

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: This paper explores the multifaceted landscape of Chinese cultural heritage management, emphasizing the critical role of state authorities in safeguarding cultural assets. The study delves into the historical evolution of Chinese cultural heritage management, tracing its roots from ancient practices to contemporary legislative efforts. It also offers a brief incursion into the history and culture of China. By analysing successful models from other countries, this research aims to provide valuable insights and strategies for enhancing Romania's cultural heritage protection. The findings advocate for a holistic approach to heritage management, aligning Romania with global standards and fostering a renewed commitment to cultural preservation.

Cultural heritage reflects a people's identity, making its protection and effective management a collective responsibility for all stakeholders involved in its preservation. This responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage often rests with state authorities, most of the time, but not always, in collaboration with experts, NGOs, and other members of civil society. However, the outcomes, methods, and resources allocated vary significantly from one country or region to another. It is imperative to note that this collective goal, while theoretically articulated, necessitates practical considerations. The protection and management of heritage hinge upon the availability of essential financial resources and the institutional prioritization of heritage protection.

Over time the list of archaeological sites, monuments, and movable cultural assets requiring protection, steadily expands; unfortunately, the corresponding financial resources seldom witness a proportional increase. Hence, cultural heritage management should incorporate commercial objectives that contribute to financial gains. Establishing coherent heritage legislation that comprehensively addresses all relevant aspects, coupled with functional mechanisms to enforce these laws, is crucial for effective management.

Unfortunately, the approach to cultural heritage management in Romania leaves much to be desired. Consider, for instance, the state's handling of issues

like treasure hunting¹, resulting in a significant number of heritage objects illicitly leaving the country and falling into the hands of criminal groups on the black market. Additionally, numerous archaeological sites remain neglected, without preservation plans, and existing heritage legislation lacks completeness and consistency². In this context, research endeavours such as this one, scrutinizing heritage protection and management practices in other countries, serve to identify potential models for adaptation, impart valuable lessons, and caution against avoidable mistakes.

Brief Insight into China's History and Culture

Summarizing the essential aspects of Chinese culture and the pivotal moments in its history is a complex endeavour. This complexity arises from the vast array of documentation available and the diverse opinions and theories that have been developed. However, such an approach is necessary for this study, as the intricacies of cultural heritage management in China are deeply influenced by its multifaceted history and culture, as well as the diversity of academic perspectives.

Domestically, there is a tendency to view Chinese culture and history as a cohesive whole, transitioning seamlessly from one dynasty to another. This perspective is rooted in the traditional theory that Chinese culture originated in the Yellow River valley and spread across the territory of modern China. The Chinese Communist Party even asserts that “Chinese civilization is the only great civilization in the world to have continuously developed to the present day and to have done so as a country.”³ However, archaeological discoveries reveal a more complex reality, with a mosaic of Neolithic cultures that developed multiple centres of civilization, influencing each other.

China’s political environment often promotes a narrative of linguistic, cultural, and spiritual unity, rarely influenced by external factors. In reality, such unity has existed for perhaps only half of the two-millennial history of imperial dynasties, with China frequently under the rule of foreign dynasties. Despite this, the importance of the diverse cultures that emerged within the current territory of China remains significant, as they constitute one of the cradles of civilization.⁴

This brief exploration of China’s history and culture links to the beginnings and evolution of modern Chinese archaeology, particularly the major excavations of the 1920s. These excavations, focusing on the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras, aimed to unravel the origins and identity of modern China. Interest in these periods persisted until the 1980s, with significant investments in research at sites such as the Zhoukoudian cave, where the famous Peking Man was discovered, and the Neolithic settlement of Banpo near Xi’an. The latter site

¹ Ciută 2021, *passim*.

² Ciută 2014, *passim*.

³ Qun 2023.

⁴ Rossabi 2014, 7.

gained prominence after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, as its discoveries seemed to support Marxist theories related to the birth of civilizations, indicating an egalitarian society without social classes.⁵

Understanding the evolution of Chinese civilization requires a chronological framework and a system of periodization, which I will provide in the table below.

