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Chapter 12
Cultural Heritage Politics in China

Christina Maags

Introduction

Understanding cultural heritage politics in China means to grasp the multiple ways in which the party-state employs the Chinese past to achieve its objectives in the present. China's cultural heritage is frequently associated with the large-scale destruction of temples, ancestor halls and antiques during the Mao era, particularly the Cultural Revolution, when many 'material' forms of culture as well as local traditions and beliefs were forbidden (Silverman and Blumenfield 2013: 3). After the Reform and Opening period commenced in 1978, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) stance towards cultural heritage has changed considerably. Since then, 'cultural heritage' has been 'revitalised' and become a resource for various state political, economic and social objectives such as enhancing national unity and economic development domestically as well as fostering the PRC's national image internationally.

Yet, why has the party-state 'revitalised' China's traditional culture after decades of neglect and repression? And how was it able to do so in practice? This chapter inquires into the reasons, processes and effects of the 'revitalisation' of Chinese cultural heritage by conducting a comparative case study of 'intangible cultural heritage' (ICH) protection on the ground – in urban Nanjing and rural Lancang County. I argue that the party-state has adopted a UNESCO[1]-inspired heritage regime to revitalise China's cultural heritage to enhance its political legitimacy. This heritage regime allows the party-state to gain control of interpreting and exploiting the Chinese past at the expense of local communities. While, on the one hand,

China's cultural heritage has thus been 'revitalised' – allowing Chinese people to reconnect with the past which was cast aside during the early 20th century- it, on the other hand, however, enables the party-state to exploit this process to the extent of offsetting the positive gains made by this cultural revitalisation process.

Conceptions of Chinese Cultural Heritage over Time

An important step in establishing a 'heritage regime' in China, as for any other country, was the adoption of the notion of 'heritage'. Originating in 'the West' (Vecco 2010), no similar concept existed in China until the turn of the 20th century. As Lai (2016) notes, with increasing contact with the West many terms were adopted which we consider to be part of a nation's 'heritage' today, such as 'as 'guwu' 古物 (ancient objects), 'shiji' 史跡 (historic sites), 'guji' 古跡 (ancient sites), 'mingsheng' 名勝 (famous sights), 'wenwu' 文物 (cultural relics), and 'guobao' 國寶 (national treasures)' (2016: 50). Many of these terms were only introduced when China was 'learning from' and 'catching up' with the West (Lai 2016). Chinese traditional culture was soon identified as the reason for China's backwardness vis-à-vis the Western imperial powers, resulting in criticism of Chinese culture, particularly during the May Fourth Movement of 1919. This criticism marked a turning point for the role and protection of Chinese cultural heritage, as it would lead to its repression and in part destruction of over the course of the 20th century, not least during the Cultural Revolution (Silverman and Blumenfield 2013: 3).

With China's opening to the international community after 1978, however, China's framing and attitude towards its cultural heritage changed. After ratifying the World Heritage Convention in 1985, the party-state began to adopt global concepts and norms (Maags 2018a), such as 'cultural heritage' (文化遗产), replacing the notion of 'cultural relics' which had been employed during the Mao era. Whereas 'material' heritage was 'revitalised' rather

soon after 1978, the party-state was less eager to reframe and revitalise traditional cultural practices formerly deemed as 'superstitious' until its ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter: ICH Convention). Soon after, UNESCO's notion of 'intangible cultural heritage' (非物质文化遗产) would come to replace the Chinese concept of (ethnic) 'folklore' (民间民族文化). Overall, with the adoption of the notions of (material) 'cultural heritage' and 'intangible cultural heritage' the Chinese government established a multi-level heritage regime which is linked to and interacts with the international realm (Yan 2018; Zhu and Maags 2020). As the next sections will demonstrate, it is this adoption of concepts and best practices from the international realm which enables the party-state to extend its control over the interpretation and exploitation of the past.

