Article

Village and Heritage in China: A Discussion on the Influence and Future of Heritage Work in Rural Areas

Iva Stojević

School of Cultural Heritage, Northwest University, Xi’an 710069, China; iva.stojevic@gmail.com

Received: 26 December 2018; Accepted: 14 February 2019; Published: 18 February 2019

Abstract: Over the past few decades, China has gone through a number of changes, and no community has been more impacted by these changes than the rural community. This paper takes a look at how heritage influences rural communities in these turbulent times. The paper focuses on three ways in which heritage is present in rural communities: Ecomuseums, rural tourism and archaeological heritage. While there are differences between all three modes, their similarities are defined by common issues addressed in this paper, such as the persisting top-down approaches, traditions in government systems, and issues native to rural areas that prevent active participation in heritage and sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Chinese village; ecomuseums; rural tourism; archaeology; heritage participation

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, Chinese rural communities have experienced fundamental changes, and have been struggling to find their footing in the midst of the social and economic turmoil of the new era. This paper explores the ways in which heritage influences rural communities, and what issues within those communities have been or can be addressed through heritage. The paper focuses on the most common way in which heritage is present in rural areas: Tourism. This paper discusses three aspects of the participation and development of heritage in rural areas: Ecomuseums, tourist villages, and archaeological heritage. The aim of this study is to research the relationship between heritage and rural communities, and to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the future of the Chinese village from the perspective of heritage work.

As shown below, much scholarly attention has been given to the influence of ecomuseums and rural tourism on rural communities in China. The extensive research conducted at such tourist sites allows for a broader insight into the current conditions of heritage in rural communities across the country. On the other hand, the influence of archaeological heritage on those communities has not been adequately studied. In order to fill the gap in this field of research, this paper focuses on the relationship between archaeology and the local community at three major archaeological sites in China’s Shaanxi province. Even though the communities living near all three sites differ and have been directly affected by archaeology in different ways, there are common themes that can be put forward for discussion.

2. The Chinese Village and the New System

In 1978, Chinese society experienced a deep transformation, and no group has been more affected by these new developments than rural populations. After land was decollectivized, households were given land that could be cultivated, thereby increasing their income [1]. However, with increased mechanization, loss of jobs in the countryside, and urbanization, China’s rural populations have faced one challenge after another. Social and economic changes did not influence all parts of China equally,
and regional disparity in development presents another problem in the country’s rural areas. There are, however, some challenges that can be viewed as the common denominator for the entire country.

2.1. The Challenges of Those Who Left

Among the plethora of issues present in rural areas, some simply cannot be overcome through heritage work. The hukou system and all that derives from it is definitely one problem of that sort. Hukou (户籍, hùkǒu), i.e., household registration, organizes and classifies Chinese households into two groups depending on one’s place of birth, and defines them either as agricultural or non-agricultural. When the system was implemented some 50 years ago, it was designed to monitor migration within the country, and the classifications were not subject to change [2]. This in turn caused rapid urbanization. In 1978, China’s urbanization rate was 17.92%, and it reached 56.1% in 2014 [3]. In 2017, China Daily [4] reported that the rate rose to 58.52%, and that the number of city residents reached 810 million.

The widespread urbanization and loss of jobs in rural areas started a demographic shift, as villagers started to leave their homes in search of work, and subsequently, mainly accepting low paying jobs in towns [5]. The impact of hukou became greater and put a strain on the majority of migrant workers, because many who came from the countryside were excluded from urban health care and pension benefits due to their household registration status. These migrants are often referred to as “the floating population” [5] (n.2). The situation also affects the children of migrant workers, seeing as schools admit children based on the number of registered children, not resident children [6]. Despite the government’s efforts to solve these problems, migrants often face additional fees (put in place by the schools to discourage the enrollment of migrant children), and end up enrolling their children in academically inferior schools set up by the migrants themselves [6]. Parents who abandon villages in search of work often opt to leave their families behind [6] (p. 3), which leads to a phenomenon referred to as “left behind children” (留守儿童, liúshˇou értóng). This phenomenon describes children who are left in villages to be raised by their grandparents while their parents search for work in towns.

