Compared Research on Authentic Culture Between the Dragon Mother Temple and the North Lord Temple

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**Abstract.** In this article, two Guangdong temples are taken as case studies to explore concepts related with authenticity in cultural heritage. This article tries to re-examine fundamental values and assessment criteria for cultural heritage conservation. Based on the views of living culture, the author puts forward the concept of "emic culture authenticity "as a hinge to explore authentic culture ecology of heritage and its model, to facilitate the cultural heritage conservation and reuse with sustainability. The Conclusion of this research is that the living culture is more important than passive preservation of physical heritage.

**Introduction**

Architectural/cultural heritage conservation has always been an important subject of architectural academia, and related issues have been gained wide range attention in recent years. While in academia, it has still some basic problems unsolved, one of them is how to deal with architectural/cultural heritage authenticity in the process of preservation. In 1964, the Venice Charter, (The International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites), laid the foundation of meaning about authenticity in the fields of international heritage protection in modern time. In 1994, the Nara Document on Authenticity was certain that the “authenticity” is a basic concept for the definition, assessment, and monitoring of cultural heritage. It was also realized that the evaluation of an object or site’s authenticity cannot be put into fixed standards, and that the concept and application of authenticity should be rooted in each heritage’s cultural context.

In today conservation can no longer be based on the object’s intrinsic quality; it must be founded on our ability to recognize its social, aesthetic, historic, religious values etc., upon which our own cultural identity can be built [1]. In current we should take a holistic approach and pay more attention to living culture than only for physical/material preservation.

**Literature review on authenticity**

Authenticity is not only as a conventional topic for cultural heritage conservation, but a wide use concept. Since MacCannell (1973, 1976) introduced the concept of authenticity to sociological studies of tourist motivations and experiences, the subject has become a topic for tourism study. Wang distinguish three different approaches—objectivism, constructivism, and postmodernism, and the limits of the conventional concept of authenticity (object-related authenticity) are reviewed and analyzed. It is suggested that existential authenticity is an alternative source in tourism, regardless of whether the toured objects are authentic [2]. Existential authenticity, in terms of Existentialism or common sense, denotes a special state of Being in which one is true to oneself. According to Heidegger (1962), to ask about the meaning of Being is to look for the meaning of authenticity. By constructive authenticity it is meant the result of social construction, not an objectively measurable quality; Things appear authentic not because they are inherently authentic but because they are constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives, or powers [2]. This notion is thus relative, negotiable [3], contextually determined [4] and even ideological [5].
Some researchers try to bridge the conceptual gaps between varied notions. As Jillian M. Rickly-Boyd (2012) argued that the dichotomy is problematic because it obscures the way that toured sites/objects and social discourses often exist in dialogue with experiences of existential authenticity. Integrative analysis of authenticity that moves beyond the solely subjective highlights the intersection of three central factors—place, belief, and action. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism and the authenticity of toured objects are constitutive of one another. The concept of place is one that refers to the dynamic amongst experiences, meanings, and physical environments [6].

**The Diamond Model of authentic cultural ecology**

Based on the existing theory related to “authenticity”, in this research it develops a model to integrate those concepts. The concepts “emic” and “etic” first put forward by linguist Kenneth Pike, late used by Marvin Harris’ in culture theory [7], are referenced by this research. Here it first divides heritage-related people as two groups: 1) people with “emic” position, and 2) people with “etic” position. The “emic” position, in this paper, is defined by the status that people take part in certain culture activity such as ritual, ceremony, etc., and the time that people engage in the culture activity beyond as bystander and spectator or as common participating with recreation and entertainment which are not so much involving deep sentiment or with religiosity in religious fair and service, etc. Except the “emic” position, all other participation can be defined as “etic” position including sectors such as government, scholar, tourist, developer and so on.

Here gives the Diamond Model of authentic cultural ecology (refer with: Fig.1).

![Figure 1. Diamond Model of authentic cultural ecology.](image)

**Etic Authenticity** means an experience of outside community not as local with emic position to participate the activity related to the heritage, mainly thorough social-constructed manner to achieve evaluation, authentication and appreciation toward heritage. Emic authenticity contrast with that of etic one is originated from heritage as a culture place correlated with “natural context” and “real life” of local. The Diamond Model of authentic cultural ecology can be used for their definition interoperability among concepts related with “authenticity”, to unlock a conceptual mess and obfuscation among the antecedents, indicators and consequences.

