MARKETING AND THE (IN)AUTHENTIC: A YIN-YANG PERSPECTIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a processual interpretation of (in)authenticity. It challenges the distinctive and polarised dualistic thinking in the context of heritage consumption and reframes the binary dynamics in marketing and consumer research. By employing an indigenous philosophy, Yin-Yang thinking, as the theoretical lens, this thesis enables a novel perspective to look at the neglected mutuality between dualistic elements. Through a two-stage online qualitative inquiry into the consumption experience of a trending museum merchandise – archaeological blind box, this study interprets the mutuality between authenticity and inauthenticity from multiple angles, and creates a Yin-Yang space where binary opposites are understood as inseparable and co-constitutive dualities. It is through the harmonious and generative interplay of these dualities within this Yin-Yang space that the *Qi* (vitality) keeps its sustainable flow. Building upon Yin-Yang thinking, this study contributes to the literature by offering an integrative review of the multifaceted and even tensional dynamics in marketing and consumption. It significantly enriches the perspectives on authenticity and subject-object relations in marketing and consumer research, opening up new prospects for rethinking these concepts through a dynamic, holistic and generative binary lens.

Keywords: (In)Authenticity, Dualism, Heritage Consumption, Yin-Yang Thinking, Vitality Making, Indigenous Theory

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is conceived in my reflection on an interesting but underappreciated consumption phenomenon, the consumption of museum merchandise. Drawing on the conspicuous tensions between authenticity and inauthenticity that emerge from this context, this thesis employs Yin-Yang thinking as an indigenous theoretical framework. By underlining the generative mutuality between the opposites, it challenges the entrenched dualistic polarity and introduces a unique binary lens, providing fresh insights into the discussion on topics such as (in)authenticity and subject-object relations in marketing and consumer research.

Commonly recognised as items developed and sold by museums with reference to their collections, museum merchandise serves as a consumable substitute for its sacred and non-tradable archetype, often purchased as a souvenir. It can be a key chain designed in the shape of the Rosetta Stone (British Museum), a postcard featuring Vincent van Gogh's Sunflower (Van Gogh Museum), or a blind box embedded with a miniature of ancient bronzeware (Henan Museum). Setting aside this outward resemblance, these products are nothing more than cheap, mass-produced and homogenised reproduction. It is understandable that people tend to see museum merchandise as lacking the authenticity that is typically associated with its precious reference carefully preserved in the exhibition hall. But such contrast and inauthenticity does not prevent people from buying museum merchandise. According to the *2019 Museum Cultural and Creative Products Market Report* launched by the Institute of Cultural Economy, Tsinghua University and Tmall.com, over the past several years, the turnover of museum merchandise in China has achieved a rapid growth, with the transactions in 2019 being threefold comparing with 2017 (Yang and Lu, 2019). And in 2017, the Palace Museum on its own was already reported to have achieved an annual revenue of over 1.5 billion RMB (approximately 160 million GBP) through selling its museum merchandise (People's Daily Online, 2019).

Personally, although I am not a big fan of museum merchandise, I still find myself browsing various museums' online stores from time to time, checking out their latest releases and placing an order when something catches my eye. With all these in mind, I cannot help but wonder: why would people spend money on museum merchandise knowing its mass-produced nature in comparison to its authentic reference collected inside the museum? Is it simply about using museum merchandise as an alternative for something that cannot be attained in reality?

After conducting a preliminary background research, I come to the awareness that museum merchandise does not simply exist as an affordable alternative but serves as an informative springboard to reexamine authenticity which is a popular and contested concept in consumer research. While the quest for authenticity in the marketplace continues to inspire scholarly exploration, it has at the same time elevated authenticity into a superior "absolute concept" with indisputable merit, standing in opposition to its less desirable counterpart – the inauthentic. In broad terms, the authentic is characterised by qualities of being real, original, and genuine, and is often regarded as worthy of recognition and consumption; In contrast, the inauthentic is typically seen as fake, cleverly disguised for appeal. Conceptualisation as such brings forwards the first research question underpinning this thesis when unpacked in the context of museum merchandise consumption – "Why would people consume the inauthentic knowing its inauthenticity?". As will become evident in the following chapters, the binary divide between the "authentic" and "inauthentic" somehow creates an oversight in recognising the potential of the dynamics in-between, and also impedes the inquiry into museum merchandise as part of a more nuanced cultural process. This unhelpful separation will be further reviewed, reflected on, and discussed in the thesis throughout.

With this awareness in mind, this thesis delves into the consumption experience of museum merchandise and presents it as a manifestation of heritage making. How, then, would the

consumption of museum merchandise tie into the making of cultural heritage? It may seem strange to bring together the commercial reproduction and sacred heritage in one setting. But building on the interpretive turn in heritage making and my employment of Yin-Yang thinking as the enabling lens, I argue that in consuming museum merchandise, people are creating cultural heritage at the same time.

As will be expanded in Chapter Two, the commercial representation can coexist with the sacred presentation of cultural heritage in a tensional but co-constitutive manner. For so long, the interpretation of cultural heritage has been governed by convention, that cultural heritage is widely accepted as it is, appearing as a fixed presentation in a designated venue like the museum or heritage site, and subject to definitive and established narratives such as the World Heritage List compiled by the UNESCO (2024). It can be the Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, the Great Wall in China, the Mona Lisa in Louvre, or the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum. Rarely would one question the reasons why these things become heritage, and it can be hard to think outside the box when things as such have been so established and accustomed to. Be that as it may, with an awareness of the hegemony of certified discourse and the corresponding emphasis put on the material manifestation and enduring entity, a group of researchers have come up with distinctive interpretations viewing heritage as a meaning-making process that is always in its constructive becoming joined by a variety of stakeholders, and not kept in check by the physicality, expertise, and authority (Harvey, 2001; Howard, 2003; Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). With the attention on heritage being liberated from authoritative discourses and certified entity and directed to a participatory meaning-making process, heritage is now packaged as consumable experience with different manifestations and further consumed by people with various background (Ashworth, 2014). Ordinary people are no longer acquiescent recipients of the predetermined rendition, but "author of meaning(s)" who has an important say in the making of cultural heritage (Staiff, 2014, p.28). In other words, heritage is not embedded

in the things we receive, but in the process of experiencing and interpreting them. It is within this context that I see the consumption of museum merchandise as a reflection of heritage making.

In so doing, attention has been directed to an enduring topic in academic discussion – the binary relation (or opposition) with its root in Cartesian dualism. For instance, pertinent to the phenomenon of interest is the context of museum, in which authenticity often appears as a popular topic in research. People appreciate the authentic and loathe the inauthentic, value the genuine treasure and belittle the plastic kitsch, desire cultural depth and dismiss commercial triviality. If that is the case, then the passion that people have shown for museum merchandise knowing its mass-produced nature is leading us to an uncharted territory with insights to be revealed within this authentic-inauthentic dichotomy. Similarly, in a broader and relevant context, with more emphasis being put on viewing heritage as a constructive and intangible becoming rather than a certified and tangible being (Smith, 2006), UNESCO has come up with a new term, "living heritage", to describe intangible cultural heritage focusing on the people and knowledge in a dynamic, interactive, and sustainable manner (UNESCO, no date). While such term acknowledges the fluidity and vitality of heritage as a social construct, its specific designation to the intangible alludes to the impression that tangible cultural heritage (e.g., monument, museum artefact and landscapes) is essentially "dead". But if that is the case, then why would people consume museum merchandise that is not only an inauthentic kitsch but also a copy of something lifeless? Why would people spend money on things that are deemed as dull and static? Consumption as such points at an intriguing possibility that the binary opposites (e.g., authentic/inauthentic, tangible/intangible) may not be as poles apart as we think they are. However, current studies, especially those developed in a Western context, are so occupied in breaking free from the Cartesian dualism that they cannot fully grasp the intricacy within the binary relation. That being so, I take advantage of my Chinese cultural background

and employ a long-established indigenous philosophy, Yin-Yang thinking, as the enabling lens to interpret this seemingly irrational consumption phenomenon. Building on the view of "heritage-as-process" and the guidance of the Yin-Yang thinking, in this thesis I conceive cultural heritage as a tensional becoming where its vitality plays out in the interplay between a series of non-contradictory oppositions. Through this unique Yin-Yang lens, I seek to enable a different perspective to view the binary dynamics explored in the phenomenon of interest and enrich our binary thinking by making a theoretical contribution to the way in which oppositional tensions are viewed in marketing. This will be metaphorically unpacked in the findings and further integrated with topics of other relevant fields in the discussion chapters.

Diving into my phenomenon of interest, I find the evolution of museum merchandise in China serves as an informative backdrop for the connection that I seek to build between the consumption of museum merchandise and heritage making. Initially, the orientation of museum merchandise in China is no different from common tourism souvenirs. The products on sale are often mediocre replications of museum collections or indistinctive items such as mugs and T-shirts printed with stereotypical images or patterns copied from the collected artefacts. But situation has changed when museums in China start taking in the cultural and creative blueprint. Despite its later start compared to the museums in the Western countries, museum merchandise in China has achieved a rapid growth in the past twenty years, developed into a system of its own known as "museum cultural creative product", and become an integral part of heritage consumption (Li *et al.*, 2021). To date, consensus has yet to be reached about the definition of such products. Yang *et al*. (2019, p.547-548) describe museum cultural creative products as "products that are creatively designed and developed based on the museum collections"; Li *et al*. (2021, p.6) consider it as "creative and unique cultural products sold by museums"; He and Timothy (2024, p.144), on the other hand, classify museum cultural creative products as one variety of souvenir and highlight its uniqueness as being "mass-produced but

with certain elements of localness that many consider to be authentic". Albeit the divergence in definition, one may notice the underlying consistency in acknowledging the creative coexistence of mass consumption and exclusive interpretation (i.e., museum-led heritage presentation). Combination as such endows museum merchandise with noticeable experiential value (Wang, 2024) and makes it stand out from the "general economic entity of the merchandise" (Lin *et al*., 2018, p.2046). Accordingly, a new route for heritage consumption is opened up, providing people with an extended heritage exposure (Shao *et al.*, 2019).

Meanwhile, it turns out that museum merchandise in China does not only exist as a commercial item, rather, it is a fusion of the dynamics in national policy, sociocultural environment, and consumption market. Firstly, from a policy standpoint, the development of museum merchandise and particularly its cultural creative subgenre align with the Chinese government's initiative to promote cultural and creative industries as one path towards the realisation of the Chinese Dream, also known as the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Wang, 2022a). In 2006, the State Council first recognised the importance of cultural and creative industries and promoted the integration of creativity into the contemporary development of museums (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, 2006). In 2016, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism together with the National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, and National Cultural Heritage Administration issued a joint notice – "Some measures on further promoting the development of cultural and creative products in cultural relics units", emphasising the principal role that museums play in developing cultural and creative products (Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, 2016). More recently, in one important discourse, President Xi Jinping calls for continuous efforts to bring cultural heritage back to life, addressing the critical role that museums play in this revitalising process, and highlighting the value of museum merchandise in this process (QSTheory, 2022). It is discernible that the advancement of museum

merchandise complies with the government prospect, which is also a reflection of the collectivist culture in China (Yang *et al*., 2022), that consumption of museum merchandise is not merely an individual transaction but a constructive purchase with public significance as one has stepped into the grand milieu of culture rejuvenation.

Secondly, the rise of museum merchandise also reflects the "Guochao" trend and emergence of Generation Z (Gen Z, people born between the late 1990s and early 2010s) as the consumer cohort representing the future market. "Guochao" (also known as China-Chic) as a "rising cultural identity" (Wang, 2022b, p.149) refers to the surge in Chinese youth's interest in consuming domestic heritage brands and products integrated with Chinese traditional culture or heritage elements (TideSight, 2021). By virtue of its rich cultural connotation and innovative presentation, museum merchandise in China is embraced as a cogent "Guochao" offering and welcomed by Gen Z. A typical example is the lipsticks launched by the Palace Museum. Having their colours inspired by the museum's jewelry collections and package decorated with motifs and patterns extracted from the nobilities' attires, these lipsticks soon become high-demand celebrity product after their release and experience recurring supply shortages. In concert, with Gen Z entering the market and gradually growing into the main force of consumption, research has found that while Gen Z are more prone to be affected by new trend in consumption, they have shown strong interest in nostalgia and retro consumption (Jiang *et al*., 2021). They also devote more time in social media to access and share information of interest comparing with previous generations (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). This to some extent has also affected the development of museum merchandise when considering its presence and application in a wider consumption context beyond the common spatial scope of museum.

Thirdly, the thriving e-commerce further accelerates the circulation of museum merchandise (Li *et al.,* 2021). Online merchandising expands the reach of museum merchandise beyond the temporal and geographical scope of museum visit. People now have access to view, purchase, and share products of this genre before and after their visit, or even without visiting the museum in person. Accordingly, this allows museum merchandise to break free from the stereotype as a subordinate "souvenir" and acquire more significance on its own merits. In addition, newfangled business formats have also inspired the "creative" dimension of museum merchandise. Huang, Chen and Zhan (2023) suggest "game+" elements as a promising direction for museums to diversify the product's usage scenario by mentioning the interactive puzzle book developed by the Palace Museum. In a similar fashion, an archaeology-themed blind box series launched by Henan Museum at the end of 2020 capitalised on the mystery aura emanated from blind box as an innovative consumption modality and became the bestseller of the year (Song and Yao, 2021). The incorporation of innovative strategies like creative interaction and trending modality aligns with consumer's pursuit of experiential benefits in heritage consumption (Chronis, 2005), particularly for Gen Z who are sensitive to trendiness and tradition at the same time. In this fashion, museum merchandise transforms into an action-oriented offering, carrying not only transaction or use value, but also experiential merit yet to be explored.

Having museum merchandise situated within the intersection of national policy, sociocultural context, and market dynamics, one may notice that the understanding of museum merchandise in this context has transcended the simplistic authentic-inauthentic divide and entered a more blended space where the authority engages with the public, the tradition intersects with the modern, and the commercial coexists with the cultural. In this space, museum merchandise is not merely a commercial item replicating the unsellable museum artefact, it also acts as an invitation to the consumers to actively join in the rejuvenation of cultural heritage, keeping it

vital and relevant in the modern world. This, therefore, brings out the second research question that underpins this study, which is "how could the consumption of museum merchandise contribute to the vitality of cultural heritage in its making?" After the interpretive turn, the literature in heritage making is yet to touch on the tensional but inseparable dynamics as part of the constructive meaning-making process, nor does it attend to the vitality generated therefrom. Exploring this question allows me to deepen the theoretical conversation around heritage making, particularly when it comes to the copresence of involved tensional elements. This will be further elaborated in Chapter Two.

The rationale behind my interpretation is Yin-Yang thinking, a Chinese philosophy known for its holistic and developmental mindset and embracing attitude towards the contradictions. Unlike the habitual separation of antithesis driven by Western dualism, the execution of Yin-Yang thinking is guided by a duality-based perspective which sees the coexistence of divergent elements as constructive because of the generative dynamics derived from their reciprocal interplay. By adopting this Yin-Yang lens, I present cultural heritage as a dynamic process manifests in the interaction among a series of tensional yet coexisting elements, with its *Qi* (vitality) playing out in the generative mutuality between the opposites. I will discuss this in greater detail in the finding chapters.

Taken above, the questions that underpinning this research are: **"Why would people consume the inauthentic knowing its inauthenticity?"** and **"How could the consumption of museum merchandise contribute to the vitality of cultural heritage in its making?"** With these questions in mind, this thesis aims to achieve the following objectives:

1) to explore the consumption of museum merchandise as an ostensibly inauthentic representation in a context (i.e., heritage making) known for its authenticity.

2) to study the dynamic interplay between key binary opposites in the process of heritage making as part of the consumption experience.
3) to further our understanding of binary oppositions by unpacking the consumption experience of museum merchandise through the lens of Yin-Yang, thereby enabling a different perspective in interpreting the binary relation in marketing research.

The empirical context of this study is a collection of products, "Archaeological Blind Box", developed by Henan Museum in China, which is also something that caught my eye while I was having my random browsing of museum merchandise. Henan Museum is one of China's most historical museums, based in Zhengzhou, Henan province. It has collections of over 170,000 pieces, including many precious relics from Shang, Zhou, Han Dynasty (Henan Museum, 2018). Like any other regional museum in China, Henan Museum has been working on developing its merchandise for a while, rolling out common products such as stationery and accessories. Before tapping into the trend of developing creative museum merchandise, Henan Museum has rarely achieved the same level of influence as the Palace Museum regarding the popularity of its merchandise. However, after the launch of the archaeological blind box at the end of 2020, Henan Museum quickly got into the top search on social media, with its blind box starting an "archaeological craze" among its enthusiasts. This blind box went in vogue soon after its release. The first release of this blind box achieved a sale of half a million RMB and the replenishment of 600 boxes was sold out in 35 seconds (Song and Zhang, 2021). Real-time statistics (note: by 02 May 2024) from Sina Weibo shows that the hashtag "Henan Museum Archaeological Blind Box" has received almost thirty million views and seventeen thousand discussions since its launch. Following the victory of its first attempt in archaeological blind box, Henan Museum keeps working on upgrading this product line with innovative ideas and integration of various traditional crafts. An overview of the "archaeological blind box" product line is presented in Appendix 1.

The birth of archaeological blind box originates from a fusion of archaeological discovery and blind box. Fitting with its name, blind box, originated in Japan as “Gashapon” (or capsule toys), is a product modality with its content being randomly packed into its package, distributed to the consumers in an unpredictable probability, and only revealed after the consumer opens the box. By the agency of the uncertainty and excitement generated from its deliberately veiled offer, blind box has perfused consumers with hedonic and impulse addiction (Zhang, Zhou and Qin, 2022; Zhang and Zhang, 2022; Liu *et al*., 2023). Integrating the similarity between blind box and archaeology in terms of the uncertainty that people might come across in experience, archaeological blind box comes into being, presenting a vicarious excitement of archaeological discovery (Meng, 2020). In this blind box, delicate-made miniatures of museum collections were embedded into a compacted soil block. Unlike the straightforward plastic wrapping used in the common blind box which only requires people to tear it open, the archaeological blind box requires consumers to get their hands dirty by gingerly chipping away the soil using the provided tool to find out what is buried inside, just like what an archaeologist would do in the field (Figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Archaeological blind box developed by Henan Museum

Comparing with the common static presentation of museum merchandise, archaeological blind box enables a more dynamic and uncommon experience integrating elements like archaeology

excavation and restoration that are rarely available in everyday life. This allows consumers to immerse themselves in the excitement of discovery and experience a sense of fulfilment as in unpacking the history. Marked as an "archaeological craze", this blind box has been selected as a classic case and presented at the Third Tourism Product Innovation Conference held by China Tourism Association, showing how museum merchandise could contribute to the rejuvenation of cultural heritage, breathing life into the dormant culture and history (Henan Museum, 2022a).

It is within this interesting context that I conducted my empirical inquiry into the consumption of museum merchandise and its connection with heritage making. Supported by my Yin-Yang informed interpretivist orientation, I direct attention to the underappreciated experiential dimension of museum merchandise and perform a two-stage online qualitative investigation adapted from netnography. Unlike previous studies that focus on extracting product features as manageable attributes in product design for broader generalisation (Sun, Jin and Li, 2017; Hu and Dai, 2018; Yang *et al*., 2019; Tsang, Zhu and Au, 2022), I make a point of the unscripted, organic and revealing interaction that consumers have with the product. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, I foreground the experiential dynamics in people's consumption of archaeological blind box by leveraging the online data such as consumer generated unboxing video as an important source of insights. I also draw on relevant archival data such as museum-initiated promotional materials and conduct interviews with both consumers and producer of archaeological blind box to further strengthen my interpretation. Diving into the experiential aspect of archaeological blind box, this thesis offers valuable empirical perspectives on museum merchandise regarding its merits in heritage making beyond being a cash cow for the museum and affordable substitute for the public.

In the empirical finding chapters, I present a different perspective to look at the consumption of museum merchandise as a constructive process of heritage making and make a contribution to the literature in marketing and consumer research through my integration of Yin-Yang thinking as an illuminating theory. The Finding Foreword first presents that instead of prioritising the material attainment (i.e., replica of museum artefacts) from their purchase of archaeological blind box, participants care more about the unboxing process, namely their distinctive personal involvement in the unboxing. As will be shown in the three interconnected finding chapters, having Yin-Yang thinking weaved into my exploration of this participatory process through three individually unique yet collectively linked metaphors, I illustrate the process of heritage making by unpacking the mutuality between three pairs of Yin-Yang informed binary oppositions, which are often treated in a separate manner in Western tradition. Focusing on participants' embodied experience with archaeological blind box, Chapter Four draws on the Yin-Yang dynamics in traditional Chinese medicine to illustrate the mutuality between tangibility and intangibility in heritage making and demonstrates how the *Qi* (vitality) of heritage plays out in between via a non-linear harmonising process. Building on the tangible access enabled by archaeological blind box, Chapter Five then expands on the constructive interplay between the expert and nonexpert in heritage making through the metaphorical association with the moon and the sun as Yin and Yang. It shows that despite the manifest divergence in expertise, expert and nonexpert are not necessarily mutual-exclusive stakeholders in heritage making but interdependent and reciprocal collaborators, sustaining the *Qi* of heritage through their harmonious interplay. Chapter Six further directs attention to the museum as an authoritative institution and outlines its interplay with the public in the studied consumption phenomenon, highlighting the Yin-Yang dynamics emerging therefrom, and addressing the strategic actions taken by the museum, which is also understood as an organic manifestation of *Qi*.

Taken as a whole, these empirical chapters illuminate a multifold "Yin-Yang space" in which various binary oppositions are brought together for their constructive interplay and generative coexistence. In the concluding chapter, I summarise the generative tensions within this Yin-Yang space and foreground Yin-Yang informed binary thinking as the central contribution that this study has for both theory and practice. The application of Yin-Yang thinking allows us to produce an integrated view on the diverse and even contrasting ideas and unify the distinctions by addressing the tensional yet generative dynamics in-between. This is particularly significant in current discourses on heritage making, (in)authenticity, and (subject-)object relation in the marketing field where continuous efforts have been made to transcend the dualistic thinking. What this Yin-Yang space enables is a transformative prospect, calling for a thorough rethink in how we explore and examine the changes and tensions in the marketplace. As a continuation and expansion of the identified Yin-Yang space, I also highlight the implication of Yin-Yang thinking as a new perspective for several areas of inquiry in the context of marketing, suggesting potential directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I review both theoretical and empirical studies relevant to the scope and purpose of this thesis, and I introduce an indigenous theory as a transformative framework to address the neglected aspects in prior scholarship. I first organise literature in heritage interpretation to illustrate how heritage making has transformed from treating heritage as it *is* to constructing heritage as it *becomes*. By outlining this transition, I call attention to a key aspect that has been overlooked in current discussion, which is the mutuality between opposing elements in heritage making trapped in the entrenched dichotomy. I then situate the discourse on heritage making within an applied context by engaging with related studies in heritage consumption, focusing on how the vitality of heritage plays out in such experiential domain. I highlight the importance of experience in heritage consumption and engage with (in)authenticity as a typical binary notion. I also look at empirical studies of museum merchandise and discuss the traces of heritage vitality therein. Finally, I introduce Yin-Yang thinking as the theoretical framework, underlining its indigenous fundamentals and establishing its compatibility with the focus of this research. The application of Yin-Yang thinking enables a novel perspective to analyse the phenomenon of interest and uncover the neglected dynamics identified in heritage making.

By critically engaging with the literature, I clarify the conceptual issues that this thesis seeks to address, namely the coexistence of binary oppositions in heritage making and their relevance to heritage vitality. I explain how these issues can be approached with Yin-Yang thinking as the enabling lens by foregrounding the generative interaction between the opposites and outline the theoretical implication derived therefrom. Meanwhile, in reviewing the literature, I am aware of other intersecting literature such as experiential marketing, assemblage thinking, and

co-creation for their relevance with the phenomenon of interest. However, to maintain a clear and in-depth engagement with the core theme of consumption in a heritage context, I choose to leave the integration of broader literature to the discussion chapter, where the potential to enrich cross-field insights and set future agenda will be explored. It is also important to note that the argument this study presents on heritage making is established on cultural heritage as a distinct subgenre, in contrast to natural heritage or personal heritage, such as rainforests (Timothy, 2020) and family heirloom (Türe and Ger, 2016). For simplicity, the terms "cultural heritage" and "heritage" will be used interchangeably throughout.

2.2 The Interpretation of Cultural Heritage

To understand how the consumption of museum merchandise is connected to heritage making, it would be necessary to first render comprehensible the idea of heritage. Being an important resource in the present world with great cultural, social, and economic significance, heritage can be a debatable and slippery notion despite its pervasive presence in academic discussion. For some, the word "heritage" is unequivocal, and they see no problem in accepting the established rendition of what heritage is. While for others, their perception of heritage can be at variance with the widely circulated accounts produced by the official, suggesting the fluidity of heritage. The dissonance in the understanding of heritage indicates the fact that there exist multiple versions of "heritage" (Harrison, 2010), of which the discovery, application, transmission and consumption are closely connected with the practice of interpretation performed by distinct stakeholders (Timothy and Boyd, 2003; Mitsche *et al.*, 2013).

Interpretation connects things and phenomena as they exist with people who perceive and reflect on them. On the subject of heritage, interpretation refers to the practices undertaken by people to make sense of heritage and construct meanings based on the derived past (Prentice and Cunnell, 1997). Interpretation can be a cornerstone for the idea of heritage to be constructed

and sustained (Hems, 2006; Tilden, *et* al., 2008; Logan, 2022), but the interpretive focus on heritage can vary, with some treat heritage as concrete properties certified by authorised entities, while others view heritage as a dynamic sociocultural process, shaped by diverse practices and understandings experienced across different people and contexts (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006).

Interpreting heritage as things

Conventionally, the practice of heritage interpretation requires three core elements including the interpreter, the object of interpretation (e.g., place, building, artefact, and skills), and the recipient (Dunbraveanu, Carciun and Todoricu, 2016; Pirkovič and Kocbek, 2023). From this perspective, heritage is often rendered as objectively measurable properties, governed by the authoritative recognition and designation, such as the 1,199 properties presented on the *UNESCO World Heritage List* (UNESCO, 2024) in which the cultural heritage is presented as found in various artefacts, monuments, buildings and sites. Applied in conventions and charters of international organisations, institutional interpretation has been given critical importance in heritage conservation and presentation, making it a crucial strategy and required practice for heritage practitioners around the world to follow.

Having its root in the acclaimed work *Interpreting Our Heritage* written in 1957 by Tilden Freeman who is known as the "father of interpretation", institutional heritage interpretation is understood as "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects" (Tilden *et al.*, 2008, p.33). With its function of raising public awareness about the existence of heritage, enlightening people about its significance, and possibly stimulating people's interest to further explore and get involved in heritage transmission (Mitsche *et al.*, 2013), interpretation with an instructive orientation is in rapport with the educational function of many heritage institutions such as the museums (Staiff, 2014). However, albeit the authoritative approval and academic laudation, heritage interpreted in this

manner is often confined to a concrete dimension and presented in a unilateral and linear fashion (Figure 2.1). In the words of Slack (2020, p.10), "perhaps the most rudimentary idea that comes up when thinking about heritage interpretation is the transfer of knowledge from a heritage institution (say, a museum, archive, library, art gallery, castle and so on) to an audience with the aim of helping them have access to, even understand, the heritage that's there". Expression as such unpacks heritage from a positivistic stance, presenting heritage as entrenched and underpinned by objective evidence and professional narration. The inexpert recipients (e.g., community and visitors), on the other hand, are treated as outsiders who have no say in this interpretation process, left to passively accept the provided information (Hein, 1998; Copeland, 2006).

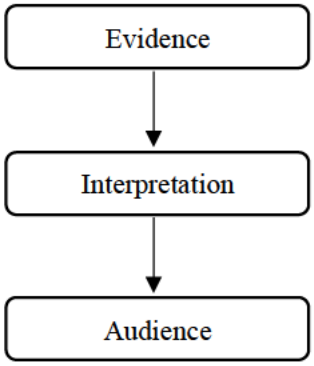


Figure 2.1: Information flow in a positivistic heritage interpretation model (Source: Copeland, 2006, p.86)

This positivistic model is particularly evident in the traditional practice of archaeology as depicted in the ivory tower model and gateway model summarised by Grima (2016, pp.51-54). In the ivory tower model, archaeologists as the professional insiders are centred in the ocean of archaeological materials (potential evidence of tangible cultural heritage) and privileged by their exclusive access to the fieldwork of excavation, backstage of the museum, or the terminology bank in archaeology. Members of the public, by contrast, are situated at the very edge and bottom of this ivory tower with limited access to either the archaeological materials or the archaeologist. The only available information of archaeology delivered to the public is

dependent on what the archaeologists decide to show them and very often the public is not authorised to engage with the interpretation. Similarly, the gateway model represents another way of presentation regarding the separation in heritage interpretation. Aligning with the "deficit model" described by Merriman (2004, p.5), the gateway model depicts archaeologists and their practice as the gatekeeper of archaeological resources and the public can only access limited archaeological information rendered by the gatekeeper after deliberate selection and interpretation. In either the ivory tower or the gateway model, the power of heritage interpretation is exclusive to the authorised expert, while the lay public is treated as passive audience whose perspective makes no difference to the development of heritage discourses. Here, the fundamental issue of positivistic heritage interpretation lies in its presupposition of heritage as a self-evident existence, of which the solely legitimate interpretation comes from the authoritative and professional expert, whereas the public deemed as layperson, is excluded and treated as resigned recipient of heritage. As a result, heritage is governed by technocratic discourses and presented in a straightforward and dichotomous division of being either cultural or natural, tangible or intangible (Ahmad, 2006).

Interpreting heritage as process

Critically framed as the "authorised heritage discourse" (AHD) by Smith (2006, p.11), presentation of regulated and sacrosanct interpretation can draw a series of issues such as the hegemony over the past, static heritage rendition, and unconstructive boundary between the expert and nonexpert, all lead to contested heritage receptions. In her purposive declaration that "There is, really, no such thing as heritage", Smith (2006, p.11) brings the intangible nature of heritage to the fore and presents heritage as a formative process that is not predetermined by AHD but relies on the public's active engagement with and negotiation of relevant resources and manifestations. The significance of heritage is not inherent and happens to be "discovered"

by the expert from the ancient artefacts or at heritage sites, on the contrary, it is an acquired quality which is progressively formed through a process of meaning-making performed by not only the experts but also the common public (Smith, 2006). This transition from treating heritage as "being" to heritage as "becoming" opens the interpretive scope of heritage making and echoes with many other studies in the field (Harrison, 2013; Ashworth, 2014; Emerick, 2014; Waterton, Watson and Silverman, 2017; Muzaini and Minca, 2018). Smith is not the first one unpacking heritage from a process-driven perspective (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Harvey, 2001; Howard, 2003; Lowenthal, 2015), but her work marks a milestone in critical heritage studies by presenting a series of case studies about "what exactly people 'do' – subjectively and culturally – at heritage sites or with the concept of heritage itself" (Smith, 2006, p.45). Mindful of the development of experience economy, Silberman (2012) highlights the experiential quality of heritage interpretation and marks the increasing participation of individuals and communities in contributing to heritage meaning making. With a reference to the "interpretive triangle" suggested by Thorsten (2018), Moreno-Melgarejo *et al.* (2019) also feature experience and participation as integral building blocks alongside with the authorised stewardship and meanings generation in heritage interpretation. Attention on experience and public participation further warrants the "heritage-as-process" argument, wherein the heritage is "always in action" (Waterton, Watson and Silverman, 2017, p.3) and hence deserves interpretation conducted in not only a "top-down approach" but also constructed from a "bottom-up relationship" (Harrison, 2010, p.8; Ashworth, 2014; Zhang, 2022).

As said by Hems (2006, p.6), "effective interpretation must involve audiences in hearing and telling past stories", aligning with the process-oriented conception of both heritage and its interpretation, addressing heritage interpretation on the move from an unauthorised, non-professional perspective would be essential and insightful. To this end, a constructivist

approach takes shape which views heritage as a social construct and underlines the active participation of nonexpert audience in heritage interpretation (Figure 2.2).

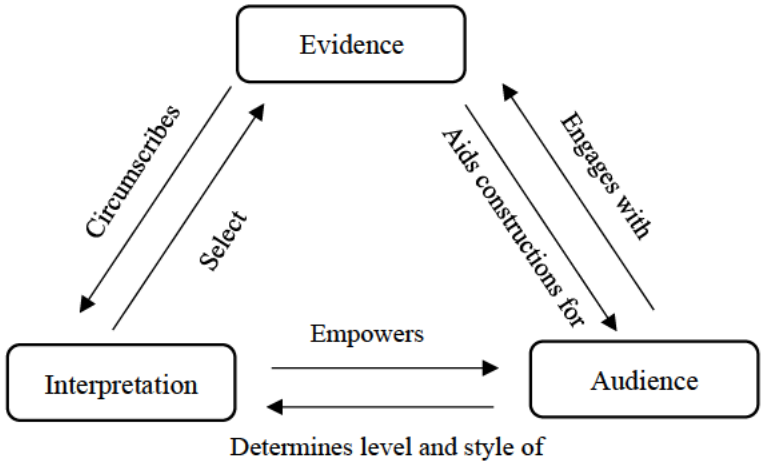


Figure 2.2: Information flow in a constructive model (Source: Copeland, 2006, p.87)

Rather than treating the institutional discourse as an overarching heritage "manual", the constructivist approach is cognizant of the fact that meanings generated by nonexpert audiences from their personal encounter with the given heritage evidence can differ from the interpretation presented by the authority (Mitsche *et al.*, 2013). All of us are audiences of heritage despite the differences in knowledge and specialty (Logan, 2022). In this constructivist setting, nonexpert audiences are empowered to directly interact with the provided heritage evidence and generate their personal understanding of the presented past, while authoritative interpreters (e.g., institutions) are advised to take the audience's perspective into account regardless of its alignment or contradiction with the official narratives (Hems, 2006).

Unlike the positivistic ivory tower or gateway model, the constructivist approach resonates with the development of public archaeology which sheds light on the interaction between archaeology and the contemporary society and seeks to understand how the public utilises the past in the present (Matsuda, 2004; Guttormsen and Hedeager, 2015; Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez, 2015). It argues for an equal or balanced relationship between the public and

archaeologist, by which the expert and lay are connected through a "conversation", rather than a "presentation" or "education" (McDavid, 2004, p.167). In a similar manner, the "open authority" conceptualised by Phillips (2013) which depicts the museum as both a temple of historical resources and a forum of collaborative communication also indicates a constructivist attitude, marking a gradual decentralisation of authority with the public joining as participant and user, instead of being the passive audience (Bollwerk, Connolly and McDavid, 2015). In this sense, the constructive model proposed by Copeland (2006) can be slightly fine-tuned, having the "audience" being replaced with "public participant" and the interpretation performed by two parties in concert (Figure 2.3), while the mutuality between the authoritative and public interpreters are yet to be reevaluated rather than being simply put as "empower" and "determine".

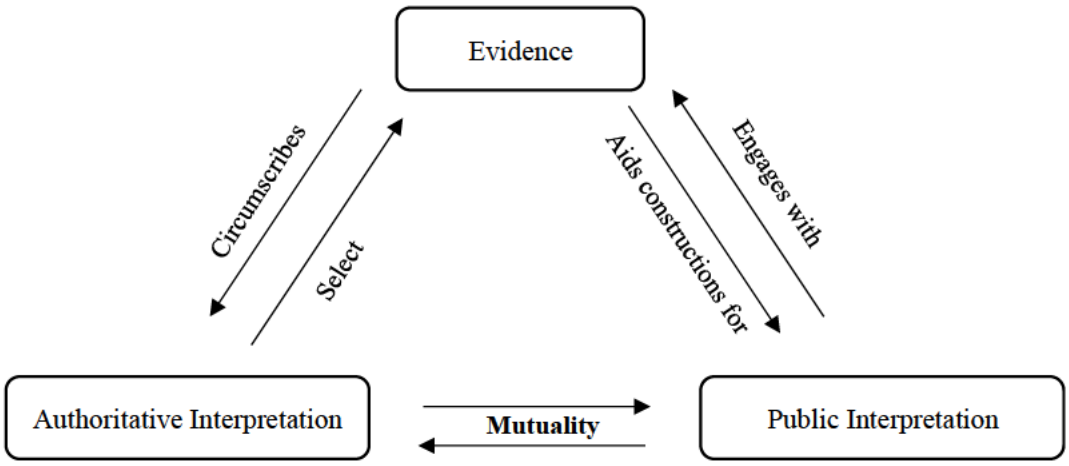


Figure 2.3: Adapted information flow in a constructive model (Source: adapted from Copeland, 2006, p.87)

Inquiry into heritage interpretation with the involvement of non-expert audience is necessary and inevitable, especially when the boundary between the public domain and certified heritage context is getting increasingly blurry. For example, the burgeoning internet and participatory social media have created a virtual space that is accessible to almost everyone. A context like this enables an extended platform not only for heritage institutions, such as the museums, to disseminate authorised interpretation of their collections to a wider public, but also for the

public, who once were passive recipients of authorised discourses, to become the creators of unauthorised interpretation as they are provided with more flexible access to the curated past (Cameron and Mengler, 2013). Drawing on the protest that Iranian nationals have towards the Hollywood movie *300* in which the Persians culture was distortedly represented, Cameron and Mengler (2012) demonstrate how the collections in British Museum presented in the museum's shared online database are wielded through search engine and social media by the Iranians and equipped with political significance to rectify the misrepresentation in the movie. Meaning attribution as demonstrated may not be envisaged in the authorised narrations generated from the interpretation performed by the museum, yet this unauthorised initiative has enriched the meaning of the heritage artefacts that are virtually appropriated by the public and further added to the artefact's contemporary influence. Interpretations as such echo with the constructive rendition of heritage as a process (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006), that "heritage is about how we use the past in the present and how, and why, we attach meaning and value to the past in the present" (Emerick, 2014, p.190). From this perspective, the "we" as mentioned by Emerick is not restricted to the interpreters with certified expertise but refers to every member of the society irrespective of the expertness. People's perception of heritage is not solely dependent on the verified account; it is also affected by their personal engagement and the relevance the heritage holds for them, which can be influenced by the value-laden individual and social context (Hardy, 1988).

In reviewing the literature, it is noticed that while the constructive and process-driven practice has broadened the interpretive scope of heritage, in some respects it makes light of the material quality of heritage and can sometimes paradoxically reinforce the very dichotomy (i.e., expert-inexpert) it aims to dissolve. For instance, although Smith (2006) argues that by assuming the intangible nature of all heritage she has no intention in dismissing the physical dimension of heritage, only to remove it from the predetermined essentiality, the materiality of heritage has

gradually drifted away from the focus of attention and become dispensable in heritage making. Referring the Stonehenge as a pile of rocks, Smith (2006, p.44) perceives heritage as a mental process where the tangible manifestations are merely "cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process". This aligns with the understanding that Stonehenge is considered as heritage because of the interpretations it has been ascribed to, rather than being inherently recognised as such. Comparably, using the well-known Michelangelo's *David* statue as an illustration, Staiff (2014) demonstrates how *David* as a shaped marble becomes meaningful and famous because of the exogenous endorsement it receives outside its material existence. Agreeing with the "heritage-as-process" position, Staiff (2014, p.33) sees heritage making from a processual perspective and suggests that the interpretation of cultural heritage "has a 'life' independent of the material object or place it represents" as most cultural heritage in physical terms is of no difference to those non-heritage beings.

At the same time, the "heritage-as-process" proposition has also triggered a democratic turn in heritage interpretation, with more emphasis being put on empowering the nonexperts to join the making of heritage, whereas the experts who used to be in the centre are now perceived as anti-democratic. This transformation is well reflected in the compilation *Who needs experts?*, in which Schofield (2014, p.2) presents three core principles in understanding cultural heritage, claiming that "1. Heritage is everywhere; 2. Heritage is for everyone; and that 3. We are all heritage experts". In doing so, Schofield (2014) presents the maximum conception of heritage and the democratic conviction that everyone has a say in heritage making. In the third claim, he also implies the existence of diverse expertise which is not confined to the AHD. While argument as such resonates with the appeal for democratising the creation of heritage to a wider interpretive scope, it conveys the impression that a democratic heritage making equals the revocation of expertness. Integrating the tacit removal of expertness with the decentralisation of physicality, it seems that the making of heritage has been reduced to a discursive practice in

which the authoritative and public interpretations are merged into one, with heritage evidence plays no causal role in the process of heritage-making but only exists as an epiphenomenon.

Some researchers have expressed their concerns about these transitions and offered alternative perspectives. As argued by Pétursdóttir (2013, p.44-45, original emphasis), the Stonehenge "isn't simply any collection of rocks, that some things actually *are* heritage – or at least through their physiognomic difference and concrete individuality offer themselves to be identified as such – but at the same time bear in mind that most things are not". Likewise, Dudley (2018) shares about her visit to an art gallery where she was captivated by the material details of a bronze vessel from ancient China. The enchantment occurred before she exposed herself to the textual interpretation provided by the gallery hence her experience at that moment was entirely a sensorial one occupied by the physicality of the object. To Dudley, her emotional reception of the bronze vessel facilitates her cognitive response to the authorised discourse afterwards, and this has much to do with the materiality of the object on display. This can also be applied to *David*, that its physicality can be indispensable to its receptivity and publicity albeit the meanings that people attach to it is in the eye of the beholder. That would also help explain why, of all the marble statues in the world, there are only a handful of household names like *David*. Describing the alienation of material entities as a "discursive turn" in critical heritage studies, Harrison (2013, p.9) points out that while the processual positioning has democratised heritage interpretation, it at the same time depreciates the evocative influence that the material qualities of the past have on the interpretation. Drawing on actor-network theory and assemblage theory, Harrison (2013, p.204) proposes a "dialogical model" depicting heritage as "emerging from the relationship between a range of human and non-human actors and their environments" and applying a "connectivity ontology" (p.217) to bring heritage's tangible and intangible aspects in one place.

Dealing with the rejection of expertise in heritage-making, Muzaini and Minca (2018) believe that the distinction between authorised heritage construction and democratic construction is not necessarily as clear as some would assume. Rather, there exists an overlap between the AHD and heritage from below (HFB) where these two seemingly antithetical makings of heritage can in fact rely on each other for its purpose. Likewise, being conscious of the repudiated attitude towards expertness, Hølleland and Skrede (2019) critically comment on Schofield's claim by underlining the inherent paradox therein. While pointing out the risk of writing off the expert dedication, they argue that attempts to erase the differences between the expert and nonexpert can be ironically a manifestation that "we are *not* all heritage experts" (p.829, original emphasis). It can be more conducive to consider the interplay between experts and nonexperts in heritage making rather than dwelling on the elimination of distinction, which also aligns with what Muzaini and Minca (2018) envision about getting rid of the hierarchical perspective in heritage making.

Taken together, heritage interpretation as an important practice in heritage making has received extensive discussion in the field. The interpretive focus on heritage making has achieved a transition from leaning towards the tangibility, expertise and authority to preference for intangibility and open construction, yet it continues to be shaped by the entrenched dualistic thinking. While research has addressed the limitations of dualism and its inadequacy in guiding in-depth analysis (Smith, 1999), it is also recognised as a useful analytical springboard for fostering critical thinking (Macdonald, 2011), as can be seen from the debates made between the tangible and intangible, expert and nonexpert (Smith, 2006), authorised and unauthorised (Cameron and Mengler, 2013), official and unofficial (Harrison, 2013). Nevertheless, while the starting point of this "things to process" transformation is to dismantle the binary opposition and hierarchical separation in heritage-making, the propositions made by researchers are still trapped in the rigid "either/or" mindset and somehow return to the monism, limiting our

understanding of heritage as a tensional but constructive *becoming*. In foregrounding the intangible and democratic nature of heritage, the focus of attention moves from one extreme to the other, leaving the nuanced dynamics between the opposing elements unattended. In this sense, the key issue in heritage-making may not be about tearing down the irreconcilable oppositions, but rather about how we perceive and capitalise on the distinction from a different perspective. To better understand the intricacies of heritage making, it would be helpful to look at a more concrete context, which is what the following section is dedicated to.

2.3 The Consumption of Heritage

While being frequently visited by the academics on a conceptual level, heritage as an important asset of human civilisation also prevails in a more pragmatic context and has been approached and interpreted by a wider public through the agency of consumption. As a common ground bringing together the divided parts in the heritage whole, heritage consumption also reflects the "thing-to-process" transition in heritage making. Commercial presentation of heritage used to be critiqued as a profit-driven distraction (Toepler, 2006), raising issues around authenticity (Harrison, 2010; Hewison, 2023 [1987]), and stifling creative interpretation with monotonous presentation (Waitt, 2000). But it also enables active public participation, aligns with the constructive conception of "heritage-as-process", and provides a relevant and interconnected context for exploring the nuances of heritage making. Moreover, the commercial representation also serves as a dynamic source of heritage vitality, interpreted as the life force of heritage manifested through the effective transmission of meanings from the past to the present (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995; Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen, 2019). Heritage vitality is essential to the making of heritage as an ongoing and constructive process, because it is the driving force that enables heritage to adapt and resonate with the contemporary world rather than remain as a static remnant of the past. By addressing the importance of vitality, we reinforce heritage as

a living connection between the past and present and further sustain heritage as a something meaningful to be engaged with. In this vein, heritage consumption not only embodies the abstract heritage making in a graspable setting, but also enriches the vitality of heritage in the contemporary world.

Heritage tourism is one representative form of heritage consumption (Santa and Tiatco, 2019). Understood as the "fundamentally economic aspect of heritage" (Harrison, 2010, p.21), tourism as a value-added industry reflects how the past is transformed into tradable commodity (Goulding, 2000; Shepherd, 2002) and received by a larger community through the channel of consumption. While acknowledging the driving forces that heritage has for the development of tourism, researcher has also argued for an inverse recognition, rendering tourism as "a heritage producing machine" and establishing a mutual relationship between heritage and tourism (Gravari-Barbas, 2018, p.5). This argument is based on the understanding that tourism could affect the symbolic and physical presentation of heritage, as illustrated in the example of the Mont-Saint-Michel that Gravari-Barbas (2018) uses to demonstrate how the Mont's discarded monuments are transformed and brought back to life by the tourist gaze, and how their restoration and development are affected by the presence of tourism. Quoting what Harvey (2001, p.327) interprets about heritage as "a value-laden concept, related to processes of commodification", the consumption of heritage has the potential to construct and reconstruct, affirm and reaffirm the meanings of the past in the present (Gravari-Barbas, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that the mutuality between heritage making and heritage consumption (tourism) is not led solely by the authorised practitioners but the consumers (tourists) as well. According to Poria, Butler and Airey (2001, p.1047, original emphasis), "heritage tourism is a phenomenon based on tourists' motivations and perceptions *rather than* on specific site attributes". This repositions tourists, who were once treated as passive recipients of predefined

heritage representation, into prospective co-constructor and disseminator of heritage. Aligning with the experiential turn revealed in the seminal study about the experiential aspect of consumption by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and the rise of experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), the pursuit of experience has been argued as the impelling cause for people to consume heritage (Prentice, 2001; Timothy and Boyd, 2006; de Rojas and Camarero, 2008). As put by Kastenholz and Gronau (2022, p.1522), "in any case, there are no 'ready-made' experiences that destinations may deliver and that tourists consume, in a standardized fashion, without any active (physical, cognitive, and/or emotional) participation of the tourists, decisively shaping the overall quality and resulting satisfaction and memorability". In this context, inquiries into heritage consumption in a tourism context have been broadened through incorporating the experiential components, with more attention being focused on people's active meaning making beyond the passive information acquirement.

