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State Institutions as Building Blocks of China's Infrastructures of Memory – The Case of Intangible Heritage

Christina Maags

Abstract

The past is continuously reinterpreted to serve the interests of the present. Over the last two centuries of turbulent Chinese history, the past has been redefined through narratives and categorisations. How does the party-state manage the diversity and complexity of China's past, and what implications does this have for state–society relations in China? Based on a case study of China's adoption of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, this article argues that the Chinese party-state creates "infrastructures of memory," which enable it to actively manage China's diverse past through selective institutionalisation. This process creates a "cognitive map" of tangible and rationalised relations and boundaries between vernacular memories *as interpreted by the state*. Although this map is to shape and direct Chinese collective memory and identity, it also sparks contestation among members of the populace who seek to preserve vernacular and multiple memories of their socio-cultural past.

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Keywords

China, intangible cultural heritage, memory, institutions, state–society relations

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Introduction

The past is continuously reinterpreted to serve the interests of the present. Over the last two centuries of turbulent Chinese history, the past has been redefined through narratives, for example, "100 years of humiliation," and binary categorisations such as "feudal" or "backward" versus "modern" ideas and practices. While these interpretations remain omnipresent on a discursive level within the Chinese media and education system, a more complex set of categorisations that selects and structures historical memory has been institutionalised and implemented. To manage the diverse Chinese culture, for instance, Chinese authorities have developed institutional processes for identifying, categorising, and ranking historical sites and traditional cultural practices. These processes raise questions about memory politics in China: How does the party-state manage the diversity and complexity of China's past? Moreover, what implications does this have for state–society relations in China?

This article discusses these questions by examining China's adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of "Intangible Cultural Heritage" (ICH) (hereafter: UNESCO ICH Convention). By retracing how the UNESCO ICH Convention has been adopted and adapted in China, I argue that the party-state creates "infrastructures of memory," which enable it to actively manage China's diverse past through selective institutionalisation. Adopting UNESCO institutions and categorisations not only allows the party-state to use internationally recognised "best practices" to determine which culture is "worth" remembering and which is not. Going beyond the valorisation of culture, I contend that China's state infrastructures of memory create cognitive maps of cultural practices which selectively institutionalise and relate these practices according to categories, spaces, administrative ranks and communities/ethnic groups. Thereby it establishes tangible and rationalised relations and boundaries between vernacular memories *as interpreted by the state*. Although this map aims to shape and direct Chinese collective memory and identity, it also sparks contestation among members of the populace seeking to preserve vernacular and multiple interpretations of their socio-cultural past.

In what follows, I first provide a brief review of the literature, explain what is meant by "infrastructures of memory" and introduce the UNESCO ICH Convention. The main part of the article will examine how ICH safeguarding has become a building block of China's infrastructures of memory by shedding light on the visible (symbolic and relational systems) and less visible (artefacts and routines) processes underlying ICH safeguarding in China. I then turn to a brief discussion of how these infrastructures of memory relate to and impact societal efforts to retain and promote vernacular memories, illustrating the politics of memory in Chinese state–society relations. A conclusion rounds off the article.

The Party-State, Heritage and Politics of Memory in China

State institutions play a key role in shaping, maintaining, and storing memory, collecting and displaying memories of the past in archives, libraries, galleries, museums, heritage sites, etc. I follow Goodin (1996) and define state institutions based on a political

science understanding as structures and organisations within the state which shape individual or collective behaviour. In turn, individual and collective agency can shape and act through these institutions. Using state institutions, the state actively creates and shapes "spaces of memory" (Erinnerungsräume) to pursue its political vision of the future (Assmann, 2018). For instance, governmental "memory institutions" preserve our heritage via collection and documentation thereby fostering a distinctive "institutionalisation of memory" to serve its interests in the present and future. Increasingly, this institutionalisation is not only found in the physical space of buildings, which encourages public interaction with the past through curation and display (Byrne, 2015). It has also entered digital space in the form of digital libraries and archives or databases (Ghobrial and Sharif, 2010).

Besides institutions, the state uses discourses to shape our memory of the past. In line with Foucault, discourses can be understood as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 2002: 49). This is possible, since "discourse is an institutionalized way of speaking or writing about reality that defines what can be intelligibly thought and said about the world and what cannot" (Longhofer and Winchester, 2016). State institutions often go alongside discourses which exert power by organising and legitimising knowledge (Adams, 2017). Institutions in turn refer to and interact with discourses (Joseph, 2004: 147). Discourses and their use in shaping our memory of the past have received ample attention in the Heritage and Memory Studies literature. As Smith (2006: 11) demonstrates, states, experts and other voices of authority promote a hegemonic "authorised heritage discourse" (AHD), which determines the way "heritage" is thought, talked, and written about. As the AHD is embedded in government regulations, these naturalise the AHD and delegitimise alternative ideas, identities, and memories. Discourses therefore act as a tool of Foucauldian governmentality (Smith, 2006: 50).

Institutions and discourses can be understood as constituting and shaping social practices. While institutions set formal rules of behaviour, thereby constraining actor agency, discourses do the same by creating rules about what can be legitimately said and done. Institutions and discourses thereby produce social practices which can be defined as "routinized type of behavior typically performed and shared by people" (Reckwitz, 2002: 249). Likewise, institutions and discourses can themselves be viewed as practices, that is, discursive and institutionalised practices. Taken together, institutions, discourses, and practices can therefore be understood as three key interrelated and mutually reinforcing mechanisms that shape processes of memory and heritage-making.

