Understanding Authenticity in Cultural Heritage: China and Beyond

Hybrid conference, to be held 22-24 June 2022 at Mordan Hall, St Hugh's College, Oxford

Organizers: Dr Christopher J. Foster (SOAS) and Dr Anke Hein (Oxford)

Programme

Wednesday, 22 June, 2022

Arrival of participants in Oxford

Thursday, 23 June, 2022

8:30-9:00 Welcome Tea and Coffee

9:00-9:10 Christopher J. Foster (SOAS) and Anke Hein (Oxford): Welcome Remarks

9:10-9:40 Susan Whitfield (Sainsbury Institute): Introductory Remarks

Session I: Material Culture

9:40-9:50 Anke Hein (Oxford): Modern Majiayao: Recreation, Imitation, Forgeries?

9:50-10:00 Michael Rowlands (UCL): Fetishism, Authenticity, and the Spirit of Substances

10:00-10:10 Comments by Anke Hein on Michael Rowland's paper

10:10-10:20 Comments by Michael Rowlands on Anke Hein's paper

10:20-10:40 General Discussion

10:40-11:00 Tea Break

Session II: Heritage Curation

11:00-11:10 Oliver Cox (Oxford): Authentic Spaces and/or Authentic Experiences: Balancing Competing Authenticities in the British Country House

11:10-11:20 Plácido González Martínez (Tongji University): From Taipingqiao to Yidahuizhi: Curating Authenticity in the Heritage Assemblage of Xintiandi.

11:20-11:30 Comments by Oliver Cox on Plácido González Martínez' paper

11:30-11:40 Comments by Plácido González Martínez on Oliver Cox' paper

11:40-12:00 General Discussion

12:00-12:10 Tea break

<u>Session III: Intangible Heritage</u>

12:10-12:20 Philipp Demgenski (Zhejiang University): Exhibiting Intangible Cultural Heritage in China: Commercialisation, Authenticity, and the Purpose of Safeguarding

12:20-12:30 Chiara Bortolotto (CY Cergy Paris Université - CY Advanced Studies): The Authenticity Taboo: UNESCO, ICH, and Shifting Heritage Paradigms

12:30-12:40 Comments by Philipp Demgenski on Chiara Borolotto's paper

12:40-1:00 Comments by Chiara Borolotto on Hpilipp Demgenski's paper

1:00 Lunch

Friday, 24 June, 2022

9:00-9:30 Welcome Tea and Coffee

<u>Session III: Built Heritage:</u>

9:30-9:40 John Pendlebury and Merve Gokcu (Newcastle University): A Short History of Authenticity

9:40-9:50 Wang Yiwen (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University): Built Heritage, Civic Pride, and Impressionist Authenticity: the (Re)construction of the Historic(al) Walled Cities in China

9:50-10:00 Comments by John Pendlebury and Merve Gokcu on Wang Yiwen's paper

10:00-10:10 Comments by Wang Yiwen on paper by John Pendlebury and Merve Gokcu

10:10-10:30 General Discussion

10:30-10:50 Tea Break

<u>Session VII: Textual classics</u>

10:50-11:00 Christopher J. Foster (SOAS): The Yuejing (Classic of Music) as an Apologetic for Modernizing China

11:00-11:10 Alfred Hiatt (Queen Mary University of London): Classics and Forgery in the European Middle Ages

11:10-11:20 Comments by Christopher J. Foster on Alfred Hiatt's paper

11:20-11:30 Comments by Alfred Hiatt on Christopher J. Foster's paper

11:30-11:50 General Discussions

11:50-12:00 Tea Break

Session VIII: Youth Movements

12:00-12:10 Fabrizio Fenghi (Brown University): The Authenticity of Experience: Contemporary Russian Art and Radical Politics

12:10-12:20 Andrew Law (Newcastle University): Narratives of Han Ethnic, Moral, and Behavioural Decline: the Contemporary *Hanfu* Movement and Discourses of Authenticity

12:20-12:30 Comments by Fabrizio Fenghi on Andrew Law's paper

12:30-12:40 Comments by Andrew Law on Fabrizio Fenghi's paper

12:40-1:00 General Discussions

1:00-1:30 Discussion on next steps with lunch

Abstracts

Modern Majiayao: Recreation, Imitation, Forgeries?

