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Review Essay: Cultural heritage management: power, values and identity

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Cultural heritage management: power, values and identity

Ana Pereira Roders*

CHRISTINA LUKE & MORAG KERSEL. *US cultural diplomacy and archaeology. Soft power, hard heritage*. xi+169 pages, 5 tables. 2013. Abingdon: Routledge; 978-0-415-64549-2 hardback £80.

ROBERT J. SHEPHERD & LARRY YU. *Heritage management, tourism, and governance in China*. xii+90 pages, 21 colour illustrations, 3 tables. 2013. New York: Springer, 978-1-4614-6917-0 paperback \$49.95.

SOPHIA LABADI. *UNESCO, cultural heritage and Outstanding Universal Value. Value-based analyses of the World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions*. xi+191 pages, 10 b&w illustrations. 2013. Lanham (MD): Altamira; 978-0-7591-2256-7 hardback £51.95.



Over recent decades, the concept of 'heritage' has evolved and expanded. From predominantly cultural and tangible, heritage is now also recognised as natural,

mixed and intangible (Smith 2006; Veldpaus *et al.* 2013). The concept of 'protection' has also evolved, from an approach where heritage was largely isolated and objectified, avoiding change at all costs, to an approach where heritage is multi-layered in cultural significance and a driver of sustainable development, and where change is expected and management required (Jokilehto 1998; Teutonico & Matero 2003; Pereira Roders 2013).

The evolution of these concepts is reflected in the increasingly diverse backgrounds of the experts involved in heritage studies, drawing from fields beyond the traditional disciplines of archaeology, art history and architecture. Similar change has happened to cultural heritage management which

now encompasses not only experts and decision-makers but also other stakeholder groups such as owners, users, citizens, representatives of focus groups and investors.

This democratisation is generally welcomed and considered to mirror the role of cultural heritage in contemporary society (De la Torre & Mason 2002). It has, however, also brought new opinions to the debate, other 'cultural values' (Labadi 2007; Pereira Roders 2007), which have increased the complexity of cultural heritage management and prompted debate amongst heritage scholars. The three books under review here are sensitive to these evolving concepts and each contributes critical analyses towards better understanding of heritage. In particular, they offer an outlook on cultural heritage management which enables comparison between experiences in the USA, China and the wider world.

Soft power, hard heritage

Christina Luke and Morag M. Kersel are academics based in the USA, with training and experience in archaeology and historic preservation in museums, cultural organisations and the US Department of State. Their fieldwork is global, with case studies in Latin America, the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa. Their shared interests are cultural heritage policy, cultural diplomacy and legislation concerning the management of archaeological artefacts and cultural landscapes in international settings. In *US cultural diplomacy and archaeology*, Luke & Kersel contribute to the state-of-the-art in cultural heritage management with a critical analysis of the role of archaeological projects in fostering international relations and cultural diplomacy, taking the USA as a case study.

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Luke & Kersel consider US archaeology abroad a 'soft' tool for international cultural diplomacy, officially operationalised but seldom studied. They bridge theoretical and empirical arguments, to demonstrate this relationship and provide rich illustrative examples of how US archaeology abroad has acted to the benefit of US cultural diplomacy. Even if critical, Luke & Kersel remain optimistic. They highlight the role of the varied UNESCO Conventions and operational guidelines, but also specific tools such as the UNESCO Database of National Cultural Heritage Laws. The main conclusions highlight the lack of cooperation between public and private partners and intra-national activities. They also suggest a handful of remarkable strengths where archaeology and cultural heritage programmes could assist cultural diplomacy, such as cross-collaboration, enjoyment, flexibility, creativity and adaptability—a contribution to a 'smart' cultural diplomacy that strategically balances 'hard' with 'soft' powers. Together, Luke & Kersel have defined and explored a new aspect of heritage; their work will stimulate further research on the interaction between field archaeologists and government.

Managing the past to serve the present

Also based in the USA, Robert J. Shepherd and Liang (Larry) Yu are academics with training and experience in political science and history, cultural studies and tourism. Their fieldwork is in Asia, primarily China. In their book, they cross-examine the political, economic and social processes of cultural heritage management in China, as well as exploring how these processes impact on local communities.

Heritage management, tourism, and governance in China is part of the 'Springer briefs in archaeological heritage management' series edited by Douglas Comer, Helaine Silverman and Willem Willems, in conjunction with the ICOMOS International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management. The series addresses critical contemporary challenges and illustrates pioneering work in archaeological heritage management, taking a broad interpretation of the concepts of archaeology, heritage and policy.

Shepherd & Yu provide a critical evaluation of changing visions of the management of tangible cultural heritage assets in China over the past two decades. The narrative is embedded in a

contextual review, going back to the Zhou Dynasty, constructed to clarify the transformation in cultural heritage management from Maoist socialism to global neoliberalism. This narrative evolves from Mao's dictum to "make the past serve the present and make foreign things serve China (*guwei jinyong*)" (p. 15).