	Dates	Period	Dynasty	Notes
1	c. 6000 - 2000 BCE	Neolithic Age		
2	c. 2000 - 1520 BCE	Xia		
3	c. 1520 - 1030 BCE	Shang		
4	c. 1030 - 722 BCE	Western Zhou period	Zhou Dynasty	
5	c. 722 – 480 BCE	Spring and Autumn period		
6	480 – 221 BCE	Warring States period		
7	221 – 207 BCE	Qin Dynasty	Qin Dynasty	
8	202 BCE – 9 CE	Western Han	Han Dynasty	
9	9 – 23 CE	Xin interregnum		
10	25 – 220 CE	Eastern Han		
11	221 – 265 CE	Three Kingdoms period	Three Kingdoms	Period of partition
12	221 – 264 CE	Shu (Han)		

⁵ Elisseeff 2002, 11.

13	220 – 264 CE	Wei		
14	222 – 280 CE	Wu		
15	265 – 317 CE	Western Jin		
16	317 – 420 CE	Eastern Jin	Jin Dynasty	
17	420 – 479 CE	Liu-Song Dynasty		
18	479 – 502 CE	Qi Dynasty		
19	502 – 557 CE	Liang Dynasty	Northern and Southern Dynasties	Period of partition
20	557 – 587 CE	Chen Dynasty		
21	386 – 535 CE	Northern Wei		
22	535 – 554 CE	Western Wei		
23	534 – 543 CE	Eastern Wei		
24	550 – 577 CE	Northern Qi Dynasty		
25	557 – 581 CE	Northern Zhou Dynasty		
26	581 – 618 CE	Sui Dynasty	Sui Dynasty	
27	618 – 906 CE	Tang Dynasty	Tang Dynasty	
28	907 – 960 CE	Five Dynasty period	Liang, Tang, Jin, Han, Zhou	
29	907 – 1125 CE	Liao Dynasty	Liao Dynasty	Qidan Tartar
30	1144 – 1211 CE	West Liao Dynasty	West Liao Dynasty	Qara - Khitai
31	990 – 1227 CE	Xi Xia State		Tangut Tibetan
32	960 – 1126 CE	Northern Song Dynasty	Northern Song Dynasty	

33	1127 – 1279 CE	Southern Song Dynasty	Southern Song Dynasty	
34	1115 – 1234 CE	Jin Dynasty	Jin Dynasty	Jurchen Tartar
35	1260 – 1368 CE	Yuan Dynasty	Yuan Dynasty	Mongol
36	1368 – 1644 CE	Ming Dynasty	Ming Dynasty	
37	1644 – 1911 CE	Qing Dynasty	Qing Dynasty	Manchu
38	1911 - 1949	Republic of China	Republic of China	
39	1949 - Present	People's Republic of China	People's Republic of China	

Table 1. Periodization of Chinese history⁶.

Researchers view Chinese history through the lens of dynastic cycles, where imperial dynasties rise, develop, and fall, giving way to new dynasties, each characterized by specific historical events and cultural aspects. This cyclical nature influences the archaeological context and the state of conservation of discovered artifacts. It may seem surprising that a country with over 4,000 years of history does not preserve ancient structures similar to those in Egypt or Central America. This is largely due to the historical practice of total destruction during dynastic transitions, where new dynasties sought to erase all traces of their predecessors. An illustrative example is the total destruction of the Qin dynasty palace by Xiang Yu, leading to the burning of Xiangyang for over three months. Consequently, China has few localities with multiple habitation levels and lacks large ancient structures, with notable exceptions such as the Great Wall and the Grand Canal.⁷

The origins of Chinese history can be traced to its two major rivers: the Yellow River and the Yangtze. Chinese creation myths mention Nuwa and Fuxi, two half-human, half-dragon deities who moulded people from clay.⁸ The fertile plains of these rivers attracted large populations since the Neolithic era, enabling the cultivation of diverse crops and the raising of animals. This gave rise to cultures such as the Dawenkou⁹ (4100-2600 BCE), Liangzhu¹⁰ (3400-2250

⁶ Shanghai Museum.

