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

SUMMARY

Taiwan has been experiencing a 'memory boom' since the 1990s. This 'memory boom', represented by dramatically increasing numbers of museum and heritage sites, is closely related to a new pursuit of locality after the end of Martial Law in 1987. During the periods of Japanese colonial occupation and KMT (Kuomintang 國民黨; Chinese Nationalist Party) authoritarian rule, the sense of place and memory of Taiwan was intentionally erased by the ruling party. In the 1990s, the sense of place and memory of Taiwan was accentuated and became instrumental in creating a different eco-political narrative. Since 1994, a new policy has been promoted by the central government, namely the Integrated Community-Making Programme (社區總體營造). After the Taiwan-centred DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) candidate won the presidential elections in 2000 and 2004, the community-building programme was continued to an unprecedented scale by the DPP government. Amid this grand community-building scheme, cultural heritage projects received enormous attention and government resources. Interestingly, the Japanese colonial sites were largely designated as cultural heritage within this burgeoning memory boom, and together with many Taiwanese heritage sites they represent a new political, cultural and economic politics which differs from the previous political periods of Japanese and postwar KMT rule. In other words, the Japanese colonial sites became a constituent part of the new identity and cultural narrative of Taiwan in the 1990s and 2000s. In the search for a Taiwanese identity rooted in the land of Taiwan the Japanese colonial past plays an ambiguous role.

Japanese colonial sites used to be regarded as the 'poisonous leftovers of Japanese imperialism' during the postwar KMT governance. The Chinese KMT

government took over Taiwan after Japan's defeat in the Second World War. In order to disconnect the Taiwanese link to Japan after 50 years of colonial rule (1895-1945), the KMT government strengthened the superior status of 'orthodox' Chinese culture and language with the assistance of Martial Law. Numerous Japanese sites, especially those representing rich religious or political symbolism, for instance Shinto shrines, were demolished, reconstructed or deserted. Within the hierarchy of the state heritage framework, Japanese sites were considered outside of the category of cultural heritage. Even Taiwanese vernacular architecture struggled to qualify as cultural heritage.

This situation changed in the 1990s. In 1991 the first two Japanese sites were designated as national 'historic monuments', protected by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act implemented in 1982. In the 2000s, numerous Japanese buildings were reported by county or city governments as being 'historic monuments' or 'historic buildings' and were renovated with subsidies from the central government under the funding framework of 'reutilising unused spaces' (xianzhi kongjian zailiyong 閒置空間再利用) which is closely related to the community-building programme. This shows a shift in the conception and value of what is 'historic'. Japanese sites gradually ceased to be seen as poisonous residues and became legitimate sites of memory in Taiwan. However, it is noteworthy that the Japanese sites did not become sites of memory only after the official recognition; rather, the perception of Japanese sites has long been interwoven with the image of Japan produced by remaining colonial structures, KMT neo-colonialism, the Japan-Taiwan relationship under the cold-war framework, and the Japanese mass-media commoditization in Asia. For many Taiwanese people, Japanese sites in their hometowns represent their proud

past, and are their sites of memory. Thus, they can also be a place of hope for the revival of the local economy. For government officials in the 1990s and 2000s, the image of Japan was an advanced model which covered both global economic and cultural terrain. Conserving and reusing the Japanese sites not only shows the emerging multicultural narrative of a de-sinicized Taiwanese identity, but also expresses enthusiasm in building an advanced new country through utilizing heritage spaces to evoke civil awareness and a sense of community. This might even trigger local development, as in the successful *machizukuri* area regeneration model in Japan. Within this framework, Japanese colonial sites, which have long been sites of memory for different groups of Taiwanese people, are used as a locality reproduction strategy for postcolonial society in Taiwan. However, the contested nature of colonial sites, particularly salient when looking at controversial memories attached to the sites, often results in ambiguity during the process of heritage-making and interpretation.

This ambiguity of representing colonial 'heritage' lies in multiple layers. First of all, within the global heritage framework, the mechanism of colonial heritage is often analogous to the power hierarchy of the colonial period. Meanwhile, this power hierarchy is applied in the domestic sphere between the state authority and communities, since the nation-state has been the major actor in determining and participating in the international mechanism. Second, when we come back to the postcolonial society in perceiving the 'colonial heritage', 'why' and 'for whom' to conserve remains a issue. Despite the fact that some postcolonial nations are involved in projects of 'mutual heritage' raised by former colonisers, the gap between the different concerns of both parties is notable. Three internal layers of ambiguity lie beneath heritage activities: the gap between the architectural fabric and cultural context, the absence of a direct memory owner, and the structural residue of colonialism. All these ambiguities indicate that a more nuanced operational model is required in representing colonial sites as heritage. Furthermore, the theme of economic development encompasses the global heritage sphere, including Taiwan. After the rescue of heritage sites is accomplished, this drive for development has been competing with grassroots concerns

of locality in the civil, welfare and environmental dimensions. In the case of colonial heritage, the lack of a direct memory linkage between the site and postcolonial communities means that citizen initiatives based upon place-rooted affection may have less power in facing economy-centred initiatives. This is also relevant to the issue of representing Japanese-ness in Taiwan.