In 2012, the Government Department of Statistics [7] reported that the number of migrant workers surpassed 260 million. However, over the past year, government reports indicate that a generation of migrants is slowly returning to villages to start their own businesses [8].

2.2. The Challenges of Those Who Stayed

Rural residents who choose to stay in villages are faced with unemployment, depleted or non-existent infrastructure, pollution, and scant access to quality education and medical care. This is also where regional disparity becomes a crucial factor, because the western regions of China are underdeveloped not only when it comes to infrastructure, but also regarding investments in education, as well as science and technology [9] (p. 208).

As work migration progresses, and with no incentives to stay in villages, the population living in rural areas is getting older [10]. On the other hand, the younger generation in rural areas, apart from the “left behind” phenomenon, is also faced with a lack of quality education, numerous health issues and malnutrition [11]. Despite government programs that aim to advance education, like the One Charge System [12], rural areas have the highest dropout rates, mostly have low quality schools, and generally lack the funds that could help alleviate these issues [13].

Education, medical care and infrastructure are still lacking in many a village in China. However, The China Yearbook of Rural Household Survey [14] (p. 31) states that the level of rural development in the country has improved, and household income in village communities has almost doubled in the period between 1999 and 2009 on a national level. Reports also show that the situation of rural households has been improving steadily all over China [15]. Additional measures have also been taken to promote sustainable development and ecological approaches to creating energy, as well as improving health care and education, and bridging the gap that was left behind after urbanization. According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs [16], possible solutions include turning towards renewable
energy and green development, improving operation systems in rural areas and management systems, as well as mechanisms that provide support and protection [10].

3. Ecomuseums

The new museum movement and new museology that brought about ecomuseums started with a reassessment of the role of museums in society and their engagement with the community. The reassessment claimed that museums have lost touch with the community and have become elitist [17,18]. In the West, the concept of ecomuseums is not necessarily the same as it is in China. However, an ecomuseum can be anything and everything heritage experts and the local population want it to be [17] (p. 80). The 1990s saw an increase in projects focusing on the preservation of local heritage in China, specifically in remote and impoverished areas inhabited by the country’s minority groups [19]. Museums that were opened through these projects aimed to preserve local culture and traditions in the midst of industrialization and urbanization, as well as to provide additional income to local people [20] (p. 233). Donghai Su, considered to be the father of Chinese ecomuseums, laid down the six principles for those museums, and emphasized that the community members had the status of owners and stewards of culture, and that the right of interpretation belonged to the community [21] (p. 29).

3.1. The Three Generations

In China, the development of ecomuseums, or community museums, is commonly divided into three generations. The first generation includes ecomuseums in Guizhou, built in areas of three minority populations: Miao, Dong and Buyi. These museums were built in cooperation with the Norwegian government in the late 1990s, and were based on “the Scandinavian ecomuseum model” that turns a landscape into a museum with one visitor orientation “center” [17] (p. 238). At first, these museums served their intended purpose: For example, the Buyi museum received 100,000 tourists in 1999 alone, and tourism in that area substantially increased the quality of life of local residents [22]. The second generation once again employed the “Scandinavian model”, and introduced ecomuseums to other remote areas in China, namely Guanxi, Yunnan and Inner Mongolia [23] (p. 88). The Guanxi museum, for example, was imagined as a 1 + 10 system, with the Guanxi national museum as the “center” [24] (p. 29).

When the author of this paper attempted to visit the Buyi museum, it became apparent that the museum had been closed, and probably abandoned for some time. This fate did not befall all first generation ecomuseums, as shown by the Dong minority ecomuseum, Tangan Dongzhai, which is still open and receives a steady flow of tourists every year. In the case of the Dong village, the area’s development surged when the nearest town of Congjiang was connected to Guizhou’s capital by a high-speed railroad. The entire area is now dedicated to tourism and strives to present Dong traditions, as shown by the railroad station in Congjiang that reflects Dong architecture. The development of tourism in that area not only took care of the surplus labor among the local Dong population, but it also brought in people looking for work from other provinces.

