Heritage as theatre: Reconceptualizing heritage-making in urban China

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Abstract
Since China's signing of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention in 1985, cultural heritage in China has become a booming industry and a key area of scholarly investigation. The mainstream literature on China's heritage and urbanization tends to view heritage as a civilizing agent to regulate and improve the urban population. Drawing on Clifford Geertz's notion of 'theatre state' and through a case study of Jiangmen, this article reconceptualizes China's urban heritage industry as 'theatre'. It shifts the focus away from neat political rationalities to messy 'magical assemblages', such as dramatic museum representation, monumental architecture and expressive ceremonies, in state-led heritage-making processes. It argues that the Chinese government makes heritage by using not only the means of political rationalities but also, and perhaps more importantly, the power of spectacle, sensation and awe. China's heritage industry is thus as much 'a technique of enchantment' as 'a technique of government', revealing complicated processes of China's negotiation with the Western-centred conceptualization of modernity and cultural heritage. Additionally, it draws attention to diasporic resources in urban heritage-making, broadening the existing research that has predominantly focused on the employment of nostalgic and/or exotic appeal for city branding and development.

Keywords
cultural heritage, urban modernity, theatre, museum, Overseas Chinese

Since China ratified UNESCO's World Heritage Convention in 1985, cultural heritage in China has become a booming industry and a key area of scholarly investigation from multiple disciplinary perspectives. The global regime of the world heritage industry is

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shaped by a universalistic conceptualization of cultural value derived from Euro-American cosmology and philosophy. Ironically, 'far from being incompatible with state interests, China incorporates UNESCO's universalism within its developmental interests of modernization and to legitimize its own claims to a millennial legacy of civilization'.[1] Indeed, heritage has become a powerful state discourse of development and modernization in contemporary China.[2] Evidence of this lies in how Chinese authorities at different levels have used heritage discourse as a tool to promote tourism for domestic and international consumption,[3] to alleviate poverty in ethnic minority regions and integrate non-Han populations into dominant (Han) Chinese society[4] and to civilize the rural population for the building of the New Socialist Countryside.[5] More significantly, since the mid-1990s, heritage discourse has become an integral part of China's construction of a new sense of urban modernity. It has played an important role in urban regeneration and city branding in mega-cities,[6] in 'urban scaling-up' and city marketing in small and medium cities,[7] as well as urbanizing ethnic minority regions in southwest China.[8]

The literature on China's cultural heritage and urbanization varies in terms of investigative focus and analytical perspective, but converges in pointing to the centrality of the state in defining and utilizing heritage. The nature of this state-led heritage-making is summarized aptly by Tim Oakes as 'a technology of government'[9] or 'heritage as improvement',[10] strongly associated with the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, referring to the ways in which the government produces civilized citizens and social order through an ensemble of hegemonic knowledge sustained by institutions, procedures, analysis, calculations and so on.[11] The central concern of this line of analysis is how heritage 'is instrumentalized as a vehicle for governmental power and what sorts of political rationalities its use in this way generates'.[12]

While identifying an affinity between heritage-making and governmentality is helpful for enhancing our understanding of cultural heritage in general, what 'governmental power' means and how it is exercised in the Chinese context is far from clear. The 'heritage as improvement' argument to some extent conceptualizes modernity through a Western-originated view of development built upon historically and ideologically defined binaries of order and disorder, modernity and tradition, civilization and backwardness. Modernity is defined in close association with rationality, in contrast to irrationality, considered intrinsic to pre-modern and uncivilized societies. Citing Yi-Fu Tuan and Steven Hoelscher, Oakes has argued that there was a parallel between the ideal civilized Chinese city and Disney Park, maintaining that 'the ideal city was more than anything a project of keeping chaos perpetually at bay'.[13] 'Chinese officials, no less than Disney officials, both fear and deprecate the sort of uninhibited carnivalesque atmosphere so beloved of the critics of bourgeois order, notably Mikhail Bakhtin'.[14]

