A Matter of Principle: Heritage management in Australia and China

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Abstract

The paper discusses recent cultural connections between Australia and the People’s Republic of China in the development of modern heritage practice. In 1997 the Getty Conservation Institute, the then Australian Heritage Commission and the Chinese State Administration for Cultural Heritage decided to collaborate in the creation of a set of conservation principles for China. As part of the project senior cultural heritage administrators from China made several visits to Australia to visit sites, to meet with Australian heritage professionals, to use these experiences and work on drafting the Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China, known as the China Principles, while return visits were made to view a range of heritage sites in China. The paper reviews Australian and Chinese impressions of differing heritage concepts and practices and relates how concepts and practices from the Burra Charter were woven into the ‘China Principles’.

Introduction

Many of the papers in this issue are about the Chinese heritage of Australia. This paper takes a slightly different tack: it discusses recent cultural connections between Australia and the People’s Republic of China in the development of modern heritage practice. In 1997, as part of the Getty Conservation Institute’s already long and successful collaboration with Chinese heritage authorities (especially at the Mogao Grottos), the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC), and the Chinese State Administration for Cultural Heritage (SACH) collaborated in the creation of a set of conservation principles for China. Known as the ‘China Principles’, Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China were issued by China ICOMOS and disseminated for national adoption in 2000.

These best practice conservation guidelines use a values-based management model of which the key example is the Charter of Places of Cultural Significance, the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1999). Elements of this process have been described and discussed in previous papers in this journal and elsewhere (Sullivan 2001; Agnew et al. 2004). As part of the project, senior cultural heritage administrators from China visited sites in Australia (February 1998, 1999, and 2001) to meet with Australian heritage professionals and site managers and to use these experiences to draft the China Principles. During the same period, the GCI and the AHC team made several visits to important Chinese sites varying from vernacular architecture, historic towns, Imperial palaces, gardens and tombs, archaeological sites, museums, temples, and cave temples. Visits were also made by the combined team to significant sites in the USA including the Capitol, the Lincoln and Vietnam memorials in Washington DC, Colonial Williamsburg and Annapolis in Maryland, Chaco Canyon and Acoma in New Mexico, the Getty Centre and the Greene & Greene designed Gamble House in Los Angeles.

Chinese Cultural Heritage

China is a vast country with a quarter of the world’s population stretching across thirty provinces with an unparalleled array of cultural heritage. These include magnificent and vast palace sites, grand classical gardens, an enormous range of archaeological sites, ancient cities, city walls, historic towns and villages, tombs, cave temple sites, vernacular housing, and cultural landscapes. Industrial heritage sites include porcelain kilns, mines, shipyards, bridges, canals, and wells. Religious sites include Daoist and Confucian temples, Buddhist temples and pagodas, Islamic mosques, and Christian churches. Many sites (such as the Forbidden City and the Great Wall) are highly visited and are instantly recognised globally while others are remote, isolated, and scarcely visited.

China has a well structured and relatively powerful heritage bureaucracy. Approximately 60,000 staff at a national, provincial, regional and local level are responsible for conserving the more than 400,000 recorded cultural heritage sites in China. Twenty nine cultural heritage sites are listed on the World Heritage List, eight are listed for their natural values and four are listed natural and cultural sites.1 A further fifty two sites are listed on the World Heritage Tentative List. In 1961, 33 sites were protected at the national level, whilst 2,352 cultural heritage sites were nationally protected in 2006; 9,396 were under provincial protection and 58,300 under county or city protection (China Gate 2006). In 2005, 103 cities and 22 towns were designated as ‘Cities and Towns of Recognised Historical and Cultural Value’. The sites demonstrate the immense depth of culture and history which characterises Chinese culture (Sullivan 2001).

At first glance therefore it may seem strange that China – possessing perhaps the greatest cultural heritage inventory in the world – should find interesting and useful examples of heritage conservation in Australia, a country with a small population and only two hundred years of European heritage. While (as other articles in this volume testify) the Chinese diaspora has left a rich recent Chinese history in Australia, for the Chinese delegates on the ‘China Principles’ team this story represents only a tiny and recent part of Chinese history. The Chinese attitude to these Australian sites was one of admiration and wonder that Australia would value and conserve them, rather than that of a high regard for the cultural value of the sites themselves. However there are a number of factors which made Chinese interest in Australian heritage practice more understandable. Though its European settlement is very brief, Australia is home to the world’s oldest continuing culture. The gradual recognition by non-Indigenous Australians of the value and complexity of this Indigenous culture has influenced Australian heritage practice in important ways, as has our need to deal with a culture of more recent origins which is not so
much monument and fabric bound as relating to place, landscape, and continuing use (Sullivan 2005). An equally important reason lies in the history of Chinese heritage conservation in the twentieth century and the rapidly changing situation brought about by the opening up of China (and the challenges which accompanied this). The fact that the Chinese are interested in a values-based management approach and in exploring new ideas in a new country is a direct result of the long history of Chinese respect for cultural heritage and China’s active conservation efforts in the twentieth century (Sullivan 2001; Agnew et al. 2004; Lai, Dumas & Agnew 2004).

