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PRACTICE REVIEW

Heritage Conservation through Planning: A Comparison of Policies and Principles in England and China

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative study of conservation planning practice between Chester, England and Qingyan, China. It examines conservation policies and plans in the two cities, and aims to contribute to current international debates surrounding heritage management. Three key dimensions of conservation planning are identified and applied to the cases: the planning tools delivering conservation; the recognition of heritage; and conservation objectives and principles pursued. The analysis reveals that enduring socio-cultural and institutional specificities contribute to moulding approaches to conservation planning. Understanding such contextual specificities and distinctiveness is essential for international exchanges of experience around conservation planning.

Introduction

Since the mid-20th century, there has been a significant global rise in the attention given to heritage conservation and management. This has been coupled with an evolution in understandings of heritage and approaches to managing changes in the historic environment. Organisations such as ICOMOS and UNESCO have been promoting the sharing of experiences and techniques of conservation worldwide. Meanwhile local practice has continued to operate within different socio-economic and political contexts. This is evident in conservation planning as a part of urban planning that sets out policies and strategies to manage and valorise the significance of heritage (Zheng, 2007).

This present historical juncture is conducive to comparative research in conservation planning which builds understandings of local practice, and promotes critical reflection, learning, and where appropriate, thoughtful policy transfer among countries (Nadin, 2012). The UN's International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning call on national governments to '(p)romote the integration of the identification, safeguarding and development of the cultural and natural heritage in urban and territorial planning processes'; and on local authorities to '(p)rotect and value the cultural heritage' (UN HABITAT, 2015, p. 15, p. 16). Similarly, the signatories of the UN's New Urban Agenda (UN HABITAT, 2017, p. 13) commit themselves to the sustainable leveraging of heritage and to highlight

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'the role that heritage plays in rehabilitating and revitalizing urban areas and in strengthening social participation and the exercise of citizenship'.

This wider backdrop provides a context for comparative evaluations of how different states address such issues. This may imply large multi-state or multi-team studies, or more focussed bilateral comparisons as in the present paper. This paper compares conservation planning in England and in China and its practice in one place in each country. With increasing links between the two countries in research, education and various sectors of the economy (Donaldson & Elliot, 2015), such a comparison is apposite at present. Conservation management and related regeneration strategies and sought after benefits to the cultural and tourist industries are one of the key economic development strategies in both countries.

To structure the analysis, the paper proposes a comparative framework which consists of reviewing three dimensions of conservation planning: 'the planning tools delivering conservation' (which planning instruments are used to frame and pursue actions in conservation planning?); 'the recognition of heritage' (how is heritage defined, and what counts as heritage?); and 'conservation objectives and principles' (which substantive goals and procedures are aimed for and followed?). These dimensions are not exhaustive, but are identified as being key to conservation planning practice based on a review of existing literature and practice. The comparative study is carried out through a discourse analysis of relevant policy documents and a review of conservation plans of the two cases. The English case Chester was selected due to its significance as a site of heritage conservation since the early 19th century. The Chinese case Qingyan, having a similar land area as Chester, has had national recognition of its historic environment.

The following sections firstly explain the objectives of this study and the proposed framework. Secondly, the basis of conservation planning in the two contexts is briefly introduced. Thirdly, the case studies of Chester and Qingyan are presented, followed by a discussion on the commonalities and differences with reference to the specific comparative points in the comparative framework. The paper concludes by highlighting the contributions insights that the comparative research has revealed.

Establishing the Comparative Framework

There is vast literature on comparative studies of the planning systems and policies in European countries, as EU-wide policies and regional strategies penetrate into diverse local practices (Sykes, 2008). This literature also extends to cover areas and regions in North America. These studies lead to discussions on planning families, planning cultures (Booth, 2011; Keller *et al.*, 1996; Othengrafen, 2012), and categories that summarise the characteristics of different planning systems and the resulting planning practice (Healey & Williams, 1993; Newman & Thornley, 1996). Nadin (2012) commented that comparative studies should not merely be descriptions of planning instruments and procedures but compare the different ways that 'planning tools and practices are being adjusted in response to common challenges' (p. 2). He went on and argued that international comparison could bring out the often overlooked or taken-for-granted cultural and structural factors of planning which would not be made clear in nationally based research, so that it would enhance our understanding and facilitate potential theory building. In light of this, the present paper does not seek to duplicate a comprehensive explanation of the conservation planning instruments and procedures in the two

countries, which are already well reported in the literature (Pendlebury, 2013; Whitehand & Gu, 2007), but intends to capture different interpretations and understandings of the key concepts or principles in the two contexts. Furthermore, both England and China are facing the challenge of heritage preservation and the need for economic development. But their fundamentally different socio-cultural and political conditions determine the differences in the planning tools delivering conservation objectives and actions. Therefore, in our proposed comparative framework, 'the planning tools' report on the approaches and funding available for planned actions; the 'recognition of heritage' addresses the different understandings of what counts as heritage in the two countries; and 'the conservation objectives and principles' focuse on the tension between conservation and economic development as well as the idea of 'authenticity' in heritage management. We believe these points of the comparative framework best reveal the outcomes of the comparison.

This study firstly looks at the planning tools delivering conservation because they set out the content of the other two dimensions of the comparative framework. The tools vary according to different planning systems. According to Booth (1996, p. 5), when land-use planning emerged in the 20th century, there existed two different types of planning systems that reflected different legal and administrative measures. The English planning system can be characterised as a discretionary system which is pragmatic, based on case law and does not spell out the full basis of decision making in advance; while the Chinese system is mainly regulatory, delivering clear development rights and floor space limits and often building envelope controls (Punter, 2007; Nadin & Stead, 2014). The differences in the two systems affect not only the nature and status of conservation policies and plans, but also the power relations among stakeholders.

Second, the definition of heritage has evolved over the years in England and the West, from the focus on physical forms in the 1960s, to also include the social aspects (Ashworth, 2011; Orbasli, 2000), from the grand to the vernacular, from the remote to the recent, and from the material to the intangible (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 14; Starn, 2005). Since the 1980 s, heritage has been considered as a cultural practice as opposed to an inanimate 'thing' (Smith, 2006, p. 44). The recognition of how heritage is conceived of in different national settings is thus an important aspect for comparison especially given the increasingly value-based definitions of it, which have come to the fore since the mid-20th century. Such values reflect a set of qualities and characteristics perceived by individuals or groups (de La Torre & Mason, 2002; Mason, 2002). The commonly recognised values include historic, aesthetic, cultural, symbolic, spiritual, educational, social, economic, political, architectural, recreational values, to name a few (English Heritage, 1997; Frey, 1997; Lipe, 1984; Mason, 2002; Throsby, 2006; Worthing & Bond, 2007). McClelland et al. (2013, p. 589) claim that values are socially constructed and associated with local communities' intellectual and emotional ties to historic remains (Jameson, 2008; Jokilehto, 2006). Heritage is claimed to relate closely to, or help people find, their identity, dignity, personality, and feel secure despite abrupt social changes (ICOMOS, 1967; UNESCO, 1968, 1976). Pearson and Sullivan (1995) suggest that a holistic value-assessment through a participatory and consultative approach is needed in heritage management. Therefore this research unpacks the content of conservation plans to understand what is recognised as heritage in the two contexts and how it is identified, designated, and managed through conservation planning.