While keeping chaos at bay might describe the situation and purpose of making heritage in some places, more and more research has, in contrast to Oakes' view, suggested that China's heritage-making does not lack a carnivalesque atmosphere. On the contrary, it has become a common practice for the Chinese government to build gigantic museums to promote 'a monumental vision of heritage',[15] and to put on spectacular shows to act out local cultural heritage.[16] In promoting its image of modernity, it is now de rigueur for the Chinese government to revive and reinvent old customs and traditions, and/or invent new ones,[17] and to resort to sensational audio-visual spectacles to invoke cultural

imaginaries of desirable place identities. The most notable example is perhaps the 'impression series' directed by the famous Chinese film director Zhang Yimou and staged in the cities of Yangshuo and Lijiang. Using cinematic skills, pyrotechnic and special effects, and incorporating the performances of singers, dancers and acrobats, the shows conjured up an image of a place desirable to both international and domestic spectators.[18] Here, heritage is made not by the forces of political rationality but by the power of 'happy daydreaming',[19] a psychocultural process that could be described as a process of hypnotic-like enchantment or captivation of its audiences.

Historians and anthropologists have revealed the complex ways in which Asian and African societies negotiated processes of modernization,[20] challenging the long-standing view that modernity is 'disenchanted' as a result of the 'modern' processes of rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization.[21] As we are reminded by Michael Saler, 'modernity is as enchanted as it is disenchanted'.[22] 'Modernity is defined less by binaries arranged in an implicit hierarchy, or by the dialectical transformation of one term into its opposite, than by unresolved contradictions and oppositions, or antinomies: modernity is Janus-faced'.[23] Drawing on Simon During,[24] Saler further argued that magical assemblages, such as modern magic, works of avant-garde art, literature, cinema, and show business, are modern forms of enchantment, things that 'delight one's reason and imagination without deluding them'.[25]

Following Saler's view of modernity and enchantment, this article attempts to reconceptualize China's heritage-making by shifting the focus away from neat political rationalities to messy magical assemblages. It suggests that disenchanted reason is not incompatible with enchanted imagination and wondrous spectacles. The Chinese government and cultural elites have turned China's urban space into an interiorized cultural imagination of the modern city by using not only rationalized governmentality but also, and sometimes more effectively, the power of spectacle, sensation and awe. Heritage is therefore as much 'a technique of enchantment' as 'a technique of government'. Here, performance is not merely 'the exterior representation of culture', as argued by some scholars.[26] Instead, China's heritage industry is a 'theatre' in itself, a political-social-cultural complex in which the meaning of heritage is contested, fabricated and played out on a deliberately and specifically constructed stage.

Heritage as theatre

In his study of Balinese society, Clifford Geertz applied a cultural interpretation to ceremonies, rituals and symbols to analyse the social organization of Bali before it was colonized by the Dutch in 1906.[27] He found that rather than being ruled by tyranny or effective administration as conceptualized by standard Western political theories, *negara* was a 'theatre state' governed by spectacles, ceremonies and the public dramatization of the ruling obsession of Balinese culture. As he famously argued:

> It was a theatre state in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience. The stupendous (ceremonies) … were not means to political ends: they were the ends themselves, they were what the state was for … Power served pomp, not pomp power.[28]

While Geertz's notion of theatre state has been an inspiration to research on various subjects in different social and historical contexts,[29] it has not yet been given adequate attention in the field of heritage studies. The value of a Geertzian perception for heritage studies, at least in the Chinese context, is its emphasis on the fundamental importance of a 'poetics of power' – indicating a notion of ruling through symbols, ceremonies and performance rather than administrative regulation – to state-led heritage-making. I am not saying that China is another theatre state characterized by chaos and violence as seen in precolonial Bali, nor do I contend that China's cultural heritage-making is all about sustaining social hierarchies and privileges along the lines of the Balinese state. What I want to suggest here is the usefulness of an interpretative approach that sees culture as a set of texts or a series of public acts in which the state authorities release 'imaginative energies' by using various signs and symbols in specific social and historical contexts. It unearths in particular the crucial role of 'culture of spectacle' in the state-led construction of cultural heritage in various locales and at different scales.[30] I argue that in the conditions of post-socialist China characterized by the amalgamation of political power, market forces and cultural identifications, dramatic museum representation, monumental architecture and expressive ceremonies are as vital as, if not more important than, laws, state policies, institutional regulations and certification of authenticity by cultural experts and the heritage authorities, in the making of cultural heritage. It is therefore essential to be analytically sensitive to meanings of the relevant myths, ceremonies and symbols in relation to the creation and transmission of heritage, to balance out the overwhelming emphasis on scientific/rational debates in the existing scholarship on cultural heritage.

