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Resurrecting Urban Heritage with Contemporary Adaption: The Reconstruction of the Porcelain Tower in Nanjing (China)

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Abstract: This article explores how reconstruction design can be used in urban heritage as an adaptive approach to creating a continuous cultural dynamic for urban regeneration. The case that is studied is the rebuilding project of the Porcelain Tower of Nanjing, well-known to westerners as a splendour of the East. The research strategy stems from the epistemological paradigm of interpretivism and relies mainly on qualitative research methods. The ethic of refashioning a past legacy is discussed by reviewing the relevant theories and documents. It is argued that the rationale for rebuilding heritage should be judged on a case-by-case basis. From the perspective of urban cultural regeneration, rebuilding can be an appropriate solution to reviving heritage within the bounds of authenticity. Respecting the delicate balance between historical significance and contemporary sustainability, urban heritage can sometimes best be served by modern reconstruction. This paper, therefore, identifies the modern Porcelain Tower as an urban landmark that distinguishes Nanjing among Chinese cities and satisfies the cultural demand for sustainable local urban regeneration. Whilst the modern pagoda is not historically inaccurate, its reconstruction was determined without public engagement in a way that emphasises the government's view of its history and value.

Keywords: reconstruction; Porcelain Tower; urban heritage; authenticity; urban regeneration

Citation: Ma, P.; Li, M.; Li, X. Resurrecting Urban Heritage with Contemporary Adaption: The Reconstruction of the Porcelain Tower in Nanjing (China). *Land* **2022**, *11*, 978. https://doi.org/10.3390/land11070978

Academic Editors: Guiwen Liu, Edwin H W Chan, Queena K. Qian and Taozhi Zhuang

Received: 18 May 2022
Accepted: 23 June 2022
Published: 26 June 2022

1. Introduction

One of the significant challenges faced in cultural sustainability is to produce a continuous dynamic for urban regeneration by adapting urban heritage to a changing urban environment. Cultural sustainability, which is related to sustainable development, means "the preservation and continuation of what we already have, know, value and cherish, ranging from cultural texts and objects to buildings and monuments that are deemed worthy of being preserved to have a future" [1]. Urban heritage highlights certain values, customs, and places that have acquired particular traits and functions over the course of urban history. It often helps to stimulate an attachment to place and create a local identity that is meaningful to residents [2]. "The inclusive development of urban heritage has the potential to foster a shared cultural identity experiencing both material and socio-psychological remnants of the nation's past and bringing pasts, peoples, places, and cultures into performative contestation and dialogue" [3]. The 2016 United Nations New Urban Agenda recognises both tangible and intangible heritage as a significant factor in developing vibrant and sustainable urban economies and supporting them to transition progressively towards higher productivity [4]. In contrast to the intangible heritage that consists of intellectual wealth, tangible heritage generally refers to material culture: "all the material traces such as archaeological sites, historical monuments, artefacts, and objects that are significant to a community, a nation, or/and humanity" [5] (p. 7213). Over recent decades, tangible elements of urban heritage have been frequently mobilised as catalysts for urban regeneration [6] (p. 429). The various forms of physical heritage, serving as

cultural cues, arouse an emotional attachment to a place and create a sense of belonging. As with Alexandria's Orabi Square, they forge a nation's social and cultural identity [7].

There are many ways of resurrecting tangible heritage in urban regeneration: reuse, restoration, renovation, refurbishment, retrofitting, and reconstruction. Among these enterprises, reconstruction means the complete rebuilding of a heritage site or property that has been destroyed or seriously damaged. As distinct from heritage restoration, which returns the building to an earlier state and preserves it, reconstruction physically creates a new entity using few if any of the original components and materials. Authenticity is the validation of a heritage attribute as genuine, whereas originality refers to the identity of the heritage item from its creation. Reconstruction produces modern copies of valuable historical structures. This potentially risks misleading the public into considering them as historical buildings, hence making them a subject of considerable ethical debate on authenticity.

Reconstructing historic buildings based on urban heritage can be successfully accomplished in different situations. When James Janowski discussed the Bamiyan Buddhas reconstruction, he listed six possible options to resurrect the collapsed sculptures: "(1) on the same site using the same (numerically identical) materials; (2) on the same site using the same type of materials; (3) on a different (presumably proximate) site using the same (numerically identical) materials; (4) on a different (presumably proximate) site using the same type of materials; (5) on the same site using a completely different type of materials; (6) on a different site using a completely different type of materials" [8] (p. 46). Taking a very cautious attitude towards reconstructing the Bamiyan Buddhas for maximum authenticity, Janowski only considered the first option. His six resurrection options can also be applied to ruins of historical buildings and monuments.

In many cases, however, though the first option is the ideal choice, it is challenging to attain in heritage conservation. There may be insufficient historical information about the exact location of some seriously damaged or obliterated emblematic buildings. In addition, it can be nearly impossible to find numerically identical materials to rebuild them. Under such circumstances, is it acceptable to rebuild them using the other options? If so, what principles and elements should be considered? Is authenticity always the governing principle guiding heritage conservation? If not, how can heritage reconstruction be designed to respond to the local context and cultural sustainability in urban areas?

Seeking answers to these questions, this study focuses on whether modern reconstruction can be an adaptive response to the contemporary demand for a culture-led regeneration of tangible urban heritage consisting of historic buildings and monuments. Authenticity, being a core concept for scholars opposing reconstruction, is reviewed first. Historical documents have identified, from an expert's standpoint, that rebuilt historic buildings and heritage sites can acquire significant value when an authentic tradition can be linked to the reconstruction. There are two types of reconstruction values: first, the value linking the new edifice to the original, then its own intrinsic value. These are examined with a specific emphasis on heritage integrity and the inherent aesthetic value of the replica. Albeit at the risk of violating authenticity, it is argued that reconstructing urban heritage should not entirely be ruled out. On the contrary, from a perspective of urban cultural regeneration, rebuilding can be an appropriate solution to reviving heritage within the bounds of authenticity.

