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A Controversial Make-Over of a ‘Make-Believe’ Heritage—The Transformation of Guangrenwang Temple

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Abstract: This article discusses issues related to sustainable heritage management in China and problematises two dichotomies in heritage practices and research: the ‘Eastern/Western’ approaches and the tangible–intangible divide. It addresses these issues by examining the dramatic ‘make-over’ project of Guangrenwang Temple in Shanxi Province, China. The ‘make-over’ project transformed a small rural temple with a ninth-century timber structure into an architectural history museum, with a combination of private, public, and crowd-sourced funding. A real-estate corporation played a significant role in the project’s initiative and organised a large-scale national and international publicity campaign around the project. Previously unknown to most laypeople in China, the temple attracted much debate since the project’s completion, revolving around its ‘cultural legitimacy’, the design’s appropriateness, the sustainability of the revitalisation, and the implications of the project to its ‘heritage value’ and authenticity. This article traces the opinions, actions, and effects of the temple’s heritage assemblage and reveals the causal powers contributing to the emergence and transformation of associations within. It further questions the project team’s claims regarding the project’s effects on the historic setting’s authenticity and its long-term social impact on the relationship between the temple and its community. It reveals five controversies regarding the choice of its curation theme, architectural language, decision-making, and management models. The complexities manifested in the actors’ actions and effects demonstrate the ambiguous boundaries between the tangible and the intangible, and the perceived ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ approaches.

Keywords: sustainable heritage management; heritage museum; China; Eastern/Western approaches; tangible; intangible



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1. Introduction—Research Context

1.1. Two Intertwined Dichotomies

In the last four decades, heritage in China has experienced an unprecedented ‘bloom’, or even ‘craze’ and ‘fever’ (pp. 10–14, [1,2]). This bloom is demonstrated not only through its keen pursuit of international recognition through UNESCO but also the increasing attention given to cultural heritage domestically. In recent years, an expanding volume of academic literature on China’s heritage phenomenon has brought critical reflections and multi-disciplinary perspectives to the subject area. This article continues these critical reflections and interdisciplinary enquiries into China’s heritage practices, focusing on a controversial heritage transformation project in Southern Shanxi Province. The case study questions some assumptions in previous heritage research on China, including those from Critical Heritage Studies (CHS).

The 1994 Nara Document highlights the significance of contextualisation when assessing authenticity in heritage [3]. Since then, Western heritage practitioners and researchers have been keen to emphasise the Eastern/Western dichotomy in heritage approaches, partly based on a widespread misunderstanding and misconception of Japanese practices such as the Ise Shrine [4,5]. The critical turn of Heritage Studies in past decades has highlighted the conflicts between competing discourses in non-Western contexts, characterising them as a result of the distinctiveness between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ traditions, cultures,

religions, and ideologies [6–11]. However, the hasty acceptance of this dichotomy has led to overly simplified, essentialised, and even romanticised views of heritage activities in non-Western contexts [12–15]. Instead of the ‘discourse of differences’, termed by Winter [16] to describe and criticise the perceived distinctions between the ‘materialistic Western approach’ and the ‘non-materialistic Eastern approach’, the processes of negotiation between these various approaches can be better described as both differentiation and assimilation [12].

As conceptualised by Smith, the Western approach emphasises the monumentality and tangibility of heritage promoted by states and international organisations such as UNESCO [17]. However, the non-Western alternatives characterised in the literature have less universal definitions and are often less explored. Specific features of these alternatives are frequently used for over-generalisation rather than further discussing the complexities within (cf. [18]), a problem that scholars of Orientalism raised over two decades ago [19,20]. This simplified dichotomy also hinders a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter in Western contexts. The conflicts, negotiations, differences, and assimilation processes in each unique country or region deserve more nuanced and in-depth scrutiny [12].

Moreover, the ‘East/West’ dichotomy is closely intertwined with the conversation between heritage’s tangible and intangible aspects, as they are often stereotypically assigned to one context or the other. However, the accuracy of claim that non-Western societies lack interest in tangibility and prefer intangible ‘folkways’ is very much debatable in the contemporary era (cf. [21]). Even though studies render the impracticality of separating the two [22,23], they are still widely used to categorise heritage entities [24,25].

1.2. *Heritage in Post-Cultural Revolution China (Post-1978)*

The development of China’s cultural heritage industry is made possible not only through the resources brought by the economic growth since the ‘Opening Up’ in 1978 [26] but also partly due to the perceived ‘threat’ associated with the heritage sites lost, or potentially lost, to the process of the very same development. During the early stage of the economic reform in the 1980s, ‘use first’ rather than conservation was the heritage principle, which led to many heritage sites, even listed ones, being lost in the rapid economic development process [27]. The perceived ‘threat’ is one of the main characteristics of heritage policies and public discourse in post-Cultural Revolution (post-1978) China [1,28]. The urgency and the implied ‘threat’ that heritage faces are characterised as a notion tightly bound with modernity, which also gave rise to the heritage boom in the late modern period in the West [29]. This notion of ‘threat’ permeates China’s heritage discourse, research, and practices, especially in the post-Cultural Revolution era. For Chinese intellectuals, such ‘threats’ are not only posed to Chinese heritage, but also, more broadly, to the ‘Chineseness’ contributing to the national identity [30].

Zhu and Maags ([2], p. 13) contend that this ‘heritage fever’ is not only a state-led political move to strengthen the ruling party’s power and reinforce a unified national identity narrative but also a trend experienced by the Chinese populace. An array of actors, including entrepreneurs, academics, and other individuals, participate in heritage activities enthusiastically and consume ‘heritage products’ with eagerness, often with active participation and collaboration from the local governments. The active engagement of academics in higher education institutions in heritage practices has blurred the division between heritage academics and professionals. The ‘heritage bloom’ also manifests as increased state funding for heritage projects and academic research (Figure 1). However, when the heritage ‘fever’ is coupled with the sense of urgency prompted by the perceived ‘threats’, it could lead to large-scale but short-sighted and compartmentalised ‘rescuing missions’ that do not consider their long-term impact and continuation.

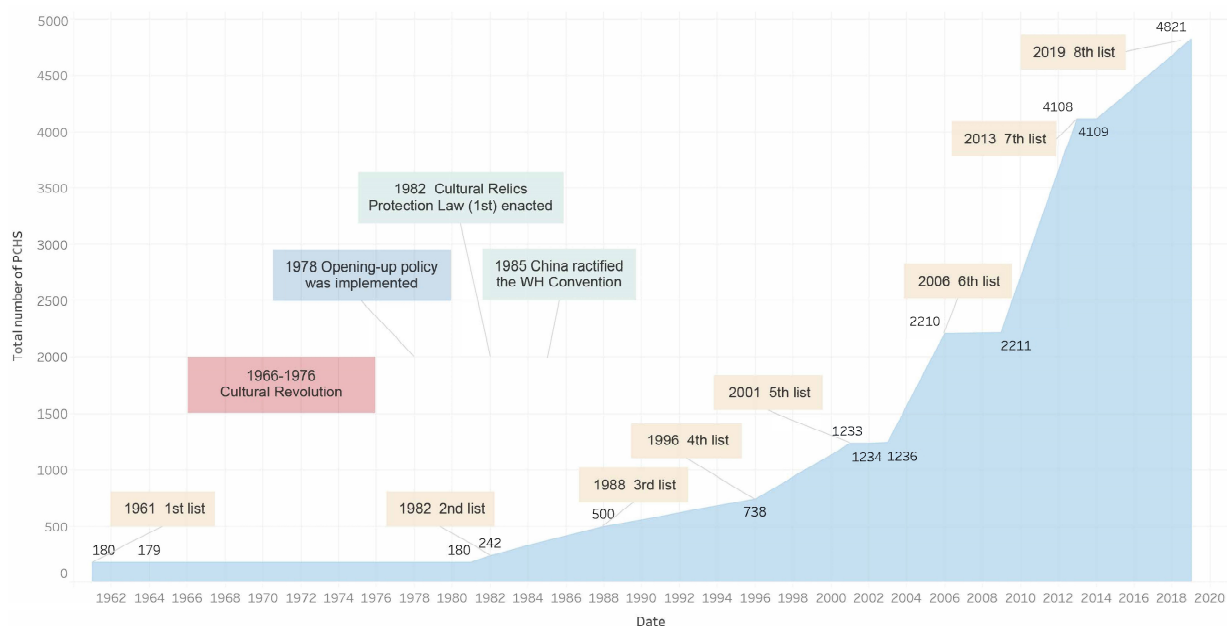


Figure 1. The number of national Protected Cultural Heritage Sites (PCHS) listed from 1960–present [31].

In recent Anglophone critical academic commentaries on China’s heritage phenomena, particularly those from the CHS, two aspects of dissonance have been highlighted. One concerns the power relation between state and non-state actors [32–34]. There have been emerging yet insufficient discussions on how local actors can also play a part in negotiating with the dominant narrative and state-led Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) through individual agencies [35]. The other aspect concerns the negotiations between a supposedly imported ‘Western’ approach and the ‘Chineseness’ advocated by state actors and non-state actors [2,10,36–39].