Anke Hein (Oxford)

The Neolithic painted pottery of the Majiayao style found in Northwest China is widely known for its high-level craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal. When the Swedish geologist Johan Gunnar Andersson commenced his field research in Gansu in the 1920s, conducting excavations but also offering to pay locals to bring him painted vessels of that style, he unwittingly caused a bout of looting as well as "enhancement" of undecorated pots with Majiayao-style motives by locals wishing to provide what the foreigner had asked for. While Andersson soon realized the issue and asked people to stop both practices, it had already become known that vessels of a certain appearance could fetch a good price. Decades later, when more systematic archaeological work in that region started - work which continues until the present day, though with various interruptions due to political upheaval, lack of funds, and other issues - soon local potters came up with a business idea. They started to create imitations for tourists to buy, and on occasion also made objects to order or copies of archaeological finds that they aged carefully.

Based on interviews and observations conducted at various workshops in southeast Gansu, this paper explores concepts of authenticity, craftmanship, and cultural heritage as perceived, created, and recreated by modern potters living near archaeological sites. Simultaneously, the paper also considers the interplay between archaeological work and creation of a broad range of object types including souvenirs, imitations, copies, forgeries, and even entirely new artistic styles, interweaving the ancient and the modern.

Fetishism, Authenticity and the Spirit of Substances

Michael Rowlands (UCL)

William Pietz writing on the origin of the concept of fetishism in European thought, in particular in the 19th century, saw it as an idea emerging historically from the entanglement of cross-cultural trade between European and Africans on the West African coast. Fetishes were actual objects that Africans believed had an essential power to act and function for good or bad depending on their perception of the actions of humans . The fetish is irreducibly material and was contrasted by Europeans to the idol or animisim which represented a spirit 'somewhere else' possessing an object. Analogues of ideas of the fetish discovered in Africa with Christianity /saints relics were for Europeans, as Peter Pels describes, compatible to links with ideas of rarities or curiosities in the creation of museums (cabinets of curiosities). The idea of the irreducible materiality of the fetish became enlarged in European thought. The entanglement of the idea of the fetish with moral and emotional longing for authenticity , (cf Bendix,Benjamin,Trilling etc) , as a search for the essence or substance of an object , its non –reproducibility was somehow bound up in these entanglements (Marx and Freud on the concept of the commodity fetish etc). My aim will be to relate this to African indigenous ideas

of the irreducible materiality of the object –how they differ and create alternative understandings of authenticity .

Authentic Spaces and/or Authentic Experiences: Balancing Competing Authenticities in the British Country House

Oliver Cox (Oxford)

This paper addresses a strategic innovation challenge facing organisations that open country houses to the public: how to transform the country house visitor experience from passive consumption behind roped areas to active engagement with these dynamic and inspiring historical spaces and collections. This transformation is likely to be rooted in two interlocking questions: 1) how can heritage organisations shift from explaining and interpreting the amalgam of material evidence of what is left to what is meaningful or significant? 2) what are the research and knowledge exchange mechanisms required to enable broader intellectual and physical access to country houses and ensure public benefit?

With more than 50 million visits to country houses in 2019, and robust post-COVID visitor numbers in 2020 and 2021, it might seem that the country house sector is in rude health. However, these figures mask fundamental issues in the way that visitors intellectually and physically access historic interiors and historic collections: from the passivity of most visits to country houses (keeping behind ropes and viewing platforms, looking but not touching; being spoken to rather than engaged with), through to the challenges facing curators and heritage professionals in communicating layered and multiple significances in-situ often without those tools commonly used elsewhere in the sector (e.g. object labels). Methods and techniques for interpreting these spaces have barely shifted from the 1950s, with most visits retaining an emphasis on the lives and loves of the heteronormative dynastic family, despite the significant innovations in the academic research landscape that have reconceptualised the country house as a nodal point in local, regional, national and international histories; major changes in visitor demographics and expectations as country houses have become part of the experience economy; as well as the enormous potential presented by developments in augmented and mixed-reality technologies. There is a dissonance between the academic and curatorial emphasis on 'animating' spaces – based on an understanding that country houses are environments that are always evolving, driven by fluid interactions between objects, people and place – and a dominant public perception that sees country houses as ossified sites with little contemporary relevance.