With experience becoming the new touchstone in heritage consumption, stereotyped and formulaic heritage presentation based on the AHD appears to lose attraction (Richards and Wilson, 2006) because consumers nowadays are getting perceptibly sophisticated and diverse in backgrounds hence demand personal, immersive, and authentic experience (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Timothy, 2014). Forming on the concept of "insightfulness", McIntosh (1999) presents that visitors of heritage sites can derive personal insights from their experience which is not only about receiving the established heritage narratives but also generating meanings imbued with subjective interpretation and imagination. Chronis (2005, p.219) also identifies six experiential benefits that tourists draw from their heritage encounter, which include knowledge, cultural identity, cultural value, escape, aesthetics, and narrative association. All demonstrate the active involvement of nonexpert tourists in constructing and energising the heritage. Correspondingly, experience-centric studies emerge from different contexts, shifting the research attention in heritage consumption from the standard, fixed offerings which is

hinged on the factual heritage resources, to a more flexible and engaging presentation focusing on the diverse individualities in experience (Apostolakis and Jaffry, 2005; Chen and Chen, 2010; Kempiak *et al*., 2017; Zhang and Liu, 2021). The active engagement that people have with the provided heritage offerings, at the same time, is viewed as a chance of heritage revitalisation with fresh meanings flowing between the past and present (Park, Choi and Lee, 2019). Viewed in this way, the experience that people have through engaging with the provided heritage resources can be understood as a manifestation of heritage making, for the meanings that people construct throughout their experience would contribute to their reception of the past (Zhang and Smith, 2019), infusing new life into heritage in the present.

(In)Authenticity and heritage consumption

Inquiry into heritage making is inextricably associated with the idea of authenticity (Silverman, 2015). Being recognised as a universal and critical value that motivates people to experience the commodified past (Park, Choi and Lee, 2019), authenticity has been a popular topic in the discussion of heritage consumption and is closely related with heritage vitality.

Just like heritage, authenticity as a complex and liquid construct has also been interpreted under variant philosophical paradigms and labelled with different characteristics (Thyne and Hede, 2016). Initially conceived as an indicator of object's genuineness in the context of museum (Trilling, 1972), authenticity is perceived as a marker of value, dealing with the material quality and legitimacy of heritage artefact. And this renders the subjective, contrived and unstructured representations as inauthentic, like the other side of the coin. However, with the shift in heritage interpretation and the pervasive experiential vibe, such straightforward distinction can be problematic for its biased attribution and negligence of the interpreter's participation (Wang, 1999). The quest for authenticity in heritage consumption, according to McIntosh and Prentice (1999, p.590), is "ultimately a cultural choice", that it is not merely a superficial evaluation of

the genuineness in display, but a revealing manifestation of individual interpretation. It is against this context that diverse conceptual insights have been derived from other paradigms such as constructivism (Cohen, 1988; Olsen, 2002); postmodernism (Rose and Wood, 2005; Lovell 2019), existentialism (Wang, 1999), social practice (Knudsen and Waade, 2010), and complexity theory (de Andrade-Matos, Richards and de Azevedo Barbosa, 2022). The difference in philosophical positions further gives rise to a variety of authenticity ranging from staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), indexical and iconic authenticity (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), hot and cool authenticity (Cohen and Cohen, 2012), existential authenticity (Wang, 1999), and performative authenticity (Zhu, 2012), to name but a few. As such, authenticity in heritage consumption is not seen as a rigid quality attribute exclusive to the material and verified presentation, but an integrated factor hinging on the organic interactions between the interpreter and heritage manifestations.

Some researchers seek to synthesise the muddled and elusive discourses in authenticity and come up with plausible umbrella concept to accommodate divergent thoughts. For instance, Jin, Xiao and Shen (2020) argue that the evaluation of authenticity in heritage museums is subject to perspectives of various stakeholders and not limited to the objective and authorised representation. By integrating the diverse authenticity discourses and putting experience at the heart of evaluation, they propose experiential authenticity as a blend of original authenticity, interactive authenticity, and emotional authenticity. In this sense, authenticity is never an intrinsic attribute but a constructed quality, "presented and experienced through endless negotiation between production and consumption" (Fu, Kim and Zhou, 2015, p.286), and plays out in the "interaction between infinite (individually mediated) combinations of objects, places, events, performances, existential moments and people" (Penrose, 2020, p.1252).

The perception of authenticity is also seen as a sign of heritage vitality, pointing at the ongoing relevance of heritage in the contemporary society. In his inquiry into the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham (UK) as a representation of industrial cultural heritage, Wesener (2016) draws attention to the perception of continuity as one key dimension of experiential authenticity, addressing how the retained tradition in jewellery production and feeling of community are deemed as authentic and contribute to the vitality and contemporary relevance of the Jewellery Quarter. Similarly, Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen (2019) attribute heritage vitality as a sub-category of heritage production authenticity and highlight the mutually reinforcing relationship between vitality and authenticity in the context of heritage consumption. And they draw upon various indexical and iconic cues across literature (e.g., Grayson and Martinec, 2004) such as material presentation (e.g., kitchen utensils exhibited at Shakespeare's Birthplace) and imaginary association (e.g., connection with the movie *Shakespeare in Love*) to illustrate the mutuality between authenticity and heritage vitality.

But is heritage consumption solely about authenticity? Exploration of the inauthentic appears to be pale in comparison to the vast body of literature on authenticity. Very often the inauthentic is treated as an inferior counterpoint, something that allows us to better appreciate the authentic, especially in a commercial setting saturated with homogeneous and standarised offerings. This establishes an unspoken binary opposition in heritage experience with the authentic pole taking precedence, while the inauthentic pole is sidelined and must be reframed within the discourse of authenticity to gain acceptance and legitimacy. For instance, Belk and Costa (1998) find that in reenacting the Rocky Mountain fur-trade, despite the clear mismatch between the buffalo hide tepee and white canvas tepee, or the presence of modern amenity like solar shower in their tents, modern mountain men embrace the inauthentic dissonance. They make knowing compromises, rationalising these inauthentic elements as an alternative but modern version of the mountain man myth. This willing suspension of disbelief is rendered as "fabricated

authenticity" (Belk and Costa, 1998, p.236). Similarly, Grayson and Martinec (2004) dissect authenticity into two dimensions, with the indexical dimension dealing with the factual genuineness and the iconic dimension legitimsing the plausibly inauthentic presentation for its outward and evocative resemblance to the original. Hede and Thyne (2010), in a similar fashion, identify a process of negotiation from the visitor experience regarding how visitors confront, accept, and reframe the inauthentic representations inside a museum. Be that as it may, the intentional division between the authentic and inauthentic and the marked inclination towards the authentic in the sense of reframing the inauthentic into the authentic, can hinder a nuanced interpretation of the intricacies in heritage consumption. Having these two concepts framed as mutually exclusive indicators, we risk overlooking the dynamics in-between, which could have provided deeper insights into how heritage in a commercial setting is understood and experienced. A lopsided binary divide as such can also undermine the development and presentation of heritage vitality, reducing rich and diversified expressions to overly simplistic categorisation.

Museum merchandising and heritage consumption

With its concentrated presentation of rare cultural artefacts, museum serves as a classic venue of heritage consumption for people to access and interpret the past. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995, p.371) describes museum as a sanctuary for heritage with existent crisis to "survive" in the way that "they stage their own rebirth as displays of what they once are". Cameron (2008, p.229) also addresses the efforts that museums make to "create a world of factual objects almost completely separate from human concerns, desires and conflicts, using systems of classification, acquisition, and documentation procedures". Although these perspectives hold some merits, they restrict the understanding of heritage to material entities with innate extraordinariness, reflecting the positivistic framework reviewed in the prior section. As argued by Gradén and

O'Dell (2016, p.49), artefacts collected inside the museum are essentially commodities "displayed through exhibitions and programmes, marketed with sophisticated promotional materials, and – increasingly – staged at the junction of education and entertainment". In this vein, if connected with the constructivist framework of heritage interpretation with these artefacts as heritage evidence, a museum does not differ much from the public within a commercial context, for both are engaged in ascribing meanings to the past, only in different ways. And correspondingly, the museum-based heritage consumption is not solely a one-way, passive appreciation of material exhibition, but realised through active participation of both the museum and public and the interaction in between.

Building on its traditional role as the committed guardian and transmitter of the past, museums in the present age are gradually transforming from a solemn institution dominated by the AHD and material authenticity, to an important culture communicator and consumption indicator, riding the waves of current trends, and reflecting the consumer culture up to date (Shiau and Hu, 2020; Waller and Waller, 2021; Zitzlsperger, 2021). Keeping in mind consumers' evolving need in cultural and heritage consumption, museums strive to construct experiences from which consumers could generate epistemic, recreational, and social benefits (Stephen, 2001; Jafari, Taheri and Vom Lehn, 2013; Manley *et al*., 2020), with the development of museum merchandise as a notable practice. Yet in reviewing the literature, it is found that despite its ubiquitous presence and huge potential in stimulating people's active involvement in heritage making, museum merchandise and its induced heritage experience remain to be a peripheral field which is theoretically underrepresented.

In Northern America, museums (e.g., the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) have started working on merchandising to expand their service scope and increase revenue ever since the late nineteenth century (Palù *et al*., 2018). Being the "last exhibition hall", museum shop is

seen as a consistent extension and meaningful enhancement to visitor's experience (Falk and Dierking, 1995; Kawashima, 1998; Kotler, 2001; Kent, 2010). McIntyre (2010, p.192) distinguishes museum shop from common commercial settings because what the ideal museum shop could offer is an interpretive environment in which consumers are involved in "a co-creative process of immersion, active absorption and personal transformation related to the learning process of a museum visit". Conception in such manner dispels the misgivings regarding the negative impact of heritage commercialisation inside museum (Toepler, 2006). Museum shop is argued to be a meaningful extension of heritage interpretation (Brown, 2013) and what it enables is a qualitatively different heritage experience compared to that in the exhibition hall. Macdonald (2011, p.52) highlights the sense of touch and ownership as two distinctive features of museum shop for it sets people free from the "haptic deprivation of the museum" and grants people with something that the museum as heritage curator cannot satisfy – to take something away through consumption. Similarly, Larkin (2016) also explicates how museum shop as a commercial space brings people closer to heritage artefacts in a more familiar and inclusive manner (i.e., retailing) and consequently establish an intimate connection with heritage.

Going hand in hand with the difference made by the museum shop is the merit of museum merchandise. Broadly received as a carrier of people's visiting experience and materialisation of the heritage connotation that the museum intends to convey to the public (Song and Li, 2018), museum merchandise in research has been overly reduced to a more well-known category – souvenir. But studies do discover that these products can be transformed into meaningful objects which not only become constituents of consumer's lifeworld but also act as engaging mediums for people to formulate personal heritage narratives in parallel with the strict authorised discourses (Collins-Kreiner and Zins, 2011; Larkin, 2016), adding to the heritage vitality. To illustrate, Zitzlsperger (2021, p.87) shows how museum merchandise can "shift the

emphasis of the factual towards alternative and, at times, aspirational narratives" via three examples of museum souvenirs, among which the "keep calm and carry on" poster as a famous wartime heritage embodied in various merchandise developed by the Imperial War Museum (UK) is reported to acquire a contemporary significance during the pandemic with its representation of public endurance. Likewise, by looking into dark souvenir in War Remnants Museum (Vietnam), Dresler (2022, p. 2126) explains museum merchandise, or souvenir, as "objects of visitor interpretation with personal and collective meanings". And through "souveniring", people (or the children in Dresler's study) could perceive the presentation at the destination with more personal relevance regarding their empathetical feelings for the victims' suffering and constructed collective identity such as national belongings in the context of dark history.

Consistent with the early reviewed positivistic heritage interpretation, understanding of museum-based heritage used to exclude unauthorised views and prioritise material genuineness (e.g., originality) and authoritarian character (i.e., certification of producers and interpreters) of the heritage objects (Reisinger and Steiner, 2006; Leonard, 2014; Rickly, 2022), presents a clear demarcation between the sacred, cultural original and the superficial, commercialised reproduction (Revilla and Dodd, 2003). Dichotomous mindset as such disregards mass-produced commodities like museum merchandise on account of their material inauthenticity. But research argues that people care more about the "creative combination (e.g., traditional and modern; past and present) that indicates a more forward-looking manner of approaching both culture and change" (He and Timothy, 2024, p.154), hence do not dwell on the physical construction. Praised by Macdonald (2011) for blurring the longstanding distinction between heritage and commerce, the development of heritage commodification, especially the subgenre of museum merchandise turns out to be a promising field of heritage making, and should not be regarded as merely a material extension to the heritage destination (e.g., museum) or silent

carrier of heritage experience. This is not to say that the physical presentation of museum merchandise is insignificant, but to argue that its importance should be understood with a developmental perspective in a more organic context.

In this vein, despite its fabricated nature, the so-called "inauthentic" museum merchandise has been recognised as valuable. It serves not only as a "controlled group", reminding people of the preciousness of the original and encouraging them to cherish the authentic (Kingston, 1999; Shepherd, 2002), but also plays a significant role in setting a participatory environment of heritage making. These commercial items provide people with the freedom to apply their creativity and project individual memories onto the material representation, fostering a more intimate connection with the underlying notion of heritage. Viewed in this way, commodified representation such as museum merchandise also bears the potential to add to heritage vitality so long as it can actively transmit meanings from the museum to consumers, or the other way around (Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen, 2019). Yang et al. (2019) envisage museum merchandise with an experiential orientation as the next vogue in heritage consumption, and it indeed is, as introduced in the prior introduction chapter about how consumers are enabled by the fast-evolving museum merchandise to construct their personal heritage encounter.

To conclude this section, heritage is more of a meaning-making process wherein the elements from the past are presented, interpreted, and attributed with meanings that are imbued with either individual or collective significance in the present. In this context, the consumption of heritage is closely related with heritage vitality and many studies reviewed in this section have touched upon that in terms of the active meaning attribution enabled through experience-driven participation. Research on heritage consumption does indicate the transition in heritage making from receiving heritage as the thing it is to experiencing heritage as a constructive process with cultural and social significance. In the meantime, the distinction between authenticity and

inauthenticity echoes with the binary division identified in heritage making as discussed in the previous section, and the consumption of museum merchandise points at an interesting convergence of the so-called authentic and inauthentic in terms of their contribution to heritage vitality. But the coexistence of these two opposing elements and their mutuality are yet to be understood in a theoretical and organic way. What can we know about this tensional coexistence and in what way does the commercial representation contribute to heritage making and its vitality? The next section will therefore introduce a unique perspective to delve into these questions and update existing discourses with a fresh look.

2.4 Yin-Yang Thinking

While we enjoy the symphony and are amazed by the ingenious harmony, it is the cacophony of two clashing notes that propels the melody forward and leads us to the next movement. Heritage making, coincidentally, indicates a similar pattern. Heritage as a modern construct is filled with tension. The interpretive turn in heritage making frees heritage from the dominance of tangible presentation and authorised discourse, and the engagement with consumption injects new energies into heritage and complicates the dynamics therein. We are now faced with a mixture, an interesting intersection where different and even opposite elements converge and interact. But in reviewing the literature, I realise that the shift in heritage making is still entrenched in a dualistic convention even though its original intention is to break away from the dichotomy. While acknowledging the constructive dynamics brought by this shift, it is yet to understand how heritage takes its shape from the juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern, the professional and the lay, the cultural and the commercial, and the authentic and inauthentic. These opposing elements are often viewed as distinct and treated in a separate way, with their interconnectedness remains theoretically unattended. In neglecting of such mutuality, we risk

losing the potential for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to heritage making, where the interplay between the opposites fosters a richer and more profound understanding of heritage.

Heritage making should move beyond the radical either/or logic and be reframed through a different mindset. To this end, a theoretical framework that gives a balanced consideration to the binary relation and constructively engages with the dynamics in-between is necessary. In this thesis, I introduce Yin-Yang thinking, an indigenous Chinese philosophical concept as the enabling lens. Application of indigenous thoughts in academic inquiry is important. It allows us to embrace a different way of thinking, comprehend the world from a novel perspective, and critically reflect on the learned frameworks often shaped by Western epistemology (Preece, Rojas-Gaviria and Rodner, 2023). The advantages of Yin-Yang thinking are supported by its holistic and developmental grounding, as well as the embracing attitude treating the contradictions as interdependent dualities with reciprocal dynamics. I devote this section to present how Yin-Yang thinking goes together with heritage making and how it enlightens the practice of this research. For brevity, the term "Yin-Yang" will be alternately used with Yin-Yang thinking to denote this indigenous perspective in the following pages of this thesis.

One widely accepted source of Yin-Yang as an idea with philosophical implication is the *Book of Change (also known as I Ching)* with over five thousand years of history, in which Yin-Yang functions as an inherent quality in everything, presenting equilibrium and stability in a dynamic state (Li, 1998). As a long-standing interpretive way of thinking all the time steering the epistemological evolvement of Chinese civilisation, Yin-Yang has been omnipresent in different fields such as traditional Chinese medicine, arts, and Hundred Schools of Thoughts (e.g., Taoism, Confucianism, Mohism, and Legalism), and has witnessed and developed with the vicissitude of China (Graham, 1986). Viewing the world in a binary lens (Rošker, 2021), Yin-Yang sees any phenomenon as the symbiosis of two opposing energies, namely Yin (black)

and Yang (white), as displayed in Figure 2.4. As indicated by their Chinese character patterns (i.e., Yin – 阴 and Yang – 阳), comparing with Yang's close and completed strokes, Yin is relatively incomplete with an open end. If put in interaction, Yin would represent the elapse of Yang, while Yang signifies the compensation of Yin (Li, 2016a). Conventionally, Yin denotes feminine, passive, and generally negative existence or status such as moon, water, weakness, and submissiveness; while Yang indicates masculine, active, and usually positive existence or status such as sun, fire, strength, and dominance (Chen, 2008; Fang, 2011; Slote, 2013). Forke (1925) also perceives Yin and Yang as two interconnected but opposing indicators of relation, that in themselves they do not possess any specific meanings but exist in a fluid relativity. As can be seen in the figure, there is a black dot in the white half and a white dot in the black half, while the line in between the black and white is not straight but curvilinear. This indicates how Yin and Yang coexist in an interdependent and interpenetrative way, and how they are intertwined and synchronously transformed in a dynamic and fluid manner (Fang and Faure, 2011; Liu and An, 2021).

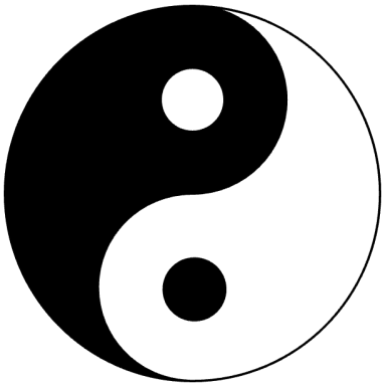


Figure 2.4: Yin-Yang Symbol

As a time-honoured philosophical concept, Yin-Yang is firmly underpinned by three pivotal principles, which are the principle of holism, as can be seen clearly in the Yin-Yang symbol it is the unity of black and white that makes both the blended half and the entire symbol complete;

the principle of contradiction, as the figure shows, is represented by the contrasting copresence of the black and white, addressing the divergent yet complementary interrelation in between; the principle of change, at last, is embodied in the middle curve characterising the constant and iterative interplay between the black and white as opposite yet correlative qualities (Li, 1998; Nisbett, 2003; Peng, Spencer-Rodgers and Nian, 2006; Fang, 2011; Tian *et al.*, 2015; Li, 2016b; Liu and An, 2021).

The principle of holism

Grounded in a relational perspective (Chen and Miller, 2011), Yin-Yang firmly believes that everything exists with its relevance to others (Nisbett, 2003), which makes relation a key to comprehension and perception (Rošker, 2008). As Chen (2002) indicates, the interdependency of relation is the cornerstone of Yin-Yang as an integrative Chinese worldview. This self-other association has been a conspicuous feature as can be seen in the influential texts produced by well-known Chinese thinkers such as Lao Tzu and Confucius. For instance, in Confucianism, human beings are perceived with intrinsic social relationships and these relationships play a crucial role in one's social presence (Wong, 2012). This relation-oriented interpretation is well represented in the work of Confucianism such as the five basic types of ethical relation (Wu Lun) – between father and son (parent and child), sovereign and minister, husband and wife, old and young (between siblings), and between friends (Mencius, no date). Under this relational perspective, a person cannot be defined without addressing the social relation, just like the example shared by Chen (2001, p.90) about Dr David Ho's reflection on this principle: "I may be a wise scholar, a famous businessman, or a good father and husband, but until I am all, I have not succeed" (Note: Dr Ho was awarded the *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1996 for his prominent contribution in inventing the antiretroviral therapy, also known as the AIDS cocktail).

Meanwhile, this holistic view is not confined to interpersonal relationship but "denotes a mode of logic or way of ordering and making sense of what we perceive" (Chen and Miller, 2011, p.7). The "unity of heaven and humanity" (*Tian Ren He Yi*) as one of the representative ideas in the *Book of Change* indicates this holistic thinking pattern that many Chinese would unconsciously apply when evaluate things that are complex and consist of multiple components. It requires one to not only bear an orientation in the context behind the evaluation, but also recognise the existence of contradiction and the potential interrelation therein (Nisbett *et al*., 2001). In the words of Peng, Spencer-Rodgers and Nian (2006, p.255), "one can understand nothing in isolated pieces. The parts are meaningful in their relations to the whole, just as individual musical instruments are to an orchestra. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. We must understand the whole to understand the parts. Anything taken in isolation is out of context, and hence distorted".

Regarding heritage making in the context of consumption, the holistic grounding of Yin-Yang warrants the copresence of contradictory elements in heritage making as essential and justifies consumption (e.g., museum merchandise) as an indispensable context. Consider, for instance, the separation between the expert and nonexpert in heritage making. Ordinary people lacking relevant expertise and authority used to be marginalised and perceived as passive and negligible in conventional heritage interpretation (Copeland, 2006). Yet as claimed by Logan (2022), no matter what kind of role played by the actors in heritage practice, be it local communities, tourists from abroad, and/or professional archaeologist, curator and policy makers, all are users of heritage, and all interpretations contribute to the meaning of heritage without distinction or qualification. Heritage as a sociocultural construct can encompass miscellaneous meanings subject to its interpretative context and stakeholders, and confining its rendition to solely AHD is clearly a biased move. This holistic mindset also formulates a co-creative outlook in heritage making, which involves the active participation of actors with different background to decipher

the past in the present (Chronis and Hampton, 2008; Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014; Thyne and Hede, 2016; Ross, 2020). Correspondingly, the commercialised presentation of heritage is endorsed by its inclusion of nonexpert consumers and contribution to the heritage's integrity and vitality through the provision and fruition of the experiential offerings in harmony with the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). This accords with what Falk and Dierking (2012) suggest about heritage experience encompasses a series of heterogenous and interrelated components inclusive of individual consumers and their diverse personal resources (e.g., motivation and knowledge), heritage offerings equipped with blended meanings and installations (e.g., educational and recreational presentation), and social environment (e.g., interpersonal interaction with peer consumers), broadening the scope of heritage making to encompass a wider context.

The principle of contradiction

Being recognised as the essence of Taoism, the principle of contradiction proposes that reality is teeming with conflicts and diverseness regardless of its seemingly coordinated presentation (Peng, Spencer-Rodgers and Nian, 2006). Very often, studies oriented in the European and North American context tend to adopt a dualism-driven separation between the opposing elements and leverage dualism as a springboard of critical thinking, like the expert-nonexpert, tangible-intangible division in heritage making as reviewed in prior section. By contrast, despite the similar binary format, Yin-Yang does not dwell on separating the opposites but embrace their difference as necessary and advisable, and deploys the discord as productive dynamics by appreciating the interdependence, interpenetration, and complementarity in-between.

Dualism and duality are different binary concepts. Grounded in a linear logic, dualism tends to polarise the situation hence leads to an "absolute separation of contradictory opposites"; while

duality in Yin-Yang thinking as a relative construct underpinned by the holistic principle would navigate the coexistence of opposites and seek to achieve a dynamic balance in between (Li, 2008; Graetz and Smith, 2009; Fang, 2011; Li, 2012, p.867; Li, 2016b). As a case in point, consider the classic shady/sunny mountain analogy, i.e., Yin-Yang Slope (Chenji *et al.*, 2006). If interpreted from a dualism-oriented point of view, the shady and sunny sides of the mountain are intrinsically separate, for the darkness and brightness are mutually exclusive and hardly can one side of the mountain be shady and sunny at the same time. In contrast, duality takes a holistic and dynamic stance in viewing the opposites. On this basis, the shady side looks shady as there exists the sunny side as a reference, and vice versa. The contrast between the shady and sunny sides may be self-evident, but they are both part of a larger whole (i.e., the mountain) hence cannot be separated in interpretation. Furthermore, the status of being shady/sunny is not permanent as the angle of sunlight will change in different times of the day, and this would make either side of the mountain eligible for being both sunny and shady, only in different context or seen from a different perspective.

In the discourse of Yin-Yang, this duality-driven perspective is unveiled in three interconnected dimensions, highlighting the interdependence, interpenetration and complementarity between the opposites. First, aligning with the principle of holism and taking the Yin-Yang symbol as an illustration, the *interdependence* would apply to the fact the black and white halves act as the point of reference to each other, so that they can together make the symbol complete despite their colour contrast. Here, this interdependence between the opposites is different from the idea of interrelation, as interrelation suggests partial association between one with the other, whereas interdependence indicates a contextual reliance that one only exists with the other functions as the context (Chen, 2002). Meanwhile, as can be seen from the uneven and mutually inclusive distribution of the black and white in each halve of the symbol, this seemingly incongruous copresence brings about the *interpenetration* and *complementarity* between the

opposites (i.e., how the black dot interpenetrates and complements the white halve and vice versa). The reciprocal copresence of the opposites works in parallel with the fluidity of comprehension and propels the change of situation. Tensional coexistence as such further adds to the principle of holism and reveals that interdependence between the opposites is supported by the fact that the opposites are in a mutual support and have each other as the "seed" of change (Fang, 2011; Li, 2018). As said by Lao Tzu (2008 [no date]) in his fundamental text *Tao Te Ching (Dao De Jing)*: "All in the world know the beauty of the beautiful, and in doing this they have (the idea of) what ugliness is; […] So it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to (the idea of) the other" (Chapter 2); "Gravity is the root of lightness; stillness, the ruler of movement" (Chapter 26). In this regard, the nebulousness of this ancient thought is beautifully interpreted by Nisbett (2003, p.14) as below:

> "The principle of yin-yang is the expression of the relationship that exists between opposing but interpenetrating forces that may complete one another, make each other comprehensible, or create the conditions for altering one into another."

Inspired by the interplay between the opposites, researchers have come up with various recapitulations with its essence in common. In his comparative account of Chinese tradition, Tian (2002, pp.128-129) uses "complementary opposition" to describe the interconnectedness of Yin-Yang, particularly the relationship between the opposites. Likewise, this relationship is summarised as a "harmonious unity of opposites" by Peng, Spencer-Rodgers and Nian (2006, p.257), emphasising how Chinese people willingly embrace the coexistence of contradictions and actively unite them to serve particular goals. Similar expression can also be found in study by Li (2016b, p.43) highlighting the indigenous feature of Chinese epistemological system being "opposites-in-unity". More recently, Rošker (2021, p.33) in her interpretation of Chinese philosophy views Yin-Yang as a complementary model underpinned by the methodology of

binary categories, interpreting binary oppositions as “oppositional dualities, but not dualistic contradictions”.

With relevance to heritage making, the principle of contradiction gives a rationale for actors or perceptions at variance to be appreciated and made conducive to the construction of heritage. This adds to what Smith (2006, p.83) claims that heritage consists of the “tension between action and material representation” in its making, as well as the embracing attitude held by Harrison (2013) towards controversy in heritage decision-making. For instance, although the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage are usually perceived as distinct taxonomy under the AHD and put as contradiction in critical heritage studies, they are in fact, interdependent because the tangible serves as an incarnated vessel for the intangible, while the intangible injects the tangible with stories and traditions for its sustainable transmission (Bouchenaki, 2003). Likewise, the opposing relation between expert and nonexpert (or authority and public) is not necessarily absolute. The distinction in professional know-how or power can be hard to overcome, yet that does not mean this opposition is useless to the making of heritage. Sometimes, to realise a constructive heritage making, a pre-established heritage manifestation by the expert is reasonable; if not, ordinary people may never have the chance or interest to get involved. This can be seen from the revival of Chinese block printing (Zhang, 2022) and Huashan rock art (Gao, 2023), both have benefited from both the top-down government-initiated preservation and the bottom-up community innovation.

In the specific context of heritage consumption, this principle also provides theoretical scaffoldings to integrate existing ideas which have implicitly touched on the duality-driven mindset but not received a coordinated integration. For example, Prideaux (2003) examines the practice of heritage commodification regarding its debatable pros and cons from different points of view, suggesting that instead of harping on about the helpfulness of commodification,

it might be more advisable to think about the consequences if certain heritage is not commodified. Deliberating on the contradiction between heritage and commodification with a neutral ground, he believes the value of commodification is "governed by the reality of the circumstances" (Prideaux, 2003, p.1), which ties in with the interdependence between the opposites that is contingent on each other for development. Hall (2007), in like manner, argues that inauthenticity that is deemed to be blemished is not innately incompetent. Rather, he believes what matters more is the variance in "experiential depth" when it comes to the debates in the authentic-inauthentic dyad, such as the issues in the original and replication. Unpacking inauthenticity with the authenticity-driven motivation in its acquirement, Hall (2007) draws attention to the interpenetrating connection between authenticity and inauthenticity, addressing how they are connected in the experiential context. Negotiated perspective such as "theoplacity" coined by Belhassen, Caton and Stewart (2008) also demonstrates a quasi-duality orientation which holds a constructive attitude to coordinate the divergence between suppliers and tourists in heritage tourism, and highlights the contribution that commodification serves in this middle ground (Chhabra, 2010). Dynamic connections such as interdependence, interpenetration, and complementarity encapsulated in the principle of contradiction provide a framework to accommodate these dispersed insights.

The principle of change

The principle of change in Yin-Yang conveys reality as a process in which everything is in a "constant flux" (Peng and Nisbett, 1999, p.743), just like the alternation of day and night, and the transition and iteration of the four seasons. Instead of perceiving things as they are in an established and static status, Yin-Yang interprets things with more emphasis on what they can become in a dynamic context subject to perception (Rošker, 2021).

As explained earlier in the principles of holism and contradiction, Yin and Yang depend on each other to exist and grow. In their interplay, Yin and Yang gradually change into each other and successively take the dominance but never permanently replace each other. By way of explanation, the dynamics between the opposites in Yin-Yang follows a pattern in which the Yin and Yang would alternately take the lead in their correlated coexistence and bring forth one another when it reaches its "extreme" (Ji, Nisbett and Su, 2001). It is this change that sustains the continuity of Yin-Yang coexistence, wherein the opposites are "constantly alternating with another, changing into each other, exchanging with each other, displacing each other, and so on" (Tian, 2002, p.128). Within this interpretation, Yin-Yang is different from the dialectics oriented in dualism where the opposing elements are connected but independent from each other as polars of a continuum. To put it simply, if you ask the "to be or not to be" question under this principle of Yin-Yang, there will be no definite answer as it is always a process of becoming (Tian, 2002; Tian *et al.*, 2015).

Let us take a well-known proverb "*Sai Weng lost his horse*" (or "a blessing in disguise" as an English alternative) as an illustrative example to further explicate this principle. Sai Weng was an old farmer living alongside the border. One day, his horse as his principal source of living ran away to the other side of the border. Knowing this misfortune, Sai Weng's neighbours came to provide solace, but Sai Weng replied: "How can this not be a good thing for me"? A few days later, the runaway horse returned and brought back another fine horse from the wild. All the neighbours came to congratulate him for the good fortune, but Sai Weng said: "How could we know that this is not a bad thing for me"? Indeed, a few days later, Sai Weng's son felt off from the fine horse and broke his leg when attempting to ride it. Once again, all the neighbours came to send comfort, but Sai Weng said: "How can this not be a good thing for me"? One year later, a drafting order was sent by the state to conscript all the well-conditioned men to

fight against barbarian tribes with heavy casualties. Given the fact that Sai Weng's son was crippled because of the horse accident, he was spared from the predictable death.

This story can be read with different understandings, but here the gist is about how assumably irrelevant affairs can be relevant and coexist in one circumstance, how capricious the situation can be, and how the opposites can affect and intertwine with one another in a constant change.

This "seeing things in progress" orientation in the principle of change goes hand in hand with the "heritage as process" claim (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006; Emerick, 2014), the processual and constructive conception of heritage interpretation (Staiff, 2014; Logan, 2022), as well as the accumulated or emergent authenticity of those deemed inauthentic existences in heritage consumption (Cohen, 1988; Hall, 2007). Heritage making takes place in a constant flux in which diverse meanings that people attached to the manifestation of heritage live together and are always in the process of becoming; in other words, heritage is emergent and contingent (Harrison, 2013). Meanwhile, the becoming-led interpretation informed by the principle of change is not merely applicable to the making of heritage, but also to the opposing components involved in its formation. Although much attention has been shed on the differences between the opposites (e.g., expert and nonexpert), we should also be mindful of the becoming of these opposites and how their mutuality evolves as goes with the becoming of each side. In this vein, research in heritage making should adopt a developmental perspective, looking at what heritage and its constituents become in its commercial manifestation rather than overstating the misalignment and potential downsides as a result of commercialisation.

Yin-Yang as a triadic thinking

By virtue of its dynamic, inclusive, and balanced attitude towards the contradiction, Yin-Yang as a long-established dialectical thinking derived from traditional Chinese culture has abiding

significance and provides valuable insights in comprehending contemporary issues if properly weaved into the fabric of appropriate context, such as heritage making. Some may question the practicability of Yin-Yang because it is a naïve thinking which only touches upon basic binary categories such as moon and sun, female and male, night and day, which weakens Yin-Yang as it bears only limited reference value when dealing with complex questions. This makes sense as we cannot deny the fact the formation of Yin-Yang is grounded in the time when knowledge is limited to frugal empirical evidence. However, what makes Yin-Yang valuable is its broad applicability to any oppositions identified in the world and the true essence of Yin-Yang lies in its generativity, which is about the emergence constructed on the Yin-Yang interplay, featured by the duality-driven thinking pattern (Wang, 2012).

Yin-Yang as a Chinese dialectical idea is sometimes presented as a "middle way" thinking, referring to an adaptive mechanism coping with inconsistencies of all forms in an integrated and generative manner. In contrast to the dualism-driven mindset in classic Western dialectics following the law of identity and absolute separation (Freiberg, 1977; Peng and Nisbett, 1999), the middle way holds an embracing attitude towards conflicts and differences, as earlier introduced in the principle of contradiction. By saying "middle" is not to connect with the mathematical calculation working on the average value, but to pose a dynamic, inclusive, and balanced attitude towards the differences, presenting "an active harmonious integration" (Chen, 2002, p.183). In this integrative middle way, Yin and Yang as representations of interdependent polarities are not staying in its extreme forever, instead, they alternately have their wax and wane as informed by the principle of change. This correlative dynamic gives rise to the whole, which is not simply the sum of Yin and Yang but constitutes the generation of something new (the principle of holism). In this sense, what Yin-Yang enables is "a type of triadic thinking centered on the thirdness that results from the interaction between yin and yang" (Wang, 2021,

p.13). It appreciates the value of binary division – Yin and Yang, but it values more of what this division can inspire through the dynamic interplay in-between.

With the triadic interpretation in mind, the interplay between Yin and Yang is closely related with another indigenous concept "*Qi*", which bears some resemblance with the concept "vitality" as addressed in previous section capturing the active transmission of cultural heritage. But what makes *Qi* stand out is its intertwined relationship with Yin-Yang. As an abstract concept, *Qi* is broadly understood as the life force existing in every perceived existence, living or lifeless (Wang, 2012). Rošker (2021, p.64) describes *Qi* as "vitality, a vital potential, or vital creativeness", while Wang (2012, p.62) sees dynamics of Yin-Yang as both the "pulse and rhythm" of *Qi*, that the proper function and delivery of *Qi* is subject to the dynamic and harmonised interaction between Yin and Yang. Taking *Huangdi Neijing* (*The Medical Classic of the Yellow* Emperor, the earliest written work of traditional Chinese medicine) as an illustration, having Yin and Yang in equilibrium is the key to people's physiological or mental health, or the harmony of *Qi* within the person's body. If there is an imbalanced distribution of Yin and Yang, then the flow of *Qi* within that person's body would be disturbed and further lead to illness. Based on *Huangdi Neijing*, Wang (2012) condenses four basic types of diseases according to the different imbalance between Yin and Yang, which can be briefly summarised as the impairment of Yin (or Yang) because of the preponderance of Yang (or Yin), and the superabundance of Yin (or Yang) caused by the deficiency of Yang (or Yin). In each scenario, the Yin and Yang are considered in parallel, for the one's health condition (i.e., the movement of *Qi*) lies in their constant interplay. In this vein, the triadic interpretation enables a novel perspective to view the binary opposition in heritage making. For example, while research has identified the mutuality between authenticity and heritage vitality, it fails to consider the inauthentic as an inseparable counterpart and how it contributes to the vitality. The flow of *Qi* and its association with the dynamic Yin-Yang interplay, by contrast, offers a different read of

the opposition between authenticity and inauthenticity, pointing at a generative mutuality and a potential connection with the *Qi* (or vitality) of heritage.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the term "thing" in Chinese is not designated to physical substances as interpreted in western philosophy but functions as a hypernym covering a broader category of creations such as material object, abstract concept, experience, and phenomenon (Wang, 2012). Viewed in this way, heritage or its construction as a Chinese "thing" can accordingly be perceived as the integrative fruit of a series of Yin-Yang interaction wherein the *Qi,* or vitality of heritage would rely on the balance among oppositions such as the tangible and intangible, expert and nonexpert, or any other underlying oppositions in its making. Guided by the Yin-Yang philosophy of duality, overreliance on the tangibility and expertise leads to the hegemony of AHD and monotony (Smith, 2006), whereas the takeover by the "all-intangible/expert" stance may result in unconstructive omissions of the interplay between the oppositions (Harrison, 2013; Hølleland and Skrede, 2019).

In sum, Yin-Yang as an indigenous thinking disrupts the conventional dualism by enabling an informative perspective for people to capture the panorama without omitting the multifaceted dynamics blended in the context and process. Unlike research which seeks to transcend the Western-centric dichotomous assumption by deconstructing or uniting the binary divide (e.g., Lanier and Rader, 2016; de Andrade-Matos, Richards and de Azevedo Barbosa, 2022; Preece, Rojas-Gaviria and Rodner, 2023), Yin-Yang appreciates the binary oppositions as co-constitutive duality and highlights the mutuality and generativity therein. Amidst the discourses on the interpretation and consumption of heritage, Yin-Yang offers a transformative lens for researchers to challenge the established dualism and appreciate the seemingly incongruent elements so that we can see the essence through phenomenon. Mindful of the multilateral interactions and dichotomous divisions in heritage making, I strongly believe that by

incorporating Yin-Yang as the theoretical lens, this thesis will address the oversight in previous scholarship and bring inspiring insights to the field.

2.5 Chapter Review

This chapter has so far presented the transformation in heritage making with the interpretive focus shifting from viewing heritage as it *is* to as it *becomes*, and reviewed literature in heritage consumption as an applied context to address this transformation and the vitality generated therefrom. Increasing attention has been paid to the constructive formation of heritage, making explicit that heritage is not solely dependent on physicality and certified discourse but formed in the eye of the beholder. Be that as it may, what remains not fully understood is the mutuality between the opposing constituents involved in heritage making, such as the tension between the tangible and intangible, expert and nonexpert, authority and public, and the authentic and inauthentic. Very often, the dynamics amidst these tensional elements have not been dissected in depth before being dismissed as unconstructive, hence were hastily skipped as an inadvertent consequence of the interpretive turn. Meanwhile, as a significant context of heritage making, heritage consumption has been identified as an important source of heritage vitality. However, how the consumption of heritage contributes to heritage vitality, especially with the coexistence of all these opposing elements, is yet to be thoroughly explored. To illuminate these unaddressed issues, this study introduces the indigenous Yin-Yang thinking as a distinctive theoretical framework, so that heritage making could embrace the tensions with a more integrative perspective and dance with the dynamics at play.

The next chapter moves on to present the methodology adopted in this study, showing the empirical practice of the proposed exploration of heritage making in a commercial context. Employing the serial product “archaeological blind box” developed by Henan Museum in China as the empirical case, this study takes a stand on interpretivism and proposes a two-stage

online research design with data collected in various forms and from different stakeholders involved in the chosen context.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The phenomenon of interest and review of relevant literature put this thesis at an interesting intersection where different, separated, and even contradictory elements converge and interact with one another. While it seems plausible to associate the popularity of museum merchandise with the evolvement in heritage meaning making and direct attention to its experiential aspect in the context of heritage consumption, the rationale behind the knowing consumption of the inauthentic is yet to be explored. It is also unclear about the way that commercial representation like museum merchandise facilitates the formation and transmission of meanings from the past to the present as a manifestation of heritage vitality. These confusions lead to the central questions underpinning this research: "Why would people consume the inauthentic knowing its inauthenticity?" and "How could the consumption of museum merchandise contribute to the vitality of cultural heritage in its making?"

In connection with the case of museum merchandise, the objectives of this research are:

1) to explore the consumption of museum merchandise as an ostensibly inauthentic representation in a context (i.e., heritage making) known for its authenticity.
2) to study the dynamic interplay between key binary opposites in the process of heritage making as part of the consumption experience.
3) to further our understanding of binary oppositions by unpacking the consumption experience of museum merchandise through the lens of Yin-Yang, thereby enabling a different perspective in interpreting the binary relation in marketing research.

As introduced earlier, Yin-Yang thinking as the enabling lens adopted in this thesis provides a transformative framework to interpret the intricacies of heritage making, illuminating the interaction between binary oppositions and rendering their contradiction as constructive and

generative. While acting as a theoretical lens to enlighten the interpretation of existing knowledge and production of the new, Yin-Yang as part of the Chinese philosophical thoughts has also profoundly affected the methodological choice and reflection that I made in the process of empirical investigation. This chapter hence presents the empirical details and elucidates the underlying chains of thoughts. In the sections that follow, I will first expatiate on the philosophical orientation of this thesis where I position both myself and my inquiry in an interpretivist paradigm combined with my Chinese cultural background; I will then expand on the practical details in two interconnected stages, covering the sampling, collection, and analysis of the empirical data; in the end, I will review the consideration that I give on the ethical issues that this research has encountered and reflect on my positionality and subjectivity, and how they have affected this research.

3.1 Research Orientation

Deciding on a philosophical paradigm to locate the proposed inquiry is a widely accepted task for researchers to fulfil before proceeding to the empirical practice. A researcher's worldview plays a vital role in determining the building blocks such as the ontology and epistemology, and the consequential methodology (Grix, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to first reflect on my personal standpoint and make explicit how it has affected my orientation as a researcher in this study. In regard to the observation of museum merchandise, I will not pretend to be an expert or exaggerate myself as an aficionado only by taking an interest in its consumption and owning a few relevant products. I must acknowledge that the inauthenticity attributed to museum merchandise is my subjective presumption, as sometimes it can be hard for me to ignore the difference between the mass-produced kitsch and the preserved artefact, especially when the kitsch is nothing but a cheap copy (e.g., the replica inside archaeological blind box) of the original (i.e., the artefacts collected inside the museum). Be that as it may, such kitsch

has gone viral, going against my preconception yet sparking my curiosity. The question that I pose, "Why would people consume the inauthentic knowing its inauthenticity?", alludes to my understanding of the constitution of reality and how I envision such reality can be approached. By asking "why", rather than insisting on the objective distinction as the universal truth or dwelling on the product per se, I seek to explore the intersubjective "truth" or the multiple meanings emerging from the experience behind such counterintuitive phenomenon. As such, my philosophical inclination is formed on my recognition of multiple realities in the sense that there exist diverse and possibly infinite understandings and receptions beyond my biased judgement on museum merchandise. Accordingly, I have situated my inquiry in the interpretivist paradigm, believing in multiple socially constructed facts (Bryman, 2016; Grix, 2018), aiming at capturing the differences and nuances therein, and further generating context-based and value-bound knowledge.

It is worth noting that while aligning this research with the interpretivist paradigm, I have also leveraged on Yin-Yang thinking for its philosophical quality and turned it into a paradigmatic constituent to account for the twists and turns emerging throughout my interpretivist inquiry. Integration of such indigenous ingredient is important to me as a cross-cultural researcher with non-Western cultural background. While laying an interpretivist foundation for my proposed inquiry, I should also clarify the cultural nuances within my personal philosophical position, which in here would be the implications that I have drawn from Chinese philosophy. It goes without saying that the Western philosophy presented as ontology-epistemology-methodology trilogy is not the solely effective way for people to make sense of the world, there exist other informative philosophical traditions which not necessarily contradict the Western thoughts but complement the philosophical territory with more subtle insights (Fung, 1948; Liu and Harrell, 2015). It is also said that both the term "philosophy" and relevant categories such as the ontology and epistemology are constructed on Western norms and such referential framework

was neither inherent nor influential in Chinese context not until the emergent dialogue in the late sixteenth century (Littlejohn and Li, 2021; Rošker, 2021). Albeit the differences in tradition and discourse, in this study I have integrated my nurtured consciousness into my inquiry, which not only relates to my initial confusion with the surprising popularity of the plausibly inauthentic museum merchandise, but also functions as a constructive framework that is compatible with my interpretivist inclination. For clarity and coherence, I have adopted what Li (2018) illustrates as the "Chinese philosophy of wisdom" as a reference to present the cultural nuances in my philosophical edifice, with *Dao* as the ontological entity, Yin-Yang as the epistemological lens, and *Wu* as the methodological intuition.

Ontology

One should first make certain of the nature, as in the "what" of social reality before marching onto the questioning of its "why" and "how", and this makes ontology as the point of departure in academic inquiry (Holden and Lynch, 2004; Grix, 2018). It would surprise few to imagine if what I believe in is the independent existence of social phenomena and meanings, then there is no need to ask the "why" question and conceive an inquiry into such phenomenon, as my answer would be "because people are tainted by the capitalism hence wasting money on the inauthentic". But in disclosing my confusion and asking "why", I have demonstrated my relativist ontological position by appreciating the existence of multiple realities residing in the social world and paying attention to their situation-dependent construction that cannot be separated from the social actors and practices involved. In the meantime, within this relativist position I am also integrating my indigenous ontological assumption that everything in itself is rooted in *Dao*, namely "the unity of man and nature", which can be understood as an ontological source in traditional Chinese philosophy conveying reality as holistic and relational. *Dao* incorporates both the macro and micro, the objective and subjective, even the

contradictory elements in their balanced and multifold becoming (Peng and Nisbett, 1999; Li, 2018). As stated in *Dao De Jing*, "Dao generates oneness, oneness generates twoness, twoness generates threeness, and threeness generates the ten thousand things." (Lao Tzu, 2008 [no date]). The emphasis on generating and becoming in *Dao* views reality as a process playing out in the dynamic interaction between the generated "twoness", which comprises of Yin and Yang as the abstract constituents with different mutuality that subjects to the eye of the beholder. Within this frame of reference, while embracing the relativity of social reality, I also see *Dao* as the roots of the relativity, and it is the eternal and subjective Yin-Yang becoming generated from *Dao* that brings us the multiple realities. In this context, to answer my posed research questions, I shall not look for reality that is out there waiting to be found, such as the manifest thingness of the museum merchandise per se. Rather, I am looking for different realities, or *Dao* in their various becoming.