State institutions, discourses, and practices are key drivers in Chinese memory politics today. Over the last few decades, China has experienced a "museum boom" (Zhang and Courty, 2021) and a "heritage craze" (Yan, 2018), leading to the creation of various spaces of memory, which institutionalise a certain interpretation of history. Here the Chinese party-state disseminates its own AHD, simultaneously drawing on expert knowledge and state power to legitimise and control the heritage-making process (Yan, 2015). At both heritage sites and museums, the party-state fosters a discourse of national identity that celebrates China's glorious past (Zhu, 2018) – for instance via discourses around the Chinese "multi-ethnic nation state" (Silverman and Blumenfield, 2013) and success of

market reforms (Denton, 2005). State institutions and discourses thus seek to use heritage as a means to foster nationalism, economic development, and ethnic minority populations (Silverman and Blumenfield, 2013). Consequently, discourses and institutions allow the party-state to reinterpret the past according to current political and socioeconomic interests, thereby shaping collective memories.

The Chinese party-state's memory institutions and discourses shape societal practices on the ground (Maags, 2018; Zhu and Maags, 2020). State heritage sites and their management (Du Cross and Lee, 2007; Shepherd and Yu, 2013) and underlying bureaucratic processes (Bodolec, 2012; Maags and Holbig, 2016) benefit certain groups and individuals who eagerly participate in the official heritage-making process (Blumenfield, 2018; Maags, 2018). Other scholars (Graezer Bideau and Yan, 2018; Zhu and Li, 2013) highlight that excluding others from such participation leads to resistance and contestation of state interventions (Maags and Svensson, 2018; Yan, 2018). Communities for instance secretly preserve their inherited and vernacular memories (Yu, 2015) or promote alternative discourses and practices (Yan, 2015). Depending on whether local communities and actors benefit from the state's efforts in heritage-making and/or consider state discourse and practice in line with their own interpretations of the past, they choose to either embrace or contest the party-state's interpretations of the past. As elsewhere, the Chinese party-state thus uses state discourses and institutions to determine and legitimise what is to be considered "heritage" to shape the collective memory and national identity of its populace. This impacts social practices and state–society relations. Non-state actors use the same kind of mechanisms – institutions, discourses, and practices – to interact with, embrace or contest official memory politics, thereby shaping state heritage-making practices themselves.

Examining Infrastructures of Memory

The role of institutions, discourses, and practices in memory politics has been a central concern in Memory Studies. As McQuaid and Gensburger (2019), however, argue, Memory Studies' work has mainly focused on discourses and display of memories, while seldom engaging with the "administration of memory," including the public policy process and public administration behind memory politics. They contend that administrations of memory lie at the heart of memory politics as they transmit, mobilise, and legitimise certain memories over others. Rubin's (2018) work extends this work by proposing the notion of "infrastructures of memory." To him, infrastructures "are distributed networks that facilitate the circulation of people, things, or ideas," which "enable and constrain the circulation of past experience in the public sphere" (Rubin, 2018: 215). While official discourses can fade away, their "physical traces" within the environment and the state apparatus continue to exert power over the populace (see Introduction of this special issue). Rubin's notion of infrastructures of memory goes beyond state institutions and discourses, as infrastructures also encompass materials, institutions, and networks outside the state (Rubin, 2018: 216). "Infrastructures of memory" are plural and centred around retaining and disseminating information, knowledge, and interpretations

of the past – by both state and non-state actors. Therefore, they can be regarded as constituting a network of different carriers of memory, that is, institutions, discourses, and practices, enabling continuous interaction, re-interpretation, and contestation between different state and societal groups shaping memory and identity politics.

Rubin's conceptualisation of "infrastructures of memory" has certain limitations in its application to studying the People's Republic of China's (PRC) memory politics. Firstly, it was created to explain how and why remnants of the fascist Franco regime continuously influence contemporary Spanish memory politics. His focus is thus on finding remains of Franco's "infrastructures of memories" in today's Spain, rather than explaining how infrastructures of memory emerge. Moreover, his work – similar to McQuaid and Gensburger's (2019) – is based on the assumption that memory politics take place in a democratic context (contemporary democratic Spain) (Rubin, 2018: 214), not authoritarian nation-states.

I contend that with further development Rubin's conception can be used to explain currently emerging "infrastructures of memory" in democratic and authoritarian states alike. To do so, it is helpful to differentiate between the roles of the state and societal actors in memory and identity politics. In line with McQuaid and Gensburger (2019) and Rubin (2018), I regard the state as creating different carriers of memory to exert "infrastructural power" over society (Mann, 1984). Based on Giddens' (1981) idea of "storage," state institutions exert power by storing and managing information about the past, thereby making them durable. As Giddens (1981) notes, "the keeping of written 'accounts' […] generates power that is unavailable in oral cultures" (p. 95). Being part of the territorially centralised organisation of the state, state institutions thus enable the state "to penetrate and centrally co-ordinate the activities of civil society through its own infrastructure" (Mann, 1984: 190, see also McQuaid and Gensburger, 2019: 138).

