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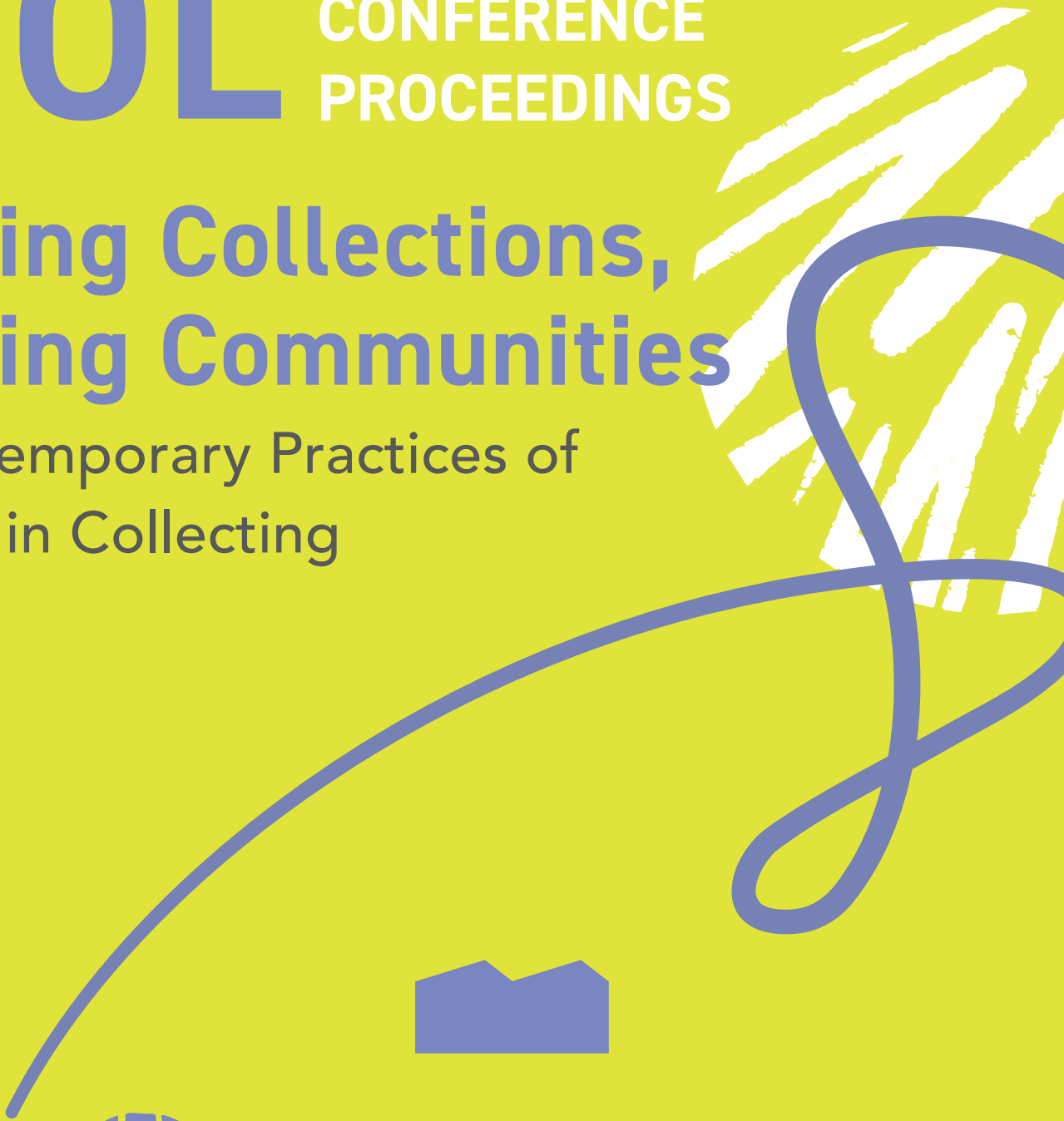# COL

Living Collections, Living Communities

Contemporary Practices of Care in Collecting

2023

Living Collections, Living Communities
Comtemporary Pratices of Care in Collecting
COMCOL 2023 Conference Proceedings

Ethics and Care in Collecting

Migration Conversation

Owning the Narrative and New Narratives

New Pathways for Collecting

Preface

Daniëlle Kuijten
President, ICOM COMCOL

Dear Readers,

It is with great joy that we present this publication highlighting some of the topics we discussed at our 2023 Conference. This conference was created with the support of our hosts, the Taiwan Museum Association, ROC (TAM) and the National Taiwan Museum in Taiwan, and took place at the National Central Library in Taipei. Their teams created an unforgettable experience for all participants, and we offer them our heartfelt gratitude for their warm hospitality and dedication that made this event possible.

Here we also would like to acknowledge that through the conference we were connected to and seated on the unceded ancestral and traditional territories of the Ketangalan Peoples 凱達格蘭族 . We honour with gratitude the Ketangalan people – a people that are still here – to bring light to their ancestral heritage and the land. Thank you for having us.

This year's gathering promised to be an extraordinary convergence of minds, ideas and innovations in the realm of museums and collections. As we gathered, we were not only looking ahead to the future, but also investigating how to increase the impact of our collective efforts to shape the narrative of our shared human and natural history.

Our theme, 'Living Collections, Living Communities. Contemporary Practices of Care in Collecting', underscores the transformative power of museums and collections in fostering connections, understanding, and preservation. It highlights that museums are not stagnant repositories of 'things' but dynamic hubs that breathe life into the stories they tell, and they are intimately intertwined with the communities they serve.

In today's world, our commitment extends beyond the mere conservation of objects; it encompasses the care of the communities whose stories are woven into the fabric of our collections. It is a call to action, a reminder that our work has profound social and cultural implications. How we collect, interpret and engage with communities directly influences our ability to engage with and transmit the essence of the societies we are part of.

Critically reflecting on the field of collecting and collections care, we invite each one of you to join us in a collective journey of searching, rethinking, negotiating and creating new practices that bridge collections to society. This journey is an exploration of the evolving role of museums and their ethical responsibilities. We must question the ethics of collecting that guide our actions, ensuring that our practices are rooted in respect, inclusivity, and a deep understanding of the communities whose stories we represent.

A pivotal aspect of this transformation is the new museum definition, which embraces a collaborative role for communities and invites us to critically reassess our approaches. As we engage in discussions and share insights

over the next few days, let us contemplate how this new perspective can guide us in redefining and strengthening the ethical foundation of our collecting practices. This redefinition reminds us that the voices and perspectives of these communities are not just valuable but essential in shaping our narratives and curatorial decisions. It invites us to adopt more inclusive, equitable and ethical practices, ensuring that our collections are not just stored objects but living reflections of the people and stories they represent.

We were gifted with rich, thought provoking, moving and inspirational sessions, keynote speakers and workshops where we exchanged insights and best practices, and envisioned a brighter, more inclusive future for museums and collections. At the network opportunities we bonded and created new friendships.

At the opening remarks I ended with the following invitation to all:

'As we embarked on an exciting journey, let us remember that our commitment to identify, collect, engage, share and tell is not just a job but a shared passion for a better future that unites us all.

In the spirit of co-creation and coming together, let us make the most of this unique opportunity to learn from one another, exchange our achievements and doubts, and collectively steer the course towards a more just and interconnected world. Let's see if we can arrive together at a new balance for the future of our collecting practice.'

Looking back, I feel we did make steps forward and towards each other. New connections were made and new insights were gained.

Thank you all for joining us in Taipei and online. You made this Annual COMCOL Conference 2023 unforgettable.

Daniëlle Kuijten
COMCOL Chair
Amsterdam, August 2024

Preface

Shih-Yu Hung

President, Taiwan Museum Association, ROC

The Taiwan Museum Association, ROC (TMA) has a longstanding commitment to promoting international museum exchanges. We were honoured to host the International Committee for Collecting (ICOM COMCOL) annual conference in Taiwan, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and ICOM. This year's conference, jointly organized by the National Taiwan Museum and our association, centred around the theme 'Living Collections, Living Communities: Contemporary Practices of Care in Collecting'.

The theme aimed to delve into the significance and value of collecting. We believe that collections should not be merely cold artefacts stored away in warehouses but rather cherished cultural assets that encapsulate wisdom and emotions. Collections are also an ongoing narrative, preserving the zeitgeist of the present for future generations.

To encourage the sharing of innovative contemporary practices, the conference featured a variety of formats, including keynote speeches, paper presentations, special lectures, interactive sessions, highlight presentations, and poster displays. Both domestic and international speakers and presenters were invited to share case studies and reflections on the connections between tangible and intangible heritage, digital archives, narrative sovereignty, contemporary practices, and the colonial histories of collections. The conference sought to collectively explore new pathways that connect collections with society. Experts, scholars and museum professionals from 25 countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Greece, the United States, Canada, Argentina, South Korea and Thailand, engaged in professional exchanges. In addressing the contemporary challenges that collections face, conference participants also explored how a 'human-centred' approach can activate the potential of diverse communities to revitalize collections, ensure their continuity for current and future generations and expand the possibilities for future collection practices.

COMCOL has long been dedicated to exploring how museums can respond to contemporary societal needs and issues through their collections. This annual conference also invited participants to engage in dialogue and contribute feedback on the 'Future of Collections', while collectively advocating for 'Future-Oriented Contemporary Collection Actions'. We envision museums and their collection practices evolving into human-centred hubs that foster open dialogue and collaboration, uniting efforts to build consensus and advance equity and justice in cultural heritage.

Through international exchange and discussion, we hope to inspire museums to embark on a new journey with their collections and collaboratively pioneer engaging and socially impactful collecting practices.
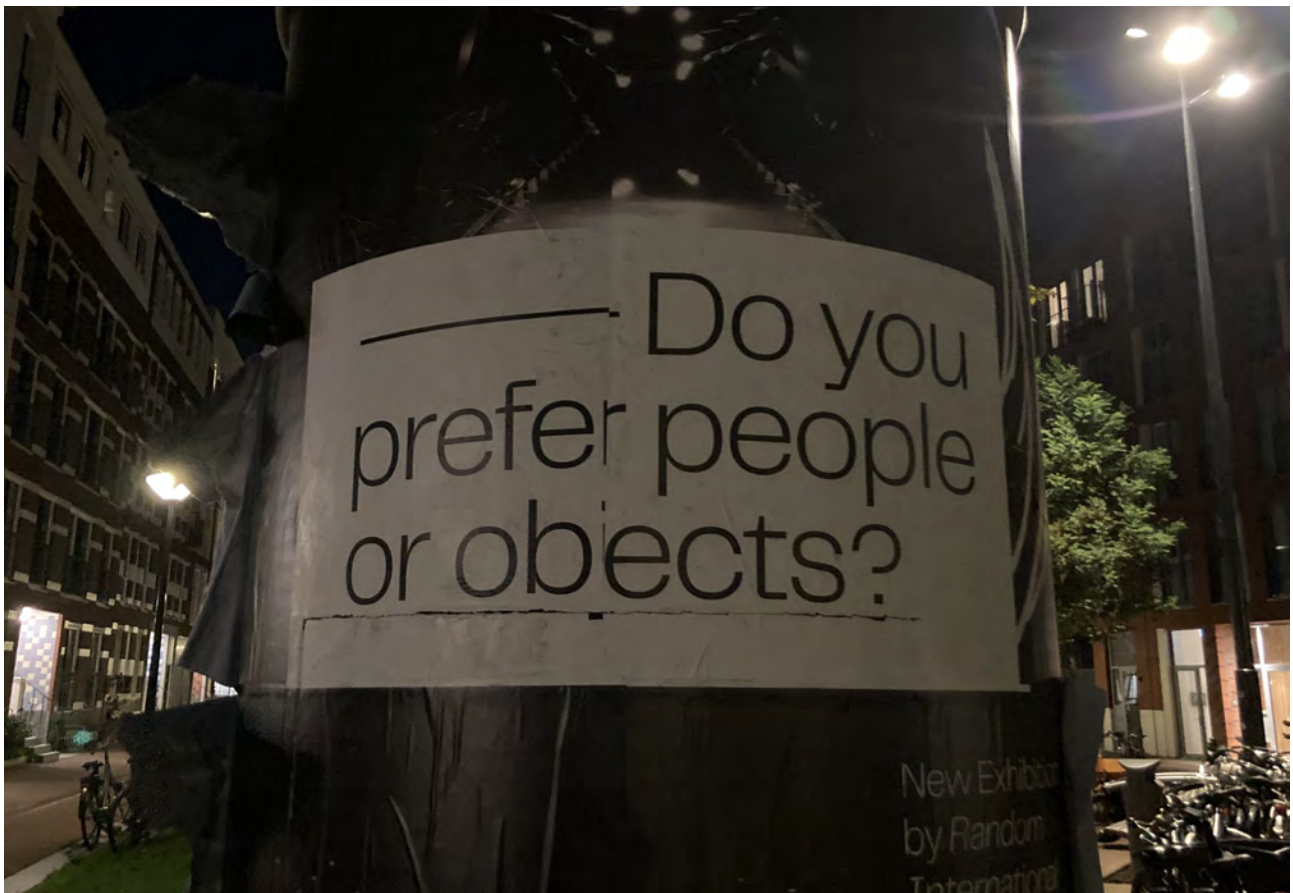
Let's Talk Listening

Daniëlle Kuijten

President, ICOM COMCOL

This paper is based on a talk I held during the COMCOL conference in Taiwan in November 2023. Here I talked about my daily practice at Imagine IC in Amsterdam, about collecting networks, creating futures, about care and about the importance of listening.

This picture is of an advertisement that was outside my house for a little over one month. Every time I looked at it the question spoke to me: *Do you prefer people or objects?* It deeply connected to questions I work with on a daily basis at Imagine IC. It also is an important given for our network of COMCOL when talking about the contemporary practice of collecting. Therefore I just want to let this question sit with you for a bit: *Do you prefer people or objects?*

The work I do has everything to do with changing perspectives and changing positions. Change is never easy, but in a time marked by extreme polarization and a growing need for more inclusive deep diving museum methodologies it has becoming increasingly crucial. Methods that centre the act of listening, dialogue and investment in each other. To achieve this, we have to face our own practices and critically question them. For decades, heritage collecting had been a top-down process, resulting in the exclusion of many voices, and an imbalance in the narratives presented. However, we have since witnessed the paradigm shift, where communities, stakeholders, groups or individuals are actively demanding to be engaged: in the interpretation, representation of their heritage, and so also to be engaged in what we do as and in museums. This requires a participatory praxis beyond interaction.

It requires collaboration, shared authority, systems of reciprocity, and co-creation, ultimately ensuring that heritage is more reflective of the context. It also makes it possible to connect with the diverse memories and experiences of people it represents.

To actively work on making this change, to experiment with how participatory heritage work can create a new balance, this is what we do at Imagine IC. Imagine IC has pioneered in participatory collecting practices, and engaged networks to contribute to the processes of meaning-making for over 23 years. This collaborative approach enables diversification of the context and diverse voices and perspectives to shape the narrative, allowing for a deeper sense of shared ownership and connection.

The contemporary participative approach also underscores the importance of care for people when inviting them to engage around topics. It prioritizes ethical considerations, respecting the rights, wishes and emotional connections of those contributing to the world.

It acknowledges the potential emotional and physiological impacts, both positive and negative, and seeks to ensure sensitivity and care throughout the process. And I'm emphasizing this because participation has been such a buzzword for so long now in the museum world for us, it goes beyond interaction and it also goes beyond the experience; it goes beyond just inviting people in, having conversations, getting their input. It is not something we do for them, the participants. The reason for using a participative approach is way more complex and also has very much to do with missions of our organizations. Therefore we have to be mindful when entering this relationships with communities.

If you truly want to engage, then you have to make the time and sit with them and you have to care. You have to start **listening.** If people open up to you, they earn your full attention beyond your exhibitions, your projects, your *needs*. There is no end to that. You start a relationship and the relationship can be rocky, but you go through it together.

Before getting to some examples of our work I briefly want to give some context of the area we are based in. As we believe that the layers of history we walk on define the steps that we make today.

The Bijlmermeer used to be a lake, which was made dry land. Between the 16th and 17th century mills were used to manage the water-levels. In this period also efforts were made to make it dry land but this only resulted in swampy areas. The final reclamation was finalized in 1825. Reclaiming land is an expensive undertaking for which you needed investors. That dry land was financed with money from wealthy families that earned well with their participation in the Dutch overseas trade business. So parts of the different efforts were also financed by the earnings from the colonial enterprises and with that from the slave trade.

Now we take a big leap in time. We are in the 50s of the 20th century and Amsterdam wanted to expand as the city centre was getting too full. The housing shortage was pressing and they were looking around the areas of Amsterdam to develop new housing projects and grow as a city. They found this Bijlmermeer area which was just outside the city, but officially not in ownership of Amsterdam. A transferal of ownership and rights was negotiated, but for many people living on that land this felt like a hostile takeover. They had to leave the land they lived on, to make space for this ambitious plan characterized by large high-rise housing in the shape of a honeycomb with spacious, bright apartments. The Bijlmer epitomized with this the futuristic lifestyle for the Dutch middle and upper class families in the early 1960s.

Like many big building projects, this one too was a rocky road and never turned out to become the dreamed district as envisioned. The architecture was maybe too much beyond human size for people to adapt to this new way of living. The neighbourhood gradually got the image of deterioration and crime. In 1975 Suriname, a former Dutch colony, became independent and with that, in the years before, during and after, people from Suriname decided to move to the Netherlands to build a live here. Many of them came to Amsterdam and eventually ended up in the Bijlmermeer. On top of this – in 1992 – the Bijlmer was the place of an immense national disaster. A cargo-plane crashed into two high rise buildings. The disaster left deep scars in the neighbourhood. It disrupted and scarred the social fabric. People felt neglected by the government in the aftermath, which is to this day still a point of discussion.

After the disaster, finally some steps were taken to improve the neighbourhood. Therefore 60 per cent of the high-rise buildings was demolished. Ever since, it has been in constant motion like any big urban space.

These are some of the different layers of time that are embodied in the space we operate in. At Imagine IC we say: 'If heritage tells us who we are together, and who we want to become. Everyone should have a voice in this.' And so this is what we try to do. We see heritage as something dynamic, as something that we make. We constantly give meaning to it, are in dialogue about it, and sometimes conflicts arise about that as well. These conflicts are there for us to meet each other, to look each other in the eye, and to say, I think differently about this, I have a different emotion. Our aim is not to come to consensus. It is to find each other in those differences.

House

We do our work from a shared house. We live together with the public library. Around five years ago, we both lost our space due to urban developments and we decided that we wanted to move in together. Our missions and ambitions complemented each other in such a way that we believed joining forces could make our work stronger. Together we have created a house for the neighbourhood, a place that is open and welcoming to everybody. You can take a seat there and read, do your homework or just simply hang out.

Team

If you say that the people should be in the centre instead of the 'things we collect', the objects, it also changes the way you build your team. We have what we call network collectors. They're two people, they're the core of our organization. Why? Because the people we're working with is what we're collecting. We build networks to have conversations. They are the bringers and owners of stories, objects, archives. Therefore it is always first about the people.

Network

These network collectors are in constant contact with people to listen. Listening in how people negotiate space in an urban environment. How can we, in this changing city landscape, assure having our own spaces where we can be ourselves, where maybe the other who is living next to you has completely different ideas of the self. How do you become a good neighbour in that sense. Based on the many conversations we created the so called Showcase of Southeast. A neighbourhood archive. Here we bring different topics together, in a holistic approach to heritage.

The Practice of Collecting

We do not have a depot, we do not own objects, we don't have the ambition to acquire and hold ownership in that sense. Everything we have in our showcase is on loan and whenever people want their object back for whatever reasons, they just come to us and say: 'I'm moving house', 'I have a celebration, can I have it back', either permanently or just for a month, the object will be taken out and if it's just temporary we put a little note saying: 'I'm travelling at the moment, but I will be back in a month', and if it is permanent we replace it with something else. It is not ours. It is the people that are telling their stories in there and we just create the space for it. So it is all about the conversations.

Transformation Through Co-Creation

We always say that with the work we do in and with the neighbourhood we develop skills and knowledge on participatory heritage work. These insights we then share with partners in the field, in an effort to inspire changes to the heritage field as a whole to become more multivocal. In the past years we developed great partnerships to do so; inspire the partner to change his processes, by working in co-developing on an exhibition.

How do we do this? These network collectors, they listen and hear about specific important topics. Based on these topics we think of themes we can arrange conversations about and start inviting people. In addition, we have roundtable or circle sessions; we bring some food in and have conversations about that topic. Everybody with a connection to the topic is invited. Many museums have specific target audiences. To us everything is always open to all. If you have a connection to the topic you're invited to be there, but make sure everybody has equal space.

Figure: *Conversations on local radio Imagine IC.*

Archives of the Mind

From local radio, to religion, to activism, to entrepreneurship, all topics we touch upon in our conversations nurture our educational programmes and presentations. One example to dive into a little with you is about the flight disaster. Two years before the twenty five years commemoration of the flight disaster, people from the neighbourhood came to us saying that the disaster is still very much present in the daily lives of many. The people in the neighbourhood felt that the disaster had been played down. That it had never been nationally recognized for the pain that was caused by this. And now twenty five years down the line, they are still fighting traumas. It has always been framed as something that happened in the Bijlmer, not in Amsterdam, not in the Netherlands. To disconnect it in this way from city and national narratives the disaster takes another place in the collective memories. In order to get exposure for this, they wanted to work with us. We asked them to open up their personal archives. People had collected a lot of things around the time of the disaster, but also from the aftermath. The collected items were put in boxes, and most of them never looked at again for another twenty five years. Together we opened the boxes and started to talk. At the same time, I also went into the official collections. What had been collected on this in the city and the national institutions as evidence of what had happened? I went into the Amsterdam City Museum, because it was a disaster that happened in the city, to see what was collected there, but there was actually not that much. Likewise on the national level. The material found in the National Archives was limited. Though, as we passed the twenty five year mark, new material was going to become available for the wider public. Here I found meeting minutes from the government from a few

days after the disaster. It was interesting to read the tone and the content and to have this national narrative against all the personal material that we had collected. It was important to get these official papers in the exhibition to create a dialogue between the local and the personal. At the same time, we realized a documentary with intimate portraits that was shown on national television. I think we were successful in making a next step with our effort of the exhibition, programming and documentary in filling in a gap the collective memory by including these stories.

Figure: *Exhibition disaster Bijlmer.*

Care

In the years after we remained working on this. Acknowledging the need for the people to work on their traumas and trying to find ways on how our work could be supporting and facilitating. Because there is a double trauma, the trauma caused by the disaster, but then there is also the trauma of feeling not being heard or being seen in the pain. Five years after the first exhibition we created a new one where we focused on the part of being heard. We created a space with no objects but just audio, inviting visitors just to sit down and listen to the people and their stories. Listening to how they commemorate and how they still feel. Listen to the intonation of the voices, to how they tell their stories. We concluded with a chair in the exhibition where you could sit and listen to music – a composition created for the commemoration composed by a local musician. In this way we invited people to take some time for themselves and digest what they have been listening to.

These are steps for us to work on our own awareness and sensitivity. What do our networks need when we engage, what do our visitors need and how do we take care of ourselves? We have to think about how we can give the people who come up and tell their stories the support they need afterwards. We're not trained trauma specialists, we're not specialists, nor do we have to, but we can be sensitive of what is needed and who can support us in supporting our networks. At the same time we did work ourselves on practices of deep listening to really think about our positionality, how can we be better listeners to each other. How to raise ourselves to be better listeners and how can we pass on inspiration to the people we work with to become better listeners.

Who Do We Not See?

One last example I want to highlight to outline the roads we try to wander and the discussions we like to evoke with our work. We have been working the last two years with two ladies who adopted a model of a refugee housing project in Markelo, in the north of the Netherlands. This model was created by a refugee who had lived there with his family. This is important as we're talking about voices that are not heard. And what is often not heard are those who are and spaces in our country.

The heritage that is made in temporary encounters is often not considered for collections. The temporary spaces that are created for refugees at the edge of villages and cities, away from the eyes of daily life. What meaning do these places have for those who started a new live there, for those who worked there, for those who live in the neighbourhood? What stories can be told about those who arrive and with their arrival touch society. Even if they are here for the shortest of times they must leave remnants from their existence. Of their *we were here* moments. These temporary places are places connected to happy and sad memories. Of arrival and trauma, but also of new beginnings and new friendships.

This model, that was created with local materials created by a refugee who lived in that park in Markelo, has meaning. It tells many stories. Before the site was used for refugee housing it was a caravan park, a place for holidays. Today there is nothing there anymore. The space is used for solar panels. The original park was torn down. The model is the one thing left to tell the stories. Since its closure the model travelled to different places. It was used for a documentary on asylum seekers. But at a certain moment it was in danger of becoming homeless and would end up in the trash.

Heritage Innovation

The *adoptive parents* of the model started campaigning to create awareness of its importance. According to them, the model should become part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum because it is part of national heritage. For three years they worked hard, bringing it to different locations, organizing talks and seeing what meaning people give to the model. It was also installed in our house at Imagine IC, in our open space to have conversations with the local asylum seeker centres. To collect the stories of what it means to you to have something that is physically not there, but the model to connect to, and to sit around something like this to exchange your experiences?

Earlier this year (2024) the Rijksmuseum acquired the object to be part of the national collection they hold in their care. Later this year, it will be added to the 21st century wing as part of the permanent exhibition.

With my examples I hope to have shown which questions we pose in our work, in our interactions. It is this constant critical reflection that infuses our practice, that hopefully inspires colleagues in the heritage field to rethink their own practices in an effort to make ways for heritage work to drive and inspire societal change.

So do you prefer people or objects?

Curating Living Cultures as a Function of Decoloniality at Manchester Museum

Njabulo Chipangura

Curator of Living Cultures, Manchester Museum
The University of Manchester

The Manchester Museum (MM) is a part of the University of Manchester and has more than 25,000 ethnographic collections, mostly dispossessed from local communities, and ordered and categorised according to geographical regions of Africa, Americas, Oceania and Asia. The African collection at MM has more than 10,000 ethnographic 'objects' and I am responsible for the curation with care of this entire living cultures collection.

I want to emphasise here from the outset that we acknowledge the problematic history of our collections and that our acts of curation are not a domain of exclusive expertise constrained by dictates of disciplines. Therefore, curating living cultures is a space for facilitating dialogue and building active relationships with descendant and diaspora communities whose African collections we hold.

Encyclopaedic museums like MM took shape as global repositories of extracted objects, sites of ordering them according to colonial knowledge and spaces where the public could acquire knowledge of (and control over) colonised peoples and cultures.

European colonialism was an epistemic project bound up with Enlightenment notions of reason, progress and modernity, which imagined Europe as the global site of scientific knowledge, and which set about creating the non-Western world as its mirror. Admittedly, MM is also complicit in amassing African 'objects' during the same period and perpetuating the thinking that supported colonisation. Colonial knowledges produced colonial practices of ordering African 'objects' which drew upon Linnaean classification, and informed scientific racism, educational curricula, and legal and administrative frameworks. In pursuit of colonial ordering, material culture was extracted from colonised societies, deprived of its original and contextual meaning and scrutinised through the lens of colonial knowledges (Muller and Langhill 2022; Chipangura and Mataga 2021).

In that respect MM has progressively sought to transform into a space of inclusion to facilitate conversations

about meanings of objects rather than presenting them as materialities of ordered cultural knowledge. Our new approach to curatorship is a profoundly relational practice of caring for living cultures through active relations and dialogue with our diaspora and descendant communities. Through emphasising the ethics of care, inclusion and imagination we have begun to rethink the African collection collaboratively.

A commitment to inclusion means greater collaboration and co-production and foregrounding diverse perspectives so that we become relevant to these communities. Imagination underscores an engagement with big ideas, bringing people together to tell stories and to explore important questions and research (Manchester Museum 2023). Our value of care is at the heart of acknowledging the role that colonial violence played in ordering our collections as we look at what it means to care for people, their ideas, and their relationships with these 'objects' which are living cultures.

All these values directly speak to our pragmatic approach to doing decolonial work as we advance the notion that whilst museums are about collections – museums are also about people (Ali 2023). Museum objects become more extraordinary when they connect with people in active curatorial relationships and meaning making than merely being treated as static and frozen in displays or storage rooms.

This I refer to as relational curatorship which we have embraced at MM as a decolonial practice. With imagination, the objects we care for help to build understanding between cultures and a more sustainable world (Ali 2023). In relational curatorship objects are not treated as frozen nor ordered in a timeless past but are reordered as living beings connected to the present and future in continuous ongoing relationships (Golding and Modest 2019; Muller and Langhill 2022). These objects connect people, places and events. Equally, they represent histories of continuity and change. Furthermore, the collaborative production of new knowledge in relational curatorship is centred on the application of the practice of 'waking up objects' through touching, looking, smelling, and listening which is a representation of living cultures.

This approach emphasises liveliness and counters the colonial emphasis on disciplinarity, ordering and containment (Muller and Langhill 2022). Meanwhile, in an African context, objects have potency and are treated by communities as living beings which they can use, touch, smell and taste. Although these 'objects' may appear stagnant within ethnographic classifications in museums – they have individual biographies and carry with them important meanings connected to their ritual and cultural functions located in societies of origin. Being the curator of living cultures at MM aligns well with notions of un disciplining the museum through a recognition that 'objects' that I am responsible for are not just static things but rather are living cultures representing living people and their practices.

Feeling at Home in Museums: Homesickness Project, Between Comfort and Pride. From Reflections to Practice

Winny Ang and Nadia Babazia

Red Star Line Museum, Antwerp, Belgium

Abstract

Being able to feel at home is a vital desire that connects us all. It is a difficult concept to define, and touches on the feeling of belonging. We value a sense of belonging somewhere. As human beings, it gives us a meaningful place in the world. Feeling at home has demonstrable effects on young people's well-being and motivation. For newcomers too, research shows that creating connections and a social network are decisive factors in mediating pre- and post-migration stress.

The Red Star Line Museum has been working for two years on a participatory Homesickness project. With a variety of people, the feeling of homesickness was made tangible in workshops and an exhibition. The search was on for what it means, how to talk about it, how to deal with it and how to give it a place in the process of searching for home. The project provided a valuable opportunity for each participant to share their personal experiences and show how homesickness is an integral part of the migration story.

