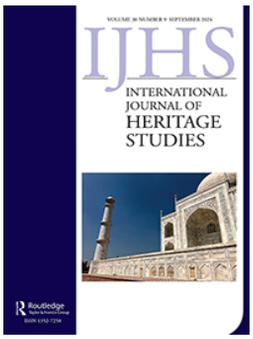

International Journal of Heritage Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjhs20

Cultivating ecomuseum practices in China: shifting from objects to users-centred approaches

Meng Li & Gehan Selim

To cite this article: Meng Li & Gehan Selim (23 Aug 2024): Cultivating ecomuseum practices in China: shifting from objects to users-centred approaches, International Journal of Heritage Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13527258.2024.2386696

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2024.2386696

Published online: 23 Aug 2024.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HERITAGE STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2024.2386696

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Cultivating ecomuseum practices in China: shifting from objects to users-centred approaches

Meng Li and Gehan Selim

School of Civil Engineering, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

This study delves into a theoretical framework crucial for guiding future empirical research and practices, tackling the challenges and constraints within the current practical approach of ecomuseums in China. It is posited that social factors and theoretical foundations are intertwined, contributing to the existing hurdles in ecomuseum practices, particularly in terms of inadequate community involvement and sustainable growth. Various studies have been examined to establish a framework that integrates various theories, such as critical heritage studies, new museology, and appropriate museology, shifting the focus from object-centred to user-centred approaches. The underlying principle is that heritage value is not fixed but rather constructed, with blurred boundaries between tangible and intangible aspects. Community engagement and development are pivotal in this construction process, necessitating the use of tailored methods and tools based on the unique circumstances of each community to achieve meaningful community participation.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 14 September 2023
Accepted 28 July 2024

KEYWORDS
Heritage; ecomuseum; integrative review; theoretical framework; community participation

1. Introduction

Ecomuseums are unique in their ability to incorporate intangible aspects, such as memories from the past, to showcase the evolving nature of human life. Unlike traditional museums, which are managed in a more institutional manner, ecomuseums focus on integrating living processes and activities (Aydemir 2017). The concept of ecomuseums was pioneered by Georges-Henri Rivière and Hugo de Varine, who envisioned it as an "intuition of the 'inventors' to explore and explain the relationship between the environment and the local population (de Varine 2006a). This idea of an 'ecology' within ecomuseums goes beyond just the natural surroundings, serving as a tool for expressing this connection to visitors (Rivière 1985, 1986). Maure (2006) further clarifies that ecomuseums serve as a window for outsiders to glimpse into the lives of local people, while also having the potential to boost tourism. By breaking away from the traditional educational model of museums, ecomuseums aim to promote self-awareness and self-education within the local community (Pan 2015). Ultimately, ecomuseums are seen as recognised as 'a long-term working method' to safeguarding and showcasing both the tangible and intangible heritage of a specific community, fostering cultural identity through community participation in the preservation process (An and Age Gjestrum 1999).

Research on Ecomuseums has made two important contributions: 'conserving and celebrating the memory of their communities' and 'implying social and political objectives' (de Varine 2006b, 78). The concept of the ecomuseum has inspired numerous communities worldwide to explore and

CONTACT Meng Li m.li7@leeds.ac.uk School of Civil Engineering, University of Leeds, Woodhouse, Leeds LS2 9LG, UK

safeguard their distinct qualities, while also promoting their cultural and political progress (Maggi 2006). The establishment of an ecomuseum is a 'dynamic process' that involves various activities such as identifying, understanding, recognising, and interpreting the community in different contexts. Consequently, it is challenging for the process to adhere to a fixed defined path or written outline (Borrelli and Davis 2012). As a result, ecomuseums exhibit different characteristics, follow diverse frameworks, and even adopt different names depending on the context and country. The exact number of ecomuseums worldwide is currently unknown, but they have proliferated across the globe, particularly in northern Europe, America, Australia, Africa, Japan, and China (de Borrelli and Davis 2012; Maggi 2006; Salvatore, Corinto Luigi, and Teresa 2011; Varine 2006b). Unlike traditional museums housed in buildings, ecomuseums are rooted in the tangible and intangible natural and cultural resources of a specific geographic territory. Through their practices, ecomuseums preserve and showcase the memory and identity of a community's daily life, making the place truly unique (M. Li and Selim 2021c, 2021a, 2022) (Figures 1 and 2).

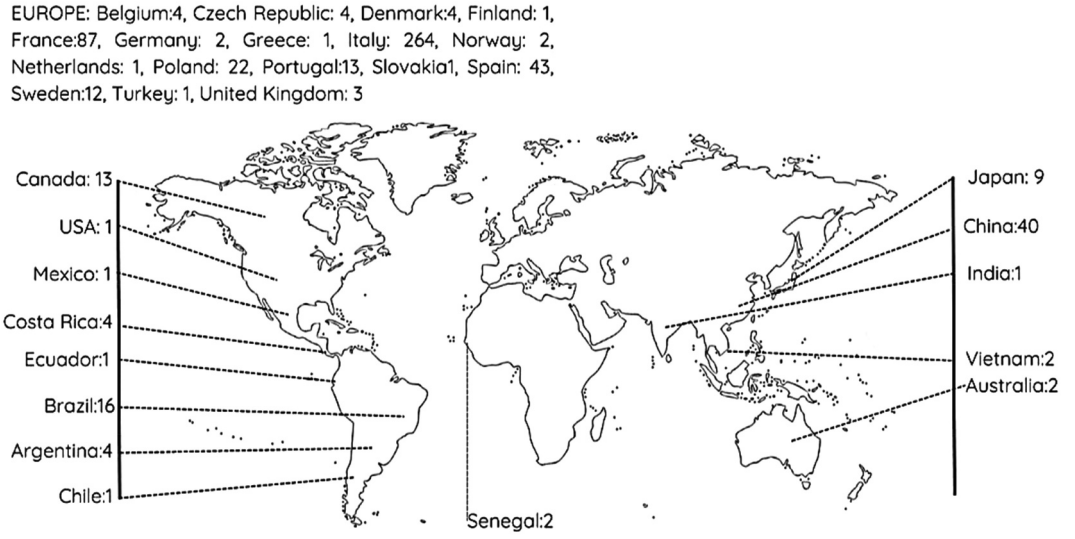

Figure 1. Approximate distribution of ecomuseums around the world. Most of the data is quoted from Borrelli and Davis (2012); data for Italy are updated from Dal Santo (2023); data for China are updated from SACH (2021, 2024); data for the UK were calculated by the authors, they are flodden 1513 ecomuseum, cateran ecomuseum, and Moffat ecomuseum.

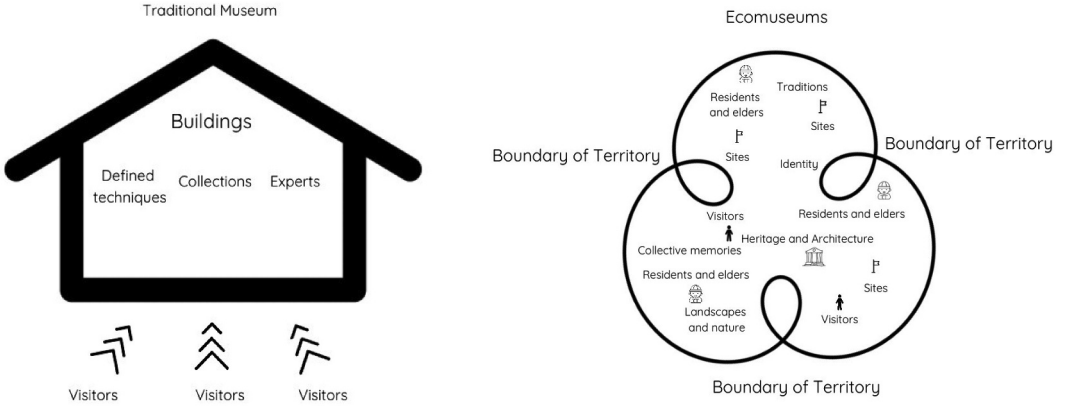

Figure 2. Differences between the traditional museum and the ecomuseum after Rivière. Source: after Davis (2011, 82–83).

There are several key concept definitions related to ecomuseums that highlight their distinction from traditional museums and heritage projects. These definitions encompass the protection of both tangible and intangible heritage, as well as considerations of landscape, memory, identity, place, communities, and sustainability (Davis 2011). Ecomuseums take a holistic approach to managing and studying heritage in a specific location, integrating environmental and cultural aspects (Aydemir 2017). Unlike traditional museums, ecomuseums do not compartmentalise heritage into separate categories such as cultural and natural, or tangible and intangible. Instead, they seek to establish connections between different types of heritage, as well as between heritage and the territories and communities they are associated with. This holistic approach to heritage preservation diverges from the research and collection-focused model of traditional museums, emphasising the importance of intangible heritage. Ecomuseums are particularly well-suited for safeguarding the diverse characteristics of rural and natural landscapes. For instance, ecomuseums in Denmark and the Netherlands focus on preserving traditional practices and rural lifestyles (Salvatore, Corinto Luigi, and Teresa 2011). In addition (Hubert 1985, 186), states that the ecomuseum concept places a strong emphasis on collective memory, underscoring the significance of place, memory, and identity of special, sensitive or marginalised communities. An example of this is the Him Dak Ecomuseum in Arizona, managed by the Ak-Chin Indian Community (Doğan and Timothy 2019; Sutter et al. 2016), which aims to strengthen tribal identity, foster community solidarity, and deepen cultural heritage (Doğan and Timothy 2019, 9).

Furthermore, the concept of 'sense of place' hinges on the active involvement of the community (Borrelli and Davis 2012), which is considered the cornerstone in this field (Davis 2011). Ecomuseums provide a platform for the community and the general public to engage in the planning and execution process, enabling them to 'comprehend, criticise and master' the challenges they encounter (Davis 2011, 81). As such, an ecomuseum is defined as 'a community-based museum or heritage project that supports sustainable development' (Davis 2007, 199), with sustainable growth typically encompassing heritage preservation, as well as the social and economic advancement of the community (can be seen in the key 'twenty-one principles' presented by Corsane 2006a, 2006b based on previous works by Boylan 1992; Corsane and Holleman 1993; O. Hamrin and Hulander 1995; Davis 1999).

In many regions, ecomuseums typically adopt a grassroots practical approach driven by community involvement. However, in China, which has a vastly different social and cultural landscape compared to the West, ecomuseums take a top-down approach (M. Li and Selim 2021b). The government and experts hold administrative and academic authority, exerting significant influence in terms of funding and implementation. This dynamic makes it challenging for communities to develop the necessary resources and skills to effectively manage ecomuseums and ensure their sustainable development (M. Li and Selim 2021b, 2022). As a result, Chinese ecomuseums often prioritise tangible outcomes related to physical objects rather than the development of community members' resources and capabilities.