Non-state actors simultaneously set up their own memory institutions, which contest and interact with state institutions. While lacking infrastructural power of the state, non-state actors nonetheless store information in, for instance, private museums, collections, and libraries (Song, 2008; Wei, 2015). They thereby establish alternative "storages," interpretations, and resources, which may run counter to that of the state. As the state has the prerogative to "store" and manage the past, we need to differentiate between "collective memory" (an official presentation of the past as disseminated by the state) and "social memory" (vernacular or personal interpretations of the past) (Van Dyke, 2019). Although these two forms of memories co-exist independently, creating conflicting discourses of the past, official information, interpretations and resources may enter society's alternative storages thus impacting social memory, and vice versa. Carriers of memory are thus relational and cross boundaries. State and non-state storages constitute two parts of interlinking infrastructures of memory, which influence each other.

While many state and non-state institutions are visible infrastructures of memory, there are also invisible components. According to Star (1999), these are often regarded as "boring" and "mundane" (p. 379), as they are related to processes such as standardisation, classification, and categorisation. Invisible processes exist because every state institution employs certain practices to carry and transmit collective memory (McQuaid and

Gensburger, 2019). Likewise, these invisible components of infrastructures of memory exist outside the state. Whether we examine social networks (Rubin, 2018) or everyday vernacular practices, which preserve a particular memory and interpretation of the past (Yu, 2015), they all constitute activities that may remain invisible but influential in memory politics. Such invisible practices can become acts of "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott, 1987), which subvert official institutions and discourses of the past.

Infrastructures of memory thus comprise carriers such as state and non-state institutions, discourses, and practices, which are interrelated and mutually influence each other. In this study, I propose to focus on the role of institutions in infrastructures of memory and how these relate to discourse and practice. To examine this carrier function of institutions, I draw on institutional theory. According to Scott (2008) institutions use (1) *symbolic systems* (collection of symbols such as norms and values; rules and laws), (2) *relational systems* (patterns of interaction among social positions within a network), (3) *artefacts* (material objects designed to support the performance of a task), and (4) *routines* (habitualised behaviour) (Scott, 2008: 79–85). While symbolic and relational systems as well as routines may be more intelligible to the reader, the notion of artefacts may need further introduction. Scott's understanding of the notion of artefacts draws on work in Anthropology, where artefacts refer to objects of material culture which embody meaning. As such, according to Miller (2002), artefacts are commonly understood as "means by which we give form to, and come to an understanding of, ourselves, others, or abstractions such as the nation or the modern" (Miller, 2002: 397). Artefacts are thus objects that institutions use to materialise more abstract understandings and thereby render them manageable. The distinctive features of all four of these "tools" may be highly visible such as institutional symbols or positions, or invisible, such as vernacular practices and institutional routines, yet they all influence how the past is to be interpreted.

To examine how China's infrastructures of memory work in practice, this study takes the PRC's implementation of the UNESCO ICH Convention as a case study. Intangible cultural heritage is examined as a case study to examine Chinese memory politics since the safeguarding of traditions and cultural practices in the present necessarily includes politics about what to preserve, how, and how they are to be remembered moving forward. The author has examined the ICH Convention, Chinese ICH-related laws and policies and Ministry of Culture and Tourism websites to identify themes representing (1) norms and values which represent the symbolic system; (2) actors (e.g. cultural departments, experts, ICH inheritors, "the public") indicating relational systems; and (3) administrative processes (e.g. categories/classification, filing, application) to shed light on artefacts and routines. As some artefacts and routines are not formalised, and thus not officially mentioned, I rely on semi-structured interviews with ICH officials, experts, and inheritors as a source of anecdotal evidence. Around sixty interviews were conducted during four fieldwork visits in 2014 and 2015 by using a snowball sampling technique. Interviewees range from provincial, municipal, and county-level officials to academics supporting the implementation of ICH policies as "experts" and cultural practitioners taking part in the ICH inheritor programme.

The UNESCO ICH Convention

Since its establishment in 1945, one of the priorities of the UNESCO has been to support the institutionalisation of memory (UNESCO, 2017). After adopting, for instance, the World Heritage Convention (WHC) in 1972 (UNESCO, 2021a) and the Memory of the World Programme in 1992 (UNESCO, 2019), the UNESCO adopted the ICH Convention in 2003 to safeguard and promote traditional cultural practices or "intangible cultural heritage" (UNESCO, 2003). In the ICH Convention, ICH is defined as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (Article 1) (UNESCO, 2003).

Similar to the WHC, the ICH Convention uses two "lists" to raise awareness of ICH practices: (1) "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" and (2) "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding." Each States Party is encouraged to create domestic "ICH inventories," which can be used to nominate domestic ICH practices to the UNESCO's lists (Article 12) (UNESCO, 2003). Moreover, States Parties should issue laws and policies, create an administration and research institutes, adopt "appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures" (Article 13) and establish "documentation institutions for the intangible cultural heritage" (Article 13) (UNESCO, 2003). As Nakano notes in her contribution to this issue, UNESCO Conventions thus create "infrastructures of memory" of their own.

For instance, the ICH Convention comprises a symbolic system of rules, norms, and values that States Parties are to follow (Maags, 2020). It perpetuates an ICH-related AHD attached to norms and values around the promotion of community empowerment, cultural diversity, and human rights (Lenzerini, 2011). The UNESCO's infrastructures of memory act as a global layer to which domestic infrastructures of memory connect. As Van Uytsel (2012) notes, for instance, when implementing the ICH Convention, States Parties are to promote cultural diversity and play "an important role in the processes of self-recognition and self-determination of communities" (p. 10), thereby enforcing the UNESCO's symbolic system on a domestic level.