Epistemology

This dynamic, relativist ontological orientation helps me identify my epistemological view so that I could grasp the reality in a proper way. By raising questions towards the relationship between the researcher and the researched, epistemology considers the nature of knowledge, or the ways of people getting to know the world (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Bearing in mind the multiplicity and dynamics in social reality, in this study I have adopted an (inter)subjective epistemology. Attention to the (inter)subjective dynamics is important as the social world is constituted by multiple norms and values (Risjord, 2014) and consumption (of museum merchandise) can be understood as a synthesis comprised of both material and symbolic interaction (McCracken, 1986). The connection that I have built between heritage (vitality) making and heritage consumption through literature review also urges me to focus on the intersubjective and processual dynamics emerged from the phenomenon of interest, because

meaning making in this context is "both personal and shared, shaped by one's experience of self and self in-relation-to-others, and it is temporal and fluid" (Grandy, 2018, p.174). In this vein, my aim is not to provide a straightforward explanation of the causes and effects of the knowing purchase of the "inauthentic" museum merchandise. Rather, I seek to understand the meanings that this consumption holds for its participants. And such meanings are not ready-made but co-created from the interaction between the researcher and researched in the process of research, which renders both as the makers of the "quilts" of meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

Meanwhile, as researcher's values is inseparable in interpretivist inquiry (Corlett and Mavin, 2018), it is thus necessary to mention that my subjective stance in epistemology has also been infused with my worldview with years of imperceptible cultural conditioning in Chinese philosophy. Specifically, this goes into my views on ambiguity and oppositions between the binaries emerged from the research process (such as the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic in my proposed research question, the relationship between myself and my participants, and other binary relations emerged from the observed consumption experience). As an interpretivist, while acknowledging the copresence of multiple knowledge in the construction of meaning, one must also pay attention to the interplay and seek to understand the potential tension in-between. To this end, I take Yin-Yang as a crucial epistemological component and believe that any interpretation comprises of two contradictory yet complementary parts, namely Yin and Yang (Wang, 2012; Li, 2018; Rošker, 2021). In addition to their presence as the abstract derivative of *Dao*, Yin-Yang also work as indicative attributes with great flexibility. The attribution of Yin-Yang is not confined by the subject under discussion, instead, it can be employed in delineating the relationship between things (or phenomena) or characterising the presence of a thing (or phenomenon) in different contexts. Take the "hand" illustration made by Forke (1925, p.215) as an example, "The left hand is

Yang, the right one Yin, in this no change is possible, but raise both hand, then they are both Yang, and put them down, they are both Yin, and no matter whether you raise them or put them down, when they are hot they are both Yang, and when they are cold they are both Yin". As such, Yin-Yang as a correlative mindset illuminates not only the diversity of relation, but also the fluidity in its becoming. With this in mind, in my inquiry into the consumption of museum merchandise, not only have I paid attention to my interaction with my participants as co-creators of knowledge, but I have also been cognizant of the fluid relativity between different subjective interpretations and how they unite to form an organic whole. Should tension emerge from such interplay, neither side of the oppositions would be erased or replaced in the framework of Yin-Yang. On the contrary, it is precisely the multiplicity and tension that render the subject issue worthy of exploration.

Methodology

It would be both meaningless and inadequate if one attempts to address the proposed inquiry by reducing the consumption of museum merchandise, as a social phenomenon and subjective experience, into statistics. In keeping with the ontological and epistemological foundations laid above, in this study I have performed a naturalistic inquiry via qualitative research methods to grasp the complicated, fluid, and idiographic reality (Gephart, 2018). As a natural ally for interpretivist research, qualitative method allows researchers to engage with participants in a setting that is not contrived only for data generation, which can be a less inhibitive way for inquiry into experience, meaning, perspective, and phenomenon to take place (Hammarberg, Kirkman and De Lacey, 2016). Meanwhile, researcher in qualitative inquiry is a key instrument and integral part in knowledge generation (Day, 2012). In this context, I also leveraged on my indigenous background and sought inspiration from *Wu* ("悟" in Chinese, as in metaphorical and imaginative interpretation) as a shared methodology in Chinese traditional philosophy,

referring to "the unique process and result of exploratory learning, with intuition as the process of imagination as well as insight as the outcome of imagination" (Li, 2016b, p.50). The application of metaphor is a distinctive feature of *Wu* in generating insights. For instance, the metaphor of "garbage can" used by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) to facilitate the dissection of the complex organisational choice, the "water ripple" metaphor that Fei (1992) adopted to explain Chinese societal structure and interpersonal relationships, as well as the renowned research "onion" describing the decision making in developing research methodology (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), all demonstrate the imaginative power derived from metaphor. As such, while using qualitative methods to search for the complexity in real life, I have also wielded my metaphorical association to facilitate my comprehension and interpretation throughout the practice of research.

As earlier addressed in the Introduction Chapter, the boom of archaeological blind box has been found as an online phenomenon on Chinese social media platforms. People actively share their experience, communicate with others about their discoveries, and search for background information. Mindful of the online popularity of museum merchandise and how it intrigued me to pursue its consumption as a research topic in the first place, I decided on performing an online qualitative inquiry into the field guided by netnography, which is defined as:

> "a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experience that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media. These cultural experiences can be engaged with, communicated through, and then reflected upon, forming the three fundamental elements of netnography: investigation, interaction, and immersion." (Kozinets, 2020, p.14)

With its origin in interpretivist paradigm, netnography leverages digital communication to facilitate researchers to explore almost any topics and generate "in-depth, contextual, and

empathetic cultural understandings" (Kozinets and Gretzel, 2024, p.2). At the time of research design, empirical practice was restricted by the coronavirus pandemic as force majeure, which turned online investigation as necessary and inevitable. It is also worth mentioning that in this study I did not conduct a strict netnography but rather follow a netnograpic approach in research design and data analysis, aligning with the core principles while adapting to the unique context. This adaptation is necessary because the general practice of netnography is often community-focused, whereas the communal aspect in my research context is more fluid and less defined, therefore requiring a more flexible and tailored methodological approach. Fortunately, my netnographic inquiry revealed a much more diverse and informative consumption phenomenon which not only went beyond my expectation, but also pointed at the experiential dimension of museum merchandise which has received scant attention in current research. It enabled me as the researcher to acquire data which captures the transient and nuanced moments of experience that can be easily overlooked by traditional methods such as survey and structured interview. Although online presentations tend to be referred as "virtual", people nowadays are actively sharing their experiences and opinions online, and these could have "real" influence on others in many aspects, such as consumer behaviour, which have provided abundant traces that could be valuable resources for researchers (Kozinets, 2002; La Rocca, Mandelli and Snehota, 2014; Heinonen and Medberg, 2018; Abutaleb, El-Bassiouny and Hamed, 2021). Moreover, netnography allows me as the researcher to take a "less invasive" position in the field (Morais, Santos and Gonçalves, 2020, p.444), unpack the phenomenon from the participant's perspective, and come up with interpretations in a co-creative way (Rageh, Melewar and Woodside, 2013).

3.2 Empirical Practice

Driven by my interest in the experience that people have with museum merchandise, I took an interpretivist stance and sought to make sense of the dynamics therein. I took the archaeological

blind box and its derivative product line initiated by Henan Museum in China as the empirical context, not only because they were the products that intrigued me in the first place, but they were all the rage at the time of my investigation, which makes them a data-rich context. I divided my netnographic inquiry into two interconnected stages with the first one focusing on the collection of online archival data in relation to the consumption of archaeological blind box, while the second one probing into the individual cases through semi-structured interview as a complementary continuation of the first stage. Table 3.1 presents an overview of data collection, with more recorded in Appendix 2. In the sections that follow, I will expand on each stage by showing the practical details therein.

Inquiry Stage	**Source**	**Format (Quantity)**	**Description**	**Purpose**
Stage I	Consumer	Videos (64)	Unboxing video produced by consumers capturing their consumption experience of archaeological blind box.	Understand the experience that consumers have with archaeological blind box (selected museum merchandise) with a focus on the process.
	Henan Museum	Video (4), text and pictures (94)	Instructional video produced by the museum; Blind box journal as promotional material circulating the recent development in merchandising.	Understand museum merchandise as a representation of cultural heritage from the angle of museum as a heritage authority.
Stage II	Consumer	Interview (27), text and picture	Online semi-structured interview with consumers of archaeological blind box (also producer of unboxing video).	Probe into consumer's experience and further explore the various mutuality identified from the unboxing videos.
	Henan Museum	Interview (1)	Online semi-structured interview with the staff in Henan Museum who oversees the branding of archaeological blind box.	Understand the museum's position and attitude in the development of archaeological blind box.

Table 3.1: Overview of data collection

3.2.1 Stage I: Experience bricolage of online archival data

Before diving into the consumption experience of archaeological blind box and exploring the dynamics therein, I must first have a clearer picture of what this experience can be. With fieldwork restricted by the pandemic control, information available online appeared as the only feasible choice at that time. The implementation of netnography generally consists of four steps: confirmation of research focus and identification of specific online platform as research field (i.e., initiation and making ethical entrée), data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and communication (Kozinets, 2020; Kozinets and Gretzel, 2024). Contingent adaptation and omission of certain procedures are common (Costello, McDermott and Wallace, 2017), but elements like online platform selection and data type should be given thorough consideration. Based on this, I conducted my first-stage inquiry in three steps, making entrée, collecting and managing data, transcription and initial interpretation.

Making entrée

As advised by Kozinets (2018), the definition of field site in netnography is flexible and in flux as it is subject to researcher's understanding of the topic of research. This requires researchers to invest time and effort to match the online site with their research interest and question(s). Seven factors are recommended to be taken into account when identifying potential online sites, they are "relevance, activity, interactivity, substantiality, heterogeneity, richness and experientiality" (Kozinets, 2015, p.168). Through an initial search, I first identified four relevant online platforms as potential sites for further exploration (see Table 3.2). All four platforms contain substantial resources in relation to the consumption experience of the chosen products.

Platform Name	Platform Description
Bilibili	Bilibili is a Chinese video sharing platform, which originally focused on animation, comic, and games (ACG), now has developed into a comprehensive video site with various themes. Statistics show that the average monthly active users of Bilibili have reached around 271.7 million in the last quarter of 2021 (Bilibili Inc., 2022). The length of video published on Bilibili.com varies from seconds to hours, presenting a rich stock of research resources. One distinctive feature of Bilibili.com is its real-time interactive commenting system (i.e., bullet comments or danmaku, in Chinese: 弹幕 dànmù).
Douban	Douban is a community-based social platform with average monthly active users of about 400 million (Douban.com, 2022). It can be seen as Chinese version of Reddit, where users can engage with people of similar interests, and the content on Douban can be accessed without account registration. The online craze of the archaeological blind box in fact originated from one post in a sub-forum on Douban.
Sina Weibo (Weibo)	Weibo is a "micro-blogging" platform in China with monthly active users of over 511 million (Weibo.com, 2020), which is often viewed as Chinese version of Twitter (X). Apart from being a platform for users to share opinion, Weibo is also utilised by marketers for propaganda and promotion.
Xiao Hong Shu (RED)	RED is a cross-border platform incorporating function of both e-commerce and social media with monthly active users of over 200 million (DeGennaro, 2020). It focuses on the sharing of user generated content and aims at constructing a reciprocal platform to help consumers making better shopping decision.

Table 3.2: Four potential platforms for netnographical investigation

After evaluating these platforms under the guidance of factors mentioned above, I decided on Bilibili.com (Bilibili) as the most appropriate site for my inquiry. The advantage of Bilibili lies in its data richness and intensive interaction. Specifically, the richness lies in the vast stock of unboxing videos shared by consumers on Bilibili documenting their first-person perspective in playing with archaeological blind box. Unboxing video has been an important information source for studying consumer experience. It is closely connected with unboxing, an online consumer behaviour originated in the consumption of digital products such as laptop and digital camera and has now expanded to almost every product category that people can ever think of (Mowlabocus, 2020). Unboxing video is a specific type of user-generated content popular among the young generation which depicts people removing the package of certain commodity, introducing some background information of the product, and is often accompanied with

consumer's physical interaction with the product (Marsh, 2016; Craig and Cunningham, 2017; Bae, Self and Kim, 2019; Kim, 2020; Ismail *et al*., 2022). Comparing with other platforms which largely consist of people's sharing in textual and graphical forms, unboxing videos presented on Bilibili usually record the experience throughout, offering a more vivid and comprehensive audio-visual reflection. In addition, the interactive commenting system also allows Bilibili to stand out from other alternatives. Unlike the general forum comments, the "pseudo-synchronised" bullet comments on Bilibili provide a "sense of togetherness" (Wu *et al*., 2018, p.210), which further lead to engagement beyond the traditional consumer-product dyad and enrich the consumption experience derived therefrom.

By digging into consumer's shared experience in the format of unboxing video, I came to the awareness that although in my biased presumption the consumption of museum merchandise is a solo play, it can also be a multi-dimensional ensemble which involves human-object interaction, video production, and viewership involvement. This is in harmony with my relativist ontology as well as what Carù and Cova (2006, p.44) argue about the completeness of experience "an experience is never really complete if it has not been expressed, i.e., as long as it is not been communicated in linguistic or other forms. Whether one has the experience at home or elsewhere, it cannot be separated from ideas such as sharing and collective enjoyment". The experiential string presented by unboxing video on Bilibili is made up successively and sometimes recurrently by consumer's personal interaction with the product, concurrent video recording and subsequent editing, as well as communication with the audience after sharing the video online. Accordingly, the presentation of unboxing video enables me to identify not only what the consumers understand as meaningful through their editing of different video effects, but also what the audience deemed impressive through the "real-time" bullet comment mechanism.

While settling on Bilibili as the online site of inquiry, I also worked on collecting information about archaeological blind box as the product of interest, so that my dissection of the experience can be strengthened from various angles. Collection was focused on the information shared by the producer of archaeological blind box, that is the Henan Museum as a dependable source. I located four interlinked platforms as the potential sites for data collection, including Bilibili, WeChat (i.e., one of the biggest social media platforms in China), Sina Weibo, and Taobao (i.e., a Chinese online shopping platform), on which Henan Museum owns its verified account. Promotional videos of new series of products are regularly published on its Bilibili homepage, with related materials documenting the evolvement of archaeological blind box made available on the other three platforms. For instance, a serial "blind box journal" (i.e., product newsletter) is pushed three times a month on the subscription account of Henan Museum on WeChat, while illustrated product copywriting is shared on its Weibo account and Taobao outlet at varying intervals. After weighing the consistency, richness, and interactivity of these sites, I decided on WeChat and Bilibili as the platforms to collect product-relevant information, presented in the form of video and blind box journal.

Collecting and managing data

After settling with online platforms for investigation, I first conducted an overt observation on the chosen site (Bilibili) from August to October 2021 on the unboxing video of archaeological blind box, so that I could have a start-to-finish familiarisation of people's experience. Through a preliminary investigation on the product information, I extracted a series of key terms such as "archaeological blind box", "relics restoration box", "archaeological restoration blind box" and "Henan Museum blind box", which were later adopted in the search for videos indicative of relevant experience. I also applied different filters to the searching results so that I could locate more data-rich resources. For instance, "most bullet comments" filter was applied to

highlight the interactivity within the video, while “most recent published” filter was adopted to identify the most recent published videos, considering the timeliness of resources. After applying these filters, I further filtered the searching results in descending orders by the number of views and time duration. Videos made by influencers with an explicit plot of sponsored promotion were removed from the search results considering their equivocal sincerity in experience (Chen, Yan and Smith, 2023); whereas videos with 100 and less view amount, and three minutes or shorter length were selectively excluded given their inadequacy in data richness. Exceptions were made for videos with rich content but less popularity, or videos created by consumers who have other informative videos in a consistent theme. Under these circumstances, the videos will be kept for later screening. 127 unboxing videos were identified as potential resources through the searching practice, and 64 unboxing videos with participant-granted access were collected as research data for Stage I till May 2022.

In parallel with the video collection, I also worked on collecting data on product information. Although relevant product information is already publicly online, it is ethical and necessary to have consent from the information source for research practice. To this end, I reached out to the channel sales manager in the merchandising department of Henan Museum through his verified Weibo account and explained my research intention. The manager further referred his colleague, Wei Liu, who is responsible for the brand operation of cultural creative products in Henan Museum, as the key research liaison. Consent was later attained from Wei in using the promotional materials as research data. 61 blind box journals and 4 instruction videos were collected till May 2022 at the end of the Stage I of my inquiry, and the number of collected blind box journals later climbed up to 94 at the end of 2023 as I have kept an eye on the product’s development as data informing the context of the observed consumption experience.

Regarding data management, data collected in the first stage are mainly archival materials publicly available online. I have created private folder on the chosen platforms to store the collected data. Additionally, I have also made screen recordings as backup for the collected videos in case the online version got deleted or hidden by its producers.

Transcription and initial interpretation of video data

Given the collected unboxing videos are primarily made up by fast-forwarded footages with limited voiceover, verbatim transcription appears to reduce the experiential quality of such data. Therefore, I adapted the transcription into video notes in which I took records of video highlights such as the surprising revelation and moment of completion marked by the consumer, copied out the significant comments (e.g., bullet comments and general comments), selectively transcribed the player's verbal narrations, and annotated with my comments. A 41-page document with 39,430 words of notes was generated accordingly.

Initial interpretation of the video data involved two parallel pathways. On one path, I took a traditional perspective by focusing on the basic video characteristics (e.g., viewership, shooting style, presence of creator, video duration, and audience interactivity) and working out the experience flow, namely the unboxing procedure which includes opening introduction, first impression, demonstration of components, operation, review, and conclusion. In doing so, I developed a general understanding the consumption process of archaeological blind box. On the other path, I constructed an individual-specific summary integrating the operational details (e.g., interaction with the material components) and experience highlights (e.g., noticeable change in emotion and tone) as recorded in the video, so that I can figure out the "plot" of every single case and generate an initial idea of what this experience could possibly mean to the specific consumer. Together, the foregoing interpretation of the collected video data enabled a

solid ground for my inquiry afterwards, equipped me with intriguing details (e.g., unexpected recreation, interesting audience reaction) that I can address and probe in the following inquiry.

3.2.2 Stage II: Complementary inquiry via online interview

Informed by the collected unboxing videos and product information, I embarked on the second stage of inquiry with online interview as the main approach, seeking to delve deeper into the investigated experience and further unpack the nuanced dynamics behind this "inauthentic" consumption phenomenon and its relevance to heritage (vitality) making.

Sampling and recruitment

The sampling and recruitment of potential interview participants started simultaneously with the entrée making in prior stage. In approaching the potential participants (i.e., producers of unboxing video), it was found that people on Bilibili appeared to be comparably more proactive and cooperative than those on other identified platforms. To achieve a consistent interpretation of consumer's experience, I adopted purposive sampling on video producers on Bilibili, with an extra consideration of their willingness and availability (Spradley, 2016; Bernard, 2018). While approaching these video producers for permission of using their video as research data, I asked for their intention of joining a one-to-one online interview with me to further talk about their experience with archaeological blind box. Participants in this stage were selected to capture a diversity of perspectives and experience relevant to the proposed inquiry. I paid special attention to the expertise (e.g., expertise in archaeology) and typicality (e.g., video content and the interactivity of their videos based on the views and comments) reflected from their engagement with the chosen product. Purposive selection as such was crucial to uncovering the nuances regarding how individuals navigate themselves in the consumption and interpret their personal involvement. Their insights, informed by the varied personal experience,

offered rich and contextualised understandings that transform the conventional narratives in heritage consumption and highlight the interplay between the opposites (e.g., expert and nonexpert). I also invited my liaison at Henan Museum to join the interview, seeking to realise a more holistic understanding of the investigated consumption with insights drawn from different angles (i.e., perspectives from the museum as authoritative stakeholder). After several rounds of informal communication, 27 video publishers (also consumers of archaeological blind box) and Wei Liu from Henan Museum agreed to join the interview. Interviews with consumers were conducted from 20 December 2021 to 04 April 2022, while the interview with Wei Liu from Henan Museum was conducted on 09 May 2022. Table 3.3 presents the demographical information of the consumer interviewees.

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Education
Joey	26	F	Art Designer	UG	DY	18	F	Student	UG
Shenhui	22	F	Student	UG	PXX	27	F	Teacher	UG
Alan	26	F	Entrepreneur	UG	Susan	24	F	Teacher	PG
Dede	25	F	Entrepreneur	UG	LGZL	22	F	Teacher	UG
HLJ	27	F	Officer	UG	Zola	25	F	Teacher	PG
NC	20	F	Student	UG	YMS	31	M	Teacher	UG
LT	24	F	Gallery staff	PG	Lois	23	F	Student	PG
YJL	26	F	Student	UG	Hyouka	23	M	Student	UG
EP	24	M	Accountant	UG	Kiyo	35	M	Florist	UG
SQ	21	F	Student	UG	Mayman	30	M	Technician	UG
Jilian	22	M	Student	UG	Peggy	19	F	Student	UG
Yi	27	F	Editor	PG	Mantos	24	M	Vlogger	UG
Lee	23	F	Director	UG	Lan	26	F	Executive	PG
Ating	24	F	Fashion Designer	UG					

Note: UG – undergraduate; PG - postgraduate

Table 3.3: Demographic information of consumer interviewees

Collecting data

The initial guideline for the semi-structured interview conducted with consumer participants was developed based on the interpretive notes of video data collected from the first stage. To

ensure that the interview is theme-oriented, presuppositionless, and opens to ambiguities and unexpected perspectives (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018), I paid special attention to the open-ended wording of each question, making sure that participants can express themselves with less or no constraints (Chenail, 2009; Bryman, 2016) and myself as the researcher would have a greater chance to collaborate with the participants as co-producer of knowledge rather than an emotionless interrogator (Brinkmann, 2007; 2017). The guideline was later checked with the supervisory team and revised based on the feedback accordingly (see Appendix 3).

During the practice, I started every interview with a brief self-introduction, reviewing the aim of the research and purpose of the interview in graspable expression that is friendly for non-academic participants: "to understand the experiential aspect of consumer's consumption of participatory museum cultural creative products". I also explained to the participants about the interview structure, restated their right to withdrawal, and reconfirmed consent. Permission of interview recording was asked before proceeding to the subject. Participants were also asked to provide basic demographical details (i.e., age, educational level, and occupation) for interview data management. Acquirement of general information also allowed me to interact with the participants in a less strict way, as sometimes there exist connections between the participants and myself in our lived everyday world that is beyond the temporary relation connecting us as the interviewee and interviewer. Through these connections I allow facets of my own personal experience to enter the conversation, and this helps me to empathise with my participants and show genuine curiosity of their experience.

The main body of the interview consisted of two parts, covering participant's experience with the chosen products and museum merchandise in general. Participants were first asked to recall their first encounter with archaeological blind box. The opening question was "let's start with archaeological blind box, can you tell me about your first encounter with this product?". This

question worked as a conversation starter and set the stage for expanding the exploration in terms of the experience details. After getting an overview of their experience, I further asked about the participant's engagement with specific components of the product (e.g., soil wrapping, excavation/restoration tools) based on my observation and initial interpretation of the archival data. Follow-up questions were also asked to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the collected videos and gain deeper insight into the dynamics within the experience, for example:

- "What's your favourite/the most impressive part in this experience?"
- "What do you mean by being a 'soil-digging lover'? What can you get from this kind of experience?"
- "In the video you referred the restoration as a stress-relieving activity, why would you say that?"
- "How do you view your participation in this archaeological blind box?"
- "What does this blind box / museum merchandise mean to you?"

Apart from these follow-up questions, I also made probing questions (e.g., "Can you elaborate on the idea that '…'?" or "I am not quite sure about the '…' you just said, could you explain further?") to invite participants to share more about their responses so that I could dig deeper and explore more nuanced dimensions of the investigated experience (Bryman, 2016; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018). I also encouraged participants to share available visual materials in addition to their unboxing videos to facilitate their expression during and after the interview. This was not a compulsory requirement so not every participant got prepared, but 18 participants managed to send supplementary materials after the interview. At the end of the interviews, appreciations were expressed to the participants. The average duration of interview was 1 hour and 12 minutes, with the longest interview being 1 hour and 49 minutes.

As for the interview with Wei from Henan Museum, my focus was on tracing the conceptual origin of the product under investigation and gaining a clearer understanding of its biography (Kopytoff, 1986). Wei is currently responsible for the brand operation in the merchandising department of Henan Museum. Her work responsibility includes brand incubation, promotion, as well as brand dissemination via mass media (e.g., live streaming and media coordination). She has closely involved in the development of the product line – archaeological blind box, and this makes her a relevant source of information. The interview with Wei covered topics such as museum's original intention and inspiration for launching the blind box series, process of product development, response to possible dissonance encountered in their promotion of the product, to mention a few (see Appendix 3). Examples were provided throughout the interview to illustrate the points. This interview lasted for 1 hour and 32 minutes.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that all interviews were conducted online via Zoom due to the coronavirus restriction. Zoom as an online conferencing platform offers an alternative "face-to-face" interaction, allowing the activation of multisensory engagement (e.g., screen sharing) and shortening the distance between the researcher and participants (Marhefka, Lockhart and Turner, 2020; Saarijärvi and Bratt, 2021). It is also a qualified platform for research use as approved by the ethics committee in The University of Birmingham. Following the suggestions made by Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman (2020), I sent detailed guidance on Zoom installation/operation to the participants and assisted when required before the formal interview. This was an important preparatory work because although participants in this research are relatively tech savvy, Zoom is not the mainstream video conferencing platform in China hence proper instruction is still necessary. During the interview, participants can choose to turn on/off the camera at will, while I would keep the camera on to convey a sense of presence. Interview recording was made through the inherent recording function in Zoom. While recognising the convenience and flexibility enabled by Zoom as an online medium facilitating the performance

of interview, constraints have also emerged with the progression of the interview. For instance, some interviews went through moments of poor internet connections and resulted in obvious audio/visual lag, under those circumstances I would take notes of the inconsistency and ask participants to repeat their response. Such repetition can affect their engagement and lead to Zoom fatigue, but in most cases, participants showed empathy and were willing to cooperate. Also, sometimes the interview was interrupted by unexpected distraction such as phone calls or notification from other devices, or renovation noise that is out of the participant's control. In that case, the verbal interview will be paused but the communication continues in the chat box of Zoom if situation allows.

Information power, transcription, and review

Rather than using the ubiquitous yet debatable "saturation" rationale, I have adopted the notion of "information power" proposed by Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) as a key reference to guide data collection. With more priority given to the information richness, this notion calls researchers to actively reflect on their research aim, sampling strategy, theoretical grounding, data quality, as well as analytical orientation (Braun and Clarke, 2022) during the process of investigation. In this study, what I aim to explore is a rather concrete consumption phenomenon with clear empirical context and theoretical framework. This means that I am more prone to the quality and completeness of information derived from the collected data, rather than the number of participants.

Transcription of verbal data such as interview recordings has been a widely acknowledged convention in qualitative research practice (Sandelowski, 1994). Despite the fact that transcription is a time-consuming work, I decided to transcribe the interviews myself, so that I could start data immersion and familiarisation at an earlier stage, and get more prepared for the analysis (May, 2011; Galletta and Cross, 2013; Bryman, 2016). As stated earlier, all interviews

conducted in this study were audio/visual recorded (depends on participants' preference on switching on the camera or not) via Zoom under permission of interviewee. After downloading these recordings from Zoom Cloud and creating backups, I deleted the online versions for data security. Interviews were transcribed separately and saved as individual file, together with the unabridged interview questions. The transcribing and reviewing work consisted of four steps. (1) I first employed the "Dictate" function embedded in Microsoft Word to auto-dictate the interview and generate a draft transcript, while I was listening to the recording as the first round of interview review during the Word-dictation. In the opinion of May (2011), listening to the interview recording is a necessary step in data familiarisation, and will further assist data analysis. It is also noticed that despite the auto-dictation granted certain speed in transcription, the generated transcript can have a lack of accuracy due to technology's incompetence of recognising multiple speakers and homonyms (Maclean, Meyer and Estable, 2004). (2) Therefore, in the second step, I manually reviewed and revised the dictated transcripts by listening/watching the interview recordings once again. Available non-verbal details were added while unnecessary disturbance (e.g., interference such as telephone calls and bad internet connection) was removed. (3) Moving forward, I proofread the corrected transcripts, identified inconsistency and inaccuracy, and made notes of ambiguities for follow-up investigation. (4) Finally, as agreed during the interview, participants were informed of potential follow-up collaboration soliciting feedback about the transcribed data (Motulsky, 2021). With an intention to ensure the consistency of interview performance, I selected eight participants whose interviews were conducted not in a consecutive manner as the reflexive collaborators and reached out to them for follow-up collaboration. All approved the trustworthiness of the transcription, with three collaborators provided extra feedback and further illustration based on their reflection of the experience.

In addition, given all interviews were conducted in Chinese, the transcripts were compiled in Chinese and later applied in data analysis. Interview excerpts presented in the finding chapters were first translated from Chinese to English and then separately translated back to Chinese to ensure the interpretation was consistent. Back-translation is frequently adopted in qualitative research to confirm the equivalence and consistency between the data presented in the target language (i.e., English in this study) and the source language (i.e., Chinese) (Chen and Boore, 2010). Given the limitation in time and budget, along with the consideration in ethics and data security, I decided to take the role of (back-)translator. Refinement has also been applied to the translated quotation to enhance the quality of translation as goes with the iterative data analysis.

3.2.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted as the analytical approach to establish a richer understanding of people's consumption experience of museum merchandise and the dynamic interplay therein. I chose the phased practice of reflexive thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019; 2021) as a key reference, for the emphasis it lays on "the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.594). The analysis was performed in five phases:

Phase 1: Data immersion

Data immersion started simultaneously with the previously presented data transcription, even earlier during the collection of video data. In this phase, I immersed myself with data via repeated watching of the unboxing videos, listening to the interview recording during auto-dictation and transcription revision. After having the transcripts checked with the participants, I re-read the interview transcripts again, together with the interpretive video notes that I sorted out during the initial interpretation of video data, as well as the collected blind box journals.

After that, I conducted a joint immersion by combining the review of video, interview transcript, and relevant product information. Data collected from specific participant was put in one place and reviewed again. I first re-watched the collected unboxing video then moved onto re-reading the interview transcript of the video producer (if one joined the interview) and retracing the mentioned product information in the blind box journal. This one-to-one correspondence allowed me to get a more comprehensive understanding of each participant's experience, which also facilitated my search for underlying meanings and patterns in an active way (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Previous notes and newly generated one in this stage were compiled together as reference for the following phases.

Phase 2: Initial data coding

After familiarising myself with the data I proceed to the generation of initial codes starting with separate coding of the video and interview data, accompanied by the summary of blind box journal. In this phase, data were coded based on their distinctive features and grouped together for similarity, and I adopted NVivo as a technical support at this phase considering the volume of data in its chaotic initial state.

Video. Enlightened by the "four sites" of a critical visual methodology introduced by Rose (2016, p.25), namely "the site of production, site of image per se, site of circulation, and site of audiencing", focusing on the locus in which the meanings of an image are generated from, I dismantled the unboxing video into three parts: video context (i.e., background information of the video production, such as the producer and presented product), video content (e.g., audio-visual cues emphasising experience highlights), and video comments (e.g., audience's reaction towards the video and producer's response). These three parts align with what Chaney, Lunardo and Mencarelli (2018) summarise as the three phases of consumption experience, namely the

antecedent, content, and consequence of the experience. Facilitated by this triadic structure, I coded the unboxing videos accordingly. Example of video coding can be found in Appendix 4.

Interview. With the help of previous immersion and interpretation of video data, I was able to connect the various points made by the participants during the interview with their experience presented in the video. The coding of interview data was initially conducted by hand where I read through the printed transcripts with a pen and a highlighter and wrote down the initial codes and notes in the right-hand margin of the hardcopies. Codes generated in this phase mainly revolved around participants' interaction with archaeological blind box and reflection of their experience, marked with the similarity and difference in between. Generated codes were later reviewed and transported to the electronic copies of transcript compiled in NVivo for convenience. I also made initial categorisation of these codes based on their plausible connections (e.g., description of the product's material feature, reflection on the macro cultural background). Appendix 4 provides an example of the initial coding of interview data.

Blind box journal. Blind box journals as the product-related data at this phase were summed rather than coded given its pre-established layout and limited variation in content. I sorted out a timeline of the development of archaeological blind box series, along with Henan Museum's regular promotion of ongoing public engagement events, expansion of its product distribution channel, and highlights of consumer stories. A separate document was created to register these points and temporarily laid aside for later reference. I found it useful as the background of the investigated consumption experience and as the contextual information supporting my analysis of the museum's involvement.

It is worth noting that while generating the initial codes from both video and interview data I spotted a notable connection among different codes, which is the copresence of opposites in participants' experience (e.g., paradoxical perception of the product's material quality, tension

in impressions regarding archaeology and tomb robbing as part of the experiential context of archaeological blind box, tension in attitudes towards expert conduct and layman recreation, and shifting reflection of the process and result of experience). I noted down this tensional copresence as an interesting and informative patten, and later used it as a key reference in the development of themes and storyline.

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

Once the video and interview data has been coded and categorised appropriately, I went back to the video notes and interview transcripts to refresh my memory and then reflected on the generated codes. It is true that people's experience with archaeological blind box varies because of the difference in their personal context, but commonality or shared pattern can still be found, and this led to my iterative construction of potential themes (sub-themes) with a "zoom-in" and "zoom-out" strategy. At this phase I made great efforts to not have my interpretation of the data affected by attribution or definition established in previous studies, so that I could let the data breathe while performing my part in co-creating the themes as researcher.

To accommodate the individual difference and dynamics, I first worked on producing a "sketch" for each participant as a "zoom-in" strategy to interpret their individual experience. Based on the related initial codes and my previous interpretive notes, I managed to develop a clearer idea of their individual experience highlight. In these sketches, I organised the codes in a shared pattern dealing with participant's explicit reflection on their experience, such as their personal background in connection with the consumption of archaeological blind box, familiarity with archaeology as the designed theme of the blind box, and reaction to the replica in comparison with its reference artefact inside the museum. These sketches have been very helpful for me to draw out the shared or contradictory patterns among different participants, and the nuanced connections in-between, which further facilitate my "zoom-out" practice in developing themes

(sub-themes). Accordingly, main themes were formed from the identified codes and generated sketches in relation to the key elements (e.g., material features of the blind box, integrated expertise, and engagement with relevant others) extracted from the observed experience. A table detailing the initial themes and subthemes can be found in Appendix 4. One notable feature that these themes share is the tensional interrelation among their subthemes, pointing at participant's (or participants') opposing attitude and behaviour towards the same thing as noticed in the analytical phase 2. This is to me an intriguing and informative finding, as well as a turning point for me to bring my theoretical framework into play. As will be discussed in the finding chapters, the existence of tension plays a crucial part in my participants' interaction with archaeological blind box as an "inauthentic" representation and how they react to such tension would strongly affect their overall consumption experience.

Phase 4: Reviewing and revising themes

After generating initial themes (subthemes) and identifying the underlying tension, I worked on reviewing and revising the connection between the themes and data to ensure the themes are not standing alone but supported by relevant and solid evidence. I also reviewed the themes regarding compatibility and consistency with the entire dataset. Overall, I extracted one overarching theme – process-driven unboxing experience, and three recurring themes from the investigated consumption experience, which are the reciprocal interplay between the original and replica, expertise-wise interaction between the expert and nonexpert, and norm-wise interaction between the museum and public. Instead of generating a thematic map to illustrate the connections among the themes, I leveraged myself as a methodological instrument and applied my metaphorical imagination (*Wu*) to interpret these themes as manifestations of a multifold Yin-Yang space, in which each (sub)theme appears as a Yin/Yang element in relation

to its opposite, and each Yin and Yang would have its own Yin-Yang constituents. The table of the revised themes and subthemes is included in Appendix 4.

Phase 5: Theme finalisation and storyline development

After having all the themes and subthemes reviewed and revised, I proceeded to the conception of the final presentation. It turns out that the metaphors I adopted in reviewing the themes direct at a common narrative and connect with my theoretical underpinning – the generative interplay between Yin and Yang as two opposing yet inseparable and co-constitutive elements. In other words, by wielding Yin-Yang thinking as my enabling lens, I interpreted the consumption of museum merchandise (archaeological blind box) as a generative process in connection with heritage making, which plays out in a series of non-contradictory yet opposite elements. To better illustrate the themes and dynamics therein, I developed three storylines with Yin-Yang as the central plot and presented them in a metaphorical form. In doing so, I have enabled a transformative perspective to interpret people's consumption of museum merchandise, which turns out to be not merely an "inauthentic" and transient purchase but a constructive process of meaning making closely related with heritage making and the sustainability of its *Qi* (vitality). The production of research findings took place in parallel with a further theme refinement and reference to the context and literature, as interpretation is a "constant dialogue and iterative back-and-forth movement" (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Figure 3.1 presents an illustrated roadmap of the research findings, which serves as an outline of the three empirical chapters, demonstrating how Yin-Yang as the theoretical framework illuminates the interpretation of the consumption phenomenon under investigation. It is worth noting that, since Yin-Yang is a dynamic framework which is always in a flux, this roadmap only illustrates one static aspect of the generated Yin-Yang dynamics through the analysis. Further elaboration will be provided in the following chapters, facilitated by the metaphorical interpretation.

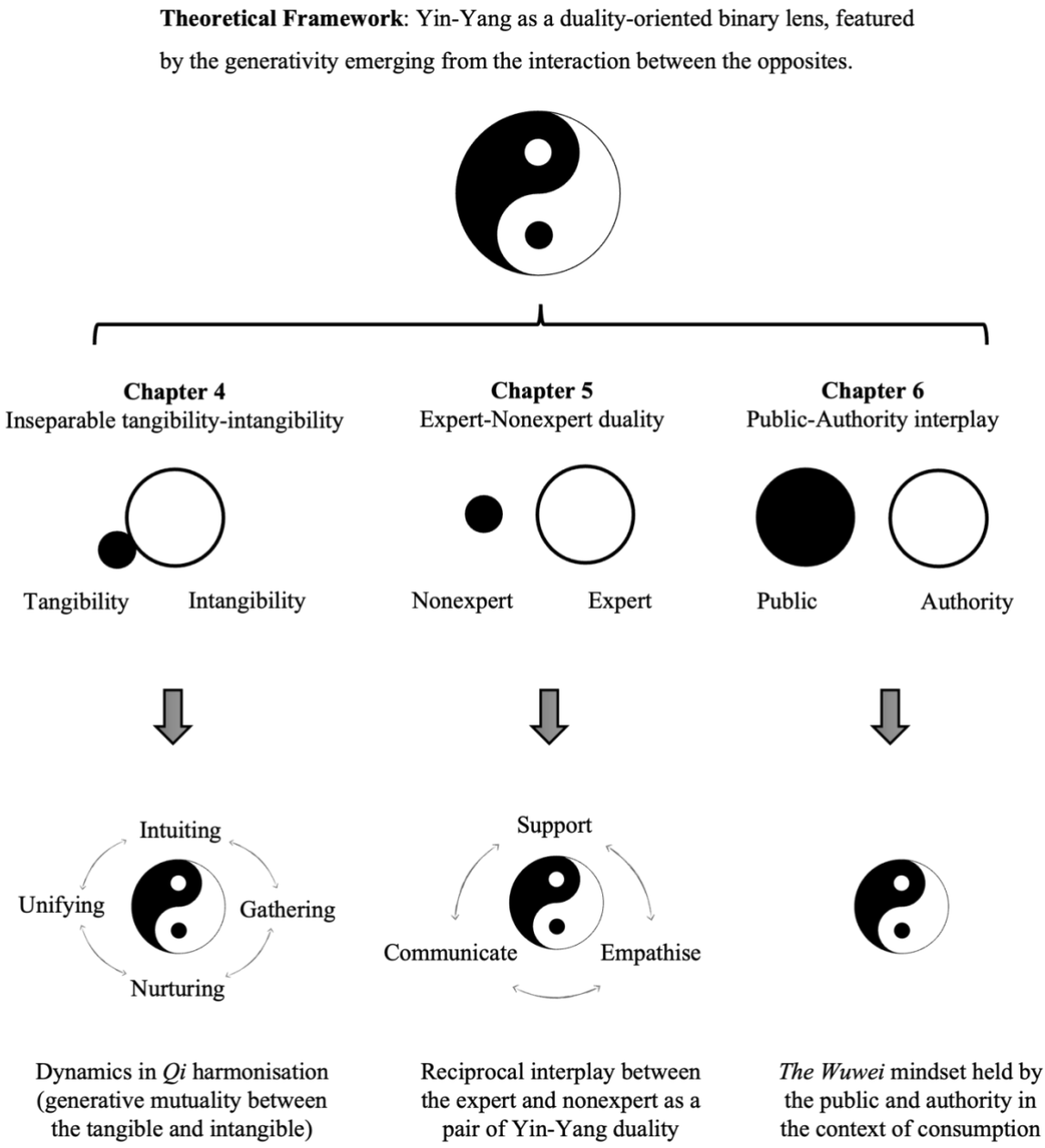


Figure 3.1: Illustrated roadmap of the finding chapters.

3.3 Ethical Consideration

Being an internet-mediated qualitative study, this research involves both online resources and human participation in data collection. Therefore, extra attention has been paid to the ethical conduct, under the guidelines suggested by The British Psychological Society (2021) and ethics committee at The University of Birmingham.

Consent and Withdrawal

Informed consent has been a debatable issue in the practice of netnography (Hookway, 2008), as some claimed that online resources are already publicly available so no more consent from the participants is required (Langer and Beckman, 2005). However, by viewing the participants as equal knowledge creators, I want to fully ensure their right, starting with obtaining their informed consent. To this end, in the first stage of data collection, rather than directly appropriate the unboxing videos as research data, I approached the video producers to ask for their permission, with a direct message sent to them through the chatting function on Bilibili. As advised by Kozinets (2020, p.201), information exchanged with potential research participants should be presented with "disclosure, simplicity, and clear communication". Therefore, in the forwarded message, I would disclose my identity as a PhD researcher, making clear of my intention and research interest in their unboxing videos. The video producers were asked if they were interested in joining the research project. Willing producers were later provided with a detailed research information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 6), explaining the purpose of the study and what would happen to their published videos. Participants in the first stage were also invited to join the second stage, hence the consent form was customised with different options regarding their intention of participation (i.e., video authorisation and interview participation). Participants were able to take time to consider the information and ask questions before making decisions. As for the way of consent, participants could choose from three options at their convenience. An electronic version of consent form was sent to the participant via email. Participants could either print out the form and send back the scanned-signed copy, or directly reply to the consent email indicating their preference of participation and data re-use with electronic signature. Audio recording consent was also adopted in this research when written or email consent cannot be obtained.

All participants were informed about their right to withdraw through the information sheet and reminded again at the interview (for interview participants). Participants in both research stages could withdraw unconditionally at any time before and during the investigation. After the data collection, participants were provided with a four-week period to withdraw from the research. Participants were also noticed that once the research findings are written and published, it might not be possible to remove their data.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Given the public availability of videos collected in this research, I have made extra efforts to inform participants about the possible breaches of anonymity. During the consent stage, participants were made aware of the possibilities of de-identified data being re-identified when linked with other publicly available online resources or being traced back to its original sources, as well as themselves being identified by non-participants. I have also presented options in the consent form about the re-use condition of their videos (e.g., as interview elicitation materials in the second stage of research, presentation at academic conference, journal/book publication) so that participants can opt-in. I also informed participants that there can be no guarantee for absolute anonymity given the established publicity of their videos and the limited control that I have on the internet. Considering the possibility that some participants might not mind being identified about their involvement in academic practice, the consent form was further customised in participant's preference of identity exposure. For participants who are willing to expose their information (e.g., name of their social media account and screenshots of their posted video), I have informed them about the potential risks of re-identification and made sure they understand the stakes. For participants who prefer to stay anonymous, their data were processed and stored in a pseudo-anomymised format instead of using their names or original pseudonyms online.

Data Storage

All acquired research data was stored on a GDPR-compliant storage tool (i.e., University OneDrive provided by Microsoft 365) with back-up copies stored separately in other secured devices. Access to both is restricted to the researcher only.

3.4 Reflexive Evaluation

It is important for interpretivist researchers to position themselves as an integral part of their inquiry and understand how such involvement would affect the research practice and outcomes (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018; Corlett and Mavin, 2018). This is particularly evident in this thesis where my subjectivity has played a significant role in my philosophical orientation, research conception, data collection, and knowledge generation.

First, this thesis can be viewed as a vivid record of me as an interpretivist PhD researcher from China finding my indigenous voice in a Western academic context. As a novice researcher with a non-Western cultural background pursuing a PhD in the UK, I took painstaking efforts to find my place in the interpretivism paradigm without deserting my indigenous cultural assets. My presumptive attribution of museum merchandise as "inauthentic" can be problematic, as one may easily argue the opposite with reference to the embranchment in authenticity research and present museum merchandise as constructively or existentially authentic (Torabian and Arai, 2016; Anastasiadou and Vettese, 2021). But I also realised that my attribution has been affected by my readings of studies conducted in Western contexts or guided by Western ideologies which see things are either authentic or inauthentic; whereas the understanding of authenticity in a non-Western context such as China can differ, as I discussed with my Chinese peers about authenticity as an imported concept in a Chinese context. For so long research in authenticity has been dominated by Western discourse, despite its professed reflection and

transcendence of the absoluteness, research around (in)authenticity has not really stepped out the polarised separation. With years of edification in Chinese culture I find it hard to accept the authentic and inauthentic as entirely opposite. My cultural instinct tells me that this "either/or" divide is inherently restrictive as it has set a clear boundary and led the research into an imbalanced preference for authenticity. And this preference has further turned authenticity into a variant of absolute idea, hiding behind the epistemological debate and riding over its inauthentic opposite. Must the authentic and inauthentic, as well as the related binary judgement (e.g., true and false, original and fake, expert and lay) be as distinct as black and white? Is people's consumption of museum merchandise really about an "either/or" judgement? Could there be another way to view these binary terms?

I traced my instinct to its source, Yin-Yang thinking, which later became a key epistemological constituent and theoretical framework of my PhD. Adapting Yin-Yang from an imperceptible subconsciousness into a workable theoretical framework was no easy work. It took me a while sorting out my subjective understanding and reading the obscure ancient texts about Yin-Yang. I also had a productive time with my supervisors who are not familiar with this remote Eastern philosophy, explaining my interpretation of Yin-Yang and discussing its pertinence and value to my PhD. While we were all excited about the possibility that Yin-Yang could bring to the table, I found it difficult to put down this thought on paper in a way that is as systematic as other Western thoughts because the fluidity and pervasiveness of Yin-Yang can make it too elusive to be delineated. For a time, the elusiveness of Yin-Yang worried me and made me wonder whether choosing the indigenous thoughts over other popular traditions is a wise move. But forcing myself to adhere to a tradition I cannot fully empathise with would be a betrayal of my subjectivity, and a denial of the existence of multiple realities. I dare not to say that up to this point I have got to the bottom of Yin-Yang, but at least by weaving it into my inquiry I have been true and honest to my subjectivity. Thus, by asking the "why" question, I am not

equating museum merchandise as inauthentic, rather, I doubt this resolute distinction and seek to produce a different view.

Meanwhile, my non-Western cultural background reminded me to pay attention to my presence as a researcher in relation to my participants. Both my participants and I are native Chinese with similar cultural background where there exists a hierarchical dependence on the authority that seats at a more "superior" knowledge position (Ho and Ho, 2008). This in my case can be the self-imposed "rigour" that some participants have demonstrated during the interview when they strived to provide a formal and proper answer to my questions and came up with stilted wording and phrasing. For example, although I adjusted the tone and expression of my question to encourage dialogue, in the first few rounds of conversation that I had with one participant who recently graduated from college, I got a strong feeling that this participant was making great effort to frame his response in a pedantic way as if he was expected to provide a "right" answer. This resulted in an awkward atmosphere and unbalanced power relation that neither of us felt comfortable with. I realised that my presence as a researcher, despite my efforts in toning down the seriousness of research, still brought an invisible sense of pressure to my participant. If put under the frame of Yin-Yang, this would mean that the Yin-Yang of research as a "shared space" comprises of the researcher and participants (Bourke, 2014, p.1) is out of balance in this interview.

I must confess that despite my presence as researcher of this study, as a Chinese I am also subject to this imbalanced power relation when it comes to knowledge and authority, which reflects a Confucian educational dogma concerning the "acquisition of correct knowledge" (Ho and Ho, 2008, p.78). I used to be educated in a rigid system where there exists a clear definition of what is correct, and worked as a business executive who is required to follows the rules and regulation. When looking into archaeological blind box as something associated with a

professional field (i.e., archaeology) that I am not familiar with, I was inclined to find out the standard know-how from the authority and align my understanding with it. For instance, some of my participants have a certified connection with archaeology and shared with me some insider knowledge in archaeological practice. In the "shared space" made up of these insider participants and I, the power is tilted towards these experienced participants as I was holding an inquisitive spirit, seeking to explore the contextual information behind archaeological blind box. While such acquirement has enriched my personal knowledge reserve, it also affected my interpretation of the experience that other participants have with the blind box as inexperienced outsiders of archaeology. I shall not hide that part of me believed that some of my nonexpert participants had made "wrong" moves in their pseudo archaeological immersion, especially when the balance is tipped towards me as the authoritative researcher.

