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COMMENTARY

Cultural mobilities and cultural heritage: concepts for an Asia-centric approach

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out an original and exploratory framework for examining emerging concepts of cultural mobilities and heritage with a key focus on the infrastructure and spatialities of cultural mobilities in, of and through Asia—specifically China. To date, the scholarly analysis of mobilities has been dominated by the social sciences in relation to central themes of migration, national borders, crisis and transnational flows of objects and people. This paper seeks to expand the focus in mobilities discourses to humanities, not only to research how infrastructures and spatialities are shaped by culture and heritage but also to analyse cultural mobility through infrastructure and spatialities. We set out epistemic considerations for approaching cultural mobilities through an interdisciplinary lens that seeks to address heritage studies of diverse kinds, from environmental to religious to architectural. By centring Asian epistemes, the paper also challenges recognition and interpretation biases in the humanities and social sciences that continue to privilege Eurocentric hegemonies. Together, the co-authors examine: how Asian cultures operate through material and non-material infrastructures that defy singular location in geopolitical crossings and networks; how culture is mobilised in different ways through infrastructure; the entanglement of cultural heritage with political infrastructure and living practice as well as embedded values. The article discusses China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), yoga as a cultural infrastructure between India and China, and the infrastructure and multiple spatialities of Chinatown as a evolving practice of cultural heritage.

Keywords mobility, cultural heritage, infrastructure, cultural mobilities, spatialities, BRI, yoga, decolonisation, Asia-centric, Chinatown

Introduction: defining cultural mobilities

This paper arises from enquiry into the methodological foregrounding of 'mobilities' in the social sciences (Castells 1989; Sheller & Urry 2016; Elliot *et al.* 2017), known as 'the mobilities turn', and asks how social science approaches such as spatiality and infrastructure can be used to examine and connect diverse analyses of culture and cultural heritage from a wider range of disciplines. The questions that we set out to address are: How can we use the mobilities concepts of infrastructure (as well as movement and direction) to understand mobilities of culture and cultural heritage? What are cultural mobilities from an Asia-centric perspective? And how do cultural mobilities give

rise to multiple spatialities of ontological, material, social and political import? In particular, we illustrate avenues for future thinking with two micro case studies that draw on environmental, cultural and architectural humanities that are in, through and of Asia. The first micro case study connects an anthropological analysis of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to yoga as a religio-cultural infrastructure between India and China. The second case study examines the architectural infrastructure and multiple spatialities of Chinatown as a symbolic form and evolving practice of cultural heritage between China and the UK.

Pioneering architectural and urban researchers such as Nishat Awan and Suzanne Hall have appropriated the 'mobilities' framework and successfully applied it to the study of multiple spatialities and dynamics of place and culture, including migration, diaspora, geopolitical borders, diversity and social impacts (Awan 2016; Hall 2021). However, the mobilities framework remains under-used in terms of understanding cultural heritage. 'Cultural heritage' was first addressed in international law in 1907, and a body of international treaties and texts for its protection has been developed by UNESCO and other intergovernmental organisations since the 1950s (Blake 2000). Since then, the term 'cultural heritage' has been widely approached in heritage discourses as tangible objects, such as monuments and historic buildings and sites including immovable physical artefacts, as well as intangible attributes, such as oral traditions, narratives, rituals and other social and cultural practices (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2009). Following this usage, the term 'cultural heritage' in this paper is further defined as how multicultural peoples and groups invest their cultural value, tradition and tacit knowledge in multiple places and practices.

