A Golden Connection: Exploring the challenges of developing interpretation strategies for a Chinese heritage precinct on the central Victorian goldfields

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Abstract

This article introduces and evaluates heritage tourism interpretation strategies for depicting the Chinese-Australian gold seeking experience across an urban tourism landscape in central Victoria, Australia. The city of Bendigo has its origins in the nineteenth century goldrushes and contains a variety of heritage sites, most notably those connected with the Chinese migration to the region in search of gold. These sites, including a temple, museum, cemetery, and kiln site, form arguably one of the most complete collections of Chinese goldrush heritage assets still in existence across the globe and have the potential to be marketed to visitors as a Chinese heritage precinct. They provide a direct familial and cultural nexus between southern China and Australia, yet also highlight a complex historical encounter that requires development of visitor interpretation to bring the stories to life and provide meaning and tourist appeal. This article, using a cultural landscape model, will evaluate the way in which key historical assets can be understood as heritage tourism attractions in the present day and the role of interpretation in that process, particularly focusing on the use of podcasts and promotional media films as interpretive tools. It will also consider how thematic interpretation, based on and acknowledging contested narratives, may add to the authenticity of the precinct for visitors and complement the built heritage. The findings suggest that while some of the Chinese heritage sites in Bendigo are successful tourism ventures or have strong tourist potential, overall the tourist experience is fragmented and would benefit from more integrated interpretation strategies that link the various sites across the precinct and the region.

Introduction

Bendigo, in regional Victoria, Australia, was established in 1851, as an important administrative centre for the goldrushes. Today it is a large regional city with a diversity of industry and functions, including an established tourism sector. The city is fortunate that a series of heritage sites connected with this goldrush history have survived to this day, including those associated with the wave of Chinese migration to the goldfields. While Chinese mining heritage assets exist in a variety of destinations across the Pacific, notably California in the United States, British Columbia in Canada, and Otago in New Zealand (Frost et al. 2007; Reeves et al. 2011), these assets tend to be sporadic and are located in remote places that do not lend themselves readily to tourism development. In contrast, the Chinese heritage assets found in Bendigo are more complete and situated within the bounds of a city that is less than two hours drive north-west of the state capital Melbourne, which holds well-established tourist infrastructure and attractions. This happenstance may provide the basis for Bendigo to develop a Chinese heritage "tourism precinct" (rather than merely a series of disparate sites) which could have marketing advantages for the city. There is a growing interest in developing tourism precincts as a means of presenting and promoting linked or themed attractions to visitors across and within a defined geographical area (Griffin & Hayllar 2009; Hall 2008; Hayllar & Griffin 2005). It is argued by McKercher & Ho (2006: 474) that ‘a critical mass of attractions grouped in a precinct and grounded by an icon […] helps to induce visitation’. The question remains whether some of the individual heritage sites in Bendigo can be developed into tourist attractions and how successfully they can be presented to visitors as a distinct precinct. While the focus of this article is on Chinese Australian heritage in Bendigo, the broader challenge of interpreting often disparate assemblages of mining heritage is instructive for other Australian former mining sites – or indeed other overseas mining heritage areas such as the Cornwall and West Devon world heritage region of England (and its associated site in Moonta in South Australia) (Moonta & District Progress Association 2008). This article explores this issue and, in particular, the role that interpretation might play in creating linkages between the various heritage sites and providing engaging experiences for tourists.

While this article is grounded in a specific locale and considers a particular region of Australia, the methodological observations contained herein are relevant for considering what are termed subtle heritage tourism sites throughout Asia, Australia, and the Pacific, where assets require extensive and vibrant interpretation to engage visitors. Although not exhaustive, international comparative examples include the world heritage sites of Malacca in Malaysia, and Roi Mata’s Domain in Vanuatu. Indicative interstate Chinese Australian heritage sites include the former Chinese village situated by the Loddon River, Vaughan in central Victoria, and the Sze Yup and Chung Wah temples in Darwin (Australian Heritage Commission 2002). It draws upon a number of related research interests, projects, and consultancies with local and state government tourism authorities in Victoria and uses interview data with key stakeholders as well as observation in the field to evaluate how historical assets can be understood as heritage tourism attractions and developed into a precinct within an urban environment.