Showing that I am aware of the influence that my cultural background has on my research is important in qualitative inquiry as I see myself as part of this research whose values affect the knowledge generation. In fact, the value of my involvement in this research plays out in the tensional interaction between my research identity as an interpretivist with an indigenous imprint of Yin-Yang and my inertial thinking cultivated in a system that praises authority and correctness. Awareness of this tensional copresence is necessary for it enabled me to work towards positioning both myself and my research in a more approachable manner. The majority of my participants are nonexpert in archaeology and so am I (although I may be more informed as I also engaged with expert participants). To mitigate the unconstructive impact brought by the imbalanced power dynamics, I chose to expose my ignorance in both archaeology and archaeological blind box, so that the nonexpert participants would see me as one of them hence be more proactive to my questions. In some cases, my sincerity would lead to a transition in power that my participants would feel themselves as more experienced than me regarding their knowledge in archaeological blind box, hence be willing to share more about their personal

insights into the product. If viewing from the perspective of Yin-Yang, such power dynamics would reflect the relative and fluid relation between my participants and I as the Yin and Yang of this shared space, which further gives rise to the generation of *Qi*, or knowledge in the context of research.

3.5 Chapter Review

In this chapter, I have made plain my interpretivist research orientation in conjunction with my indigenous Yin-Yang worldview and detailed the qualitative methods that I adopted in my inquiry into the consumption experience of the selected museum merchandise. Notably, I have reflected on my presence as researcher with a particular focus on my culture background and highlighted how it has influenced my subjectivity and performance. In the following three chapters, I will unfold the consumption experience of archaeological blind box by presenting the findings in the light of Yin-Yang thinking.

CHAPTER 4: HERITAGE MAKING AS *QI* HARMONISATION

Foreword to the Finding Chapters

Why would people consume museum merchandise knowing it as an assembly-line creation if compared to its precious reference collected inside the museum? "Because we cannot appropriate the museum artefacts to ourselves so we buy something as a substitute", you may have answer like this in your mind now. I shall not deny that, because this can be one true reality that shared by many, even by myself. But this is not the only reality in such consumption phenomenon, particularly in the case of archaeological blind box. Almost unanimously, the responses that my participants have to the question that I asked during the interview – "can you tell me the most impressive or enjoyable part of your consumption?", is "the unboxing process". For them, the process of unboxing is not only a unique selling point of the archaeological blind box, but also the essence of their consumption.

> *"People buying this (archaeological) blind box is not aiming at what's inside the soil, what they really want is the process of digging the soil, and that's what matters the most. I mean, I dug it out, this process is why I spent a hundred or so on it, not that I need this token (i.e., the ox-head token she dug out). To be honest, we all know that we may never pay attention to this token if we come across it in the souvenir store. But I spent nearly 40 minutes digging it out of the soil, so it is important. It's more about the process, the experience, I would say." (LGZL, F22, Interview)*

The emphasis that LGZL places on hands-on participation points at the key difference between archaeological blind box and common blind box, the extended and participatory unveiling. Common blind box usually comes with an identity card informing the object inside the tear-open packaging bag, so people barely spend physical efforts in consuming such product. By contrast, what archaeological blind box enables is an extended experience that not only delays the reveal but also complicates the unveiling by necessitating consumer's personal involvement.

Instead of taking this experience as an effortless acquisition of a ready-made commodity, participants expect to physically get their hands dirty via digging, repairing, or crafting the embedded content inside the box to reach their "final acquirement", just as what LGZL has highlighted above. But this is not the sole reason that archaeological blind box has won so many consumers' hearts. The excerpt below from my interview with Jilian (M22) can provide a clue:

> *"You'll be provided with a card telling you what is inside the box. But from my perspective, I don't think this would impair the charm of this product (archaeological restoration blind box). Why is that? Well, as I've said earlier, the essence is the process of your digging, bit by bit, and putting it together piece by piece. If you just take a look at this card and stop right there, then it (the blind box) is nothing but a pile of worthless fragments buried in dirt. It will never become a craftwork, it's just a pile of broken pieces that you can easily get in some old ceramic workshop – but what's the point in doing that? The key is the process of your discovery and creation, and that's the fundamental difference that I see in this product from those common ones (blind box)." (Jilian, M22, Interview)*

The card that Jilian mentioned is the identity card recently added to the upgraded version of archaeological restoration blind box, informing the identity of the embedded replica so that people can have a clearer idea during its restoration. Yet it is obvious that Jilian does not see the reveal of content as the essence of the experience. Instead, what he truly enjoys is the process of uncovering in which himself is an indispensable part. Preference as such is shared by many, highlighting their personal involvement in this consumption experience:

> *"It's more about the process of experiencing this blind box, from the digging to repairing. I don't really care about the result. If you have a particular taste, why bother buying a blind box? Just get a ready-made one from the museum store." (Shenhui, F22, Interview)*

"For me it's really more about the process. It's a pretty rewarding one. The end result matters too of course, but… well." (DY, F18, Interview)

"You literally dig that thing out bit by bit. The soil is super hard and my hands hurt! And when you are guessing what the thing could be seeing one tiny part of it appears as you dig, that process is pretty fun!" (Kiyo, M35, Interview)

So, what exactly is this process that almost every participant is emphasising? What happens during this process and what can it inform us about heritage making and its vitality? What implications can be drawn from this process for the field of marketing and consumer research? Aligning with other themes that I have summarised from data analysis, the prevailing attention focused by my participants on the process of consumption turns out to be an overarching theme, running through their consumption of archaeological blind box. In this vein, I dissect this process by three interesting "tensions" that I have identified from the analysis and organise them into three finding chapters. Underpinned by Yin-Yang thinking as my theoretical framework, I render this consumption process as a manifestation of Yin-Yang balancing in the context of heritage making. In this context, all stakeholders involved in such process are interpreted as partakers in a multifold Yin-Yang space, navigating the intertwined and generative Yin-Yang dynamics therein. Findings delving into this Yin-Yang infused unboxing process will be presented in the following chapters, laying the groundwork for the discussion in Chapter Seven, where their broader implication for heritage making and consumer research are explored.

In the next three chapters that follow, I will unpack these three tensions in turn. In each chapter, I will employ metaphors that may appear distinct but are unified by a shared Yin-Yang essence to interpret the dynamics emerging from the consumption of the archaeological blind box. Chapter Four presents a harmonising process, in which I unpack the mutuality between the tangible and intangible in heritage making and delineate how the heritage's *Qi* (vitality) flows

in the process of consumption. In Chapter Five, I move onto the constructive interplay between the expert and nonexpert as a pair of duality concepts and discuss how they harmonise with each other in archaeological practice, a representative expertise in heritage making. At last, in Chapter Six, I present details on the tacit reciprocity between the museum and public in the development of museum merchandise, which is revealed as a quasi-laissez-faire approach but interpreted as a *wuwei* mindset under the Yin-Yang framework.

4.1 Chapter Introduction: A Process of *Qi* Harmonisation

> *"All living beings are, therefore, brought into existence by yang influence and given a physical structure by yin influence. This process of genesis proceeds indefinitely, ensuring the continuation of existence. An imbalance of yin and yang influences leads eventually to death." (Unschuld, 1985, p.199)*

Under the framework of Yin-Yang, everything, human or non-human, comprises of Yin and Yang as its basic fabric of existence, and relies on the dynamic Yin-Yang balance for its vitality, which is also known as *Qi* in Chinese thought. As earlier addressed in the theoretical framework (Chapter Two), *Qi* as a universal and perpetual energy arises from the Yin-Yang interplay and reciprocally functions as the context supporting such interplay. The continuous flow of *Qi* depends on the harmonious interaction between Yin and Yang. When the dynamics between Yin and Yang is off balance, *Qi* will become stagnant and further come across as the cessation of the perceived vitality, just as what Unschuld (1985) stated in the opening excerpt above. In this context, this chapter looks into the unboxing experience of archaeological blind box and illustrates it as a progressive *Qi* harmonisation as part of heritage making. Particularly, this *Qi* emerges from the reciprocal interplay between one pair of Yin-Yang dyad in heritage making, namely the tangible and intangible.

This chapter explores the embodied experience that participants have with archaeological blind box and presents this experience as a non-linear harmonisation of *Qi* playing out in a multifold Yin-Yang space, in which people intuit, gather, nurture, and unify the *Qi* of heritage. As discussed in previous chapters, the interpretation of heritage has gradually moved away from the tangible and put more emphasis on the intangible attributes (Smith, 2006). Consequently, tangible manifestations such as the inanimate objects are played down for their influence on heritage making because all heritage in essence is an intangible process which is socially and culturally constructed and attached with various meanings and values produced by the actors

involved in its progressive formation. Preference as such can be also seen in the case of archaeological blind box when it comes to participants' interpretation of their experience, which is more related to the participatory process rather than the mass-produced product per se. But this is not the whole story. Apart from the shared focus on process, the unboxing experience of archaeological blind box also gives rise to a different perspective to view the opposite relation between the tangible and intangible in heritage making. This chapter, accordingly, reconditions the importance of tangibility in heritage making and interprets the relation between the tangible and intangible as inseparable, mutual, and generative.

The rationale behind this perspective is Yin-Yang thinking with its application in traditional Chinese medicine. I draw on the dialectics between Yin and Yang in this particular context to metaphorise the mutual relation between tangibility and intangibility in heritage making, and highlight its influence on heritage's *Qi* (vitality). What inspired me to establish the metaphorical connection between heritage making and Yin-Yang in medicine in the first place is one participant's (YJL, F26) recollection of her experience in which she considers herself as a "battlefield medic" by playing with the archaeological restoration blind box (Figure 4.1). She presents the whole consumption process as a "rescue operation" and humanises the replica as "injured soldiers" in need of medical attention, hinting at the vitality generated from her embodied interaction with the materiality of the blind box:

> *"I felt like a battlefield medic. Collecting the parcel is like transporting a wounded soldier back from the frontline. The digging is like a preoperative preparation, the splicing is like performing an operation and binding up the wound. Then I waited till noon the next day, as if the wounded soldiers were in a healing process. When I unpacked the tapes, the soldiers (the restored replicas) are then in a state of full recovery." (YJL, F26, Interview)*



Figure 4.1: YJL's illustrated sharing on her personal social media (translation added by researcher).

Is YJL's experience merely about treating the "wounded" replica and restoring its health? I see her experience as something more comprehensive, particularly considering the evolvement of heritage making. If compared heritage making to human's physiological functioning, the tangible manifestation of heritage would echo with the corporeal structure of human body (e.g., organs, nerves, blood, limbs and trunk as Yin), and the intangible interpretation would be the mental process that human body reacts to relevant activities (Yang). "Yinyang thought is a bodily thinking in the sense that it is not simply an activity of the mind isolated from the world and its object" (Wang, 2012, p,186). Based on this, the wholeness of human performance comes down to the coordination between the somatic and mental functions. By the same token,

heritage making as an organic doing should also be established on the synergy between the tangible and intangible. Nevertheless, with more attention being paid to the intangible quality of heritage, the balance of the tangibility-intangibility dyad is tipped. Such imbalance leads to an unhealthy condition or illness (e.g., disturbance or stagnation in the flow of *Qi*) in heritage making, which is read as the tangibility (Yin) being consumed by the preponderance of intangibility (Yang). That is to say, the tangible representation of heritage is impaired by the partial emphasis put on the intangible aura in the construction of heritage. In this vein, I see YJL's "rescue operation" as a reflection of heritage making, in which she brings balance to the tangible and intangible by supplementing the tangible through her embodied devotion to the "wounded solider".

There exists a distinct difference between traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine in how they treat disease and health issue. Western medicine sees disease as a body malfunction opposite to health (Fu *et al.,* 2021) and seeks to cure the disease with treatment prescribed to eradicate all evidence of disease and repair the body following a linear causality – "virus-causes-disease" (Wang, 2012, p.173). By contrast, traditional Chinese medicine sees health as an embodiment of Yin-Yang philosophy and human body as an organic Yin-Yang system comprising different yet coordinated parts. It also views human body as an integral part of the universe (external environment), that the Yin-Yang relation between human and external world would also influence the Yin-Yang balance within the human body. This is compatible with the holism principle in Yin-Yang thinking, that not only human and external world connect and resonate with each other in the sense of the "unity of heaven and humanity"; but in every identified Yin-Yang dyad, the constituent Yin and Yang would also have their own Yin-Yang system. Recognition of such multifold Yin-Yang system is important in the practice traditional Chinese medicine because the treatment deals with not only the Yin-Yang balance within human body, but also the balance between the body and the external world. For example, while

clinical practice of common cold has been well-established in Western medicine with organised diagnosis and nearly universal treatment, traditional Chinese medicine offers a different idea focusing on the individual and corresponding environmental factors. Apart from examining the individual on their inner Yin-Yang balance, traditional Chinese medicine would also consider the external factors (i.e., cold, heat, dryness, and dampness) that may affect the internal balance and come up with different prescriptions to restore the Yin-Yang balance (Wu *et al.*, 2023). As such, the treatment of illness in traditional Chinese medicine is not a linear and "once-and-for-all" cure that only deals with the removal of external virus. It is instead a healing process through which people are advised to supplement the deficiency and attenuate the excess across different Yin-Yang dyads so that they could restore the balance in a systemic and sustainable way (Wang, 2012; Fu *et al.*, 2021). In fact, the application of traditional Chinese medicine is not limited in treating the disease, but also deals with the prevention of disease and general health preservation, leading to the harmonisation of *Qi* in a multifold Yin-Yang system.

Within this context, in this chapter I see participants' experience with archaeological blind box as a process of *Qi* harmonisation, in which participants as consumer of such product breathe life into multiple things via their balance of the tangible and intangible within and across these things as interactional Yin-Yang dyads. For instance, while interpreting the museum artefact as a Yin-Yang dyad with its tangibility being compromised by its intangibility, I also see it as in conjunction with archaeological blind box as the Yin and Yang of heritage making in the context of consumption. Reversely, while dissecting archaeological blind box on its tangibility and intangibility as Yin and Yang, I also delve into its constituents (e.g., soil covering) and explore the Yin-Yang mutuality therein. In this vein, I am presenting various manifestations of *Qi* emerging from different but interrelated Yin-Yang dyads. By digging into the bodily interaction that participants have with the blind box and their related reflection on the intangible association therein, a systemic process of *Qi* harmonisation comes into play. This process

includes four interconnected dimensions in which participants intuit, gather, nurture, and unify the *Qi* emerged therefrom. In the following sections, I will expand on this harmonising process, unpacking how people traverse across different Yin-Yang dyads and balance the dynamics in-between, and addressing the importance of *Qi* in heritage making.

4.2 Intuiting the *Qi*

As a pervasive and subtle energy, *Qi* can be hard to notice and easily taken for granted. Very often we only become aware of the trace of *Qi* in its stagnation or disturbance, and this means the Yin and Yang within the thing/phenomenon under observation is out of balance. As revealed through my analysis of the research data, such awareness is not based on participants' conscious reasoning but their instinctive reaction, which is closely related with *Wu* as a methodological intuition that people would leverage in their exploration of the world. My initial awareness of *Qi* in this consumption experience is inspired by the reflections below:

> *"The museum has become some morgue-like place for (heritage) artefacts. I have many friends who hardly ever go to the museum, And they just find it so dull, and lifeless, you know?" (LT, F24, Interview)*

> *"You know, what the museum's got on display are things from the past. Well, how do I put this… just think about it in a superstitious way, it's like what they say, the museum can be a bit – um – eerie – because all those artefacts are from the past and they used to be funerary objects for the dead. So, in a way people can find museum eerie, and spiritually daunting… Right. And in terms of the layout inside the museum, sometimes they would deliberately reproduce a historical scene, which can be so detached from the present reality. Uh, it's usually quiet (inside the exhibition hall), filled with objects from the past… I remember once I visited a museum when I was in high school, it was a workday, so the museum was relatively empty. I was the only one there, surrounded by all the historical stuff and restored scenes. I found it so cut off and oppressing. I just can't fit in." (SQ, F21, Interview)*

"Morgue-like", "lifeless", "eerie" and "daunting", it can be hard to associate these descriptions with a heritage-relevant venue like the museum together with the collected artefacts therein. But this is precisely what people have in mind based on their intuitive feelings of the curated past. For them, the past-oriented setting inside the museum is devoid of connection with the present world, especially when the exhibition environment has been deliberately laid out to highlight the historical significance of the exhibited artefacts. It is true that a well-curated historic atmosphere can transport people into the past and facilitate heritage meaning making through contextual information. However, overemphasis on the past can sometimes give out a formidable ambience that negatively act up on people's sensorial perception, preventing them from fully immersing in the constructed atmosphere. In the light of Yin-Yang, the intuited lifelessness and eeriness are both reflection of the stagnant *Qi* in heritage making caused by an unbalanced Yin-Yang interplay known as "yin consumed by a preponderance of yang" (Wang, 2012, p.177). That is to say, the flow of *Qi* is blocked because the Yin is consumed (i.e., the dormancy of the collected artefacts' materiality, or tangibility) by the eminence of Yang (i.e., the overabundance of the constructed solemnness, or intangibility). The sensorial eeriness felt by SQ can be interpreted as manifestation of stagnant *Qi* owing to the excessive emphasis that museum has put on the spiritual significance (i.e., the constructed historical scene). Such an inclination further impairs SQ's recognition of the concrete aspects of the presented artefacts that could have supported her personal construction of cultural heritage, and can also be used to understand LT's "morgue-like" impression.

Comparably, widespread protective presentation of heritage artefact such as the normalised vitrine-based display is also accused of impeding the flow of *Qi* in heritage making by encasing the artefacts in a static and inhibitive manner. This "bodily separation" (Smith, 1999, p.141) set up in heritage venue to protect the exhibits from unexpected harm is based on the rarity attached to the ancient artefacts. It has taken its root in heritage presentation and become a

symbol of the artefact's intangible profoundness. However, the deprivation of tangibility caused by this respectful distance has gradually hidden away the dynamics embedded in the artefact's physicality and left its audience with an impression of being lofty and inaccessible:

> *"There is always a showcase between us and the relics, not to mention the distance between the glass and objects inside the cabinet. Also, have you watched the documentary 'Masters in The Forbidden City'? What impressed me the most is that in one episode about renovating the antique clocks. It took ages for those masters to restore the clocks' function, so that the clocks could signal the time with all built-in gadgets working smoothly, the birds, ringtones… just like what they used to be. But when they are put on exhibition, all these dynamics and functions are hidden from us for fear of the potential damage. There's always a distance between us, forbidding us to really appreciate the beauty of these artefacts." (Shenhui, F22, Interview)*

Just like the perceptual separation felt by SQ, the physical isolation between the visitor and exhibit inside the museum as identified by Shenhui in her reflection also alludes to the holistic orientation in heritage making under the framework of Yin-Yang. The "beauty" of heritage artefacts, or the *Qi* of heritage making lies in the balanced coexistence of the tangible and intangible. Highlighting the abstract meanings at the price of concealing the creative physicality stagnates the flow of *Qi* in Shenhui's personal heritage making, as the Yin (e.g., concealed dynamics of the exhibits) and Yang (e.g., presented dynamics and significance of the exhibits via the agency of documentary) in her construction deplete each other and lead to the distant and ungraspable beauty.

Intuitive awareness of *Qi* is critical in heritage making because the stagnation of *Qi* can be problematic and bring negative consequences that not only concern museum practice but also individual engagement. For one thing, museum as one representative venue for heritage making seeks to foster learning, engagement, and curiosity. Yet the way it preserves and displays the historic artefacts can enshrine these artefacts with ungraspable solemnity that comes across as

unattractive, lifeless, even intimidating. As such, museum becomes a temple that is alienated from the secular world, with all collections being placed on a distant pedestal and only available for passive observation. This is particularly true in China where the imposing presence of museum is often consistent with the social and cultural importance attached to its collection, which can provoke admiration but also intimidation in the visitors. In some cases, it drives people away:

> *"Henan Museum… I've passed by its doorsteps so many times, but I've never actually set foot in the building. It's sort of intimidating, even though I don't really know what I'm afraid of. I mean, it's free and you only need to bring your ID to get in. But still, I just can't shake off this eeriness." (comment under SQ's unboxing video of the gold strip) – "LOL, I totally get it! I feel the same at place like museum. I mean, it's so solemn that makes you automatically hold your breath. So, I don't feel like going into the museum from time to time." (comment replied by SQ, F21)*

In addition to the alienation, the stagnation of *Qi* owing to the excess of intangibility can also lead to people's emotional disconnection and indifference towards culture and history. While establishing a viewing distance between the artefact and its audience, the emphasis laid on the artefact's historical solemnity can at the same time affectively fence the artefacts up with no avenue provided to the outsiders for the construction of emotional connections. For instance, Hyouka (M23) during the interview shares with me about the irrelevance he feels towards the heritage artefacts inside the museum using an analogy of generation gap:

> *"Let's say, for example, we tend to find that we have certain… disconnection when communicate with the elderly. [You mean generation gap?] Yes. Actually, isn't it the same between us and these artefacts? Living in the 21st century, young generation like us versus objects from hundreds of years ago… When we mention the word 'museum', it just makes me feel that… uh… very deep, solemn… or whatever. Then you are put in front of something from centuries ago, for that we'd naturally feel … well, never heard it before. I might know some really famous one like the 'Ma Ta Fei Yan' (The Flying*

Horse of Gansu, one of the most valuable artefacts in Gansu Museum, China), or some other tripods. But for other artefacts, I've never heard of them, so there's definitely some strangeness. […] Actually, even if we don't call them heritage artefact, even they're just some insignificant objects from hundred years ago, we might still feel a sense of distance. I mean, it feels like these things are… They just don't belong to us, and obviously I've never used them before, so it's really hard for me to judge them or discuss about likes and dislikes. I just… can't feel a thing. [Me: so you feel it is the timespan and sense of unfamiliarity that make you feel nothing, or feel irrelevant?] Sort of. Or it is just my wishful thinking, about this irrelevance. But this is just how the history works, passing down these things generation after generation, right? In a sense you can't say it is absolutely irrelevant." (Hyouka, M23, Interview)

What Hyouka expresses is an indifferent attitude derived from his interpretation of the temporality attributed to the heritage artefacts. While appearing as one compelling intangible feature justifying the historical significance of heritage, the unsurpassable timespan here stops Hyouka from connecting with the heritage artefacts in a personal manner as he cannot see the personal relevance and merit of doing so. This is similar to what Lois (F23) shares about her friend's impression of museum visit:

"I remembered that I once asked my friends why they don't like visiting the museum. Some said, 'it's boring', while others thought 'why bother looking at things that I'd never understand'. It's like… too profound to be taken into." (Lois, F23, Interview)

The copresence of "boring" and "profound" suggests the downside of being sacred, that in the making of heritage having too much emphasis put on the attributed significance, either by the authority or the common public, can sometimes makes the idea of heritage too sacrosanct to be intervened, and too intricate to be resonated with (Mason and McCarthy, 2006). Viewing from the interpretive lens of Yin-Yang, the overemphasis on the intangible significance of museum artefacts has undermined their thingness because of the alleged importance, which results in the stagnation of *Qi* and leads to people's alienation and indifference. This is not a negation of

these artefacts' significance because participants do appreciate their existence as important witnesses of historical milestone or representations of ingenious craft. What really troubles the participants is the absence of a tangible access for them to identify or connect with both the artefacts and the attributed meanings, so that they can come up with their personal construction of heritage. This insight will be revisited in Chapter Seven to assess how it challenges the rising interpretive turn in heritage (vitality) making, where the significance of tangibility is discussed.

So, how might we restore the flow of *Qi* after noticing its existence and realising the consequence of its stagnation? A Western way would diagnose that there must be something "wrong" behind the perceived lifelessness and it can be fixed with targeted approach. It might be the dim illumination in the exhibition hall, the elusive wording on the exhibit illustration, or the overcrowded visitor traffic that prevents people from having an intimate and sufficient contact with the exhibits. But Yin-Yang sees it differently. Guided by the principle of holism, the restoration of *Qi*, or the healing of it in heritage making is not confined to particular artefact but extended to the external environment where this artefact is situated in. And this would lead us to the next dimension of *Qi* harmonisation, the gathering.

4.3 Gathering the *Qi*

Nothing exists in isolation and heritage is no exception. By associating the consumption of museum merchandise with heritage making, I am constructing a multifold Yin-Yang space in which the formation of heritage relies on the coordinated Yin-Yang dynamics within and across different Yin-Yang dyads and the *Qi* emerging therefrom. Within this context, while addressing the existence of *Qi* in its stagnation by rendering participants' encounter with museum artefacts as a Yin-Yang dyad, I have also noticed the implicit connection between this dyad and the consumption of archaeological blind box as another. With or without awareness, participants in their interaction with this blind box are at the same time gathering the Yin-Yang energies

across these different dyads and giving rise to new manifestations of *Qi*. The gathering starts with participants' unprompted acceptance of archaeological blind box as a manufactured commodity:

> *"We all know it (archaeological blind box) is not real, but the process of your archaeological excavation is. It is true that the thing in your hand is a fake, but the process is a real deal." (Shenhui, F22, Interview)*

> *"It is very fake, but I will never throw it away. It's not easy (getting hold of it through the unboxing), after all." (Pxx, F27, Interview)*

If viewed in isolation and only considered the objective distinction out of context, neither the material value nor symbolic meaning of archaeological blind box can compete with its enshrined reference (Appadurai, 1988; Baudrillard, 1998). This leads to the typical disregard that people commonly hold towards objects alike being "trifling" and "trashy" hence not a value for money. My participants do not deny the mass-produced nature of archaeological blind box. Quite the opposite, they admit the fakeness of this imitative and synthetic plaything, but they care more about the experience that such fakeness can render as they are not consuming this blind box only for the thing it is, but the participatory process it allows. In this context, instead of getting in the way of their experience, this fakeness has been accepted and even appreciated in certain circumstances. For instance, while Susan (F24) jokes about her excavated bronze tripod as a "*defective good of modern industry*" if found somewhere else such as a nameless stall rather than being buried into this themed blind box, her interaction with this replica suggests otherwise. As can be seen in Susan's unboxing video, she has manifested great patience and attention to detail throughout her unboxing process, treating the replica as if it were the genuine artefact it copies. When Susan accidentally overexerts her power onto the soil near the embedded replica, an audible gasp can be discerned from the video as if she did something irretrievable to jeopardise the museum artefact far away. "*Thank god you are not*

real", says Susan to the embedded replica in her unboxing video. Rather than being disdained for its fakeness, the replica was appreciated by Susan for being a fake so that her "mistake" can be tolerated.

Why would Shenhui and Pxx make peace with the fakeness of archaeological blind box, and why would Susan appreciate such fakeness and mix it with the genuine? Simply attributing this willingness as part of the attention that participants have focused on the unboxing process is not convincing enough, nor would it suffice to render this experience as a reflection of heritage making. Through the lens of Yin-Yang, I see this willingness as a manifestation of people's gathering of *Qi* within and across different Yin-Yang dyads in their engagement with archaeological blind box. I focus on the interplay between the tangible and intangible noticed in participants' interaction with archaeological blind box per se, the extended association with the corresponding museum artefact, and heritage making in general. Notably, the *Qi* emerging in this dimension is different from the *Qi* intuited by participants in its stagnation, yet I find it as related and somehow complementary to the loss of vitality discerned in the museum. By pointing out such connection I am not trying to prove causality between a disappointing museum visit and a compensatory consumption of museum merchandise. Rather, what I seek to highlight is the generative mutuality between tangibility and intangibility that I have explored in this multifold Yin-Yang space, and how the *Qi* harmonised at this dimension can be incorporated as part of the process of heritage making (or healing).

4.3.1 Materialising the intangible

Sensorial impression and symbolic association could affect people's interpretation of their encounter with the untouchable through embodiment and imagination (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Roederer and Filser, 2018). In the case of archaeological blind box, participants' experience is largely made up from their hands-on interaction with the soil wrappage, tools, and replica. It is

widely acknowledged by participants that the presence of these material components is crucial to the richness and substantiality of their experience, for these components not only augment the experience with concrete sensation, but also materialise the abstract meanings that this product is deemed to convey. With awareness of the constructive interplay between the tangible and intangible, different embodiments along with the *Qi* they arouse are gathered and blended in a shared context.

To start with, the creative adoption of soil as the content wrappage is marked by many as an impressive point of difference for archaeological blind box if compared with the generic blind box like POP MART (blind box brand in China). At first sight, there is nothing special about the soil inside archaeological blind box, it is just, soil. But it is precisely because of this approachable ordinariness (i.e., real soil) that people can interact with the abstract profoundness at ease and gather the *Qi* in their experience manifested as "sense of history" and "a feeling down to earth".

> *"… It (soil) sends you back to the Loess Plateau, brings an intense sense of history… Just like what the TV reports, like 'there's a newly discovered tomb dating back to Han or Tang dynasty, and here's the excavation site…'" (Jilian, M22, Interview)*

> *"I'd say the soil carries both concrete and abstract representation. By saying concrete, I mean that it is the covering of the replica, which also indicates the land under which the heritage is buried. It is also said that the soil used in this blind box is from various historical cities in Henan, might also render a feeling down to earth. Abstractly speaking I'd say it's about history, that the soil is history, be it the sealing layer or covering earth above the heritage artefacts, it marks the precipitation of history, as if we are excavating history through history, perhaps that's the romance of archaeology, isn't it?" (Joey, F26, Interview)*

Similarly, the provided tools such as gloves are also understood as facilitative in materialising the intangible and promoting the flow of *Qi* emerged from this interplay. As an assistive tool

mirroring the practice of archaeology, while effectively protecting people from being cut by the shards, the gloves materialise the professionality which used to exist only in participant's imagination. As recalled by Jilian (M22), the moment he saw the gloves in the provided toolkit, he instantly left the idea "blind box" behind his head and engendered a feeling that he was working on a highly sacred profession – "*That's the spirit!*", says Jilian as recorded in his unboxing video. Similar perceptions can also be found in the video produced by Mayman (M30), in which he described the gloves as "*a symbol of expertise*", and the reflection that EP (M24) shares in the interview, that wearing the gloves makes him "*feel more professional*" and take the unboxing experience more seriously.

By the same token, be it intact or broken, replica inside the blind box on the strength of its physicality has also inspired participants to associate their hands-on involvement with abstract meanings beyond unboxing. For instance, despite often being viewed as a not-so-endearing attribute under general quality standard, the man-made patina and incomplete grain on replicas of bronzeware and ceramic have been regarded by participants as highlight of their immersion. Through this materialised "pastness" (Holtorf, 2013, p.427), participants manage to connect their experience with an imaginary past marked by a self-assumed time span and attribute it as experientially authentic (Gao and Jone, 2021).

> *"The smaller one here [showing the 'ancient' coin to the camera, Figure 4.2] ... it might be the irregular pattern on its surface, makes it harder for me to wash off the dirt inside. Perhaps it was made to look this way, as if its surface was rusted with all those passing years. Well, it really needs a thorough bath after 200 years!" (HLJ, F27, Video voiceover)*



Figure 4.2: screenshot of HLJ's unboxing video (showing the grains and patina)

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that while appreciating the concrete embodiment of the intangible, participants do not forget or seek to hide the "inauthenticity" therein. They do not see the so-called "inauthentic" as meaningless and harmful, as long as the inauthentic is presented in an authentic way. In other words, participants do not see authenticity and inauthenticity as entirely opposite; rather, they see them as inseparable and interdependent just as Yin and Yang. For example, while the artificial patina added to the replica is appreciated by many for its embodiment of the flow of time, materialisation as such can backfire if the artificiality fails to play its part as an "authentic inauthentic". This is evident in the experience that Lee (F23) has with her excavated bronze mirror, when she was unexpectedly pulled out from her immersion seeing the artificial patina of the bronze mirror lose its colour on the soil.

> *"[Me: I remember that in your video you mentioned that the bronze mirror would lose colour on the soil?] (Figure 4.3) Right, yes! That's a technical problem of this defective artefact, isn't it? Um, making a fake bronze mirror, wouldn't they (the producers) be… I don't know… They got to dye the mirror, or distress it by dyeing, but they may have forgotten to fix the colour after dyeing. It really turned me off, the patina on the soil. You can immediately tell it's a modern artefact. I mean, come on! If you are making something fake, make it real! The only excuse I can think of is that they could be in a hurry at that time with all those orders, so they rushed. [Me: It feels like the fading, or*

inadequate distressed effect has really affected your experience] You see, I paid real money for fake artefacts, of course I would wish for a real fake, as fake as genuine. If it is not fake enough, that it is something freshly manufactured that would lose its colour, then what's the point of me buying it?" (Lee, F23, Interview)



Figure 4.3: Video screenshot (the moment of Lee noticing the colour losing), EN subtitle added by researcher.

Viewing from the perspective of Yin-Yang, the disappointment that Lee has gone through after seeing the faded patina can be interpreted as a disturbance of *Qi* in her unboxing experience owing to the imbalanced interplay between the Yin (i.e., the tangible but "inauthentic" patina) and Yang (i.e., the intangible but "authentic" feeling of pastness). With this in mind, we may come to the understanding that while heritage is rendered as inherently intangible, it would be partial to separate heritage from the tangible, as the interpretation of the intangible is dependent on the tangible so that it can be noticed and taken in. The Yin-Yang dynamics spotted in this artificial pastness also feed into the ongoing debate in research on the topic of (in)authenticity, which will be further unpacked in the discussion chapter (Section 7.2.3).

4.3.2 Sanctifying the tangible

The relation between the tangible and intangible is mutual. While underlining the support that tangible elements of archaeological blind box have for participants' grasp of the intangible such as history, professionality, and pastness, I also notice the dependence that these tangibles have on the intangible. Participants acknowledge archaeological blind box as a manufactured copy, but they do not accept this copy as just a copy. Intentionally or otherwise, participants are sanctifying this copy with meanings that they have drawn from its inaccessible counterpart, building up the interplay between the tangible and intangible from a different direction.

While soil as an ordinary material has been appreciated by participants for its graspable embodiment of history, it is at the same time made extraordinary through its connection with the intangible. Bearing in mind the archaeological theme of this blind box, for some, soil in archaeological blind box is not merely a distinctive wrappage, but the life and soul that account for the essence of their unboxing experience as an immersive archaeological encounter.

> *"I'd say the soil is also something remarkable. For archaeological blind box, the soil just makes it more vivid, more like the real archaeology process. In common blind box there's only a packing box, it doesn't have soil like this one does. Well… archaeological blind box with soil feels like… (being) endowed with a soul. [Me: You mean that the soil is the soul of this blind box?] Exactly." (EP, M24, Interview)*

Attention has also been drawn to the source of the soil which has been leveraged to elevate the soil as "not just any soil". This is brought up by Joey (F26) in the interview, that she highlights the source of the soil (Mountain Mang in Henan Province) and connects it with a lifelong wish that Chinese people harbour across generation. In searching for the background information about archaeological blind box, I learned that this connection has much to do with the meanings that people attach to Mountain Mang regarding their vision for the afterlife. Lauded for its perfect geomantic structure and matchup with the burial culture in traditional China, Mountain

Mang has been chosen as the final resting place by emperors and dignitaries through the history (Jin, 2010) and sacralised by various folktales for the generation to come. Though traditional burial is gradually out of style in the present age, the meanings still last, only not in a tangible form. Accordingly, Mountain Mang is not just a cherished mountain or an ideal cemetery site, it is also a sacred belief lasts for generations. With such connection, the ordinary soil is historised with spiritual importance and transformed into an epitome of ancient material culture, immersing the participants with bygone charisma of unique geographical characteristic.

> *"There is a popular folk saying, I don't know if you've heard about that… it's called 'born in Suhang, buried in Beimang'. Beimang is part of the Mountain Mang in Henan (province). The ancients found that area has excellent fengshui, you know, being buried there will bring good fortune to your offspring. So, there are plenty of tombs in Henan, more like a Top One place. I would say Henan Museum has a natural advantage developing this blind box, they've made a really clever connection." (Joey, F26, Interview)*

In a like manner, I have also spotted the reliance that the miniature inside archaeological blind box has on its reference inside the museum, which is frequently highlighted by my participants as not only a point of differentiation but also a trustworthy source of reassurance. Participants do not deny the manufactured nature of their excavated/restored replica, but they expect it to be not just any rootless replica made for profit. Having certified museum collection as reference endorses the replica with a conceivable ambiance of history, which has effectively mediated the commercial nature of archaeological blind box and further transformed the once daunting significance inside the museum into praised endorsement.

> *"Even though it is simply a copy of the heritage, by association you'd naturally feel… 'yes, it has a historical template right there in the museum', a mysterious profoundness. It is a mass-produced replica, true, but you'll feel the profoundness therein." (Yi, F27, Interview)*

> *"I only fancy blind box of IP figures that already exist. Let me give you one example, like Snoopy, it is a cartoon figure exists for so many years. I like it, so I'd pay for its co-branded blind box. What I will never buy is … DIMMO (a sub-series of POP MART), it is only created to be put into the blind box, I'm not buying it. What this Henan stuff (archaeological blind box) attracts me is essentially the same, that it's not these (trumped-up creation) … I mean, just like the bronze mirror I unboxed, it's not something baseless, it's already there, just being miniaturised into a vintage look – that's why I bought it." (Lee, F23, Interview)*

While giving precedence to its museum-related source, participants also seek to establish a link between their acquired replica with veritable history so they can assure themselves that they are not merely getting a replica, but the history behind. For example, when LGZL (F22) unearthed an ox-head token from the archaeological blind box, she was clueless about its identity and the inscription on it. After consulting with the customer service, LGZL came to know that this token is a military token for border travelling, which serves as valuable evidence for researching Khitan history (Figure 4.4). "*For me, the moment I know the use and value of this artefact was probably the most meaningful part of my experience*", says LGZL in the interview. Being able to confirm the iconic connection (Grayson and Martinec, 2004) between the replica and relevant historical background allows LGZL to gather the Yin/Yang energy across different Yin-Yang dyads, so that the *Qi* of her experience can play out in the interplay between the tangible and intangible, appearing as the meaningfulness that LGZL has perceived.



Notes to the conversation (Jan 2021)
[LGZL sent the photo (left) to Henan Museum (HM) online customer service]
HM: Brilliant! This is a token.
LGZL: I'm confused, what's this?
HM: Hang on a moment.
HM: "Daliao Border Defense" ox-head token was intended to be cast by the government uniformly. Based on the specific location the ox-head would be inscribed with corresponding garrison's name and then issued to the military personnel. This "Daliao Border Defense" ox-head token served as a certificate of access, functioning as a relatively lower-ranking military token. Despite its lower rank, it is especially rare due to the limited production and preservation, which makes them highly treasured. Its excavation has filled a significant gap in researching Kitan history with a valuable piece evidence. Its significance cannot be overstated.

Figure 4.4: LGZL's discovery and subsequent communication with Henan Museum

Likewise, when come across replicas with distinct contrast in their physical representations of the "pastness", participants tend to show a preference towards the one that is deemed as more "historical". To give an example, in her unboxing HLJ (F27) managed to get two objects out of her archaeological blind box, one is a piece of Chinese chess, and the other is an "ancient" coin. Judging by appearance, the chess looks more exquisite and larger in size whereas the coin is rusty and relatively smaller (Figure 4.5). HLJ found the chess unexpected as she was not sure about its fitness in this blind box with her personal understanding of heritage artefacts being something from the past and full of story. She finds it hard to associate something as common as a chess given its relatively present-day appearance if compared with the rusty coin. After some inquiries, HLJ perceives the coin as more meaningful than the chess given its ascribable connection with a piece of trackable history.

> *"Like the coin and chess that I dug out. I had no idea what they are at that time, and there's no introduction inside the box telling me more details about them. (It) might because they are relatively… inferior? So, I took a photo of them and asked the customer service. You know what, they shared with me about the history of the coin, which was quite thorough, including the interpretation of its pattern. After that, I*

thought, 'well, it (the coin) looks so-so but actually quite nice'. Because it is indeed a copy of some known, historical artefact. By contrast, the chess is really, just a chess, even inferior to the tiny coin.
[Me: Wow, that's a bit dramatic, it looks better in your unboxing…]
Exactly! It (the chess) is not even a heritage! [Me: Larger than the coin, but inferior]
So, if put together, I would find the coin more worthwhile. Because at least it is very fine made, there's the aged design, and it is really a traceable piece of cultural relics." (HLJ, F27, Interview)



Figure 4.5: HLJ's presentation of the chess and coin (video screenshot)

Drawing on the imbued historical depth and cultural connection, archaeological blind box is elevated from a plaything to a valuable "national treasure" which deserves to be handled with utmost caution. As can be seen in the unboxing videos, some participants would worry about failing the people and country if they accidentally damage the replica during the unboxing, while others would imagine and resonate with the consequence of their careless unboxing in real life. Both reactions manifest the *Qi* emerged from their immersed engagement with archaeological blind box and reflect the sacredness of heritage in participants' mind. This is particularly true in a Chinese context where cultural heritage is deemed as the essence of Chinese collective identity and part of the nation-building process that touches upon many aspects of people's lives (Shepherd, 2014).

"If I were an archaeologist, I'd probably be fired by now… perhaps I'll also be sentenced to two years behind bars! […] I did worry about becoming a sinner to our nation if I did cause some damage to the thing inside" (Mo, Male, age n/a, video narration)

"(When Susan nearly scratched the tripod inside her blind box) I won't bother the state to pass a sentence, I'll cry myself to death first!" (Susan, F24, video narration)

"(When Alan intends to force apart the soil wrappage during her excavation of the replica inside archaeological restoration blind box, Dede stops her and says) No! Don't do that! If this were the real national treasure, could you possibly afford to make amends for the damage?! Once it's gone there's no way getting it back!" (Dede, F25, video narration)

Association as such does not change the blind box's fabricated nature, but it manifests the *Qi* that gathered from participant's integrated engagement with the product's physicality and the referential artefact's significance. Moreover, the formation of this connection can also be interpreted as part of the healing process for the museum artefacts in terms of the intuited lifelessness discussed in earlier section. In a sense, the physicality of archaeological blind box offers an accessible medium for the ungraspable significance to be felt; reciprocally, this felt profoundness enriches the cultural narrative of the tangible replica and elevates it to a symbol of culture and history. Together, these two seemingly opposing entities (i.e., museum artefacts and archaeological blind box) merge into one and give rise to a new Yin-Yang dyad out of the interplay between their tangibility and intangibility.

4.4 Nurturing the *Qi*

In parallel with the harmonised gathering across different Yin-Yang dyads, the *Qi* of heritage making in the context of consumption is also nourished by the intimate engagement that participants have with archaeological blind box. In analysing the unboxing experience, I notice

that while particularising the blind box for its reciprocal connection with its museum-based counterpart, participants also give prominence to their personal involvement in transcending this indistinctive commodity into an embodiment of individuality. Compiling this observation into the theme "It is a replica, but my replica", I understand this influence as another dimension of the *Qi* harmonisation and render it as nurturing.

Formed on the hands-on involvement with archaeological blind box, participants' experience is revealed to be not merely a feelingless unboxing but a devoted participation full of individual passion and personal significance. To demonstrate this individuality, I will first expand on the experience that EP (M24) has with his archaeological restoration blind box and draw on other participants' reflection to further explain what I mean by nurturing.

When excavating the scattered shards in the archaeological restoration blind box, every touch and breath made by EP (M24) with his hands gloved is marked by manifest caution, as if he was uncovering a long-lost treasure and the moment of revelation will go down in history. In the process of his exploration, EP repeatedly emphasises the tension and gingerliness he feels as proceed with his operation, that the "task" at his hand is something cannot be underestimated and every step he takes requires precision and sophistication. This is particularly evident as I watch his unboxing video, that EP has thrown himself into this simulated archaeological adventure. He approaches the embedded object with caution inside out and this mental engagement is not created out of imagination, but gradually built through his embodied interaction with the object in his hands.

> *"I must be more careful in this one comparing with the previous archaeological blind box. It's full of fragments. One might suddenly pop out while digging. And it's all ceramic and fragile, so I'll just think twice about the digging. I'll go slowly, little by little, might be easier if apply some water. […] I just feel the tension is building within me… It's all splinters, I can't dig too hard. Any little carelessness is likely to lead to*

extra breakage." (Voiceover during EP's excavation of the fragmented object in the archaeological restoration blind box)

"I have a hunch this is going to be very difficult to repair debris as tiny as this one […] Just felt a knot in my stomach." (Voiceover when EP is splicing the excavated fragments together piece by piece).

Following his dedicated participation in restoring the broken replica, EP has progressively generated a strong sense of achievement, which further injects his experience with a personal highlight. As shown in his unboxing video, EP has externalised his embodied efforts and inner excitement by adding the interactive pop-up "one click, three strikes" (note: "一键三连" in Chinese, an in-video overlap serving the triple function of "Like, Saving, Tipping", calling the audience to give a long press on the "Like" button to show support to the vlogger, similar to "Like and Subscribe"), to share this special moment with the audience of his video.

"I was quite careful during the pre-piecing because I hadn't applied the glue at that point… Let me think… it's rather integrate as I felt that I'd dug out all the pieces, so there were no missing pieces. It just felt like… well, I don't know how to describe… It's just like… [Me: that you are the one turning the object from broken to complete?] Something like that, I mean, in that video, the moment I finish the pre-piecing I just have a strong sense of achievement, and I added the 'one click, three strikes' button there. That moment was so excited, that all those fragments coming together and turning into a complete artefact, although it's just a rehearsal." (EP, M24, Interview)

Nurtured by EP's devoted involvement and the generated sense of achievement, the restored replica is transcended and later endowed with life force. Instead of attributing this replica as "fake", EP chose to adopt another simile "craft" to describe the replica during the interview, granting the replica with quality and appeal as similar as any carefully curated national treasure. When I asked about his meticulous treatment to the replica, EP shared his interpretation as follows:

> *"It was restored by me, piece by piece. Compared to those common blind boxes, I treated this one with greater care. It's like… not sure if this analogy fit, it's like my child." (EP, M24, Interview)*

EP's account for his meticulousness reminds me of the notion "singularisation" theorised by Kopytoff (1986) as part of the cultural biography of things. By reforging the replica with his tangible (i.e., hands-on restoration) and intangible (i.e., generated intimacy) involvement, EP pulls the replica out of the commercial context and endows it with a new identity – his "child". Similar interpretations can also be found in the reflection that Yi (F27) and Jilian (M22) have for their experience, individuating the ordinary replica via the bond and energy formed from their personal and dedicated care and responsibility.

> *"It's something that you excavated by yourself, something you restored by yourself, which is interesting. I mean, no matter how identical the shards are, even if everyone got the shards smashed in the same pattern, the output cannot be the same. Some may fix them with wider gaps, while others may add on their ingenuity, just like that nicely recreated lady figurine. I think it is also an extension to the product, the moment you thought of it, it is unique, and it was created by me. There must be some differences from those normal ones, or other mass-produced products." (Yi, F27, Interview)*

> *"(The unboxing is) Very time-consuming, like a protracted war. But via killing the time, you just generate a spontaneous commitment to this thing, or a sense of substitution so to speak. That you are dealing with something… well, no longer an imperfection. It's more like… now that you (the embedded replica) are with me, then I am duty-bound to bring you out and restore you to the original state. You are the one and only genuine artefact in my eyes and I will treat you with my greatest care, just like that." (Jilian, M22, Interview)*

But is nurturing merely a variation of singularisation as a one-way transformation animating the inert tangible with a sense of intimacy? My answer would be negative, because in the framework of Yin-Yang, the transformation is always reciprocal:

> *"You'll just unconsciously pay more attention to the things that bear a connection with you, especially this connection is created by yourself. Just like all these restoration blind boxes I've played so far, and the one that I recently unboxed, which has a Medicine Buddha inside. I have it now sitting on my desk as if it was a guardian angel exclusive to my health. Just by having it there I get a feeling that my health is blessed." (YJL, F26, Interview)*

Singularisation might account for only one dimension of this transformation, but participants are being transformed by the materiality of archaeological blind box at the same time. In other words, while participants nurture the blind box with care and emotion, they are also nurtured by the blind box and left with a more enduring and exclusive significance. In this sense, I find what Tilley (2006, p.61) argues about objectification as a more relevant interpretation that "we touch the things and the things simultaneously touch us". And through the lens of Yin-Yang, we can dig into the intricacies within objectification focusing on the generative power therein, such as the enduring and exclusive feeling generated from this interaction and embodied in the finished product (i.e., the excavated/restored replica), which can be understood as a manifestation of *Qi* in conjunction with the intimacy attached to the object. The implication of this finding provides a basis for the discussion of subject-object relation in consumer research, which will be further developed in Chapter Seven (Section 7.2.4).