A museum as a safe space implies a conscious effort to create an environment where visitors feel respected and protected. The concept of a brave space then relates to a conscious decision to provide space for dialogue and exchange on sometimes more difficult, sensitive issues. This challenges visitors to remain open to new perspectives.

The Red Star Line Museum tells the story of migration. Past and present. Since its inception – ten years ago – the museum has had both feet firmly planted in society. As the stories of the migrants remain relevant today. Because the museum wants to be a place where people come home.

In the buildings you can feel the hopes, pains and dreams associated with migration. Homesickness is a common thread in migration and a universal feeling that we all recognise.

Working on the theme of homesickness (comfort and pride), this article focuses on the social role of museums in making people with migratory roots and refugee pasts feel at home. How can museums be safer and braver spaces, making time and space in heritage for the vital stories of home, homesickness and identity?

This article discusses how participatory work around the theme of homesickness, and working with attention to time and tailoring to people, can have a positive impact on the wellbeing of newcomers.

Feeling at Home

Being able to feel at home is a vital desire that connects us all, young and old, big and small, wherever we come from. It is a difficult concept to define, and touches on the feeling of belonging. We value a sense of belonging somewhere. As human beings, it gives us a meaningful place in the world.

Research in schools confirms that the feeling of feeling at home is important for both mental and physical health. It has demonstrable effects on young people's well-being and motivation. For newcomers too, research also indicates that creating connections and a social network are decisive factors in mediating pre- and post-migration stress.

This underlines the need to pay continuous attention to fostering this feeling. Creating an environment where people can feel at home contributes not only to their individual growth but to a healthier society.

Feeling at Home Is a Dynamic Process

> I like to think of home
> as a verb, something
> we keep recreating
> (Madeleine Thien) [1]

Home is not a fixed concept, but rather a dynamic process that is constantly in motion, as stated by Chinese-Malaysian-Canadian writer Madeleine Thien. Instead of viewing it as a static location, we understand it as a verb, something that is constantly reshaping itself.

For individuals from migrant backgrounds, this process can be particularly complex. They have roots that anchor them in different places, which can result in an ongoing search for how to connect to different realities. Navigating between different environments can be challenging due to differing expectations.

For individuals with a refugee background, the process of resettlement can evoke mixed emotions towards their country of origin and their new home. This is a transitional period that involves mourning for what/who has been

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1. < https://madeleinethien.com >, accessed 5 February 2024

left behind, as well as the search for a place in a new environment.

Homesickness (Between Comfort and Pride) at the Red Star Line Museum

The Red Star Line Museum is dedicated to telling the stories of migration, both past and present. The museum acts as a lieu de mémoire, a place where the hopes, pains and dreams associated with migration can be experienced in the place itself and through the many testimonies.

Homesickness is a recurrent theme in migration. It is a universal feeling that everyone (re)experiences. It touches on a feeling that is sometimes sad, can be comforting and can inspire pride. Homesickness has a strong sensory connotation (memories in smells, tastes, images, sounds ....).

The Red Star Line Museum has been working for two years on a participatory homesickness project. With a variety of people, the feeling of homesickness was made tangible, and the search was on for what it means, how to talk about it, how to deal with it and how to give it a place in the process of searching for home.

The project was based on the *homesickness boxes* that were specially designed for the project. Using these boxes, participants were invited to share their homesickness memories through objects, photos, smells and colours. The sessions took place in the museum itself or in the community (e.g., schools).

> Amina looks at the homesickness box. Her eyes sparkle. We forget for a moment that we are meeting in the garden of Permeke Library on a Thursday of the week to create a new herb garden. She discovers images, scents and colours in the box. Objects like a necklace with a blue eye on it. It reminds her of the sheep her grandfather used to tend.
>
> She sees an old razor. 'Just like my dad,' she says. 'When he came home from work, he would hide sweets in his coat pocket. I always found them.'
>
> The homesickness box brings back memories. Amina is back in Syria. Not the Syria of the war. The Syria of her childhood, of the loving care of her family.
>
> (Homesickness session participant)

The first Homesickness sessions with the homesickness boxes inspired the further development of the project and they remained an integral part of all activities.

This was followed by an exhibition in which the homesickness box was transformed into a homesickness room where visitors could search for and work with their own homesickness. The exhibition also brought together the work of nine emerging artists from different backgrounds. Through coaching and masterclasses, they explored what homesickness means to them and created a new work around that feeling.

A second part of the Homesickness project was the creation of a community garden, 'Our Garden', in one of Antwerp's public libraries. Herbs, flavours and foods often evoke memories of home. It is the smells and colours that often travel with us from our country of origin to Belgium and sometimes make us nostalgic for home here. From the strength of a group of women with a migrant background and the library itself 'Our Garden' grew. With the memories of smells, colours and tastes of home, a new green oasis was planted in the city.

Giving Space to Homesickness: Co-Creation of Stories in Museums

Participation is an important way of promoting representation. It shows that heritage and museums are part of society. It is about involving as many people as possible and getting them to participate, but also about creating participation. It emphasises the importance of meaning-making ('collective appreciation') and of representation itself.

The Homesickness sessions provided a valuable opportunity for each participant to share their personal experiences and show how homesickness is an integral part of the migration story. It gives space to the participants' identity in a dynamic way; they feel valued.

Giving people the right to exist is essential. As a person who has migrated, who has fled, you find yourself in an intense, often confusing (transition) process. You are questioning your identity, your existence. Giving space to such feelings can mean a lot in this process. Especially as these feelings and thoughts are not easy to share in everyday life. There is often a constant looking forward to the (better) future, with little or no space to look back. It is also valuable and meaningful to integrate the good (talents, rituals, ...) of what was left behind into the new life. The Homesickness sessions provide this space – space to reflect on the past and the present, so that a bridge can be built to the future.

Giving words to the certainly complex and important feeling of homesickness through objects and stories can be beneficial and healing for participants. It is empowering because participants are in control, they decide what to bring, what to share and how to tell it. It creates connections between people who find each other through shared experiences.

The Social Role of Museums as Safer and Braver Spaces

The role of museums and heritage institutions has evolved considerably in recent decades, with increasing emphasis on their social relevance. They are no longer seen as 'neutral repositories of objective knowledge about the past'.

Museums are seeking links with other sectors, including health, and promoting the use of heritage collections as a bridge to well-being and inclusion. This shift implies a recognition of the impact that cultural heritage can have on people's wellbeing and underlines the importance of actively engaging this institution in the wider social context. It is not just about preserving the past, but also about creating value and meaning in the present.

A museum as a safer space implies a conscious effort to create an environment where visitors feel respected and protected. The concept of a braver space then relates to a conscious decision to provide space for dialogue and exchange on sometimes more difficult, sensitive issues. This challenges visitors to remain open to new perspectives.

Time as an Important Breeding Ground for Wellbeing

Projects like this need time and space. In the Homesickness project, the Red Star Line Museum took time to let the project grow organically. It takes time to build trusting relationships in the safest way possible; time to experiment; time to reflect on one's own and others' sense of home. Time to work (determinedly) participatively. Time to think about how, as a museum, you can make people feel at home. Time to think outside the box and dare to explore other (than the known) paths. These are ongoing, fascinating and necessary quests to create space for wellbeing in museums and the heritage sector.

> The sea takes me to my family, they are far away but they live close to the sea, the sea that also reaches Belgium. The sea that has always been there.
> (Homesickness session participant)

Biographies

Winny Ang works as a child and adolescent psychiatrist in Antwerp. She also holds an MSc in Transcultural Psychiatry (McGill University, Canada). In addition to her clinical work with a (culturally) diverse clientele, Winny Ang is also affiliated to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Antwerp as a communication practice assistant and lecturer in arts & society and diversity. She offers experiential training in diversity-sensitive work in various settings (health care, cultural sector, education, etc.). Her training focuses on culturally sensitive care in social/mental health care. Various topics can be discussed, such as culture and health, (ethnic) identity development, working with trauma, diversity-sensitive work, etc.

Migration and stories are a common thread in Nadia Babazia's life. As a sociologist and anthropologist (University of Leuven, Belgium), she has been working on participation and outreach at the Red Star Line Museum for almost 15 years. Homesickness is the theme of choice to explore how stories can empower and heal, and how museums can become safe and courageous spaces in the lives of people with migratory roots. Nadia incorporated her own family's migration story and feelings of homesickness into the children's book *Grandma's Suitcases*.

Final Curtain Call?
Keeping the Puppetry Collection ALIVE
at the National Taiwan Museum

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Abstract

In the 21st century, modern audiences, particularly those of the tech generation, no longer possess the patience for slow-paced classical puppet shows. Similarly, descendants of collectors show little interest in inheriting antique collections. Despite decades of passionate calls from puppetry communities and professionals for the government to take cultural loss seriously, a significant number of theatrical props were finally stepping down from the stage and finding their new home as part of the museum collection. In 2019, the National Taiwan Museum was faced with the challenge of receiving over ten thousand donated puppetry collections. The museum needed to procure funding, storage space and resources to preserve these precious artefacts in a more modern way. Scientific methods were employed to verify the records and centuries-old secret recipes. Furthermore, the preservation of intangible cultural assets has not been overlooked.

To keep classic puppetry alive, the museum had to re-understand and re-interpret this collection, taking into account the brutality of generational differences. We listened to the little-known behind-the-scenes stories of the older puppet masters, understood rituals and respected folk taboos. We also embraced the viewpoints and tastes of the younger generation and implemented digital display methods. For instance, the museum designed a psychological quiz for audiences to match to the characters that best suited their personality. The results were further linked to short clips of 12 classic roles, performed by young puppeteers with witty up-to-date dialogues mixing Mandarin, Hokkien and English. Antique puppets from the collection were meticulously selected and video-recorded under the careful protection of the conservators in the storage environment. Although during the pandemic, some of the originally interactive exhibits had to be modified or cancelled, through both on-site and online panoramic exhibitions, older visitors could relive their childhood memories, while younger visitors could discover the beauty of classical puppetry.

Keywords: Puppetry, Cultural Heritage, Preservation, Museum Collection

Introduction

Is it a sad end to the decline of traditional theatre when the puppet on the stage enters the museum collection?

Many people, including ourselves, who are concerned about the passing of traditional culture have pondered this question. Part of the reason for this concern may be that most people still have the stereotypical impression that museums are uninteresting and rigid (林崇熙 2009). However, contemporary museums are very different from those of the past. Modern museums are staffed by a variety of professionals who, through preservation, education and community engagement, play a role in reflecting contemporary social phenomena and thinking about the future direction of society. We who work in museums try to hold the hands of different communities and make attempts to find the answer to this question in the field of museums.

Puppetry as Cultural Heritage: A Reflection of Taiwan's Diverse Cultures and Social Change

Among various cultures, puppetry is not only a form of entertainment for the general public, but also a means of projection and support for religious beliefs, as well as a reflection of the comprehensive artistic aesthetics of different places and a microcosm of social change. As a repository for Taiwan's diverse cultural heritage, the National Taiwan Museum inevitably boasts a collection of puppet plays representing various ethnic groups across the island. During the first forty years of the Japanese colonizers' establishment and operation of the museum, the initial collection of puppetries included: Southern Chinese Potehi (Glove Puppetry), Indonesian Wayang Klitik (Flat Wooden Puppetry) and Wayang Kulit (Shadow Puppetry). While Potehi represented Taiwan's dominant Minnan (Southern Fujian) ethnic group, Wayang Klitik and Wayang Kulit from Indonesia served as evidence of the Japanese colonizers' ambitions to expand their territory into Southeast Asia.

After World War II, when the Nationalist government of China came to take over Taiwan, they further introduced traditional Chinese Shadow Puppetry and String Puppetry, both imbued with nostalgic elements, to strengthen the Taiwanese people's identification with a unified China. Fortunately, they also didn't overlook the Golden Ray Glove Puppetry, which reflected the prosperous development of Taiwan's economy and folk entertainment in the 1980s. In museums, puppetry collections can reflect societal changes and the perspectives of museum operators.

In contrast to official entities, Taiwan in the 1980s saw the rise of a trend towards valuing local culture, with a growing number of grassroots movements and organizations championing its preservation. University scholars took the lead in caring for street puppetry, which at the time was deemed by the Nationalist government as lacking refinement and sophistication. They raised funds to establish the Seden Glove Puppet Society, inviting old puppet masters to perform and give lectures to promote the revitalization of traditional culture, and also advocating the inheritance of the performing language, Taiwanese Hokkien, in an attempt to overcome the strong pressure of the official language, Standard Mandarin Chinese (呂理政 1991; 陳龍廷 2007).

Meanwhile, Dr Paul Lin of the Taiyuan Arts and Culture Foundation has also spared no effort in using his own wealth and resources to preserve culture. In founding the Taiyuan Asian Puppetry Museum, talented puppetry professionals were gathered to expand the spectrum of the collection. In addition to the aforementioned collection of Potehi (Glove Puppetry), the museum's collection also includes puppetry from various parts of Asia, such as China, Japan, India, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and more. This comprehensive collection encompasses Shadow Puppetry, String Puppetry, Rod Puppetry and various other forms (Ruizendaal 2022). Other related folk performing groups also work together to preserve traditional puppetry culture through various educational activities.

In the Era of Fast Entertainment: Cultural Shifts and Museum Challenges

In the 21st century, modern audiences, particularly those of the tech generation, no longer possess the patience for slow-paced classical puppet shows. And the entertainment has gradually shifted from television or movies to internet video streaming. It gets shorter and shorter in length, faster and faster in pace, and more and more visually and aurally stimulating. Although adults are gradually becoming aware of such issues and expressing concerns about the influence on children and adolescents, ironically, we often find ourselves, after making such comments, turning around and picking up our phones to immerse ourselves in the same convenient and fast-paced audio-visual entertainment. Are we doomed to this?

Meanwhile, in the museum, we also notice that the descendants of collectors show little interest in inheriting antique collections. Managing large and outdated collections is expensive and difficult to sustain without a passion or a sense of mission for cultural heritage. Despite decades of passionate calls from the puppetry community and professionals for the government to take cultural loss seriously and continued funding and various program proposals from both the private sector and the government, the time has come for a significant number of theatrical props to step down the stage and to find their new home in museum collections.

Challenges and Solutions

Navigating Museum Challenges: Bridging Generational Divides in Preserving Taiwan's Puppetry Heritage

In 2019, the National Taiwan Museum faced the challenge of receiving more than 10,000 donated puppets. The two aforementioned organizations, the Seden Glove Puppet Society and Dr. Paul Lin's Taiyuan Asian Puppetry Museum, have successively donated their collections, which they had possessed for over thirty years, to the state for safekeeping. After careful evaluation, it was recognized that these puppetry collections were of great significance to the museum in preserving cultural diversity, and therefore the museum actively sought funding from the Ministry of Culture. With the support of the Ministry of Culture's 'Reconstruction of Taiwan's Art History Project', the museum team conducted a project which included inventory, digitalization, establishment of metadata, rehousing and conservation. Meanwhile, adjustments were made to the storage space, and the existing collection as well as the new acquisitions were reorganized. The dedicated puppetry storage facility construction project has been completed, along with the addition of new shelves suitable for storing such collections. This enables the management and storage of over ten thousand new and existing artefacts in a more modern manner, facilitating ease of access for subsequent museum research and utilization. Furthermore, the team pays special attention to balancing the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural in the process. Once a week during the project, we invited puppeteers and traditional puppet makers to help identify each artefact, and through interviews, we have collected a wealth of oral histories, folklore taboos, mysterious legends and ancestral recipes. With their input, they also led us to discover many hidden veins and messages in the artefacts. For example, the edges of the puppet's head hidden within the cloth often bear V-shaped marks. It is only through the master's explanation that one learns these are not signs of damage but intentional grooves made by the puppeteer for ease of head movement. The cylindrical puppet head is prone to slipping, so these grooves are crafted to facilitate the insertion of the thumb and fingernail for rotation.

Figure 1: *A puppetry hand gesture.*

After obtaining the puppet maker's explanation and demonstration of the production procedure, and with samples of the materials used, generously provided by the puppet maker, the museum team was able to use scientific methods, such as X-ray, XRF, FTIR and other equipment to understand and verify the structure, material composition and even the areas that differentiate the restoration of its predecessors. The secret production methods, once handed down for centuries, were gradually deciphered through such exchanges and discussions (陳婉平 2021).

Figure 2: *X-ray image helps decipher the structure of the puppet head.*

The 'intergenerational disparities' among the work teams compellingly underscored the need for us to adopt a more positive stance in perpetuating both the legacy and the future. In addition to actively pursuing and absorbing the research results cultivated by our predecessors and thoroughly understanding the traditional context, we also try to reinterpret them from a contemporary point of view. We aim to find out the entry points that may be curious and interesting to future generations, even though some of the ideas are considered 'common sense' in the eyes of our predecessors. However, we believe that if the younger generation does not have access to these cultures due to various factors, we should 'let them know and be touched'. Hence, we have invested considerable effort in designing a variety of activities, including exchange visits, lectures and workshops, to perpetuate the intangible aspects of puppetry culture.

Transition from Performance Props to Collectibles: Solutions for Showcasing Puppetry

One might ask 'Can a puppet show become a collector's item and still be performed?' Some of the donation items date back to as early as the Qing Dynasty, featuring exquisite craftsmanship and including many pieces by renowned artists. Due to the change in performance formats, traditional-style puppets are hardly taking the stage anymore. Before entering the museum, these puppets were already collectibles, circulating among antique dealers and collectors, providing enthusiasts other than performers with opportunities for appreciation, manipulation, study, disassembly and replication. In some ways, they have long since retired from the stage. Their research, educational, commemorative and rarity value (Appelbaum, 2012) in museums far outweighs their practical value as performance props. Therefore, for the existing collection policy of the National Taiwan Museum (NTM) and the conservators who must ensure the safety of the artefacts, the prospect of risking potential damage by handling them and hoping they can still be used for performances (often outdoors) presents a significant challenge. The team must brainstorm creative solutions to ensure that puppetry can still showcase its vibrant performances, capturing the essence of live shows. These efforts are crucial for promoting accessibility to the collections and overcoming limitations of static displays. Initial proposals include flexible adjustments to usage conditions or the possibility of using replicas, but these options also come with their own drawbacks or constraints.

Just as the museum completed the arrangement of the donated collections and was in the midst of preparing for an exhibition, we, like our counterparts worldwide, unexpectedly encountered a significant challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic. This has necessitated adjustments and restrictions to some physical interactive measures, while digital display technologies are relatively safer for both visitors and staff. Even in the face of unknown circumstances and operational challenges, we still ventured beyond static displays to explore an interactive solution.

In one of the display modules of the exhibition, we designed a psychometric game for the visitors to test which of the 12 classic puppetry characters they are. Visitors can scan a QR code with their own cell phones without touching the objects on display; then, after answering a few simple questions, the program will calculate the test results, which can be uploaded to social media, and will also be linked to a short video of the character's performance. To make the videos, hats, costumes and props in good condition from the collection were carefully selected to correspond to the dress of 12 classic puppet characters. After all personnel had thoroughly disinfected their hands with alcohol and properly fitted themselves with masks, a talented young puppeteer, Chen Guan-Lin (陳冠霖), was invited to perform in the storage room. The performances were vividly staged, with witty

dialogues in Mandarin, Hokkien and English, and even improvised dialogues in line with current events, such as encouraging everyone to get vaccinated. The final product was humorous and well received. After the exhibition period, this display module was later modified and extended to the online Panorama Exhibition. It was also later adapted into a tarot card deck, which was used as material for other educational and promotional activities after the epidemic.
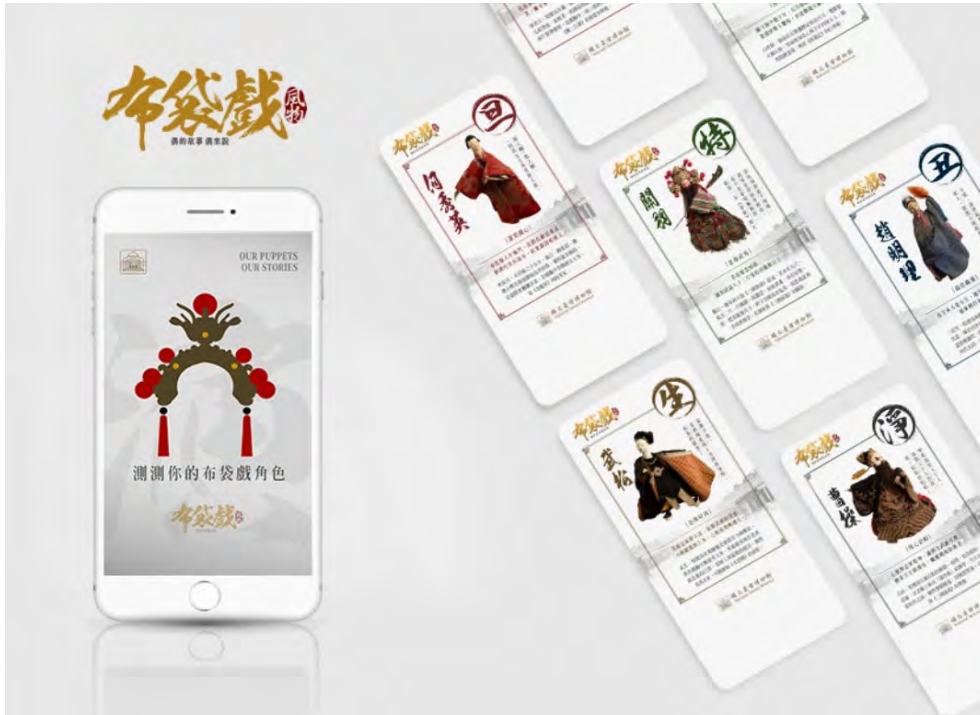
Figure 3: *A psychometric game was designed for the visitors to test which of the 12 classic puppetry characters they are.*

Figure 4: *Visitors can scan a QR code, share the test result and watch short videos.*

Figure 5: *Videos were made by inviting a young puppeteer to perform in the collection storage room.*

Achievements and Impact

During the five years of the project, we successfully completed the sorting of more than 10,000 donated items and housed them in the newly built storage dedicated to puppetry collections. In addition to the digitization of all the items, which facilitates their subsequent use and dissemination, exhibitions and book series have also been published so that the general public can get closer to the collection at any time. The condition classification survey of the collection as a whole also allows the museum conservator to plan the conservation of the collection in the future according to the deterioration condition and the degree of urgency in order to achieve the sustainable preservation of the physical objects. In addition, we are also very glad that we did not neglect the non-material while organizing the material parts of the donated artefacts. Through the oral histories and information provided by the old puppeteers and craftsmen who assisted in the identification of the collection, we were able to better grasp the overall inner meaning of the puppetry, to pick out the important and attractive objects and to understand the stories behind them. As a result, we were able to bring the entire design of the exhibition's psychometric test module to fruition. And as the project progressed, younger members of our team also expressed how this work experience provided them with the opportunity to closely engage with the exquisite puppetry culture and captivating puppeteers. It transformed what was initially seen as routine tasks into exciting and anticipated endeavours.

At the opening of the exhibition, what moved us deeply was that several old gentlemen who had prompted the donation said that they were a bit reluctant to donate their lifelong collections. But like marrying off their daughters, when they saw the professional team of the museum showing that they could take good care of their collections and make better use of them, their ambivalent feelings changed to relief; they felt that these treasures

had finally found a good home. They were deeply moved by the government's determination to support the preservation of traditional culture with resources and funding, and looked forward to more opportunities for creativity and promotion in the future. And through observing discussions on puppetry community forums, we were also surprised to find that many collectors and enthusiasts not only recognized the value of the exhibition and the book series but also acknowledged the advantage of publicizing private collections. This made the collections more accessible, allowing them to be viewed online at any time. People no longer need to establish extra connections with private collectors in order to see the collections they desire.

Thinking back to the question at the beginning of this article, does it mean it's the final curtain call when puppetry enters a museum? We are confident that there are numerous additional avenues for the expertise and enchantment that a museum can offer its visitors.

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Biography

Wan-Ping received her MA in Paper Conservation from the Graduate Institute of Conservation of Culture Relics, Tainan National University of the Arts (國立臺南藝術大學古物維護研究所). She's been working in the Collection Management Department of the National Taiwan Museum (國立臺灣博物館典藏管理組) since 2008. She has over a decade of experience in museum collection management, preservation and conservation. Fields of interests include: preventive conservation, paper conservation, photo conservation, book conservation and papermaking. In recent years, she has also expanded her research interests to Asian puppetry, encompassing the management, preservation and exhibition planning of puppetry artefacts, owing to her involvement in handling tens of thousands of puppetry artefact donations.

'Alofo, Collective Memory and Identity in the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Makotaay Pangcah Annual Ritual Ilisin in Taiwan

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Abstract

In Taiwan, with the lifting of martial law in 1987, the indigenous peoples' name rectification movement, and the rising urban unemployment rate, the Makotaay Pangcah returned to their hometown from big cities in the 1990s and devoted themselves to art and cultural revitalization. During the process of cultural revitalization that has continued since then, they have reconnected with their traditions. As a result, they began to place renewed importance on their most important annual ritual, Ilisin, and reinstated their social structure based on age groups. Their collective memory and identity are represented by 'alofo bags, part of their clothing.

In 2011, Ilisin was registered as intangible cultural heritage and designated an important national folk belief in Taiwan. In this paper, I look at 'alofo bags worn by the Makotaay Pangcah during Ilisin and explain why the 'alofo is a memory carrier. I also describe the transformation of how memories are dealt with, especially how the Makotaay Pangcah have exposed a part of history that was long kept concealed: the Battle at Cepo', a conflict between the Qing-dynasty Han and the Makotaay Pangcah from 1877 to 1878. Now, the collective memory and identity of the Makotaay Pangcah community are reproduced in the clothing worn during Ilisin.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, ethnological collection, annual ritual Ilisin, Pangcah, age group, battle

Introduction

In 2011, the Makotaay Pangcah annual ritual Ilisin was registered as intangible cultural heritage and designated an important national folk belief in Taiwan. Since the 1990s, the Makotaay Pangcah have presented their subjectivity on the *'alofo* (a bag which represents their collective memory and identity). There are numerous ethnic groups in Taiwan. The Han Chinese account for 96.4 per cent of the population, while indigenous people account for 2.5 per cent (Executive Yuan 2024). The indigenous peoples of Taiwan are Austronesian peoples, with linguistic and genetic ties to other Austronesian ethnic groups in the world. There are 16 officially recognized indigenous groups in Taiwan: the Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Pinuyumayan, Rukai, Cou, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu (Council of Indigenous Peoples 2024). The classification of Taiwanese indigenous groups started during the Japanese occupation period and has, for the most part, remained unchanged to the present.

With the lifting of martial law in the late 1980s, the Taiwanization movement arose, producing a significant influence on politics, society, and culture. The decolonization movement also led indigenous people to review the official classifications of indigenous groups designated by colonial powers. For instance, the indigenous Pingpu peoples, who made contact with the Han Chinese earlier than indigenous people who lived in the mountains and in eastern Taiwan (such as the Siraya, Taivoan, Kaxabu, and Makatao), have not been recognized as indigenous groups despite being Austronesian peoples. They have their own languages, clothing, rituals, and social structures and are still striving for name rectification.

The Amis is the largest officially recognized indigenous group. Their traditional homeland spans from northern Hualien County southward to Taitung County and as far south as Hengchun Township, all of which are in eastern Taiwan. The name 'Amis' is what the Pinuyumayan (an indigenous group in Taitung) called other indigenous people who lived to the north. 'Amis' thus became widely used during the Japanese occupation and has remained so to the present. However, the 'Amis' in Hualien County called themselves 'Pangcah', which means 'people'.

'Alofo in Daily Life, Rituals and Museums

Based on fieldwork in the Makotaay Pangcah community in Hualien, I have compared the *'alofo* from two museums. The *'alofo* is a symbolic object of the Amis/Pangcah, representing their identity in both daily life and during Ilisin. The *'alofo* vary among the different Amis/Pangcah groups. The *'alofo* at the National Museum of Prehistory and the Museum of Anthropology at National Taiwan University reflect these differences. For example, those from the Pangcah in Hualien are square, while those from the Amis in Taitung and Pingtung are boat-shaped.

Most Makotaay Pangcah adults left their hometown for work in big cities in the 1970s and 1980s, the majority going to New Taipei City in the north and Kaohsiung in southwestern Taiwan. During the 1990s, due to a rise in both identity awareness and the unemployment rate in big cities, some Makotaay Pangcah returned home to work in driftwood art and cultural revitalization. Ilisin is an important example of this revitalization. It is held from July 20 to July 25 each year. Local inhabitants and those who have moved away gather together to worship their ancestors in supplication for protection and a good harvest in the coming year. They reinforce their traditional

social structure and bring together their collective consciousness and sentiment by doing so. Also, more and more of them are embroidering the word 'Cepo'' or their indigenous names on their *'alofo*.

The names of many coastal places in the Makotaay area are related to the locals' collective memory and cultural practices. 'Cepo'' has multiple meanings (Lu 2010). First, it is the old name of Makotaay. It is also the name of a place at the mouth of the Siouguluan River, which is where the Battle of Cepo' took place about 150 years ago. The Qing-government policy of 'opening up the mountains and pacifying the indigenous people' led to the Battle of Cepo', a conflict between the Han (more specifically, the Qing army) and Pangcah. For many years, the Makotaay Pangcah avoided discussing this traumatic experience in public.

Traditionally, the Makotaay Pangcah made their livelihoods by farming, fishing, and gathering. However, as the economy took off in Taiwan beginning in the 1960s, most locals started to move to big cities for work, the majority working in the capitalist labour market. They gradually lost the link with their home community, culture, and identity. This is especially true for those of the younger generations who grew up in the cities.

But in the 1990s, some of them began returning to Makotaay. Community leader Lekal Makor led local people to reconnect with their traditions, and Makotaay artist Rahic Talif started doing driftwood art and even named his son Cepo' to remind people of that concealed aspect of history. Since then, knowledge of the battle has been gradually exposed in different ways. People of varying ages formed the Cepo' Troupe to sing and transmit ancient songs to remember their ancestors and to perform dramas depicting the battle. People of all age groups need to wear traditional clothing during Ilisin. A local clothing maker started to add the word 'Cepo'' on the *'alofo* and on traditional necklaces, which are worn during Ilisin. Elementary school students participated in a national dance competition, the theme of their dance being the story of the Pangcah hero Kafu'ok, who led his people during the battle. Local artists have also done work to depict the battle, and the elderly now tell the story of the battle to the young generation as a means of remembering their ancestors during Ilisin.

