

Challenges in Archaeological Tourism in China

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Abstract

Worldwide archaeological tourism, or tourism to sites with archaeological significance, has been rapidly growing and has attracted increased academic attention in recent years. China is an outstanding case in this field. In fact, its government has been actively promoting tourism and archaeological tourism for the last three decades. The understanding of the challenges that Chinese archaeological tourism is currently facing is the focus of this article. Four aspects will guide the discussion: the dilemma between site preservation and economic profitability, unregulated tourism development, the influence of UNESCO World Heritage designation, and authorities' sensitivity towards ethnic issues in archaeological tourism.

Key words: archaeological tourism, China, cultural heritage, World Heritage Sites

Introduction

Tourism has been transformed into a massive and extensive global industry in the past few

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decades, and this has also been the case for archaeological tourism, one of its important subsets. Archaeological tourism refers to people's activity of consuming the past through visiting places of archaeological significance. Archaeological tourism is not a recent phenomenon but scholarly analysis of it has been scant until recently. It was only in the years immediately before the turn of the twenty-first century that a strong interest emerged in this field (Hoffman et al. 2002). Today it is a growing field of study with recent articles exploring a diversity of related issues (e.g., Bowers 2014; Comer 2012; Herrera 2015; Walker and Carr 2013). This recent surge of interest has also produced a growing body of literature in China, one of the countries where archaeological tourism is becoming a key economic asset. Recent publications focusing on this subject consist predominately of analyses of individual case studies looking at issues such as conflicts between site conservation and tourism demand, stakeholder management, tourism planning, and sustainable development (e.g., Liu 2009; Yang 2002; Zhang 2013; Zhao 2011). An examination of this body of literature, as well as some observations made during my own fieldwork, conducted at two archaeological sites in China in July and August 2014, reveals that, even though the difficulties and opportunities involved in the interplay between tourism and archaeological heritage vary across destinations, all the issues mentioned above share many features in common. This article identifies some of the key factors that are behind archaeological tourism in China and the significant challenges it faces as a contributor to the country's economic, political and cultural development.

Archaeological tourism emerged in China in the late 1970s after the central government's implementation of the "Reform and Open" policy. Although it has gradually turned into a robust

multifunctional industry over the past four decades, it is also encountering a range of challenges. In recent years, China has undergone remarkable economic and social changes at the domestic level. The rapid transition, however, has brought not only increased income but also acute socio-economic and political tensions. Issues such as pragmatism in development, regional imbalance and social unrest in ethnic autonomous regions have all contributed to a growth in challenges that archaeological tourism needs to tackle carefully. In this article, my aim is to provide an examination of the issues that Chinese archaeological tourism is currently facing. After a brief historical introduction, the discussion focuses on four important aspects: (a) the dilemma between site preservation and economic profitability; (b) unregulated tourism development; (c) the impact that UNESCO is having through the World Heritage List; and (d) the tension generated by authorities' sensitivity towards ethnic issues. The discussion also produces a synthetic analysis of the intersection between material remains and the tourism consumption of the past in an international context. This will help to fill in the gap of the lack of research on this subject, and contribute to the completion of a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic role that archaeological heritage is playing in the realm of tourism from a global perspective.

The development of archaeological tourism in China: a historical background

Archaeological tourism in China has evolved over the past four decades in response to dramatic political, social, and economic changes, and understanding these changes allows us to better recognize the challenges this industry faces today. Before tourism and archaeology officially engaged with each other, on this ancient landmass called China the activity of travel had existed for thousands of years and the traditional practice of antiquarianism had also