Governmental Objectives behind Cultural Heritage Protection in China

The party-state's willingness to adopt international concepts and best practices for the sake of 'revitalising' China's heritage is a result of its search for ways to enhance its political legitimacy. With the decline in socialist values and the rapid modernization and globalization of China during the Reform and Opening Period, the Chinese party-state was facing a ''crisis of faith' which was not merely a loss of faith in communism but a loss of faith in Chinese culture and tradition as well' (Guo 2003: xi). To counter this crisis, the party-state started promoting a specific interpretation of China's history and culture in, for instance, the education system[2] (Dirlik 2011), museums (Denton 2005) and patriotic education campaigns (Zhao 1998), to actively foster cultural nationalism across different segments of society (Guo 2003: 1). In this specific interpretation of China's past, the historic achievements of the Chinese civilisation are strategically linked to those of the CCP, for instance, by promoting narratives how the Communist Party saved China by ending the century of national humiliation and establishing a New China (Callahan 2006). While using different methods of

disseminating this narrative, including the media, public holidays, the education system and the like, 'Beijing has creatively used history education as an instrument for the glorification of the party, for the consolidation of the PRC's national identity, and for the justification of the political system of the CCP's one party rule' (Wang 2008: 784).

The party-state's strategic interpretation of the past is moreover aimed at countering nationalist and separatist movements among ethnic minorities by promoting pride in a single Chinese nation. While acknowledging ethnic differences in its official narrative of the Chinese 'multi-ethnic nation state' (Silverman and Blumenfield 2013: 6; Gorfinkel 2012), the party-state simultaneously 'insists that all are members of a large nation that binds them together by the Communist state' (Zhao 1998: 291). In listing traditional buildings and cultural practices as 'national heritage', for instance, the party-state demonstrates its sovereignty and control over territories with large ethnic minority populations. Since these national sites and cultural practices, such as the Tibetan Potala Palace, are recognized by the UNESCO as 'Chinese heritage' (Shepherd 2006), the party-state has used international heritage lists to bind ethnic minority territories and groups more closely to the state – thereby receiving international legitimacy for ruling over ethnic minority territories.

Through international heritage lists and domestic protection of its heritage, the party-state, not only receives international recognition but is moreover able to enhance its soft power worldwide. To date, the PRC has listed the largest amount of 'World Heritage Sites' (55 sites) at the UNESCO (UNESCO 2020a) – together with Italy – and the largest number of items (40) on the 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', which focuses on traditional cultural practices (UNESCO 2020b). Both lists are used by the party-state to present China as a 'civilised country with a rich history, ethnic unity and cultural diversity' (Inkster 2018) and thus promote cultural soft power internationally.

In addition to supporting Chinese nation-building and soft power, the revitalisation of China's cultural heritage is used as a tool to foster economic development. As elsewhere, the listing of a building or site as a UNESCO 'World Heritage Site' results in a marked increase in domestic and international tourists visiting the site, and thus in the development of the tourism industry (Sofield and Li 1998). As Chau (2005) and Liang (2013) have observed, in addition to heritage sites, traditional festivals have been turned into tourist attractions - despite them being based on local 'superstitious' beliefs and religions. Heritage and tourism policies are used as a civilising and modernisation project to develop rural and ethnic minority areas' local economies (Wang 2017). To attract tourists, the party-state has moreover fostered the rebranding of entire cities along particular heritage themes. The city of Xi'an, which is known for its Terracotta Army, for instance, has been revived through a strategic reconstruction of its built environment which highlights its Tang dynasty history (Zhu 2017).

The revitalisation of China's cultural heritage thus supports the pursuit of many political and economic objectives which are all interlinked: Both the promotion of national unity under CCP rule as well as the pride in China's cultural achievements and international recognition thereof facilitate the spread of cultural nationalism which celebrates the party-state as the leader and protector of the Chinese nation and culture. China's rapid economic development, in turn, further supports this state-led nationalism as the Chinese populace's pride in the past is linked to its prosperity and achievements today. Together, the nationalist interpretation of and economic exploitation of the Chinese past via the heritage regime thus support the ruling legitimacy of the party-state.

Multiple Layers of Cultural Heritage Politics

The main tool to control the interpretation and exploitation of the past is China's heritage regime, which is influenced by developments on the international, national and local level. The PRC is State Party to UNESCO Conventions on heritage protection and thereby vows to protect and promote heritage within its borders. To do so, the central government has issued laws and policies on heritage protection which are implemented by local governments. These three levels combined determine heritage politics on the ground.