The discussion of 'cultural mobilities' as a conjoined pair of terms denotes that in the age of mass movement of peoples and objects, culture in its material, intangible, embodied and ephemeral states is also moving. The Anglophone research in this area, especially in relation to Asian cultural mobilities, is a desideratum. In the emerging field of urban studies, the 'Southern' and 'Eastern' global perspectives have proved crucial to challenge the Eurocentric 'master' narratives, dominant theories and epistemologies that sustain colonial power structures of knowledge production (Shin *et al.* 2016; Müller 2020; Shin 2021; Yiftachel & Mammon 2022). In this paper, Asian perspectives are foregrounded in order to challenge and complement the dominant racialised and ethnic perspectives in discussions and discourses on culture and mobility. By developing an Asia-centric perspective, we do not refer to 'Asia' as an isolated geographical, geopolitical or social–racialised concept, but as a cultural and heritage construct that is an inseparable part of cultural mobilities at a global scale. Our understanding of cultural heritage is of large-scale human expressions and movements of both material and intangible cultures, linked to multi-ethnic, transnational and trans-localised patterns over history. In sum, this paper seeks to extend discussions of mobilities to encompass *cultural* mobilities, specifically cultural heritage, and to map out a theoretical frame for interrogating claims about cultural transmission, reproducibility, directionality and heritage in relation in inter-Asian and extra-Asian dynamics.

In the humanities there has been one promising start towards an analysis of culture using the mobilities lens, made by Greenblatt *et al.* in the 2009 edited collection *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*. This volume begins from the premise that 'There is an urgent need to rethink fundamental assumptions about the fate of culture in an age of global mobility, a need to formulate, both for scholars and for the larger public, new ways to understand the vitally important dialectic of cultural persistence and change' (1–2). The collection of essays uses literary and cultural artefacts to examine the reality of their subjects' 'tangled inner experience of alienation and adherence to various national, ethnic and religious communities' (1–2). Like that manifesto, this article is focused on the 'restless process through which texts, images, artefacts, and ideas are moved, disguised, translated, transformed, adapted, and reimagined in the ceaseless, resourceful work of culture' (4). However, Greenblatt *et al.*'s scope is limited to the literary domain and to historical texts (through local microhistories of displaced things and persons) and it settles for a celebration of cosmopolitanism as a reflection of physical movement (in its everyday forms). We also seek to consider cultural heritage as a historical–contemporary relation, but our analysis of culture extends beyond the literary and is resolutely Asia-centric. Nonetheless, Greenblatt *et al.*'s volume does offer an important signpost to Asia-centric analysis in Nyíri's chapter on the mobility and modernity of Chinese subjects, both as privileged tourists at heritage sites in their own state and as working migrants in the urban landscape of New York—reflecting respective cultural dynamics of consumption and production (Nyíri 2009). Nyíri's research centres Asia, specifically China, in the examination of China's local re-constructions of ancient heritage as part of modernity for the middle classes, its push for migration as a way to spread Chinese culture globally as soft power, and the media use of Western cultures as a subsidiary backdrop in soap operas. These TV spectacles tame 'the [European] locals and provide them with a place in a nationalised Chinese cultural universe' (193), thereby provincialising Europe (Chakrabarty 2000) in this narrative of cultural mobility. One other scholarly analysis of culture in relation to mobilities and to Asia has been made by Salazar, who provides important directions for examining how Chinese migration is interpreted in Tanzanian arts and cultural imagination through mediums of music and film (Salazar 2010). Here too, however, the main presentation of culture is from 'the arts'.

Greenblatt *et al.* identify two dominant modes of cultural mobility in history: one of transmission/translation/displacement and one of progress (7). We might think of these two as affecting, respectively, diachronic and synchronic dimensions of culture through time and space—with the synchronic about reproducibility of culture and the diachronic about expression and movement of culture. However, these modes of analysis are highly teleological, and our interest also lies in the unpredictability of cultural mobility, which can resist mapping or chronology—for example, returning flows, circularity, fragmentation, untranslatability, selective mobilisation and cultural infrastructures that are unstable or transient. But what we can take away from Greenblatt *et al.*'s manifesto on cultural mobility is the irreducible point that

'one of the characteristic powers of a culture is its ability to hide the mobility that is its enabling condition' (252), such that culture is never global or even regional, but always local and inherently mobile, even if in opaque ways.

