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Disneyfication or Self-Referentiality: Recent Conservation Efforts and Modern Planning History in Datong

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Introduction

Over 2400 years old, Datong is a historical city well known for its surviving ancient city form, which was established in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), and its surrounding Buddhist heritage sites dating from the Northern Wei Dynasty (368–534). The city boasts of a unique heritage which has been recognised by its listing as a National Historic City in 1982[1], the Best Tourism City in China in 2000[2] and a National Excellent Tourism City in 2003.[3] Seeking to capitalise on the city's heritage and its tourist potential, in 2008, Mayor Geng Yanbo proposed the demolition and (re)construction of much of the old city and the improvement of its historic monuments. A series of conservation projects, including the

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(re)construction of city walls and renovation of heritage sites, were carried out starting in 2008 in accordance with the new city master plan (2006–2020), costing some RMB 50bn (EUR 6.67bn). The vision of the then-Mayor, Geng Yanbo, was for Datong to reinvent itself as a competitive tourist destination. Many projects that were implemented not only ignored the historical layers of development that actually form the historical city and maintain its variety, but also destroyed the heritage of modern urbanisation. The tourism-based redevelopment strategy has bulldozed the old city and replaced it with a new faux-historic, 'ancient', predominantly Ming-style city in the construction of an idealised heritage rather than a literal re-creation of historic Datong.

Regarding 'Disneyfication' as the creation of an area based on an abstracted history made to look and feel authentic, this paper aims to problematise the issue of authenticity in Datong's planned past. Further, we question whether the (re)construction of Datong exemplifies Disneyfication and the commodification of heritage or, alternatively, the production of what will become a new 'authentic' self-referential heritage of the early twenty-first-century period.

There are many definitions of heritage. The UNESCO definition of cultural heritage as monuments, groups of buildings and sites of 'outstanding universal value' (1972, Article 2) has been loudly criticised by many scholars, including Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, who stated 'heritage is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead and the defunct' (1998, 369).

Lowenthal (1997) makes the important distinction between history and heritage. Nietzsche (2010 [1874]) further argues that we must not be slaves to historicism, but neither should we abuse historical knowledge. He suggests that 'those who find no inspiration in daily life look to history—monumentalise it' (Thoughtjam 2007, online). Actors 'claim to monumentalise history for the good of collective. By building monuments, for instance, we are proclaiming: we will be great by making greatness exist once again! Greatness perseveres!' (ibid.). However, as Nietzsche explains, we inevitably distort the past by monumentalising it. It is impossible to repeat history. Monumental history is thus a 'theatrical costume' (Nietzsche 2010, 7), often disguised as heritage. Heritage repackages the past for some purpose in the present, such as enhancing

national or local identity, economic tourism and so on. Heritage, for Schouten (1995, 21) is 'history processed through mythology, ideology, nationalism, local pride, romantic ideas or just plain marketing, into a commodity'.

The heritage 'industry' is often invoked by local municipalities seeking to make the transition from primary or secondary sector-based economies (such as coal mining and railway engineering in Datong) to the tertiary service sector. In line with Hewison's (1987) and Wright's (1985) UK-based understandings of an 'industry' which sanitises and commercialises versions of the past as heritage, city governments, such as in Datong, utilise the idea of heritage in order to reinvent the past as a 'golden age' in seeking to revive both the city and its economy. In doing so, officials seek to substantially demolish and (re)construct the old city in what may be regarded as 'fake authenticity', engaging 'an imagined past for current use' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996, 6). Shopping malls, such as the Small East City [Dongxiaocheng] (Lu 2014), theme parks and urban 'revitalisation' programmes (re)produce particular representations of places in this way (Waitt 2000). Heritage may thus be appropriated and refashioned by interested actors, resonating perhaps with Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's (1998, 369) assertion that 'heritage is a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past'.

In order to explore the question of whether Datong exemplifies the processes of Disneyfication or self-referentiality, in the next section, we examine the operative logic (Massumi 2015) of the city's transformation over time, including the part-concepts of progress, improvement or modernisation, harmony and self-referentiality. We then introduce our main analytical concepts of hyperreality and authenticity, highlighting, in particular, the recent debate in China concerning the importance of heritage authenticity. Following explication of our theoretical framework, we outline the modern planning history of Datong. We then critically explore two case examples of recent cultural heritage planning in Datong: the (re)construction of the city walls dating from the Northern Wei period and the 'improvement' of the Buddhist Huayansi temple complex. In conclusion, we ask whether the new, twenty-first-century (re)construction exemplifies Disneyfication or whether it may actually come to be regarded as an authentic representation of the current era.

Theoretical Frame and Methodology

We engage a theoretical frame and methodology inspired by Massumi's (2015) exploration of 'historical moments'. Our historical moments are four important master plans as we explain below. We do not 'do history' as such, but take an approach to the (re)novation of Datong which is both pragmatic and speculative. Pragmatically, we ask 'how does it work?' to generate, through selective demolition and reconstruction, an improved, modern, harmonious city, an increasing awareness of urban heritage and the attraction of tourism as key to economic growth. Speculatively, we ask what does how it works tell us about how we might rethink fundamental notions, such as of authenticity. In order to do this, we explore what Massumi terms the 'operative logic': the 'speculatively pragmatic formative forces' (Massumi 2015, viii) of change and transformation.