⁷ Zhang 2022, 3.

⁸ Rossabi 2014, 13.

⁹ Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999, 52.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 60.

BCE), and Longshan¹¹ (3000-1900 BCE), during which silk production and refined pottery developed. These early cultures were vulnerable to catastrophic floods from the rivers, leading to the emergence of the Xia Dynasty, associated with the Erlitou culture (2100-1600 BCE). The Xia Dynasty, shrouded in legend, is said to have emerged from the ruling class that organized flood control works. Ancient chronicles mention Yu, the architect of these works, as the founder of the Xia Dynasty.¹²

The Xia Dynasty was conquered by Tang, the king of the vassal state of Shang. With the Shang Dynasty (1600-1050 BCE), China entered the Bronze Age and the historical record, being the first dynasty to use writing. The Shang were warriors who subjugated other cultures within China, enslaving entire populations.¹³

The Shang Dynasty was overthrown by the Zhou (1050-256 BCE), aided by numerous slaves seeking to escape Shang tyranny.¹⁴ The Zhou Dynasty established fundamental institutions underpinning Chinese culture, including Taoist philosophy, which promoted humility and religious piety, and Confucianism, which emphasized rationality, filial obedience, and respect for authority. During the Zhou Dynasty, a feudal-like socio-political system emerged, with over seventy semi-independent states subject to the Zhou emperor. Over time, these states developed distinct identities, leading to fragmentation and perpetual conflict, especially during the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE).¹⁵

After centuries of chaos, the Qin state, under Emperor Qin Shihuang, unified all other states under the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE). Qin Shihuang is widely regarded by historians as the first leader of a unified China, a unity forged through violent means. His reign saw the execution of numerous scholars and the extensive destruction of books and manuscripts to erase the histories of the formerly independent states, thereby creating a unified language, history, and national identity.¹⁶

Qin Shihuang initiated the construction of the Great Wall, with significant portions built during his reign. Another monumental infrastructure project he began was the Grand Canal, which still connects northern and southern China. Additionally, he commissioned a grand tomb in Xi'an, which remains unexcavated but is renowned for the terracotta army discovered in its auxiliary structures, intended to protect the emperor in the afterlife.

¹¹ Ibidem, 61.

¹² Rossabi 2014, 15.

¹³ Loewe-Shaughnessy 1999, *passim*.

¹⁴ Ibidem, *passim*.

¹⁵ Ibidem, *passim*.

¹⁶ Twitchett-Fairbank 2008, *passim*.

Despite these achievements, the Qin dynasty was short-lived, largely built on the formidable reputation of Qin Shihuang. Following his death, widespread revolts erupted, leading to the rise of the Han culture, which consolidated power and unified many of the independent states under the Western Han and Eastern Han dynasties. The Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), contemporary with Ancient Rome, exported vast quantities of silk and other goods via the Silk Road. The profitability of this trade prompted the Han to expand westward to control these routes. This era is considered China's first golden age, marked by significant social, cultural, and scientific advancements.¹⁷

The Han dynasty eventually fragmented into three entities (Shu Han, Jin, and Wei), each with its own emperor claiming the imperial throne. The Jin were descendants of generals' families who had rebelled against the imperial throne. This period, characterized by instability and conflict, saw China split into 16 warring states, with Wei in the north and Qi in the south (420 – 589 AD) eventually rising to prominence. During this time, barbarian invasions from the north intensified.¹⁸

The Sui dynasty (581 – 618 AD) played a crucial role in unifying the northern and southern dynasties and restoring the dominance of the Han ethnic group. This period marked the beginning of the integration and cultural assimilation of barbarian tribes that had settled in China during centuries of instability.¹⁹

The Tang dynasty (618 – 906 AD) is considered the pinnacle of Chinese civilization, characterized by internal stability, scientific development, and cultural refinement. During this period, Chinese culture spread throughout Asia, the population grew from about 50 to 80 million, and relations with other states and cultures flourished. The Chinese imperial court became a melting pot for philosophers, artists, and scientists from various cultures and religions. However, the decline of the Tang began with the persecution of Buddhists and increasing authoritarianism to quell revolts among integrated populations.²⁰