**Traditional Chinese approaches to conserving heritage**

Respect for history and scholarship, for longevity and tradition, the collecting of antiquities, and honouring past achievements and the places associated with them has a long history in China. Transformation and adaptability – symbolised since antiquity as the dragon – are characteristics that are the key to the resilience of Chinese civilisation over at least four millennia (Shaughnessy 2005: 7). During its long history China has developed a complex, sophisticated, and essentially didactic view of its past. The Confucian view of the world incorporates a respect for the wisdom of the past, before which the present generation is humbled. Two texts from the Confucian Analects set the scene from long ago: ‘I am not one who was born with knowledge. I love the ancient and earnestly seek it. I transmit but I do not create, I believe in and love the ancient’ (quoted in Gungwu 1985: 176), According to historian Wang Gungwu:

> The ancient past having been tested over the centuries and found to be valued for all times [...] in fact provided the principles for determining how to deal with the recent past [...] it was natural to think that the ancient past was more worth knowing, more attractive even more lovable than the recent past [...] There are four points to these two texts: knowing the ancient and earnestly loving the ancient, believing in it, transmitting and not creating; seeking out knowledge or learning from the past. (1985: 176)

Also embodied in Chinese traditional practice is a strong belief in the importance of respecting and caring for important sites relating to Chinese culture and history – and hence the necessity for their ‘restoration’ and ‘maintenance’. The past was traditionally honoured by shining ‘as new’ in the present (Lai, Demas & Agnew 2004).

China has a diversity and wealth of architectural heritage which was strongly influenced by religious beliefs (especially Confucianism) until the Cultural Revolution (1967-76). Architectural practice was based on traditional structural principles which retained key characteristics for several thousand years, with the main changes being the decorative details. Essentially the same design for a complex of buildings was used for palaces and temples with modular systems and grouping principal buildings supplemented by subsidiary ones. While building materials were extremely varied across China, the predominant building material was wood (Chinese Academy of Sciences 1986). Locating buildings within the natural setting to form an integrated landscape ‘is a fundamental feature of Chinese traditional architecture, showing the harmony between man and nature, between the spiritual and the material world’ (d’Ayala and Wang 2006: 56).

Texts on architectural practice written during the Song dynasty (960-1127 CE) continued in use throughout the following Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. These reference texts highlight ‘the high level of standardisation and control historically exercised by the central and spiritual authority on the built environment of China. This has found confirmation in the direct survey and observation of historic buildings, which also document a steady pace of innovation’ (d’Ayala and Wang 2006: 58).

It is easy, however, to overstate the influence of tradition and of a cyclical view of history on Chinese society in general, and on modern heritage conservation practice in particular. During the twentieth century, before and after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China (1949), there was a great deal of scholarly exchange with the West that brought about the introduction of new conservation ideas into China. Several heritage protection laws were passed in China between 1928 and 1938 before the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese war which were clearly influenced by Western countries (Gruber 2008: 272). An outstanding example of early twentieth century modern Chinese scholarship in heritage conservation can be found in the work of Liang Sicheng (1901-1972) (Lai, Demas & Agnew 2004). Liang Sicheng and his wife, Lin Huiyin were part of a group of Chinese scholars who studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania on scholarships funded by Boxer Rebellion indemnity money. When Liang returned to China in 1927 with a Master of Architecture degree, he set up the Architecture Department at Northeast University in 1928 and at Tsinghua University in Beijing in 1946. Liang Sicheng wrote China’s first modern history on Chinese architecture and was the best known representative of the Construction Research Association, which undertook the study and preservation of China’s traditional buildings based on comparative research. Working with Lin Huiyin (1904-1955), Mo Zongjiang (1916-1999), and Ji Yutang (1902-c1960s), Liang Sicheng identified the Nanchan Temple and Foguang Temple at Mount Wutai as being the first and second oldest timber structures still standing in China. Recognised as the ‘Father of Modern Chinese Architecture’ Liang was awarded an honorary doctoral degree in 1947 by Princeton University, stating that he was ‘a creative architect who has also been a teacher of architectural history, a pioneer in historical research and exploration in Chinese architecture and planning, and a leader in the restoration and preservation of the priceless monuments of his country’ (History Cultural China 2010: para 1). Liang Sicheng and Lin Huiyin were part of a committee which designed the national emblem of the People’s Republic of China (featuring the façade of Tiananmen Square and still in use today) and the Monument to People’s Heroes in Tiananmen Square. Liang tried unsuccessfully to prevent the demolition of the Beijing city wall in the 1950s. For this he was repeatedly criticised and regarded as politically untrustworthy (Qian 2007: 256). His contribution to the nation through design is now recognised by naming the national prize for architectural design the ‘Liang Sicheng Award’ (Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Centre 2010).