'An operative logic extrudes its own spatiality and temporality' (Massumi 2015, 231). It is productive of the space-times of its own operativity. An operative logic 'governs a pragmatic working out' (Massumi 2015, 212). In this paper, we demonstrate how the operative logic—of progress, modernisation or improvement, harmony and self-referentiality—is productive of the pragmatic working out of the planned stories of Datong. The part-concepts or elements (above) of the operative logic may be distinct, but in their pragmatic operation, they combine effectively in the production of the actual formation of the physical landscape of Datong.

These elements appear to be particularly relevant in Chinese logic. Ryckmans/Leys (1991, 2008 [1986]) comments that despite China's long history of architectural and cultural development, relatively few historical monuments remain. The author suggests that this stems from previous little-demonstrated interest in the past by Chinese people as a whole, but that there is a recent awakening of interest from the professional middle and upper classes who have the financial means to travel and visit historic places. However, we argue that a more important reason for this lack of monuments is the existence of a deep-rooted set of dominant values or operative logic as outlined above, which have grounded urban plans and projects.

Progress, modernisation and improvement have long prevailed as formative tendencies. From ancient periods, emerging dynasties demolished the palaces, temples and city buildings of the previous dynasty in order to remove any possibility of its restoration and to make their own mark (Fu 2015). Further, Li (2007) demonstrates the importance of the will to improve in China and how projects of modernisation and development are regarded as improvements: 'everything new is better' (Safford 2013, 2). Recent examples of demolition and reconstruction may thus appear as 'the latest expression of a very ancient phenomenon of massive iconoclasm, that was recurrent all through the ages' (Ryckmans 2008, 1). Ryckmans goes on to say that the periodic destruction of material heritage 'seems to have characterised Chinese history' (ibid.).

Chinese people have long emphasised the virtue of harmony at the heart of their culture. With regard to architecture, buildings should be harmonious in themselves (often symmetrical) and be co-ordinated with, be in harmony with each other and with the natural landscape. Cities were traditionally planned in the form of a cosmic diagram in order to maintain harmony and balance between humans and non-human nature. Even today, the website *China Daily* claims that 'effective planning should steer towards harmonious settlements' (2008, online).

Self-referentiality is a keynote trait of Chinese culture. As a reference to embedded cultural values, self-referentiality involves preconceived judgements about 'good' decisions and outcomes. The retro-ancient past [Chong-gu] is a long tradition of the Han Chinese philosophy postulating that to establish orthodoxy, one must restore an idea or a thing to its form when it first appeared long ago, in ancient times. This tradition is also reflected in urban planning: almost all the ancient Chinese capital cities were claimed to have been laid out to follow the *Rites of Zhou* (Zhou-li), a work regulating Han bureaucracy and organisational theory edited in the Zhou Dynasty (1045 BC–256 BC). In Datong, we may discern an element of fictive self-reference of an ancient past as imagined, rather than real, history invoked in heritage construction.

Having explained the operative logic, which we analyse below as the grounding planning and perceptions of cultural heritage in Datong, we now discuss the main analytical concepts which we employ in the paper.

Botz-Bornstein (2012, 8) suggests that several 'historical monuments' in China are 'not real but hyperreal'. Coined by Baudrillard (1983), the term hyperreality refers to an idealised reality. 'It is the state in which it is impossible to distinguish reality from fantasy, not because the fantasy is such a good imitation of reality, but because hyperreality produces images of something that never existed in the first place' (Botz-Bornstein 2012, 7). Where reality and representation are intermeshed such that it is difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins, simulation occurs. A simulacrum is a copy without an actual original which becomes accepted as true. The question of reality becomes redundant with simulacra. Baudrillard (1983) cites Disneyland as exemplifying hyperreality. Created to look realistic, the fake reality of Disneyland as simulacra creates the illusion of a version of other times and/or places, sanitised and non-threatening (no disease, no crime etc.) for present consumption. It is, as Eco (1976) calls it, a 'false authenticity'.

Sorkin (1992, 231) argues that Disneyland is 'a place everywhere and nowhere'. It is 'someplace that is "like" somewhere else … [where] the "authenticity" of the substitution always depends on the knowledge, however faded, of some absent genuine' (Sorkin 1992, 216). The term 'Disneyfication' (Rojek 1993; Warren 1994), or 'Disneyisation' (Bryman 1999), refers to the creation of an area based on an abstracted history made to look and feel authentic, through processes in which 'pasts are condensed into easily consumed, bite-sized pieces lacking any authenticity' (Ashworth 2009, 79).

The inherent link between hyperreality and Disneyfication is that of (in)authenticity. Yet, what is 'authentic'? Teo and Yeoh (1997, 194) define authenticity as 'the accurate presentation of the past through the conservation of its relict features'. However, as the authors point out, what is 'accurate' is very much open to the (selective) interpretation of (often limited) available data. Authenticity should be regarded as 'emergent' (Cohen 1988) or ephemeral, as 'new' data may be discovered and opinions may change over time (Waitt 2000). In addition, there may be pressure on heritage officers to cater to the demands of politicians, developers and tourists, among other actors. Heritage landscapes may thus be 'manipulated', 'packaged' (Baillie et al. 2010) or 'spruced up' (Bristow 2010) to tell a 'good story', as in the case of Datong.