The UNESCO as an organisation also has its specific global cultural governance system, or relational system, comprising the General Assembly of States Parties, the ICH Committee, and its Secretariat and advisory bodies. Most importantly, this governance system oversees the implementation of the ICH Convention worldwide. For example, it decides which domestic ICH practices are added to UNESCO ICH lists and which States Parties will receive support from the ICH Fund (UNESCO, 2003, 2021b). It has its own artefacts and routines as well (Bortolotto et al., 2020) – a topic beyond the scope of this study.

By adopting the ICH Convention, States Parties connect their domestic infrastructures of memory to the global level. However, as Adell (2012) notes, the "ICH Convention complements and reinforces a complex set of historical measures concerning the

protection and conservation of heritage" (p. 178) on the domestic level. For instance, in 2003, some States Parties such as France, Japan, or South Korea had already established an extensive infrastructure to safeguard "ethnological heritage" (France) or "intangible cultural properties" (Japan and South Korea), while others such as Germany or China had not (Bortolotto, 2012; Howard, 2012; Maags and Trifu, 2019). To connect to the global level, States Parties are prompted to establish a new and/or additional layer to existing infrastructures of memories.

UNESCO's infrastructures of memory moreover produce international collaboration and contestation. States Party representatives, expert bodies, non-governmental organisations, and others seek to influence how domestic heritage is interpreted and valorised internationally. On the one hand, joint States Party ICH listings such as falconry (UNESCO, 2021c) showcase shared traditional practices which transcend state borders and demonstrate inter-state collaboration on the international level. The Chinese party-state alludes to this "shared heritage" in its joint nomination of the Silk Road as a cultural heritage route, allegedly to enhance people-to-people bonds (see O'Brien and Brown as well as Nakano in this volume). On the other hand, the international recognition of heritage may also incite contestation and struggles between States Parties, as shown in Nakano's contribution. As international heritage listings function as a source of cultural soft power and national identity, States Parties compete for inclusion on a list (e.g. Silk Roads) or contest associated interpretations of the past (e.g. the PRC's listing of "Document of Nanjing Massacre" in the Memory of the World Programme, see Nakano this volume). Finally, UNESCO listings moreover legitimise domestic control over certain territories at the international level – as with UNESCO's recognition of the Tibetan Potala Palace as the PRC's heritage (Shepherd, 2006).

To sum up, UNESCO has created infrastructures of memory at the international level which comprise and connect different "building blocks" such as the WHC and ICH Convention. Depending on whether and how the ICH Convention is implemented domestically, this change at the international level can have profound implications for the development of domestic infrastructures of memory – as the case of the PRC demonstrates (see also Maags and Trifu, 2019).

Chinese Infrastructures of Memory

After decades of neglecting and in part destroying China's intangible heritage, the party-state ratified the ICH Convention in 2004, the sixth nation worldwide (UNESCO, 2021d), to foster cultural nationalism and economic development and thereby state legitimacy (see Maags, 2021a). To incorporate ICH safeguarding into its infrastructures of memory, it quickly adopted a China-specific AHD (Yan, 2015), expanded its state institutions according to UNESCO recommendations and developed new institutional practices to steer the interpretation of China's ICH (see below). This new ICH "building block" within China's infrastructures of memory is linked to other Chinese infrastructures, for example, (tangible) heritage sites, museums, TV, and

movies. For instance, ICH practitioners operate stands within heritage sites to perform ICH practices and sell traditional handcrafts, museums organise ICH exhibitions (Maags, 2021b) and TV documentaries such as “A bite of China” (舌尖上的中国, *shejian shang de zhongguo*) celebrate Chinese culinary traditions (Kunze, 2018). In the following, I will focus on how state institutions have been used to create this ICH building block in China’s infrastructures of memory and how they influence heritage discourses and practices.

Symbolic System

Firstly, the party-state established ICH-related infrastructures of memory by issuing laws and policies on ICH safeguarding, including many norms and categorisations mentioned in the ICH Convention. On the one hand, China’s ICH-related legislation is a complex set of hierarchically structured “rules.” Topping this hierarchy is the ICH Law adopted in 2011 (Gov.cn, 2011), followed by policies – by the State Council (SC, 2005), the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (formerly Ministry of Culture; MOC, 2006a, 2008) or in conjunction with other ministries – as well as lower-level administrative guidelines and ordinances. These are then replicated and adapted at the provincial, municipal, and county level to ensure the state’s “infrastructural power” can be executed. The “rules” established by the ICH Law determine administrative practices on how ICH is to be surveyed, categorised, and preserved. Cultural departments need to survey all ICH practices in their jurisdiction to collect, classify, file, and store relevant information and representative objects (Articles 11–13, Gov.cn, 2011). In line with UNESCO ICH Convention, authorities also create ICH “lists” or inventories which can be nominated for inclusion on UNESCO ICH safeguarding lists. Both institutional practices, ICH surveys and lists, demonstrate how states gain power over history and memory through their capacity for centralised “storage” (Giddens, 1981).

Besides these more technical “rules,” Chinese laws and policies include norms and values which underpin state activities of cultural protection. In China, elements of both the UNESCO’s symbolic system and pre-existing national norms were incorporated into Chinese legislation and thus state institutions (Maags, 2020). The co-existence of two symbolic systems creates tensions. According to the party-state, ICH should reflect the Chinese nation and contain “historical, literary, artistic or scientific value” (Article 3, Gov.cn, 2011) to be protected, aiming to preserve the most “outstanding” traditions and memories. In contrast to the UNESCO’s norms mentioned above (community participation, cultural diversity, and human rights), the Chinese party-state emphasises norms such as “authenticity” and “national unity and ethnic solidarity” (Article 4, Gov.cn, 2011), which may only include the protection of ICH deemed as authentic and promoting national unity. As Maags (2020) shows, Chinese ICH norms and values thus demonstrate a patchwork of norms enshrined in the ICH Convention, WHC, and in Chinese political ideology. The institutionalised symbolic system feeds into the Chinese authorised heritage discourse and vice versa – linking state institutions and official discourses.