Indigenous peoples traditionally remembered their pasts through oral history instead of writing, but many historical events related to indigenous people, including the Battle of Cepo', were written and published by the Council of Indigenous Peoples from 2005 to 2019 to let more people know about the ignored history of indigenous people, making the subjectivity of the indigenous community available to a wider audience. The government began sponsoring large-scale memorial events with eight Pangcah clans to remember the Battle of Cepo'. In 2014, the Battle of Cepo' monument was set up by the local government at Jingpu Elementary School in Fengbin, where the battle happened. In 2023, the Hualien County cultural bureau, Fengbin Township, the Council of Indigenous Peoples and people from Makotaay renewed the monument.

Indigenous Culture and Intangible Cultural Heritage

Candidates for registration as intangible cultural heritage in Taiwan are reviewed and registered by the Cultural Assets Bureau of the Ministry of Culture. Makotaay Pangcah annual ritual Ilisin was the second indigenous case registered in 2011; other registered indigenous cases include the Cou Mayasvi, Jibeishua Siraya night ritual, and Saisiyat paSta'ay. However, controversy arose after the announcement that Makotaay Pangcah annual ritual Ilisin had been designated intangible cultural heritage.

First, the other Pangcah indigenous communities pointed out that each Pangcah/Amis community's annual ritual is unique; thus, Makotaay's Ilisin should not be viewed as representative of all Pangcah/Amis communities. Second, the question arose as to who should be members of the community's intangible cultural heritage preservation group (the group in charge of applying for recognition as intangible cultural heritage). Should it be those who have traditionally headed the social structure – the community leader and male age groups – or should it be the community development association, which was established by the Ministry of the Interior to promote community development work?

Thirdly, the community leader and male age groups were traditionally in charge of all public affairs, including Ilisin. But during the 1990s, women started becoming highly involved in public affairs, including cultural revitalization and the land-return movement, and in preserving traditional songs and Ilisin rituals. So how women should participate in the preservation of Ilisin became part of the question. Many questions on this were posed by the people of Makotaay, the preservation group, and the Cultural Assets Bureau. Since 2011, the people and groups in Makotaay have negotiated with each other and the Cultural Assets Bureau, achieving much more balance in the handling of these matters.

Conclusion

Since the 1990s, Makotaay Pangcah people devoted themselves to art and cultural revitalization. Their Ilisin was registered as intangible cultural heritage in 2011. I look at *'alofo* bags worn by the Makotaay Pangcah during Ilisin and explain why the *'alofo* is a memory carrier. I also describe the transformation of how memories are dealt with, especially how the Makotaay Pangcah have exposed a part of history that was long kept concealed: the Battle at Cepo', a conflict between the Qing-dynasty Han and the Makotaay Pangcah from 1877 to 1878. By embroidering 'Cepo'' on the *'alofo* and telling the younger generations about the Battle of Cepo' through the above-mentioned means, the Makotaay Pangcah's subjectivity, collective memory, and identity are presented in daily life and during Ilisin.

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Biography

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Reconsidering Dispersed Ethnographic Collections: A Case Study of Indigenous Textile in Taiwan

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Abstract

During the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), lepec, a type of funerary textile of the Paiwan indigenous group in Taiwan, were acquired for ethnographic collections as part of efforts to assert colonial authority. To comprehend the significance of lepec, this study adopts a social life of collections approach, arguing for the consideration of collecting contexts and the dispersal of textiles into worldwide collections during a period of significant upheaval for indigenous societies in Taiwan. Emphasizing the importance of materiality, this approach offers fresh insights into how lepec found their way into collections and contributed to knowledge construction. Moreover, it underscores the necessity of reconsidering ethnographic collections' viewing and naming methods, advocating for engagement with source communities rather than solely relying on records and research. By adopting this approach, a more nuanced understanding of lepec's historical and cultural roles emerges, highlighting their material and cultural significance beyond their mere classification within collections.

Introduction

Museums acquired numerous funeral textiles woven with intricate techniques used by the Paiwan tribe. Traditionally worn by the Paiwan people during mourning, these textiles, crafted with nearly lost weaving techniques, exhibit exquisite delicacy and are rare and unique artefacts. Various historical backgrounds, including colonial governance, religious conversions and socio-economic changes, have driven their acquisition by museums. Traditionally, during the acquisition process, these artefacts were often viewed as cultural specimens, offering glimpses into underlying cultural practices. Researchers would study, describe and classify these objects, using them as mediums to comprehend exotic cultures and construct knowledge systems, then share them with the public. However, this essay aims to indicate, using the example of Paiwan funeral textiles, *lepec*, that such thinking overlooks the using context and the social relationships of the objects. Understanding the social life of these objects, including their collecting process and use within the source community, is crucial for understanding the artefact, the culture, the historical context, the source community and the people.

This essay will use *lepec*, a funeral textile made with a unique and traditional brocade weaving technique[1] and used by women as square funeral headwear, to illustrate the social life of the artefacts. By examining one of the collecting policies during the colonial period, this essay aims to illustrate the contextual backdrop of acquisition. Additionally, a brief overview of the textile's use within the source community will underscore the complexity of weaving culture and funeral ceremonies, often overlooked in collection records.

Finally, this essay discusses the impact of religious conversion and socio-economic changes as one of the reasons why so many *lepec* were acquired and deduced from the fact and the knowledge constructing process in the museums to illustrate why *lepec* is not the same as *vinecikan*, which contains more types of textiles that are made with special skills. This case highlights the necessity of reassessing ethnographic collections' viewing and naming methods, emphasizing the importance of engaging with source communities and learning from their perspectives and language rather than solely focusing on the objects themselves.

The Textiles in Museums

In the quiet corners of museum storage rooms, tens of thousands of collections are preserved in stable and highly controlled conditions to best maintain the quality of the objects and preserve them for future generations. Temperature, humidity, lighting and even ultraviolet ray intensity are rigorously regulated throughout the year to ensure the optimal preservation of these objects. Rows of shelves house an array of rectangular boxes, each custom-made from acid-free paper to provide the ideal environment for the diverse collections.

Among these boxes, a particular type of textile captures our attention with its intricate patterns. Commonly labelled as funeral cloth, mourning attire, funeral shawls, funeral headwear or funeral textiles, these woven artefacts possess distinct characteristics. Some museums have further classified them into two subtypes based on their form. One subtype, known as the funeral shawl, kaljuljud/aljuljud, typically measures around 90 cm in length and 80 cm in width, and is stitched together from three pieces of textiles that are nearly identical or slightly varied in pattern. Woven in plain or twill weaving on a blue-black or greige base, blue and red warp threads are alternated during the warp. In contrast, the weft threads are interwoven with red, yellow, green and

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1. The textile made with the traditional brocade weaving technique with a beautiful pattern is called *vinecikan* in Paiwan.

black threads to create hairline patterns, mountain-shaped motifs, triangular patterns, rhombic patterns and varying human figures, resulting in a striped pattern with geometric motifs when viewed from a distance. The other subtype, funeral headwear (*lepec*), measures approximately 80 cm in length and 50 cm in width, and is similarly assembled from three pieces of fabric. Predominantly featuring blue warp strips, the fabric's ends boast vibrant rhombic patterns in shades of orange, red, green and black, gradually expanding into diamond shapes. The central section may be left blank or adorned with triangular patterns, hairline motifs, snake motifs and rhombic patterns, resembling decorative bands running across the fabric.

The museum's cataloguing system often labels the former as shawls, funeral attire or shawl-style funeral attire, while the latter are labelled as funeral headwear. In many cases, however, these kinds of woven textiles are referred to as funeral cloth, funeral shawls or funeral textiles, which need to be checked the form and usage, whether it is funeral shawls or headwear worn during a funeral. Alternatively, that is the textile for other uses.

However, from the above description, we need help understanding the context of this unique textile woven with special techniques. How to make and use? What is the cultural meaning? Moreover, in what historical context did these textiles leave their original context to be acquired by museums?

Knowledge Construction Process in the Museums

Establishing a museum knowledge system involves categorizing and describing objects to construct knowledge systems aimed at understanding cultures through material artefacts. Historically, museum collections were perceived as static specimens, partially representing underlying cultural contexts. For example, in the history of collecting funeral textiles in museums in Taiwan, the first systematic collecting action of funeral textiles can be traced back to the Japanese colonial period[2] when the Sakuma Group began collecting artefacts. During this period, under the governance of the Governor-General of Japan, Sakuma Samata, military colonization and police networks were employed to control and govern the population, particularly indigenous communities in Taiwan. Amidst significant societal changes spurred by colonial influences, traditional cultures and crafts faced gradual erosion. In response to the push towards 'civilization' and the loss of 'primitive' ways of life, coupled with a growing awareness of the importance of preserving folk art and colonial policies promoting cultural governance through museum construction, the Sakuma Group, funded by the Governor-General's Office, commenced with systematic collection of cultural artefacts across Taiwan. These artefacts were housed in the Governor-General's Museum[3] for research, exhibition and education. Furthermore, different museums have acquired similar artefacts for various reasons and historical contexts. It can be indicated that there are over 200[4] pieces of *lepec* that have been acquired by various museums, some of which are dispersed worldwide, including the British Museum in the UK, the American Museum of Natural History in the USA and the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan.

Sociology at that time conceptualized society as an integrated whole comprising various functional systems akin to bodily organs, in which objects were merely human creations reflecting different functions and thereby representing human society. Consequently, curators made conscious efforts to collect artefacts systematically across 99 material categories, including clothing, tableware and tools, to represent the underlying culture. Funeral attire represented one such category, serving as a window into funeral customs. Additionally, the collection

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2. Taiwan was colonized by Japan from 1895 to 1945.
3. The Governor-General's Museum was founded in 1908 during the Japanese colonial period. Now, it is known as the National Taiwan Museum.
4. This number continues to grow as research progresses.

strategy prioritized artefacts based on their craftsmanship and rarity. If the artefact is rare and delicately made with complicated skills, it is a must-collect object in the collecting strategy.

Hence, the beautiful *lepec* came to be seen as so unique because, on the one hand, the Paiwan people wore it during mourning, meaning it represented the funeral customs, and on the other hand, it can be considered artwork, made, as it is, with complex craftsmanship and beautiful woven patterns. In other words, *lepec* were emphasized for their functionality as cultural specimens, as well as for their exquisite woven patterns, often regarded as works of art. As a result, a total of eight pieces of Paiwan funeral textiles were collected from various communities, including tjalja'avus, kuljaljau, lalekeleke, vunglid and talilik, and recorded in the accession records as 'funeral headwear', with detailed information about the ethnic group and collection location, including prefectures, counties, villages and family names.

The collection and documentation tradition established during this period has left a lasting impact on subsequent collection records. Essential museum registration records typically include names, functions, collectors, collecting locations and objective descriptions related to the artefacts. Within this framework, funeral textiles are seen as representatives of Paiwan funeral culture, social customs, clothing and weaving techniques, offering insights into their utilization in Paiwan society. However, this approach implicitly assumes Paiwan society is a homogenous entity, where objects and customs can accurately represent the entirety, disregarding potential regional variations.

Paiwan is one of the 16 officially recognized ethnic groups in Taiwan. They reside in the southern and eastern parts of Taiwan, mainly in Pingtung and Taitung counties. However, after closer examination of the collection, we found that the source community of *lepec* is limited to specific regions. These regions do not cover the entire area inhabited by Paiwan people, but through the colonial collecting process, they represent Paiwan funeral costumes as the entire costumes. That is to say, this understanding Paiwan culture and Paiwan funeral costumes, or the textiles and the social relationship behind them is incomplete and may lead to misunderstanding. Therefore, re-examining the record and learning from the source communities' knowledge is crucial.

Using Context

Traditionally, the funeral cloth is worn during mourning as identification in traditional Paiwan costumes. When someone passes away in the tribe, relatives and friends are informed, and they will take food to comfort and accompany the bereaved family, chanting in a lamenting tone to commemorate the deceased's identity and life experiences. On the day of the funeral, almost everyone puts aside their work to send the deceased off on their final journey. After the burial ceremony, the pulingao pray to ask the deceased's soul not to linger in the cemetery. In the evening, the pulingao conduct another ritual to pray for the deceased leader or family member to lead the deceased's soul to the ancestral home. Relatives then wear funeral attire according to their kinship hierarchy, and the tribe refrains from major activities or ceremonies the following day. When the deceased's meeting with the ancestors is not confirmed, the family regularly offers meals and asks the deceased's soul to wait at home until the ancestors take them to the ancestral home. On the fourth day, people slaughter a pig, and tribal leaders and close family members invite the bereaved family to their homes to sit and mourn. Friends and relatives help the bereaved family return to their usual work on the fifth day.

Traditionally, funeral textiles are changed upon returning home after burying the deceased. How long the funeral textiles are worn for varies depending on the relationship with the deceased. Spouses or heirs mourn for one hundred days, while siblings mourn for about a month. However, nowadays, due to the fast pace of life and the need for work outside, many people remove funeral attire immediately after mourning and replace it with simple accessories to symbolize mourning.

Nevertheless, funeral customs have evolved significantly over time. Previously, individuals were typically buried within their homes, except in cases of accidental deaths, suicide or other exceptional circumstances necessitating burial outside the home. Each household had a designated burial area. However, during the Japanese colonial period, regulations were imposed banning indoor burials, leading to a transition to cemetery burials. Additionally, the widespread conversion of many tribes to Christianity resulted in the adoption of Christian funeral practices, leading some families to forego traditional funeral textiles like *lepec*. Moreover, forced relocations of tribes by the Japanese government to areas nearer to plains brought economic challenges, prompting many families to sell or give *lepec* that lost their practical purpose or being collected as cultural specimens and leading to their acquisition by museums during the colonial period.

Reconsider the Form, Skill and Name

Traditionally woven funeral textiles can be categorized into two main types: shawl-style funeral textiles and women's square funeral headwear, known as *lepec*. This square funeral headwear is crafted by stitching together three pieces of fabric adorned with intricate patterns, with straps sewn between each pair of fabric pieces. The head straps are tied at the back, allowing the fabric to drape naturally on either side. Hence, the form, the length and width of the textile, as well as the pattern of placement and the location of the strap's seams can all be used to identify whether it is a *lepec* or not.

It is notable that museums predominantly acquire *lepec* over other types of funeral textiles. This trend can be attributed to the historical context wherein traditional funeral textiles experienced a decline in use with the adoption of Christianity. Consequently, these textiles were either sold off or collected by museums. Moreover, the prevalence of *lepec* in museum collections can also be attributed to the practical versatility of shawl-style textiles. As these textiles are larger in size, they can be repurposed for various uses, such as men's leggings. This may explain why there is a higher representation of funeral textiles than other textiles and, among this category, why there are more *lepec* in museums than other funeral textiles.

Additionally, it is crucial to recognize the significance of the complicated weaving technique employed in creating these funeral textiles. This technique, brocade, involves weaving coloured wool as weft to produce intricate patterns called *vinecikan*. In the past, from the collection study, some researchers may have misunderstood *vinecikan* as equal to the funeral cloth as they studied and constructed knowledge from the collections, while most textiles had been acquired at that time as funeral textiles due to the historical context. In fact, from the interview, fieldwork and other collection studies, it was found that brocade is a complicated skill that can make beautiful *vinecikan* with delicate patterns. *Vinecikan*, as the most precious textile, can be used in many ways, such as for jackets, skirts, leggings, shawls and funeral headwear (*lepec*). In other words, brocade is the skill used to produce *vinecikan*, a textile with a particular pattern that can be used for various purposes. Among these, funeral

clothes are one of the usages, highlighting the respect accorded to the deceased by utilizing the finest textiles.

Therefore, we should reconsider when we face these kinds of ethnographic collections. We cannot name it just by skill, pattern or type, but must actually and carefully consider the usage, form and function and check and connect with the source communities. This approach ensures a more accurate and respectful interpretation of these cultural artefacts.

Conclusion

This essay traces the collecting and usage contexts of funeral textiles, beginning with the introduction of museum collections. It re-evaluates the context of funeral textiles by scrutinizing their forms, colours, materials and production techniques.

In essence, this essay argues that simply characterizing funeral cloths as rectangular pieces measuring approximately 75 cm in length and 55 cm in width, describing them as headscarves worn during mourning and emphasizing their unique double weaving and patterns while assessing their artistic value solely from the perspective of primitive art, is somewhat superficial. Textile is not merely a technical product but a cultural practice, cultural memory transmission and societal refinement under societal norms. As a byproduct of mediating society, woven fabric possesses intricate and exquisite graphics and texts. In addition to being influenced by the colonial context and associated changes in religious conventions, the collecting process of these kinds of artefacts epitomizes the era and serves as a witness to how people constructed their knowledge system at that time.

Hence, the essay suggests establishing a bridge to the future by transcending mere storage and re-establishing connections with the source community. While the collection is crucial, preserving cultural memory, relationships and material knowledge holds greater significance. Upon examination, as mentioned above that specific families with traditional brief within specific communities still wear *lepec* during mourning in nowadays. Additionally, materiality analysis reveals that *lepec* incorporates materials such as wool obtained through external exchanges, suggesting the production process involved more people than a static cultural specimen can represent.

Furthermore, as we now open access and reconnect with the source community, we encounter new agencies that can reshape the knowledge system more comprehensively and holistically. For instance, we find that the source community of lepers is limited to specific regions. These regions do not cover the entire area inhabited by Paiwan people, but through the colonial collecting process, they came to represent Paiwan funeral costumes. This raises questions about whether using a part to represent the whole group needs to be re-evaluated, or if it creates a new identity. In addition, some *lepec* has transitioned from its original use in tribal communities to being collected by museums and scholars worldwide for preservation and interpretation. Eventually, due to the transformation of museums, *lepec* has been reconnected with the tribes, becoming a symbol of culture revitalization.

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Biography

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Promotion and Use of Unearthed Archaeological Relics – A Case Study of Collaboration Between the Museum of Archaeology in Tainan and the Siraya Community

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I. Permanent Exhibition of Siraya Relics at the Museum

The cultural layers discovered in the area of the Southern Taiwan Science Park and its surroundings can generally be divided into belonging to the Dabenkeng (5000–4200 BP), Niuchouzi (3800–3300 BP), Dahu (3300–1800 BP), Niaosong (1800–500 BP), Siraya (500–300 BP) and Ming-Qing Han cultures. At the Shenei archaeological site in Xinshi District and the Dadaogong site at the science park, a massive store of Siraya culture remains has been found, their time period overlapping that of recorded Taiwanese history. The location of the site is quite close to that of the Siraya community of Xingangshe described in historical documents, indicating the site's close relationship with today's Siraya community. In addition to human bones and gravesites, these sites have also produced remains of shells, plants and animals. Red-brown, undecorated, sand-infused pottery found there is very similar to that from the Niaosong culture, and it can be seen that the Siraya traded to obtain various other types of pottery and porcelain. They had a great number of iron implements as well, and used carved horns with bored holes, glass beads, rings and agate beads as jewellery (Tsang Cheng-hwa and Li Kuang-ti, 2018).In addition

Archaeological Culture period		Date
Ming-Qing period culture of Han people		300 BP–
Siraya Culture		500–300 BP
Niaosong Culture	Kanxi Phase	1000–500 BP
	Niosong Phase	1400–1000 BP
	Anzi Phase	1800–1400 BP
Dahu Culture	Yuliao Phase	2000–1800 BP
	Wusantou Phase	2800–2000 BP
	Dahu Phase	3300–2800 BP
Niuchuozi Culture	Niuchuozi Phase	3800–3300 BP
	Suogang Phase	4200–3800 BP
Dabengkeng Culture	Guoye Phase	5000–4200 BP

◎ BP (Before Present)

Table 1: *Archaeological culture periods unearthed at Southern Taiwan Science Park (Tsang Cheng-hwa and Li Kuang-ti, 2018:77).*

to preserving these Siraya culture relics, the Museum of Archaeology in Tainan (a branch of the National Museum of Prehistory) displays some of them in its permanent exhibition hall so that the public may see verification of the Siraya people's history of survival in southern Taiwan and learn about where the Siraya lived and the implements they used long ago. The human bone specimens found are stored in the Bone Collection Room. Siraya ceremonies of ancestor worship and blessing are held in the area with cooperation between the local Fanzaitian Siraya Association and the management committee of the Fuxing Temple in Guantian. Such ceremonies are a means of connecting with ancestral spirits. A Siraya priest, the communication link between the human and spirit worlds, makes supplications known to the spirits, inquires of the spirits' demands and explains the ceremonial procedure.

Figure 1: *A priest ensures all the ceremonial items are present (photo: the author).*

II. Joint Exhibition with the Siraya Community

The museum held a special exhibition on the Siraya, Makatao and Taivoan cultures, the exhibition name beginning with 'Hand in Hand with the Pingpu People', which has the following implications: The first is the cooperation among the three groups in reviving each other's cultures through a variety of contemporary methods, which is part of the effort to obtain the right to be officially recognized by the government as an Indigenous group and a symbol of the emotional bond with Taiwanese society. The second is the active cooperation among various Pingpu peoples in eastern and southern Taiwan with the museum in recent years. With a foundation of achievements in reviving culture, the cooperation involves relics unearthed by the museum; pieces of modern and contemporary Pingpu relics; and assisting colleges, universities, museums, government agencies and private organizations that research Pingpu relics and culture as a means of presenting the diversity, uniqueness and vitality of Pingpu culture. The third is to allow viewers to experience how Taiwan is comparable to a garden of

Figure 2: *Entrance to the exhibition (photo: the author).*

hundreds of kinds of flowers or a symphony of diverse kinds of music harmoniously combined. Learning about these cultures helps the public better understand history and the people of this land while learning to respect and embrace the diversity in Taiwan's culture so that every type of 'music' may be heard.

The permanent exhibition hall contains numerous unearthed Siraya culture relics. Pieces from the museum's collection storeroom were incorporated into the special exhibition described above, including objects possibly used in ritual, objects used in daily life, pottery designs, glass and shell implements, foreign blue and white porcelain pieces and foreign coins.

Figure 3: *Siraya archaeological relics on display at the special exhibition (photo: the author).*

One of the relics is a turtle shell with holes bored into it from the Dadaogong site. The dorsal side (carapace) has two holes, and the ventral side (plastron) has three. The shell, which may have been used ritually, measures 175 mm long, 121.48 mm wide and 54.31 mm tall with a mass of 135.2 g. According to Siraya expert Duan Hung-kun, Scotsman David Wright, who came to Taiwan with the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century, wrote in his Notes on Formosa that the Siraya living in the Tainan region beat on turtle shells with sticks or their hands while running through the community as a means of calling people to assemble for rituals.

Figure 4: *An unearthed turtle shell with bored holes (photo: National Museum of Prehistory, 2022).*

Also unearthed in the area near the museum are numerous cut and polished cone snail shells with bored holes that were used as jewellery. Large specimens are 55 mm in diameter, about 15 mm thick and 41.5 g in mass, while small ones are 20 mm long, 8 mm thick and 2.5 g in mass. Hung on the ceremonial jars in today's Siraya Kabuasua community are objects similar in shape to these shells, and they are called 'snail shell talismans' by the Siraya. Cone snail shells are often attached as accessories to formal clothing or to straps worn diagonally across the back in other Taiwanese Indigenous groups, so it is hypothesized that the Siraya may also have used them in those ways. Another find is clay bracelets, some of which are a single ring, while others are several rings fixed together, serving as evidence that the early Siraya wore bracelets. In addition, relics of bone and horn with exquisite carvings and bored holes have been found, which are also believed to have been ornamental.

Figure 5: *A cut and polished cone snail shell with a bored hole (photo: National Museum of Prehistory, 2022).*

The ornamentation on the necks and shoulders of Siraya pottery is continuous. Fragments unearthed at the Dadaogong site include pieces with circles, dots, waves, short lines and shell impressions. Shell impressions on the body of pottery are believed to have been made with the edges of blood clam shells. In the museum's permanent exhibition hall are bones with inscribed ornamentation, one of which has circular and triangular (half diamond) ornamentation. There is also is finely carved ornamentation on deer antlers, showing the diversity in Siraya culture ornamentation. Archaeologists have yet to find Siraya culture clothing, making it impossible to determine whether the clothing had ornamentation, but based on studies of other Taiwanese Indigenous groups, it is believed that the Siraya indeed embellished their clothing, especially because patterning found on pottery could be presented on clothing just as readily. As for iron objects, several knives and spears have been found, their appearances providing an idea of the Siraya culture's common cutting tools.

Figure 6: *Flat bone piece with incised ornamentation (photo: National Museum of Prehistory, 2022).*

The Shenei and Dadaogong sites have produced a vast amount of foreign relics, including glass beads, agate beads, blue and white porcelain, glazed Anping pottery and coins. One of the more notable coins has an inscription of four Chinese characters that mean 'Cundhi Bodhisattva', and a silver one from the Netherlands has a lion holding a sword. These discoveries show that the Siraya culture was frequently engaged in exchange with foreign cultures. The glass beads and agate beads all have holes, and they are usually found in groups, indicating that they were strung together as necklaces.

III. How the Siraya Feel About Relics in the Museum

In recent years, the Siraya have been actively working to revive their traditional culture, focusing on ritual, language and clothing. They have attempted to learn about their ancestors' clothing from historical documents, but early documents lack imagery. Later documents include photographs, which would seem a useful supplement, but the clothing of that time may have already been infused with foreign elements. The museum looks to make up for the current limitations on knowledge of Siraya clothing based on the relics it has unearthed. As part of that effort, people from the Siraya community have been invited to come see the museum's relics and assist in discovering the early Siraya clothing culture.

After the special exhibition, the museum invited people from the Siraya community to observe relics up close that had not been on display so as to help with adding ornamentation to clothing. Their high degree of interest became apparent as they viewed the pieces, especially because the objects are no longer used in daily Siraya life. This satisfied their desire to see relics left behind by their progenitors and allowed them to re-familiarize themselves and reconnect with their ancestry. For instance, they were especially interested in the necklaces of glass and agate beads, carefully observing each piece with a magnifying glass. This showed them that their ancestors wore beautiful, valuable accessories to embellish their appearance. Even so, questions came to mind while viewing the relics. First, are these items truly from the Siraya culture? Second, seeing as the items are no longer used in daily life, can the Siraya identify with these relics?

Figure 7: *Siraya people viewing Siraya culture relics up close (photo: the author).*

In response to the first question, the crux of the matter lies in the fact that the Siraya are unfamiliar with the science of archaeology, a problem that also exists for other groups in Taiwan. The grand majority of interpretations of unearthed relics are made by archaeologists, and very few people outside of the archaeology field are able to understand reports written on the objects. The descriptions, jargon and categories used for relics are quite different from the language most people are familiar with, an issue the museum hopes to remedy. The second question is related to the first. It is important to realize that these relics are no longer part of daily life, making it hard to identify with them. Perhaps the Siraya changed their material preferences of their own volition with the passage of time. Another possibility is that the strong influence of outside cultures forced the Siraya to change their culture, this being a passive form of change that led to a break in the transmission of culture and memories. For the challenge of the first question, besides the museum looking to conduct events promoting archaeology, Siraya people may collaborate with universities in excavations so that they may play a direct role in handling relics left behind by their ancestors. They may even study archaeology formally so that they may lead digs and conduct research in the future. For the challenge of the second question, we must see how the Siraya wish to go about reviving and developing their culture. Currently, they are working hard to obtain official recognition as an Indigenous group, so actively looking for the culture of their ancestors is a focal task for them. In comparison with many Taiwanese Indigenous groups, whose elders are able to transmit traditional culture, most Siraya people only have the assets of historical documentation and relics in museums from which to learn about their culture. Thus, working with the museum is an effective path for the Siraya, and the museum can make use of the relics, so both will benefit from the collaboration. However, it will take time.

IV. Continued Cooperation Between the Museum and the Siraya

The Siraya culture has long been viewed as Sinicized or having ceased to exist. Meanwhile, the museum is displaying unearthed relics and holding promotional events to remind the public that, in the big picture, the Siraya culture has continually assimilated characteristics from other cultures, causing its own culture to continually change. Instead of trying to define the essence of Siraya culture, it would be better to think about what the Siraya themselves believe their culture is.

The vast majority of unearthed Siraya culture relics need to be studied in depth through a blend of ethnographic research, historical document studies and field surveys. Doing so will produce more stories from the relics for the public and will give the relics more meaning and thus make them more readily identified with. Relatively speaking, relics in museum collections being made available for learning and research by the people of the groups from which the relics originated is often critical in helping these groups revive their culture, and it highlights the value of museums in the present day. Thus, the rich store of Siraya culture relics at the Museum of Archaeology will be studied in collaboration with the Siraya people, while the relics obtained through archaeological excavation and specimens collected in ethnographic field surveys will complement each other well.

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Multiple Interpretations of Torii Ryuzo's Manuscripts – Transnational Collaborations and Efforts at Decolonization by the National Museum of Prehistory

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Abstract

This study looks at the academic exchanges and collaboration on the interpretation of manuscripts written by Torii Ryuzo (on anthropological research left behind after the Japanese occupation of Taiwan) between Taiwan's National Museum of Prehistory and the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum that have been underway since 2021. Besides the perspective of Taiwanese and Japanese scholars, the study looks at how interpretations may be made by integrating the perspective of the indigenous community of Taiwan and explores the possibility of returning the authority of cultural interpretation to this community and the possible role of the museum within this process.

In the overall historical and environmental context of its era, Torii Ryuzo's research must not be viewed outside of its relationship to colonialism. Based on a contemporary perspective, this study focuses on expanding the value of his research past the manuscripts themselves by inspiring indigenous Taiwanese people to look again at the history of their colonization, turning the content of the manuscripts into a force in their favour while advancing the museums' practical and diversified efforts at promoting decolonization.

I. Foreword

Early anthropological research often unfolded in tandem with the spread of colonialism. During the early years of Japanese rule in Taiwan, several Japanese scholars engaged in related investigations and research. One of the purposes of their research was to effectively assist the Japanese government in its governance of Taiwan. Reflecting upon this historical background, we also scrutinize the role and function of museums, where the development of museums is intricately intertwined with colonial history. Even today, visitors to the British Museum can admire totem poles from Northwest Coast indigenous peoples of Canada, while the traditional attire of Taiwanese indigenous peoples can be seen in Japanese museums. The collections displayed in museums consistently invoke the historical traces of previous colonizers.