Unfortunately, community members frequently fail to see ecomuseums as a long-term strategy or tool for preserving local heritage and promoting sustainable community growth. Instead, they tend to view ecomuseums as conventional cultural institutions or museums. Typically, ecomuseum projects begin with the establishment of a central venue to house and exhibit objects collected by external experts from the local community, with the aim of attracting tourists. This process is exclusive, limiting the effective participation of community members. The ecomuseum is only officially recognised once the construction of the central venue is completed. Consequently, communities often perceive the 'central venue' as the ecomuseum, viewing it as a public facility overseen by the local government or cultural department rather than as part of their heritage (Yin 2019, 151). An anecdote highlights this disconnect: a villager once contacted an expert from the local cultural department to report potential damage to the local ecomuseum due to heavy rain, emphasising the need for urgent repairs to preserve 'his museum' (Pan 2011, 31). The social and theoretical foundation of this

approach is rooted in the unshakeable top-down social structure, where heritage activities, including ecomuseum practices, are predominantly controlled by the government (Yin 2016). Moreover, the traditional philosophy of heritage studies continues to heavily influence practices, emphasising materiality, technological advancements, and authority (Lin and You 2021). Consequently, Chinese ecomuseum practices have consistently encountered obstacles and constraints, notably inadequate community involvement and sustainability issues(Fang 2010; Gan 2009; Nitzky 2013; Stojevic 2019).

In this paper, we want to explore the practice path of ecomuseums in a social and cultural landscape that is different from the original environment of ecomuseums. The main challenge is the conflict between the top-down social system (state-led initiatives), and the bottom-up participatory approach (community-based processes) that is in the original intention of the ecomuseum. This conflict is not a completely unsolvable challenge, hence there is still opportunity to practice the idea of ecomuseum in the social and cultural landscape of China. However, we acknowledge that the source of addressing the challenge is to revise the existing theoretical framework to guide the practice process. Therefore, this paper argues that the prerequisite for addressing practical challenges is to establish a sound philosophy to steer practices. We intend to propose a theoretical framework to guide future empirical studies or practices, addressing the aforementioned challenges. Hence, this paper addresses several questions/objectives. Firstly, we explore the approach that Chinese ecomuseum practices adhere to, along with the limitations that stem from this approach. Secondly, we delve into the social factors that underpin this approach. Thirdly, we examine the theoretical factors that influence the approach. Lastly, we identify theoretical paradigms that can be utilised to construct a framework for guiding and enhancing future practices. The significance of this paper lies in its recognition that overcoming challenges in China's ecomuseum practices necessitates a deeper dive into empirical research, while also elevating practical challenges to a theoretical realm for in-depth discussion. In our discourse, we have employed an integrative review approach, which extends beyond the ecomuseum concept to encompass discussions on a broad array of social, community, and heritage research theories. This has enabled us to develop a theoretical framework that bridges the gaps in existing studies, offering theoretical backing for future empirical research.

2. Research methods: integrative review

This research utilises the integrative review method to develop a theoretical framework for empirical research and practices in ecomuseums in China. It differs from the systematic review approach, which typically has strict requirements for search strategies. Instead, this study focuses on the breadth, diversity, and creativity of materials, aiming to combine perspectives and create new theoretical models (Snyder 2019, 334). This paper specifically examines the practical approach in China and utilises Google Scholar, Scopus, and cnki as the primary databases for searching. The materials analysed include theoretical discussions, practical studies, and governmental documents, as the paper aims to bridge the gap between practice and theory. The narrative of the study is structured around three main objectives: 1) explaining the concept of ecomuseums, 2) examining the current ecomuseum approach in China and identifying the factors that contribute to its challenges, and 3) proposing a theoretical framework to guide future developments in the field. To achieve the first objective, the study draws on basic classical ecomuseum theories and studies. The second objective is addressed through a review of Chinese ecomuseum practices, heritage activities, and community participation, with a focus on uncovering the social factors that contribute to the challenges faced. Finally, the third objective is achieved by incorporating theories from critical heritage studies, new museology, and appropriate museology, which are combined to generate a framework for responding to the findings of the previous objectives (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of integrative approach employed in the study.

Structure	Types of materials	Aims
Research context	Theories of ecomuseum	1. Explain the idea of ecomuseum, providing the general research background
Analysis	Studies on Chinese ecomuseum practices	2.1 Demonstrate the current ecomuseum practical approach in China and its limitations and challenges
	• Theory of community • Studies on Chinese social structure and community participation • Studies on Chinese heritage activities	2.2 Investigate the social factors led to the challenges of the current approach
	Theories of traditional heritage studies	2.3 Investigate the theoretical factors led to the challenges of the current approach
Discussion	• Theory of critical heritage studies • Theory of new museology • Theory of appropriate museology	3. Generate a theoretical framework to guide further empirical research or practices to ecomuseums in China

3. Ecomuseums in China: approaches and practices

The ecomuseum concept was introduced to China by Su Donghai (1927–2021), known as the 'father of ecomuseums in China', in 1986. Today, there are at least three generations of ecomuseums in China, as divided by Su (Pan 2017). The first ecomuseum was opened to the public on 31 October 1998, in Suojia County, Guizhou Province, as part of a collaborative project between the Chinese and Norwegian governments (An and Age Gjestrum 1999, 65). This project aimed to preserve the original traditional culture of the Qing Miao minority ethnic group (He 2010; Peng 2018; Qu 2016; D. Su 2008; Zhao 2011; Zhao et al. 2014). The second generation of ecomuseums includes the Olunsum Ecomuseum in Inner Mongolia, the first ecomuseum in northern China, and the '1 + 10' Ethnic Ecomuseum in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (D. Su 2008). The third generation comprises the Anji Ecomuseum in Zhejiang Province, Tunxi Old Street Community Museum in Anhui Province, Sanfang Qixiang Community Museum in Fuzhou, Fujian Province (Pan 2013), China Marine and Fishery Culture Ecomuseum in Zhejiang Province, Taihang Three Villages Ecomuseum in Shanxi Province, Songyang Village (Eco-)Museums in Zhejiang Province, and Yunnan Folk (Eco-) Museum in Henan Province (Pan 2019). Therefore, based on the scholars' division and definition mentioned above, the first generation of ecomuseums was primarily concentrated in Guizhou, the second generation in Guangxi, and another one emerged in Inner Mongolia. The third generation of ecomuseums has spread across the country, with the Zhejiang Anji Ecomuseum serving as a reference for their practices (Table 2).

In the realm of past practice, two noteworthy elements emerge: the establishment of a set of exemplary principles and the introduction of two ecomuseum models. The 'Liuzhi Principle', considered a pivotal document for ecomuseum practice in China, was formulated and put forth as a guiding principle during the Chinese-Norwegian collaboration, spearheaded by Dag Myklebust (Table 3).

The indigenous communities' culture and beliefs are fully respected by these principles, and they provide a clear definition of the appropriate connection between economic development and heritage conservation (Yi 2010). Consequently, ecomuseums in China must adhere to these fundamental values. Moreover, Chinese regional disparities are taken into consideration. While Article 9 May not be necessary for constructing ecomuseums in developed regions, it must be taken into account in less developed and impoverished areas (Hu 2011).

As defined by Ö. Hamrin (1996), the initial design of each ecomuseum from the first generation was commonly known as the Scandinavian ecomuseum model (Davis 1999). Both the first and second generations of ecomuseums followed a similar layout, consisting of an information centre and *in-situ* protection points (Yin 2019). In addition to connecting various on-site protection points, such as historical sites and inhabited villages, the centre served as a hub for collecting and showcasing community objects, exhibiting traditional culture, and facilitating internal and external

Table 2. Highlights of each generation of Chinese ecomuseum.

	Generation One	Generation Two	Anji Ecomuseum the representative for Generation Three
Location	Guizhou, mountainous areas in southwest China, inhabited by ethnic minorities, remote and underdeveloped in economy	• Guangxi, mountainous areas in southwest China, inhabited by ethnic minorities, remote and underdeveloped in economy • Inner Mongolia, grassland areas of northern China, inhabited by ethnic Mongolians, underdeveloped in economy	Anji, Zhejiang Province, the eastern coastal area of China, close to the economically developed big cities
Layout/style	Scandinavian version of the ecomuseum ideal, information centre plus *in-situ* protection villages	• Scandinavian version of the ecomuseum ideal, information centre plus *in-situ* protection villages • Several ecomuseums formed a network bridged by a traditional museum • Added mobile caravan according to the characteristics of grassland culture	French model of central hall plus satellite points
Achievements	• The first practice of the ecomuseum idea in China • Recorded and preserved part of the local traditional culture • Promoted local economic development through infrastructure and tourism • Promoted the generation of "Liuzhi Principle"	• Recorded and protected local culture and traditions • Improved the professionalism and created cooperation between ecomuseums and traditional museum • Promoted local economic development through infrastructure and tourism • The first ecomuseum in North of China	• The first practice adopting French model of ecomuseum in China • Created the "Anji Model", group of ecomuseums across the county • Protected local culture and traditions • Promoted local industries through branding and tourism development
Main Actors	• Government: Chinese Government, Norwegian Government, and Guizhou Government • Main external experts: Su Donghai, Hu Chaoxiang, An Laishun, John Aage Gjestrum	• Guangxi- Guanxi Government, relevant governments on county level of Guangxi. External Chinese experts (specific person unknown) • Inner Mongolia- Government of Inner Mongolia, relevant government on lower-level of Inner Mongolia. External Chinese experts (specific person unknown)	• Government: Anji County Government • Main external experts: Institute of Planning and Landscape Design at Zhejiang University, the group leaded by Pan Shouyong
Aims	• Protect traditional culture of the minority groups • Poverty alleviation	• Protect traditional culture of the minority groups • Poverty alleviation and promote local economic development	• Integrated and protected culture and heritage throughout the county • Integrated traditional industries to realise their branding
Gaps	• In-depth and long-term community participation mechanism • long-term and sustainable local development goals • Stable and long-term internal and external communication and cooperation mechanism	• In-depth and long-term community participation mechanism • long-term and sustainable local development goals • Stable and long-term internal and external communication and cooperation mechanism	• Clear mechanism of in-depth and long-term community participation • Clear goals of long-term and sustainable local development • Clear mechanism of stable and long-term internal and external communication and cooperation

Table 3. 'Liuzhi principle' (Myklebust 2006, 18).

(1)	The people of the villages are the true owners of their culture. They have the right to interpret and validate it themselves.
(2)	The meaning of culture and its values can be defined only by human perception and interpretation based on knowledge. Cultural competence must be enhanced.
(3)	Public participation is essential to the ecomuseums. Culture is a common and democratic asset and must be democratically managed.
(4)	When there is a conflict between tourism and preservation of culture, the latter must be given priority. Genuine heritage should not be sold, but the production of quality souvenirs based on traditional crafts should be encouraged.
(5)	Long-term and holistic planning is of utmost importance. Short-term economic profits that destroy culture in the long term must be avoided.
(6)	Cultural heritage protection must be integrated in the total environmental approach. Traditional techniques and materials are essential in this respect.
(7)	Visitors have a moral obligation to behave respectfully. They must be given a code of conduct.
(8)	There is no bible for ecomuseums. They will all be different according to the specific culture and situation of the society they represent.
(9)	Social development is a prerequisite for establishing ecomuseums in living societies. The well-being of the inhabitants must be enhanced in ways that do not compromise traditional values.