There is no direct evidence that Liang knew of the Venice Charter, but in his last article on architectural conservation in 1964 he demonstrates thinking which is clearly in line with it: ‘[h]e contrasts the traditional practice of “having a completely bright new look” with the method he is promoting, that is respecting the patina of time and the character and qualities with which the ancient is imbued’ (Lai, Demas & Agnew 2004: 85). He
can be regarded as the chief proponent of the philosophy of heritage conservation in China which he saw as ‘repair and restore an old building as it used to be’ (d’Ayala & Wang 2006: 60; Qian 2007: 256). This approach was later restated as ‘preserving a building in its present state, or no originality to be changed’ and included in the first National Relics Conservation Law of 1982 (Qian 2007: 256; China Gate 2006: para 11).

The turbulent events in China during the twentieth century resulted in great destruction of China’s cultural heritage, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. Many cultural heritage sites and items were deliberately destroyed and all existing protection mechanisms were abandoned with most of the legal system and existing laws (Gruber 2007: 272). During this period conservation work was often labelled as conservative and therefore risked being harshly attacked (Qian 2007: 256). The periods of devastation and damage also included loss of knowledge, traditional building and craft skills. As traditional methods and approaches to conservation were lost there was a resulting discontinuity of skills and techniques. This period of destruction was followed by a hasty acceptance of western technologies and practices, which were sometimes inappropriate for the conservation of China’s cultural heritage. This ready acceptance of western technology has on occasion accelerated the loss of and disregard for traditional skills.

On the other hand, other periods since 1949 have witnessed considerable effort in the conservation of cultural heritage especially considering the economic issues facing modern China, with quite massive interventions at threatened sites and the establishment of a strict and comprehensive legal system for cultural heritage. The 1982 Constitution clearly stated a commitment to preserve China’s cultural heritage: ‘The state protects places of scenic and historic interest, valuable cultural monuments and relics and other important items of China’s historical and cultural heritage’ (Gruber 2007: 275).

The Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Preservation of Cultural Relics, adopted in 1982, has been amended twice. Rules for its implementation were introduced in 2003. In 1989 the Urban Planning Law of the People’s Republic of China included provisions to ensure any cultural heritage is included in all urban planning provisions for the area in which it is located (Gruber 2007: 277). Shanghai, for example, in 1991 had a list of 11 historical and cultural areas in the inner city area, four ancient towns in surrounding areas and 398 ‘excellent modern buildings’ – all backed up with government promulgated administrative procedures. This was just before the city entered a phase of massive development.

One of the priorities of the new Republic was to protect and conserve China’s heritage places. As an example, even before its rule had been firmly established throughout the entire country, the first cultural heritage manager was sent by the party hierarchy to safeguard the Mogao Grottoes in Gansu Province in Western China — a famous Buddhist cave temple site on the Silk Road containing 492 painted and decorated caves and one of the few sites now listed on the World Heritage List for all six criteria (Sullivan 2001). The first priority for the managers of Mogao has rightly been the physical conservation of this fabric. The earliest efforts went towards basic stabilisation of the painted walls and statues, along with meticulous systematic recording, stabilising the cliff face, and securing the caves against weathering. A physical conservation facility was quickly established, which began analysis of problems and testing of conservation solutions. International partners such as the GCI were recruited to assist in this massive work of physical conservation. The achievements of these 50 years of work at Mogao are evident, as is the gradual improvement in the discipline of physical conservation over this period moving from basic, emergency efforts carried out under very difficult conditions through a period of experimentation and learning to a situation of state-of-the-art work at Mogao today. Innovative solutions such as the installation of windbreak fences constructed above the cliff face and reinforced with the planting of a living fence of desert-adapted plants indigenous to the central Asian deserts to mitigate wind borne sand entering the caves, and the five years of conservation work on Cave 85 jointly conducted by the Dunhuang Academy and the GCI are some examples of this progress (Agnew 1993, 2010).