The perceived distinctiveness of traditional Chinese philosophy from the Western AHD can be misleading. For example, the dynastic political interruptions in China’s historical times are often cited as the reason for the lack of surviving historic buildings, demonstrating Chinese traditional society’s lack of interest in preserving the historic built environment [2,40]. However, ample archaeological evidence shows that social organisations on a local level that maintained and restored historic buildings, including local communities and craftsmen, had shown keen consideration of preserving and reusing previous building materials and architectural forms [41,42]. A more fine-grained and nuanced characterisation of these aspects has long been needed.

Bridging and dissolving the two dichotomies present a research opportunity to fully capture the complexity and omnipresent interconnectedness of heritage’s tangible and intangible aspects in a contemporary context. The case study in this article sets out to answer the questions: What does the case study demonstrate that can help overcome the Eastern/Western and tangible/intangible dichotomies? How can critical reflections on heritage approaches impact practices and decision-making? What fundamental mechanisms and conditions give rise to the (un)sustainable outcome in heritage management?

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

2.1. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

The case study reported here is part of broader research on sustainable heritage management in contemporary China. The research adopts a relational and dynamic framework inspired by Assemblage Theory (as developed in [43]) and Critical Realism (CR) [44–48], defining sustainable heritage as ‘an assemblage sustained by human and non-human actors connected by enduring and dynamic associations’ [49].¹ The framework examines how

these associations and actors emerge and evolve through the assemblage's life cycles. It investigates what impact certain events or interventions might have had on the assemblage by scrutinising the tendency for change (or the lack thereof) in the associations and actors.

Case study research as a methodology guides the research design, allowing in-depth empirical investigation and analysis [50]. The broader research informing this article focuses on a case study region, within which three cases are selected for further scrutiny, one of which is reported in this article. This research design is particularly deployed to answer questions related to China's heritage management complexities and to identify the generative mechanisms for sustainable heritage management without any presumptions of which and how actors and mechanisms are at work. The incorporation of CR brings a focus on causality into the research and identifies the generative mechanisms through abstraction [51–53]. However, before this step, it is paramount to trace the causal chains of events to understand the causal powers at play.

Tracing the causal links within the broader research is achieved through several analytical steps: 'explanation building', 'time-series analysis', and 'cross-case synthesis' (pp. 212–255, [54]). This article will not elaborate on the third step, but the broader regional context will inform the arguments. The data analysis starts with a qualitative description for explanation building [55]. Controversy mapping [56] navigated among discourses, attitudes, and actions, elucidating the most contested issues within this complex case. Time-series analysis traces the life cycles of the actors and associations involved in the case study. It identifies the causal powers contributing to these associations' emergence and evolution.

2.2. Case Study Selection and Data Collection

The broader research informing this article focuses on the South and Southeast Shanxi region in China, with a high concentration of surviving early timber structures (pre-14th century). This research, conducted between 2017–2022, started upon the completion of a decade-long (2005–2015) national scheme, 'The Southern Project' (*Nanbu Gongcheng*), aimed at 'rescuing' and restoring 105 early timber structures in this region. The early timber buildings in this region are among the most typical heritage recognised by China's current administrative and legislative system and heritage professionals. The conservation and management approach to this heritage type shapes many of the approaches taken towards other types of heritage. Moreover, this research reveals many complexities and controversies, even in these 'typical' heritage sites.

The case studies were selected based on the presence of controversies and the accessibility of data. The Guangrenwang Temple case is exceptional in terms of these two criteria due to the extensive publication of actors' opinions, a record of public discourse and controversies documented on social media, the presence of a high-profile and heavily invested intervention with prominent external actors and demonstrated challenges in facilitating its sustainable future.

The data were obtained from documents, archival records, interviews, and direct observations. The documents and archival records include heritage records of the national PCHS published by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH)² and other statistical records from the census, national and provincial policies, and legislative and regulatory documents relevant to heritage conservation and management in China. The case-specific documents and records include the transcriptions of the historic stone steles and other inscriptions on site, historic and contemporary chronographies, project design drawings and documentation, administrative documents, news and magazine articles, and social media entries relevant to the case.

For the broader research, two fieldwork studies were conducted in 2018 in the case study region, the capital city of Shanxi Province, Taiyuan, and Beijing. Within the case study region, 53 national PCHS with early timber buildings across 16 counties were investigated. A total of 71 semi-structured focused interviews were conducted with six categories of actors, including (A) national officials in SACH and provincial-level officials in the Cultural Heritage Bureau of Shanxi Province; (B) local-level officials in heritage management and other relevant departments (municipal, district, and county levels); (C) on-site managers and caretakers of the PCHS; (D) local community members; (E) heritage professionals; and (F) local craftsmen and artisans. For the Guangrenwang Temple case, nine relevant participants from categories A, B, C, and E were interviewed directly. Due to this research's financial and temporal constraints, it was not possible to collect broader longitudinal data such as more community members' opinions over time, which is a limitation. To mitigate this limitation, the opinions of broader local community members, the architects and entrepreneurs involved, the general public, and other commentators were collected and recorded indirectly through publications, social media platforms, and other online records. Besides interviews, direct observations cover PCHS's physical conditions and settings and people's behaviours and interactions with the space, documented with field notes, photographs, videos, and mapping.

3. A Closer Look—The 'Long Plan' at Guangrenwang Temple

3.1. Background—The Make-Believe Heritage

Guangrenwang Temple, also known as the Wulong Temple (Five-Dragon Temple), is in Zhonglongquan (lit. 'middle dragon spring') Village in Ruicheng County, Yuncheng Municipality (Figures 2 and 3). The temple is on an earth mound northeast of the village, about seven kilometres north of Ruicheng, in the northwest corner of the ancient Wei City ruins (ca. 403–225 BCE). About 800 metres southeast of Guangrenwang Temple is the well-known relocated Yuan Dynasty (1366–1468 CE) Yongle Taoist Temple [57].³ Guangrenwang Temple was designated as a provincial PCHS in 1965 and a national PCHS in 2001. Only two historic buildings are left on the temple ground [58]. The north-facing stage is located on the south end of the mound, opposite the south-facing main hall. The surviving stage was constructed in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 CE) while the main hall is believed to have retained a Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) timber structure. Two side halls were described to have once been on the temple ground [59].

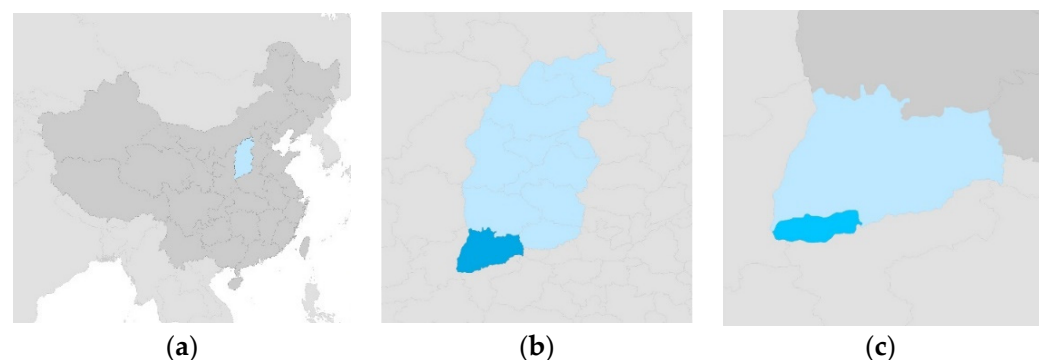


Figure 2. (a) Shanxi Province in China; (b) Yuncheng Municipality in Shanxi Province; (c) Ruicheng County in Yuncheng Municipality, base map GIS data: [60].

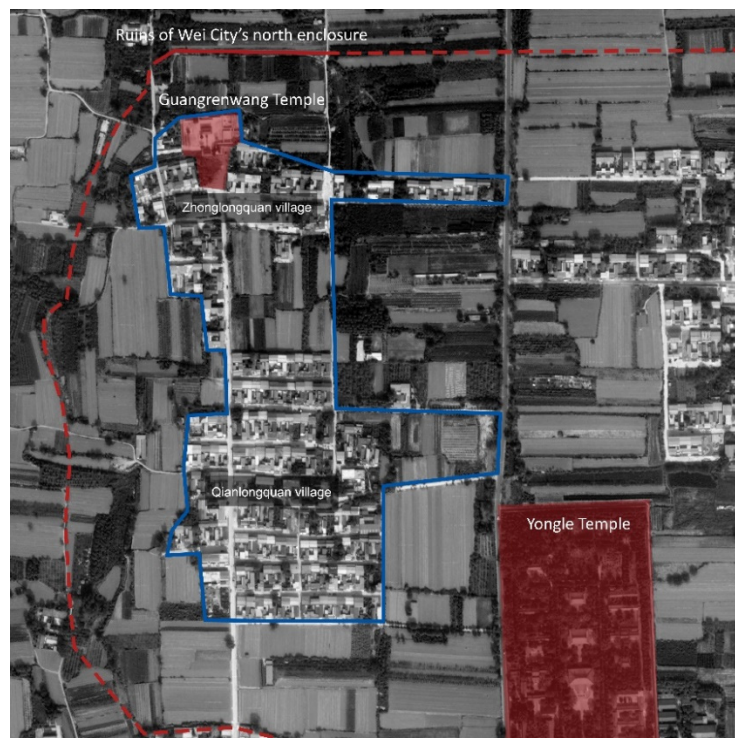


Figure 3. Location of Guangrenwang Temple in relation to Zhonglongquan village and Qianlongquan village, Yongle Temple and the ancient Wei City, base map: [61], annotated by the author.

