

The Impacts of Dictatorship on Heritage Management

Minjae Zoh

Series in World History



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Foreword

by
Marie Louise Stig Sørensen

University of Cambridge

Are there degrees of AHD? On the usefulness of exploring the extreme to understand the average

Research over recent decades has increasingly helped us understand the fundamental and very varied roles that cultural heritage plays. Ranging from being a focus of pride and entertainment to being targets of deliberate harm and destruction, heritage in its diverse forms is part of not just our cultural make-up but also integral to a range of social and political formations. It provides useful, malleable, and potent reference points. It is vulnerable to exploitation and yet able to ignite emotive and creative responses. It is often used to legitimise positions and claims, but it can also be used as a tool of resistance.

With the increased appreciation of how heritage infuses so many forms of socio-political and cultural debates, assumptions, and practices, it has become ever more important to also understand how heritage is agreed to. Which mechanisms sit behind its construction as not just a personal idea but as a shared recognition and value? A fundamental question is also what power relations are embedded within these agreements, and how they affect what is or will become heritage. Laurajane Smith's seminal proposition of an Authorised Heritage Discourse (2006) is arguably one of the first solid steps towards such an understanding and certainly one of the most influential arguments within Critical Heritage Studies. This volume is a response to those arguments, rethinking them under the condition of heritage during the dictatorship period in South Korea, and thus contributing to the critical refinement of this concept (for further examples of critical engagement with the AHD, see Skrede and Hølleland 2018).

Challenges to and elaborations of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)

Central to Laurajane Smith's argument is the proposition that heritage is a cultural and political practice; it is a process rather than a 'thing' (Smith 2006: 11, 44). In this statement, Smith turns the attention from the object of heritage to the practices that produce those objects as heritage. She provides a means of standing back, gazing at our own practices, and appreciating them as a

mechanism of power and control. She argues that there is a dominant understanding of what heritage is that presents heritage as essentially universal, but which, in practice, is rooted in a western concept of heritage. Moreover, this Eurocentric understanding of heritage has prioritised certain forms of heritage (and arguably also aesthetics), and it is underwritten by an expectation of the forms that heritage takes. It therefore “privileges monumentality and grand scale, innate artefact/ site significance tied to time depth, scientific/aesthetic expert judgement, social consensus and nation-building” (Smith 2006: 11).

The AHD is the means through which this hegemony is maintained and reproduced, with the various heritage agencies being its agents. These agents employ laws and policies to maintain order and control regarding what is defined as heritage, how it is valued and protected. Arguing for AHD as the mechanisms for the production of officially sanctioned and managed heritage means that it has also been seen as a tool for the suppression of other forms of heritage and subaltern heritage production.

The topic of this volume is exactly this question of who defines and controls heritage, but by investigating this within the context of a dictatorship, it provides new dimensions to these core concerns. The volume asks how the nature of a political system may itself affect the production of heritage. This is a very significant advancement as our routine employments of the AHD usually stay focussed on how particular values are sustained and privileged, and how heritage practices and norms are regulated, taking for granted that the way the AHD functions is universal. Importantly, it is also assumed that this takes place through discourse, and it tends to present this as a self-referential discourse (Pendlebury 2013: 4; Smith 2006: 11). In practice, however, heritage management (in its varied forms) is part of larger socio-political complexes of decision-making and managerial regimes in which expectations and demands for accountability are not wholly owned by the heritage practitioners. Heritage practitioners do not function in social and political vacuums but instead have 'taskmasters' who influence agendas and may be located within and outside the heritage sectors. In this context, the recent decades' emphasis on duties owed to taxpayers within many western heritage organisations is revealing; it suggests that influence, if not control, is far more distributed than our discussion of the AHD usually implies.

Is the AHD a western concept based on the assumption of a nation-state and democracy?