Relational System

Secondly, the party-state established its ICH "building block" by setting up an ICH-related administration of memory within the Ministry of Culture – the ICH Department – extending the "infrastructural power" of the state (Article 7, Gov.cn, 2011; see also Bodolec, 2012). While the department oversees policy implementation, its second-tier organisation, the ICH Protection Centre (MOC, 2006b), organises ICH-related projects. The ICH department is supported by an "expert evaluation committee" including academics from different disciplines (Articles 6 and 11; MOC, 2006a). This committee is to support the ICH department in deciding which ICH practice or ICH inheritor (see below) should be included on an ICH list (Articles 6–8; MOC, 2008), thereby "scientifically" legitimising the Chinese party-state's decision of what to select for governmental protection and support (Maags and Holbig, 2016). The party-state's infrastructural power thus exerts power over society but excludes (and does not coordinate as Mann (1984) argued) civil society participation.

Artefacts

The symbolic and relational systems use and produce certain artefacts which "give form" to our understanding of China's ICH (see Miller, 2002). In other words, they structure how ICH practices are stored and presented to the public. Some of these artefacts are somewhat visible to the public. For instance, the two ICH lists – ICH practices and ICH practitioners, respectively – are set up on all four administrative levels and highly publicised. The former is comparable to the UNESCO's "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" and comprises China's ICH inventory. As only ICH practices on China's national list can be nominated to the UNESCO lists, the list creates a link between UNESCO's and China's infrastructures of memory. The latter list designates selected cultural practitioners as "ICH inheritors" and supports their transmission of cultural knowledge to the next generation by providing an annual stipend and in-kind support (Maags, 2018). The ICH inheritor list goes beyond the measures explicitly mentioned in the ICH Convention and resembles the Chinese party-state's version of a "Living Human Treasures" system (Howard, 2012; Maags, 2018). State legislation, administration, and lists constitute highly visible elements of China's ICH-related infrastructures of memory since these are all frequently mentioned in the media (TV, newspapers, and online).

The perhaps "boring" and "mundane" (Star, 1999) areas of China's infrastructures of memory are the less visible artefacts aiming to support ICH safeguarding in practice. For instance, official documentation forms and their inherent classifications and categorisations are invisible to the public. Firstly, ICH lists are compiled according to specific categorisations of ICH. While the UNESCO has classified ICH into five categories, Chinese legislation includes six (Gov.cn, 2011), which are comparable to those outlined by the UNESCO: The UNESCO's five categories are "(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts;

(c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship" (Article 2) (UNESCO, 2003). In contrast, the ten Chinese domains are: folk music (民间音乐, *minjian yinyue*), folk dances (民间舞蹈, *minjian wudao*), traditional drama (传统戏剧, *chuantong xiju*), 曲艺 (small arts, *quyi*), folk literature (民间文学, *minjian wenxue*), martial arts (杂技与竞技, *zaji yu jingji*), folk art (民间美术, *minjian meishu*), traditional handcrafts (传统手工技艺, *chuantong shougong jiyi*), traditional medicine (传统医药, *chuantong yiyao*), and customs (民俗, *minsu*) (IHChina.cn, 2021). Officially, Chinese infrastructures of memory thus employ UNESCO "best practices" to classify heritage. In practice, however, when compiling ICH lists, China's public administration differentiates between ten domains of ICH, which are more specific and narrower. As Zhu and Maags (2020) note, this classification repackages an ICH practice as "heritage," enabling institutional recognition. In so doing, its meaning can change as the institutionalisation process "emphasises a particular cultural perspective or element of cultural practice while others are de-emphasised or remain unrecognized" (Zhu and Maags, 2020: 132).

The re-classification of a cultural practice as ICH enables the state to actively de-politicise cultural practices of, for instance, ethnic minority or religious origin. For instance, cultural practices associated with Nuo culture found in parts of Jiangsu and Jiangxi provinces were long criticised as "superstitious" since they are based on a belief in exorcism. The classification of selected Nuo practices as ICH, such as Liyang County's Nuo festival, strips the practice of its religious background and focuses on the cultural knowledge associated with the festival.

Secondly, this categorisation renders the diversity of cultural practices and traditions "manageable" as it selectively institutionalises ICH practices of certain communities and ethnic groups worthy of safeguarding. According to one ICH official (Anonymous 1, 2015), in places with many ethnic minority groups, local listings of ethnic ICH practices have followed the principle of enlisting one ICH practice per ethnic group. Subgroups of an ethnic minority have complained that they are falsely associated with listed ICH practices, making it impossible for them to have their own ICH practice listed. The listing of a particular cultural practice under one particular category thus decreases the institutionalisation of cultural diversity. For the party-state, however, heritage-related classifications such as these simplify the diverse and complex nature of the past. This enhances the state's ability to govern and manage China's diverse traditions and associated memories.

