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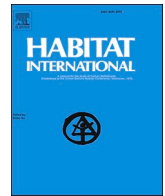
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Informing or consulting? Exploring community participation within urban heritage management in China

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ABSTRACT

To better face the challenges of rapid urbanisation, it is recommended urban heritage management is carried out through community participation. In the Chinese context of state centralisation, however, inclusive participatory governance for urban heritage has remained limited, and effective ways of engaging residents in decision-making have yet to be explored adequately. This paper aims to explore community participation within Chinese urban heritage management, taking the Old Town of Lijiang as a case study. During fieldwork, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with both native and migrant residents as well as administrators. Based on a community participation assessment framework, the interview guide was developed and then built on four aspects: community participation in decision-making; the competence of participants; the right to social justice and confidence of participants; and community empowerment and equity. This paper reveals the current state of participatory practices in the Old Town of Lijiang and, specifically, discusses the roles of residents, elites and community-based organisations in decision-making concerning urban heritage management, in the contexts of state-centralisation. Chinese urban heritage management needs to raise public awareness and willingness as well as give residents more responsibilities and power to face the challenges of rapid urbanisation, but currently, the degree of participation is still minimal, only between informing and consulting.

1. Introduction

Today, the concept of heritage includes not only isolated artefacts and historic buildings but also larger-scale ensembles, districts and landscapes (Veldpaus, 2015). There is a growing awareness that urban socio-economic development activities have profound impacts on both heritage and its communities (Buckley, Cooke, & Fayad, 2015). To better face the challenges of rapid urbanisation and modernisation, it is recommended that urban heritage management is carried out through inclusive and dynamic community participation processes (Lewis, 2015; Yung, Zhang, & Chan, 2017). The UNESCO 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (hereafter: the HUL approach), states the importance of engaging local communities in heritage discussions within broader urban settings, by developing more holistic approaches to capture and manage the change of urban development and heritage (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012; Verdini, Frassoldati, & Nolf, 2017). Urban heritage management is then requested to include different stakeholder groups in the decision-making processes, e.g. identification,

programming and execution steps (Veldpaus, 2015). The stakeholder groups can be defined as communities who can contribute to decision-making processes and affect decisions for the protection and (re)use of heritage (Mısırlısoy & Günçe, 2016). As noted by Poullos (2014), stakeholders engaged in heritage management can be categorised into either a core or a broader community, based on their association with heritage. The core community is the local residents, related to those who have created, still using and/or safeguarding heritage, through their traditional knowledge and practices. The broader community is defined as a group of facilitators, including public administrators, experts, business people and real estate developers (Poullos, 2014). Therefore, in theory, heritage management is expected to be a community-based process, in which the interests of the core community can be prioritised and the broader community can provide financial and administrative support (Court & Wijesuriya, 2015; Poullos, 2014).

Urban heritage has been already understood as a resource for cultural commodification, and some countries are placing the core focus of heritage management on enhancing socio-economic development (for

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example in Logan, 2018; Su, 2011, 2015; Wu, 2018). Although more opportunities for socio-economic development can come along with the process, challenges and threats have also been placed on urban heritage management and protection (Seyedashrafi, Ravankhah, Weidner, & Schmidt, 2017). In China, the whole country is experiencing unprecedented urban (re)development, and the rapidly urbanising process has caused various social tensions to both heritage and its communities, including over-commercialisation, enforced eviction and social inequality (Ng, Zhai, Zhao, & Li, 2016; Tan & Altrock, 2016; Wang & Aoki, 2019). Moreover, being based on state centralisation and market orientation, decision-making processes in China lack legal mechanisms to ensure public participation and benefits (Arkaraprasertkul, 2018; Fan, 2014). That can trigger conflicts between the state's and residents' interests, especially for the conflicts of ambitious economic targets (Logan, 2018; Wu, 2018). To mitigate social tensions in China, as Yung, Chan, & Xu (2014) and Fan (2014) have pointed out, sufficient and effective community participation can help balance different economic, social and cultural interests between citizens, entrepreneurs and local governments. Community participation can help enhance urban social sustainability (Yung et al., 2014), make integrated heritage conservation-planning (Verdini et al., 2017; Wang & Gu, 2020), and improve local livelihoods (Kou, Zhou, Chen, & Zhang, 2018).

In China, community participation within urban heritage management practices, generally, is government-led, in which the state has exclusive power and local residents lack competence and platforms so that the degree of participation is relatively low (Tan & Altrock, 2016; Verdini, 2015; Zhai & Ng, 2013). This paper aims to explore community participation within the context of urban heritage management in China. The Old Town of Lijiang was selected as a case study, because it is currently under the pressure of rapid urbanisation, and its heritage management and protection practices have already involved residents (Su, 2015). During the fieldwork in Lijiang, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with both native and migrant residents, as well as, local public administrators. This paper reveals the current state of participatory practices in the Old Town of Lijiang and, specifically, discusses the roles of local residents, elites and community-based organisations in the government-led decision-making process within Chinese urban heritage management.

2. Community participation and Chinese characteristics in urban heritage management

In China, community participation is considered to be a practical solution to mitigate social tensions between local governments, business people, experts and residents, as well as to balance heritage conservation and urban (re)development (Yung et al., 2014; Zhao, Ponzini & Zhang, 2020). And effective community participation can contribute to well-organised heritage-led urban development (Zhao et al., 2020). The success of Chinese heritage projects often relies on effectively consulting or even involving with residents, to better include their interests in the government-led management processes (Fan, 2014; Li, Krishnamurthy, Pereira Roders, & van Wesemael, 2020a). An inclusive participatory process can work for better cultural mapping integrated into the local management scheme (Verdini et al., 2017). And also, the final scheme is then acceptable in communities to be implemented smoothly (Fan, 2014). Furthermore, the Central Government has established local state organisations such as Street Offices (jiedao banshichu) and neighbourhood Residents' Committees (RCs, shequ juweihui) (Fan, 2014; Li et al., 2020a). These local state organisations are committed to managing neighbourhood administrative issues and facilitating grassroots activities related to heritage management practices (Verdini, 2015). However, the primary task of these local organisations is to execute governmental decisions rather than to be real representatives of residents (Fan, 2014; Verdini, 2015).

