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Maintaining Affective Engagements with the Local Heritage in Taishun

Marina Svensson

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Abstract
This chapter addresses how the Internet and social media enable new forms of engagements with heritage that are more individual, performative and visual in character. This is explored through a case study of the Taishun (later China) Covered Bridges network. Most of the members come from Taishun, although the network also brings together experts and enthusiasts from different parts of China. They engage with heritage in different ways, documenting local history and traditions, calling for the protection of sites, and creating awareness on heritage issues, all while integrating online and offline activities. Through sharing information and sentiments, commenting on each other's postings, and uploading images and news in real time, they are able to reflect upon and build a stronger affective engagement with heritage.

Keywords: Internet, social media, affective engagement, photography, covered bridges, migration, intangible heritage

This chapter discusses how a group of individuals who have left Taishun – a county in the Wenzhou municipality, Zhejiang Province – remember and engage with their heritage, and how this affective engagement is expressed and experienced both offline and online. These individuals are rediscovering and showing appreciation of a heritage that they were, in many cases, ignorant of or indifferent to in the past. Although the situation is complex and also differs between individuals, one could argue that the heritagization process has prompted people to rediscover their heritage and place-based identity, at the same time that they are

co-producers of this heritagization. Nonetheless, the individuals in my study also exhibit views and perform heritage in ways that depart from the authorized heritage discourse (AHD), or constitute 'heritage from below' (Robertson 2012). Some sites and cultural practices elevated to cultural heritage are more important to them because they carry deep personal, tactile, and sensory reminiscences, whereas others have lost their importance due to socio-economic changes. Digital technologies, including in particular social media, have offered new possibilities to share and engage with memories, identities, local culture, and heritage. The connective and affective affordances of social media strengthens the performative dimension of heritage experiences as well as creates a 'co-present visuality'.

The chapter provides insights into the heritagization process in Taishun while focusing on a group of individuals who are connected through the Taishun (later China) Covered Bridges network. It got its first online presence in 2000 when the founder set up a website, whereas today the network of friends and enthusiasts are connected on social media. In my analysis I draw on theoretical insights from critical heritage studies as well as recent work on social media. My study is based on ethnographic work, both online and offline, site visits, and participation in different activities, including travelling together with individuals from Taishun, and interviews with members of the social media group Covered Bridges' Village (*Langqiao cun*) and with other actors such as transmitters and villagers in the county.[1]

The history and heritage of Taishun

Taishun county is situated in the Wenzhou municipality in the mountainous border region between Zhejiang Province and Fujian Province. This geographical position has influenced both its cultural and economic development (Liu 2001). The county is home to people from many different parts of China, many families having migrated there in the Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as to the She minority. Travel was very difficult in the past but several important trade routes (today referred to as *gudao* [old

1 I first went to Taishun in 2007, and then again in 2009, twice in 2015 and most recently in 2017. I have also interviewed people from Taishun during visits to Wenzhou and Shanghai in 2015 and 2017. For a discussion on methodological issues related to using social media, see Svensson 2017.

roads]) crossed the mountain ridges and linked villages within the county, and Taishun with cities in Zhejiang and Fujian. Many of my interviewees who were born before 1970 could recount long walks over the mountains in order to reach other villages and the county town. One man told me how he walked for two days, passing several bridges, before he reached the river where a boat took him downstream to Rui'an.

Taishun was for a long time known as the poorest county in Wenzhou, and one former teacher originally from Rui'an told me that due to her 'bad' family background, coming from a family of landlords with ties to the Nationalist Party (Guomindang GMD), she was sent to work there in the 1960s. The county's per capita income is still below the average in Zhejiang and there are few industries. The county has several dams and is today a so-called National Ecological County (*Guojiaji shengtai xian*) and Nationally Designated Eco-Demonstration Region (*Guojiaji shengtai shifan qu*). In 2010, the county had 233,400 permanent residents and a rather large out-migration to Wenzhou and cities farther away. It has been mentioned that since the reform period as many as 140,000 people have left the county to work and set up businesses elsewhere.[2] The natural environment has shaped the architectural style of buildings and resulted in the need to build bridges that enabled people to cross the many streams and rivers. The unspoilt nature and scenery is today one of the county's assets and tourism is a growing business that has been facilitated by investment in infrastructure and roads, which nowadays has shortened the driving time between Taishun and Wenzhou to two hours.

The history and heritage of Taishun is well documented in a range of books published by official institutions, individual scholars, and local amateur historians and enthusiasts. The covered bridges (*langqiao*) have emerged as the foremost symbol of the county's heritage through a range of different initiatives and activities. Villagers and other citizens, experts on architecture, media institutions, and the heritage bureau have all been involved in the heritagization and branding of the bridges. The heritage bureau started to pay attention to the bridges in the late 1980s, and in the 1990s the first of them were listed as protected sites. In the 1990s, studies of the bridges' history and unique architectural form attracted both national and international interest (Liu and Shen 2005; Knapp 2008). In 2006, fifteen bridges were listed as national heritage sites (*guojia wenwu baohu danwei*).

2 This figure is provided on the Covered Bridges website, see http://www.langqiao.net/web/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=29882.