The fall of the Tang dynasty led to the Five Dynasties period (907 – 960 AD). Between 960 and 1279, the Song dynasty ruled China, a period noted for scientific progress, including the inventions of the magnetic compass, gunpowder, and printing, which led to the creation of the world's first paper banknote.²¹

The Song dynasty ended abruptly with the Mongol invasion, and Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, founded the Yuan dynasty (1279 – 1368 AD). For the first time, the Silk Road from China to Europe was controlled by a

¹⁷ Ibidem, *passim*.

¹⁸ Ibidem, *passim*.

¹⁹ Twitchett 1979, *passim*.

²⁰ Ibidem, *passim*.

²¹ Herbert-Twitchett 1994, *passim*.

single power, enhancing material and cultural exchanges. However, the Yuan dynasty was short-lived, collapsing after the death of Kublai Khan.²²

From 1386 to 1644, the Ming dynasty ruled China, a period of prosperity and peak development in art and literature. The Ming dynasty was succeeded by the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 AD), which began as a golden age but ended disastrously with the Opium Wars between China and the British Empire. These conflicts arose when China banned the opium that the British were exporting to avoid paying hard currency for Chinese tea. Following the Opium Wars, China experienced a period of stagnation and isolation from the West. In 1911, the last emperor of China was deposed following an agreement between the palace administration and republican revolutionary forces.²³²⁴

Imperial China was succeeded by Republican China, a period marked by internal conflicts among various factions led by local warlords, followed by the Japanese invasion. The end of World War II and Japan's defeat reignited the conflict between the Republicans and the Communists led by Mao Zedong. This conflict culminated in the Republicans' retreat to Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, with the Communists taking control of mainland China.²⁵²⁶

History of Chinese Cultural Heritage Legislation

Concerns related to the protection of cultural heritage, especially ancient objects and manuscripts, have been manifested among Chinese scholars since ancient times, but these concerns were overshadowed by the political realities that unfolded at the end of each dynasty, when the new power sought to erase the previous dynasty from existence, first of all by destroying all the architectural ensembles created by the previous dynasty and especially their capitals from where they governed. "In general, as past dynasties ended, people tended to create chaos. Wherever wars have occurred, cities have been ruined. All the buildings were set on fire, and the treasures in them were lost. Moreover, the robberies were widespread. In addition to the arsons, grain was also stolen. The essence of a generation has been lost."²⁷

Although architectural monuments have suffered significant destruction during periods of transition from one dynasty to another, archaeological artifacts have traditionally been revered by the Chinese who believe that they contain the essence and souls of their ancestors.²⁸

²² Ibidem, *passim*.

²³ Mote-Twitchett 1998, *passim*.

²⁴ Twitchett-Mote 1998, *passim*.

²⁵ Fairbank-Twitchett 1983, *passim*.

²⁶ Fairbank-Feuerwerker 1986, *passim*.

²⁷ Zhang 2022, 2.

²⁸ He 2021, 21.

As early as the Song Dynasty, scholars in the service of the elites sought to catalogue, analyse, and protect ancient relics, some of which were even used in ceremonial state rituals.²⁹

Despite all these early efforts, the first attempts to formulate laws aimed at protecting cultural heritage did not appear until the end of the Qing dynasty, representing only passing mentions in laws aimed at other matters. Thus, on January 18, 1909, the "Regulation for the Self-Government of Villages, Cities and Communes of China" was promulgated, where in Chapter 1, Section 3, Article 5, it is mentioned as a purpose, among other things, "to protect the ancient sites, arts and crafts of the less privileged social categories".³⁰

Also in 1909, the imperial court proposed the promulgation of a law entitled "Measures for the preservation of antiquities". At the same time, provincial governments received instructions to "preserve and catalogue ancient tombs and ancestral temples."³¹ However, this initiative did not have a real impact in practice, due to the political instability that brought about the end of the last imperial dynasty. Although it failed, this first attempt was due to the existence of an intellectual elite that was becoming increasingly aware of the value of the national cultural heritage and the need to protect it. For the first time, the notion of "cultural heritage" was used, a concept that did not exist in China until the beginning of the twentieth century and that was imported from the West.³²