emerged since the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE). Started in Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) and thrived in Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE), visiting famous sites became an indispensable source of inspiration for Chinese scholars (Shepherd and Yu 2013, p. 6). Later during the Ming and Qing era (1368-1911 CE), this travel activity extended to the upper class who, during their visits, referred back to and reinforced the impressions of their predecessors from the Tang and Song era (618-1279 CE) through written and visual markers (Brook 1998, p. 180). Traditional antiquarianism initiated and flourished in the Song Dynasty, when dozens of Song scholars studied and recorded in their compiled works bronze artifacts and other objects from previous dynasties (Chang 1981, pp. 158-159). However, the antiquarianism tradition suffered a severe decline when the Song's Mongol successors took over the country, and it was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the tradition was resumed (Debaine-Francfort 1999, p. 15). In the mid-nineteenth century, when China opened its doors under the imposed force of the West, modern travel started to pour in along with Western scholarship (Wang 2003, p. 37). The increase in international travel to China in the early twentieth century triggered the birth of Chinese tourism industry (Zhang et al. 2000, p. 282); while almost simultaneously European scholars introduced archaeological field methods, which led to the establishment of archaeology as a scientific discipline in China (Liu and Chen 2012, p. 3). However, in the late 1930s and 1940s, a series of upheavals, including the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45 CE) and the Chinese Civil War (1945-49 CE), wracked the country and essentially prevented all recreational travels and archaeological excavations.

After the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, for almost three decades

freedom to travel in China was restrained (Chow 1988, p. 207), and tourism was held tightly in the hands of the state machinery as a propaganda tool, serving political rather than economic purposes (Zhang et al. 1999, p. 473). Even though archaeology as a scientific discipline was resumed after 1949 and a range of splendid discoveries were made between 1949 and 1978, archaeological sites or any other cultural heritage sites were not promoted as touristic resources. Instead, touristic destinations focused on material achievements of Communism such as factories, schools, and communes of revolutionary peasant, regardless of visitors' interests (Nyíri 2011). It is worth noting that some of the most renowned sites of Chinese archaeological tourism in later decades were excavated during this period. Taking the "Thirteen Imperial Tombs of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 CE)" for instance, located in a cluster near Beijing, they are a collection of mausoleums built by the Ming emperors. In 1956, the Dingling tomb of Emperor Wanli (r. 1572-1620 CE) was excavated as a trial site in preparation for a more ambitious project of unearthing the Changling tomb, the largest and oldest one among the thirteen (Needham 1959). The excavation of Dingling was finished in 1957 and a museum was established two years later. However, due to a lack of adequate technique, expertise and resources, the excavation resulted in an irreversible damage to the site, as thousands of surviving artifacts discovered from the tomb were later poorly preserved. In addition, when the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) swept across the nation, fervent Red Guards stormed the Dingling museum and destroyed the remains of the Wanli Emperor and his two empresses, as well as many other objects exhibited (Yang and Yue 2007).

Archaeological tourism in its present form appeared soon after 1978, a year in which the

Chinese central government, following Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Open" policy, made an epic decision to shift emphasis from political struggle to economic development. After 1978, tourism was rehabilitated as an industry, and heritage was promoted as a valuable touristic resource. Because many of the heritage sites are archaeological sites, this marked the beginning of modern archaeological tourism in China. In the initial years after 1978, and to a great extent still today, the combination of archaeology and tourism was perceived as a means of educating the Chinese about their own collective past, and reconstituting a shared cultural landscape and national identity. However, archaeological sites were increasingly promoted for their economic value as touristic attractions.

The promotion of archaeological tourism in China was also fostered by its perceived political value. Since the 1980s, some magnificent sites, such as the Terracotta Army and the Great Wall, have been frequently used to showcase Chinese culture to important foreign guests (Debaine-Francfort 1999, p. 34). A significant step was taken in 1985, when the central government ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Since then, many archaeological sites in China have been inscribed on the World Heritage List, such as the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor and the Mogao Caves, both inscribed in 1987, the Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Koguryo Kingdom, inscribed in 2004, and the Site of Xanadu, inscribed in 2012. UNESCO accreditation amplified the international visibility of these sites and prompted the Chinese authorities to upgrade them as major tourist destinations. In the 1990s, in search for funding, expertise, and international visibility, the state government began to actively seek international assistance for the conservation of China's heritage resources, including

archaeological sites (e.g., Agnew 1997). The increased international cooperation also fostered the establishment of “China Principles” (Lu 2008), an instructive guidance which integrated the Burra Charter with existent Chinese legislation for the conservation of Chinese cultural heritage.

