

Museum 2015 conference paper

THEME: How are the traditional models of partnership and collaboration being challenged?

### **Re-thinking Representation: Shifting relations between Museums and the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan**

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My research interest is looking at the ways in which the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan are represented and, the extent to which they are represented fully reflects not only their historical position but also contemporary social and political issues which affect them.

Abstract:

The museum is a powerful site of representation, ‘what’ and ‘how’ objects are displayed in museums does not only concern issues of ownership but also carries a symbolism which has social and political consequences. This paper will look at the changing relations between museums and the Indigenous communities of Taiwan and how these relationships are manifest in the collections, exhibitions and communication strategies of the museums.

To provide some historical context and trajectories of change I examine how the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan were represented in museums and exhibitions in early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial regimes. I then discuss the changes in representation of indigenous peoples within post-war Taiwan and how this relates to the expansion in the number of museums over recent years and to the complex search for national identity which invokes echoes of the Japanese colonial period and the dominance of Han Chinese heritage. I utilize James Clifford’s idea of the museum as a contact zone to explore strategies of “culture-collecting” and the extent to which this can be seen as a response to particular political conditions, such as histories of dominance, hierarchy and resistance. As contact zones, museums can help communities negotiate difficult cultural and political problems through dialogue and alliances. Furthermore, in order to identify some of the key themes which also relate to Taiwan, the paper will also draw upon cases in Taiwan, and how emerging partnerships and collaborations between Indigenous communities and the museum sectors are assisting in re-thinking the issues around the representation of indigenous peoples by asserting new political relationships through their material culture (Hendry, 2005).

Keywords: museum, Indigenous peoples, representations, politics

## Introduction

The population of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan is 2.3 percent (534,007 peoples) out of 23.5 million Taiwanese (2014). Until 2014, there are sixteen tribes that have been officially recognized. The position of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan has been different from the past, these changes also reflect on their relationships with museums in Taiwan, from being represented as cultural others to being regarded as the symbol of social diversity. Recently, overall the number of museums in Taiwan has been increased significantly, out of this, also an increase in Indigenous cultural centres. There are many Indigenous museums focus on their local cultures and communities. However, due to lack of resources and dilemma between traditions and social changes, some of them were end up being abandoned.

In order to examine the relationships among Indigenous peoples and museums in Taiwan, this paper will first look at representations of Indigenous peoples during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). The discussion will then move to political changes after 1980s, when martial law lifted, Indigenous peoples became critical for Rainbow nation approach. After introducing the idea of representation in museum, it may help us to have a clear picture on how Indigenous peoples' roles and positions have been changing in Taiwanese society. In the last part, I will consider some of the challenges presented when major museums and regional Indigenous cultural centres collaborate.

Museums are considered as part of national authority, since political climate in Taiwan has been changing and put much emphasis on cultural diversity as well as marginal groups right. Museums also began to reconsider their representations on Indigenous peoples. However, with influences from the past, such as advantageous status of museums professions and unbalance of resources distribution among museums, museums are still an under considered aspect of this. I argue that through examining relationships between Indigenous communities and museums, it may help us to understand Indigenous peoples' current and further challenges.

### Representations of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan during colonial period:

Indigenous peoples compare to other groups of people in Taiwan are believed to be the group that arrived the earliest. Until 2014, there are sixteen tribes has been officially recognized, which are Amis, Paiwan, Tayal, Bunun, Puyuma, Rukai, Cou, Saysiat, Yami, Kavalan, Truku, Salizaya, Seediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu. Prior to Japanese colonial period, Indigenous peoples were considered to coexist with Han Chinese, which was the other significant group in Taiwan. As no great different from other colonial power in other places of the world, Japanese colonial government developed the systematic and comprehensive control, since the ultimate goal of the Japanese colonial government was to assimilate the Indigenous peoples into Japanese society. From the first year of Japanese rule, the colonial government embarked on a mission to study the aborigines so they could classify, locate and "civilize" Taiwan Indigenous peoples, and to practice the administrative control over the entire island (Suenari, 2006). With the notion of social evolution, "the Japanese portrayed and catalogued Taiwanese Indigenous peoples through a welter of statistical tables, magazines and newspaper articles, photograph albums for popular consumption"

(Matsuda, 2003:181), Indigenous peoples of Taiwan were placed at a lower level of evolutionary scale as opposed to Han peoples and Japanese.

