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Transformed:
Representing Japanese Colonial
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Memory Contested, Locality Transformed: Representing Japanese Colonial ‘Heritage’ in Taiwan

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*To My Beloved Grandmother
and Mother,
Chiang, Shieh Pi-yeh
and Lin, Yueh-tao*

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Preface: Journey from a Gold Town

It was an evening in 2005, after a tough day like many other days at the museum park where I was working. My colleague and I were sitting on the port embankment, looking at the lights shining from the mountain town where we worked, on the other side of bay. The construction of the museum was nearly complete, and it had already been open to the public for several months. Thinking about all the complexities and difficulties of the past three years, I felt exhausted, and asked my colleague, “What are we striving for? Have we made any meaningful changes after all this hard work?” I thought about the misunderstandings we had had with some local people, and the pressures from county government, the local councilors, state enterprises and so on. Museum and heritage work is a dynamic process and it can often feel like its value is easily forgotten. My colleague answered, “Look at those new constructions in the neighbourhood area”. She pointed to the lights. “They have improved little by little. This is because of the museum.” This was the moment I decided to begin my research on heritage.

Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s saw a heritage and museum boom throughout the land. Almost every local government strove to improve the local economy and enhance the political reputation of the mayor through museum and heritage tourism. This was encouraged by the central government as a means of national identity building in the 1990s and 2000s. The theme of heritage burgeoned especially when it was connected to international diplomacy and domestic social issues. Meanwhile, the press focussed on the negative results of this boom, such as the fact that many museums which had been heavily subsidized by the central and local governments eventually ended up as ‘mosquito halls’. Used as a political means to earn local support in elections, many museums and culture centres were constructed and opened in advance of elections; however, there was

no long term plan or professional personnel for operation. After luxurious opening ceremonies, many museums ended up as empty spaces, with mosquitoes as their only visitors.

My colleagues and I were lucky enough to be working for a daring mayor who provided great help in gaining support from the stiff bureaucratic system, and who persuaded property owners to participate in the museum project. The 2000s was also a time of relatively good cultural and economic investment from the county government, and so we had plenty of resources in terms of finance and personnel. This allowed us to work towards cultural and educational targets despite facing certain difficulties. Indeed, in comparison with many other cases in Taiwan, the situation at our museum was quite good. Other sites had to deal with problems including a lack of professional staff owing to legal restrictions on government organisation, a lack of financial support from local councilors and mayors because of disagreements over cultural necessities, resistance from local residents or property owners, and uncontrolled or short-sighted displays and research projects conducted by private companies and university units, whose contracts were agreed by the Government Procurement Act (Caigoufa 採購法). These structural deficiencies posed a great obstacle to the accumulation of culture in Taiwan. At present, we have numerous luxury constructions built by famous architects, yet few long-term plans to manage the heritage sites in a sustainable way.

A Local Museum—locality and community

Our museum park, the Gold Ecological Park in Jinguashi, was built as an ecomuseum and opened to the public in 2004. Jinguashi was a gold and copper mining area from the Japanese colonial period to the 1980s. The Gold Ecological Park was aimed to pre-

serve the mining remains and improve the local economy through heritage strategies. The term *ecomuseum* indicates an ideal model of researchers redeveloping the area through cultural industries with community participation, and it also incorporates the state programme of 'community building'. However, when the model was put in place in the locale, the problem of translating these notions into practice became a big issue.

The locale itself presented challenges for our work as staff of the museum. First, the land and buildings belong to two national enterprises, not the museum or Taipei County Government. Second, the local residents did not trust the county government owing to previous issues of land ownership and architectural renovation. The tourist management department established in the town by the county government the previous year had a bad relationship with the local residents. When the museum team first came to the locale, the local residents did not welcome them, and regarded them as just another government body. Third, this locale used to be a mining district, and development of the entire area has been conducted according to old mining legislation. This was a major obstacle to many previous development plans in this area, for instance turning the old mining tunnels into a tourist attraction. Fourth, the town is situated on the outskirts of an urban centre. Owing to its declining economic condition, the majority of the population is made up of mostly elders and children. Young people and adults have left home for better job opportunities, and those who chose to stay in their hometown did not seem to want to cooperate with other members of the town. There was little sense of a community. Due to these factors, the museum team was already on shaky ground when starting the ecomuseum which required a relationship of mutual trust, community awareness and a passion among the residents to participate in the scheme.

The intention of the county government was simple. Heritage tourism is a means to improve the local economy, and may be an asset to the cultural reputation of the county mayor and local politicians. However, the intention of the museum team did not entirely fit these expectations. During the process, I often thought about what our targets were. As a county museum, we could simply be an ecomuseum,

built to fit the government bureaucracy and policy of the time. But we thought that since we had both the resources and professionalism, the museum should help the local people in the long run. If museums and heritage are a means of economic improvement, the improvement should be achieved in a sustainable way, and should benefit the local people. That means that the museum should belong to the local community in the future, when a community is eventually formed and when they know what they want to do with their heritage.

Re-mapping Memories

We quickly realized that there was no 'community' in the town. The adult generation, except the elders and their grandchildren, had several local societies. However, many of their leaders would not cooperate with each other, and in some cases even showed mutual antipathy. The people who voiced their opinions to the county government and researchers were mainly males. The views of the local females were seldom heard. When we started to collect opinions in the locale, we thought that the history of working in the tunnels, operating the mining machines and so forth was the only history of the town. We later discovered, however, that the past, just like a community, has no single common story: there are numerous memories, not one single 'memory'.

Alongside gender and occupation, a structural factor was also an obstacle to the formation of a community. When we started to renovate a Japanese residence, we were aware of having little data about the house. Only after the participation of an artist who grew up in the residence during her childhood did a memory version suddenly spring up. She told us vivid stories about living in the house and the neighbourhood, how she played with brothers and neighbours, how her school life was different from that of the other children from miners' families, etc. She is from a Chinese mainlanders' family,¹ and her father used to be a high-ranking manager in the mining company. Fascinated by her stories, I was stunned at

1. The mainlanders refer to the group of people who emigrated from China to Taiwan with the KMT retreat in the 1940s and 50s.

the same time. I realized that there was more than one memory version to deal with. Investigation of diversified memories compelled me to look into various social frameworks. This situation of diversified social frameworks was one of the major factors resulting in the fragmented sense of community. In order to build up a sense of community, it would be vital to represent this diversity. Meanwhile I realized that the colonial structures and asymmetrical hierarchy are still alive in an unconscious way. Even our museum, a county apparatus, represents an extension of a kind of colonial structure.

This was an incentive to investigate the underlying fabric of colonial remains in Taiwan. The representation of colonial 'heritage' can never exist separately from an understanding of its structure. Without awareness of 'coloniality', no postcolonial 'subjectivity' can be formed. People can fully welcome heritage tourism from colonial connections or simply reject the whole colonial past, but without some negotiated sense of continuity with the past, they will be unable to develop civil power and sustain a sense of place, such as that which existed during colonial periods.