The first section of this article briefly introduces the nineteenth century gold fields region of central Victoria, the historical context of Chinese heritage tourism and the present day
heritage tourism issues surrounding key urban goldfields tourist precincts. Drawing on an experiential audit of cultural tourism assets, the second section of this article focuses upon the challenges inherent in developing a cultural heritage tourism precinct of Bendigo’s Chinatown, particularly issues associated with interpretation. These include an analysis of the importance of developing a story-based approach to interpretation that acknowledges contested narratives/heritage dissonance, a discussion of the merits of using technology-based interpretative media to deliver thematic messages, and an examination of the nexus between interpretation and perceived authenticity of the precinct. The article concludes with a discussion of issues requiring further research and lessons learned for future development of urban heritage tourism precincts.

The Victorian goldfields and historical context for Chinese heritage tourism in Victoria

Despite the current global economic turmoil, it has become abundantly clear that during the previous decade that Australia has benefitted from the great wealth created as a result of its biggest mineral boom. This in turn has led the mining industry to take great interest in its heritage. This follows a similar trend in California (where renewed interest was driven by fin-de-siecle sesquicentennial celebrations), Canada (with the development of the integrated strategies for promoting the Caribou as a heritage tourism destination), and the central Otago gold fields of New Zealand (which is now promoted as a heritage and nature based tourism destination, a self-styled antipodean winter-wonderland and former gold fields region) (Frost 2001, 2005). The Victorian goldfields contain a wide variety of heritage sites and there is particular attention being paid in recent years to strategically developing its attractiveness to tourists, especially around the Bendigo region (Bannear et al. 2002; Taylor 1995).

Gold was discovered at Bendigo Creek in 1851 (the curious name of which comes from an English boxer). Initially an alluvial field, Bendigo acquired permanence through the development of deep lead mining. In 1861, it had a population of 14,000; by 1881 this had grown to 36,000. It has a current population of 20,260 (2006). Their peak was around 1858, causing the Victorian Government to introduce restrictive legislation. Declining gold yields in the early 1860s led to widespread discrimination against the foreign-speaking population (Broome 1984: 81). However, the 1857 Census refutes this. In that year, over 23,000 Chinese were recorded as on the goldfields, approximately one in every five males. The largest numbers were at Ballarat, followed by Beechworth and Castlemaine. Bendigo had the fourth largest population, with 3,629 Chinese – approximately 11 percent of the total population and about 60 percent of the foreign-speaking population (Broome 1984: 81).

The rapid increase in Chinese numbers coupled with a decline in alluvial yields led to widespread discrimination against the Chinese (Frost et al. 2007; Reeves et al. 2011). There were calls for the Chinese to be expelled from the goldfields and a head tax was placed on Chinese arrivals, leading many to walk overland from the South Australian port of Robe, in order to avoid this new impost. Their story is not however merely one of conflict and disenfranchisement. Many of these Chinese miners stayed on after the gold rushes and married local women, with a number of their descendents still living in Bendigo and active members of the local Bendigo Chinese Association. They were a vital part of the community and left the marks of their history in Bendigo on the landscape. The Chinese have also taken part in the Easter Fair and the parade of the Chinese dragon has been a long-standing highlight of these festivities (Lovejoy 2010; Rasmussen 2004). The Chinese story is thus a complex narrative; of transience and settlement, conflict and collaboration.

Key sites in and around the city of Bendigo associated with the Chinese include the Golden Dragon Museum, the Chinese Temple (or Joss House), a kiln site at PepperGreen Farm and Chinese graves at White Hills Cemetery. A tourist tram links the Museum and the Temple. Interpretation is neither consistent nor integrated across the various sites, despite the common thread of Chinese mining history. The Golden Dragon Museum contains a plethora of artefacts linked to the Bendigo Chinese story, including Loong, the oldest imperial dragon in the world, and Sun Loong, the largest imperial dragon in the world. The museum was developed by the Bendigo Chinese Association to house and present artefacts of historical and cultural significance to the Chinese. The collection is mostly presented in the form of static indoor displays, although the Museum also incorporates a traditional Chinese Garden and Temple. The Chinese Temple was erected in the 1860s in order that Chinese sojourners and settlers would be able to practice their culture and religion and is the only remaining Temple on the Victorian goldfields. It is only open at certain times of the month and has limited interpretation for visitors. Adjacent to the Temple is PepperGreen Farm, the site of the recent discovery of a Chinese kiln dating back to the nineteenth century. As an archaeological site, the Farm would need extensive development and tourist infrastructure in order to present the kiln to visitors in any meaningful way. White Hills Cemetery is thought to be one of the largest sites of Chinese burials in Australia. In accordance with traditional Chinese beliefs, the graves are marked by small footstones and a funeral tower was built for burnt offerings (Frost et al. 2007; Reeves et al. 2011). The Cemetery needs funding for improving road access and lacks visitor interpretation and public transport options.