As discussed elsewhere, however (Sullivan 2001; Agnew et al. 2004), the opening up of China posed a range of new challenges for the Chinese, similar to those faced in Australia. Previously the Chinese bureaucracy was able to maintain a fortress mentality in the conservation of their sites. Sites were classified as being of national, provincial or local significance, and in general sites were basically conserved as museums, with a great deal of emphasis on physical conservation, research (such as that at Mogao), and with little attention to the then controlled and highly regulated visitor presence, and with no real development pressure except occasionally from important state projects. It is worth noting in this context that Mogao did not allow any visitors except expert researchers for the caves until 1979, and then only very reluctantly with the opening up of China. All this has radically changed. In particular, massive visitation, pressure from provincial governments to utilise sites for economic development, and the growth of private development pressure had created a situation which by the time of the China Principles project was much more comparable with the Australian situation where cultural heritage management had already faced the challenges of a modern state, with all the complexities of the free market economy, an active civil society, and the overt political pressures of heritage versus development.

Senior Chinese heritage officials were well aware of the implications of this changing situation and, like Australia ICOMOS in the 1970s, sought to develop a set of principles for Chinese heritage management. While building on Western traditions such as the Venice Charter these guidelines would provide the Chinese with their own unique culturally appropriate version of heritage conservation methodology. In 1998 a delegation of senior Chinese heritage officials and experts led by Zhang Bai, Deputy Director of SACH and the GCI visited Australia to better understand Australian heritage management principles and practice. Participants were involved in workshops, site visits, discussions, and meetings with Australian government ministers, heritage agencies, professional bodies, universities, and heritage practitioners.

Sharing heritage concepts and practices

In China

In China the GCI and the Australian team members found an astounding range of cultural heritage, comprehensive legislation, a very active classification and listing process, a hierarchical system of controls, and interpretation for domestic consumption often with an interesting mixture of excellence in scholarship combined with a range of didactic and political messages. Our senior Chinese colleagues were dedicated,
enthusiastic, and in their personal histories demonstrated a high degree of persistence. Considering the effects on them as young professionals during the Cultural Revolution, one could recognise heroism in their pursuit of a career in cultural heritage and their commitment to the ideals of conservation – this combined with a sophisticated understanding of the complex issues and choices which this involves.

We enthusiastically discussed many issues relating to China’s heritage regime. There was an emphasis on monumental heritage with a lack of recognition of vernacular architecture and an emphasis on emperors and revolutionary exploits at the expense of places of social significance. Industrial heritage, cultural landscapes, and intangible heritage were also not recognised. The variety and scale of sites and their longevity and complexity was, however, extraordinary. The emphasis on physical conservation in conserving sites mentioned above was also apparent, as was an acceptance of new Western technologies – though sometimes with lack of resources and back up to ensure continuity. Some loss of skills and craft traditions was apparent, but there was a strong commitment to traditional conservation methodology. The growing pressure of visitation and the lack of modern management as well as the growing threat from provincial interests and the pressure for over development at sites was very evident and readily recognised. There was generally poor coordination between tourism and heritage authorities (Agnew et al. 2006: 19).

Our colleagues were particularly concerned that administration at a provincial level tended to be overzealous in the exploitation of their sites and over-reconstruction (Lai, Dames & Agnew 2004). Interpretation emphasised hierarchy and focused entirely on dynastic histories while stories of ordinary lives, women (except empresses or concubines), or children were absent.

In Australia

The China Principles project and the Chinese visits to Australia provided an insight into Chinese views on Australian heritage practice in various ways. The Chinese magazine World Architecture (1999) published an edition of papers on Australia’s built heritage – including observations by two leading Chinese architectural heritage experts who visited Australia as part of the China Principles project. The Australian Heritage Commission (1999) subsequently published the papers as a ‘Special Issue’ on Australian architectural heritage. In addition there was continual discussion among team members and a lively exchange of views with Australian practitioners.