Third, specific objectives and principles of conservation planning in the two countries can help account for the potentially different actions which result. In particular, driven by global forces, heritage is increasingly transformed into products for tourist consumption through a global 'heritage industry' (Hewison, 1987). Heritage has become a process 'whereby objects, events, sites, performances and personalities, derived from the past, are transformed into experiences in and for the present' (Ashworth, 2011, p. 3). This process facilitates the redefinition and reinterpretation of heritage in order to enhance local competitiveness and attractiveness (Nasser, 2003). Tourism becomes the impetus for conservation planning. Scholars have reported potential problems with the commercialisation of heritage including – disproportionally distributed investment, sanitised history, neglected local values, inflated local economy, and a damaged environment (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990; Jansen-Verbeke, 1997; Nasser, 2003; Newby, 1994). The common global forces which foster the instrumentalisation of heritage however have attracted very different responses from local practices as part of strategies for competitiveness and capital accumulation. The idea of 'authenticity', which refers to originality from a wide range of perspectives (e.g. history, culture, politics, health, ecology etc) during the revitalisation process of heritage thus becomes key to such understanding (Zhu, 2015).

Conservation Planning in England

In England, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are normally responsible for discretionary decision-making, advised by Historic England (HE) for matters relating to conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Planners operate using legislation, national planning policy and guidance (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2014), HE Practice Advice, their own local plans, and any relevant local supplementary planning documents, such as conservation area character appraisals and management plans. Local plans are statutory and set out planning policies for making planning decisions in an area. They may also direct developers to other relevant guidance documents (non-statutory) that they must take into account if they wish to maximise the chances of gaining planning consent for development proposals. Conservation planning policy in England, therefore, provides a framework to be used to manage change in historic environments and respond appropriately to development pressure or investment opportunities.

Within this planning system, heritage is managed through listed buildings and designated conservation areas, as well as other forms of heritage designation regimes. The Town and Country Planning Acts of 1945 and 1947 were the first to introduce a duty to compile statutory lists of buildings (Ashworth & Howard, 1999; Hobson, 2004; While, 2007), classified based on their architectural, artistic and historic interests (Boland, 1998). The criteria for buildings to be qualified for the listing status extended from merely their age initially (Pickard, 1996) to the values they embody (Delafons, 1997; While, 2007; Pendlebury, 2009).

Furthermore, the 1967 Civic Amenities Act imposed a duty on local authorities to designate whole conservation areas (See Section 69 of the Planning Act 1990). Conservation areas reflect local distinctiveness and their 'special interest' derives from the area's 'topography, historical development, archaeological significance and potential, the prevalent building materials of an area, its character and hierarchy of spaces and the quality and relationship of its buildings' (DoE/DNH, 1994, 4.4). Coupled with this, National Planning Policy Guidance for the Historic Environment (PPG15) urged

a move towards producing formal 'character assessments' in order to underpin and justify conservation area designations. This represented a positive opportunity to move beyond narrow considerations of artistic or architectural quality and towards an understanding of the evolution of an area and the key interrelationships of all its historic components (Boland, 1998). Conservation area character appraisals tend to describe what it is about the character or appearance of the area that should be preserved or enhanced. Some appraisals include management plans which set out proposals for protecting the special character of the area, or enhancing that character where there are opportunities to do so.

As of 2016, the UK had 31 cultural, natural and mixed World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, n.d.), and England had approximately 19,854 scheduled monuments, 377,587 listed buildings, over 1,600 registered parks and gardens, 46 registered battlefields and approximately 7,000 conservation areas (Historic England, n.d.).

There are also other forms of heritage designation regimes in England. Some local authorities produce a local list of heritage assets (non-statutory non-designated heritage assets). Within the hierarchy of designations, such locally listed buildings and sites fall within the lowest category of protection, carrying least weight within decision-making, although they are often of most importance to local communities (Boland, 1998; Ludwig, 2016). Formally identifying different categories of 'heritage asset', however, enables their significance to be recorded and ensures they are given consideration in planning decision-making.

Produced by Historic England (HE, previously named English Heritage (EH) before 1 April 2015), many guidance documents are available for local conservation practice. These include guides covering topics such as local plan-making, settings and views, tall buildings, and local heritage listing. Moreover, HE prepared 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance' in 2008, which is the basis for all decisions to be consistently made (English Heritage, 2008). Recognising that people value heritage in a multitude of different ways, the document groups values into four overarching categories: evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal. The 'communal' value reflects the more intangible aspects of heritage, which relate to meanings, experiences and memories. HE has also produced several useful guides to try to reconcile growth and sensitive change with conservation, for instance, 'Sustainable Growth for Historic Places' (English Heritage, 2013).

Conservation Planning in China

Conservation activities in modern China began with the listing of historic buildings or artefacts in the 1950 s (Ruan & Sun, 2001). This was followed by a long period of neglect and destruction of the country's historic remains during the period of political unrests, e.g. the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). China's present-day conservation practice was legislated for in the Act for the Protection of Cultural Relics (*Wenwu Baohufa*) in 1982. In the same year, 24 so-called national Historic and Cultural Cities (*Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng*, HCCs) were identified and a call was issued for appropriate protection of them through planning. Since 2003, the initial listing has been extended to include towns and villages nationally (*Lishi Wenhua Mingzhen Mingcun*) as Historic and Cultural Towns and Villages (HCTs and HCVs). By May 2018, 134 HCCs, 252 HCTs and 276 HCVs had been listed. It was not until 1986 that area-based conservation was introduced by the State Council, and this was also included in the Protection Act 2002 as *Lishi*

Wenhua Jiequ (Historic and Cultural Areas – HCCAs, authors' translation). By then, a system of three levels of conservation typology existed in China including listed buildings or artefacts, HCCAs and HCCs (or HCTs and HCVs).