Experts and the local government have also been very active in trying to get the bridges listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and through joint efforts with local governments in other parts of Zhejiang and Fujian, which also have many of these kind of bridges, the bridges were added to the Chinese UNESCO preparation list in 2011. In the meantime, because the knowledge and skills to build the bridges were threatened and rapidly forgotten, the craftsmanship was nominated and entered the UNESCO Urgent Safeguarding List in 2009 (UNESCO 2009). Several carpenters were also nominated as transmitters (*chuanchengren*) and the local government took different measures to protect and promote the craft among younger workers.

Taishun has a range of other buildings and sites that have been listed as cultural heritage, including individual buildings such as the Bao Lineage Ancestral Hall and the Hu Lineage Mansion, as well as whole villages. A number of cultural practices have also been listed as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) since 2003, including six on the national-level list, fifteen on the provincial-level list, 99 on the municipal-level list, and 142 on the county-level list (Wenzhou Government Information Catalogue 2016). Among the six national-level ICH items, apart from the craftsmanship of constructing the covered bridges, are the puppet theatre (*mu'ou xi*) and the making of puppets, as well as the She minority folk songs. There are three national-level transmitters, sixteen provincial-level transmitters, and 58 municipal-level transmitters in the county. The Taishun's puppet theatre was once an important part of the ritual and cultural life in Taishun and many villages had their own troupes. In the 1960s, during the Cultural Revolution, the puppet theatre was criticized because of its connection to old traditions and belief systems, and many puppets were destroyed, as were many other cultural artefacts at that time. After 1976 the puppet theatre was revived in the villages and the cultural bureau also established the Taishun County Puppet Theatre to promote the art. Both performers and puppet makers have now been listed as transmitters of ICH.

Place, identity, and heritage: Senses of belonging in a mobile society

Places are defined by and made up of individual and collective memories, histories, and practices associated with being in that particular place. Feuchtwang defines place-making as 'the centring and marking of a place by the actions and constructions of people tracing salient parts of their daily

lives as a homing point in their trajectories. Places and their features are in turn triggers of memories of their lives, reminders of whatever longer senses of time they have' (Feuchtwang 2004: 10). Places can mean different things to different people and their meanings can also change over time. The heritagization process, as well as different cultural productions such as visual representations and narratives circulated in the media, may change how people identify with a place, and how they remember and experience it. Places are thus constantly made, remade and negotiated as different factors and processes, including personal changes such as migration, mediatization, heritagization, and globalization, influence people's sense of place. These processes are particularly dramatic and complex in China today.

Chinese people's references to and sense of home/hometown (*laojia*/*guxiang*) do not exclusively refer to their place of birth but often to the place where their father or ancestors came from. Genealogies (*jiapu*), regularly revised, provide information about the ancestral home and the lineage's history. Family and lineage ties often bind people to a specific village. In the village many different landmarks and buildings commemorate and celebrate these family and place-based identities, including shrines and temples, ancestral halls, pavilions, pagodas, bridges, and graves. In south China ancestral halls were often the most central and architecturally magnificent buildings where many important ceremonies and rituals were held throughout the year. Other rituals include the grave-sweeping ceremony of Qingming, and different temple festivals to celebrate local gods that protect the lineage and the village (Feuchtwang 1996). During imperial times, aside from lineages, so-called native place associations (*tongxiang hui*) served as supportive networks (Goodman 1995). After 1949, the CCP suppressed lineage ties, condemned ancestor worship, and confiscated ancestral halls, and forbade many religious manifestations. The more ideologically relaxed environment since the 1980s has, however, seen a revival of lineages and the rituals associated with them (Svensson 2012). This development is particularly striking in south China, and Wenzhou is known for both its successful economic development as well as for its active lineages and religious communities.

Taishun, like many other rural areas in China, has seen a large out-migration of young people since the reform period began. However, migrants often retain close contacts with their hometowns and villages, particularly if their parents still live there, and travel home for Chinese New Year. Many of them also identify with their old hometown rather than with their new places of residence, and they do not experience any close

attachment to the heritage in the cities. There are many markers of place-based identity, including dialect, food, and customs, that set migrants apart from the host community. All of the individuals I interviewed who were connected on the social media group Covered Bridges' Village, ten of whom lived in Wenzhou city and three in Shanghai, self-identified as *Taishunren* (a person from Taishun) despite having in some cases lived in the city in question for more than 20 years. They also felt close to others from Taishun based on a shared background and history, including dialect and food preferences, memories of the same places and natural scenery, as well as having experienced similar struggles leaving the countryside and trying to make a life in the city. Their common identity was also fostered due to the region's geographical isolation and past poverty. Several of my interviewees mentioned that people from Taishun had long been looked down upon (*kanbuqi*) in Wenzhou and called 'people from the mountains' (*shantou/shanli ren*). Apart from the Covered Bridges' Village network, many were involved in various other place-based associations and networks, such as a school alumni network and business associations, which provide support and a sense of community. Several people talked about having their '*geng*' (roots) in Taishun and not having any roots in the city. Many also acknowledged that as youngsters they had been eager to leave Taishun and had not felt any special attachment to local history and heritage, whereas things had changed as they became older. It was not only age that made them view their hometown in a more positive light and express interest in local history and heritage, they were also influenced by the growing focus on heritage and traditions in society and in the media. The Internet and social media in addition made it easier for them to follow what was happening in Taishun, and find and share information about local history and connect with others from the county. The heritage status bestowed on different sites and practices, and the high praise of experts, also awakened their interest and made them feel proud of their heritage. Although their memories and personal stories were attached to more local sites, mostly in the villages they grew up in, and in most cases they had not travelled much within Taishun in the past, they united to celebrate their Taishun identity at the same time that they also discovered the county's history and many new heritage sites outside of their own village. In the following I will try to analyse the many dimensions and expressions of these individuals' attachment to and understanding of heritage, and how they are related to the AHD and to their social media use.

