

## **Cultural heritage resources as environmental sustainability enablers within the Sino-Africa environmental partnership: the case of Botswana**

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### **Abstract**

Opportunities for China-Africa environmental collaboration have always existed but the gap lies in establishing forms of partnerships that cover a wide spectrum of stakeholders and resources. This paper discusses opportunities that aim at value-add in environmental sustainability initiatives through the use of cultural and heritage resources within the China-Botswana partnership. Both Botswana and China have different strengths that are complementary when it comes to environmental conservation. China has a diversified pool of cultural and heritage resources, as well as a traceable cultural philosophy but lacks rigorous conservation strategies including those aimed at grassroots levels. Botswana's strength on the other hand lies in rigorous internationally accredited natural resources conservation policies which nonetheless lack conscious incorporation of cultural resources. The China-Botswana partnerships therefore provide an opportunity to explore cultural heritage resources as key components of environmental conservation and local economic development.

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## Introduction

China-Africa relations are gradually gaining ground, with various sectors in both countries searching for avenues of collaboration. Environmental conservation is one area where the Sino-Africa relations feature promptly with several opportunities yet to be discovered, explored, and initiated. This paper discusses opportunities that allow for value-add within environmental sustainability initiative. Almost three decades since the formulation of sustainable development principles (WCED 1987), co-operation on environmental conservation by various state parties is still largely centred on environmental sustainability as a consequence of managing only those resources that are considered of “natural” value at the passive mention of cultural and heritage resources. This point of departure compromises environmental sustainability efforts as they remain devoid of cultural and heritage resources which would enrich existing and popular indicators coined for natural resources conservation. Cultural values are ubiquitous in inhabited geographic spaces of the world.

For both Africa and China, while focusing on a generic natural environment was acceptable two decades ago as a point of departure, the failure to co-opt other conservation indicators such as those emanating from cultural and heritage resources existent in the historic environment has left a loophole, particularly where involvement of people other than government officials and international experts are concerned. This omission continues to make environmental conservation efforts vulnerable at rural, remote, and most pristine areas of the world where grassroots communities are the main custodians at the disposal of the natural environment and hence readily available to monitor the situation. The rural levels of Botswana and China contain cultural and heritage resources in abundance therefore it is here where grassroots communities- who are time-immemorial custodians of the resources- can be motivated to translate their understanding and regard for cultural and heritage resources into conservation strategies for the overall environment. To achieve this mandate, the following processes are necessary:

- Identify procedures and processes through which cultural and heritage aspects of the environment can be recognised, acknowledged, and fully incorporated within sustainability initiatives.
- Identify and implement consumption and production indicators of cultural and heritage resources that will supplement those of natural resources.
- Use cultural heritage indicators to nurture sustainable communities – those that are in touch with their environment emotionally, psychologically and economically.
- Facilitate opportunities such as the Sino-Africa collaboration in a way that they become learning platforms for achieving sustainability initiatives.

Communities that are educated on comparative advantage provided by heritage resources within their respective geographical location, and the possible economic gains that follow as a result of conservation of relics, monuments, sites, and landscapes are likely to value the heritage first for the worth of their individual/communal identity (*heritage for heritage's sake*) nurturing a network of individual/communal and country identities together in a way that strengthens the relationship between the urban-rural, centre-periphery.

In order to safeguard cultural resources through community participation, governments often enforce return of discovered material objects to the central government, at times with an offer for a reward as is the norm in China. This approach can in certain instances influence local communities to become indifferent to conservation of cultural heritage as it does not allow the individual/community to connect emotionally and psychologically with the resources. A community-based cultural heritage model provide a potential to find/identify and celebrate cultural material at the level where it has to first bring value as a matter of precedence before that same value is catapulted to the regional and national levels.