The Japanese colonial power was combined with suppression and education, the colonial government began a political socialization programme to enforce Japanese customs, rituals and Japanese identity on Indigenous peoples (Chang, 2008). For example, in order to eliminate the custom of headhunting, The Japanese used the story of Goho, who was said to be a respectful man by Indigenous peoples and sacrificed himself in order to ‘civilise’ the savage aborigines and having them give up their ‘vicious’ customs (Ching, 2000). The tale was rewritten by the Japanese from the earlier Chinese version, and omitted the supernatural elements and aboriginal account that Goho was a controversial officer because of his exploiting ruling over the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan. The new version was created based on the Japanese policy to have Indigenous peoples to be more culturally compliant by discarding all superstition and ancient beliefs, as Ching states, since the ideology of the tale is to highlight the hostile relationships between Han Chinese and Indigenous peoples, “its eventual appearance in the text books of imperialist Japan, the ritualistic and social purposes of head-hunting are entirely left out” (Ching, 2000:806). The representations of Indigenous peoples of Taiwan changed according to the Japanese concerns. For example, in the tale of ‘Sayon’, which is about a seventeen-year-old aboriginal woman who volunteered to carry the Japanese luggage to the mountain during the war in 1938 and sacrifice herself, was used to encourage Indigenous peoples’ patriotism in order to become loyal imperial subjects (Ching 2000).

As Spurr (1993) states, the idea of the ‘cultural other’ plays a critical role in Japanese colonisation, especially through material representation, objects become evidence for categorising the subordinated position of Indigenous peoples. Through distancing Indigenous peoples, the Japanese would be able to manage the threats and create good reasons to rule over them. Bourdieu (1984: 40) also argued that, putting an Indigenous collection, is “made not twice, but a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, and possessing it.” The Japanese started to collect Indigenous artifacts in the later period of their occupation, in general, these objects were regarded as the evidence of Indigenous classification or their ‘primitiveness’. These collections were displayed in various events, for example, in the Exhibition of the Twentieth Anniversary of Colonization in 1916 and the Exhibition of the Fortieth Anniversary of Colonization in 1935, Indigenous artifacts were represented in order to show the power of the Japanese colonial government over native resources. In addition, Indigenous artifacts were also exhibited in Japan, such as the Fifth Domestic Industrial Exhibition held in Osaka in 1903, the purpose was to acquire the Japanese public’s consent by making the public feel superior to the colonized Taiwanese (Hu, 2007). In exhibitions, the Japanese represented the Taiwanese Indigenous peoples as ‘cultural incompetents, morally suspect, and indeed somehow ‘fictive’ and distinct from the real thing’ (Thomas, 1991: 205) in order to justify the Japanese colonialism. Unlike previous representations were created to justify their colonial power, the purposes of attending International exhibitions are to present distinctive images of Japanese political and economic power, inherited Oriental traditions, and a high degree of modernization. Taiwanese Indigenous peoples were also displayed in some international occasions to the Western countries,

such as the International Exhibition in Paris in 1900, and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 (Thomas, 1991).

In these exhibitions, in spite of political intentions, Indigenous artefacts were also romanticised, Indigenous collections were displayed for their exotic beauty and craftsmanship. During the Japanese colonized period, although many traditions had been eliminated because they were deemed unsavory by Japanese culture, such as tattooing, Indigenous peoples were also encouraged to maintain some of their traditions such as dress and selected customs that were not considered to be detrimental to society. The Japanese believed that Taiwanese Indigenous peoples should be modernized and civilized, as well as Indigenous cultural practices, which deemed acceptable for Japanese, should be preserved.