On the lower ground, in front of the temple, was a pond, referenced in historical records as the Dragon Spring, closely related to the temple. The pond has been dried out for decades due to the decreasing underground water level, but its shape is still visible. Across from the fields north of the Wei City site, Zhongtiao Mountain forms the backdrop of the temple, another crucial element of its natural setting [62,63]. The earliest known academic literature hypothesising that the main hall was a possible Tang structure was published in 1959 [58]. Jiu asserted that despite having experienced several alterations after its initial construction, the architectural structure of the main hall still retained the ‘Tang Dynasty style’ (ibid. p. 43). Several other architectural historians subsequently endorsed this view, which became a consensus [64–66]. The verdict is essential to reading the ‘heritagisation’ of the temple as one of the country’s four surviving Tang Dynasty timber structures.⁴

After it was ‘re-discovered’ in 1958, a restoration was carried out in the same year by the Shanxi Cultural Relics Management Committee and Ruicheng County People’s Committee.⁵ Subsequently, SACH issued criticism regarding the restoration’s intrusive interventions [67], but what percentage of the structure has been ‘altered’ has never been assessed. Chai, a renowned architectural historian, also criticised the fact that many of the components have been replaced without a basis of sound historical evidence [57]. Chai considered that it would be advisable to ‘restore the structure to follow the Tang style’ in the future [57], which suggests that his criticism towards the 1958 restoration focused more on the incorrect form of the components used for replacement rather than a concern that the historic fabric was substantially replaced.

Despite contested opinions over whether the main hall can still be qualified as a ‘Tang Dynasty structure’ due to the ‘heavy-handed’ restoration in 1959, the ‘belief’ that this temple is of outstanding significance for containing one of the few surviving Tang structures in the country remains persistent [67]. It should be emphasised here that the Tang structure’s materiality is essential to the representational ‘heritagisation’ process on a national level. However, the ‘material authenticity’ seems to have become less vital after it became PCHS. This ‘make-believe’ mentality was instrumental and strengthened during the 2016 ‘make-over’ project that followed the 2015 restoration.

The 1959 article states that the dragon king statue was missing then. No information has been found regarding when the temple lost its historic statues and other temple buildings. Jiu also recorded that after the 1958 restoration, the temple was a 'recreational venue for the people' and a scenic attraction [58]. It suggests that the temple's religious status was somehow considered as being in the past, and the desire to use it for tourism was already present in the 1950s. Guangrenwang Temple was used as a primary school during the 'Socialist Transformation Movement' in the 1960s–1970s. The primary school moved away in 1981, and the temple was never registered as an official religious venue under the new administrative system for religious affairs [67,68]. Nevertheless, statues were re-installed. Even though the temple might not have the same popularity as a space of worship as it used to, there are still religious activities in the temple since its heritagisation.

Despite its proximity to the famous Yongle Temple, Guangrenwang Temple has rarely received visitors since the 1950s. The temple, especially its surroundings, slowly became dilapidated after the primary school left [67]. Before the 2013–15 restoration, the temple was only enclosed by a short brick wall and a small picket fence that could be easily breached. There have been caretakers at the temple since 1993. However, their presence was far from enough to safeguard the temple site. In December 2012, one of the two Tang steles was stolen, which, fortunately, was soon recovered [67].

3.2. The 'Long (Dragon) Plan' – The Post-Restoration Make-Over

Such was the temple's situation when Ding, the senior vice president of Vanke, one of the country's largest residential real estate developers, allegedly went on a historical architectural tour in Shanxi and encountered Guangrenwang Temple in 2012. Subsequently, Vanke contacted the local authority of Ruicheng County, intending to get involved in the temple's restoration that was due to start in 2013. However, the local authorities in Shanxi and SACH were cautious and sceptical when a private corporation, especially a real estate developer, often perceived to be the 'enemy' of historic buildings, attempted to get involved in a heritage project. The authorities refused Vanke's request, citing that a national PCHS's restoration must be carried out by organisations with first-class qualifications in heritage conservation [69,70].

The restoration of Guangrenwang Temple under the Southern Project took place from 2013 to 2015 (Figure 4). An 'environment improvement' project was expected after the restoration. Such improvement projects are usually small and less significant than restorations [71]. Therefore, it was unusual when Vanke, a real estate company, announced to the public in June 2015 that a crowd-sourcing heritage project called the 'Long (Dragon) Plan' had been set up to facilitate the environmental improvement of the temple to create a museum [72].



Figure 4. The main hall of Guangrenwang Temple after restoration, March 2018 (source: author).

Vanke associated the 'Long (Dragon) Plan' ('the Project' from hereafter) with Vanke's pavilion at the Milan Expo 2015 to boost international publicity. The pavilion, designed by Daniel Libeskind, was shaped like a dragon, covered with 4000 red tiles symbolising dragon scales.⁶ To fulfil the Project's crowdfunding claim, Vanke auctioned the 4000 tiles to raise some of the funds from the public. The Project was eventually carried out with crowdfunding, private funding (from Vanke), and state funding [69].

URBANUS, an architectural studio based in Beijing, led by a star architect Wang Hui, was responsible for the design. According to Wang, there were two main objectives when they were conceiving the Project: to create an open-air exhibition space on the temple ground for Chinese architectural history and the temple's interpretation, and to create a public space for the villagers [73]. The Project was also supported by a team of heritage professionals from Tsinghua University, led by Lv Zhou. As a professor from Tsinghua University, the director of Tsinghua National Heritage Centre, and the vice president of ICOMOS-China, Lv's voice carried much weight and radiated influence among the administrative branches, academics, and the public. According to the Southern Project's leading engineer, who works extensively with SACH, the involvement and endorsement of Lv's team provided the provocative Project proposal with credit during the administrative approval process [74]. (See Figures 5–8 for comparisons of before and after the Project, and Appendix A for a detailed description of the Project's interventions on site, annotated in Figure 9).



Figure 5. Entrance to the temple via a slope before the Project, March 2011 (source: author).



Figure 6. New entrance with flights of steps towards the ticket office at the southeast corner of the museum, March 2018 (source: author).

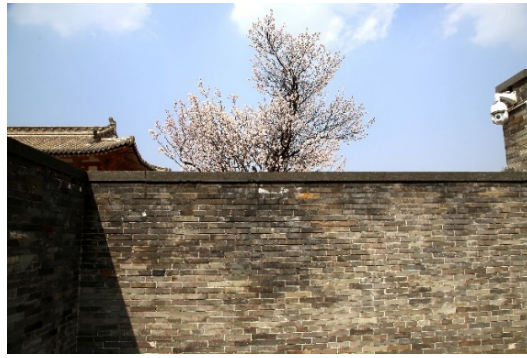


Figure 7. Limited view of the main hall's roof from the top of the entrance staircase, March 2018 (source: author).



Figure 8. View of the main hall at the top of the entrance slope, March 2011 (source: author).

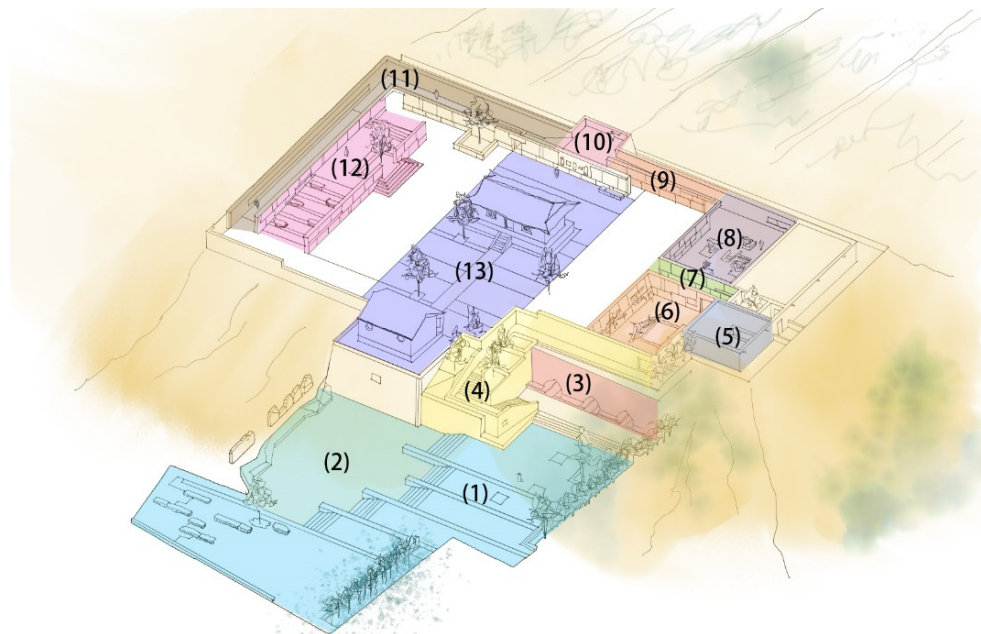


Figure 9. Axonometric view of Guangrenwang Temple after the Project [73], redrawn and annotated by the author (see Appendix A for a detailed description of each numbered area).