Entering the new millennium, archaeological tourism in China experienced an unprecedentedly strong momentum in development. This had very much to do with the decision made by the central government to attach great significance to the conservation and promotion of “Great Sites” (da yizhi 大遗址), a proposal incorporated into the country’s “Five-Year Plan” in 2000. The so-called “Great Sites”, a rather unique concept produced in Chinese context, refer to ancient cultural remains of a large scale, rich contents, and prominent significance, including prehistoric settlements, ruins of cities and palaces, cemeteries, necropolis, and other major historical remains of human activities (SACH 2006). In other words, almost all Great Sites are archaeological sites. With upgraded funding and attention from the central authorities, many of the largest and more spectacular archaeological sites, including the Great Wall and several sites along the Silk Road, went through large-scale renovations such as enhanced touristic facilities and access (SACH 2009). During the past five years, one of the dominant methods used for site conservation has been to convert these Great Sites into archaeological heritage parks (Li and Quan 2007). They have been designed to combine the protection and exhibition of archaeological remains with the functions of education, research and leisure for a cultural public space (Xiao 2010). Therefore, in little more than a quarter of a century, China’s archaeological heritage has passed from playing a minor role in the country’s economy to being a major source of income at the national, provincial, and local levels, whose development is increasingly and

actively encouraged by the government.

However, despite the tremendous transformation, in recent years the archaeological tourism industry in China is also facing growing challenges compounded by the ever-changing social, economic and political environments. After three decades of rapid development, China has gained economic prosperity, but the Chinese-style market economy firmly embedded within a socialist regulatory and administrative framework has also produced a wide range of issues including disparities in wealth, regional imbalance, and ethnic tensions. These issues have all placed greater pressures on the current development of archaeological tourism in China and generated further challenges for it to address.

The dilemma between heritage preservation and economic profitability

One of the most imperative challenges that archaeological tourism is facing in China is the increased tension between heritage preservation and economic profitability in recent years. This has much to do with regional governments' efforts to promote the local economy and prosperity. In fact, regional governments have been playing a huge role in reshaping the development of Chinese archaeological tourism (Luo 2007). Starting from 1998, the Chinese central authorities gradually shifted control of tourism and heritage management to provincial governments. The decision of decentralization triggered intensified competition among different regions, and encouraged local authorities to invest in the touristic development of archaeological sites, in order to capture a larger sharing of the tourism market. However, it also puts more pressure on regional governments in terms of the expense of site conservation. Archaeological sites in China are protected under the legal framework of the "Law on Protection of Cultural

Heritage (*wenwu baohu fa* 文物保护法)", which indicates that any material artifacts unearthed during construction projects must be protected using local funds (Svensson 2006, p. 30). The protection of large archaeological sites, in particular, requires huge amounts of financial investment to cover the cost of land acquisition, resident and industry relocation, and environmental improvement (Lu 2005, p. 122). As well, the current political system determines that local officials are evaluated and promoted largely on their achievements in short-term economic growth (Li et al. 2008, p. 315). All these lead to regional authorities not necessarily welcoming archaeological discoveries that do not contain conspicuous touristic value, due to the costs involved in preservation, something that has been seen with concern by archaeologists (Gruber 2007, p. 282).

Even though in recent years the state authorities have promoted the conservation of archaeological sites, in practice it is common that usually only those sites that are perceived by authorities as presentable or attractive to tourists are considered worthwhile to be preserved. Many sites that do not contain enticing material are often neglected after salvage excavation (Lu 2008, p. 356). Furthermore, fast growing urbanization and modernization is also putting more archaeological sites at peril, especially in cases when the requirement of heritage preservation and the demand for constructional development become incompatible. Since the maximum fine for destroying cultural heritage is only 500,000 RMB (approximately 81,700 USD) according to current legislation (State Council 2013), some construction companies prefer to pay the penalty than delay their projects when they discover archaeological remains. One example of such an attitude took place in 2013 in Luogang, Guangzhou province, when a subway construction

company intentionally demolished overnight five ancient tombs, which had just been unearthed during the project and dated to a period from the late Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-c. 1046 BCE) to Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046-256 BCE), resulting in the payment of a relatively small fine (Shi 2014).