The International Level: UNESCO

In ratifying and implementing the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972 (UNESCO 1972) and the ICH Convention (UNESCO 2003) – in short establishing a heritage regime domestically - the party-state has voluntarily agreed to protect domestic heritage via laws and policies, governmental agencies and programs, promoting research and raising public awareness. In return, the party-state may nominate heritage sites to the World Heritage List, or intangible cultural heritage (ICH) practices such as traditional dances and songs to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Both activities, protecting heritage domestically and listing it internationally facilitates China's international prestige and recognition, and thus soft power.

As cultural heritage is a key resource to promote the party-state's economic and political objectives, the PRC has become a key player within the UNESCO. While in the 1980s and 1990s, the party-state was still wary of international organisations and less integrated within UNESCO internal groups (Meskell 2014: 224), it is now increasingly pacting with BRICS[3] countries to pursue its objectives on the international stage. The PRC today has the largest UNESCO delegation, engages in lobbying and hands in the largest number of nomination files to support its international objectives, resulting in the highest success rate of heritage

inscriptions at the UNESCO (Meskell et al. 2015) as evident in the data number of inscriptions listed above.

The Chinese party-state's savvy use of UNESCO Conventions and programs to pursue its political and economic interests, however, has also resulted in tensions with its neighbouring countries. One prominent case concerns the PRC's listing of archival materials related to the 'Nanjing Massacre' to the UNESCO's 'Memory of the World' Programme – a programme which seeks to foster global remembrance of wars and atrocities of the past. As Japan rejects China's stance towards Japan's actions in Nanjing during the Second World War, this inscription enhanced existing tensions in Sino-Japanese international relations. In response, the Japanese government halted its financial contributions to the UNESCO (Nakano 2018). Through such actions, and listings of ethnic minority heritage on UNESCO heritage lists, the party-state seeks to substantiate its sovereignty and interpretation of the past more strongly in the international realm.

The National-Level: Central Government

The Chinese party-state's actions within the UNESCO are strongly shaped by its domestic cultural heritage regime and vice versa. In contrast to the Mao era, the PRC today has established an elaborate domestic system of identifying, listing and managing heritage sites and cultural practices (Zhu and Maags 2020) which is strongly influenced by UNESCO guidelines on heritage protection. For instance, just as on the international level, Chinese government actors and experts use the instrument of 'heritage lists' to manage heritage on the ground. Through listing ICH practices on four government levels, the domestic heritage regime produces a four-level hierarchy of 'Chinese heritage' which provides the basis for subsequent listings at the UNESCO: Whereas national government agencies select from provincial heritage lists, provincial governments choose from municipal-level heritage lists.

County-level lists, in turn are the source for municipal lists and thus provide the backbone of Chinese heritage regime (Maags and Trifu 2019). Similarly, heritage sites are listed on national inventories and categorised for tourism purposes according to a five-tier ranking system, which ranges from 1A (A) to 5A (AAAAA) (Shepherd and Yu 2013: 53).

By including certain cultural sites, objects and practices on 'lists', the party-state is able to take control over the interpretation, valorisation and management of China's cultural past. Not only can the government decide what is to be identified as 'Chinese heritage', and what is to be discarded as unworthy of protection or 'superstition', its classification via lists moreover adds different kinds of value to the heritage sites and ICH practices inscribed. On the one hand, the inscription on different levels creates a hierarchy of values – as in being of international, national, provincial or local value (Maags 2018b). On the other hand, as Zhu and Maags (2020) explain, identifying a reminiscent of the Chinese past as 'heritage' turns it into a public good for the display in museums and into a private good for commercial gain. As the party-state is able to monopolise on the narratives told at as well as on the economic profit made from heritage exhibitions and sites (Denton 2005; Yan 2015) it can determine how China's past is interpreted and used.

There are numerous bureaucratic actors in charge of protecting China's cultural heritage who use the Chinese heritage regime to interpret and exploit China's past in practice. While the State Administration of Cultural Heritage is responsible for preserving archaeological excavations and heritage sites, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department within the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is responsible for all work related to safeguarding ICH practices (Bodolec 2012; Maags and Trifu 2019). Together they are tasked to oversee the implementation of heritage laws and policies across China, by supervising their superordinate agencies on the provincial, municipal and county level (Shepherd and Yu 2013).