At the local level, for HCCAs, HCCs, HCTs and HCVs, conservation plans are required to not only identify historic characteristics of the area concerned, but also produce management strategies for their development. A conservation plan may be stand-alone or be part of the masterplan of the area (Chen, 2016). Urban design plans sometimes are produced with regard to conservation and regeneration strategies of the area, although they are not statutory. The local plan making and approval has been guided by a series of documents produced by the Bureau of Cultural Relics (BCR) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-rural Development (MOHURD)[1] at the national level. For instance, the BCR launched the Guidelines for Preparing Conservation Plans for Cultural Relics and the related guidelines for plan-approval (*Quanguo Zhongdian Wenwu Baohu Danwei Baohu Guihua Bianzhi he Shenpi Banfa*) in 2004. MOHURD issued the Conservation Standard of Historic and Cultural Cities (*Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng Baohu Guihua Guifan, GB50357-2005*) the year after. The State Council launched the Regulations on the Protection of Historic and Cultural Cities and Towns (*Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng Mingzhen Mingcun Biaohu Tiaoli*) in 2008. As an explanation document for the aforementioned regulation, the BCR and MOHURD jointly launched the Guidelines for Preparing Conservation Plans for Historic and Cultural Cities and Towns (*Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng Baohu Guihua Bianzhi Yaoqiu*) in 2012. The guideline claims that HCCAs are significant and need to be accompanied by respective development control areas (*Jianshe Kongzhiqu*) and character coordinated areas (*fengmao xietiaoqu*) acting as buffer zones between the conservation core areas and the rest of the city (Whitehand & Gu, 2007). Specific control strategies should be established for HCCAs and their buffering areas. Nevertheless, these policies and guidelines focus primarily on the procedures and formats of plan making.

In China, conservation principles were mainly developed by ICOMOS China from 1997 with assistance from the Getty Conservation Institute and the Australian Heritage Commission, as the *China Principles* (Zheng, 2007). The *China Principles* were officially promulgated by the State Council in 2000 and adopted in the Protection Act 2002 (Zheng, 2007). They have articulated China's practice with international charters and conventions (ICOMOS China, 2000). The *China Principles* stress the historical, artistic and scientific values of heritage and promote minimal intervention and regular maintenance. This is consistent with international concern for authenticity and integrity. The *China Principles* permit minor restoration, major restoration and relocation which however should be well documented and use materials consistent with existing fabric (See 4.31 and 4.32, ICOMOS China, 2000). The document explicitly mentions that reconstruction in situ is 'an exceptional measure undertaken only in special circumstances', and the action should cause no damage to ruins and be based on evidence. Conjectural reconstruction is not permitted (See 4.33, ICOMOS China, 2000). Meanwhile, new ideas such as intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003) have been well received in China. Lists of intangible heritage have been established nationally and enriched over the years. Table 1 summarises the aforementioned institutional contexts of England and China.

The following two sections examine the cases. According to a local conservation officer of Chester, the active policy and plans for Chester at the time of writing the paper include

Table 1. Institutional contexts of conservation planning in England and China.

	England	China
Responsible authorities for conservation planning	Local Planning Authority; Historical England (HE);	Local Planning Department; Local Bureau of Cultural Relics; National Bureau of Cultural Relics (BCR); Ministry of Housing and Urban-rural Development;
Types of legal documents	Local Plan; Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan; HE Practice Advice; National Planning Policy Guidance; Other non-statutory guidance document;	Local Master Plan; Local Conservation Plans; Local Master Urban Design Plans; National guidelines and standard;
Ways to manage heritage	Listed Buildings; Conservation Areas; World Heritage Sites; Local Lists of Heritage Assets; Intangible heritage scheduled monuments and registered gardens, parks and battlefields;	Listed Buildings or artefacts; Conservation Areas and buffer zones; World Heritage Site; Historic and Cultural Cities, towns and villages (national listing) Intangible heritage;
High-level Conservation Principles	Historical environment as shared resource; Everyone participating in sustaining the historic environment; understanding the significance; sustaining the value of significance; reasonable transparent consistent decision-making about change; documenting and learning from decisions;	*China Principles* by ICOMOS China
Overarching heritage values	Evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal values	Historical, artistic and scientific values

the Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan (2015), the Chester City Council District Local Plan (2006), The One City Plan (a non-statutory collaborative development strategy involving local professionals and councillors), and the Chester Characterisation Study (an evidence base for the Local Plan) (Taylor Young, 2012). There is no active conservation management plan available, although for the area of Chester Rows, it is in preparation (F. Chen, personal communication, 5th April 2019). Regarding Qingyan, the Master Plan of Qingyan (2006–2020; 2013–2030) and its related Master Urban Design Plan (2005), and several versions of Conservation Plans (1999, 2014) are studied. These plans cover the city-level policies, principles and area-focused conservation strategies. The findings are structured according to the comparative framework proposed above.

Case Studies – Chester, England

Chester is a small English city located about 29 km south of Liverpool on the river Dee and the Welsh border. It has a population of roughly 77,000 inhabitants and is the historic county town of Cheshire and current administrative centre of the single tier local government authority Cheshire West and Chester. It is an ancient city founded by the Romans as a major fort and garrison town in AD79. The Anglo-Saxons, arrived in AD 689 after which the Minster Church of West Mercia was founded – the ancestor to the present cathedral. Following the Norman conquest of AD 1066 the city maintained its strategic importance on the border with Wales and as a port. Despite the decline of the port from the 18th century onwards, it remained an important transport hub, as part of

the canal, then later, railway networks. In the 19th century though the city did not become a major industrial city, it did attract industrial activities and its population and area grew significantly (Herson, 1996). It was also becoming a well-known historic city as societal interest in preservation grew.

Chester has had an interesting relationship with different forms of preservation, restoration and statutory conservation. Though it is often seen, due to its appearance, as a medieval city, many of its emblematic medieval-looking buildings were in fact comprehensively restored or rebuilt in the Victorian period as part of the so called 'black-and-white revival' – an architectural movement which valued and sought to emulate the vernacular building styles of earlier periods (notably the Tudor style). The 20th century saw a continued interest in conservation and the emergence of a well-developed framework of conservation policy. As Dennier (1975, p. 383) notes, in 1966 Chester 'was chosen as one of four towns in which the implications of conservation policies were studied under joint commissions from the government and the local authorities concerned'. This resulted in a report (Insall & Associates, 1968) which sought to 'pioneer a method of conservation' and to guide the city's future development emphasising the 'importance of money and management in achieving results' (Dennier, 1975, p. 383). One of the outcomes locally was the designation of the conservation area in 1969 and since that time much work has been done to conserve its historic fabric (Figure 1). Dennier (1975, p383, p. 384) thus notes that over time, Chester has gained a reputation as a leader among Britain's historic cities in conserving its heritage and that the study of it undertaken in the 1960 s was also of national significance as many of its recommendations were 'incorporated in the Civic Amenities Act 1967 and subsequent Town and Country Planning Acts'. The original conservation area boundary has also been extended since that time (Figure 2).

The local plan is a key Council document which gives 'the spatial expression of the borough's priorities and development needs going forward' and 'provides the planning framework to support the priorities identified in other Council plans and programmes' including strategies covering sustainable development, regeneration, housing, climate change, environment and waste (Cheshire West and Chester, 2015). Though not forming part of the statutory conservation framework, the so-called Chester One City Plan considers many aspects of the city's built environment and heritage character (Cheshire West and Chester & Chester Renaissance, 2012). This 15-year strategy to guide economic regeneration of the city has a 'Strategic Objective 4′ of '(c)elebrating its long and varied history and heritage – protecting, promoting and utilising its assets, to enhance their settings and maximise their full potential' (Cheshire West and Chester & Chester Renaissance, 2012, p. 27).