Within such a state-centralisation environment, heritage projects are easily undertaken through government-led processes (Fan, 2014; Li

et al., 2020a; Verdini, 2015). Aligned with economic developers, the governments often play a dominant role in programming and finalizing schemes, and residents' tokenistic role in participation may create social unrest (Zhai & Ng, 2013). For example, although community concerns through public consultations were collected and then reported by local newspapers concerning the Enning Road project in Guangzhou, residents' interests were still being neglected in the government-finalised plan. And then, civil protests happened, which involved journalists, a local civic group and experts as well as house proprietors (Tan & Altrock, 2016). In the Drum Tower Muslim district in Xi'an, residential dialogues were organised between the government and residents. However, eventually, residents' concerns, such as the issues of housing removal and residential relocation, were not solved in the final scheme. Several civil resistance activities then took place for their community-based demands, with the help and support from a local mosque-based management committee (Zhai & Ng, 2013). Also, residents were engaged in the negotiation process of the project of the old city centre of Nanjing but still, their interests were not included in the final scheme (Verdini, 2015). Within these cases, even though residential consultation activities were conducted with the public, the local governments would still like to implement a more market-oriented approach with residents' interests excluded, which can trigger civil protests fighting for social justice (Tan & Altrock, 2016; Zhai & Ng, 2013). These protest and resistance activities are from local civil society to challenge exclusive government-led decision-making processes deviating from public expectations (Morrison & Xian, 2016). And these cases have shown a tokenistic manner of community participation in Chinese urban heritage management, wherein residents get involved in the government-led process but collected public interests and needs are still not included in the final scheme (Li et al., 2020a).

Government-led processes in China are often positioned simplistically with a bias to be along with the characteristics of exclusive, controversial and unorthodox (Verdini et al., 2017). In fact, government-led processes can also produce excellent outcomes in Chinese urban heritage practices as long as residents' interests are effectively discussed and sufficiently included (Verdini, 2015). For example, in the Wenhuali project in Yangzhou, experts consulted with residents to contribute their ideas, which were authorised and supported by the government (Fan, 2014). Also, the government of the Shuangwan cun in Suzhou initiated a heritage project, in which both decision-makers and residents were consulted to define local developmental contexts and map heritage attributes. Residents' needs were included in the final strategic plan and they felt satisfied with it (Verdini et al., 2017). In addition, it is noted that local elites and community-based organisations can play a key role in mediating with local governments to include residents' interests within Chinese urban heritage management (Verdini, 2015; Zhai & Ng, 2013). For example, local elites included planning experts and university students in the project of Enning Road while academic scholars, local architects, and planners in the old city centre of Nanjing, to help residents address their ideas to the local governments (Tan & Altrock, 2016; Verdini, 2015), and also like the mosque-based management committee as a community-based organisation in the project of the Drum Tower Muslim district (Zhai & Ng, 2013). Furthermore, as (Morrison & Xian, 2016) have revealed, in Chinese cities, committees are usually formed to review and deliberate urban planning issues, and residents' representatives are part of the committee. Besides, local elites and community-based organisations are often appointed by the government to be residents' representatives because of their high reputation in vernacular cultural protection, public administration or business management (Shao, 2017; Su, 2011; Zhao et al., 2020).

These urban heritage practices have demonstrated that the current state of Chinese civil society is in an incipient stage (Verdini, 2015). In theory, civil society can play a fundamental role in counterbalancing the system of power with local governments by building horizontal alliances between citizens and heterogeneous community organisations (Chen &

Qu, 2020; Verdini, 2015). Because of the immaturity of Chinese civil society, local governments and political leaders have spaces for discretionary mandates through an exclusive decision-making process when implementing policies formulated by the national Central Government (Birney, 2014; Morrison & Xian, 2016; Verdini, 2015). Also, the strong willingness of different individuals and groups to be engaged is key to achieve inclusive participatory practices within such a government-centralised process, aiming to endeavour to get their “agreement on how to change the existing status-quo” included in the final scheme (Verdini, 2015, p. 371). To promote the function of civil society for effective community participation, local elites (leading professionals) and community-based organisations (civil society organisations), therefore, need to play a role in supporting resident interests and public needs when participating in the decision-making negotiation process with governments, developers and other social actors, within urban heritage management in China (Chen & Qu, 2020).

The main characteristic of community participation in the context of Chinese urban heritage management is co-existence of both top-down and bottom-up processes, wherein effective public participation is struggling but endeavouring to be created within a government-led environment (Li et al., 2020a). As long as residents’ interests are sufficiently discussed and then included in the decision-making processes, namely positioning residents on the role of consulting or involving rather than just informing, civil resistance could be effectively avoided and projects could achieve better outcomes (Fan, 2014).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection during fieldwork

The process of data collection was carried out during fieldwork between September to December 2019 in Lijiang, China. In the fieldwork, in-depth semi-structured interviews were organised with six local public administrators and twenty residents (ten natives and ten migrants). The six administrators were from four sectors affiliated to the Conservation and Management Bureau of the World Heritage Lijiang Old Town (hereafter: the Management Bureau, *shijie wenhua yichan lijiang gucheng guanli baohu ju*). The Management Bureau is a place-specific governmental agency, established for the direct protection and management work of the old town (Su, 2010). The sectors included the Department of Protection and Construction (*baohu jianshe ke*, one interviewee), the Department of Market Operation and Management (*shichang jingying zhunru guanli ke*, one interviewee), the Centre of Heritage Monitoring (*yichan jiance zhongxin*, two interviewees) and the Lijiang Old Town Management Co., Ltd (*gucheng guanli gongsi*, two interviewees). Their daily work covered not only the protection of traditional dwellings and historic public buildings but also different aspects of local community initiatives, heritage environment monitoring and socio-economic development. These six administrators were familiar with local community affairs and able to contribute ideas to the current state of public participatory practices from various views.