3.3. *The Voices and the Silence—Five Controversies*

The action of Vanke is characterised in most media reports as an act of philanthropy [69,75–77]. They tend to depict the initiative as stemming from individuals' spontaneous enthusiasm instead of Vanke's corporate action, and praise the fact that

the chief architect took on the design pro bono [69,72,78]. However, it is equally reasonable to believe that Vanke chose this specific site because of its title as a Tang Dynasty structure. It was important enough to create good publicity but also sufficiently ‘unknown’ to the public that a case of ‘rescuing’ and ‘revitalising’ could be made [79]. A closer look at the debates and reality of the case suggests that behind the positive media coverage, there are many controversies worth unfolding in order to appraise the Project critically.

The heated nation-wide debate started when the outcome of the transformation was revealed in May 2016. Many were surprised to see the images of the museum publicised online, which received various comments from the public. Furthermore, heritage professionals, architects, academics in relevant disciplines, and the media started publishing more detailed responses to the Project (Figure 10). Subsequently, the chief architect and heritage professionals involved in the Project responded to some of the most contentious issues.

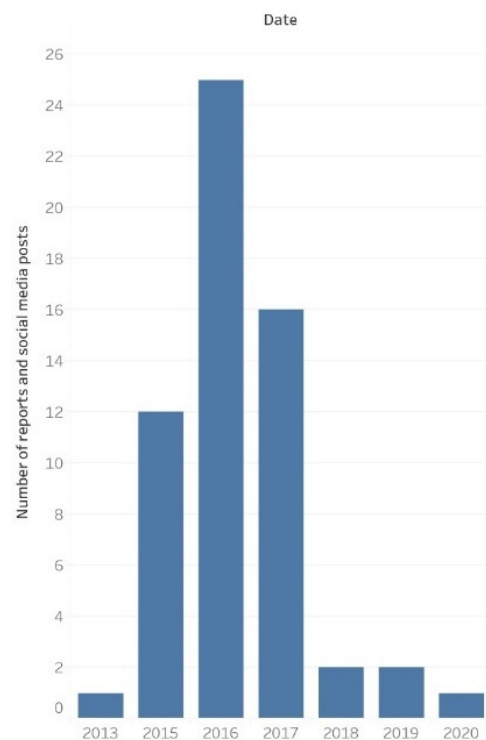


Figure 10. The number of academic articles, op-eds, media reports, and social media posts about the Project before and after its completion; data collected by March 2020.

Data collected during this research show that the actors’ opinions had changed over time. For example, according to Ruicheng’s local officials and a media report, when the provincial officials first came to see the site immediately after its completion, they were hesitant to voice their opinions [80]. Such hesitation was no longer evident during the interviews in 2018. Changes were also present in the caretakers’ opinions from different times. According to media reports, the caretakers were optimistic about the change upon the Project’s completion [67,78]. However, in the 2018 interview, one of the caretakers voiced detailed complaints about the Project’s construction quality and design choices. They were also dissatisfied that the caretakers and community members were not consulted until the construction stage [81]. This discovery demonstrates that changing opinions should be considered when assessing the Project’s long-term impact.

3.3.1. Controversy I—The Authenticity of the Historic Setting

Commentators hold contrasting opinions regarding the Project’s impact on the authenticity of the historic setting (*lishi huanjing*). These debates not only demonstrate the actors’ opinions but also their understanding of authenticity as a concept. Architects, her-

itage professionals, and architecture magazine commentators tend to refer to the term explicitly. Within these debates, the authenticity of the site's historic setting involves both the physical setting and the anthropological and socio-cultural contexts.

Wang, the lead architect, claims that the Project did not intervene with the temple's historic setting because there was no material evidence remaining, citing that the site's physical environment has been altered several times over the centuries [73]. Following the same reasoning, Huang suggests that the heritage museum is, therefore, only yet another layer of this ever-changing setting [82]. Lv (also appearing as Lyu) and Guo comment from the perspective of heritage professionals. They argue that it is reasonable and 'respectful to history' to create something modern instead of a 'reconstruction out of imagination' due to a lack of tangible trace left of the 'historic layout' [83,84]. However, citing the Venice Charter and the Nairobi Recommendation, Guo admits that the new environment does not support the role of the historic temple as a 'testimony of history' [84].

Conversely, several commentators suggest that the Project is not sensitive to the broader physical setting—the rural village and surroundings [74,85]. Qi and Li note that the Dragon Spring Pond, the surrounding fields, and mountains are essential elements of the temple's historic setting, evidenced by the historical records in local chronographies and historic steles on-site [62,63]. Qi and other media outlets report that the caretakers regret the design team's decision not to recover the Dragon Spring fully, aligning with the interview with the caretaker during this research [67,78,81].

The lead engineer of the temple's latest restoration interprets its authenticity based on the philosophical position of the ICOMOS Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (the 'China Principles' hereafter), where minimal intervention is the overarching principle [86]. They consider that heritage professionals are responsible for interpreting and promoting the China Principles. After trying to minimise the intervention when restoring the main hall, they are especially disappointed to see the drastic transformation of its environment [74].

In response to such criticism, Wang references the minimum intervention principle from the Venice Charter and claims that the design has been revised multiple times to avoid unnecessary interventions with the purpose of 'keeping the heritage in its setting with authenticity and integrity' (p. 113, [73]). However, Wang goes on to argue that keeping the authenticity of the setting is paradoxical in practice because the archaeological survey did not find any physical evidence of the historic setting. Therefore, there is no reliable source from which to draw a hypothesis. This argument shows that Wang's definition of authenticity has changed slightly from when he references the Venice Charter. In the latter instance, he understands 'retaining authenticity' as a requirement to reconstruct the temple's historic layout.

The way visitors approach the main hall is one of the most debated design decisions. Chinese historic buildings are mainly approached from their front façades. Such an approach accentuates the significance of the temple's main hall. The spatial relationship between the main hall and the north-facing stage is the most essential element of the layout. It is the connection between the deity worshipped in the main hall and the people who perform for the spirits on the stage. This association, symbolising the relationship between humans and the place, has existed since the creation of this temple.

The spatial organisation of the museum now takes visitors from the entrance, where the main hall is blocked from view, to a narrow opening towards the side façade of the main hall flanked by two walls. The architect is indeed very proud of this framed image as it appeared in his original design sketches, and it is most often photographed after the Project (Figures 9 and 11) [87]. By blocking the visitors' peripheral vision to achieve a framed side-elevation of the main hall, the design has distracted the visitors from discovering the connection between the stage and the main hall. As revealed from the architect's argument, the decision-making was primarily based on one attribute of the site's heritage value—its status as a Tang structure [73]. The choice to highlight the single authorised discourse and view the main hall as a stand-alone 'large museum object' appears deliberate [87]. The

de-contextualisation of the main hall is praised by some architects such as Zhou and Lu, who consider its museumification as a post-modern way to present the building [87,88].



Figure 11. Elevation of the main hall from the corridor towards the temple ground (source: author).

Chen, however, is critical towards the neglect of the association between the main hall and the stage. As a heritage professional, she perceives this association as the most significant testimony of its heritage value (being a local temple) and should be respected by any project [85]. Furthermore, Liu notes that the relationships among the village, the pond, the temple, and the field are the most significant associations relevant to the Project, as they symbolise the associations among heaven, earth, and people. He suggests that the temple's creation and the century-old worshipping activities have fostered a shared meaning among the local population. He argues that such a shared meaning should be preserved and enhanced by the Project, which, in his opinion, has not been achieved [85]. The comments on authenticity also engage with the intangible setting—the socio-cultural 'landscape' of the community. Guo considers that the new heritage museum diversifies the connections between the historic temple and its audience, as a museum of ancient architecture, a heritage site, and a temple. He concludes that the Project positively impacts the 'reconstruction' of the intangible setting [84]. Conversely, the Southern Project's leading engineer comments that the heritage site now no longer looks like a temple created to serve the village and the local region. They argue that the Project has an adverse impact on the temple's historic function, which, according to them, constitutes part of its authentic historic setting [74].

In conclusion, by tracing the opinions and their underpinning philosophical positions around the concept of 'authenticity', this controversy demonstrates the relativity and contradictions in interpreting this concept often used by heritage commentators and professionals. Wang claims that the design's consideration regarding authenticity is demonstrated by transforming the site in a 'subtle' way, which has a positive impact on its authenticity through reinstating the connection between the site and the community and 'return[ing] kinship and folklore culture to the everyday life of the villagers' (p. 113, [73]). However, as discussed below, the choice of the exhibition theme and the decision to ignore the relatable association between the main hall and the stage brings this claim into question.