Unregulated tourism development at major archaeological sites

China's iconic archaeological sites, such as the Great Wall, the tomb complex of the First Emperor of Qin, and the Mogao Buddhist caves at Dunhuang, have played a leading role in the tourism market since 1978, but even these famous sites are vulnerable to the threats brought by unregulated tourism. Since major archaeological sites—both famous destinations as well as recently developed sites—are bringing visitors in substantial numbers, regional governments usually perceive them as key revenue generators. Therefore, in recent years the admission fees for many archaeological sites, especially the famous ones, have been raised dramatically (Huang and Chen 2005, p. 181). Even though the elevated entry fee is justified as a means to reduce crowding, apart from maximize revenue, in practice, the number of tourists continues to grow at a phenomenal rate (Zhang and Yang 2007, p. 59). Since tourist admission income has become a sizeable source of revenue, local government officials frequently seek to attract more visitors without considering the carrying capacity of the sites and facilities, which in turn puts more strain on existing conservation efforts and creates new demands for protection. As a result, almost all iconic Chinese archaeological sites are now facing the problem of overcrowding, which not only threatens the conservation of the sites but also impairs tourists' experience at the sites and their appreciation of the heritage value (e.g., Global Heritage Fund 2010; Li et al. 2010).

In addition to overcrowding, in order to attract more tourists, local authorities often try to add human-made features to “enrich” and repackage archaeological sites opened to the public. Often criticized for being short-sighted, unregulated and vulgar, these features are threatening the integrity and authenticity of the site itself (Feng 2010, p. 14). Taking the “Underground Palace of the Qin Emperor” as an example, as I observed from my fieldwork in this area east of Xi’an in August 2014, an exhibition center has been newly constructed by local authorities to append more selling points to the world renowned third century BCE mausoleum complex of the First Emperor of Qin, a World Heritage site located 2mi (3.2km) away from the new center. The exhibition center, in which a set of shoddily produced miniatures shows the imaginary internal structure of the unexcavated mausoleum, has been criticized for its poor taste and inaccurate reconstruction, and listed as one of the top three most unworthy tourist spots in Xi’an city from an online survey conducted in 2012 (Xi’an 2012).

The strategies employed for promoting tourism in order to turn large archaeological sites into heritage parks are also triggering dispute and fierce criticism. The reconstruction project of the Tang dynasty Daming Palace (seventh century CE) national heritage park, located just northeast of present-day Xi’an, illustrates this issue well. According to Xu Pingfang, former director of the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the establishment of the park has been damaging for the archaeological study of the site, for it has prevented future archaeological work to be undertaken at the site since many archaeological remains were covered by concrete before the completion of a thorough archaeological survey (Li 2010). Chinese archaeologist Xie Chensheng also expressed his concern about the enterprise-

style management approach that is currently practiced at the park. He has strongly argued against the idea of creating within it ten “archaized scenic spots,” a project proposed by developers to attach more human-made features to the site (Wang 2012, p. 69). In addition, many question the motivation behind local authorities’ investment in the Daming Palace heritage park. Some scholars have pointed out that the real intention behind site conservation might be to push up property values around the site in favor of real estate development (Liu 2010).

The impact that UNESCO is having on archaeological tourism in China through the World Heritage List

Among all the factors that have affected archaeological tourism in China, the impact of UNESCO World Heritage List should not be underestimated. Since the late 1990s, a series of successful designations of sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List have greatly promoted the awareness of some previously unknown cultural sites and effectively increased tourism. Such is the case of the Old Town of Lijiang (an ancient trading center in southwest China’s Yunnan Province), whose inscription on the World Heritage List in 1997 has helped it to become one of the most popular tourist destinations in China (Zheng 2011, p. 169). Lijiang’s success encouraged many regional governments to follow suit, especially considering that since the 1990s the widening development gap between the eastern (coastal) provinces and the western regions of China, where Yunnan is located, has prompted provincial authorities of poorer areas to search for alternative strategies for economic prosperity. However, regional governments seem to turn blind to the fact that not all designated World Heritage sites in China are financially profitable, such as the case of Mount Wutai (Shao and Huang 2009). This is partly because the

designation of a site as World Heritage is perceived as a great honor, and therefore it brings instant glory to the political achievement of regional politicians. Driven by the seemingly subjectively guaranteed economic profit and objectively perceived political benefit followed by site inscription, local governments are showing a sometimes overheated enthusiasm towards World Heritage application (Lv 2009; Xiao and Chen 2003).