The third generation of ecomuseums was marked by the physical shift of ecomuseums from impoverished areas settled by China’s minority groups to more developed areas in the east [25] (p. 140). The Zhejiang Anji ecomuseum opened in 2009, with the main goal of protecting Anji. At the same time, while adhering to the holistic aspects of ecomuseums, the main attribute of this museum, cited by its proponents, is the development of tourism [24,26]. The strong emphasis on developing the financial aspect of the area is in accordance with the initial purposes of the first two generations and is expected to help local communities thrive. Some ecomuseums do not fall within any of the generations, but were
also opened in an effort to preserve local heritage and attract tourists, such as the Ansai ecomuseum in the Shaanxi province, which opened in 2015.1

3.2. Challenges in Ecomuseums

All three generations of ecomuseums in China have contributed to the development of roads and infrastructure and have become touristic revenues in remote and underdeveloped areas [19]. However, there is still a lot of room to increase community participation. The most commonly criticized aspect of the first two generations is the lack of local involvement, the lack of autonomy of local people, the persisting top-down approach [17,27], as well as a lack of legislature that would resolve these issues [20] (p. 234). The surge in the number of tourists was also seen as the cause of the commodification of local customs that led to traditional performances, like the ones of the Dong minority that are being adapted and executed with the sole aim of entertaining tourists [28] (p. 64). Additionally, the fact that those museums resembled their Western counterparts and were not compatible with local conditions is also commonly criticized [29] (p. 104). The third generation is relatively new, and it is still too early to determine whether or not this model of Chinese ecomuseums is successful enough to be implemented in other parts of the country. Fuye Yu [28] compared the museums in Guizhou and Anji and concluded that there is not much difference when it comes to the involvement of local people or their understanding of heritage.

4. Rural Tourism

With changes in rural areas taking place all over the world (in terms of mechanization and a loss of jobs in those areas), the development of tourism has become a viable solution to issues that plague rural communities [30–32]. Ever since, tourist villages have become a place of leisure, recreation and consumption. Also, with the increased pressure brought on by urban life, rural areas have distinguished themselves as havens of a simpler and more peaceful existence [33].

As Sharpley and Roberts [30] (p. 120) point out, rural tourism is a domestic phenomenon that contributes to a wide range of definitions and practices. Rural tourism involves a variety of activities and different stakeholders who have different interests, but it also involves intensive cooperation with local residents [34]. The stakeholders are relying on both private and public cultural and natural resources [33] (p. 317). Seeing as this type of tourism takes place in smaller settlements where farming is usually the main source of income [35], adjusting villages for tourism undoubtedly influences the equilibrium of local communities. In light of this, sustainability [36,37] and authenticity [38] have been given more attention in the planning and management of rural tourism projects. Apart from the local environment and culture, publications have also focused on the influence of tourist activities on rural areas, and research has included the attitudes of local communities on tourism development [39–42]. The authors that discuss those effects focus on the welfare of the community that develops these projects, as well as on legislative solutions that allow for the creation of sustainable and fair projects in communities that have to redesign their way of life in the new era.

Apart from ecomuseums, tourism and heritage-related activities, Chinese villages themselves are becoming new tourist hotspots. In that sense, they somewhat resemble China’s ecomuseums: They are often found in relatively underdeveloped areas and reflect the government’s effort to boost local economy through tourism [43] (p. 41). Another similarity is that the villages are also often inhabited by ethnic minorities. However, tourist villages inhabited by the Han majority are by no means an exception.2

---

1 Correspondence with the curator of the Ansai Ecomuseum, Xiaozhen Wu, 14 May 2018.
2 Villages like Yuanjia in the Shaanxi province, the Yulong River tourist attraction from the Sun J. and Bao J. paper (2007), and sites from the Huang and Wang study (2013) are just a few examples.
4.1. Rural Tourism as a Strategy for a New Era

Tourism in China is government directed, and it has been used as a poverty alleviation strategy in rural areas since the 1990s [44] (p. 48). It is also a part of a government strategy that aims to develop a “new socialist countryside”. In 2006, the National Tourism Administration launched the “new countryside, new tourism, new experience, new trend” slogan, thereby announcing that year’s tourism theme: “China Urban and Rural Tour” [3] (p. 28). China’s tourism is developing fast: The World Tourism Alliance [45] reports that there were over a billion and a half tourist trips in the first half of 2017, and that the domestic tourism revenue exceeded 2 trillion RMB in the same period. It is also suggested that China will become the largest tourism market by 2020 [17] (p. 247).