Fig.1. indicate that the emic authenticity is interactive with all other authenticity in a reciprocal manner, and at the core of culture ecological niche of heritage. The Diamond Model of authentic cultural ecology forms a cycle among the different species of authenticity by which the energy of authentic culture recycling.

Emic culture authenticity is complex issues, and its accurate quantification is difficult. In this research it put forward the Degree of Emic position (DEm) as most important parameter to indicate the basic aspect of emic culture authenticity. DEm is composed by two figures: one (DEm-p) is the percentage of people’s number with emic position in certain culture activity related to the heritage; another (DEm-t) is the percentage of the time of full engagement by people with emic position and
deep sentiment in that of culture activity. In this paper, the Emic Culture Authenticity Index (EmCAI) is defined as equal to DEm-p multiply by DEm-t and modified by coefficient:\(\alpha\):

\[
\text{EmCAI} = \text{DEm-p} \times \text{DEm-t} \times \alpha
\]  

(1)

Here modified by coefficient \(\alpha\) means other complementary parameters related with emic culture authenticity such as heritage rooted in long history/tradition, the compared importance of the heritage site in emic community, the compared annual frequency of cultural events taken place in the heritage site, and so on. Increasing the times of observations/statistics can increase the accuracy of the index, averaging all those indexes, so:

\[
\text{EmCAI} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \left( \text{DEm(p)} \times \text{DEm(t)} + \alpha \right)
\]  

(2)

The indexes of two temples as study cases are shown in Table.1. Here, it set up the Dragon Mother Temple as benchmark (\(\alpha=1\)) to compare with the North Lord temple. The figures of DEm-p and DEm-t which come from many times observation adopt the multiple of 0.05 that means the figures are not accurate sense in terms of difficult process of the observation for avoiding problems such as sometime repeatedly counting same person as different people. Nevertheless, the figures of Table.1 have still important significance to illustrate the basic situation in two Guangdong temples.

**Table 1. The main information and indexes of two temples.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worship god</th>
<th>Origin time</th>
<th>Transformation</th>
<th>Scale(sq.m)</th>
<th>DEm-p</th>
<th>DEm-t</th>
<th>EmCAI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dragon Mother Temple</td>
<td>Qin Dynasty (200 BC)</td>
<td>No (but architecture rebuilt in 1907)</td>
<td>36600; 6400</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lord Temple</td>
<td>Song Dynasty (1078-1085)</td>
<td>Before 1451(Ming Dynasty) called as Flying Dragon Temple</td>
<td>16200; 2700</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1) Scale including two figures: the former refer to whole temple’s area, the later refer main architecture’s floor area. 2) Similar temples refer to the number of temples in which worshiping same god or having similar religious significance in Guangdong Province.

The Compared Study between Two Temples

**Yuecheng’s Dragon Mother Temple**

The two temples are very representative heritages of Guangdong province. The Yuecheng’s Dragon Mother Temple is located in Yuecheng town beside the Xijiang River in county Deqing, Guangdong. Dragon is a water god, so all dragon-mother temples are nearby river; among all those temples, the Yuecheng’s Dragon Mother Temple as progenitor is the most grandeur and spectacular one [8] (refer with: Fig.1).

Comprehensive research is generally believed that the Dragon Mother culture embodied in the following points: (1) the witchcraft of totem worship and imitation: the ancestors of Xijiang River people imitated dragon tattooing their body for safeguard; (2) hero worship and ancestor worship: the Dragon Mother was a female leader of Yue tribal in transitional period from matriarchal society to patriarchal social, was endowed with extraordinary ability and was finally apotheosis; (3) water god and nature worship god (4) feudal filial piety and hierarchy institution boosted Dragon Mother culture. Those conclusions are mostly from views of “etic”, dissociation with religious experience of “emic” itself. As an original culture rooted in long history and tradition, the kernel of dragon-mother worship is a nature/totem worship of dragon combined with worship of Great Mother [9], with which producing a lot of vital religious images and symbolic, creating fundamental life meanings for Xijiang River people over thousand years.
As a folk religion, it has its own unique characteristics, but also has some common features of general religions. For example, the front of dragon-mother’s amulet is dragon-mother’s image, but the back of the amulet is printed with the words of "Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra" (refer with: Fig. 2). It demonstrates that the dragon-mother’s belief in deep level of people's spirit whether has no essential different with Buddhism Guanyin belief or has been happened a variation in modern time. Yet from the perspective of archetype, Dragon Mother, as well as Guanyin, Mazu, or Virgin, all are the same subject of Great Mother worship with variation in different cultural contexts.