Using Asia as an epistemic centre for analysing cultural mobility

Using Asia as an epistemic site for analysing cultural mobility aims to de-emphasize Eurocentric discourses of culture and mobility. By exploring and extending the situated concepts and perspectives of Asia, this approach is relational and transnational, stretching beyond a singular Eurocentric idea of Asia, and beyond a reified geo-cultural construct superimposed on Asia. This methodological position views culture through the mobilities turn in the social sciences with its perspectives shifted from object/structure/order to relation/ interaction/disorder, and its understanding of spatiality shifted from 'spaces of places' to 'spaces of flows' (Castells 1989). Moreover, our approach follows the methodological debates in the arts and humanities on using Asia as 'a method', where the critical inter-Asian cultural theorist Kuan-hsing Chen positions multiple frames of reference for understanding 'subjectivity' and 'worldview' (Chen 2010; Ong 2011). This entails engaging Asia as a changing body and process of spatial and cultural knowledge, mobilised to negotiate new worlds (Rujivacharakul *et al.* 2013). Centring Asia is a specific strategy that complements the decentring or provincialisation of Europe (Chakrabarty 2000), but which has been hitherto under-exposed as an approach (despite Asia currently holding around 60% of the world's population). It acknowledges the colonial hauntings of cultural mobilities in relation to Asia—in which colonial infrastructures exist within cultural heritage, shaping lived realities of migration, language, education, religion, architecture and built environment. However, it is also necessary to surpass these hauntings to narrate a re-centred Asian theory of culture without reinforcing globalisation perspectives, Eurocentric gazes or re-essentialisation.

What, then, are the cultural–historical rather than geophysical or geopolitical territorial borders of Asia? And which images, imageries and imaginaries of Asia drive the boundaries of Asian culture? Reading and re-interpreting Asia as an inter-referential form of construction and knowledge needs to engage multiple situated perspectives, both inter- and extra-Asian. The recent decolonial turn in the humanities disrupts the historic binary cultural cartographies of 'East–West' or 'West/and-the-rest' to highlight how the construction of 'the East' is not only for Western thinkers but for Asian thinkers too a 'modern/colonial construction of time and space' (Maldonado-Torres *et al.* 2018: 72). Since a decolonised humanities offer new modes of spatio-conceptual analysis that promote polycentricity and pluriversality (Mbembe 2016), the breaking up of hegemonic perspectives produced during colonial imaginaries can also be achieved through interdisciplinary methods, using the social science lens to sharpen humanities understandings. Let's begin with how a social science analysis of infrastructure might be used to understand cultural heritage.

Micro-study 1: inter-Asian infrastructures and cultural mobility

Studies of mobility and circulations in the social sciences and humanities are increasingly engaging with the theme of infrastructure. As a lively and growing scholarship shows (for an overview see Larkin 2013; Knox & Gambino 2023), infrastructures are central to how power (Elyachar 2010; Simone 2004), categories (Bowker 1994; Carse & Lewis 2017), and social imaginaries (Anand *et al.* 2018; Harvey & Knox 2015) are shaped and experienced.

This body of literature consistently demonstrates how infrastructures are eminently political. The very term 'infrastructure', as Ashley Carse discussed, emerged in the context of 19th-century civil engineering and was adopted by bureaucrats and international development actors in the aftermath of the Second World War (Carse 2017). In this context, post-war infrastructure was more than just technology; it embodied a particular ideology. The term's expanding use in the second half of the 20th century reflected the establishment of global transportation, communication and logistics networks, while also pushing forward particular (and largely Western-centric) ideas of development. These long networks facilitated a sharp increase in population, economic activity and resource extraction, circulation, and use—thus contributing to the pairing of infrastructure and modernity. Infrastructures—both the material things, and the ideology of development that underpin them—were central to those processes.

Early interest in infrastructure across the social sciences was driven by the prominent role that infrastructure spaces and complex technological systems had in everyday life, and reflected the role of material infrastructure in driving development processes. In addressing this nexus, scholars of infrastructure in science and technology studies, geography and anthropology, consistently stressed how the hard structures that mediate and engender global connections were integral to their politics (Barry 2013; Easterling 2014; Von Schnitzler 2016). In other words, these studies examined how the material structure of global circulations was not a neutral, passive background, but came imbued with particular ideologies. What stands out from this growing body of literature is an understanding of infrastructures as a process that emerges from particular practices between people, activities and structures, encompassing both technological systems and social forms, based on cultural practices and political work.