Echoing definitions in national policy, in the statutory local plan, 'heritage assets' are defined as 'a building, monument, site, place, structure, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions.' This includes 'designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets identified in the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (Cheshire West and Chester, 2015, p. 92). These include diverse sites and structures, for example, remains of a Centurion's House, remains of Roman Barracks, Chester City Walls, Chester Castle, Chester Cathedral, or more recent sites and buildings like the Leadworks established in 1800 by Samuel Walker. The non-designated assets are not statutory but 'play an important role in contributing to local character within each character area' (Taylor Young, 2012, p. 7). The Chester
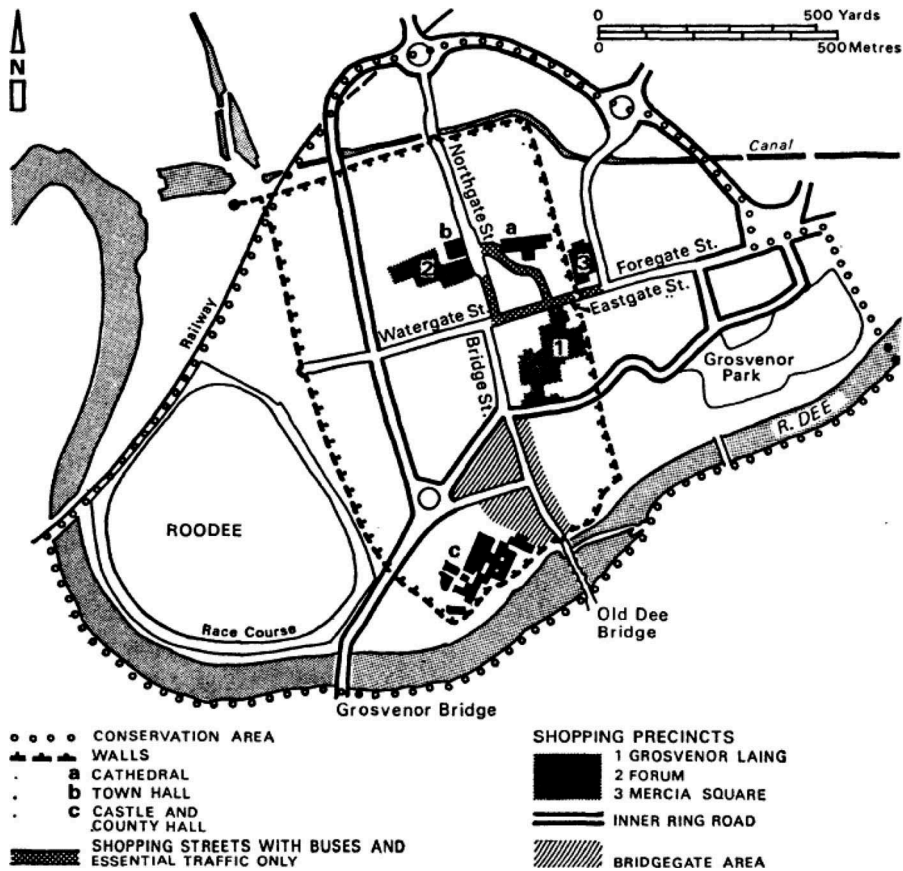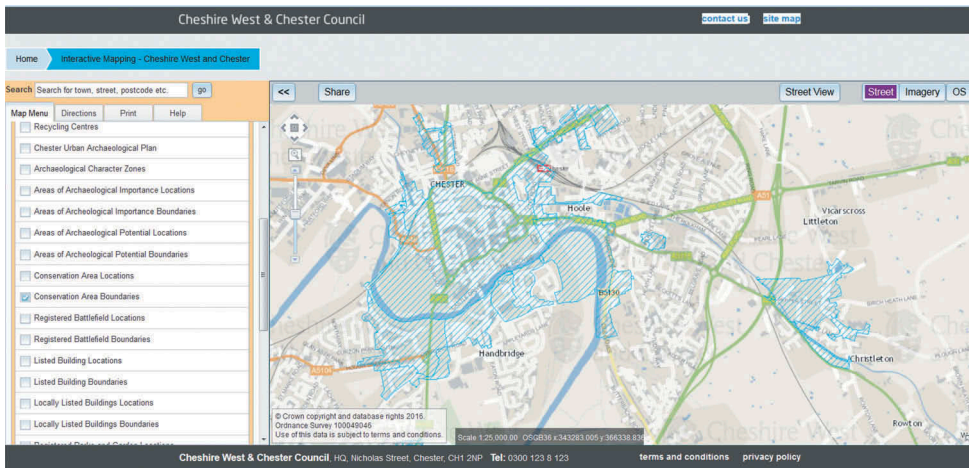
Figure 1. The initial conservation area in central Chester.
Source: Dennier (1975, p. 386)

Characterisation Study (Taylor Young, 2012) has identified over 200 buildings and structures of merit which are suggested to form a short-list for local listing. The assessments were undertaken for areas of the central part of the City and within existing conservation areas. A set of criteria were used including – predominant building height; predominant building era (based on frontages); land use; experience ('the general impression of the area and impact of features such as topography, views, traffic and business/role of the area'); buildings and structures of townscape merit; and any key 'detractors'. These criteria and some others informed an overall character assessment of the contribution the area made to the character of the city overall, or its sub-areas graded as – critical, positive, neutral, or negative (Taylor Young, 2012, p. 35-37). The statutory designation and non-statutory designations have covered a large proportion of Chester's historical assets.

In terms of conservation objectives, the statutory local plan stresses the 'importance of managing development with respect to all heritage assets', a practice which is seen as being 'in accordance with national planning policy and best practice advice from Government advisory bodies such as Historic England and the Design Council, which seek to ensure that protection and restoration of historic areas is seen as a key contribution to sustainable

Figure 2. The current conservation area in central Chester.
Source: *http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/CWAC/interactivemapping/#*

regeneration' (Cheshire West and Chester, 2015, p. 92-93). In the One City Plan it is also noted that 'historic environments and assets underpin the city's character, individuality and unique identity and must play a driving role in Chester's future success and growth' (Cheshire West and Chester & Chester Renaissance, 2012, p. 38). So the purpose of conservation is both to preserve physical artefacts and sites that are seen as constituting heritage for their own intrinsic value, but also to manage them for their potential to play a role in the city's ongoing growth and development (Figure 3a). The local plan thus notes how 'Chester city centre is the commercial and tourism centre of the sub-region and attracts approximately 9 million visitors a year' and explicitly that '(v)isitors are attracted to Chester's heritage assets including the cathedral, roman amphitheatre and historic shopping Rows' (Figure 3a) (Cheshire West and Chester, 2015, p. 64-65).