In China, the application for a site to be proposed as World Heritage is treated as a highly political activity. From central government to different regional level offices, there are several administrative sectors involved. At the top national level, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) decides which cultural sites go onto the World Heritage Tentative List. Once a site is on the Tentative List, the local authorities in charge are asked to strengthen not only the research and particularly the preservation and management aspects of the site. Because China can only propose one cultural site each year to UNESCO to go through formal nomination and testing processes, the competition for this annual opportunity is keen and fierce among different levels of government, as every province has at least one cultural site on the Tentative List. This scramble for World Heritage inscription sometimes aggravates the negative effects embodied in the commercialization of archaeological sites. For instance, because local communities in China usually have very low participation in the management of heritage sites due to an absence of either interest or opportunity, and lack the influence in decision making, World Heritage application campaigns sometimes generate conflicts among different stakeholders and infringe upon the interest of local communities.

It should be noted that apart from its negative effects, there are also positive aspects in the

promotion of the World Heritage status for monuments and archaeological sites. The preparation for a site to be nominated for World Heritage status assists in regulating tourism promotion strategies, and therefore encourages sustainable development in the region where the site is located. Such is the case of the Huashan rock art cultural landscape along the Zuojiang River in southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China's candidate for World Heritage designation in 2016. The cultural landscape encompasses the Huashan rock art area, in which 81 pictographic sites were distributed along the picturesque Zuojiang river valley. The motifs are all painted in a brownish-red color with a highly standardized style. They are believed to be produced between the Warring States Period (403-221 BCE) and Eastern Han dynasty (26-220 CE), by an ethnic group named Luo Yue (Gao 2013). For the last two decades, the local authorities have been making an effort to develop tourism as well as promote the area's rock art heritage as a World Heritage candidate. Since its nomination was made official by the state authorities in 2014, as I noticed during my fieldwork at Huashan in July 2014, the local Chongzuo municipal government, which is in charge of the whole rock art area, has ordered the cessation of all on-going tourism development projects that involve the protected areas of the rock art cultural landscape. This restriction will last until a consolidated tourism development plan is drawn up and approved (pers. comm., government officials in Chongzuo).

Archaeological tourism and ethnic sensitivity in China

Another remarkable challenge that archaeological tourism has faced in China in recent years has been the growing political sensitivity intensified by the increased tension in ethnic minority areas. The ethnic minority issue has historical roots that can be traced back to the

imperial and Republican periods of Chinese history. During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911CE), the Manchu ruling elite developed administrative relations with the non-Han dominated regions of Inner Asia, such as Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang (Xinjiang literally means “New Territory”) (Rawski 1996). After the Revolution of 1911 put an end to the Qing Empire, even though the newly established Republic of China struggled to maintain authority over these regions, both Tibet and Mongolia declared independence soon after the fall of the Qing Dynasty (Goldstein 1991; Humphrey 1994). In Xinjiang, in spite of the fact that the attempts to establish an ‘East Turkestan Republic’ all failed, this region moved out of China’s control after 1911 (Forbes 1986). When the Communist Party of China established the People's Republic of China in 1949, the new government regained administrative control of Tibet and Xinjiang. Since then, the two regions have become major areas of ethnic separatism. In an effort to bind together the “multiethnic” and “unitary” Chinese state, the central government has implemented a suite of policies, which sometimes have contributed to, rather than ameliorated, ethnic minority discontent and separatist sentiments in these regions (Clarke 2013, p. 223). Moreover, in the last three decades, the widening of the pre-existing economic disparities between the eastern region and western provinces, which generally have the largest concentrations of ethnic minority populations, has also led to the increase in inter-ethnic tension (Clarke 2013, p. 225).

The importance of the ethnic minority issue in archaeological tourism is exemplified by the so-called “Xinjiang mummies” in far northwest China. Around the edges of the Tarim Basin, archaeologists since the 1980’s have discovered dozens of cemeteries, some of which have yielded extraordinarily well-preserved desiccated corpses, known as the “Xinjiang mummies”.

