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WINNER OF THE PCA AWARD 2016

# Social values and archaeological heritage: an ethnographic study of the Daming Palace archaeological site (China)

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In recent years, it is progressively believed that heritage itself does not have values, but rather values are assigned to places of heritage by people. The evolution of how heritage values should be considered has deeply influenced practices and policies of archaeological sites. Social value is now increasingly emphasized in legislation and guidelines for heritage management. In China, as with many countries, the development of tourism and the influence of UNESCO World Heritage nomination have remarkably changed the relationship between archaeological heritage and local communities. Therefore, they have also re-shaped the social values ascribed to heritage by communal groups. Using the Daming Palace archaeological site as a case study, this article employs ethnographic approaches to scrutinize the impact of archaeological tourism and World Heritage designation on the social values attributed to the site by its local communities.

**Keywords:** social value, heritage, archaeological sites, tourism, China

*In anni recenti si è fatta strada l'idea che il patrimonio di per se stesso non abbia valori, ma che piuttosto i valori siano assegnati al patrimonio dalle persone. L'evoluzione della considerazione dei valori del patrimonio ha profondamente influenzato pratiche e politiche per i siti archeologici. In Cina, come in molti altri paesi, lo sviluppo del turismo e l'influenza della nomination per l'UNESCO hanno considerevolmente cambiato la relazione tra il patrimonio archeologico e le comunità locali. Dunque, hanno anche trasformato i valori sociali assegnati dai gruppi locali al patrimonio culturale. Usando il Daming Palace come caso studio, l'articolo impiega un approccio etnografico per indagare l'impatto del turismo archeologico e dell'iscrizione alla lista del Patrimonio dell'Umanità sui valori sociali attribuiti al sito da parte delle comunità locali.*

**Parole chiave:** valore sociale, patrimonio, siti archeologici, turismo, Cina

## 1. Introduction

The growing commercialization of cultural heritage draws archaeology and tourism into ever-closer contact (Meskell 2007). With the increased development of tourism, archaeological sites are exploited for their

potential as revenue generators, public education providers, national identity promoters, and for many other roles. It should be noted that these potential roles are defined by the values that a society attributes to its archaeological sites. These values, once considered to be intrinsic, are now believed to be extrinsic and dynamic, produced by the interaction between heritage and its historical, social and economic contexts (Avrami 2009). In recent years, the social values of cultural heritage have been increasingly emphasized in legislation and guidelines for heritage management (Díaz-Andreu this volume; Díaz-Andreu *et al.* forthcoming; Cooper 2008). First mentioned in the Burra Charter of 1979, social value refers to “the associations that a place has for a particular community or cultural group and the social or cultural meanings that it holds for them (Australia ICOMOS 2013, p. 4)”. It is generally recognized that heritage as a cultural process has a social effect through the way the cultural meanings of heritage are redefined and experienced by the public (Smith 2009). Decisions made in such a process have a considerable impact on the livelihood of social groups geographically or culturally related to the heritage (Shan 2015). Therefore, the decisions also reshape the social values attributed to a place of heritage by different social groups. Even though the social value of heritage has become an important consideration for policymakers, in practice it remains difficult to assess due to its contemporary and local nature (Walker 1998). This is why ethnographic methods become essentially auxiliary in producing reflexive discussions to reveal diverse meanings, opinions, and interpretations of particular social phenomena (Low 2002).

This article employs ethnographic approaches to scrutinize the influence of tourism and UNESCO World Heritage designation on the social values attributed to archaeological heritage by local communities in China, using the Daming Palace archaeological site as a case study. In China, as with most countries, a substantial number of archaeological sites are commercialized for tourist consumption. China stands out, however, on the international stage, due to the “heritage protection craze (Sigley 2010)” that has prevailed across the country since the 1980s. Such a craze has been fueled by a range of factors, among which the influence of UNESCO World Heritage List should not be underestimated. The impact of the list can be seen in the Chinese government’s arduous endeavour to transform large archaeological sites, namely the “Great Sites”, into archaeological heritage parks since the beginning of the new millennium (Gao 2016). The conversion from archaeological sites to touristic parks is a heritage process which redefines and recreates values – among them social values – that a society or sections of a society wish to preserve. In the case of China, the changes in the social values

ascribed to archaeological sites by local communities are often conspicuous, because the transformation method is geared towards relocating entire communities whose dwelling spaces share the location of the archaeological remains. Among the sites converted to heritage parks, the Daming Palace archaeological site is arguably the most emblematic, for its phenomenal size, lavish investment, and large-scale residential relocation. Using this site for reference, this article aims to examine the impact of archaeological tourism and World Heritage nomination on the social values attributed to the site by its local communities, through calibrating the perceptions and attitudes of community members of a wide social spectrum. The ultimate goal of the research is to boost further reflection on the existing practices in conservation and management of archaeological heritage both in China and worldwide.