If the focus of this literature remained, predominantly, one of political economy, scholars also noted some of the more narrative components of infrastructure spaces. Development projects, after all, rest on powerful promises, and anthropologists in particular have paid attention to those 'poetic' aspects of infrastructure alongside their politics (Larkin 2013). In this article, we follow this line of thought, and propose a shift in attention from a predominantly political economic focus of infrastructure studies to one that attends more comprehensively to the cultural components of infrastructure spaces, and to cultural heritage in particular.

To stress the need for such an approach, we briefly turn to the most ambitious infrastructure project of the present era: China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI was famously launched officially in 2013, and soon made its way into the Chinese constitution. Reflecting a more ambitious and assertive foreign policy approach, this initiative was seen by many scholars and analysts outside of China as the country's latest attempt to establish itself as the world's main economic and cultural power, and to gain strategic allies to its continental West in its flared-up rivalry with its East across the Pacifics. Within China, on the other hand, the BRI is seen predominantly as a purely developmental initiative, aiming to strengthen Sino-centric economic ties and help replicate China's economic miracle—and its mode of development—across the Global South (Olivera *et al.* 2020; Khanal & Zhang 2023).

For scholars of Asia, and of China in particular, the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative a decade ago seemed to confirm that an infrastructure-based approach to studying political narratives and practices was not just correct, but necessary (Rippa & Oakes 2023). The BRI, in particular, led many to ask: what are the hidden political–economic and cultural drives of those new and planned infrastructure spaces? What are the material politics of Global China? What is the particular developmental ideology that Belt and Road projects underscore?

These questions, we argue, are crucial if we are to take seriously initiatives such as BRI not just for the material consequences in particular infrastructure spaces, but also as discursive tools that can challenge, and even replace, dominant ideas and ideologies of modernisation and development. In other words, these enquiries address development initiatives as cultural artefacts in themselves, and study how those particular artefacts travel and take shape in particular contexts.

The apparent globality of China's BRI offers a unique entrypoint to studying those particular relations, and a prominent case in point is the initiative's reliance on the Silk Road narrative. While historians continue to remind us that the Silk Road was a modern and colonial artefact (Millward 2013), and that the very concept of the Silk Road can be detrimental to historical scholarship (Rezakhani 2010), this notion remains central to Chinese cultural and infrastructural politics across Asia. Addressing this particular example, Tim Winter's (2019) *Geocultural Power* recently showed how, by virtue of mobilising particular narratives of ancient Silk Roads, Chinese officials engage heritage and history in support of the geopolitical and economic aspirations of the BRI. That is to say: heritage is not an addendum to a broader infrastructural plan, but a core element of how these are envisioned, marketed and executed.

Moving from examples such as Winter's book, this article argues for paying more attention to the infrastructural components of cultural mobilities, and for addressing infrastructures themselves as meaning-making sites. Larger and future questions include: How do communication and technology infrastructures hold culture? What are some of the inter-Asian dynamics of vernacular and indigenous knowledge circulations? And how does technology partake in particular cultural modes across Asia?

To begin addressing those questions, we turn now to a non-material example of how inter-Asian infrastructure can be used to understand ways in which culture is constructed, represented and transmitted within and across boundaries: the current case of yoga between India and China. While China has been focusing on the material infrastructure of the BRI, India has kept its distance from the initiative, citing concerns over borders, sovereignty, governance and costs (Bharti 2023). Yet India has continued to build an infrastructure of a different kind, directed towards China and promoting the mobility of Indian cultural heritage, a move that is generating significant economic impacts in China. Although yoga had its own commercial wave in China through the early success of Taiwanese teacher Zhang Huilan,[1] who broadcast on the TV channel CCTV1 from 1985 to 1999, there have been recent separate efforts in China by the Indian government to cultivate an alternative narrative to yoga-for-health, namely yoga as a marker of Indian cultural heritage and prestige. Here we see a political infrastructure that manifests through cultural heritage mobility.