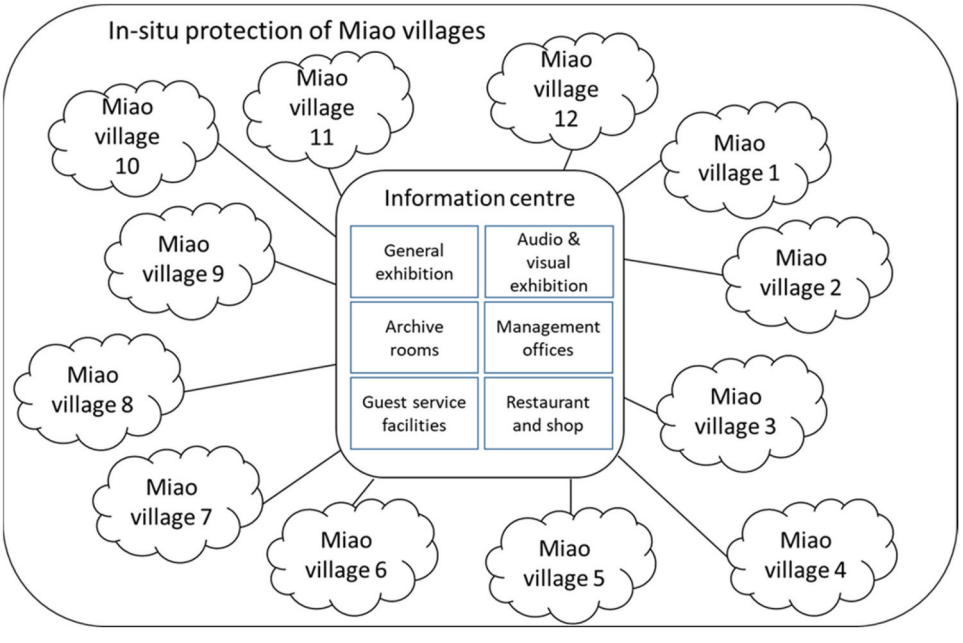

Figure 3. The layout of the soga miao ecomuseum in Guizhou (the first generation), China. The 'miao' are one of the ethnic minorities in China, after An (1995, 13).

communication (He 2010, Figure 3). However, this layout was altered in the third generation of ecomuseums. China introduced the 'French model', which deviated from the previous Norwegian-style generations and adopted a layout of a 'central exhibition hall + satellite hall/points' that covered the entire county (Yin 2019, 148–149). This marked the beginning of a new era in ecomuseum practice in China, known as the 'Anji' Model. The 'Anji Model' established a countywide ecomuseum practice/layout, introducing the concept of ecomuseum clusters and encompassing the entire county as the territorial scope for ecomuseums. The project included a central museum (the Anji County Museum), 13 themed ecomuseums and 40 satellite village museums or exhibition pavilions (Pan 2015). By 2017, the number of themed ecomuseums had increased to 14 (Yin 2019).

However, the development of ecomuseums in China did not undergo 'subversive' change. Despite the continuous updates in technology and layout, the practical approach followed by ecomuseum projects across the country has remained largely unchanged. This focus on external representations such as scale, form, and layout has created a monotonous atmosphere in the study and practice of ecomuseums. According to recent data, there are a total of 6,183 registered museums in the country, with only 37 of them being ecomuseums. Out of these, five ecomuseums in Shandong province specifically focus on natural ecology, while only three are community museums (SACH 2021, 2024). It is worth noting that some practices mentioned in previous literature are no longer included in the directory for unknown reasons. This suggests that ecomuseums have not received much attention in China, contributing to the overall dull atmosphere surrounding them. In contrast to the enthusiastic academic studies on ecomuseums in the West, China lacks discussions on ecomuseums as a cross-disciplinary social approach that combines museums, heritage, community, participation, and cooperation (Yin 2019). This lack of discourse may hinder the evolution of ecomuseums, leading to repetitive practices. China has yet to develop a national plan, common standards, mechanisms, or frameworks for ecomuseum construction and management (Pan 2015). As a result, new practices can only conform to the established approach due to inertia (Figure 4).

From above, there is a significant limitation in the development of ecomuseums in China over the past few decades: to regard ecomuseums as a model and focus on updating the model rather than viewing it as a resilient and adaptable device or path to evolute its practice process. Therefore, there is currently no specific practical framework for ecomuseums in China. M. Li and Selim (2021b) have outlined the workflow involved in establishing an ecomuseum in the country, which follows a top-down, one-way approach similar to other heritage activities (Ibid., Figure 5). Local governments take the lead by proposing the idea and hiring external professionals to carry out anthropological fieldwork to assess local heritage (Fang 2010; Mo 2015). These professionals then create design plans for the ecomuseum's layout and construction, seeking funding from local and higher-level governments. While funding sources are expanding, government investment remains

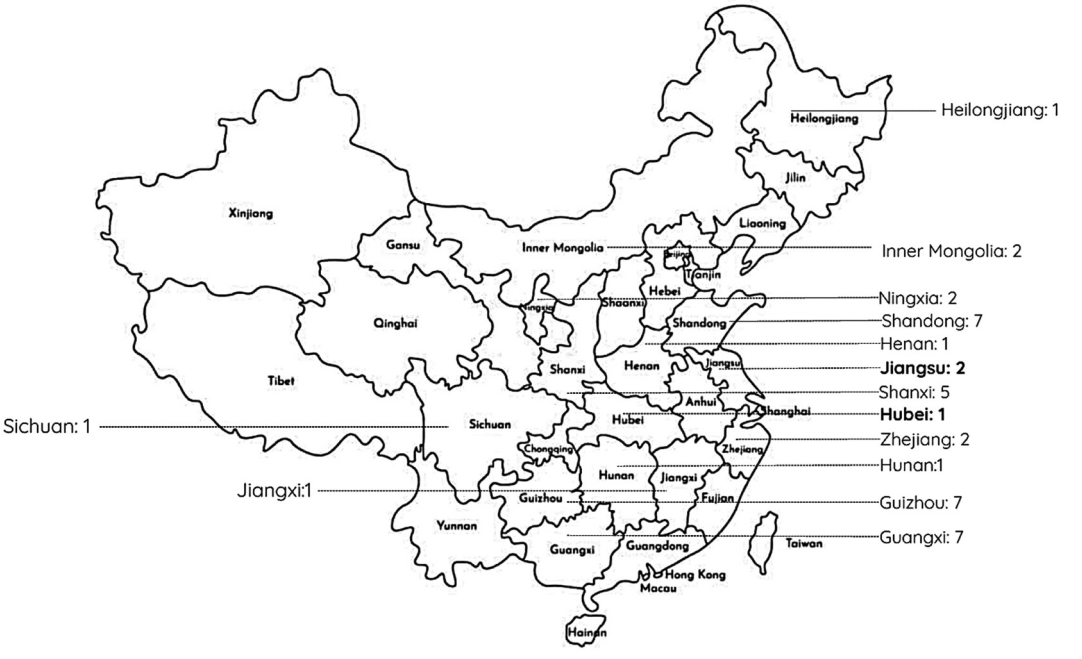

Figure 4. Approximate distribution of registered ecomuseums/community museums in China. Sources: SACH (2021, 2024).

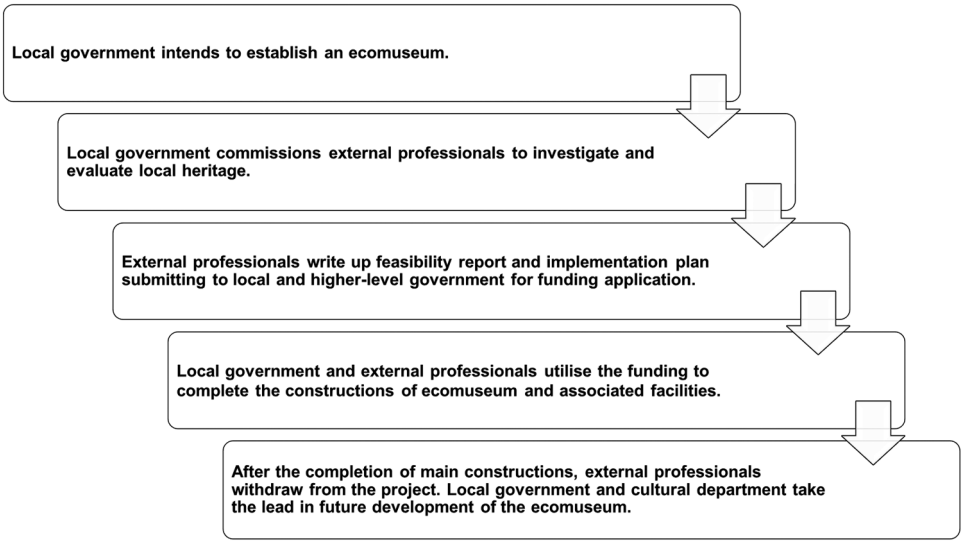

Figure 5. The current approach/workflow/framework for ecomuseums in China. Source: M. Li and Selim (2021b).

the primary source for constructing key buildings and facilities (Stojevic 2019). Once funding is secured, construction begins with the main building, typically an information/exhibition/cognition centre, to showcase project progress. Infrastructure development also occurs to address poverty issues. Limited interactions between the local community and external professionals take place during construction, such as involving locals in building the information centre or training community members in documentation. However, there is little evidence of deep, long-term interaction (An and Age Gjestrum 1999). External professionals typically exit the project after completing the main buildings, leaving the ecomuseum open to the public under the supervision of local traditional museums or cultural institutions (Nitzky 2011). Management is often overseen by officials from the supervisory department or external tourist companies (Nitzky 2012).

In the third generation, there is an increase in the presence of private capital managing satellite pavilions due to the comprehensive approach of the 'Anji' model towards local social ecology and culture. This model not only emphasises local heritage and traditions but also focuses on local industry, resulting in more extensive content compared to the previous generations. Satellite points across the county now include various ecomuseums such as the Bamboo Culture Ecomuseum, White Tea Culture Ecomuseum, Mountain Residents Culture Ecomuseum, Eco-Agriculture Museum, Immigrant Culture Ecomuseum, Ancient Military Defence Ecomuseum, and Ancient Tombs Ecomuseum (Yin 2019, 112). However, despite their apparent completeness, these ecomuseums are not deeply rooted in the community, hindering their sustainable development. Many ecomuseums have faced challenges in survival as local communities struggle to manage and develop them independently (Ibid.). D. Su (2006) has famously discussed the concept of 'cultural consignment' in ecomuseum practice in China, highlighting the need for communities to take ownership of their culture in order to truly own the ecomuseum is reflected in the 'Liuzhi Principle' introduced during the launch of the first ecomuseum, but there is little evidence to suggest that this vision has been fully realised under the current approach.

4. Factors behind the challenges of Chinese ecomuseum practices

The criticism of ecomuseum practices in China primarily revolves around two key issues: inadequate community participation and unsustainable development. Community participation plays a crucial role in the long-term development of ecomuseums (Borrelli and Ge 2019). However, due

to the top-down social system in place, achieving effective community participation becomes challenging (Gan 2009), the lack of sufficient community involvement has led to the deviation from and loss of the pioneering and revolutionary essence of ecomuseums in China (Yin 2019). Additionally, the combination of ecomuseums with tourism in China seems to hinder the effective protection of cultural heritage, further exacerbating the loss of local culture (Fang 2010). The absence of clear long-term objectives makes it difficult to strike a balance between heritage preservation and economic interests for local communities and governments.