### **Establishing opportunities**

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The passive mention of cultural heritage resources in sustainable development initiatives has with time only served to compromise the process of achieving sustainable use of both natural and cultural resources because in rural areas of developing countries, cultural factors emanating from heritage resources are key in devising coherent local land use planning (places of historical value, sacred spaces and so forth); influencing people's attitudes to the environment; and recently, in redefining rural economic systems (for example the boom in heritage tourism). Rural areas of countries such as Botswana and China therefore provide an untapped potential to juxtapose cultural heritage resources with wilderness and wildlife resources' to enhance sustainable utilisation of rural environments. Communities resident around wilderness and wildlife landscapes are custodians of these resources who are also endowed with knowledge and skills relating to both tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources (cf. UNESCO 1972; 2003) that when recognised and tapped can influence the attitudes of these communities and behaviour towards the environment. Rural communities therefore provide readily available personnel to be inducted on "modern management" methods.

In most developing countries, a more prevalent focus on cultural heritage and sustainable development link has been placed on urban spaces or cities (or rather, rural landscapes that have with time been urbanised), while in developing countries and emerging economies such as Botswana and China cultural heritage resources are mostly found in rural areas where an untapped opportunity to engage grassroots communities is readily available, and where opportunities for education on natural resource conservation remain open. A much needed geographical diversification of economic engagement is provided by a focus on cultural heritage whose most authentic components are located in rural areas. For a Sino-Africa partnership in environmental sustainability, it is pertinent to first of all recognise that there is a growing interest in community indigenous tourism using cultural heritage resources and as such, a re-assessment of conservation philosophies involving the addition of new conservation indicators specific to cultural and heritage resources.

In particular, China has the strength in terms of cultural and heritage products as well the Chinese philosophical heritage embedded within a history that runs from ancient period (371–233 BC) - mythological time of culture heroes known as the sage kings; the medieval period (179BC-798 AD); modern period (1017-1777 and the contemporary period (1858-1968) with the Communism years (1949-) and the Republic. In terms of conservation, China's philosophical heritage can guide the refining of conservation strategies. For instance, Chairman Mao's philosophical principle on continuation of culture is to look at the Marxist –Leninists' approach dividing between the quintessence and dregs of heritage whereby the quintessence "is that part of the heritage that is democratic, scientific, and for the masses.", and the dregs is defined as "what is anti-democratic, anti-scientific, and anti-people or aristocratic" (Chan 1963:781).

Botswana on the other hand, as evidenced by its environmental policies outlined in Table 03 below, is devoid of any traceable philosophical direction relating to cultural heritage management although it has cultural activities that can be interpreted as traditional management of cultural heritage, particularly that of an intangible nature. The country largely depends on international conventions to "manage" both its natural and cultural heritage and as such has national conservation policies that are highly favourable to the environment. Experiences of the two countries can be merged to inform new approaches to cultural resource management.

In addition, initiatives that exist in already popular conservation models such as the eco-tourism model (cf. Drum and Moore, 2002) can provide guidance, although it is similarly important to caution that ecotourism principles need to be modified as they are not tailor-made to be compatible with cultural heritage resources conservation (cf. Keitumetse 2009).

Adding new products requires new approaches. A cultural heritage specific community-based a conservation model named community-based cultural heritage resources management model (COBACHREM) has been outlined in earlier publications as a point of departure (Keitumetse 2013). The need for this model is compounded by the fact that modern managers of heritage sites (both national and in-

ternational) are involved in a growing trend where natural resource conservation approaches are automatically “adapted” into cultural and heritage resources, a process that ends up with cultural and heritage resources not adding value to conservation of natural resources. It is necessary to *adopt* some ideals from natural resources conservation models but *not adapt* these into management of cultural and heritage resources within the Sino-African partnerships.

### **International legislation on environmental conservation: Botswana and China**

At an international policy level, mainstreaming cultural and heritage resources into sustainable development ideals will inform the Rio+20 debates, in particular agenda 21 chapter 26 of the sustainable development framework beyond a narrow definition of “communities” to a much broader and holistic definition that encompasses all people that have a relationship with their environment.

In identifying indicators that are specific to cultural and heritage resources it is necessary to not compare apples with oranges. It is equally important that the anticipated Sino-Africa environmental partnership identify a common point of departure to ease implementation at the national level. Already existing international conventions on environment and cultural heritage ratified (Table 01), ratified by both countries provide a point of departure in this regard. A majority of the states/countries sign international conventions after a thorough legal assessment on how compatible these are with the specific country’s internal laws and national systems. Viewed in this manner, international conventions constitute common concepts that harmonise various countries’ approach to resource conservation, thus providing a template for collaboration that is compatible for both regions. The purpose of international conventions such as those in *Table 01* below is well captured by Gruber (2007: 263) when discussing the world heritage and its associated benefits in asserting that “The duty of State Parties to protect their heritage properties does not completely depend on inclusion in the World Heritage List, but comes from the duty to identify a nation’s heritage”, because countries are charged with developing implementation strategies that resonate with their national levels, hence models such as COBACHREM are significant in this regard.