In terms of conservation principles, Policy ENV5 of the local plan says that '(d)evelopment should safeguard or enhance both designated and non-designated heritage assets and the character and setting of areas of acknowledged significance' and that '(t)he degree of protection afforded to a heritage asset will reflect its position within the hierarchy of designations' (Cheshire West and Chester, 2015, p. 92). Other principles stated are that '(p)roposals that involve securing a viable future use or improvement to an asset on the Heritage at Risk register will be supported'. Furthermore, policy ENV6 on '(h)igh quality design and sustainable construction' states that '(d)evelopment should … provide high quality public realm' and '(b)e sympathetic to heritage, environmental and landscape assets' (Cheshire West and Chester, 2015, p. 94). The redevelopment of existing buildings for new uses where this is 'mindful of the heritage value of the existing building' is supported. This conservation philosophy is well-illustrated in practice by the recent repurposing of a derelict Grade II-listed art deco style former 'Odeon' cinema dating from 1936, into a £37 m new cultural venue the Chester Storyhouse (Figure 4a). Although the lack of financial capacity and 'a loss of heritage expertise in local government' in England have been noted by many commentators (Donnelly, 2014), this case provides a more optimistic example of what can be achieved. The majority of the funding for the project was provided by the local government: £33 m of
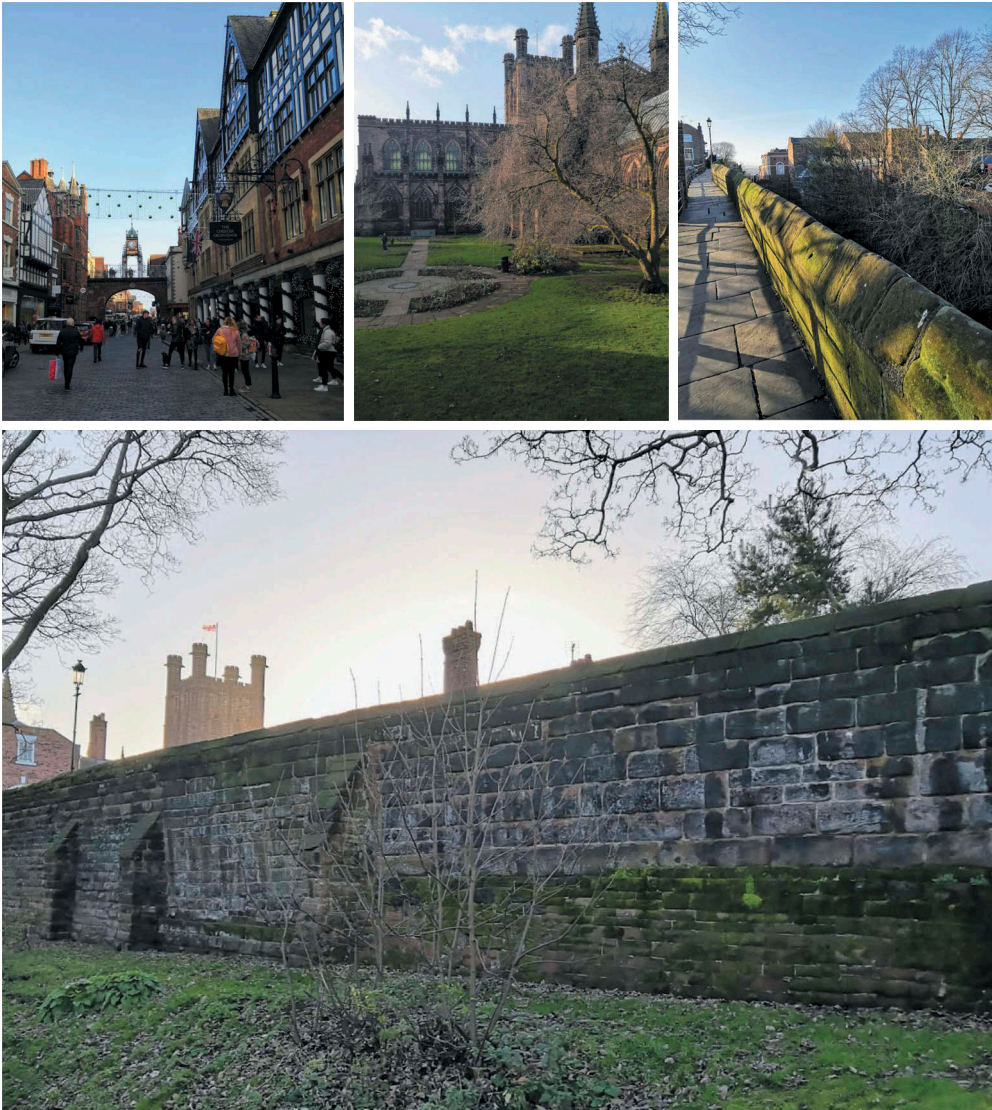
Figure 3. Examples of heritage assets and their setting in Chester *(Source: photography by C. Sykes in Feb 2020).*

the £37 m cost (Moore, 2017). It also represents a sensitive redevelopment of more recent heritage (1930 s) in a city that is better known for its Roman, Medieval, Georgian and Victorian history and townscape, through giving the site a 'viable future use' in the context of new patterns of accessing urban leisure and information consumption opportunities.

In summary, Chester has had a reputation as a historically significant and characterful place since the 19th century. It is interesting that in his 1903 novel *The Ambassadors*, Henry James described Chester as 'the little swollen city, half held in place by careful civic hands' (see Walsh, 1996). This still seems appropriate today as the city seeks to balance its popularity as a place to visit, and live, work and invest in, with (civic) stewardship of its historic built environment.
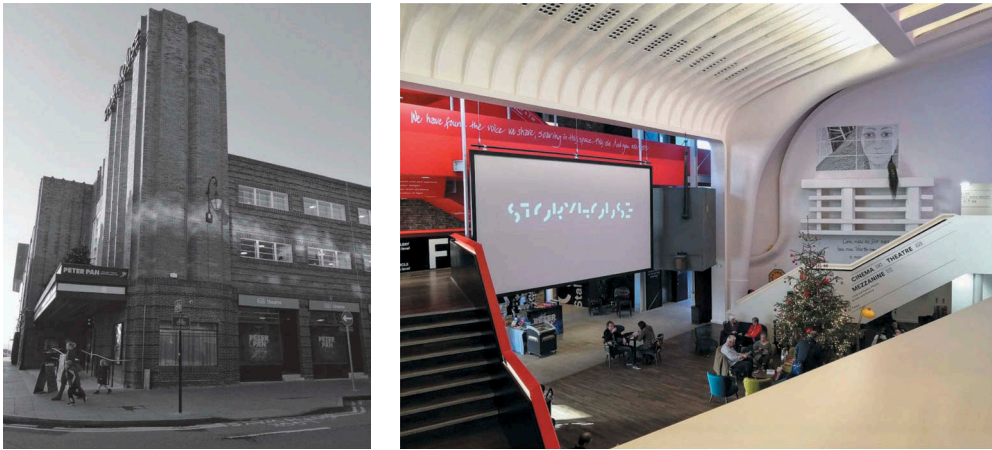
Figure 4. Restored former cinema – the Chester storyhouse *(Source: photography by C. Sykes in Feb 2020).*

Case Studies – Qingyan, Guizhou Province, China

Qingyan town, located 29 km to the south of the capital of Guizhou Province, covers 923,000sqm of land including the 183,000sqm built up area and surrounding agricultural land. The population reached 28,000 by 2000, of whom 7880 live in the built-up area and the rest in surrounding villages within the town's jurisdiction. Qingyan town was a military stronghold set up by the Royal Court of Ming dating back to the 14th century. The town has taken its currently visible shape since 1623 when the town wall, five gates, four main cross streets, the temple and many houses were built. Because of its strategic location in the region, it has served as a commercial and cultural hub in several stages of its history, which has left abundant historic remains. The physical form of the town experienced continuous piecemeal deterioration and renewal until the 1990 s.