Concerning the selection of interviewed residents, two methods were applied. One was based on recommendations from the administrators, proposing some well-known residents who were active in local heritage activities and grass-roots community initiatives. These recommended people included the leaders of neighbourhood community committees, museum managers, business owners and several elders. The other method was that the fieldwork investigators went to community centres and private residential/business houses to meet residents at random, including the owners of guesthouses, shops, bars and restaurants as well as other residents living or working within the old town. Besides this, these selected residents, including both natives and migrants, needed to have lived in the old town for over a year, knowing local conditions well in both community activities and socio-economic development. The selected native residents, also called old Lijiangers (*lao lijiang ren*), were residents either born or raised in the old town, who were assumed to

have a strong association to vernacular cultural identity and sense of belonging. The selected migrant residents were referred to people who had moved to Lijiang, for making a living, also called by the natives as new Lijiangers (*xin lijiang ren*). Tourists were not included as this research was not focused on their experiences or expectations.

The method of the semi-structured interview included open-ended questions, primarily to give interviewees enough space to articulate ideas and answers, based on their own experiences. The interview guide, including twenty open-ended questions, was based on a community participation assessment framework for cultural heritage management, developed by (Li, Krishnamurthy, Pereira Roders, & van Wesemael, 2020b). This assessment framework includes systematic criteria and indicators to assess the depth and breadth of community participatory practices. It has been applied to assess Chinese World Heritage, and the Old Town of Lijiang was then identified as a suitable case to explore public participatory practices in the Chinese contexts of urban heritage management. Also, the concept of community participation has broadened to cover various aspects related to local communities’ engagement as well as their roles, competence and empowerment (Li et al., 2020b). Therefore, the interview guide, as shown in the appendix, included four main aspects: community participation in decision-making (nine questions); the competence of participants (three questions); the right to social justice and confidence of participants (three questions); and community empowerment and equity (five questions). These selected residents were interviewed question by question, individually, to ensure they can express their true feelings and ideas. Each interview took around 20 min. Through semi-structured interviews, we targeted the contextual nuance and consistency of the responses from different stakeholder groups and individuals, maximising response validity and exploration (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, 2018). Responses from different groups can enhance data validity, as this was also a confirmation process of the collected information. Besides this, various ideas and attitudes of respondents can gain exploration in the research fieldwork.

3.2. Post-coding of interview transcripts

Post-coding procedures were employed for the formal qualitative analysis on the contents of the interview transcripts. By applying these procedures, we attempted to extract subtle and extensive information from the interview transcripts, and then use the extracted information in the qualitative analysis. Relying on the open-ended questions, a post-coding system was defined, to benefit from the richness of responses from the different stakeholder groups and individuals and their responses. Within the post-coding system, three levels of codes were developed, which are manifest coding, latent coding and global coding items (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002).

Manifest coding items were applied to code direct responses. For example, in the question that identifying the roles of local community-based organisations, respondents were asked to rank their roles from 1) informing about government decisions, 2) supporting government work and 3) protecting residents’ benefits. Through the application of the manifest coding items, we can directly get the information of various stakeholders’ attitudes and also general local participatory practices. Further, the interview questions requested respondents not only to answer yes or no directly but also to address their reasons. Latent coding items were then used to elicit the characteristics of the responses to expressing respondents’ ideas and perceptions, elaborating the manifest coding items. For example, in the question “do residents have platforms to contribute their ideas or challenge government decision?”, respondents needed to answer yes/no (manifest coding items), as well as what the platforms are and if they work well based on their experiences (latent coding items). Last, global coding was used to support the judgement process in which we, as coders, discussed the traits and styles from respondents’ answers. This judgement processes led an analysis of local community participatory practices, as well as, to compare the

perceptions and attitudes of administrators, native and migrant residents towards heritage practices. By comparing their perceptions and attitudes, this analysis identified and discussed gaps and consistency between the local government and residents.

In the result section, we purely presented local responses and ideas collected from the fieldwork in Lijiang' old town, and the results, in principle, are solely reflective of how these interviewees considered local community participatory practices. Further on in the discussion section, related existing literature was also discussed together with the fieldwork outcomes, would like to ascertain an overview of Chinese community participation and contribute to urban literature more markedly. Especially, the model of International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (Li et al., 2020a) and the concept of Ballarat Imagine project from Australia (Buckley et al., 2015) were brought into the discussion section, helping further demonstrate the current state of participatory practices in the context of Chinese urban heritage management and recommend future actions.

4. Background of community participation in the Old Town of Lijiang

The Old Town of Lijiang was built 800 years ago and is located in northwest Yunnan province in the southwest of China (see Fig. 1). It was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997, under the selection criteria (ii), (iv) and (v). Its *Outstanding Universal Value* was defined as a “harmonious living environment between human and nature as well as human wisdom to use the land. The Old Town of Lijiang comprises Dayan Old Town (including the Black Dragon Pond), Baisha and Shuhe housing clusters (UNESCO 1997). While a World Heritage property, the Old Town of Lijiang is also a place where residents continue practising daily socio-economic activities. This is significant as residents' traditional activities and daily needs are of importance when developing heritage management schemes (Shao, 2017; Su, 2015).