## National legislation on environmental conservation: China and Botswana

In addition to international legislation, both China and Botswana have national

**Table 01: Select international conventions guiding both natural and cultural resources conservation in Botswana and China**

International conventions on resources conservation/preservation	Country's # sites on World Heritage List	
	CN	BW
1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the world's cultural and natural heritage	43	01
2003 UNESCO convention for the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage	36	00
1971 Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran), hence Ramsar Convention,	41 sites (3, 709, 853 hectares)	01 site (5, 537, 400 hectares)

policies covering natural and cultural resource conservation. A selection of key laws governing conservation of resources within the two countries is outlined in this section.

### *China*

Literature on China's environmental issues illustrates that the majority of public outcry against environmental degradation derives from the public's "sense of injustice over the sacrifice of environmental and human health in the name of economic development" (Moore and Warren 206: 03), illustrating a reactive, rather than a proactive response to environmental concerns. In addition, the statement also points to an unbalanced placement of value on economics, at the expense of conservation, a common characteristic also in Botswana, though the scale of destruction varies due to

volume and significance in each country. However, with 41 sites on the world heritage list (UNESCO 1972); 36 sites on the Intangible Heritage list (UNESCO 2003); and 43 sites on the Ramsar convention list (Ramsar 1971), it is fair to expect China to lead initiatives on sustainable management of cultural and heritage resources conservation.

The law on protection of cultural relics (2002) in China is premised on the concept that inherited historical and cultural legacy can enable the Chinese government to build “a socialist society with cultural, ideological and material progress” (Chapter I, article. 01). Implementation strategies that could translate such a mission to practical resources management tools are more likely than not, to require grassroots community involvement because it is at grassroots level where the Chinese society’s cultural assets are located. However, like most national policies and legal instruments, the law focuses primarily on punitive measures towards destructions rather than on identifying and outlining participatory approaches towards cultural conservation (example, ref chapter. V, art. 50-59). The same can be said of Botswana. At a country level, the National Bureau of Statistics of China 2011 report states that:

*“At the end of 2010, there were 2, 515 art-performing groups, 2, 141 museums, ...3, 258 culture centres”* (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2008: online).

However, issues of looting, illicit trading and illegal excavations are reported to be rampant in China, at most times perpetuated by communities that are local to the areas where cultural heritage resources are located. A case in point is that outlined by Gruber (2008: 294-295) in 1998 in Qixing Town in Xiangxiang city where a receding flood exposed “possibly the largest kiln site ever discovered in China” which was later looted by communities in the area.

Nonetheless China continues to encourage local communities’ to participate in conservation of resources through measures such as education on the laws protecting the cultural relics; returning discovered relics to the state with a possible reward system to those that turn the items back. Adding more grassroots initiatives



such as those contained within a community-based cultural heritage resources management (COBACHREM) framework may curb destruction as communities become less indifferent to cultural material which they themselves can use in their geographical locations both as symbols of identity and as economic assets.

### ***Botswana***

As already stated and outlined, Botswana's conservation policies are mainly biased towards natural resources and this poses a risk as these strategies are current-

**Table 02: China's existing legal frameworks for natural and cultural resources conservation under State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) and State Administration for Cultural Heritage (SACH)**

Legal Instrument	Yr.	Community Participation Enablers	Forms of community participation Translation ©Moore and Warren (2006)
1) Environmental Impact Assessment Law [EIA Law]	2003	2006 Provisional Measures for Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment [EIA Implementing Law]	- Surveys ( <i>diao cha</i> ) - Solicitation and collection of expert opinion ( <i>zhengqu yujian</i> )
2) Administrative License Law [ALL]	2004	2004 Environmental Protection Administrative Licensing Hearings Provisional Measures [ALL Implementing Measures]	- Public hearings ( <i>gongzhongtingzhongnui</i> ) - Intergovernmental coordination meetings ( <i>xietiaohui</i> ) - Advance briefings ( <i>chufenghui</i> )
3) Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of cultural Relics (Order of the President No. 76)	2002	- Chapter I, Article 01 and 02 (cultural material and society) - Chapter. V (on cultural relics in People's collection)	- Inheritance of historical and cultural legacy - "...material objects reflecting the social system, social production or the life of various nationalities in different historical periods.