Since the inauguration of the China–India Yoga Summit in 2011, which was organised by India's Ministry of Health and Guangdoc province's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, yoga has been deployed in soft-power exchanges between India and China. In this exchange, yoga is presented as a gift of cultural heritage (and not as a Hindu religious practice, which is the primary cultural heritage framing in India itself).[2] So successful has this move been that the Beijing postal department issued a set of commemorative stamps for the Summit in 2011, depicting images of Indian teacher B.K.S. Iyengar in yoga poses from his classic book *Light on Yoga* (1966). In this case, cultural mobility was not facilitated by existing material infrastructures, but rather deployed within stabilising structures of diplomacy and political exchange to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between India and China. Since that first summit in 2011, several other ambitious initiatives have followed, establishing a soft-power infrastructure that has grown in scale and extent. In 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the opening of the India–China Yoga College at the Yunnan Minzu University in Kunming, China, launched in collaboration with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. The 2019 China–India Yoga Summit sought to promote 'cultural exchange' through 'kung-fu yoga' displays at Duijiangyan in Sichuan province, southwest China, a location associated with the founding of Daoism (Xi 2019). Announcing 'kung-fu yoga' as 'a new international cultural IP [intellectual property] for Dujiangyan' (Xi 2019), the organisers' decision to hold the yoga summit at Dujiangyan was not arbitrary since the city boasts its own cultural heritage that has status on the UNESCO world heritage list.[3] Choosing the historic and internationally recognised site of Dujiangyan to welcome India's ambassadors

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[1] Later known as Wai Lana in the west, where she continued a successful broadcast and media career.

[2] For a recent discussion of Indian Hindu nationalist discourses, described as Hindutva, and yoga, see Black (2023).

[3] It has status as a site in World Cultural Heritage, World Natural Heritage and World Heritage Irrigation Structures (Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System - UNESCO World Heritage Centre) [accessed 30 January 2023]).

sent the message that the Indian presentations of yoga as part of antique Indian culture were equally matched with the martial arts and religio-cultural heritages of China. This sustained soft-power infrastructure uses culture as a currency to signal political power within Asia and to the rest of the world. Although the cultural mobility of yoga has been stripped of its Hindu religious scaffolding and been staged through the performative structures of public diplomacy, it has nonetheless led to spontaneous outgrowths of Indian culture in China, advancing the Chinese yoga industry to produce tens of thousands of new yoga centres and hundreds of millions of Chinese yoga practitioners in the past decade, and launching new inroads of spiritual tourism from China to India. A 2018 Chinese economic report predicted that the market value of the Chinese yoga industry would rise to 47 billion ¥ in 2020.[4]

In the city of Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, the Consulate General of India prepared for India's International Day of Yoga 2024 through official political and consular channels. The Consulate advertised to Guangzhou's citizens, offering three months of subsidised yoga classes (described as a 'Special Yoga Batch') by 'a Yoga Teacher from India'.[5] The announcement was entirely diplomatic in its framing with logos from the Ministry of AYUSH (Government of India)[6] and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations alongside the Consulate General of India. The advert also included the Indian nationalist slogan 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' (Great Festival of Nectar of Freedom) which was launched by the government of India in 2021 in the run-up to the 2023 celebration of India's 75 years of independence in order 'to celebrate a progressive independent India, culturally rich heritage and achievements of India'[7] and a 'glorious history' of India's 'people, culture and achievements'.[8] Prime Minister Modi's own official video[9] on the Azadi initiative,[10] released on 31 October 2023, described a 'rich history and cultural heritage' that can yield 'an ocean of opportunities'. And yet the current opportunities yielded through India's cultural heritage infrastructure in China via yoga look set to economically benefit China more than India, even taking into account the potential export of spiritual tourists to India.

This examination of knowledge circulations through infrastructural means between India and China can be further augmented by a humanities concept. Beyond the more familiar lens of religious transnationalism (Burgess 2021; Cavalcanti de Arruda *et al.* 2022), which arguably rests on notions of

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[4]https://report.iresearch.cn/report_pdf.aspx?id=3260 [accessed 21 March 2024].

[5]Consulate General of India, Guangzhou: https://www.cgiguangzhou.gov.in/alert_detail/?alertid=237 [accessed 21 March 2024]. The invitation was posted on 19 March 2024 to prepare for 21 June 2024.