## **2. Values and archaeological sites in China**

Before analyzing the impact of tourism and World Heritage designation on the social values attributed to the Daming Palace archaeological site by its local residents, it may be worth considering more generally the revolution of values ascribed to archaeological sites in China since 1949. In China archaeological sites are perceived as a form of “*wenwu*” (literally meaning ‘cultural properties’). The concept of *wenwu* refers to monuments and sites as unmovable cultural properties, and artefacts as movable cultural properties. Archaeological sites in China have been subjected to planning conservation since the late 1950s (Lu 2008). At first, only the intrinsic values were recognized, as shown in preliminary legislation which demanded regional governments to evaluate and categorize unmovable cultural properties based on their historical, artistic, scientific, and commemorative values (State Council 1961).

After China implemented the “Reform and Opening policy” in 1978, the tourism industry was rehabilitated, and so were several important archaeological sites. The terracotta Army of the Qin Emperor and the Yin Xu site, for example, were turned into *in situ* museums and opened to the public. Since then, archaeological sites in China have begun to carry pedagogical, recreational, social, political and economic values (Shepherd, Yu 2013). China’s formal legislation on heritage conservation — the “Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage,” first issued in 1982 and recently revised in 2013 — only addresses the historical, artistic, and scientific values of archaeological sites though (State Council 2013). However, in the last two decades the sole emphasis on the intrinsic values of archaeological sites has gradually been substituted by a growing

appreciation of extrinsic values. This is largely triggered by the economic and political benefits brought about by touristic commercialization of archaeological remains, since a popular archaeological tourist attraction serves as a source of income as well as a symbol of national/regional identity.

The UNESCO World Heritage List also has a deep influence on the consideration of values ascribed to archaeological sites. In tourism market campaigns, regional governments and private sectors perceive the title of World Heritage as an effective tool to attract tourists (Li *et al.* 2008). Besides, a successful World Heritage inscription is also considered to be a great political achievement for government officials, whose promotion largely depends on the glories produced in their administrative jurisdictions. Therefore, with the World Heritage List functioning as a catalyst, economic and political values have more often than not overshadowed other values in local government's assessment of archaeological sites. The impact of the list can also be seen in the Chinese authorities' vigorous promotion of so-called "Great Sites" (*da yizhi*) from the turn of the last century. According to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), "Great Sites" refers to ancient cultural remains of large sizes, rich contents, and prominent values, including prehistoric settlements, the ruins of cities and palaces, cemeteries, and more generally any important historical remain of human activities (SACH 2006). In other words, they are all archaeological sites. The dominant method employed to conserve Great Sites is to transform them into archaeological heritage parks, the concept of which is to combine the protection and exhibition of ancient cultural remains with their function as public spaces (Li, Quan 2007).

The numerous projects to convert Great Sites to heritage parks have been facilitated by the Chinese government's passionate pursuit of World Heritage designation. In turn, those projects have contributed to the successful inscription of several archaeological sites on the World Heritage List, such as the archaeological remains of Koguryo kingdom (inscribed in 2004), the site of Yin Xu (inscribed in 2006), the site of Xanadu (inscribed in 2012), and the sites along the Silk Roads (inscribed in 2014). The prevalence of heritage parks has prompted Chinese authorities and scholars to pay attention to issues regarding the relationship between heritage and the public (Yan 2014). It has also triggered discussions of an alternative value assessment mechanism that goes beyond the traditional focus on historical, artistic and scientific facets to include extrinsic aspects such as social and economic values (Zhang 2006; Liu 2011). Reflections on value assessment have led to changes in official documents, as shown by the "China Principles"

document. Initially published in 2002, this national instruction for conservation practices for heritage sites explicitly detailed, for the first time, the social and cultural values of heritage sites in its 2015 revision (ICOMOS China 2015).