In the following pages, the ethics of heritage refabrication as it relates to Chinese relic conservation is discussed. A study of the relevant laws and government guidelines reveals a change in the attitude of the Chinese government towards heritage reconstruction, from prohibition to conditional tolerance. The Porcelain Tower of Nanjing, well-known to westerners as a splendour of the East and a specific case of reconstruction, is analysed in the second part of this paper. The ancient and modern versions of the Porcelain Tower are introduced respectively. Then the contribution of the rebuilt pagoda to Nanjing's urban regeneration is analysed in the light of the city's urban history and the current rivalry among Chinese cities. Finally, the paper examines how Nanjing's residents perceive the

significance of the pagoda. As passive observers, they are subject to media manipulation that aims to generate an approved collective cultural interpretation of Nanjing's history.

2. Research Methodology

In line with the research goal of examining heritage reconstruction's contribution to urban regeneration, this study is built around a theoretical analysis of the ethical issues raised by reconstruction and then a discussion of the practical case involving the modern Porcelain Tower. The research strategy is based on the epistemological paradigm of interpretivism. It relies mainly on qualitative research into the discourse and contextual meanings of reconstruction. The emphasis is both on gaining insights from various observers and understanding their experiences. The goal, using an inductive approach, is to present a credible representation of the interpretations of these experiences [9]. A variety of sources such as literature, policy documents, state laws, archaeological reports, and newspaper articles were used to gather data for triangulation purposes. The main advantage of using triangulation is that it allows for the evaluation of information from a variety of sources when investigating concepts, applying the principle that coherence in the findings always produces more robust results [10] (p. 222).

As anticipated, the theoretical analysis is based on qualitative data, ranging from policy and charter documents issued by international non-governmental organisations (such as ICOMOS and CIAM) to academic writings and laws. Crucial suggestions regarding reconstruction ethics have been examined and studied using an inductive research method. The perception of heritage authenticity has been pursued on several levels (chronological and national). Meanwhile, an interpretivism inquiry on the relative worth of a rebuilding work versus an original may contribute potential legitimacy to reconstruction works from a holistic, economic, social, and cultural sustainability perspective.

For the single case study, a historical survey and design review with qualitative research has been conducted through direct observation of the Porcelain Tower and its reconstruction process. Triangulation of the viewpoints gathered from local media, research works, archaeological reports, and internet documents enhances and balances the interpretation of the underlying motivations and aspirations of the different stakeholders in the reconstruction project. These include the investor, city fathers, cultural officers, designers, and the public. An illustration of the research methodology and instruments can be viewed in Figure 1.

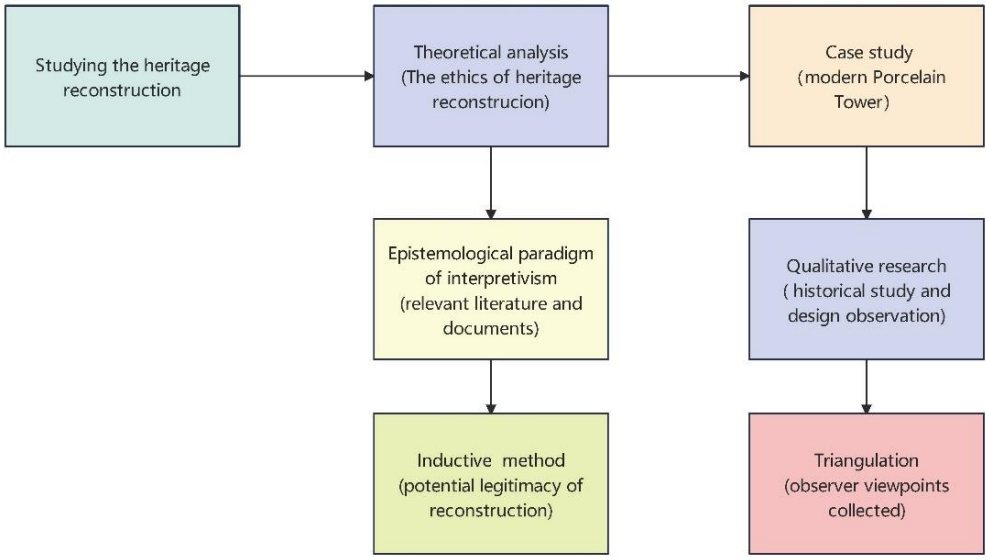

Figure 1. The methodology adopted in the research (Source: by the authors).

3. The Ethics of Rebuilding a Historic Legacy

On 16 April 2019, when the collapsing spire of Notre Dame de Paris cathedral appeared on media screens, the world was shocked. French President Emmanuel Macron immediately declared on the night of the fire that the burnt structure would be rebuilt under an international fundraising campaign. This cathedral is renowned as an exceptional example of French Gothic architecture. Made famous in Victor Hugo's novel, it is recognised worldwide as a symbol of Paris and even as a French national icon. It was not only the physical structure of the cathedral but also its attached traditions, culture and ancestral memory that were burning [11]. For those who cared most about Notre Dame, it seemed that only rebuilding the thoroughly damaged spire could mitigate and compensate for the harm that had been suffered. The question of whether it is appropriate to reconstruct a destroyed or ruined legacy, however, is still a matter of debate in the field of heritage conservation.

3.1. Authenticity

Archaeologists and heritage professionals tend to reject reconstruction, suggesting that rebuilt objects can never completely regain the value of the original [12,13]. They attach most importance to the value of heritage authenticity. For them, rebuilding merely produces a replica of the original. It definitely lacks authenticity and thus can potentially devalue the project. Carolyn Korsmeyer defined the value associated with authenticity as "transitivity of touch" and argued that antiques are valued to some extent because they possess a particular "aura". They offer a sort of aesthetic experience of being associated with the "real thing", which can never be replicated [12] (p. 49). Emma Cunliffe criticised 3D rebuilding as it "fails to capture the authenticity of the original structures, amounting to little more than the Disneyfication of heritage" [14]. When discussing the Palmyra ruins, Jonathan Jones went even further: "What is never legitimate is to rebuild ancient monuments using modern materials to replace lost parts—to essentially refabricate them—even though today's technology makes that seem practical" [15].