As one of the most popular tourist destinations in China, the City of Lijiang is mainly populated by a group of ethnic minority people Naxi, which was 20% of the local population in 2010, and some other minorities such as Tibetan, Yi, Lisu and Pumi (The Government of Lijiang,

2010; Zhu, 2018). Since the World Heritage inscription in 1997, along with the local booming tourism market, “tens of thousands of domestic migrants” have moved to Lijiang to run businesses, such as restaurants and guesthouses, for new business opportunities and also a better quality of life (Su, Zhang & Cai, 2020). Han Chinese was then 40% of the local population in 2010 (The Government of Lijiang, 2010; Zhu, 2018), and these migrants are mainly from some China's megacities including Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen (Su et al., 2020). As Shao (2017) stated, in 2011, only around 32.6% of the local population was native residents but 67.4% was migrant business people, who were living within the Dayan Old Town. And currently, migrant residents make up a larger proportion of the population than natives within the old town, so local population replacement has then become a public concerned issue (Shao, 2017). In 2018, 1.2 million international and 45.2 million domestic tourists travelled to Lijiang and the overall revenue of local tourism industry reached 99.8 billion Chinese yuan (around 14.4 billion US dollars) (Lijiang Bureau of Statistics, 2019), while there were only 45,930 international and 1.1 million domestic tourists in 1996 (Zhu, 2018). The local tourism industry and migrant (business) people's needs are pivotal to be part of the working agendas of the old town management and development (Shao, 2017). Therefore, the involvement of local governmental agencies, as well as both native and migrant residents in the decision-making and benefit-sharing processes of heritage protection, has been embraced in Lijiang's urban heritage conservation plans (Shao, 2017).

In 2003, the local government of Lijiang commissioned an urban planning research team from Tongji University in Shanghai to complete a conservation plan for the old town. This conservation plan highlighted the importance of community participation as “positive protection through community participation and the active involvement from tourists and migrant business people” (Su, 2010, p. 166). However, community participation was not carried out with residents when making the 2003 conservation plan (Su, 2010). Subsequently, an updated plan, Conservation Plan of World Heritage Site: Lijiang Old Town was completed in 2013. This updated plan states the management mechanism comprises multi-level governance. It includes the World Heritage committee, national and provincial institutions, the

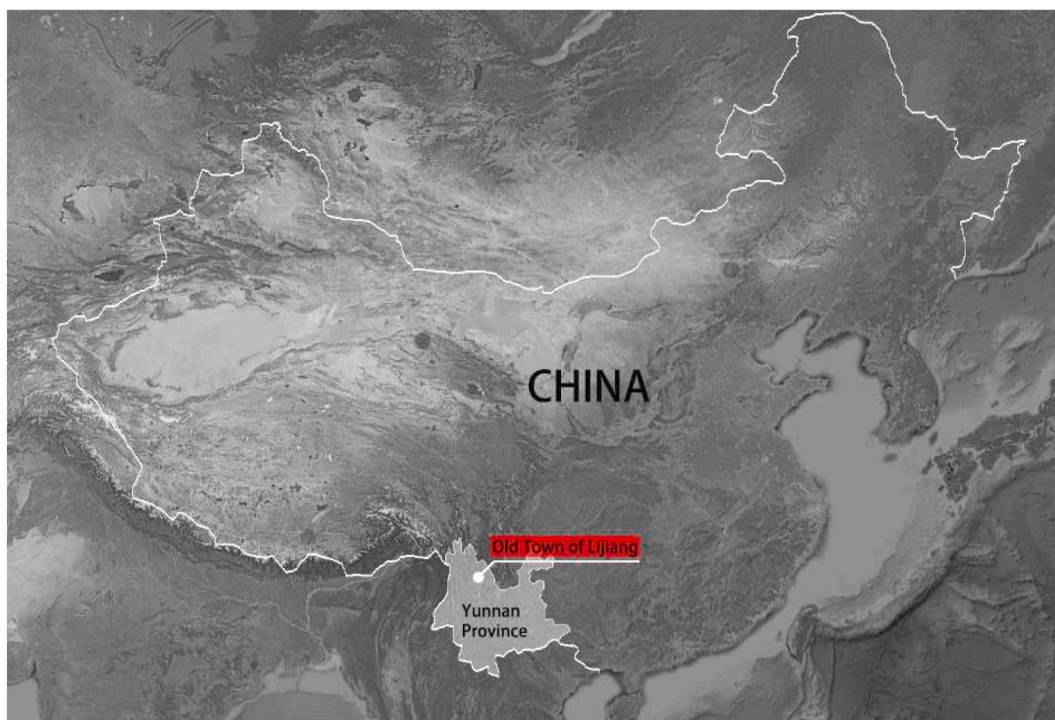


Fig. 1. Location of the old town of lijiang in China (adapted from Fig. 1 in Su (2010)).

Management Bureau as well as residents' participation and supervision.

Heritage management practices in Lijiang, at the local level, mainly rely on the Management Bureau, also with support from neighbourhood residents' committees and several other community-based organisations like the association of guesthouses (Su, 2010). They take efforts on both neighbourhood administration and heritage management within their daily work (Shao, 2017). Given Lijiang is a living World Heritage property, the Management Bureau, therefore, has set the goal of community improvement and development into the working agendas of local heritage management, as a project director of local heritage dwellings lucidly enunciated,

“Over 90% of Lijiang's heritage-designated dwellings are privately-owned. Local heritage and its protection, therefore, need to contribute to residents' daily requirements. Involving residents in decision-making can enhance their sense of ownership and help them comply with institutional regulations. We have a series of governmental meetings called *tingzhenghui* at the Management Bureau and community meetings called *kentanhui* in the Residents' Committees, in which residents can express their ideas and suggestions towards local heritage practices.”