This article conceptualizes China's urban heritage industry as theatre. It pays particular attention to the role of cultural spectacles in constructing and performing heritage, and how China's heritage industry is becoming part of what Robin Visser called the production of a post-socialist urban aesthetics.[31] Specifically, it identifies three interrelated 'heritage vehicles' used by the Chinese authorities to create a 'space of sensation' for the performance and display of heritage: namely, museumification, monumentation and ritualization. I use museumification to refer to the process in which local history is crafted in museum spaces by using stage props, mannequins, dioramas and other exhibiting techniques; monumentation refers to the construction of gigantic buildings and public spaces to commemorate local cultural heroes and promote tourism; and ritualization refers to local authorities' repetitious staging of reinvented or artificially invented festivals to celebrate local cultural heritage, construct new city brands and boost the tourist industry. Each performance has its own vocabularies, tricks and agenda. Together, they contribute to the production of an ostentatious show directed by the local authorities and scripted by the local cultural elites, in which the city residents participate as crew and as spectators. While this article touches upon the processes of selective use and reinvention of local history and tradition that the local authorities draw on to construct their version of 'desirable heritage', its analytical focus on official perspectives and tactical practices in heritage-making leads instead to an emphasis on the efficacy of heritagization in shaping urban space.

Jiangmen, where the research on which this article is based was conducted, is a prefecture-level municipality situated in the western part of Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province. The area now under the jurisdiction of Jiangmen was traditionally

called Wuyi (五邑), literally 'five counties', referring to Xinhui, Taishan, Kaiping, Enping and Heshan. In 2015, it had a population of about 4.5 million. Due to its geographical proximity to the major sea ports from which domestic Chinese went abroad in the 19th century, large numbers of poor peasants ventured abroad to search for a better life when the Qing Empire was forced to open up and allowed its subjects to go overseas.[32] According to recently published official survey data, the administrative area of Jiangmen has a population of over 3.8 million Overseas Chinese, residing in over 107 countries and regions (including Hong Kong and Macao), with the biggest majority settling in North America and Southeast Asia.[33]

Museumification: The Jiangmen Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum

Since the 1990s, the Chinese state has put growing emphasis on urbanization as the key strategy of China's modernization and globalization. The pressure on cities to take a leading role in regional as well as national socio-economic development has led to increasingly intense competition for reputation and status among cities of all sizes.[34] To this end, Chinese cities have tried to preserve and promote a version of heritage that distinguishes their city from others as an effective method of city branding. For analytical purposes and at the risk of oversimplification, it is useful to divide urban heritage practices in China into two main categories: the 'nostalgic' and the 'exotic'. In some areas (notably Han-populated central China), heritagization means the preservation and reintegration of city ruins or restoration of symbols of the glorious past to enhance the regional image of a city or area in the present.[35] In some others, it is more about how to repackage a marginalized place in peripheral China by performing ethnic authenticity to arouse fantasies of the exotic among the Han majority and the international audience.[36]

Jiangmen partakes in this ongoing 'branding war' by making use of an alternative recourse, the diasporic heritage. In 2004, China's Central Television (CCTV) for the first time organized a high-profile competition among China's second-tiered cities for the title of 'the ten most charming cities in China'. Jiangmen entered this competition but failed to be listed. This incident shocked the local authorities and cultural elites, alerting them to the fact that Jiangmen had not yet accumulated enough well-recognized cultural resources to brand itself and compete with other municipalities. Lacking the kind of nostalgic and/or exotic appeal of other cities, the municipal government of Jiangmen was determined to make use of its Overseas Chinese heritage as the city's distinctive feature, and started to tout the slogan of Jiangmen as 'China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese'.[37]

The use of public slogans to promulgate official discourses has long characterized the political culture of contemporary China, not least in the form of omnipresent revolutionary slogans and posters of the Mao era.[38] In a 2015 issue of *China Information*, Meiqin Wang discussed how the conceptual artist Ni Weihua coined the term 'language event' to denote the changes in the political rhetoric from Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao.[39] While Ni brought to our attention the power (and irony) of political sloganeering employed by the Chinese government at the national level, the same can be said about city-branding at the

local level, as this case study shows. When the municipal government of Jiangmen put forward its bold and unprecedented claim to be China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese, it received immediate opposition from experts on the history of Overseas Chinese in other cities. Even some local residents and historians were doubtful about the validity of the claim.[40] No other Chinese city had ever made such a statement before. Traditionally, Overseas Chinese originated from many different areas in the provinces of Guangdong and Fujian and elsewhere in China. It is technically impossible to give a ranking to cities to say which is number one. Indeed, in terms of the size of population residing overseas – a criterion commonly used to quantify the size of hometowns of Overseas Chinese – Jiangmen is outnumbered by some other cities.[41]