The emphasis on physical authenticity in the modern field of historic building conservation has evolved through time. Archaeologists started formulating rules to ensure the legitimacy of ruins and prevent their falsification at the end of the nineteenth century [16]. As early as 1933, the Athens Charter stated that adopting past styles for new structures in historic areas leads to disastrous consequences, and such habits cannot be tolerated [17]. The Venice Charter (1964) for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments set an explicit rule prohibiting reconstruction: "All reconstruction work should, however, be ruled out 'a priori' and only anastylosis, that is to say, the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts can be permitted" [18] (p. 3). Further, the Venice Charter notes that heritage preservation should accept the finality of loss unless the originals can be restored with lossless authenticity. In the case of indispensable restoration, the new materials used to preserve a historic structure should bear a contemporary stamp and be distinguishable from the original construction [18] (p. 3). The Venice Charter apparently rejected either rebuilding using new materials or restoration based on conjecture, acknowledging that the aesthetic and historical essence of a monument can only be expressed by original materials and authentic documents.

Nevertheless, these principles are not fully followed in practice. There are exceptions to rebuilding projects where aesthetic and historical values are not challenged. For example, historic Central Warsaw, destroyed during World War II, was almost completely reconstructed. Now it is a World Heritage site. Indeed, the notion of authenticity has been progressing over the past three decades. The extensive worldwide practice of heritage conservation confirms that the Venice Charter has failed to offer a universally applicable understanding of heritage authenticity. For some non-Western countries, especially in East Asia and Africa, the essence of their heritage was the constant and regular renewal of physical structures through age-old cultural practices. From their perspective, heritage is more authentically expressed in the tradition of repeating construction than in the original

materiality of an ancient structure. Thus, the Nara Document 1994 extended the meaning of authenticity in heritage to include new cultural perspectives. A great variety of intangible and immaterial attributes of authenticity, including "'form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling", contributed to the heritage value of the property [19]. The document results from the need of non-European countries to balance what was perceived as a Eurocentric bias in the approach to cultural heritage conservation [20] (p. 5). It provides an updated recognition that heritage value can be found outside tangible physical substance, in intangible tradition or spirit.

The best-known case of constant and regular reconstruction conforming to the Nara Document's definition is the Ise Grand Shrine. Starting in 690 C.E., the shrine has, with some exceptions, been rebuilt every 20 years up until the present day. Its unique connection to the imperial court has made it possible to perpetuate cycles of costly rebuilding for centuries. The unaltered custom of periodic rebuilding at Ise is regarded as a great honour for Japan as it "manifests the spirit of simplicity that is characteristic of the Japanese people" [21]. Respect for the building materials and the preservation of ancient architectural forms are primary objectives in the rebuilding practice. The authenticity of the rebuilt shrine depends primarily on its design and construction methods rather than on the materials used.

The Nara Document did not, however, address the increasing tensions surrounding the concept of authenticity in the field of heritage. A series of international meetings held by the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs between 2012 and 2014 discussed the practical implementation of the Nara document. They recognised the growing emphasis on the role of authenticity in the Nara + 20 document and observed that heritage is a cultural construct that should be defined by people in their own terms, whose meaning is thus subject to the evolving social process [22]. It also acknowledges that operationalising the notion of authenticity in the heritage context is somewhat challenging. The Nara + 20 document states that "respect for cultural diversity" calls for complex negotiations and compromise among multiple stakeholders [23]. The document ultimately discusses the role of cultural heritage in the sustainable progress of society and the economy. Though it has never been featured in previous documents, this point is often raised today in the management of historic urban buildings.

The Nara and Nara + 20 documents essentially identified authenticity as an open concept that can differ from one culture to another, and that should be understood through specific epistemological frameworks. This observation indeed demonstrates respect for a diversity of cultural perspectives. The open concept does, however, introduce significant ambiguity in assessing the authenticity of a given heritage property. It is not easy to grasp its full cultural intent and establish objectively universal standards for assessing heritage authenticity. Therefore, when the ICOMOS experts came to judge the authenticity of a heritage nominated item for inscription on the World Heritage List, they were not seen to be discussing the culturally specific epistemological framework applying to the property in question. Instead, they were more focused on "the reality of the valuing itself over time, as embodied in certain physical attributes" [20] (p. 14).

Following the principles identified and adopted by ICOMOS, a rebuilt heritage property can possess significant value if the authenticity of an intangible tradition associated with its reconstruction can be proved, even if the rebuilt work has lost its original physical attributes. Material authenticity is arguably merely one of the attributes for consideration among several tangible and intangible heritage elements. It seems difficult to accept that pure material authenticity prevails over all other forms of authenticity.

3.2. Value of Reconstruction

There are two kinds of values that can be attributed to a rebuilt work, the value of its association with the original and its own intrinsic value. Indeed, a reconstruction directly or indirectly possesses a spiritual connection to the original, recalling the original's intangible values. As Erich Matthes points out in the discussion on Palmyra, "recreating

parts of the city . . . can offer a robust sense of what's been destroyed. People can see and touch these replicas, and more easily grasp the magnitude of the loss" [24] (p. 2). In such cases, much of the original's religious, sentimental, and commemorative values can be retrieved through recreations. It is conceivable that rebuilding could be the most suitable response to the loss of these values. In particular, when it comes to alleviating the suffering caused by the damage or destruction of heritage structures, there seems to be no alternative to reconstruction.

Moreover, this process is a valuable step in restoring the integrity of an entire heritage site. Despite the Declaration of San Antonio (1996): "authenticity is a concept much larger than material integrity, and the two concepts must not be assumed to be equivalent or consubstantial" [25], UNESCO 2019 acknowledged that both integrity and authenticity are determinants in assessing the overall value of cultural properties [26]. Integrity is also fundamental in heritage properties, just as the scale is essential in conveying their former splendour and significance. Admittedly, from the point of view of pure authenticity, a heritage site can, by its genuine historical origin, lay claim to a degree of valued authenticity. The addition of new buildings physically modifies the composition of the site, creating a mixture of old and new, and alters its enduring value. Nonetheless, a damaged or incomplete site loses its overall appeal, as missing components detract from its appearance when the original location is intact. It is evident that not restoring its spire would deal for Notre-Dame de Paris an unacceptable blow to its overall integrity. Restoring integrity might be seen as valuable if there is something inherently good about objects or places of value being unified rather than fragmented or broken.

Furthermore, a rebuilt work can achieve an aesthetic virtue and artistic value of its own. Indeed, clumsy imitations of historic buildings and over-commercialised heritage recreations that damage the value of a site can be found all over the world. Some poor designs can draw strong criticism. These inferior efforts fail to compensate for the ageing of the original edifice and risk reducing its historical value. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that all reconstructions are unacceptable because of such failures. Rather, a successful rebuilding can draw praise for its tasteful design and meticulous construction, creating fresh aesthetic value that might align with contemporary artistic values. As Korsmeyer accepted, reconstruction "has other virtues: informative, beautiful, and marvellous as an achievement. Moreover, insofar as its recreation gives hope and sustenance to those whose material past was destroyed, it stands defiant and resilient" [12] (p. 157).