Starting in 2021, the National Museum of Prehistory (hereafter referred to as the NMP) and the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum (hereafter referred to as the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum), embarked on a series of transnational academic exchanges. The effectiveness and value of this academic collaboration, when viewed from the perspectives of the development backgrounds of the two museums themselves, can be said to embody the actions of the museums towards decolonization. In 1896, Torii Ryuzo arrived in Taiwan and embarked on anthropological research focused on the indigenous peoples of the island. During this period, Torii Ryuzo was commissioned by a university and did not hold an official government position. This academic role allowed him to maintain a certain level of detachment from the political milieu, thereby preserving a degree of academic autonomy. Nevertheless, when viewed within the broader historical context of the time, it remains challenging to entirely disassociate his academic research achievements from the influence of colonialism. However, Torii Ryuzo's research career contributed significantly to the field of anthropology and resulted in the accumulation of a substantial body of research findings. While Taiwan represented only a portion of his research career, the valuable data he left behind is regarded as rare and invaluable for the study of Taiwan's indigenous peoples.

The National Museum of Prehistory in Taiwan has long focused its research efforts on the cultures of Austronesian indigenous peoples. In recent years, there has been a shift in the development of research related to Taiwan's indigenous peoples towards practical actions that involve collaboration with various indigenous groups to assert their cultural interpretation rights. These actions encompass a range of activities, including the interpretation and curation of the NMP's collections, the replication of cultural artifacts, collaborations with indigenous museums or ancestral communities for exhibition curation, as well as the publication of books and materials. The collaboration with the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum, centred on the interpretation of Torii Ryuzo's manuscripts, represents a contemporary challenge for museums. It not only seeks to demonstrate the museum's contemporaneity and fulfil its significant social responsibilities but also aims to ponder how to accurately approach the original intent in interpreting this century-old manuscript. Furthermore, it strives to continue efforts in making the ethnic groups and their associated cultures recorded in the manuscript visible once again. This stands as the overarching goal for future endeavours in this collaboration.

(Source: National Museum of Prehistory)

II. International Museum Interinstitutional Cooperation and Manuscript Interpretation

(I) Opportunity for Collaboration Between the Two Museums

Due to the extensive and complex nature of the data accumulated by Torii Ryuzo in the past, which not only includes Taiwan but also regions such as East Asia, Siberia, Mongolia, Northeast and Southwest China, and South America, the task of organizing and conducting subsequent research on the vast amount of field notes, specimens, photographs, and other materials left behind by Torii is formidable given the limited manpower available at the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum. During the second half of 2020, the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum successfully carried out the initial digitization and online publication of materials belonging to Torii Ryuzo. The primary goal of this endeavour was to foster collaborative research across various academic disciplines by providing online access to these materials, aiming to encourage experts from different professional domains to rigorously examine and revise the materials, thereby advancing research related to Torii Ryuzo and its subsequent developments (Torii Ryuzo Research No. 5: 2022:9). In response to this initiative, the NMP actively engaged in open data sharing and collaborative research with the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum. This collaboration was made possible through introductions by relevant Japanese scholars and the enthusiastic support of both institutions' leaders. As part of this collaborative effort, the NMP hosted the first online discussion forum, and this partnership has since been marked by ongoing interactions. To date, these interactions have included four

online discussion forums (including working meetings), two physical lecture events, four bilateral exchange visits, one international conference, and the signing of a memorandum of cooperation. Subsequently, both museums will continue to engage in field research and online academic research activities.

(II) Initial Scope of Research on Torii Ryuzo's Manuscripts

Torii Ryuzo, who was sent to Taiwan by the Tokyo Imperial University, conducted a series of five surveys in Taiwan spanning from 1896 to 1910. He was one of the few scholars who conducted in-depth research deep in the mountains and forests of Taiwan during the early Japanese colonial period when traditional indigenous cultures in Taiwan had not yet been significantly disrupted. Therefore, the data, photographs, specimens, and other cultural artefacts he left behind, along with communication records and research publications from that time, are considered invaluable and crucial resources for contemporary research on Taiwan's indigenous peoples. To date, there are over a hundred of Torii Ryuzo's field manuscripts that have been successfully digitized and made publicly accessible. Among these, a total of 24 manuscripts have been confirmed to be related to Taiwan. After an initial inventory of the manuscript's content by the NMP, considering that the records left behind during the field investigations were closely tied to the geographical context of that time and place, the NMP decided against adopting a chronological timeline as the basis for selecting the research order. In other words, the selection of research order was not based on the sequence of Torii Ryuzo's five Taiwan surveys. Instead, it was based on the spatial context of each respective time period. Among these, the most suitable for aligning with the characteristics of the manuscript records are the historic trails and old tribal routes. These routes have the capacity to convey information about individuals, historical events, specific locations and detailed geographical features encountered along the way. Additionally, these routes retain a traceable and accessible spatial context in the contemporary era.

Therefore, the NMP initially focused on the Jinshuiying Historic Trail and the Alangyi Historic Trail, which could connect the southwestern and eastern indigenous communities in Taiwan. The Jinshuiying Historic Trail is located in the present-day Chunri Township of Pingtung County, falling within the scope of Torii Ryuzo's fourth investigation. The Alangyi Historic Trail is located in the Shizi Township area of Pingtung County and falls within the scope of Torii Ryuzo's third investigation. Among these options, taking into account the ease of initiating the research and the richness of the manuscript's recorded content, the NMP ultimately selected the Jinshuiying Historic Trail and the Lili Community of Chunri Township in Pingtung as the starting point. The Shizi Township area was chosen as the subsequent primary research area. The collaboration between the NMP and the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum brought together a diverse team of researchers from various disciplines, including archaeology, ethnology and anthropology, natural sciences, history and museum studies, along with external scholars. Most significantly, this collaboration involved connecting with indigenous communities, fostering their active participation, and attempting to incorporate the perspectives of tribal members in the joint interpretation of the manuscript. Both museums, under the guidance of tribal members, physically visited the old communities in the source areas to conduct field surveys. The aim was to consolidate the manuscript records with on-site geographical information to comprehend Torii Ryuzo's observations and experiences. This approach served a dual purpose: Firstly, it facilitated the reconfirmation of the manuscript data, and secondly, it allowed researchers from Taiwan and Japan to gain a deeper understanding of the discrepancies between the field and the manuscript. Furthermore, it provided the source community's tribal members with access to more valuable records and information, contributing to a deeper re-evaluation and examination of their own traditional culture and history.

Sequence	Manuscript Title	Recorded Year	Survey Period
1	(Taiwan 1896 -1)	1896	1st Field Investigation
2	(Taiwan 1896 -2)	1896	1st Field Investigation
3	(Taiwan 1896 -3)	1896	1st Field Investigation
4	(Taiwan 1896 -4)	1896	1st Field Investigation
5	(Taiwan 1896 -5)	1896	1st Field Investigation
6	(Taiwan 1896 -6)	1896	1st Field Investigation
7	(Taiwan 1896 -7)	1896	1st Field Investigation
8	(Taiwan 1897)	1897	2nd Field Investigation
9	(Taiwan 1897)	1897	2nd Field Investigation
10	(Taiwan 1897)	1897	2nd Field Investigation
11	(Taiwan 1898)	1898	3rd Field Investigation
12	(Taiwan 1898)	1898	3rd Field Investigation
13	(Taiwan 1898-1899)	1898	3rd Field Investigation
14	たかさごのたび　一	1900	4th Field Investigation
15	たかさごのたび　二	1900	4th Field Investigation
16	たかさごのたび　三	1900	4th Field Investigation
17	たかさごのたび　四	1900	4th Field Investigation
18	たかさごのたび　五	1900	4th Field Investigation
19	たかさごのたび　六	1900	4th Field Investigation
20	たかさごのたび　七	1900	4th Field Investigation
21	たかさごのたび　八	1900	4th Field Investigation
22	しやしんひかへ　二 (Taiwan 1900)	1900	4th Field Investigation
23	(Taiwan 1910)	1910	5th Field Investigation
24	Taiwan	Year Unknown	Year Unknown

Table 1: *Table of Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum's Publicly Available Field Notes Related to Taiwan (as of 30 September 2023).*

Survey Period	Qty	Recorded Year
1st Field Investigation	7	1896
2nd Field Investigation	3	1897
3rd Field Investigation	3	1898
4th Field Investigation	9	1900
5th Field Investigation	1	1910
Year Unknow	1	Year Unknown

Table 2: *Quantity and Chronological Classification of Field Notes Related to Field Investigations in Taiwan (as of 30 September 2023).*

Torii's manuscripts are primarily housed in the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum, and the manuscript materials related to Taiwan have been publicly available on the museum's official website. As for the dry plate photographs, they can be found on the website of the University Museum, The University of Tokyo.

Sources for Tables 1 and 2: Compiled by the author, referencing publicly available information on the website of the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum.
https://adeac.jp/tokushima-bunkanomori/top/topg/koukai_list/index.html?org=tmm

第1回台湾調査
第2回台湾調査
第3回台湾調査
第4回台湾調査
第5回台湾調査

Torii Ryuzo's Taiwan Survey Route Map
Source: Volume 2 of the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo
Memorial Museum's brochure: 'Tracing Torii Ryuzo's
Footsteps on Maps.'

III. Initiating Collaboration between the NMP and the Source Indigenous Community – A Case Study of the Lili Community

(I) About the Lili Tribe (Lalekeleke Tribe)

Located in today's Lili Village, Chunri Township, Pingtung County, Taiwan, the Lili Tribe (Lalekeleke Tribe), noted as 'リキリキ' in Torii Ryuzo's early records, belongs to the Paiwan indigenous people. This community is situated at the eastern and western entrance of the Jinshuiying Historic Trail, and was an important settlement for the Paiwan tribe. Due to its location at the vital entry and exit points in southern Taiwan, it frequently appears in historical records from the Qing Dynasty to the Japanese colonial period. On the path to the modern revival of Taiwan's indigenous cultures, the Lili Tribe has played an indispensable role. Their tribal publication 'Ralekerek Tribal Journal', published in 2004, comprehensively documents the history and traditional culture of their tribe.

According to the tribal journal records, the traditional territory of the Lili community extends from the western region of the central mountain range's Gugilun Mountain to the west, to the eastern region extending from Gugilun Mountain in the central mountain range to the south along the Gugilun River on the right side to Chachayadon River. The entire Jinshuiying Historic Trail serves as their activity area. The Lili community underwent three relocations: in 1931, 1967 and 1973. The relocation in 1973, especially, was prompted by the typhoon-induced landslides, which lead the Lili community to abandon their original settlement and relocate to

the current community location (Weng and Hsu, 2004).

(II) Early Communication Between the NMP and the Lili Community

After selecting the Lili Tribe as the initial community partner for interpretation efforts, the NMP conducted multiple visits to the community. The research team, with the assistance of local historians, community development associations, and other intermediaries, patiently elaborated on the collaboration's specifics and practical aspects to the tribal members. Apart from the main task of interpreting the manuscripts, this collaboration encompassed preparatory work for the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum's forthcoming investigations in Taiwan and the community briefing sessions.

The NMP initially liaised with Gijegiliev Malmgalm, a local historian of the Lili tribe and a member of the tribal leader's family (Han Chinese name: Wen-Lung Chen)[1]. Through Gijegiliev Malmgalm's introduction, the NMP had their first meeting and communication with various local historians and members of the tribal leader's family. After these meetings, when tribal members understood the manuscript interpretation work being conducted in collaboration between the NMP and the Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum, they expressed great anticipation and a strong willingness to participate and assist in the project.

The NMP conducted initial visits and talks with tribal leaders and members of the Lili Tribe.
(Source: National Museum of Prehistory)

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1. His father was the head of the Mab'ingab' in family in the Lili Community

The National Museum of Prehistory revisited the Lili community on 27 December 2022, to further explain the collaborative direction of manuscript interpretation and to explain the desired assistance from more tribal members. Due to the presence of many tribal leaders and family members that day, when they saw the presentation of precious historical materials in the briefing, they were all amazed and moved. They expressed great interest in the content of the manuscripts.
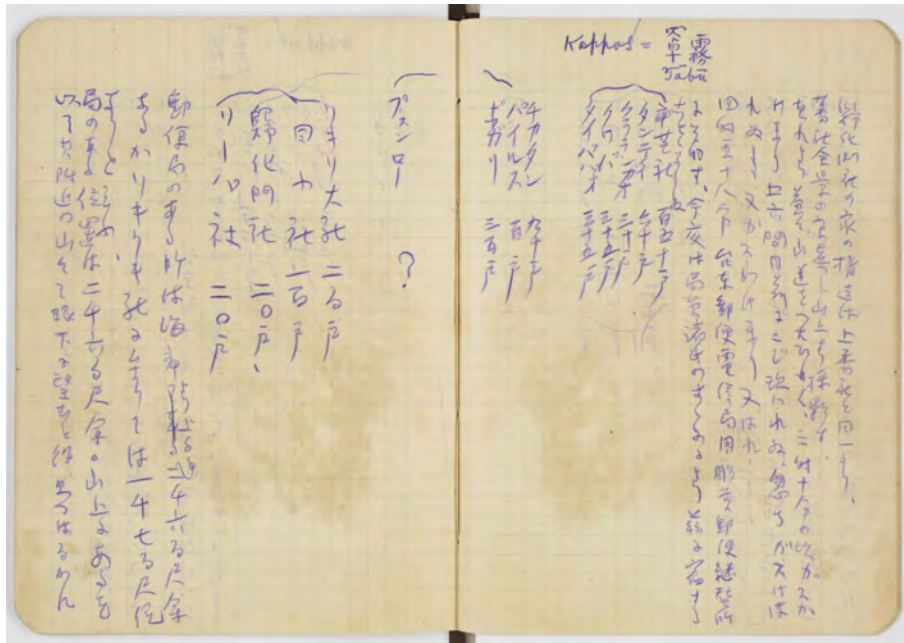
Figure 1: *In the manuscript records, it is noted that the population of the Lili Tribe reached 200 households, surpassing the tribal members' perception of the population at that time. (Source: Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum)*

Figure 2: *The manuscripts contain records of female handprints. Although the tribal members present at the time couldn't immediately provide in-depth confirmation regarding the handprints, it was evident that these patterns may have originated from either a tribal leader's family or the priestly system. It was also confirmed that in the early days, commoners in the Lili Tribe were not allowed to have tattoos or handprints. (Source: Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum)*

(III) Reading the Manuscripts Together with Tribal Elders and Tribal Members

The preliminary interpretation of Torii Ryuzo's four Taiwan surveys by the NMP primarily focused on the content related to the Lili tribe in Chunri Township. After categorizing the content, it became evident that the main recorded themes in the manuscripts revolved around various aspects of the tribal culture and lifestyle. These included descriptions of tribal attire, clothing habits, architectural appearances, natural landscape descriptions, tattoos, tribal household records, bow and arrow text and illustrative descriptions, body part names, and language pronunciation records. The manuscripts are written in a mixture of early Japanese writing conventions, English, Classical Chinese (Literary Chinese), and tribal languages (Romanized phonetics). Among these, Japanese and indigenous tribal language are the predominant languages used in the manuscripts.

(IV) Interpretations:

(1) Confirmation of Tribal Language Records:
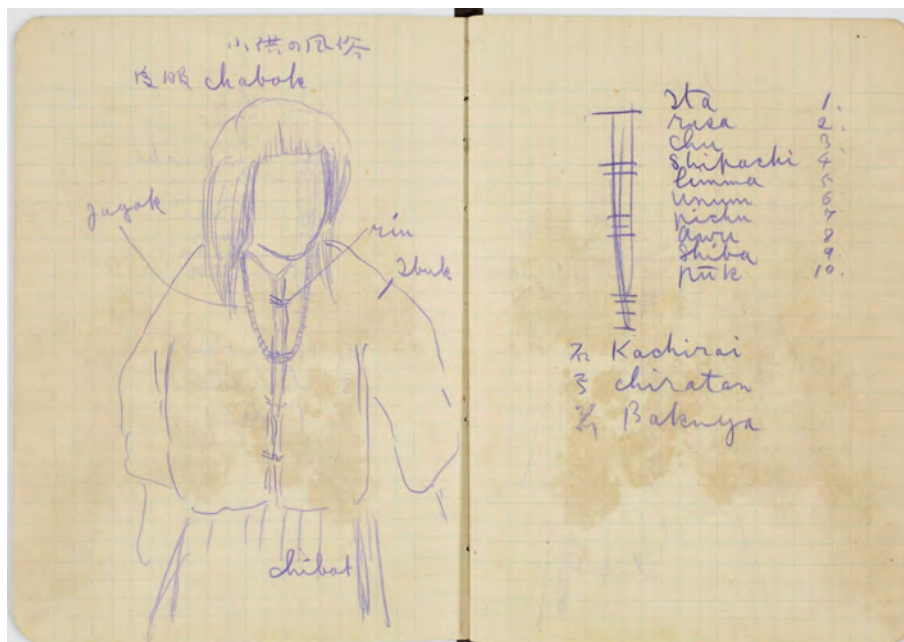
Figure 3: *Content with confirmed phonetic annotations are marked, while portions with question marks indicate that the phonetics couldn't be confirmed. (Source: Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum)*

In Torii Ryuzo's manuscript materials, there are often illustrations accompanied by Romanized phonetic annotations of tribal language pronunciations or annotations solely in tribal languages, Japanese or English. Most of the tribal language annotations in the image were confirmed by local elders. However, some words marked with question marks in the image, such as the pronunciation of the single word and the pronunciation of 'male short skirt', were pronounced differently by the local elders compared to the annotated pronunciations. They indicated that these pronunciations might not belong to the language of the Lili tribe or suggested that these might be words that have since fallen into disuse. It's also possible that the museum staff on-site couldn't accurately pronounce the phonetics, leading to the elders' inability to identify them correctly. Therefore, this

interpretation work requires repeated confirmation to achieve accurate readings and confirmations.

(2) Image Interpretation and Expanded Explanation:
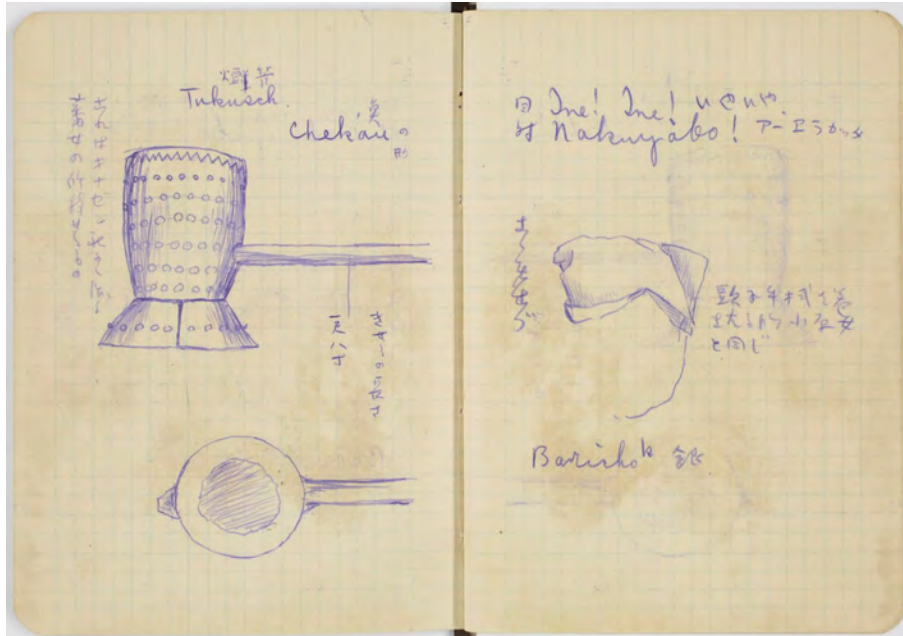
(Source: Tokushima Prefectural Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum)

During the confirmation process of the above image, although the local elders couldn't completely confirm the Romanized phonetic content of this page, they provided additional supplementary information based on the image. For example, in the upper left image, they mentioned that early tobacco pipes would be coated with silver on the upper edge to protect them from burning, which aligns with the text on the lower right of this page that is noted with the character 'silver'.

(V) Local Perspective and Interpretative Insights of the Source Community

The main contact person between the National Museum of Prehistory and the Lili Tribe is Mr Gijegiliev Malmgalm (Han Chinese name: Wen-Lung Chen), who has been actively involved in tribal cultural affairs and research for a long time. Upon learning about the unpublished historical documents related to the old Lili community recorded by Torii Ryuzo, he expressed a strong desire to participate in understanding their contents. Throughout the subsequent implementation process, it was evident that members of the tribe were particularly focused on conducting historical research on the relevant documents by Torii Ryuzo and providing their personal perspectives and insights on the interpretation of the manuscripts. For example, Mr Giljegiliev was able to articulate his understanding of some parts of the manuscripts and propose potential locations that Torii Ryuzo may have visited when he came to the Lili Tribe, while also explaining the historical and environmental conditions of that time and place to the museum staff.

(Left image) Gijegiliev Malmgalm and researchers from the NMP conducting an on-site investigation of Torii Ryuzo's survey route during the preliminary phase. (Image courtesy of National Museum of Prehistory)

(Right image) Rock inscription with the characters '領路頭' (Leading the Way) under a banyan tree near the temple. (Image courtesy of National Museum of Prehistory)

The location in the picture is the Land Deity Temple in Shuidiliao, Fangliao Township, Pingtung County. Under the banyan tree next to the temple, there are three characters '領路頭' (Leading the Way) carved on the rock indicating the starting point of the Jinshuiying Historic Trail. Gijegiliev Malmgalm expressed that, considering the era and environment, this place should have been a must-pass location for Torii Ryuzo before visiting the Lili Tribe. Additionally, he explained that Shuidiliao Settlement was originally within the territory of the Pingpu indigenous people. During the Qing Dynasty, after the Jinshuiying Historic Trail became a major east-west trade route, this area became a trading post between the Han Chinese and indigenous peoples. Many Han Chinese near the '領路頭' had relatives among the Lili people. Huang Hansheng, who travelled with Torii, was one of these relatives.

Moreover, Gijegiliev Malmgalm pointed out that based on related research and existing manuscripts by Torii Ryuzo, there might be a discrepancy in the location of the Kalevuan Tribe as described by Torii Ryuzo, in comparison to contemporary understanding. This discrepancy arises from the fact that when Torii Ryuzo visited the Kalevuan Tribe in 1900, there was no tribe present at that location in that particular year. After confirming the manuscript, it was discovered that Torii Ryuzo recorded the Kalevuan Tribe in Romanized form as 'Chakuru'. In modern Paiwan language phonetics, it would be written as 'Tjaukulju'. This place should be the one shown in the following image, not the currently marked location of the Kalevuan Tribe site.

During the field survey, tribal member Gijegiliev Malmgalm and staff from the NMP provided their individual interpretations regarding the geographical markers mentioned in the manuscript records. (Source: National Museum of Prehistory)

The location depicted in the image above is not far off from the site of the subsequently established Kalevuan Tribe. However, the reason why there are records of over twenty households in this area in Torii Ryuzo's manuscript remains a point of contention. From Gijegiliev Malmgalm's perspective, he believes that this area served as cultivated land for the Lili Tribe, and the Paiwan tribe had a practice of building working sheds on cultivated land. These sheds might have been similar in size to houses, leading Torii Ryuzo to possibly mistake the working sheds for residences and thus record them as such. Upon examining photographs taken by Torii of the Kalevuan Tribe, it appears that the houses captured in the images are likely 'turtle-shell huts' rather than the typical stone-slab houses used as residences. While these explanations still require further validation and research, they reflect the observational skills and sensitivity of the source community in terms of their local perspective and interpretative insights into their own culture.

IV. Exploring the Construction of the Indigenous Knowledge Base and Decolonization Practices in the Context of Taiwan-Japan Manuscript Interpretation

(I) A Preliminary Exploration of Museum and Indigenous Knowledge Construction

Museums have long been perceived by the public as products of colonialism. Nevertheless, in recent years, museums have taken proactive measures, including dialogues and self-examination, to address this issue. They have undertaken practical actions such as returning the rights to interpret culture to source communities, repatriating cultural artifacts, and deaccessioning collections. These initiatives are designed to foster reconciliation with source communities and guide contemporary museums towards new missions and directions, liberated from the legacy of colonialism.

At the ICOM Prague Museum Conference in Prague in 2022, the definition of a museum was given as follows: 'A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.' In recent years, the National Museum of Prehistory has actively connected with indigenous peoples through research publications, exhibitions, and the reuse of cultural relics, thereby assisting in the construction of indigenous knowledge and cultural revitalization.

The collaborative process of manuscript interpretation between museums from Taiwan and Japan and tribal members represents a form of indigenous knowledge construction. This action transcends mere manuscript interpretation; it involves linking the past to contemporary communities and fostering the accumulation and promotion of traditional cultural knowledge for the future. Spatially, it entails exploring and understanding the living spaces of indigenous communities and generating logical thinking connected to tribal history. Article 31(1) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples outlines the rights of indigenous peoples as follows: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies, and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports, traditional games, and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.' The collaborative manuscript interpretation action between museums from Taiwan and Japan and the source community of the Lili Tribe embodies the tracing of temporal and spatial connections, indirectly facilitating the initial development of indigenous knowledge construction within the Lili community.

(II) Decolonization Practices in the Context of Taiwan-Japan Manuscript Interpretation – Joint Field Surveys by Museums from Taiwan and Japan and Tribal Members of the Lili Community

Image source: National Museum of Prehistory

The museums of Taiwan and Japan collaborated on manuscript interpretation in this project. Regarding the division of interpretation tasks, initially, the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum conducted the preliminary identification of handwritten manuscript texts, converting them into digital data. Subsequently, both Taiwan and

Japan jointly participated in the interpretation process. Before the formal interpretation began, in addition to the preliminary communication and initial interpretation work with the source community by the National Museum of Prehistory, Japanese museum researchers were invited to Taiwan for on-site exchanges and field visits with the source community. The substantive significance lies not only in establishing mutual trust between the museums of Taiwan and Japan but also in enabling Japanese researchers to truly set foot on Taiwan's land, witnessing first-hand the mountains and forests of Taiwan that Torii Ryuzo once traversed. Following the paths recorded in Torii Ryuzo's manuscripts, they experienced it personally and witnessed and felt the tribal life and culture depicted in detail by Torii, as well as the indigenous people who lived here.

The National Museum of Prehistory invited researchers from the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum to visit Taiwan at the beginning of 2023 and organized a trip to visit the tribes, conducting thorough field surveys in the old communities. Due to the difficulty in reaching the current locations of these old communities, local tribal guidance was necessary to proceed. Throughout the process, the Japanese researchers keenly observed the tribes' meticulous attention to traditional culture and the intricacies of mountainous tribal life. This experience provided them with a deeper understanding of Taiwan's diverse geographical environment, enabling Japanese scholars to better understand the challenges faced by Torii Ryuzo during his past surveys of Taiwan's forests.

These first-hand experiences of the environment and cultural insights, which can only be fully appreciated on-site, not only enhance the Japanese researchers' initial understanding of the living environment of Taiwan's indigenous peoples but also broaden their perspectives on local conditions and indigenous cultures. This will also provide more positive assistance for future collaborative manuscript interpretation efforts.

V. Conclusions

During the visit of researchers from the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum, staff from the National Museum of Prehistory not only assumed the role of researchers but also served as intermediaries, facilitating two-way dialogues, understanding, and reassessment between local tribal members and Japanese museum researchers, as well as the historical data linked to colonial contexts behind their research. Conversely, while Japanese researchers today can utilize various contemporary research materials such as online information, books, and historical records to understand Taiwan's indigenous peoples and interpret Torii's manuscripts, a lack of understanding of cross-temporal contexts and the imagination of local people, events, and environments could easily limit the interpretation of Torii Ryuzo's field manuscripts. Through the platform provided by the National Museum of Prehistory to connect the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum with the local source community, this three-party collaboration can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the details in the manuscripts through on-site field investigations, and even potentially correct past misconceptions. This underscores the importance and significance of this collaboration.

During his farewell event, Kenji Tanigawa, the director of the Torii Ryuzo Memorial Museum, expressed the following sentiments: 'In the past, I conducted research on Torii Ryuzo's history with a strong focus on studying the past. However, during this visit, as I met the indigenous people and engaged in various dialogues, I profoundly experienced for the first time that Torii Ryuzo's research still holds a significant relevance today.'

In the context of transnational and cross-cultural collaboration, interpreting historic manuscripts together

poses certain challenges and relies on the combination of a variety of fields and the mutual interaction and understanding of all parties involved. From the perspective of returning cultural interpretation rights, this exchange and dialogue with the Lili community have emphasized the passion of local cultural workers in rediscovering the tribe's history. It has also demonstrated the sincere interest of tribal members in gaining insights and knowledge about the relevant history of Torii Ryuzo. The tribal members have also expressed their hope to transform the outcomes of this collaboration into tribal cultural assets, which can be used for promoting and preserving local culture or as elements for local tourism-related applications.

In terms of museums, the current cooperation between the bilateral museums is still in the early stages. The National Museum of Prehistory will continue to play the role of researchers and intermediaries, bridging the cooperation and interaction between the Taiwan-Japan bilateral museums and the source communities related to research and manuscripts. Through such coordination and diverse collaborative interpretations, assisting the source communities in their needs for indigenous knowledge construction and decolonization practices, promoting the research capacity of all three parties in Taiwanese indigenous cultures, is a mutually beneficial, positive, and cyclical cooperative relationship for all parties involved.

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Open Storages: A Tool to Democratise Museums? Motives and Practices of Current Open Depots

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Abstract

Open storages started in the 1970s as a tool to democratise museums, with the overall aim to make collections and how museums work more transparent. Today, open depots are a frequent feature of new or renovated museum buildings. Do these new open storages fulfil the original intentions? This was the central topic of the interactive session 'Open Depots' at the 2023 Icom COMCOL Annual Conference. This essay moves beyond building plans and discusses motives and practices of current open depots ranging from architectural choices to collection care, collection presentations, interactions with society and financial policies. The central cases in this essay are two recently opened depots in the Low Countries: the Boijmans Van Beuningen Depot in Rotterdam (the Netherlands) and the MAS Visible Storage in Antwerp (Belgium), but references to other open depots are given as well.