Therefore, in Lijiang, various activities related to the facilitation of community participation have been conducted but the demonstration of their effectiveness is still limited. In the following sections, the data collected from fieldwork show the current state of Lijiang's community participation and residents' attitudes and ideas towards their participation in local heritage management practices.

5. Local responses to participatory practices in the Old Town of Lijiang

5.1. Community participation in decision-making

Community and governmental meetings are regarded as platforms that facilitate residents' participation in the decision-making of Lijiang's heritage management. In the process, at the neighbourhood level, residents are mobilised in community meetings – *kentanhui* to discuss their interests and suggestions towards local heritage practices and social issues. Then, when new institutional regulations need to be approved, such as the collection of the old town maintenance fee and the approval

of the list of permitted business, a governmental meeting – *tingzhenghui* with residents is organised in the Management Bureau (as Fig. 2 shows). This meeting is organised with a wide range of stakeholders, as an administrator from the Management Bureau said, “we invite decision-makers, RCs, experts as well as the representatives of both native and migrant residents to attend our *tingzhenghui*”. Besides, a board member of a neighbourhood RC confirmed this and stated, “residents from our neighbourhood can join our *kentanhui* directly, and then we pass on their ideas to the Management Bureau. Besides this, their representatives also can bring residents' needs to *tingzhenghui*.”

The representatives of both native and migrant residents are appointed by the state from local elites, who either have a high reputation in vernacular culture protection or run a big business. “When conducting management practices, we cannot listen to or fully follow the ideas of a person who either just moved to Lijiang or knows less about vernacular Naxi culture”, an administrator explained. Furthermore, a native resident who is working for neighbourhood administration pointed out, “once appointed as a representative, the person can play a role in approving local social affairs for at least three years”. It is hard for ordinary people to participate in governmental meetings directly while the same groups of people will attend the meetings for quite a while (at least three years).

During interviews, all native residents addressed the necessity and willingness to be engaged in heritage management together with local administrators. Because they are the bearers of vernacular culture and their participation can contribute ideas to the protection of heritage values and attributes. They expect that the government can initiate and lead the management processes of local heritage projects, with their interests and needs included as well. However, over half of the interviewed native residents do not feel positive about current community participatory practices, due to their insufficient engagement. They said,

“It is hard to achieve community participation. Although representatives are invited to attend governmental meetings, that is only a small amount of people. These representatives do not collect ideas from the public and their interests are in line with the government” (Native 1).

“We need to have a say as heritage is part of our daily life, and the main part of the old town is our houses. We know better local



Fig. 2. A *tingzhenghui* to approve the list of local permitted business. The image accessed on February 23, 2020 from https://www.sohu.com/a/228300289_704998.

situations than the administrators who only work in front of a computer every day” (Native 2).

“When we are invited to community meetings, decisions have been made from higher-level governments,” a native resident expressed his disappointment. Furthermore, in governmental meetings, several minor revisions of policies and regulations can only be made when experts support residents’ suggestions, but a major revision is rare to occur. In *tingzhenghui*, approving the government’s decisions is the priority for residents’ representatives, especially when new policies are about to be implemented. They can only propose some very tiny changes”, as an RC member addressed. This is also reflected in public projects such as plaza and museum construction. A project director from the Old Town Management Co., Ltd. described the process as, “we normally develop schemes of public projects with experts and decision-makers but do not consult with the public. Even so, what we do can improve local living environments and increase residents’ income so they will definitely support our projects”. The Old Town Management Co., Ltd is a fully-affiliated corporation of the Management Bureau. Its two main functions, as (Su, 2010) has noted, include “managing the economic issues of urban conservation and exclusively running the ancient town as a tourist product (pp. 169)”, which are tourism-oriented rather than engage or favour town residents.

In contrast, over half of the interviewed migrants did not know they had representatives engaged in governmental meetings so they concluded that community engagement was not implemented yet. Furthermore, three (out of ten) interviewed migrants showed the unwillingness to foster community participatory practices. From their perspectives, the implementation of community participation was not easy in operation and they only concerned their own business. They addressed,

“Most of the residents currently living within the old town are migrants and they may only stay temporarily. Migrants are from different cultural backgrounds and the ideas they may propose are only self-serving to the promotion of their business” (Migrant 1).

“Governmental meetings are mainly organised for informing new policies, not for collecting our ideas. Especially for us as migrants, this form of participation is symbolic. Therefore, we “trust” our government and I do not want to be involved” (Migrant 2).

Therefore, in Lijiang, the local government has created platforms to engage residents in the decision-making of the old town management. Representatives of both natives and migrants can attend governmental meetings together with decision-makers and experts. However, residents are not satisfied with their current participation in the decision-making processes. From their views, the representatives are in line with the government’s expectations and focus on enlarging their own business, instead of collecting the public’s real interests.

5.2. The competence of participants

Awareness-raising and capacity-building are essential to facilitate community participatory practices within urban heritage management (Li et al., 2020a; Wijesuriya, Thompson, & Court, 2017). Regarding local awareness-raising efforts, several series of events have been initiated in the Old Town of Lijiang. A board member of a neighbourhood RC introduced,

“We have cultural activities called *hemeidayan* for celebrating traditional festivals, such as the Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival and Lantern Festival. Besides, some state-owned houses are being used for exhibiting vernacular cultures, including traditional papermaking, silversmithing and Dongba characters of Naxi people. Furthermore, lectures are organised monthly at *Xueshan College* to educate residents on the importance of heritage protection, Naxi traditional conventions and tourism management.”