More importantly, rebuilding heritage with sustainable regard for contemporary urban regeneration can create innovative and independent social values that might never have been achieved by the original that is being replaced. For example, redesign and reconstruction using modern advanced technology and materials can be seen as departing from a heritage site's initial purpose of providing a public place for education or facilitating local urban life. A successful resurrection of urban heritage shows respect for the original and contributes to cultural sustainability by revitalising collective urban memory and identity, thus producing broad benefits for the local community.

Though it runs the risk of damaging material authenticity and associated values, reconstruction is not always unacceptable in the field of heritage conservation. Material authenticity has declined in importance as a factor in determining the authenticity of urban heritage. Other attributes such as use and function, tradition and technique, even spirit and feeling can be of equal importance and should be considered in heritage conservation decision-making. According to the ICOMOS documents, demonstrating the authenticity of these intangible attributes expressed and conveyed by heritage rebuilding is at its most effective when heritage authenticity is being assessed. In particular, the intrinsic value of reconstructed heritage buildings, rebuilt or entirely new, is essential to the aesthetic experience they produce, whether connected or not to the original. Meanwhile, their social function and contribution to local communities confirm their practical necessity in the contemporary context. In some circumstances, reconstruction can help damaged heritage survive and even prosper.

Consequently, it is argued that reconstruction as an appropriate option should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Any fraudulent refabrication that conveys erroneous historical information to the public definitely needs to be condemned. Reconstruction does, however, promote an important social asset: the nation's built heritage. Sometimes, there are good reasons to engage in rebuilding. By respecting the delicate balance between original and contemporary values, refabricating historic buildings can justify itself by benefitting local communities and enhancing urban growth after construction.

3.3. Heritage Reconstruction in China

The legitimacy of refashioning urban heritage is also being questioned in modern China. In pre-modern times, most Chinese buildings were built of wood and rammed earth, with a relatively short life expectancy. As in Japan, therefore, traditional Chinese architecture was characterised by material impermanence. The vast majority of timber-structured historic buildings have not survived, and many of the existing heritage sites have undergone programs of restoration and even reconstruction at various times in their history. When it comes to modern China, traditional timber structures in urban areas have often been radically replaced by those homogeneous structures of steel and concrete so characteristic of modern Chinese cities. Heritage elements located in urban areas tend to be more insecure and fragile than in rural areas.

Since the 1990s, the sheer volume and speed of urban development that China has experienced has been remarkable. In particular, the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed large-scale demolition works, causing irreparable damage to heritage properties and historical urban areas. Later, on learning that cultural heritage is really a vital economic asset, regional managers turned to selling heritage as an effective way to help cities develop their urban tourism and commerce. Heritage reconstruction gained in popularity throughout China. Some heritage buildings were even completely destroyed and then replaced with copies made from new materials on the same site. The rationale was that replacement was cheaper than restoration and that these new buildings would be easier to operate. Some examples of this, predominantly catering to tourists, are the Yongdingmen, Qianmen, and Nanluoguxiang in Beijing, the Tianzifang in Shanghai, the Old Town in Liaocheng, and there are others. Indeed, these sites with replicas of historic structures used to feature as attractions and contribute to the local GDP but by failing to respect the urban context and history, they drew wide criticism from scholars [27,28].

A significant factor that triggers much of the discussion on authenticity in China is the quest for inscription on the World Heritage List. Although China joined UNESCO very early in 1985, the World Heritage List only became a hot topic in the 2000s. Then a number of city fathers realised that inscription would tremendously boost the visibility of their local heritage and attract more tourists. The notion of 'authenticity' is often mentioned by official institutions, for it is one of the core criteria examined by UNESCO when deciding on the inscription of a property on the World Heritage List. The massive proliferation of replica historical structures and sites has, in the meantime, met with much opposition from Chinese scholars in their research on the ethics of heritage conservation. That said, their research is still overwhelmingly influenced by Western traditions and approaches [27] (p. 459). After much attention from governments and scholars, a social consensus on protecting heritage authenticity has been reached in China over the past decade.

The official attitude to heritage rebuilding can be found in the relevant Chinese laws. The initial *Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Cultural Relics* enacted in 1982 mentions nothing about heritage refabrication. In its 2002 revision, however, a new provision was added: "If immovable cultural relics have been destroyed, they shall be protected and not rebuilt on their original sites" [29]. This revision laid the foundation for a legal prohibition on reconstruction in China. Later in 2004, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage approved and recommended the publication of the *Protection Regulation for Chinese Cultural Relics*. In Article 25, the regulation clearly states that "buildings that no longer exist should not be rebuilt" [30]. These provisions and articles were drawn mainly

in reference to the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments that reached China in the early 2000s. After that, the Chinese laws on restoration and reconstruction remained basically unaltered until 2015.

In contrast to the massive destruction and construction up until 2015, Chinese cities switched from a dominant model of urban sprawl to the revitalising of old urban areas to be more competitive and attractive to domestic migrants against a background of Chinese urbanisation. The resurrection of destroyed urban legacy, historic buildings, and streets has been a common approach in the revival of local areas when a city's uniqueness is drowned in steel and concrete. Quality heritage restoration has become more valued but also more demanding in terms of structural and contextual respect for historical accuracy. Meanwhile, heritage properties shoddily reproduced for tourism and commerce have increasingly lost their appeal in Chinese society.

When revitalising urban areas became a core topic in Chinese city growth, an increase in demand for cultural resources in China progressively enabled urban managers to review their attitudes towards refashioning historic buildings. As a result, China's prohibition on heritage reconstruction started to ease. The 2015 edition of the *Protection Regulation for Chinese Cultural Relics* expressly loosened its restriction on heritage reconstruction:

"Given the overall integrity of an architectural complex as a cultural relic, for a small number of missing buildings, in order to protect the integrity of the architectural complex as a whole, and under the condition of sufficient literature and image data, we can consider reconstructing the overall pattern of the architectural complex. However, relevant architectural remains, such as the base site, as the main body of cultural relics, must be protected and not altered or damaged. The rebuilding schemes must be demonstrated by the expert committee and approved by relevant evaluations through the approval process stipulated before proceeding" [31].