Conservation of the historic town started in 1992 following the provincial government's recognition of its cultural significance, before its national designation in 2005 (Minstry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of P.R China, 2005). Prior to any formal planning being conducted, the government had already funded the repair and rebuilding of a few important buildings in the town, including two town gates, churches and a commercial street. In 1999, the Conservation Plan of Qingyan was made and the Master Urban Design Plan of Qingyan produced in 2005. These plans have informed the Master Plan of Qingyan (2006–2020) and a newer version covering the period between 2013 and 2030. A later version of the Conservation Plan of the Historic and Cultural Town of Qingyan was produced in 2014 after the national designation.

The Conservation Plan of Qingyan 1999 constituted a list of historic buildings and artefacts, a core conservation area and its surrounding buffer zones (Figure 5), which were confined to the national framework mentioned earlier. The core conservation area only covered key buildings, public squares and the main cross streets. No new building was permitted in the core area and the historic spatial features needed to be preserved. The buffer zones enjoyed more relaxed development controls. For example, a limited number of new buildings were allowed in the development control area, and the scale of
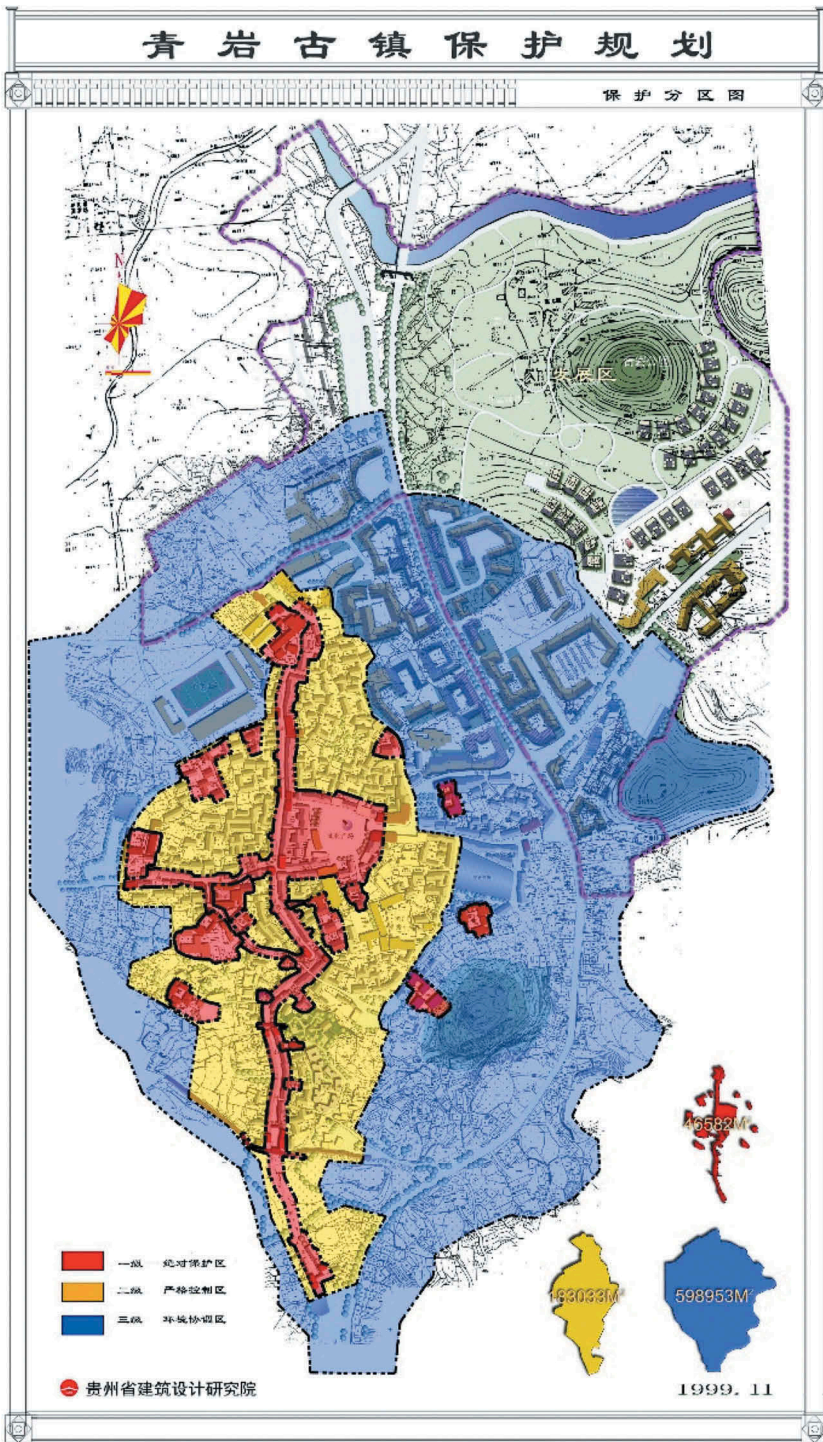
Figure 5. The conservation core area of Qingyan (in red) and its development control area (in yellow) and the character coordinated area (in blue).

Source: The Conservation Plan of Qingyan, 1999

street space and volumes of buildings could be slightly bigger. Within the coordinated area, a considerable number of new facilities could be built. Buildings could be taller (up to three storeys), and their styles more flexible while being harmonious with the rest of the town.

In addition to set up boundaries of the core and buffer zones, the Conservation Plan 1999 paid special attention to the south cross street and its surrounding buildings and spaces. Specific strategies for individual buildings along the street were proposed. The plan also identified visual nodes and tourist interest points. It proposed new public open spaces, infrastructure, transport, the green system and tourist routes to support tourism. It also put forward a detailed budget for all actions and an immediate construction action plan in the character coordinated area. Similarly, the other plans studied in the research do not only cover the conservation issues but also propose new development. The Master Urban Design Plan 2005 proposed to develop the town towards the east, and the Master Plan 2013–2030 suggested much larger areas of new development on all four directions of the historic town.