The city's branding enterprise, however, received strong backing from local cultural elites. When asked about the controversial nature of the city's new slogan, a professor from Wuyi University, also a key figure behind the city's branding project, unequivocally defended the local government's position:

> It is the duty of local government to make the fullest use of local historical and cultural heritage to enhance a city's profile, so as to secure broader resources for urban development … there is nothing wrong in 'creating histories' for the sake of promoting a city's image, and to this end, it is absolutely right for the municipal government to promote the idea of Jiangmen as China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese.[42]

In order to convince the general public that it was acceptable to use the epithet 'China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese' as the city's new 'business card', it became essential to build a museum where 'scientific' evidence of Jiangmen as a primary hometown of Overseas Chinese could be displayed.[43] It was against this background that the local government laid the foundation stone to the Jiangmen Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum in 2004. The aims in building the museum were summarized in three points by Li Wei, then deputy mayor of Jiangmen:

> The first is to remember the bitter history of Overseas Chinese; the second is to recognize and cherish their great contributions to China and to use their stories to educate the younger generation; the third is to represent the Wuyi Overseas Chinese spirit … to enhance our city's economic development, and to speed up the construction of Jiangmen as one of China's prominent cultural cities.[44]

It is the third point concerning local economic development and city branding which is the biggest driving force behind the museum project. The municipal government offered strong administrative and financial support to the construction of the museum. Despite the fact that Jiangmen had the second lowest annual income among all prefectures in Guangdong, the municipal government spent approximately RMB 100 million on collecting objects and museum construction, and invited the Guangzhou-based Zhujiang Film Studio to take charge of the museum's interior design. When the museum was fully opened in 2010, it was reportedly the most comprehensive and modern museum of Overseas Chinese in China.[45]

The narrative of Overseas Chinese history exhibited in the museum is chronologically organized to display the history of Chinese emigration from the mid-19th century to the

Figure 1. Replica of a shop in Wuyi's local market in the 1860s.
Source: Photo by the author, 2013.

present; it is not substantially different from that of other Overseas Chinese museums I have visited. What really struck me as distinctive was its theatrical representation of Overseas Chinese history unseen in other museums. Firstly, it explicitly draws on stage design techniques, such as play sets, props and costumes, to exhibit local migration history. The first scene visitors come across on entering the museum is a local market place in 1860s Wuyi. Several life-sized shops have been constructed in the museum's main hall to portray traditional village life (Figure 1). However, none of the items on display – the furniture, working tools and everyday utensils – are authentic objects. Rather, they are all brand-new 'theatrical props' manufactured by the film studio and used by the museum to 'act out' the past. The next scene depicts a pier where villagers boarded ships to go overseas. Again, the stone steps leading to the pier, the gate of the pier, the plaque on the top of the gate and the ship moored by the pier, are all purpose-made props to perform the history of migration through dramatizing the moment of departure. It is apparent that what matters to the museum authority is not so much preserving and exhibiting historical authenticity, but rather the degree of 'theatrical effect' of its displays. Stage design techniques of these kinds are used throughout the exhibition.

The second main theatrical technique employed by the museum is the use of mannequins to highlight key figures and themes in the history of Overseas Chinese. One of the most dramatic is the story of an Overseas Chinese named Zheng Chaojiong who 'sold his son to save the nation' (Figure 2). Zheng was a pedlar who made a living by selling sunflower seeds in Malaya. In order to support China's War of Resistance against Japan, he joined the fundraising campaign among Overseas Chinese by saving money from selling sunflower seeds. When his fourth son was born, he sold the newborn baby boy to a rich Chinese family and donated the money he received to China. To highlight Zheng's patriotic story – described as 'the treasure of the museum' by the curator – a life-sized model of Zheng is displayed in a specially designed space inside the museum. Behind the model stands a screen displaying his photograph, a short biography and his 'family motto': 'Without a country, families have nowhere to settle'.