It is important to recognise that very few heritage assets have the potential to develop as tourism products (McKercher & Ho 2000). Those that do may require a level of development to make them market-ready and able to be experienced by visitors, involving marketing, interpretation, and other visitor services. This article will focus on the role of interpretation in this process. It is asserted that a more nuanced interpretation of the Chinese gold seeking experience, heritage site management and culturally aware (and in turn authentic) tourism experiences can be developed globally by historically locating Chinese gold seekers within the polity of a dynamic and expanding imperial British society on the periphery of the settled world (Mountford & Reeves 2011; Reeves et al. 2011). In doing so, the enduring Chinese role is noted in Bendigo (albeit on a smaller scale) as a key locale in the Pacific Rim neo-European gold rush from the early 1850s until the dawn of the twentieth century. This argument engages with the broader historiographical debates.
with Chinese-diaspora history that inform notions of regional identities and a contested past at a number of Pacific goldrush tourism destinations (Mayne 2004). While acknowledging previous research on Chinese-Australian studies, such as Fitzgerald’s (2007) recent Big white lie and Wilton’s (2004) Golden threads, the aim is to add a new level of accessible, yet complex, analysis to the debate over the role of Chinese gold seekers in tourism development at gold rush heritage sites, by concentrating on the regional Victorian city of Bendigo.

Method
The main methods used to collect data for this article were long interviews and researcher observation. Interviews were conducted with various stakeholders in Bendigo, including tour operators and site managers of attractions, members of the Bendigo Chinese Association, and representatives of local government and the State Heritage body, Heritage Victoria. Sixteen stakeholder groups were consulted in total. This project was administered under the aegis of the City of Greater Bendigo. One of the authors was also part of a project team required to develop internet content for promoting key towns within the goldfields region. That project was administered by the Central Victorian Goldfields Tourism Authority. Data was then analysed in part using a cultural landscape model, as discussed below.

Reading the Bendigo Chinese-Australian heritage precinct as a cultural landscape

One way of enabling an authentic heritage tourism experience is to consider sites or assets with reference to a cultural tourism framework that emphasises both people and place in order to identify and interpret various layers of the past. For the purposes of this article we call this ‘cultural landscape analysis’. The research of cultural landscapes in historical analysis is a relatively new phenomenon in Australia (Taylor 1995). It is an approach that involves interpreting historical landscapes in tandem with more conventional written historical sources. Interpreting these landscapes ‘involves the interplay between specific landscape patterns, elements or components and the “meaning” that it has within specific historical, social or cultural contexts’ (Hardesty 2003: 81). We analyse and interpret the different elements of these historical landscapes by focusing on the patterns of land usage over time and the cultural histories that are associated with them (Lancashire 2000).

In central Victoria, the nineteenth century layers of cultural heritage includes Indigenous history, pastoralism, gold discovery, as well as agricultural, viticultural and timber-cutting industries (Reeves 2008a, 2008b). For instance, when considering a key site such as Chinese heritage sites in Bendigo, the cultural landscape approach enables the consideration of many overlapping historical themes for interpretation at cultural heritage sites and in turn underpins authentic engaging tourist attractions. Attractions that combine built heritage with hidden and sometimes contested stories. In this respect, the study upon which this article is based draws upon du Cros’ and Smith’s use of historical archaeology approaches in the areas of tourism and heritage studies respectively (du Cros 2002; McKercher & du Cros 2002; Smith & Logan 2009).

While each period constitutes a theme that is significant of itself, it is only by understanding the relationships and overlap between these layers and applying an historical meaning to them that we are able to gain a greater depth of historical understanding for the region as a whole. By reading these layers of the past in terms of how they are revealed in the present day, we are able to consider key heritage sites as cultural landscapes. Through the provision of a methodological approach that emphasises the cultural aspect of the built environment, it is possible to develop a new conceptual framework for heritage studies. This principle is equally the same for Cornwall and Devon world heritage mining sites and the former trading entrepot of Malacca as it is for the prominent Australian cultural landscapes of Uluru, the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, Melbourne, or indeed the Chinese heritage sites throughout the central Victorian goldfields. This article considers some of the challenges of interpreting these layers in terms of their historical authenticity and heritage tourism potential.