[6]Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy, formed in 2014, although existing in previous iterations as a department since 2003. The ten-year report celebrating the activities of the ministry from 2014 to 2024 makes the economic aims of globalisation clear, detailing 'The proactive initiatives taken by the Ministry of Ayush to position India as a global leader in Traditional Medicine … [which] have greatly bolstered the demand for Ayurveda, Yoga and other traditional Indian systems of medicine worldwide' (AYUSH 2024).

[7]https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1804730 [accessed 21 March 2024].

[8]https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/ [accessed 21 March 2024].

[9]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsjtn_UjLyU&t=157s [accessed 20 March 2024].

[10]Which he described as a *sankalp*, or religious vow.

infrastructure, the discipline of religious studies also offers a more radically decentred or non-located understanding of cultural mobility, as expressed specifically through 'transreligiosity' (Panagiotopoulos & Roussou 2022). Defying the clear directionality of infrastructural analysis, transreligiosity is a theory of global 'transgressional webs' of religious practices that eschew understanding of transnationalism as focused solely on migration, borders and diaspora (Panagiotopoulos & Roussou 2022). Transreligiosity describes an unpredictable cultural mobility beyond transnational borders; it transgresses symbolic borders 'through the creative amalgamation of different religious traditions' (Panagiotopoulos & Roussou 2022). It describes a cultural porosity that signals cultural mobility not tied to physical movement, often with multiple spatialities playing out in one cultural location (O'Brien-Kop 2023). Here, 'multiple spatialities' signals that religious individuals or communities can enfold multiple time–space zones into their ontological and heritage realities due to conceptual or practice infrastructures in their cultures—also discussed below in the case of Chinatown. Using transreligiosity as a lens, even to analyse non-religion, offers a way to understand cultural movements beyond the predictable flows of infrastructure. And outside the cultivated diplomatic infrastructures between India and China, yoga as Indian cultural heritage circulates and adapts across Asia in a multitude of unpredictable ways.

Such an understanding of cultural mobilities as both infrastructural and as transreligious can be gainful in humanities approaches. Addressing multiple spatialities helps to excise binary cultural cartographies, especially the colonial 'West-impact/East-response narrative model' (Li 2020: 87) as applied to understandings of religious cultural mobilities within Asia. At the same time, it can foster an analysis of current Chinese state-led attempts at engaging with heritage politics across different Belt and Road contexts that does not reduce them to either neo-colonialist frameworks nor the win–win outputs upended by such narratives.

Micro-study 2: multiple spatialities of cultural mobilities

In this next case discussion from the architectural humanities, we see how combining a material excavation of multiple cultures in one location combined with an analysis of movement and directionality (of 'China-outside-China') yields new insights on the constructions, operations and circulations of cultural mobility. Chinatown is an evolving place and resilient practice that combines cultural heritage, minority space and symbolic meaning into one coherent infrastructure that signals the multiple spatialities of Asian cultural mobilities. Categorised both as architecture and as city-within-the-city, Chinatown exists as structure and as infrastructure of cultural mobilities. As architecture and city-within-the-city, Chinatown can be understood as an established socio-spatial typology and urban enclave found in almost all earliest global

modern cities in the 19th century.[11] As the structure and infrastructure of cultural mobilities, Chinatown is both an arrival space for Asians from different cultural backgrounds and minorities' interaction space with the majority cultural communities. Chinatown has been considered 'other' by mainstream architecture and heritage discourse, mainly because it is perceived as lacking a clarity in modernity and in pre-modern traditions in architecture and lacking evidential value in heritage, from a Eurocentric perspective.

Constituting a place and practice of cultural heritage, Chinatown in the UK is a one-stop-shop of Chinese cultural mobilities where 'East meets West', based on multiple images of an imaginary China. It is itself being produced and reproduced by established imagistic infrastructures; as a collective homecoming symbol for diasporic Chinese or Asian communities and as a sustaining mnemonic for both diasporic and hosting communities. Chinatown is a super-category of culture because the 'East–West' binary is absorbed, fractalised and reproduced in the West itself.