Along with the concept of "cultural heritage" came other terms such as *guwu* 古物 - ancient objects, *guji* 古迹 - ancient sites, *wenwu* 文物 - cultural relics, *guobao* 国宝 - national treasure.³³

During the Republic of China, founded in 1912, the destruction of ancient sites intensified, the theft and illicit sale of heritage goods attracted the attention of the government, which decided in 1914 to issue, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a set of "Instructions on the Effective Preservation of Historical Objects, Monuments and Sites of the Past", while drawing attention to the need to adopt comprehensive legislation aimed at protecting the "Our country cannot protect its own antiquities, but must rely on foreigners to facilitate their preservation. This is not dignified for our country. Therefore, we must declare strict laws and instructions to protect them."³⁴

In October 1916, "Temporary Measures for the Protection of Antiquities" are issued. This temporary document did not materialize in a body of laws, but nevertheless the *Measures* of 1916 and those of 1909 are considered by

²⁹ He 2021, 22.

³⁰ Zhang 2009, 29.

³¹ Zhang 2022, 3.

³² Vecco 2010, 322.

³³ Lai 2016, 54.

³⁴ Zhang 2022, 4.

researchers as the foundation on which the heritage legislation in China was built. These *Temporary Measures* listed cultural relics in need of protection, including mausoleums and tombs belonging to key figures in Chinese history, manuscripts, paintings, calligraphic inscriptions, bronze relics, statuettes, as well as buildings of historical significance.³⁵

A comparison between the measures issued by the imperial court in 1909 and those created by the republican government in 1916 clearly indicates that the republican regulation was heavily influenced and was based on that of the Qing dynasty, which in turn was influenced by the "Law on the Protection of Ancient Temples and Shrines" issued in Japan in 1897. It was expected that the first ideas related to the protection of China's heritage would come from Japan, many intellectuals of the time from Asia were studying in Japan, and Japan was one step ahead of the other countries in the Far East, being in the midst of a period of reform and modernization, known as the Meiji period. Despite all these influences, the 1916 law nevertheless presents new elements. The list of categories to be included in the protection scheme is extended to include fortresses and walls of fortified cities, towers and temples, bridges and gardens. Very progressive for that time, the need to protect the "natural landscape of the past" as well as some old and famous trees is also mentioned.³⁶

The problem with both *Measures* is that they did not have a real impact in practice, as they did not stipulate the establishment of a state institution to deal with the protection of heritage, the implementation falling in the hands of provincial governments, which had to do so as they saw fit. Although both documents mention "severe punishments", these sanctions as well as the methods of application are not explained.³⁷

Between 1927 and 1937, the Republic of China was in a period of relative stability and even economic and cultural development, and changes in the management of cultural heritage were not long in coming. From the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, modern archaeology was gradually introduced to China by Western researchers, but in 1928 a series of archaeological sites under the direct control of Chinese archaeologists began: the ruins of the city of Yin Xin, the Zhoukoudian cave, the sites of Chengziya, Yanxiadu and Liangzhu.³⁸

In addition to this debut of domestic archaeology, new steps have been taken in terms of heritage legislation. Thus, in September 1928, the Ministry of Internal Affairs published the "Regulation for the Preservation of Historical Sites and Antiquities", being a reference document in the history of heritage legislation

³⁵ Zhao-Doyon 2021, 148.

³⁶ Zhang 2022, 5.

³⁷ Li 2015, 155.

