Infrastructures of Memory
Heritages and Diversity in Modern China

Workshop

27 May 2021
9:30 AM – 16:00 PM CET

Zoom
Meeting ID: 925 1836 4365
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Organizer: Prof. Dr. Maximilian Mayer, CASSIS, University of Bonn
Host: Research Group „Infrastructures of China’s Modernity and Their Global Constitutive Effects” at the Center for Advanced Security, Strategic and Integration Studies (CASSIS), University of Bonn.
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BACKGROUND

The politics of cultural heritage are driven by competing historical memories, negotiated narratives and conflicting priorities. History and memory are far from being synonymous and often even opposed (Nora 1989). Memory is life, borne by living societies; history, on the other hand, is a reconstruction of the past and remains “always problematic and incomplete”. As Nora points out, “history is perpetually suspicious of memory; its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.” (p. 7-8) Van Dyke (2019) stressed another tension springing from diversity: the logic of “collective memory”, which serves political positions, on the one hand and “social memory” on the other hand, which is closer to individual experiences and local agendas. Building on memory studies’ analysis of the nexus between memory, history and politics (Olick 2008, Gabel 2013, De Cesari 2017) as well as the role of hybrid and heterogeneous memories in daily life and political practices (McQuaid and Gensburger 2019), this workshop aims to deepen and extend recent scholarly attention to memory politics in China (Denton 2013, Maags and Svensson 2018, Ludwig, Wang, and Walton 2020). Conceptually, it proposes an infrastructural approach to the study of memory in order to connect new empirical sites and materials and reflect on new conceptual puzzles.

INFRASTRUCTURES OF MEMORY

Infrastructure is an “underlying foundation or basic framework of a system” (Meyboom 2009, 72), which goes beyond the notion of carriers of memory. Infrastructures of memory are in a broad sense an “invisible” foundation of modern states, collective imagination and everyday life. Two crucial characteristics of infrastructure are implicitly associated with “memory”: first is the relational and boundary transgressing nature of infrastructure. According to Star (1999, p. 381): “infrastructure has reached beyond a single event or one-site practice”. Not only do infrastructures reach beyond specific sites and practices, but due to their double nature, they “are things and also the relation between things” (Larking 2013, p. 329). For instance, Winner describes how New York city planners use the design of overpass heights, thus creating a detached relationship between the poor and the rich (1980). Traffic infrastructure is thus shaping everyday interactions in modern society, enabling the “plasticity” of social identities but also a contestation of memories and meanings. Memory infrastructures can enable a diversity of values and viewpoints and, at the same time, offer a range of selected pasts to be shaped and communicated through infrastructural platforms (Star 1996, 1999, Humphrey 2005). This insight corresponds with the growing research body on interactions and contestations around diverging perspectives of cultural heritage (see Smith 2006, Winter 2015, 2016, Lixinski 2014, Nakano 2018, Jacquesson 2020).

From a heritage studies viewpoint, the idea of infrastructures of memory opens up new perspectives. First, the social process by which architecture, roads, routes, irrigation system, or costumes, rituals, ceremonies, music, that served as “infrastructure” of daily live, became
“heritage”. Whatever the original roles and ownership of heritage sites were, once they enter the realm of memory politics and become modern memory infrastructures, they become arenas for meaning making with often diverse and conflicting interpretations. Phenomena such as of narrative competition, which receive scholarly attention (Ahn 2006, Chase 2011, Aykan 2015, 2016, Zhang 2017, Zhang and Smith 2019, Elpers 2020, Zhu and Maags 2020, O’Brien and Brown 2020), are connected to heritage as a present-centered tool for commercial and cultural practices as well as cultural marginalization/dominance (Harvey 2001). Second, the relationship between past and present is one of reconstruction (in the light of the present), more than one of preservation. For example, the meaning of China’s Grand Canal, once the world’s greatest transportation infrastructure, became contested between the authorized heritage discourse (AHD) and the local narratives (Zhang and Lenzer 2020); the New Silk Road project, with its emphasis on the inheritance of Chinese historical memory, was earlier considered by the international community as an “infrastructure” related to Japan’s cultural and diplomatic practice (Schoenberger 1988, Winter 2020). Finally, the durability of collective memories is a currently undertheorized question to which an infrastructural perspective can offer new insights.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This workshop aims to discuss how different heritage related actors in contemporary China construct and employ historical, architectural and cultural resources as memory infrastructures to engage in identity construction in the context of modern Chinese society and in China’s transnational cultural and political interactions.

