
CONFERENCES

Heritage across Borders – Conference on Critical Heritage **4th Biennial Conference of the Association of Critical Heritage** **Studies in Hangzhou, China, 1–6 September 2018** ***Maija Mäki & Helena Ruotsala***

The fourth biennial conference of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies gathered over 800 participants in Hangzhou, China, last August. Earlier, the conference has been organized in Canberra in 2014, in Montreal in 2016, and in Gothenburg in 2012, where the preliminary manifesto of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies was launched. The next conference will be held in London in 2020 with a future-oriented theme.

The recent and broad global rise of heritage studies and the heritage industry has been evident in many areas and countries, also crossing borders and frontiers. During the conference, the participants could choose from 520 papers presented in 84 different sessions. In addition to these, there were six keynote or public lectures. Some of the keynote lectures concentrated on special themes, such as juridical questions or cityscapes. Out of these lectures, one in particular stuck in our minds, and not least because the speaker ventured to criticize China. Professor emeritus Nelson H. Graburn spoke about how tourism uses cultural heritage in different countries, and what tourism and indigenous research means for local inhabitants or indigenous people. In his lecture “Minority Empowerment in Tourism and Heritage Research in Multicultural Nations,” Graburn painted a somewhat too positive picture of indigenous tourism in Finland and Scandinavia. He gave several examples of indigenous tourism and research in Europe, America, and Asia, and told that many minority people are doing research in heritage culture or heritage tourism in China. If it really is so, we can only ask. He also touched the question of indigenous art and tourism. According to him, there is still very much to do in the tourism industry, and especially native people bear a huge responsibility in this. His lecture was stimulating, and there was no self-censorship even though he was speaking in China.

Another memorable keynote paper, “Critique a Heritage: The Cultural Significance of Dispute and its Implications for Heritage Research,” was given by professor Michael Herzfeld. According to him, those who work with heritage issues have the possibility to raise questions concerning heritage and its safeguarding from the point of view of local people. They have the power and also the responsibility not to use heritage in creating fake reality. However,

he criticized applied anthropology, fearing that it may become “dirty anthropology.” It was interesting to also listen to Chinese keynotes, because it was possible to read the official Chinese message between the lines of these papers.

Gender balance has been an important issue in conferences for already several decades, and it was really surprising that all the keynote speakers were male, and although they were active researchers, most of them were over 60 years old. It was unbelievable that there were no female keynote speakers in this kind of international conference. Of course, there were some women speaking on the stage, including the chair of the association, professor Lucie K. Morisset.

The venue was on the campus of Zhejiang University, which is one of the top higher education institutions in China. All the keynote lectures took place in the Zijingang Campus Theater, and the panels were held in one of the huge buildings on the campus. The distance between them was about 500 meters; on the way to lunch and dinner at the Linhu cafeteria by the Campus Theatre, it was possible to admire or marvel several groups of first-year-students, who marched, ran, and made some military-looking exercises in the campus area.

The variety of the papers was both positive and negative. Sometimes it was like having the candy store syndrome: it was difficult to choose papers that could interest you only based on the title of the panel. Many panels and papers discussed cultural heritage and borders, or border regions and nationalism. From the point of view of borders, it was possible to discuss more deeply how cultural heritage is valued, used, safeguarded, politicized, financed, designed, or destroyed. Although several panels and papers covered only Asia and especially China, all continents and most countries were presented. The Finnish participants included, besides the University of Turku, also researchers from the Universities of Jyväskylä and Helsinki. Unfortunately, the interesting panel on borders in European cultural heritage by Tuuli Lähdesmäki took place at the same time with our own presentations. In several panels, a more theoretical discussion about cultural heritage was not the main point, but it was interesting to hear about some examples concerning the use of heritage or bordering, re-bordering, or de-bordering cultural heritage in different parts of the world. The presentations which we could attend were selected based on our own personal research themes and interests. So, you can travel to China to hear about the city planning of Kiruna when the city center had to be displaced, or about the campaign of cultural heritage in the Arctic and Antarctic.

There were several sessions about the usage of heritage. Heritage provides a selective record, which demonstrates lived experienced to both locals and visitors, and provides meanings for the creation, recreation, and sustenance of identities for communities and individuals. In the panel “Heritage and Leisure/

Recreation/Tourism,” we heard examples of the tourism industry and heritage from France, Canada, São Tomé and Príncipe, Brazil, and China. Catherine Morgan-Proux from Université Clermont Auvergne spoke about the spa towns in France. Up until recently, tourists have not shown interest in spas in France, and Morgan-Proux showed how tourism developers got the inspiration to enliven the spa culture from the European sketch book genre. In the small island of São Tomé and Príncipe, efforts have been made to guide tourists to the sites of local heritage, especially the cacao and coffee industry, instead of the luxury hotel areas. Eugenio van Maanen has done several student projects in the island over the years, and he debated how sustainable tourism development and marketing can effectively be connected to local communities. One very interesting example from the perspective of locality was given by Jianping Yang, who presented a research process in the Longjing village, China. An old man from the village had asked researchers to write down the history of the village based on the documents he had collected over the years. The village is famous for tea, and there have been efforts to create a tourism industry in the village, but the locals have not had the chance to affect the development. For Finnish ethnologists, this was an interesting example of Chinese ethnography.

As already mentioned, the variety of papers was enormous. In the panel “Heritage, Museum and Nation-building,” where Ruotsala gave her speech on the transnational museum in the Tornio River Valley, the other papers also focused on museums, but they all had very different perspectives. We heard e.g. about the feedback of Chinese visitors on the art exhibition “Romantic Scotland,” which was curated by Historic Environment Scotland and was on display at the Nanjing Museum (by Andrew Manley and Yiwen Wang). Hong Wan Chan discussed how museum buildings have been designed in modern China, and how the local culture has had an impact on them. In her paper, Emma Roberts described an interesting example of how Canadian heritage objects and cultural institutions were mobilized in support of both the nation-state and UNESCO’s global community simultaneously.

The conference was well organized; there were English-speaking volunteers even in street corners to show where to go. The lunches, dinners, and tea breaks – yes, tea breaks – were also well organized, although the tea served was in teabags. The campus area seemed nice and cozy. The temperature of over 30°C made it a little bit hard to walk in the sunshine. Fortunately, the air-conditioned lecture rooms allowed us to enjoy some of the 520 papers. The traffic on the campus was silent because of e-bikes, e-mopeds, and hybrid cars. We also made a short day trip with our host, assistant professor Chuanming Sun to Westlake, 西湖, *Xī Hú*, in Chinese, which is a UNESCO World Heritage

Site. After the conference, our journey continued to Wuhan, where we met researchers from the National Research Center of Cultural Industries at the Central China Normal University. But that is a different story.

AUTHORS

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