

Inaugural Editorial

Built heritage is a prevailing concept in the international cultural heritage field, which encompasses three types of building activities, namely; architectural, urban and landscape heritage. It includes assets already listed for preservation, as well as the potential heritage that still awaits evaluation and recognition. According to its spatial range, another expression that applies for built heritage is 'historic environment', referring to urban and rural areas of specific historic significance. This spans over built heritage ensembles and specific landscape elements that stage historic cultural neighbourhoods in the city and traditional settlements in the countryside. In addition, an extended concept of 'historic environment' also encompasses those places that despite the loss of their physical fabric still exert a deep historical influence in their environments.

From the perspective of value rationality, built heritage bears witness to the national and local historic character, acting as a carrier of nostalgia and collective memory. Therefore, built heritage upholds the profound meaning of identity. As Winston Churchill once said, 'the farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see', thus built heritage appears as a set of time and space coordinates, helping people trace their way back to the past. At the end of his recent work *World Order*, Henry Alfred Kissinger also reminds: 'History offers no respite to countries that set aside their commitments or sense of identity in favour of a seemingly less arduous course'. The importance of identity, that applies to countries, societies and individuals, also relates to the attitude towards cultural heritage and its values. It goes without saying that this association also conveys 'soft power' implications.

From the perspective of instrumental rationality, built heritage cannot be duplicated, requiring instead regeneration and revitalisation. As a resource for sustainable development, built heritage can improve the social prestige and cultural quality of urban and rural areas, also enjoying the potential to become a highly profitable touristic asset. However, we should be vigilant about its overdevelopment, for it may not only compromise its conservation, but also spoil its original flavour. In his book *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (1998), American historian and geographer David Lowenthal ironized with examples of the trends towards heritage identification based on mere economic motivations. He severely criticised malpractices of the deliberate invention of history with the presumed purpose of enhancing a variety of 'heritage values'. These phenomena have been widely spread in China, and deserve serious consideration and correction through the means of heritage management and education.

It must be made clear that 'conservation' differs from 'preservation'. Heritage 'preservation' means to maintain the original site outlook and location, even its intact condition. Heritage 'conservation' has much broader connotations, which include 'safeguard', 'restoration', 'renovation', 'addition', 'reconstruction' and 'regeneration', among other related strategies. In general, 'conservation' is a kind of systematic project, ranging from information collection and processing, state assessment and evaluation; to

structural reinforcement and façade restoration. It concludes with regeneration or revitalisation design, which requires the interdisciplinary integration of culture, law, technology and management, among other majors. Therefore, should we regard the built heritage as an ageing ill body, the conservation project would be the medical process of diagnosis and treatment.

The UNESCO 'Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity' (2001) emphasises the fact that creation derives from heritage, stressing that both concepts are mutually indispensable and deserve comparable protection. And it should also be reminded that for the discipline of architecture, 'conservation' is the premise and not the purpose. 'Inheritance' does not only mean a physical transmission, but to make built heritage become a bridge between the past and today, allowing its essence inspire contemporary creation. As an ancient academic discipline, architecture can be compared to a two-sided coin; one side of which is 'heritage', involving conservation and inheritance, while the other side is 'creation', focusing on transformation and innovation. Therefore, the process of 'inheriting' creates a nexus between heritage and creation, unequivocally oriented towards the future. The relationship between the two 'sides' can thus be epitomised by four words: 'conservation', 'inheritance', 'transformation', and 'innovation'.

However, due to the accelerated process of globalisation and modernisation that characterises the 21st century, built heritage conservation becomes an ever challenging task and mission. This is especially the case for China, as the country is currently undergoing a crucial period of transition and development. In this historic context, Tongji University has gathered the scholarly elite in China and overseas to launch China's first English journal in this field: *Built Heritage*. As a platform for general international academic exchange, its significant mission includes introducing the important information regarding the research and conservation of Chinese built heritage to the world, and at the same time, to bring the most cutting-edge specialised advancements to China. Summarising, the goal of this journal is to explore a Chinese way to maintain and regenerate built heritage, keeping the essence of the past, integrating it into future development and crystallising the consensus over heritage values for humanity.



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