There is no such absolute thing as authenticity. It is a social construct: 'a buzzword, obsolete before you know it' (Beijer 2013, 532). If, as Ashworth and Graham (2005, 4) suggest, heritage is more concerned with meaning than with material artefacts, and the key issue is not what heritage *is*, but the work which heritage *does*—its performance—in the particular circumstances in which it is enacted (Silverman 2015, 69), logic asks why should it be necessary for it to have existed in reality at all? 'Why not skip the preliminary stage of actual existence and jump directly to the final state of [fictitious] existence?' (Ryckmans 2008, 4). This is what appears to be happening in Lijiang, as Su (2011) illustrates. The new 'old' Dayan area of Lijiang, rebuilt after the 1996 earthquake, is accepted as authentic of today's heritage, as is the new 'old' Dukezong area of Zhongdian, devastated by fire in 2014 (Hillman 2015).

The 'authenticity' of these and other contrived constructions has recently become the topic of debate amongst Chinese heritage scholars (e.g. Hu et al. 2015; Long 2015; Zhang 2011; Zhu 2012). Opinion is divided as to the importance of a modernist, Western interpretation of authenticity (cited in Teo and Yeoh 1997, 194), represented in Zhang (2011), or a more postmodern interpretation of 'becoming' authentic which weaves interaction between agents (Zhu 2012).

Datong: Historical Stories

Datong is geographically located between the inside and outside lines of the Great Wall, on the northern border where the Han Chinese defended themselves from invaders. Since the time of its first foundation as Yun-zhong during the Warring States Period (475 BC–221 BC), Datong was at war for long periods, while the ruling regime changed frequently between Han and non-Han Chinese. Datong is described as having its heyday in four periods: as Ping-cheng during the Qin and Han dynasties, Du-cheng (capital city) in the Northern Wei Dynasty, Xi-jing (west capital) in the Liao and Jin dynasties, and Datong Fu-cheng in the Ming Dynasty (Datongshi 2000, 25). As described in the nomination files for National Historic City (1982), the recent urban form of the old city is generally considered to be the result of construction in the Ming Dynasty

(1372), when General Xu Da built the city walls on the earthen basis of the Northern Wei Dynasty (Wu 1782) and city buildings were constructed based on the Li-fang[4] street form shaped in the Tang Dynasty. However, heritage sites inside or surrounding the old city include, among other notable sites, the Huayansi temple and Yungang Grottoes, which can be traced further back to the Liao Dynasty or even the Northern Wei Dynasty when Datong was under non-Han domination. Thus, unlike other historical cities in China, Datong is a complex city with far more complicated historic layers influenced by various cultures.

Planning Towards Modernisation Before the 1990s

Having undergone no crucial changes since the Ming Dynasty Datong started its modernisation at the end of the Qing Dynasty. The process was strongly influenced by the regional railway construction project that intended to link Mongolia with Beijing. Functioning as a hub for the Jing-zhang Line (Beijing-Zhangjiakou, started 1914) and later the Ping-sui Line (Beijing-Hohhot, started 1921), Datong ushered in a new period of development. Modern manufacturing and financial industries were introduced, and the urban layout changed as well. With more and more investors expecting the railway to bring prosperity and business opportunities, increasing numbers of modern houses and urban facilities were built in the area in front of the railway station, located just outside the old city to the north (Jiang 2007). By the 1930s, in addition to the traditional market area outside of the east and south gates, the area outside of the north and west gates was gradually beginning to urbanise (Anon 1926).

Following their occupation of Datong from 1937, the Japanese planned to construct a modern industrial city, Daidō. The planning was assigned to Uchida Yoshikazu from the Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo) in July 1937. He and his assistant, Takayama Eika, made the project part of an academic design studio programme in the university, and finalised the first version of the plan based on their students' work. Meanwhile, Sekino Masaru from the Fine Art School (now the Tokyo University of the Arts) prepared reports about Datong's background

information, including geography, history, historical remains, chronicles, maps and climate. After over a year's preparation, Yoshikazu, together with his son, Uchida Yosifumi, also a graduate student in the University of Tokyo, and his assistant, Eika, along with Masaru, visited Datong from September to October in 1938. They revised the plan based on their field surveys, and finished planning related legislation ordinances before their return. The final version was finished in February 1939 (Fig. 8.1b). A look at the drawings and text descriptions (Iwazaki 1939) reveals that the plan was 'remarkable' (Hein 2003, 317) in several ways, incorporating 'the most advanced standards and up-to-date planning concepts' (Lu 2006, 25). The plan included provisions for zoning, a green belt, traffic segregation inspired by Radburn, New Jersey, a satellite city, the conservation of the old city and the design of neighbourhood units based on the Detroit garden-city model (Takayama 1936, in Hein 2003; Lu 2006; Kuan 2013). The plan also aimed to set up a new city centre in the western area outside