4.1. Social factors

Insufficient community involvement is identified as the primary obstacle confronting ecomuseum operations in China (e.g. Gan 2009; Nitzky 2013; Stojevic 2019). The issue of community engagement is not limited to ecomuseums but extends to all heritage endeavours throughout China, as it is closely tied to the social environment: the top-down governmental approach and communities unprepared for involvement in such undertakings. The predominant control over operations remains in the hands of a select few influential stakeholders, including local authorities and external specialists. While local authorities are the primary source of funding, their practical objectives often revolve around short-term aims like regional economic advancement and political accomplishments (Stojevic 2019). Consequently, involved stakeholders tend to prioritise rapid large-scale development over the gradual process of community empowerment, leading to a scenario where community members struggle to comprehend, endorse, or implement the principles on which the ecomuseum is founded. This entrenched national framework necessitates that ecomuseums in China take on a utopian character (Yin 2016) with the pioneering and revolutionary essence of ecomuseums either abandoned or reshaped into socialist ideology (Yin 2019). To elucidate the roots of these challenges in community participation, both practice and framework must be contextualised within the Chinese societal landscape, a context that cannot be adequately explained solely through the lens of democracy.

4.1.1. The structured concept of community

Gusfield (1975) delineates two implications of community: groups concentrated within the same geographic territory; or groups connected, beyond regional limits, by specific human relationships. McMillan and Chavis (1986, 9) posit that the term encompasses four elements, namely 'membership', 'influence', 'integration and fulfilment of needs', and 'shared emotional connection'. They further elaborate that a 'sense of community' is characterised by a feeling of belonging, the significance of members to one another and the group, and a shared belief that members' needs will be met through their commitment to one another. However, in the Chinese context, the term 'community', translated as shequ, holds a political connotation and symbolises the downward extension of the state's administrative function – a departure from Western society, tracing back to the concept of community governance in ancient China (Wu and Yue 2020). The tradition of top-down centralised rule has persisted in Chinese society for millennia, with the state consistently maintaining control over grassroots levels since ancient times. Wu and Yue (2020, 127) assert that this central authority grew stronger during later dynasties in ancient China, embodying the characteristics of a 'strong country and weak community'. Despite the numerous transformations in contemporary China, certain historical legacies contribute to the distinctiveness of Chinese communities compared to those in the West. Community governance in China continues to emphasise 'regional boundaries', contrasting with the Western focus on 'individual-based association' (Ibid.). This divergence underscores that discussions on community and community involvement in public affairs in China inherently incorporate the structured concept of community. This highly centralised top-down system has two sides. On the one hand, it is conducive to governing a country with a large territory, diverse ethnic groups and a large population. On the other hand, it restricts activities that start from the grassroots level under the bottom-up ideal in some ways. Even

though the concept of community has been evolving in contemporary China, its administrative significance far outweighs the significance of grassroots spontaneous organisations.

The contemporary sense of community has been gradually established in China since the 1990s (Wu and Yue 2020), and its scope generally defined in Chinese cities as the area under the jurisdiction of the residents' committee whose scale has been adjusted after the community system reform (MCA 2000). This system was reformed by the government, which played a key role in initiating community building and implementing related policies (Ding 2008, 154). As a result, the idea of community in China is primarily seen as an administrative one, established by the state rather than emerging organically from the bottom-up. Community members are typically residents of a specific area, rather than being united by shared culture or relationships. While communities in China serve a management function and are effective in handling public affairs and emergencies, they are ultimately driven by the state's interests rather than grassroots initiatives (Fan 2014). In rural areas, the term 'villager participation' is more commonly used to describe community involvement, reflecting the division of communities along village boundaries. The village serves as the fundamental unit of rural community governance, with the Communist Party of China holding leadership at the grassroots level (F. Zhang 2019). Despite the administrative nature of communities in rural areas, they are more closely tied to villagers' lives and exhibit a greater degree of autonomy compared to urban communities.

4.1.2. Authoritative administrative system

In this context, the overall performance of community participation in heritage conservation is deemed inadequate. J. Li et al. (2020) valuated community engagement in the management and preservation procedures at 36 World Heritage Sites throughout China utilising their unique evaluation criteria. They observed that cultural heritage management in China is primarily led by the government, with minimal participation from the community: 'Most sites lack sufficient input from residents in decision-making, and the management focus is more on showcasing the material aspects of heritage rather than enhancing traditional community life' (Ibid., 9). Furthermore, Lu (2010) elaborates that aside from the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), heritage preservation involves various central departments, including the Ministry of Construction, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, State Administration for Religious Affairs, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Land and Resources, and State Environmental Protection Administration. Moreover, local governments at the provincial, city, and county levels bear the responsibility of safeguarding cultural heritage within their respective regions (Ibid.). Within the framework of national and local regulations, China's cultural heritage preservation follows a top-down approach with the state taking the lead (W. Zhang 2011). Ecomuseums, as one of the tools for national heritage protection, are also integrated into the national operational framework; hence, the role of local government within this framework is indispensable. While the SACH's initiatives to establish a national conservation framework and coordinate resources nationwide are evident (J. Li et al. 2020), it is apparent that the extensive reach of administrative power does not adequately accommodate community involvement and decision-making.

In addition, the participation of NGOs is a common path to community participation in European and American countries, where more mature models of NGO participation in heritage protection have developed (Chen, Liu, and Zhu 2018). In China, however, NGOs are not very active as they first have to seek legitimacy within the national administrative framework: 'An NGO in China has to find an authority as its upper-level administration; for example, ICOMOS China is itself administered by the SACH, which reports to the Ministry of Culture' (J. Li et al. 2020, 653). It is impossible for any community to set up an NGO through a bottom-up initiative without government authority. Once an NGO is incorporated into the state's administrative framework, its plans and actions will inevitably be influenced by the practical framework and ideology of the government. In Chinese NGOs, participants do not view these associations as a means to promote political democracy, but rather as partners of the government in enhancing societal governance

(Hsu 2010). There are few NGOs active in heritage protection in China (Svensson 2016), and their role is primarily auxiliary, lacking significant impact on the heritage protection framework (G. Zhang and Liu 2011). The authority to identify, nominate, and manage heritage lies with experts, cultural departments, and local governments, while the public has no right to participate in these discussions (Svensson 2011). This closed system excludes public involvement in heritage management (Luo 2004). Again, as mentioned before, this is another important manifestation of a top-down system in a centralised context. From some administrative and legislative aspects, it indirectly weakens the influence and possibility of grassroots initiation.

4.1.3. Improvised community

There is a prevailing assumption that the government completely empowers community, but community is not completely prepared to fulfil its responsibilities and 'the absence of knowledge among ordinary Chinese of their long and complex history' (Safford 2013, 2) is a key issue. Apart from historical knowledge, the appreciation and preservation of heritage are also essential for a comprehensive understanding of its safeguarding. In the rapidly evolving landscape of China, there is a preference for modern, cutting-edge elements, leading to the replacement of ancient streets and buildings with skyscrapers. Consequently, heritage preservation takes a backseat and may be less appealing to the younger generation growing up in a globalised society. The allure of modern pop culture often overshadows traditional culture, resulting in a decline in interest across generations, posing a threat to the survival of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (Luo 2016). Inadequate awareness and a lack of ability to protect heritage are particularly pronounced in rural areas. Heritage sites deemed valuable by cultural authorities are frequently disregarded by villagers, who view them as insignificant. Moreover, rich traditional customs, handicrafts, and other forms of ICH are often deemed unrefined (Tong and Ma 2009). The lower educational attainment in rural regions further hinders community involvement (Yu 2019), as higher levels of education generally correlate with increased awareness of heritage preservation and a stronger drive to engage in conservation efforts (M. Li et al. 2013). The awareness and willingness of villagers to participate are closely tied to their living standards: 'impoverished individuals may lack the means to effectively engage and may be compelled to adhere to existing livelihood strategies' (Xu 2007, 153). It is not uncommon in China to witness villagers turning to tourism as a means to enhance their living conditions, resulting in the erosion of cultural identity in local areas due to inadequate protection (see the Lijiang ancient town mentioned in Yang 2016, 93). A prevalent paradox arises when the inhabitants of historical villages find themselves in dire need of reconstructing their dwellings to enhance their quality of life (Tong and Ma 2009). However, their plea for approval encounters a roadblock as the preservation of the village's original aesthetics takes precedence 'in general, residents still lack resources to negotiate with different stakeholders and challenge any government decisions deviating from their interests' (J. Li et al. 2020, 9).

The above situation stimulates a deeper reflection; that is, China's heritage and museum practices still need to fully realise their social education functions, which new/social museology emphasises. During the 1960s and 1970s, a series of movements focused on equality, liberalism, empowerment, and awakening emerged, influencing the development of New Museology (Storino, Judite, and Mario 2021). This new approach, particularly social museology, shifted its focus from objects to the active participation of people, emphasising the role of museums in liberation and education. Paulo Freire's libertarian pedagogy theory, as outlined in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, highlighted the importance of education based on students' experiences and knowledge, promoting interaction and discussion between educators and learners (Freire and Bergman Ramos 2000). This approach contrasts with traditional indoctrination methods, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills to drive social progress (Ibid).

In the realm of ecomuseum practices worldwide, the process of community participation, influenced by similar ideas, plays a crucial role in promoting local social education and sustainable community development. The Ak-Chin Him-Dak Ecomuseum in Arizona serves as a prime

example of a successful path and framework that empowered the community to overcome economic and cultural challenges posed by high-tech development and globalisation, leading them towards independence and confidence (Doğan and Timothy 2019; Fuller, Luo, and Zhang 1993; Sutter et al. 2016). In 1984, an archaeological excavation in the area unearthed a significant number of relics, which stirred strong emotions within the local community. This prompted them to advocate for the preservation of their own culture and heritage (Fuller, Luo, and Zhang 1993). Approximately four years later, on 29 July 1991, the central building of the ecomuseum was completed. The community set ambitious two-year goals, which included educating themselves about the role of museums and archives, developing their internal management capabilities, and designing appropriate cultural facilities. To achieve these objectives, the community embarked on a journey of self-discovery and growth, involving visits to archives, museums, and heritage sites, active participation in community activities, and collaboration with the local university. Ultimately, they fostered a shared understanding centred around long-term development and lifelong learning within the community.