**Table 03: Botswana’s key existing legal frameworks for natural and cultural resources conservation under the Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism (MEWT)**

	<b>Legal instrument</b>	<b>Yr.</b>	<b>Existing Community participation enablers</b>
1	Botswana Ecotourism Best Practices Manual	2009	Identified ecotourism guidelines and criteria that later contributed to the development of Botswana Eco-certification programme. Funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat.
2	Community Based Natural Resources Management Policy (CBNRM)	2007	Guides community conservation of natural resources in tourism and regulates the use of natural resources in protected areas
3*	Environmental Impact Assessment Act	2005	Guides the conduct of environmental impact assessments that evaluate the effects of planned developmental activities on the environment and determine mitigation measures where necessary
4	Botswana National Ecotourism Strategy	2002	Ensures adherence to ecotourism principles by outlining guiding principles for environmental management The instrument guides the headline content of the Botswana Eco-certification programme, 2009/10.
5*	Monument and Relics Act (re-enactment of the 1970 version)	2001	For protection of heritage environments and resources. Provides for archaeological impact assessment (AIA) as part of EIA
6	National Parks and Game Reserve Regulations	2000	Regulates processes and procedures of activities taking place in protected areas through management plans, building & infrastructure specifications, waste management specifications, and so forth
7	Waste Management Act	1998	Describes activities necessary to ensure environmentally compliant waste disposal regulated by local authorities.
8	Tourism Regulations	1996	Provides processes, procedures, and instruments, for setting up tourism business establishments, and carrying out tourism activities in environmentally sensitive areas.
9	Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act ( <i>under review</i> )	1992	Provides for conservation of both wilderness spaces and wildlife species in the country. Provides quotas and permits for use of natural resources, etc.
10	Tourism Policy ( <i>under review</i> )	1990	Guides tourism strategy for the country – e.g. high value, low volume strategy
11	Herbage Preservation Act	1977	Control and regulation of veldt fires for rangeland management purposes

ly being adapted into cultural and heritage resources during implementation, without assessing compatibility with cultural and heritage resources.

### **Discussion: collaboration opportunities on cultural heritage resources conservation within the Sino-Africa partnership**

Although Botswana and China have not had significant direct collaboration within environmental sectors, there have been some encounters that provide opportunities to learn from one another and benchmark on possible future collaboration. In 2010, the two countries' select natural legislation outlined in tables 02 and 03 above had an opportunity to be compared and discussed at international level within the tourism industry. Botswana and China competed for the World Travel and Tourism (WTTC) Destination Stewardship Award that was won by the former.

The two sites, Huangshan Mountains in China and Okavango Ramsar site in Botswana are presented in brief here to indicate possible areas of collaboration for the two countries. The WTTC website outlines the following about the destination stewardship award:

*“This award goes to a destination - country, region, state, or town - which comprises a network of tourism enterprises and organisations which show dedication to and success in maintaining a programme of sustainable tourism management at the destination level, incorporating social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits as well as multi-stakeholder engagement... Finalists in this category must demonstrate sustainable tourism planning and policies that enhance the natural, historic and cultural assets unique to a destination”* (<http://www.wttc.org/tourismfortomorrow/awards/award-categories/destination-stewardship-award/>) as outlined in table 04 below.

It would appear from earlier sections of this article that unlike Botswana, China has a lot to offer in terms of cultural heritage landscapes of international value as well as endowed with cultural philosophy spanning years, while Botswana appears to have conservation policies and on-ground strategies that spans a wide network of stakeholders varying from government officials through to community and

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business investors in natural resources conservation. The WTTC competition platform provides a starting point for future collaboration between the two countries.