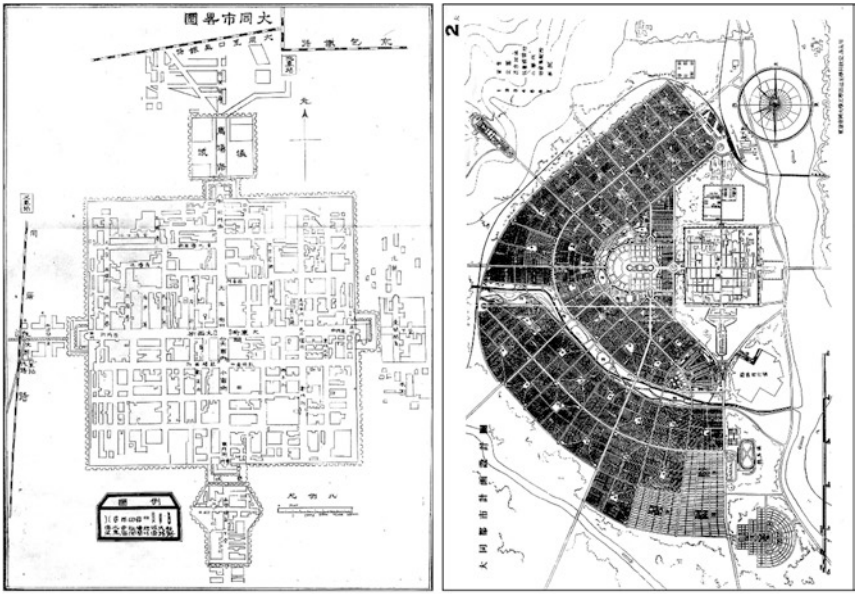

Fig. 8.1 City map and drawing of the final Uchida Plan in the 1930s. (**a**) City map of Datong in 1937, (**b**) Drawing of the final plan in 1939. Source: Nakajima Naoto

of the city gate, while using a fan-shaped pattern of radial roads to connect the station area in the north and the traditional business centre in the south. The plan proposals mixed Western concepts and local Chinese traditions (Hein 2003). Yoshikazu insisted, for example, that the new courthouses should be constructed in local Datong style. The plan was widely regarded as 'one of the most sophisticated master plans of its time' (Lu 2006, 25).

War broke out soon after, and the plan was not fully implemented (Monkyo Sinbunsya 1941). A comparison of the drawing with aerial maps before and after the war indicates that only three main roads were laid out roughly according to the plan. One is the road connecting the Station and the North Gate (ibid.), while the other two are the north-east main roads for constructing a new urban centre in the west. During the same period, some renovation work was also done, such as on the North Gate, which was renovated with a Baroque-style façade.

Tucker (2005, 55) claims that the Japanese planners sought to build 'ideal cities', regarding conquered 'Manchuria' as a 'blank slate' or 'white page' for urban experimentation. Sorensen (2005, 143) points out that the indigenous Chinese inhabitants of Datong, not surprisingly, 'were unlikely to have been very enthusiastic about any plans for their cities that regarded them as non-existent and their land as a void territory'.

After the war, a new round of planning was ordered for developing Datong as one of the most important industrial cities in China, as required by the first Five-Year Plan.[5] The resulting plan appeared in 1955. The plan had the support of experts from the Soviet Union and aimed to build a 'new industrial city supporting the steel base in Baotou' (Zhao 2001, 299) (Fig. 8.2a). Judging from the surviving drawing, this plan seems more realistic than the previous Japanese plan. Its main intended effect on the urban structure was to set up a new city centre in the south, where the traditional business area was located. By diagonal roads, the new centre was linearly extended towards the Heavy Industry Zone in the southwest, while also being linked with the old city in the north. By 1958, four main roads had been finished parallel to the city wall, on both the west and south sides. Along the main roads on the west side (which had been first shaped by the Japanese plan), the children's park, a stadium and new buildings housing municipal enterprises and institutions were