Not unexpectedly, this does not mean that all rural tourism projects are the result of investments made by the central government. As shown by some examples, such as the Xianrendong village, inhabited by the Sun Yi people in the Yunnan province, or the Yuanjia village in the Shaanxi province, Chinese villagers and local governments have no problems with taking the matter into their own hands. After realizing that their way of life was about to change due to the ongoing reforms in China, Xianrendong has transformed itself into a tourist attraction that now draws a steady flow of people hoping to experience the original Chinese village [46]. In Yuanjia, the development of rural tourism resulted in significant improvements in the lives of the local community, such as increases in employment, income, and recently, in investments in green energy and sustainable development [47].

4.2. The Impact of New Trends

What do these developments mean for the Chinese rural community? Historically, Chinese society has been mainly agrarian. Transforming rural areas into tourist attractions is a way to cope with the surplus of labor in villages through the process of transforming production-based economies into service-based ones [48] (p. 50).

Existing research on the participation of local communities in rural tourism shows different results [44,46,48]. Researchers have called for more community involvement, the empowerment of local residents [49,50], and including the opinions and rights of local residents into tourism development strategies [31,48,51,52]. The ideas of local involvement also represent a challenge to the long-held ideas of self-protective leadership [51] (p. 6), which are at odds with community-based trends in heritage. This means that the disenfranchisement, the gaps between developed and underdeveloped rural communities, and the power imbalance between stakeholders will often create conflict between the community and its leaders [44,48,51].

If we consider local participation in tourism not just in China, but in general, the negative aspects of tourism are often addressed by the general public after the site has reached a certain point in its development [53] (p. 99). With the rise of revenue accumulated through tourism, the planners are often tempted to adjust a tourist site to tourists at the expense of local inhabitants [54] (p. 40). In their comparative study on Chinese and Western community participation in tourism development in a social context, Jigang Bao and Jiuxia Sun [55] describe the difficulties of community participation in China. According to their research, communities are almost always passive participants in tourism, as China’s community participation focuses solely on economic interests [55] (p. 405). Rong Hu [56] discusses economic development and village elections in China based on rural areas in the Fujian province. The author concludes that the implementation of village elections and local participation are tied to the revenue and the living standards of local residents [56] (p. 43), meaning that the individuals who have high stakes in the development of their community are more likely to participate. When this is put in the perspective of rural tourism, which is often developed in poor areas where there is an inherent lack of financial resources and access to education and relevant business experience [55] (p. 406), the local populations are often left “at the mercy of development”.

While Sun and Bao [48] see community participation as the task of future policies from the central government, some authors suggest that the participation of local communities in tourist activities has been observed through Western concepts. Tianyu Ying and Yongguang Zhou [57] consider that,
at this stage of China’s socioeconomic development, community involvement must revolve around shared benefits and the developing relevant regulations, rather than blindly reflecting the practices of developed countries in the West. Whatever the future of participation for local communities in rural tourism may be, the ideas behind direct community involvement have made the leap from academic theory into management practices [55].

5. Archaeology

Unlike ecomuseums and tourist villages, archaeological sites cannot just appear in a poor area and help the community, so the assessment of their influence on the community has to be observed after the site has been researched and presented [19]. At the same time, archaeological projects cannot represent local effort, seeing as all archaeological research in China is directed by the government [58].

The first example of community involvement in archaeology appeared in the first decades of the 20th century at Anyang, a Shang dynasty site [59]. The direct influence of archaeology on that community included the construction of a building that was used as a primary school for the workers’ children and as a training center [59] (p. 46). The emergence of archaeology from workers and farmers (gong-nong kaoguxue) during the Cultural Revolution led to archaeology being utilized in a class struggle, thereby attributing many archaeological finds of that era to farmers and factory workers [60]. Political trends and the utilization of rural communities made archaeology a discipline which flourished in the Revolution era. However, with the major change in China’s political course, ideas behind this kind of archaeology have since been discarded [59].