### **3. The transition of Daming Palace Archaeological Site: from palatial complex to national heritage park**

The Daming Palace archaeological site is located on the Longshou Plateau in the north suburb of Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province. Xi'an acted as the capital city for thirteen dynasties, including the Tang Dynasty (CE 681-907) (fig. 1). During the Tang Dynasty, the Daming Palace was a magnificent imperial residence, which served as the symbol of central power for about 240 years (Yu 1997, p. 56). In its heyday, the palace covered an area of approximately 320 hectares. Three main halls divided the palace into outer, middle and inner courts, which respectively acted as venues for diplomatic events and ceremonies, an administrative centre, and the residence of the royal family. Towards the end of Tang dynasty, the palace was first burnt and then dismantled (Gao, Han 2009). In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vast region that contained the remnant



Fig. 1. Location of the Daming Palace site.

of the palace became an expanse of farmland. This scenario changed completely in 1934, when the newly constructed Long-Hai railway reached Xi'an, triggering the farmland to become a residential area. Since then, this region has been referred to as "Daobei (north of railway)." During the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), a catastrophic flood of the Yellow River in 1938 forced tens of thousands of refugees from Henan Province to move to Xi'an following the railroad line. The Daobei region became a temporary, and later permanent, shelter for many of these refugees, who soon outnumbered local residents (He 2009).

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, the Daobei region gradually developed into a mixture of urban and rural spaces, with a jumbled layout of densely populated shack-houses, farmsteads and industrial buildings. Archaeological excavations carried out between 1957 and 1960 contributed to the site's inclusion on the list of "National Important Cultural Properties under Special Preservation," issued by the State Council in 1961 (Quan 2009, p. 69). Archaeological excavation of the site stopped during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), resuming later, after 1978. From 1981 to 1987 several successive excavations explored some important remains from the site. Meanwhile, China's fast rate of urbanization triggered a boom of unregulated construction in the Daobei region, further exacerbating poor living conditions. Entering the 1990s, research into the Daming Palace was integrated with conservation for the first time. In 1994 a master plan was drawn up for the restoration of Hanyuan Hall, the main building of the palace, with funding from the UNESCO/Japanese Fund Trust (UNESCO 2003).

From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the city of Xi'an experienced a phenomenal tourist commercialization of cultural heritage. Taking advantage of its abundance of cultural sites, the government of the Qujiang New District, placed in southeastern Xi'an, took the lead in introducing a Public-Private Partnership business model in the development of historical remains, and converted several iconic ancient monuments into eye-catching tourist attractions. Under this business model, the Qujiang authorities assigned the right to the use of the land around these sites to real estate companies in exchange for substantial investments (Suo 2011). This new approach was named the "Qujiang Model," and was later applied to the Daming Palace site. In 2007, the Xi'an government initiated the "Daming Palace Heritage Area Protection and Reform" project and entrusted the Qujiang New District administrative board to be in charge. With an estimated total investment of 14 billion RMB (about 1.9 billion euro), a grandiose blueprint called "One Core, Two Wings, Three Circles and Six Districts" was formulated. In it, the park was utilized as a core to establish two urbanized zones,



three circles of commercial areas, and six districts with individual functions such as business service, high-grade residence, and community resettlement (Liu 2009).

The Xi'an government's decision of investing in a large-scale renovation project of the Daming Palace site was partially driven by the fact that the site could be incorporated as a component of the "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor" cultural heritage, a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage designation proposed by China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The construction of the park took place between 2008 and 2010, completely changing the social landscape of surrounding neighbourhoods. Within two years, 7 villages, 80 factories, 27,000 commercial tenants, and in total approximately 100,000 people were removed from the site (Xi'an Qujiang Daming Palace Heritage Area Protection and Reform Office, 2015). The park was opened for visitation on 1st October 2010, the National Day of China. The park is divided into a free entry part and a non-free part. The non-free part, which includes two museums and an archaeology discovery centre, charges 60 RMB (about 8 euro). The successful inscription of the Silk Roads on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014 granted the park with a World Heritage title.