The Chinese delegation to Australia in 1998 identified their aims as being to ‘choose from what is good and follow that practice, that is to take what we believe is good and use that in our own cultural heritage work in China’ (Jin Hongkui in Australian Heritage Commission 1999: 21). At the end of the first visit Zhang Bai clarified that Australian heritage practice had two elements which should be included in the China Principles: the Burra Charter firstly provided a logical and sequential assessment and management process and secondly provided Australian heritage agencies, practitioners and the broader community with a common language – an operational tool which China could adapt for its heritage conservation.

Wang Shiren, a senior architect in the Chinese delegation identified that the Burra Charter introduced three new concepts (qtd. in AHC 1999: 18–20). One concept was that of ‘place’ (as opposed to ‘monument’ or ‘site’) which he found hard to translate because of the difficulty of finding a Chinese word to convey the concept. This led to discussions about the fact that the Australia ICOMOS use of the word ‘place’ in the Burra Charter to replace the term ‘monuments and sites’ as used in the Venice Charter was a deliberate choice aimed at creating a less fabric-bound concept. Wang identified the term ‘fabric’ to distinguish the physical element being conserved as the second new concept while ‘cultural significance’ was the third new concept (ibid.: 18–19). Wang agreed that these new concepts ‘provide the logic to solve some difficult issues that often cause problems when undertaking conservation work’ (ibid.: 19).

He also found that the Burra Charter was valuable in being strongly focused on operations, and that the three guidelines on cultural significance, conservation policy and procedures for undertaking research and report writing were recognised professional standards.

Wang Shiren described the Burra Charter principles of maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, and adaptation, and provided a preliminary overview of what he regarded as similarities and differences between Chinese and Australian practice. (Frequently due to interpretive or language differences, later discussions with the China Principles working group involved many points of clarification, discussion, and debate over the meanings and practices of maintenance, restoration, and reconstruction.) In this paper Wang Shiren agreed strongly with the statement in the Burra Charter that reconstruction is not the same as re-creation and that this concept is even further removed from ‘conjectural reconstruction’. He considered that different countries interpret the principle of re-creating destroyed monuments in different ways, citing Russia as an example where it is ‘one of the most frequently used methods for conserving and restoring historic buildings’ (qtd. in AHC 1999: 20).

In his view some reconstruction is necessary in China but it should be based on solid evidence. He identified that ‘there is some reconstruction done when there is no need to do so and when there is no basis for carrying out this kind of work. What is more: there is a lot of it!’ (ibid.: 20). Wang Shiren endorsed the concept of compatible use, seeing it as an extremely positive approach to conservation. He also noted the importance of planning for the surrounding environment.

Jin Hongkui contributed a paper with a summary of his experiences on the visit to Australia accompanied by an accomplished photographic record of the places he had seen (AHC 1999: 21–28). He was similarly impressed with the concept of an evaluation of cultural significance which underpins the conservation management planning for the place. As both countries faced the dilemma of conservation versus development, Jin Hongkui found the concept of finding an appropriate use for heritage sites to be crucial to conserve the site. He considered the principle to be ‘far sighted’ and recognised that this principle was being applied in Australia although he pointed out that it was not written into the Burra Charter itself (this visit was prior to the revision in 1999). This was to some extent a new concept to our Chinese colleagues, and one which they were eager to explore and consider, since the Chinese traditional practice of simply conserving historic places as museums was in some cases no longer feasible or desirable, as the concept of what constitutes cultural heritage expanded in China to take in such places as historic housing still in use, and recently abandoned industrial complexes. Jin Hongkui compared this principle with China’s introduction of the principle of ‘rational use’ ‘with the criterion being that it is suited to progress’ (qtd. in AHC 1999: 27). Wang Shiren also endorsed the concept of compatible use, seeing it as an
extremely positive approach to conservation (ibid.: 20). However delegates were quite critical of some aspects of continuing use which they saw in Australia. For example, they were concerned about the addition of buildings for church use quite close to St Mary’s cathedral, considering that this was not really compatible use since in their opinion it impacted on the original grand and spacious setting of the Cathedral and hence impacted on an important element of its significance.

Jin Hongkui questioned what gives the Burra Charter so much vitality and concluded that it was probably because it was respected by the public. Having seen how the public was engaged in conservation issues (firstly at St Mary’s cathedral in Sydney on whether the location of the chancel should be changed to accommodate changes in religious ceremonies and whether two spires which had been part of the original plan never constructed should now be built, and secondly on plans for the conversion of the former Kingston Power Plant in Canberra for future uses) he saw public consultation as being a necessary part of the cultural heritage process and ‘a big advantage’ for Australia (qtd. in AHC 1999: 28). The proposed changes to the fabric of St Mary’s cathedral stimulated considerable discussion with our Chinese colleagues as the examples also impacted on issues relating to ongoing and evolving use and its significance versus fabric.