Similar to nomination processes within the UNESCO, government agencies on each level are supported by 'expert committees' who gather material on each heritage site and practice, evaluate them and make recommendations on which to enlist. Moreover, as experts are handpicked by the government, heritage-making is a process directed by 'symbiotic government-scholar networks' (Maags and Holbig 2016) who mutually support and benefit from each other. While the party-state includes selective non-state actors in the decision-making process, government officials have the final say in what to identify as 'Chinese heritage' and how to exploit it to pursue its political and economic objectives.

Members of the community who have cared for historical sites or practiced cultural practices for centuries are not included in this decision-making process. Whereas in countries such as Germany or France, NGOs, associations and individuals are able to make proposals for their country's nominations to the UNESCO's 'Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity', and thus have a say in what should be regarded as 'national heritage' and receive government protection, in China this is not the case. The party-state, supported by experts, defines what heritage is and how it is to be used (Maags and Trifu 2019). Therefore, in contrast to liberal democracies, in China, there is very limited space for local communities, ethnic minority groups and individuals to influence what is to be regarded as Chinese heritage. For instance, as Graezer Bideau and Yan (2018) show in their analysis of Beijing's traditional neighbourhoods called Hutongs, local communities are not consulted in deciding which historical buildings are to be protected and thus valorized, but instead forcefully relocated to the outskirts of the city. The party-state not only singlehandedly determines which material heritage to protect, but also how to interpret and market it for tourist consumption, often ignoring ethnic or religious beliefs associated with natural and cultural heritage – as in the case of a Tibetan village in Yunnan described by Laukkanen (2018).

As public participation in decision-making is limited, Chinese people have developed alternative ways to commemorate their past or have resorted to openly contesting official discourses and heritage practices (Yu 2015; Cui 2018; Zhu and Maags 2020). As Guo (2003) argues, members of the Chinese populace are 'contesting the meaning of the same signifiers that the Party-state wants to hegemonize, such as patriotism, 'national interest', 'national tradition', 'national spirit', 'national harmony' and 'Chineseness'' (2003: 1). Thus, while the Chinese heritage regime appears to be a holistic machinery designed to control and exploit the Chinese past for the sake of enhancing political legitimacy, in practice heritage politics are much more complex, involving constant negotiation and contestation.

The Local-Level: Local Governments, Businesses and Communities

Contestations around how to interpret, valorize and use China's cultural heritage mainly unfolds on the local-level. On the one hand, the party-state's revitalisation of cultural heritage has created opportunities for local communities to reconnect with and economically gain from their past. For example, much has been written about the ways in which local governments have used the central government's change in attitude towards heritage as an opportunity for urban rebranding (Xie and Heath 2017; Zhu 2017) and developing the local economy, particularly the tourism (Sofield and Li 1998; Shepherd and Yu 2013) and cultural industries (O'Connor and Gu 2014; Chen et al. 2016). After the central government declared the tourism industry as 'a new key area of growth for the national economy' in 1998, heritage has become a valuable economic resource to attract domestic and international tourists (Nyíri 2008). Consequently, many local governments, businesses and members of the community have sought to profit from the rapidly growing tourism sector (Zhu 2018). Municipal governments adopt tourism policies to enhance local economic growth (Yan and Bramwell 2012) and set up tourism companies to manage and profit from tourism development (Zhu and Li 2013). The increasing development of China's cultural heritage-based tourism sector

has resulted in the greater internationalisation of China's 'World Heritage Sites' (Wang 2010), which has brought economic opportunities to local communities as well as enhanced their pride in China's cultural heritage.

Therefore, in some areas, the revitalisation of cultural heritage has been gauged to be a positive development. The promotion of ethnic tourism practices, for instance, has supported a 'cultural revival' (Oakes 1993) and raised living standards (Kang 2009: 250). Increased state attention to heritage protection, moreover, opened the door for more community-led practices of celebrating and protecting the past (Svensson 2018), resulting in the revitalisation of cultural practices which were at the verge of extinction (McLaren 2010). Therefore, as Gao (2013) notes, particularly the state's recognition and support of 'intangible cultural heritage' safeguarding has allowed the Chinese people to reconnect with their past and overcome the century-long critique of its traditional culture embodied in the May Fourth Movement.