The use of charitable funds – in the case of the National Trust – to conserve, research and interpret what were once private spaces, requires a significant shift in interpretation and display practices. To achieve wider public benefit requires a specific form of authenticity that not only acknowledges the constraints posed by the historic fabric of the buildings themselves, but also engages with potential challenges posed by inherited curatorial practices, alongside the question of audience perceptions and expectations. The rural location of these sites adds an extra level of urgency, as publically-accessible country houses can be reconfigured as locations for rural regeneration and anchor points for the development of place-based partnerships that create new intellectual, cultural, community and economic opportunities, in areas of the UK that currently lack a significant cultural offering.

From Taipingqiao to Yidahuizhi: Curating Authenticity in the Heritage Assemblage of Xintiandi

Plácido González Martínez (Tongji University)

An outcome of material, temporal and social layering, the definition of authenticity of the built environment is challenged in contexts of rapid economic change and strong political control like China, and remains a pending question from the perspective of heritage studies. Shanghai's Xintiandi is an outstanding case study for this question, due to the harmonious convergence of political and economic interests. As birthplace of the Communist Party of China, it is highly significant for the production of official narratives, both at local and national level. As first case of heritage-led redevelopment in Shanghai, it constitutes a turning point in the appreciation of the historic built environment as entrepreneurial resource. An ongoing project that started in 1996, the curation of Xintiandi's authenticity is a highly sophisticated process, which has undergone different stages: from its departure point as Shanghai lilong neighbourhood (Taipingqiao); through its first formulation as redeveloped open-air shopping quarter (Xintiandi); to its rising role as political memorial (Yidahuizhi·Xintiandi). Using discourse analysis, site observation and semi-structured interviews, we will analyse the spatial, material and discursive strategies supporting the changes in Xintiandi's authenticity in these different stages. We will argue that authenticity is a dynamic concept that evolves in time according to changes in the power balance that produces the built environment, from the fresh entrepreneurial atmosphere of its early years to the severe monumental spirit of recent times.

Exhibiting Intangible Cultural Heritage in China: Commercialisation, Authenticity and the Purpose of Safeguarding

Philipp Demgenski (Zhejiang University)

The notion of authenticity is not part of the official definition of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as we find it in the UNESCO 2003 Convention. This is because the ICH communities themselves and not external experts are to define heritage, imbue it with meaning and value and work towards its safeguarding and management. In reality, however, the so-called communities often use their respective ICH as an economic resource to make profit. Such usages in turn raise concerns about the loss of cultural integrity, decontextualisation and over-commercialisation and so, authenticity does continue to be an implicit idea in the ICH safeguarding discourse, often creating a sense of malaise among international ICH actors and administrators. In China, the situation is different. Here, both authenticity and commercial uses of ICH are much less seen as taboo concepts. Authenticity is, for example, written into domestic ICH laws. One area that makes this particularly salient is that of China's ICH exhibitions. As I show in this paper, display premises, exhibition spaces and museums that specialize in putting ICH on the public stage do lead to the fossilisation, commercialisation and decontextualisation of ICH. But so-called ICH transmitters embrace the opportunities that they get from this and regard display, performances and for-profit uses of their ICH at the very least as a source of pride and mostly also explicitly as a form of (economic) empowerment. Officials, scholars and ICH experts in China do debate the potentially adverse effects of exhibiting ICH, but they do not face the same malaise as their international counterparts, as they have no reservations

against using ideas of authenticity and cultural integrity and they often also acknowledge the intrinsically commercial character of ICH, even calling this a most apt form of keeping culture alive. The broader question that I wish to raise in dialogue with Chiara Bortolotto's research is what and how the situation in China may inform international debates about the nature and purpose of ICH safeguarding.