4.2. Theoretical factors

The current approach presents a potential challenge due to the conflicting viewpoints of traditional and critical heritage studies. Traditional heritage studies emphasise the fixed authority and materiality of heritage, while critical heritage studies focus on the dynamic nature of heritage and the influence of people in shaping it (Smith 2006). This ongoing debate between proponents of these two paradigms raises fundamental questions about our understanding of heritage. If heritage is viewed as a consolidated representation of values from a specific historical era, efforts may concentrate on preserving its inherent significance. Conversely, if heritage is seen as a fluid phenomenon, the driving forces behind its evolution, such as the individuals connected to it, must be considered. The principles and methodologies of traditional heritage studies have long been predominant, even in China, where ecomuseums are significantly influenced by this theoretical framework. Smith (2006) introduces the concept of Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), which underscores the expertise of professionals and technical discussions, highlighting heritage as a tangible vessel of meaning. Major international bodies like UNESCO and ICOMOS have embraced this perspective, establishing a series of conventions, charters, and guidelines that define the standard paradigm followed in heritage practices and research worldwide (Lin and You 2021). China, as a member of these organisations, adheres to traditional heritage principles in its studies and practices, emphasising tangibility, boundaries, authenticity, integrity, and the various historical, aesthetic, scientific, and intrinsic values of heritage. Additionally, there is a belief that heritage belongs to all of humanity (Ibid).

Influenced by traditional heritage studies, ecomuseums in China typically prioritise objects or material culture and technology at the outset, with community memories and stories often falling outside this scope. This partially explains the lack of community involvement in the current approach. Ecomuseums typically start by assessing and preserving objects, using memories and stories to enhance the heritage's value rather than shaping it. This perspective has deep historical roots and significantly influences how heritage-related activities are carried out. Since the establishment of The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites in 1964 and the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972, which form the basis of the current heritage activity framework, the primary focus has been on safeguarding tangible remains (Jokilehto 2017; Munjeri 2004). Despite an increase in community-based dialogues in recent times, most resources still define heritage as comprising movable or immovable materials (Munoz-Vinas 2004; Richmond and Bracker 2009). Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that the conventional viewpoint does not align with the community-centred and comprehensive approach of ecomuseums in safeguarding all heritage within the region. Numerous operational strategies in the current approach may be deemed inadequate. Moreover,

the authoritative control from academia emphasises techniques and professional assessment in traditional heritage endeavours, asserting that heritage's intrinsic value must be professionally evaluated. Prominent international organisations implement a rigorous evaluation and reporting system that garners support from experts, with scientific materials and technology serving as the central discourse, while discussions on sociology and anthropology remain limited (Winter 2013). Therefore, insights from museum experts, as well as historical and archaeological authorities, play a crucial role in evaluation and the provision of heritage preservation techniques.

5. The theoretical framework that guides practice

From above, the development of the ecomuseum practical approach to address current limitations and challenges involves two key considerations: addressing social factors and establishing a solid theoretical foundation. It is essential to conduct further empirical research to understand and respond to social factors, while also identifying a theoretical framework to guide future research and ecomuseum practices. Despite the abundance of theoretical discussions on ecomuseums, Chinese ecomuseums have yet to fully implement these theories. By incorporating a wider range of relevant theoretical perspectives, a practical framework tailored to Chinese society can be created, shifting from object- and technology-focused approaches to human-centred theories to inform decision-making.

5.1. Inspiration for ecomuseums from critical perspectives

Different theoretical foundations can lead to cognitive changes that result in fundamental shifts in practical approaches. The philosophy of critical heritage studies can be seen as an underlying rationale for these changes. In 2011, Laurajane Smith argued that 'All heritage is intangible', suggesting that heritage is not fixed in any physical form but rather a dynamic process that encompasses activities such as memory, communication, knowledge transmission, identity formation, and the expression of values and significance within a social culture (Smith and Zhang 2018). This perspective in critical heritage studies shifts the focus onto people and their heritage-related activities, aligning it more closely with the community-centred concept of ecomuseums. Additionally, this perspective challenges the dichotomy between tangible and intangible cultural heritages as defined by UNESCO (Smith 2015), blurring the boundaries between them and promoting a holistic approach to ecomuseum practice In the traditional paradigm, both intangible and tangible heritage have their own clear classification criteria; however, 'too many things do not fit comfortably into any one category, and other things fit into several categories' (Howard 2003, 52). While standardised classification systems aid in implementing specific protections, they can also limit opportunities for action. For example, the memory of a community may be challenging to categorise for protection but can be associated with multiple heritage categories. The discussion surrounding critical heritage studies does not aim to disregard the contributions and accomplishments of previous heritage studies and practice frameworks. Instead, it seeks to uncover issues within the current practical framework. It is admittedly challenging to find a precise definition of the term 'heritage' or to position heritage within a single academic discipline, as it appears to be a complex and multifaceted concept (Howard 2003), since heritage seems to be 'the lovechild of a multitude of relationships between academics in many disciplines, and then nurtured by practitioners and institutions' (Uzzell 2009, 326).

The intricate nature of heritage practices results in a diverse range of approaches. Ecomuseums serve as a means of continuously interpreting regional culture and heritage through both internal and external communication (Rivière 1986). Heritage can be viewed as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon (Gentry and Smith 2019), a 'discursive construction' through a material one (Smith 2006, 11–13). This perspective challenges the traditional separation of heritage objects and the communities they belong to, suggesting that heritage is no longer fragile and in need of rescue, and communities are not merely passive consumers guided by professionals. External experts involved in ecomuseum projects must consider not only the value of the heritage and conservation techniques

employed in traditional practices, but also the connections between the heritage and the associated communities, which is an anthropological and sociological concern.

By adopting a perspective that views heritage and community as dynamically constructed entities, traditional practices can be questioned. People and heritage are intertwined in the transformation, reconstruction, and creation of heritage, with intangible elements such as memories and community participation playing a crucial role. This process acknowledges that heritage is a dynamic phenomenon that extends beyond the authorised heritage discourse (AHD), challenging the conventional system of evaluating heritage value. For instance, there is often a tension between memory and history as concepts (Nora 1989; Samuel 1994) with memory being subjective and history being seen as an authorised narrative (Smith 2006). Remembering is a constructive process that both individuals and groups constantly negotiate as they reconstruct their heritage based on their present experiences and needs (Wertsch 2002), resulting in a reimagining of heritage as an ongoing process that involves negotiating the present (Smith 2006). This represents the conflict between the narratives formed by community memories and by authoritative evaluation of history and cultural relics. Furthermore, compared to traditional heritage protection, ecomuseums welcome all intangible elements, including the memories mentioned above.

In 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage was approved by UNESCO, which provided a definition for ICH and emphasised the importance of its protection. In contrast to the understanding of tangible cultural heritage, the value of ICH lies in people mastering their heritage skills: 'intrapersonal and interpersonal values are central to the ICH practitioners' (J. Su 2018, 933), and relies on extensive grassroots participation, aligning with the principles and approach of ecomuseums (see the example of Guyana in Mazel et al. 2017). This bottom-up approach provides more opportunities to local communities to contribute to narrating, interpreting and preserving their ICH, and empowers local communities to actively contribute to the narration, interpretation, and preservation of their own intangible cultural heritage (Murtas 2017). While everyday ICH is delicate, it can be revitalised and rediscovered. Ecomuseums, through their reliance on community involvement, establish a reciprocal relationship between people and their heritage. By sustaining the preservation of heritage and promoting social and economic development within communities, ecomuseums enable continuous heritage protection activities and foster a dynamic relationship between people and their heritage. This virtuous circle drives the overall development of the community, as highlighted by Sutter (2017, 453) asserts that 'community-led projects that encourage sustainable forms of development can be an effective way to revive, safeguard, and raise the profile of intangible cultural heritage'.

5.2. Completely absorbing new ideas from relevant museology

> One cannot bypass the fact that Critical Heritage is currently flourishing thanks to a body of 20th century avant-garde thinkers who, on the pretext of museums, transliterated the anxieties, hopes and aspirations of their times into critical reflections on humans, objects and memories, social possibility and social utopia. (Tzortzaki 2021, 17–18)

Therefore, the absorption and borrowing by the current approach of ecomuseums in China of new practical methods and philosophies from new museology and other appropriate museology also could be re-examined.

5.2.1. New museology

The compilation of papers edited by Delia Tzortzaki and Stefanos Keramidas showcases the progression of museum studies and theories, focusing on the influence of region and time from the 1960s to the present day. This study highlights two significant trends: the transformation of museums from exclusive spaces for the privileged few to inclusive resources for all, and the shift in their practices from solely relying on material evidence to incorporating diverse societal expressions (Tzortzaki and Keramidas 2021). This means museums are now entrusted with additional responsibilities,

particularly in terms of assuming social obligations, aligning with the objectives of the new museology. As previously mentioned, the new museology movement emerged from the enlightenment, transformative changes, and liberal ideological movements that impacted various aspects of social life. Notably, the concept of social museology/sociomuseology is closely linked to the notion of ecomuseums. Storino, Judite, and Mario (2021) delve into the numerous transformations associated with the new museology, with a particular focus on the discussions surrounding social museology. Numerous examples demonstrate the essential reforms and grassroots spirit embodied in social museology. These initiatives encompass contemporary indigenous narratives, dynamic engagement with collections, dismantling the boundaries of traditional museum structures, adopting interdisciplinary approaches to emphasise the significance of heritage values such as memory, identity, and inclusivity, as well as mediating conflicts and promoting sustainable education and community development (Ibid.). All of these endeavours revolve around the interplay between museums and social development, highlighting how museums assume the responsibility of educating and inspiring society. These efforts align with the mission of ecomuseums, making them a manifestation of this spirit. Their discussions shed more light on the fact that we have the potential to surpass the typical ideological critiques of museology when museology intersects with society. The heightened importance of social museology lies in its ability to offer concrete conceptual direction for museum operations, thereby spurring modifications in approach. This shift holds particular weight for certain nations and areas, like China, where museology theory and practice are adopted from elsewhere.

The ecomuseum in China is more about integrating traditional museums into the community rather than following the new museology approach. The current focus is mainly on regional economic growth through ecomuseums, neglecting the broader concept of community development. New museology emphasises the importance of museums involving the community directly to not only preserve heritage but also promote social development (Davis 2008, 2011). It highlights the importance of learning and growth through community participation, as well as the community's awareness of the significance of local heritage (Borrelli and Davis 2013). The goal of participation is to realise regional value, empowering the community to utilise regional resources for sustainable construction and development (Karp 1992; Lane et al. 2007; Murtas and Davis 2009; Perin and Karp 1992). Although there are some indications of this approach in recent practices, a clearly defined practical framework or guidelines have yet to be established. Therefore, the practice of ecomuseums necessitates a significant departure from traditional heritage conservation techniques in order to prioritise building community capacity. Borrelli and Davis (2013) identify 'capacity building' as the most crucial step in the community development process, which involves creating a sound policy and legal framework and promoting an effective management system (Cuthill and Fien 2005).

> In other words, capacity building is the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to perform core functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives; and understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner. (Borrelli and Davis 2013, 4)

The practical focus of ecomuseum is not only to evaluate local heritage and provide conservation techniques but also trigger changes in behaviour and consciousness among the community and local stakeholders. However, there is no evidence that ecomuseums in China have fulfilled this responsibility nor enough evidence that ecomuseums have generated more profound changes in local communities, beyond developing tourism and improving infrastructure.