4.5 Unifying the *Qi*

> *"Museums are packed with amazing stuffs and theses stuffs often hold beautiful stories. But… how should I put it… sometimes they are kind of… tucked away, you see what I mean? If they just stay inside the museum, not many people would get to know about them, because not everyone gets the time or energy to dive into their stories. But what if they actively reach out to us? Like they are coming to us in all sorts of cool ways, right? It's like 'hey, check out this cool replica of something brilliant that we've got in our museum!' You don't even have to come to the museum in person, you don't have to leave your house. Just stay put and get your hands dirty, the heritage is coming to you*

right away. And if you find it interesting, you can explore more about it. […] You'll also realise that actually there exist a lot of beautiful things in our history, so you can feel the past…" (SQ, F21, Interview)

The excerpt above presents SQ's overall comment on museum merchandise in the context of heritage consumption. One may read this excerpt as a recognition of museum merchandise for the tangible and substitutive access it enables for people to get a taste of the immobile museum artefact. But in my point of view, I see it as a presentation of unified *Qi* emerging from SQ's encounter with both the museum artefact and museum merchandise. The word "heritage" in SQ's narration "*the heritage is coming to you*" does not refer to any particular heritage artefact or discourse. Rather, it is an ongoing construct which is always in its becoming, absorbing the *Qi* emerged from the encounters that people have with various representations of the past. Despite the difference in its manifestation and state, *Qi* in itself is abstract, pervasive, and mergeable. So far, I have presented three dimensions of *Qi* harmonisation in heritage making based on my interpretation of participants' experience with archaeological blind box, which involves the implicit intuition of *Qi* in its stagnation, the coordinated gathering of *Qi* within and across different Yin-Yang dyads, and the reciprocal nurturing of *Qi* imbued with individuality. In this section, I will turn to the last dimension in this harmonising process, the unification of *Qi*.

When it comes to heritage making, museum collected artefact and replica inside the archaeological blind box are not fundamentally different. As unfolded in prior sections, they both play a critical part in the formation of heritage through their constructive "copresence", facilitating the flow of *Qi* embedded in the interplay between the tangible and intangible. While addressing how participants harmonise the *Qi* in their experience by leveraging the tangible and intangible as Yin-Yang constituents across different Yin-Yang dyads, I realise that the different *Qi* emerged from this process has also been unified and granted with a refreshed

manifestation. In the "nurturing" section I have illustrated how participants individuate the replica inside archaeological blind box in the sense of life-giving. But when I stretch my perspective to a wider scope, I notice that the *Qi* nurtured by the participants in the replica can also be shared by the seemingly "lifeless" museum artefacts. For instance, seeing the restored replica as equivalent to his "child" after his devoted participation, EP (M24) finds the enclosed "cousin" (i.e., the referential artefact collected inside the museum) of his "child" plausibly closer and more spirited because of this projected intimacy. Similarly, Shenhui (F22) also finds the museum artefacts more "real" after having the vitrine between her and the artefacts vicariously removed by the hands-on interaction that she has with archaeological restoration blind box. As such, the once distant exhibit is injected with new life, which would effectively mediate its solemnness and further enhance its perceptual accessibility. Reflections alike can also be found in other participants' statements, suggesting a subtle resonation between the *Qi* emerging from one Yin-Yang dyad (archaeological blind box-participant) and another (museum artefact-participant). Implications for practitioners can be drawn from the distinct attitude that participants have shown for the museum artefact and the artificial replica, together with the transformed intimacy endorsed by the participatory consumption, which will be further considered and contextualised in the discussion chapter (Section 7.3).

> *"Normally when I go to a museum, I may linger around a bit longer if I saw some unique exhibits. But if I could see the artefact 'unearthed' by myself, then I would for sure pay special attention to it. [Because you 'dug' it out?] Yes, as if it was there because of me. I even thought about bringing my restored gooseneck bottle to the museum, but I didn't make it/haven't got the chance to do so. It would be great seeing them in one place." (EP, M24, Interview)*

> *"Museum for me, well, before this product (archaeological blind box), it was all about those serious stuff, magnificent building, frosty paintings, and ancient artefacts sitting in the corner. But if you can have some interaction with them (e.g., by playing with the archaeological blind box), I'll find them warmer." (Lan, F26, Interview)*

> *"(Heritage artefact collected inside the museum is) More dynamic now, with all these different presentations (e.g., replica in the blind box) it just comes to life, and we just realise that all these heritage artefacts are actually our ancestors' lives." (YMS, M31, Interview)*

Running in parallel with the resonated unification of *Qi* between different Yin-Yang dyads is the emergence of a more profound heritage milieu, in which participants are travelling within and across different Yin-Yang dyads and unifying the *Qi* arising therefrom into a constructive flow that I take as a manifestation of heritage. As reflected by Pxx (F27) in the interview, by consuming the archaeological blind box she feels as if she is stepping into "*a vast and invisible cultural milieu that lingers around*" and getting closer to the core rather than skimming the surface. She finds it difficult to further unpack this milieu and its core and put them into words. In my view, the invisible and inexpressible milieu in Pxx's description can be precisely a manifestation of *Qi*, that unconsciously she has unified the *Qi* generated from her interplay with archaeological blind box and entered a different level of Yin-Yang space imbued with *Qi* manifested in a different form that she has not yet realised.

The unification that Pxx has implicitly alluded in her reflection might be rendered in a more explicit way in the excerpt below shared by Jilian (M22) reflecting on his presence in this consumption experience. Rather than accounting himself as merely a passive consumer of a mass-produced object, Jilian sees himself as a successor of history, transmitting and creating heritage at the same time.

> *"To me, it (archaeological blind box) revives and carries forward the history. How it revives? It clones an artefact made by the ancients in the past through a contemporary way. How could it pass down the history? Well, that would be our recreation during its reproduction. I mean, it is indeed different from what it used to be, and this difference is made by us as modern people. Because we can't just stay at certain point of time, and we can't resist to change. We must move forward, right? We must do something*

> *different. A bit lofty now, isn't it? But what I'm trying to say is that it (archaeological blind box) does bring things up to that level. Just like history, we as successor are picking up what's left by the former and taking it to a better future. I guess that's what I've seen in this blind box. (It is) Not a creation emerging from nowhere, nor a simple reproduction. Rather, (through it) you are carrying something from the past at this moment and heading to the future." (Jilian, M22, Interview)*

Jilian's reflection aligns with what Howard (2003) argues about heritage being a product of the present although many of its components come from the past. But beyond that, what is more important here is the unified *Qi* embodied in archaeological blind box, orienting Jilian in this continuously evolving heritage milieu and concretising his involvement therein. At the same time, the *Qi* unified in this milieu is an organic integration of *Qi* emerged from a series of interconnected Yin-Yang dyads in which the tangible and intangible are inextricably associated and interact with each other.

4.6 Chapter Review

In this chapter, I have focused on the dialectical relation between the tangible and intangible as an entrenched binary in heritage making and rendered them as the inseparable Yin and Yang. Inspired by the metaphorical association between my participants' imaginative account of their unboxing experience and the presence of Yin-Yang in traditional Chinese medicine, I come up with a process of *Qi* harmonisation consists of four dimensions: intuiting, gathering, nurturing, and unifying. It is necessary to readdress that these four dimensions do not unfold in a linear order; rather, they are interweaved and can develop simultaneously. Moreover, I have no intention in presenting these four dimensions as my participant's deliberate doing, hence rendering heritage making as a deliberate construction. To me, what these dimensions inform is my participant's implicit or unconscious integration of the present and the past, the tangible

and intangible, manifested in their explicit passion, action, and imagination which I interpret as the *Qi* of heritage.

The highlight of this harmonising process is its systemic integration of *Qi* across different but related Yin-Yang dyads in heritage making. In particular, I have focused on the mutuality between the tangible and intangible in participants' unboxing experience and their extended reflection. It has been argued in the heritage-as-process proposition that intangibility is the intrinsic nature of heritage with tangibility being nothing but a peripheral and dispensable accessory (Smith, 2006; Byrne, 2009). However, in this chapter what I have made explicit about heritage so far is how its *Qi* plays out in the interplay between tangibility and intangibility. We cannot separate heritage as a product of human civilisation from the tangible or the perception of thingness, because "material forms do not simply mirror pre-existing social distinctions, sets of ideas or symbolic systems. They are instead the very medium through which these values, ideas and social distinction are constantly reproduced and legitimized, or transformed" (Tilley, 2006, p.61). As I have illustrated in this process, the absence of such tangible medium would break the harmony and disturb the flow of *Qi*, resulting in consequences such as avoidance, emotional disconnection, and indifference. In this context, the generative coordination between the tangible and intangible that I have presented in each dimension happens to be a plausible manifestation of the mutuality in-between. Findings presented in this chapter will be revisited in the discussion, addressing the implications for contested theorisation of (in)authenticity and how they will contribute to the ever-evolving interpretation of subject-object relation in the marketing field.

The next chapter sheds light on another pair of opposing forces which I find informative in the consumption experience of archaeological blind box, and it is also an enduring topic in heritage making, namely the debatable distinction between expert and nonexpert. Discussion unfolds

around archaeology as the experiential theme, and I will metaphorically expand on the notion of duality to explicate how these two opposites engage in a collaborative manner and contribute to the making of heritage.

CHAPTER 5: HERITAGE MAKING AS A DANCE OF DUALITY

> *"The constellations follow their revolutions; the sun and moon alternately shine; the four seasons present themselves in succession; then yin and yang enlarge and transform; and the wind and rains spread out everywhere. Each of the myriad things must be in a harmonious relationship with Nature in order to grow, and each must obtain from Nature the proper nurture in order to become complete." (Xunzi [no date], translated by Knoblock (1994) cited in Li, 2014, p.158-159)*

The quote above is drawn from Xunzi's *Discourse on Nature* (also translated as *Discourse on Heaven*), presenting how the harmonious development of the myriad things depends on the generative interplay between Yin and Yang manifested as the change in nature just like the alternation between the sun and moon, the wind and rain. We can also grasp another implication from this quote, that is the duality-led mindset in Yin-Yang philosophy. Earlier in framing Yin-Yang as my enabling lens, I have used a metaphor of mountain slope to demonstrate how Yin-Yang as a duality-based thinking differs from the conventional dualism thinking, viewing binary opposites as inseparable, co-constitutive, and interdependent rather than mutually exclusive. Let us extend this mountain metaphor and integrate it with Xunzi's statement. The biodiversity of this mountain can be understood as a harmonious synergy between the moon and sun as a pair of Yin-Yang duality. By day, the flora and fauna are energised in the warmth and sunlight; At night, nocturnal creatures emerge and roam in the moonlight. The rhythmic and fluid transition between the sun and moon allows the mountain to thrive and makes our visit richer. Albeit their difference, we cannot separate the sun and moon as unrelated opposites, because we need them both to weave the fabric of life. If there is only the sun or moon ruling the mountain, life would wither. Without the moonlight shadow, animals of the night would fade in the searing heat; without the sun, plants may never bloom again.

5.1 Chapter Introduction

In the prior chapter, I have discussed how heritage gains its *Qi* from the dynamic interplay between the tangible and intangible drawing on participants' hands-on engagement with the archaeological blind box. Building on this participatory mutuality, another pair of opposites in heritage making comes into view regarding the variance between the expert and nonexpert as manifestation of the "how" in heritage making. Heritage is not fixed to any object or site, nor is it subject to any preconceived interpretation. It is always in its becoming and vary depending on its maker, and this brings forth the debatable dualism in heritage making concerning the contrast between the expert and nonexpert. Heritage making used to be exclusive to those experts with trained eyes, such as the archaeologist who is seen as the authorised expert with legitimate right to "define and interpret what heritage is" (Zhang, 2020, p.28). But with the rise of critical heritage studies, the lopsided practice in heritage making has been reshaped with a constructive mind. Having the interpretive focus on heritage shifting from "being" to "becoming", perspectives on the expertise have also encountered some changes, represented by the proposal of "authorised heritage discourse" challenging the unconstructive hegemony in heritage making (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). But democratising heritage making does not mean unnecessary cancellation or full repudiation of the expertise. The emergence of a claim such as "we are all heritage experts" (Schofield, 2014, p.7) somehow backfires and escalates the separation it seeks to close, which would even send the expert to the "professional suicide" (Hølleland and Skrede, 2019, p.829) and affect the vitality of heritage regarding the effective transmission of meanings. Against this background arises the key objective of this chapter, which is to shed light on the underestimated mutuality between expert and nonexpert in the creation of heritage.

If we connect heritage making with the mountain metaphor that I referred above, then the expert practice can be compared to the sun and nonexpert the moon. The mountain's biodiversity will be jeopardised with either force overpowering the other. Only through a balanced interplay between these two can the mountain achieve an enduring harmony. Likewise, I see a dynamic and mutual in-betweenness between the expert and nonexpert in the process of heritage making, rather than a rigid hierarchy. Just like the sun and moon, they are equally important to the mountain, only shine in different ways.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I present an imbalanced expert-nonexpert interplay focusing on the inaccessible archaeology as a typical expertise in heritage making. In the second section, I turn to participants' unboxing experience and demonstrate how a balanced mutuality can lead to a sustainable and energetic heritage making.

5.2 In the Shadow of Expertise: the inaccessible archaeology

Expertise can be a contentious notion in heritage making, and in the context of archaeological blind box the expertise would refer to archaeology as the name of the game. While archaeology enriches people's understanding of culture and history with its specialised knowledge and high standard practice, it at the same time raises the bar for participation and stifles the diversity in heritage making. In other words, expertise has a boundary and boundary indicates difference, leading to the common dualistic separation between the expert and nonexpert. This is evident in China as the sociocultural context of my inquiry, where there is a long-standing hierarchical relation between the expert and nonexpert. It is also received as a conventional virtue to show reverence for and obedience to the expert as the legitimate authority (Chien, 2016; Lake, 2017). Tradition as such has influenced the practice in heritage making, known as the privilege and overemphasis given to expert knowledge (Yan, 2014; Maags and Holbig, 2016). In interpreting participants' reception of expertise like archaeology embedded in their unboxing experience, I

feel as if I am witnessing the sun (expert) ruling over the mountain (heritage making), with its heat draining the vitality from all beneath its exclusive reign. Going deeper into participants' perspective on archaeology, I further dissect this disharmony into two parts: one deals with the disconnection in expertise communication treating the nonexpert as irrelevant outsider, the other is about the expert-nonexpert separation, focusing on the elitist and unconcerned attitude held by the expert.

5.2.1 Disconnection: the marginalised nonexpert

> *"We don't really have access to archaeology, and honestly I barely know a thing about it." (YJL, F26, Interview)*

As the experiential gist of the archaeological blind box, archaeology is not received as popular or accessible by my participants. By itself, archaeology in China as a niche and obstruse subject is usually taken as a practice behind-the-scenes, leaving the outsiders with a mysterious and incommunicado impression. When asked about their impression of archaeology, participants are like-minded on the view that archaeology as a specialised domain appears to be estranged from their lifeworld. One must be equipped with relevant knowledge through professional training to enter the field and not everyone has this privilege. In some cases, even one has been intellectually qualified through education, the outsider status remains if one failed to acquire institutional authorisation, particularly in China where the competition for authorised positions is remarkably fierce. For example, now working as an editor in a publishing house, Yi (F27) used to major in museology and had participated in a few archaeological fieldworks. She became quite sentimental when we started talking about archaeology during the interview:

> *"I spent three years studying archaeology, we were connected for three whole years. In fact, my dream has never changed since my childhood, it's always been archaeology. I took a detour during my undergraduate years (not studying archaeology), and I found my way back in my master's. But… you just can't fight against the reality, can you? It*

is cruel. You got to be certified to work for public institutions such as the museum or archaeology research centre. You just can't get in. So basically, the moment I graduate, my connection with archaeology was pretty much cut off." (Yi, F27, Interview)

Along with the institutional barrier, participants also mention the communication barrier that hinders them from knowing more about archaeology or other expertise related to heritage even they have found access to information that is available to the outsider. Slotten (2021) divides the communication barrier by its mode and style in delivery, that people are either constrained by access or limited by capability to enter the conversation with the professionals in their traditional academic way (e.g., conference, reports, and publication). People struggle to fully grasp the professional terminologies, and this would discourage their interest and involvement in such expertise and gradually drive them away from heritage making.

"Seriously, we rarely have any chance to know archaeology. Like this report (showing the report to the camera), what you may find on CNKI (i.e., China National Knowledge Infrastructure, known for its knowledge resource system) would largely be a short report on those two or three major journals. Basically, it covers things like 'we found a tomb, we excavated this tomb and found this and that, and our discovery is ... this and that'. If it's a formal report like the one I used for my dissertation, then it would be extremely academic, filled with lines, graphs, endless descriptions, and numbers. It's expensive, around ¥400-500 (around £50-60). And as heavy as a brick if the tomb excavated is evaluated as a high rank with large volume of discoveries. Plus, not every detail of this excavation will be published, some information is insider-only. Honestly, audience of archaeology may only be those who do archaeology. If you are not one of them, why would you read these journals? Why bother yourself with this clerical dryness?" (Yi, F27, Interview)

"Let's say there's a newly released archaeology report. It will be published in a journal, but things like academic journals are somehow separated from the public. It's not popular, and it just can't be messed up just to cater to the market demand. It's serious, elusive, and hard to access. You got to have certain academic awareness to fully grasp the message it tries to convey. And it can be very boring." (Alan, F26, Interview)

Lois (F23), a postgraduate in museology (note: Lois was a student at the time of the interview, she is now a full-time staff working at a museum in China) also shares her perspective on the disconnection in communication with two examples that she has observed inside the museum. She first addresses the interpretive label commonly used on illustrating museum artefacts as an ineffective communication of expertise and then refers to an informative but unexplained display wall that she came across one time, which presents knowledge that only the expert can grasp. This biased presentation aligns with the ignorant assumption identified by Slotten (2021) in archaeology communication, that the insiders would unthinkingly assume that all audiences are informed and inquisitive enough to grasp the terminologies without additional clarification.

> *"Let's say the tripod, the shape of the bronzeware in ancient China is already hard to interpret, right? Some characters describing the shape can be very hard to pronounce and understand. Usually, people have no idea what they mean. But they (the museum) just put these characters there, showing you the artefact's name, chronology, and measuring data. They just don't tell you the artefact's function or at least how to pronounce its name. Nothing but the ungraspable basics. […] Once I was in a museum, I can't remember which museum, in one exhibition all they have a full wall displaying chrono-stratigraphy. They put the stratum straight up and down and divide it into different dynasties like Song to Tang. I've been there many times, but I only noticed this wall once. Other people just pass it by as if it was never there. People don't know what it is, or they just can't get it. Only those who are specialised in archaeology or stratigraphy would recognise it and find it useful in educating the audience. But it's not, because no one could get the point." (Lois, F23, Interview)*

The disconnection that participants have with expertise such as archaeology has touched on the downsides of authorised heritage discourse in terms of its technical domination over heritage making. While the popularity of authorised discourses has facilitated the professional conduct by offering a feasible guide to manage the practice in conserving heritage and formulating policy, it confines the idea of heritage to a narrow interpretive scope with limited meanings and flexibility for public involvement (Smith and Waterton, 2012). Threshold set by the

established knowledge and unintelligible presentation of professional discourse treats the untrained public as resigned and irrelevant beholder whose personal insights have no referential value to heritage making and can easily discourage the public to articulate their personal insights on heritage (Schofield, 2014). All these disconnects nonexpert from heritage making, leaving this mountain under the rule of the relentless sun.

5.2.2 Separation: the unconcerned expert

With the professional practice being certified as the authoritative and sacrosanct act in heritage making, the expert practitioners have gradually sealed themselves into an ivory tower (Grima, 2016) and formed a sense of superiority hence unconcerned about the opinions held by the outsiders towards their work. This has been reflected in what Lois (F23) shares about the past performance of heritage authority:

> *"Museums in China in the past used to work in obscurity and can be very passive in providing access or promoting itself to the public. Earlier in 2000s, the attitude held by many (museums) was like 'I'm a cultural institution and I don't care whether you are interested or not'. […] I remember there's a senior academic was once asked about 'Hey, have you ever considered not writing the label this way? The audience may have no idea what it means.' But the academic replied with 'I am not doing this for them, why would I bother if they could understand or not'. It's like… if you can't get it, then you are ruled out and the knowledge won't become yours." (Lois, F23, Interview)*

It is precisely this "*I don't care*" and "*I am not doing this for them*" attitudes held by the expert that indulge the exclusiveness of expertise and accelerate the separation between the expert and nonexpert in heritage making. This unconcerned attitude is also evident in their perception of museum merchandise. Apart from the archaeological excavation, Henan Museum has invited other areas of expertise and traditional craft into the product lineup as the experiential theme such as relics restoration, woodblock rubbing and gilding. While bringing variety to people's

unboxing experience, integrations as such have also exposed the divide between the expert and nonexpert. One of my participants, Mantos (M24), is a freelance relics restorer specialised in paper artefacts such as painting and calligraphy. Without prompting, Mantos discloses that he has been invited by Henan Museum to join the development of a new blind box series, focusing on the restoration of paper artefacts. While sharing about the problems that he has encountered in adapting the expertise into a commercial plaything, he also expresses his attitude towards the potential misunderstanding and distortion that consumers may have towards the expertise presented by this blind box:

> *"For me, it doesn't matter. Of course as a vlogger I'd make things as clear as possible and explain everything in my video. But if I weren't making these videos and just speaking from my own stance as an insider, I wouldn't care at all. You (ordinary consumer) are not doing this (relic restoration) for living and it's almost impossible for you to ever enter our trade. Even if you get it wrong, so what? It's good that you come to know the existence of this expertise in restoring calligraphy and painting, and the misunderstanding can be just, harmless. It won't affect me or the industry at all. As minority we are no strangers to misunderstanding, so be it." (Mantos, M24, Interview)*

Although considering himself for bearing a more open mind towards heritage commodification as a restorer of new era comparing with the old-school practitioners, Mantos still comfortably remains in the authorised sanctuary. The ivory-towered attitude manifested in Manto's account is grounded in his perception of the potential conflict of interest if brings together the expert and nonexpert in the context of commodification. For him, the expertise as his livelihood and the expertise adapted into nonexpert entertainment are separate realms with no crossing paths. By referring himself and his peer practitioners as minority suffering from misunderstanding, he is also hinting at the understanding of heritage making as an exclusive, expert-only practice.

5.3 Harmonising the Expertise: the participative archaeology

As discussed in preceding chapters, archaeological blind box with its trending and participatory modality sets a concrete stage for consumers to personally get involved in the construction of heritage. Having the inaccessible archaeology adapted into an experiential theme embedded in the palpable blind box, ordinary people are provided with a vicarious and participatory access to practices that are exclusive to the expert. Against this backdrop, archaeological blind box as a recreational product is infused with an expert aura. Accordingly, the following participation that consumers have with this themed blind box represents a harmonisation between the expert and nonexpert, as in enhancing public reception of expertise via recreational adaptation and enriching the ordinary recreation through the injection of simplified expertise. This is unlike the expert-nonexpert separation in authorised heritage making, nor does it echo with the cancellation of expertise as claimed in certain radical proposition (Schofield, 2014). What this harmonisation illuminates is a balanced synergy between the expert and nonexpert in heritage making, just like the mountain that thrives under the alternating and coalescing light of the sun and moon. To put it differently, the expert (sun/Yang) and nonexpert (moon/Yin) in this harmonisation are not treated as mutually exclusive and independent dualism but reciprocal and generative duality; nor would they be compared regarding superiority or inferiority. Based on my observation, participants consuming the archaeological blind box care more about the how these two interact, namely how they support, respond to, and attain each other. Invited by archaeological blind box for a 24-hour adventure into the mountain, participants experience the beauty of this mountain through a full cycle of day and night, illuminated by the sun and moon.

5.3.1 Mutual Support

With its graspable presentation and participatory nature, archaeological blind box enables a different perspective for people to view archaeology as an exclusive expertise and leverage on

its exclusivity as a point of difference. In this context, the expert and nonexpert dimensions of archaeology are brought together in a mutually supporting way.

> *"Archaeology is just like a blind box – you never know what you are going to dig up from the earth!" (Comment under the unboxing video produced by Lois, F23)*

Thanks to the comparable feature found between the blind box and archaeology in terms of the random and uncertain nature of discovery, archaeology has been reconstructed in the context of archaeological blind box from a "no admittance" professional practice into an attractive recreation. Transformation as such allows ordinary people, especially those without access and certified expertise, to realise a substitute but intimate contact with archaeology.

> *"We can't just go somewhere and smash a heritage piece, can we? I'd rather have it this way (substitutive presentation as archaeological blind box). We can't really repair any ancient relics in real life, but through this product, ordinary people like us can at least have a hands-on experience." (Peggy, F19, Interview)*

> *"To be honest, when I first learned about this archaeological blind box, I just found the person who designed it a genius! So clever. It just gives us… Because most people probably don't visit museums that frequent, and even less… well, nearly none of us would have the chance to see archaeologists at work, live. But now I can put my hands on it, it's a very good way for popularisation, whether it's for education or just being part of the museum's commerce. I just find it brilliant the way it's conceived." (LGZL, F22, Interview)*

The substitutive access enabled by archaeological blind box is grounded in the agency of the blind box mechanism and particular material components of this product. Just like what LGZL commends about archaeological blind box as a genius fusion, the adoption of blind box has been welcomed by many nonexpert consumers as a graspable presentation of archaeology. It is true that recreational presentation of blind box cannot fully reproduce the realities of actual practice in archaeology, but it at least enables the marginalised nonexpert to get a taste of some

basic and direct aspects of such expertise. For instance, blind box is known for the unpredictability of its revelation, and this is the same with the excavation practice in archaeology. As shared by Dede (F25) who used to be an archaeology undergraduate, archaeological work is full of chances. Only with favourable timing and proper geographical condition can archaeologists have the chance to unearth relics of unparalleled rarity, and the odds are very often one in a million. In this vein, the setting of hidden edition in blind box matches perfectly with the unforeseeable discovery in archaeological excavation, turning the unboxing experience into a straightforward reflection of archaeology and presenting an absorbing invitation for the public to get closer to archaeology.

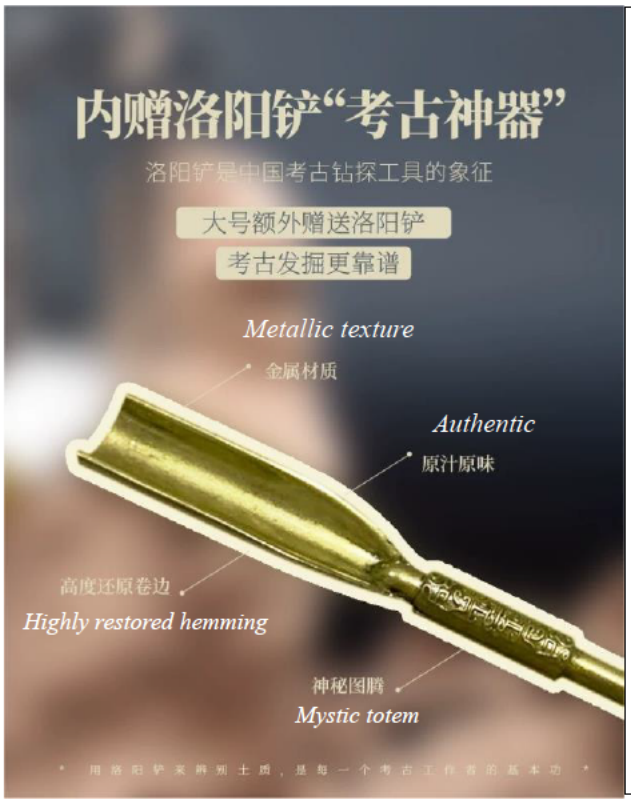
Along with its vicarious reflection of unpredictability, archaeological blind box has also united the expert and nonexpert via its inviting thingness embodied in its tangible components such as the soil wrappage and Luoyang shovel. As I have addressed in Chapter Four, the *Qi* (vitality) of heritage cannot be separated from the tangible, and I shall argue the same about the presence of expertise. From my perspective, one possible factor of the expert-nonexpert separation in heritage making can be the absence of tangibility, that the nonexpert is not granted equal access to the tangible resources as the expert is. And this may further intensify the existing epistemic disconnection in their understanding of archaeology. In this context, archaeological blind box being a tangible representation tailored for the nonexpert turns up as a constructive and evocative medium. For instance, praised as a crucial component in setting the keynote of their unboxing experience as an archaeological discovery, soil is taken by many as a practical linkage between the inaccessible archaeology and their recreational unboxing. It not only provides a visual cue for the nonexpert to imagine the physical environment of archaeological excavation, but also enables them to bodily put themselves in the expert's position and initiate their own archaeological discovery.

> *"The soil really matters, at least for me. I mean, it (the product line of archaeological blind box) actually has many different series, for some there's no soil inside, which is about piecing together the fragments. But I would choose the one with soil even they both involve relics restoration. I just feel that the soil offers a sense of reality, that we can't really be there at the excavation site, but with the soil it would be like a micro-field. It might fully restore the procedures that archaeologists would follow while they are on-site, excavating the relics." (Lan, F26, Interview)*

> *"If it (archaeological blind box) is just a heritage blind box – that there's no need to dig or whatever, and it's right there once opened, then it's essentially the same with ordinary POP MART blind box, just like every blind box on the shelf. You feel nothing upon the unboxing, maybe just 'oh, that's new/fun'. Without the gradual digging it's just not… well, you'll be able to get a taste of archaeology through the digging process, as if you were working in a lab, trying to reveal the truth." (Ating, F24, Interview)*

Similarly, even though archaeology excavation in practice tends to involve a wide range of tools such as shovels, trowels, brushes, flags and tape measures, the most widely known one in China is unarguably the famous Luoyang shovel (Figure 5.1). "Luoyang" is a city in Henan province, and it is also the birthplace of this famous shovel, which accounts for the source of its name. This shovel consists of a U-shape cylindrical shovelhead and a long handle, works as a handy hardware for the archaeologist to drill out some soil sample for examination without damaging the main structure of the tomb (Cheng *et al*., 2014). While the attraction of Luoyang shovel has been addressed from different perspectives, there is something in common, which is the archaeological ambience it contributes to the unboxing experience. In my observation, most participants choose to buy the largest model of archaeological blind box because it is the only model that includes Luoyang shovel. "*The whole experience will be discounted without the Luoyang shovel*", says Joey (F26) in her unboxing video. Facilitated by the familiarity that people have with this shovel, archaeology as an inaccessible and exclusive expertise is brought closer to the nonexpert.

"[Me: You mentioned in your video that the experience will be compromised if there's no Luoyang shovel, why is that?] Yes, I did say that. Because Luoyang shovel is one of the iconic tools in Chinese archaeology. Whether in literary work, teledrama, or documentary, whether it is about archaeology or tomb robbing, none of them can do without Luoyang shovel. Since it is an archaeological blind box, and Luoyang shovel is a classic prop, originated from Henan, no doubt it would add to the experience." (Joey, F26, Interview)



Find inside the Luoyang shovel – the ultimate archaeological tool

Representing the digging tool in Chinese archaeological exploration

Only available in the largest model of archaeological blind box

*Using the Luoyang shovel to distinguish soil is the basic skill for every archaeology worker

(Translation added by researcher)

Figure 5.1: Introduction of Luoyang Shovel included inside archaeological blind box

Alternately, integration of the little-known archaeology as the experiential theme also grants the blind box a gripping feature, differentiating this participatory product from its competitive products with an extra layer of expertise. If unpack this integration via the mountain metaphor, archaeological blind box as a recreational product can be considered as initially a nighttime tour pass, but its inclusion of archaeological elements extends the duration of this pass, allowing visitors to explore the mountain by both day and night.

> *"It (archaeological restoration blind box) is a blind box, trending now like POP MART. POP MART is nothing but a blind box, just unbox it and that's it. Just take it out of the packaging and that's the end of it. But this one (archaeological restoration blind box), it includes a hands-on process that requires you to…well, if you like, the process of unboxing is not just about removing the packaging, you got to clean out the stuff inside the soil clod inch by inch, and then you put it together so you can see 'wow that's the thing I unboxed!' It's like… a copy and paste of what the archaeologist might feel – that you find this site but have no idea what's underground. You might have a rough idea of what kind of tomb or remain it is. So – you dig and dig and dig until you found a ceramic chip, then you find out what it is and which dynasty it belongs." (Jilian, M22, Interview)*

In addition, the inclusion of archaeology as a meaningful reference also effectively alleviates some people's feeling of guilt and anxiety generated from wasting time on repetitive digging and repairing, allowing them to appreciate their immersion with this bind box. In other words, what this product offers are not meaningless entertainment, but a meaningful exploration.

> *"In just 30 minutes or 1 hour I'd be able to create this beautiful artefact, although not in a super exquisite way. I dug them (the fragments) out and put them together – something that would normally take an archaeologist at least a year to complete. But I managed to do that in just one hour. It's a toy, I know, but in playing with it I can get a sense of achievement that others might work an entire year to attain, so what else can I complain about?" (Dede, F25, Interview)*

> *"You may feel guilty or anxious about wasting your time on this game, thinking 'Ah, once again I've wasted my time!'. But if you could get yourself a piece of heritage artefact out of this archaeological encounter, and you actually learn something from it, that's so much more satisfying." (Alan, F26, Interview)*

In sum, having its inaccessibility complemented by archaeological blind box as an amateurish but tangible medium, archaeology is adapted from an exclusive expertise to a participatory and meaningful experience. Reciprocally, the inclusion of archaeology also infuses this recreational

product with distinctive meanings, enhancing people's casual entertainment with a sense of discovery and a deeper connection to the past.

5.3.2 Balanced Communication

Transformed by the tangible agency of archaeological blind box, archaeology as an exclusive expertise in heritage making now enters the public spotlight with a more accessible appearance. In this context, people are granted with equal access to archaeology without being affected by their professional background. This indiscriminate participation exposes the gap between the expert and nonexpert, as can be seen from the contrasting handling of archaeological expertise shown in the unboxing videos. Notably, in the case of archaeological blind box, this gap has not been kept to oneself but made public through the agency of the publicly shared unboxing video. It further triggers the constructive communication around archaeology among the public, forming a Yin-Yang space embodied in the shared experience. In this Yin-Yang space, the gap between expert and nonexpert does not lead to an unproductive separation as is usually found in conventional communication of archaeology. Instead, this gap is received as a meaningful resource contributing to the reception of expertise, with productive energy exchanging between the opposing sides, alternately responding to each other with a balanced perspective.

For people who are not equipped with related knowledge and skills, experiencing expertise in professional field such as archaeology can be filled with questions and uncertainty, as if they are exploring the mysteries of a mountain under the veil of night. The experience that EP (M24) has with archaeological restoration blind box can be a proper manifestation of such exploration. This blind box is marked by its reproduction of archaeological excavation and relics restoration. EP makes no secret of his layperson nature and amateurism in acting up to the projected professional conduct. *"I don't know how, I can only follow my nose", "I think I'm I bit clumsy", "(It's) my first time using it (provided spatula), I'm just not good at it"*, mutterings alike appear

frequently in his unboxing video. However, this nonexpert anxiety and feeling of insecurity did not prevent EP from generating a sense of contentment in accomplishing his participation. As reflected at the end of his unboxing video, EP does not depreciate his hard work because of the amateurish incompetence, rather, he finds it commendable albeit all the "mistakes" he has made.

> *"I won't deny my clumsiness, but I've given my best in making it look like this. This is way harder than I've ever imagined, but it turns out pretty great." (Video voiceover in EP's unboxing video after finishing the restoration)*



Figure 5.2: Skeptical and disapproving comment under EP's unboxing video, together with EP's response.

After sharing his experience online, EP was questioned for the correctness of his practice of applying glue to the fragments and received disapproving comment calling his operation as "an absolute textbook example of what not to do" (Figure 5.2). But instead of feeling disturbed by the critical comments, EP took a thorough review of his operation by double checking the provided instruction and watching other players' videos. He then wrote a long reflection and pinned it at the top of the comment section under his video as a constructive response to all the criticisms he has received, thinking through his operation and making suggestions for potential product improvement. Skill-wise, what EP has shown in the unboxing video may not be counted as a normative demonstration, but this does not render his involvement as futile. The essence of EP's unboxing experience does not lie in his unmistakable reproduction of expertise;

rather, it is his balance and negotiation of his internal constraints (i.e., amateurism) and external forces (i.e., audience criticism) that renders this consumption experience into a constructive participation in relics restoration.

It is later explored in other participants' unboxing videos that amateurism shown by nonexpert consumers in playing with this themed blind box also facilitates the formation of the Yin-Yang space as a neutral ground for the expert and nonexpert to come together and communicate in a balanced manner without depleting or opposing each other. For instance, Lois (F23) as a heritage professional came across this blind box via the unboxing videos shared by Mo (Male, age N/A), a popular influencer with over a million of followers on Bilibili.com. Mo's unboxing practice is poles apart from the rigorous professional conduct, as can be seen in his disruptive application of chopper knife in chopping the soil chunk and crude overgild on the roughly restored replica (Figure 5.3). Such reckless practice has achieved a successful virality with over four million views and been received by the audience as unexpected, offbeat, and entertaining, as presented in the thousands of comments under Mo's unboxing videos.



Figure 5.3: (Left) Adoption of kitchen knife; (Right) Coating the figurine with gold powder

With her background in museology and archaeology, Lois was attracted by this irregularity and wondered if she could make any difference by playing this blind box with a professional eye. Four videos (three unboxing videos and one Q&A video) born in response to this thought. As

illustrated in the description of her first unboxing video, she writes: "*Finally received my order from Henan Museum, here comes the archaeological blind box! This time I will crack it open from the perspective of an archaeology student. There will be not only unboxing experience but also some professional tips about archaeology. Enjoy!*".

Lois kicks off her unboxing by highlighting a misleading message she noticed in the product, that the blind box modality has presented archaeology as a fun exploration:

> *"This blind box is indeed entertaining, but it also leads to a misunderstanding about archaeology, that archaeology is fun and mysterious. It is nothing like that! And that's why I decide to excavate this blind box in an authentic, archaeological way, so that you guys can have a look." (Lois, F23, Video Voiceover)*



Figure 5.4: Screenshot of Lois' unboxing video

Hoping to share with a broader audience what professional archaeological practice involves, in her videos, Lois explains the function of provided tools in the box based on their application in practical archaeology and walks through the audience about the professional terms and procedures via her selectively simplified operation. For instance, as shown in Figure 5.4, Lois is demonstrating to the audience what the actual archaeological excavation is like, using the "excavation unit" and "balk" that she dug on the soil block inside the blind box as illustration,

forming an interesting contrast with Mo's bold and rough handling. Captions and illustrations are also added to the video by Lois for nonexpert audience's information.

Unlike the incomprehensible and exclusive presentation that I have discussed in prior section, Lois' attempt was welcomed by many, achieving over 170,000 views and nearly 800 comments. Many of the audience hold a learning attitude towards Lois's informative presentation and appreciate her attempts on enlightening the layperson: "*All those punchy details! It seems that she really wants to train us into the professional!*", "*I've been waiting for a professional demonstration for ages and here you are!*" (Comments under Lois' unboxing video).

It is essential to note that although Lois has directed attention to the distinction between the actual archaeological practice and archaeological blind box, she is not devaluating this product as a meaningless distortion. I see her unboxing experience as a balanced response to the nonexpert from her expert view, that Lois does not insist on the procedural correctness of archaeological blind box nor does she write off nonexpert participation as worthless. Instead, what Lois addresses through her informative unboxing experience is the aspects of archaeology which have been selectively omitted in the production of archaeological blind box with the consideration of public receptivity. As one may discern in her wording and phrasing of the video description, she adopts "*professional tips*" to describe her practice, rather than the didactic "*dos and don'ts*". In this sense, the presentation of professional conduct made by Lois is complementary to the communication of archaeology in archaeological blind box. Moreover, as Lois later informed in the interview, she appreciates the convergence of expertise and entertainment enabled by commercial presentation like this archaeological blind box, as it is through this recreational participation that expertise is made concrete and acceptable for its popularity and perpetual development. This finding serves as a steppingstone for consolidating the mutuality between expert and nonexpert in heritage making in the discussion chapter.

> *"I just feel that… after all these years, archaeology is finally being recognised. Because archaeology doesn't have many opportunities to be noticed by the public apart from the channel provided by the museum or university. Personally, I would wish that through this product (archaeological blind box) people could take interest in archaeology and even make it as future career. There is indeed a shortage of people in this field, and even fewer graduates (major in archaeology) choose to stay because of the drudgery…" (Lois, F23, Interview)*

Similarly, as a former archaeology insider, what Yi (F27) has presented in her unboxing video has also attracted a considerable number of audiences, and many of them have witnessed Mo's reckless conduct. With her professional meticulousness, Yi's interaction with the blind box is more than a careless investment of manual labour such as constantly spraying water onto the soil block, laboriously scraping the soil around the buried debris, or attentively gluing together the scattered shards. It involves her speculating the distribution of shards during excavation, testing the viscosity of the provided glue before applying it to the shards, as well as reviewing specific historical background of the archetypical heritage collections. Although Yi has made clear at the beginning in her unboxing video that she has never intended to make her experience as an instruction to the layman, her rigorous practice has been acknowledged by the audiences. Comments such as "*here comes the correct operation*", "*I'm here for the expert*", and "*such a professional*" frequently appear in the commenting area. Interestingly, there is one comment stating, "*It drives me crazy watching Mo's video, luckily I found yours, feeling so much better now!*". Similar comparative remarks can also be spotted under Lois' video as well as others where the players have demonstrated a relatively dedicated conduct regardless of their actual character as professional or not.

But not every expert can live peacefully with the nonexpert in this shared space and vice versa. For instance, after putting together her archaeological restoration blind box, YJL (F26) searched for videos by professional players to get a sense of how the expert approaches to this

plaything. For YJL, viewing videos produced by those who are diligently sharing without a didactic tone does not discomfort her, but she finds those demonstrations with an authoritative attitude hard to accept, as the so-called expert is at the same time looking down upon nonexpert conduct. This echoes with the challenge that Kersel and Luke (2015, p.79) pose for heritage professionals: "to recognise their obligations to a wider public and to participate in a much more diverse set of conversations, rather than merely 'science' or 'preservation'".

> *"After putting together my boxes (archaeological restoration blind box), I did check out others' video, including Mantos'. He also got a restoration box, the one that belongs to the slightly cheaper series. I didn't feel any discomfort watching his video. His practice is no doubt more professional than mine, and I can feel that he is dealing with this product in a very dedicated manner, and he wants to show us how, in a considerate way. What I really don't like are those who posted video, telling people how thing should be done in a rather preachy tone, and sometimes knocking lay operations." (YJL, F26, Interview)*

Taken together, with the participatory experience enabled by archaeological blind box, expert and nonexpert in archaeology are brought together and form a Yin-Yang space. It appears that the gap in handling the expertise in heritage making as revealed from the experience of archaeological blind box is not essentially unproductive, for it is through this gap that the expert and nonexpert are united and communicate in a mutual manner. In this space, archaeology is granted with more unprompted attention from the public through undifferentiated consumption and is gradually made plain through the constructive expert-nonexpert interplay. The copresence of expert and nonexpert demonstrates an intriguing in-betweenness which fills the consumption-initiated Yin-Yang space with transformative power. The observation in this chapter provides a basis for the rethink of the dialectics of expertise in heritage making, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven (Section 7.2.2). Connecting this space with the mountain metaphor that I have introduced earlier, I see its *Qi* ebbs and flows in EP's hesitation, Mo's

wildness, Lois and Yi's attention to detail, and YJL's discontent; and the mountain now hums with energy, thriving with the alternating illumination of the sun and moon.

5.3.3 Embodied Empathy

Along with the mutual support and balanced communication, I also unveil another facet of the harmonious expert-nonexpert interplay identified from participants' experience, which is the empathy that nonexperts have developed for the professional practitioners through their hands-on experience of the expertise reflected in the archaeological blind box. Empathy is regarded as a reflection of heritage vitality for its embodiment of meanings (Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen, 2019). Here, empathy springs from the amateurishness that participants have shown in living up to the self-imposed standard when playing with archaeological blind box. To put it another way, the coordinated dynamics between expert and nonexpert is not solely about bridging the gap so people *can* get involved and communicate on the neutral ground, but also concern the unprompted recognition of gap as a healthy distinction, as in the constructive understanding of why people *cannot* get involved. Drawing on the metaphor of sun and moon, awareness as such is just like how we appreciate the splendor of dawn and dusk and make peace with the fact that we cannot halt the dance of day and night.

> *"Thank God I'm not working in archaeology; my body just can't take this much." (LGZL's narration in her unboxing video)*

With a sense of relief and disbelief, the excerpt above is what LGZL (F22) whined about her draining excavation in playing with the archaeological blind box, feeling thankful for being physically incompetent to take on the archaeological work. As presented in her unboxing video which documents every groan that LGZL has made for her felt exhaustion and frustration, the pseudo-archaeological experience for LGZL turns out to be surprisingly exhausted and mentally taxing. According to LGZL, she was first drained by the repetitive digging because

the soil appears to be tougher than she has ever expected, and then worn out by the subtle cleaning as in removing the embedded replica out of the mess. However, rather than viewing this unexpected hardship as a meaningless torture, LGZL generates an empathetic awareness of the exertion and trial in actual archaeological practice. This awareness draws a distinction between her temporary fatigue and the professional dedication, and further dispels her rebellious idea about forcing the soil chunk apart as it goes against the professional spirit and can put the "treasure" inside at the risk of being damaged.

> *"Heritage work is all about patience, really. I really feel that, and I thought the same when watching the documentary before. You must be patient and physically fit. Seriously, damaging the heritage artefact is a crime." (LGZL's narration in her unboxing video)*

Later in the interview, LGZL happily embraced the distance between expert and nonexpert in performing the physically demanding fieldwork when commenting on her consumption of archaeological blind box. She specifically brought up her unfulfilled archaeological dream – she has been haunted by the regret of not choosing archaeology as her major in college for so long. But after experiencing the vicarious hardship, she managed to talk herself out of this regret by embracing the gap between expert and nonexpert in performing archaeology.

> *"It's a good deal. At least it gets me to realise my regret for 'not choosing archaeology' might not be a bad decision. I just really can't do it. It (digging the soil) is so hard and demanding, you know. Fieldwork is a must-do for archaeological workers as many of the relics are literally underneath the field… […] It (archaeological blind box) is more like a professional experience to me, to get a taste of archaeology and let go of my regret. An echo of memory, a relief." (LGZL, F22, Interview)*

In similar fashion, Shenhui (F22) has also realised an embodied resonance with archaeological professionals. Treating archaeological blind box as a palpable medium to satisfy her curiosity towards archaeology, Shenhui decided to have an outdoor excavation so she could faithfully

recreate the natural environment of archaeological practice. She launched her discovery in a local park at a carefully selected spot on a sweltering summer day. As shown in her unboxing video, her forehead is quickly covered by sweat after several strikes on the soil chunk. While gingerly unearthing the scattered shards from the blind box with her hands gloved, she cannot help but marvel at the dedication of archaeologists and their laborious work with her temporarily set working environment as a reference.

> *"I really admire those archaeologists, going to the excavation site with the sun relentlessly beating down. Comparing with them, my working environment is not so bad. My gloves are also sweaty now. I'm a student in arts and humanities so I don't really have the opportunity to use the lab. Maybe for those who are in the field of STEM it will be easier to empathise. I mean, when you wear this kind of gloves for a long time, it just becomes very stuffy, and hard to take off because of the sweaty moisture. […] Although the weather is cloudy today, it is still hot outside, so you can imagine how hard it is for those archaeologists who works under the scorching sun with no shade and wears a lot to protect themselves from mosquito bite." (Shenhui's narration in her unboxing video)*

While paying tribute to the professional's devotion through her embodied perception, Shenhui also reflects on her imperfect completion in this substitutive archaeology practice, drawing a comparison between her amateurishness and the assumed rigour of professional conduct.