#### Indigenous policies after 1989s

After World War II, the island is under the ruling of the Republic of China (R.O.C.) government, it is common to divide the past 75 years into two parts, from 1937 to 1989 and from 1989 to present, as the martial law was lifted in 1989. The reason to divide the period is because after the martial law was lifted Taiwanese society had dramatic differences, especially in equal rights and human rights for minorities, such as the Indigenous peoples in Taiwan. After 1989, it is considered that Taiwanese society entered the democratic era, a time of great change for the aborigines of Taiwan, in both constructive and destructive ways. Especially the establishment of the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines (ATA, or yuan chuan hui) in 1984, is considered as a significant moment in the history of the Indigenous rights movement in Taiwan, it gave the movement a stronger voice on solutions for social problems related to aborigines. Economic and social disadvantage is considered to be the main difficulty affecting Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, the establishment of the ATA raised a greater awareness of the problems that Indigenous communities commonly experience, such as prostitution, economic hardship, claims to land rights and name rights (Faure, 2001; Stainton, 1999; Hsieh, 2006).

In the early stage of ruling period of the Kuo Ming Tang (KMT), which was the national party, the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan were represented with the characteristic of 'backwardness' and need to be 'Hanized'. However, after the martial law lifted and the idea of 'New Taiwanese' became popular, KMT began to represent the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan as pioneers who protected the island. For instance, in December, 2005, during the election, the Musha Incident, one of the biggest resisting that against to Japanese colonial government, was appropriated by KMT with the leader of the occasion, Mona Rudao, who was portrayed as a hero (Simon, 2007), as KMT were the voice of the Indigenous peoples of Taiwan. This representation may not only win the support from aborigines, but also could appeal to anti-Japanese mainlanders, who were fighting against to them during WWII. In 2008, the period when political power shifted from the party KMT to the party Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which was the biggest opposition party, it is considered as the time that Taiwanese Indigenous peoples have been recognised in the country. Since the emergence of new Taiwanese identities, which was illustrated as Chen Shui-Bian's, candidate from DPP, election slogan, the Indigenous Taiwanese cultures and historical uniqueness was emphasized in order to contrast with previous Chinese

identity. From this time on, Taiwanese Indigenous people have been widely recognised and involved in national and international events, for example, Indigenous singers were invited to lead the national anthem on National Day in 2000 and flag-raising ceremony on the New Year's Day in 2002. Additionally, Taiwanese Indigenous groups have more political influence, as wearing Indigenous costumes at public occasions by politicians, joining Indigenous events has become a necessary way to win support. Respond to it, including Indigenous cultures in contemporary museums becomes a way of contributing to this democratic and equal impression. The issue of representing Indigenous peoples in Taiwan has shifted from being ignored, silent to what is the reality and what do they like to say.

### Museums as contact zones in Taiwan

According to Clifford, museums are not only for exhibiting material objects but also become 'contact zones' for objects and people from different places and cultures. Museums are "rather than simply educating or edifying a public, they begin to operate – consciously and at times self-critically – in contact histories" (Clifford, 1997, p.204). Museums are places where have people from different backgrounds, as preparing an exhibition on Indigenous cultures, Indigenous peoples may tell other perspectives of the same period of history that are against the one is written in text books. Also, there are many tribal objects in museums which are seen in different ways; for museum experts, tribal objects may represent as the symbol of certain communities, however, for the tribal people, those material objects could be seen as records, law and occasions for them to tell their histories, stories and memories, which may refer to their past or current difficulties with purpose. Objects in museums could be regarded as the interests of the dominant groups among negotiations of forming collections; on the other hand, these material collections are also embedded with those inadequacies of winning groups, such as neglect, ignorance, misunderstanding and stereotypes (Miller, 2007). Therefore, it is not uncommon to find out that especially in national museums, material collections may be used to propagate certain political identities. In ethnographic museums, for example, the national or political identities may be strengthened by exhibiting 'others', material cultures from marginalized communities like Indigenous peoples may be displayed with the excuses such as cultural diversity and social hybridity. Nevertheless, the collections usually conceal the intention of certain political interests as well as unpleasing social issues like power imbalance and structural inequalities (Dicks, 2004).