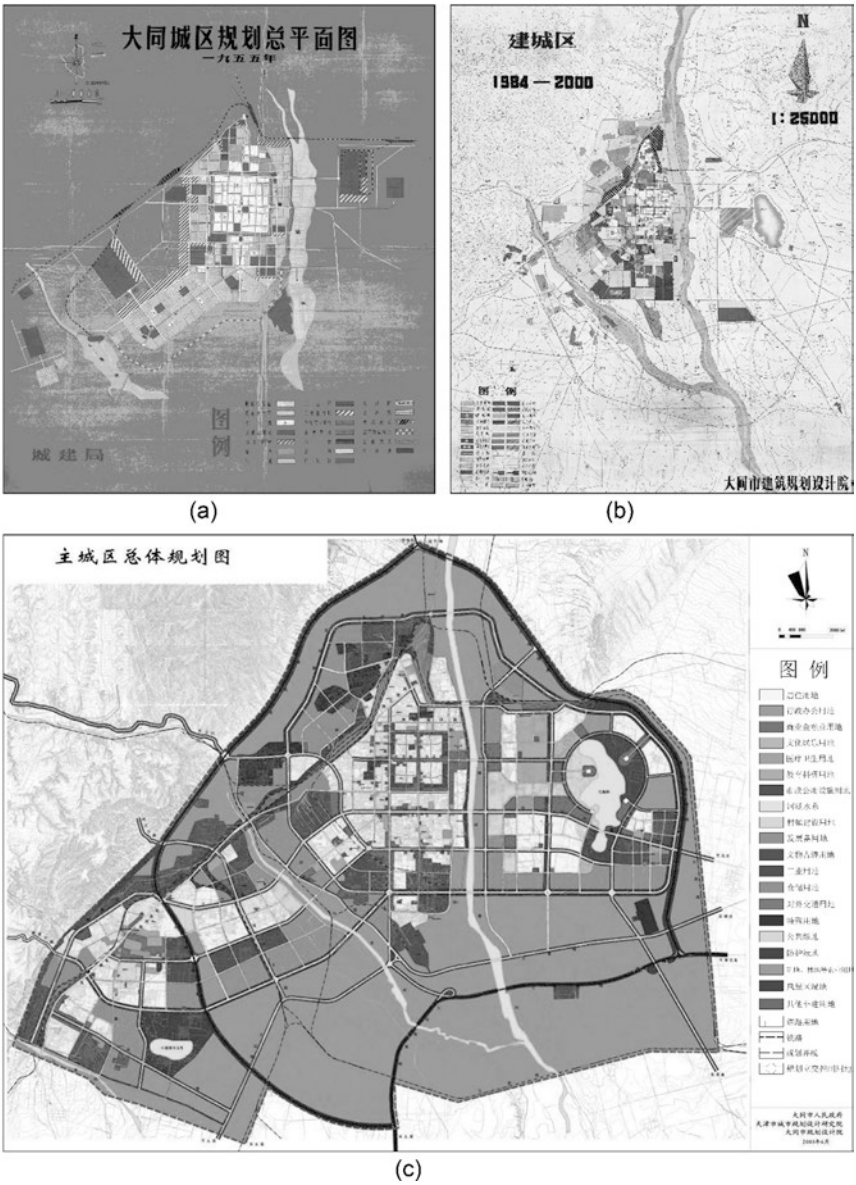

Fig. 8.2 Drawing of the master plans in (**a**) 1955, (**b**) 1985, (**c**) 2006. Source: Urban Construction Archive of Datong City

built. Instead of the south centre planned by the Japanese, the west part outside of the old city became the most active part and the new centre of the city.

The city master plan was revised twice before the 1980s. The first revision was made in 1958 (Datongshi 2000), following the new city definition as a 'base for heavy industry, international hub, and political, economic, and cultural centre of the Northern Shanxi Region' (Zhao 2001, 299). This version planned to remove the Japanese radial road pattern in the south and demolish all of the old Northern Wei Dynasty city wall to construct a 40-metre wide ring road. However, the limited funds could not support the whole demolition project, so during the project's execution 'only eight selected segments were totally demolished to ease transportation, and the remaining parts were truncated to half their original height' (Datongshi 2000, 113). The second revision was made in 1964, aiming to control the urban scale. This directional shift in planning led to more attention being given to improving the built-up areas rather than developing new ones. The four main streets passing through the old city crosswise were expanded to 20–25 metres wide by demolishing old houses. Public facilities were constructed along the new road outside of the west gate to meet residential demand, and the city centre square (now Hongqi Square), once planned by the Japanese for the south, was relocated to the former site of the west gate. The relocated square and its exhibition hall were finalised and functioned as a venue for rallies and a destination for processions along the new roads during the soon-to-come Cultural Revolution.

After the 1970s, which were influenced by reform and the opening up of China, Datong entered a new development period. Work began on a new master plan in 1978, resulting in a plan being finalised in 1985 (Fig. 8.2b). This time, a new city identification, 'historic city' (Datongshi 2000, 114), was added into the plan, while the main development direction was returned to urban expansion towards the southwest, as first proposed in the 1955 version (ibid.). Two general approaches directed attitudes towards the treatment of the old city. One, referred to as Ming Cheng Bao Hu (Conserve the Historic City), was to keep the original urban texture and architectural style by regulating reconstruction projects. The other, Jiu Cheng Gai Zao (Reconstructing the Old City), was to

demolish the old parts and reconstruct them in a convenient modern style. Clearly, the two approaches contradicted each other. For example, the renovation project in Sipailou, praised as 'the most iconic and successful reconstruction project of the 1980s' by the chief secretary of the City Construction Bureau, actually demolished 28000 square metres of historical houses and shops in the most central location of the old city and replaced them with widened roads and a modern commerce quarter with ten large malls (Li 1995). This contradiction in planning then led to long-term effects and difficulties in conserving the old city. The city succeeded in rapidly modernising, at the cost of losing valuable heritage in the 1990s.

Planning for Protecting the Ancient City (2006)

A turning point occurred in 1996, at the start of the ninth Five-Year Plan, when the coal industry was no longer encouraged by the state. As a result, Datong was ordered to change its city identification from that of a coal-based industrial city to a 'comprehensive, multi-functional, and preliminary modernised city' (Zhao 2001, 300). This change meant that the master plan was to be reconsidered, while the city searched for a new industry to support it economically. A round of discussions was initiated by the municipal government from 2000 to 2001, in order to clarify the city's direction of development. Summarising the results of the expert opinions from all sides, the new direction was stated as follows: 'Construct Datong as a new industrial processing base, regional business centre, and northern tourist destination by taking advantage of the historic city, nearby mineral resources, and the city's location' (Wang 2001, 3). The idea of treating the historic city as a development resource led directly to the planning efforts and numerous 'retro' construction projects implemented since 2000.

According to the master plan authorised in 2006, the main concern was to reconstruct the city in order to deal with its significant expansion in size while strengthening the importance of conserving the historic city (Fig. 8.2c). However, in reality, the renovation projects that started in 2008, headed directly by Mayor Geng Yanbo, were not fully in accordance

with the plan or even ignored the conservation restriction. The mayor called his approach 'from Jiu Cheng Gai Zao (reconstruction of old city) to Gu Cheng Bao Hu (protection of ancient city)' (Geng 2011). He did halt over 60 real estate development projects directed by the concept of Jiu Cheng Gai Zao (Reconstructing the Old City) which intended to destroy historical layers and pursue a modern style, but he also started no less than 80 projects for 'protection and restoration' from 2008 to 2012, which resulted in the demolition of more than 30790000 square metres of buildings and 71 streets (Datong 2013, 1083).