The process of selecting cultural practices for inclusion on lists is not only found in China but also globally since ICH practices need to be translated into "the language" and practices of public administration. Yet this administrative logic shapes the way ICH practices are institutionalised and become part of China's infrastructures of memory. For instance, an ICH expert from Hangzhou reports that only cultural practitioners who represent a listed, "official" ICH practice can be recognised as "ICH inheritors" and thus receive state funding. Moreover, whether a cultural practitioner is deemed "worthy" of support is determined by government-scholarly committees that evaluate the salience and authenticity of the ICH practice and the practitioner's cultural knowledge (Anonymous 2, 2014). Only when deemed worthy is the practice inscribed locally.

This has far-reaching implications: Only if a higher-level selection panel, that is, on the provincial level, selects a practice (from the municipal level) for inclusion on their ICH list, is the practice promoted to a higher scale.

Together, artefacts thus enable a selective institutionalisation of ICH practices according to four criteria: a certain (1) category (e.g. festival, performing arts), (2) space (geographical location), (3) community or ethnic group, and (4) scale (based on administrative listing as county, municipal, provincial, or national level ICH). These criteria subsequently influence the meaning and purpose of ICH practices by creating different institutional paths via classification and protection plans.

Routines

In addition to material artefacts, China's infrastructures of memory are also influenced by formal and informal routines. In other words, although not specified in the ICH Law and policies, informal routines shape how ICH practices and inheritors are selected and who can participate. For instance, although in theory, anybody can file an application for listing an ICH (SC, 2005), in practice it is often local officials who do so, since – as a local official argued (Anonymous 3, 2014) – local people (老百姓, *laobaixing*) do not understand the process and too much debate and competition over recognition would ensue if they had a say.

Similarly, bureaucratic routines influence the selection of cultural practitioners on the "ICH inheritor list." Although practitioners can apply for listing, often social connections or *guanxi* play an important role in the selection (Anonymous 4, 2015). According to one ICH inheritor, having guanxi with local officials means that some cultural practitioners knew about the ICH inheritor programme earlier and were therefore quicker to apply (Maags, 2018). As Liang (2013) has shown, local government officials also use their contacts to promote ICH practices to higher-level ICH lists.

In addition to social connections, several ICH practitioners interviewed argued that the selection of ICH practices and associated inheritors often follows local government interests and biases. One traditional musician, for instance, argued that since his music was not very popular and difficult to commercialise, he received no further state support and the practice (included on the county-level list) would not be promoted up to higher-level lists (Anonymous 5, 2014). Similarly, a traditional pottery crafter stated that the local pottery tradition was only selected for local ICH listing after the government decided to use this particular pottery tradition as a tourism and cultural industries branding device. She moreover highlighted the difficulty for women to be included on the ICH inheritor list, since selection committees associate certain crafts with male practitioners (Anonymous 6, 2015). Bureaucratic routines and inherent power structures thus influence which heritage is preserved or not.

Although social connections, local interests, and personal biases play a role in any public administration, in China and elsewhere, in the case of heritage this has profound effects on the institutionalisation of memory, as it influences which ICH practices and cultural practitioners are recognised as "heritage," included in the state's "storage" and

thus safeguarded. This echoes McQuaid and Gensburger's (2019) argument that "the current governmental investment in memory implies a specific relation between public administration, scientific experts, and citizens' participation" (p. 139). In other words, analysing China's infrastructure of memory enables us to see how social and power relations impact politics of memory in practice.

Administrative routines not only influence which ICH practice or knowledge is supported, but also how. For decades, Chinese officials have followed quantitative performance evaluation criteria which impact officials' promotions and work placements as well as local government funding (Edin, 2003). This has also influenced ICH safeguarding work. If an ICH practice or inheritor is included in higher-level government lists, this "success" leads to a positive performance evaluation and increase in governmental funding. In addition, as an official explained, she and her team are annually assessed on how many ICH-related events or materials they produce (Anonymous 7, 2015). Influenced by "New Public Management" objective-based performance measurement principles (McQuaid and Gensburger, 2019: 138–139), safeguarding projects, for example, in museums and schools focuses on quantity and not on its usefulness or appreciation by the community.

State institutions and their carriers (symbolic and relational systems, artefacts, and routines) thus are a key component of China's infrastructures of memory as they exert power and authority over how certain elements of the past are preserved, which impacts social memory. Through visible and invisible processes within the infrastructures of memory, Chinese local officials and experts influence how Chinese traditions and cultural practices are interpreted and institutionalised today and in the future.

On the one hand, the selection process as such – that is, what or whom to include (or not) on heritage lists – is a process of recognising the value of certain heritage and memory (Maags, 2018, 2019). On the other hand, as I argue, China's infrastructures of memory go beyond that: they construct a "cognitive map" of China's ICH to guide an individual's interpretation and valorisation of the past. This map is based on the four criteria mentioned above: (1) category, (2) space, (3) community/ethnicity, and (4) scale. Ultimately, this cognitive map creates tangible and rationalised relations and boundaries between vernacular memories as interpreted by the state. By selectively institutionalising heritage according to specific criteria, the state seeks to create a "cognitive map" of the past that shapes how heritage is interpreted today.

State–Society Relations and China's Infrastructures of Memory

The state's cognitive map is sometimes at odds with vernacular meanings, associations, and memories, and thus with pre-existing social "cognitive maps" underlying local meaning- and place-making processes. For instance, as Liang (2013) has shown, when classifying and recognising the Gwer Sa La festival in Yunnan province as an ICH practice, it was inscribed as a "religious ritual" celebrating primitive promiscuity and fertility, an interpretation contrary to the meaning and memory of local communities. For another example, see Thum's work on the desecration of Mazars in Xinjiang (Thum, 2020).