The China Principles identifies cultural heritage sites as:

- the immovable physical remains that were created during the history of humankind and that have significance; they include archaeological sites and ruins, tombs, traditional architecture, cave temples, stone carvings, sculpture, inscriptions, stele, and petroglyphs, as well as modern and contemporary places and commemorative buildings, and those historic precincts (villages or towns), together with their original heritage components, that are officially declared protected sites. (Agnew & Demas 2002: 60)

Jin Hongkui classified the sites that the delegation visited in Australia into three of the categories in Chinese legislation for identifying heritage as:

- historic cultural towns, precincts and areas – The Rocks, Sydney and Lanyon, ACT
- archaeological sites – Museum of Sydney, site of the first Government House
- historic buildings and groups of buildings – Hyde Park Barracks, Government House and Moore Park Showgrounds.

Jin considered that the adaptation occurring at the Showground when the Chinese visited was ‘a good example of how the conservation of heritage sites is handled differently in Australia compared to China as this site is really closer to what we would term ‘readaptation of old buildings’ in China (qtd. in AHC 1999: 26).

Wang Shiren characterised Australia’s history as having a ‘big gap in the middle’, i.e. he saw a large number of prehistoric and contact sites followed by evidence of European history beginning only in the eighteenth century (qtd. in AHC 1999: 18). In this comment he was referring to what he regarded as a relatively short period of historic heritage compared to the Chinese situation, rather than to Australia’s continuing Indigenous heritage. (Unlike Australia, China does not have a nationwide living hunter-gatherer tradition that has continued for millennia.)

Archaeology

Jin Hongkui noted in his paper that China was extending the time frames for the definition of the concept of archaeology. Archaeology in China was defined as ‘a branch of science that is used to do research into the history of mankind’s ancient society through the research of physical remains of all types of activities undertaken by mankind in ancient times’ (AHC 1999: 28). Archaeology was confined to ‘ancient times’ and did not become involved in ‘modern’ (defined as 1840 to 1949) and ‘contemporary’ history (1949 to the present). In China, archaeological studies ceased with the end of the Ming dynasty in 1644. Jin Hongkui compared Chinese practice with the Australian approach – the study of both prehistoric and historic archaeology. He wrote that in China this is regarded as using archaeological methods to research modern and contemporary history. As a result, the time limit for archaeological practice has been extended to the Qing dynasty. Jin Hongkui questioned whether it should be extended to the present and whether this is ‘an extension of this science’ (ibid. 1999: 28).

Adaptive Re-use

Inspection of a range of sites provoked a good deal of discussion on other issues. A site visit to the Grace Bros department store in Broadway, Sydney, stimulated a spirited discussion about adaptive reuse. Changes to the building’s fabric were being made to retain the department store’s traditional use for retailing, yet also take advantage of commercial opportunities to adapt part of the building for apartments. The Chinese considered that the removal of original fabric associated with traditional retail use had a detrimental impact on the significance of the place, which in their view was not balanced by the conservation of values relating to traditional use.

A visit to the historic town of Braidwood, NSW, provided opportunities to observe an historic town that continues its traditional use providing rural services yet retains its heritage significance within its Georgian layout and its landscape setting. Functioning as a dynamic rural community Braidwood demonstrated the option of retaining heritage places as living places, not simply as museums. The Chinese were grappling with the issue of conserving the integrity of heritage places, particularly historic towns and villages, vernacular buildings and cultural landscapes and saw Braidwood as an example of a functioning rural township which retained its significance as a service town for the pastoral industry supported by active community use.

During visits to Old Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra discussions focused on conservation management planning and also visitor management and interpretation. The didactic role of heritage sites was discussed, using the place to interpret stories for different audiences and ages with an emphasis on school children. At Old Parliament House conservation management planning was demonstrated as an integral part of place management and this process was incorporated into the China Principles. The Australian War Memorial provided opportunities to discuss issues of mass tourism, albeit on an Australian scale which cannot compare with visitor numbers at many Chinese sites. At the pastoral property Lanyon in the ACT the China Principles participants discussed cultural landscapes and observed the effectiveness of buffer zones to protect heritage significance.
An earlier paper for this journal (Agnew et al. 2004) described the further development of the ‘China Principles’ which were issued by ICOMOS China and disseminated for national adoption in 2000 (Agnew & Demas 2004). An illustrated version of the China Principles was published by ICOMOS China in 2005, the year when SACH and ICOMOS China presented the China Principles in a dedicated session during the 15th ICOMOS General Assembly in Xi’an. This was followed by a program of dissemination and promotion at the national level.