#### **4. Articulating changes in social values: ethnographic research**

The construction of the Daming Palace Heritage Park has proved highly controversial. The park has been praised by local authorities as a successful example of innovative cultural heritage use as a means to reconcile the tension between the need for urbanization and the demand for heritage protection (Liu 2009). It is also seen as a triumph in improving the livelihood of local communities and encouraging public participation (Shan 2015). However, since its opening, the park has encountered criticism from a variety of media, including the People's Daily, an official newspaper usually representing viewpoints of the central government (Li 2010). A few Chinese archaeologists have also expressed their concerns regarding the establishment of the park as they argued that it has actually damaged the heritage remains (Zhang 2015).

Beyond the opinions from government and professional circles, little regarding the local community perception was known. In considering the development of Daming Palace archaeological site one particular question remained: how had the touristic commercialization and the World Heritage nomination influenced the social values ascribed to the site by local communities? To better answer the question, fieldwork was

conducted in July and August 2014 around the site. The fieldwork involved a qualitative approach based on the employment of ethnographic strategies, which included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and casual conversations. Since qualitative research is mainly based on theoretical principles of interpretive science, its data analysis does not usually contain the application of mathematical formulas (Sarantakos 1997). This ethnographic study thus involved an interpretive focus and aimed for the production of “thick description” in which reality could be re-conceptualized through various articulations of various individual’s viewpoints on the social phenomenon under consideration.

In total, ninety-seven individuals participated in the interview. Among them sixty-seven were from the communities relocated from the site, nineteen belonged to the neighbourhoods that live adjacent to the park, and the remaining eleven were citizens from other districts of Xi’an. The need to collect data from all three groups was because each one of them represent a distinct local community whose livelihood has a varying degree of attachment to the archaeological site. Interviewees were chosen in such a way that maximized the opinions of people with a wide range of backgrounds. In doing so, a short list of key informants was first selected with the help of two local government officials. Once data were collected from these informants, the method of snowball sampling was applied (Babbie 2010), as they were asked to assist in identifying and bringing more diversified participants in contact. The questions aimed to assess the emotional and attitudinal transition of individuals regarding the touristic commercialization of this shared cultural property. In addition, information collected through participant observation and casual conversation was used to fill in blanks left by interview data. Through data analysis, I have identified eight different themes related to the factors affecting the social values ascribed to the site by local communities, which are explained below. As it will be seen, they represent a wide range of perceptions, some positive and some negative.

#### *4.1. Improvement in physical and conceptual living environments*

Data analysis revealed that fifty-six (57.7%) interviewees expressed a generally positive attitude towards the touristic transformation of the site. One theme that emerged from their support was that the renovation project had improved both the physical and conceptual environments of the Daobei region. It should be noted that even among those who expressed objection to the project, most of them agreed that the public environment of this area had improved enormously after the reformation. Interviewees commented that before the creation of the

park, the living condition of the Daobei region was considered one of the worst in the city of Xi'an. Many interviewees shared the belief that the backwardness in their neighbourhoods was partially contributed to by the existence of the archaeological remains. According to one interviewee (a 33-year-old man from group one),

“We used to say that the Daobei region was left out of development because we had palace remains lying under our feet. Since the law said they should be protected, any industrialization around it must be restrained. In order to protect the past, we suffered in the present.”

In total thirty-one interviewees from group one stated that they were generally satisfied with their current living environment. As a previous Daobei resident (a 52-year-old man from group one) put it,

“For many years, we shared a small single-storey house with my wife's parents, and it was located near to a public toilet which smelled badly in summer. I am happy with the change. After all, who would rather live in a tumbledown neighbourhood than one with nicer environment and more facilities?”

A few interviewees commented that, apart from the improvement in living conditions, they felt that the project had also assisted in eliminating prejudice towards Daobei. They remarked that the Daobei region was always associated with negative conceptual labels such as chaotic and criminal, and they believed it had much to do with “regional discrimination”. One interviewee (a 41-year-old woman from group one) said:

“If you ask those Xi'an citizens why would they look down upon Daobei, probably they would tell you that it is because there lived too many immigrants from Henan Province. For many years people had a bias against us and it was hard to change. I support the project, because for whatever reason the government did splash out a considerable amount of money to change something that I thought was never going to change.”