Nevertheless, henceforth it will be officially interpreted and institutionalised as such (Liang, 2013). Tensions thus arise between state and society as to how to categorise a certain ICH practice.

In addition, contestations occur over which community or ethnic group a certain ICH practice is ascribed to. Since administrative processes lead to the association of ICH practices with a specific location, this can result in competition and contestation if other communities also regard the tradition as theirs. This, for instance, occurred when inscribing the above-mentioned practices associated with Nuo culture – which can be found in several Chinese provinces (Li, 2016). Moreover, as this example shows, ethnic ICH practices associated with a specific ethnic group might also lead to contestations among ethnic subgroups. Communities also compete over whose ICH practice is "promoted up" the administrative ladder (Maags, 2018).

The state's creation of a cognitive map thus generates friction in Chinese state–society relations as the state's map differs from that of local communities and ethnic groups. Often contestations occur between state and society, as well as between different communities, around how to categorise, associate (space and community) and valorise (which administrative level of acknowledgement and support) a certain ICH practice. However, in contrast to non-state actors and communities, the party-state can use its infrastructural power to manage socio-cultural diversity via institutional selection and classification processes. These processes simplify and rationalise vernacular memories and practices, which in turn may impact social memory as the state's interpretation of these practices is "stored" in memory institutions.

As the state's cognitive maps endure over time, they moreover have the potential to become a social reality in the future. In China's Ethnic Classification Project of the 1950s, for instance, state ethnologists were sent to communities to classify these according to defined categories, leading to the "identification" of fifty-five ethnic minorities, sometimes including sub-groups (as mentioned above) (Tapp, 2002: 72). Although this state-imposed, artificial classification did not mirror local identities, over time they became part of "reality" for ethnic groups themselves as well as others who learn about and encounter these groups. As Tapp (2002) notes, ethnic categories have therefore "taken on a social life of their own […], have become vital social categories shaping and articulating local forms of identity in new ways and directions as identities change and transform" (p. 70).

Institutions of memory, such as museums or archives, further promote and solidify such classifications and categorisations, thereby making them "durable" over time. As Zhu and Maags (2020) note, once something is recognised (and classified) as "heritage," a cultural site or practice undergoes museumification in which it is secularised, de-contextualised, and displayed for educational or leisure purposes of the public. Museumification is thus one part of the state's "storage" functions, as described by Giddens (1981). Together, state-led institutionalisation, authentication, and recognition processes turn a private and vernacular site, object or cultural practice into a public good which is to be publicly displayed or further commercialised as a private (or commercial) good (Zhu and Maags, 2020: 128–134).

While state infrastructures of memory may create cognitive maps designed to shape collective memory over time, local communities nevertheless retain and nourish their own vernacular infrastructures. State infrastructures of memory may merely add an additional "layer" to vernacular understandings of the cultural practice, and therefore remain disconnected from local meanings and cultural practices. In the case of the Gwer Sa La festival, mentioned above, for instance, although local communities participated in tourist performances portraying the "invented tradition" (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 2012), they were unaware of the inscription of their festival as "ICH" and continued to practice their traditions as they have for centuries (Liang, 2013). Therefore, vernacular infrastructures of memory embedded in local institutions (i.e. temples), social networks and practices may remain less connected to state infrastructures of memory, leading to collective and social memory continuing to exist side by side.

In other cases, local communities contest state interpretations of the past. It may be that local communities choose to reject the party-state's interpretation and subvert it by disseminating counter-narratives and maintaining local memories and practices (Yan, 2015; Yu, 2015). Local communities also seek to make their memories and interpretations of the past durable by creating their own museums (Song, 2008; Wei, 2015) or archives (Anonymous 8, 2015). One ICH inheritor stated, for instance, that he kept a secret archive of ancient scripts related to the performing art he represents, which cannot be accessed by the state (Anonymous 8, 2015). As social memories are stored and made durable, they too may become part of collective memory over time – perhaps at a time when vernacular and official interpretations of a given past are more congruent.

Others embrace the opportunities state recognition of a cultural practice as "ICH" can entail. In this case, contestations can occur where certain members of the local community economically benefit while others do not (Blumenfield, 2018) or when certain practices are "promoted" to another scale as this enhances the recognition and "value" of such practices (Maags, 2019). Thus the interaction and interplay between different cognitive maps can create contestation – not only between state and society but also among diverse societal actors. Depending on whether governmental actions benefit local communities and/or reflect local interpretations of the past, local actors may either embrace or contest the party-state's heritage and memory-making efforts.

A key difference between infrastructures of memory in democratic and authoritarian states is the extent to which local communities can "openly" and visibly contest state infrastructures of memory. In authoritarian states, the state can exert more power, in the sense of despotic or infrastructural power (Mann, 1984), than societal actors. Therefore, citizens of authoritarian states face higher barriers and risks when challenging state power (Fu, 2016). Another key difference between democratic and authoritarian states is the extent to which communities themselves can participate in the state's cognitive mapping of memories, traditions and cultural practices. While the ICH Convention is based on the norm of "community participation," it has no power to enforce it among its States Parties. In fact, as Coombe and Turcotte (2012) argue, "Although the ultimate priority given to the involvement of communities and civil society is evident, the appropriate

mechanisms to achieve this without state initiative are unclear" (p. 293). While the Chinese party-state does support cultural practitioners through its "ICH inheritor" programme and engages communities and the wider public through a plurality of awareness-raising events, the public is largely excluded from influencing the often invisible working mechanisms of the party-state's infrastructures of memory. The only non-state actors directly involved in choosing ICH practices are selected Chinese academics who are invited to support this process as "experts" (Maags and Holbig, 2016).