3.3.2. Controversy II—Space of Worship vs. Place of Knowledge

Another central issue refers to the dual associations of the site being a space of worship, built for a local population to worship a local deity, and a place of knowledge that came with its heritagisation, recognising its value as a testimony to Chinese architectural history. Wang and other commentators, including architectural and heritage professionals and journalists, base their arguments on the premise of the 'former' temple's spiritual obsolescence [67,73,83,87–89].⁷ These commentators define the site's architectural significance as the embodiment of knowledge and consider folk culture and religions as the past, implying that the religious and folk connotations are not to be identified as 'knowledge'.

Such a judgement is biased against the grassroots meaning-making process around the temple that still exists today.⁸

Chen considers the site's most significant identity to be a temple created for worshipping a local deity. They suggest that this heritage value has not been sufficiently explored by the Project team [85]. Qi considers it false to presume that the historic temple is no longer a sacred space. Before the Project, the temple, although without an official religious venue registration, was still a space of worship on at least two occasions each month and during the temple fair related to Guanyu, a deity popular among the local population. Qi emphasises that this pattern of worship fits into the rhythm of everyday life in rural villages. She criticises the fact that the architect assumed responsibility for reinventing a connection between the site and the community out of imagination instead of respecting and enhancing what has existed and is still existing on-site [63].

Wang recalls that their team had considered two exhibition themes based on the value assessment published by SACH⁹, which, he relates, were its architectural significance and the folk custom of rain-praying to the Dragon King. He admits that the final decision to exclude the latter was mainly based on the team's limited capacity, consisting primarily of architects who did not possess sufficient knowledge of folk cultures and religions [73]. This admission is telling. It reveals that the determining factor for this significant decision was the design team's limited specialism. It is then unsurprising that not only did the design team exclude the rain-praying custom, but they also overlooked the contemporary meaning-making process in the temple demonstrated by the local community's faith and worshipping activities.¹⁰

It should be noted that when all the interventions are considered, the spiritual connection has not been entirely ignored. New statues of the deities were installed in the main hall by Vanke. The local population has not stopped considering the site as a space of worship either [63,67,78,81]. It is, however, peculiar that this aspect is rarely mentioned in the initiators' responses to criticism of the Project. Similar silence can be found among the local authorities. Religion is still a politically sensitive topic for local officials, even though they all acknowledge the existence and significance of faith among the local population.¹¹

3.3.3. Controversy III—The Design Language and Exhibition Curation

The Project's improvement of Guangrenwang Temple's physical environment is undeniable, considering that an informal landfill previously surrounded the historic temple. The controversy presented here focuses more on the effects of the design and museum curation on the site as a heritage space and a historic temple. According to media coverage, the public sector's opinions about the Project are mostly positive [67,69,72,75]. The administrations' reservations regarding the appropriateness of the design in written form can only be seen in the advisory and approval documents published by SACH [90,91]. However, interviews with officials from various administrative levels during this research reveal a less homogeneous set of opinions. Several local-level officials, including those not from Ruicheng County, express that they consider the design of the open-air museum to be 'too much'—too provocative and incompatible with the rural village environment [92,93].¹²

Li and Liu comment that the spatial organisation and volume of the added construction are disrespectful to the historic buildings as they made the main hall, which is not a large building, seem even smaller in the complex [85]. Additionally, Liu remarks that the circulation appears to guide him away from the main hall during his visit. This remark demonstrates the design's unintended impact of taking away the visitors' attention to the temple ground [85]. Relevant to this aspect, Guo and Zhou criticise the fact that the exhibition curation has abstracted the main hall into large-scale architectural drawings, purposefully framing the historic building into static elevations and creating a strict circulation route to access the main hall (Figures 11 and 12). In doing so, the design has taken away visitors' freedom to intuitively explore and experience the historic temple [84,87].



Figure 12. Introduction space with a section of the main hall and timeline display, March 2018 (source: author).

Nevertheless, Lv comments that using modern architectural language effectively distinguishes the new design from the historic remains of the temple (p. 2, [85]). Liu praises the fact that the unconventional entrance and the maze-like circulation are modern architectural languages but resemble classical Chinese gardens (pp. 6–7, [85]).

In his criticism of Liebeskind's Jewish Museum's cultivation of 'reductive approaches to built space', Koepnik considers places as articulations whose 'identities exceed the work of abstract and unified interpretations'. He emphasises the diversity of space and its association with history, memory, narratives, and uses (p. 346, [94]). The Project's interventions appear to have introduced a similar reductive approach. Behind the orchestrated architectural language and the curation theme is the explicit intention to create a museum as a top-down educational space. It is then unsurprising that the voices of villagers, whom the architect considers as needing to be 'educated', were not heard during the decision-making process. This intention is also related to one of the claimed achievements of the Project—the social impact, which will be discussed next.

3.3.4. Controversy IV—Social Impact of Public Engagement and 'Giving It Back to the Community'

According to Vanke, the Project was set out with three main objectives, the first of which was 'returning the temple to the village'. He explains that this objective derives from the hope to reinstate the temple's status as a public space in the village, to introduce the temple back into the everyday life of the villagers, and to encourage the villagers to care for the temple (p. 115, [95]). Wang, on the other hand, considers that in today's villages, virtues and faith are at a loss, and Longquan village is 'fortunate' to have this ancient temple. By 'returning the temple to the everyday life of the village', Wang appraises the fact that the Project is a 'redemption to the problematic village life' (p. 113, [73]).

Many commentators address the issue of public engagement and the Project's benefit to the village. According to Lv, one of the Project's most crucial contributions is the participation of various sectors of society [83]. This argument addresses a long-lasting condition of heritage practice in China, which had been limited to the public sector and government-appointed professional institutions. It was also why the administration rejected Vanke's first initiative to participate in the temple's restoration [69]. However, heritage professionals and some of the high-ranking government officials in the cultural heritage departments have been advocating for the participation of a broader range of actors from society in heritage projects, especially regarding adaptive reuse [96–108]. The eventual acceptance of Vanke's second initiative demonstrates that the public sector has become more open to private sector involvement.¹³

Lv praises the touching fact that after the completion of the Project, villagers, elderly people, and children were seen enjoying the site [83] (Figure 13). However, based on the observation in 2018 and interviews with Ruicheng's local officials and the temple's care-

taker, the frequency of the villagers' visits to the site has only moderately increased, even though they do use the public square.¹⁴ The increase of non-local visitors is also insignificant after the initial excitement. According to the local official, the annual income from the ticket fees was about 20,000 CNY (approx. 2200 GBP) in 2017. It was better than before the Project when there was no income at all, yet it was hardly enough for the maintenance of the site, let alone to bring any extra benefit to the village [80]. The impact (or the lack of it) of the Project on the local development opportunities, which is one of the claims of the Project's initiators, will be further discussed in Section 3.3.5.



Figure 13. The public square created by the Project in front of Guangrenwang Temple, March 2018 (source: author).

As pointed out by Zhuang, the Project's decision-making, either regarding the spatial organisation or the exhibition theme, received no input from the community [85].¹⁵ According to the temple's caretaker, he could only voice his opinions when the construction started, and the architects altered part of the plan accordingly [81]. The lack of community participation reflects not only the project team's lack of awareness but also an institutional flaw embedded in the current administrative procedures of heritage projects in China. As a project of a national PCHS, the proposal only needs to be appraised by heritage professionals and approved by the various levels of administration, who are more concerned about abiding by the heritage regulations and legislation than whether the project meets the local population's needs [90,91].

In conclusion, although the initiators and the architect claim that the Project has harnessed significant benefits for the local community by inserting a museum in a rural setting, evidence indicates a lack of impact on the villagers' willingness to visit the museum and the local economy. While the museum management has returned to the local administrative department, the villagers' participation in the Project or the museum's management is minimum. While it is undeniable that the Project has enhanced the 'social values' of the site by allowing private sector participation and attracting public attention, the short-term nature of the Project also means that the private sector investment is probably a one-off incident, and public attention quickly died out after 2016.

3.3.5. Controversy V—Revitalisation and Sustainable Management

All the above controversies point to an overarching issue regarding the sustainability of the Project and the heritage assemblage of Guangrenwang Temple. Ding, the initiator from Vanke, praises the project's objective to transform 'dead heritage' into 'living heritage', echoed by Zhou (p. 1, [85,87]).¹⁶ Ding believes the Project can potentially provide a model for revitalising other local heritage sites [85]. Such a belief is shared by local and provincial officials, who are hoping to promote this model in Shanxi Province [80,109].