Open storages started in the 1970s as a tool to democratise museums, with the overall aim to make collections and how museums work more transparent. Today, open depots are a frequent feature of new or renovated museum buildings. Do these new open storages fulfil the original intentions? This was the central topic of the interactive session 'Open Depots' at the 2023 Icom COMCOL Annual Conference, which was moderated by COMCOL board members Sandra Vacca and Leen Beyers. This essay moves beyond building plans and discusses motives and practices of current open depots ranging from architectural choices to collection care, collection presentations, interactions with society and financial challenges. The central cases in this essay are two recently opened depots in the Low Countries: the Boijmans Van Beuningen Depot in Rotterdam (the Netherlands) and the MAS Visible Storage in Antwerp (Belgium), but references to other open depots are given as well.

The Most Important Question: Why?

The University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology (MOA) in Vancouver, Canada, was probably the first museum to open a visible storage in 1976 when it moved into a new building. Audrey Hawthorn, the museum's first curator, developed the idea as part of an overall exhibition strategy. On the one hand, the museum proposed exhibitions for the general public, and on the other hand, it created a visible storage geared towards students and researchers, including First Nation community members and artists looking to reclaim and deepen their knowledge of their own cultural patrimony. The main goal was increasing collection access and specifically reconnecting collections to the source communities they came from. In 1976 the MOA visible storage was an innovative response to the call for democratisation of museums. To what extent is this ambition still present in contemporary open storages? What are the goals of open storages today?

Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen is located in Rotterdam, where since 2021 the whole collection is kept in an open depot. The building is located next to the original museum building complex at Museumpark. It was designed by the Dutch architecture firm MVRDV. The spectacular bowl-shaped building, covered with mirrors, reflects the city and the sky, and houses over 155,000 objects, varying from old master paintings and sculptures, to prints and drawings from the Middle Ages to the present, applied arts and design, and modern and contemporary art. The two ambitions of the Boijmans depot were first to improve the collection safety. The original museum storage – located in the museum's basements – had been at risk of water damage, and the collection had grown so significantly that the majority was located in five different external locations. The new depot now brings together the collection in one building in excellent conditions. The second ambition was to offer people access to the collection and more importantly, insight into what it means to take care of a diverse and sometimes fragile, valuable art collection. Since the collection is owned by the city, the museum considers it to be owned by everyone. Although it is a public art collection, in the museum only seven per cent is on view. In the depot, the entire collection is accessible, but as it is in storage, it is not explicitly on display.

Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen. Photos: Ossip van Duivenbode

The goal of Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen is to push the concept of an open storage to its fullest. The aim is to be transparent about working processes, about how the collection is being stored and organised, about what kind of research museum curators do and to invite others to study the collection. By opening up the collection, the goal is that it will be studied more diversely, offering new perspectives on lesser known artists and artworks, and new insights for artists and designers for their own practice. The aim is to reach a broader audience than in the museum by addressing visitors as fellow collectors. Opportunities for practice-based learning are also offered in the depot, demonstrating that museums not only offer jobs for curators and conservators, but also for art handlers, photographers, guides, registrars, et cetera. The reflecting bowl-shaped design may be less practical than a rectangular box, but its design and location attract more people than a practical depot in the outskirts of the city. Nonetheless, explaining to visitors what the depot is remains important; it is not a museum, but a working building. Currently, the museum is closed for large-scale renovation, which makes the separation of museum and depot somewhat difficult to maintain.

View of the MAS Museum (left) and the Visible Storage floor in the MAS (right). Photos: MAS

In contrast to the Boijmans Depot, the Visible Storage of the MAS museum in Antwerp, Belgium, is part of the museum building. The MAS, open since 2011, is a museum about the connections between the port city of Antwerp and the world and between local and global culture. On the second floor of the MAS building a 'visible storage' was installed. This open storage was part of a bigger plan to drastically improve the collection care for the MAS collection of about 600,000 items, which before the opening of the MAS were part of smaller museums with poorly equipped storage spaces. The second ambition of the MAS Visible Storage was to increase the number of objects shown to audiences. The exhibition space in the MAS is large, but less than one per cent of the collection is on show. Though this second goal comes close to the first democratising ambitions of open storages, it should be added that the MAS Visible Storage is only one of the four storages of the MAS museum, where about 300,000 smaller objects are kept. In other words, while full access to the MAS collection is available online, the MAS Visible Storage only shows a part of the collection, in contrast to the Boijmans Depot. Discussing open storages at the 2023 Icom COMCOL Conference, it appeared that many open storages, like at the MAS, are meant to share only part – not the whole – of the collection with the public. This raises questions about the pre-selection of objects that are made accessible: how are they 'curated', by whom, and is this made transparent to the visitors?

Interestingly, neither the Boijmans Depot nor the MAS Visible Storage has the goal of inducing the donation of new museum objects. Open depots also confront us with the question of collection growth. Collections cannot grow at the pace they have over the last 200 years.

Financial Choices

Generating extra income was equally not mentioned at the conference as a main goal of open storages, probably because most open storages are part of (public) museums. The case of the Warehouse of Art in Tokyo, Japan, was mentioned as an institution using the open depot concept as part of their financial strategy. This exhibition space looks like an open storage, but its main goal is to rent out space to artists and collectors who can exhibit their items there. Most museums which have open storages are far from market oriented, but they differ in their financial policies.

The MAS Visible Storage was partly financed by public money and partly privately sponsored, as was the rest of the MAS building. Once the Visible Storage was open, it has never been considered a means to generate income. From the start in 2011, the Visible Storage was freely accessible, in contrast to the other exhibitions of the MAS. Since the collection kept and shown in the Visible Storage is a public collection, the policy of the MAS is it should be freely accessible. Within the overall not-for-profit logic of the museum sector, it seemed more logical to ask an entrance fee for exhibitions than for the 'collection as such' in the accessible storage. Following this, the investment in public activities in the MAS Visible Storages is limited. For instance, there are no guided tours specifically for the depot.

The financial structure of the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam is very different. The building itself was financed partly by public and partly by private money. Tickets are sold for 20 euros, although in the Netherlands 80 per cent of the visitors have discount cards such as the Museumcard, the Rotterdam pass, or the ICOM card. Included in the ticket are the standard guided tours, the presentations in the galleries, and the

additional programming. The museum rents out compartments with a storage, a showroom and a pantry facility to private collectors. The costs of preserving the museum collection (housing/storage, staff and conservation) are covered by a subsidy from the municipality, which owns the collection. The income that is generated with the ticket sales, the museum shop, the restaurant, renting the event space and art services like the storage of private collections covers the costs for the programme in the depot and in other locations. Besided using the art services, the collectors all use their spaces differently. Where Rabobank uses it as a gallery and artist in residency space, KPN uses it as a boardroom, and Verhalenhuis Belvédère as a meeting space. They decide their own opening hours within the perimeters of the depot. The restaurant is for visitors during the day, but in the evening it is a high class restaurant. In the evenings the rooftop garden is open free of charge for people to enjoy the view.

In other words, financial policies and the associated challenges faced by museums differ widely. However, the higher financial barriers are for audiences, the less we can speak of fully 'open depots'. A topic addressed in very general terms at the conference was the cost of building an open storage. Creating a new storage is always expensive, the installation of showcases and many other facilities make most open storages more expensive than regular storages.

How 'Safe' Is the Open Storage for the Collection?

In theory, the safest way for the conservation of museum objects is a dark, climatised, pest-controlled, heavily guarded box without any contact with human beings. Both the MAS Visible Storage and the Boijmans Depot have a combination of accessible and non-accessible spaces. This way, international storage standards for conservation are met. For instance, in the MAS Visible Storage, paper objects are kept in boxes and only shown on request or in presentations with minimal light load. The temperature in the storage is 19 degrees and the relative humidity is 50 per cent. Integrated pest management (prevention of damage by living organisms) is organised. Gloves, aprons and trolleys are used for collection work. Objects are packed according to international standards. A special point of attention is damage and theft prevention by not placing objects within reach of audiences.

At the Boijmans Depot the conservation challenge is approached similarly: it is most of the time a dark, climatised, pest-controlled, heavily guarded bowl. The museum does allow visitors in the depot under strict conditions and regulations. Museums are in themselves a threat to objects of art, but according to the Boijmans standpoint the only way art can function as art is in direct communication with audiences. Therefore, the museum has an open storage, but with minimised risks for the collection. In the Boijmans Depot visitors have to walk over the sticky mats, and only walk through the middle path of the store rooms when they follow a tour. They are not allowed to touch the artworks or the moveable racks and stands. Tours are only held once an hour per store room, in order to keep the climate stable and reduce the amount of light in the spaces (at 200 lux). Vulnerable objects are covered with a cloth or 'tivek', or are kept in boxes or crates in order to protect them from light and dust.

Both in the case of the MAS and the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum the overall quality of the new, open storages has improved compared to the previous storages. Hence, the argument that ideal storages should be bunkers with no public interference at all, is not convincing when it comes to recent newly built accessible

storages. But if most open storages comprise a mix of open and closed spaces and if many objects in open storages are packed, how open are they really?

How 'Open' Is the Open Storage Space?

personeels-ingang

truckdok

A0.17

A0.09

A0.08

A0.07

A0.18

WC

groepsingang

hoofdingang
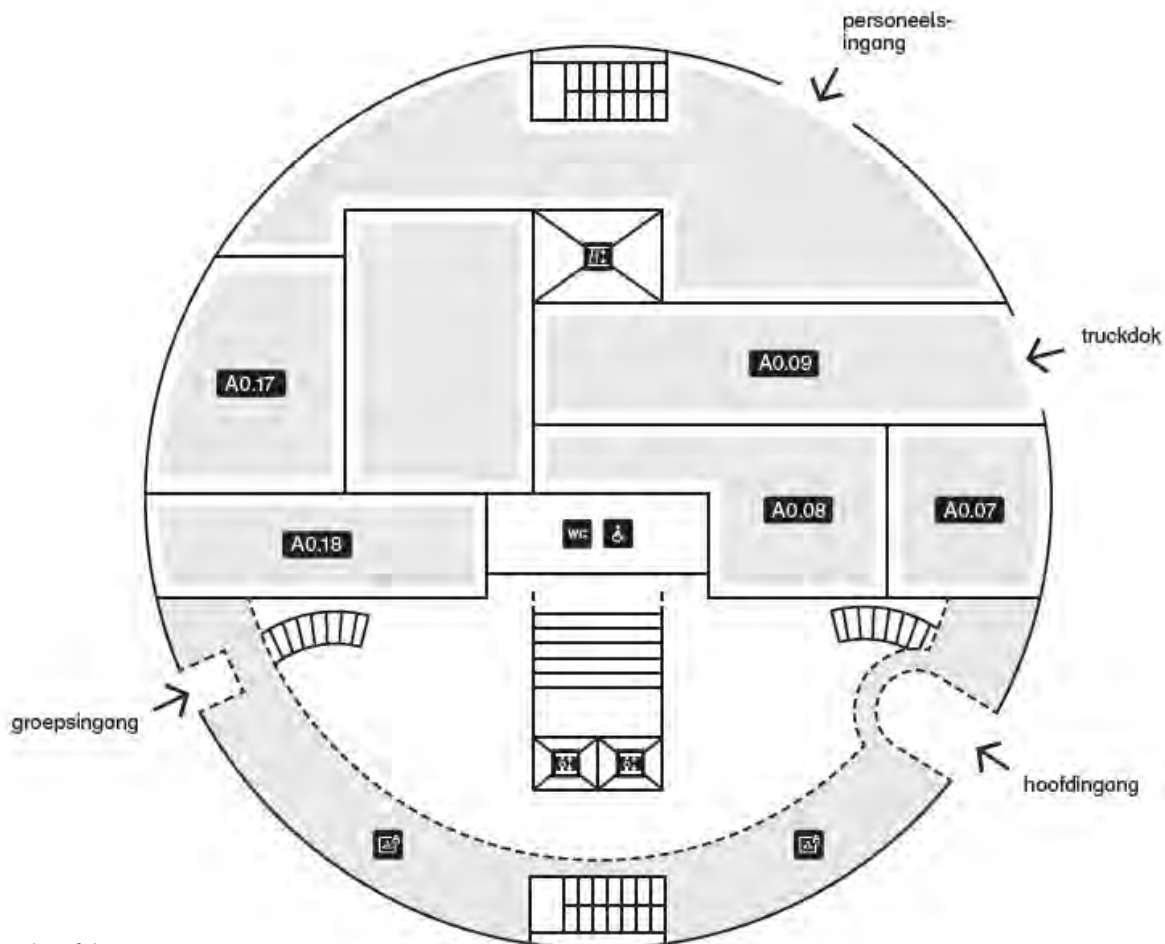
Floor plan of the Boijmans Depot

The Boijmans depot consists of 14 store rooms, four restoration studios including a framing studio, a photography studio, package and quarantine area, an in-house loading dock and a transfer space. Ten of the store rooms are open to guided tours, two are mezzanine levels that have a staircase and are therefore not inclusive for disabled people. The other two that are not included are the photography stores because of the cold climates. There are five climate zones for various materials, colour and black-and-white photography, metals, organic/inorganic materials, and the restoration studios. In the rectangular atrium there are 13 glass vitrines designed by Marieke van Diemen together with MVRDV that hold a curated selection of works from the collection. In the two gallery spaces on the third and fourth floor there are exhibitions on research, conservation, registration projects or experiments with materials or technology. Glass is a recurring element in the building design; huge glass windows provide insight into the store rooms, the restoration studios, and other workspaces, such as the study rooms. The glass symbolises the Boijmans's vision of transparency, literally, but also metaphorically, as in being transparent about how the institution works. On the top floor there is an event space, a restaurant and a rooftop garden.
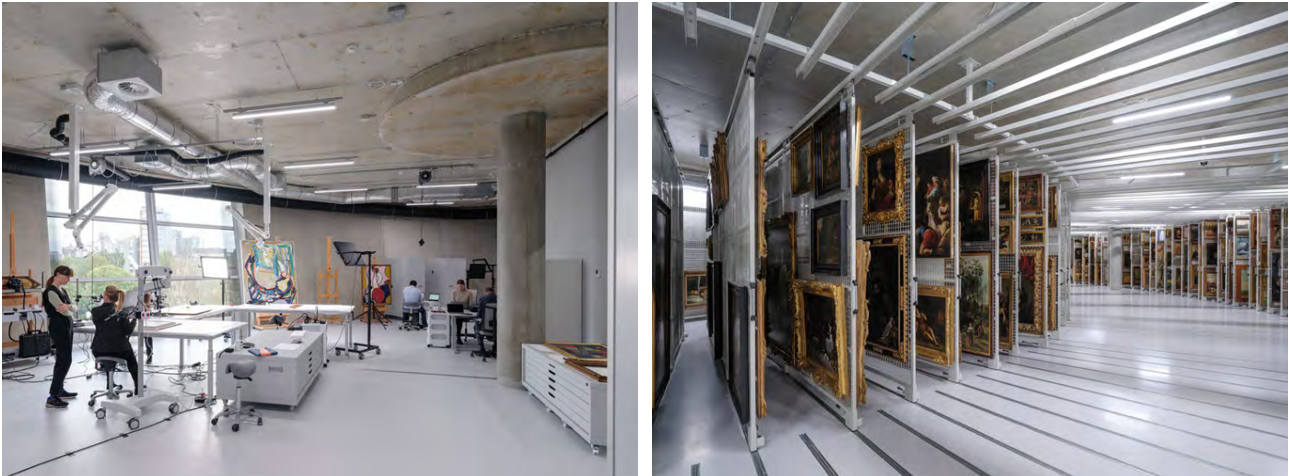
Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen. Photos: Ossip van Duivenbode.
The paintings restoration studio (left), the large hanging objects store room on the second floor (right).
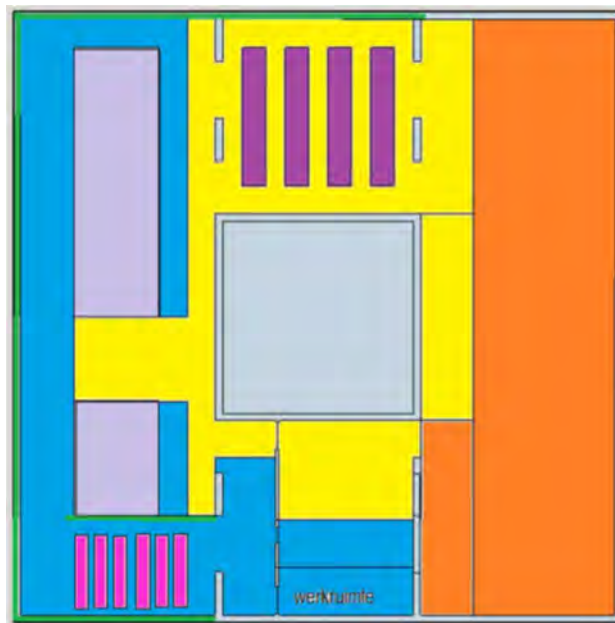
Floor plan of the MAS Visible Storage

The MAS Visible Storages, on the other hand, is on the second floor of the MAS museum. It is 850 square metres and it is, after the entrance (orange) divided into a public area with showcases (yellow) and a non-public, but visible area (blue). The public area is filled with displays, drawers which the public can open, warehouse racks with mesh walls (purple) and information panels. A screen shows the digital access to the whole of the MAS collection and in-depth information on masterpieces of the collection. In the area after the mesh racks, showcases are added in the case of a special exhibition. The non-public, but visible area comprises a workstation, which is partly visible, a compactus system of two levels of mobile shelves (light purple) and mobile drawer units in which paper objects are kept (pink) and on top of which objects are unpacked to be researched or to be prepared for exhibitions and loans. The non-public area has mesh walls, hence the reason why objects and the handling of objects can be partly seen by audiences. It should be added however that about half of the objects are packed in boxes and not directly visible on the shelves. Furthermore, the MAS Visible Storage is only one of four storages of the MAS and it is used only for certain types of objects, not for all. For instance, textiles are kept in another storage.

The MAS Visible Storage: Photos MAS
Mobile drawer units with objects which are being researched or prepared for loans or exhibitions on top (left)
Compactus systems with objects in boxes on shelves (right)

Degrees of openness of the architecture of open depots vary widely. As a comparison, the current Multiversity Galleries of the MOA, where the first open storage opened in 1976, are filled with glass showcases providing maximal visual access to the whole of the collection. Many other open storages around the world only show a selection of the collection. Examples are the changing exhibitions by curators in the Centre de Conservation et de Ressources of the MUCEM in Marseille or the open storage of the Kaoshiung Art Museum in Kaoshiung, Taiwan, with a display of objects and guided tours in the conservation area offered on request, or the extensive Luce Centre for the American Arts of the Brooklyn Museum. In Brazil, the Reserva Tecnica Visitavel – Arqueologia de Amazonica of the Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia of the University of São Paulo, is an open storage which, with guided tours, aims to reconnect with the source communities of the Amazon. Another choice was made in the Museum Secret Chamber in the Prehistory Museum in Tainan, Taiwan, where visitors can see the storage space and conservation work with archaeological collections through the glass window from the floor above. Finally, the Glasgow Museums Resource Centre has invested little in architecture. It looks like a regular storage, but offers free guided visits every day of the week.

How 'Open' Are the Presentations in the Open Storage?

Architecture is only one aspect of the openness of an open storage. As important and maybe even more important is how objects are presented and interpreted in an open storage. Open storages are not narrative exhibitions, it's opening the storage to the public. Even without labels: the way in which objects are classified is an interpretation. There are therefore important questions which should be considered in every open storage project, such as:

How are decisions made in the museum about what to show in the open storage? Who is involved in deciding what is shown? How are source communities involved (or not)? Do people see masterpieces in the open storage or a wide variety of the collection?

Are museum collections and/or private collections on display? What are the criteria to select private collections?

How are objects classified? How much information is given? Can visitors learn more about the provenance of objects?

How are sensitive objects dealt with in the open storage, such as sacred objects or objects related to or obtained through war, crime or looting? How inclusive is the collection care when it comes to these sensitive objects? Who is included in the conversation on if and how to make these objects accessible?

Which visitor groups are expected and how is it made clear what they can expect to see? (research, teaching, co-creation, dialogue, debate…?)

In 1976 the first open storage at the MOA in Vancouver was nothing more than an accessible series of shelves with objects. This visible storage was accessible to students and researchers, including First Nation community members, but not to a wider audience. No further explanations were given. Hence, the way objects were presented and classified was decided by the keepers of the collection. When the open storage was reshaped into the Multiversity Galleries in 2010, not only the architecture changed, but also the way objects were grouped, classified and interpreted. Members of communities whose relatives and ancestors made the pieces helped to organise the collections using their own classification systems. The audiences have widened and an educational programme has been added. Similarly, the Museum of Tropical Queensland, Australia, has recently reconfigured the former, colonial classification of objects by 'object type' or 'collector', to a classification by country and traditional owners. What is the concept of the public programmes in the Boijmans and MAS depots?

The extensive public programme of the Boijmans Depot focuses on collecting and taking care of art. In the depot, visitors can take a guided tour, but they can also use the Depot app, which functions by scanning QR codes in the building. Through the app, visitors can see which objects are held in the store rooms or glass vitrines, but also read interactive stories about collecting, collection care and conservation issues. The object information in the app is connected to TMS, the collection registration system, and includes provenance information. The Family of Objects is a programme which invites the visitor to collect objects throughout the collection in a fictional co-created narrative. In the exhibitions there is a combination of classical information on cards and wall texts, but also information through the app. Next to each store room and restoration studio, there are touch screens with films about collection care, the type of collection held in the store rooms and a profile of a museum employee. At the Boijmans depot, it is not only about making the collection accessible on a larger scale, but also about the transparency of museum processes like conservation, restoration, collecting, researching and programming. Hence, the depot not only passively shows the collection in storage, it also uses the collection to present ongoing research, for example in the Unpacking Boijmans programme. Its aim is to examine the relationship between colonialism and slavery within the museum's collection. Visitors are invited to observe and help the museum to reflect. They are asked what they would like to know about the objects, what questions they would like investigated, and what suggestions or insights they want to share. One result was that relatives of a plantation owner were found, who could contribute information about an object. During the project, the museum acquired two Kabra blue vases, designed by Boris van Berkum in cooperation with Winti priestess Marian Markelo, combining African/Surinam and Dutch traditions. In the Boijmans Depot, sometimes presentation ambitions interfere with the storage organisation, for instance, regarding which objects are placed on the first shelves that are visible through the glass windows from the atrium side. But this is decided in consultation with the collection management staff.

The public programme in the MAS Visible Storage is smaller than in the Boijmans Depot, as is the team working on it. In the first years after the opening of the storage in 2011, part of the presentations in the storage consisted

of mini-exhibitions about specific topics which were too small to programme in the large exhibition rooms. These mini presentations often involved a participative contemporary collecting, but it appeared that the Visible Storage was not the logical place for these narrative exhibitions. As a consequence the focus of presentations in the Visible Storage has been entirely on collecting, conservation and research since 2020. Similar to the Boijmans Depot, the ambition of the MAS Visible storage today is to make museum work transparent, but also to invite and involve communities and audiences to be part of it. For instance, in 2023, 16 residents of Antwerp, who differed widely in terms of interests, ages and backgrounds chose 16 personal masterpieces in the MAS collection and created the Eyecatchers exhibit. Contemporary collecting in partnership with communities is also shown in the MAS Visible Storage. Furthermore, currently, the provenance research on the MAS Congo collection in collaboration with researchers in Congo is shown in the Visible Storage in an interactive display. Contrary to the Boijmans Depot, the MAS is not offering guided tours in the Visible Storage. Actually, the non-public parts of the MAS Visible Storage are for the moment only visible but not accessible to visitors. They can see how keepers have organised the depot by classifying the collections by object type, but no explanations are given. In the non-public parts of the MAS Visible Storage, masterpieces have been put in front, behind the mesh racks.

Collection Care Is About People

Considering the history of open storages since 1976, we can conclude that open storages have challenged and continue to challenge the classic concepts of collection care. The safest way to conserve objects in the state they were in when they became museum objects is a dark, climatised, pest-controlled, heavily guarded box without any contact with human beings. This is, however, a limited approach to collection care, because the only way art and heritage become meaningful is in relation to people. In other words, as museum workers we should not only care about objects, but about the full relationship between heritage objects and people. This accounts as much for the people connected to the provenance of the objects as for the audiences visiting the museum. If museums take these two relationships seriously into account and use the open storage to reconnect with source communities, which includes addressing problematic provenance histories, they contribute to the democratisation of museums. If open storages are merely considered as a building project, they risk being interpreted as a new showcase of the supremacy of museums.

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https://www.boijmans.nl/en/exhibitions/unpacking-boijmans

BROOKLYN MUSEUM – LUCE CENTRE OF AMERICAN ART
https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/luce

GLASGOW MUSEUMS RESOURCE CENTRE
https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/venues/glasgow-museums-resource-centre-gmrc /

KAOHSIUNG ART MUSEUM
https://www.nwac.org.tw/tw/about-repair

MAS VISIBLE STORAGE
https://mas.be/en/content/2-visible-storage

MUCEM: CENTRE DE CONSERVATION ET DE RESSOURCES
https://www.mucem.org/collections/explorez-les-collections/centre-de-conservation-et-de-ressources

PRE-HISTORY MUSEUM, TAINAN, MUSEUM'S SECRET CHAMBER
https://stsp.nmp.gov.tw/en/exhibition/permanent.php?id=1000

UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO MUSEU DE ARQUEOLOGIA E ETNOLOGIA – RESERVA VISITAVEL
Reserva Tecnica Visitavel - Arqueologia de Amazonica

WAREHOUSE OF ART
https://what.warehouseofart.org/en/about-en/

Biographies

Leen Beyers is head of the collection and research department of the MAS museum (Belgium), which displays, researches and updates the MAS collection of about 600,000 objects of history, art and culture associated with the city and port of Antwerp, with overseas shipping and maritime trade and with Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Oceania. She holds a PhD in history and an MA in anthropology. Her expertise as researcher and curator mainly relates to urban history, food culture, migration, oral history, memory and collecting. She is board member of ICOM COMCOL.

Sandra Kisters is director of collections and research Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (the Netherlands). This museum holds a collection of over 155,000 objects, ranging from old master paintings and sculptures, applied arts and design, prints and drawings from the Middle Ages to the present and modern and contemporary art. The main museum building is currently closed for a large-scale renovation. The Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen, which is located next to the museum in the Rotterdam Museumpark opened in 2021. Kisters holds a PhD in art history.

Against Opacity: Improving Digital Accessibility of Cultural Heritage from Colonial Contexts in the Netherlands

Camiel de Kom
Valentin Vogelmann

Abstract

Accessibility of heritage, or rather the lack thereof, is an issue brought to the foreground by digitisation and is of special importance for collections from colonial contexts due to its close relationship with restitution and repair. In 2023, the Dutch Colonial Collections Consortium started working on a datahub to address the accessibility of colonial collection data in the Netherlands as part of the larger project Against Opacity. This digital platform aims to be a central point of access to colonial heritage for international audiences, (provenance) researchers and other stakeholders. Essential features of the datahub towards higher degrees of accessibility, inspired by inputs from international stakeholders, include adding perspectives on collection metadata and community building. The latter aims to provide space for collective digital cooperation and (provenance) research, which can fuel new insights on creating digital ownership of cultural heritage from a colonial context. Notably, the inclusion of perspectives on metadata fields is facilitated through Nanopublications, ensuring ownership by the respective communities. This article explores the developments and findings of the datahub in relation to making colonial collections accessible in a collaborative way and in relation to the ICOM's renewed definition of museums.

Introduction

The (digital) accessibility of heritage collections has become a known issue and many institutions are beginning to embrace their responsibility to improve it. In contexts of colonial heritage collections, however, accessibility additionally gains an international dimension and requires special attention. Most prominently, for communities of origin, inaccessible collections create blockades that prevent them from interacting with their own material culture and intangible heritage and from possible restitution. In 2022, The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science requested the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherland (RCE), Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD), Bronbeek Military Museum and the Wereldmuseum to form a consortium for the project *Against Opacity*.[1] In line with the request, a national consortium for expertise on the return of objects collected in the colonial period was established. Its goals are to facilitate the implementation of the Dutch policy on return through the sharing of knowledge and expertise on collections acquired in colonial contexts; to support the caretakers of the diverse collections in the Netherlands in the process of provenance research; to support and facilitate extensive research, documentation and (public) accessibility of these collections and finally to be a central access point (or *a hub*) for stakeholders from countries of origin for questions regarding colonial collections and provenance research. *Against Opacity* divides these objectives into three work packages: *building trust; from data opacity to data transparency; and co-creating knowledge of the past for the present and the future.* As such, a new approach is being taken in dealing with colonial collections present within the Netherlands.

As part of the work package from data opacity to data transparency, the Wereldmuseum – in the name of the consortium – has taken charge in the creation of a *datahub*. In short, the *datahub* is a digital platform which seeks to unify and expose collection data from various colonial collection-holding institutions in order to help better understand which and how many objects from colonial contexts are present in the Netherlands and what their provenance is. The approach taken here is that, given the scale of the colonial history of the Netherlands, answering such question is a matter of digital accessibility, especially for international audiences, and of data quality. This is why the *datahub* is at its core a digital infrastructure project and its main tasks consist of building data transformation pipelines which feed into a unified knowledge graph of Linked Open Data (following the guidelines of the Digital Heritage Network[2]). Therefore, user-facing applications for different tasks can be built on top of the *datahub*, which do not need to be built by the *datahub* team itself but can also be tailored-made by other parties according to their needs. To initiate this, the *datahub* team is building two applications that we deem most immediately necessary: a dataset browser and a research application. The former aims to provide overviews of the highly scattered landscape of colonial collections held by various institutions in the Netherlands, while the latter allows users to investigate those collections at an object level.

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1. <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/>, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en>, <https://www.niod.nl/en>, <https://english.defensie.nl/topics/bronbeek/bronbeek-museum>, <https://welkom.wereldmuseum.nl/>, all accessed 14 March 2024.
2. <https://netwerk-digitaal-erfgoed.github.io/cm-implementation-guidelines/ >, accessed 14 March 2024.