#### *4.2. Archaeological heritage as a public green space for leisure and entertainment*

A second factor that many interviewees considered a positive change generated by the park was the creation of a large public green space for leisure and entertainment. Seventy-three (75.3%) interviewees argued



Fig. 2. Local residents taking activities in front of the Danfeng Gate after dusk (photo: Qian Gao).

that the construction of the park had achieved the purpose of combining the protection and exhibition of archaeological remains with the functions of cultural public space. Many of them commented that since its opening, the free-entry part of the park had become a popular place for local residents to relax and exercise in their spare time. During the course of fieldwork, I observed that after dusk the vast “Imperial Path” square between the Danfeng Gate and the Hanyuan Hall was taken up by local residents doing activities such as dancing, shuttlecock kicking and body-building (fig. 2). Other free-entry parts were also utilized by many citizens for strolling and jogging. A 51-year-old woman from group two said:

“My husband and I take a walk around the Taiye Pool in the park almost every day after dinner for the last four years. My in-law, who used to stay at home all the time, also comes to practice square dancing. I think the government should build more parks like this.”

It should be noticed that supplementary facilities intended for local communities were also provided in the park. The “Daming Palace Tang cultural street” as an example: located at the eastern side of the park, the small street provides snacks and beverages, as well as a public library and art exhibition, an open-air karaoke and cinema, and an adventure playground for children. A local resident (a 23-year-old man from group two) said:

“My friends and I hang out in this place a lot to play pool when the weather is nice. I remember Daobei used to be a dangerous neighbourhood and it is much nicer after they have built the park.”

#### *4.3. Easier access to the appreciation of archaeological heritage*

The interviews revealed a further factor that affected the social values attributed to the site by local communities. This was the consideration that the park has offered easier access to the appreciation of the archaeological heritage. This was mentioned by sixty-one (62.9%) interviewees from all three groups. Many of them argued that before the project, the archaeological remains were under increasing threat from unregulated shack-house building and indiscriminate waste disposal. One interviewee (a 32-year-old man from group three) commented that:

“A few years ago I went to look for the Daming Palace remnant. It took me hours and I felt so disappointed when seeing it. What I saw was a stone tablet with the name of the property, surrounded by piles of garbage, and there was no sign of any remains. I felt nothing historical or cultural with the scenery. It is much better the way it is protected now. Heritage like this deserves to be treated with integrity and decency.”

A few interviewees also made reference to the interpretation boards provided at each particular remnant of the site. According to one interviewee (a 47-year-old woman from group one):

“I am not particularly interested in archaeology or history, but it is hard not to pay attention to what the boards have to say, when you take a walk in the park every day. Eventually I become more knowledgeable of the site than I ever was.”

In terms of increasing the general public's interest in archaeology, a few interviewees commented on the Archaeological Discovery Centre, a key component of the park. One interviewee (39-year-old man from group three) remarked on one program named “I am a little archaeologist” provided by the centre:

“...it is an activity regularly organized by the centre for children and parents. My daughter and I took part in it once and both enjoyed it. She was taught to differentiate coins from different dynasties, and also participated in a simulated excavation. We both practiced pottery and toured around the park with a professional guide. It was a good experience.”

#### *4.4. Discontentment with the development model and cost*

In contrast with the interviewees' support for the benefits that had been brought by the project, substantial opposition was also observed in the way local residents perceived the changes. Overall forty-one (42.3%) interviewees expressed a critical attitude towards the touristic transformation of the site. One theme common to most interviewees who showed discontentment was objection to the development model. According to many of these interviewees, they believed that the true motivation behind the project was economic profitability in real estate development. According to one interviewee (a 43-year-old man from group two):

"...it is not that we do not support the utilization of archaeological sites, or the reformation of backward areas. It is just we do not approve how it has been done. The Qujiang model is clearly a business approach that uses heritage protection as an excuse to make money in real estate. Since the model was successful in increasing the land price of Qujiang and benefiting a lot of government officials, they have transplanted it to the Daming Palace site. The authorities may call it reform and advancement, but I call it over-exploitation and misuse."

It is alarming to notice that up to eighty-seven (89.7%) interviewees called in to question the huge amount of investment that the authorities claimed to have spent on the project. Many of them mentioned that they found it difficult to believe there was no corruption involved considering the contrast between the cost and its achievement. In addition, some interviewees also reported their dissatisfaction towards the master plan drawn up for the development of the surrounding areas of the park. As one interviewee (a 22-year-old woman from group two) commented:

"The authorities claimed that the park would function as a 'green lung' to the city just as the 'Central Park' to New York. However, as an ancient city, Xi'an has its own unique attributes and cultural connotations. Its evolution should follow its own way."