This statement legally grants permission to refashion heritage properties within strict limitations. Before this permission was granted in China, there was already in practice a tendency to reconstruct momentous historic buildings, streets, and districts such as the Danfeng Gate of the Daming Palace in Xi'an, the Leifeng Tower in Hangzhou, and the Old Town in Datong. These heritage reconstructions were basically designed by experts at the invitation of local governments, heritage architects, and university scholars well versed in heritage conservation, though officials still had the final say. Economic interests are still undeniably at the forefront of these rebuilding projects, but as a way of regenerating urban meaning and vitality, equally significant is their contribution to local cultural sustainability in the current growth agenda of Chinese cities.

The following section presents an analysis of modern reconstruction using the case study of Nanjing's Porcelain Tower.

4. Rebuilding the Porcelain Tower

The Porcelain Tower of Nanjing, also called Great Bao'en (repaid gratitude) Temple Tower, is one of the best-known Chinese cultural artefacts in Western society. Constructed in the 15th century, this magnificent pagoda was first discovered by Dutch traveller Johan Nieuhof on his visit to China from 1655 to 1657. Nieuhof, in his note *An embassy from the East-India Company*, described it in detail and attached an impressive engraving of the pagoda (Figure 2). By collating Johan Nieuhof's notes and annotations, his brother Hendrik Nieuhof later produced a study of China, which was published by Jacob van Meurs as a book in 1665. Later, Western explorers Granville Gower Loch [32] (p. 180) and William Dallas Bernard [33] also mentioned the tower before its destruction in their writings. On its exposure to the Western world, the tower achieved instant and widespread fame, becoming a cultural icon of China.

Figure 2. The Porcelain Tower of Nanjing, published in England by Johan Nieuhof in 1669 (source: Ref. [34]).

4.1. The Original Porcelain Tower

The original Porcelain Tower of Nanjing was a royal building designed by Emperor Yong Le of the Ming Dynasty in honour of his parents. It took 15 years to build (1413–1428), a considerable time when compared to the construction time of other large timber structures which was usually just several months. The Great Bao'en Temple in the capital Nanjing was the centre of Buddhism in China at the time. The pagoda was the place of Buddhist worship in the temple up until its destruction in 1856. The octagonal-shaped tower, located on the south bank of the Qinhuai River, was built nine stories high, standing 261 feet tall and 97 feet wide at the base, one of the largest buildings in China at the time. Inside was a staircase of 184 steps, and its top was adorned with a golden sphere. Unfortunately, it was razed to the ground in the Taiping Rebellion of 1856.

The Porcelain Tower receives its name from its colourful exterior brickwork. Johan Nieuhof described it as "a high steeple or tower made of porcelain . . . the outside is all glazed over and painted with several colours, green, red, and yellow. The whole fabric consists of several pieces so artfully cemented that the entire work seems like one piece" [34] (p. 78). Unbeknownst to Nieuhof, the tower was, in reality, made of glazed rather than porcelain bricks. These bricks made up the central portion of the pagoda and became its most striking feature. The installed glazed bricks twinkled to reflect the sun's rays during the daytime, while at night, the tower was lit with over 100 hanging lamps. In addition, images of flowers, landscapes, and animals were represented on the bricks in a pattern of green, yellow, brown, and white, but the Buddhist images were the most common depictions on the porcelain bricks.

By the time of its destruction, the tower had come to represent three things: a symbol of royal power, a religious monument and a magnificent architectural spectacle that could rival any other around the world. The scholar Zhang Dai who lived in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, commented on the original Porcelain Tower in his prose work *Taoan mengyi*. He described the pagoda as Emperor Yong Le's glazed treasure displaying his spirit, power, and outstanding achievements. He also claimed that during the emperor's reign, foreigners unfamiliar with China from more than one hundred countries never failed to admire and praise the Porcelain Tower with reverence on their visit. When he

recounted the tower's appearance, he described how the countless glazed Buddhist statues placed in the tower body to express religious grandeur were identified as the uncanny work of supernatural beings [35]. As the product of personal reminiscences, Zhang Dai's descriptions were unashamedly nostalgic, providing a subjective and even embellished appreciation. Nevertheless, his writings were widely accepted by later generations. People in modern China tend, therefore, to interpret his observations as authentic in their collective cultural memory. Indeed, his words fully satisfy the imagination and meet the spiritual requirements of urban historical monuments.

Once European explorers introduced the original Porcelain Tower to European readers through their journey notes, it became the archetypical Chinoiserie building to imitate over the 18th century. A nine-foot-high pagoda on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is regarded as a replica of the Porcelain Tower of Nanjing. In 1761, a counterpart of the Nanjing pagoda was built in southwest London at Kew Gardens, a supreme example of *Chinoiserie*. Sir William Chambers, who had been to China, designed the Great Pagoda of Kew Gardens for Princess Augusta. The pagoda was very similar to the Porcelain Tower in appearance (Figure 3). Patrick Conner believed that the latter inspired the former: "There can be little doubt that the Great Pagoda was inspired first and foremost by the so-called Porcelain Tower of Nanking . . . It is true that Chambers would have seen several other pagodas in his travels. But the Kew Gardens pagoda bears a closer resemblance to the Porcelain Tower than to the pagoda near Canton, which he reproduced in *Designs of Chinese Buildings* or to any other pagodas illustrated in the English literature of China" [36].

Figure 3. A view of the Great Pagoda at Kew Gardens in 1763 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC0 1.0, via Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pagoda,_Kew_Gardens#/media/File:View_of_the_Wilderness_at_Kew_MET_DP105027.jpg, accessed on 5 May 2022).