We like to see the *datahub* as a project that takes up the elements from the new ICOM definition on the role of the museum as a social organisation.[3] At the same time, we broaden the definition by taking the collections as a starting point, not the museum itself. Consequently, the *datahub* overarches museums as individual institutions and seeks the connection of knowledge through collaboration; it exists in the space between museums. A second element to which the ICOM definition refers is the involvement in and with diverse communities, when it comes to collecting and taking care of collections. The question of how to do this is of paramount importance for colonial collections, and therefore for the *datahub*. As such, this article focuses on the question of how a *datahub*, from a technical standpoint, can help make colonial collections accessible in a collaborative way. We first describe how the initial focus of the project has shifted through conversation, before analysing what a collaborative approach means in this case. Following this, we elaborate on a pivotal point in the project – an international user workshop with guests from countries of origin – and the lessons learned from these sessions. Next, we explore how these lessons affected the implementation of the *datahub* and its functionalities. We conclude the article by referring back to our original question in relation to the more human-centred approach to collections, according to the ICOM's definition.

Before we begin, we would like to note that our positionality as authors of this article is characterised by our being members of the *datahub* project team and by growing up with European Western museums as 'standards' for education about the world's history and cultures and for answers to museological issues.

Direction of the Datahub

The initial aim for the consortium's *datahub* centred primarily around providing an environment in which researchers of Dutch institutions could investigate colonial collections more efficiently and focusing on the known importance of provenance research for restitution cases. For this reason, the early development of the *datahub* focused on a research application that would allow users to explore and investigate the (provenance) data already contained in digital collection in the Netherlands but held disjointly in various data silos. Therefore, it made sense to try to replicate how provenance researchers and experts on Dutch colonial history conduct their research, which sources of information they consult and which kinds of visualisations they prefer. Although both Dutch and international researchers were targeted as potential users, in practice only the first group was consulted for their experiences and requirements. The main reasons for this were that this group is already familiar with the collection data in the Netherlands and part of the same institutions that make up the consortium.

However, this approach ignored a highly important group of users and their experiences and requirements for a digital environment that brings together and makes accessible colonial collections data, namely communities of origin of the colonial objects and their diasporas in the Netherlands. To address this blind spot, the *datahub* team initiated an international workshop and symposium in May 2023, several months after the start of the project. For this week-long exchange, guests from countries and areas where the Dutch had colonies or trading posts of importance, such as Aruba, Curacao, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St. Eustatius and Suriname were

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3. 'A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.' <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>, accessed 13 March 2024.

invited. The symposium included presentations by policy makers, researchers and museum employees, both from the Netherlands and from the international community. For the workshop the decision was consciously made to limit the number of Dutch participants to the actual members of the team developing the software, in order to increase the chance for the stakeholders to raise their concerns. In the end, the group consisted of ten to twelve Dutch participants and about fifteen to twenty invited guests from the countries of origin. The balance was carefully maintained over both days and resulted in a space that sparked many conversations, both in exchanges of ideas and opinions, of shared problems as well as of frustrations and disagreement.

A specific set of methods used in the workshop we would like to mention due to their fruitfulness for the aim of collaboratively designing the goals and implementation of digital infrastructures and tools is called Liberating Structures. These methods are intended to engage everyone in the room and gather the ideas, opinions, insights, and knowledge of the full group – instead of the most dominant speakers. Fundamental to this collaborative approach is the space for conversations between different standpoints, which result in various narratives existing in dialogue with each other, in both the making of the *datahub* and the final product; elements also brought forward by the ICOM museum definition.

From the workshop sessions, we – as the *datahub* team – learned many lessons concerning the experiences and requirements of the group of participants. As such, they cannot be summarised with such brevity while doing them full justice and the following section should be read with this in mind.[4] To start, the workshop showed that it is essential to redefine our understanding of who the *datahub*'s audience is. We cannot view Dutch researchers as a separate user community from researchers in the nations of origin, nor should we treat heritage organisations in the nations of origin differently from their counterparts in the Netherlands. Instead, the *datahub* should function as a meeting place for all these communities of researchers, heritage specialists and the public. Furthermore, we noticed that the participants from the nations of origin did not mention material restitution; it was not a primary topic since participants found restitution of information and history a much more important step towards decolonisation (in particular of the cultural heritage field). If not the restitution of material objects, what concerned participants most is that the vast majority of colonial objects in Dutch custody are removed and detached from their original contexts, their original purposes and cultural practices surrounding them, often still as part of everyday, living cultures that. These contexts are lost to a large extent in colonial collections, with objects having become quite literally untouchable, hidden in depots and vacuum exhibition vitrines. Similarly, as part of the colonial collection craze, there has been tremendous loss of information that is often not recoverable in hindsight, and which forces meta-data descriptions to focus on superficial characteristics such as size and material.

When asked about what digital infrastructure can offer in the way of decolonisation, virtually all participants considered the restoration of these original contexts as more immediately valuable than the restitution of material objects. Participants wished for the ability to add their knowledge of the original purpose for the original people in the original location and in the original language. Their aim is to tell the story of the objects as intended by the communities of origin, to foster discussions among those to whom these objects, still, have cultural and emotional value and eventually to help strengthen their cultural identities. The suggested usage of this knowledge is highly practical: in local education, by local artists, or for the benefit of people in diasporas. Moreover, the participants of the workshop were adamant that this story cannot, and must not, be told by

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4. A full report on the workshop is available on the Consortium's website: <https://colonialcollections.org/>

Western experts. Therefore, the *datahub* should enable users to add data to objects: narratives, original sources, names, descriptions, images, videos and beyond.

Given this input from a group that we consider as representative for the potential users of the *datahub* and stakeholders of the project at large, we as the *datahub* team are faced with a dilemma: On the hand, providing users from the most diverse contexts with such intimate (digital) access to their own and each other's heritage is a project that would likely have to leverage state-of-the-art AI and digital interfacing techniques and that would require creating tremendous amounts of new data. Take language as an example: In this idea of a *datahub*, both the interface itself and the data it exposes should clearly be available in local languages, allowing users to use their own, colloquial languages and community-specific expressions to interact with objects, and therefore also entails a massive translation project. On the other hand, the highly scattered and complex landscape of digital colonial collections in the Netherlands, often lacking standard procedures, data formats and documentation, makes even the basic acquisition of data a laborious process.

This is why the *datahub* has shaped up to be an infrastructure project at its core: to bridge this gap and to prepare for future projects which engage with communities in the ways our international stakeholders indicated. Further, for this reason, we embrace a minimal working definition of accessibility: we take the lack thereof to mean any hindrance that limits understanding of data, what the data does and does not contain; how information is created, curated and maintained; where to find and how to combine pieces of information; and how to interpret and contextualise information. We emphasise that even such a minimal definition of accessibility goes beyond merely exposing museum catalogues on the internet. By taking such a stance, we also follow the examples of, among others, the Open Knowledge Foundation[5] and the FAIR principles[6] and see our work in line with the ICOM's museum definition.

Functionalities of the Datahub

In practice, this means that beyond simply bringing data together, we try to establish shared curation of and forums to exchange knowledge around data, show the way through Dutch collections and policies by creating extensive systems of research guides and improve accountability by pointing users to the creators and maintainers of information at the individual level.

As a first step, and in order to inventorise for ourselves and provide users with an overview, we built a dataset browser which assigns a set of technical metrics to each collection (or dataset). These metrics provide insights into how accessible datasets are in their current state, which from a technical perspective – that of the *datahub* team – is mainly about data properties and formats, and meta-data regarding those, such as: is the collection available with an open license; does the dataset have meta-information in which language(s) it is available; can a full download of the dataset be generated from an endpoint or API; has the dataset been mapped to open, standardised and rich formats such as RDF; does the dataset comprise standard vocabularies and is it linked to open knowledge bases such a WikiData, in order to be readily aligned with other datasets. Because all of these metrics are about a dataset and rely on self-reporting, we gather them through the use of forms to be filled out by dataset managers. In designing these forms and choosing aspects of accessibility to be measured, we heavily

5. < https://okfn.org/en/>, accessed 14 March 2024.
6. <https://www.go-fair.org/>, accessed 14 March 2024.

drew on the FAIR principles[7], the W3C rating scheme for Linked Open Data[8] and the CARE principles[9]. The results, visualised in the dataset browser, are intended to show the project's progress and are reported to data providers (museums, archives, etc.) Moreover, they help prioritise curation and enrichment activities that directly benefit the accessibility of datasets.

The process of creating a *datahub* and shaping this understanding of accessibility already started before the workshop in May 2023. These tasks are mainly technical in nature and thus within the scope of the *datahub* team's expertise, and were undertaken during the first three months of implementing the *datahub*, beginning in January 2023. This includes transforming the first datasets of the consortium partners to linked open data by modelling it in close collaboration with the respective musea and choosing a unified model for objects and actors across catalogues registered in the dataset browser.[10] A unified data model makes it possible to search through all objects and all persons as if they were one dataset and is thus vital to creating a data hub. Moreover, at the end of June 2023, a first version of the research application was made available containing all objects and persons. At that moment, the applications were very basic – although they worked, they contained few features, a lot of 'dirty data', and a lot of comments like 'not implemented' and 'unknown'. This was entirely by choice. The *datahub* team preferred to show what data was available at the moment, so that users could start giving feedback immediately, rather than wait for improvements. In 2024, new datasets from both consortium and non-consortium partners will be added.

The *datahub* aims to expose as much collection information as possible. It aims to refrain from curating (to the maximum degree possible) which information is exposed to the public and how; in the colonial context, and with the findings of the May 2023 workshop, this is important because we as the consortium are not in the right position to decide what information relating to objects, that is present in Dutch collections, is relevant to communities of origin. Moreover, through the use of Nanopublications[11], users – individuals or communities – are able to add and own their perspective through comments on meta data fields of objects within the *datahub*. Importantly, there are no hierarchies in this added information – every annotation or comment is simply another voice – and this is decidely also true for the information originally taken from museums' collection management systems. This ties into how the ICOM museum definition approaches and questions current knowledge, ownership and authority hierarchies. In the current incarnation of the *datahub*, this aspect is also the most directly related to the inputs from the participants of the workshop in May 2023, as this feature aims to invite users to add, correct or contest information from the Netherlands' colonial collections and seeks to serve as a platform for communities of users to have (largely unmoderated) conversations about their heritage. An example of how this functionality is implemented in the research application is given by figure 1.

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7. <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>, accessed 14 March 2024.
8. <https://www.w3.org/2011/gld/wiki/5_Star_Linked_Data>, accessed 14 March 2024.
9. <https://www.gida-global.org/care>, accessed 14 March 2024.
10. By the end of 2023, this included the object catalogue of Wereldmuseum and the collection of objects with a colonial context from the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands.
11. <https://nanopub.net/>, accessed 14 March 2024.
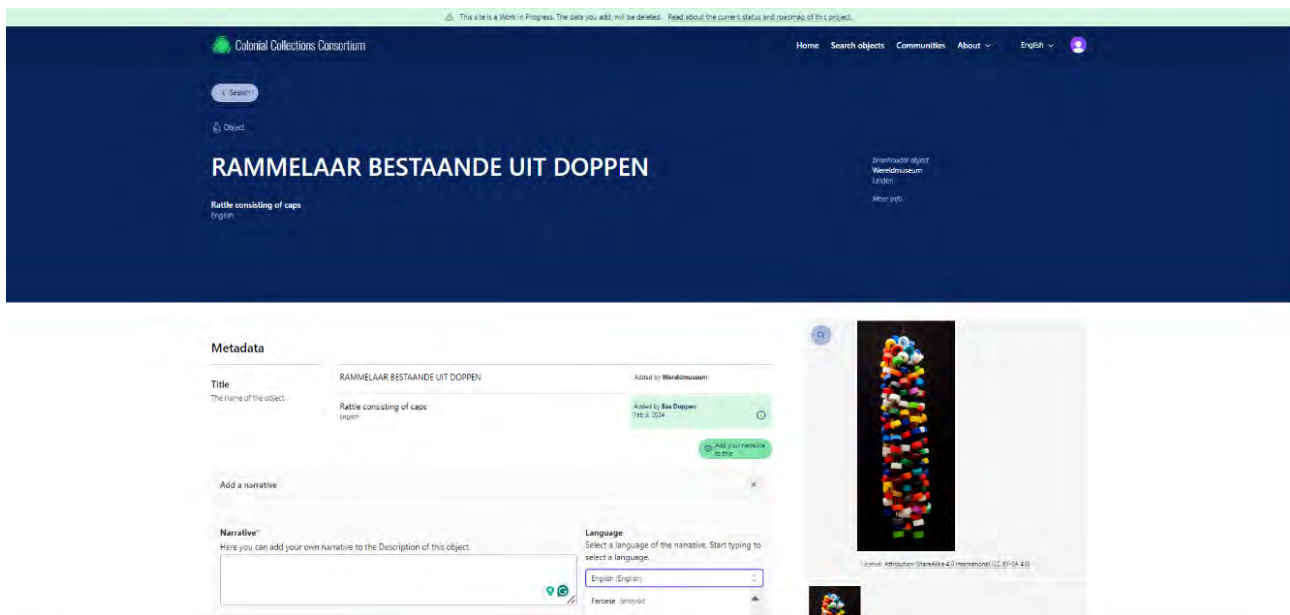
Figure 1: *Screenshot of an object's detail page, specifically the object's 'Title' field, and the way in which users can add information, February 2024.*

The community-oriented aspect is an explicit part of the research application: users are able to create their own communities to which members can be added, as displayed in figure 2. As a community, collections of objects can be established, bringing together heritage that is available in the collection data (figure 3). These 'category pages' allow stories to emerge by creating a bigger picture of a whole network of artefacts and how they relate to one another. These collections can be made by both communities of people or individuals. These collections can also be shared. Additionally, in 2024, it will become possible to add Local Context Labels[12] called Traditional Knowledge Labels to objects. These labels make it possible, through the Local Context hub, to display information about, among other things, community rules and guidelines in accessing and using (digital) material and knowledge. Additionally, in 2024, the *datahub* team will focus on the implementation of research guides, as data requires contextualization and additional information to be made more accessible to generic users; these guides can be seen as 'data about the data' and are meant to be a toolkit to the user while navigating collections.

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12. <https://localcontexts.org/>, accessed 14 March 2024.
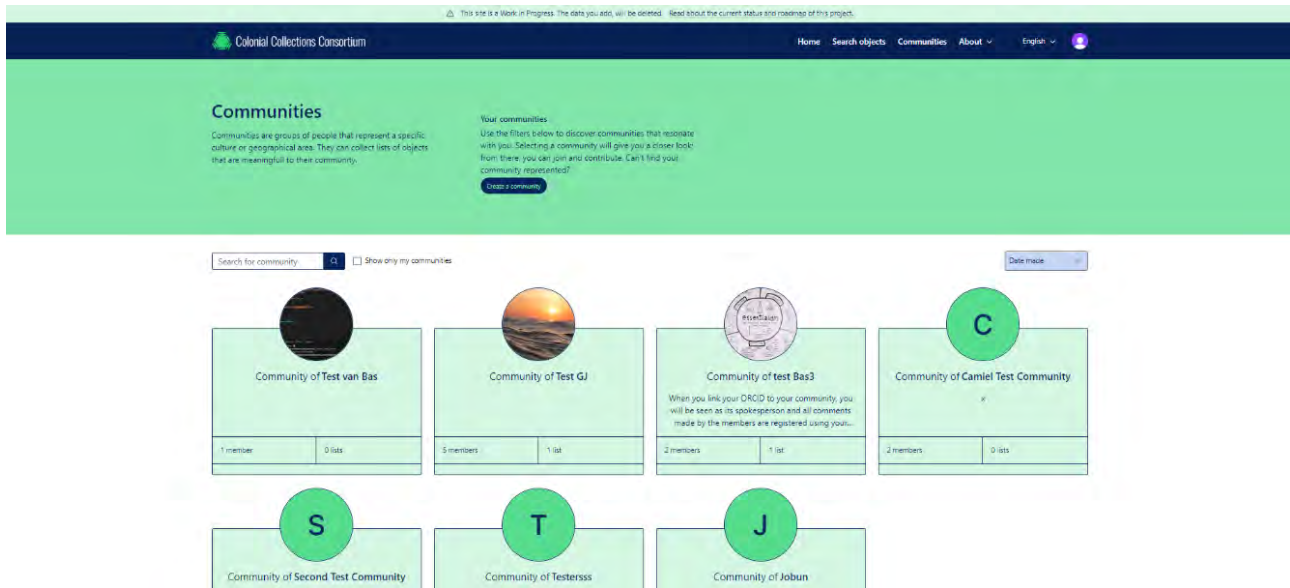
Figure 2: *Screenshot of the research application displaying test communities, February 2024.*
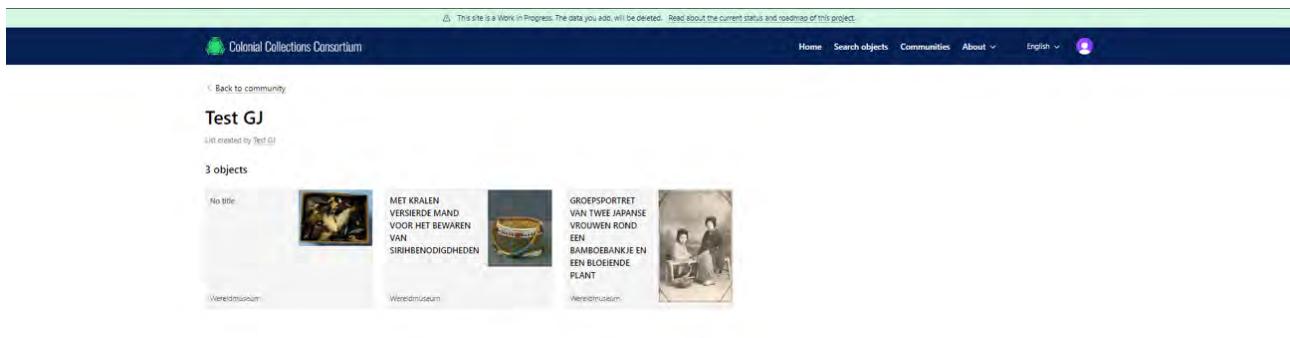
Figure 3: *Screenshot of the research application displaying records added to a test collection of a test community, February 2024.*

Conclusions

Since in the sections above, we looked at the starting intentions of the project – including their shift as a consequence of the May 2023 workshop and the lessons learned from it – and the consequences for the implemented features of the platform, we now come back to the question posed in the introduction of this article: how is the Consortium's *datahub* making colonial collections accessible in a collaborative way? In formulating an answer to this question, two elements come to light. On the one hand, the workshop in May 2023 created a way to understand – and enter into conversation with – a paramount user group for the *datahub*. This necessary collaborative effort laid the basis for the platform as we know it and aim for. Therefore, concerning the

how, this would be the first step; figuring out through conversation with users what the goals and requirements are for the project.

Second, to make collaboration part of the make-up of the *datahub*, the above-described features were incorporated as part of the *datahub*'s most important functionalities to make colonial collections accessible in a meaningful way. This accessibility comes forward in multiple ways of accessing the data (dumps, APIs, UIs). The reason this is important is that it serves the restitution and decolonisation of knowledge: by granting users access to the data on multiple technical levels (in whatever format users require and however much of it they require) the consortium implements space to interact with the knowledge in many ways – e.g., for users to build their own interface as they see fit or integrate data into their own archives. The latter is an additional aspect that should be taken into consideration; accessibility is one element, but making it meaningful by not only allowing users to see the data in question, but to also use it, extract it, add to it, or oppose it, is where the *datahub* as a project has benefited especially from its collaborative approach. Moreover, the platform stands or falls with the input that users and communities generate because this makes the platform what it is designed to be: a digital space in which a user can find their heritage and possibly restore some of its context, therefore returning some of its meaning and identity. The latter is in line with ICOM's position of a more human-centred approach to collections, as the *datahub* aims to create meaning through human interaction and added context, and not by merely displaying a digital record. In line with these findings, the goal of the consortium is to maintain the collaborative approach as a constant throughout the future of the project.

Biographies

Camiel de Kom

My work and studies focus on museums, colonial collections, (digital) heritage, and memory; subjects with which I came into contact growing up in Amsterdam, and through my Surinamese family heritage. I graduated in art history (BA) and museum studies (MA), with a minor in programming, at the University of Amsterdam. The interest in programming came from working on a digital archive at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, where I noticed the importance of technical knowledge. Currently, I'm a digital heritage coach for the bureau of the Colonial Collections Consortium in the Netherlands. Our aim is to support the creation of a datahub of colonial collections for stakeholders from countries of origin and provenance research.

Valentin Vogelmann

With academic backgrounds in computational linguistics and logic, I feel professionally most at home at the intersections between formal theory and cultural societal activity. Excited to use my formal skills to aid more freely engaging with our own societies' cultural outputs, I often engage in rethinking algorithms through philosophical and societal lenses. Currently, I realise this role as data scientist at the Wereldmuseum. Prior to that, I investigated AI-driven and data-visualisation techniques to highlight social and colonial biases in digital heritage collections in an attempt to emphasise the perspectivistic aspects of large-scale sociological research in historical data. My mission in these projects is mirrored in extracurricular artistic collaborations that revolve around reframing the role of AI towards reflecting upon ourselves and accessing those parts of the digital worlds we live in that usually stay hidden and inaccessible.

Digital Curation for Museums: Taking the Open Data of Digital Collections in the National Palace Museum as an Example

Ting-Sheng Lai

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Abstract

This paper explores the digital transformation journey of the National Palace Museum (NPM) in Taipei, Taiwan, highlighting its commitment to preserving Chinese cultural artefacts and enhancing learning experiences through multimedia resources. The NPM's Open Data policy since 2017 underscores its dedication to community engagement and collaboration. The paper reviews digital curation practices, shifting towards a user-centric approach and integrating digital humanities methodologies. Examples of digital curation in museums, like the Art Institute of Chicago and the British Museum, illustrate innovative digital projects. The introduction of the nine-box grid model offers a strategic framework for digital curation, emphasising education and research. Visualisations, such as Sankey diagrams and Treemaps, aid in understanding the vast NPM collections. The paper suggests leveraging digital humanities research to generate diversified post-processing data, enhancing the interpretation and presentation of digital collections. Integration of open data from museums worldwide presents opportunities for collaborative research. The paper concludes by advocating for innovative digital curatorial mechanisms within the nine-box grid model to facilitate successful digital transformation in museums.

Introduction

In the realm of cultural institutions, the National Palace Museum (NPM) in Taipei, Taiwan plays a crucial role in conserving Chinese cultural artefacts. Over the past two decades, the NPM has embarked on a 'digital transformation' journey, revolutionising the way it curates, preserves, and disseminates its extensive collection of cultural relics.

Recognising the pivotal role of museum education, the NPM has remained steadfast in its commitment to enhancing learning experiences through the development of educational multimedia resources. These initiatives aim to engage visitors of all ages and backgrounds, fostering a deeper appreciation for the historical and artistic treasures housed within the museum's walls.

Open Data Policy

Since 2017, the NPM has championed an 'Open Data (Open Access)' policy, signalling its commitment to promoting broader community engagement and collaboration. By making its digital assets freely available to the public, the museum encourages individuals and organisations outside its walls to utilise these resources for various educational, research, and creative endeavours.

In the Open GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) survey conducted in March 2018 (McCarthy & Wallace 2018), it was reported that over 1,600 institutions around the world released their digital collections for open access. These institutions collectively provided direct links to over 95 million digital objects.

Therefore, the author believes that in view of the growing demand for digital content in modern society, it has become an important issue to re-examine the digital curatorial policy of museums.

Review of Digital Curation

'Digital curation' was conventionally viewed as management and preservation data or information over the long term (DCC 2008). The author argues that it was rooted in a 'museum-centred' perspective; however, with the adoption of open data policies, this paradigm is shifting towards a more 'user-centred' approach.

This shift recognises the significance of accommodating the needs and preferences of various users, prioritising accessibility, and promoting engagement with digital collections. Rather than exclusively concentrating on institutional objectives, museums are progressively adopting approaches that empower users to interact with and contribute to digital content. This enriches the overall curation process and enhances the value of cultural relics. Notably, the integration of both educational media and open data in museums signifies a substantial evolution in digital curation practices.

Furthermore, there has been significant growth in digital humanities research within libraries in recent years (Hartsell-Gundy et al 2015), with libraries playing a crucial role in supporting scholarship and facilitating access to research resources. They have increasingly embraced digital humanities methodologies and technologies to

enhance research capabilities and broaden the dissemination of scholarly output. In contrast to libraries, the availability of digital resources within museums is contingent upon the extent of digitisation efforts and the level of innovation in service provision.

The author argues that digital curation for museums should encompass the field of digital humanities research to effectively manage the broader application of open data.

Instances of Digital Curation in Museums

In recent years, the museum field has witnessed several instances of digital curation involving the utilisation of digital data.

During the special exhibition 'Whistler and Roussel: Linked Visions' held at the Art Institute of Chicago (2015), the institution unveiled a digital interactive piece, enabling attendees to delve into the shared interpersonal dynamics between James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) and Theodore Rousse (1847–1903), as well as the interconnectedness among relevant artistic creators and their works.

The British Museum (2020), in collaboration with the Google Arts & Culture Lab unveiled a digital interactive piece titled 'The Museum of the World'. This innovative work projects the museum's collections onto a three-dimensional space with a chronological timeline, allowing audiences to explore the interconnectedness of these artifacts across creation periods, continents and cultures.

The Novel Nine-Box Grid Model

In response to the challenges outlined, the author synthesised findings from previous projects and conducted a comprehensive analysis of the current digital services landscape within the National Palace Museum. The author introduced a novel nine-box grid model (Figure 1), crafted to align with the overarching principles of digital curation in museum contexts.

The nine-box grid model' mentioned here likely refers to a strategic management tool used to analyse and evaluate the performance and potential of various aspects of a business or organisation, which was inspired by the work of the McKinsey Consulting at GE in the 1970s.

The authors reviewed the digital-related projects implemented by the NPM since 2000, assigned the objectives of each project to the different facets of the model, and found that the dimensions encompassing 'Exhibition', 'Media', 'Education' and 'Documents' belonging to the upper-right half of the model. In other words, the main objectives of the past projects were all focused on education and communications for the public.

The other dimensions in the lower-left half of the model appear to lack substantial coverage. The author suggests that since the implementation of the open data policy at the National Palace Museum, this segment of the nine-grid data model primarily corresponds to research in digital humanities. This encompasses dimensions such as 'Visualisation', 'Representation', 'Indexing' and 'Mining'.

'Education' has long been considered one of the most significant functions of museums. The open data of collections or the educational multimedia produced by museums rightly fall under the 'Communications' coordinate axis. This viewpoint is widely supported by relevant academic research (Falk et al 2007; Hooper-Greenhill 2007; Hein 1998), which can be traced back to the ideas of John Dewey, a renowned American philosopher, educator, and psychologist, dating back to 1900.

'Representation' refers to the use of language, symbols, and images to convey the meaning of things. This concept draws upon cultural studies, visual culture, and other related academic fields (Sturken & Cartwright 2017; Hall et al, 2013; Berger 1972). Walter Benjamin (1936), a German philosopher and cultural critic, extensively explored the concept of 'fragmentation' across various aspects of modern society, particularly in his writings on art and media. Fragmentation entails the disintegration or breaking apart of traditional structures, narratives, and experiences in modernity. These characteristics are shared with digital archival materials, and owing to the traits of online media, they are designated as the focal point of the 'Exploring' coordinate axis.

The dimension of 'Representation' advocates considering all digital collections-related metadata, images, etc., as digital artefacts for in-depth exploration, deconstruction or reinterpretation. This viewpoint also resonates with the commentary of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1967): 'There is nothing beyond the text', suggesting that everything can be seen as text, capable of being turned into language, read, interpreted, and deconstructed, serving as material for textual analysis.

The aspect of 'Mining' refers to the application of automated analytical methods to extract meaningful keywords or data from text or images, thereby inferring systematic structures such as automatic classification and content analysis. Recent advancements in various Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications continually exemplify this trend.

Digital Humanities Research in the NPM

The genesis of the collections housed within the National Palace Museum (NPM), established in 1925, can be traced back to the ancient imperial collection of the Qing Dynasty, which ruled China from 1644 to 1912. In addition, it expanded through the amalgamation of other collection units, alongside donations and new acquisitions. The current collection of cultural relics has reached 698,857 items as of January 2023. Among the world's major museums, it stands out as exceptionally unique.

Visualisation of the NPM's Collections

In the author's opinion, the Sankey Diagram, which has been used in the field of information visualisation, is suitable for presenting the hierarchical structure of the collection's organisations, sources and material attributes, whereas the inner band represents the relationship between each two variables; the width of the band indicates the relative amount of each statistic. The diagram is presented as a web page with interactive features. When the mouse cursor is moved over the band, a small window will pop up on the screen to show the statistics.

Given that the statistics pertaining to the books and documents within the NPM would significantly dominate the chart, potentially obstructing the comprehension of other data points, the author adopts a grouping

approach. This involves dividing the original data collection into two distinct groups: 'Rare Books and Historical Documents' and 'Antiquities, Paintings, Calligraphy and the South Branch'. Subsequently, the author employs this categorisation to create individual Sankey diagrams for each group, facilitating a comparative analysis between them (Figure 2).

Antique Collections in the NPM

There is a wide variety of antique collections in the NPM, and the total count of relics surpasses 71,000. One would need to invest considerable time sifting through each of the four primary categories: bronzes, ceramics, jades, and curios. However, through visualisation, it becomes possible to grasp the entire collection at a glance in a single diagram.

When analysing the collection of objects in the NPM by means of a 'Treemap', the large blocks present information on different types of objects, and are ordered according to the amount of material, with porcelain and jade being the most numerous, followed by miscellaneous wares, meaning curiosities made of a wide variety of materials.

The smaller squares within each section show the different functions of the wares, followed by display or floral objects; jade and miscellaneous wares are mostly used for clothing and jewellery; and bronze is mainly used for ceremonial objects and seals.

The concept of a 'Treemap' is derived from the work of the Human-Computer Interaction Laboratory at the University of Maryland (Shneiderman & Plaisant 2014). Its characteristics are suitable for computer interactive interface display. It uses the size of the blocks to represent the amount of data, and the layout consists of a nested block structure, which can display the hierarchical structure of the data set, or use different block spaces to display groups of data; it can use the colour shades and shades to represent the amount of data or different categories.