#### *4.5. Dissatisfaction towards the park itself*

Dissatisfaction towards the content of the park was another theme that raised varying comments from sixty-four (66%) of the interviewees.



Fig. 3. A human-made feature adjacent to archaeological remains (photo: Qian Gao).

The most commonly shared opinion was that the park took too large a space for too little content. In accordance with one interviewee (a 41-year-old man from group three):

“It is perhaps fine as a park for the locals, but too big and not interesting enough to be an attractive archaeological tourist site. The historical remains are nothing but piles of earth, and it takes a lot of imagination to perceive what the park tries to convey.”

Furthermore, during the fieldwork I observed that many human-made features, whose design seemed to both embody modern aesthetics and resonate with the antiquity, were installed adjacent to archaeological remains (fig. 3). A few interviewees expressed their criticism towards these added features. As one (a 29-year-old woman from group three) argued:

“The human-made features make the park look odd. I know that they are meant for the remains to be more appealing, but with modern design and construction, now everything looks fake and loses its genuine flavour.”

Some interviewees also remarked that they believed the restoration was actually harmful to the protection of archaeological heritage. One interviewee (a 27-year-old woman from group one) commented that:



"...building the park took less than two years. When it first opened to the public, everything looked so hastily done. I wonder, did they ruin anything during the construction? My family used to live near to what seemed to be a remain of an islet of the Taiye Pond. Now the Taiye Pond is refilled with water and the islet has disappeared."

#### *4.6. The lost sense of belonging*

Another theme shared by forty-one (42.3%) interviewees was related to a feeling of a lost sense of belonging. They argued that the construction of the park had irreversibly changed the landscape of the region. This is especially prominent among former Daobei residents (i.e. group one), many of whom voiced their nostalgia due to the detachment to their previous home. However, it is worth noting that the park authorities have made an effort to maintain some elements of the old neighbourhood for relocated residents to reflect upon the past. The trees at the Imperial Path Square, for instance, are left from the previous village, so that villagers can still locate where they used to live in accordance with the trees. Apart from the Daobei residents, some Xi'an citizens also expressed their concern to the complete transfiguration of cultural places like the Daming Palace site. As one interviewee (a 57-year-old man from group three) put it:

"...in the last ten years, the wholesome reconstruction centring on cultural sites has changed the appearance of the city to such an extent that it is fearsome to wonder whether any old image would remain after another ten years. When a city changes its trace of the past completely, what do we expect the future generations to memorize?"

#### *4.7. Displeasure for image of neighbourhood identity*

During the interview eighteen (26.9%) former Daobei residents expressed their disappointment towards the image representing their past neighbourhood identity. They commented that the authorities deliberately portrayed the Daobei region as a slum in order to give favourable publicity to their reformation project. During fieldwork, I observed that in the park there were a large number of sign boards set up showing the contrast between the past and the present (fig. 4). Besides this, in the park museum there was a whole exhibition devoted to the relocation program, with pictures and items showing the life of the





Fig. 4. A sign board showing the contrast between the past and the present of one archaeological remain (photo: Qian Gao).

Daobei residents before the phenomenal change. One interviewee (43-year-old man from group one) complained that:

“...the government chose to show to the public the worst image of the Daobei neighbourhood, and now everyone thinks Daobei used to be a slum. The actual situation was much more complicated, and we do not like our old home to be referred to in that way.”

#### 4.8. Dissatisfaction for the current living environment and relocation compensation

The last factor that affected the local communities' perspective of the social values associated to the site also related to the relocation program. In total forty-three (64.2%) interviewees from group one expressed dissatisfaction towards their current living environment or the compensation for dislocation. One interviewee (a 39-year-old man from group one) said that,

“My family and I do not like the new apartment assigned to us. The new building has 36 floors and each floor holds 10

apartments, but only 3 elevators were installed. Besides, the elders have spent most of their lives living in single-storey houses, so they are having difficulties with adjusting to life in places as high as this.”