Native residents considered these cultural activities can naturally be part of their daily life while the attitudes of migrants were shown more passively. All the interviewed natives were familiar with these awareness-raising activities and showed their willingness to be involved, saying, “we are invited to volunteer to prepare traditional cuisine and cultural rituals together with tourists (see Fig. 3)”, and “I like participating in these activities to celebrate festivals, as this makes me feel proud of being a member of Naxi people”. However, four migrants (out of ten) addressed they did not know these activities. Two migrants showed the unwillingness to participate, “I am very busy with my business so I do not have time to participate”, and “we are requested to be present in these activities and that is a waste of my time”.

The Management Bureau has organised various activities related to local heritage protection and entrepreneurial skills. On the World and Chinese Heritage Day, several departments of the Management Bureau organise annual consultation meetings with residents about the norms of housing renovation, knowledge of fire-prevention security and business management (see Fig. 4). The director of local heritage centre interpreted, “during the consultation meetings, handbooks demonstrating the characteristics of Lijiang traditional dwellings are also handed out to residents”. Besides, public lectures have been organised to improve entrepreneurial skills among residents. “We launch these activities to educate residents about their business management, focusing on applying for business permits, avoiding the homogenization of local business and obtaining a bank loan”, as the director of the business department said. Residents are encouraged to start a new business, related to vernacular culture and distinguish their own business from others’.

Native residents have not engaged actively nor studied the handbook of housing renovation, although they know there are educational opportunities of local heritage protection. As a native resident said, “we have received the handbook teaching us about our dwellings’ renovation, but I have never opened it yet”. Besides, another native pointed out, “most of our houses have been rented and switched to guesthouses, restaurants or bars, and business people should study the right ways of housing renovation, instead of us”. However, migrant residents are not willing to participate in these capacity-building activities. Over half of the interviewed migrants did not know or had yet participated in such activities. Their attitudes were “I do not have time” or “we can manage our own business well”. Actually, what business people truly concerned was simplifying the process of applying and issuing a business permit. Several guesthouse owners addressed,

“The Management Bureau educates us about the knowledge of traditional housing renovation. Actually, they are not aiming at building our capacity to involve us in the old town protection but letting us obey the regulations of housing renovation.” (Migrant 1).

“I can run my own business well without joining these activities. But, as we business people need to have a good relationship with the Management Bureau, we have to attend some of these activities to support the government’s work.” (Migrant 2).

Therefore, cultural activities, lectures and consultation meetings have been conducted in Lijiang, aiming to raise residents’ awareness to value local heritage and build their capacity to protect the old town better, but not to promote skills of public participation. However, native residents would like to participate in cultural activities for entertainment in festivals rather than educational lectures. And migrant residents are not interested in these collective activities but only concern their own business.

5.3. The right to social justice and confidence of participants

In order to enhance social justice in urban heritage management, residents need legal mechanisms to ensure their interests are well-considered and/or they can challenge the government’s decisions,



Fig. 3. Naxi people making traditional moon cakes with tourists in the Mid-Autumn Festival The image accessed on February 23, 2020 from <http://www.ljgc517.com/gcdtv2/2277.htm>.



Fig. 4. The consultation meeting on the 2019 World Heritage Day in Lijiang The image accessed on February 23, 2020 from <http://www.wenlvlijiang.com/ljwh/p/6947.html>.

which differ from their expectations (Lausche, 2011; Simakole, Farrelly, & Holland, 2018). The legal mechanisms could be supported by local community-based organisations, websites, (e-)mails and mobile phone apps (Li et al., 2020b). In Lijiang, neighbourhood RCs and the association of guesthouses are the two most important local community-based organisations, as both are eligible to attend governmental meetings. RCs

are state organisations established for public administration at the neighbourhood level while the association of guesthouses is purely resident-based and consists of guesthouse owners. Their roles are of significance to enhance social justice and build residents' confidence in local heritage practices, bridging and levelling residents' and the government' expectations.

However, the roles of these local community-based organisations did not appear to be fully working for the benefit of the residents' interests to enhance their confidence. When the interests between residents and the government differ, the priority of these organisations is to guide residents towards implementing the government's decisions. During interviews, a native resident addressed,

"The priority of residents' committees is supporting the government's work and implementing their decisions. They organise meetings with us, saying as public communication platforms. But the meetings are mainly used for educating us about fire security, housing renovation and economic activity norms, rather than collecting our ideas."

Furthermore, regarding the role of the association of guesthouses, the owner of a guesthouse expressed, "Although we have the association of guesthouses, they organise meetings with us more to inform the government's latest decisions than to collect current living problems or protect our benefits."

The meetings organised by the two community-based organisations are essentially designed to implement government decisions and community education. Residents' right cannot be protected through the participation of the community-based organisations so other platforms are needed. As an administrator from the Management Bureau interpreted, "they can also use mobile phone apps such as WeChat and Weibo to communicate with us directly. And through these apps, residents can access to the latest information of local heritage practices". But these platforms do not always work well, as a resident pointed out, "when our problems are not in the consideration of the Management Bureau, we have to deliver letters to the mayor or complain through a 24-h special hotline to the Management Bureau, to get our voice heard". Therefore, community-based organisations in Lijiang are not playing a strong role in protecting residents' right and enhancing their confidence. Sometimes, residents have to find a way themselves, to include their needs and have a say. It is still hard to get residents' right and equality ensured in the management process which is predominantly led the local government.

