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Creating ‘Heritage’ in Theme Parks:

The Case of Newly Constructed Ancient Towns in China

(テーマパークにおける「遺産」の創造：中国の新築古鎮を例に)

Doctoral thesis summary

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1 Abstract

Theme parks have become more than a metaphor used by academics to evaluate the invention of heritage, but an ordering and operating form adopted by practitioners for heritage practices. The convergence of heritage and theme parks nowadays has an impact on the ontological and epistemic reality. This study is a critical enquiry that develops knowledge about ontological and axiological aspects of heritage-theme park combinations by unravelling the ‘heritage’-creating process in Gubei Water Town (hereafter, GBWT), a newly constructed ancient town (hereafter, NCAT) in China.

GBWT has been built on the original site of Simatai Village, an old village at the foot of Simatai Great Wall. The findings reveal that the authentication of GBWT as a historical town is accompanied by the de-authentication of Simatai Village. The development of GBWT is underpinned by political and managerial rationales. Consequently, rather than local cultures of Simatai Village, common knowledge about traditional China is represented. Despite that GBWT is designed as a theme park, it has been widely appreciated as a site that revitalises traditional culture and activates heritage. As a result, local cultures are homogenised with grand narratives.

In theorising such a ‘heritage’-creating process, critical realism is applied in two ways. Firstly, the intransitive-transitive distinction of reality is introduced to the discussion of authenticity. A conceptual model of object authenticity is proposed to theorise the ontological existence of GBWT and NCATs. Secondly, stratified ontology, which divides reality into empirical, actual, and real domains, is drawn upon to conceptualise the emergence of GBWT and NCATs. Interactions among actors, discourses, and extra-discursive elements are sorted out and thereby axiological aspects are clarified. This study shows how and why heritage is being unmade and remade and thereby inspires people to reflect upon who they are being made into and what kind of heritage that should be preserved for future generations.

2 Summary of thesis

The thesis is composed of 11 chapters. Chapters 2-3 provide literature reviews and conclude the research objective. Chapters 4-6 show how I approach the research objective by presenting paradigmatic, theoretical, and methodological assumptions. Chapters 7-10 display the analysis and summarise the results. Chapter 11 concludes the study.

Chapters 2-3

Chapter 2 shows the rationale underpinning the convergence of heritage and theme parks. In doing this, I analyse the transformations in heritage studies and theme park studies. I shall show that both the realms have shifted from focusing on hegemonic aspects to emancipative aspects. Also, both heritage and theme parks have been increasingly regarded as a fluid process that interweaves with objectives, desires, and actions of different actors. This tendency makes the two realms converge with other fields, and accordingly, heritage-theme park combinations have emerged. Against this background, I suggest the significance of exploring ontological and axiological aspects of heritage-theme park combinations.

Chapter 3 further narrows the research objective by providing literature reviews of heritage-theme park combinations and NCATs. I categorise three orientations for integrating heritage and theme parks, which are named *themed heritage*, *historical and cultural theme parks*, and *heritage-themed parks*. The categorisation is made based on dominant values underpinning each orientation. The first orientation emphasises cultural values of heritage, whereas the second orientation focuses on commercial and political utilities of heritage. This study primarily investigates the third orientation because it conflates heritage and cultural representations by creating new 'heritage'. In this case, political, commercial, and cultural values are further interweaved with each other.

As an example of the third orientation, the literature on NCATs is summarised. I identify three approaches used to investigate NCATs, which are *historical and cultural theme parks*, *imitated heritage sites*, and *the heritage-creating agency*. I follow the third approach because the first two approaches neglect political, social, and cultural influences of NCATs and fail to consider the interaction between NCATs and the rest of the world. To sum up, this study examines ontological and axiological aspects of heritage-theme park combinations by analysing the ‘heritage’-creating process in NCATs.

Chapters 4-6

Critical Realism (hereafter, CR) is adopted in this study. As postmodernism and social constructionism are two commonly used paradigms in investigations on NCATs, **Chapter 4** shows why CR is chosen by comparing the three paradigms. I situate them on the realism-relativism continuum. Postmodernism and social constructionism take the side of relativism. In contrast, CR is situated between realism and relativism because it embraces ontological realism and epistemic relativism. I suggest that CR agrees with postmodernist and social constructionist critiques over realism but CR does not give up exploring the objective world. An independent reality is necessary for exploring ontological and axiological aspects of NCATs.