Regarding the recognition of heritage, all the plans of Qingyan considered the spatial pattern – streets and plaza to be important historic remains. The spatial quality was strengthened by the topography and natural environment in the vicinity (Figure 6). Buildings and artefacts were also deemed to be important heritage, including historic

Figure 6. Qingyan town with the surrounding natural environment.
Source: Author's own photo

temples, churches, bridges, stone arches and tombs. Buildings associated with famous persons and the Communist revolution were regarded as important and therefore listed. Common residential buildings with special characteristics were also listed. Detailed strategies and construction proposals were included in conservation plans and the urban design plan for repair, extension or rebuilding. Intangible heritage including cultural narratives, customs and festivals of several local ethnic nations in the town, was also mentioned in the plans. The Master Urban Design Plan 2005 proposed to allocate specific plazas or open spaces for cultural-themed performances and a new market (Figure 7). To do so, the schools and the existing markets which mainly served the residents were to be moved out.

In terms of conservation objectives and principles, the Conservation Plan 1999 highlighted 'inherit, protect and develop' as the key principles. The conservation section of the masterplan stressed 'repairing the old to appear old' (*xiujiu rujiu, zhengjiu rujiu, jianjiu rujiu*) in all conservation actions. These principles mean that the repaired or rebuilt buildings need to achieve an old appearance even though they may have used new materials and technologies (Luo & Yu, 2011). Moreover, the new should be harmonious to the historic surroundings by following the stylistic features of the old. In addition to these principles, the conservation plans stated the importance of maintaining the town's historic characteristics; creating a tourism-friendly environment; improving living standards; and, enhancing economic development.

Moreover, the Master Urban Design Plan 2005 proposed five key strategies, first, to coordinate historic conservation and new development; second, to protect landscape characteristics and to restore historic atmosphere; third, to expand tourism capacity and to increase the town's competitiveness; fourth, to enhance legibility and imageability; fifth, to improve the transportation system. The urban design proposal went as far as to propose a complete separation between tourism-related functions and everyday life of the residents. The former was proposed to be in the historic town and the latter in the new district to the east of the town. According to the urban design proposal, tourism routes needed to be extended from the main streets and plazas as defined in the Conservation Plan of Qingyan 1999 to include the hills outside the city wall (Figure 8). As such, already demolished temples were proposed to be rebuilt on the hill top, landscape features integrated with visual nodes, open spaces given cultural themes, and functions which did not contribute to tourism moved out.

In the latest version of the masterplan, the built up area proposed reached 318,300sqm, almost doubling the current area of the town. The masterplan claimed to make Qingyan a 5A tourist destination (highest national rating) and 'model town for tourism and landscape' (*Lvyou Jingguan Shifan Xiao Chengzhen*). It allowed development to the west, east, south and north of the historic town, despite the Master Urban Design Plan 2005 claiming that the south and north areas were not suitable for new development which otherwise would damage the natural backdrops of the town. Nevertheless, it was reported that visitors to Qingyan had increased from 10 million in 1999 to 150 million in 2004 and the revenue generated had been increasing 15% annually (Luo, 2006). The number of tourists visiting Qingyan reached 380 million by 2013 (Toutiao.com, 2014).

It is clear that conservation plans and policies for Qingyan put emphasis on its economic future, and heritage is largely capitalised for such a purpose. The town has received an investment of 495 million RMB in 2014 to implement the proposed strategies

Figure 7. Cultural performance at the cross streets of Qingyan. The streets are packed with tourists.
Source: Author's own photo

and actions (Huaxi District Authority of Guiyang, 2014). In the plans, much attention was paid to enhancing the visibility of heritage and tourists' experience. As such, some radical actions were proposed to perfect the tourist environment such as rebuilding

现状旅游线路　　　　　　　　　　　　　规划旅游线路
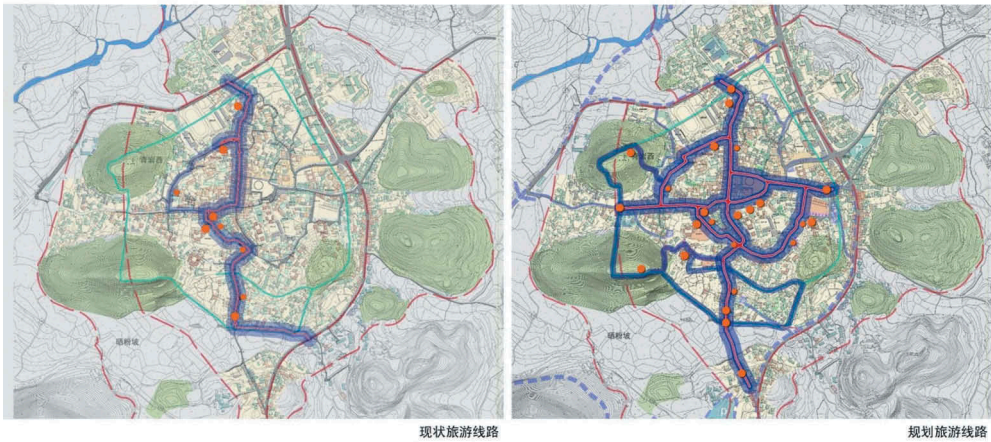
Figure 8. The current tourist routes (left) and planned routes (right).
Source: the Master Urban Design for the Town's Conservation and Development, 2005

historic temples and removing the local school from the historic core. The social impact of this on local residents is not assessed in this research but it is the local authority's belief (one of the main funders of conservation) that the locals would benefit ultimately with the improvement of economic competitiveness of the town.

Discussion

This section synthesises the case study evidence to unpack some comparative findings.

First, the study looks at planning tools delivering conservation actions. In both countries, conservation planning involves hierarchical lists of designated buildings and assets, conservation areas and world heritage sites. Such lists in both countries have covered a large number of historic assets and areas. The English case was also benefited from a local list which was not evident in the Chinese case. Nevertheless, China has nationally designated historic and cultural cities, towns and villages which prompt conservation plans. While England has a long history of conservation planning, China's conservation legislation and principles have only been established in the relatively recent past. Both however are influenced by international movements and standards. Furthermore, England enjoys abundant national and local guidance and policies through the statutory plans in its conservation practice, while in China, national level policies mostly focus on plan-making and administrative procedures rather than guiding conservation actions and practice. This perhaps is due to the vast variety of local contexts and the relatively young planning system of China. Another observation on the planning tools in the two countries is the fundamental difference in format: plans and documents in the UK are mostly text-based setting out policies, principles and giving suggestions, while plans in China are mostly graphic-based and spatially oriented highlighting boundaries, paths and objects. This was well-illustrated by the contrast between the plans and strategies for conservation planning in the two cases studies. Such differences may be attributed to the different planning cultures (Keller *et al.*, 1996) that are rooted deeply in the two countries' tradition and past. However, the findings indicate that the

conservation plans in China are able to provide immediate action plans driving urban form change because substantial governmental funding can be secured to assist in furthering conservation planning objectives. Such actions proposed in a later version of the plan may even contradict with previous decisions as the situation changes over time. In contrast, the funding sources for conservation in England are not secured through the statutory plans and implementation of plan objectives is often reliant on other parties (Ludwig & Ludwig, 2014). Thus the local government in Chester acts primarily as a regulator rather than a facilitator. Nevertheless, the One City Plan of Chester seeks to promote development strategies too and the local government can sometimes promote the delivery of projects which combine heritage, local development and amenity goals (e.g. as in the case of the repurposed 1930 s cinema alluded to above).