The current trends are marked with consistent efforts to bridge the gaps between archaeology and the public through concepts of public archaeology (gongzhong kaogu), sometimes called archaeology for the masses (gongzhong kaogu) [61–64]. These new trends in archaeology have turned the conversation towards the need to educate and involve the community through community action, new media, and various educational efforts [62,65,66]. Nevertheless, since the archaeology of workers and farmers was discarded, there has been little research into the influence of archaeology on rural communities.

5.1. Methodology

The data for this research was collected over a course of two years, from September 2016 to December 2018. This research was conducted using qualitative methods, mainly formal and informal interviews with the stakeholders of three archaeological sites: Qin Shihuang Mausoleum Site Museum, Qianling, and Zhaoling. Since there is a discrepancy in terms of the available publications that focus on the ways in which archaeology influences rural communities, the analysis of the relationship between archaeology and rural areas will be observed through these three sites. The interviews included heritage workers, local government and local residents. Interviews fall within the category of research that mostly relies on inductive reasoning and using data to generate a hypothesis, as opposed to deductive reasoning that uses data to confirm or negate a hypothesis [67] (p. 68). Wengraff explains that the purpose of conducting a research interview is to develop a model that will be in accordance with facts and to test an existing model against facts, or to do both [68] (p. 4). In qualitative research, conceptualization is often preceded by operationalization, as opposed to quantitative methods, where the creation of a concept is followed by the creation of measurement operations (Neuman 2014, p. 209). This means that instead of having a clear hypothesis, the researcher has “working ideas” that they use while collecting data [69] (p. 209). These “working ideas” (the facts that the data was tested against), as well as the interview questions, were all created through publicized reviews of current conditions in rural China, ecomuseums, rural tourism, and public archaeology in China.

The questions used in the in-depth interviews used in this research are given in Table 1. The semi-structured interview was constructed in an open way in order to decrease the possibility of predicted responses, and to prevent the researcher from “leading on” the interviewee. This allowed the researcher to improvise if a new interesting direction presented itself during the interview [68] (p. 5). The questions were also altered depending on who the researcher was talking to, whether it be
a heritage expert or a member of the local community. The researcher collected 30 interviews with local government officials, archaeologists, museum staff and local residents in the period between January 2017 and November 2018. The number of interview respondents is determined by the amount of information that can be gained on a particular topic. In case of these three sites, the number of respondents quickly came to a close, as there was no new information to be discovered.

Table 1. Questions of the semi-structured interview with the stakeholders of the archaeological sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The site</td>
<td>• How would you (shortly) describe this site?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why is this site important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Please describe the archaeological and/or heritage activities that take place at this site (excavations, archaeological surveys, exhibitions, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>• How do/did those activities include local people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• During those activities, how did you cooperate with heritage experts (example: Locals as hired labor at the site, use of local knowledge/tales/legends during research)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is your opinion on getting local people involved with the site (example: As vendors, tour guides, locals as hired labor at the site, use of local knowledge/tales/legends during research)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In your opinion, how much is the local community involved with the site at the present moment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How is heritage involved in your daily life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What does community involvement mean to you personally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are there organizations that include local people in these activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there a program that involves local schools at this site?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects on the local community</td>
<td>• How does archaeology affect local sense of pride?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does archaeology affect local economy? Local education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How does this site affect the local environment (example: enhanced traffic, more trash, more pollution)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What changes have you noticed since working here (in people, the environment)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data were analyzed by following the principles of grounded theory [70], wherein data analysis is done by coding (i.e., organizing raw data and creating themes or concepts) [69] (p. 480). All interviews, along with the notes and observations made during the research process, were transcribed and coded using RQDA software. The process used in coding, as described by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin [71] (pp. 13–14), is divided into three parts: Open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding discerns the major themes, concepts, and labels of the processed data. During axial coding, the categories from the former process are connected to their subcategories and tested against the data. The final process, selective coding, unifies the categories from the former steps into core concepts that are further developed into a theory.

5.2. Archaeology and the Rural Community at the Studied Sites

The general state of influence on all three sites was observed through site visits and interviews with all stakeholders at the site. In an effort to understand the relationship between archaeology and the rural community, this paper discusses the data collected in communities that live close to three major archaeological sites in the Shaanxi province.