Social media, affect, and heritage: New forms of engagement and 'co-present visuality'

Within heritage studies there has been an increasing emphasis on feelings, emotions, affect, and performativity in people's engagement with heritage (Crouch 2015; Smith 2006; Waterton 2014; Waterton and Watson 2013). Harrison has, for example, argued that it is 'important to bring the affective qualities of heritage "things" more squarely back into the critical heritage studies arena [...] [and to explore] its corporeal influences on the bodies of human and non-human actors, and the ways in which heritage is caught up in the quotidian bodily practices of dwelling, travelling, working and 'being' in the world' (2013: 112-113). Waterton likewise emphasizes that through 'affect' we can better understand how people interact with heritage in everyday life. What heritage is or feels like is fluid, shifting, and constitutive of both individual and collective memories and experiences, and through the way those memories and experiences are mediated and shared among people and in society. As Waterton puts it, 'narratives of heritage are mediated in affective worlds that shape their reception, tapping into everyday emotional resonances and circulation of feelings of inclusion and exclusion' (Waterton 2014: 824). Social media is increasingly incorporated into people's daily routines and affective worlds, and can thus 'invite and transmit affect but also sustain affective feedback loops that generate and reproduce affective patterns of relating to others' (Papacharissi 2015: 23), as well as, I would like to add, to artefacts, sites, and places. Social media can, in other words, enable and strengthen people's affective engagement with heritage.

Recent works have focused on how digital technologies, including smartphones and social media, encourage and enable new forms of engagement with heritage (Aigner 2016; Freeman 2010; Giaccardi 2012; Pietrobruno 2014). These technologies, at least in theory, provide a more participatory and democratic platform for discussions on and celebrations of the cultural heritage. They enable individuals and local communities to bypass traditional heritage institutions and instead document and celebrate heritage in different ways, or heritage that these institutions may have overlooked or refused to acknowledge as such. People can today thus create their own digital heritagescapes, museums, and archives (Aigner 2016). It is not only established grassroots organizations that make use of the Internet and social media, there have also emerged new online communities formed around topics of shared interests, specific cultural practices, or centred around affinities based on place and heritage (Freeman 2010; Volland 2011).

Social media can thus support both the formation of new publics or communities by enabling strangers to share experiences with places, historical events, and cultural practices, as well as enable existing communities to strengthen their ties and help them remember, experience, and perhaps re-imagine their own heritage. Papacharissi has in a recent work defined 'affective publics' as 'networked publics that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment' (Papacharissi 2015: 125). Whereas she focuses on the sphere of social protests and politics, I here develop a notion of 'affective heritage communities' that borrows from her insights into the affective affordances of digital media.

The ubiquitous use of images and film, and the mobile or locative nature of smartphones and social media platforms, is of special importance in the creation of affective communities. While visual representation and mediatization have always been an important aspect of heritage-making (Waterton and Watson 2010), the emergence of smartphones, social media, and the Internet has changed the ways images are produced, stored, shared, and viewed, as well as enabled more people to produce images. The portable nature of smartphones and the visual affordances of social media open up new possibilities to engage with and perform cultural heritage in everyday life. Taking photos and sharing them is a way to commemorate, experience, and perform heritage, as well as a tool to communicate and maintain or create relationships with objects, sites, and other people (Freeman 2010; Pietrobruno 2014). The mobile and locative nature of new digital technologies creates what Hjorth fittingly calls an 'ambient, intimate, and mobile visuality' (Hjorth 2015: 25), and what she and others also refer to as 'co-present visuality' (e.g. Hjorth and Pink 2014). These scholars thus draw attention to the visuality of connectivity on social media and its mobile, embedded, and embodied nature. They argue that the portable nature of smartphones gives rise to a heightened everyday visual awareness and a new engagement with place, and, I would argue, also heritage. 'Through sharing playful pictures of places as part of everyday movements, camera phone practices provide new ways of mapping place beyond just the geographic: They partake in adding social, emotional, psychological, and aesthetic dimensions to a sense of place. Camera phone sharing shows the importance of copresence sociality in the practice of place as something more than just geographic or physical' (Hjorth and Pink 2014: 42).

Social media, such as, for example, WeChat in the case of China, can thus activate and sustain feelings of belonging and place identity, and so produce a sense of affective community. It may furthermore stimulate reflexivity and visual awareness regarding heritage and place. Affect is

demonstrated through sharing stories, sentiments, experiences, and images related to heritage, and liking and commenting on posts, including using a range of emoticons to express sentiments and produce affect. Of particular interest is whether these stories and narratives align with or diverge from the official heritage narrative. As I will discuss below, new affective heritage communities that are digitally enabled to some extent produce heritage from below or, at least, disruptions and interruptions of the official narrative. They give voice to a more ambient, personal, performative, and visual experience of heritage.