Some of the mummies have been dated as early as 2000 BCE and bear features that have been described as manifestly Caucasoid in appearance (Allen 1996). Since their discovery, these mummies have been used by separatists among the majority Uyghur ethnic group of Xinjiang to claim that these early settlers were their ancestors and that Xinjiang was never part of China until recently (Shepherd and Yu 2013, p. 26). The Xinjiang mummies therefore have become politically sensitive objects, and the Chinese government appears to be very cautious about their exhibition and interpretation. For instance, during an exhibition named “Secrets of the Silk Road” at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, due to the pressure from a delicate political climate, the display of two Xinjiang mummies on loan from China was suddenly forbidden by the Chinese officials, who later compromised and allowed them to be shown with an abbreviated schedule (for details see Edward 2011). The Xinjiang mummies issue is an excellent example to demonstrate the political bottom-line of the promotion of archaeological tourism in China: it is allowed only so long as it does not, from the state perspective, threaten national unity or challenge the official narrative of Chinese history.

Ethnic sensitivity in archaeological tourism can also be seen in the narratives of World Heritage sites that concern ethnic minorities. The interpretations of these sites often emphasize the theme of cooperation among different ethnic groups in history. For instance, the description of the archaeological site of Xanadu, the Mongolian capital established by Kublai Khan in 1256 CE and a World Heritage site inscribed in 2012, underscores the value of the site as “a unique attempt to assimilate the nomadic Mongolian and Han Chinese cultures (UNESCO 2012).” Other examples can be found in the Chinese state applications for World Heritage designation of

archaeological remains such as the site of southern Yue state, the sites of the ancient Shu state in present-day Sichuan province, and the Western Xia imperial tombs in northwest China. The narratives all highlight their values in promoting and displaying cultural integration among different ethnic groups (UNESCO 2008, 2013a, 2013b).

China's challenges in a global context

Archaeological tourism is a relatively new economic activity in China, but has shown a strong and steady development in the past three decades. The analysis undertaken in this paper, which is based on a comparative study of the individual case-studies found in the literature and also on my own observations during fieldwork, has highlighted a series of challenges that archaeological tourism is currently facing in China: (a) the dilemma between site preservation and economic profitability; (b) unregulated tourism development; (c) the impact that UNESCO is having through the World Heritage List; and (d) the tension generated by authorities' sensitivity towards ethnic issues. The range of challenges that archaeological tourism is facing in China shows that a paradox exists in contemporary Chinese society in which, on the one hand, the need for rapid economic growth thwarts the preservation of archaeological sites and, on the other hand, national policies encourage the transformation of precisely such sites into tourism destinations and national glories for serving economic, political, social, and cultural purposes. Underlying the paradox is the political quandary that the Chinese central authorities have been trying to resolve for the last two decades: the task of reconciling the conflicting tensions generated by the desire to maintain rapid economic development, the demand to promote China's national identity, and the challenge of managing the country's transformation in a way that

justifies continued Communist Party rule. The existence of these political predicaments determines that the economic and political values in archaeological heritage will outweigh other considerations for some time to come, and archaeological tourism in China will continue to develop under the influence of market forces and a “top-down” decision-making political approach. The question that remains for future improvement of archaeological tourism in China is how to strike a balance between preserving the past, improving the material aspects of society, and maintaining internal stability. Indeed, there is no easy answer to this question in any country, and especially in the case of China, a nation that has the largest population in the world on a vast land that has been continuously inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups for thousands of years.

Are the challenges highlighted in the article unique to China? A comparison of China’s situation to those in many other countries in the world shows that from an international perspective, it is important to acknowledge that the challenges that have been analyzed in this article are not exclusive to China. It is true that because the Chinese government monopolizes the production, utilization, and protection of archaeological heritage, archaeological practice goes hand in hand with the political agenda. This means that when inappropriate utilizations occur in practice, the self-supervisory mechanism sometimes fails to curb such behaviors (Comer 2015, p. 23). However, a government-business alliance in so-called free-market economies is similar in many ways to its counterpart in monopolistic governments like China. When the past is increasingly transformed into a commodity for touristic consumption, tensions between heritage preservation and economic profitability become more and more evident. This is especially acute in less affluent regions where the combination of a dire need for income, large scale exploitation

of resources, and a lack of legislation concerning impact assessment and site protection has put much archaeological heritage in grave danger (Willems 2014, p. 110). This combination of circumstances can be found in countries such as India (Leech 2004), Bolivia (Malisius 2003), and Honduras (Mortensen 2009), but many others could be cited. Furthermore, government corruption compounds the monetary scarcity even further. Abuse of power and favoritism conducted by dishonest judiciaries, political parties, and bureaucracies often plague decision-making processes and influence what sites get selected and financed for conservation (e.g., Pwiti and Ndoro 1999; Stark and Griffin 2004; Zan and Lusiani 2011).