In terms of the recognition of heritage, the legitimised examples of heritage do not differ substantially between the two case studies. Indeed, heritage in both cases is dominated by buildings and structures, including those associated with well-known people of interest. Both plans recognise vernacular, everyday heritage if it is considered to have special characteristics worthy of protection. Both England and China have been similarly influenced by wider international trends towards recognition of a broader range of heritage values. Such similarities echo Smith's (2006) criticisms of the authorised heritage discourse (AHD), which she associates with 'Western' deficiencies in heritage management. The difference however lies in the fact that Chester stresses the communal value and recognises the residents' various ways of valuing the historic environment through the local list. Moreover, although literature (e.g. Pearson & Sullivan, 1995) has advocated public involvement in the value assessment of heritage, both cases seem to be professional-led and generally lacking input from communities.

Regarding conservation objectives and principles, both cases acknowledge the important role of heritage in facilitating economic development. The current conservation policies in Chester stress local citizens' sense of place and their everyday experience. The Chinese case explicitly aims for economic gain by capitalising heritage for tourism and enhancing the town's competitiveness as a tourist destination within the region. While Qingyan adopted the principle of 'repairing or rebuilding the old to appear old', this is somewhat atypical in England's contemporary conservation planning context, although similar actions were common in the 19th century notably in Chester. The *China Principles* permit such rebuilding in 'exceptional cases', but it is widely practised at the local level to coincide with symbiotic aims to increase tourist numbers and enhance the annual income from tourism. Such commodification of heritage reflects Hewison's (1987) concern about the 'heritage industry'. From a Western perspective, this practice also raises issues about integrity and authenticity. Qingyan's approach however is not about deceit. Indeed, signage informs the visitors of the date of construction, with no attempt to depict the new as original. Perhaps this avoids Western concerns for 'fake restoration', but not necessarily the phenomenon of undesirable pastiche. Authenticity in Qingyan's approach places importance on aesthetics that effectively convey a historic flavor rather than on preserving the original structures. Drawing on Urry's (1990) discussion of the 'tourist gaze' and Smith's (2006) concern with the way in which heritage is commodified and forcibly consumed passively, the ethics of this political strategy could be questioned. It is, however, important to make clear that understanding the cultural differences between England and China is essential to fully understand and appreciate this Eastern approach to conservation practice.

Indeed, Chinese culture does not consider the essence/spirit of a building to lie within its physical entity. Instead, the building's 'life' can be extended if a new entity is built following its original pattern and/or by using the same technique. This fundamental belief is the reason why it has been common in China throughout history to rebuild buildings when they are dilapidated or rebuild them at a different location (Li, 2010). This cultural philosophy has clearly influenced the decision to adopt rebuilding strategies in Qingyan.

Qingyan's emphasis on the tourist market shows an extreme example of a plan which proposes complete separation of tourism-related functions from local residents, as well as other forms of displacement (such as the local school and markets being moved out using government funding). However, one may argue that using heritage for financial gain is a justifiable strategic way of effectively leveraging its economic value. Not only does this approach mean the heritage is 'protected', but also this business-oriented approach sees the local economy grow stronger, arguably benefitting native residents. Indeed, Qingyan provides an example of a town which understands its place-specific locational advantages (Brenner, 1999) and endogenous 'territorial capital', and creatively extracts value from its heritage. While reported successes in Qingyan include increased tourism and income generation, and continuous investment in heritage, the English case reminds us that the production and consumption of heritage should not lose sight of its intrinsic social/communal value and human focus. As is now widely accepted globally, heritage only becomes such when it is given meaning and valued by people. Rather than decompartmentalise heritage in terms of its purpose and beneficiaries, the unmeasurable intrinsic values of heritage are shared and also need to be acknowledged more explicitly in plan making. If the tourism market in towns like Qingyan disappears and the marginalised, excluded local residents are disconnected from the historic core, the heritage is at risk of being lost. Without people, there is no heritage.

Conclusion

The paper has investigated and compared the case studies of Chester and Qingyan, specifically through the comparative framework of three dimensions of conservation planning. A key finding is that, whilst there are certain commonalities and convergences between the two countries, there remain important nuances and differences in the mechanisms through which conservation planning operates, conceptions of what constitutes heritage in the physical built environment and in intangible forms, and how the 'territorial capital' represented by heritage assets can be harnessed for the benefit of current and future society. To elaborate, while China needs to focus more on the welfare of the local residents and liveability of the historical environment, Western values or perspectives may not always be appropriate in developing understandings of local conservation actions such as the rebuilding of heritage structures. With regards to the 'equivalence of concepts' in comparative studies (Nadin, 2012, p. 3), the differences in the interpretation of authenticity are significant in the two cases. In the English context, concept stresses the original physical structure and its surrounding environment of historical remains, while the Chinese case emphasises aesthetics and spatial typology. The meanings of 'conservation' also vary in England and China. Qingyan has clearly fully integrated tourism development within the process of conservation.

Furthermore, the planning system of China lacks higher-level guidance on conservation and development, comparable to that which is in place in England. For England, it

may be beneficial to increase certainty for investors in the historical environment through more specific site-based planning tools. However, the Chinese form-based and action-oriented ways of practice may not be transferable, as the diffusion of ideas always involves complex interactions of structural forces, individual agents and institutional cultures (Ward, 2002).

Echoing themes in the wider field of comparative planning and urban studies (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2009), this research confirms the influence of complex institutional, cultural and socio-economic contexts which frame planning practices and actions in different places. Such specificities may not otherwise become clear. The comparison not only helps consolidate the experiences of the two countries and cities in a critical and carefully analysed way, but also 'cultivates critical exchange and debates through which crude hegemonies can be challenged' (Healey, 2010, p. 19). Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that the planning systems are constantly evolving and this study only provides a snapshot of the two cases at this moment in time.

This research enriches the knowledge of planning communities and facilitates the work and productivity of international planners and designers as they are increasingly called upon to conduct their practice in different cultures. In this regard, the non-exclusive comparative framework proposed in this study might be usefully applied in framing further comparisons of heritage conservation planning in more countries and cultures. Furthermore, future study with a wider scope and expanded research methodology (e.g. the use of stakeholder interviews) could look in greater depth at the dynamics and practices of the conservation planning and implementation processes in the two countries.

Note

1. China's State Council has been undergoing a restructuring since early 2018 in order to facilitate administrative reform and streamline responsibilities and procedures among different government departments. This restructuring is to be mirrored at the provincial and municipal levels. However, this paper still refers to the pre-reform ministries and departments with regards to conservation planning because the effect of the restructuring is yet to be seen.

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Disclosure statement

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