However, more often than not, local communities have contested this commodification and valorisation of heritage due to their exclusion from this 'revitalisation' process. For instance, after the historic city centre of Lijiang (Yunnan province) was turned into a tourism hot spot, many members of the local Naxi ethnic group had to relocate to the city outskirts, to make way for state and private tourism developers (Su and Teo 2009). While the questions of who manages and who economically benefits from local heritage is often the basis of contention, at times struggles occur over the right of interpreting the past (Yan and Bramwell 2012). As mentioned above, the official narratives and discourses presented at historical sites often run counter to vernacular understandings and interpretations of local culture, leading to resistance and contestation (Yu 2015). In addition, as heritage listings and narratives recognize certain heritage sites and cultural practices as being of value, struggles of recognition unfold over who or what is recognized as 'official heritage' and who/what is not (Maags 2018b). The main reason for contestations is thus the exclusion of local communities from interpreting

and economically benefitting from 'their' past, which – due to the extensive Chinese heritage regime – has become a monopoly of the party-state. However, as local communities are the 'bearers' of culture (people whose ancestors have erected historical buildings and who perform traditional cultural practices), their exclusion from the interpretation and use of 'their' cultural heritage risks undermining what should be the purpose of the Chinese heritage regime: the protection and promotion of Chinese historic past for future generations.

Case Study: 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' in China

A closer look at China's safeguarding of ICH practices exemplifies the tensions between simultaneously (commercially) promoting and protecting heritage.. With its ratification of the ICH Convention in 2004, being the sixth country worldwide (UNESCO 2020c), the party-state embarked on a mission to safeguard its 'intangible cultural heritage'.[4] To protect China's ICH, the Chinese heritage regime – which was largely based on protecting material forms of culture such as heritage sites, historic buildings and antiques – first had to be extended to also enable the 'safeguarding' of traditional cultural practices such as songs, dances, handcrafts and folktales.

Implementing the UNESCO ICH Convention in China

Similar to the adoption of the World Heritage Convention, the party-state implemented the ICH Convention by adopting regulation (SC 2005; 2011) and establishing a new ICH Department (Bodolec 2012: 525; Maags and Holbig 2016) which is supported by a second-tier ICH Safeguarding Centre (IHChina.cn 2018a). The main tool to manage ICH, as mentioned above, are heritage lists. In China, ICH departments create two different 'ICH lists' which complement each other: The first list represents an inventory of cultural practices officially recognised as 'ICH practices' at that particular administrative level (county, municipal, provincial or national), whereas the second list pairs these practices with

respective ‘ICH inheritors’ – the bearers of the cultural practice. The party-state’s ‘revitalisation’ of traditional culture has had certain positive effects: These two lists enhance the visibility and awareness of ICH practices by officially recognising and linking them to state safeguarding projects, while also supporting the maintenance and transmission of the traditional knowledge needed to perform the ICH practice itself (Maags and Trifu 2019). In addition to the title ‘ICH inheritor’, these officially recognized cultural practitioners receive an annual stipend and (in some cases) other in-kind state support, in return for teaching students and taking part in state-organised ICH events such as ICH museum exhibitions, expos, festivals or ‘cultural heritage days’ (Maags 2018b).

As these two lists are adopted across China on four different administrative levels, the party-state recognises and supports several tens of thousands of ICH practices and cultural practitioners. To date, on the national-level alone, the four ‘national ICH lists’ (2006 2008 2011 and 2014) include 1372 ICH safeguarding projects which are associated with 3145 ICH practices (IHChina.cn 2018b). Given that only a few decades ago many cultural practices and traditions were repressed, the extensiveness of the Chinese ICH regime is even more astonishing. Indeed, as Rees (2012) notes, ‘[t]he treatment of intangible cultural heritage in the People’s Republic has (thus) undergone a remarkable transformation. China may have come late to the party, but the liveliness and number of ideas, concepts, policies and plans are startling’ (2012: 25). However, while the party-state has been innovative in creating ICH safeguarding practices, its control of the interpretation and exploitation of ICH has resulted in ambiguous, often negative, side effects on the ground.