Although the AHD is, and probably will remain, an analytically very powerful argument, it is time to scrutinise it and its assumed applicability. We need to develop more nuanced insights into when, where, and how it applies, and how it is best used. Whereas the AHD has proven very useful for analyses of institutions such as UNESCO and its nomination processes (e.g. Bortolotto

2015; Yan 2015), the AHD needs refinement in terms of its applicability to other situations and institutions. The argument made by this book is a step towards this. In particular, in revealing the mechanisms of heritage construction and management within the South Korean dictatorial regime, it provokes questions about what kind of political relationships are taken for granted in our routine assumptions about the AHD. Did our analyses of how AHD 'works' fail to consider that some political regimes lack accountability, and that in such systems authority is taken rather than earned or presumed? The latter is the case within systems of trustees and guardians. Is the AHD limited to a certain kind of political system, to various versions of democratic nation-states? This volume raises such core questions of direct relevance to the central canon of Critical Heritage Studies.

To appreciate this challenge better, a brief reminder of the checks and balances found within the heritage management systems of western democracies (as indeed also in their constitutions) is helpful. Who are those bodies that we focus on when discussing AHD? What are the elements of political control and how are changes effected within routine constructions and maintenance of heritage? In particular, how are the central values and definitions of heritage and the rights to exercise those judgements defended—if they are?

John Pendlebury's discursive reflection on conservation planning in England (2013), as an example of a central heritage body, provides a useful entry point for such a perusal. He points to the range of practices that continuously affect and interfere with any attempt at static centrally controlled heritage management, including its very definition. He emphasises that conservation planning as a social entity has "its own distinct history, stories, institutions and institutional context and relationship with actors and interests outside the heritage sphere" (*ibid.* 2) and that the particular values of various heritage objects will, therefore, be sustained and privileged by the system, but they are not static. Most importantly, he argues that such conservation planning is "affected and changed because of wider social forces and tactical positioning within the political and economic frames within which it works." (*Ibid.* 4) Even as regards to the central role of controlling the definition of heritage, Pendlebury's review of conservation planning reveals, not surprisingly, the ever-changing understanding of what constitutes heritage and the central role other bodies, including lobbyists and various social and political interests, have had in this process (*Ibid.* 4). Even the moralistic frameworks (*Ibid.* 4) that get erected around AHD and which find their most explicit formulation in articulation about correct action (for example in worldwide arguments about conservation and authenticity, e.g. Silverman 2015) are not static, self-imposed, and solely within the control of the AHD as a system of power and discursive

control. Pendlebury therefore argues that the AHD (in the form of conservation planning in England) “is thus not an exclusively self-referential discourse. Nor, perhaps, is it always regressive. Whilst it might serve the purposes of a particular elite, this may be less at the expense of suppressing subaltern heritage as in competition for control over the built environment with other elite interests.” (*Ibid.* 8).

Importantly, in such systems, heritage management is part of other processes of social management, and it is performed within a degree of open governmentality. This means that a certain accountability is ever-present and will affect practices. What this volume asks is, what happens to heritage when accountability is not relevant? What is the significance of the AHD if a dictator rewrites the decision-making process?

The recognition that heritage under dictatorship takes on different roles than in other political systems has been growing over the last decade, with important projects investigating heritage under Stalin, within Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Franco’s Spain and during various stages of the evolution of communist Cuba or communist eastern Europe (e.g. Alonso González 2018; Bartolini 2019; Comer 2017; Iacono 2019; Mink and Neumayer 2013; Viejo Rose 2011). These studies have, however, mainly focused on extricating the relationship between heritage and politics within arguments about identity construction, heritage abuse, historical revisionism, or the roles of heritage in the societies emerging after the dictatorship period and the complex challenges of how to deal with the aftermath.

This study introduces us to another line of reflection and insights. Its focus is on how the South Korean dictators (Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan from 1961 to 1988) used heritage in their self-promotion and how, in the shaping of the dictatorship, they advanced tailor-made accounts of South Korean history/heritage to match their political ambitions. Such accounts may sound familiar, but Zoh also vividly demonstrates how their own personal biographies and geopolitical connection to specific places and regions became interwoven with the heritage places they promoted. The result was the neglect of some regions and some pasts—and the overexposure of others. This differentiation and resulting unequal heritage management decisions and practices are documented through a range of selected case studies. Moreover, in the process of revealing these exploitations of heritage, Zoh also reflects on and questions the value of the concept of AHD. Thus, this volume not only adds to our expanding range of case studies investigating the conditions and usage of heritage under dictatorship, but it also questions the basis on which we have assumed the universal usefulness of the canon of the AHD. In this way, the volume lends support to critical concerns about how the AHD risks becoming a term that nominalises and reifies and thus obscures, as Skrede and Hølleland (2018) warn,

and how the term contributes to universalising what it denominates (*Ibid.* 84). More specifically, in their discussion of nominalisations (i.e. verb replaced with a noun construction), Skrede and Hølleland stress that nominalisation is hard to contest because it “has the effect of transforming processes into entities—and it is these nominalised entities that become the agents in the process” (*Ibid.* 85). As a result of how we have assigned agency to the acronyms of AHD we have obscured who has agency and who takes responsibility for action.