³⁸ Zan et alli 2018, 23.

in China. The *Regulation* creates clear categories of heritage elements to be protected, as well as criteria for their identification.³⁹

In 1930, the "Law for the Protection of Antiquities" was promulgated, with 14 articles defining what constitutes antiquities, their excavation, registration and excavation, as well as the organization of agencies in charge of protecting and preserving heritage.⁴⁰

For the proper functioning of the 1928 Regulation and the 1930 Act, the executive government then issued several rules and regulations: "Rules on the Excavation of Antiquities" 1935, "Rules on Foreign Research Institutes and Private Individuals in Relation to the Excavation of Antiquities" 1935, "Regulations on Passports for the Export of Antiquities" 1935, "Regulations on the Handing Over of Accidentally Discovered Antiquities" 1936.⁴¹

All these legislative efforts ceased in 1937 with the onset of the Sino-Japanese War, followed by World War II. In 1949, the communists led by Mao Zedong took political power in China.⁴²

Starting in 1953, the communist government implemented the five-year plans, which promoted intensive agricultural and industrial activities. These activities endangered the conservation and protection of numerous heritage objects and structures. In response, the government placed a new law targeting cultural heritage on its agenda. Although a series of provisional measures and regulations were issued in the following years, the promulgation of a new law did not occur until after the tumultuous period of repression and political purges known as the Cultural Revolution.⁴³

In 1978, China began a process of reform and opening-up, and in November 1982, the "Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage" was promulgated. This law, comprising 33 articles, laid the foundation for the current heritage legislation in China.⁴⁴

The 2002 amendments brought significant changes to align the legislation with the realities of cultural heritage management, adding 47 new articles to the 1982 law.⁴⁵ Also in 2002, ICOMOS China published the "Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China," the first publication by heritage specialists rather than a state institution.⁴⁶

In 2011, the "Law for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage" was promulgated. Although based on the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible

³⁹ Zhou 2007, 119.

⁴⁰ Zan et alli 2018, 24.

⁴¹ Zhang 2022, 6.

⁴² Zan et alli 2018, 24.

⁴³ Zhang 2022, 8.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 8.

⁴⁵ Rong-Li 2023, 18.

⁴⁶ Zan et alli 2018, 29.

Cultural Heritage, this law reflects the specific cultural, social, and political realities of China.⁴⁷

As of this year (2024), the Chinese government has begun taking the first steps to enact a new law targeting national cultural heritage.⁴⁸

Current legislative framework and government agencies for safeguarding Chinese cultural heritage

In a bid to enhance its political legitimacy, the Chinese Communist Party has made cultural heritage a top priority, one of the results being frequent updates to cultural heritage legislation.⁴⁹ China currently has in force the following laws and regulations⁵⁰ directly targeting or making extensive reference to national cultural heritage:

Laws:

1. Law on Protection of Cultural Heritage 2002⁵¹
2. Urban and Rural Planning Act 2007⁵²
3. Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011⁵³
4. Environmental Protection Law 2014⁵⁴

Regulations of the State Council:

1. Regulation on the implementation of the law on protection of cultural heritage 2003⁵⁵
2. Regulation on the Protection of the Great Wall 2006⁵⁶
3. Regulation on the conservation and management of underwater cultural heritage 1989⁵⁷
4. Regulation on tourist attractions 2006⁵⁸

⁴⁷ Xu et alli 2022, 570.

⁴⁸ China Culture 2024.

⁴⁹ Maags 2021, *passim*.

⁵⁰ Zhang 2022, p. 11.

⁵¹ Wenwu Baohu Fa (文物保护法).

⁵² Chengxiang Guihua Fa (城乡规划法).

⁵³ Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan Fa (非物质文化遗产法).

⁵⁴ Huanjing Baohu Fa (环境保护法).

⁵⁵ Wenwu Baohu Guanli Zanxing Tiaoli (文物保护管理暂行条例).

⁵⁶ Changcheng Baohu Tiaoli (长城保护条例).

⁵⁷ Baohu Degui Ze Heshui Xia Wenhua Yichan De Guanli (保护的规则和水下文化遗产的管理).

⁵⁸ Fengjing Mingsheng Qu Tiaoli (风景名胜区条例).

5. Regulation on the conservation and protection of villages, communes, and towns of major importance for history and culture 2008⁵⁹
6. Regulation on the Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts 1997⁶⁰
7. Regulation on nature reserves 1994⁶¹
8. Regulation on the conservation of paleontological fossils 2010⁶²

There is also a wide range of departmental regulations that I will mention and reflect upon, in detail, on a different occasion.