4.2. The Modern Porcelain Tower

The construction of the modern Porcelain Tower as an urban regeneration project went through a long process. In the Chinese civil construction system, the city government is the principal administrative entity to develop and regenerate local urban areas. Thus, government leaders as city fathers hold the power of decision-making in urban heritage projects. City governments in China, however, normally do not directly invest in and manage heritage projects. Instead, they often delegate local state enterprises as city managers to engage in urban heritage development. For the first time in 2003, the Nanjing municipal

government itself undertook the project of pagoda reconstruction and sought to attract investments. Scholars from the Architecture School of Nanjing's Southeast University, a pioneer in architectural education and one of China's top research institutions, were then commissioned to examine the history of the Great Bao'en Temple and the Porcelain Tower. One year later, the government announced a reconstruction scheme devised by these scholars, but its potential commercial risk deterred investors, and the government failed to attract sufficient funds. In 2006, the government resorted to assigning its financing to the Nanjing State Assets Investment Management Holding Corporation. This body later managed to convince four other local state enterprises to set up a new company to manage the heritage project (Figure 4). The reconstruction, however, did not launch until 2010 when Chinese businessman Wang Jianlin sponsored the project with the equivalent of 156 million U.S. dollars, the largest personal donation ever made in China. From 2011 to 2013, scholars from Southeast University again designed the modern Porcelain Tower, with construction finally completed in 2016.

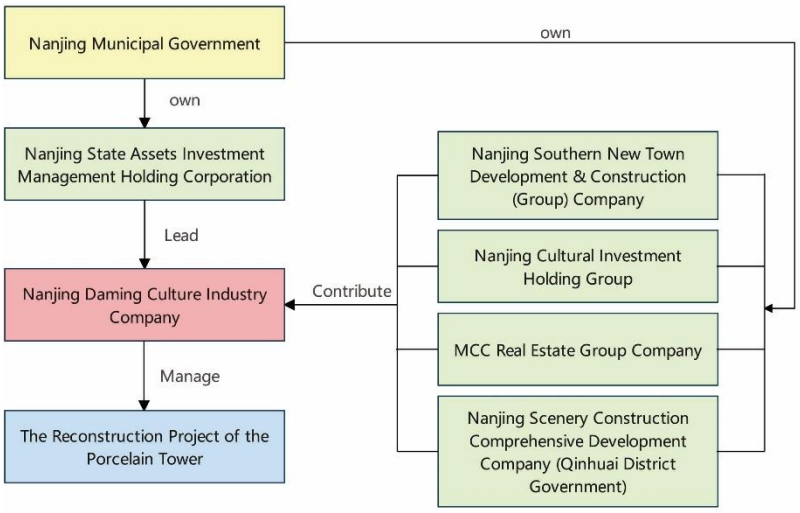

Figure 4. Organisation Chart for reconstruction of the Porcelain Tower (Source: the authors).

When the Nanjing government took the decision to refashion the Porcelain Tower, two options were considered: (1) a faithful reproduction with form, shape, scale, and materials as true to the original as possible; (2) a contemporary recreation employing modern structure and technique in the original location but with a form and elements that could evoke in people the memory of the original and its specific history. Finally, option 2 was chosen, as option 1 ran a greater risk of falsifying heritage. The architects were expected to follow two basic principles in the reconstruction of the Porcelain Tower. First, the new structure must respect the authenticity of the heritage site and avoid any further damage to the ruins of the underground chamber discovered. Second, as a product of urban regeneration, the new design must help recall the glory of the original Porcelain Tower while respecting the urban context.

The modern Porcelain Tower was constructed in the original's exact position. According to the image from the book *Jingling Fansha Zhi* (Buddhist Temples in Jingling) from the Ming period when the Porcelain Tower was built (Figure 5), the original tower was located in the centre of a courtyard enclosed by the walls, corridors, and structures of the Great Bao'en Temple [37]. In the relic areas south of the Nanjing town of the Ming Dynasty, archaeologists made a succession of discoveries including a series of underground ruins of the destroyed tower and temple buildings, stone plinths, and rammed-earth foundations. The entire heritage site was managed as a large public relic park, with the boundary of the temple site and the location of the historical buildings conspicuously marked. To protect and exhibit these ruins, a modern museum was created within a layout similar to the Great Bao'en Temple, while the new pagoda was placed on the middle axis of the museum

(Figure 6). The temple ruins discovered are now properly displayed inside the museum without any restoration or reconstruction (Figure 6).

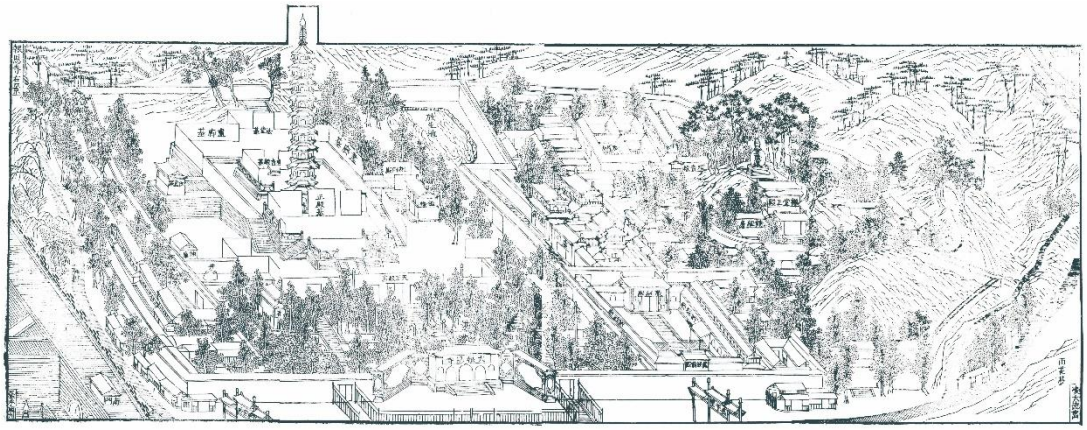

Figure 5. Overall view image of the Porcelain Tower in the book *Jingling Fansha Zhi* (source: Ref. [37]).

Figure 6. The ruins of the Great Bao'en Temple on display (Source: photo courtesy of Pengfei Ma).

The overall appearance of the new tower was inspired by historical documents and a previous rebuilding design from Pan Guxi, a well-known architectural historian. Just as in the original, there are nine stories in the new pagoda, but the designers used a conical steel framework for the pagoda's foundation, spanning and shielding the discovered chamber. As well as supporting the main structure above, the steel framework was designed to protect the ruins and leave enough surrounding space for an exhibition or commemoration hall with a capacity of 200 people [38]. The main body of the tower above rests on a complex steel mast frame composed of sixteen vertical pillars connecting to intersected beams at each story. In each story, the outer outline matches the original's octagonal plane, with an inner core consisting of two rotating squares interlacing to the form of lotus petals. The plan size decreases progressively at each story and finishes with a spire at the top. The eight corners of each story are steel beams with wing plates stretching out from the core and both sides of the beams wrapped in white glass. Graphics containing information on the original tower's facade are imprinted into the inner glass of the wings. To recreate the abstract presentation of the facade image from the ancient pagoda, the architects in collaboration with glass artists adopted the innovative technology of fused-colour plastic glass. This enables the

images of the ancient pagoda to be observed from different angles [39]. All these elements contribute to its graceful appearance evoking the original Porcelain Tower (Figure 7).