In response to these challenges, Zoh uses the empirical data of her case studies to propose that during the South Korean dictatorships the conditions of heritage production were so that heritage was singularly controlled by the dictator and that, therefore, the concept of AHD does not apply. In its place there is what she calls an Authorised Dictatorial Discourse (ADD). This form of discourse dresses itself up as accountable and engaging, as professional and formal, but this is just shadow play and mimicry. Instead, in practice the heritage management is totally open to the vagaries of the dictator's sentiments, passions, and secondary goals. It, therefore, also becomes random and emotional, affected by the politics and concerns of the moment in a non-transparent manner. Regarding the nominalisation mentioned above, which arises from a concern with identifying agency and intentions, it is noteworthy that the terminology suggested by Zoh acknowledges and places the agency directly and unambiguously with the dictator.

Zoh does not suggest that all dictatorships are alike in their relationship to heritage, but her research strongly suggests that their differences from democracies have implications for not just what kind of heritage discourses are formulated, but also how this is done. In her conclusion, she argues for the idea of soft and hard AHD. She suggests that the AHD can soften or harden or, in other words, can be more or less rigid, more or less accountable and aware of different interests, depending on the type of political system that the respective heritage management is operating within. Taking as her starting point one of the extreme political systems in which authority is unquestioned and discourse an illusion, Zoh ends by questioning the universal applicability of the AHD and its assumption about how authority is exercised, and discourse formulated.

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Author's Preface

The study presented here is an outcome of a PhD dissertation; a PhD in Heritage Studies. This PhD project in terms of its direction and motivations were very much inspired by the two dissertations that I wrote for my two former degrees. My Bachelors' degree was in Archaeology and my Masters' degree was in Public Archaeology and both were completed at University College London (UCL). During my undergraduate studies, my father took me to a place called Gochang in South Korea, his hometown. Here, I found thousands of dolmens dispersed around its grounds. Some of the dolmens (not all) had been registered as UNESCO World Heritage in December 2000 alongside some other dolmens in Ganghwa and Hwasun in South Korea. My father told me that he had memories of these dolmens as a child; how he used to climb them with his friends and how all the locals called what is today's UNESCO site 'the rocky village' back in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

I found this fascinating and decided to write my undergraduate dissertation on how the 'rocky village' became a 'World Heritage Site.' Intrigued also by the museum of intangible heritage at Gochang (the Gochang *Pansori* Museum), I wrote my Masters' dissertation on the contemporary relevance of intangible heritage and more specifically questioned why the Gochang County invests in preserving and presenting intangible heritage. During the course of these research projects, it became very apparent that the heritage in Gochang was little known both nationally and internationally despite its immensely preserved Bronze Age remains and its history of intangible traditions. After discussions with museum professionals and historians as well as reading into the background of South Korea's iconic heritage sites, I came to understand that the outcome of Gochang's little known heritage had deep connections with South Korea's Military Dictatorship Era; to its territorial politics as well as the two dictators' national narrative that they wished to construct via a careful selection of heritage. Thus, I chose to pursue this topic further and the specific objectives of this research emerged alongside the comparative case studies for analysis.

Initially, the goal of this project was to gain a better understanding of the relationship between heritage and territorial politics and the impact it can have on the preservation and promotion of heritage sites. However, after conducting fieldwork in South Korea, it became clear that the choices and actions of the South Korean dictators deeply permeated into the immediate and long term management, perception, value and identity of the country's heritage. Therefore, I changed the direction of this research to investigate into the

impacts of dictatorship on heritage management. The original contribution of this research is threefold: first, a critical assessment of Smith's AHD; two, the broader concept of 'soft and hard' AHD; and three, a thorough documentation and assessment of how heritage practises have changed in South Korea under dictatorship.

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