Ambiguous Effects of ICH Policy Implementation

In the following, I will briefly illustrate two cases from my fieldwork – Nanjing City (Jiangsu province) and Lancang County (Yunnan province) - to showcase these effects of the ICH

safeguarding regime across different provinces, administrative levels as well as socio-economic, ethnic and cultural contexts.

Drawing on international and national best practices for ICH safeguarding, Jiangsu's provincial government quickly established an extensive provincial ICH regime. It was among the first to adopt provincial-level policies on ICH safeguarding, it has listed comparatively many ICH practices and inheritors on its 'ICH lists' (Maags and Holbig 2016; Zhu and Maags 2020) and it has promoted the establishment of ICH museums and exhibitions. Jiangsu is well known for its traditional practices, which are predominantly associated with Han Chinese high (imperial) culture (Britannica 2020). In Nanjing, the capital of rich and prosperous Jiangsu province, the provincial museum, for instance, houses a very successful ICH exhibition. This exhibition introduces the visitor to the notion of ICH, Jiangsu province's ICH lists and a selection of ICH practices by offering ICH inheritors the opportunity to showcase their ICH practice – mostly handcrafts – to the visitor. The visitor can 'browse through' Jiangsu province's ICH by stopping at different stands, talking to ICH inheritors and by purchasing an ICH-related product such as embroidery, hand-painted masks or shadow puppets. A similar concept is employed at another museum, the ethnic folk culture museum, which is located in a historical building complex of the Qing dynasty, thereby linking and simultaneously showcasing material and intangible heritage of the province.

The ICH museum exhibitions successfully support the transmission of ICH practices. Firstly, they raise awareness among museum visitors of regional cultural traditions and the need to protect them. This strengthens the visitors' cultural identity and pride in the cultural achievements of the province or China as a whole. In addition, particularly members of younger generations may become interested in learning to perform this cultural practice, thereby supporting its transmission to the next generation. Secondly, the 'stands' function as workshop space for ICH inheritors which is given to them free of charge by the provincial

government. In my interviews with ICH inheritors many emphasized how the opportunity to sell their products to visitors has supported them in earning a living – something they had previously struggled with as renting a shop is expensive and the museum guarantees a continuous stream of visitors.

However, Nanjing's ICH safeguarding approach has also resulted in negative side effects. For instance, the museum exhibition only represents traditional handcrafts, neglecting other forms of ICH practices such as traditional folk literature or performing arts. Similarly, due to limited space, only a dozen, mostly provincial-level ICH inheritors obtain the opportunity to showcase their culture. Both processes result in a 'selection' of cultural practices and people for official state recognition and support which causes envy and contestation among ICH inheritors (Maags 2018c). In other words, contestations occur because state museums display a specific selection and thus interpretation of ICH practices as well as determine which cultural practitioner can benefit (and conversely who cannot). One might argue that due to practical reasons a selection is necessary and that it is better to showcase a few ICH practices and inheritors than none at all. This is certainly the case. Yet as the state makes this selection, who and which ICH practice is represented is a political question and will be influenced by the political and economic objectives mentioned above.

The state's objectives and priorities are visible in the province's approach towards ICH-related products in tourism areas. Although the government has provided workshop space near the Nanjing's famous Fuzi Temple, it does not police or punish nearby commercial vendors from selling 'fake' ICH goods (goods which are mass produced by machines, not hand-made) which carry the official governmental ICH logo on their packaging. As the ICH regime identifies certain traditional cultural practices as 'ICH', this has added value to associated goods. Consequently, ICH inheritors need to compete with vendors which sell the same type of goods at a much lower price. As a result, cultural practitioners suddenly need to

compete with fake goods illegally making use of the 'ICH brand'. The party-state's ICH regime thus has intervened in the local market environment for handcrafts, changing its dynamic. However, as it prioritises the development of the tourism sector over ICH safeguarding, its support for ICH inheritors is in part off-set by its lack of action against the illegal selling of 'fake' ICH tourist products.