Compared to restoration projects, cultural heritage administrations are much more relaxed regarding environmental improvement projects because they do not directly involve the PCHS's historic structures. It is also more desirable for the provincial and local authorities for them to be privately funded due to a decrease in state funding for such projects since 2015 [69].¹⁷ The Project's eventual approval by SACH and the praise from the public sector show that there has been a desire to 'think outside of the box' within the administration. Such a project would have been almost unthinkable just a few years

before. Nine interviewees, including heritage professionals and provincial and local officials, who have commented on the Project, all agree that it was positive in attracting attention from the broader public and getting more actors in society involved in heritage management [74,79,80,92,93,109–113].¹⁸ However, while finding a suitable new function for a heritage site might be a good start, sustainable management afterwards is often very challenging.¹⁹ This concern is aligned with the current situation of the museum at Guangrenwang Temple. Two years after the project's completion, the revitalisation's impact had already become questionable. The lack of planning for the museum's sustainable management might eventually make the effort futile.²⁰

According to the architect Wang, maintaining a national PCHS like this cannot be supported only by a remote village but needs to attract tourism. It indicates that one of the design's objectives is to attract an external audience. Hou from Vanke also states that the Project has attracted more visitors and increased the village's income. He considers that such a change will create new opportunities for a traditional village like Longquan [95]. However, based on the information gathered during the fieldwork of this research, such a claim appears questionable.

According to the village chief of Longquan village, the entrance fee income from the museum is first submitted to the centralised county financial system, and the same amount is returned to the heritage site for its maintenance and management [67]. Therefore, the income of the heritage museum does not directly benefit the villagers. Furthermore, according to the village chief and a local community member who took part in the Project as a project supervisor, since there is no other supporting infrastructure or other attractions in the area, the mode of visiting is unlikely to change despite the potential increase in visitor numbers. Currently, tourist visits usually involve a two-hour to half-day tour of Yongle Temple and Guangrenwang Temple in Ruicheng [67]. By 2018, according to local officials in Ruicheng County, there was a plan to sign off a contract for a private company to develop rural tourism in the village. The company will not be allowed to do anything more with the temple, and there is no further plan regarding how the open-air museum will be managed differently [80]. However provocative, the Project did not fundamentally transform the nature of the site's management. It is then predictable that enthusiasm and motivation to keep the site alive may not last long.²¹

Moreover, whether developing tourism with a heritage museum is suitable for a village like this is debatable. Literature in tourism studies has addressed contested issues regarding the role of community members in the decision-making processes, their share of benefits from tourism development, gentrification, and displacement of local settlements [114,115]. The 'gaze' of affluent urban tourists on the disadvantaged and low-income communities, exacerbating the inequalities between the consumers and producers in tourism development, has also been fiercely problematised [116–118].

The Project has created a museum space that requires more than grassroots efforts to maintain, let alone to update and renew the exhibition. The permanent exhibition facilities—the large bracket-sets models, the full-scale engraved architectural drawings, and information panels—make it difficult to add different exhibition themes to the museum to become more inclusive of local folk culture (Figures 14 and 15). This sub-section demonstrates that the Project's decision-making process predetermined its short-term effect. Indeed, Lv admits that despite the project's great potential for fostering opportunities locally, continuous observation is needed to determine how sustainable its management will be [110]. As with most heritage projects in China, the Long Plan was set out to be a one-off construction project. There was never a plan for grounded and long-term research to support the design or implement a sustainable management mechanism that returns a sense of ownership to the community. The decision of the exhibition theme strengthens the authorised discourse of the temple as a national PCHS. However, it ignores the other associations that are also present in the temple's history and more relatable to the local community, such as the religious connotation and folklore culture. Even if the community members are proud of the temple holding one of the few surviving Tang structures, a

one-sided story about its architectural history does not excite long-lasting interest in their everyday lives. The lack of long-term engagement fails to sustain the associations between the temple and its local community.



Figure 14. Exhibition space with *dougong* models and information panels (source: author).



Figure 15. Corridor with information panels about early timber structures in Shanxi Province (source: author).

4. Discussion—Analysis of the Heritage Assemblage and Causal Powers

Like many other temples in the region, Guangrenwang Temple's assemblage started with the emergence of the religious association between the temple and its local community. The surviving historic documentation reveals that the temple's religious connotation is also related to specific associations between other actors in the local area, such as those between the temple and the Dragon Spring, between the Dragon Spring and the villages, and between the temple and the ancient Wei city. The drought seasons were explicitly recorded as causes for the construction and reconstruction of the temple. These associations, actors, the initiative of the local officials, and the specific climate conditions formed part of the generative mechanisms for Guangrenwang Temple's (re)constructions in the ninth century. Also present, albeit less explicitly expressed, was the local community's economic capacity to obtain the necessary resources to maintain the religious associations. The records on the historic steles also suggest a human–nature relationship between the local commune and the trees planted on site, which were both the consequence of and the resources for maintaining the religious association between the temple and the community.

The state-wide ideological movement in the mid-20th century significantly impacted the temple's religious association. The 'Socialist Transformation Movement' in the 1950s–1960s was the most apparent cause for such changes. However, the fact that Guangrenwang Temple no longer had worshippers by the 1950s suggests that broader social changes and the communities' dwindling religious faith at the time also played a role. The composition of actors who facilitated and participated in the 'Socialist Transformation Movement' is complex, including people and organisations from the state to the local levels, driven by state policies and ideologies. As in many other cases in the region, these mechanisms disrupted the historic religious associations but also created new associations between the temples' physical space and the community members who studied or worked there when the temple became a local school. The causal powers that started and sustained the 'Socialist' association were impactful and dictated by external actors. During this period, this association was the only prevailing one, as all other associations related to its religious function were subdued. However, in Guangrenwang Temple, this 'Socialist' association was short-lived and became obsolete as soon as the primary causal power coming from the state's ideological movement ceased to exist.

Another prominent association came into play as the heritagisation process of these sites started. For the sites studied in this research, the causal powers for their heritagisation almost exclusively came from recognising their architectural significance and the established administrative and legal system for heritage conservation in the country. The crucial role of this recognition in their heritagisation is particularly apparent in Guangrenwang Temple's case, as it was considered 'heritage' by architectural historians even before its early designation in 1965. Like many other sites in the region, Guangrenwang Temple was in a severely dilapidated state when it was rediscovered. The rediscoveries of these sites and their heritagisation, especially their designation as national PCHS, prevented them from complete physical obsolescence. In this sense, the site itself was a 'marginalised' actor in society, with its historic religious association with the local community dwindling or already obsolete. Heritagisation created a new association between the historic temples and broader society.

This association was strengthened further by the restoration under the Southern Project scheme from 2005–2015. The 'Long Plan' Project, a unique case in the region, triggered changes in multiple associations. Most notably, it strengthened its heritage association based upon its architectural significance even further after the latest restoration, bringing more of the general public to forge a new association with the temple as a heritage museum through public debates and publicity campaigns from Vanke. However, these connections, emerging through the heat of the topic, are weakened quickly as the public attention dies down. The limited increase in visitor numbers, the unchanged local management model, and sporadic activities organised by Vanke indicate that the association derived from its museum function will be challenging to sustain.

Despite the significant improvement in the temple's environment, the single focus on its architectural significance in the museum and the lack of input from the local community have significantly reduced the community's chance to forge any new association. The Project team's misconception of the temple's religious obsolescence further weakened the existing association with the local community derived from its religious connotation. Despite the good intention to create a public square for the villagers to socialise and 'return the temple to the community', the rest of the design has missed the opportunity to create an inviting environment for the villagers. At present, the heritage and museum associations are dominant among all other associations. While the heritage association was strengthened through the museum project and will likely be sustained, the museum association faces severe challenges in gathering enough causal powers for it to be sustained.

Comparing Guangrenwang Temple to another case, the Dongyi Longwang Temple in this region, where the community initiative and engagement are front and centre in its community museum's emergence (see [119]), reveals two opposite approaches. The themes of the two museums speak truth to this contrast, with the one in Dongyi Village

proactively engaging the local culture and community and the one in Guangrenwang Temple deliberately excluding them. Despite the much smaller scale of investment and public attention, the Dongyi Village community is free and willing to pace the process according to their capacity and resources. Without the high-profile professionals and academics involved in the Guangrenwang Temple project, the community-based exhibition in Longwang Temple features more multidisciplinary involvement. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that if community initiatives in the region can receive such generous financial support as the Long Plan project, it would provide more flexibility and opportunities for the grassroots activities. The crucial point here is not that powerful external actors like Vanke cannot be involved, but that such projects need to be more inclusive of the heritage assemblages' tangible and intangible elements of the heritage assemblage with a holistic approach.

For the cases investigated in the case study region, the state or provincial level policies, the religious faith of local communities, and the local initiative and capacity exercise crucial causal powers for sustaining the religious and heritage associations. A provincial official mentioned that Guangrenwang Temple's project might well provide a precedent for implementing the provincial scheme, the 'Safeguarding the Civilisation' Scheme [109]. This scheme would influence how similar heritage sites might be used or adaptively reused in the case study region. However, the Guangrenwang Temple case needs to be considered as a lesson learnt rather than a desirable outcome where the sustainable future of these sites is concerned.