In addition, a few interviewees also argued that once they were relocated from their previous home, they had felt abandoned and neglected. This is because until 2014 they had had to wait for several years before moving into the resettlement buildings. As one interviewee (a 29-year-old woman from group one) commented:

“We were asked to compromise our interests for the sake of the protection of the archaeological heritage; we were requested to understand and support the government’s decision for the better good; we were promised that we would receive a reasonable compensation and once the resettlement buildings were completed, we would have a new home. However, in reality the compensation can hardly make up for what my family had to give up, and nobody cared where we were going to settle once our old neighbourhood had been demolished.”

## **5. Discussion**

The data analysis above reveals that the touristic commercialization and the UNESCO World Heritage nomination of the Daming Palace archaeological site have hugely affected the social values attributed to it by its local communities. In other words, the site has become a focus of different sentiments and varying qualities to local community members. The social values ascribed to the site from a local communal perspective include many aspects: the ability to upgrade physical and conceptual living environment, the capability of improving local livelihood, its capacity as a space for leisure, entertainment and education, its role in maintaining a sense of belonging and regional pride, and its proficiency in fulfilling social expectation. The data shows that even though more than half of the interviewees expressed various levels of dissatisfaction towards the project, most of them supported the idea of using archaeological sites through touristic development to achieve general improvement for the entire community. The transformation of the site has increased the variety and measure of social values ascribed to it from local communal perspective through the enhanced living

environment of the region, the creation of a large public green space for relaxation and entertainment, and the upgraded public access to the heritage itself. Interviewees' concerns regarding the negative impact of the project on the social values attributed to the site mainly focused on the applied business model, the content of the park, as well as the compromises they had to make.

The interviewee's generally positive attitude towards heritage refurbishment shows that, to most local community members, the social values attributed to an archaeological site boil down to one practical concern: whether its existence and use can bring any tangible benefit to the people. Many Daobei residents shared the sentiment that before the restoration project, the palace remains did, to some extent, prevent local livelihood from advancing. They believed that due to the preservation of the ancient remnant, the region compromised its modernization, and the local residents somehow took on the role of graveyard keepers for this particular piece of Chinese history. This viewpoint represents, to a large extent, the attitude of many local communities towards archaeological sites that cover a large space and lack obvious touristic characteristics — the sort of heritage that the Chinese government has paid great attention to in the past few years. A practical reason behind the rather pragmatic perspective of local communities is that in a society with generally fast economic development, the widening gap between the rich and poor prompts people to prioritize monetary gain over other concerns. This tendency is compounded by an absence of sentimental bond between the heritage and the communities geographically attached to it. Lost memory of ancient glory and the often complex demographic composition give rise to the phenomenon that such archaeological heritage is better appreciated by outsiders than those who live adjacent to it.

Another important line of reflection concerning the impact of touristic commercialization and World Heritage nomination on the social values attributed to the site relates to real estate 'frenzies'. The interview data demonstrate that the social values ascribed to the site by local residents are imperilled by their discontent towards the business model in which real estate companies play major roles. The application of the Public-Private Partnership Qujiang model is an experiment of using the potentials of archaeological heritage and the financial means of real estate industry as catalysts for mutual benefit. This leads to perhaps the most controversial implication in China's current practice of archaeological tourism: the extent of direct private sector involvement in the heritage realm. The imbalance of consideration between economic

interest and social impact is manifested by the relatively high percentage of dissatisfaction of local residents towards the current development model. The mistrust held by most interviewees for the budget involved also reflects the lack of transparency in the construction process.

The interviewees' concerns towards the content of the park show that local community members also responded with enthusiasm to one subtle aspect of the social values ascribed to the site, namely its proficiency in fulfilling social expectations. The analysis reveals that one common criticism of the park is related to its content, which was often condemned as either showing a decrease in original antique taste or being a vast space of emptiness and boredom. Such comments reflect the general public's perception towards the authenticity of material culture. The Chinese version of the word "authentic," means "maintaining the true essence," denoting that a copy truthful to what it mirrors is not considered a lesser version of its original (Shepherd, Yu 2013, p. 41). This partly explains Chinese society's relatively high tolerance of large-scale heritage reconstruction. However, it also implies that local communities may have a different expectation of how an archaeological heritage park should look like from what the designers intend for it to be. The data show that many individuals expected a similar experience to that of visiting an antique-style theme park, and therefore anticipated to see more intuitive features. To them, the sheer exhibition of a large quantity of homogeneous archaeological remains was not entertaining. This reconfirms the current dilemma facing Chinese conservationists regarding how to reconcile the demands of being authentic, attractive, and satisfactory to the expectation of the general public.