As a physical place, the British Chinatown is an architectural bricolage—a bricolage of Chinese and East-Asian (and later pan-Asian) architectural and spatial symbols with locally styled buildings. Its legibility relies on a visual system with a wide range of Chinese symbolic forms and metaphysical elements, including pitched roofs, pagodas, balconies, latticeworks, motifs, colour schemes and street furniture, such as lanterns—all transplanted onto the Georgian building envelopes in a stage-set fashion. This cultural practice can be read in a variety of forms, from Chinatowns in London and Liverpool to Manchester and Newcastle. Such spatio-visual bricolage is hardly a modern invention, mostly a postmodern collage, not yet included in the principle of cultural heritage or cultural property. None of the building objects in those Chinatowns are listed as a singular cultural heritage, because the whole fabric here operates physically as merely a stage-set for a distant culture. For example, the current London Chinatown has only been at its present site since the 1960s following its move out of Limehouse in the East End docks where Chinese seamen visited Britain for the first time in the 19th century. The new London Chinatown lacks historical depth and has no ground-up influence of Chinese architecture; hence, it can be simply dismissed as a facade of architectural motifs that are added onto a typical Georgian streetscape. For much of Chinatown's history in the UK, there were very few unique architectural features other than the above-mentioned surface treatments or frontage decorations. Socio-economically, there was an underlying reason for disadvantaged early Chinese communities to rebrand Chinese culture via architecture. Therefore the cultural infrastructure of Chinatown rarely builds new buildings, but mostly re-appropriates streets as in the case of Newcastle, or urban quarters in the case of Manchester, hence producing juxtapositions of multiple senses of place, spatial practices and spatialities.[12]

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[11] Indeed, Chinatown could still be considered as an emerging typology in a longer temporal frame. For example, the City of Sheffield made the latest attempt in the UK to create a Chinatown, but the process was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[12] Manhattan's Chinatown was listed in 2010 in a single historic district on the US National Register of Historical Places.

However, the British Chinatown is not only a physical place filled with architectural and spatial meanings. It is also the very concept and form of cultural mobilities materialised, and a place of multiple spatialities engendered by collective practices between China and the UK. Following the pioneering book titled *Chinatown Stories* written by Marjorie R. Johnson in 1900 with a focus on Chinatown in San Francisco, there were several attempts to write about British Chinatowns, including the recent storytelling project by Freya Aitken-Turff and Xiao Ma from 2017. Besides stories, Chinatowns are often used as shorthand for UK–China political relations; and used to reflect all layers of Chineseness through the catch-all term 'The Chinese Community' which on the one hand evokes a strong sense of identity and on the other some contested belongings (Aitken-Turff 2021).

In London, its Chinatown embeds a rich palimpsest of cultural memories, meanings and uses—both pre-modern and modern uses (for example, London Chinatown's uses are unfolded by peeling back overlaid memories and traces as well as layered meanings and imaginations that were all superimposed across the 19th and 20th centuries). As a practice of cultural mobilities, Chinatown signifies a resilient minority's space, in the form of a static urban enclave that facilitates dynamic or transient urban rituals, set within major British city centres. Moreover, it has been used, misused and creatively reused by ethnic minority groups to transform it from a single migrants' residential zone into a multi-ethnic and 'multi-racial' zone, to quote critical architectural historian Yat Ming Loo (Loo 2022). Furthermore, the British Chinatown performs as an alternative infrastructure of cultural mobilities towards a collective social–economic enterprise, a juxtaposed presentation of multiple spatialities and temporalities and a multicultural way of heritage-in-the-making.

Chinatown's multiple spatialities of cultural heritage lie in its 200 years of accumulated cultural productions, uses and tacit knowledge, which have collectively responded to and adapted to the changes of both modernisation and modern society, passed down from generation to generation. The presence of colonial logic in culturally misreading and stereotyping Chinatown has still been evident in the recent past and immediate present. This logic intensified the tabula-rasa approach of modernisation and its result of placelessness, such as the abandonment of Chinatown in the 1960s' decision to relocate it from its original East London Limehouse area. This reallocation intensified London Chinatown's detachment from modernity as a minority's space. Another piece of collective memory in this logic is that colonial hauntings were embedded in some controversial police investigations and social media abuses in and towards London Chinatown at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the racist prejudices relating to the origins of the novel coronavirus (Hui 2021). And these colonial hauntings were spread as quickly as the virus across the world's Chinatowns (BBC 2021). Ironically, these practices were still founded on Chinatown's infrastructural role of cultural mobilities and cultural heritage, with its fundamental logic undermining the diversities of Asian cultures and Asian peoples, following Simone's powerful argument about people as infrastructure in broader socio-geographical territories (Simone 2004).