Shepherd & Yu explain the ratification of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention by the Chinese government in 1985 and subsequent integration of cultural heritage management into the national Five-Year Plans. Accordingly, cultural heritage assets have become economic resources exploitable for tourism and political resources which can build patriotism and contribute to the modernisation of China. Shepherd & Yu argue that the modern Chinese perspective on cultural heritage management is rooted in the combination of two dictums: the Buddhist focus on intangible heritage and the Maoist focus on material growth. They note, however, that the impact of these two dictums on heritage management, affecting cultural and natural resources, has only recently begun to be critically questioned. They draw attention to different attitudes towards authenticity and imitations, comparing Chinese and Western ('Euro-American') perspectives, to illustrate and argue the validity of global perspectives in cultural heritage management.

Shepherd & Yu also investigate cultural heritage management during an era of globalisation to assess assumptions about the distinctiveness and homogeneity of norms and values shared at community and global levels, and the emphasis on cultural diversity over sameness. Significant attention is given to explaining the role of local communities in cultural heritage management, as well as Chinese interpretations of global concepts such as civilisation and civil society.

The conclusions note the unique opportunity to use China as an experimental laboratory of cultural heritage management as a result of the unprecedented speed of decision-making, rapid economic development and the resulting impact on cultural heritage assets, both tangible and intangible. Shepherd & Yu highlight the need to deepen discussion about what to protect, how to protect it, and who should be involved. They urge a stronger role both for local communities and for experts in national decision-making concerning cultural heritage management.

UNESCO Heritage Conventions and cultural values

Sophia Labadi is an academic based in the UK, with training and experience bridging political sciences, cultural heritage studies and archaeology in academic institutions and regional and international organisations. Interested in topics ranging from migration, museums, heritage regeneration and development, Labadi is best known for her pioneering work bridging cultural heritage management and globalisation, where UNESCO Heritage Conventions and cultural values play a crucial role.

In *UNESCO, cultural heritage, and Outstanding Universal Value*, Labadi contributes to understanding of cultural heritage management with a critical analysis of the two International Conventions developed by UNESCO concerning the protection of cultural and natural heritage. The 1972 World Heritage Convention and 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention are compared through a mixed methodology, combining close analysis of UNESCO policy with observations made during key UNESCO meetings and in-depth case studies from Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Labadi questions the role of globalisation in cultural heritage management, departing from the assumption that the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is Eurocentric and dominated by a European interpretation of cultural heritage. She also challenges the 'neo-colonialist' interpretation of the World Heritage Convention noting that its implementation and the nominations of national heritage properties for World Heritage designation are voluntary and led by autonomous States Parties.

Labadi analyses the official narratives presented by States Parties to the World Heritage Convention systematically, with in-depth consideration of 114 nomination dossiers, in search of subversions of dominant values and their interpretation over time, framed within national constructions of the past, and aligned to key concepts, such as tourism, development, sustainability, intangible heritage and authenticity. Labadi also discusses crucial trends such as the persistence of intrinsic values in official narratives, as well as the important role of the formal discipline of heritage preservation. Notions of truth and credibility are considered to influence how values are endorsed by fellow experts, decision-makers and local communities. She highlights the imbalance between

intrinsic and relativistic values, denoting a tendency to underline the tangible dimension of heritage, when intangibility seems to play a crucial role in its protection and *vice versa*. Labadi stresses the paradox in respecting both representativeness and selectivity within a single designation: the World Heritage Site.

The principal conclusions take an historic perspective, looking back over the past 40 years and noting the contribution of the UNESCO Convention to date as well as deliberation on what it could become if fully implemented. The departure from a nationalistic approach, the match in notions and definitions between countries, the reduction of diversity in decision-making around heritage management, and the interrelation between the World Heritage Convention and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention are a few of the many inspiring recommendations Labadi presents both to scholars and practitioners.

An outlook on cultural heritage management

All three books are direct contributions to cultural heritage management, each one adding innovative thoughts to the existing body of knowledge: Luke & Kersel explore the role of US fieldwork overseas on international cultural diplomacy; through Chinese heritage, Shepherd & Yu open a new perspective on understanding heritage concepts globally; and Labadi explores how the two UNESCO Conventions have been interpreted by States Parties in their nomination dossiers. Together, these books emphasise the important role of UNESCO and its conventions both for heritage management and heritage studies. They not only contribute to the definition of common ground, exchanging best practice and sharing resources but also to increasing awareness, reducing stereotyping and improving understanding about the diversity of values.

Arguments are presented for and against different concepts: Western and non-Western, tangible and intangible. The evidence-based approaches adopted by the authors, building critical analyses of policies and events, has permitted further steps to be taken in understanding these concepts: their differences, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Nonetheless, questions remain, for example surrounding distinctions between Western and non-Western perspectives: are these differences

behavioural, reflecting tradition- and innovation-led societies, independent of their territories?

These three pioneering contributions help us to understand archaeology in its societal context, strengthening existing knowledge and building new bridges with other disciplines. Together they offer a new perspective on heritage, its definitions and management; they speak not only to other scholars of heritage, but also to organisations and governments involved in heritage management and of wider international cultural diplomacy.

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