Heritage tourism issues associated with the goldfields

In central Victoria, the validity and world heritage significance of historical mining landscapes and the cultural significance of nineteenth century industrial landscapes are not as readily accepted as individual buildings or heritage sites (Lennon 2000; Pearson, Lennon & Marshall 2002). Nonetheless, understanding cultural landscapes is central to an effective heritage interpretation of the central Victorian gold rushes and key sites and to developing attractions and experiences for tourists. This approach is very useful for promoting the Central Victorian goldfields region, including its Chinese heritage.

A challenge for tourism operators and industry organisations throughout the region is to develop ways to maintain (or increase) tourism visitation in a diminishing market. The City of Greater Bendigo and the adjoining Shire of Mount Alexander (the two key central Victorian goldfields municipalities) see promotion of gold fields heritage as an additional niche that complements current tourism products based on food, wine, and cultural experiences such as visits to the Bendigo Art Gallery. However, an ongoing challenge for promoting goldfields heritage, particularly Chinese sites, is that many of the experiences are not widely known and are not visually outstanding. Chinese heritage sites include grave markers, temples in suburban Bendigo, and archaeological former market sites. The stories associated with them are fascinating but require innovative interpretation strategies and promotion in order to make them attractive to visitors to the region. Accordingly authenticity (discussed in the following section of this article) is an important means of promoting these locations and strong historical interpretation is central to branding them as desirable heritage tourism assets to visit.

Finding the balance between developing authentic heritage interpretation content and providing attractive tourism experiences for visitors is central to the long-term viability of tourism throughout the region. Moreover, heritage tourism visitation that has a low impact on the environment may also be central to the long-term preservation of key sites such as the Chinese klin and the White Hills Joss House (Chinese temple). The Burra Charter assertion that the best way of preserving a heritage building is to use it is especially applicable to Chinese heritage sites throughout regional Victoria (Australia ICOMOS, 2000). The next section of this paper will examine some of the key interpretation strategies that could be used to present the Chinese-Australian gold seeking experience to visitors and assist with the development of a Chinese heritage tourism precinct in Bendigo.
Analysis of heritage tourism interpretation strategies in Bendigo

A Story-Based Approach

The Interpretation Plan for the precinct is based on the principles of ‘Story-based interpretation.’ Typically, visitor interpretation provides a range of facts. These are presented with little thought of their order and importance or of how visitors will relate to them. Thus, interpretation at a mining site might give the dates it operated, who its owners were, how much ore was processed and how much gold was produced. Unfortunately, this is likely to overwhelm the visitor with factual information that they do not comprehend and do not remember.

Story-based interpretation returns to the first principle of interpretation, that is, that visitors are seeking meaning and understanding. The interpretation must be constructed to achieve that purpose. Rather than providing a wide range of facts, this approach seeks to engage the visitor by telling a story. To be more effective, this story must have three elements:

1. It has a message, something for the visitor to remember, be influenced by and even act on in the future.
2. It is provocative, challenging the visitor to think about the interpretation further.
3. People are central to the story, rather than machines or companies (n.b. this applies for cultural heritage, a different approach is taken with natural heritage).

For the Bendigo Chinese Heritage Precinct, five story-based themes were developed. These were based on historical interpretations and our interviews with stakeholder groups. The strategy is that all future interpretation for the precinct will be connected with these themes.

Theme 1: The Gold Rush drew people from all over the world

The multi-cultural nature of its participants distinguishes the Victorian Gold Rushes. There was a greater ethnic diversity than in the Californian Gold Rush. This is a special quality which needs to be recognised and celebrated. The Chinese were a major part of that diversity, but other ethnic groups need to be covered. Such an inclusion helps to place the Chinese immigration in a global context. This theme should include an examination of why people left home for the Gold Rushes. The pull-factors might seem quite clear, but the push factors are probably not widely known. Events in China, particularly the Taiping Rebellion (T'ai Ping Tian Guo in pinyin) and Opium Wars need to be featured. They may also be contrasted to European experiences, including the Irish Potato Famine and 1848 as the Year of Revolutions.

Theme 2: The Chinese came for Gold, but stayed and settled in Bendigo

The Chinese have often been characterised as sojourners, but recent historical research has emphasised their tendency to settle and create enduring communities. The Golden Dragon Museum already strongly emphasises the story of the Chinese as a continuing element in the Bendigo community. This theme needs to be extended to the Ironbark Camp Precinct. The Temple and Brick Kiln are both tangible markers of a permanent settlement at Ironbark Camp. Interpretation at the Brick Kiln should emphasise that this was a substantial capital investment. The Chinese burials at the White Hills Cemetery are a legacy of the enduring Chinese presence in the city since the Victorian Gold Rushes. Recently completed doctoral studies could provide the level of detail required for interpreting the Bendigo Chinese experience for a wider audience (Lovejoy 2009; Rasmussen 2009).