Adapting to the digital age: The emergence of the Covered Bridges network in Taishun

There are very few formal organizations devoted to cultural heritage issues in China, but an increasing number of loose networks focus on issues related to heritage.[3] Individuals involved in these networks early on realized the potential of the Internet, and today increasingly use social media such as Sina Weibo (China's equivalent of Twitter) and WeChat (a messaging app that combines the functions of WhatsApp and Facebook). A growing number of Chinese citizens are thus today using a wide range of digital technologies to document, celebrate and debate local traditions and heritage. These online networks are built around topics of shared interests, specific cultural practices, threatened heritage, or specific places and cities. The Covered Bridges Website, which was established as early as 2000, is one of the earliest such networked communities. The Old Beijing website established by Zhang Wei in 2001 is another example.[4] Zhang Wei, whose family home had been demolished, wanted to document the rapidly vanishing number of courtyards and hutongs in Beijing. The website encouraged people to post photos and share them online, and members of the network also gathered to explore and take photos in different parts of the city.[5] With the advent of Weibo in 2009 and WeChat in 2013, and the rapid spread of smartphones, new possibilities for interactivity and user-generated content have emerged that facilitate debates and the sharing of information. The

3 The most well-known organization that is also formally registered is the Beijing Cultural Heritage Protection Centre that was established as early as 1998; see http://www.bjchp.org.

4 The website has undergone different changes over time but still exists at http://www.obj.cc/. Zhang Wei today also has a Weibo account with some 2400 followers.

5 I took part in one such walking session in 2010.

activists from the Old Beijing Net and new activists and concerned citizens later turned to Weibo, where they, for example, discussed the threat to the Gulou area (see further Graezer Bideau and Yan). In the case of Datong, as discussed by Cui, both supporters and critics of Mayor Geng Yanbo made active use of social media.

Zhong Xiaobo was studying at university in Sichuan Province when he came across an article on Taishun's covered bridges that made him look at his hometown with new eyes.[6] He had previously not given much thought to the bridges, or been aware of their historical value and uniqueness, but the article made him rediscover his hometown and feel proud. Since Zhong Xiaobo was an early user of the Internet (he later came to work for China Mobile) he realized its growing importance and decided to establish the Taishun Covered Bridges Website in 2000; in 2005 the name was changed to China Covered Bridges Website.[7] At the time when Zhong established his website, the bridges were still not very well known and few of them had been listed as protected sites. Zhong's goal to raise public awareness about the bridges met with success and the site attracted many visitors and supporters. Many of them came from Taishun whereas others were netizens interested in nature, tourism, and backpacking. A network of supporters and volunteers quickly developed that would also meet up in person and travel together to different bridges in Taishun. Zhong Xiaobo has continued to keep up with digital developments, and first set up a Weibo account, which at its height had 327,000 followers, and later a public WeChat account in 2013 with almost 10,000 followers, and two WeChat groups that gather around 200 of the more enthusiastic members of the network. In recent years some members of this original network have established another public WeChat account as well as a WeChat group. There are also other WeChat accounts that address local culture in Taishun; a woman, for instance, set up a public account devoted to the She minority culture. When Zhong Xiaobo briefly returned to Taishun to work after his studies, he and his friends set up the Taishun Covered Bridges Association, an unregistered organization that engaged in many different activities. In 2009 they established the Wenzhou Covered Bridges Cultural Association (*Wenzhou shi langqiao wenhua xuehui*) registered as a non-profit organization under the local China Federation of

6 His personal story and the creation of the website have been told many times in the local media and on the website. For a recent report, see http://www.langqiao.net/web/forum.php?mod=viewthread&tid=30027, and for a report on Taishun TV in 2015, see http://v.qq.com/x/page/a0153h1c2n9.html.

7 See www.langqiao.net.

Figure 11.1 Members of the Covered Bridges network on a visit to Xianju Bridge

Photograph by Li Yongzai

Literary and Art Circles (usually known under its abbreviation *Wenlian*), which today shares an office with the Taishun Business Association. Since 2004 Zhong Xiaobo has lived in Wenzhou with his wife, whom he met thanks to the Covered Bridges network, and the whole family devote a considerable time to the network and continue to travel to explore Taishun's heritage.

The core members of the social media group are mostly well-educated, middle-class people in their late thirties and forties, and a majority today live outside Taishun but retain close contacts with their hometown. The network has close links with Chinese scholars and experts, some of whom are also members of the WeChat group.[8] Furthermore, it has good contacts with local authorities and Zhong Xiaobo has also received several awards for his work to promote Taishun. The website and the public WeChat account provide rich information about the bridges and other heritage sites and cultural

8 Liu Jie, a professor of architecture at Jiaotong University, Shanghai, has written several books and also organized conferences. In 2006, Liu Jie and Wu Songdi, a professor at Fudan University, a native of Taishun, together with Peter Bol from Harvard University, organized an expedition with the international organization Earthwatch to document Taishun's history and architecture. In 2007 they organized a smaller group of scholars and students from China and Taiwan, of which I was also a part. Wu Songdi has continued to undertake research with his students and written several articles and books.

practices in the county. It makes use of media reports, official documents, and academic work, but also publishes its own reports and announces the network's activities. Apart from publishing materials online, the association also publishes an annual magazine/book with articles from its network of experts and concerned citizens. In addition it organizes talks (often uploaded on their public WeChat account), cultural events, and trips to Taishun.