The first site is the tomb of the first emperor of China, located in Lintong: Emperor Qinshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum, better known as the Terracotta Warriors and Horses. The site is a major tourist destination. It is situated in the vicinity of the provincial capital and has thoroughly transformed its surroundings over the past two decades. Every minute, a number of buses go from Xi’an to the museum, and local workforce has been employed in the development of the site from the initial stages. The second site is the tomb of the first and only empress of China, sovereign ruler Wu Zetian, buried...
in Qianling (乾陵), located about 5 kilometers from Qianxian (乾县). Even though heritage work has employed local people in the past, the site’s development plan is still on the way, and the relative distance from the more developed provincial capital has had an impact on the number of tourists who venture to the empress’ tomb. The third site is Zhaoling (唐昭陵) in Liquan County (礼泉县), the imperial mausoleum with the greatest number of subordinate tombs. The site is not as well connected to the capital, it is not as famous as the other two sites, and it does not draw a large number of tourists, despite its historical significance. All three sites have been excavated (though some not completely) and presented to the public.

5.2. The Influence of Archaeology

In the first stages of this research, respondents were divided into groups based on the site they were connected to and their role at the site. These groups were heritage expert, government official and local resident. The interviews with heritage experts lasted up to an hour, while the interviews with the two remaining groups lasted up to 20 minutes. The length of these interviews is also an indicator of the relationship between the local community and archaeological heritage. While archeologists and museum staff had an expectedly better insight into these issues and answered in length, the responses of local residents and local government officials were mostly short and concise.

During the described coding process, data from each individual site resulted in a unique set of codes that tell a story of local archaeology and its community. For example, Qingshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum and Qianling are surrounded by communities who are experiencing the same issues as rural populations all over China: A loss of jobs in farming and a decrease of population due to work migration. Communities around Zhaoling, on the other hand, live in the vicinity of Yuanjia, a prospering tourist village, which has had a positive impact on the local economy and demography. Even though the sites affected the surrounding communities in different ways, there are common denominators for all three sites. The current relationship between archaeology and the community can, based on codes created from the interviews with heritage experts, be divided into two phases that are, for the purpose of this research, defined as active and passive. The general characteristics of all respondents and the distribution of local respondents involved in these phases at different sites can be observed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Heritage Experts</th>
<th>Local Government</th>
<th>Local Residents</th>
<th>Participants in Active Phase</th>
<th>Participants in Passive Phase</th>
<th>Participants in None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QSH</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZHL</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: QSH stands for Emperor Qingshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum, QL for Qianling, ZHL for Zhaoling.

5.2.2. The Active Phase

The active phase starts with the discovery of a site and excavations. It is marked by the participation of local people as manual laborers, or the providers of housing and local food. During this phase the community is actively involved in archaeology and is given direct access to it. The local people are involved not just as laborers, but also as storytellers:

“When we discover a site, we usually set up a local workstation, and when the locals are available, we employ them as the main labor force . . . and when we discovered the site, we asked the locals about the legends they’ve been told, and did detailed investigations of those
places, in hopes of finding related sites. Through interviews, we gained more information for our archaeological research, such as the possible distribution of the site.” (Heritage expert, Qingshihuang Mausoleum Site Museum).

It is in this phase that heritage workers create a bond with the local community, the sort of comradery that comes with working at an archaeological site. Even though, according to heritage experts, local people participated in this phase at all three sites, all respondents that participated in this phase were found in Emperor Qinshihuanq’s Mausoleum Site Museum, while the remaining two sites yielded no respondents that were actively involved in archaeological excavations. Some respondents from the Emperor Qinshihuanq’s Mausoleum Site Museum participated in both phases, and the archaeological research at the site is still in progress. Despite the lack of respondents who participated in the active phase at the other two sites, all three sites represent important parts of China’s imperial past and the efforts made by local people to contribute to the uncovering of the past that is still a source of pride.

“During the excavations, . . ., we used local people’s food, their residence and payed local people to work [at the site], . . . They also [developed] a kind of respect for local culture, they felt honored … and they were also happy that they could make money. In addition, during the excavations, we all uncovered new things every day, [when that happened] they were happy, and we were satisfied.” (Heritage expert, Zhaoling)

5.2.3. The Passive Phase

The passive phase begins when the site has been adjusted for tourism. At that point, the local community is only marginally involved in archaeology through selling goods or providing services to tourists, and the bonds of comradery remain only in the memories of those who participated in the excavations.