Beyond the UK almost every Chinatown in the world's cities today functions as alternative cultural infrastructure where in most cases it is blurring the boundary between the architecture of cultural heritage and the infrastructure of cultural heritage. Archi-infrastructure refers to an urban patchwork and generator in the built-up urban fabric, with its strategy to respond to the immediate urban realm, to be stitched into local context as a remedial layer and to trigger broader progressive urban regeneration (Ren & Qiao 2016). In this view, Chinatown performs as a layer of artificial ecology in integrated urban systems, navigating the system while balancing the space of places and the space of flows, i.e. traffic, goods, migrants, information and capital (Castells & Cardoso 2005).

To expand and decolonise the definitions and scope of cultural mobilities by adopting an Asia-centric perspective, there is a need to engage a deeper and broader understanding of cultural places and collective practices in and through Asian minorities' spaces outside the geographies of Asia. This entails taking a longer historical view across a larger world, rereading Asian cultural mobilities as a layered, heritage-in-the-making process rather than as singular or static heritage. The architectural forms and symbols of the urban enclave of Chinatown, often read superficially through their decorated nature and disgraceful histories, have articulated expressive visual and spatial elements to meet specific social and cultural needs, both on the streets and in the buildings. Performing this cultural infrastructure, Chinatown secures a healthy reciprocal relationship with the majority hosting culture and society. Indeed, Chinatowns across the world evoke a coherent infrastructure to construct and maintain a broader Asian cultural heritage, in which cultural memories and ancestral heritage belong not only to a single Chinese ethnic group's spatiality, but also to multiple spatialities from extensive Chinese, Asian and local hosting communities over time. These multiple belongings expand the role and meaning of Chinatown as an infrastructure of cultural mobilities to a global Chinese and Asian cultural heritage. It is also a shared infrastructure of cultural mobilities belonging both to China and non-China, to Asia and non-Asia, to Chinatowns past and present. Although Western hegemony over Asian minority spaces can be accompanied by colonial takeovers and patronising orientalism, the case of Chinatown expresses the alternative infrastructure and multiple spatialities, which involve the travelling, mobilising, meeting, learning and assimilating spaces of Asia's multiple cultures, transforming each cultural production beyond a merely 'East–West' arena and a singular spatiality.

Conclusions

This article has collaboratively explored how to combine the social sciences and humanities' lenses of mobilities to approach cultural heritage and thus integrate mobilities concepts into socio-spatial and cultural analyses more broadly. Based on repeated interactions between scholars from across the humanities and social sciences, the paper itself results from experimental dialogues across disciplinary boundaries and convention. Combining social anthropology, architecture, and

religious and heritage studies has yielded new angles from which to think about cultural mobilities. In particular, we have shown that cultural mobilities cannot be thought of outside of the material structure of circulations upon which they often rely, and that material structures profoundly influence *how* tacit dimensions of places and practices mobilise and transform certain places and communities over others, and why. An appreciation of such entanglements needs to follow a holistic approach, as the literature on culture and infrastructure and our two micro case studies discussed above often point out. Echoing Larkin's (2013) phrasing, studies of cultural mobilities ought to centre on both their political and poetic elements. Moreover, cultivating Asia-centric approaches leads to new ways of mapping cultural cartographies that dismantle the outmoded colonial binary of 'East–West' while recognising that it still operates in our contemporary multiple worlds in pluriversal, fractalised, integrated or generative ways—within, in relation to, or apart from Asia. Centring Asia—in this paper specifically China, the China–India axis, and China-outside-China—also encourages new scholarship to remap the horizons and infrastructures of globalisation and contemporary world-making in relation to cultural mobilities and heritage.

Acknowledgement

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