Government-led projects related to the restoration of historical settlements and streets were undertaken to reconstruct the city in the ancient style of the Ming Dynasty, including symbolic items, such as the city wall, the city gates, the palace (Daiwangfu) and the central business streets (Gulou), and to 'comprehensively improve the surrounding environment' (Datong 2013, 449) of nominated heritage sites from other ancient periods by planning new tourist squares and facilities in new styles which reflect a feature of the sites they serve, typified by the projects at the Huayansi temple and Yungang Grottoes.

The modern rebirth of historical street space is based on a 'blend of traditional and modern experience' to 'create continuation of history', a 're-interpretation of history' (Zhou et al. 2012). Modern Datong has undergone the construction of tradition. The construction of the past gives the state the 'opportunity to filter out what it deems undesirable and to retain what it considers beneficial to cultivating a sense of cohesion and national identity' (Yeoh and King 1997, 59). For instance, neither the 'non-harmonious' layers of old streets and dwellings, nor the non-Han Northern Wei Dynasty city wall were deemed 'desirable' as representations of place identity. Further, decisions were taken to extinguish virtually all evidence of the Japanese occupation of Datong, with the exceptions of the (modified) North Gate and the Mass Graves Memorial Hall at the Meiyukou coal mine where 60000 miners died. Construction is pursued in the name of 'harmony'—Jane Lu (national manager at the State Administration of Cultural Heritage) stated that buildings in Datong were previously 'not harmonious' (in Bruno 2014, online), being constructed at different times in different styles.

Case Examples Discussion

In Datong's historical development process since the modern era, a clear division of planning and its implementation directions can be observed. Furthermore, it is clear that despite a general direction of 'protecting the ancient city', apparent since the 1980s, but even in the 1939 Japanese plan, numerous historic dwellings in the old city have been and are being demolished, to be replaced with new 'old' buildings (see Fig. 8.4). Construction projects are more an idealised exploration responding to the new challenges of development rather than the implementation of conservation in the traditional sense. Throughout the stories of planning

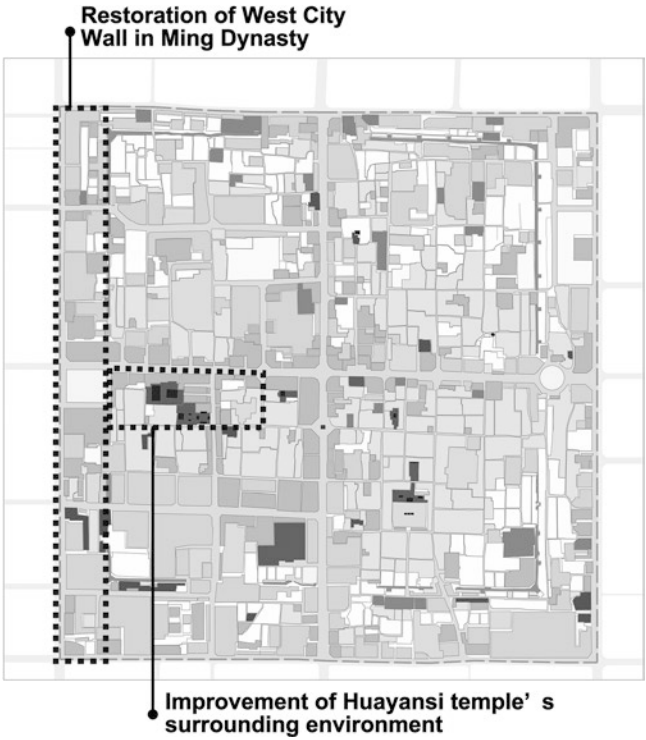

Fig. 8.3 Project area of two cases in *Land Use Analysis of Datong Old City*. Map Source: Shulan Fu

in Datong, we can discern an operative logic of progress, modernisation/improvement, harmony and, to a greater or lesser extent, self-referentiality. In what follows, we examine the restoration of the west city wall and the improvement of the Huayansi temple complex environment.

Restoration of the West City Wall in the Ming Dynasty (2011–Recent)

This project is one of a series planned to 'reproduce an integrated scene of Datong city in the Ming Dynasty' (Datong 2013, 353). The project area covered the entire west city wall, including its surroundings, as depicted in Fig. 8.3. The project affects built heritage from almost the entire story of Datong and its planning history. For example, the Wei-du-da-dao Road was historically formed based on the Japanese plan; the settlements in between Wei-du-da-dao and the city wall, including modern residences, offices and Hongqi Square were formed based on the plan from the 1950s to the 1970s; the inner side of the city wall includes the Li-Fang street form shaped in the Tang Dynasty and the old houses constructed in the Ming and Qing dynasties prior to modernisation; and the Northern Wei Dynasty city wall was reformed in the Ming Dynasty and then half-lowered and partially removed during the 1950s. Ignoring these layers of heritage, all the above buildings were planned to be demolished in 'restoring' the wall. Even the extremely symbolic Hongqi Square,