“[The site] does not affect [the community], it can help the villagers to a point, like the old ladies who make crafts and make money [off them], [for example] to afford for a child to go to school.” (Local resident from the area around Qianling).

“I think the museum should let the people [who] found [the site] visit for free now. If they want to look back on the original place [they excavated], they should [be able to] do that, right? But the museum does not give us this opportunity, nor do they treat the local people well.” (Local government, Xiahe village near Qingshihuang Mausoleum Site Museum).

Local residents who are part of this phase were found at all three sites, with Zhaoling having the least amount of respondents in general (due to the fact that it is situated near another tourist attraction—Yuanjia village, and archaeology does not play an important role in that area) [72]. The ways in which the local population was involved with their respective site was also not regulated or organized by a group or society, but rather scattered around the sites. This creates friction between those who are in charge of the site and local people who are trying to make a living off of it:

“[They] should be encouraged to participate in some cultural activities related to these sites, but they should be standardized, not [scattered and disorganized] as they are now.” (Heritage expert, Shaanxi Department for Cultural Relics)

“So the current situation may not be able to satisfy everyone. For example, you can see tour guides without [proper] certificates issued by the state, and they will pull you to “come [with them so they can show you the site]”. [Because they had] no professional training, they might make mistakes and give you wrong [information] . . . Can they all be eliminated? They also have to [make a living], [so if] you don’t let them [do it] today, they will come again
tomorrow. From the point of view of management, this is not a lack of discipline [on the part of the management], this is [an indicator of] the current situation [of local residents].” (Management, Qingshihuang Mausoleum Site Museum)

The observed rural communities were preoccupied with ensuring their livelihood, and kept away from archaeology that does not leave room for their participation:

“We are farmers . . . . And farmers cannot work [in archaeology]. Archaeology does not need farmers.” (Local resident from the area around Qianling)

Just like the other two examples, when it comes to archaeological heritage in rural areas, there is a persisting top-down approach that creates a sort of “stay in your lane” attitude amongst local communities. In those communities, archaeology is perceived through the direct benefits it generates: Archaeology does or does not build roads, it does or does not create jobs. If observed through the prism of challenges faced by rural communities, for example work migration and loss of jobs in the countryside, archaeology has made no systemic effort to address the issues present at the sites.

“Local people support [heritage work], but the excavations and discovery did not bring much benefit to the development of local people.” (Local government, Xiahe village near Qingshihuang Mausoleum Site Museum)

All of the communities’ livelihoods are still tied to agrarian jobs, and education and community action are not issues that archaeology was meant to solve [71]. As the lack of cooperation and communication between the stakeholders persists, both local residents and local heritage experts are affected:

“Local people do care for the site, but they must first consider their own survival. So they have their fields, orchards and trees at the site. This is their income. If you don’t let them plant land and apples here, they will not have an income. But if you plant apples here, it will certainly affect the site.” (Archaeologist, discussing Zhaoling).

“The site did develop local pride. Everyone knows that the people [who live] inside the Terracotta Warriors are proud of this . . . [But] nothing has changed. Still, as before, [for local people] it’s hard work and [trying to make] a living. [Archaeology had] no impact.” (Local resident who worked on the excavations of the Qingshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum)

6. The Future of Heritage in Rural Areas

China’s tourism industry is quickly developing and it remains to be seen how these new trends will affect its rural populations. On one hand, those are the communities whose lives were most affected by the reforms introduced over the past few decades, and tourism seemed to be the answer to their troubles. Issues like the residential statuses of rural inhabitants are deeply rooted in China’s past and cannot be solved by heritage workers or tourism development. However, heritage work in China’s rural areas has been one of the ways of tackling the challenges of the new era, and it has, to a certain extent, helped solve the issues of poverty, the depleting infrastructure and the lack of traffic connections. On the other hand, these heritage projects have had varying success, often due to the quality of education and training that people in rural areas receive, as well as to the lack of appropriate legislature and mechanisms of involvement. In the new era, where tourism is one of the most common tools used in the effort to improve the lives of rural populations, it is obvious that changes will have to be made in order to ensure those projects become sustainable.