5.2.2. Appropriate museology

Appropriate museology, aligned with some new museological movements, also sheds light on practical ecomuseum frameworks, providing a path around technical barriers to community participation in heritage conservation. Inspired by participatory methods and suitable technology, proper museology embraces developmental and educational approaches that are tailored to the local cultural and socioeconomic environment (Kreps 2008), emphasising that the key to museums

fulfilling a social function in diverse settings lies in an appropriate approach to their operations. This aligns well with the transition in new museology from traditional museum practices and methodologies to social functions and community engagement in development, suggesting that communities lacking the necessary resources for preservation still have the chance to engage in local heritage conservation through appropriate resources and training Kreps (2008) guides the curation and conservation efforts of local indigenous museums in Indonesia, demonstrating the practicality and legitimacy of proper museology and proposing that ecomuseums in various cultural and economic contexts may not adhere to the same construction timeline but rather evolve on a community-specific basis. The focus may shift from the completion date of the main structure to what the community can construct and implement at different stages.

5.3. The important overlapping part

The focus on people and society is a significant convergence among the various theoretical foundations discussed earlier. This convergence serves as a crucial framework for future empirical research and practices, which involve the construction of heritage through the active involvement of the community and their collective memories. These approaches should be tailored to the specific context of the community. Therefore, an effective framework or approach for ecomuseum practices must align with the objectives of heritage preservation and sustainable development within the community (Figure 6). The conceptual framework resulting from this convergence is not a coincidence; it aligns with the development trend of ecomuseums and the broader field of museum practice. The Strategic Manifesto of Italian Ecomuseums that was presented ICOM General Conference Milan in 2016 states that in the following year, Ecomuseums in the country would be committed to 'supporting processes of territorialisation; improving the identity of places and the virtuous relationship between a community and its surroundings; and developing heritage awareness' (Dal Santo et al. 2017, 89–90). These three key strategies aim to promote social education and awareness regarding heritage conservation, establish inclusive connections between heritage and place, and encourage sustainable social development by actively involving participants. This is because 'an ecomuseum differs from other cultural institutions since it is progressively built on

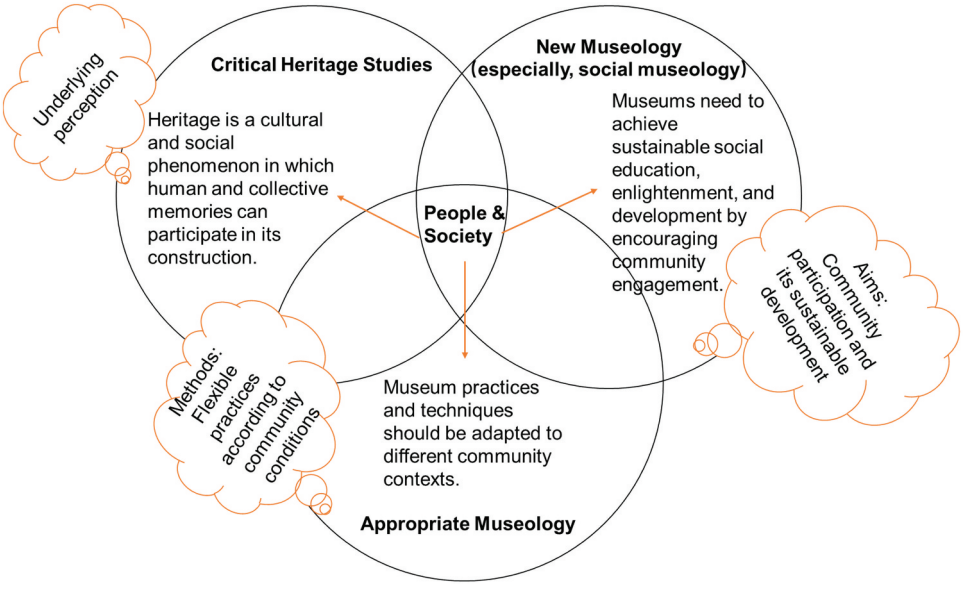

Figure 6. Overlap of theoretical paradigms centred on human and social development.

a special heritage: a group of people, whose sensitivity and energy are mobilised to reach sustainable development (Dal Santo et al. 2017, 89)'. Furthermore, the new museum definition was approved by ICOM in 2022:

> A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing. (ICOM 2022)

The practical objects of museums are more inclusive, including intangible heritage more closely related to daily human activities; besides, community participation and urban sustainability are emphasised. These imply that museology is adopting an approach of interaction and negotiation between authorities and ordinary people to realise its social education and enlightenment functions (Song and Selim 2022).

The framework consists of three components: the underlying philosophy, the guiding theories and aims, and the practice tools. The primary theoretical foundation for this framework is to comprehend heritage from a critical heritage perspective. Rather than being a fixed concept, heritage is a constructed one that is influenced by the social and cultural context of the present, as well as the daily activities and memories of the people. This understanding shifts the focus from materials, technology, classification, and authority to the role of individuals and society in heritage construction (Song et al. 2023). To fully grasp the concept of heritage from a critical heritage perspective, it is essential to consider the core concept of new museology theory: the active involvement of the community in heritage activities. This is where the new museology serves as a guiding principle, bridging the gap between theory and practice and enabling ecomuseums to promote social education and development. This approach incorporates key ideas and theories from libertarian pedagogy and social museology.

Thorough participation enables humans to construct and interpret their heritage using their activities and memories, and community members experience significant changes in their participation. In addition, communities derive benefits from lifelong learning and self-nurturing, as well as the virtuous progress that occurs within each community, which ultimately drives societal evolution. Finally, appropriate museology's focus on individual differences in community and social development enables a flexible approach to ecomuseum practice. This approach advocates for specific practical strategies that focus on effectively involving community members with diverse circumstances in museum activities. It suggests that community participation in heritage activities should not be constrained by standardised and regulated conservation requirements, but rather encourages the customisation of conservation efforts to suit local conditions, thereby reinforcing the notion of heritage conservation in relation to people and social contexts. Similar to critical heritage studies, this theory offers an alternative perspective that highlights the importance of community participation and provides a practical framework for in-depth participation.

Focusing on the intersecting aspects of the aforementioned theories – individuals and society – aids in establishing an efficient approach to ecomuseum practice. The rationale behind this framework shifts the conventional focus on objects in heritage research and conservation to a user-centred approach that embraces the social function of community development. The potential impact of this shift on current practices could be transformative. For instance, within the same stakeholder structure – local government, external assistance, and local community – their roles, objectives, and methods of action would differ significantly from the present practices. In other words, guided by this conceptual framework, individuals may shift their attention from constructing grand centres to engaging in a diverse range of daily community activities that contribute to capacity building.

6. Conclusion

In summary, a well-defined and efficient theoretical foundation is crucial for guiding further empirical research or practices in ecomuseums in China, in response to the social factors influencing the development of practical approaches or frameworks. The current approach to ecomuseum practices falls short in fully supporting the role of ecomuseums in sustainable heritage conservation and community development. Due to entrenched perceptions and perspectives from traditional heritage studies, ecomuseums in the country have not fully embraced the principles of new museology. Additionally, inadequate community participation is influenced by social structures and community capabilities. Recognising that heritage is not fixed but rather constructible, as emphasised in critical heritage studies, can serve as the basis for transitioning from an object-centred to a user-centred approach. The emphasis on community participation in new museology is not merely a theoretical concept, but a long-term process that recognises the vital role of communities in constructing, reshaping, and preserving their heritage. Moreover, appropriate museology offers technical support to enable communities in various conditions to engage in heritage activities. The integration of sustainable community development in heritage conservation underscores the importance of people and society, which forms the central focus of the theoretical framework. Within the framework, we acknowledge the significance of intangible components, including community memories, knowledge, and daily routines, that shape the heritage and culture of a community. It is important to emphasise that the objective of ecomuseum practice is not solely focused on constructing buildings, but rather on empowering the community through their active involvement in heritage activities. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that all communities, regardless of their circumstances, are provided with equal opportunities to engage in heritage preservation. This can be achieved by employing suitable techniques and approaches tailored to each community's specific needs. Finally, we acknowledge that the theoretical framework cannot fully explain the complex challenges in practice, especially many factors involving social and cultural landscapes and social systems. Therefore, in subsequent research, further empirical research is needed to reveal the reasons behind the challenges based on the ideals of the theoretical framework to form a practical framework for ecomuseums in China.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Meng Li is a Research Fellow in the Architecture and Urbanism Research Group (AURG) of the School of Civil Engineering at the University of Leeds. Her expertise mainly includes critical heritage studies, new museology, heritage conservation and community participation, and heritage-related creative industries. She completed her PhD degree at AURG, the University of Leeds, in 2023, and the title of her thesis is Developing a Practical Framework for Ecomuseums in China: Building the Malanyu Ecomuseum with the Community of Descendants of the Caretakers of the Eastern Qing Tombs.

Gehan Selim is the Hoffman Wood Chair in Architecture at the University of Leeds. She is the Deputy Director at Leeds Social Sciences Institute and was Fellow of The Senator George Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice (2017/18). She is leading the Architecture and Urbanism Research Group at the University of Leeds with her research covering interdisciplinary methods bridging between Architecture, Memory and Digital Heritage. Her research received multiple national/international awards such as Routledge Areas studies award (2023), Newton Fund Prize for Outstanding Impact (2020) and Best Practice Project by the International Council of Museums, ICOM (2017). She is the author of 'Unfinished Places' (Routledge, 2017) and 'Architecture, Space and Memory of Resurrection in Northern Ireland' (Routledge, 2019).

References

An, L. 1995. “Feasibility Study Report on Establishing China’s First Ecomuseum in Suojia, Guizhou Province (在贵州省梭嘎乡建立中国第一座生态博物馆的可行性研究报告).”

An, L., and J. Age Gjestrum. 1999. “The Ecomuseum in Theory and Practice: The First Chinese Ecomuseum Established.” *Nordisk Museologi* 2 (s): 65–86. https://doi.org/10.5617/nm.3813.

Aydemir, D. L. R. 2017. “Safeguarding Maritime Intangible Cultural Heritage: Ecomuseum Batana, Croatia.” In *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, edited by M. L. Stefano and P. Davis. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716404-40.

Borrelli, N., and P. Davis. 2012. “How Culture Shapes Nature: Reflections on Ecomuseum Practices.” *Nature and Culture* 7 (1): 31–47. https://doi.org/10.3167/nc.2012.070103.

Borrelli, N., and P. Davis. 2013. “Developing Capacity Building: Reflections on Experiences in Chicago’s Field Museum,us.” *Museum Management & Curatorship* 28 (5): 455–466. https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2013.850826.

Borrelli, N., and R. Ge. 2019. “An Analysis of Chinese Ecomuseums in Relation to Ecomuseum Theories and Principles.” *Organon* 51:123–151. https://doi.org/10.4467/00786500.org.19.005.11326.

Boylan, P. 1992. “Is Yours a ’classic’musuem or an Ecomuseum/’new’musuem?” *Museums Journal* 92 (4): 30.

Chen, W., M. Liu, and Z. Zhu. 2018. “Management Mechanism and Mode of European and American Cultural Heritage Protection Under the Participation of NGO(NGO参与下的欧美文化遗产保护管理机制与模式).” *Research on Heritages and Preservation* 3 (11): 17–23. https://doi.org/10.19490/j.cnki.issn2096-0913.2018.11.005.