The Authenticity Taboo: UNESCO, ICH and Shifting Heritage Paradigms

Chiara Bortolotto (CY Cergy Paris Université)

Based on an ethnography of the Organs of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), this paper describes the controversies spurred by references to authenticity and highlights the discrepancies between the UNESCO doxa and local representations of heritage reflected in the nomination forms crafted by national heritage experts for the inscription of a given item on the UNESCO lists. Reflecting deconstructionist approaches in social sciences and defining ICH as being "constantly recreated", the UNESCO ICH regime banns authenticity and its associated concepts, spanning from "original" to "unique". Bewildering heritage experts trained in recognizing and preserving authenticity, this move upsets at the same time deep seated representations of heritage among heritage entrepreneurs. While advocating the idea that "communities are at the heart of the Convention" and entrusting them with the authority to recognize particular cultural practices as heritage, the UNESCO ICH authorized heritage discourse is at odds with their inclination for authenticity narratives, instrumental for the social uses of heritage, including on the commercial and political level. In dialogue with Philipp Demgenski's paper I will describe how the implementation of the ICH Convention lives with its contradictions in combining the quintessence of heritage, namely the social construction of authenticity, with the ideal of a de-essentialized heritage.

A Short History of Authenticity

John Pendlebury (Newcastle) & Merve Gokcu (Newcastle)

Possibly the most totemic international conservation statement of all, the Venice Charter of 1964, opens with this statement:

Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity (emphasis added).

The concept of authenticity was central to the development of the modern conservation movement. This presentation will briefly look at this history in relation to the UK, together with how the concept has evolved and been problemitised by scholarship and practice in recent decades.

Built Heritage, Civic Pride and Impressionist Authenticity: the (Re)construction of the Historic(al) Walled‑Cities in China

Wang Yiwen (Xi'an Jiaotong University)

The last decade in China has witnessed an unprecedented number of reconstruction projects in numerous historic cities, towns, and villages. Debatably, this national trend toward reconstruction was spearheaded by the initiatives of some political leaders to construct the historical city walls to conjure up the images of a walled city. To date, almost all the national historic cities have endeavoured to preserve and restore the remaining walls or reconstruct or reinvent their historical city walls. The number of fabricated "walled cities" has become innumerable.

To understand China's cultural nuance in conceptualising authenticity, this paper draws on historical maps, photography, and satellite images to examine the city wall reconstruction phenomenon in China over the last decade. It dismisses two major criticisms over China's reconstruction: reconstruction does not represent a public demand but a political decision; reconstruction entails much conjecture and interpretation as no archival documents are available after the Cultural Revolution.

Empirically, structured interviews will be conducted with local citizen users around the city walls in Suzhou to capture the perceived and experienced authenticity of the reconstructed wall and to reveal the extent to which it creates a sense of civic pride despite its dubious authenticity. The paper argues that the current trend of reconstruction is a continuation of traditional conservation practices, which represents the application of an implicit concept of "impressionist authenticity" embedded in both Chinese artwork and historic monument conservation.

The *Yuejing* (*Classic of Music*) as an Apologetic for Modernizing China

Chris Foster (SOAS)

In works dating to the Warring States period (5th cen.-3rd cen. BCE), such as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Xunzi* 荀子, or the newly unearthed *Xingzimingchu* 性自命出, the term "music (*yue* 樂)" is listed alongside other authoritative activities and traditions, including those of the "odes (*shi* 詩)," "documents (*shu* 書)," "rites (*li* 禮)," "springs and autumns annals (*chunqiu* 春秋)," and "changes (*yi* 易)." During the first enduring empire in China, the Han dynasty, all of these latter traditions came to be embodied in authoritative texts (of the same or similar titles), called the classics. Curiously, however, no equivalent classic for "music" materialized within that canon. Most sinologists agree that a *Classic of Music* never existed, and therefore discussion of this work is largely absent in academic treatments of the Confucian classics. Yet a popular myth persists, claiming that there once was a *Classic of Music*, purged by the First Emperor of Qin and lost for over two millennia. This is the story given, for instance, in the December 12th, 1936 issue of the *Siking Mass* newspaper, when it announces the remarkable discovery of the *Gu Yuejing* 古樂經, a forgery now found in the rare *Qingzhaotang* 青照堂 collectanea. My talk introduces this *Gu Yuejing* and examines its connection to the *Siking Mass* report. Lacking a secure provenance, as is the case with the study of most forgeries, I turn to reception history

and investigate why the *Gu Yuejing* may have appealed to early Republican audiences. Whether in response to the Doubting Antiquity movement, initiated by figures like Hu Shi 胡適 and Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, or as a product of encroaching foreign powers and the internal strife between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Nationalist Party of China (KMT), the "discovery" of a *Classic of Music* would have served not only to feed nationalistic sentiments, but also to offer a "missing technology" of sorts, promising a restoration of China's former glory.