5.4. Community empowerment and equity

Community empowerment in the contexts of urban heritage management includes 1) economic empowerment to increase residents' income; 2) psychological empowerment to enhance community values and confidence; 3) social empowerment to ensure social benefits and stability; and 4) political empowerment to protect all affected communities' equal rights (Li et al., 2020b; Regina, 2002; Simakole et al., 2018). Currently, in Lijiang, residents can get paid from the Management Bureau when they contribute towards town protection work and public cultural activities. For example, local residents can be hired with priority in a town-run company to clean the environment and provide convenience to residents' living. Besides, "elderly people are invited to perform traditional dance activities for which they then get paid. We appropriate the maintenance fee collected from tourists as the financial source for public activities", as an administrator from the Management Bureau said.

Engaging communities is common practice in Lijiang, their roles and values have been recognised among administrators, involving not only native residents but also migrant residents. Residents' daily living requirements are ensured by the Management Bureau, to remain native populations and enhance their empowerment within local heritage management. An administrator addressed that, "we have embraced the protection of local lifestyle characteristics, especially intangible heritage and traditional conventions, into the government's working agendas". To keep native residents living within the town, infrastructures are continuously maintained and improved by the Management Bureau, including the conditions of pavement, drainage, transportation systems,

water and electricity supply. Furthermore, "neighbourhood community facilities such as schools, markets, clinics, parks and banks are provided. And the government has taken efforts to strengthen public security, stabilise prices and improve infrastructures", as a guesthouse owner expressed.

The local government gives subsidies to the residents whose houses are authorised as dwelling museums. But the number of authorised museums is very limited even though people think their own houses are carrying greater cultural and historical values. Therefore, to cope with the financial constraints, residents need to sublet their homes and then business people complete housing renovation. Gradually, native residents have left the town while migrants moved in for economic activities. Although efforts have been taken on recognising the significance of residents playing a role in local heritage management, residents are still not sufficiently empowered nor aware of its added value in carrying intangible heritage and traditional lifestyle characteristics. Most respondents, especially the migrant residents, have never been involved or even know who their representatives are. A board member of a neighbourhood RC confirmed that,

"The representatives of native and migrant residents are only elites who are famous in a local business or vernacular cultural protection, such as retired administrators, elderly residents and the chairman of the guesthouse association. Many of our neighbourhood residents think their participation in decision-making is symbolic and feel unsatisfied and angry."

Delightedly, residents have shown their positive attitudes towards the government's actions practised to enhance community cultural identity and confidence as well as to solve local concerned living issues. "The Management Bureau invites us to organise cultural activities and it is also a learning process of intangible heritage and traditional rituals that tourists expect", a shop keeper said. But, he also addressed the worries that "with native residents moving away, it is a challenge for the Management Bureau to manage the old town as traditional living neighbourhoods". The Management Bureau has to face the pressure of economic development from the local government and also the pressure of heritage protection from both the national central government and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (Su, 2010). Therefore, in Lijiang, residents are not truly empowered within heritage management processes by acquiring more power to enhance equity from local government institutions. It is the Management Bureau which actually controls over the social, psychological, political and economic factors and decisions that shape local residents lives.

6. Discussion

Although community and governmental meetings for residents' consultation are frequently organised in the Old Town of Lijiang, they often become a platform to let residents know and approve the government's decisions. The government is playing a leading and predominant role within local heritage protection and management, and this has been also observed in many other Chinese heritage practices (for example in Zhai & Ng, 2013; Tan & Altrock, 2016). Within such an environment of government centralisation in Lijiang, residents sometimes lack strong confidence and willingness to participate in local participatory practices. Especially in profit-driven migrant business people, they lack the interest to be engaged even though the Management Bureau has invited their representatives to the governmental meetings. This is a manifestation of scarce civil society, wherein residents are so weak that they are not interested in participating in government-initiated participatory platforms to express their real thoughts and true feelings. In the IAP2 model, the degrees of community participation are categorised, in sequence from lower to higher degrees, as inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower (De Leuven & Arthure, 2016; Li et al., 2020a). The degree of consulting is defined as

“to obtain community feedback at the start of the management project to help with analysis, approaches and/or decisions” (Li et al., 2020a, p. 4). This requires that residents are consulted at the very beginning and then their needs and interests are included throughout the whole management process.

Within the local heritage management of Lijiang, residents' voice is neither fully included nor totally excluded, demonstrating the degree of participation ranges from informing to consulting. If management schemes totally align with the government's expectations but ignore residents' interests, the degree is informing and then negative social resistance may happen, such as civil protests and petition letters from residents to higher-level government institutions (Zhai & Ng, 2013; Zhang & Li, 2016). In such a government-led process, local elites and community-based organisations are core to counterbalance the power between the government and residents, moving the degree of participation from informing towards consulting thus enhancing local civil society. Local heritage management could include more consultation practices to reach consensus, rather than through an informing process to build interaction with residents only on the level of permission-approval and community education. Furthermore, although it would be still hard to achieve community collaboration and empowerment within such a Chinese state-centralised environment, residents' participation reaching the degree of involvement can better benefit the whole management process from local contextual identification to plan-making to plan-execution (Li et al., 2020a).

To enhance community participation in the globe, the HUL approach proposes a dynamic and inclusive process for urban heritage management, moving beyond heritage *per se* to cover the whole urban environment (Li et al., 2020a; Rey-Perez & Siguencia Ávila, 2017). The HUL approach could be applicable to the Old Town of Lijiang and China as a whole because it recommends integrating heritage resources in broader urban settings to mitigate local conflicts between heritage protection, booming tourism development and daily community activities. Especially, the first step of the HUL approach is identifying local contexts, including the identification of cultural, natural and human resources through community participation (Veldpaus, 2015). The identification step should be a consulting process to collect local interests and needs from a wide range of residents, not only local political leaders and elites (Morrison & Xian, 2016; Verdini et al., 2017). And then the identified and agreed items should be included in the final scheme through residents' involvement ensuring their interests are well understood and incorporated (Li et al., 2020a). This needs to seek a better balance point of the power between residents and local political leaders (decision-makers) who are leading local governments and heritage practices (Morrison & Xian, 2016).