> *"I accidentally broke one shard during the excavation, it is already broken but I just made it worse. In real archaeological work, this should be a major mistake. One can further imagine that the archaeologists have to work calmly in a harsh environment and try to avoid mistakes. It is also hard washing off the soil from the shards. It's easily done in this blind box, but the genuine heritage would require the archaeologist to gently brushing off the dust bit by bit. I also forgot to use the brush and gold powder; this might not be compliant with the standard…" (Shenhui's reflective narration at the end of her unboxing video)*

Although the empathy that Shenhui has expressed towards the professional conduct is mainly grounded in her flawed practice and subjective conjecture as an amateur, the fact that she is able to empathetically associate her substitute consumption experience with the actual practice has reflected her spontaneous coordination of the divided expert and nonexpert dimensions in heritage making. Facilitated by her felt amateurishness, Shenhui associates the recognition of expert dedication with heritage appreciation and further underlines the merit of archaeological blind box for bridging her with archaeology, without belittling her inadequate but meaningful involvement.

> *"Only when we realise how hard it is to excavate the relics and how much patience and caution it requires to restore and conserve them, can we generate genuine care and affinity with the heritage, really think about the history and culture behind, and develop true national pride and cultural confidence. […] What this blind box brings us is more than novelty, rather, it is the awareness that behind our entertaining attempt lies the archaeologist's dedication. Please, everyone, please pay more attention to those heritage artefacts next time when you visit the museum." (Shenhui's reflective narration at the end of her unboxing video)*

> *"My understanding of the real archaeology might still be shallow. Most work that archaeologists do must be much more monotonous than what I've experienced (through archaeological blind box). It (factual archaeology practice) might not be accomplished no sweat as it can involves endless repetitive work, round and round. My experience, finished in one hour or two, in essence is a fast-paced consumption, but it grants me some transient fun, and enables me to have a connection with archaeology." (Shenhui, F22, Interview)*

Comparatively, the empathetic feeling the Jilian (M22) has developed for the archaeological practitioners is found as interestingly paradoxical. On one hand, Jilian describes his experience with this themed blind box as an escape, that through the pseudo excavation and restoration he could temporarily break free from his petty routine and throw himself into a carefree adventure.

"You are being dragged out of your world and put into one that's not yours, and this would render you a sense of … relief. Break you away from the dissertation, your work, or your nagging parents… All these are gone during that time period, you are free. […] It looks like you've put yourself into someone else (by playing archaeological restoration blind box), but you are actually stepping out of yourself, a detachment so to speak. You will face entirely different things when you return to the reality, and what you get out of this (blind box) is something more relaxed, comparing with the trifles and tension afterwards (in real life). […] The detachment here is rather idle, because while we put ourselves as archaeologist, we are not really experiencing their pressure at work, right? It's not that we are literally on the field and nerve-racking. You are not in a rush but at ease. […] Just like esports, for us as outsiders – gaming is just gaming; but for them, gaming might be work, life, or something they earn a living through. Turning someone else's duty into relaxation is unprecedentedly laidback." (Jilian, M22, Interview)

Is Jilian's experience really as carefree as he describes? I see it differently. It is true that as a consumer Jilian does not bear the responsibility as the professionals do, but that does not mean he cannot derive an empathetic feeling for such responsibility. For instance, when reflecting on the unexpected circumstances in his experience, Jilian shared his struggle over the repetitive work in cleaning the stain attached on the unearthed shards and associated this struggle with what the archaeologist would face in real life practice.

"When I was cleaning up the mud (i.e., stain attached on the unearthed shards) … it never occurs to me that those fragments were this hard to wash. I thought it'll be clean after rinsing. But when I tried to splice them together, they can't fit with each other. So, I started over and realised that I've missed some mud. I was so confused. It looks spotless enough and I've already dried it in the shade (as instructed by the operation guideline). Felt like everything is done, but it's not. I could really feel the struggle as an archaeologist through this process." (Jilian, M22, Interview)

Jilian further mentioned his imperfect restoration of the fragmented replica, which appears to be a headache. According to Jilian, he could not help but notice that there exist some fine lines and unevenness along the seams between the shards of the restored replica (Figure 5.5). These fine lines, though not appear as significant and locate at the back of the figurine, suggest the misalignment between the shards and hence the imperfection of Jilian's restoration. Every time he looks at this finished figurine, Jilian is reminded that his painstaking efforts at the time of restoration is not as perfect as he thought.



Figure 5.5: Uneven surface on the back of Jilian's restored figurine

This reminded inadequacy leaves Jilian with ironic frustration and contradicts his claimed detachment. But building on this frustration, he also made a voluntary association with the archaeologists for they would have to follow more stringent criteria in their professional conduct. Supported by such association, the focus of attention on Jilian's experience is transformed from its completeness to the empathetic appreciation for professional practice, marking a calmly acknowledged disparity between the expert and nonexpert.

> *"When you've given your best and used up every provided material but later found your output was not so good, that is indeed quite… disheartening. But on second thought,*

think about the archaeologist, they must do the restoration in a more concise way, that the cracks must be repaired with finer seam and more even surface. That's something we cannot do." (Jilian, M22, Interview)

Collectively, through the participatory access enabled by archaeological blind box, amateurish consumers get the opportunity to mess around with the exclusive archaeology. The recognition of archaeological expertise that LGZL (F22), Shenhui (F22) and Jilian (M22) have expressed is not a blind worship of the expertise, but an embodied empathy derived from their amateurish but heartfelt involvement. It is embodied in the exhaustion felt by LGZL and Shenhui in their excavation, or the imperfect restoration conducted by Shenhui and Jilian on their fragmented replica. As Munoz-Vinas (2023, p.172) reminds us about the rationality of the existence of expertise, "each field of expertise is based on the existence of people who know the field better than the rest and thus possess greater epistemic authority". Awareness of the expert-nonexpert gap at this point is not understood as restraining or negative. On the contrary, it promotes people's reception of expertise by empathising with its unsung dedication, connecting them more directly with the exclusive expertise in an imperfect but meaningful way. If put this in a metaphorical way, the unsatisfactory and imperfect operation that participants have shared is like the natural rhythm as day follows night, but the empathy generated from this exchange can be interpreted as the breathtaking beauty when the sun and moon briefly share the sky at dawn.

To conclude, this section has unpacked three aspects of the expert-nonexpert harmonisation as derived from my interpretation of participants' consumption experience of archaeological blind box. Underpinned by Yin-Yang thinking, I do not view the expert and nonexpert in heritage making as irreconcilable opposites. Instead, I see them as the alternating sun and moon – being distinct from each other, but interdependent and synergetic at the same time, contributing to the mountain's biodiversity (the flow of *Qi* in heritage making). By virtue of the inviting tangibility of archaeological blind box, archaeology as an exclusive expertise in heritage

making is converted into a participative experience. In this context, I have shown how the expert and nonexpert aspects of archaeology as a pair of inseparable opposites support and respond to each other in a constructive interplay, and how the marked differences identified by participants draw them closer to archaeology in an empathetic way.

5.4 Chapter Review

Drawing on the metaphors of the sun and moon, in this chapter I have focused on the distinction between expert and nonexpert in archaeology as a crucial expertise in heritage making. I first underline the shadow of expertise entrenched in the dualism thinking, and then discuss the experience derived from archaeological blind box with a focus on how such distinction can be reshaped into a coordinated and generative interplay which contributes to the dynamics in heritage making. It is worth reiterating that I have no intention to rehabilitate the dominance of expert authority in heritage making; rather, what I argue against is the democracy at the expense of expertise removal (Schofield, 2014). To this end, I provide a different perspective to unpack the mutuality between the expert and nonexpert as a pair of intertwined dualities in heritage making, using the sun/moon metaphor as illustration. Attention on democratising heritage making has been concentrated on removing the barrier for nonexpert to get involved, which I have touched on. What I have also revealed in this chapter is the unbiased communication between the expert and nonexpert, as well as the ignored merit of the reproduction, contrast, and empathy that nonexperts have for the expert as displayed in their experience of the expertise moment by moment. Heritage making is not a solo dance performed by the expert, rather, it is a collaborative performance joined by a variety of people, with the *Qi* of heritage playing out in their harmonious interplay, in the same way as the vitality of flora and fauna unfolds in the alternating dance of the sun and moon.

In the chapter that follows, I will expand on the mutuality between heritage authority (museum) and the public (consumer) in heritage making as explored in the consumption of archaeological blind box. Formulated on a Yin-Yang informed *wuwei* (nonaction) mindset, a different angle viewing the dissonance emerging from heritage making comes into view. A review of the strategic move of Henan Museum in developing its merchandise will also be presented, adding to the *wuwei* mindset from another perspective.

CHAPTER 6: HERITAGE MAKING AS WUWEI

"Sages can be yin, and they can be yang; they can be weak, and they can be strong; in tempo with the times, they are active or still; in accordance with the inner substance of things, they establish merit. When things become active, they know their reversions; when affairs sprout forth, they anticipate their alterations; when things transform, they act in their image; when things move, they respond to them; this is why to the end of their days, they are effective and free of troubles." (The Huainanzi – Boundless Discourses, translated by Roth et al., 2010, p.510)

Having unpacked the consumption of archaeological blind box with a focus on the generative balance in physicality and expertise in relation to heritage making, I will now turn to the underlying dynamics and mutuality between the authority and public. In Yin-Yang philosophy, the attribution of Yin and Yang is not static but always shifts with the change of time and situation. As described in the quoted passage above from *The Huainanzi*, the wise man seizes the momentum and goes with the flow, just like what Sai Weng did with his strayed horse and crippled son (i.e., the proverb presented in Chapter Two illustrating the principle of change in Yin-Yang thinking). Bearing an awareness of unexpected development of the situation, Sai Weng was not carried away with joy when seeing his strayed horse return with a wild horse, nor was he consumed by sorrow when his son was crippled by the wild horse. As later revealed in this allegory, while the wild horse crippled his son, his son was consequently exempted from the dangerous military service. In taking things as they come and being aware of the lurking changes, Sai Weng lives his life wisely and free of troubles. This consciousness of the flow and Yin-Yang interconversion connects with "*wuwei*" ("无为" in Chinese, pronounced as "woo-way") being an important notion in Daoist thinking, understood as nonaction in opposition to deliberate enforcement. Note that in Yin-Yang thinking, nonaction is not equal to inaction or negative action, on the contrary, it refers to how one relies on the self-generating Yin-Yang interplay and adapts to the shifting situation without forcing to the extreme and

losing the balance (Wang, 2012). Formulating on this mindset, this chapter examines the dynamic interplay between the authority (i.e., the museum) and the public (i.e., the consumer) identified from the consumption experience of archaeological blind box, with a particular focus on how they respond to the dissonance and situation in the context of heritage consumption and further reveals heritage making as an organic reflection of *wuwei.*

6.1 Chapter Introduction

Going along with the heritage-as-process proposition (Smith, 2006), the evolvement of heritage consumption has granted the ordinary public with more flexible access to participate in the construction of heritage, stimulating the transformation of the public from being acquiescent recipients of authorised discourses to proactive contributors for the contemporary meaning of heritage. Authoritative institutions such as museums, at the same time, are also taking on a new role as provider and marketer through the development and promotion of heritage products in this constructive process. Nevertheless, while the democratisation in heritage making has liberated heritage from the confinement of the authorised "commonsense" (Smith and Waterton, 2012, p.153), the equal treatment applied to both the authority and the public has also resulted in the omission of the mutuality between these two distinct contributors of heritage (Muzaini and Minca, 2018). This is particularly true when varieties have been brought to the context of heritage making via the development of commercialisation, which in this research refers to the consumption of museum merchandise.

With the previous two chapters paying more attention to how the public deals with the tension in heritage making, this chapter invites the authority, namely the museum as an equally crucial contributor into the conversation, making explicit the dissonance and change that the museum has experienced in the context of consumption. The adjustment in focus is necessary because while the public has reshaped their presence in heritage making as active and influential, the

museum as the former sacrosanct authority is also reorienting its position to go with the tide. This is particularly evident in China, where the rapid growth of cultural and creative industry has infused new energy into the contemporary role of museum, as reflected in the rapidly evolving and multifaceted museum merchandise. In analysing the consumption of the archaeological blind box, I noticed some intriguing divergences emerging from the participants' experience. But what is more interesting here is the attitudes held by the participants and measures taken by the museum in response to these divergences. Drawing on Yin-Yang thinking, I take their handling as a reflection of *wuwei* and interpret it from two perspectives. Digging into the divergence emerging from participants' irregular creativity and tomb robbing fantasy, I first take both the consumers and museum's mindset as an embodiment of "relying" (Wang, 2012, p.144), which will be unpacked in section 6.2. I then focus on the actions taken by Henan Museum in its development of the archaeological blind box and render it as a proactive adaptation to the circumstances, as will be expanded in section 6.3. It is pertinent to mention that in interpreting consumer and museum's performance with *wuwei* as a reference, I am not indicating that they are as wise as a sage with no troubles. Rather, what I seek to highlight is how the awareness of Yin-Yang and *wuwei* are weaved into heritage making in the context of consumption, and further present a different angle to view the mutuality between authority and the public.

6.2 Facing the Divergence via "Relying"

> *"The ten thousand things fu yin bao yang, and blend their Qi to create a state of harmony" (Lao Tzu, 2008 [no date])*

The statement above comes from the *Tao Te Ching* (Chapter 42), emphasising the coexistence of Yin and Yang in achieving the balance of *Qi* and hinting at Yin as the underlying background and hidden dynamics which tends to be ignored if one does not pay attention. The expression

"*fu yin bao yang*" ("负阴抱阳" in Chinese) can be translated as "*embody yin and embrace yang*" (Wang, 2012, p.145), in which "embrace" corresponds to "bao", indicating direct contact and confrontation; whereas "embody", or "carry" as the translation of "fu", suggesting the awareness of some hidden forces (Yin) which are temporarily out of sight but lurking in the background when Yang is embraced on the other side. Building on the mountain metaphor that I have used in the prior chapter, this "*embody yin embrace yang*" statement dissects the mountain into two opposing yet complementary sides at different times of the day – with "embrace Yang" points at the sunny side of the mountain embracing the brightness brought by the sun, and "embody Yin" relates with the shady side of the mountain which has not yet been lit by the sun but still exists as part of the mountain waiting for its time to be illuminated. The idea of "embody Yin and embrace Yang" reflects the awareness of the coexistence of possibly contradictory elements: the explicit encounter that is present, as well as the unseen change and lurking opportunity. Only through attending to both the foreground (explicit Yang) and background (unseen Yin) can one reach the harmony, just like the illustrative example presented by Wang (2012, p.146) drawing on the *Huangdi Neijing*: "Farmers do not simply see what will grow out of the soil, but also make an effort to cultivate the soil, that is, attending to the background". By paying attention to the background, one is expected to trust the hidden forces to come into effect at their own pace, and this reflects *wuwei* or nonaction, as in relying on the underlying structures to unfold in due course without hastening its progress.

The statement "embody Yin and embrace Yang" is also connected with the interpenetrating relationship between Yin and Yang as part of their dynamic interplay (Chen, 2002), which is well reflected in Chinese language. For instance, in English, "crisis" originally refers to "a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023), hinting at a dualism-driven mindset seeking to find a conclusive solution so that ambiguity and inconsistency can be avoided, without thinking about the "Yin" side of the

confronted danger and confusion. But in Chinese, "crisis" – "危机" (wei ji) is made up by two distinct characters, "危" (wei) – "danger" and "机" (ji) – "opportunity". In this sense, the emergence of confusion or contradiction is not necessarily as disturbing as it may seem, as from a Yin-Yang point of view every crisis comes with an underlying opportunity, and they are interchangeable when time comes. Likewise, the word "heritage" in Chinese is usually presented as "遗产" (yi chan), which can be divided into "遗" (yi) – "to leave behind or hand down" and "产" (chan) – "property, or to produce" (Munoz-Vinas, 2023). Illustration as such echoes with the interpretation of heritage as a constructive process (Smith, 2006; Emerick, 2014), which does not present heritage as merely an immutable inheritance of the past, but also bear an awareness of the adaptable representation emerging in the present.

When it comes to the consumption of archaeological blind box as investigated in this research, the active participation that consumers have in their unboxing experience has brought variety to the way that people connect with the connotation embedded in the product. This variety, as discovered in this chapter, emerges from people's divergent reception of archaeology as an authorised and established sector dealing with artefacts from the past, which is slightly different from the perspective covered in Chapter Five viewing archaeology as an exclusive expertise focusing on its practical know-how and engendered boundary. What stands out here from the divergent receptions are people's irregular presentation and even rebellious interpretation of archaeology as a normative and legitimate representation of heritage making based on their interaction with archaeological blind box, forming a sharp contrast with the commonly perceived image of archaeology as normative and legitimate. Specifically, the irregularity refers to consumer's unrestrained operation under the name of archaeology, whereas the rebellious understanding touches upon people's voluntary association with tomb robbing fantasy. Bearing in mind the museum's intention in promoting traditional culture and history

and archaeology as a certified profession in heritage making, it appears that this twofold irregularity has put Henan Museum as an authoritative institution into an awkward situation (or crisis) which could really use a solution to eliminate the dissonance. But the experience and reflection discovered in this study tell a different story with an alternative point of view.

6.2.1 Creativity behind the irregularity

Research suggests that in heritage consumption, consumers' hedonistic expectation towards the offering can sometimes run counter to its "intellectually inspired" gist (Calver and Page, 2013, p.23). As such, conflicts enter the picture between consumers' enjoyment and the preset experiential setting. The participatory nature of archaeological blind box makes forefront consumers' action-oriented involvement with the adapted presentation of archaeology as a structured profession, giving rise to the divergence in people's reception of archaeology via their irregular actions towards the blind box under the designed operating procedures.

For instance, while having his operation guided by the procedures presented in the instruction and adopting a "professional" attitude towards his participation, Jilian (M22) takes the "liberty" of covering the restored figurine completely with the provided gold powder (Figure 6.1) which was supposed to be used only for delineating the traces of restoration if strictly following the museum's instruction. As Jilian recalled, this irregular move was initially unplanned only because he was unable to live up to the professional standard, but he was surprised by what he ended up with this improvisation. Rather than perceiving this move as a failure, he sees this irregularity as rewarding because it allows him to have a personal interpretation of the trajectory of a heritage artefact. As shared in the interview, in likening his glittering, gold-painted figurine to what the museum collected artefacts might have been centuries ago, Jilian imagines that if he buries his creation in the earth, it might also become a precious exhibit conserved inside the museum when unearthed after hundreds of years.



Figure 6.1: Jilian's creative transformation of the restored figurine in contrast with the archetypical artefact presented on the identity card.

In a similar fashion, UU's (Female, age n/a) creative experience with archaeological restoration blind box has amazed a large crowd with her video views reaching over a million and acted as a remarkable reference encouraging other people's creative involvement. Instead of following the given instruction throughout, UU takes the initiative to try out her creativity. By applying additional clay, illuminous coating, and dried flowers, UU reconstructs the restored pottery lady figure and turns it into a delightful creation full of stories (Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2: UU's creative transformation (collage made by researcher with screenshots of video)
Notes: translated subtitles from top to bottom – "I was quite cautious at the beginning of the excavation", "(I might have already been arrested if I were repairing the real stuff)", "It feels pretty good after cleansing"

As presented in the video, UU is aware that her irregular act goes against the professional rules ("*I might have already been arrested if I were repairing the real stuff*") and audience's comments have also jokingly pointed out this irregularity – "*how many years of sentence would that be LOL!*". Nevertheless, this manifest distinction between the normative restoration practice and the nonstandard transformation presented in UU's unboxing experience does not trivialise this innovation as meaningless. Instead, this innovative presentation has been received

by the public with predominant appreciation, as can be seen in the comments section below this video, which is filled with praise: "*What a great idea! Feel like a time travel!*", "*Recreation beyond time and space!*", "*Bury it in a park and it'll become a relic after 500 years!*", "*Such a creative interpretation of history!*".

Resonating with the appreciation that people have expressed for UU's creative transformation in contrast to the standard practice, participants have dialectically attributed this "rule-breaking" creation to the power of folk creativity, which is understood as inherently not in conflict with the authority's wish for revitalising the tradition and little-known field like archaeology. In their opinions, the creativity emerging from people's seemingly irregular act is complementary and indispensable to the revitalisation of the past, forming a reciprocal relationship between the authority and public in cultural rejuvenation. Just like what Alan (F26) understands the political narratives embedded in museum merchandise, she suggests that museums, as public institutions in China, carry multiple cultural, social and political mission. She also notes that the seemingly irregular creations made by the public can hold equal significance.

> *"I believe one essence of Chinese culture lies in Yin-Yang, while the other lies in the wisdom, courage, and critical thinking that Yin-Yang has inspired in people's capacity of innovation. That's how I see UU's video. That what we've inherited from the past is not some rigid traditions, but the wisdom and capacity to generate something new. […] What we see (UU's creation) is not… to be honest, the credit does not go to the authority, it has more to do with our people – 'masters exist among the ordinary folks'! The authority provides us a platform and what's actually needed is to encourage people to create, not rigidly copy and paste. Especially nowadays that the authority is calling on people to return to the ancients, recommending some classic readings and reminding us not to forget our origin. Even so, it is still necessary to encourage creation." (Alan, F26, Interview)*

The "authority" that Alan mentions in her account is twofold. In one respect, the authority refers to the museum as initiator of archaeological blind box bringing forward a participatory

platform for the public to have a closer interaction with the exclusive heritage practice. In another respect, the authority reflects state's will of national rejuvenation known as Chinese Dream (Wang, 2022a), in which the inheritance of culture and history are given priority. In fact, these two dimensions of authority are interconnected, especially in the context of China where public museums are also received as a political institution run by national and local government. Namely, in addition to their responsibility in preserving and presenting heritage artefacts, museums in China also have their political mission in conjunction with state goals such as promoting the government's ideological and cultural representations and fostering a cohesive and unified heritage narrative. As LT (F24) reflects during the interview:

> *"Museums in China have a strong political role. Very often they are tasked with things like propaganda – spreading ideologies, the party's glorious history, or the great rejuvenation of our nation." (LT, F24, Interview)*

Within this context, what Alan has highlighted about the creation and innovation manifested from people's transformation of the restored replica is in essence the hidden Yin side of the appealed Chinese Dream, which should not be taken lightly because of its insignificance and irregularity in contrast to the museum's political intention and normative rendition as the manifest Yang side. Such awareness resonates with what Aroles *et al.* (2024, p.5) argues about the dialectics of memory work in relation to the notion of history, that "history is not only representation of the past (how things were), but re-presentation of the past (how they are seen to be)". Similarly, Dede (F25) has also highlighted how such irregularities are in fact part of the essence of heritage, manifested as the creative inheritance, interpretation, and transformation of the past in the present. To put it another way, albeit its contradiction with the manifest professional conduct as the bright Yang side of heritage making, people's spontaneous creativity can be perceived as the hidden Yin side which is not trivial but of equal importance, just like what Jilian and UU have done with their blind box.

> *"No doubt this toy (archaeological restoration blind box) has been promoted for its reproduction of professional restoration, the authority (museum) does not insist on the completeness of the result. I mean, if one's got imagination to make it… well, it's absolutely fine if one leaves all those fragments unattended and frame them together for display, no problem with that at all! It's just a toy, and you are not messing with the real thing, and we don't have to follow the regulation step by step, we can do whatever we want. As long as you feel the happiness and achievement after your interaction with it, and you've made something with your own understanding of beauty and the heritage, anything works!" (Dede, F25, Interview)*

Note that in Dede's account "*the authority (museum) does not insist on the completeness of the result*", it is discovered that in this participatory experience Henan Museum as the official provider of this themed product has not presented itself as a serious and supreme authority, judging people's participation with a pair of dogmatic eyes and seeking to guard the integrity of professional practice. On the contrary, Henan Museum has been actively reaching out to the public beyond its enclosed territory. As one may notice that in some unboxing videos, very often the most popular comment (either pinned top by the video producer or at the forefront endorsed by audience's "like") is posted by Henan Museum, just like the one under UU's video where the museum gasped with admiration – "*Oh My God! What am I looking at! This is absolutely gorgeous!*", sending out an encouraging recognition rather than criticising UU for not doing the restoration "right".

Apart from its recognition of the creativity underlying consumers' irregular practice, Henan Museum has also put this recognition into practice by leveraging archaeological blind box as a springboard to nourish people's creativity and patiently wait for its fruition. For instance, at the beginning of 2022, Henan Museum launched a crowdsourcing campaign with a catchy, encouraging slogan "*Unite Creativity, Ignite Brilliance*" to invite the public to join the development of its museum merchandise, with a number of non-monetary incentives promised to ideas with executable value. Similarly, in March 2022, Henan Museum took some public

initiatives on board and came up with related updates to its product lineup to advance people's creative engagement. A gilding package with gold and silver foil papers was introduced as a supplementary kit to facilitate consumers in creatively transforming their excavated replica. With the user guide only covers the instruction on the operation sequence of gilding, consumers are presented with an unrestrained platform to construct their own heritage artefact (Figure 6.3).

> *"It is no secret that there are some hidden dragons and crouching tigers (i.e., undiscovered talents) among you guys. If you have any new ideas about developing museum cultural product, and you can do some basic copywriting, why not putting your ideas down on paper and send it to 'email address' [omitted here as the email belong to product development team]. Once we feel a resonance, we will send our professional colleagues (e.g., our designer and quality controllers, etc.) to form a new project team with you and work together throughout the idea implementation from design to production. For you, while having the very first finished product with 'code 0001' exclusive to you, you will also be awarded with a medal of 'Mastermind of Creativity'. Let's get your creativity shine in 2022!" (promotion copywriting in the blind box journal published on 20th January 2022)*



Figure 6.3: Screenshots from the Blind Box Journal published on 10th March 2022, (content translated by researcher)

Findings in this section resonate with literature concerning the constructive nature of cultural heritage. The emergence of consumer's irregular presentation supports the argument that the public is not merely "passive consumers of the heritage message" (Smith, 2006, p.32) and what the heritage authorities present is just one version of the past through a professional lens (Staiff, 2014). When sharing about his impression of archaeological blind box, Jilian (M22) applies a graphic analogy referring the museum as a tree and its merchandise as its boughs and twigs. In this vein, people's counter-norm conduct is never a meaningless act but nourishment to the growth of this tree. And in recognising and collaborating with this irregularity as farmer attending to the soil (background), the tree (museum) would imbibe more nutrition and further extend the shades through its leafy branches, contributing to the vitality of heritage in the modern context. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the mutuality between the public and authority in the context of consumption.

6.2.2 Opportunity behind the rebellion

The other irregular and even rebellious reception of archaeology that I notice goes into people's unprompted association with tomb robbing. It comes to my awareness that while celebrating this blind box as an accessible alternative to have a closer contact with heritage artefacts and get a taste of archaeology, some participants or video audiences – who are indirect consumers of this blind box – would hold a dissonant interpretation of the staged archaeological immersion. This dissonance is manifested in their association with tomb robbing fantasies. Here, the dissonance lies in the chronic debate and incommensurable publicity between archaeology and tomb robbing in China. While archaeology is known as a study of past human activity and distinguished for its highly specialised conduct and coded language (Richardson and Almansa-Sánchez, 2015), people's perceptions of tomb robbing are comparatively diversified owing to

its entanglement with various media portrayals, rendering tomb robbing as an unlawful act but a captivating fantasy.

To varying extents, academics and authoritative institutions in China have underlined the incomparability between archaeology and tomb robbing. In a nutshell, archaeology and tomb robbing represent two contradictory approaches, or occupations to the exploration of ancient heritage artefacts, with tomb robbing having a detrimental effect on the conduct of archaeology. The phenomenon of tomb robbing in China is objectively linked to the custom of extravagant burials practiced in ancient times. This historical custom is notably widespread, especially among old-time dignitaries such as royalty and nobles, as they would be buried with not only funeral objects such as documentary volume and articles of utilities during their lifetimes, but also articles of luxury such as ritual bronzes, jade, gold, and silver, marking their social status and wealth in this life and expressing expectation for the afterlife. For archaeology researcher, these burial objects, together with the tomb itself usually function as important material evidence for heritage studies so that the continuity of history could be sustained while the future generation could be benefited with a clearer understanding of the past. Yet to the tomb robbers, the economic value possessed by these burial objects far outweighs their cultural and historical significance (Hu, 2008). Their robbing conduct has also been viewed as ethically unacceptable and condemned for its violent disrespect towards the deceased (Bahn, 1984). In this context, the existence of such conflicting and misleading perception seems unreasonable given that archaeological blind box is initiated as a cultural merchandise by a legitimate cultural institution with the aim of promoting traditional culture, demystifying archaeology as a niche discipline, and paying a tribute to the dedicated archaeology workers.

Despite the contrast in intention, the factual distinction offers only a partial and elite narrative and does not fully account for the dissonant perceptions, such as the deliberate association with

tomb robbing found in the consumption of archaeological blind box. As can be seen from the unboxing videos, some players would bring up tomb robbing and joke themselves as "tomb robber" by adopting specific terms and jargons in tomb robbing to describe their actions; concurrently, apart from commenting on the consumer's luck and operation, audiences would also leave comments like "tomb robbing", "jail alert", and "how many years of sentence await" to jokingly associate the recorded unboxing experience with tomb robbing. As proceed with the investigation, I discover that this association mainly originates from two popular tomb robbing fictional book series (i.e., *The Lost Tomb* and *Candle in the Tomb*). By blending Chinese traditional burial culture with features derived from Chinese mystery novel, tomb robbing fiction as a well-known subgenre in contemporary Chinese online reading culture has tasted the sweetness of literary and been adapted into film and television works, going strong among its enthusiasts. As can be seen in HLJ (F27)'s unboxing video, while she was digging the archaeological blind box, HLJ recalled her reading experience of *The Lost Tomb* and talked to the camera about what she remembered about the usage and gripping depiction of Luoyang shovel in that fiction, supported by the fiction's screenshot (Figure 6.4) that she inserted to the soil digging part in her unboxing video afterwards.

> *"I remember reading The Lost Tomb that this Luoyang shovel should be first put up straight and then knocked down, like this (hammering down the shovel with her self-prepared mini hammer). Then the soil brought up can be used to 'Fen Jin Ding Xue' (a jargon in tomb robbing fiction, suggesting how the soil can be used to tell the tomb structure and location of treasure), and tell the dynasty the tomb belongs. Also, the soil extracted can sometimes appear in red, as if it was blended with blood. The Lost Tomb is so good, The Lost Tomb's GOAT (Greatest of all time)!" (HLJ, F27, voiceover in unboxing video)*



Translation by researcher:

Uncle Three crouched down and grabbed a handful of soil, put it under his nose and smelled it. He shook his head, took a few more steps and grabbed another handful, and said “It’s buried too deep, we’ll need a few shovels to see it”.

We connected the threaded pipes and attached the shovel head. Uncle Three stepped some marks on the ground showing us the spot. Dakui first fixed the shovel head then started to hammer down the shovel. Uncle Three put one hand on the pipe to feel the situation underneath. When thirteen sections of the pipe were hammered underground, Uncle Three suddenly said, “There it is!”

We pulled the shovel up section by section, the last one brought up a shovelful of soil. Dakui unloaded the shovelhead and walked over to the bonfire showing us. Uncle Three and I took a look and our faces turned pale at the same time, even Kylin Zhang exclaimed ‘ah’ in shock. It turned out that there was blood-like liquid dripping down from the soil, as if the soil had been dipped in blood.

(Excerpt from Volume I ‘*Cavern of the Blood Zombies*’)

Figure 6.4: Screenshots of HLJ showing the excerpt from the fiction (collage made by researcher).

In a similar fashion, after digging out a buddha figurine from the archaeological blind box, Zola (F25) also considers herself as a certified “Mo Jin Xiao Wei” (“摸金校尉” in Chinese, a classic alias for tomb robbers in the fiction *Candle in the Tomb*). From her point of view, despite its normality and integrity, elite occupation such as archaeology is not as relevant and exciting as irregular presentation like tomb robbing in the literary work, especially when the thrill of tomb robbing depicted in the fiction is infeasible and forbidden in real life. In this view, the contrast between archaeology and tomb robbing to Zola (F25) is not understood based on their factual distinction but feasibility, that if given the chance people would like to vicariously experience something that is more exciting but infeasible in real life.

> *"I think it's no big deal experiencing this archaeological blind box as a process of tomb robbing, for me it doesn't matter. To be honest, for many people archaeology and tomb robbing are bonded, and the difference in-between is only a matter of legality. I bet many would hold the idea that 'well, to put it nicely, I am doing archaeology; but bluntly, I am robbing a tomb.'" (Zola, F25, Interview)*

Comparing with the rigid and exclusive archaeology, fictionalised tomb robbing enables a more intriguing and approachable context for people to vicariously get lost in, particularly through the bold imagination of the characters' adventure and insertion of gripping suspense. In its literary presentation, the illicit nature and destructive consequence of tomb robbing is often omitted selectively with much ink shed over the adventurous world underground and intensive plot highlighting the thrills. Ergo, what arrests readers' eyeballs is the thrilling and supernatural rendition of tomb robbing as an extraordinary adventure, rather than its immoral grounding. Nevertheless, the fascination that the public has for tomb robbing has been received by the heritage authority with a mix of caution and concern. On one hand, these fantastical narratives may spark interest in culture and history, and possibly archaeological exploration with a wider scope of coverage than the conventional, authority-led transmission. On the other hand, such fantasy goes against the authorised discourses and may distort the public's understanding of cultural heritage, leading to irresponsible generalisation such as "archaeologist is legitimate tomb robber" with no consideration of the fundamental difference in between.

Is this fantastical association truly without any merit? If interpreted through the lens of Yin-Yang, reinforcing the dichotomous divide between the legitimate fact and popular fiction may lead to an unconstructive dualism, but viewing them as a duality pair can bring new ideas. In this vein, this association points at an implicit overlap and mutuality between elite culture and popular culture regarding their opposing presence in heritage interpretation (Smith, 1999; Liboriussen and Martin, 2020), represented by the copresence of authority-led archaeology and folk-initiated tomb robbing fantasy as reviewed above. As later shared by Dede (F25) who used

to major in archaeology during her undergraduate study, this association is not exclusive to China because archaeology in the West is also suffering from the theatrical distortion, with the professional being transfigured into fearless "bounty hunter". Ironically, the popularity of tomb robbing fantasy has been productive in bringing archaeology to the front.

> *"Situation abroad is no different than The Lost Tomb, there's Indiana Jones. When I was in my first year of college and we had the fundamental module in archaeology, I remembered that we had a professor mentioning this movie and every student sighed heavily about it, just like what our (Chinese) archaeologists do when hearing the name of The Lost Tomb. You just can't do anything about it, and it happens to be the best publicity despite all the collateral misconceptions." (Dede, F25, Interview)*

This distorted endorsement has also been acknowledged by Henan Museum as the provider of archaeological blind box and an authoritative advocate of archaeology, reluctantly admitting the facilitation resulting from people's voluntary association with tomb robbing to the popularity of archeological blind box.

> *"Although we very much do not want to get involved with those tomb robbing matters, the buzz around them like some popular spin-off TV series, indeed draws attention to archaeology, heritage, and products like ours. Perhaps that's also why our latter launches enjoy less public receptivity, that our restoration blind box, rubbing, gilding and woodblock printing box didn't realise the market effect as good as archaeological blind box did." (Wei, Museum, Interview)*

Interestingly, although Wei is consciously labelling tomb robbing as a negative existence and steering clear of it during the interview, the museum has not wielded its authority over the public hence remained a relatively silent gesture in confronting with this irregular association. Apart from ensuring there is "*no connection with tomb robbing*" in its publicity materials, the museum has not taken any coercive measures to eliminate this rebellious association among the public in playing with archaeological blind box. In recognising the publicity brought by

this tomb robbing fantasy the museum has been conscious of the hidden Yin side of this improper association. Such consciousness paves the way for a reconsideration of the supremacy of an authoritative body in heritage and other relevant fields in the context of consumption, which will be further addressed in the discussion chapter. And thanks to the museum's quiet "relying" as a manifestation of *wuwei*, the hidden forces underneath this association, or the opportunity behind this tomb robbing "crisis" gradually plays out to the benefit of archaeology. For instance, in an unprompted manner, audiences of respondents' unboxing video share their personal understanding of the distinction between tomb robbing and archaeology as a response to other comments with deliberate distortion.

> *"Looks like many in the bullet comments have confused archaeology and tomb robbing. Guys, come on, tomb robbing is done for one's own selfish interest which only cares about the material value of ancient artefacts. Archaeology, on the other hand, not only protects these artefacts, but also employs them as evidence to understand the evolution of Chinese history, treating them as important carriers of our civilisation! Archaeology is way different from tomb robbing! Don't you remember that countless artefacts have been destroyed or lost overseas because of tomb robbing? Seriously, tomb robbing is not as glamorous as depicted in the books." (Comment under the unboxing video shared by Lois, F23)*

The quoted comment above may exaggerate the severity of people's imaginative association which can be playful and harmless, but emergence of such counteractive reaction is not futile. As one manifested achievement of the museum's nonaction, comment as such adds to the mutuality between the authority and the public regarding the popularisation of archaeology in the case of archaeological blind box. To put it another way, unlike the typical one-way dissemination of authoritative definition, interactive communication induced from the ostensibly irregular association can sometimes produce better result. Just like what Dede (F25) and Alan (F26) shared in the interview about their perspectives on the opposite relation between archaeology and tomb robbing, that rather than dwelling on asserting the

unquestionable legitimacy and illegality, it would be more productive for the authority to capitalise on the displayed similarity and allow the disparity to play out at its own pace till it transforms into conducive elements to feed the desired goal.

> *"They (archaeology and tomb robbing) are very alike indeed… and it's hard for people to tell the difference when they have limited access to the proper information, in other words there's not enough publicity about archaeology. Archaeology is more about documentation and conservation, whereas tomb robbing is all about money… But if you popularise this via social media, some will concur and alter their stereotypical perception, while others may just be like – 'What does this have to do with me? Didn't the archaeologist dig someone else's ancestral tomb? They did!' So, it'd be better to utilise what archaeology and tomb robbing have in common and do some targeted dissemination." (Dede, F25, Interview)*

> *"'It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice' (a famous saying by Deng Xiaoping, former state leader of China), if the tomb-robbing literature goes viral, just face it. But ride with the wave at the same time, take it as an opportunity to promote archaeology! It will be impossible to remove subject like tomb-robbing from the market, because people just find it interesting, you can't just erase it for good. The key is to make the most of it. The water that bears the boat is the same that swallows it up. If it (tomb-robbing) has people's attention, then seize the opportunity to promote something more worthy of attention." (Alan, F26, Interview)*

Taken together, regardless of their radical difference, the copresence of archaeology and tomb robbing as found in the experience of archaeological blind box reflects an implicit Yin-Yang interplay concerning the mutuality between elite and popular culture embedded therein. The substantial public interest in tomb robbing fantasy has much to do with the fact that archaeology as a professional trade has been kept away from the public hence been received as cognitively ungraspable and hard to empathise. As such, it is not uncommon that people would turn to their imagination and associate the unfamiliar archaeology with something that is more related to them in a personal way to assist their experience (Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014).

Association in this circumstance is not of no importance because the popularity of tomb robbing fantasy is an implicit reflection of the public's curiosity of archaeology and desire to explore more, and clearly the way that these fantasies are crafted and promoted works better than the normative presentation of archaeology. Within this context, for museum as the authority, perhaps the most workable coping mechanism for this tomb robbing complication is relying, to let the association take its course and feed back to archaeology in due manner. Just like what Yu the Great (Dayu, the legendary sovereign of the Xia Dynasty in ancient China) did in controlling the flood, that rather than taking a head-on confrontation with the floods, he leveraged the terrain underneath the water (i.e., the hidden Yin) to guide the flood (i.e., the manifest Yang) to flow into the farmland where water is desired and gradually attenuated the damage caused by the flood (Wang, 2012). Implications derived from the "relying" in this case is also considered in the discussion chapter, where practical connections to the working style of the authority are further developed.

6.3 Actions of Nonaction

In connection with the idea of "relying", Henan Museum as a curatorial authority and producer of archaeological blind box is found as adaptive in the strategic measures it has taken in embodying the hidden dynamics and opportunities (Yin) underlying people's consumption of museum merchandise. In this section I focus on how Henan Museum as authoritative institution are actively adjusting its representation of the past to go with the flow, particularly when it comes to a series of actions taken by the museum in its development of archaeological blind box. This is found as in sync with what Waterton, Watson and Silverman (2017, p.4) suggest about the creation of cultural heritage is constantly evolving, "always bringing the past into the present through historical contingency and strategic appropriation, deployment, redeployment, and creation of connections and reconnections".

What is notable here is the museum's adaptability to the market and proactive reliance on the public, intersecting with its interpretation of the past. Efforts have been made by Henan Museum from different aspects to adapt into the public flow, and I conceive of these efforts as three connected "actions of nonaction" in consistent with the mindset of *wuwei*. The first action, *aligning*, refers to how the museum stays attuned to the popular trends and proactively adjusting its offerings to the shifting public interests. The second action, *responding*, indicates how the museum actively responds to the public's feedback and draws inspiration from its dialogue with the public to enrich its offerings. The third action, *merging*, highlights how the museum identifies the relevance that its collection has with the public's lifeworld and integrates such relevance into its offerings.

Aligning. Rather than exerting its authority over the consumers to force people to accept the official-led interpretation and commodification of the past, Henan Museum has displayed great receptiveness to the public's hidden ingenuity while actively reaching out to the public to construct the manifestation of the past in a collaborative way.

> *"What we are doing now is not just about museum culture, it's more about traditional culture. And in the process of promoting traditional culture, we are also exploring different patterns and see which one is more acceptable for the public. For instance, if the content presented in the exhibition hall is too obscure, then we hope that through the presentation of our product, people could generate an experience and get to know a story, and consequently get a taste of the cultural relics. This can be an effective way, and also an objective that we are trying to achieve." (Wei, Museum, Interview)*

As stated by Wei, staff working at Henan Museum who oversees the brand management of museum merchandise, the development of archaeological blind box is not simply a unilateral delivery or selected presentation targeted at the public so that they could have an idea of what is kept inside the museum. Instead, it is more about stimulating people's motivation to actively engage with the past and tradition and further come up with their own interpretation of heritage.

This also marks an adaptive awareness that the museum has towards its orientation in heritage making, that despite its certified "authority", the museum is in essence a partaker in the process of heritage making, rather than an unchallengeable figure that dominates all. To this end, while fulfilling its established responsibility in research and preservation, Henan Museum has also been keeping an eye on the market and actively interacting with the public to ensure its top-down representation can be constructively tied in with the bottom-up interpretation. For instance, archaeological blind box at its primary stage was not as popular as it became over time. One decisive factor for its later virality goes to the museum's adaptive adoption of blind box as its reorientation in the consumption market. As informed by Wei (Museum) during the interview, the initial positioning of archaeological blind box was not related to blind box, it only become viral after they adjusted its orientation by aligning the excavation-led plaything with the trending modality at that moment, which is the blind box. According to Baidu Index (2024), blind box in China emerges as an innovative consumption modality in 2019 and has quickly swept over China as a rising star in the following years. On the strength of blind box's inviting nature and popularity among the young generation, archaeological blind box as a variation soon grabs the attention of the public after its launch. Just as what NC (F20) highlights during the interview, that she was at first only aiming at buying the blind box but attracted by the uncommon theme of archaeology.

> *"At first, we set this product only as a digging toy, and public's reaction to it has been noticeably tepid. But when blind box went viral in 2019, we came to realise the potential similarity between blind box and our product, so we brought up the concept – 'archaeological blind box', and we are the first one to do that." (Wei, Museum, Interview)*

> *"I don't know much about museums before, but I'm really into blind box and I buy a lot of them. I came to know this kind (archaeological bind box) when I was browsing online – searching for blind box, and I just found it interesting, so I gave it a go. Such*

a clever move, you know, having this sort of attempt in creating cultural product – combining the old thing with the in-thing at the moment, very tuned-in." (NC, F20, Interview)

On the basis of the success of archaeological blind box, Henan Museum further brings up a pioneering notion coined as "dynamic development of cultural and creative product" ("动态文创" in Chinese). This notion, while being referred by Wei in the interview as the iterative refinement of archaeological blind box based on feedback collected from various channels, is essentially a reflection of the museum's awareness to engage with the public rather than ignoring people's opinions as if they were irrelevant.

"We've been continuously modifying the blind box by taking into consumer's feedback. Eight iterations have been made to the appearance of the box. Apart from that, other elements, such as the box's 'identity card' and the 'treasure catalogue' added afterwards, all (inspirations) of them come from the interactions we've had with the consumers. And later we define that as 'dynamic development of cultural and creative product', closely in connection with the increase of consumer engagement." (Wei, Museum, Interview)

Responding. Acting in parallel with its proactive alignment is the constructive communication that museum has with the public as documented in the blind box journal. Developed by Henan Museum as a tri-monthly bulletin, this journal appears as a channel of communication offering latest news about the product development (i.e., launch of new series) and updating the follow-up of museum's response to consumer's feedback. As indicated in the first issue of this journal, Henan Museum explains to the public about the concept "dynamic development" as part of its initiative in launching archaeological blind box and makes explicit about the central role that consumers play in the development of archaeological blind box. By wittingly applying a strikethrough to hide its "true" intention as in promoting the sale of the product, the museum further softens its authoritative image through this humorous expression. This approach

essentially reflects how the museum adapts to the consumption-driven context, with the intention of engaging with the public in a constructive way.

> *"This archaeological blind box is the first product developed by '豫博文创' (Yubo Wenchuang, brand name of museum merchandise in Henan Museum) using the concept '动态文创' (dynamic development of cultural and creative product). The product will be adjusted and iterated constantly based on your continuous feedback. For your convenience, we will update this journal on a regular basis. We hope that through these journals, many of your questions will be answered (~~and spark a strong desire in you to make a purchase~~)." (Quote from the first issue published on 10th April 2021, original strikethrough)*

As reviewed in earlier section, Henan Museum has paid close attention on public response to its offerings (e.g., the publicly shared unboxing video) and has been open-minded to people's diverse conducts regardless of its compliance with the convention. In treating the public's feedback as an important indicator of its product development, Henan Museum has been attentive to consumers' post-purchase sharing and actively taken advice therefrom. For example, as published in the journal on the 10th of July 2021, an illustrated post published by a Weibo user advising a more detailed introduction of the embedded artefact was featured by Henan Museum (note: Weibo is a popular social media platform in China, sharing some similarities with X – previously known as Twitter), followed by corresponding actions made by the museum. Similar improvements such as adding bilingual illustration (20th April 2021) and adjusting the release probability of certain replicas in the archaeological blind box (10th December 2021 and 21st March 2022) can also be found in the journal. The museum would also provide feedback to the public through the journal, acknowledging the receipt of advice and updating the measures taken in response to the advice respectively.

> *"Yesterday, one of our 'archaeology officers' @FYFC posted on Weibo sharing some suggestions about the introduction of individual artefact presented on the product*

brochure with detailed illustration and sincere words, showing great devotion to this creation. Our copywriting team is currently working on these suggestions point by point. Given the fact that heritage research is in a process of continuous advancement, some expressions will be revised based on the latest research findings, this is also what we are trying to convey through promoting the communication of heritage and history. Many thanks to this archaeology officer's invaluable advice, we will treat it with greatest care. Once the advice got adopted, we wish to express our appreciation through a humble gift. We are also eagerly looking forward to your frank expression, the more the merrier!" (Quote from the journal published on 10th July 2021)

It is worth noting that in this quote rather than using the pragmatic label "consumer/customer", the museum has adopted a more cheerful name – "archaeology officer" to address the players of archaeological blind box. Without being specifically announced, this appellation is put in use together with the initiatory issue of the blind box journal and used consistently to the present day. Appellation as such puts the public on an equal footing with the museum and facilitates the public to generate a sense of recognition and autonomy to treat their consumption as meaningful involvement, reflecting the museum's awareness of the hidden facet of consumer being not merely a "empty, passive vessels waiting to be filled" by the official presentation (Mason, 2004, p.67), but active generator of the contemporary meaning of heritage. As such, the museum sees the Yin side of the public in heritage making and contributes to its conversion (to Yang).