**Chinese Heritage in Australia**

One of the outcomes of the China Principles work in Australia was an increased appreciation of the extent of Chinese heritage in Australia which was little known or appreciated by the broader Australian community. The Australian Heritage Commission was working to rectify the gap in knowledge of migrant-related heritage places and had been developing ways to assist migrant groups and the wider community to identify heritage places important to them. The Commission had funded a research project to develop an outline history of the Chinese in Australia which formed the basis to develop guidelines and an associated ‘toolkit’ for heritage practitioners and the Chinese Australian community. The toolkit included a bibliography of Chinese Australian references and a database of heritage sites, *Tracking the dragon: a guide for finding and assessing places of Chinese Australian heritage (AHC 2002).*

**The China Principles**

d’Ayala and Wang (2006: 59) have identified differences between Chinese and Western approaches and conservation interventions, highlighting ‘the inherent pragmatism present in the Chinese context’. They judged conservation and restoration to be different conservation approaches which were used historically irrespective of the heritage value of the building. As improved economic conditions and increased emphasis on historic protection enabled central government and local authorities to allocate increasing portions of their budgets to larger scale projects, conservation and restoration were used alternatively depending on the building type, its current state, future use and sponsoring agency (ibid.: 61). The authors identified a disparity between institutional approach, academic debate and current Chinese professional conservation practice, ‘[The principle of “preserving the originality or existing state” sometimes generates frustration and conflict among conservators, architects and engineers, when there are serious defects or flaws endangering building survival or public safety’ (ibid.: 61).

The China Principles were welcomed as the first professional guidance for heritage practice, timely and useful industry guidelines which made a substantial effort to address differences in conservation practice in China. Lack of guidance on structural issues were identified in the Principles, such as implementation of reinforcement and complete or partial disassembly when intervening on a substantially deteriorated building. The dilemma is identified as one between reinforcement with additional materials to protect original fabric with potential impacts on the aesthetic value and structural authenticity, or the alternative of disassembly and reassembly with potential loss of historic fabric. However the guidelines do assist in resolving this issue since in the China Principles undertaking research and ascertaining the most significant values of the building determines the conservation outcomes.

Principles and practices discussed and debated during the development of the China Principles have been implemented at cultural heritage sites in China. Zhang Bai has spoken of the role and influence the China Principles have played in heritage conservation, citing the development and implementation of the Chinese Cultural Relics Protection Standards as being one of the more prominent examples of projects which ‘can consciously implement [...] the spirit, and strive to reflect the requirements of the guidelines’ (State Administration for Cultural Heritage 2007: para 7).

Heritage management practice is outstanding at sites such as the Mogao Grottoes, yet many sites continue to face overwhelming pressure from overdevelopment, mass tourism or neglect. Many places of cultural heritage importance have been destroyed, their significance been severely impacted or inappropriately reconstructed. The great pressure for modernisation and demands for raising living standards puts particular pressure on urban historic areas and cultural landscapes, as exemplified in the redevelopment of the hutong of Beijing prior to and since the 2007 Olympic Games. Fengqi Qian (2006) has highlighted how the renewal of historic precincts may revitalise old neighbourhoods, yet the demolition of physical fabric also results in the loss of the spirit of place. Qian found that heritage protection provisions in the national heritage law, municipal regulations, and the municipal planning scheme combined had not ‘prevented the comprehensive demolition in a listed historic neighbourhood like Nanchizi’ (2006: 8) and also failed to comply with the principle of minimal intervention in the China Principles.