Figure 7. The overall appearance of the rebuilt Porcelain Tower (Source: photo courtesy of Pengfei Ma).

With its modern steel and glass appearance, the new tower rejects any call for material authenticity. Unlike the traditional paradigm that finds in heritage residue an intrinsic value worthy of painstaking collection, cataloguing and preservation for likely philological restoration, recent strategies encourage the more innovative approach of managing the larger quantities of remnants with a lay spirit and approach [40]. Considering the minimal quantity of heritage residue discovered in the Porcelain Tower site, the original materials, broken brickwork and tiles, are exhibited in the museum. Meanwhile, designers adopted the strategy of rebuilding the new tower with a steel structure, concrete interior walls and a glass finish. Under the huge concrete foundation and glass body, observers could not possibly think of it as the original. Authenticity in the modern pagoda is better expressed by its location, setting and, more importantly, its spirit and feeling. The original Porcelain Tower, as shared in cultural memory, is evoked by the heritage ruins inside and the images reflected on the fused-colour plastic glass.

Today, the modern Porcelain Tower is one of the most striking landmarks of the city. Despite the artful reconstruction, the new tower still caused great controversy and drew criticism from academics and residents. They argued, for instance, that avoiding ancient techniques and materials in the rebuilding process could be disrespectful to the original and to history. Some locals even commented that the modern glass of the pagoda was ugly [41]. Indeed, it is debatable, even doubtful, whether lending the refashioned Porcelain Tower the appearance of modern glass was the best option. It might, however, be a matter of design quality rather than rationality of reconstruction. As argued above, poor reproductions do not invalidate rational reconstruction as an approach to urban regeneration. The purpose of serving urban development and cultural sustainability was central to the entire reconstruction process. To sustain its urban context and restore its historical identity, the city of Nanjing needs urgently to start rebuilding.

4.3. Urban Context and Regeneration

The city of Nanjing is keen to celebrate its historical glory. The sheer speed of Chinese urbanisation has seen a large number of rural people flock to cities, and the population is viewed as the core resource for urban development. Since 2015, the governments of

major Chinese cities have strived to attract immigrants to provide a steady impetus for sustainable urban development and regeneration. For those historic cities, sustaining the urban context and historical uniqueness is an effective way of establishing a specific city identity and distinction in the current era of homogeneous urban construction. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Nanjing served as a capital for several Chinese dynasties, states, and republican governments dating back to the 3rd century. As a result, it held a prominent place in Chinese history and culture and was a significant centre of culture, education, research, politics, economy, transport networks, and tourism for a long time. Yet, in today's Chinese regional administration, the city is merely one of twenty-three provincial capitals.

The Nanjing municipal government has produced targeted strategies to redevelop urban areas and restore the city's glory. Urban regeneration policies in Chinese historic towns fit into one of two categories: conservation of limited listed heritage properties or revival of rundown neighbourhoods [42]. According to *General Urban Planning of Nanjing (2008–2020),* an official document issued by the municipal government, Nanjing's three primary urban cultural development goals are to be "an important pivot of Chinese culture, an outstanding representative of the southern capital cities and a famous historic cultural city with international influence" [43]. To achieve these aims, the government adopted the strategy to launch a series of construction projects related to heritage buildings. These construction projects, involving both restoration and reconstruction, were designed to propagate the history and values of the city.

As visual reminders, significant heritage buildings serve to translate the abstract discourse of shared history and memory into a tangible presence to be perceived, understood, and communicated to the public. Unlike the Notre Dame de Paris spire, the original Porcelain Tower had been destroyed for more than one hundred years. Being a distant cultural memory with no actual structure to refer to, people can only visualise the tower from literature. Those unfamiliar with its history and relevant literature, even local citizens, had little chance to learn about this monument. Before the archaeological excavation was launched, its site was just a dilapidated neighbourhood in Nanjing's old town where people lived in squalid conditions. Most residents had no idea about the heritage and the glorious history of the place they were living in. The reconstruction approach to urban regeneration not only revitalised the old neighbourhood but also struck a balance between local needs and the rebirth of the city's historic character.

The modern Porcelain Tower was viewed by the government as a significant project that would arouse great expectations and bring worldwide prestige to the city. Today it evokes a specific urban memory, that of a Chinese wonder widely known in the West, thus perpetuating a continuous cultural dynamic in the city's growth. Within the current literary discussion on reconstruction, as already mentioned, scholars value authenticity, but the importance to urban cultural sustainability of rebuilding urban heritage rarely rates a mention. In this case, the modern reconstruction of the Porcelain Tower transforms the urban legacy from a historical monument into a contemporary "urban spectacle" that enhances the city's reputation both in China and the West. For migrants settling in Nanjing, it highlights the city's significant history and involves them in the city's past through a meaningful landmark where they can enjoy their new urban life. This steel and glass spectacle has updated the city's identity and refashioned the public's collective memory of the city. In London, on 23 September 2016, the Tale of Two Pagodas (the Porcelain Tower of Nanjing and the Kew Gardens Pagoda of London) was held solemnly at the Kew Gardens, gathering investors, important officials from both China and Britain, and special guests to witness a traditional Chinese blessing ceremony on the site. Soon afterwards, an agreement for the restoration of London's Kew Gardens Pagoda was officially signed [44].

The reconstruction of the Porcelain Tower also provides the opportunity to build a more resilient local society: "When there is a trauma, people really need to hold on to their cultural landmarks" [45]. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 identifies the role of culture as a component of disaster risk management, and

its Priority 4 highlights the "Build Back Better" approach to recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction [46]. The rebuilding strategy of the Porcelain Tower aims to ensure that after the rehabilitation process, the heritage site does not revert to becoming a normal urban area but instead achieves more, binding locals together as a community. The heritage park, museum and landmark replacing the old neighbourhood are places of significance to the local communities. Through cultural expression, they offer appropriate ways to deal with potential social traumas such as COVID-19 and rebuild affected communities. The new pagoda promotes sustainable community development by investing in culture, urban regeneration and resilience in an integrated way.