Figure 2. Life-sized model of Zheng Chaojiong, a prominent Overseas Chinese, displayed inside the Jiangmen Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum.
Source: Photo by the author, 2013.

In her study of China's ethnic minority museums, Marzia Varutti argued that the mannequin 'depersonalizes the object in order to enable the generalization of the representation'.[46] Here, similarly, the museum intends to use Zheng's model to generalize the reality of the story it tells. By presenting this story of self-sacrifice as the very 'treasure' of the exhibition, the museum plays up to the patriotic discourse of Overseas Chinese promoted by the Chinese party-state. In so doing, it seeks to obtain recognition as the true representative of Overseas Chinese history, thus elevating Jiangmen's city image.

Thirdly, the museum makes extensive use of dioramas to simulate the working and living environments of Overseas Chinese. Examples include a Chinese restaurant, a tailor's shop, a pharmacy, a laundry and a barber's shop displayed in the scene of Chinatown (Figure 3). By using dioramas in combination with mannequins, the museum seeks to bring to life the past experience of Overseas Chinese and the material world in which they lived. The use of diorama and mannequins received mixed responses from the audience. While some thought they helped visualize the history of Overseas Chinese, for others the artificiality of the mannequins ironically produced the opposite effect to what the museum intended. One visitor commented that the dioramas and models looked like decorations, irrelevant to the real life of Overseas Chinese they had known.[47] Others said they had expected to see on display more authentic objects related to Overseas Chinese history.[48]

Despite such criticisms, local official newspapers hailed the museum as Jiangmen's 'landmark building' and an ideal window to showcase its local history and unique culture.[49] By using stage props, mannequins and dioramas as crafting devices, the museum attempted to produce what Erik Cohen and Scott Cohen called 'hot authentication', a process aimed at stimulating an affective and self-reinforcing response in which the projected 'real' is confirmed, in contrast to 'cool authentication', defined as certification of an object as original or genuine.[50] The municipal government presented Jiangmen simultaneously as a heritage site, a base for patriotic education, a tourist spot and a prominent

Figure 3. Depiction of a tailor's shop in Chinatown.
Source: Photo by the author, 2013.

cultural city. Since 2010, the museum has received regular visits from civil servants, primary, secondary school and university students, and occasional visits from senior party and government officials from Beijing. The opening of this museum has been widely regarded as a major reason for the city's success in being listed as one of China's 'Civilized Cities of the Nation' in 2011, a big step forward in Jiangmei's branding enterprise.[51]

Monumentation: Wuyi Overseas Chinese Square, Scholar Street and Star Park

At the same time as they were developing the theatrical representation of Overseas Chinese history in the space of the museum, the local authorities dramatically transformed the city's landscape into an 'open-air theatre' to stage its diasporic heritage. Indeed, at a time when urban space has become a crucial element in China's economic success and new global status, 'the most forceful language that the government can speak is the language of controlling the urban space itself'.[52] Here, the respacing of urban topographies is realized through what could be called monumentation: the construction of titanic architectural structures in purpose-built public spaces as the embodiment of heritage and its tourist appeal.

In Jiangmen, monumentation is centred on the construction of a massive square in the centre of the city (Figure 4). Just as the museum was named after Wuyi Overseas Chinese to stress the linkage between the city's past as a sending area of Overseas Chinese in history and its present as a modern city, the square was called Wuyi Overseas Chinese Square. The huge square, built in 2004, measures 61,766 m², and is surrounded by a modern exhibition hall, a state-of-the-art conference centre and an art gallery. It is also the location of the Overseas Chinese Museum. A gigantic stone gate in the style of a traditional memorial archway was erected as the main entrance to the square, the name

Figure 4. The main entrance to Wuyi Overseas Chinese Square.
Source: Photo by the author, 2013.

of which was inscribed on the top of the gate in traditional Chinese characters, in sym-bolic reference to Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Overseas Chinese communities where traditional characters are commonly used, in contrast to the simplified characters used elsewhere in China. The square thus announced its role as a symbolic 'rallying point' for Wuyi-originated peoples dispersed outside mainland China.