Looking into the history of Taiwan, it is easy to find that Indigenous peoples have been considered as subjects of colonialism, it is not only shown in policies that are related to them, but also can be found in the Indigenous representations, as Chia-Yu Hu (2007: 203) suggests "the collected objects as a whole became a symbol that signified the subordinated position of indigenous peoples". Representing Indigenous cultures has been more about politics, for example, representing Indigenous peoples as groups that are alien from the dominant society can still be found until 1980s when the concept of 'Taiwanese consciousness' was offered. After then, Indigenous cultures have become the marker of democracy for distinguishing Taiwan from China. It is not only because Indigenous cultures on the island are different from China, but

also acknowledging the Indigenous rights indicates the political differences in two countries. Thus, Taiwanese Indigenous cultures are more than resources for claiming Indigenous identity, they also become an essential part of Taiwanese identity as opposed to Mainland China. In addition, since the number of Taiwanese who consider themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese has greatly increased, the concept of ‘Taiwanese consciousness’ causes the focus of society to shift to local issues, such as Indigenous identity and regional development.

As Michael Brown (2009: 151) puts it, ‘curators and cultural critics who think of themselves as progressives see these shifts as inherently democratizing: by putting oral tradition and community sentiment on the same footing as professional expertise, indigenous peoples achieve something like cultural equality’. Including Indigenous cultures in contemporary museums becomes a way of contributing to a democratic and equal. In 2002 the Taiwanese Council of Cultural Affairs developed the ‘Local Cultural Museums Development Scheme’. In the scheme museums are emphasised as critical places for shaping Taiwanese cultural identity, and re-writing Taiwanese history, which would no longer exclude ethnic minorities, in particular the history of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, Indigenous peoples begin to obtain a significant place in some museums, these museums can be distinguished into two main categories, one is existing museums which embed Indigenous cultural into national narratives, the other is newly built local cultural centre which represent Indigenous culture with their own terms.

Indigenous cultural identity became a tool used to differentiate Taiwanese identity from China, representing Indigenous cultures become not only for social justice concerns, the history and culture of Indigenous peoples has also been emphasized for political purpose. On the other hand, there are many museums in Taiwan which have responded to changes with Taiwanese society by emphasizing social and cultural diversity of Indigenous groups. Some of artifacts were made to reflect the history, social surroundings, those objects would contain the originality and creativity, and could be described as ‘hybrid’ that Homi Bhabha (1994) indicates to be the result from the continuous dissemination in suppressed, colonized situations. For Taiwanese Indigenous peoples, the hybridity of Indigenous works may contain inequality relationships with colonial authorities, the oppressed history could be turned to empower their identity and position in contemporary society.

Representing Indigenous peoples in Taiwan in ways that are different from national narratives has been regarded as a progress towards becoming a democratic country, nevertheless, however, there are various controversial issues to negotiate and compromise among parties. The issue of cultural property’s ownership often occurs when representing Indigenous culture on commercial product like souvenirs. There are several occasions where Indigenous intangible cultures can be found, for example in theme parks, such as Formosa Aboriginal Culture Village where Indigenous clothes and life styles are not only present but so to are Indigenous dance and concerts. Another occasion that Indigenous intangible cultures would be presented is various workshops in some Indigenous villages as part of the tourism industry. However, in these occasions, it is not uncommon for these representations to be criticized as unauthentic, and the original meaning has been obscured as those performances were presented for tourist rather than tribal traditions (Li, Li, and Chen, 2014), especially when native signs become national symbols, such as Indigenous pattern can be found

in Taiwan's International airports (figure 1), it makes Indigenous peoples lose their uniqueness and fail to be recognised and distinguished from the surrounding dominant culture (Todd, 1990).