Given various community participatory tools have been well developed and implemented within some other international contexts, these tools need to be further adapted to fit into China's situation rather than directly adopted (Li et al., 2020a). For example, an Australian project called Ballarat Imagine conducted a large community conversation before developing a new long-term strategy (Buckley et al., 2015). This project employed a value-based process to explore “the better understanding of what different communities value most in Ballarat, what they imagine for their future and what they do not want to lose”. It seeks to explore and monitor both local community value and the *Outstanding Universal Value* in urban heritage properties (Buckley et al., 2015, p. 103). Local communities' willingness, awareness and capacity towards participating in heritage protection and management are essential to facilitate this project successfully (Fayad & Kendal, 2020). However, given the local conditions of public participation varying in both institutional systems and civil societies (Verdini, 2015), it is assumed the Ballarat Imagine could be an applicable tool but need to be further adapted and tested its viability in China. Through the effective involvement of residents, universal heritage values can be integrated into local livelihood improvement and community development, avoiding “awkward engagements” defined by governmental agencies

and experts (MacRae, 2017, p. 846). Therefore, community participation in China is still in a nascent stage showing its contextual characteristics, which needs to be advanced by learning from global approaches and localising them to be relevant to China's contexts, to be more inclusive and reach a higher degree.

7. Conclusion

Community participatory practices encounter many obstacles in Chinese urban heritage management, including centralised governance, market-orientation and lack of professional expertise among residents (Li et al., 2020a; Zhai & Ng, 2013). Within such an environment, it remains difficult to let residents fully take the responsibility of local heritage protection and management by following a purely bottom-up process (Verdini, 2015). Even though, the importance of community participation is also widely recognised when carrying out heritage projects and facing rapid urbanisation (Fan, 2014; Verdini et al., 2017). This research investigated the current situation of community participatory practices in the management process of the Old Town of Lijiang through interviews with local administrators, native and migrant residents. By doing so, community participation can be revealed within the context of urban heritage management in China, indicating future actions and contributing to global theories.

In Lijiang, the importance of community participation has been recognised by local government institutions. Various stakeholder groups have been already engaged in the decision-making of local heritage management, such as discussing and approving new policies and institutional regulations. The representatives of both native and migrant residents are invited to governmental meetings, together with other stakeholders such as experts and local administrators. However, the representatives of residents are only local elites, appointed by the government. They need to be the intermediating between residents' and the government's interests and expectations. But they are mainly playing a role in line with the government's expectations, based on residents' perceptions. Local community participation is relying on a planning and permission-approval process, rather than on active grassroots activities. The Management Bureau has organised collective activities for residents' competence-building, including lectures and consulting meetings. But there is little progress in further enhancing residents' skills of participating in the decision-making of the old town.

In Chinese urban heritage management, local elites and community-based organisations play a critical role in the negotiation process between governments and residents (Tan & Altrock, 2016; Verdini, 2015). Local community-based organisations, in Lijiang, including neighbourhood RCs and the association of guesthouses cannot only be considered the representatives of residents but also organisations under governments' strict control. Implementation of policies and institutional regulations is the prioritised work in their daily administration. Once the government's decisions deviate from local expectations, residents have to employ other platforms to get their opposite ideas heard, such as through the complaining hotline and the mayor's mailbox. These two platforms are working well. Furthermore, public heritage projects are exclusively conducted by the Lijiang Old Town Management Company, “on behalf of” the residents'. Therefore, community participation in the decision-making process of the Old Town of Lijiang is taking place today, to a minimal degree, between informing and consulting.

To avoid social conflicts, in addition to the endeavours from local elites and community-based organisations, governmental institutions also need to play a vital role in communicating, educating, consulting and even collaborating with residents rather than just informing about finalised decisions. For example, within Lijiang's local governance system, as sectors of the Management Bureau, the Centre of Heritage Monitoring needs to continue organising collective activities regularly to raise public awareness and build their capacities in protecting vernacular culture, and the Old Town Management Co., Ltd should collect residents' interests before making schemes for public heritage

projects. Also, the Department of Protection and Construction and the Department of Market Operation and Management need to respect and negotiate with residents about how to maintain, renovate, finance and (re)use their traditional dwellings. Furthermore, as China is lacking a maturity of civil society, the willingness, confidence and capacities of both native and migrant residents can also be an important variable to generate effective horizontal alliance between local individuals and heterogeneous organisations (Verdini, 2015). Inclusive participatory governance for urban heritage, in China, is still nascent and needs to find a medium between top-down and bottom-up processes, to better include residents' interests into the government-led management process.

The participatory platforms and procedures that Lijiang has established can contribute to the holistic and dynamic process of HUL, as a management approach to global urban heritage. Especially in urban heritage like the Old Town of Lijiang which is continuously human-inhabited, improving community life and living conditions is the core issue when protecting heritage values and maintaining the population of the core community (Poulios, 2014; Shao, 2017). The implementation of the HUL approach relies on well-established public participatory procedures, to manage the balance between heritage protection, socio-economic development, nature conservation and community improvement. In future studies, it would be interesting to further community participation theories within the HUL framework and its process steps, in China and also the whole globe.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ji Li: led the whole research process including case selection, fieldwork, data analysis, and paper drafting. **Sukanya Krishnamurthy:** contributed to the methodology development and the analytical process and then revised the initial manuscript. **Ana Pereira Roders:** contributed to the data collection during fieldwork and manuscript proof-reading. **Pieter van Wesemael:** supervised this research and discussions during fieldwork and data analysis.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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