The Collections of Paintings and Calligraphy

The Collections of Paintings and Calligraphy at the National Palace Museum are renowned for their exceptional quality and historical significance. The museum houses a vast array of masterpieces spanning various dynasties and artistic styles, making it one of the most esteemed repositories of Chinese art in the world. Currently, there are over 340 objects designated as 'National Treasures' and over 1,700 individual items marked as 'Significant Historic Artefacts' in the painting and calligraphy category. This extensive collection provides visitors with a comprehensive insight into China's rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions.

To make the museum's painting and calligraphy collections more accessible to a wider range of audiences, digital humanities methods, particularly indexing and visualisation, can be utilised to create a clear and comprehensive understanding.

Using the collections of paintings and calligraphy at the Palace Museum as an example, metadata includes

a 'theme' field related to painting works, which can be used as an index. With over two hundred thousand keywords recorded in the database, it is beyond the capability of ordinary individuals to read and analyse.

To visualise the results of frequency analysis, the most common method is a 'Word Cloud', widely used in many websites' automatic summarisation functions, such as blogs, which automatically summarise the keywords and frequency of categories into a tag cloud.

Generally, keywords are displayed in different sizes to indicate their frequency, with the placement of keywords varied and colour used to differentiate frequency or according to specific sorting rules.

The author has created a word cloud and grouped the main themes accordingly (Figure 4). Keywords with higher frequency are represented in shades of red, while those with lower frequency are represented in shades of blue.

The potential relevance of the data can be seen in the figure: the themes of the paintings in the collections are 'Trees' and 'Landscapes', followed by 'Flowers' and 'People', and then by 'Architecture' and 'Appliance'.

Overall, the thematic essence of East Asian art, particularly evident in traditional landscape paintings and poetry, revolves around the profound connection between humanity and the natural world. Through depictions of rivers, lakes, streams, springs and mountain paths, artists capture the dynamic beauty and ever-changing elements of the landscape. Trees such as pine and bamboo symbolise longevity, resilience and strength, while flowers like lotus, peony and chrysanthemum carry symbolic meanings of purity, prosperity and elegance. These botanical motifs, alongside strange rocks and waterfalls, reflect the artists' keen observation of the natural environment and their sense of aesthetic appreciation. Overall, East Asian art celebrates the poetic essence of nature, inviting viewers to contemplate the harmonious coexistence of humanity and the natural world.

Integration of Open Data from Museums Worldwide

To carry out an experiment on integrating data from various museums, the authors initially searched for artefacts related to 'Chinese' in the open-access databases of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET), the Louvre and the British Museum. They then downloaded the metadata pertaining to these artefacts. The MET's collection includes roughly 2,300 Chinese-related artefacts out of a total of 470,000 items, comprising items made in China and those made elsewhere but relevant to Chinese culture. The Louvre houses around 17,000 Oriental artefacts, though it hasn't conducted extensive research specifically on Chinese artifacts. On the other hand, the British Museum possesses approximately 23,000 fully documented Chinese artefacts from a collection exceeding two million items.

Hence, the British Museum's assortment of Chinese cultural relics was chosen for additional investigation. The author discovered that the British Museum had acquired Chinese cultural relics as far back as the 19th century. However, the metadata specifications of the collection and the attributes of the relics differed significantly from those of the NPM, preventing direct merging of the metadata.

The author examined a comprehensive example of integration, namely the Smithsonian Open Access, which

consolidates 21 museums under its umbrella. This initiative offers access to over 4.5 million digital items and implements a unified classification system encompassing Museum/Unit, Topic, Date, Resource Type, and Group categories.

The outcome of this practical endeavour is supported by the author's prior investigation into the nine-grid model of digital curation (Figure 1). This model illustrates that by 'deconstructing' the 'digital archives' of various museums, common classification items can be identified within the dimension of 'indexing'.

Furthermore, museum scholars have put forth the theory of 'Museum texts', which suggests two modes of communication: 'texts in museums' and 'museums as texts', which can be further dialectical (Ravelli 2006). By delving deeply into the 'Digital Collection' data of various museums, we can extract the narrative themes from the National Palace Museum and British Museum data within the dimension of 'Representation', thus addressing the issue of differing metadata schemas.

Summary

To sum up, the two components of 'visualisation' and 'indexing' have been verified in practice, and the textual post-processing data of the digital collection can be used to draw charts with narrative information visualisation through the extraction of keywords, classification, grouping, and frequency statistics of words and phrases.

The authors suggest that the Palace or external researchers can conduct more exploration of the Palace's open data through digital humanities research methods, and then generate more diversified 'post-processing data', such as 'visualisation' and 'indexing', which can increase the depth and breadth of the data in the digital collection, and allow for a more diversified presentation of the ways of using the digital collection and interpreting its contents, thus contributing to the new opportunities for the use of the open data in the Palace. The nine grid model is used as a model for the Palace's open data use.

In terms of the nine grid model, the visualisation component (upper left) can be communicated with the display component (upper middle), such as: designing highly narrative infographics for displaying the main visual content of the design; or incorporating into the online social media for visual communication.

As for the index structure, it can be used for the continuous structural analysis of digital collection data through digital humanities related tools or technologies, for example, through the platform of sharing with the outside world, social tagging (social tagging) collection, or using the way of exploring (Mining) structure, using automatic marking work (Automatic), and the Annotation Tool (Annotation Tool). These can increase the correlation between the internal data, improve the narrativity of the data, and reduce the learning curve of the use of open data.

Secondly, even if various information technologies continue to evolve in the future, museums can identify the role of this new digital practice and its relationship with existing practices in the nine-grid model. Based on this, museums can try to deduce the innovative digital curatorial mechanism to promote the chance of successful digital transformation.

Figure 1: *The Nine-Box Grid Model.*

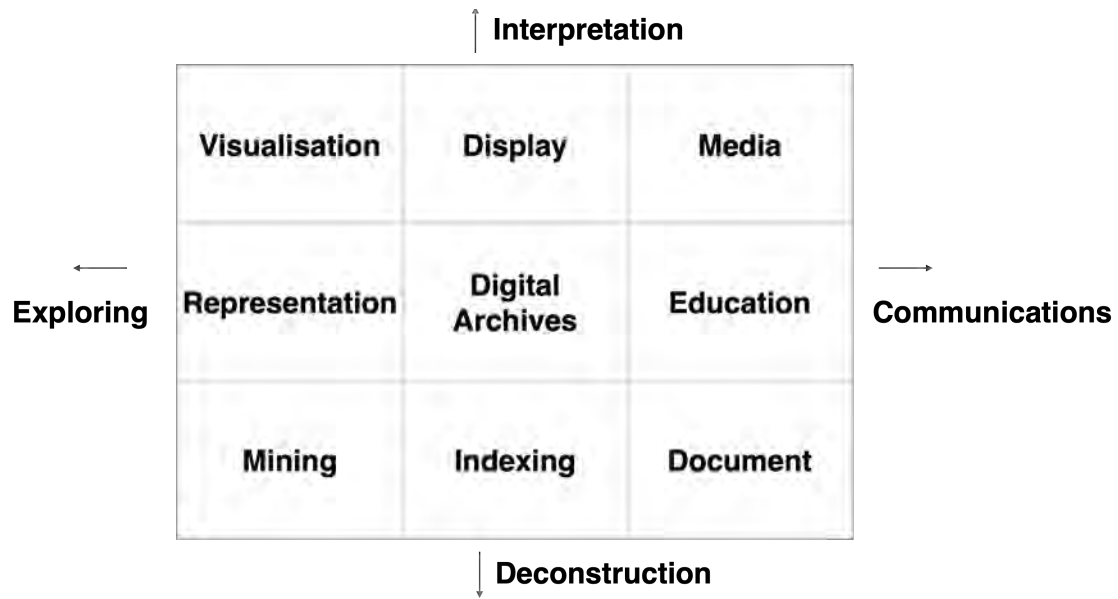Rare Books and Historical Documents

Antiquities, Painting and Calligraphy, the "South Branch"
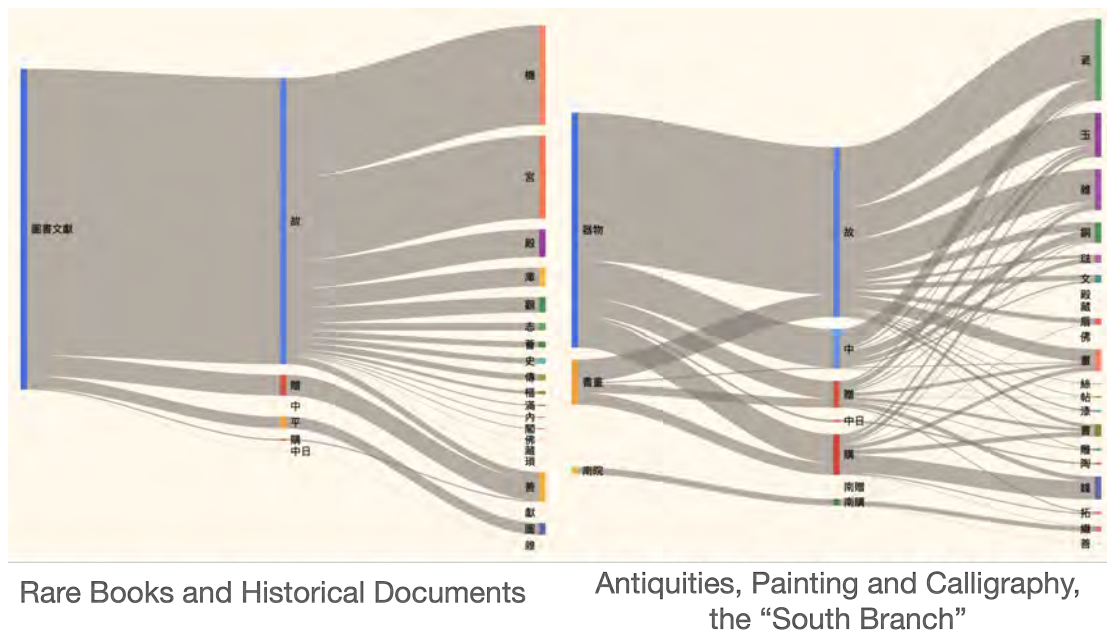
Figure 2: *Visualisation of the NPM's Collection, Presented in Sankey Diagrams.*

Figure 3: *The Collection of Antiquities in NPM Presented as a Treemap.*

Figure 4: *The Collections of Paintings and Calligraphy in NPM Presented as Word Clouds.*

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Ethical Guidelines in Collecting Biographical Migration Heritage

Rabab Hammoudi and Greet Voorhoof

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Abstract

Set in the historic buildings of a shipping company, the Red Star Line Museum is a starting point for reflection and dialogue on migration in the past, present and future. Therefore, the museum collects migration stories from the past as well as current stories.

The care the museum takes to protect its storytellers and the handling of what is often highly sensitive information, has been the subject of a research project for the past two years. After all, the Red star Line Museum wants to prevent vulnerable witnesses from experiencing negative consequences as a result of their testimony or that traumas are triggered.

The result of the project is a well-developed policy, protocol and legal framework to facilitate the process of registering and releasing contemporary heritage involving living people and/or sensitive material. It is well documented what can and cannot be disclosed, to whom and within what timeframe. This provides a sustainable basis for future disclosure and further registration of biographical migration heritage.

Red Star Line Museum: A Brief Introduction

The Red Star Line Museum opened in 2013 in Antwerp, Belgium. The museum takes its name from the company that transported nearly two million European emigrants to North America between 1873 and 1934. The museum is located in the old harbour, in the original Red Star Line departure halls, where third-class passengers were inspected, bathed, and deloused before boarding their ships. The permanent exhibition is dedicated to the experiences of those passengers who often took their final steps on European soil in Antwerp on their way to a new life overseas. Their story is presented as still relevant today. Although many things have changed, countless people from all over the world still leave everything behind in search of a better life elsewhere. In the permanent exhibition, connections are made both with the timeless and universal migration through time and with migration in Antwerp today. Temporary exhibitions focus on themes that connect both recent and historical migration experiences, such as love and migration, labour migration, refugees and homesickness.

The museum places great emphasis on personal narratives of migration. Both past and present, we want to tell a story from the perspective of the migrant, rather than from the often problematising and divisive perspective of society. It wants to be an open house, a safe and courageous space that challenges and inspires visitors. Its relevance lies in bridging past and present for a wide audience and being a safe place of resilience for migrants today. The museum therefore invests in projects and partnerships that focus on wellbeing, community engagement, and dialogue. Taking the time to develop these long-term relationships influences the museum's narrative, its growing heritage community and the way the museum collects stories and objects.

Particularly in collecting stories and objects about recent migration, the museum acknowledges the deeply personal anecdotes shared by interviewees, as well as their occasional vulnerability.

The Red Star Line Museum has created a well-developed workflow, policy and legal framework to facilitate the process of registering and unlocking (contemporary) biographical migration heritage involving living people and/or dealing with sensitive material. Careful consideration has been given to what can and cannot be disclosed, to whom, and within what timeframe. These elements provide a sustainable basis for future disclosure and further registration of biographical migration heritage.

The starting point of the whole process is the Red Star Line Museum as a place of collection and research, but also as a place of care, both for the collection and for the communities and individuals with whom the museum works. To this end, a process has been developed to serve as a guide, especially during interviews.

Ethical Guidelines

First things first: a warm welcome. It is important for a storyteller to feel safe and welcome to share his or her story. The museum takes the time to listen, to show how interviews are used in the museum, and what the possibilities are. Then the goals of the interview, the process, and the procedures are discussed. We try to clarify in advance with the interviewee what is a safe and comfortable place for the interview, what the preferred language of communication (and possible translation) is, what the motive for participation is and what the expectations are for use, and how intensive the long-term contact will be.

All this is done in a simple and safe language. After all, a large proportion of the storytellers are not native Dutch speakers. In 2022, the Red Star Line developed a policy on clear and safe language, which is used throughout the museum. The third step: conducting the interview and possibly receiving objects that support the migration story. The comfort level of the (story) donor determines the course and duration of this phase. A few days after the interview, the interviewer assesses how the interviewee experienced the interview. We determine whether the presence of family members/social workers is necessary if traumatic memories have been mentioned. In the future, the Red Star Line Museum also plans to put additional effort into training on trauma (retraumatisation, secondary trauma, self-care) for employees and volunteers involved in building the museum's oral history collection.

Before conducting an interview, the Red Star Line Museum requires the interviewee to sign a consent form for the audio or video recording of the interview and its use in connection with a specific project or temporary exhibition. If the interview is included in the collection, the interviewee also consents to the long-term preservation and distribution of the interview through various channels via a donation agreement. Interviewees may indicate whether they wish to exclude certain uses. The museum distinguishes between different levels of use, including use for internal research only, external use by researchers, artistic or educational partners upon request, or online publication. In addition, for several years, interviewees have signed a GDPR statement regarding the storage of their personal data. Feedback and adaptation are a difficult balancing act in this respect, but extremely important. There is a museum logic, but external parties do not always adhere to these rules and commitments. The museum has to take them through the process so that they fully understand why they have to sign an agreement or another document. This creates a tension between establishing a bond of trust while also looking after the collection and following procedures. But even when you have the trust, as a museum professional you want to be sure that the storyteller will support your decisions, for example, on what to offer at an exhibition.

When processing interviews, the Red Star Line Museum works with, among others, volunteers and student interns who transcribe or translate the interviews. They sign a declaration that they will keep the information confidential. The Red Star Line Museum also plans to experiment with AI transcription in the coming months. Again, we are deliberately choosing software and systems that ensure the privacy of the interview and the interviewee. The results of the study will be shared with the heritage sector.

One aspect to which the museum attaches great importance is the analysis of possible risks for the interviewee in the disclosure of the interview and any accompanying objects (photos, documents, etc.) This will be discussed in more detail later in this article. Finally, the museum carries out a thorough follow-up. This concerns both the donor, with whom the museum keeps in touch and tries to build a lasting relationship. For example, one of the history donors has become a guide in the museum, another is working as a work student and digitising the collection, etc. Then there is the aftercare of the heritage itself: the museum ensures that the interviews and objects are properly registered, preserved and made available, as agreed to in the contract.

Risk Analysis

A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is a tool that identifies and assesses potential adverse effects on

data subjects in a structured and standardised way. It also aids in ensuring compliance with data protection regulations, allowing the Red Star Line Museum to make assessments to minimise or mitigate the impact on the donor.

As a first step, the museum considers how the interview came about and for what purpose: e.g., for a research project or an exhibition. Who are the interviewer and interviewee, and how did they come together? Was this done through an intermediary?

Then the museum considers whether the interviewee said or implied anything that might indicate reluctance, uncertainty or discomfort about giving the testimony or its possible use.

The General Data Protection Regulation, the European data protection law (2016), stipulates that a number of categories of special or sensitive data may only be processed under strict conditions. The Red Star Line Museum will therefore screen the interview for medical data, criminal data, biometric data, criminal records and/or data from which racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, membership in a trade union, association or similar group and sexual identity or orientation may be derived[1].

The museum also screens the interview for insults, libel and slander, and how and in what context minors are discussed in the story. A glossary of examples of special categories of personal data has been prepared for this purpose. Screening the interview for these terms is a time-consuming process. Peripheral documents such as a person sheet, a summary and a tape content sheet can be used as a starting point. Indeed, these can give an indication of sensitivities in an interview. Ideally, work is done on the transcripts themselves. Transcriptions and subtitles improve the retrievability and accessibility of interviews by making an interview fully searchable in text.

After this phase, the risks are assessed. For this purpose, the Red Star Line Museum has developed a risk matrix that systematically measures and categorises risks. Although risks cannot be completely avoided, a risk matrix can assess the potential damage of these risks. A risk matrix is a graphical risk analysis tool that assigns a score to each risk based on two factors: probability and impact. Potential harm is estimated by the museum for the interviewee, third parties mentioned in the story, and the interviewee's own descendants.

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1. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016R0679>, art. 9.1, 10 and 87, accessed 6 February 2024.

RISK	CHANCE	IMPACT	RISKLEVEL	RECOMMENDATION
Damage to donor due to sensitive personal data.	5	5	25	The story remains locked and is preserved in a closed environment. Using the decision tree, the disclosure year for the story is determined.
Damage to descendants due to mention in a sensitive context.	5	4	20	The story remains locked and is stored in the back office. Using the decision tree, the disclosure year for the story is determined. The story is only accessible upon request and under strict conditions.
Damage to identifiable third parties due to mention in a sensitive context.	4	3	12	Adapted versions of the story (e.g., fragments used in exhibitions) may be made accessible online. The original is stored in the back office and is only accessible upon request and under conditions. The disclosure year of the full story is determined using the decision tree.
Damage to non-identifiable third parties due to sensitive personal data.	1	1	1	The story may be fully accessed: both online and offline.

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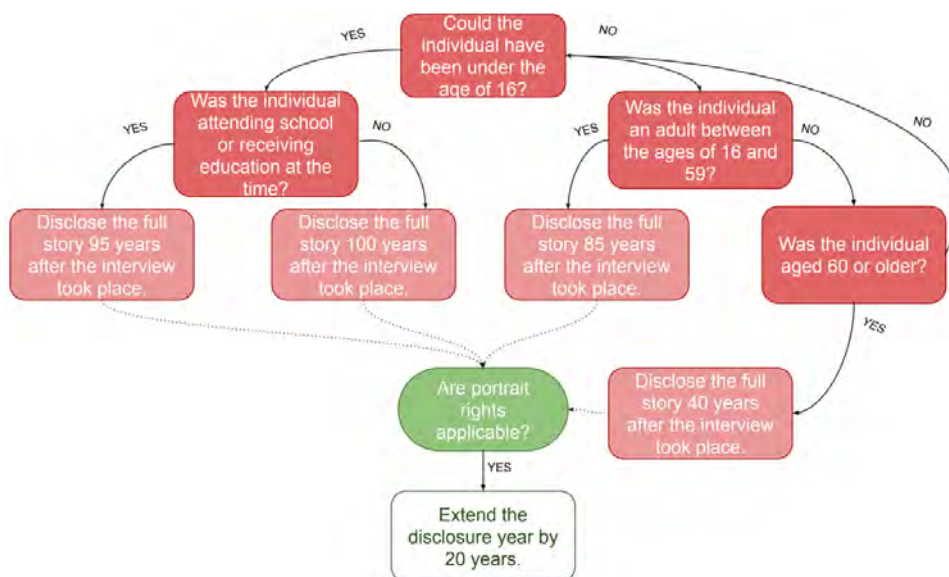
Systematically screening interviews and assessing risk requires a significant time commitment from the museum. The Red Star Line Museum will further refine its policy in 2024 and determine how and when it will fully implement this process.

Once decisions are made regarding the handling of the story, the results of the risk analysis are documented to ensure transparency and they are communicated with the interviewee. By prioritising privacy and adhering to legal standards, the museum aims to fulfil its responsibility to safeguard the integrity of its oral history collection while honouring the individuals who share their stories.

Biographies

Rabab Hammoudi holds a Master's degree in conservation-restoration (University of Antwerp, Belgium) and a Bachelor's degree in art science (University of Leuven, Belgium). She has been working for the Red Star Line Museum for two and a half years as a biographical migration heritage officer. Her expertise lies in interview registration, GDPR and privacy legislation.

Greet Voorhoof has a Master's degree in history (University of Brussels, Belgium) and works as a collections manager for the Red Star Line Museum (Antwerp, Belgium). She is responsible for all processes related to the collection and digitisation policy of the historical and contemporary migration collection. One of her focal points is the registration and accessibility of biographical migration heritage and how to do this in a correct and ethical way.

Towards More Human-Centred Collecting Practices: A Case Study of the Museum of Chinese Australian History

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Abstract

This short essay delves into the pressing need for a transformative shift in collecting practices, advocating for a more human-centred approach. As a case study, the Museum of Chinese Australian History (MCAH) stands out for its pivotal role in safeguarding Chinese Australian heritage and contributing to the multicultural narrative. The evolving demographics demand nuanced representation, engagement through the Collection Development Advisory Group and the Chinese Melbourne project for community collaboration and trust-building between the museum and the community. Acknowledging the emotive role of museums and the nuanced view of deaccessioning becomes essential for fostering trust.

Looking ahead, the MCAH is urged to redefine the essence of its collection, employing models like the 'ring of object meaning', and sustain community engagement for future relevance. The shift towards human-centred collecting practices is not just theoretical but a proactive call to action, offering the MCAH an opportunity to safeguard and dynamically contribute to the narratives of Chinese Australians. Emphasising community involvement redirects focus from institutional achievements to active community participation, ensuring the museum remains a living entity authentically reflecting the diverse narratives of Chinese Australian heritage.

Introduction

As a museum registrar and a researcher specialising in collection practices in Chinese Australian museums, it is disheartening to hear statements like, 'I do not wish to participate in your exhibition, my personal story is not a specimen', 'I feel like we are just little mice living in a historian's laboratory' and 'I am a Chinese, but I don't feel a sense of belonging through your museum collection'. These sentiments are contrary to a museum's aspirations, which centre on creating a welcoming, safe and inclusive atmosphere. The goal is to ensure visitors and project participants feel a sense of connection and collaboration rather than detachment or discomfort.

Yet, difficult as they are, these statements indicate potential trust issues within the community towards the museum. They also provide a valuable reference for reflecting on and evaluating how the museum has established trust with the Chinese community through its collecting practices. Drawing on my experience as the museum registrar at the Museum of Chinese Australian History (MCAH) in Melbourne, this short essay aims to prompt museum professionals to reflect on strategies for incorporating the social roles of museums and the inclusivity of museum collections into their collecting practices. The objective is to shift these practices towards a more human-centred approach rather than materiality-oriented methods. This paper delves into how the collecting approach and processes at the MCAH contribute to building and facilitating a connection between the museum and the community it aspires to represent and serve. The ultimate aim is to identify ways to mitigate challenges in building trust between the museum and the Chinese community by integrating rethinking the social roles of museums and inclusiveness in collection development, eventually moving towards more human-centred collecting practices.

A Brief Background of the MCAH

Situated in Melbourne's Chinatown, the MCAH has been a significant repository for tangible and intangible aspects of Chinese Australian heritage. Established in 1985 through collaboration between the Victorian State Government, Melbourne City Council and the Chinese Australian community, the museum operates as a not-for-profit cultural collecting institution. Housed in a building with historical significance – a former furniture warehouse built in 1890 – the museum serves to provide Chinatown with a foundation rooted in history and culture (MCAH 2024a). With a mission to promote and safeguard Chinese values, beliefs and Australian history, the museum acknowledges the identity of Australians with Chinese ancestry. Through various initiatives such as exhibitions, collecting activities, educational programs and public events, the museum is dedicated to documenting and preserving Chinese Australians' experiences, stories and accomplishments for future generations (MCAH 2024b, 2024c).

The museum's collection of over 8,000 catalogued items aligns with its mission to collect materials closely associated with Chinese Australians' history, values and beliefs (MCAH 2024d). These materials include three-dimensional objects, oral history recordings, original textual and visual materials, and digital materials. Currently, more than 2,000 items are available for public access through the museum's online catalogue (CatalogIt Hub 2024). This commitment to accessibility aligns with the museum's overarching goal of sharing the rich cultural heritage of Chinese Australians with the wider community, fostering understanding and appreciation for this significant aspect of Australia's multicultural landscape.

The Ever-Evolving Demographic of the Chinese Community in Australia

Australia's history of Chinese immigration dates back to the 19th century, with the initial significant influx occurring during the 1850s gold rush (Wong and Ang 2017). However, between 1901 and 1970, the number of Chinese migrants declined due to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, commonly known as the 'White Australia Policy'. The termination of this policy marked a turning point, leading to a steady increase in Chinese migration (National Museum of Australia 2021; Wong and Ang 2017).

A survey conducted by Jennifer Hsu in 2023 sheds light on the Australian Bureau of Statistic's 28 June 2022 'Cultural Diversity: Census' data, revealing a significant and growing Chinese population in Australia, with 1.4 million people of Chinese heritage, constituting 5.5 per cent of the country's total population. Hsu's (2023, p. 5) survey aimed to delve deeper into the life experiences and perspectives of individuals identifying as Chinese in Australia, categorising them into two main groups:

The Chinese have a long history in Australia. Some are descendants of Chinese migrants who came to Australia during the gold rush of the nineteenth century. Others are more recent migrants from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and across Southeast Asia.

The survey emphasises the dynamic nature of the Chinese population in Australia, reflecting the ongoing influx of individuals from diverse backgrounds. While acknowledging the significant historical impact of the gold rush era on Chinese Australian history, the 2023 survey provides a nuanced perspective. It reveals that a greater diversity characterises the Chinese community in Australia than merely consisting of descendants from the gold rush era. This recognition underscores the multifaceted and complex nature of the Chinese Australian tapestry, encompassing individuals with varying historical roots and experiences. It challenges a singular narrative and focuses on appreciating and representing the ever-changing backgrounds and stories within the Chinese Australian community.

The Social Role of the MCAH

The longstanding presence of Chinese migrants and their descendants in Australia has given rise to several private institutions dedicated to preserving Chinese migrant cultural heritage. The MCAH is one of the notable collecting institutions among these. The MCAH's mission revolves around deepening understanding, promoting Chinese Australian culture, and recognising the identity of Chinese Australian people. Given the ever-evolving traditions, beliefs and values of the Chinese community in Australia, the MCAH is obligated to build collections that document and reflect this ongoing transformation.

The interaction between the MCAH and the Chinese community can be viewed as a two-way relationship, with museums seen as active platforms rather than passive repositories. Lois Silverman's (2010, p. 13) analysis highlights the transformative impact museums can have on individuals and society by facilitating expression and identity development:

For countless years and all around the world, museums have both intentionally and unintentionally facilitated the

expression and transformation of individuals and their sense of identity and contributed to the development and maintenance of friendship, family, and other important social bonds.

The MCAH is responsible for understanding and embracing the dynamic nature of cultural elements for a more inclusive and meaningful role in shaping social narratives. This involves staying attuned to the evolving cultural heritage landscape through continuous collection renewal. This implies that the museum should recognise the broader temporal context of the cultural materials, contemplating their ongoing relevance and meaning. Further, it underscores the interconnectedness of recognising the temporal context and ensuring contemporary and future relevance for a more inclusive museum collecting practice.

Attracting Trust and Interest Through Collecting Practices

The foundation for building trust between a museum and the community it aspires to represent hinges on the museum's proactive approach to dispel the perception of being a 'know-it-all'. In the case of the MCAH, this approach is manifested through initiatives like the Collection Development Advisory Group (CDAG) and the Chinese Melbourne research project.

The CDAG is responsible for providing recommendations and feedback to the museum regarding potential collection objects (MCAH 2021). This signifies the museum's recognition of the value of external input. Importantly, the CDAG does not solely comprise external museum sector experts but actively includes members from the Chinese community and those well-versed in Chinese Australian history. This inclusive composition underscores the museum's commitment to a well-informed decision-making process, acknowledging and respecting input from both professional and community perspectives (MCAH 2024e).

The Chinese Melbourne project also illustrates community participation in enriching the museum's oral history collection. The project actively involves the community by calling out online and collaborating with various Chinese community groups. This collaborative effort invites relevant community members to share their stories through oral history interviews (MCAH 2023). The flexibility offered, where individuals or groups from the Chinese community can participate, fosters a relaxed atmosphere resembling friendly chats. In this role, the museum is a facilitator and platform, bringing together community members with shared interests or knowledge of specific periods or themes related to Chinese Australian history. This approach transforms the museum into a space for community members to connect, reminisce and share experiences, strengthening the sense of collaboration.

These examples of the museum's collection processes and activities emphasise a genuine appreciation and collaboration between the museum and the community. By actively engaging with external expertise and community stories, the museum avoids creating an impression of unilateral knowledge production. This approach ensures a healthy and substantial relationship whereby the community feels valued and not merely instrumentalised for the museum's objectives.

Moreover, while the act of deaccessioning may initially be perceived as a deviation from the traditional role of collecting, it can actually serve as a means to demonstrate respect and foster trust. A notable experience during my tenure as the museum registrar at the MCAH exemplifies this nuanced perspective. We received a request for the return of objects from a family, prompting detailed face-to-face discussions between the museum team and the concerned family.