But who will carry out the necessary changes? Those who remain in rural areas are mostly the older generation, who are often tasked with taking care of grandchildren while their parents are off to work in the cities. It is not likely that this generation will be the barer of change, or the target of educational efforts, which means that the New Socialist Countryside will not be created by merely
investing in heritage in rural communities, but by also having a plan that draws the younger, educated crowd into villages, giving that generation a stake in their own heritage.

As demonstrated by the examples listed above, the investments in heritage are almost always government directed. Some migrants are coming back to the villages, but heritage does not play a decisive role, as their decision was made in the hope of starting their own business. This reveals the one common denominator for all three described ways in which heritage is present in rural areas, and that is the lack of a bottom-up approach. The lack of direct involvement by the community is connected to China’s tradition of governing and leadership that tends to be centralistic and self-preserving. These long-standing traditions will not be challenged by regulations or laws, but by creating circumstances that give local residents a stake in heritage, which in turn makes them more active participants in heritage and tourism.

For the community, tourism development represents a way out of poverty, and poverty-stricken communities are less likely to care about the negative effects of tourism. Whether it is a transformation of the environment through the construction, or the distortion of local customs in order to accommodate mass tourism, local people are often willing to accept the downsides, because ensuring a means of survival largely shapes the way in which every project set in rural areas is observed. Simply creating mechanisms of involvement will not make a community actively participate in heritage if the residents cannot see the direct benefits of heritage project.

7. Conclusions

This paper discusses changes in China’s rural areas and the impact of heritage on those changes, and it is only fair to concede that heritage has a limited reach in what are currently very challenging times. The examples of heritage participation in China discussed above point to the fact that a community heritage project set in a rural area has to be set up in such a way that it improves the financial status of the local residents.

Ecomuseums and tourist villages were originally set up in order to assist development in rural areas. Despite their contribution to developing tourism, all three generations of ecomusuemhs have been criticized because of the lack of community involvement. The same goes for rural tourism: The communities are passive and accepting of all negative aspects of tourism if it improves their living standards. Archaeology, on the other hand, has not participated in rural development, other than in cases when archaeologists were able to conduct research. Developing community involvement in archaeology would create an arena for that to change.

Because rural development is mostly directed through government investments, it often happens that the communities are not consulted, but are simply left to make the best of the situation. When developing community participation projects, heritage workers will have to consider regulatory solutions. In order to ensure the active participation of local residents however, they will first have to face the practical issues inherent in those communities.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank the Chinese Government Scholarship Council for supporting her work. The author would also like to thank her mentor, Junmin Liu, PhD, for his guidance, as well as all students of Northwest University who assisted in this research. A special thanks is due to Vitomira Lončar, PhD, for taking the time out of her day to help me.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References
2. Chan, K.W. The Chinese Hukou System at 50. Eurasian Geogr. Econ. 2009, 50, 197–221. [CrossRef]


44. Long, M.; Zhang, Y. Minzu cunzhai shequ canyu lüyou fazhan de fupin xiaoying yanjiu [Research on the effects of village community participation in tourism development on poverty alleviation.]. *Nongye Jingji [Agric. Econ.]* 2014, 5, 48–50. [CrossRef]


49. Pan, Z.; Liang, B.; Wu, Y.; Lin, Y.; Cao, T. Community empowerment: An effective way to realize community involvement in tourism development. Tour. Forum 2014, 7, 43–49. [CrossRef]


51. Xu, K.; Jin, Z.; Tian, F. Community Leadership in Rural Tourism Development: A Tale of Two Ancient Chinese Villages. Sustainability 2017, 9, 2344. [CrossRef]


63. Gao, M. Kaogu Huaowen; Fudan Daxue Chubanshe (Fudan University Press): Beijing, China, 2011.

64. Zhang, H. Youguan xinmeiti zai gonggong kaogu lingyu yingyong de ji dian sikao [Some thoughts on the application of new media in public archaeology]. Beifang Wenxue 2017, 2, 239–244.


© 2019 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).