1. Conceptually, how to analyze interactions and contestations of diverse interpretations of heritage within Chinese society? What are the key puzzles when theorizing the diversity of cultural heritage and politics of memory in and beyond China?
2. In which ways does the concept of the *infrastructures of memory* help to reexamine the existing research (or raise new questions) and to theorize heritage and identity politics?
3. In the light of the bottom-up and discursive turn in heritage studies and memory practices, how do official organizations and policies respond to societal diversity and diverging “local” heritage approaches? Which novel representational techniques and framing strategies are employed to that end?
4. What role does heritage play in China’s diplomatic, propaganda and intercultural practices, such as the “Belt and Road Initiative” in particular in relation with national identity formation and transnational collective imaginations?
WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

CET Summer time, 27 May, 2021

9:00-9:15AM Introduction
Karoline Noack (Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Department for the Anthropology of the Americas, University of Bonn) tbc.
Maximilian Mayer (CASSIS, University of Bonn)

9:15-11:15AM Panel 1. Multiple Infrastructures, Multiple Meanings
Sophie Elpers (Meertens Institute, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences): Intangible cultural heritage, museums and the challenge of diversity
Puay-peng Ho (National University of Singapore/UNESCO Chair on Architectural Heritage): Walking a Tightrope: Rethinking cultural urban landscape in China
Andrew Law and Qianqian Qin (Newcastle University): Cultural nationalism, ontological (in)security and reflective nostalgia? The Hanfu movement and young adults in China

Break (30 Minutes)

11:45AM - 13:45PM Panel 2. Categories, Institutions, Selection
Christina Maags Christina, (University of Sheffield): State Institutions as Building Blocks of Chinese Cultural Memory–The Case of Intangible Heritage
Sandra Gilgan (University of Bonn): The Role of History and Memory in the Popular Claim on Confucian Educational Tradition
Maximilian Mayer (University of Bonn): Infrastructures of memory: making memories durable – the case of Yushu after the 2010 earthquake

Break (15 Minutes)

14:00-16:00PM Panel 3. (Transnational) Power Relations of Memory
Ryoko Nakano (Kanazawa University): The Silk Roads as global memory infrastructures: Japan and South Korea’s views on China’s initiatives
David O’Brien (Ruhr University Bochum) and Melissa Shani Brown (Ruhr University Bochum): ‘Making the Past Serve the Present’: Tourism, Sinicisation, and BRI’s ‘People to People Bonds’ in Xinjiang (XUAR), China

Hendrik W. Ohnesorge (University of Bonn): Soft Power, Historic Statecraft and Memory in Great Power Politics

16:00-16:20PM Discussion and planning for publication

Moderation: Maximilian Mayer

Expected outcomes:

- Draft paper submission: 2 May 2021 (for circulation)
- Preparation of a special journal issue / or edited volume
Short Biographies

**Dr. Sophie Elpers** is a research associate at the Amsterdam Meertens Institute (Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences), research area Museology, Cultural Heritage Studies, European Ethnology. Her research focuses are intangible cultural heritage and the relationship between museums and diverse societies.

**Dr. Sandra Gilgan** is Managing Director of the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research, University of Bonn. Her research interests are Confucian education in China, modern China’s tradition revival movements.

**Dr. Ryoko Nakano** is a professor in the School of International Studies and the Faculty of Law at Kanazawa University. She has published numerous works on international relations in East Asia and Japanese international perspectives.

**Dr. Puay-peng Ho** is UNESCO Chair on Architectural Heritage Conservation and Management in Asia and Professor and Head Department of Architecture NUS.

**Dr. Christina Maags** is a lecturer in Chinese Studies at the School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield. Her research interests include political economy, multi-level governance, local policy implementation, and cultural heritage politics in the People’s Republic of China.

**Dr. David O’Brien** is a research associate at the Faculty of the East Asian Studies, Ruhr University Bochum. His research interests are China's ethnic identity policy, China’s Western development economic policy and BRI, China-Central Asian relations.

**Dr. Hendrick Ohnesorge** is Managing Director at the Center for Global Studies and Research Fellow at the Chair in International Relations at the University of Bonn. He focuses on the understanding and role of soft power and history in international affairs.

**Dr. Maximilian Mayer** is junior professor for international relations and global politics of technology at University of Bonn.
References