Shortly after building Wuyi Overseas Chinese Square, the municipal government launched another branding project – Scholar Street – starting right from the main entrance of the square (Figure 5). Along both sides of this 100 metre-long street stand a total of 31 bronze busts of prominent Chinese scholars. Over half of them are foreign nationals or Taiwan and Hong Kong residents. They are, however, considered to belong to Wuyi either by birth or by place of origin. Each pillar supporting the busts stand is decorated with two bronze plaques. The upper one records the name, place of origin and specialty of the scholar, in both Chinese and English; the lower one is engraved with the scholar's handprints.

In a similar style, from 2009 to 2010, the municipal government built another public space called Star Park (Figure 6), covering an area of 14,000 m². In the central area of the park stand 124 life-sized bronze statues of Chinese pop singers and film stars, the major-ity of them being Hong Kong residents with Wuyi as their place of origin.[53] At the side of each statue is a plaque recording the name, place of origin and a short biography of the artist. In a separate space inside the park are a number of stone stands bearing handprints and signatures of the most popular artists. The building of this theme park, as stated in the inscription on its Chronicle Tower of Star Park, is 'to improve the cultural status of our city and to speed up the construction of a distinguished cultural city in Jiangmen'. The inscription goes on to say, 'the park is comparable to the Walk of Fame in Hollywood and the Avenue of Stars in Hong Kong … a wonderful modern artwork added to Jiangmen's cultural landscape'.

Figure 5. A view of Scholar Street.
Source: Photo by the author, 2013.

Figure 6. A corner of Star Park.
Source: Photo by the author, 2013.

The bronze statues in Scholar Street and Star Park are strikingly similar, despite their differences. The variations between them in terms of occupation, age, sex and physical features are almost totally flattened out in their design and display. Whether scholars or artists, young or old, men or women, they are all presented as anonymous 'pop stars' or celebrities to impress the local residents and attract domestic and international tourists. They are all what Charles Peirce called 'symbolic signs'[54] deployed by the Jiangmen authorities to portray the city's cultural distinction, magnify its international influence, and ultimately justify the claim that Jiangmen is China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese.

Natalie Koch has discussed how the 'monumental presentation' of Astana contributed to the elite definition of a modern and forward-looking Kazakhstan identity.[55] Similarly, through the monumentation exercise discussed in the above, the local authorities and cultural elites of Jiangmen have sought to create a new mental map defined by the city's diasporic heritage. Their aim has been to give the city a new brand and embed its new identity in the city's collective memory as a desirable place on a transnational platform.

Ritualization: Staging the Overseas Chinese Carnival

In the same year as it laid the foundation stone to the Wuyi Overseas Chinese Museum, constructed Wuyi Overseas Chinese Square and launched Scholar Street, Jiangmen's municipal government kicked off an unprecedented event – a biannual Overseas Chinese Carnival. At the time of writing this article, the city had already hosted a total of five carnivals, the last of which was in 2013. Each carnival was held between mid-October and early November, lasting for an average of three days.

Carnival is a notion and custom that originated from medieval Europe and gradually spread to other parts of the world. Following Bahktin, carnival is a cultural practice characterized by the expression of free spirits challenging the authorities and (symbolically) overturning the social hierarchies of everyday life, often associated with humour, mockery and anarchic celebrations.[56] Despite carrying a Western label, the nature of the Overseas Chinese Carnival is fundamentally different from, if not contradictory to, how carnival is defined and practised in the Western tradition. The purpose for launching the Overseas Chinese Carnival, as explained by the Party Secretary of Jiangmen in his speech at the opening ceremony of the debut carnival, was 'to exhibit Jiangmen's great achievements in economic reform … [and] spread its influence in China and strengthen its exchange and cooperation with the world'.[57]

Clearly, the Overseas Chinese Carnival is a campaign orchestrated by the local authorities to achieve specifically defined political and economic goals. The periodically staged carnival is better seen as an 'invented tradition' that 'is taken to mean a set of practices … which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past … or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition'.[58] Here, the past that local authorities intend to invoke is the diasporic legacy associated with the place of Wuyi, and the value they intend to inculcate is the perception of Jiangmen as a cultural city with international status. Indeed, by artificially transplanting a foreign custom to Chinese soil, the local authorities and cultural elites have created a much-needed cultural vehicle to summon, perform and sustain the city's diasporic heritage, to give the city a global feel, and ultimately to promote Jiangmen as a renowned cultural city.