Chapter 5 shows how CR works with authenticity and authentication, the theories I use in this study. I especially focus on object authenticity, the authenticity of toured objects. Based on critical realist assumptions, object authenticity is understood as the negotiation between human and the objective world. I further propose a conceptual model of object authenticity that indicates the intransitive dimension of objects and consists of inherent property and discourse. Based on this conceptual model, I consider

the emergence of an authentic object. Inspired by Cohen & Cohen (2012)¹'s conceptualisation of hot and cool authentication, I suggest that object authenticity can be constructed with four authentication modes, which are the top-down material mode, the top-down discursive mode, the bottom-up material mode, and the bottom-up discursive mode.

Chapter 6 presents the methodological assumptions by clarifying how the 'heritage'-creating process can be investigated with critical discourse analysis (hereafter, CDA). I suggest that the analysis of the 'heritage'-creating process in NCATs should include the interaction between national discourses and local practices and also the interplay between discursive and extra-discursive elements of NCATs. I further introduce three methods: case study, discourse analysis, and thematic analysis. A case study of GBWT is conducted for the investigation of local practices in NCATs. Discourse analysis is used throughout the whole research procedure. Both linguistic and visual approaches are applied to analyse texts, spaces, and images. Thematic analysis is only applied to summarise tourists' perceptual patterns of GBWT.

Chapters 7-11

Chapter 7 examines the emergence of NCATs on the national level. I identify an emerging national discourse that appreciates cultural transformation and heritage activation as two approaches to heritage preservation. Based on the new national discourse, I unravel how NCATs that were built as theme parks have been increasingly regarded as one type of heritage site. Specifically, various values including, political values of the central government, cultural values about intangible heritage and heritage reconstruction, and commercial values of tourism developers, are identified influencing such a transformation. However, actual consequences of the negotiation between

¹ Cohen, E., & Cohen, S. A. (2012). Authentication: Hot and cool. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(3), 1295–1314.

different values need to be analysed contextually.

Chapters 8-10 investigate the 'heritage'-creating process at GBWT. **Chapter 8** shows the official practices at GBWT. The local government appreciated GBWT as a project that promotes regional development. The tourism developer valued GBWT as a tourism development. Recently, with the influence of the new national discourse, both the stakeholders started to regard GBWT as an extension of the Simatai Great Wall. Therefore, although GBWT was materially designed as a theme park, it has been discursively authenticated as a 'heritage' site. Thereby, political goodness for the local government and commercial goodness for the tourism developer are camouflaged with cultural values of the Simatai Great Wall.

Chapters 9-10 show the unofficial practices about GBWT. **Chapter 9** presents how tourism bloggers perceive and authenticate GBWT on social media platforms. I show that tourism bloggers follow the official interpretation and authenticate GBWT as a historical site. However, as some tourism bloggers have business cooperation with the tourism developer and social media platforms, opinions on social media should not be taken as actual experiences of tourists because they may be created based on commercial values.

As an exploration of the lived reality at GBWT, **Chapter 10** presents actual experiences of tourists and opinions of local residents. It shows that tourism blogs create the reality in a privileged way because some of my interviewees take GBWT as a pure artificial attraction. Also, Simatai Villagers, the original residents at the foot of the Simatai Great Wall, disagree with the authentication of GBWT. However, their claims can hardly be heard due to their marginalisation in the tourism market. Based on these results, I argue that the authenticating process is not only about the social acceptance of GBWT but also about the social oblivion of Simatai Village.

By drawing together results presented in chapters 7-10, **Chapter 11** shows that

although GBWT is officially regarded as a site that revitalises traditional culture and activates heritage, it actually leads to the disappearance of the local culture of Simatai Village and the Simatai Great Wall. Such a distorted consequence is directly caused by the inconsistency between inherent property and discourses of GBWT. However, the underlying reason should be ascribed to the incompatibility between different axiological aspects of GBWT, including political goodness for the government, commercial goodness for the tourism developer, and cultural goodness for Simatai Villagers.

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