Classics and Forgery in the European Middle Ages

Alfred Hiatt (Queen Mary)

Were classics forged in Europe during the Middle Ages (i.e. roughly 500-1500 CE)? The answer to this question is yes, but both terms must be treated with caution. The concept of a 'classic' in the sense of a canonical work of ancient literature that formed a bedrock of pedagogy and more generally culture certainly existed, as did the notion of a forgery. Yet it can be argued that the intersection of the two was relatively rare. 'Forgeries' of classical literary texts, when not simply cases of mis-attribution, turn out on inspection to exist on a spectrum that includes imitation, pastiche, and parody. They are at times so outlandishly dissimilar to the genuine works of their purported authors as to make their attribution seem close to incredible. On the other hand, taking such works seriously requires us to expand our notions of what constituted a 'classic' in the Middle Ages to include apocryphal and pseudonymous material, and to examine the ways in which such material interacted with genuinely ancient work. Through reference to the 'Appendix Vergiliana' and the 'Appendix Ovidiana' -- that is, to works incorrectly attributed to the Roman poets Virgil and Ovid during the Middle Ages -- this contribution will ask what medieval forgeries of classics have to tell us about pre-modern notions of authenticity and literary value.

The Authenticity of Experience: Contemporary Russian Art and Radical Politics

Fabrizio Fenghi (Brown University)

Abstract: My paper focuses on the concept of authenticity of experience in general, and physical experience in particular, in contemporary Russian art and politics, seen primarily as a form of resistance against the commodification and "virtualization" of reality that many Russian writers, artists, and political activists believe occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union. Drawing on examples from different cultural spheres, I will show how authenticity in post-Soviet Russia is not primarily associated with uniqueness or originality, but rather with the incommunicable, non-reproducible, and immediate nature of experience. The clearest example of this is the testimony of radical political activists that I interviewed during my fieldwork, who would romanticize war and other extreme or dangerous experiences (for instance, public protests) as a way of reclaiming political agency, or would favor performance over traditional art forms, namely because it created unique experiences or rituals that could not be reproduced or commodified. Similarly, the emergence of "contemporary art" in Russia during the 1990s—most notably, in the case of Moscow Actionism—was marked by shocking, provocative, and at times violent or overtly sexual public performances which blurred the boundaries between art and radical action. Even in the case of Russian postmodernist fiction, which by and large

denies the existence of physical reality and the possibility of a historical tradition, only the performance of rituals provides characters with a momentary sense of collective belonging. On the basis of these examples, I will argue that authenticity, in the form of a kind of Heideggerian presence or indivisibility of subject and object, plays an important role in defining specifically post-Soviet conceptions of both creative and political processes.

Narratives of Han Ethnic, Moral, and Behavioural Decline: The Contemporary Hanfu Movement and Discourses of Authenticity

Andrew M Law (Newcastle)

In the last 20 years, a growing body of academic work has emerged on youth cultures in China. Particularly, interlocutors have discussed the issue of Chinese youth cultures through binaries of resistance and compliance. Replacing ideas of 'youth culture' with the notion of 'generational culture', and binaries of resistance and/or compliance with notions of alternative subjectivities and hegemony, this paper looks at a generational culture in China known as the Hanfu movement. It is argued that this movement, which is composed, of young adults (aged approximately between 15-40), positions the recent Chinese past (from the Qing dynasty to the present) through narratives of Han ethnic and moral and behavioural decline. In doing so, as we shall suggest, the Hanfu movement simultaneously draws upon discourses of Han-ness and imaginaries of a classical and Confucianist China to rejuvenate the present. In constructing these rejuvenation discourses, we suggest that the movement builds ideas of 'authenticity' through narratives of Han identity, morality and etiquette.