In terms of what constitutes cultural heritage, under the 2002 “Cultural Heritage Protection Law”, and how exactly does the law categorise them, Zhang⁶³ notes the following. Under immovable cultural heritage we have archaeological sites, ancient tombs, historic buildings, cave temples and stone carvings, historic memorial sites and exemplary buildings from the modern and contemporary periods. All of these are categorised as national protected heritage sites, provincial protected heritage sites, municipal and county-level protected heritage sites, and registered immovable cultural heritage.

For movable cultural heritage we have precious works of art and handicrafts; literature, manuscripts, and books of historical value; exemplary material objects reflecting social systems, production methods, and lifestyle. All of these are categorised as ordinary heritage objects or valuable heritage objects, with the latter being further split into three grades, with grade one object being the most important, while grade three objects are the least important.

When it comes to government agencies tasked with cultural heritage protection, there should be noted a “high level of decentralisation between central and local government, as a general element of the Chinese state”.⁶⁴

The first state agency dedicated to protecting cultural heritage was established in 1949 under the name State Bureau of Cultural Relics.⁶⁵ Today the National Administration of Cultural Heritage (NACH) also known as State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), affiliated to the Ministry of Culture

⁵⁹ Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng Mingzhen Mingcun Baohu Tiaoli (历史文化名城名镇名村保护条例).

⁶⁰ Chuantong Gongyi Meishu Baohu Tiaoli (传统工艺美术保护条例).

⁶¹ Ziran Baohu Qu Tiaoli (自然保护区条例).

⁶² Gushengwu Huashi Baohu Tiaoli (古生物化石保护条例).

⁶³ Zhang 2022, fig. 1.

⁶⁴ Zan et alli 2018, 20.

⁶⁵ China Heritage 2006.

and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, is responsible for the development and management of museums as well as the protection of cultural relics of national importance and it plays a role of regulation and professional control. The “operating responsibility [is] delegated to the local level. Even for very important sites of national significance, operations are run at the local level, sometimes with greater financial support from the central administration, as in the case of national Key Protected Units”. This has various negative consequences, especially in the case of salvage archaeology. “If there is a project carried out at the local level for economic development, poverty reduction, or even mere speculation which has negative impacts on heritage, the people in charge of protection can easily become hostages to the level of government they report to. If the mayor is in favour of the project, there is little that heritage professionals can do when they must report to the same mayor more or less directly”.⁶⁶ The efficacy of the mechanisms in place and agencies tasked with cultural heritage protection in China will be a topic which we will reflect upon some other time.

Conclusions

China, positioned as the world's second-largest economic power, stands as a civilization shaped by a rich history spanning millennia, boasting an extensive cultural heritage and unprecedented conservation efforts. Surprisingly, to the best of our knowledge, there is a total absence of Romanian studies dedicated to the management of Chinese cultural heritage. The current paper aims to rectify this oversight and provide a new angle of reflection on Romania's cultural preservation efforts.

In advocating for equality on Europe's negotiating and political platforms, it is imperative that we recognize the symbiotic relationship between a nation's investment in culture, including heritage, and its global standing. A nation that neglects these vital aspects compromises its ability to present itself with dignity to the international community.

This paper represents just the beginning of a more complex academic endeavour, that seeks to bridge the existing gap and become a valuable resource for the Romanian heritage sector, its stakeholders, and government institutions, and to act as a catalyst for change, offering insights and strategies that can steer Romanian heritage onto a trajectory of enhanced protection, preservation, and effective management.

By acknowledging the importance of investing in culture, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic approach to heritage, aligning Romania with the global dialogue on cultural conservation and management. Ultimately, the hope is that the findings of this study will resonate as a call to action, inspiring a

⁶⁶ Zan et alli 2018, 21.

renewed commitment to safeguarding our cultural treasures and positioning Romania as a responsible custodian of its invaluable heritage.

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