Theme 3: Chinese interactions with Europeans were complex, including both conflict and co-operation

In the past, there has been a strong emphasis on the Chinese as physically and socially separate, with interaction confined to discrimination and persecution. Recent historical research has highlighted that a more balanced interpretation is required. There was conflict (and that should not be downplayed). However, there was also co-operation between the Chinese and Europeans, including interracial relationships. This co-operation is well illustrated by the story of Bendigo’s Chinese dragons. In 1879 a dragon and costumes were imported for the Easter Fair procession. This display was intended to raise money for local charities and had the further effect of promoting goodwill between various communities. The parading of the dragon has continued to have these same effects for over 130 years (Rasmussen 2004). At the former Ironbark Camp, Chinese market gardens were integral to the food supply and good health of Bendigo. Chinese gardeners produced and sold a wide array of European and Chinese vegetables. It is also likely that the brick kiln had an impact upon the European economy. It is an area that requires further historical research, but in its 30 years of operations it is likely that the bricks produced were used widely throughout Bendigo. There are a number of sites throughout Bendigo where the Chinese bricks can still be seen in constructions.

Theme 4: Water was important to the Chinese and their settlement follows Bendigo Creek

Water was of the utmost importance to the Bendigo Chinese. Initially, it was needed to wash alluvial gold, later in the nineteenth century it was required for the operation of market gardens. The settlements at the Bridge St Chinatown (near the Golden Dragon Museum) and the Ironbark Camp were both on the Bendigo Creek. Water also had important ceremonial functions in Chinese society. Its importance in Feng Shui is now widely known and understood in Western societies. A major feature of a proposed plaza in the Golden Dragon Precinct will be the creation of an ornamental water feature through the construction of a weir across the Bendigo Creek. It is important to provide interpretation as to why this has been done. Similarly, the Chinese Joss House has a water feature and is deliberately sited to overlook the creek valley.

Theme 5: Chinese culture is now part of Australia’s shared heritage

The Chinese procession, part of the Easter Parade since 1879, is the centrepiece of the Bendigo Easter Fair. The parade draws many visitors from across Victoria and the Bendigo Chinese Association encourages people of all races and ages to join with them in the Procession. Similarly, although not directly related to the history of the Bendigo Chinese community, the construction of Bendigo Stupa, demonstrates that Buddhism, a philosophy and religious practice brought to Australia by the goldfields Chinese is now a shared cultural practice. Together, these community cultural practices present a Bendigo society in which the Australian Chinese and the greater community are part of a shared future.

Despite the lack of a historical connection, cultural links between Bendigo’s Chinese community and the presence of
the Stupa in Bendigo can be made. Chinese heritage and cultural sites in Bendigo, including the presence of the still practising Chinese Joss House, make visible to Bendigo residents and visitors the links between Chinese culture and the practice of Buddhism. The very physical presence of the Stupa in Bendigo provides the opportunity to connect these historical understandings of the Bendigo Chinese to life in present day Bendigo.

Use of innovative interpretive tools
A key way of attracting visitors to the region was to promote it through the internet. Between 2007 and 2008, a resolution was made by the two regional councils to combine their tourism and their development/promotional strategies in order to co-brand three key central Victorian towns (Bendigo, Castlemaine, and Maldon) as key heritage tourism destinations. This was supported by a budget of approximately $140,000 for the production of six films and eight podcasts. These tourism products were intended to be freely available to the public and were formatted so that they could be downloaded from a council hosted internet portal and also played on a continuous rotational advertorial basis at tourism kiosks in Castlemaine, Bendigo, and the smaller and strategically important town of Maldon, widely known as Australia’s first notable town.

Selection and development of thematic content
An advisory panel, including representatives from the respective councils, a project manager, a state government representative from the local community and an academic historian, was charged with the task of selecting and developing appropriate interpretive content. A number of different agendas were identified during the formative stages. For some, it was regarded as an employment programme for local artists (a former radio presenter and musician were engaged to develop scripts and a local film making production team). This attitude was a reflection on regional parochialism, but also of an awareness of the broader social mandate local and state government authorities owed to the local community. Some committee members were concerned with maximising the economic benefits of tourism to the region, while others were interested in the history and heritage of the region but prioritised the production of content that promoted the liveability of the region to prospective new residents. A minority wanted to prioritise the various key historical themes, particularly the gold rush era, the Chinese colonial experience and the role of the Dja Dja Wurrung (the local Indigenous community) in gold rush society. This content, it was argued, was central to providing accessible high quality interpretation that would be an effective way of enhancing the visitor experience. The themes of films and podcasts reflected the diverse range of outcomes desired by the steering committee.