The Porcelain Tower in history has held a variety of meanings and values in a variety of contexts. For example, in the writings of Western explorers, the pagoda was perceived essentially as an architectural wonder. Lacking local cultural awareness, they paid little attention to the social and religious significance of the building in its historical context. Today while integrating it into Nanjing's urban growth, city managers would perhaps do well to ponder which heritage traits and values to underscore when regenerating the pagoda's meaning through the reconstruction process.

4.4. Selected History and Value

What merits special attention is that emphasising the cultural necessity of urban growth could selectively increase the weight of urban history and values in the reconstruction. When the function of urban heritage is associated with contemporary city development, "a historical monument's value primarily depends on its contribution to the history that the city managers hope to shape" [47] (p. 83). When they believe that some specific values of the original from a selected period need to be emphasised in the reconstruction, other historical facts might be deliberately neglected or even ignored.

During the process of reconstructing the Porcelain Tower, the heritage theme was altered more than once. Nanjing's municipal government first launched the rebuilding project in early 2001. Then from 2001 to 2008, before the ruins had been found, the government organised an extensive consultation on the rebuilding design among architects and heritage specialists. In this phase, the Porcelain Tower was merely regarded as a historic building, so, for the protection of any possible original remains, no structure was envisaged for the heritage site. Instead, the design was for a symbolic replica of the Porcelain Tower to be erected far away from the site [48].

In April 2008, archaeologists from Nanjing Museum started to excavate the tower site. On 16 July, in a live television broadcast, they uncovered the underground chamber where many antiquities were discovered, including coins, luminous pearls, and a stele. The most notable find in the chamber was the gold Seven Treasures Asoka Pagoda, about 3.5 feet high and 1.5 feet wide. Archaeologists in 2010, using a mechanical arm, opened the miniature pagoda. Surprisingly, what they found inside was Buddha Sakyamuni's head sarira (pearl or crystal-like bead-shaped objects purportedly found in the cremated ashes of Buddhist spiritual masters), the only head sarira ever found [31]. This significant discovery established the religious value of the Porcelain Tower as paramount among all other considerations. From that point onwards, the absolute imperative of the rebuilding project was to reflect Nanjing's key position in the history of Chinese Buddhism [49].

Once again, however, a Nanjing government decision upset the reconstruction project. The officials believed that the sarira should be moved from the Porcelain Tower site to Niushou Mountain, a renowned Buddhist hub with many monasteries. The Porcelain Tower's religious value was thus diminished, and the heritage site was redefined as a place of recreation for locals. The museum and tower rebuilding project's design criteria were relaxed to allow the introduction of modern concepts, seen as better suited to local urban regeneration than the traditional style, and the faithful replication of the original tower option was now rejected. Consequently, part of the museum's interior was designed with innovative techniques and equipment, creating a truly remarkable modern religious space rarely seen in China (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Modern religious space in the Great Bao'en Temple Museum (Source: photo courtesy of Pengfei Ma).

The media played a subtle role in defining the history and value of the pagoda. Since 2001, frequent articles about the Porcelain Tower and its reconstruction have appeared in various media. This coverage focuses mainly on the pagoda's history, the archaeological discovery, and progress on the reconstruction project. In the early days, when the theme of "architectural marvels" dominated, historical facts and descriptions relating to the pagoda itself provided the key phrases in the relevant reports. They included "the relationship between the pagoda and the emperor", "the scale and colour of the pagoda", "the number of bells and lights", and "one of the seven architectural wonders of the world" [50]. After the archaeological discovery, the details of the sarira, "Capital of Buddhism", "Seven Treasures Asoka Pagoda", and the religious history of Nanjing become favourite themes in the media [49,51]. Notably, the change of emphasis from "architectural marvels" to "Buddhist shrines" was described in an article on 9 November 2010 in the *Nanjing Daily*, one of the critical local media which has been tracking the reconstruction project from the beginning [52]. The public passively followed the discussion in the media but was left no chance to express its opinion. A carefully selected representation of the different arguments surrounding the Porcelain Tower created and delivered the official line required for urban growth. Historical myths were thus devised to redirect and redefine the public image of the tower.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The rebuilding of the Porcelain Tower offered a distinct opportunity to contextualise a specific city's history in a contemporary sustainable manner. It is wrong to argue that rebuilding the Porcelain Tower with modern technology and materials was inevitable. The reconstruction did, however, symbolically create a cultural connection between the past and the present by refreshing social memory and regenerating the urban context. The modern Porcelain Tower as an urban feature strengthens the urban edge of Nanjing in the competition between Chinese cities and sustainably satisfies the cultural demand for local urban development.

The urbanisation China has experienced in the past three decades is unprecedented in human history. The expanding population of Chinese cities has produced a vast demand for housing and urban facilities, leading to rapid urban expansion. Meanwhile, fostering sustainable cultural regeneration and responding to the demand for urban culture has become a focal point for the central government, local governments, and academics in China. Respecting the importance of historical monuments is a fervent desire for the

Chinese if they are to gain cultural confidence and achieve cultural stability. City managers now consider urban heritage and historical buildings as significant assets in their mission to protect their city's uniqueness and appeal. Now that heritage reconstruction is legally sanctioned in China, it is predicted there will be more urban reconstruction projects in the future.

With due respect to heritage authenticity, reconstruction can ethically be considered a valid approach to resurrecting historical monuments, especially in view of its contribution to preserving cultural memory in urban regeneration. Nevertheless, there are matters to debate. What kind of monuments should be rebuilt? What principles should be followed in reconstruction? Is it necessary for reconstruction to be as faithful as possible to the original? To what extent is a reconstruction using modern technology and materials acceptable to the public? How can the public participate in heritage management and urban regeneration? These questions still await definitive answers in today's urban China.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, P.M.; methodology, P.M.; formal analysis, P.M.; investigation, P.M.; writing—original draft preparation, P.M.; writing—review and editing, M.L.; supervision, X.L.; funding acquisition, X.L. and P.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was sponsored by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (grant number 51878451) and the Shanghai Pujiang Program (grant number 21PJC111).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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