Fig. 8.4 Recent photos of the West City Wall and Huayansi. (**a**) Construction scene of the West City Wall, (**b**) The tourist square in front of Huayansi. Source: (a) Jean Hillier (September 29, 2016), (b) Shulan Fu (September 23, 2016)

created to showcase the Party's new regime, was also planned to be demolished to make space for (re)constructing the West City Gate. Only the exhibition hall was kept intact through relocation. Besides demolishing all the former urban texture, the reconstruction itself may be questioned because of its method of implementation, which was extremely careless about the remaining original buildings. The modern rebirth of the old city is based on inaccurate ancient maps and literary descriptions about the Ming Dynasty. Modern construction materials and techniques have been used for the wall. New red bricks fill in steel reinforced concrete pillars and grey stones cover the construction so that it appears 'old'. The walls are a full scale replica of the originals (39 feet high and 60 feet wide at the base). Brand-new watchtowers have been constructed at intervals, while there are holes for traffic to pass through. As Ren (2014, online) comments, the walls are '*almost* impressive' (emphasis in original).

The total demolition and new building of the city wall represents an operative logic of 'progress, modernisation and improvement'. Meanwhile, the part-concept of 'retro ancient past' explains why the Ming Dynasty was chosen to be the period for restoration, when the city wall had already lost its original form to plans implemented in the 1960s, and when it is clear that the Ming city wall was built on the clay wall of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–557). The logic here is that although the Northern Wei Dynasty is the earliest period to which the wall could be traced back, it was not a period of Han domination. It fits the governments' needs of establishing orthodoxy for the new plan to choose the Ming Dynasty as the self-referential point of return. In addition, with little accurate historical data available, it is relatively easy to construct things which fit recent fictions about a 'good' past. A new 'old city gate' was constructed to replace Hongqi Square, which had reflected aspects of Datong's 'real' history and was the most symbolic urban space of the 1960s.

Improvement of the Huayansi temple complex environment (2008–2011)

The Huayansi temple is a national heritage site (nominated 1961) established in the Liao Dynasty (907–1125). The temple has been reconstructed several times, however, after being demolished by war and thus includes architecture from the Liao, Jin, Ming and Qing dynasties. The improvement project included the restoration of several historic buildings, the creation of a tourist square opposite the temple gate and the

construction of a new business complex surrounding the square, including an underground parking facility and a 'Liao-Jin style' gallery for an exhibition showcasing culture in the Liao and Jin dynasties (see Fig. 8.4b). In order to build the new tourist square and business complex, an urban block was demolished, including 45 historic residential courtyards, five modern commercial buildings, and three historic streets. After the project, the Huayansi temple site was expanded to more than five times larger than its previous size, from 9600 square metres to 60000 square metres.

Again, an operative logic of 'progress, modernisation and improvement' is apparent. The former historic residential area beside the temple was considered to be old and impeding the needed tourism and so it was demolished and a new tourist square complex constructed to 'improve the surrounding environment of the temple' (Datong 2013, 373). In order to be in harmony with the temple, the new tourist square complex was designed in Liao-jin style. This is a newly created style, made by borrowing architectural images and details from an antique wooden shelf inside the temple's scripture library (Bo Jia Jiao Cang), which is the oldest extant Buddhist scripture library, founded in the Liao Dynasty and renovated in the Jin and Ming dynasties. Choosing the sculpted images from a piece of artistic furniture rather than the architecture itself reflects the part-concepts of both self-referentiality and retro-ancient past. As one of the oldest artefacts inside the temple, the wooden shelf has retained its original appearance from the Liao Dynasty, and is therefore considered as reflecting the most 'correct' image of the Liao-dynasty style. However, the artwork from the wooden shelf is not reality, but a re-creation based on reality.

The new ancient city is more an idealised than a literal re-creation of Datong. It actualises an operative logic of harmony (the Ming-style walls, Tang-style Li-fang street form, Ming-Qin-style courtyards and Liao-Jin complex at Huayansi), progress, improvement, retro-ancient past and self-referentiality. The use of records, ancient artworks and Chinese ideals in the new (re)constructions is self-referential. Dressed as the city is in 'new clothes', are people conditioned to look in Datong for qualities associated with the Chinese cultural model rather than Datong's social, cultural and historical trajectories? As Waitt (2000, 258) suggests, the 'danger' of an official, commodified interpretation and representation of

Datong's 'heritage' story is that it closes off other versions. Little remains of the city plan from the period of Japanese occupation, for example. Perhaps this less harmonious history comes from a period which local officials would prefer to forget; yet, its national significance cannot be denied (see above).

Bruno (2014, 3) illustrates how much of the historic housing in the old city is being demolished 'because it doesn't date to as ancient a period as the renovators wanted'. Whitehead wrote that 'pure history is a figment of the imagination' (1967, 3–4, in Massumi 2015, 155). The new old city is imagined history: faux-history. But does this matter if heritage is merely a social construction attributed by the user, as Ashworth (2009) suggests?

It is clear that the renovation of Datong is not historically authentic. Despite the use of old maps, records and artefacts as reference, Datong is a replica city. Rather than conserve old houses, factories, shops and historic monuments 'out of harmony' with the preferred Ming, Tang and Liao-Jin dynasty styles, the structures were demolished in the name of harmonious improvement. If there is no such thing as real authenticity, does it really matter if Datong's heritage is manufactured or staged? As Bruno (2014, 4) comments, 'five or six years ago, Datong looked nothing like a historic city.' Today, it may be faux-history, but it gives the illusion of an historic place. Existential authenticity is not the authenticity of a place or object per se, but the existential experience activated by the place or object (Steiner and Reisinger 2006), as Lijiang and Zhongdian illustrate. These renovations of the early twenty-first century are 'authentic' of their time.

