes (Khalaf 2021). The continuity of Chinese culture and heritage has been reinvigorated and emphasised since the Cultural Revolution, as the Communist Party of China adjusted its attitude towards the ancient and remote past of Chinese culture/heritage so as to integrate the past of China into the country's contemporary socialist modernisation (Ai 2012; Sofield and Li 1998).

A critical examination of heritagisation requires an understanding of diverse participants. The 'local state' is a useful concept that the author used in the article to group local authorities and professionals who dominate local heritagisation. Law notes in this article that the local state may include 'related state networks of developers, retailers, tourist officials, town planners, architects, and designers'. The local state is not the direct agent of the national AHD in China (Su and Chen 2018); rather, it is situated in a mixed position between the top-down national AHD and local unofficial heritage discourse/practice. Here, the identity of the local state matters. It is

therefore meaningful to examine the discourse and practice of these local states whose identities are local residents/organisations, as they will share more sympathy with local community members (Su 2020).

In addition to examining the local state in Xi'an, the understanding of other unofficial stakeholders in Xi'an, such as local residents and visitors/tourists (both local and outside), is also important because their cultural and spiritual needs, cultural and place identity, nostalgia, and place associations are indispensable to understanding the imagination and nostalgia of Xi'an, which can be analysed as a 'hot' authentication process (Cohen and Cohen 2012) of the historic city. The economy, consumption and politics are entwined in the AHD in China's heritage policies regarding both tangible and intangible heritage and are manifested in multilevel agendas, including national political, economic and cultural agendas, as well as the wellbeing of the general public, such as the public's ever-growing need for a better life and its perceived senses of participation, gain and identity.[1] Politics/policies on heritage places in China have been associated with comprehensive national strategies, such as rural revitalisation and urban renewal; thus, heritage places should be analysed from political, cultural, and economic perspectives.

When heritage is regarded as a social and cultural phenomenon and process (Smith 2006), city heritage can be seen as a lens through which to look at a dynamic and complicated city and social development. Law's article on Xi'an, as well as others' discussion on the heritage phenomenon in Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou, reveal the work of heritage within the modernisation of Chinese cities. Future studies based on these findings are still needed.

The idea of the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' implies systematic and comprehensive agendas based on the notion of modernisation with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, regarding the discourse and practice of the discourse of rejuvenation, additional aspects of the 'Five-Sphere' Integrated Plan, such as culture, society, ecology, international relations, politics, and the economy, need to be considered.[2] Furthermore, the discussion of the 'face of the city and face of China' is an interesting topic in Law's article, and these can be further discussed in relation to the ideas of soft power and 'Chinese culture going global', such as in a study on the Silk Roads (Wang 2019).

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[1] See the related detailed articles on the national 14th 5-year-plan for cultural relics at https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2021-11/08/content_5649764.htm and the State Council's opinions on the safeguarding of ICH at https://www.gov.cn/govweb/zhengce/2021-08/12/content_5630974.htm.

[2] See the article on the "Five-sphere Integrated Plan" at https://www.12371.cn/2013/05/10/ARTI1368184054375142.shtml?from=groupmessage.

There are two other potential research avenues related to historic cities/towns in China. The first avenue is studies on historic cities/towns of historical ethnic regimes in China, such as Dali, Yunnan (Dali Kingdom), Yinchuan, Ningxia (the Western Xia), Shenyang, and Liaoning (early Qing). Studies on these cases can increase the understanding of the relationship between ethnic minorities and Han Chinese and of the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. The second avenue is studies on the collision of different dynastic heritages within the same city. Xi'an, for example, has been the capital city of 13 dynasties. As the glorious Han and Tang Dynasties have thus far been privileged by the AHD, are the heritages of other dynasties and social memories marginalised/dismissed in the imaginaries and brandscape of Xi'an? This issue can be further discussed through the collaboration and intersection among different cities that boast the same dynastic heritage, as is the case for Xi'an and Luoyang. To what extent do these two Tang-themed cities collaborate and compete with each other in relation to local and national agendas? Imaginary city building, simulacrascapes, and brandscapes are interesting concepts through which Chinese modernisation can be examined in a localised context. Law's article will definitely invite more discussion on these concepts and issues in both China and other countries.

Abbreviation
AHD   authorised heritage discourse

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Author's contributions
The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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