However, this exclusion of the local communities in the selection of ICH (and thus heritage-making) not only occurs in China, but also in democratic countries such as Japan (Maags and Trifu, 2019). Consequently, in any country, "memory becomes a social resource to fight for and through which to engage in a relation with this very same state" (McQuaid and Gensburger, 2019: 138). The extent and ways in which contestation and struggle against the state is allowed, however, is an indicator of how infrastructures of memory differ across different political regimes.

Finally, China's infrastructures of memory are also connected to and interact with UNESCO's infrastructures of memory. Chinese legislation includes certain elements of UNESCO's symbolic system, in particular norms and values associated with the ICH and World Heritage Conventions. In addition, the Chinese and UNESCO's relational systems are linked, as Chinese bureaucrats and experts make up the Chinese delegation to the UNESCO and influence decision-making within UNESCO committees. As the Chinese party-state nominates and promotes domestic ICH practices at the UNESCO, UNESCO and Chinese artefacts are linked as well. Via this link, the party-state has direct control over which ICH practices may be institutionalised at the international level, including how this practice is framed and categorised. The UNESCO, however, has little power to impact Chinese ICH safeguarding practices nationally. The UNESCO may also become an arena for interstate contestation. Domestic listings of certain ICH practices can result in contestations at the international level, when nation-states try to list them as theirs on UNESCO lists (Park, 2017). Infrastructures of memory thus form at different levels, creating contestations and struggles around memory and identity across different scales (see also Nakano in this volume).

Conclusion

How does the Chinese party-state manage the cultural diversity and complexity of China's past? As this study has shown by examining the case of ICH, the Chinese party-state achieves this by establishing "infrastructures of memory" allowing it to take charge of interpreting the past. These infrastructures comprise visible (symbolic and relational systems) and invisible processes (routines and artefacts). In particular, artefacts and routines simplify the complexity and diversity of the Chinese past by categorising, classifying, and listing certain ICH practices (and not others) within the state's "storage." This selectively institutionalises certain heritage in China's collective memory. Selective institutionalisation renders China's cultural diversity – and by

extension Chinese society at large – governable for the sake of fostering social stability and the political legitimacy of the party-state.

I contend that ICH inscriptions on lists, associated classifications, and categorisations create an official "cognitive map" of China's ICH practices, which establishes tangible and rationalised relations and boundaries between vernacular memories as interpreted by the state. Over time, official "cognitive maps" may influence social memory and thereby make state interpretations durable. Nevertheless, social actors frequently subvert and contest official interpretations of the past as well. By storing their own interpretations of the past, social memory may also influence collective memory over time.

Such dual memory-making processes have profound implications for Chinese state–society relations. On the one hand, official processes enable the state to assume the role of caretaker and guardian of Chinese cultural knowledge. Furthermore, the Chinese party-state's infrastructures of memory allow it to exert "infrastructural power" (Mann, 1984) over Chinese society, which helps it to legitimise itself and govern Chinese society. At the same time, these infrastructures of memory comply with UNESCO best practices and have helped many cultural practitioners gain recognition and support to safeguard their ICH practice.

On the other hand, state infrastructures of memory may only influence vernacular infrastructures of memory to the extent that local communities embrace the state's interpretation of the past. While certain cultural practitioners and local communities have embraced the state's classification and recognition as "intangible heritage," and thereby seemingly recognise the state's interpretation of the past, others have chosen to contest governmental memory-making and heritagisation efforts. As state classifications and interpretations are disregarded, subverted, and side-lined, to some communities the party-state's infrastructures of the past may only represent a disconnected "layer" of local memory-making efforts, which has little impact on the ways in which they retain and promote personal and vernacular memories of the past. Yet China's ICH-related infrastructure of memory has just emerged in the last decade. To what extent the party-state's creation of a cognitive map will influence vernacular understandings of cultural practices is yet to be seen.

Employing this study's conceptualisation of "infrastructures of memory" has several benefits. Firstly, it enables us to zoom into the ways how state institutions visibly and invisibly shape memory institutions – in China and elsewhere – by focusing on symbolic and relational systems, artefacts and routines. Secondly, using this notion enables an analysis of how different infrastructures of memories are connected across scales. Finally, using this conceptualisation contributes to our understanding of state governance in China in particular, since it helps illustrate what specific issues (classifications, association with certain spaces and communities) lie at the heart of contestations within China's state–society relations and how each side uses cognitive maps to maintain and store its interpretation of the past.

Overall, this study's findings demonstrate the interactive and complex processes underlying memory and identity construction. While previous studies have drawn attention to the role of state administration and discourses in memory politics, this study sheds

light on the many invisible and thus less researched artefacts and routines within the state's infrastructures of memory which selectively institutionalise (and store) the past. This selective institutionalisation seeks to influence the ways in which societal actors make sense of the past and present by creating "cognitive maps" constructing tangible and rationalised relations and boundaries between memories. However, to what extent these state-created cognitive maps can influence pre-existing systems of meaning and memory-making and under what conditions this takes place, remains opaque. Therefore, more research on the interplay between state and societal infrastructures of memory is needed and how these shape the internalisation of certain interpretations of the past in the present.

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