The development of the link between sustainable development and the field of cultural heritage is facilitated from the disciplinary sub-fields that include public archaeology; historical archaeology, intangible heritage, museums, among others.

The main question is: how can the link between environmental sustainability and

**Table 04:** conservation characteristics of the two competing sites

SITE	Yr. of nomination	WTTC performance indicators for the Destination Stewardship Award © <a href="http://www.wttc.org/">http://www.wttc.org/</a>	Community components of the two sites
Huangshan mountains (yellow mountains)	1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ maximum positive benefits and minimum negative impacts to the environment,</li> <li>✓ tangible support for the protection of the destination's natural and cultural heritage,</li> <li>✓ promotion of sense of place and authenticity,</li> <li>✓ direct economic and social benefits to the host community,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present: Inclusion of a number of Tibetan villages in the buffer zone.</li> <li>- Tang dynasty (Ad 747): Named Huangshan (Yellow) mountain</li> <li>- Yuan dynasty (1271-1368): temples constructed</li> <li>- Ming dynasty (1606): Fahai Meditation Temple and Wonshu Temple built</li> </ul>
Okavango Delta Ramsar Site (ODRS)	1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <u>and</u> educating visitors on the sustainable tourism efforts of the destination.</li> <li>✓ These goals and accomplishments are also communicated widely with media and other stakeholders, in order to promote best practice in the Travel &amp; Tourism industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 15<sup>th</sup> Century and earlier: San communities inhabited the landscape</li> <li>- 16<sup>th</sup> Century onwards: Bantu-speaking communities inhabited the landscape.</li> <li>- 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present: Various ethnic groups and businesses depend on the river system for economic, social, cultural and spiritual substance. Direct interaction with the landscape.</li> </ul>

cultural resources be operationalised at community level? Developing conservation models that explore opportunities, and guide use of cultural and heritage at local community level may be the key. A working model coined Community Based Cultural Heritage Resources Management (COBACHREM) aims to build a practical framework that starts by first identifying production and consumption indicators specific only to cultural and heritage resources at a community level on one end, and the at national level on the other extreme to account for variations in cultural affiliation and use.

For instance, China may choose to focus on the pre-war period, post Cultural Revolution period, while Botswana may look at colonial, post-colonial or post-independence, as timeframes of interest. However, at community levels, the heritage in question will determine a point of departure for implementation.

The COBACHREM model is an outcome of experiences accumulated over a decade by the author. The research and experiences were accumulated from continuing work in Botswana's two regions of Okavango Delta in the North and Kgalegadi in the South. Other experiences emanate from consultancy works for institutions such as UNESCO which has cultural heritage data for most countries of the world including China and Botswana.

In addition to new perspective to sustainable development approaches, the relevance of this work lies in its potential to offer comparisons on the application of sustainable development using natural resources versus the application of sustainable development using cultural resources, thus providing opportunities to enhance conservation of the environment as a whole. Having China and Botswana as partners brings experiences that complement one another and offer opportunities to compare and share experiences across countries and continents.

## **Conclusion**

Opportunities for China-Africa environmental collaboration have always existed but the gap lies in establishing forms of partnerships as well as diversifying them from manufacturing to other resources conservation for development in a way that

engages and motivates rural communities to translate their cultural heritage resources to environmental conservation as a whole. This article explored new forms of collaboration involving cultural and heritage resources.

While international organisations provide a general guiding platform for conservation of both natural and cultural resources, individual countries have the responsibility to formulate conservation programs that are specific to their countries' cultural contexts and that are sustainable.

Bi-lateral co-operation between China and Botswana in cultural heritage conservation has the potential to open up avenues through which the two countries' conservation efforts could be improved to benefit the psycho-social and economic well-being of their populations. Although the two countries have different strengths that complement each other, China and Botswana seem to be facing the same challenge of finding a way to incorporate resource conservation at grassroots level. As earlier stated, China has a diversified pool of cultural and heritage resources but lacks organised grassroots conservation strategies. Botswana's strength on the other hand is in natural resource conservation policies which nonetheless lack focused cultural resources conservation approaches in the country's many well reserved national parks. Sino-Africa co-operation could harness the comparative advantage of the two countries and explore opportunities for conservation of cultural and heritage resources and extrapolate those to local economic development.

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