The notions of 'heritage', nowadays shared worldwide, were originally shaped following European cultural backgrounds and are mainly based on material authenticity, aesthetic qualities, and historical and artistic values. Disseminated on an international scale, first by the colonial powers, then by organizations such as UNESCO, and appropriated and reassembled by local agents, these notions deeply influence the way heritage is currently defined and managed on the global level. An emergent thinking developed by researchers, but also by international organizations, institutions, and practitioners in the field of critical heritage studies has recently started to call into question the dominant paradigms that influence heritage recognition, and to evaluate the relevance of these paradigms outside Europe, in particular in postcolonial contexts. We have observed that the current avenues of inquiry in heritage studies are keen on producing well-argued critiques of institutional heritage practices, but show some difficulties in proposing positive and forward-looking approaches for dealing with heritage in contemporary societies.

A manifesto

This text was generated in response to the manifesto produced by the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in 2011. A team of MA students and PhD candidates, enrolled in the Leiden University program Critical Heritage Studies of Asia and Europe have compiled this text, with support from the MA program coordinator, Adèle Esposito, and independent researcher, Ian Dull. This manifesto aims to foster debates, raise critiques, and inspire new ideas that deepen the understanding of the complex phenomenon of heritage in contemporary societies. Based on our research in various contexts of Asia, we wish to make some preliminary statements, which may help to problematize contemporary heritage approaches and elaborate on policy and management measures.

Asia is characterized by a high diversity of religious, linguistic, and cultural contexts. We have observed that, while national institutions tend to endorse internationalized heritage discourses and to conceive heritage through the filter of postcolonial cultural influences, numerous social groups and individuals show an emerging concern for heritage and contest the promoters and the users of the new city attach cultural values to the ‘copy’ that are related to the fascination with foreign heritage and culture. Analyzing the case of Hallstätter See, authenticity and fakeness appear to be relative and questionable categories. This extreme example leads us to question the plurality of visions encompassed by the notion of authenticity. Yet previous research has often ridiculed and condemned these kinds of projects. Breaking with this judgmental attitude, we call for further research, aiming to understand the social, political, and cultural contexts, which give rise to specific, sometimes disruptive, ideas of authenticity.

Dear readers of The Newsletter, you too are welcome to respond to this manifesto. Do you work on heritage in the context of Asia? Would you like to make a statement drawing on your own research?

You are invited to submit a short article (max 400 words) before 15 Dec 2014, to the following email address: criticalheritagestudies@gmail.com

Selected contributions will be published in the next issue of The Newsletter (issue #70, February 2015).
Condemnation of memory

Institutional heritage in modern Western societies is a process of accumulation and classification of objects (Harrison 2013). In the contemporary world, which is already overwhelmed by data, the indiscriminate collection of heritage artifacts and sites might result in a sterile archival census of past remains. As argued by Harrison (2012), an artifact, despite and sites might result in a sterile archival census of past remains. As argued by Harrison (2012), an artifact, despite being considered as valuable in the past, might have lost its qualities for present societies. For this reason, various social agencies must undertake a conscious and honest process of heritage assessment to judge what values has today, for whom, and why. We even assert further by saying that the results of this process may imply that certain legacies from the past can be destroyed, because they lack importance in contemporary times, or because they embody negative values that societies wish to ‘erasure’. The history of humankind presents numerous cases in which heritage was deliberately negated. In the Roman Empire, this practice was defined as domus memoriae (the condemnation of memory) and was applied to people and objects representing dishonor or betrayal of the state. To us, this kind of approach is authoritarian and violent - it perpetuates a top-down perspective - yet we defend one's right to get rid of negative heritage, as a conscious act. In Korea, for instance, the Government General Building, built by the Japanese administration in front of the Gyeongbokgung royal palace in Seoul, was demolished between 1995-1996 after a long debate because it represented a negative symbol of colonial imperialism (fig. 2). However, the dome and other parts of this building have been preserved inside the Independence Hall Museum of Cheonan. In this way the negative memory was not completely destroyed, why must heritage be a necessary discourse in every place? Heritage of heritage in a number of domains cannot be denied, why heritage districts to promote urban economic development and revitalization for touristic pleasures an almost ubiquitous phenomena it is best suited to study. One cannot forget that the consistent use of these same logics worldwide endorses authenticity, conserving material heritage to this process may imply that certain legacies from the past can be destroyed, because they lack importance in contemporary times, or because they embody negative values that societies wish to ‘erasure’. The history of humankind presents numerous cases in which heritage was deliberately negated. In the Roman Empire, this practice was defined as domus memoriae (the condemnation of memory) and was applied to people and objects representing dishonor or betrayal of the state. To us, this kind of approach is authoritarian and violent - it perpetuates a top-down perspective - yet we defend one's right to get rid of negative heritage, as a conscious act. In Korea, for instance, the Government General Building, built by the Japanese administration in front of the Gyeongbokgung royal palace in Seoul, was demolished between 1995-1996 after a long debate because it represented a negative symbol of colonial imperialism (fig. 2). However, the dome and other parts of this building have been preserved inside the Independence Hall Museum of Cheonan. In this way the negative memory was not completely destroyed, why must heritage be a necessary discourse in every place? Heritage of heritage in a number of domains cannot be denied, why must heritage be a necessary discourse in every place? Heritage of heritage in a number of domains cannot be denied, why must heritage be a necessary discourse in every place? Heritage of heritage in a number of domains cannot be denied, why must heritage be a necessary discourse in every place? Heritage of heritage in a number of domains cannot be denied, why must heritage be a necessary discourse in every place? Heritage of