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- 1 An authoritative work on the concept of heritage in China, has long been overdue, and it has finally arrived with this work by Zhang Liang, based on his doctoral thesis. Its publication comes at just the right time amid China's rapid modernisation, and her participation in the global politics concerned with this issue. Although the idea of heritage has drawn the attention of western observers like Simon Leys and Victor Segalen, until now no real research into the concepts involved has been pursued. As Pierre Clément notes in his introduction, the author's main qualifications for success in this enterprise are his being "a Chinese architect but a 'French' researcher". From within the perspectives of Western research, and making constant references to European thinkers (Françoise Choay, for example), he raises questions about the basic assumptions of Chinese thinking about heritage. His work will be of interest to architects, urban specialists, geographers, historians and the general reader concerned with understanding Chinese ways of thinking.
- 2 The cult of memory in China does not find expression in the same kind of deference towards prestigious buildings as in Europe. Zhang Liang throws light on the specific nature of the deep bonds which link the Chinese to their ancient architectural monuments and to their sense of heritage. He raises questions around the issues of authenticity and figuration, and of representations and living non-material forms of culture. He also pays careful attention to the debates over style (*fengmao*) and specific qualities (*tese*). His work uncovers the history of the Chinese appropriation of the concept of material heritage, starting with the introduction of Western architecture. Five chapters trace the historical development, over a century, of the concept of heritage buildings in China. The author analyses the ways in which the Chinese have thereby reinterpreted their own heritage. In a context where the notions of modernity and identity set the terms of the debate, he describes the transition from modernity to modernisation, that is, from the moment when the idea of a historical monument was

born to the genesis of the idea of an urban inheritance. Zhang Liang identifies four distinct phases : an awakening awareness amidst “modernity”, the assimilation of the idea of a historical monument, the assimilation of the idea of the city as a museum, and urban heritage in the era of “modernisation”.

- 3 This is a very useful reference work. It comes with a well documented bibliography, a majority of whose works are in Chinese, and a “chronological table of facts, texts and ‘events’ connected to heritage, 1867-2000”, which contains the main legislative sources. It is theoretically informed, but also contains analyses of concrete instances, supported by maps and photographs (65 plates). It tackles the role of intellectuals and university research at the same time as it traces the stages in the development of a heritage policy, showing that it was the work of both architects and administrators. The different chapters demonstrate how awareness of these issues was born amidst the tumult of ideological debates, and the whole study is based on a careful analysis of the terminology used to discuss heritage in China, and its development. In this respect, however, the lack of a glossary is a serious omission, and the absence of Chinese characters gives rise to the occasional awkwardness, especially since a few errors in the *pinyin* transcriptions have found their way into the text. As this is mostly the kind of work which depends on a study of particular cases, and emphasises the role of individuals, the abundance of proper names would amply justify the use of Chinese characters.
- 4 The writer has opted to begin his work by considering Chinese reactions to the introduction of Western architecture. He emphasises the urban reforms of the early twentieth century, and the importation of Western models. He then follows developments after the reforms of 1901, and Zhu Qiqian’s system of urban management which formulated a series of regulations adopting Western values. He describes the 1920s as the era when an awareness of the national heritage came into being. Here he gives prominence to the role of the Society for the Study of Chinese Building, founded by Zhu Qiqian in 1930, and its leading contribution to the birth of Chinese historical monuments. The writing of this history of art and architecture in China draws on a combination of inventories, relief models, and plans, as well as the discovery of forgotten treatises (*Yingzhao fashi*) and the publication of an architectural dictionary. The roles of Liang Sicheng and Liu Dunzhen are also given prominence. Although Liang Sicheng’s theories on historical monuments may not have had an immediate influence on the preservation of the national heritage, it nevertheless contributed towards the ideas for creating new public monuments and was part of the “Chinese renaissance”. It was in this cultural context that Lü Yanshi created the nationalist monument. This was how the first half of the twentieth century saw the beginnings of the modern Chinese concept of heritage buildings and the birth of the idea of towns as celebrated historical and cultural centres. Paradoxically, their destruction began at the very time when the awareness of the need to preserve the national heritage arose, that is, with the reconstruction projects of 1949. The idea of the new socialist city stood in opposition to the city as museum piece, and communism to cultural preservation. Through his detailed study of the case of Beijing and the urban planning policies that followed immediately after the founding of the People’s Republic, Zhang Liang shows how Liang Sicheng defined his version of the urban heritage but failed in his attempts to preserve it against the views of the Soviet advisers. Regrettably, there is no mention of the period of the Cultural Revolution, since it represents a break in his version of the

general development, and its analysis would perhaps provide some counter-examples to his definition of the idea of heritage in China.

- 5 The last two chapters deal with the period after 1978. The author departs from his overall conceptual argument to give more space to the study of particular cases, and to an analysis of the policies concerned with protecting the national heritage. While modernisation is now threatening the traditional cities, their protection has been undertaken through providing a definition of the kind of sites which need protection. These are: city preservation districts, protected countryside zones, and protected recreational resort towns. In 1982, the first national list of towns of historical and cultural value was drawn up, and the law on the protection of the national heritage was promulgated. The author emphasises the role of the Committee for the Study of the History of Architecture (the successor to the Society for the Study of Chinese Building), and raises questions about national forms and criteria for defining style (*fengmao*). His study of the counter-example, the pastiche Liulichang district of Beijing (1978), shows how imagination can still have the upper hand over historical reality. The idea of a historical preservation district is gradually taking hold, but it has still not achieved national recognition. The notion of an “urban heritage” was first mentioned in the 1980s during the renovations of the Chaoyang district. Within the overall situation of tension between public and private interests, the ideas of a “historical preservation area” and a “historical and cultural protection zone” were hammered out. These are examined through two detailed studies, the first dealing with the city of Tunxi (Huangshan shi) in Anhui province, and the second with the Ju’er *hutong* alley in Beijing. The author concludes by pointing out that, outside the protected areas, there has still been no real intellectual change in the conception of architecture and urban planning, and that such a development still lies ahead.
- 6 This work is richly informative and throws new light on the overall development of attitudes to, and management of, China’s heritage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, the author’s point of view, which sees the emergence of the concept of a national heritage as a reaction to the introduction of Western architecture, is open to question. The reader of a volume entitled *La Naissance du concept de patrimoine en Chine* might well expect somewhat more than an introduction to the Chinese concepts of authenticity and attitudes to ruins. This work deals solely with the adoption of the Western conception of a heritage in buildings, and the use of the word “birth” (*naissance*) in the title presupposes an absence of any concept of heritage in China before the introduction of foreign architecture. An analysis of the way the Chinese perceived their heritage before the introduction of such foreign concepts could have thrown a good deal of light on the issue and contributed to greater understanding of the roots of Chinese perspectives on it. Despite this shortcoming, the book makes a valuable contribution to the field.

NOTES

Translated from the French original by Jonathan Hall