Merging. Henan Museum has also been working on enhancing the relevance of not only its collection but its merchandise with current affairs in public's everyday life. Allowing by its abundant collections, Henan Museum is equipped with great flexibility to pair the replica inside archaeological blind box with topical discussion at the time. For instance, in June 2021, having the annual nation-wide college entrance examination once again becomes the focus of the whole society, Henan Museum added two limited editions under the theme of exam to its archaeological blind box available in the market, with the replicas inside being its collected

bronze mirrors date back to Ming Dynasty, both engraved with blessings pertinent to the situation (Figure 6.5). In the promotional introduction of this themed addition, the museum also adopts a homophonic pun to further integrate the official interpretation with good wishes for the students taking the national exam (i.e., the pronunciation of "mirror" – "jing" in Chinese is the same with a keyword in an ancient Chinese proverb expressing strong faith in success). Similar promotions can also be spotted in other special occasions such as Chinese New Year (with the specific Chinese zodiac of the year) and Mid-Autumn Festival. Adaptation as such reflects the effort that the authority makes seeking to connect with the public by replacing the authorised gloss attached to the ancient artefacts with pro-public discourse in the present (Waterton, Watson and Silverman, 2017).

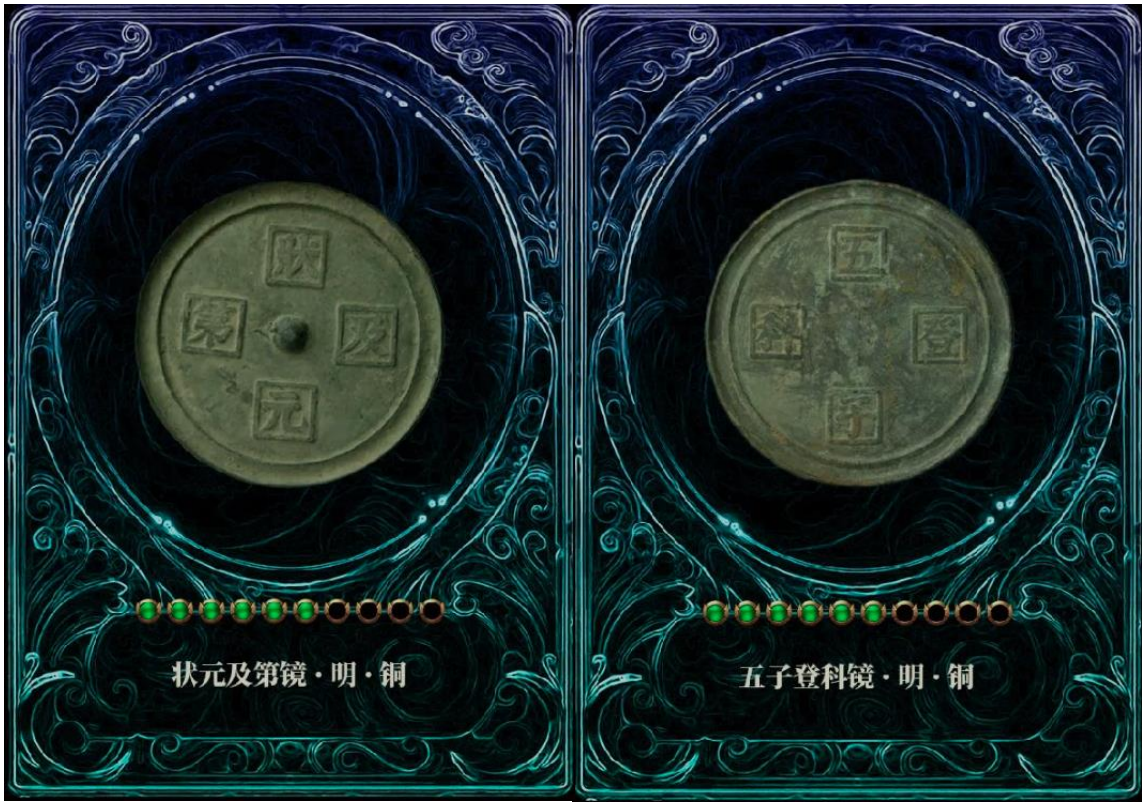


Figure 6.5: Heritage identity card (cited from the blind box journal published on 10 June 2021)
Left: the inscription on the mirror is "状元及第" ("Top scholar in the imperial exam"), symbolising fame and wealth.
Right: the inscription on the mirror is "五子登科" ("All five sons passing the imperial exam"), expressing good wishes.

Meanwhile, Henan Museum have also been working on blending its merchandise with broader consumption scenarios. As documented in the blind box journal published on 20th May 2021,

an unofficially recognised but popular Valentines' Day in modern China, Henan Museum shares a story of one "archaeology officer" adapting the blind box into a prop of his marriage proposal, and comments as follow: "*This action is full of creation and sincerity. Having your path crossed with a man who entrusts his past (= treasure), present (= wedding ring), and future (= promise) to you, could it get any more blissful than this!*". Inspired by this creative and earnest experience, five months later, Henan Museum launched an individualised service in making "exclusive emotion blind box". Consumers can specify their preferred soil (extracted from appointed location), external packaging, and the embedded content of the blind box as a gift to its target recipient. This customised offering receives wide attention after its release and is reported by national media as a novel extension of cultural consumption. Diversification like this not only enriches the museum's profile as an authoritative institution and extends the application of archaeological blind box to a broader context, but also presents an expressive affinity between the tradition and innovation, and between exclusive expertise and ordinary everyday life.

To sum up, in this section I have presented how Henan Museum as a traditionally authoritative heritage institution engages constructively with the public and organically adapts its practice in response to the dynamics in the consumption society. By proposing the notion "dynamic development of cultural and creative product", Henan Museum combines the development and refinement of archaeological blind box with public experience and feedback. It has also flexibly worked on adjusting its product line based on consumer feedback while enriching the public relevance of their product. In going with the public flow, Henan Museum has manifested great adaptability and developed a reciprocal relationship with the public through its "actions of nonaction".

6.4 Chapter Review

Thus far, in this chapter I have approached the mutuality between the authority and the public in heritage making by looking into their reception of the dissonance emerging from heritage consumption in the case of archaeological blind box. Drawing on the Yin-Yang informed *wuwei* mindset, the irregularity manifested from consumer's counter-norm action on the blind box (Yang) was constructively embraced with an awareness of the embodied creativity (Yin). Similarly, the rebellious association with tomb robbing (Yang) was also embraced with the recognition of its embodied opportunities in promoting archaeology (Yin). It is also discovered that in acknowledging the hidden merits of these dissonance, consumers are actively offering suggestions to the museum on deploying the disparity and turning it into chances of breakthrough, such as the publicity brought by the tomb robbing fantasy. Correspondingly, museum as the authoritative institution is not putting itself as the unchallengeable antithesis to the public, rather, it adopts an open mind (i.e., dynamic development of cultural and creative product) and treats the public as equal contributor to the making of heritage through the agency of consumption. In this vein, I synthesise three "actions of nonaction" based on the museum's practice in developing archaeological blind box, showing how the museum goes with the flow facing the uncontrolled dynamics in heritage consumption.

In this context, the mutuality between authority and the public presents a two-way *wuwei* (nonaction). It does not indicate the passive tolerance and acceptance of the disparity, rather, it bears the awareness of the hidden potential underneath the disparity and allows it to subtly run its course without forcing it to take shape. It is about going with the flow and creating a facilitative and reciprocal context to let things grow, generate, and transform on their own. In a sense, *wuwei* can be understood as a different form of *Qi* harmonisation with a focus on Yin as the hidden background, which in this case is the unpredictable dynamics emerging from

people's consumption of museum merchandise. The fruit of *wuwei*, accordingly, rendered as the manifestation of the *Qi*, arises from the interplay between the authority and public in the consumption of museum merchandise.

The next chapter will summarise this thesis and present a discussion of the research findings. It will also reflect on the theoretical contribution and practical implication of this study, while addressing the research limitation and suggesting directions for future research.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Motivated by an interest in the growing appeal of museum merchandise, this thesis was set out on a journey of exploring the uncharted intricacy of binary dynamics in the context of heritage consumption with the following research questions in mind: “why would people consume the inauthentic despite knowing its inauthenticity?”, “in what way does the consumption of museum merchandise contribute to the vitality of cultural heritage in the contemporary world?”. In reviewing the literature, this study first recontextualised the consumption of museum merchandise as a manifestation of heritage making. It then referred to the studies in heritage consumption to highlight and problematise the experiential dynamics (i.e., the pursuit of authenticity) therein. With the context getting clearer, a theoretical framework was further constructed based on Yin-Yang thinking, enabling a transformative lens to understand the constructive interplay between the binary oppositions. Through a qualitative inquiry into the consumption of archaeological blind box as an empirical case addressing the research questions, data analysis reveals archaeological blind box as a constructive intermedium. A multifold Yin-Yang space in connection with heritage making was identified based on the research findings. While presenting itself as the middle ground for opposing elements to gather and interact, this Yin-Yang space also serves as the seedbed for heritage vitality, emerging from the dynamic interplay of the opposing forces. Theoretically, this study distinctly enriches the discourse on heritage making and challenges the prevailing dualistic mindset in marketing and consumer research. Building on the earlier reviewed literature, this study advances current thinkings on authenticity and (consumer-)object relations by integrating the Yin-Yang space into the interpretation, so that the opposites can be organically unified through their synergetic generativity. Practical implications are offered, and future research agendas are proposed for the field of marketing and beyond. These are elaborated in the following sections.

7.1 Discussion of Research Findings

Why would people consume the inauthentic? Why would people be so fond of archaeological blind box knowing it as nothing but a made-for-sale replication of something more authentic? And what does that mean for the vital existence of cultural heritage in the contemporary world? Through an interpretivist inquiry into the consumption of museum merchandise in relation to heritage making, a multifold Yin-Yang space takes shape, in which the museum merchandise plays a significant part in uniting the binary oppositions and facilitating the vitality of cultural heritage to play out in tension. Findings indicate that while people are consuming the deemed "inauthentic" museum merchandise, they are enjoying the "authentic" at the same time. But instead of having a distinct attribution of (in)authenticity, or other binary opposites found in the analysis, what this study informs is a duality-oriented mindset, addressing the subtle interwovenness between the binary opposites and calling attention to the generative and fluid mutuality in-between, as in the dynamic harmonisation and flow of the *Qi* (vitality) of heritage.

In the context of heritage making, one striking feature of this Yin-Yang space formed on the museum merchandise is its constructive embracement of divergence and contradiction. The rationale behind the formation of such space, together with the mechanism of action behind the dynamics within this space, have much to do with the three principles underpinning Yin-Yang thinking. In this space, binary opposites are not viewed as unconstructive hence treated in a separate way. Instead, they are understood as inherently correlated and serve a shared goal in creating a more profound whole (*principle of holism*), which in this study would refer to the harmonisation of *Qi* (vitality) in heritage making. The realisation of this profound whole, at the same time, relies on the mutuality between these opposites with their divergence maintained rather than removed, as the removal of divergence indicates the loss of constituent parts, which would lead to the incompleteness of the profound whole and disturb the flow of *Qi*. Specifically,

this mutuality is underpinned by the acknowledgement of the interdependence, interpenetration, and complementarity between the opposites (*principle of contradiction*). It goes hand in hand with the developmental perspective that one has taken in viewing these opposites (*principle of change*). In other words, the mutuality between the opposites is not constructed solely on their current divergence but future synergy, because the divergence in the present can become a facilitation in the future with a change in context. It is because of this future-oriented mindset that opposing elements in this Yin-Yang space are embraced with a constructive look.

As informed by the research findings, the carefully curated museum artefacts and mass-produced blind box replica are united in this Yin-Yang space, regardless of their opposition in the conventional authentic-inauthentic divide. Their coexistence has much to do with how participants leverage on the non-contradictory tension between the physical form (tangibility) and abstract meanings (intangibility) as a pair of inseparable Yin-Yang constituents in heritage making, highlighting the reciprocal mutuality therein. For instance, participants find it hard to connect with the museum artefacts in the absence of a concrete access, hence arrive at a feeling of "lifelessness" despite the presented cultural and historical significance. To put differently, participants struggle to deploy the museum exhibits as widely recognised authentic resources from the past to construct their interpretation of heritage in the present. They recognise a trace of inauthenticity within the alleged authentic, hinting at a not-so-separated divide between the authentic and inauthentic. In contrast, by complementing the absent tangibility in the meaning-making process, archaeological blind box as a palpable intermedium enables the participants to have an artificial yet intimate and engaging contact with those allegedly authentic artefacts that is received as inaccessible and lifeless. Through their hands-on involvement, participants manage to materialise the once ungraspable meaning into the tangible product details (e.g., the artificial patina on the replica) and update the replica with a personal significance which sublimes its mass-produced quality. Moreover, it is worth noting that for some participants, the

“authentic” museum artefacts only become alive after they have realised a substitutive touch via the “inauthentic” replica; likewise, the authenticity of the replica also partly depends on the virtual endorsement of its reference inside the museum. As such, the distinct opposition between the authentic and inauthentic, the tangible and intangible is further blurred, as both require its opposite side to support its integrity.

In a similar fashion, the blurring division between binary oppositions can also be found in the reciprocal interplay between the expert and nonexpert as revealed in the case of archaeological blind box. With archaeology as a typical practice in heritage making being adapted from an elusive expertise into an engaging experience through the agency of blind box, attention on the authentic archaeology practice is subsequently brought to the fore. As presented in the finding chapter, while receiving comments on their operation with a reference to the expert practice, participants themselves would also compare their amateurish participation with the professional one. Although it has been argued that the awareness of incompetence can frustrate public participation in heritage making (Schofield, 2014), it is later revealed that comparison or divergence is not understood as entirely restrictive. What really matters in this Yin-Yang space is the reciprocity between the expert and nonexpert based on their difference. In other words, it is through the presentation of irregular and unprofessional operation that people are motivated to find out what normative and professional operation could be. In return, through such comparison, authentic archaeological expertise is provided with an accessible channel to be received by a wider audience, rather than being confined to the ivory tower or disseminated in a didactic and ineffective way. This would also involve details that might be omitted or marginalised in conventional communication of such expertise (e.g., archaeological report). In this sense, an authentic archaeological immersion is not necessarily subject to the command of expertise or correctness of operation. Rather than viewing their recreational immersion with archaeological blind box as inferior to the professional practice in-house, participants of this

research value their amateurish involvement as of equal importance and authenticity to the expert operation, for both are conducive to the vitality of heritage in the sense of active meaning transmission (Farrelly, Kock and Josiassen, 2019). Meanwhile, it is via their bodily awareness of incompetence that some participants managed to develop an empathy for the professionals and come to the awareness that the expert-nonexpert divide is not moot, because we need the experts for their epistemic authority and trained capability to sustain the field (Munoz-Vinaz, 2023)

Additionally, facilitated by the archaeological blind box as a participatory intermedium, the findings have also shown that heritage as a constructive process of meaning-making can be revealed in diverse and even contradictory forms. For example, although people's arbitrary transformation of the replica and rebellious association with tomb robbing in consuming the archaeological blind box may run counter to the authorised rules and beliefs, these behaviours are not irrelevant to the making of heritage. As addressed by Robinson and Silverman (2015, p.26), the meaning of heritage is not confined to the authority-led interpretation and regulated practice, but also in connection with "how it is received, understood, talked about, looked at, circulated, ignored, and loved in the interconnected world and our own lived realities". In this sense, the irregular transformation of replica can be interpreted as a life-giving action through which the consumer creates liveliness within the lifelessness, revitalising the dormant heritage stock (e.g., museum artefacts) and enriching its contemporary meanings with something new. Similarly, the fantasised connection with tomb robbing also directs at a playful connection that people have constructed between the past and the present, despite its contrast with the legitimate archaeological discourse. It is also understood by the participants as an effective way-out for the authority to improve the publicity of archaeology, pointing at a reciprocal mutuality with a developmental look.

Last but not least, while underlining the mutuality between the binary opposites emerging from the consumption experience of the archaeological blind box, this research has also addressed the generative power embodied in the balanced copresence of binary oppositions, namely, the generation of *Qi* as the emerging thirdness of this binary interplay. For instance, in Chapter Four, rather than dwelling on the difference between the replica at hand and artefact inside the museum for their plausible (in)authenticity in substance and meanings, participants care more about their synergy in invigorating the whole, as can be seen from the reported meaningfulness and enhanced heritage awareness as part of their reception of archaeological blind box. This synergy has been rendered as an ongoing and iterative harmonisation of *Qi* in heritage making, where people intuit, gather, nurture, and unify the *Qi* emerging from the dynamic interplay between the tangible and intangible dimension of heritage making. Likewise, in Chapter Five, focusing on the harmonisation of archaeology as an expertise embedded in archaeological blind box, I put the expert and nonexpert as a pair of inseparable and complementary duality, and spotlight the mutual support, balanced communication, and embodied empathy in-between. It is through this harmonious duality that heritage as a constructive process is brimming with *Qi* in its smooth and organic flow. Lastly, in Chapter Six, drawing on the mutuality between the authority and public when confronted with dissonance in consuming archaeological blind box, I expand further on the flow of *Qi* by underlining the latent potential in the explored dissonance. I also reflect on three "actions of nonaction" as the museum's strategic move as part of its synergy with the public.

7.2 Theoretical Contribution

By applying Yin-Yang thinking to the exploration of the binary dynamics in heritage making in the context of museum merchandise consumption, the principal theoretical contribution of this thesis is its indigenous perspective in interpreting elements in dichotomous relation as non-

contradictory oppositions with generative power. This thesis makes significant contribution to three key areas of literature, namely heritage making, the quest for authenticity in marketing and consumption, and (subject-)object relation in consumer research. But before moving on to the specific contribution by area, it would be necessary to first spell out the overarching implication brought by Yin-Yang as an indigenous philosophy and how it differs from others that are also informative and transformative.

7.2.1 Yin-Yang thinking as an indigenous (binary) lens

Application of indigenous knowledge to update the research field which was once inundated with Western philosophies and traditions is not new. Particularly in marketing research where consumption as one central subject of inquiry is in itself bounded in cultural value and open to interpretation with different cultural orientations. Nearly forty years ago, Ilmonen (1985, p.415) argued that research in consumption should not be separated from its pertinent cultural context as "consumption does not take place in an economic and social vacuum". A special issue in *Marketing Theory* later restated this point, highlighting the Western bias in marketing research, and reinforced the necessity of paying attention to the non-Western half as a less-visited field with insights that could promote the communication across different cultural contexts (Jafari *et al.,* 2012).

Various non-Western wisdoms have been brought to the table in the past decades and enriched our understanding of consumer culture which used to be dominated by Western tradition of thoughts known as being linear, rational, and dualistic (Gu and Guo, 2015). One notable source of these non-Western wisdoms is the East, represented by nations such as China, India and Japan, providing indigenous thoughts with ontological, epistemological and methodological implications. For example, with a reference to the Japanese folk knowledge featured by the consumption of the energy *ki* (i.e., an adapted version of Chinese concept *Qi* in Chinese Yin-

Yang philosophy), Minowa (2012) proposes a theoretical model depicting the transcendental consumption ritual. By presenting how metaphorical interpretation in folk knowledge affects people's consumption of ritual such as New Year ceremony, the author updates the existing knowledge which presents ritual as static and linear with a holistic and dynamic perspective, underlining the ritual's synchronicity and diachronicity. Similarly, focusing on mindfulness as a popular concept in consumer research especially in the field of tourism, Chen, Scott and Benckendorff (2017) introduce a term of "meditative mindfulness" with a perspective developed from a Buddhist philosophy. Drawing on the present-oriented and non-judgemental awareness of being aware, they shed light on the nuances (e.g., detached meditation) in mindful tourism that can be seen as mindless if follow a Western tradition which cares more about active involvement and cognitive distinction. In so doing, attention is directed to the inner transformative power of humans and complements previous research which mainly focuses on the external stimuli that trigger people to learn and reflect. More recently, developing on the philosophical concept "nothingness" from the Kyoto School, Preece, Rojas-Gaviria and Rodner (2023) propose a "selfless epistemology" to transcend the opposition between the researcher (subject) and the researched (object) owing to the dualistic tradition in tourism research. Through a recursive process of (re)construction and deconstruction, the "double-eyes" come into play and enable the researchers to enter the field with a selfless self.

In a similar fashion, this thesis has also built on this indigenous stream by implementing Yin-Yang thinking as the enabling lens in exploring the consumption of museum merchandise. Although Yin-Yang thinking has received increasing attention in management and organisation studies for the strategic angle it provides in handling managerial tension and paradox (see Chen, 2002; Smith and Lewis, 2011; Li, 2016b; Chin *et al.*, 2018), rarely has it been applied in the consumption field to revisit the entrenched tradition or key concepts. In this respect, the present study is one of the first attempts to apply Yin-Yang thinking in the context of consumption.

Notably, what Yin-Yang enables in this thesis is a different angle to appreciate, rather than depreciate the controversial binary opposition. By viewing the opposite elements as mutually dependent, inclusive and complementary, and co-constitutive to a more organic and vital whole, Yin-Yang thinking facilitates researchers to take a cyclic yet developmental perspective to leverage on the binary opposition as constructive duality, rather than the restrictive dualism.

Binary thinking has been an entrenched tradition in Western metaphysics, and it is often formed in an imbalanced constitution with "one term is privileged at the expense of the other" (Bruner, 1994, p.398). Within this context, researchers have been busy destablising the dualism, seeking to bring "justice" to the field. For instance, with a recognition of the importance of "meaning" in symbolic consumption and consumer culture theory, Lanier and Rader (2016) call attention to the silenced "meaninglessness" by proposing an "anti-synthetic space" as the locus of consumption between the meaning and meaninglessness. Using Derrida's deconstruction as a strategic approach and popular culture consumption (i.e., digital fandom) as a typical symbolic consumption that privileges meaning as the core constitutive force that drives consumption, they reevaluate the opposition between meaning and meaninglessness and highlight the irresolvable tensions in-between. In their accounts, consumption is inherently dissonant and cannot be found "in either functions or symbols, but lies somewhere in the nebulous time and space between something and nothing" (Lanier and Rader, 2016, p.25).

This thesis believes that Yin-Yang offers a transformative perspective to interpret the binaries. While Lanier and Rader (2016) have advanced our knowledge beyond dualistic thinking by creating an interspace, demonstrating how binary elements can coexist without compromise and contribute to consumption practice, it remains unclear how such polarities – namely meaning and meaninglessness, presence and absence, or something and nothing – collaborate with each other inside this anti-synthetic space. Moreover, by underlining the anti-synthetic

feature of this coexisting space, they are reinforcing the dualistic impression that these opposite elements are inherently mutual-exclusive. Alternatively, if put under the Yin-Yang framework and replace this anti-synthetic space with the Yin-Yang space which holds a duality view, one would realise that while the tension between meaning and meaninglessness is kept in this Yin-Yang space, these two opposing elements are not entirely incompatible as fire and water. For instance, the identified ambiguity of presence and ambiguity of absence in the context of online fan fiction can be interpreted as the interpenetrated Yin and Yang, which are in opposition but still require each other for integrity – just like the contradictory yet mutual promoting archaeology and tomb robbing in nurturing the popularity of archaeological blind box. Such interpenetration can be one explanation of the perpetual generation of fan fiction which is not aiming at eliminating the ambiguity but building on it to generate something new (e.g., the production of new narratives based on the unresolved issues in existing fan fiction). This momentum of generation, left unattended in the previously proposed anti-synthetic space, can be rendered as the *Qi* of fan fiction consumption, rising from the tensional but constructive interplay between the meaning and meaningless. It is neither the meaning nor meaninglessness, but their inseparable and generative interplay that sustains the life force of fandom consumption.

To put it succinctly, when addressing the limitation imposed by entrenched dualistic thinking, unlike studies which either direct attention to the once disadvantaged half or create a new space to accommodate the binary tension without transcending the incompatibility, Yin-Yang takes a duality view and sees the opposites as not only co-constitutive but also generative. In the sections that follow, the theoretical implication of Yin-Yang thinking will be discussed in turn, presenting how such duality view can enhance our thinking in heritage making, (in)authenticity, and (subject-)object relation.

7.2.2 Revisiting heritage making with a Yin-Yang lens

> *"Heritage is not simply about the past; it is vitally about the present and future. A heritage that is disjoined from ongoing life has limited value. Heritage involves continual creation and transformation. We can make heritage by adding new ideas to old ideas. Heritage is never merely something to be conserved or protected, but rather to be modified and enhanced. Heritage atrophies in the absence of public involvement and public support."* (Palmer, 2009, p.8)

Just like what Palmer (2009) has beautifully summarised above, as a fusion of the past, present and future, heritage is always in its becoming, blending the old with the new. "Not everything is heritage, but anything could become heritage" (Howard, 2003, p.7). As established in the literature review, the interpretive focus of heritage has evolved from focusing on the concrete and certified *being* to emphasising the discursive and participatory *becoming*. Wielding Yin-Yang thinking as the enabling lens, this research, while supporting the processual accounts in heritage making, has enhanced our understanding on the dynamics therein. Specifically, this would refer to the Yin-Yang space that this study has constructed to accommodate the distinct elements in heritage making which used to be perceived as mutually exclusive. Insights as such contribute to the ongoing critical discussion around heritage as a Western construct (Winter, 2014), and respond to what Skrede and Hølleland (2018, p.89) have reminded us about the creation of heritage that "we have yet a distance to go before the tangible, intangible, discursive and affective aspects of heritage are succinctly treated as a complementary rather than oppositional".

Despite its common presentation as a past existence, heritage is inherently a modern product at the service of the present (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996) and unfolds itself as a process of meaning-making available to all kinds of people. Drawing on the consumption experience of archaeological blind box as a representative museum merchandise, this research comes to the

awareness that cultural heritage, interpreted as a constitutive process, in fact, plays out in the constructive tension among antithetical elements which may appear as irreconcilable at first sight. Accordingly, heritage consumption can also be interpreted with a formative outlook as a democratic branch of heritage making, that what people consume is not the "what" of heritage, but the "how". To put differently, in consuming the heritage, consumers are creating heritage at the same time.

This study makes an important contribution to critical heritage studies by highlighting the mutuality between tangibility and intangibility in heritage making. Without a doubt the interpretive focus from the tangible to intangible has effectively unchained heritage making from the restrictions such as authenticity, temporality and monumentality derived from the dominance of physicality (Smith, 2006). However, if interpreted with the lens of Yin-Yang, such transition is in essence an attempt seeking to transcend or avoid the established binary categories in heritage making at the price of ignoring the constructive dynamics generated in-between. Although Smith (2006, p.83) did mention that "it is the tension between action and material representation that is an important element of heritage", she did not further investigate this tension in detail, as in how such tension contributes to the formation of heritage. In this respect, this study enhances to the understanding of this tension by highlighting the mutuality therein and presenting tangibility as essential in heritage making for its synergistic interaction with the intangibility, which contributes to the harmonious flow of the heritage's *Qi* (vitality). By underlining the palpable "helping hand" that material elements have lent to the ungraspable meanings attached to the ancient artefact and the personal feelings evoked from participant's embodied involvement in the case of archaeological blind box (i.e., the "gathering" and "nurturing" in Chapter Four), this study explicates how the material affectivity embedded in "things" can shape the creation of heritage (Pétursdóttir, 2013; Harrison, 2013), rather than being used as a silenced tool supporting the heritage creator's subjective action (Smith, 2006).

This study has also addressed the reciprocal connection between the expert and nonexpert in engaging with the expertise (archaeology) involved in heritage making. While commending the efforts that researchers have made in criticising expert dominance over heritage discourse (Smith, 2006; Schofield, 2014), this study comes to the awareness that this democratic inclination has failed to address the mutuality between the expert and nonexpert in heritage making, especially in the context of heritage consumption. By looking into the dynamics in the Yin-Yang space constructed on the consumption of archaeology, this study explicates the reciprocity between the expert and nonexpert. As presented in Chapter Five, the interaction between the expert and nonexpert in engaging with archaeology as a niche expertise embedded in a mass-marketed blind box gives rise to an intriguing in-betweenness. It presents how ungraspable expertise can be capitalised as a competitive advantage and a constructive pathway for the nonexpert to actively participate in heritage making; and in return, how nonexpert participation can facilitate the communication and publicity of expert presentation and discourse. What's more, such in-betweenness points at an intermediate zone in which the identity of the stakeholder is fluid, hybrid, and even transformative when interpreted in the context of consumption. Insights as such prompt research to reconsider the expert-nonexpert separation in heritage making and hold the potential to foster a new form of expertise that transcends the designated professional boundaries.

It is worth noting that although the mutuality between tangibility and intangibility, between the expert and nonexpert, and between the authority and public explored from this research bears some resemblance with the dialogical model proposed by Harrison (2013), the Yin-Yang space identified in this research has its own unique merit. Drawing on the actor network theory and assemblage theory, the dialogical model adopts a flattening ontology and sees heritage as "an emergent property" which plays out in the symmetric coordination among various stakeholders, human or non-human (Harrison, 2013, p.222). Despite its efforts in transcending the

dominance of binary opposition, interpretation as such cannot fully explain the intricacies between the opposites, as in how their distinction contributes to their synergy. In contrast, the application of Yin-Yang thinking in the current study allows distinct elements in heritage making to be dialectically evaluated without eliminating their difference. Accordingly, the proposed Yin-Yang space enables an inclusive recognition of the discordance emerging from the investigated consumption experience, and further transcends the dichotomous divide by addressing the negotiated becoming between conflictive elements, in the sense of the "thirdness" (i.e., heritage vitality, *Qi*) originated from the progressive and generative interaction between Yin and Yang. This can be seen from the research findings like the harmonised *Qi* in the interaction between the embodied immersion that participants have had with the blind box and their reception and conversion of the immaterial meanings in Chapter Four.

Additionally, this study also provides insights into the concept of "living heritage". While this term to date has been mainly applied to the conservation and management of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, no date), this study argues that "living heritage" should be adopted as an umbrella term for cultural heritage in general rather than exclusive to the intangible ones. As informed by the intuited lifelessness analysed in Chapter Four, tangibility and intangibility as two distinct heritage attributes are in fact interdependent and mutually inclusive. Tangible cultural heritage (e.g., museum artefacts) which is sensuously "dead" can be revitalised through its generative interplay with the intangible in the Yin-Yang space facilitated by the blind box as an intermedium. From such processual perspective, all cultural heritage is living heritage. They may vary in form (i.e., tangible/intangible) or expression (i.e., expert/lay, authority/public), but such variance should not affect people's evaluation of their vitality. After all, the evaluation of heritage vitality goes hand in hand with its generation, and the inspiration or momentum of such generation has much to do with the co-constitutive interplay among the opposite elements which are ostensibly irreconcilable at first sight.

7.2.3 Revisiting (in)authenticity in marketing with a Yin-Yang lens

With authenticity being crowned as the "cornerstone of contemporary marketing practice" (Beverland, 2006, p.251) and receiving multifaceted dissection from various research traditions (Rickly, 2022), inauthenticity as its antithesis is often being thoughtlessly adopted to describe things and experience that are ingenuine, feigned, and ineligible, representing nearly all the opposite qualities that people would be stayed away from (Anthony and Joshi, 2017). But in reality, many cases suggest otherwise, just like the popular archaeological blind box studied in this thesis, which is a visibly mass-produced copy of genuine museum artefact but still manages to win the favour of consumers. Exception as such urges research to revisit the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity, and this study makes a substantial contribution by presenting these two contrasting ideas as an inseparable and mutually inclusive two-in-one with generative power.

Efforts have been made to update our understanding regarding the dialectical relation between authenticity and inauthenticity, that these two opposite concepts are no longer non-interactive but relative and negotiable in different contexts (Bruner, 1994; Timothy and Byod, 2006; Goulding and Derbaix, 2019). Hietanen *et al.* (2020) scrutinise the authentic/counterfeit distinction in luxury fashion consumption with a Baudrillardian perspective. By presenting the semiotic interplay between the authentic and the counterfeit as seductive and ambivalent, they argue that authenticity and inauthenticity as signs in fact "feed on each other" (p.35), as can be seen from the legitimisation of the explicit counterfeit, as well as the ironic reliance that luxury brand has on its counterfeit to prove its authenticity, that "without counterfeit (or its constant reminder) as part of the sign system, the claim of authenticity becomes increasingly vacuous, void of meaning" (p.37). Similar interplay can also be found in research conducted by Hede and Thyne (2010) on how visitors negotiate the copresence of the authentic (i.e., original items)

and inauthentic (i.e., replicas) as part of their museum visiting experience; and the exploration performed by Canavan (2023) on Gem TV, a shopping channel with explicit inauthenticity yet is discovered as facilitative to people's search for existential authenticity via their imaginative engagement with the backstage.

While it is informative that studies above have enriched the conversation by underlining the interdependency between the authentic and inauthentic so that we can view the inauthentic with a more constructive look, they are still trapped in the established dualism treating authenticity and inauthenticity in a separate manner. Namely, although being recognised for its facilitative existence, inauthenticity is still at the service of the privileged authenticity in their dualistic relation. Leveraging on Yin-Yang thinking, this thesis has shed new light on the mutuality between authenticity and inauthenticity by understanding them as a pair of inseparable Yin-Yang duality. Just like the dynamic interplay between Yin and Yang, authenticity and inauthenticity are not only interdependent but also mutual inclusive and interconvertible. As indicated in the findings (Chapter Four), the blended interpretation participants demonstrated toward the (in)authenticity of the archaeological blind box has enriched our understanding by highlighting their inseparability and reciprocity, such as the mixed feeling that Lee (F23) has for the "patina" on her excavated bronze mirror. In this vein, this thesis believes that when we feel authenticity, it is never solely about the authentic, but a blended Yin-Yang duality with the authentic temporarily in the ascendent and the inauthentic in the shadow, and vice versa. Dolan (2010, p.462, original emphasis) holds the view that authenticity is subjective, that "it is a *feeling* and what feels authentic to one person might seem fake and insincere to another". This study resonates with this view and further argues that what this feeling leads people to is neither authenticity nor inauthenticity, but the *Qi* of the perceived thing or practice generated from the interplay between the representations of what deemed as authentic and inauthentic. Illustrations of this *Qi* can be found in previous finding chapters such as the reported lifelessness of museum

artefacts owing to the unbalanced copresence between its objective genuineness and perceptual inaccessibility; or the nurtured vitality of the replica inside archaeological blind box, generated from the reciprocal interplay between its inauthentic thingness and authentic staging. This would also account for the popularity of archaeological blind box with its manifest "inauthenticity", as it is not the inauthentic replication that attracts consumer's attention, nor the substitutive intimacy with its authentic archetype; rather, it is the inseparable coexistence of both the authentic and inauthentic that turns this product into an irresistible attraction.

Viewing the authenticity and inauthenticity through the lens of Yin-Yang allows a different interpretation of the dialectics in-between. For instance, while judging the Gem TV channel as inauthentic with shoddy props and unconvincing performance, Canavan (2023) directs attention to its stimulation of existential authenticity, noting how viewers suspend disbelief when encountering the designed "authentic" backstage, and start searching for the intrapersonal and interpersonal connections. By contrast, insights gained from this thesis provide a different interpretation of such "inauthentic" encounter. Rather than attributing the Gem TV as inauthentic, one may also see it as a designed presentation of an imbalanced Yin-Yang duality with the manifest inauthenticity prevailing over the authentic. It is the disordered *Qi* shown through the Gem TV that attracts people and drives them to nurture the disadvantaged root of authenticity through their active search for the existential connection facilitated by the presented authentic cues (i.e., the behind the scenes). In doing so, the balance is reconstructed through the interplay between the authentic and inauthentic, and what people really enjoy is the *Qi* restored through their existential engagement.

Additionally, viewing the dynamics between authenticity and inauthenticity using a Yin-Yang lens can also help research to explicate some context-specific phenomenon with deeper insights. With its implicit dichotomous roots in Western traditions, authenticity as an imported concept

in China can be contested and enriched by indigenous insights. For example, Liu *et al*. (2015) challenge the binary divide between authenticity and inauthenticity drawing on the "shanzhai" phenomenon in the marketplace of China. Shanzhai in Chinese metaphorically refers to imitative production by manufacturers aiming to jump on the bandwagon, such as the brand "Louis Vuitton FAKE" mentioned in the study conducted by Hietanen *et al*. (2020). Products with a shanzhai feature are often more affordable and on the brink of violating the IP right of the authentic brand. However, rather than categorising these shanzhai products into the counterpart of authenticity as Hietanen *et al.* (2020) have done, Liu *et al.* (2015) propose two subcategories of authenticity, domesticated and mimicked authenticity, to accommodate such counterfeit creation and extend the dyadic authentic-inauthentic divide into a relational and hierarchical structure. Similarly, Yousaf and Fan (2020) examine a series of "copysites/duplitectures" as tourist spots in China (e.g., Tower Bridge in Suzhou) for their orientation in the authenticity discourse. Drawing on the different interpretation of imitation and replication between China and the West, Yousaf and Fan build on the relativity of authenticity (Timothy and Boyd, 2006) by highlighting the tolerance and appreciation that tourists have for these replicated attractions. Against this background, the present study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the possible rationale behind these two context-specific inquiries. As evidenced by participants' contrasting but intertwined feelings and experiences with both the museum collection and replica inside the archaeological blind box (Chapter Four), people's interpretation of authenticity (or inauthenticity) is not emerging in a vacuum, independent of its antithesis. By viewing authenticity and inauthenticity as an inseparable and interpenetrative two-in-one, the authenticity identified in either the case of shanzhai products or the replicated tourist attraction is essentially the manifestation of the balanced *Qi* generated from people's active coordination of the inseparable and interpenetrative authentic and inauthentic qualities, such as the delicate balance (i.e., tolerance and appreciation)

that tourists have shown in acknowledging both the tributes paid by the copysites to the original sites, and the ingenious craftmanship behind these replications (Yousaf and Fan, 2020). Whereas the perception of inauthenticity represented by counterfeit products in contrast with shanzhai products which are deemed authentic by Liu *et al.* (2015), would refer to the imbalance between authenticity and inauthenticity within the counterfeits, presenting as the preponderance of inauthenticity (e.g., poor product quality, piratic branding) over the authentic (e.g., superficial resemblance).

7.2.4 Revisiting consumer-object relation with a Yin-Yang lens

Last but not least, findings of this research will be of interest to the discussion on consumer-object relation as a popular and profound topic in consumer research (Borgerson, 2013). Via the inquiry into the consumption of the archaeological blind box, this study introduces a novel perspective on consumer-object relation, emphasising the dynamic and generative mutuality without removing the primordial distinction.

In reviewing the literature, one may notice that there exists a growing trend in consumer research seeking to transcend the Cartesian subject-object dualism by proposing approaches with different ontological assumptions. Actor network theory (ANT), with its origin in Science and Technology Studies and featured by the work of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law, is a popular theoretical framework adopted by many in the consumption field. By virtue of its symmetrical ontology and flattening context, ANT grants agency to every actor (or actant), human or non-human, in this heterogeneous network (Bajde, 2013; Bettany, 2018). Such a framework enables researchers to destablise the predominance of human subject and enhance the understanding of some entrenched binaries with a more holistic view. Examples can be found in the ethnographic study conducted by Bettany and Kerrane (2011) on the plastic chicken coop as an emergent actant in family hen-keeping network in the context of anti-

consumption; and the inquiry into the motorcycle industry performed by Martin and Schouten (2014) to see how a new market is formed on a network co-constituted by interactional human and nonhuman actors. At the same time, while ANT has provided a constitutive and connected theoretical framework, Franco, Canniford and Phipps (2022) believe that ANT is still dominated by human subject with object being enslaved to a material-semiotic network of which the scale can be slippery to define. Specifically, they underline how such researcher-determined network may result in the oversight of some other informative features of the object that are inconspicuous in the current network. They turn to Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) proposed by Graham Harman as an alternative "within and toward thinking" and ponder over its implication for marketing research (Franco, Canniford and Phipps, 2022, p.10). In OOO, "object" as the unit of analysis can be applied to anything including the subject (i.e., human) and even the heterogenous networks, in the sense that objects are "things cannot be entirely explained by reference to component parts or by wider effects" (ibid., p.9). By using the case of Freon leak and treating landfill sites as an emergent object, they show how OOO can effectively balance and unite the separated parts (e.g., components of the landfill) and whole (e.g., consequence of the landfill at both micro and macro level).

Both ANT and OOO in their own ways have made important contribution to advance our understanding of the relational dynamics in marketplace. However, non-binary proposition as such can lead to unnecessary disregard of the distinction and fluidity between the subject and object in consumption. This has also been reflected by Franco, Canniford and Phipps (2022) with reference to the work done by Canniford and Shankar (2015) on binary logics in which they present as "dualism". Meanwhile, the rather fixed attribution (i.e., actant or object) in these non-binary approaches suggests a monistic strand of thoughts and moves towards the formation of assemblages and hybrids (Young, 2021). By contrast, as addressed in the previous section, one of this thesis' theoretical contribution is its application of Yin-Yang as the enabling lens

which sees binaries not as distinct dualism but co-constitutive duality. What Yin-Yang enables is a flexible and dynamic way of thinking which perceives dualistic entities – whether subject/object, ancient/modern, expert/lay – not as rigid opposites, but as interconnected dualities in a constant flux that depend on one another in a reciprocal way. Yin-Yang does not dwell on the ontological assumption because everything in the world, human or nonhuman, even cyborg is made up by Yin and Yang energy. As such, there is no ontological difference between theses binaries, which can be quite similar to what ANT and OOO contend.

But what is noteworthy here is that Yin-Yang is not simply referring to the intra-component constitution but also indicating the inter-component mutuality in a relational context. To put it simply, within human body there exist female sex hormones (Yin) and male sex hormone (Yang), no matter which sex this body is referred as it is constituted by both Yin and Yang components. When it comes the inter-component level, there will then exist the divide between an introvert boy (Yang) and an extravert girl (Yin), or an extravert boy (Yang) and an introvert boy (Yin). Findings presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five have also illustrated this intra/inter fluidity of Yin-Yang. For example, when EP (M24) felt at a loss and indecisive about what to do next with the soil block and broken shards in his archaeological restoration blind box, he chose to think twice and act with great cautiousness. In a way, EP at such moment is dominated by the blind box, and this renders EP as Yin and the blind box as Yang in this binary relation which cannot be viewed in a separate way, or the experience no longer holds. But this Yin-Yang duality soon presents an interconversion when EP finished his pre-assemblage of the replica. It starts with the change in EP's intra Yin-Yang in the sense of his confidence and hesitancy, with the confidence starts to grow from a Yin position and take over the Yang from his hesitancy. And accordingly, with EP expressing his sense of achievement and describing the restored replica as his "child", the inter Yin-Yang between him and the blind box has also realised a shift, that is, EP is the Yang now.

Fluidity as such will be of interest to studies seeking to update the entrenched dualism. Let's take the human (subject)/nonhuman (object) dualism in pet consumption as an illustration. The concept of ownership derived from the pet-owner dualism has been criticised as unequal (Ellson, 2008) and researchers have been working on destablising such dualism with different ontological interpretations such as companion species (Bettany and Daly, 2008) and subject-subject relation (Cheetham and McEachern, 2013). In this vein, Yin-Yang provides a novel understanding of the pet-human relations with more dynamic nuances. To start with, it takes both the pet and human to build up the pet-human relation, but the Yin-Yang distribution can vary given the circumstances. Rather than viewing human as the dominant master, in a Yin-Yang informed pet-human relation, the attribution of dominancy is fluid. For example, when dog owners exercise the dog for the dog's fit or feel the house being incomplete without the dog, they become the Yin in this pet-human duality, spontaneously surrender themselves to the dog's "dominancy". Alternatively, when the dog owners train the dog so that the dog can follow the instruction, they become the Yang in this relation. Situation may vary when it comes to the cat or other species given the variation in their biological nature, but the Yin-Yang attribution would still apply. Accordingly, a healthy, sustainable pet-human relation would depend on the Yin-Yang balance in-between. Harmonious mutuality can nurture "reciprocal love" (Cheetham and McEachern, 2013, p.100) or "the hearthound" (Bettany and Daly, 2008, p.411) as manifestation of the *Qi* of this dual relation. Whereas imbalance would possibly lead to the "dark side" of this dual relation, such as the debatable "designer pet", which raises concerns about the ethics of crossbreeding dogs (Beverland, Farrelly and Lim, 2008).

Additionally, the subject-object interplay as explored in this thesis also speaks to studies which have engaged with materiality and object relations theory. The reciprocity between participants and their excavated/restored replica (i.e., how they nurture the replica and are nurtured by the replica) as illustrated in Chapter Four reflects the idea of materiality (or objectification) as a

dynamic process in which the connection and transformation of consumers and object take place in a concurrent manner (Tilley, 2006). In the meantime, the integrated Yin-Yang space extracted from the observed experience bears some resemblance to the "third space" created by Woodward (2011, p.375) based on the notion "transitional objects" (Winnicott, 2005), or transformational objects as preferred by Bollas (1979). This "third space" bridges the human subject with other non-human externalities and is known for its processual, reflexive, and creative quality. In their study on the plastic shoe brand Melissa addressing the interplay between materiality and consumer identity, Ferreira and Scaraboto (2016) adapt this "third space" into "creative space" to illustrate the consumer-object interaction as an emotion-laden intermediary between pre-objectification and objectification in the process of materialisation. Given the connecting and convergent presence of this creative space, insights gained from this thesis can be of assistance to further unpack the Yin-Yang fluidity behind the emotional energy within this creative space. On one hand, consumers (Yin) can submit to Melissa (Yang) with their feet hurt, closet clogged, and wallet emptied; yet alternately, consumers (Yang) can also deploy their experience with Melissa (Yin) as part of their personal resources and share with other fans to help with their inquiries. From such fluid mutuality a new interpretation of the emotional energy comes into being. For example, rather than interpreting the description of Melissa being "photogenic" as a nearly fetishistic personification, such emotional expression in Yin-Yang space would be understood as *Qi* (vitality/life force) which is neither inherent in the shoes nor the consumer but generated from the reciprocal interplay between the consumer and the shoes.

7.3 Practical Implications

At a practical level, this study has identified a number of implications derived from the research findings, which can make a contribution to the practices in heritage venues such as the museum and other similar organisations.

One of the most explicit implications that this study has for the museum touches on its practice in commodification and merchandising. Based on the development of museum merchandise in China and the empirical case of archaeological blind box, this study has brought the underestimated museum merchandise to the fore and recognised it as of equal importance and even bears more attraction if set against the certified artefacts collected inside the museum. Canavan (2023) suggests that manifest inauthenticity can bring unexpected productivity for its facilitation of people's imaginative engagement and quest for existential authenticity. Here, findings of this research indicate that authenticity and inauthenticity are in fact an inseparable and intertwined pair of dualities. As such, by consuming the ostensibly inauthentic museum merchandise, people are also enjoying the authenticity that is not exclusive to the collected artefacts. Moreover, one noticeable developing trend for the museum in today's experience era as suggested by Li *et al.* (2021, p.6) is the construction of "sociable, recreational, and participatory experiences". In this context, museum merchandise, in particular the participatory genre, by virtue of its organic presentation of authenticity and inauthenticity, has the potential to variegate the experience that one can imagine with cultural heritage, promote the interaction between the museum and its consumer, and further bring in more diverse crowds to the museum. Findings point out that in consuming archaeological blind box, the experience that participants have is not confined to the embodied interaction with the product, but also filled with their multifarious receptions of the involved artefacts (Chapter Four), expertise (Chapter Five) and culture (Chapter Six) behind. All these contribute to the construction of their personal

interpretation of cultural heritage, which in a sense can be understood as heritage making *ex situ* if compared with the traditional *in situ* museum visit. That being the case, working on creating a consumption context via museum merchandise which integrates the need of modern consumers with ancient collections is in line with the aspiration of contemporary museum in "fostering diversity and sustainability […] offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and sharing" (ICOM, 2022).