Now the temple faces tourism exploitation and strong government’s involvement, which have been diluting the “original taste and flavor” of this indigenous culture. The commodification is, for the most part, beyond the control of the locals which often stay marginalized. As an authentic culture heritage and a religious site under using, the Dragon Mother Temple carries a living folk religious service as its main function. We should alarm that the transformation of authentic culture under the guise of urban/government entrepreneurialism and the ubiquitous logic of commodification is whether right and sustainable?

![Figure 1. The Dragon Mother Temple.](image1)

![Figure 2. The Dragon Mother’s amulet.](image2)

**Foshan North Lord Temple**

Foshan was Located in the downstream of the Xijiang River basin. Foshan in late feudal periods was very famous for its tradition of ritual and sacrifice, and the Foshan North Lord Temple is the most important religious place (refer with: Fig.3). The big hall of the temple eventually had become a place for arbitration and civil management, also being the most important local academy.

Added to architectural heritage, the most important Temple’s cultural heritage embodied in the North Lord Temple Fair. The Temple Fair happened in the most periods in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, but discontinued in the period of the Republic of China. In 2005 onward, government has committed to restore some Foshan temple fair activities, adding some new elements or contents for conforming to modern life, but it inevitably has been happened a cultural alienation, and its cultural authenticity is doubtful.

![Figure 3. The North Lord Temple.](image3)

In consideration of sensitive and complicated situation about the emic authentic culture of the North Lord Temple, we did two further tracking investigation and survey for the activity taken place
in the North Lord Temple to give some empirical evidence. On January 1st, 2017, at the front/gate of the temple, we did 3-hours observation and statistics. The statistics data count once every 10 minutes, altogether 18 times. In each time of that statistics remembered the appearance of people, so same person had no longer been counted again. On January 8th, 2017, we did the same thing again in this weekend. The statistics date is shown as Table.3.

As the Table.2 shown, On New Year's day period, the total visit as well as worshiper was obviously more than usual weekend, which illustrate that some person might be make a special trip for worship at the New Year's holiday, but the proportion is still much less than the people come only for tourism. According to traditional function of the temple, to worship the North Lord is the emic authentic culture for the temple, While, as shown in Figure.3, the atmosphere of the temple is filled with leisure and entertainment, even the worshipers are not so much devoted and pious, especially compared with the scene at the Dragon Mother Temple as shown in Figure.1. Interview with some young people, we asked them why to worship or go to temple to pray? The statistics and interview illustrate that the key/original culture value of the North Lord Temple was acculturation by other value and by commercialized in modern society.

In North Lord Temple’s historic district, recently a renewal project Lingnan Tiandi has been developing. This renovation project tries to answer the question how to do with industry transformation, urban transformation and environment reconstruction, and exploring scientific development pattern, which transformed the precinct from abandoned buildings and homes of many of the most disadvantaged in around the temple into a site of heritage-based attractions that is attracting wide range attention and creating appeal of the city. However, couple with the problem of gentrification, the practice of Lingnan Tiandi project also triggers a doubt concerning culture authenticity.

**Table 2. The statistics data of activity in the North Lord Temple.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Worship</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
<th>Leisure</th>
<th>Entertainment</th>
<th>Sales (incense)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1st, 2017</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>162 12%</td>
<td>200 14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1368 person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36 3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 8th, 2017</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>76 10%</td>
<td>64 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>722 person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36 5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

The main theory contribution of this paper is putting forward a Diamond Model of authentic cultural ecology for logically clear up those concepts related to “authenticity”. Through above research concerning emic authenticity, we can quickly distinguish the Dragon Mother Temple as true temple in all sense in today, but the Foshan’s North Lord Temple which is seemly more elusive about whether it is a temple or museum, even as a recreation place? Emic authenticity is deeply related with sustainable conservation of cultural heritage, it is important which not only lies in the heritage conserving our long-term cultural memory, in other words, our nostalgic “awareness of what is missing”, also in order that our own cultural identity can be formed today. This study demonstrates how Chinese cities are shaped by the practices of global consumerism, and the local neoliberal logic of entrepreneurialism behind the rhetoric of “cultural approach”. It should be alarm that the short-term effects of economic benefits may be destroy the long-term cultural memory and affect the culture safety resulted by losing cultural gene and disappearing cultural species. We also should note that the important things is living culture; the passive heritage conservation for the sake of conservation like what happened in the past is very difficult to adapt to new demands of contemporary social development.
References


