connecting objects and people, which is power. Though narratives may be fluid and multidimensional, the essays in the book emphasise how different power structures and political conditions affect the way things are seen, used, understood, appreciated, preserved, reconstructed, and interpreted. In turn, the presentation and interpretation of objects and collections reinforce current world views and contribute to construct a sense of grounding and stability in our material worlds.

Though not a direct biographical homage, the volume is a testimony to the inspirational force of the work on material culture, collections, and biographies developed by Susan Pearce to whom this collection is dedicated. Solidly grounded in material culture theory developed since the mid 1980s, and in more recent developments that emphasise a stronger material agency, this volume contributes to the field a rich range of well researched case studies, which will be of interest to students of material culture, heritage, and museums.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2016.1274673

Reconsidering cultural heritage in East Asia, edited by Akira Matsuda and Luisa Elena Mengoni, London, Ubiquity Press, 2016, 172 pp., (paperback), ISBN 978-1-909188-88-4, Open Access (EPUB – http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/baz), ISBN 978-1-909188-90-7.

Neither a primer on East Asian heritage nor the last word on the state of play in cultural heritage discourse, this collection of seven essays, three related to China, three on Japan and one on Korea, offers a sampling of recent heritage practice in the region. A further introductory essay, reflecting on some emerging and current practices in the region, highlights how one’s perspectives can distort our perception of the nature of heritage. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, to speak of East Asian, or indeed of Japanese, or Chinese, or Korean heritage, or heritage as a geographically or temporally fixed phenomenon, can be misleading. Heritage can more usefully be thought of as:

result[ing] from a web of interactions and exchanges between various groups and [as] changing and reconstructed over time by all the actors involved. (3)

Two primary agents in the making and remaking of heritage, the editors suggest, are ‘the logic of actualisation,’ the way heritage is used to ‘reconcil[e] tradition and modernity’ (7) and the role of language as ‘the core of constructing meaning’ (8). This last point is perhaps of particular significance in any global discourse on cultural heritage, but the issues raised in each of the chapters have relevance to the wider contemporary global discussion of heritage and heritage practice.

In the three chapters related to contemporary heritage practice in Japan, their authors echo the case detailed in Akagawa (2014) that the Japanese approach to heritage has both differed from and shared similarities with, practice in the West, and more recently is undergoing change in the light of changes in national and global heritage discourse and legislative practice. Masahiro Ogino introduces this sequence on Japanese heritage with an essay in which he argues that two key feature can be said to characterise heritage practice in Japan: ‘the logic of actualisation,’ and ‘the preservation of the present’ The former can be seen in the importance traditionally given to ‘living national treasures’ in the Japanese approach to heritage that shifts the focus from the material object or tradition of the past, to the people who carry the knowledge and re-enact traditional practice in the present. The latter points to the way heritage works to fuse past and present, such that even contemporary everyday things become transformed into ‘heritage’. The effect, the author suggests, can be described as the
‘doubling of the world’, as Japanese people ‘drift […] back and forth between two worlds’. If this is an outcome of the way heritage practice has evolved in Japan, it may nevertheless, the author suggests, also describe a common global experience as we are all ‘increasingly seeing the world we live in as cultural heritage’ (28).

Kazuo Mouri continues the theme of ‘past in the present’ in discussing the Japanese approach to ‘cultural landscape’ under recent changes to legislation influenced by the 1992 UNESCO Cultural Landscapes Convention. In examining a local ‘ground breaking’ case to protect the cultural landscape of the historic port town of Tomo, Mouri examines the complications that have arisen with attempts to protect ‘lived’ cultural landscapes. Megan Good addresses a different set of circumstances affecting traditional heritage practice in examining a prominent example of ‘disaster heritage’, the memorialisation of the 2011 earthquake and related tsunami. Again this touches on heritage traditions in a country where the erection of tsunamihi (monuments commemorating tsunami) has been practiced for centuries to the extent that one can speak of the existence of ‘disaster heritage’.

The three chapters relating to China gain their interest in their discussion of how an authoritarian state with global interests deals with local community heritage actors and issues. Two chapters (with almost identical titles) provide a useful outline of the evolution of modern Chinese heritage practice since the turn of the twentieth century. While the form of the state has changed in the course of the twentieth century, the designation and protection of heritage had always been a matter for the state. More recently, however, Guolong Lai suggests, heritage conservation ‘is in the midst of a […] dramatic shift from a state-monopolised enterprise to a multi-channelled social project’ (79). Marina Svensson also sees signs of significant change but is less sanguine about community involvement. This caution is also voiced by Fuquan Yang in examining an example of ‘ethnic heritage’. Like Svensson, he points to the impact on local communities resulting from official heritage designation in which process local communities appear to have only a marginal role to play, but which bring to the local community the rewards and drawbacks of tourist income.

A single chapter on heritage practice in Korea is written ‘from a Japanese perspective’. Toshio Asakura, discusses the similarities and differences in Korean and Japanese approaches to heritage practice, which includes the common use of the concept of ‘living national treasures’ and ‘important cultural landscapes’. In the course of this comparative discussion, the chapter also raises the significance of a growing global interest in culinary heritage, and how this is addressed in each country. Interesting as this comparison is, it hardly provides scope for a Korean presence in this ‘reconsideration of East Asian cultural heritage’.

In a short book of short essays such as this is, little more than suggestions and isolated examples can be provided. Nevertheless, each chapter offers a useful succinct sketch of heritage practice and highlight important current and changing practices in the region that have relevance for heritage practices globally.

Reference

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1287120