The missed opportunities in Guangrenwang Temple's case to create or strengthen the associations between the local community, the site, and those among community members demonstrate that the connection between the heritage assemblage and actors in broader society is not guaranteed. The weakening museum association will afford fewer and fewer causal powers to initiate change in the local area, such as tourism development and other economic opportunities. Without sustained connections that bond the local community together, there is less opportunity for community-level initiatives, crowdsourcing, and collective actions to initiate change or sustain the museum in the future. The sustainable management of the temple as a religious venue, heritage site, or museum is relevant to the local community's potential to facilitate sustainable development. However, continued interactions between the sites and the local communities, either through religious worshipping or community engagement in the museum or heritage site, are crucial for this relevance to be translated into change.

Finally, the Guangrenwang Temple case suggests that new sustained associations would not automatically emerge from new adaptive reuse without the sustained and continuous involvement of actors. It also reveals that when an assemblage is dominated by a specific association while excluding others, it affects the entire assemblage's resilience and leaves little room for new associations to emerge. Conversely, a heritage assemblage with more sustained and coexisting associations reinforcing each other is more likely to be sustainable.

5. Conclusions

Through this case study, I have questioned the project team's claims regarding the Project's effects on the historic setting's authenticity and its social impact on the relationship between the temple and its community. The article reveals the controversies regarding the choice of its curation theme, architectural language, decision-making, and management models. Mechanisms such as individual preferences, disciplinary backgrounds, personal understanding of philosophical approaches to heritage, administrative structures, and religious faith exercise their causal powers on various site associations.

The complexities manifested in the actors' actions and effects demonstrate the ambiguous boundaries between the two dichotomies—the 'Eastern/Western' and the 'Tangible/Intangible'. This article has provided a vivid picture of how the perceived 'Western' and 'non-Western' approaches can be interwoven in individuals' actions, intentionally or

unintentionally. It has also illustrated that tangible and intangible aspects of heritage are indeed inseparable, both in their interdependence and synchronicity. The controversies highlight that such initiatives must consider beyond the straitjacket of these dichotomies and adopt a more holistic and grounded approach to transforming these heritage sites towards a more sustainable future.

As the Project is still perceived to be a positive one by the administration, the issues regarding the project's impact can become more widespread if not given critical consideration. This article argues that future projects to initiate new associations must identify the actors forming these associations and what kind of causal powers are needed to sustain these associations. This insight will have broader relevance beyond this case study's context, scale, and heritage typology and potentially inform anticipatory policymaking in sustainability development and heritage management.

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Data Availability Statement: Translated anonymised interview summaries, tables of identified actors and their opinions, and process diagrams for mapping the actors' voices and controversies can be accessed through this link: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25718766> (accessed on 29 April 2024). Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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Appendix A. Description of the Interventions of the Project

(number as indicated in Figure 9)

A small public square (1) is created in front of the entrance to the temple, next to the site of the dry Dragon Spring pond (2). The pond (Figure A1) was not refilled with water but only planted with grass which was said to be taken from the Yellow River's banks by the project team [73]. Three existing earthen caves (3), one of the common forms of vernacular architecture in the region, were dug into the earth mound where the temple is located are transformed into small exhibiting and resting spaces (Figure A2). The entrance to the temple was redesigned, different from both the entrances before the Project and from even earlier. The access from before the Project was an earth slope stretching from the east side of the pond up to the southeast corner of the temple ground.



Figure A1. The Dragon Spring Pond (*longquan chi*), March 2018 (source: author).



Figure A2. Renovated earthen caves by the entrance of Guangrenwang Temple, March 2018 (source: author).

According to the temple's caretaker interviewed during this research, at least as he remembered from the 1950s, the earlier entrance was a pathway across the middle of the Dragon Spring. It split into two ascending paths leading to the temple ground's southwest and southeast corners [81]. The new entrance takes visitors through a winding ascent (4) (Figure A3) to the ticket office, which is connected to a new office, a small community library and a living space for the caretakers (5). Visitors are then led to an enclosed introduction space (6). A full-scale section of the main hall is engraved on the ground, and a timeline on the wall shows where the construction date of the main hall is located in history relative to other well-known historic timber buildings in China. On the opposite wall is a plaque containing information about the Project, donors, and participants' names (Figure A4).



Figure A3. The winding ascent to the ticket office, March 2018 (source: author).

From the entrance to this point of the introduction space, the temple's main hall is blocked from the visitors' sight by the enclosing walls. Only a few occasional glimpses of the roof are possible, and only if one pays attention (Figure A5). This approach contrasts with the previous entrances, which led the visitors to the main temple ground via the side of the stage. The visitors are then directed to exit the introduction space and turn into a narrow ascending corridor (7). The walls that flank both sides of the corridor block out the other area of the temple and create a restricted frame pointing towards the side façade of the main hall, creating an image of the historic building's elevation.

While walking through the corridor, visitors are directed towards the next exhibition space (8) through a wall opening. The visitors are encouraged to turn towards this space after the corridor, where enlarged models of bracket sets of the surviving Tang structures in the country are displayed (Figure A6), with information and architectural drawings of these buildings exhibited on some permanently installed panels. This second exhibition

space is connected to another long corridor (9) at the back of the temple. It takes the visitors to a raised platform (10) on the central axis of the temple, where an information panel explains the ruins of Wei City and Zhongtiao Mountain as a significant element of the historic setting for both the ancient city and the historic temple (Figure A7). The visitors are then encouraged to continue along the edge of the temple ground towards yet another corridor on the west side (11), where some brief information about other early timber structures in the region is displayed. Next to this corridor is a resting space (12). The museum space is separated from the main temple ground (13) by walls, except for a few openings. The circulation is guided along the site's edge rather than towards the centre, where the historic buildings stand. The historic steles are relocated and embedded into the wall behind the main hall (14). New statues of the deities in the main hall were also commissioned during the Project by Vanke [67].



Figure A4. Plaque with names of donors and participants of the Project, March 2018 (source: author).

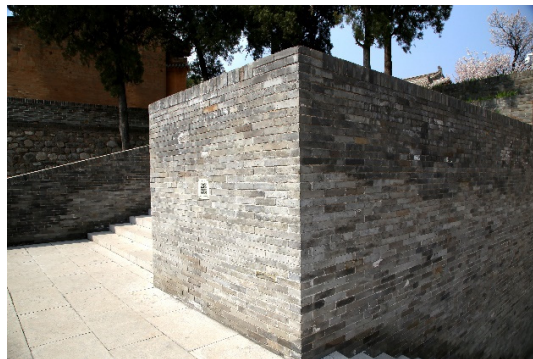


Figure A5. Limited view of the main hall's roof from the entrance staircase, March 2018 (source: author).



Figure A6. View of the *dougong* model display through the wall opening of the corridor (source: author).



Figure A7. Information panel about the natural and historical setting of Guangrenwang Temple (information about the Ancient Wei City and Zhongtiao Mountain) with Zhongtiao Mountain in view (source: author).

Appendix B. Descriptions of the Surviving Historic Steles in the Temple

Four historic steles survive in the temple, two from the Tang Dynasty and two from the Qing Dynasty. The one from 808 CE records the water system in the area, which is the earliest record of the Dragon Spring (*longquan*) and the temple's initial construction. The 808 CE inscription is titled '*Guangrenwang Longquan Ji*', suggesting that Guangrenwang was already the subject of worship at the time. It also records that the temple was built next to the spring because it was believed to be where the deity resides, who can prevent draught. Another stele from 832 CE mentions the ancient Wei City and that there was a spring in the northwest corner of the city, which can be confirmed by archaeology (Figure 3). It records that the temple built in 808 resulted from drought and was commissioned by the former governor and that the temple buildings were already dilapidated. Another drought season between 831–832 CE prompted the temple's reconstruction by the villagers commissioned by Ruicheng's governor. The 832 inscription records that rain came pouring down upon this reconstruction and exclaimed the significance of paying tribute to nature. The surviving main hall is believed to be the result of this reconstruction. Both ninth-century steles mention that mountains surrounded the temple, and the area was crisscrossed with creeks. Indeed, Zhonglongquan (Middle Dragon Spring) village is only one of the three villages named after the Dragon Spring.²² These historical records confirmed the close relationship between the temple, the local community, and the natural environment.

The two Qing Dynasty steles record two restorations of the temple. The 1758 one describes that the temple was restored in 1745, confirmed by the inscription inside the main hall. The stele describes that the temple was still well maintained, but the stage (*yuelou*) needed restoration by 1758. The village chiefs commissioned the repair of the stage and the east wall of the main hall, funded by several surrounding communities. The inscription also mentions that five communes (*she*) discussed and agreed that anyone who stored branches in the temple should be fined, suggesting the scope of the historic community that managed the temple. Besides the stage and the main hall, the inscription records a repair of another building and two corner gates. While it is unclear where the building was, it provided information on the historic access to the temple, possibly through two corner gates on both sides of the stage. Another stele from 1812 records that the temple needed another repair by 1806. It mentions the restoration in 1745 but not the one in 1758. The inscription describes that the restoration of the stage started in 1806 and was completed by 1812. The buildings were re-decorated, and the temple walls were repaired in 1811. The

1812 inscription also mentions that the repair was partly funded by selling a few trees in the temple, suggesting that trees were not only planted to provide timber for the repair but also used as a commodity to support the temple's maintenance. Another restoration in 1906 is recorded by an inscription written on a board underneath the ridge purlin of the main hall. A Qing Dynasty local chronography of Ruicheng mentions the Dragon Spring and records that it was connected to the Yellow River, which runs south of Ruicheng. The same entry mentions the temple as *Wulong Ci* (Wulong Temple). A village named *Hou-longquan* village was also recorded in the chronography [120].