Corsane, G. 2006a. “From ‘Outreach’ to ‘Inreach’: How Ecomuseum Principles Encourage Community Participation in Museum Processes.” In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China*, edited by D. Su, 155–171. Beijing: Forbidden City press.

Corsane, G. 2006b. “Using Ecomuseum Indicators to Evaluate the Robben Island Museum and World Heritage Site.” *Landscape Research* 31 (4): 399–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/01426390601004400.

Corsane, G., and W. Holleman. 1993. “Ecomuseums:A Brief Evaluation.” *Museums and the Environment*, edited by R. De Jong, 111–125. Pretoria: South African Museums Association.

Cuthill, M., and J. Fien. 2005. “Capacity Building: Facilitating Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Local Governance.” *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 64 (4): 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8500.2005.00465a.x.

Dal Santo, R. 2023. “Italian Ecomuseums(2022 Summary Report).” https://docs.google.com/document/d/1h8jUuKiDEe4PRCQX2p60BwsECbZE8cQChP2p8tKN_yI/edit#heading=h.c7t0nxy88ygk.

Dal Santo, R., N. Baldi, A. Del Duca, and A. Rossi. 2017. “The Strategic Manifesto of Italian Ecomuseums.” *Museum International* 69 (1–2): 86–95. https://doi.org/10.1111/muse.12153.

Davis, P. 1999. *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*. London: Leicester University Press.

Davis, P. 2007. “Ecomuseums and Sustainability in Italy, Japan and China: Concept Adaptation Through Implementation.” In *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, edited by S. J. Knell, S. MacLeod, and S. E. R. Watson, 198–214. London, New York: Routledge.

Davis, P. 2008. “New Museologies and the Ecomuseum.” In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, edited by B. Graham and P. Howard, 397–414. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Davis, P. 2011. “Ecomuseum: A Sense of Place.” New York: Continuum. https://www.dawsonera.com/readonline/9781441157447.

Ding, Y. 2008. “Community Building in China: Issues and Directions.” *Social Sciences in China* 29 (1): 152–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/02529200801921051.

Doğan, M., and D. J. Timothy. 2019. “Beyond Tourism and Taxes: The Ecomuseum and Social Development in the Ak-Chin Tribal Community.” *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 18 (2): 133–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2019.1593994.

Fan, L. 2014. “International Influence and Local Response: Understanding Community Involvement in Urban Heritage Conservation in China.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20 (6): 651–662. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2013.834837.

Fang, L. 2010. *Life Changes in Longga Village: Research on the Suojia Ecomusuem (陇戛寨人的生活变迁—梭戛生态博物馆研究)*. Beijing: Xueyuan Press.

Freire, P., and M. Bergman Ramos. 2000. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Thirtieth ed. New York; London: Continuum.

Fuller, J. N., X. Luo, and S. Zhang. 1993. “Concept and Approach of Ecomuseum: Introduction to the AK-Chin Indian Community Ecomuseum Project(生态博物馆的概念与方法—介绍亚克钦印第安社区生态博物馆计划).” *Chinese Museum* 4:73–82.

Gan, D. 2009. “The Paradox of Eco-Museum Chinalisation(生态博物馆中国化的悖论).” *Journal of Minzu University of China (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 36 (2): 68–73.

Gentry, K., and L. Smith. 2019. “Critical Heritage Studies and the Legacies of the Late-Twentieth Century Heritage Canon.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25 (11): 1148–1168. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2019.1570964.

Gusfield, J. R. 1975. *The Community: A Critical Response*. New York: Harper Colophon.
Hamrin, Ö. 1996. "Ekomuseum Bergslagen-Från Idé till Verklighet." *Nordisk Museologi* 2 (s): 27–34. https://doi.org/10.5617/nm.3674.
Hamrin, O., and M. Hulander. 1995. *The Ecomuseum Bergslagen*. Falun: Ekomuseum Bergslagen.
He, L. 2010. "Virtual Eco-Museum: A New Way to Building the Information Center of Eco-Museum (虚拟生态博物馆: 生态博物馆资料中心建设的新途径)." *Guizhou Ethnic Studies* 31 (132): 51–55. https://doi.org/10.13965/j.cnki.gzmzyj10026959.2010.02.042.
Howard, P. 2003. *Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity*. London, New York: BoodEns Ltd. Royston, Herts.
Hsu, C. 2010. "Beyond Civil Society: An Organizational Perspective on State–NGO Relations in the People 's Republic of China." *Journal of Civil Society* 6 (3): 259–277. https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2010.528949.
Hu, C. 2011. *Guizhou Ecomuseums Documentary (贵州生态博物馆纪实)*. Beijing: China Minzu University Press.
Hubert, F. 1985. "Ecomuseum in France: Contradiction and Distortions." *Museum International* 4 (4): 186–190. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.1985.tb00584.x.
ICOM. 2022. "ICOM Approves a New Museum Definition." https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-approves-a-new-museum-definition/#:~:text="A museum is a not,museums foster diversity and sustainability".
Jokilehto, J. 2017. *A History of Architectural Conservation*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315636931.
Karp, I. 1992. "On Civil Society and Social Identity." In *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, edited by I. Karp, C. M. Kreamer, and S. D. Lavine, 19–33. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution.
Kreps, C. F. 2008. "Appropriate Museology in Theory and Practice." *Museum Management & Curatorship* 23 (1): 23–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770701865345.
Lane, R., F. Vanclay, J. Wills, and D. Lucas. 2007. "Museum Outreach Programs to Promote Community Engagement in Local Environmental Issues." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 66 (2): 159–174. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8500.2007.00525.x.
Li, J., S. Krishnamurthy, A. Pereira Roders, and P. van Wesemael. 2020. "State-Of-The-Practice: Assessing Community Participation within Chinese Cultural World Heritage Properties." *Habitat International* 96:1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2019.102107.
Li, M., Z. Guan, J. Wang, and W. Bai. 2013. "Community Participation in Protection and Development of Cultural Heritage Sites: A Case Study of Dafo Temple in Binxian County, Shanxi Province (社区参与的文化遗产地保护与开发问题探析: 以山西彬县大佛寺为例)." *New West* (9): 33–34. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:XXBL.0.2013-06-022 .
Li, M.and Selim, G. 2021a. "Heritage, Identity and Memory of the Caretakers 'Descendants at the Imperial Qing Tombs in China." *Contemporary Approaches in Urbanism and Heritage Studies*, edited by R. Rahbarianyazd, 209–218. Online: Cinius Yayınları. https://doi.org/10.38027/N4ICCAUA2021308.
Li, M., and G. Selim. 2021b. "Ecomuseums in China: Challenges and Defects to the Existing Practical Framework." *Heritage* 4 (3): 1868–1882. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage4030105.
Li, M.and Selim, G. 2021c. "Vanishing Memory and Identity: Tomb Caretakers and Their Descendants at the Imperial Tombs of the Qing Dynasty in China." *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 33 (1): 26. ISSN 1050–2092. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27086213.
Li, M.and Selim, G. 2022. "A Practice Research on the Framework for Ecomuseum in China: Case Study in Malanyu Town." IGSCONG'22, Online, 08-11 June 2022, 121–139. Online: IGSCONG`22. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/188015/1/A%20Practice%20Research%20on%20the%20Framework%20for%20Ecomuseum%20in%20China-Case%20Study%20in%20Malanyu%20Town.pdf.
Lin, B., and Z. You. 2021. "Opposing Narrative and Negotiation of Traditional Heritage Studies and Critical Heritage Studies (传统遗产研究与批判性遗产研究的对立叙事与协商)." *Southeast Academic Research* (1): 140–147. https://doi.org/10.13658/j.cnki.sar.2021.01.012.
Lu, J. 2010. "Policy Consideration on Cultural Heritage Protection and Management in China (中国文化遗产保护管理的政策思考)." *Southeast Culture* 216 (4): 22–29.
Luo, J. 2004. *Study on the Management System of World Heritage in China (中国世界遗产管理体制研究)*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press.
Luo, J. 2016. "Study on Community Participation in Performing Intangible Cultural Heritage-A Case Study of Migration Epic Yannya Gajangga of Hani Nationality (表演类非物质文化遗产保护的社区参与研究-以哈尼族迁徙史诗雅尼雅嘎赞嘎为例)." *Art Studies* (1): 80–81. https://doi.org/10.13944/j.cnki.ysyj.2016.0036.
Maggi, M. 2006. "Ecomuseums Worldwide: Converging Routes Among Similar Obstacles." In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China*, edited by D. Su, 88–94. Beijing: Forbidden City press.
Maure, M. 2006. "Ecomuseums:A Mirror,a Window, or a Showcase?" In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China*, edited by D. Su, 113–117. Beijing: Forbidden City press.
Mazel, A., C. Gerard, T. Raquel, and J. Samantha. 2017. "From the Bottom Up:The Identification and Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Guyana." In *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, edited by M. L. Stefano and P. Davis. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716404-10.