Senses of home and heritage: Community building, affective engagement, performativity, and 'co-present visuality'

The WeChat group Covered Bridges' Village consists of some 200 people, although some are more active than others. The choice of name suggests an ambition to create a sense of identity and community united around and defined by the covered bridges as a symbol for home. It also reflects nostalgia for life in the 'village' where people know each other and also share each other's daily life and events. The members describe themselves as 'villagers' (*cunmin*) and the founder Zhong Xiaobo jokingly as the 'village head' (*cunzhang*). Many of the postings in the group also resemble that of small talk among neighbours who run into each other in the (virtual) village. This nurturing aspect of social media was also emphasized by one of my interviewees who himself set up another group consisting of people from Taishun. Most of the people know each other or have met thanks to the network and its activities. Although people might not meet up so often in person, the online 'meetings' and everyday chatting make up for this lack of physical meetings while sustaining and nurturing a joint identity as people who are concerned about Taishun and its heritage. People also plan offline meetings on the platform, talk about forthcoming trips home, suggest joint trips to some specific site, and invite others to visit them.

The WeChat group thus serves many different functions but it is particularly devoted to the sharing of information, news, and images related to Taishun and its heritage. We find some reposting of news and reports from other sources, including from the public WeChat account, but the majority of the posts consists of brief comments, reminiscences, and images related to heritage and hometown. People, for example, post images when they travel home to their villages, including images of the natural scenery, old buildings, and of course the bridges, which prompt comments or just a 'Like' or the use of an emoticon such as a 'thumbs up' or a 'rose'. Sometimes people ask questions about the site/place and a longer conversation develops. People also post photos of themselves and others during their visits and travels,

although selfies as such are not used. A favourite topic is food, and photos of local dishes give rise to strong emotions and reminiscences, which shows how food, memory, place, and identity are closely connected (e.g. Chan 2010).

The urge to share with others reveals how deeply social media practices have become embedded in people's everyday life and activities. The sharing of information, personal stories, and images constitute an engagement with heritage itself and is a performative act, but it also serves to connect people and is an example of the co-present visuality and sociality discussed by Hjorth and Pink (2014) among others. What is striking is thus how people perform and create their own heritagescape through 'embodied engagements, social relationships, and ways of moving with camera phones' (Hjorth and Pink 2014: 54). People are not primarily focusing on the age or authenticity of the heritage sites, so prominent in the AHD, but more express attachment based on personal memories and emotions.

To illustrate this co-present visuality and how people use social media, I will conclude this section with some more examples. On one occasion I was invited to give a talk for the association – this information was spread on both their public account and on the WeChat group. During the talk, which was filmed and later shared on these platforms, many participants took photos that they instantly uploaded. Others present at the event commented on the photos, as did several of those in the network not present. After the event we took some group photos that were also shared and commented upon, and later a report of the whole event was published on the public WeChat account. That weekend several of us went on a trip to a village in Taishun, which was also documented and shared on the WeChat group. The images posted, apart from scenery and old buildings, included several from our dinner and of the local dishes we ate. The posting and sharing of news, images, and experiences on social media today comes naturally for many people and is embedded in everyday life. For this particular group, heritage is the main focus and something to be performed and shared with those not present in order to stimulate affective responses. The postings also serve as a memory device that preserves the moment and the experiences of heritage for the future.

The multiple meanings and uses of the covered bridges: Expert-led AHD, brand, and site of memories

The covered bridges are today a symbol and brand of Taishun owing to the work of experts, officials, and local citizens. Although the bridges are protected and celebrated due to their age and architectural qualities, they

are also sites of local and very personal memories. It is fair to say that the Covered Bridges Website triggered an interest in the bridges and their history among people in Taishun and those who had left the county and, like Zhong Xiaobo, had hitherto not paid much attention to them.

There are around 900 old bridges of different kinds in Taishun, most of them are rather simple bridges made of stone, including so-called block bridges, and different wooden beam bridges. It is, however, the wooden bridges built in the form of a corridor with a roof, or one could describe them as having a building on top, nowadays most often known as covered bridges (*langqiao*) that are the pride of Taishun. Today some 33 bridges still exist with the oldest originating from the Ming dynasty. The bridges were obviously built to serve a specific function, but apart from transportation they in fact had many other functions. Many also had religious functions and housed shrines in the form of alcoves on the bridge, or had shrines at the end of the bridge, where both travellers and local residents would come to pray and make offerings. The bridges were also a place for travellers to rest, and sometimes inns, teahouses, and shops were built close to the bridge. The bridges in addition served as a public space where people could sit and talk, as they offered protection from both rain and sun and were pleasantly cool in the summer.