Figure 1: Indigenous craft shop in Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport  
(source: <http://goo.gl/kKCA1U>)

With the political climate of building a 'Taiwanese consciousness', local history and community has been emphasized in 1990s, there are many local museums were built in order to present multicultural and local Taiwan society (Chang, 2004; Chen, 2002; Wang, 2004). In response to the change of social climate that Indigenous peoples in Taiwan acquire much more attention and power, developing local areas and working with local communities has become a priority policy. As a result, the number of local museums and cultural centres has increased treble within ten years<sup>1</sup>. Apart from museums and cultural centres that are built by the government, there are also some Indigenous visitor centres that are built by local communities. Furthermore, since 1999, setting Indigenous cultural centres has been part of the Council of Indigenous Peoples (CIP) published 'six-year-plan of revitalizing Indigenous cultures'. With further policies published in 2007, establishing regional Indigenous cultural centres became essential in constructing local networks, supporting Indigenous artists and tourism. Now, there are 28 cultural centres around the island (see figure 2). Many of these cultural centres used to be the gathering places, for tribal people to hold their meetings. Indeed, some of these cultural centres still function as meeting places for members, and also include their own representations, souvenir shops or coffee shops which are set up with the intention of supporting local artists and offering job opportunities to local people. By doing this, Indigenous peoples could use their identity to sustain communities on their own terms.

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<sup>1</sup> statistics concluded from Chinese Association of Museums.  
<http://www.cam.org.tw/big5/resource6.htm>

## 臺灣原住民族地方文化館分布圖

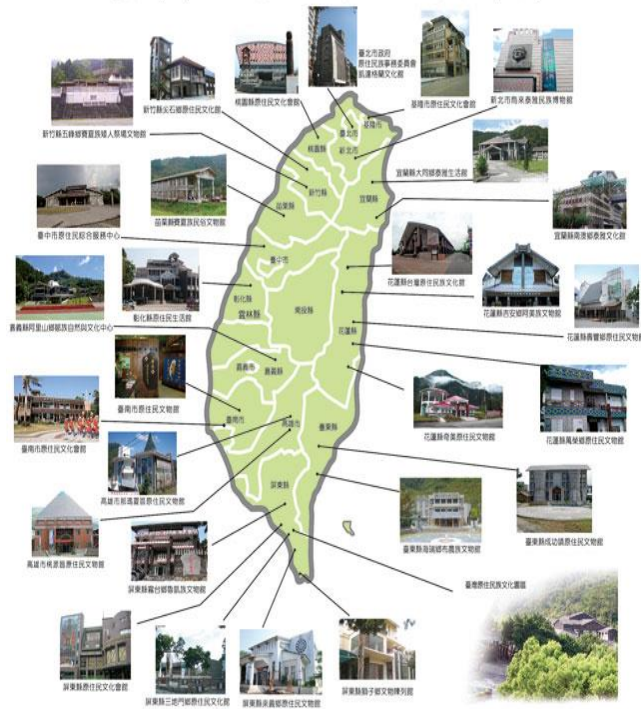


Figure 2: The distribution of Indigenous cultural centre in Taiwan.

Source: CIP Website of Indigenous Cultural centres

<http://www.ims.org.tw/template/aboriginal.php>

Nevertheless, in the report ‘Project of Developing Regional Indigenous Cultural Centres’ (2013), issues such as lack of professional museum staffs and poor management has been pointed out. In 2008, CIP published a project ‘Big Museums Lead Small Museums’ which brings several major museums into the network, and wishes that these cultural centres could benefit from their resources. There are several sessions, including training museum professions, building museum network. Putting an exhibition that is cooperated by these two parts has been considered as a popular way, such as ‘Aborigines and shells’ stories’ was cooperated by National Taiwan Museum and Tainan city Indigenous cultural centres and I-Lan Atayal cultural centres. As Lu (2003) illustrates, in museums representations, Indigenous peoples used to be involved as interviewees, artefacts makers or material providers, in these regional Indigenous cultural centres, Indigenous peoples begin to work in leading positions and break the traditional hierarchy with museum professions. Arguably, in the past Indigenous peoples would be skilled at making traditional objects but not in understanding how these objects would be used/ represented, but in these cooperation, Indigenous peoples were involved as partners who not only could offer traditional knowledge but also would be taught professional museum skills.