Development of integrated tourism and interpretation strategies
One of the films focused on the Chinese gold seekers who arrived in great numbers on the central Victorian diggings from 1853 onwards. The film examined the Bendigo Chinese community and their ongoing role in the civic life of Bendigo. Drawing upon notable local Bendigo Chinese identities, the film highlights the rich Chinese history of Bendigo connected with the goldfields. In this respect it is a success. Yet measuring the commercial impact at this point of time is difficult as many of the Chinese tourism products are not yet developed and on offer to visitors. In a sense, the promotional tourism film has preceded the provision of the heritage tourism product. It is important that development of tourism and interpretive strategies occur in tandem in order to have a coherent strategy that can showcase the Chinese gold rush stories of the region and also attract visitors. Moreover, an on-going challenge is to provide a diversity of leisure, nature, and heritage tourism products that will entice visitors to stay for a longer period in the region. The Chinese heritage film is best understood as part of a renewed interest in Chinese heritage throughout the Australian community. The success of the film in addressing present day notions of multicultural regional identity is clear, while its commercial appeal in attracting new visitors is open to conjecture at this point.

Perhaps a better example of a critical success is another film Creating a Community Museum (2009) (auspiced by the Bendigo Golden Dragon Museum and directed by documentary film maker Juliane Deeb) that highlights the re-enactment of the overland route between Robe and the central Victorian gold fields taken by the Chinese gold seekers. Part of The Golden Trail Project, the short film was recently awarded a Victorian community history award. When the two films are considered together they comprise an important initial entry point for many visitors into the goldfields Chinese experience but need to be supported by appropriate tourism products, particularly across the Chinese heritage precinct. Measuring the appeal and success of these films is difficult to quantify as there is a lack of formal response and instead the research team relied on anecdotal evidence.

Issues of authenticity associated with interpretation of the heritage precinct
Objective or perceived authenticity is an integral part of many tourist experiences, particularly involving visits to historic or heritage sites (Chhabra, Healy & Sils 2003; Chronis 2005; Moscardo & Pearce 1986). Although developing tourist experiences is not necessarily antithetical to authenticity, too great a degree of commodification of heritage can lead to a suspicion that what is being viewed is a ‘show’ rather than ‘history’ (Chronis 2005: 393). Developing interpretive content that links the various heritage sites together based on appropriate historical themes might be one way of boosting authenticity in the minds of visitors. This might involve presenting contested narratives, such as the way the Chinese miners were treated and viewed by the local community.

Conclusion
While heritage tourism is a key driver of cultural and economic life in central Victoria, much of its success is contingent upon melding high quality interpretation with local, regional, and national commercial imperatives and tourism strategies. Benefits include the development of infrastructure and increased employment opportunities that will flow from an integrated strategy for interpreting a potential world heritage landscape. The Chinese heritage sites in the city of Bendigo can be viewed as a broad historical precinct that engages not only with the remnant industrial mining landscape but also with the cultural history of the region. Accordingly, it is argued that interpretation can be used to develop a precinct, as opposed to a series of isolated heritage sites, which may have strong visitor appeal. In making this assertion, it is noted that this process of tourism (and regional) development must be underpinned by strong tourism product. Such product is contingent on having sufficiently interesting remnant heritage...
sites and explaining these with engaging, story-based and sometimes contested historical narratives.

The analysis of the Bendigo Chinese heritage tourist precinct in this article has also demonstrated that further opportunities for developing Australia Chinese heritage potentially lie in extending the interdisciplinary dialogue between tourism studies, heritage practitioners and historical research. As Lennon et al. (1999: 2) noted over a decade ago, in the recent Australian experience, there has been ‘little application of a multidisciplinary approach to assessing the significance of cultural values in natural areas on a regional basis because most professional disciplines tackle only one aspect’. Clearly, new interdisciplinary approaches (such as the one utilised in this article), with clear applied outcomes to Chinese oriented Australian tourism destinations, are a key part of any future research agenda. It is hoped that they will lead to innovations in regional heritage tourism and, ultimately, research-to-practice reforms.

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