There is no tension in hyperreality between the past and the creation of 'culture' in the Chinese sense of an absolute self-referential quality (Botz-Bornstein 2012, 14). In the case of Datong, newly (re)constructed walls and buildings refer to a mythical cultural past which now has a real presence. Structures (such as the Huayansi complex) are real precisely because they are *not* real; that is, because they are not 'merely' items representing ancient civilisation, but of Chinese culture. As Botz-Bornstein (2012, 16) explains, 'anything that refers to the vast reservoir of Chinese culture is authentic enough because its relationship with this culture *makes* it authentic' (emphasis in original). Datong can dispense with or

demolish its original 'old' buildings as they are not needed in hyperreality. In fact, they obstruct the telling of a harmonious story. The authorities in Datong have not abandoned history, but merely its material expression. Representations of heritage become more important than experience of the original. Representations may only be facades, as in the new old city gate and the Small East City (Dongxiaocheng) shopping mall.[6]

Disneylands are constructed on the lines of Walt Disney's assumption that 'people prefer tidy replicas to the real thing' (Steiner 1998, 12). Disneylands are places where everything works, and they are clean and safe for visitors. As such, they 'whitewash' and sanitise history to render it more palatable to people.

It may be argued that Disneylands are effectively non-places (Augé 1995). This is a one-dimensional space; a space not rooted in time or sustained relationships with people. But can non-places become places over time as people get to know and form relationships with them? Perhaps, like the new old areas of Lijiang and Zhongdian, Datong will become recognised by tourists as 'unique' and 'a great place to walk around' (TripAdvisor 2017).

Conclusions

'Heritage sites are the ultimate reduction of the dimensionality of time' (Baillie et al. 2010, 57). Through heritage, the past merges with, and may be subsumed by, the present, narrating possibly historically accurate, possibly distorted or possibly entirely fictitious stories. If Massey (1993) argues for the redefinition of place to include its being a progressive site of social life, perhaps the traditional Chinese cultural vision of progress as frequently iconoclastic may indeed define Datong as a place? As AlSayyad (2001, 15) notes: 'the consumption of tradition as a form of cultural demand and the manufacture of heritage as a field of commercial supply are two sides of the same coin.'

The vision of progress, improvement and modernisation is a formative tendency, which, together with the part-concepts of harmony, self-referentiality and retro-ancient past, forms the operative logic underlying

the historical moments of planning and (re)novation of Datong. Everything is transient. Nothing is indispensable. Heritage is always in the process of re-making (Waterton and Watson 2015).

Through studying Datong's past via maps, records, plans, photographs and artefacts as repositories of the past, municipal authorities have drawn upon a found 'past' to design its present. Iconoclasm is not regarded as barbarism or abuse, but as the enabling of improved replacement and restoration. Heritage forms a bridge with the past, but it is not the past. Buildings represent ideas, not Nietzschean monuments.

Heritage is a resource (Hall 2009), with utility value. 'The Chinese past is a perpetually elusive enemy' (Botz-Bornstein 2012, 16). But this is an essentially pragmatic view. It may be regarded as 'progressive and flexible because it does not insist on the literal preservation of material things and because it is not attached to history as an object' (ibid.). As such, the (re)construction of the fabric of Datong with Ming dynasty-style walls and Tang or Liao-Jin dynasty-style buildings directs people's attention to a limited range of interpretations of the city's planning past.

The importance of heritage lies in the way in which it reveals to us something about ourselves and our worlds (Malpas 2007). Renovation in Datong presents an 'imagined rootedness' (Beijer 2013); a deliberate effort to evoke a sense of place rooted in a certain historic past. As Ashworth and Graham (2005, 5) comment: 'we create the heritage we require.' A Disney-type approach promotes the authenticity of the copy of the Ming- and Tang-dynasty construction and the creation of a new Liao-Jin style at Huayansi. Disneyfication exaggerates the hyperreal component of Datong's renovation. But place is a process of multiple histories and multiple identities. Previous, current and future master plans and renovations are part of this process. Mayor Geng's construction work is simply the latest in a series of histories and identities, each one 'authentic' to itself. Authenticity is thus not an absolute, but a dynamic social construct. Datong's (re)development is 'authentically' self-referential in its modern retro-ancient styles. In time, Datong's city walls and renovated buildings may be regarded as authentically representative of the early twenty-first-century vogue in China for recapturing the 'old' glory of post-industrial cities.

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Notes

1. By the State Council.
2. By the National Tourism Administration.
3. By the National Tourism Administration.
4. Li-fang (里坊) is an ancient concept of planning residential areas, following the *Rites of Zhou*, which refers to a chessboard-like arrangement of streets delineating walled blocks of residences. Chang-an (now Xi-an), planned in the Tang dynasty, is considered to be the most typical example of Li-fang put into practice.
5. In China, city master plans are made and revised by a municipality according to the national economy development plan, which has been revised every five years since 1951.
6. The constructed façade of a walled town serves as scenery for shopping and standardised consumerist experiences which do little, if anything, to engage people with the rich cultural heritage of Datong.

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