The compromise made by local communities for the project probably has the most direct impact on their perception of the social values associated to the site. In recent years, the touristic reformation of archaeological sites in the name of conservation has often involved the displacement of local residents. This is partially because of the management model promoted by UNESCO to divide protected areas into inner cores and outer fringe regions (Weller 2006, p. 78). The application of the spatial segregation model in China often leads to an opaque resettlement process, especially when real estate companies get involved. The interviewees confirmed that small-scale conflicts between the government and local communities regarding compensation rates and other related disputes have occurred at varying intervals for the past few years, which is an alarming reality for the authorities to take into consideration.

## **6. Conclusion**

The myriad of values that a society attributes to its archaeological heritage are the fundamental reasons behind its protection and development (De la Torre 2013). In recent years, the growing touristic commercialization of archaeological sites and the rising influence of UNESCO World Heritage List have reshaped how these values are perceived by different stakeholders. This article has focused on issues related to social values using the Daming Palace archaeological site in China as a case study. In China, the development of archaeological tourism has changed the relationship between heritage and communities in the immediate vicinity of heritage sites remarkably. Such changes have been further prompted by the Chinese authorities' constant pursuit of World Heritage inscription of cultural sites. One strategy worth noting is the conversion of large archaeological sites, namely the "Great Sites," into heritage parks, a practice that is praised for its ability to enhance local livelihood and encourage social participation in safeguarding cultural heritage. However, this novel practice still requires critical reflection on its impacts on local communities and how their perceptions of the values associated with these sites have transformed. Accordingly, this article has employed ethnographic approaches to scrutinize how the practice has affected social values ascribed to the Daming Palace archaeological site by local residents.

This conservational strategy is mostly well received by local communities with regard to its improvement in living environments of surrounding areas, the creation of a public space for leisure and entertainment, and the enhancement of public access to the heritage itself. In these regards, the practice is believed to have enhanced social values attributed to the site by local communities. However, the oversight of this programme in causing discontent with the relocation program, content of the park, and the perceived over-dependency on private sectors has also impaired these values. In view of the changes in social values ascribed to the Daming Palace archaeological sites by local communities, the question remains as to how to gear social values towards a positive improvement through the seemingly inexorable trend of increased touristic commercialization. It should be noted that with tourism playing a major role, archaeological sites in China have become a contested ground for community engagement (Shan 2015). The Chinese authorities' endeavour to integrate elements of participatory approaches into conservation projects for archaeological sites enhances, at least in theory, the social values associated to these

sites. However, in practice they become places where local residents are confronted with the cross-cutting interests of other stakeholders over rights, roles and voices (Plummer, Taylor 2004). Therefore, current community collaboration in heritage management only superficially touches upon the issue of local participation. The engagement of local residents is restrained within the sphere of passive attendance after the development stage of the project is finished, while their voices have no part to play in the decision-making process (Nitzky 2013).

Understanding the diverse social values attributed by local communities to an archaeological site helps to prompt community participation discourse to live up to its rhetorical potential. Consequently, this article advocates the establishment of a collaborative managerial framework that assimilates community-centred initiatives in the planning stage of commercial projects. How to construct such a framework is a challenge that is not exclusive to China but is in fact faced by most countries around the world. In a global context that is increasingly subjected to the forces of a market-driven economy, the underscoring of social value should be considered as a potential means to harness excessive commercialization. Increasing public and administrative awareness of this fundamental dimension to heritage is an absolute necessity in the development of a more concrete measure for safeguarding the past.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to deliver my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Margarita Díaz-Andreu, for her priceless guidance, support and encouragement. I would also like to thank my friend Dr. James Walker, whose help and advice have greatly improved this article. My appreciation also goes to all the people who have assisted me in conducting my fieldwork in Xi'an. This research would not be possible without their help, generosity and kindness. Research for this article was undertaken in the context of the European JPI—JHEP Heritage Values Network (H@V) project ([www.heritagevalues.net/](http://www.heritagevalues.net/)) and the I+D+i Orientada a los retos de la sociedad project with the title “La Red de los Valores del Patrimonio” (ref PCIN-2013-036).



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