Unregulated tourism development in archaeological sites is the second challenge identified for archaeological tourism in China. Unfortunately, China is, again, not the only country with this problem, for it is also frequently seen worldwide. To many popular sites, negative impacts such as visitor congestion derived from the absence of proper regulations have caused both tourists and the host community to be caught in a downward spiral of poor visitor experiences and degradation of heritage values. Furthermore, strategies used for promoting tourism at archaeological sites are also triggering concerns towards issues such as authenticity. This has much to do with the changing patterns in the nature of the tourist population. Traditional visitors to archaeological sites were mainly an educated minority who were content to visit sites where minimal or no complementary information was provided (Walker and Carr 2013, p. 23). Today, even though such visitors still exist, the average tourists to an archaeological site value their entertainment experience at the site as much as the site itself (Slick 2002, p. 223). Therefore, for archaeological sites to provide wider relevance to their audience it is often the

case that many of them depend on the staging or the reconstruction of the past to attract tourists, and as a result the issue of authenticity is often consciously invoked (e.g., Halewood and Hannam 2001).

A third challenge highlighted in this article has been the impact that UNESCO is having through the designation of World Heritage on archaeological tourism. As it was in the two first challenges discussed, it is also the case that there are similar situations in other parts of the world. From an international perspective, the UNESCO World Heritage List has also played a significant role in shaping the touristic commercialization of global archaeological heritage. As Comer and Willems (2012) argue, for archaeological sites already inscribed on the list there is often a risk of over-exploitation of tourism value and degradation of the resource by too many visitors. For sites that are not on the list, the UNESCO label is recognized as a highly valued promotional tool for tourism and national prestige (Timothy and Boyd 2006; Willems 2014). There has been a scramble in many countries, especially the less developed ones, to inscribe as many heritage sites as possible on the list (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009, p. 11). The excessive demand and use of World Heritage sites have led to subsequent problems extensively addressed in the extant literature (e.g., Jimura 2011; Leask and Fyall 2006; Shackley 2000).

Finally, the issue of ethnic sensitivity in tourism and especially in archaeological tourism has also been examined above. Ethnic sensitivities in archaeological tourism are also a universal phenomenon that is usually associated with nationalism and political tensions inextricably linked to historical legacies. It has been noticed that archaeology does not function independently of the societies in which it is practiced, and the political implication of presenting archaeological

remains to the public has been discussed by numerous scholars (e.g., Díaz-Andreu 2007; Goode 2007; Hamilakis 2007; Meskell 1998; Trigger 1984).

Worldwide archaeological heritage has been increasingly utilized for tourism development and therefore has provided a vast menu of opportunities for benefiting the destination residents and stimulating regional economic and cultural advancement. However, this development is hardly neutral and has encountered a range of difficulties that need to be tackled carefully. The analysis generated by the study should help to increase awareness of the negative impacts that tourism promotion places on the authenticity and integrity of archaeological heritage. More importantly, the examination underlines the urgent need to develop sound policies and effective regulations based on the understanding of these negative impacts, so the best interests of the public, including local communities, both current and future tourists, can be served. It is also proposed that increasing public participation in the planning and management of archaeological tourism could be a way of promoting sustainability in its future development. This is indeed a fundamental challenge to China since this country has still been heavily influenced by the traditionally strict form of top-down planning that essentially disallows all forms of grassroots participation. However, the engagement of a variety of stakeholders will undoubtedly help to mitigate potential conflicts in the process of commercializing archaeological heritage, and therefore assist in promoting a more balanced and sustainable transformation of archaeological sites into tourism destinations.

In summary, worldwide archaeological tourism is encountering a range of challenges that are not easy to reconcile for any state that seeks to maintain sustainable development and balance

between preserving the past and fulfilling contemporary needs. China serves as an extreme example of this dilemma, as it has gone through major transformational changes in the past three decades while at the same time shouldering the burden of a complex historical legacy, as well as the largest population in the world. The significant challenges that archaeological tourism is currently facing in China are applicable globally and are highly significant for understanding the role that archaeological heritage has and continues to play in today's global tourism arena.

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