Notes

- 1 Due to the limited scope of this article, the theoretical underpinnings of the framework will not be elaborated on in detail. For further details of this framework see [50].
- 2 This department was renamed National Cultural Heritage Administration (NCHA) in English in 2018. However, SACH has been widely used in Anglophone academic literature. Therefore, SACH will still be used in this article to avoid confusion.
- 3 The re-discovery of Guangrenwang Temple is believed to be the result of the relocation of Yongle Temple from 1958–1964. The relocation was a major heritage project considered to be one of the most significant achievements at the beginning of the PRC. Guangrenwang Temple, being very close to the new site of Yongle Temple, was 're-discovered' by those who participated in the relocation project in 1958.
- 4 With many existing contested opinions, the most common understanding is that there are about four and a half Tang timber structures left in the country, which are the main hall of Nanchan Temple, the east main hall of Foguang Temple, the main hall of Tiantai Monastery, the main hall of Guangrenwang Temple (all in Shanxi Province), and the ground floor of the bell tower of Kaiyuan Temple in Hebei Province. While the first two are recognised as Tang structures without much dispute (although the first one had been significantly restored in 1978), there is no definite evidence for the construction dates of the surviving main halls of Tiantai Monastery and Guangrenwang Temple. During the Southern Project, new evidence was found in Tiantai Monastery which suggested that its main hall was constructed during the Five Dynasties instead. It makes it more desirable for the state and population that the main hall of Guangrenwang Temple retains its Tang structure status.
- 5 On one of the beams inside the main hall, an inscription reads “*Yi Jiu Wu Ba Nian Shi Yi Yue Shi Jiu Ri Shan Xi Sheng Wen Wu Guan Li Wei Yuan Hui Rui Cheng Xian Ren Min Wei Yuan Hui Chong Xiu Guang Ren Miao Ji Nian*” (To commemorate the restoration of Guangren Temple on November 19th 1958 by Shanxi Cultural Relics Management Committee and Ruicheng County People's Committee).
- 6 This interpretation, however, is not the original conception of Libeskind when he designed the building. Interestingly, the 're-interpretation' of the building as a dragon by *Vanke* and its subsequent link with the crowd-funding scheme of the Guangrenwang (Five-Dragon) Temple adds another 'make-believe' aspect to the Project.
- 7 Wang, Lu, Dou, and Zhou, all of whom are from an architectural background, consider the Project an excellent opportunity to transform and enhance the site's status as a place for knowledge transfer, highlighting its significance in architectural history. Specifically, Zhou considers that instead of revitalising the temple as a religious space for worshipping deities, the project managed to recreate a secular sacred space by presenting knowledge as the subject of worship in a museum setting [88]. This perspective is resonated by Lu, who considers that knowledge has replaced religion as a driving factor for the meaning-making process on-site [89]. Lv (Lyu), coming from the same premise, takes a more cautious stance as a heritage professional. He admits that since there is not enough research on the temple's religious history, folk customs and rituals, emphasising its significance in architectural history is a reasonable choice [84].
- 8 This concern is raised by Liu Diyu, who acknowledges the subjectivity of value assessment. He warns that overly emphasising the authorised value assessment that is commonly known to the general public may exclude the possibility to discover lesser-known and hidden meanings [86]. A similar comment was made by Zhang Lufeng, who considers that the existence of a heritage site is a composition of various meanings which should allow multiple interpretations and the new intervention should be more open-ended. He questions the decision to transform the historic temple to a museum, which highlights the site's 'contemporary values' but might have excluded others [86].
- 9 While this value assessment should be publicly available, upon consulting the inventory of the national PCHS, it is not obvious where the said value assessment is.
- 10 Interestingly, there are a few commentators who acknowledge the significance of the temple's religious connotation among the current local population but consider that the Project has indeed managed to elevate this discourse. By referencing Article 7 and Article 33 of the Nairobi Declaration, Guo, as a heritage professional, acknowledges that Guangrenwang Temple is both a space of worship and a place for knowledge. He comments that the Project, while revitalising the heritage site, also revived the faith for local religions and culture among the local population. He also suggests that the local community is not bothered by the new layers added to the identities of the temple. However, the article has not provided any evidence in support of these statements [85].

- 11 A candid comment from the village chief reveals the complexity behind this silence. While recalling his experience of being invited to Milan as the representative of the villagers to speak at Vanke's exhibition at the Expo, he admitted that he was a little nervous because it involved discussion of issues relating to religion and faith. He exemplified that a local official was deposed simply because he gave a speech at a temple fair [67]. The village chief's comment is emblematic of the deliberate ambiguity in the implementation of religious policy across the country.
- 12 These opinions resemble those of some community and public members, as well as some heritage professionals. The leading engineer of the Southern Project quoted her colleague's exclaims upon seeing the site during the interview of this research—'(It is) so twee! So full of petit-bourgeois sentiments! (in Chinese)'—while commenting that it is telling that these adjectives which are usually used for describing urban lifestyles were inspired by this little village temple [75]. This opinion is echoed by Liu Diyu, who comments that the architectural language of the museum, including the scale, the volume, and the materials of the floor tiles on the temple ground, resembles the design of an urban square or a park [86].
- 13 Lv points out that getting private funding and participation is beneficial to tackling the shortage of state funding for the caretaking of heritage sites, especially on projects that do not involve the historic buildings. More importantly, he considers that getting more actors from society to participate is itself a process which enriches the social value of the heritage site. In the same way, the fact that the Project has attracted the attention of the general public has a similar effect [84]. This perspective has its root in a significant shift in China's heritage discourse. The addition of the categories of social and cultural values in the China Principles is an attempt to incorporate intangible associations of these tangible sites into their value assessment process.
- 14 An observation by a Weibo user Chinn-秦汇川's visit to the temple in 2019 provides a vivid account and insights into the reasons behind. According to their report, when asked why they do not go to the museum even though they approve of the positive impact on the temple's environment, the villagers replied, 'Sure, it is beautiful. But it is not so interesting for us.' 'We do not understand it anyway.' 'It is hard to find people who are under 60 years old in the village. We cannot climb those stairs.' 'It is hardly as lively as here (around 60 metres from the temple).'
- 15 However, they suggested that the villagers could have been invited to participate in the construction of the walls, which still did not address the most fundamental aspect of the issue, the lack of community involvement in the decision-making of the Project.
- 16 The term 'dead heritage' is referring to a common situation in many sites' post-restoration status in the Southern Project, where they are closed and are referred to as 'museum objects' locked away from the public [86,88].
- 17 This decrease of funding is a nation-wide policy which is meant to encourage the provincial and local governments to take up more responsibilities in the management of national PCHS. It is part of the administration's 'decentralisation process'.
- 18 Meanwhile, there is much debate on whether the effort of revitalisation could be shared by different sectors of society besides the public sector. As mentioned in Section 3.3.4, some heritage professionals believe the participation of the private sector in the case of Guangrenwang Temple has increased the social impact of the heritage site. They believe that the broader involvement of society in heritage projects is beneficial for their long-term survival. During the interviews of this research, most of the local officials tend to think that there should be a certain degree of control over these projects by the administrations since these sites are 'very important' [81,93,94,114]. This opinion also represents a general attitude towards private sector participation in heritage projects among heritage professionals, caretakers, and community members. What differs between individual interviewees is the extent to which the government should be in control. Some consider it only suitable for the private sector to get involved financially, while others consider it essential for the private sector to come up with viable management and operational plans and that they should oversee the implementation and sustaining the management of the site in the long term.
- 19 As suggested in national legislation and the China Principles, non-profit functions such as research institutes, museums, and community centres are preferred as 'appropriate use' of heritage sites [71,87]. It is reasonable to question the viability and sustainability of funding and human resources for these entities.
- 20 The agreement between Vanke and the public sector is that while Vanke was responsible for financing and implementing the Project, it is not taking on the responsibility of running the museum, which would be given back to the local authority instead. From what can be seen on-site, such a model does not guarantee the continuous innovation and maintenance of the museum. As soon as the Project was completed, the management model went back to being almost the same as it was previously. According to the local official and the caretaker, events and activities only happen sporadically on-site [81,82].
- 21 According to one unnamed local official, such a project is like 'gifting a low-income family a big refrigerator. Even though it might seem like a nice gesture, the low-income family now has to carry the burden of buying more food to put in it and paying for the electricity bill' [79]. Although the local official allegedly said so because he was 'not understanding what the project was actually about', such an analogy rings true considering the reality seen on the ground during this research [67].
- 22 The other two villages are Qianlongquan (front Dragon Spring) village and Houlongquan (back Dragon Spring) village.

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