By looking at the example of Bunun cultural centre would help us to understand how the project benefit small scale museums as well as the concerns of the project. Bunun cultural centre is located in Town Haiduan, Taitung, in the early stage it functioned more like a storage room full of Indigenous objects. Since lacking professional knowledge, the cultural centre decided to imitate the traditional display and put their collections in order but without any further context (Ma, 2012). The effect of the exhibition would be different, depends on its audience’s understanding



and knowledge. For people who are familiar to the culture may see the deeper contexts, on the other hand, for those who have no related background knowledge may not be able to understand connects among objects. In 2008, because of the project from CIP, it began to work with National Museum of Prehistory. Through working with the National Museum of Prehistory, professional knowledge and techniques have passed to Indigenous peoples, as well as traditional knowledge and community's concerns has also been realized by museum staff who used to look at these objects as outsiders. The project could be seen as a two-way project, especially, in the cooperate project, Indigenous people had much more autonomy and create their own narrative to speak for themselves. As Smith (1999) states, when Indigenous peoples become the researchers, they would develop their own viewpoints and speak for themselves, their researches is initiated to benefit themselves. Rather than being examined as 'others', in their own representations, Indigenous peoples' feelings, voices and concerns would be expressed (Lin, 2012).

In spite of the fact that working with leading museums could bridge the gap of lacking professional knowledge and help Indigenous cultural centres to improve their management, there are also some concerns have been debated during the cooperation. Such as there is hierarchical relationship among bigger museums and regional Indigenous cultural centres, cultural centres are in a less powerful and passive position. Also, in order to present obvious improvement, instead of working with Indigenous peoples, loan of exhibition from leading museums might be considered as an useful strategy, however, with unbalance power, it would make cultural centres rely on bigger museums more and be more difficult to manage the cultural centre after the project ends (Lu 2014). Running regional Indigenous cultural centres is considered to be very different from managing traditional museums, as Ma (2012) states, different from big museums which usually recruit peoples based on capability consideration, however, regional cultural centres are close to their communities, there are various things need to consider, as positions in cultural centres may also have political, or social influences.

Furthermore, although the representations in majority of the visitor centres are initiated by the Indigenous communities, sometimes self-initiated representations could also be challenged when the narrative is considered to be politically sensitive. For example, Torako tribe which is under the institution of national park, as Simon describes, "when the Han park superintendent viewed the exhibit the day before the opening ceremony, she asked the curator to remove the final panel with its oblique reference to the National Park as another colonial power. She said that it risked inciting 'ethnic conflict'" (Simon, 2006, 5).

## Conclusion

Representations on Indigenous peoples in Taiwan have been changed significantly in a short period, from being exploited to engaging autonomy. Since Indigenous peoples had been subject to colonization, during the colonial period, they were often presented as 'others' in order to strengthen government's authority or various needs. With very little power to speak for themselves; it is very difficult for Indigenous peoples in Taiwan claim their rights. Due to the awareness of human rights and 'new Taiwanese' identity, Indigenous peoples become the critical culture

for Taiwan society. Institutes as museums become important spaces that witness these changes. Such as including Indigenous cultures in contemporary museums becomes a way of contributing to a democratic and equal impression. However, in spite of the fact that in regional museums or visitor centres, Indigenous collections have become the highlight, Indigenous peoples' participation still remains limited (Varutti, 2012). There are still issues regarding professionalism, access, power struggles as well as coordination.

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