MCA. 2000. *Notice of the Ministry of Civil Affairs on the Opinions on Promoting Urban Community Construction in the Nation (民政部关于在全国推进城市社区建设的意见的通知)*. Ministry of Civil Affairs.
McMillan, D. W., and D. M. Chavis. 1986. "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory." *Journal of Community Psychology* 14 (1): 6–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(198601)14:1<6:AID-JCOP2290140103>3.0.CO;2-I.
Mo, Z. 2015. "Exploration Road of Guangxi National Ecomuseum '1+10' Project (广西民族生态博物馆1+10工程探索之路)." *Chinese Cultural Heritage* (1): 32–39. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:CCRN.0.2015-01-006.
Munjeri, D. 2004. "Tangible and Intangible Heritage: From Difference to Convergence." *Museum International* 56 (1–2): 12–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-0775.2004.00453.x.
Munoz-Vinas, S. 2004. *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. 1st ed. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780080476834.
Murtas, D. 2017. "Reflections of a Heritage Professional:Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Ecomuseum of the Terraces and Vineyards, Italy." In *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, edited by M. L. Stefano and P. Davis. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716404-41.
Murtas, D., and P. Davis. 2009. "The Role of The Ecomuseo Dei Terrazzamenti E Della Vite, (Cortemilia, Italy) in Community Development." *Community Development* 7 (3): 150–186.
Myklebust, D. 2006. "The Ecomuseum in Guizhou from a Norwegian Point of View." In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China*, edited by D. Su, 11–22. Beijing: Forbidden City press.
Nitzky, W. 2011. "Reflections and Visions of Chinese Ecomuseum – an Interview with Mr.Donghai Su (中国生态博物馆的反思与瞻望—苏东海先生访谈)." *Chinese Museum*: 109–115.
Nitzky, W. 2012. "Mediating Heritage Preservation and Rural Development: Ecomuseum in China." *Urban Anthropology* 41 (2,3,4): 367–417.
Nitzky, W. 2013. "Community Empowerment at the Periphery? Participatory Approaches to Heritage Protection in Guizhou, China." In *Cultural Heritage Politics in China*, edited by T. Blumenfield and H. Silverman, 205–232. New York: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6874-5_11.
Nora, P. 1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." *Representations* 26 (Spring): 7–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520.
Pan, S. 2011. "Ecomuseums and Their Development in China: Historical Observations and Reflections (生态博物馆及其在中国的发展: 历时性观察与思考)." *Chinese Museum* (Z1): 24–33. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:GBWG.0.2011-Z1-006.
Pan, S. 2013. "Theoretical Discussion on the Third-Generation Ecomuseum and the Construction of Anji Ecomuseum Cluster ('第三代'生态博物馆与安吉生态博物馆群建设的理论思考)." *Southeast Culture* (6): 86–93. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:DNWH.0.2013-06-019.
Pan, S. 2015. "A Scan of Current Status of Ecomusuems in China (中国生态博物馆现况扫描)." *China Culture Daily*. 22nd July 2015
Pan, S. 2017. "The Ecomuseum (Community Museum): Chinese Experiences and Critical Discussions (生态/社区博物馆的中国经验与学术性 批判反思)." *Southeast Culture* 6 (260): 115–128.
Pan, S. 2019. "Consider the Contemporary Dimensions of Ecomuseums- Prologue for 'Ecomuseum: Tought, Theory and Practice'(思考生态博物馆的当代维度 —《生态博物馆:思想、理论与实践》序)." In *Ecomuseum: Thought, Theory and Practice*, Science Press.
Peng, G. 2018. "Research on Digital Protection of Ecological Culture of Longji Zhuang Ecological Museum (龙脊壮族生态博物馆生态文化数字化保护研究)." *Design and Exploration* 33 (183): 77–80. https://doi.org/10.19686/j.cnki.issn167-4997.2018.06.019.
Perin, C., and I. Karp. 1992. "The Communicative Circle: Museums as Communities." In *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, edited by C. M. Kreamer and D. L. Steven, 182–220. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
Qu, K. 2016. "New Perspective of Cultural Safeguarding Construction of Traditional Villages in Ethnic Minority Areas: A Case Study of Constructing on Cultural Ecological Reserve and Ecomuseum (民族地区传统村落文化安全建设的新视角-以文化生态保护区与文化生态博物馆的建设为例)." *Cultural Studies* 12: 177–178. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:LBYT.0.2016-12-078.
Richmond, A., and A. Bracker, eds. 2009. *Conservation:Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.
Rivière, G.-H. 1985. "The Ecomuseum: An Evlutive Definition." *Museum* 37 (4): 182–183. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.1985.tb00581.x.
Rivière, G.-H. 1986. "The Ecomuseum: An Evaluative Definition (生态博物馆: 一个进化的定义)." *Chinese Museum* (4): 75. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:GBWG.0.1986-04-017.
SACH. 2021. "National Museum Annual Report Information System." http://nb.ncha.gov.cn/museum.html.
SACH. 2024. "National Museum List." http://www.ncha.gov.cn/col/col2267/index.html.
Safford, L. B. 2013. "Cultural Heritage Preservation in Modern China: Problems, Perspectives, and Potentials." *ASIANetwork Exchaange* 21 (1): 3–15. https://doi.org/10.16995/ane.69.

Salvatore, C., G. Corinto Luigi, and G. Teresa. 2011. "Limits and Potentialities of Ecomuseums in Sicily, Between Tourist Exploitation and Cultural Heritage Preservation." In *5th International Congress on "Science and Technology for the Safeguard of Cultural Heritage in the Mediterranean Basin"*, Istanbul, edited by S. Tardiola, and G. Pingue, 442–450. Centro Copie l'Istantanea.

Samuel, R. 1994. "Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture." London: Verso.

Smith, L. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London and New York: Routledge.

Smith, L. 2015. "Intangible Heritage: A Challenge to the Authorised Heritage Discourse?" *Revista d'Etnologia de Catalunya* (40): 133–142. https://raco.cat/index.php/RevistaEtnologia/article/view/293392.

Smith, L., and Y. Zhang. 2018. "All Heritage is Intangible: Critical Heritage Studies and Museums (遗产本质上都是非物质的: 遗产批判研究和博物馆研究)." *Cultural Heritage* (3): 62–71. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:WHYA.0.2018-03-009.

Snyder, H. 2019. "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines." *Journal of Business Research* (104): 333–339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039.

Song, H.and G. Selim. 2022. "Smart heritage for urban sustainability: a review of current definitions and future developments." *Journal of Contemporary Urban Affairs* 6 (2): 175–192. https://doi.org/10.25034/ijcua.2022.v6n2-5.

Song, H., G. Selim and Y. Gao. 2023. "Smart heritage practice and its characteristics based on architectural heritage conservation—A case study of the management platform of the Shanghai Federation of Literary and Art Circles China." *Sustainability* 15 (24): 16559. https://doi.org/10.3390/su152416559.

Stojevic, I. 2019. "Village and Heritage in China: A Discussion on the Influence and Future of HeritageWork in Rural Areas." *Heritage* 2:666–680. https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage2010043.

Storino, C., P. Judite, and C. Mario. 2021. "Museology and the Construction of Its Social Dimension: Multiple Perspectives and Paths in Brazil." In *Theory of Museology Main Schools of ThoughT 1960-2000*, edited by D. Tzortzaki and S. Keramidas, Vol. 13, 335–354. Athens: The Norwegian Institute.

Su, D. 2006. "Chinese Ecomuseum:The Path of Development(中国生态博物馆的道路)." In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China*, edited by D. Su, 5–10. Beijing: Forbidden City press.

Su, D. 2008. "The Concept of the Ecomuseum and Its Practice in China." *Museum International* 60 (1–2): 29–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0033.2008.00634.x.

Su, J. 2018. "Conceptualising the Subjective Authenticity of Intangible Cultural Heritage." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24 (9): 919–937. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2018.1428662.

Sutter, G. C. 2017. "Growing Ecomuseums on the Canadian Prairies:Prospects for Intangible Cultural Heritage." In *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, edited by M. L. Stefano and P. Davis. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716404-43.

Sutter, G. C., T. Sperlich, D. Worts, R. Rivard, and L. Teather. 2016. "Fostering Cultures of Sustainability Through Community-Engaged Museums: The History and Re-Emergence of Ecomuseums in Canada and the USA." *Sustainability* 8 (1310): 1310. https://doi.org/10.3390/su8121310.

Svensson, M. 2011. "Cultural Heritage Protection in the People's Republic of China: Preservation Policies, Institutions, Laws, and Enforcement in Zhejiang." In *Making Law Work: Chinese Laws in Context*, edited by M. Burell and M. Svensson, 225–266. New York: Cornell University Press.

Svensson, M. 2016. "Evolving and Contested Cultural Heritage in China: The Tural Heritage Scape." In *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia*, edited by A. Mastsuda and L. E. Mengoni, 31–46. London: Ubiquity Press. https://doi.org/10.5334/baz.c.

Tong, Y.-Q., and H.-D. Ma. 2009. "Community Participation - the Key to Protection for Rural Cultural Heritage (社区参与-促进农村文化遗产保护之关键)." *Rural Economy* 25 (12): 109–112.

Tzortzaki, D. 2021. "School of Thought: The Map and the Stratum." In *Theory of Museology Main Schools of ThoughT 1960–2000*, edited by D. Tzortzaki and S. Keramidas, 17–32. Athens: The Norwegian Institute.

Tzortzaki, D., and S. Keramidas, eds. 2021. *Theory of Museology Main Schools of ThoughT 1960–2000*. Athens: The Norwegian Institute.

Uzzell, D. 2009. "Where is the Discipline in Heritage Studies? A View from Environmental Psychology." In *Heritage Studies: Methods and Approaches*, edited by M. L. S. Sørensen and J. Carman, 326–333. Abing and New York: Routledge.

Varine, H. D. 2006a. "Ecomuseology and Sustainable Development." In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China2*, edited by D. Su, 83–87. Beijing: Forbidden City press.

Varine, H. D. 2006b. "The Origins of the New Museology Concept and of the Ecomuseum Word and Conept, in the 1960s and the 1970s." In *Communication and Exploration: Papers of the International Ecomuseum Forum, Guizhou, China*, edited by D. Su, 72–79. Beijing: Forbidden City press.

Wertsch, J. V. 2002. *Voices of Collective Remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Winter, T. 2013. "Clarifying the Critical in Critical Heritage Studies." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19 (6): 532–545. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2012.720997.

Wu, X., and Q. Yue. 2020. "How Does the Imperial Power Descend to the County: An 'Ancient Sample' of Chinese Community Governance (皇权如何下县: 中国社区治理的'古代样本')." *Academics* 269 (10): 120–129. https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1002-1698.2020.10.013.

Xu, J. 2007. "Community Participation in Ethnic Minority Cultural Heritage Management in China: A Case Study of Xianrendong Ethnic Cultural and Ecological Village." *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 18:148–160. https://doi.org/10.5334/pia.307.

Yang, F. 2016. "Ethnic Heritage in Yunnan: Contradictions and Challenges." In *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia*, edited by A. Matsuda and L. E. Mengoni, 87–102. London: Ubiquity Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/baz.e.

Yi, S. H. 2010. "The Comparison of the First and the Second Generation of Chinese Ecomuseums."

Yin, K. 2016. "Utopian Imagination: The Idea of Multicultural and Ecomuseum (乌托邦的想象: 多元文化与生态博物馆思想)." *Chinese Museum* (4): 5–11. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:GBWG.0.2016-04-003.

Yin, K. 2019. *Ecomuseum: Thought, Theory and Practice (生态博物馆:思想、理论与实践)*. Beijing: Science Press.

Yu, C. 2019. "Community Participation: A New Approach to the Inheritance and Protection of Marine Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Yantai Fishing Lantern Festival (社区参与: 海洋非物质文化遗产传承与保护新路径: 以烟台渔灯节为例)." *Chinese Marine Sociology Research* 7: 199–207. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:SWSY.0.2019-00-017.

Zhang, F. 2019. "The Development Process and Modern Trend of Rural Community Governance Since the Foundation of the New China(新中国成立以来农村社区治理的 发展进程与现代走向)." *Rural Economy and Science Technology* 30 (21): 255–257.

Zhang, G., and S. Liu. 2011. "Comparison of Cultural Heritage Management Between China and Other Countries (中外文化遗产管理模式比较研究)." *Fujian Forum: Humanities and Social Sciences* 4: 60–65. https://doi.org/CNKI:SUN:FJLW.0.2011-04-011.

Zhang, W. 2011. "Institutions of Cultural Relics Preservation in Modern China and Their Effect (近代以来中国文物保护制度的实践及效果分析)." *Journal of National Museum of China* 6 (95): 138–149.

Zhao, M. 2011. "Construction and Application of Digital Eco-Museum for Five Gongdiao of Haizhou (海州五大宫调数字化生态博物馆的建设与运用)." *Journal of Huaihai Institute of Technology (Humanities & Social Sciences Edition)* 9 (11): 22–25. https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1008-3499.2011.11.009.

Zhao, M., Z. Cheng, A. Ni, and H. Xu. 2014. "Digital Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Construction of Eco-Museum: A Case Study of the Protection of Five Gong Mode in Haizhou (非物质文化遗产数字化保护与生态博物馆建设——以海州五大宫调保护为例)." *Journal of Huaihai Institute of Technology (Humanities & Social Sciences Edition)* 12 (7): 71–75. https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.2095-333x.201407022.