In comparison, in Lancang County - a rural and impoverished area in Southern Yunnan province - ICH safeguarding has taken a different form (Maags 2018d). As the county is largely inhabited by members of the Lahu ethnic group, the county is designated as 'autonomous' (FMPRC 2014). Being situated in a mountainous region at the border to Myanmar, the county is rather far from municipal centres such as Pu'er or Xishuangbanna. Despite its rather remote location and limited fiscal resources, however, the Lancang County government has put a lot of effort into developing and implementing ICH policies locally. It has sought to use the central government's attention towards ICH safeguarding to have its local ICH practices inscribed at higher ICH lists so as to receive superordinate government levels' financial support (Interview 42/2015). The Lancang County government's efforts have paid off. Lancang managed to have two of its local ICH practices, the Mupamipa legend and the Lusheng dance, inscribed on China's first national ICH list in 2006 and was designated a 'model county' for ICH safeguarding.

Lancang County's strategy to safeguard ICH practices differs greatly to that of Nanjing. In Lancang, there is no ICH museum or exhibition at which ICH inheritors could perform their practice and earn a living. As very few 'outsiders' visit the County, this would not be a suitable model. Moreover, local ICH inheritors are commonly farmers with very little or no education (including the ability to speak Mandarin Chinese) and the ICH practices they represent belong to the category of 'performing arts'. To preserve local ICH, the county

government has stipulated that each village is to have its own cultural performance group and a cultural centre at which students can study local traditional cultural practices free of charge.

In addition, the county seat has been rebranded according to the local Mupamipa legend. Since the legend tells the story of the God Exia forming the first Lahu people out of a calabash, the streets of the county seat, particularly the central square, are decorated with figures of the calabash. The county government has moreover used the Mupamipa legend as a theme in the local 'Lahu Traditional Garden', a newly created tourist attraction, where the visitor can learn about local culture by looking at the statues depicting scenes of the legend or listening to performing arts presented at the open-air stage. Overall, due to the establishment of the ICH regime in China, the county government has been able to revitalise practices formerly deemed as 'superstitious' and received state funds to support community-based safeguarding of local Lahu performing arts.

While this strategy is directed at safeguarding and preserving ICH practices of the Lahu people, as an ICH official explained, it is also an effort to develop the local tourism industry so that 'visitors can learn about Lahu culture'. As in Nanjing, governmental ICH safeguarding is thus linked to economic objectives. This strategy, however, has been in conflict with higher-level objectives of turning Lancang and neighbouring counties into a 'Tea Origin Culture Park' (Yunnan gov. 2015). Lancang lies within the historic 'Ancient Tea Horse Road' (Sigley 2010) – an ancient trade route spreading from Nepal and Tibet across Yunnan and Sichuan province, forming a part of the 'Southern Silk Road'. However, as the local ICH official noted, Lahu culture is not related to tea at all. As Lancang County has little means to counteract provincial-level decisions, its attempt to brand itself along Lahu culture may be overpowered by provincial interests in promoting Yunnan as a historic landscape of the 'Southern Silk Road' (Sigley 2010: 535). While the ICH regime has enabled the Lancang County government to revitalise Lahu culture, it has also paved the way for different

administrative levels to compete over who can interpret and manage ICH on the ground for the sake of economic gain. This has resulted in an exclusion of local communities from this process and potential negative side effects for the socio-cultural environment ICH needs to survive.

As these brief case studies demonstrate, China's creation of an ICH regime has had profound impact on the ground, albeit in different ways. Most significantly, the party-state has set up an extensive system which encourages and financially supports the safeguarding of traditional culture – many of which would have been labelled 'superstitious' in the past. This has, on the one hand, meant that China's heritage, after decades of repression, has been revived as a foundation of local and national identities. On the other hand, however, the regime enables the party-state to intervene on unprecedented scale in the interpretation, management and control of cultural practices. The ICH regime resulted in the appearance of 'fake' ICH goods (Nanjing) and governmental competition over how to interpret and exploit Lahu ethnic culture for the tourism industry (Lancang), with the potential of undermining the very basis of its existence. In both cases, individual cultural practitioners and local communities are excluded from the 'revitalisation' process, as it is the state who identifies and interprets 'Chinese heritage' for promotion and who makes the decision as to who can economically benefit from it and how.

Conclusion

With the Reform and Opening Period, China's cultural heritage has become a key resource for the party-state to foster its political legitimacy. The Chinese heritage regime, based on UNESCO concepts and best practices, has enabled the party-state to gain control of the interpretation and exploitation of the Chinese past. It has used this regime to foster cultural nationalism and economic development domestically, as well as soft power internationally.