In the past people would refer to the bridges using many different names, whereas today, however, they are known and branded under the generic name 'covered or lounge bridges' (*langqiao*). Local residents would, for example, in the past refer to the wooden arch bridges, one specific type, as 'centipede bridges' (*wugong qiao*) because they resemble the body of a crawling arthropod, or simply as 'flying bridges' (*feiqiao*) because of their structure. Many of the bridges have local place names, such as Xianju Bridge, or were named after the lineage that built them, for example, the Xue Hamlet Bridge. Some bridges were simply known by their nicknames such as the Two Sisters Bridges (*Jiemie qiao*) at Sixi, or referred to as the new bridge when the old bridge had been destroyed.

Building and renovating the bridges was the responsibility of local villages and done by skilled carpenters and craftsmen. Today, however, much of this knowledge has been lost because the old bridges do not fulfil their original functions anymore due to the fact that cars cannot cross them and new roads have been built elsewhere. Several bridges have over the years been destroyed in storms, demolished to make way for new bridges, or simply left to collapse due to lack of repair. However, after experts discovered the bridges in the late 1980s and 1990s, they have been listed as cultural heritage, and their repair and upkeep are now the responsibility

of the heritage bureaus and the government. In 2006, fifteen of the bridges were listed as national-level protected sites, whereas eighteen of them are today provincial-level protected sites. After 1954 when the Red Army Bridge was built no more bridges were built using the old technique until villagers and the local government in Beiling township decided to rebuild the Tongle Bridge. The funding came from the local community and from wealthy individuals. The bridge was finished in 2004 with the help of one of the remaining carpenters, Dong Zhiji, who remembered the old technique. Mr Dong became a national-level transmitter in 2008, and several initiatives have been taken by the government to protect the craft and encourage young carpenters to learn the technique (UNESCO 2009). Few young people, however, are interested in spending time and effort learning a skill that does not earn them much money. Nevertheless, Zeng Jiakuai became interested in the craft and was later nominated as a provincial-level transmitter. It is estimated that at least ten new bridges have been built since Tongle Bridge. The villagers and local governments involved in this work have lamented the loss of the old bridges and felt that a covered bridge is an important symbol for the community, not to mention a potential tourist attraction.

Carpenters and villagers who were once involved in repairing and building the bridges have a special tactile relationship with the bridges, which for them also represent workmanship and skills, as well as local pride. This was evident in my interview with Dong Zhiji in 2007. At that time he was already 83 years old and had spent his whole life working as a carpenter, which also included building and repairing ancestral halls and temples. According to the now prevalent narrative retold in many articles and books, and also told to me, he had long nurtured a dream of one day being able to build a bridge in the traditional style.[9] He said he wanted to build the bridge to honour and help his hometown, showcase the bridges' architectural and technical splendour, and spread knowledge of the covered bridges worldwide. When I interviewed Zeng Jiakuai in 2015, a lot had happened since 2007 and although he himself did not have the same memories and experiences as Dong, much of the same rhetoric was evident.[10] Pride in the local history and achievements, and a wish to contribute to the hometown, was also evident in my conversations with Zhou Wangong in 2007. In 2002 Zhou set

9 The reference to a dream, or master Dong's 'dream of a covered bridge' (*langqiao meng*), is mentioned in numerous news reports on the building of the bridge; see, for example, *Wenzhou wanbao*, 6 February 2007, http://news.sina.com.cn/c/edu/2007-02-06/1524111179828s.shtml.

10 CCTV 3 screened a programme on Heritage Day in 2016 on the bridges in which Dong Zhiji and Zeng Jiakuai both appeared; see http://tv.cctv.com/2016/06/13/VIDEp67CWfxymhvZMOSJf2p1160613.shtml.

up a private museum exhibiting the history and architecture of the covered bridges; it was housed in one of the old shops close to Beijian Bridge in Sixi.

The heritagization of the bridges has resulted in the appropriation of new symbols and language. For the local government the bridges constitute an important cultural capital and are used in place branding and tourist promotion. In promotional materials the county is often referred to as the 'county of covered bridges', and as a 'museum of covered bridges'. One of the more striking examples of creative appropriation is the use of the American film *The Bridges of Madison County*. The film's title has been translated as 'Langqiao yimeng' in Chinese, and so made the concept of 'covered bridges' well known and associated with dreams and romance. Dreams are a recurring trope, whether it is having the dream of building a bridge, or the dream of getting the bridges listed as a World Heritage site. Nowadays, the language of China Dream, as put forward by President Xi Jingping, is also linked with the bridges. A competition to make short films on the theme 'China Dream, Covered Bridges Dream' was, for example, recently announced. In the heritagization process there is a strong aestheticization of the bridges, which is evident in the way they are showcased in promotional materials and photographed by professional photographers. This aesthetic gaze is also prevalent among tourists and the members of the Covered Bridges network. There are clear national and global aspirations linked to the bridges and what they can do for Taishun. The fact that the original Taishun Covered Bridges Website was renamed as the Chinese Covered Bridges Website is an example of these aspirations. The attempt to push for World Heritage status is another. The bridges thus have some 'scale-jumping' qualities for Taishun as they become national symbols as well as aspire to become international heritage (compare Oakes 2005).