Meanwhile, working on the development of museum merchandise is found as an effective formula for geographically disadvantaged museums to enhance their public engagement and realise a sustainable revenue generation, while attending to their traditional responsibility in extending educational outreach. For example, albeit its rich collections and documentations of history, Henan Museum as a regional museum with a relatively remote inland location does not enjoy the similar popularity if compared with other museums with more advantaged geographical location, such as the world-known Palace Museum located in Beijing (capital city of China). However, via its pathbreaking initiatives in merchandising such as archaeological blind box, Henan Museum was catapulted into the forefront of museum search results in the Chinese Trending Searches List (Henan Museum, 2022b) and becomes an online celebrity and popular destination among the tourists all over the country. Therefore, it would be necessary to consider museum merchandise as an indispensable part of museum development within both the local community and broader cultural landscape.

A further implication relates to the working style of authoritative institution, such as museum and other relevant heritage entities, in the construction of cultural heritage. In keeping with the process-driven heritage making and the rapidly evolving experience economy, this study suggests that rather than drawing a distinct line between the authoritative practice and popular interpretation, it would be more constructive for museums to balance their dual role as both

guardian of heritage and facilitator of industry. This is particularly important when confronting the tension between preservation (integrity) and commercialisation (popularity) (Winter, 2002; Bąkiewicz *et al*., 2017). This is evident as shown in the findings that carefully curated artefacts inside the museum is perceived as inaccessible and irrelevant hence lifeless, yet their mass-produced replicas gain popularity among consumers across the country (Chapter Four); or that legitimised archaeology is viewed as exclusive and unwelcoming, whereas the fantasised tomb robbing as an illicit wrongdoing is going strong among the lays (Chapter Six). The need for balance resonates with what Hatcher (2023, p.42, original emphasis) proposes about revaluating museums as "both temples *and* forums" so that museums can have a chance to maximise their potential by fostering mutuality with the public. To navigate such paradoxical situation, this study recommends that institutions should not put these opposing phenomena at opposite poles. Instead, it would be more promising for institution to tactically let go of its unchallengeable authority and adopt a *wuwei* mindset so that it could blend with the public for a co-constitutive development. Sometimes leveraging on the dialectical relevance, as in the case of tomb robbing fantasy which is an irrelevant and even taboo topic to the museum yet highly relevant and familiar to the public, relying on the hidden dynamics, and driving with the flow can bring unexpected gain for the institution (e.g., people's unprompted learning and appreciation of archaeology). This study also encourages authoritative institutions, such as museums involved in heritage making, to actively engage with the idea of "actions of nonaction" (Section 6.3) as part of their strategic development plan, so that they can better adapt to the market, remain relevant to the society, and co-create with the public (Minkiewicz, Evans and Bridson, 2014; Thyne and Hede, 2016).

7.4 Research Limitations

This study is not without limitation. First, restrained by the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of data collection, this study was unfortunately unable to reach the participants face-to-face and conduct direct observation of their interaction with the blind box. Although the collected unboxing videos have presented a relatively holistic documentation of their experience and the online interviews have further enriched the exploration with many valuable insights, the online practice still prevented me from acquiring the information on-the-spot and probing the undertone of some unsaid, tacit details, such as participants' instant facial expressions in certain unboxing videos using point-of-view shot. The unstructured nature and inconsistent presentation of these videos have also made it difficult for me to elicit consistent theme across different participants and summarise them into meaningful storylines. Be that as it may, this does not diminish the value of the online practice. In the practice of data collection, unboxing video as the publicly available archival data has largely filled the temporal gap between the actual unboxing experience and the interview afterwards. The accompanied comments in these videos have also provided rich information to the understanding of heritage making in consumption, in the sense of viewing heritage as a sociocultural constructive process.

Second, limited by the remote practice, this study only performed one online interview with one museum staff and did not manage to communicate with the experts and outsourcing service involved in the design and production of archaeological blind box and its derivatives. Although I did make a personal visit to the museum at the final year of my PhD, at that time I was unable to conduct any follow-up inquiries owing to the restricted time of visit and the unavailability of the potential participants. More insights regarding the mutuality among the different players could have been generated and added to the discussion of heritage making if permitted by the time and resources. But this study has also been blessed by the online practice as there do exist

some participants bearing the expertise relevant to the investigation, whose experience has complemented the absence of expert voice. Connections with those participants may not be possible if it were not for the online practice.

7.5 Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings and contribution of this study, some directions for future research have been identified, concentrating on the use of Yin-Yang thinking in theorising inquiries emerging from other intersecting literature.

To extend the debate on authenticity in an expanded context of heritage making:

Recently, it has been noticed during the investigation that Henan Museum, along with other heritage institutions in China, have successively joined the tide of metaverse and launched their digital collectibles (i.e., digital replica of museum artefacts) as intangible museum merchandise in collaboration with e-commerce platform such as Alipay (Liddell, 2021). Such development presents an interesting yet opposing coexistence of physical and digital museum merchandise, both being the commodified representation of museum artefacts yet offering distinct experience. Goulding and Derbaix (2019) have studied the revival of vinyl records as an old-time tangible product facing the challenge brought by the popularity of digital music, and explicated how the perception of authenticity affects consumers' enthusiasm of the vinyl. Bearing in mind the inseparable mutuality between authenticity and inauthenticity as revealed from this thesis, a greater focus on the digital collectibles as part of the museum's commercial practice on the topic of authenticity could produce interesting findings and bring new insights into the dynamic interplay between the digital and physical consumption, adding to the conversation in heritage making.

To explore the Yin-Yang dynamics in paradoxical consumption:

Findings of this study have shed light on the coexistence of seemingly contradictory elements in the context of consumption, which would be a fruitful area for future work. For instance, while it has been a commonly accepted judgement on the desire that people have for attractive looks and avoidance of ugly ones, latest research has noticed that ugliness is not entirely worthless. Cesareo, Townsend and Pavlov (2023) discover that ugliness has been adopted as a distinction for luxury brand and conduct a series of experiments to examine how ugly products affect consumer's decision making in different consumption contexts (i.e., ugliness is desired when adopted by luxury brands but not by the non-luxury ones). However, it remains to be elucidated on why such ugliness can serve as a symbol of luxury and why it cannot work in a non-luxury context. In this vein, Yin-Yang thinking provides a different lens which allows the ugly to be considered alongside its more commonly favoured antithesis – the beauty. By viewing them as a pair of inseparable and interpenetrative dualities, new insights could be generated and enhance our understanding of consumer behaviour – such as the recent "ugly decade" in the fashion world (Marriott, 2024) and the "Chou Meng" (ugly cute) fad among Chinese SMEs (TMT, 2023), and offer practical implications for enterprise such as food retailers to mediate consumer's dislike to ugly food and reduce food waste (Yang, Huang and Chen, 2023).

To explore the potential of Yin-Yang space in dealing with tensions in marketplace:

This study has presented how cultural heritage as a constructive process plays out in tension by looking into the generative Yin-Yang space in which consumers are actively negotiating the opposing forces for a self-consistent balance. Presentations of the dynamic interdependence, interpenetration and complementarity between the opposites enable a different perspective to explore a wider range of tensions in the marketplace than those presented in this thesis. Research could leverage on Yin-Yang thinking to construct case-specific Yin-Yang space to

further explore how tension is dissected and balanced by consumers in different contexts, such as the conflicting individual goals in collective extraordinary consumption (Tumbat and Belk, 2011), the transformation of shapewear as a marketplace icon out of the female oppression-empowerment opposition (Zanette and Scaraboto, 2019), deliberate consumption of pain (Scott, Cayla and Cova, 2017; Cova, 2021), and cultural consumption which appears to be inundated with countervailing forces of appreciation and appropriation (Cruz, Seo and Scaraboto, 2024).

To explore Yin-Yang for its indigenous and methodological implication:

Yin-Yang as an indigenous thinking can also be applied as an epistemological lens to facilitate researcher's reflexivity in practicing interpretive research. While Preece, Rojas-Gaviria and Rodner (2023) in their selfless epistemology encourage researchers to actively detach from their selves through unlearning and enter the field with "double-eyes", more work is needed to further understand where these opposite unities found in "double-eyes" could lead us to. Albeit the similarity in acknowledging the co-constitutive nature between the opposites, what Yin-Yang differs from the Kyoto School's nothingness lies in its generative power for the thirdness (e.g., *Qi*) emerging from the dynamic interplay between Yin and Yang. For example, as said by Confucius (2018, p.11) in *The Analects*, "when you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it; this is knowledge". In Yin-Yang thinking, ambiguity and uncertainty are not seen as problems to be solved but valuable resources for interpretation. The power of interpretation only comes into play when one embarks on the path of inquiry underpinned by both the known and unknown (Wu, 2014). There is abundant room for further investigations to be conducted on exploring the possibly generative mutuality between the knowing and not-knowing, egocentric self and non-egocentric self, as well as mindfulness and mindlessness, all would contribute an informative facet to current understanding of researcher's reflexivity and involvement in research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Overview of the "archaeological blind box" product line

Archaeological blind box. "Lost Treasure" is the first blind box series launched by Henan Museum. The main body of the product looks like a jar of compacted soil block (Figure A.1), accompanied by a number of tools for excavation (i.e., miniature Luoyang shovel, brush, and wooden stick). To revivify the archaeological experience to the full extent, delicate miniature replicas of the museum collections are embedded into piece of soil extracted from several historic cities in Henan Province. The archaeological blind box is divided into three grades vary in price. The higher the grade (and price), the higher the possibility of excavating limited treasure (1% in Legend, 5‰ in Epic, and 2‰ in Inheritance). The embedded "treasure" includes bronze ware, bronze buddha, bronze mirror, three-colour glazed pottery, jade article, arrowhead, bronze currency, pottery ware and porcelain. Consumers will also have the chance of excavating "hidden treasure" from this blind box, which would be the nine most precious collections of Henan Museum. Together with the soli block, this blind box also contains tools for excavation (with Luoyang shovel only provided in Legend box).



Figure A.1: Archaeological Blind Box

Relics restoration box. "Master of Relics Restoration" is another follow-up launch (Figure A.2) by Henan Museum after the success of archaeological blind box. The inspiration of this product is developed from the work of relics restorer and the public's interest in relics restoration. This product is designed to bring restorer's work to the front by selecting the most basic steps, so the lay public could experience the charm of relics restoration. According to the information presented on its online store, all the "relics" in this product are hand-made in the traditional way with raw material extracted from the original heritage sites, so every piece of them is unique. The relics restoration box contains a specimen bag for carrying the fragmented relic, a toolbox with seven various tools (e.g., tape, glue, powdered gold, and sandpaper) inside, a scorecard which could be used to redeem badge, and an instruction pamphlet with detailed illustration of relics restoration. The "masters" (i.e., consumers) are expected to follow the instruction and operate with the provided tools to restore the broken pieces. The first series covers relics from the Neolithic Age, and the second series moves on to the restoration of blue and white porcelain with increased difficulty. It is said that in the upcoming series, the Bronze Age will be the new theme.



Figure A.2: Relics Restoration Box

Archaeological restoration blind box. "Scattered Treasure" is a joint product (Figure A.3) combining features from the archaeological blind box and relics restoration box. It aims at providing a holistic archaeology experience and communicating the charm of Zhongyuan Culture to wider public. Consumers will first go through the excavation experience similar with archaeological



Figure A.3: Archaeological Restoration Blind Box

blind box, and then moved on to restoration of their excavated pieces (similar with the relic restoration box). The tools provided in this product have been improved based on consumer feedback and enriched with the inclusion of mini hand shovel (trowel). Currently launched offering covers mainly porcelain artefacts, while the upcoming products will move on to other materials such as jade ware, bronze ware, and fresco.

Rubbing blind box. "Carven Memory", reflects the historical rubbing technique in China (Figure A.4). Rubbings of inscriptions carved in past generations accurately preserve the memory of important events in the history. Using rice paper and ink as the raw material, facilitated by tools such as brush and dabber, player could make precise copies of the miniature inscribed slate. Different levels have been set regarding the operative difficulty; all inscribed slates are selected from collections in Henan Museum.



Figure A.4: Rubbing Blind Box

Woodblock mater blind box. "Eternal Ingenuity" is a product aiming at reproducing the long-standing woodblock printing technique in China (Figure A.5). As one of the Four Great Inventions, woodblock printing has enabled the wider knowledge transmission and communication and facilitated the advancement of human civilisation. In this blind box, consumers are



Figure A.5: Woodblock Master Blind Box

provided with a carving knife, a wooden block, rice paper, and other relevant tools. Consumers will get one out of four aphorisms presented oracle bone script after their experience.

Gilding blind box is launched at the beginning of 2022 (Figure A.6). presents the consumers with an adapted experience of the traditional Chinese gilding technique. Miniature of collections is distributed at random with gilding tools provided in the blind box. Players could apply genuine gold foil to the miniature and refresh it with a gold appearance.



Figure A.6: Gilding Blind Box

Appendix 2 – Overview of data collected in the first empirical stage

(1) Unboxing video produced by consumers of MCP under investigation

No.	*Video Name*	*Post Date*	*Duration*	*n. of Views*	*n. of Likes*	*Marked as Favourite*	*n. of Comments*	*n. of Bullet Comments*
01	【考古盲盒】非酋的一次开箱+挖土 （河南博物院考古盲盒）	20210323	00:30:31	391	15	5	0	0
02	【考古盲盒】挖到铜镜？手动打磨！（河南博物院考古盲盒）	20210326	00:17:31	4,643	118	19	31	4
03	【考古盲盒】非酋的第二次开箱+挖土·虎符·香炉（河南博物院考古盲盒）	20210528	00:25:48	367	17	6	6	2
04	考古盲盒开出唐代仕女	20210709	00:13:02	159	7	0	1	6
05	考古盲盒开箱：我们复刻了考古人的一生！——从热爱到双眼失去光芒【整活复刻第5期】	20211126	00:15:57	367	55	20	9	1
06	【考古盲盒初体验】论河南省博物院的考古盲盒究竟值不值？！	20210325	00:25:00	1,265	47	6	12	28
07	开箱河南博物院考古盲盒！我居然挖出了超级稀有？！	20210303	00:08:59	3,358	95	10	16	24
08	我在家里修文物！河南博物院考古盲盒第二弹～	20210704	00:12:58	726	28	9	9	7
09	【套头】NYU 博物馆学研究生考古修复盲盒开箱，顺便聊聊选专业	20210710	00:14:55	5,725	362	277	11	55
10	【河南博物院】散落的宝物 文物修复盲盒 整套修复过程部分展示（上）	20210821	00:32:45	1,129	16	7	3	5
11	【河南博物院】散落的宝物 文物修复盲盒 整套修复过程部分展示（下）	20210821	00:31:16	574	18	7	2	3
12	【盲盒开箱】河南博物院考古盲盒开箱	20210124	00:12:29	442	19	0	3	7
13	【盲盒开箱】河南博物院考古盲盒开箱（第二弹）	20210125	00:02:25	197	13	0	4	0
14	【盲盒开箱】河南博物院文物修复大师套装	20210528	00:09:54	2,521	103	7	12	30
15	【盲盒开箱】河南博物院散落的宝物，一发入魂隐藏款鹅颈瓶！	20210529	00:16:50	65,000	2,444	233	157	291
16	【河南博物院】永恒的精神 - 铜镜打磨套装（我翻车了）	20210728	00:12:52	5,440	106	10	35	9

17	【盲盒开箱】河南博物院千古玦尘联名款千古神仙爱情盲盒开箱	20210708	00:07:17	2,250	62	1	12	9
18	【河南博物院】“限定款”考古盲盒开箱	20220129	00:06:18	317	20	2	4	1
19	【河南博物院】雕版大师盲盒 我刻印了一个一键三连！	20220130	00:18:30	359	20	2	2	0
20	【河南博物院】鎏金盲盒开箱——鎏金技艺 get✓	20220212	00:16:42	4,266	76	9	10	13
21	河南博物院盲盒一发入魂！挖到隐藏武则天金简了(≧∇≦)	20210201	00:03:11	699,000	21,000	1,649	1,764	850
22	河南博物院文创产品文物修复大师。果然不按套路走会出奇迹(・ω・)ノ	20210517	00:07:22	90,000	1,859	226	370	134
23	挖到隐藏还有神秘礼物？终于拿到河南博物院《藏珍品鉴》书籍了(^-^)/	20210309	00:04:12	4,845	214	24	46	4
24	【日常/手工】复原失落的唐代仕女俑（已完结）	20210716	01:40:00	209	10	5	5	0
25	【开箱】河南博物院盲盒！发掘修复全过程！	20210612	00:24:45	6,202	262	32	50	49
26	文物修复大师！全过程启动！	20210618	00:09:59	1,980	59	15	21	6
27	在家也能修复青花瓷！河南博物院青花纪元修复！全过程记录！	20210717	00:05:02	1,361	53	7	18	0
28	文物修复大师第三弹！花瓣纹彩陶钵	20210911	00:07:17	110	9	1	3	0
29	【开箱】河南博物院传拓盲盒！硬核帮你点亮新的技能点（bushi）！	20220108	00:06:47	146	14	1	2	0
30	失传的宝物 考古盲盒开箱（河南博物院出品）	20210126	00:13:45	482	17	3	7	3
31	文物修复盲盒开箱（其实不是无聊的刨土视频）	20210710	00:14:50	106	5	1	0	0
32	咱也是考古人了！河南博物院考古盲盒试玩（简单测评）不要轻易高估自己的运气！最后，日常撸猫	20210821	00:24:30	122	1	0	2	0
33	【苏无相】河南博物院考古盲盒挖土实录丨请叫我非洲预言家	20210819	00:16:44	720	29	2	28	1
34	【苏无相】文物修复盲盒修复实录丨河南博物院	20220412	00:07:52	76	10	0	10	0
35	【开箱】河南博物院系列盲盒	20210221	00:45:30	374	18	2	6	3
36	河南博物院盲盒开箱丨来当一回考古工作者	20210801	00:10:12	94	4	2	3	1
37	【失传的宝物】河南博物院盲盒考古	20210219	00:15:05	1,816	119	25	56	43
38	【Lois 开箱】当考古系学生遇上考古盲盒丨河南省博考古盲盒发掘记	20210212	00:15:08	167,000	8,543	1,456	460	737

39	【回复评论】关于考古盲盒视频的评论们…我又做了一些小科普	20210222	00:15:34	1,921	144	17	13	20
40	【Lois 开箱】考古系学生的文物修复盲盒体验丨河南博物院文物修复大师盲盒开箱	20210707	00:11:09	3,194	147	27	27	12
41	【Lois 开箱】考古系学生的文物修复盲盒体验丨河南博物院散落的宝物盲盒开箱	20210712	00:12:44	1,818	120	10	18	23
42	【冰菓】猜猜我从河南博物院“挖”出了什么？	20210706	00:42:29	459	11	0	5	1
43	【VLOG】河南博物院传拓盲盒开箱+拓印 DIY 体验	20220123	00:06:22	176	25	7	9	18
44	【梅男】第一次玩河南博物院文物修复盲盒！竟然和做模型有这么多相似之处！	20210515	00:03:47	19,000	521	94	84	42
45	可以修复文物的盲盒你见过吗？河南博物院文物修复盲盒开箱评测！	20210904	00:02:57	2,022	253	30	62	78
46	这款盲盒让我有了点石成金的错觉：河南博物院“鎏金盲盒”初体验	20220121	00:03:51	24,000	622	151	258	195
47	【考古盲盒】河南博物院的超 nice 盲盒 欧洲人竟是我自己？	20210225	00:04:28	5,337	116	9	24	1
48	【河南博物院文物修复大师】新品测评冲冲冲！修复带师倦鸟上线	20210712	00:04:29	459	13	4	10	2
49	【河南博物院鎏金盲盒】什么？！一个真的有金箔的手工盲盒！	20220215	00:06:06	213	10	3	1	1
50	文创开箱丨你距离一个合格的文物修复师，只差亿点了…	20210617	00:11:35	54,000	5,533	830	202	347
51	摔成这样再寄给我，你这不是欺负老实人吗！	20210717	00:12:22	407,000	34,000	3,526	530	1,449
52	后悔！我曾在极度喝多的情况下...开了一个箱	20210831	00:10:09	670,000	54,000	5,740	1,102	1,698
53	过年了 来贴个金箔吧！河南博物院鎏金盲盒开箱	20220201	00:09:13	18,000	2,203	176	106	181
54	Vlog02 快乐日常丨探秘河南博物院考古盲盒	20210110	00:06:34	163	8	1	0	0
55	Vlog03 快乐日常丨河南博物院文物修复盲盒开箱	20210627	00:12:03	2,482	86	8	17	10
56	我们这一期买来了网上非常火的考古盲盒…么?	20210108	00:07:40	2,17,2000	120,000	12,000	1,278	5,075
57	我们这一期终于买来了网上非常火的考古盲盒…而且是从官方手里！	20210219	00:09:13	1,884,000	106,000	11,000	1,719	14,000
58	今天我拿到了来自河南博物院的修复盲盒…	20210624	00:10:35	926,000	52,000	3,659	1,643	4,364
59	今天我们买来了各地博物馆的周边…	20211019	00:15:11	1,400,000	83,000	8,272	2,232	55,000

60	文物盲盒系列（一）唐•仕女俑修复	20210805	00:10:50	195	3	0	0	0
61	我在北大修文物/陶器/大家都能尝试修复的盲盒	20210709	00:20:52	5,933	532	87	200	68
62	开箱文物修复盲盒，好像和想象中不一样？	20210626	00:03:02	1,065,000	69,000	13,000	815	874
63	【开箱】考古盲盒开箱/失传的宝物/河南省博物馆/全程碎碎念，保证不无聊	20210226	00:20:01	431	56	5	11	0
64	阿汀丨河南博物院考古盲盒VS名创优品盲盒？！丨轻测评	20220113	00:21:15	92	2	1	4	27

Note: Information were updated on 12th April 2022.

(2) Product information produced by Henan Museum

a) Instruction video

No.	*Video Name*	*Post Date*	*Duration*	*n. of Views*	*n. of Likes*	*Marked as Favourite*	*n. of Comments*	*n. of Bullet Comments*
01	考古体验感满分丨考古盲盒之后，要不要再来试试文物修复？	20210514	00:03:00	20,000	1027	88	140	27
02	河南博物院文创又又上新了丨我在家里修文物之【散落的宝物】登场！	20210621	00:01:00	127,000	14,000	1485	262	36
03	河南博物院年底巨献丨豫博文创《永恒的匠心•雕版大师》	20211231	00:03:23	2850	447	23	46	9
04	河南博物院文创上新丨鎏金盲盒，来贴金箔？	20220211	00:00:58	14,000	930	73	148	11

Note: Information were updated on 12th April 2022.

b) Blind Box Journal

No.	*Journal Name*	*Post Date*	*No.*	*Journal Name*	*Post Date*
01	盲盒日志|今儿起，我们开始不定期写日记了	20210410	48	Extra by 河南博物院文创研发中心 - 宝贝诞生记丨纸质修复盲盒	20220820
02	盲盒日志|去看看我们盲盒里的考古现场吧	20210420	49	盲盒日志丨“博博会”来啦！芋头们，线下约不约？	20220830
03	盲盒日志|银铲铲可以耍起来了	20210430	50	Extra by 河南博物院文创研发中心 - 新品暴击|“溪世珍宝”—大溪遗址考古盲盒	20220910
04	盲盒日志|考古盲盒升级版，来体验下文物修复吧	20210510	51	盲盒日志丨但愿人长久，千里共婵娟	20220911

05	盲盒日志|盲盒还能用来求婚？520 的高配狗粮来了！	20210520	52	盲盒日志丨叮铃铃铃，“虚拟公社”伙同爆火铃铛来搞福利啦！	20220920
06	盲盒日志|考古官们可以在线查看宝物身份啦~	20210530	53	盲盒日志丨文创有“新”意	20221010
07	盲盒日志|萌兔儿破壳 团宠蹦哒哒	20210610	54	盲盒日志|“豫博仕女之贴秋膘”表情包上线啦！	20221020
08	盲盒日志|爱情盲盒近期上线，快来挖掘你的《千古玦尘》之神仙爱恋！	20210620	55	盲盒日志丨河南博物院“虚拟公社”十月视频合集上线啦！	20221030
09	盲盒日志|铜镜打磨套装即将上线，毕竟光挖土已经无法满足你们了……	20210710	56	盲盒日志丨双十一优惠倒计时，豫博好物狂欢购	20221110
10	盲盒日志|求求了，请不要再 rua 我们的兔子了	20210720	57	盲盒日志丨激活千年古藏，这样的国潮文化有没有戳中你的心？	20221120
11	盲盒日志|青山一道同风雨，明月何曾是两乡	20210730	58	盲盒日志丨虚拟公社 11 月视频合集上线啦！快来秀出你的神仙创意	20221130
12	盲盒日志|既然不能面对面，那就直播间里见	20210810	59	盲盒日志丨双 12，豫博好礼重磅来袭，快来给你的购物车加点 buff	20221210
13	盲盒日志|明晚直播间，惊喜福利等你哟！	20210820	60	盲盒日志丨取色古今，共绘山海，成就我们心中的中国色	20221220
14	盲盒日志|升级了！	20210910	61	盲盒日志丨当文物遇上五谷，传承焕发新生	20221230
15	盲盒日志|来当我们的考古盲盒策展人吧	20210920	62	盲盒日志丨这次我们把展览搬到了二楼的阳光房	20230110
16	主展馆开放一年啦，今天做个盘点吧	20210927	63	盲盒日志丨豫博文创来送新年礼物啦	20230120
17	盲盒日志|定制一个你的专属个人情感盲盒吧	20211010	64	盲盒日志丨新年新砖，认真地搬	20230130
18	盲盒日志|叮，您的《专属情感盲盒》定制菜单，请查收！	20211021	65	盲盒日志丨是铜镜盲盒呀！	20230210
19	盲盒日志|我的这点小心思，全在这个盲盒里了…	20211030	66	盲盒日志丨铜镜考古盲盒将于 2 月 24 日上线发售啦～	20230220
20	盲盒日志|考古盲盒 X 青玉人首蛇身饰棒棒糖,梦幻联动来咯！	20211110	67	盲盒日志丨被古人的仪式感拉满！	20230310
21	盲盒日志|文创也 Battle！还有盲盒主题文创展等你来约	20211120	68	盲盒日志丨文物里的那些建筑	20230320
22	盲盒日志|考古盲盒周年庆！你好，考古官	20211130	69	盲盒日志丨许你一个文创四月天	20230330
23	盲盒日志|这一年，那些被误解的宝物	20211210	70	盲盒日志丨我们的汉服文化节加场啦！	20230410
24	盲盒日志|这一年，那些被误解的宝物（下）	20211220	71	盲盒日志丨系列活动如期而至，快来豫博文创来场甜蜜的邂逅吧！	20230420
25	盲盒日志|告别 emo 的新年好物大合集！	20211230	72	盲盒日志丨本篇日志内容太多，标题就不起了，你们自己进去看吧	20230430

26	盲盒日志|万万没想到，会被一卷纸难倒	20220110	73	盲盒日志丨在小小的宝盒里面挖呀挖呀挖～	20230510
27	盲盒日志|集虎符，迎欧气	20220120	74	盲盒日志丨博物馆里的“小怪兽”	20230520
28	盲盒日志|虎里虎气的考古盲盒	20220130	75	盲盒日志|即将到来的六月能干点啥？玉雕艺术了解下	20230530
29	盲盒日志|豫博里的中国式浪漫	20220210	76	盲盒日志丨我们的棒棒糖得奖啦！	20230610
30	盲盒日志丨我们正青春	20220220	77	盲盒日志丨用 “新仪式”解锁属于我们自己的节日	20230621
31	盲盒日志丨虚拟版的“到此一游”，你 get 了吗？	20220302	78	盲盒日志丨我们在蚂蚁森林里藏了件“莲鹤方壶”	20230701
32	盲盒日志丨“考古盲盒增强版”今日加载上线	20220310	79	盲盒日志丨这款博物馆里的中国桌游到底该咋玩？	20230710
33	盲盒日志丨稀缺配置，先到为君！	20220321	80	盲盒日志丨天儿热，送点小小的福利吧	20230721
34	盲盒日志丨“宝物概览”单元固定新增了	20220330	81	盲盒日志丨又一款好玩有趣的新产品被大家发现了	20230730
35	盲盒日志丨冷兵出，敢争锋！？	20220411	82	盲盒日志丨本期日志里还有博物雅堂，记得报名呀！	20230810
36	盲盒日志丨”宝物出道了”，来线上感受古典最强音	20220421	83	盲盒日志丨限量版“莲鹤方壶”邮折即将发布	20230821
37	盲盒日志丨这个五一，在“只有河南”“豫”见你	20220501	84	盲盒日志丨月饼礼盒你冲不冲	20230830
38	盲盒日志丨开不了馆，继续搞直播……	20220510	85	盲盒日志丨首款全 3D 冰淇淋来啦	20230910
39	盲盒日志丨冷兵器考古盲盒全系上线啦～	20220520	86	盲盒日志丨被发现的墩墩……	20230920
40	盲盒日志丨“六一”节，来豫博现场探宝哇	20220530	87	盲盒日志丨一大波新品来袭～	20230930
41	盲盒日志丨文化和自然遗产日，来“博物雅堂”一起感受金石传拓的魅力	20220610	88	盲盒日志丨国庆文创热，店长有话说	20231010
42	盲盒日志丨“开卷遇良友”，每周三在线上和豫博一同遨游茫茫书海	20220620	89	盲盒日志丨豫博文创第五期实习生前来报道！	20231020
43	盲盒日志|秦砖汉瓦苍茫了时光，唐风宋雨摇曳了花香	20220702	90	盲盒日志丨叮铃铃铃铃铃～	20231030
44	盲盒日志丨九鼎一玺系列今日上新	20220721	91	盲盒日志丨办展、论坛、动漫、邮局……还是豫博文创吗	20231110
45	盲盒日志丨我们又上新了！	20220731	92	盲盒日志丨瓷中君子 厚土生花	20231121
46	盲盒日志丨宝物又上新啦～	20220810	93	盲盒日志丨“礼合中国”最后一个展厅	20231210
47	盲盒日志丨“中秋不搬砖”表情包来啦，快来扫码获取吧！	20220820	94	盲盒日志丨豫博文创惊喜亮相国新办 2024 新年招待会	20231223

Note: Information were updated on 24th December 2023.

Appendix 3 – Interview Guideline

Interview Guideline

Opening of the interview

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher will re-introduce the intention of the interview and expectation of the research. Participants will be re-informed about the reason they were chosen for the interview, as well as the expected duration of the interview. Informed consent, confidentiality/privacy issue, and right of withdrawal will also be re-addressed to the participant. Meanwhile, the researcher will ask participants for permission to record the interview. General demographic information will be obtained during the opening (e.g., gender, age group, occupation, etc.)

Preliminary questions with CONSUMER:

1. Can you tell me about your first encounter with this product?
2. Can you talk me through the story of your experience?
    a. Which parts of the experience do you enjoy the most? Any examples?
3. Specific questions regarding interviewee's interaction with the product (based on interviewee's unboxing video or description during the interview), for example:
    a. How does the soil feel like?
    b. Why did you use the shovel in this way?
    c. How do you feel about restoring these scattered pieces?
    d. …
4. What would happen if you did not get your expected "relic" from this box?
5. How do you find about your experience with this product? How do you view your participation in this archaeological blind box?
6. What do you think about museum cultural products? Any experience with other museum cultural products?
7. Overall, what does this blind box / museum cultural product mean to you?

Potential interview topics with MUSEUM STAFF:

1. The original intention and inspiration of launching this blind box series.
    a. Target consumer
2. The process of product development. For example, the choice of material and accessories, the criteria of selecting the embedded miniature piece of relics.
3. The balance between entertainment/popularity and profession/expertise.
    a. Response/solution to any possible misunderstanding
4. Promotional strategy.
5. Message that museum aims to deliver through these products to the public.
6. Examples of any memorable engagement with consumers about their experience and feedback of this series of products.
7. Interpretation of museum's contemporary role.
8. Recent progress of product development.

Possible probing questions:

- Would you provide an example for the "…" you mentioned?
- Can you elaborate on that idea?
- I am not quite sure about the "…" you just said, would you explain further?

Closing comments:

- Is there anything I have not asked regarding your experiences that you'd like to tell me? / Is there any information you want to add?
- I will then work on the information analysis based on the interview, if you would like to receive a feedback report of this research, please let me know by sending email to the email address provided on the information sheet.
- Thank you for your participation.

Appendix 4 – Worked example of data analysis

(1) Coding example in Phase 2

a) For video data (EP, M24)



Triadic analysis	Initial codes
• **Context**: The unboxing experience that EP (M24) has with his archaeological restoration blind box, after his experience of the archaeological blind box as the "entry level" of this serial produce line. • **Content**: Following what he understood from the instructions EP chose to leave the glued pieces to sit separately for ten minutes. He repeatedly emphasised his uncertainty about this move (video: 00:10:25). • **Comment**: The audiences questioned EP's approach, as can be seen from both the bullet comments and forum comments (Figure 5.2 in the main body). EP replied to some of these comments after a reflection.	• Hesitation/uncertainty in performing the adapted professional practice • Comparison between the professional and lay • (Virtual) confrontation and communication between the consumer and video audience (as indirect consumer) regarding the embedded expertise

b) For interview data (Extract from Yi, F27)

Yi: It's something that you excavated by yourself, something you restored by yourself, which is interesting [C1]. I mean, no matter how identical the shards are, even if everyone got the shards smashed in the same pattern, the output cannot be the same. Some may fix them with wider gaps, while others may add on their ingenuity [C2], just like that nicely recreated lady figurine. I think it's also an extension to the product, the moment you thought of it, it is unique, and it was created by me [C3]. There must be some differences from those normal ones [C4], or other mass-produced products. Even though it is simply a copy of the heritage artefact, by association you'd naturally feel… 'yes, it has a historical template right there in the museum', a mysterious profoundness [C5]. It is a mass-produced replica, true, but you'll feel the profoundness therein [C6]. [Researcher: Like something with track records and full of story?] Yi: Exactly, and I think it's mainly because this thing feels more personal [C7]. For me, blind box is something personal. Like, when I look at these blind boxes now, I'd think, 'Ah, I chose this one to come home with me.' Even if I don't like it, it's still something I picked, so I feel there's a bit of an emotional connection because we've had some close contact [C8]. It's different from something that feels like a cold, mass-produced industrial product. Someone else might argue, 'there's no difference'. Well, they wouldn't be wrong, they are indeed factory-made stuff after all [C9]. But from my point of view, as you slowly uncover the (archaeological) blind box piece by piece, at that moment, you wouldn't even care if it was some mass-produced cheap copy. You'd just feel that – 'I worked so hard to get this, it has to be something special and meaningful!' [C10]	[C1] The significance of active involvement [C2] The individualities in handling the blind box [C3] Personal involvement allows archaeological blind box to transcend from its mass-produced essence [C4] Mark the distinction between archaeological blind box and general blind box [C5] The endorsement of museum collection for the mass-produced replica [C6] Replica inside archaeological blind box stands out because of the endorsed profoundness [C7] Substantial weight of personal involvement in shaping the uniqueness of this blind box [C8] Emotional connection emerging from the personal involvement [C9] Acknowledge the mass-produced essence of archaeological blind box [C10] How personal investment (physical) reshape the meaning of the replica

(2) Initial theme (and subtheme) generation in Phase 3

Themes	Sub-themes
The presentation of blind box	• Attraction of the uncertainty • Attraction of historical content (museum collection replica) • Trending consumption modality in the past few years • Surprising compatibility with the theme of archaeology • Transformed by the integration of archaeology

Established impression of the museum and archaeology (before/during the experience)	• Personal enthusiasm for archaeology/heritage/historical past
	  o Curiosity restricted by the regulation
	  o Unfulfilled passion for archaeology
	• Information gap between the insider and outsider
	  o Inaccessibility (physical/intellectual) faced by the outsiders.
	  o Indifferent attitude presented by the insiders
	• Stereotypical association with tomb robbing
	  o Misleading and unacceptable
	  o Add spice to archaeology

Highlights in the process of participation	• Immersive experience
	  o Extended unboxing experience
	  o Vicarious devotion and derived responsibility
	  o Detachment from the everyday life
	  o Exhaustion and time-consuming engagement
	• A copresence of the entertainment and profession
	  o Emphasising personal limitation in living up to the professional standard
	  o Presenting a delicate balance between the personal recreation and professional practice

Mixed reaction to key tangible components of the product	• Making indexical and iconic connection
	  o Appreciate soil as an enabling element
	  o Address the replica's resemblance with the preserved museum artefact, verifiable history
	  o Highlight the existence of Luoyang Shovel for its association with both archaeology and tomb robbing
	• Bodily reaction to the physicality of the components
	  o Amazed by the soil's smooth texture
	  o Shocked by the soil's hardness

	○ Highlight the replica's artificial "pastness" (e.g., patina and grain on the miniature bronzeware) ○ Assess the physicality of other tools included in the blind box (e.g., shovel, gloves, glue) • Personalisation of the components ○ Awareness of the replica's artificiality yet still handle with great care ○ Transformation of the replica with creative individuality
Reflection on heritage, expertise and museum (during/after the experience)	• Distance reduced between the public and heritage/museum/archaeology ○ Heritage (collections) comes back to life ○ Improved interest, empathy, and mutuality • Connection strengthened between the public and heritage/museum/archaeology
Reflection on museum merchandise consumption	• Museum merchandise as an intermediate channel for the transmission of history ○ Palpable, ownable, and sharable • Transformation of museum in this consumption ○ Active engagement with consumers through different channels ○ Crowdsourced enhancement of existing product ○ Continuous new product development ○ Embracing attitude towards difference/contradiction • Formation of a more integrated and holistic system ○ Increasing communication between the museum and the consumers ○ Interaction among the (direct/indirect) consumers (i.e., the consumer of archaeological blind box and the audience of unboxing video)

(3) Revised theme (and subtheme) in Phase 4

Themes	Subthemes
Process-driven unboxing experience	• Extended and themed unboxing experience • An experience depends on personal participation

Reciprocal interplay between the original and replica	• Physical resemblance (the replica to original)
	  o Facilitation of other material components (their existence and evoked hands-on participation)
	• Symbolic endorsement (the original to replica)
	  o Facilitation of related history/folklore
	• Consumer's immersive involvement
	  o Bodily reaction (to the replica)
	  o Cultivated intimacy (to both the replica and original) and sense of responsibility

Expertise-wise interplay between the expert and nonexpert	• The similarity between mass-marketed blind box and niche archaeology
	• The mutual endorsement between recreational blind box and professional archaeology
	  o Tangible and nonexpert-friendly access enabled by the form of blind box
	  o Enhanced meaningfulness thanks to the integration of exclusive archaeology
	• Mixed feelings and responses held by the consumers with/without experience in archaeology
	  o Change in attitude towards archaeology
	  o Recognition and acceptance of personal limitation (facilitated by hands-on interaction with the material components)
	  o Interaction/communication among consumers with diverse background

Norm-wise interaction between the public and museum in consumption	• Transformation in both the public and museum
	  o Willingness to break the boundary and embrace innovation despite irregularity.
	• Collaboration between the public and museum
	  o Dynamic development of museum cultural creative product

Appendix 5 – Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet (for netnography-only participant)

Project Title: Museum cultural products: An investigation on the role of materiality in cultural consumption

Project Information: This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted as part of PhD research at the University of Birmingham. The aim of this study is to examine the emerging role of museum cultural products in the context of contemporary cultural consumption and investigate its contribution to consumer experience.

Description of participation

You are invited to participate this research because of your post "_____" on platform "_____". We would like to ask for your permission to use your posted content as data for research purpose. Your posts, together with the comments posted by the viewers about your post will be analysed to facilitate the investigation of this research.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation at any time during data collection. After the data collection, if you would like to withdraw from the research, you can contact the researcher via details provided at the end of this sheet within four weeks (start from the date of your consent). Once the withdrawal is confirmed, all data relating to your participation will be deleted and will not be used. Please note that it might not be possible to remove your data from the study when the research findings are being finished and published.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

All collected data will be kept confidential, stored in a password-protected hard-drive, and can only be accessed by the researcher. Your personal information will not be exposed in any of the research findings. The data collected from your participation will only be used for research purposes, and the de-identified data will be published in a PhD dissertation, journal articles, conference papers, and book publications.

Please note that there are still possibilities for your online posts used in this research being re-identified after publication considering its already publicly available nature and researcher's limited control of the internet, but the researcher will do her very best to protect your privacy.

On the consent form, you could select your preference for the disclosure of your personal information (e.g., social media account name, photos, video channel, etc.) and data re-use condition (e.g., for interview elicitation in the second stage of this research, academic conference, journal/book publication).

Further enquiry

If you require further clarification about your participation, or if you prefer to receive any feedback about the research findings, please contact the researcher via the details provided at the end of this sheet.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Contact details

Investigator

Xuxiangru (Fiona) Fan |

Department of Marketing, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

Supervisors

Dr Emma Surman

Dr Pilar Rojas-Gaviria

Department of Marketing, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

Participant Information Sheet (for netnography and interview participant)

Project Title: Museum cultural products: An investigation on the role of materiality in cultural consumption

Project Information: This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted as part of PhD research at the University of Birmingham. The aim of this study is to examine the emerging role of museum cultural products in the context of contemporary cultural consumption and investigate its contribution to consumer experience.

Description of participation

You are invited to participate this research because of your post "_____" on platform "_____". We would like to ask for your permission to use your posted content as data for research purpose. Your posts, together with the comments posted by the viewers about your post will be analysed to facilitate the investigation of this research.

In the meantime, you are also invited to join the online interview designed for the second stage of the research project, to further share your experience with the mystery box of Henan Museum. You could provide any visual materials (e.g., photos/videos recording your experience), or continue with your unfinished "exploration" during the interview. The online interview may take up 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time and we can foresee no potential risks for you. The interview will be recorded with your permission.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation at any time during data collection. After the data collection, if you would like to withdraw from the research, you can contact the researcher via details provided at the end of this sheet within four weeks (start from the date of your consent). Once the withdrawal is confirmed, all data relating to your participation will be deleted and will not be used. Please note that it might not be possible to remove your data from the study when the research findings are being finished and published.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

All collected data will be kept confidential, stored in a password-protected hard-drive, and can only be accessed by the researcher. Your personal information will not be exposed in any of the research findings. The data collected from your participation will only be used for research

purposes, and the de-identified data will be published in a PhD dissertation, journal articles, conference papers, and book publications.

Please note that there are still possibilities for your online posts used in this research being re-identified after publication considering its already publicly available nature and researcher's limited control of the internet, but the researcher will do her very best to protect your privacy. On the consent form, you could select your preference for the disclosure of your personal information (e.g., social media account name, photos, video channel, etc.) and data re-use condition (e.g., for interview elicitation in the second stage of this research, academic conference, journal/book publication).

Further enquiry

If you require further clarification about your participation, or if you prefer to receive any feedback about the research findings, please contact the researcher via the details provided at the end of this sheet.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Contact details

Investigator

Xuxiangru (Fiona) Fan |

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Supervisors

Dr Emma Surman

Dr Pilar Rojas-Gaviria

Department of Marketing, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

Participant Information Sheet (for interviewee-only consumer)

Project Title: Museum cultural products: An investigation on the role of materiality in cultural consumption

Project Information: This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted as part of PhD research at the University of Birmingham. The aim of this study is to examine the emerging role of museum cultural products in the context of contemporary cultural consumption and investigate its contribution to consumer experience.

Description of participation

You are invited to participate in an online personal interview on your experience with the series of "archaeological mystery box" launched by Henan Museum. You are also welcomed to provide any visual materials (e.g., photos/videos recording your experience), or continue with your unfinished "exploration" during the interview. The online interview may take up 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time and we can foresee no potential risks for you. The interview will be recorded with your permission.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation at any time during data collection. After the data collection, if you would like to withdraw from the research, you can contact the researcher via details provided at the end of this sheet within four weeks (start from the date of your consent). Once the withdrawal is confirmed, all data relating to your participation will be deleted and will not be used. Please note that it might not be possible to remove your data from the study when the research findings are being finished and published.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

All collected data will be kept confidential, stored in a password-protected hard-drive, and can only be accessed by the researcher. Your personal information will not be exposed in any of the research findings. The data collected from your participation will only be used for research purposes, and the de-identified data will be published in a PhD dissertation, journal articles, conference papers, and book publications.

On the consent form, you could select your preference for the disclosure of your personal information (e.g., visual materials used in the interview that may disclose your information)

and your preference for the data re-use condition (e.g., academic conference, journal/book publication).

Further enquiry

If you require further clarification about your participation, or if you prefer to receive any feedback about the research findings, please contact the researcher via the details provided at the end of this sheet.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Contact details

Investigator

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Department of Marketing, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

Participant Information Sheet (for interviewee-only museum staff)

Project Title: Museum cultural products: An investigation on the role of materiality in cultural consumption

Project Information: This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted as part of PhD research at the University of Birmingham. The aim of this study is to examine the emerging role of museum cultural products in the context of contemporary cultural consumption and investigate its contribution to consumer experience.

Description of participation

You are invited to participate in an online personal interview regarding the marketing practice of the archaeological series of museum cultural products in Henan Museum. Questions will cover the product development story, cultural/historical background of this series, as well as memorable consumer engagement. The online interview may take up 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time and we can foresee no potential risks for you. The interview will be recorded with your permission.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation at any time during data collection. After the data collection, if you would like to withdraw from the research, you can contact the researcher via details provided at the end of this sheet within four weeks (start from the date of your consent). Once the withdrawal is confirmed, all data relating to your participation will be deleted and will not be used. Please note that it might not be possible to remove your data from the study when the research findings are being finished and published.

Confidentiality/anonymity and data security

All collected data will be kept confidential, stored in a password-protected hard-drive, and can only be accessed by the researcher. Your personal information will not be exposed in any of the research findings. The data collected from your participation will only be used for research purposes, and the de-identified data will be published in a PhD dissertation, journal articles, conference papers, and book publications.

Please note that you may face some risks (e.g., re-identification, influence on work) by expressing your opinions on certain issues. On the consent form, you could select your

preference for the disclosure of your personal information (e.g., position and responsibility at the museum) and data re-use condition (e.g., academic conference, journal/book publication).

Further enquiry

If you require further clarification about your participation, or if you prefer to receive any feedback about the research findings, please contact the researcher via the details provided at the end of this sheet.

Thank you for your interest and support.

Contact details

Investigator

Xuxiangru (Fiona) Fan |

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Supervisors

Dr Emma Surman

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Appendix 6 – Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the proposed study

Museum cultural products: An investigation on the role of materiality in cultural consumption

Fair Processing Statement

This information is being collected as part of a research project concerned with examining the emerging role of museum cultural product in the context of contemporary cultural consumption and investigating its contribution to consumer experience by the Department of Marketing in the University of Birmingham, UK. The information which you supply and that which may be collected as part of the research project will be entered into a filing system or database and will only be accessed by authorised personnel involved in the project. The information will be retained by the University of Birmingham and will only be used for the purpose of research, and statistical and audit purposes. By supplying this information, you are consenting to the University storing your information for the purposes stated above. The information will be processed by the University of Birmingham in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018. No identifiable personal data will be published without consent.

Data usage preference (please tick all that apply)

☐ I agree that my online post "_____" will be adopted as data for this PhD research and

- ☐ re-used as elicitation material for interview in the second stage of this research.
- ☐ presented at academic conference.
- ☐ presented in academic publication (e.g., journal article and book).

☐ I agree that the interview I attended will be adopted as data for this PhD research and

- ☐ presented at academic conference.
- ☐ presented in academic publication (e.g., journal article and book).

Anonymity preference for presenting online post (please tick as appropriate)

☐ I understand the possibility of re-identification and breach of confidentiality. I am willing to share information that may include identifiable data (e.g., name of my social media account, photos/screenshots of my post, and work responsibility).

☐ I understand the possibility of re-identification and breach of confidentiality. I prefer to stay anonymous.

Statements of understanding

- I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information leaflet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if necessary and have had these answered satisfactorily.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research without giving any reason before the agreed deadline. If I withdraw my data will be removed from the study and will be destroyed. I understand the possibility that the data may not be able to be removed once the research is published.

- I understand that my personal data will be processed for the purposes detailed above, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

- Based upon the above, I agree to take part in this study.

Name of participant…… Date…… Signature……..

Name of researcher …….....Date…… Signature……..