In the 1990s, the global order was reorganised after the dissolution of the Cold War structure. New nations and area leagues formed and competed for new political and economic terrain. Heritage, already institutionalised in the 1970s by UNESCO and always inseparable from nationalist projects, was also implemented for negotiations between nations and areas. The issue of a colonial past not only relates to diplomatic affairs between the former colonizer and colonized nations, but also concerns domestic struggles resulting from the colonial past, for instance the land claim of indigenous groups on their traditional territory in settlers' countries, or ethnic controversies resulting from migration in former colonizer societies. What were once seen as 'embarrassing' colonial sites, either sites of past 'glories' or of past 'shame', have been reinterpreted within the new world heritage framework and within the projects of global and national institutions. As a result, Asian sites and sites with multiple values have been increasingly designated as world heritage since the 1990s, following UNESCO's emphasis on cultural diversity and universal value. Intra-regional and national cooperation on heritage projects includes 'shared' heritage sites; yet at the same time, armed threats to controversial sites have not disappeared. Moreover, the unbalanced relationships between postcolonial nations and the states and communities in the global heritage arena can easily become analogous to the power hierarchy of colonial periods. Within this framework, the value of colonial heritage to postcolonial communities is arguable, and this question is often answered with rhetoric of development and worked under a top-down mechanism.

Lying outside of the diplomatic sphere framed by the United Nations, sites in Taiwan are not allowed to be included in the World Heritage List and related heritage network. Yet Taiwan's heritage policies and practice mostly refer to conventions and models le-

gitimated by international institutions such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, even though Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations. Since the 2000s the government of Taiwan has nominated its own 'Potential World Heritage Sites', and has invested professionally and financially in supporting the conservation work of world heritage sites. This nomination of potential world heritage sites is seen as preparation for joining in with UN and UNESCO-based international heritage affairs in the future. Stressing the locality of Taiwan in the global arena has been a strong theme within the state cultural department in implementing potential world heritage policies. This is in line with Taiwan's search for a position in the global arena within the remapping process of a new world order, politically and economically, after the Cold War.

Although the state heritage activities of Taiwan are politically and diplomatically similar to those of many postcolonial new nations, the issue of representing Japanese colonial heritage in Taiwan provides a unique angle from which to approach 'shared heritage'. Within the context of flourishing localism resulting from resistance to former colonization of KMT, Japanese colonial sites have been incorporated into local heritage not only through top-down policies but also by autonomous initiatives of social or community groups. The subjects who 'share' the site as heritage are not restricted within colonizer-colonized, state-state, state-local networks. Rather, an emphasis on the local autonomy of small-scale places by state community-building projects and privately initiated conservation movements in Taiwan has triggered an alternative means of sharing heritage. Although controversy, negotiation and ambivalence in the process of representing the colonial past are inevitable, Taiwan's case of representing Japanese heritage may contribute to an understanding of the value or impact of colonial heritage for postcolo-

nial communities aside from tourist and diplomatic effects. Further, it contributes to the exploration of whether local autonomy can change the meaning of colonial sites and can turn colonial sites into community heritage. In this regard, 'sharing' is not always a one-way process which fits in a power hierarchy in which the former colonizer shares the techniques of preserving their architectural remains with the former colonized by training programmes and subsidies. The active role that Taiwanese heritage workers play in engaging Japanese architects and related professionals in renovating Japanese sites is different from this one-way sharing. To some degree, this active role shows that postcolonial communities in Taiwan have been empowered to break from the colonial hierarchy by sharing what is now *their* heritage, no longer the heritage of the colonizer.

This thesis presents the extreme complexity of sharing the Japanese colonial past in postcolonial Taiwanese society, and examines possibilities of decolonization through community-based heritage activities. Five Japanese colonial sites were chosen for investigation. While none shows an ideal successful outcome, all represent an ongoing process. Problems and ambiguity stemming from the tentative transformation from colonialism to locality help to trigger further thinking or warn against the ideological trap of taking mutuality in 'sharing' the past for granted.

Hence, decolonization does not necessarily mean 'removing colonial material traces'. Preserving colonial sites through recognising the contested nature, actively exploring and engaging controversial voices, insisting with finding out historical depth of every memory version attached to the site, and transforming structural inequality with persistent locality building would better contribute to trigger a decolonizing process. This is the significance of the colonial sites as 'heritage' for the postcolonial society.