People in the Covered Bridges network whom I interviewed seldom mentioned the age or architecture of the bridges. For them the bridges instead evoked a sense of home and childhood. Their memories and experiences of the bridges were also very tactile and sensory. One of the most frequent stories I heard from my interviewees was about crossing the bridges on their way to school and using them as play areas. Many talked about swimming in the streams and catching fish and shrimp beneath the bridges. One of them who later discussed the bridges and his memories with another man on the WeChat group wrote that 'I grew up 100 metres from the bridge, and as a child swam naked under it' (*guang pigu zai qiao xia youyong*). Another man said to me that for him the bridges were actually less important than the streams and rivers. He remembered falling asleep to the comforting sound of running water. Many interviewees talked about the bridges as a natural meeting place or community space (*gonggong changsuo*) where young and

old in the village would gather. They also claimed that they had not really paid much attention to the bridges but had taken them for granted as children. In their memories they existed as quite mundane sites that were a natural part of their environment. These childhood memories and experiences are today overlaid by information about the bridges that show them in a new light and make people appreciate and experience them differently, as revealed in, for example, their photographic practices. Many now also explore bridges in Taishun that they never saw as children and this experience is both visual and embodied. Travelling and walking are important ways of experiencing and appropriating new heritage sites, and many have also discovered and walk on the old roads (*gudao*) that once were the only mode of travel in Taishun. Several of my interviewees expressed regret that the natural environment around many bridges has been destroyed. New buildings now, for example, surround Xuezhai Bridge whereas a park has been built at the sister bridges in Sixi.

People's strong emotional attachment to the bridges was revealed when a devastating flood swept away three bridges on 15 September 2016.[11] The three bridges, Xue Hamlet Bridge, Wenchong Bridge, and Wenxing Bridge, were all national-level protected sites. As the flooding occurred during the Mid-Autumn Festival many of the people in the WeChat group were at home, or had relatives and friends who were able to forward news and images of the destruction on social media. The Covered Bridges' Village WeChat group thus rapidly filled up with information and images, including dramatic films taken on smartphones, as people shared the information they had and expressed their concern and sadness. Several people later mentioned that they had cried when they heard the news, and the destruction also triggered a flood of reminiscences. Many people at the scene immediately sought to salvage the bridges' timber that had been swept away by the floods, and put them on a safe place so they could be used when rebuilding the bridges. There was no doubt within the local community that the bridges needed to be rebuilt and calls to rebuild the bridges were also spread in the media. Different actors, including the Taishun Covered Bridges Association, began to raise money although in the end the majority of the funding came from the government. This was not the first time that Taishun's bridges had been destroyed in storms and floods. Wenchong Bridge had, for example, been rebuilt four times throughout its history. This time, however, the work was not led by local villagers but by the local government and the heritage

11 Although I was in Sweden at the time of the disaster I was able to get instant information and follow developments on WeChat as they unfolded. In early November I travelled to Wenzhou and Taishun for follow-up interviews and to see the destruction for myself.

Figure 11.2 Children playing at the foot of the Beijian Bridge

Photograph by Marina Svensson

bureau as the bridges were of national concern and cultural symbols rather than fulfilling any practical use for transportation as in the past. For local residents and people who had left Taishun the bridges were more than a cultural symbol, however, and the loss of a familiar feature in the village was keenly felt. Many local residents expressed a sense of displacement and often came to look at the empty place in disbelief.

Depending on people's personal experiences and situations, their relationship with the bridges takes different forms at the same time as new dimensions have been added over the years due to the heritagization process. The covered bridges today serve as identity markers for people from Taishun and they have also become important in Taishun's place branding. In the heritagization process, and also due to socio-economic changes, some aspects of the bridges' history and centrality for the community have been lost. The bridges were in the past striking landmarks, important nodes for transportation, and central community spaces, but today they are not needed for transportation and are surrounded by new buildings. Fewer people linger on them and their religious significance has also dwindled and is not important for most young people. Instead, the bridges today fulfil a new function as heritage and tourist sites that are visited by new groups of people such as tourists, artists, and photographers.

Figure 11.3 Xue Hamlet Bridge (destroyed by a flood in September 2016)

Photograph by Marina Svensson

Selective heritage: Generational differences and a new socio-economic environment

A range of sites, buildings, and cultural practices have nowadays been elevated to cultural heritage status in Taishun, but not all of them carry the same meaning and importance to all people. We can detect both generational and individual differences and changes over time. Due to social and economic changes, a number of cultural practices are no longer integrated in local cultural and social life. The puppet theatre was in the past part of the annual ritual calendar with plays staged during the Chinese New Year and major ritual events. One man recounted how plays would be performed in honour of a Daoist deity in his home village. Before TV and the Internet these performances were also a rare opportunity for entertainment in the countryside that was much appreciated by both young and old, and where people would come to watch a story unfold over many evenings. Many of the people I interviewed had fond memories of watching the puppet theatre as children but said that neither themselves nor their children today had the interest and patience to watch a full play. Today the puppet theatre is

often performed in the form of short excerpts of plays for an audience who watch it more out of curiosity (*haoqi*) and as a spectacle and performance (*biaoyan*).