What inventing traditions is essentially about, as argued by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, is 'a process of formalization and ritualization' often characterized by imposing repetition.[59] Despite variations in the specific theme for each carnival, they have all largely followed the same format and set of procedures. The municipal government is the organizer and main sponsor of each carnival. Each time, the carnival kicks off with an ostentatious opening ceremony. The Party Secretary of Jiangmen gives speeches

in front of the general audience and several hundred domestic and overseas VIP guests. The highlight is a splendid parade that takes place at the end of the opening ceremony. The parade normally lasts for two hours, involving the participation of some 2000 performers from local areas and overseas. Each time, it attracts approximately 200,000 to 500,000 local residents who line the main streets to watch the parade passing by. In the days following, a wide range of activities are routinely carried out, including government-sponsored forums, variety shows and food festivals.

The official media has commended the Overseas Chinese Carnival as a great innovation that has successfully developed a taste for high culture in the city.[60] In this sense, and from the perspective of its architects, the periodically staged carnival could be thought of as a ritual to enchant the city and people, used by the local authorities to give the city a new face and new life. While the museum and the monuments are silent and static objects, the ostentatious carnivals bring to the theatre of the city's heritage noise, smoke, colour, scent and excitement, with the intention of keeping the audience captivated. The enchantment is not opposed to modernity and development. On the contrary, it is used by the local authorities and cultural elites to construct a modern present and a cosmopolitan future.

The carnival received more critique than applause from the residents of Jiangmen. Some complained that they had no real connections with the carnival and little involvement in the event. Those who did have opportunities to participate did not see how such a costly event did anything particularly useful to boost the city's reputation.[61] However, there is no sign that the authorities of Jiangmen will give up the musicological, spatial and ritual practices it has employed in recent years to promote its city image. In 2015, the municipal government announced its new Five-Year Plan with the chief target being to develop Jiangmen from China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese to China's capital of Overseas Chinese by 2020.[62] The show certainly goes on.

Conclusion

This article has applied the concept of theatre, inspired by Geertz's notion of theatre state, to the study of China's heritage industry in urban space. Drawing on a case study of Jiangmen, it discusses three interrelated vehicles, namely, museumification, monumentation and ritualization, which the local authorities have skilfully employed to make cultural heritage in urban space. The museum is where the local history of Overseas Chinese is scientifically framed and theatrically presented to offer evidence in support of the slogan that Jiangmen is China's number-one hometown of Overseas Chinese; Wuyi Overseas Chinese Square, Scholar Street and Star Park are monuments constructed to produce a sensational spectacle with the same message. They have not only materialized the history and glory of the place, but also transformed the city's landscape into a perfect setting for staging the biannual Overseas Chinese Carnival. The carnival is a ritual in the sense that it seeks to enchant the place and people by inventing its own tradition rooted in periodic staging. The intersections of these vehicles have contributed to the formation of a theatre of heritage, in which the local authorities are the producer, the local cultural elites the director and playwright, and the city residents and visitors are crew and spectators. Instead of preserving and utilizing cultural authenticity for the creation of an orderly

model city – although this is certainly one aspect of state-led heritage work – the local authorities and cultural elites have made tremendous efforts to put on a series of spectacular and sometimes chaotic shows to conjure up a desirable heritage underpinning its city brand and identification as a desirable place.

Rather than emphasizing the speciality of Jiangmen as a hometown of Overseas Chinese, this article is an attempt to identify an emergent feature of China's fast-developing heritage industry, reflective of 'an increased degree of commonality in lived experience and communicative practice'[63] characterizing the sociocultural development in post-socialist China. Following Saler, who defined modernity as 'a disenchanted enchantment',[64] this article challenges the mainstream view that conceptualizes heritage as a civilizing agent to modernize the urban population. It suggests strongly that China's state-led heritage-making, whether it draws on nostalgic, exotic or diasporic resources, is as much 'a technique of enchantment' as a 'technique of government', and reveals complicated processes involved in China's negotiation with the universalistic European-inspired conceptualization of modernity and cultural heritage. This new conceptual understanding of cultural heritage remedies the highly rationalized theorization of Chinese heritage in the existing literature, and has larger implications for the study of heritage and urbanization in non-Western countries, the fuller understanding of which requires more contextualized investigation beyond the Western-centred perspective of modernity.

Notes

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