The inscription of the West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou in the World Heritage List (June 2011) meeting criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi) recognises a landscape that has:

inspired famous poets, scholars and artists since the ninth century. It comprises numerous temples, pagodas, pavilions, gardens and ornamental trees, as well as causeways and artificial islands [...] The West Lake has influenced garden design in the rest of China as well as Japan and Korea over the centuries and bears an exceptional testimony to the cultural tradition of improving landscapes to create a series of vistas reflecting an idealised fusion between humans and nature. (UNESCO 2011: paras 1–6)

West Lake epitomises the construction of an idealised cultural landscape, and has been identified as the ‘most distinguished living cultural landscape in China which perfectly represents Chinese philosophies of “oneness with nature”. Cultural identities and the sense of place have been successfully enhanced by passing on its traditional spirit through history to the point where the West Lake has become an exemplary living cultural landscape in China’ (Han 2008: 1–2). However the journey to achieve World Heritage listing was fraught and it ‘experienced a very painful period in conservation. It encountered two most difficult issues in conservation. One was the methodology and another one was the attitude to history’ (ibid.: 8). The West Lake nomination was initially as a natural place, and considered as a static rather than as a dynamic evolving cultural landscape. Local people were removed from the place. ‘[F]ighting with people’ was identified as being the most difficult thing in heritage conservation (ibid.: 8). Eventually, however, changing ‘attitudes to history’, acknowledging social values, the role of communities in heritage, and recognition of West Lake as a vibrant cultural landscape has provided an
exemplary example of successful conservation in line with the China Principles.

**Conclusion**

Looking back it is useful to consider the differences between the genesis of the Burra Charter and the China Principles and their resulting trajectories. The Burra Charter was implemented by Australia ICOMOS in the 1970s when heritage legislation and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of improving professional practice but also of persuading and administration was in its infancy in Australia. It had the aim of providing a certain standard. It was initially generated by the ICOMOS membership (who maintain a strong sense of ownership of it) and was regarded as quite radical (or perhaps impractical) by some bureaucrats, planners, and developers. The successful selling of its key principles to various government jurisdictions was a twenty-year project.

The China Principles, on the other hand, were an initiative of SACH (though finally published as a China ICOMOS document) and officially accepted by government and internationally (ICOMOS 2011: para 26). They have been influential in China and internationally, but many heritage professionals in China felt a lack of ownership of the document and argued it did not go far enough in some respects. A review of the Charter by China ICOMOS was commenced in 2010 with the intent to incorporating the views of a range of experts. This should improve the document and give it a broader ownership.

Participation in the China Principles project was an immensely rewarding cooperative international partnership with benefits to all parties. Sharing information and ideas lead to successful outcomes which will be further advanced by the review of the China Principles being undertaken by ICOMOS China.

**Endnotes**

1 China - World Heritage List properties:
   - Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Beijing and Shenyang – Cultural (1987, 2004)
   - Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor – Cultural (1987)
   - Mogao Caves – Cultural (1987)
   - Mount Tai Shan – Natural and Cultural (1987)
   - Peking Man Site at Zhoukoudian – Cultural (1987)
   - The Great Wall – Cultural (1987)
   - Mount Huangshan – Natural and Cultural (1990)
   - Huanglong Scenic and Historic Interest Area – Natural (1992)
   - Jiuzhaigou Valley Scenic and Historic Interest Area – Natural (1992)
   - Wuliuyang Scenic and Historic Interest Area – Natural (1992)
   - Ancient Building Complex in the Wudang Mountains – Cultural (1994)
   - Temple and Cemetery of Confucius and the Kong Family Mansion in Qufu – Cultural (1994)
   - Lushan National Park – Natural (1996)
   - Mount Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area – Natural and Cultural (1996)
   - Ancient City of Ping Yao – Cultural (1997)
   - Old Town of Liping – Cultural (1997)
   - Summer Palace, an Imperial Garden in Beijing – Cultural (1998)
   - Dazu Rock Carvings – Cultural (1999)
   - Imperial Tombs of the Ming and Qing Dynasties – Cultural (2002, 2003, 2004)
   - Yangshuo Grottoes – Cultural (2001)
   - Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas – Natural (2003)
   - Historic Centre of Macao – Cultural (2005)
   - Shuishan Giant Panda Sanctuaries – Wolong, Mt Siguniang and Jiuzhaigou – Natural (2006)
   - Yin Xu – Cultural (2006)
   - Kaiping Diaolou and Villages – Cultural (2007)
   - South China Karst – Natural (2007)
   - Fujian Tulou – Cultural (2008)
   - Mount Sanqing National Park – Natural (2008)
   - Mount Wutai – Cultural (2009)
   - China Danxia – Natural (2010)

2 The recognition in the Australian context of place rather than site, the significance of landscape and associational values resulted in the shift of emphasis from physical fabric in the Venice Charter to the Burra Charter. The 1999 Burra Charter revision further highlighted the significance of meanings, use and intangible heritage values.

**References**