There used to be people in almost every village in Taishun who would get together during slack periods or for special events to organize performances. Although there still exist some grassroots troupes, the art would today not survive without government support.[12] The making of puppets and the performance itself has now been listed as intangible cultural heritage and some individuals selected as transmitters. The transmitters I talked to all acknowledged that prospects for survival were not bright because few young people were interested in learning the art.[13] The making of puppets and the performance of plays are nowadays often showcased in museums and other cultural exhibitions in Taishun and outside of the county. Transmitters are also required to take on disciplines, teach in schools, and perform in different spaces (on new expectations and changes in life circumstances for transmitters, see also Maags and Blumenfield in this volume). There is considerable local pride and promotion of the puppet theatre, and its history is well documented by the ICH department and in books written by both experts and enthusiasts. However, it has lost much of the significance it once had for the local community, and for people who left Taishun it is even more distant and seen as a cultural form that belongs to the past and is not part of their life anymore.

Although some traditions and rituals have disappeared, many still remain and survive in Taishun without having been listed as cultural heritage. Lineages and religious communities continue to play an important role and they are involved in many different ritual practices. Since the 1980s lineages have begun once again to revise their genealogies on a regular basis and have also recovered and renovated their ancestral halls where important rituals such as the Hungry Ghosts Festival take place. While several ancestral halls today have obtained status as cultural heritage, for example, the Bao ancestral hall is now a national-level protected building, the original initiative to protect and restore them came from the lineages themselves, who also continue to use them for ancestral ceremonies. In

12 It is said that 72 troupes still exist.

13 I have interviewed a municipal-level transmitter of a puppet theatre, a national-level puppet maker and his daughter, a provincial-level transmitter. I have seen some performances, including a performance at Fudan University, and also visited exhibitions in the Wenzhou Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum and a temporary exhibition in Hangzhou.

2007 and 2009 I visited several ancestral halls and interviewed villagers during the Hungry Ghosts Festival (also known as the Yulan Festival). The ceremony is found in many parts of China (including Hong Kong, where it has developed a unique form suited to the needs of the new society, as discussed by Chan in this volume). Although the general purpose and origin is similar – it takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the lunar calendar to ensure the safe departure of the dead and to prevent them from an existence as ghosts – the festival in Taishun exhibits some different features and organization. It has not been listed as intangible cultural heritage and it is organized by lineages and held in the ancestral halls. The lineage invites Daoists to perform but the rituals have both Buddhist and Daoist elements. The performance may continue for one or two days and throughout the night, and involves readings of scriptures and sacrifices to send off the dead. Memorial tablets over the dead (*paiwei*) are kept in the ancestral halls and during the ceremony family members bring tablets for people who died during the past year to the hall. The ceremony also includes a large communal banquet for the lineage members. Older people in the villages are in charge of the ceremony but some young people who have migrated and live in cities also come back for the event. However, none of my interviewees in Wenzhou and Shanghai said they would come back for this ceremony although their fathers and grandfathers may be present. Most of the interviewees, however, try to return to celebrate Qingming, which since 2008 also is a national holiday, and they would also return for the Chinese New Year. One of my interviewees mentioned that he made a special point of taking his son with him for Qingming so he would know where the graves were located (as the old graves were spread out in the countryside and not found in the public graveyard). On WeChat postings and images of temples, ancestral halls and rituals are quite strikingly absent, which seems to underscore that this type of heritage is not so important to the younger generation, or at least not something they choose to share online.[14] Nonetheless, although many young people are not so interested, knowledgeable, or active in lineage activities today (it is mostly the responsibility of the older generation), they generally seem to support them and might become more involved as they grow older.[15]

14 This contrasts with another WeChat group of which I am a member that consists of members of the Ye lineage who more celebrate their clan and often post images from rituals and ancestral halls.

15 On a recent visit one of my interviewees showed me an old genealogy that he had discovered at home, whereas another man proudly showed me his lineage's recently revised genealogy.

Negotiating and adapting to heritagization: Memories, affect, and 'co-present visuality'

This chapter has discussed what home and heritage signifies for a range of people from Taishun, including, in particular, those who have left their hometown, and how people in different capacities and different ways are involved in the complex heritagization process that we currently observe in China. The way an individual is affected by and uses heritage is shaped by previous experiences, embodied memories, and circulated and mediated representations, including official and expert narratives and prescribed emotions associated with nationalism. The chapter has drawn attention to and analysed how digital platforms, including, in particular, social media, open up for more performative, reflexive, and affective experiences of and with heritage. People are today often articulating their emotions, memories, and experiences of heritage in new online communities, and thus creating both new affective heritage communities and their own individual heritagescapes. One of the more striking aspects is the central role of images and how they are being used to express engagement with heritage and also connect with others, which creates a 'co-present visuality'. Heritage is a complex embodied experience that engages different senses, and it is increasingly experienced with a camera or smartphone in hand. It is obvious that most people appropriate and negotiate with rather than challenge the AHD, but perform heritage in a more personal way where certain sites and cultural practices for both individual and socio-economic reasons are more important than others. There are certainly individual differences, including different motivations, levels of engagement, ambitions, and economic interests, and abilities to have their voices heard within the Covered Bridges group as well as within the population in Taishun in general that needs to be further explored. The heritagization process is not neutral. It can strengthen people's identity and thus empower them at the same time as it might disempower or marginalize other individuals and their heritage.

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About the author

Marina Svensson, Professor of Modern China Studies, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, Sweden