For the Chinese people, this 'revitalisation' process has had mixed consequences. On the one hand, after almost 100 years, the Chinese populace has been 'allowed' to reconnect with its historical past. Consequently, the party-state's shift to officially embracing cultural heritage has created many opportunities ranging from increased government recognition and financial support to the ability to once again make a living off of cultural goods and performances. As the brief case studies of Nanjing and Lancang demonstrate, however, the 'revitalisation' process has also had negative side effects. While being the 'bearers' of tradition and culture since ancient history, with the establishment of the Chinese heritage regime, the party-state has now taken over control and effectively excluded local communities from the interpretation and use of 'their' heritage. While in Lancang the local government is forced to change the interpretation and practice of local culture because it better suits higher-level political objectives to promote the 'Southern Silk Road', in Nanjing, the local government enables the over-commercialisation of ICH products to foster economic development. In both cases the party-state risks exploiting Chinese heritage to the extent of offsetting the positive gains of the revitalisation process in the first place.

Whereas many governments across the globe use cultural heritage to pursue their interests, the party-state, an authoritarian government, differs from liberal democracies in certain ways. First, it has more power to determine when to allow the 'revitalisation' of traditional culture. In contrast to liberal democracies where there is more space for bottom-up activities and contestation of the state, in China, it only became possible to promote ICH practices after the formal 'go ahead' of the party-state. Second, and related to the former point, the party-state has significant power to determine what heritage is, and what it is not. This differs in democratic systems. While not all liberal democracies include communities into the decision-making process (for instance in Japan), in many cases NGOs, community groups or professional associations have a say in what constitutes 'their' cultural heritage (Maags and

Trifu 2019). In this way, the party-state is able to manipulate the meaning ofcultural heritage in a way that it emphasizes the CCP-preferred interpretation of Chinese history and culture. In so doing, it seeks to use heritage to promote its ruling legitimacy domestically and its soft power internationally to serve its global ambitions. Finally, the party-state's significant administrative reach and power has produced a comprehensive heritage regime which can intervene in the protection and transmission of traditional culture down to the community-level. Nevertheless, despite the overwhelming power of the state, contestation and circumvention of central state policies and objectives persists – by actors within and outside of the party-state. It is in these acts of contestation and resistance where Chinese cultural heritage politics unfolds in multifaceted ways.

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Abstract

Understanding cultural heritage politics in China means to grasp the multiple ways in which the party-state employs the Chinese past to achieve its objectives in the present. Since 1978, 'cultural heritage' has been 'revitalised' and become a resource for the pursuit of various state political, economic and social objectives. This chapter inquires into the reasons, processes and effects of the 'revitalisation' of Chinese cultural heritage by conducting a comparative case study of 'intangible cultural heritage' (ICH) protection on the ground – in urban Nanjing and rural Lancang County. I argue that the party-state has adopted a heritage regime to revitalise China's cultural heritage to enhance its political legitimacy. This heritage

regime allows the party-state to gain control of interpreting and exploiting the Chinese past at the expense of local communities. While, on the one hand, China's cultural heritage has thus been 'revitalised' – allowing Chinese people to reconnect with the past which was cast aside during the early 20th century- it, on the other hand, however, enables the party-state to exploit this process to the extent of offsetting the positive gains made by this cultural revitalisation process.

Note on Contributor

Christina Maags is Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield. She has studied in Bonn, Frankfurt and Oxford, specialising in Chinese politics. Christina's research interests focus on Chinese cultural heritage politics particularly surrounding 'intangible cultural heritage'. In a new research project, she examines the politics of demographic change in China focusing on elderly care. Most recently, Christina has published a book titled 'Heritage Politics in China: The Power of the Past' with Yujie Zhu (2020) and 'When East Meets West: International Change and Its Effects on Domestic Cultural Institutions' in *Politics & Policy* with Ioan Trifu (2019).

[1] The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
[2] Examples include 'Study of the Nation' (Guoxue or 国学) classes in Chinese schools and universities (Dirlik 2011).
[3] BRICS is an acronym for five emerging national economies, including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, who have become significant regional powers.
[4] According to the ICH Convention, ICH can be defined as 'practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage' (UNESCO 2003).