The museum team exhibited transparency and openness throughout this process, presenting the family's donated objects. This discussion led to a mutual understanding and agreement to return the objects to the family. This experience underscores the museum's commitment to a principle that prioritises its role for the people and the community, not merely as custodians of objects. While the museum deeply appreciates the significance of the objects in narrating the stories of Chinese Australian heritage, it equally recognises and values the personal meaning these objects hold for the family making the request.

This specific encounter illustrates the broader concept that museum collections are not solely intended to disseminate knowledge about culture or the past. Instead, museums, through their collections, become agents that evoke feelings and emotions. The significance lies not only in the static information the objects convey but, more importantly, in the dynamic and evolving meanings they generate through continuous interaction with individuals.

In essence, this experience underscores the understanding that the relationship between museums and their collections is inherently tied to people's emotional and personal connections with objects. It goes beyond the conventional narrative of preserving and presenting historical artefacts; museums play a crucial role in acknowledging and respecting objects' diverse meanings for individuals and communities. By recognising the dynamic nature of these connections, museums can further strengthen their commitment to community engagement and foster a sense of trust and respect.

Suggestions for Future Directions

The MCAH serves not only as a custodian of the cultural heritage of Chinese Australians but also as a proactive facilitator capable of unlocking the untapped potential within its existing collection. This transformative approach involves redefining the significance of the current collection in relation to the past, present and future.

Figure 1: *The ring of meaning, created by Vanessa Shia.*

The 'ring of object meaning' concept challenges the conventional notion that museum objects are solely tethered to the distant past. Illustrated in Figure 1, this model encourages museums to construct a more expansive narrative around their collections. While certain objects may possess historical or age-related attributes, it does not dictate that the emotions or meanings they evoke are confined to a bygone era. A noteworthy example is the initiative undertaken by the Manchester Museum, where young individuals with refugee backgrounds were invited to participate in a research project. This project aimed to craft new narratives for ancient artefacts within the museum's collection by allowing these young participants to explore objects from their regions of origin. Through their engagement, these young contributors integrated their own stories, enriching the existing narrative and providing additional biographical information for the artefacts. The primary goal of such initiatives is to highlight the enduring migration history in the UK and its ongoing impact on contemporary society (Manchester Metropolitan University 2021).

It is imperative the MCAH recognises that an object's meaning extends beyond its moment of creation or historical context. While the presence of an object may serve as evidence of a past event, its meaning remains fluid and subject to interpretation, capable of evoking different attitudes and emotions in various contexts. Its commitment to continually expanding the cultural significance and meaning of individual objects or collections is vital. This involves ongoing exploration and observation of what these objects signify to Chinese Australians today. By evaluating the sustainability and variability of cultural meanings attached to these objects, the museum can ensure it remains a relevant and inclusive institution for future generations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the MCAH plays a vital role in preserving Chinese Australian heritage and actively contributes to Australia's multicultural narrative. With demographic changes in the Chinese community, there is a growing need for nuanced representation. Acting as a dynamic platform, the MCAH engages the community through initiatives like the CDAG and the Chinese Melbourne project, fostering collaboration for trust-building. Recognising the museum's role in evoking emotions, including the nuanced perspective of deaccessioning, becomes crucial for reinforcing trust between the museum and the community. Moving forward, the MCAH is encouraged to redefine its current collection's significance, considering models like the 'ring of object meaning' and fostering ongoing community engagement for relevance in future generations.

The journey towards more human-centred collecting practices is not merely a theoretical shift but a proactive call to action. This collaborative and inclusive approach offers the MCAH the opportunity to not only safeguard history but dynamically contribute to the narratives of Chinese Australians. By placing a strong emphasis on community involvement, the shift redirects focus from institutional accomplishments to the active participation of the community in the collecting processes. While celebrating the end results is crucial, ongoing community engagement throughout the journey ensures the museum evolves as a living entity, authentically reflecting the diverse narratives of Chinese Australian heritage and making it an inclusive space shaped by the community it serves.

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Biography

Vanessa has previously worked as the museum registrar and assistant curator at the Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne, Australia. Her role included collections care, exhibition planning and development, and conducting curatorial research. She holds a Master of Arts Management and a Master of Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies and is currently a PhD student at Deakin University. Her research interests lie in object reinterpretation and collection renewal strategies in museums. She is developing a research project that examines collection renewal approaches in Chinese Australian museums. It explores what Chinese Australian museums can do to better represent more recent waves of Chinese migration to Australia through their collections. Specifically, the project focuses on the rationale behind museum collection development and exploring possibilities for more integrated collection-building paradigms.

Religious and Sacred Objects in Collections: Respect as a Key Concept to Museum Practice

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Brazil

Abstract

This work aims to address tensions in museum professionals' practices arising from the presence of religious and sacred objects in the collection; in this particular study, the Nosso Sagrado collection, as compared to other Brazilian and international collections. The historical formation of this collection and changes to it occurring since 2017, including the renaming of the studied collection, observed during this field work, are presented in the first section. Some reflections on race and Whiteness in museums are presented as the basis for the following discussions. In the second section, based on the methodology of participant observation, I analyse the political movement around the Liberte Nosso Sagrado campaign, which sought and obtained the transfer of 521 objects, confiscated by the police throughout the twentieth century, to Museu da República. We present the main strategies used by the campaign, with a significant focus on traditional and social media, and also the first challenges encountered by the adopted perspective of 'shared management'. Considering the new definition of museums which includes the participation of the community in that space and reorientations related to the ethics in museums, the tensions on religious and sacred objects and their specificities are identified and presented in the third section. We identify the use of the term 'respect' in documents of reference for museum professionals and in the demands related to the devolution of the Afro-Brazilian religious objects, as a key concept to understanding museum practices which consider the participation of the community, dealing with a concept which is built with the practice of dialogue and listening. In that sense, we raise some counterparts related to practices around religious and sacred objects in traditional museums and in terreiro memory and museums.

The historical formation of the Nosso Sagrado Collection came about through the confiscation of Afro-Brazilian religious objects. This practice was a constant act carried out by the Court Police in the 19th century, and it continued in the Republic based on the laws 155, 156 and 157 of the Criminal Code from 1890 which considered its medicine and *curandeirismo* (healing practices), its magic and spells illegal practices[1].

The *Orixás*' congas, *fios de contas*[2], clothing and tools as well as the *Orixás*' *ibás* or *assentamentos*[3] were part of a setting that had an educational character and were used in the training of new policemen. Afterwards those objects were exhibited among other seized objects such as guns, fascist objects, counterfeit money, which made up the museum of crime.

In previous research (Pereira, 2016, 2017) we analysed the historic formation of this collection based on the concept of the cultural biography of things by Igor Kopytoff (2008), identifying the multiple categories in which the objects were placed through the years, whether as evidence of a crime, museum and pedagogic objects or as national heritage. From interviewing religious leaders, it was understood that the perspective of *terreiro*[4] communities was that the presence of the objects at the Museu da Polícia meant the imprisonment of the Sacred itself and, as a consequence, of all people from *terreiro*.

The collection was considered a piece of national heritage in 1938, when it received the title *Coleção de Magia Negra* (Black Magic Collection), one year after the creation of the national regulatory institution called *Serviço de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* (SPHAN), presently under the name *Instituto Histórico e Artístico Nacional* (IPHAN)[5]. In 1980 custody of the collection was disputed, and its restitution was demanded by the people from *terreiro*, who considered the acquisition of the objects by the police illegal.

For many years the requests for their restitution were objected to by the police, similar to the refusals of certain nations to return the objects they took from the places they colonized. These and other examples highlight, for the present, the tensions at the core of these institutions: How do museums corroborate with the maintenance of asymmetrical relations which allows the exoticism of certain groups to the detriment of others? How are mechanisms of epistemic violence updated nowadays?

Based on the notion of biopower, developed by Michel Foucault, the Cameroonian author Achille Mbembe coined the term necropolitics from the concept of necropower, which means: the guarantee of power through the choice of who must or must not live, a role already taken by sovereigns and, nowadays, substituted by the Government (Mbembe, 2018). This concept has a relationship with a set of laws which criminalized Afro-

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1. The complete Criminal Code from 1890 is available at http://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1824-1899/decreto -847-11-outubro-1890-503086-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html Acesso em 27/10/2017
2. *Fios de contas* are, as the name implies, beads on a string or nylon string (…) The colours and the materials that form each string of beads vary according to its intention, marking hierarchy, special situations or daily use, besides identifying the gods' Lody, 2003. p. 233.
3. 'The main piece, usually made by mood, for building up the *assentamento.* It also generically designates the *assentamento*' Lody, 2003. p. 108.
4. 'Organized liturgical association' (Sodré, 2019, p. 51).
5. The sacred Afro-Brazilian object collection is the first one documented in the registration book called *Livro de Tombo, Arqueológi co, Etnográfico e Paisagístico.*

Brazilian religions during the construction of the modern Brazilian state, as part of a norm which encouraged the persecution of *capoeira* and *samba*, which are cultural practices belonging to Black people. The sum of repressive actions sought the *epistemicídio* (Carneiro, 1985; Sousa Santos, 1999) of knowledge and Afro-Brazilians manifestations as a whole, inside a national project that enabled the whitening of the population towards modernity. The *epistemicídio* is an instrument/gadget/strategy of the modern paradigm of capitalism in the construction of the 'other as a non-being', according to Suely Carneiro (1985).

It is possible to understand the demands for reparation and repatriation as a legal apparatus which seeks the rupture of the violence caused by the state, with the intention of evaluating the past, and observing that in the present the consequences of institutionalized racism are still functioning. Museums are important places for us to think about the issues we are living with in the present as a society. The exercise of reflecting on the past is one of the goals of these institutions. The museum, as a product of its time, can tell us a lot about the social group responsible for its creation and maintenance, whether through its collections or through the practices and policies it developed.

In this sense, some related issues are brought up in the discussion which relates museums to whitening to support debates about the tensions created by the religious and sacred objects in museums, more specifically, the ones related to religions of Afro-Brazilian origin. Thus, we present theories developed by Brazilian authors about Whiteness.

The work which is a reference for these studies in Brazil is *Pacto social da branquitude* by Cida Bento (2022), in which the whitening pact is understood as an informal agreement which has kept white people in power and denied access to black people, structuring Brazilian society. Her arguments are relevant for the complex debate about museums nowadays and, particularly, about reparation and repatriation which concepts that guide our thinking about the collection analysed here.

Bento contextualizes this pact as the founding basis for capitalism, naming it as racial capitalism and 'explaining how capitalism works through the exploitation of wage labour and, at the same time, bases it on a perspective of race, ethnicity and gender for expropriation' (ibid, p. 41), since the times of enslaved Africans and the genocide of indigenous American peoples, the Mayan and Aztec.

Lia Weiner Schucman (2020) shows that the myth of racial democracy[6] which structures Brazilian society also has its basis in the concept of Whiteness. Thus, she attributes to this structure a consciousness of usurpation which is the basis for privilege, implying an 'absence of moral commitment' for the excluded ones (ibid, p. 75). Hence the recurrence of the value placed upon ethics in the practices of modern institutions, as highlighted here, the museum[7].

For Cida Bento, 'a society based on profit and elimination of the weaker causes ethical demands to emerge' (ibid). The museums try to include in their discussion agenda a set of ethical parameters to deal with the same objects and, in some cases, human remains and deities. This isn't an internal movement, however, as such institutions

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6. Meaning the understanding of Brazil as a country constituted by three founding races with equal access to civil rights.

7. The attempt to create a set of guidelines for professional practices also reached the museums in 1986 with the first Code of Ethics for museums, approved in the 15th General Assembly of ICOM. Nowadays the document is being reviewed so that guidelines to deal with sensitive questions will be included.

were asked to recognize, after the colonial period, their role in the reproduction of colonial violence, which is still ongoing, with tensions, and emerging in the dialogue between distinct subjects.

Free Our Sacred Campaign: Media as a Tool for Political Articulation

In the second section, based on the methodology of participant observation, I analyse the political movement centred around the Liberte Nosso Sagrado campaign, which succeeded in obtaining the transfer of 521 objects, confiscated by the police throughout the twentieth century, to the Museu da República. We presented the main strategies used by the campaign, with a huge focus on the traditional and social media.

The campaign Free Our Sacred, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, started in April 2017 and comprised religious leaders from *Umbanda* and *Candomblé*, civil representatives, members from the academic community and others. Through public hearings, inspections at the Museu da Polícia, intense mobilization on social media and political articulation at the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro, the negotiation process with the police in Rio de Janeiro started. Through a process in the Public Ministry, advances successfully culminated in the acceptance of the claims.

The Free Our Sacred campaign consisted of two main demands: firstly, to change the setting name which, in the religious leaders' perspective, represented and recalled the racism that surrounded its formation and, secondly, to transfer this setting to another museum. On 21 September 2020, a total of 519 items – of which 126 items are considered a national heritage by IPHAN – were transferred to the Museu da República (IBRAM) and Iyalorixás and Babalorixás, marking the beginning of a new chapter of this history.

We highlighted some strategies which used social media to spread news about the campaign and which worked as articulate issues with the communities. On 11 December 2017, Human Rights Day, the documentary *Liberte nosso sagrado*[8] premiered at Circo Voador, recounting the history of the collection formation and evidence the restitution requests from the campaign. This documentary served to effectively communicate the campaign's aims and to document the established dispute.

The exhibition of this short film, followed by debates between the participants, was one of the initiatives which guaranteed the decentralization of the discussion around the theme. Town, state and federal schools, as well as institutions of higher education, settled the discussions about religious racism in the past and present. Showing the film in *terreiros* allowed the questions to reach a wider number of their own members, including members of *Casas* whose leaderships were part of the campaign. It has been reiterated that following eight decades of silencing and erasure of the setting and its formation history, this information was not known by a considerable part of *terreiro fluminense* people.[9]

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8. Directed by Fernando Souza, Gabriel Barbosa and Jorge Santana; direction assistance by Viviane Tavares and Mariana Medeiros and production by Quiprocó films.

9. Another medium-length documentary which contributed to the dissemination of the information about the campaign was Cárcere dos deuses. The police discourse in it shows consideration, mainly about the return of the objects. To whom should they be returned? This is the question asked by a deputy interviewed in the documentary. Despite knowing the historical value of the set, he justifies its presence in the Police Museum by saying they demonstrate the evolution of the law and its enforcement: firstly repressive, later by the decriminalization of African religions and, in the interview, against forms of religious intolerance. Presenting this counterpoint was the great differential of this documentary and shows that it was not possible anymore for the police to avoid the debate.

The dissemination of information through social media increased the reach and effectiveness of the campaign, which quickly acquired a considerable number of followers who, after watching the documentary or getting to know this cause, started following developments online. The focus given to the campaign was, without any doubt, one of the main factors for its success. The main media also soon started to follow the developments related to the restitution process, covering and broadcasting the main events.

The delay in transferring the set, after both sides signed the agreement demonstrating the Police Museum's intention to transfer it, was addressed in a video called 'Police and religious leaders fight a battle for confiscated sacred pieces'[10], published on 4 May 2019 on UOL Mais. The media's pressure was one of the factors undertaken by the campaign for this movement not to be out of the debates in the city.

The police media was also present: 'Today we are *spontaneously* (our emphasis*)* returning the items to whom they always belonged', stated Daniel Mayr, the Deputy and chief, in an interview published on the institution website[11] after signing a term of interest of return. The statement's headline reads 'Sepol is the first police in Brazil to return objects of African religions'. It is noticeable that there is a considerable change in the police discourse, which seeks to highlight the spontaneous character of this action, despite the previous refusal to return the set.

Since the transfer, widely covered by the media on the local and national level, other debates concerning the management of collections have publicly arisen. A work group formed by religious leaders was created to be responsible for the shared management of the collection. This form of management, once again, brings with it tensions and necessary negotiations about the presence of the religious and sacred objects in museums.

Ethical Issues and the Sacred in Museums: Respect as a Key Concept

Considering the new definition of museums which includes the participation of the community in that space and reorientations related to ethics in museums, the tensions around religious and sacred objects and their specificities are identified and presented in the third section. We identified the use of the term 'respect' in documents of reference for the museum professionals and in the demands related to the devolution of the Afro-Brazilian religious objects, as a key concept to understanding museum practices which consider the participation of the community, dealing with a concept which is built on the practice of dialogue and listening. In that sense, we brought up some counterparts related to practices of religious and sacred objects in traditional museums and in *terreiros* memory and museums.

Some guiding documents in the field of museums may be useful for reflections about the institutional practices related to sacred and religious objects. Firstly, the new ICOM definition of museum from August 2022 must be considered, highlighting the notion of 'community participation' and 'diversity', which seeks a broader concept than the previous one. Secondly, the Code of Ethics for Museums published by ICOM is a document which guides

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10. Available at
    https://mais.uol.com.br/view/16645579?fbclid=IwAR2Bcd_q_MyFYDWTPpTHgwjWTeldQkzoud6dR6978Rg9ArjjBSG1AgKiHPE.
    Accessed on 07/06/2022
11. Available at http://www.policiacivilrj.net.br/noticias.php?id=7884. Accessed on 06/06/2022

the professional activities in museums[12]. Regarding sensitive materials, including sacred and religious objects, it deals with specificities in management decisions about this type of material and the communities from which they were removed.

In the guidelines provided by the Code of Ethics it was possible to identify that, regarding acquisitions of sacred objects and human remains, the document states that dealing process must be carried out with respect. The same requirement appears in item '4.3' when dealing with the display of this kind of material: 'they must be presented with *care* and *respect*'. However, what is understood as *respect?* And *care?*

In that quoted passage, there is also reference to respect as well as the interests and beliefs of the original communities, whether ethnic or religious. In many cases, the types of objects referred to here were incorporated in museum collections through plundering practices. In this regard, how could the practice and contact between community and museums be carried out?

There are cases in which the communities themselves state that their objects, as origin groups, may be displayed (or not) regarding determined conditions. How many opposite actions have we heard of? Usually resulting from political pressure, some museums try to bring light to sensitive objects in their collections, inviting the communities to participate in the cataloguing process and conservation of these objects.

The article collection titled *Museology and the Sacred*, edited by François Mairesse, for the 41st Symposium of ICOFOM in October 2018, raises some interesting reflections to discuss in this context. Luciana Menezes de Carvalho, in the article called 'Como o museu afeta o sagrado? (How the museum affects the sacred?)'*,* points out that museum objects resonate with the individual through their cultural and social characteristics. This means that for museum professionals and visitors to recognize an object as sacred, it is necessary a symbolic capital, that is, a previous recognition.

This statement causes us to reflect on two distinct situations where the museum is the arena. Firstly, regarding museum professionals there is a series of factors which must be considered and are previous to this recognition: the registration, involving data of origin and provenance, the history of these objects, and the necessary research to collect this information. This recognition is only possible when we know what exactly the collection is made up of, where it comes from, and how they ended up as museum objects.

However, I state that there is another relevant factor in this process: sensitivity, which does not relate directly to the knowledge of the collections, but is rather about the human capacity to be affected by the surrounding world and by other living things. A sensitive museology is what we propose as a new analysis key to deal with sacred and religious objects. Sensitive materials demand, consequently, sensitivity from museum teams.

The complexity generated by the inclusion of religious objects in a museum is proportional to the responsibility required for the technical treatment and approach from a concept that features in numerous official documents from the field of museums: respect. This is a wide notion and, therefore, it demands special attention from

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12. The original document was unanimously approved in 1986, modified afterwards in 2001, reviewed in 2004 and is nowadays in a revision process.

museum professionals to the particularities of each item and related group. It is our intention to elaborate on this dialogic perspective: What is respect? Who defines it?

There are no instructions to be followed, but a set of practices which can collaborate to achieve a museological practice that respects not only the 'object' itself, but also the set of beliefs attached to its origin group. The removal of this 'object' from the individuals is highlighted by Paine (2013), when the author indicates that a respectful practice is open to dialogue, and mainly to listening. Therefore, we seek to highlight the multiplicity of voices and allow a representation, representative and, mainly, diversity affirmation. It must also occur when there is no consensus among the religious community, i.e., as in the case of the collection *Nosso sagrado*, when there was an initial disagreement about the possibility of restoration of its items.

The concept of respect is also a central point for the Afro-Brazilian religions, which seek the recognition of their religious practices in opposition to religious racism. In response to attacks of neo-Pentecostal religions in the 1980s, a movement against racism and religious intolerance was formed. The sentence 'we do not want to be tolerated, but respected' is present in many speeches of African religion leaders and is a converging point between practices developed in museums around religious and sacred objects and the fight against racism, which has in its heritage process one of its strategies (Gomes, 2010; Gomes and Oliveira, 2019, 2021).

There are *terreiro* memorials and museums, institutions created inside Afro-Brazilian religion temples that seek to strengthen the identity and community memories by exhibiting religious, sacred and daily-used objects in religious space[13]. Created by community initiatives, *terreiro* memorials have become space for the exhibition of sacred objects, however, in this case, the negotiations between museology practices and religious aspects happen inside the group itself (Pereira, 2023).

The search for new approaches for religious and sacred objects demands more attention from museum professionals who embrace in their practices and techniques the perspectives of original groups. It is necessary to highlight that exchanges with community museums, such as *terreiro* memorials and museums, may be of great aid for museum professionals. From the category *respect* we propose some guidelines: the first one is connected to the informal treatment of the items, regarding the cataloguing and research, involving the museology classification and the language used for this purpose. The second one deals with the materiality of the objects, their protection, conservation and restoration. In both cases, assuming the perspective of community participation, the practices in museums and religious practices are negotiated.

We notice that the proposal of a restrict technical practice is not applicable when talking about religious and sacred objects, which means: not to consider its connection with individuals related to it. Trying just the technical approach, the museum restates its place as a colonizing institution, which sets a hierarchy of knowledge, valuing one knowledge to the detriment of another.

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13. The first terreiro memorial was created in 1992 in Salvador – Bahia, at Gantois Terreiro: the Mãe Menininha do Gantois Memorial. More information is available on the institutional website: http://terreirodogantois.com.br/index.php/memorial. Accessed on 08/02/2024

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Biography

Bachelor in museology (UNIRIO, 2008–2013). One semester of art history, Universidad de Valladolid, Spain (2010). Master's degree (UNIRIO, 2015 to 2018) and doctorate (UNIRIO, 2018 to 2023) in social memory with thesis titled 'Respect our sacred: balancing museum techniques and traditional knowledge' (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior/CAPES grant receiver). Development of the strategic institutional plan for Museu do Trabalho e dos Direitos Humanos and elaboration of a document for the preservation of Parque da Cidade, a strategic place for the army during the period of dictatorship in Brazil. Organization and inventory of a photography collection, including the digital arrangement on a database, in Instituto Moreira Salles. Participation in the team developing the museography of the first exhibition of Coleção Nosso Sagrado after its transfer to Museu da República at the demand of an Afro-Brazilian religious group, in a collaborative curatorship with their leaders.

To Empower and Redevelop Community Through Re-excavating the Local History: A Case Study on Keelung Port Dock Workers' Storytelling and Exhibition

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1. Introduction

Museums are increasingly seen as institutions closely linked to social change, which means understanding that museums need to move beyond the intra-disciplinary concerns to greater dialogue with others, and to adopt and adapt questions, techniques and approaches derived from other areas of disciplinary expertise. All of this has contributed to museum studies becoming one of the most genuinely multi- and increasingly inter-disciplinary areas of the academy today (Macdonald, 2011a: 1).

Peter Vergo advocated this new museology and proposed his critique: 'What is wrong with the "old" museology is that it is too much about museum *methods*, and too little about the purposes of museums' (Vergo 1989: 3). The concept of the new museology can be elaborated on more from three perspectives.

The first is a call to understand the meanings of museum objects as situated and contextual rather than inherent. Second, the new museological broadening of remit, and in particular its attention to matters of commerce, market and entertainment, has also continued, and become further developed in the expanded museum studies. Third, how the museum and its exhibitions may be variously perceived, especially by those who visit, as these three areas of emphasis demonstrate a shift to seeing the museum and the meaning of its contents, not as fixed and bounded, but as contextual and contingent (Macdonald, 2011a: 2–3). The proposition of the new museology should serve as a reminder for people to consider more about the functions, missions and aims of museums in different societies, and under varied historical context.

Collecting – including the assembly, preservation and display of collections – is fundamental to the idea of the museum, even if not all 'museums' directly engage in it. The idea of the museum has become fundamental

to collecting practices beyond the museum. Furthermore, collecting is variously entangled with other ways of relating to objects and according them their meaning and value – that is, to wider epistemologies and the moral economies of objects (Macdonald, 2011b: 81).

However, the trend of the democratization of museums aims to transform museums from repositions to public forums. Museums work not only for, but much more with, their public. The trend is crucial, as the new focus on audiences provides public historians with new opportunities to foster public engagement with their collections (Cauvin, 2016: 31).

2. The Development Process of Local Museums in Taiwan

Taiwan's museum policy was initially led by the central government, with national museums as the mainstay around the 1970s. However, after the lifting of martial law in 1987, many local governments began to build museums as a political means so as to encourage local consensus, excavate local history, preserve local cultural heritage, establish local identity and, even further, become a method of city/place branding from the 1990s onwards. At the same time, many local private organizations and individuals were also actively involved in the investigation and research of local histories and the preservation of local cultural assets. Many buildings that had a historical and cultural value but had been neglected in the past were officially registered as cultural heritage. In addition to their historical value being valued and concerned, people have begun to care about local histories and to actively advocate that they should be given attention, and that the hidden or ignored past and places should be excavated. Many of the buildings registered as cultural assets were also revitalized as museums with an emphasis on local histories. Furthermore, because they care about the unique history of local development, the old houses in many places have also attracted the attention of local people, hoping to unearth more unknown local stories and histories.

As people begin to realize the importance of local development history and local life, many more old houses are being transformed into local cultural centres, a type of small local museums run by the private sector. In view of the increasing number of local museums, the central government has also begun to formulate relevant subsidy policies so as to assist the operation of these small local cultural centres. Over time, Taiwan's local museums have become important cultural sites that chronicle local stories and unearth local history. Each local museum and cultural heritage site represents the specific achievements of the local people in discovering local stories, preserving local culture and establishing local identity. Of course, it also becomes the starting point for people to gain a new understanding of local history. For example, Hsinchu City, whose main industry was glass production, set up a glass museum around 2000. One village in Yilan County was once rich in trees for making clogs, and was famous for its production of clogs. After the decline of the industry, local people voluntarily set up a clog museum for them to be remembered. The important mining area in the north-eastern corner of Taiwan that once produced coal has also opened a coal mine labour museum with the active efforts of the former miners. There are also many stories of people who actively strive to set up small local museums to excavate and commemorate their histories.

Paying much more attention to the importance of one's own history has become a global phenomenon. There is an intellectual trend emerging concerned with 'public history'. Local and public history practice share common

roots. For most of the 20th century, local history remained in the field of the public practice of history, and accordingly, was disconnected from academic work. Due to its connection with non-academic audiences, public history practices have had a privileged relationship with local history. For example, the development of black history and feminist history shed light on the links between historians and contemporary activism. In other words, history could be used to address injustice (Cauvin, 2016: 7).

In addition, since museums are nodes that carry and remember local history and cultural inheritance, these local museums can help to explore more knowledgeable production of public history and avoid the writing of histories that are only a grand narrative based solely on national identity construction, without caring for personal stories and collective memories of local communities. Moreover, museums can become a mechanism to advocate social equality and drive social change.

To sum up, in Taiwan's social development in recent years, the establishment of local museums has been observed as not only a concrete action taken by residents to discover and commemorate the history of their community, but also an effective way for locals to gain a new understanding of their own history and collective memory. In this way, on the one hand, it will make more places want to use this method to excavate the history of local communities; on the other hand, it will also invite one to further reflect on how to excavate the stories of local communities. In addition, when one looks at it from the perspective of museum collections, one should not only think about for whom to collect objects and histories that contain rich stories, but more importantly, how does one collect and discover the stories of local communities? What's more, in the process of excavating and exploring local history, can one empower local communities through the reinterpretation of local history? Let the idea of the museum no longer just stop at constructing buildings or collecting tangible objects, but let it go further to respond to the real needs of local communities who want to better understand their own history and rebuild their self-identity and confidence.

Therefore, this article will illustrate the above concept through a project we promoted in Keelung, the northernmost city in Taiwan.

3. The Case Study of Keelung Port West Bank Community: A Story About Immigration

Taiwan is an island, geographically located between China, Japan and Southeast Asia. The history of the island can be said to be a history of immigration; a history ruled by people of different ethnicities.

Although there were native peoples that lived here, the Dutch, the Spanish and the Japanese people ruled the land at different times in history.

After World War II, the KMT government retreated from China and took control of Taiwan. As a result of the civil war, many political and social immigrants arrived in Taiwan, so-called mainlanders, in contrast to the 'people of the province'. The binary distinction drew a line between ethnic groups and became a big issue in society, meanwhile ignoring other types of immigration issues.

For instance, due to modernization and urban expansion, in eager pursuit of economic development and

the transformation from agriculture to industry, urban-rural immigrants appeared. However, the urban-rural immigrants' issues were not taken seriously. The collective consumption for immigrants became the urban question.

The site of our project, in Keelung city, is an example of this situation. Keelung is the northernmost and the starting city of Taiwan, open to the whole world, and also the first stop for new immigrants. Around the 1960's, Taiwan's gradual expansion of international trade had created a huge demand for port transportation. Keelung Port, with its great demand for dock workers, attracted many immigrants from all over Taiwan.

Figure1: *The old landscape of the west bank hill community, Keelung Port.*

These workers built their own houses on the hills near the port due to the lack of housing (figure1).

The living landscape of the community on the hill nearby the port varied over time. Because of the increase of the population, the city government set up an elementary school on the hilltop for the children of these immigrates' families. When the population reached its peak around the 1970s, there were nearly 2,000 primary school students. It was a living community built by the dockers and their families, who were immigrants from the whole island, looking for the job opportunities from the 1960s. However, the stories and memories of their immigration history were never recorded. The international trade function of Keelung Port from the 1960s was part of Taiwan's economic miracle. A large amount of money earned from foreign trade made the city wealthy and fuelled its development, creating a golden age of prosperity and beauty in Keelung. However, it was the people who lived on the edge of the city, the dock workers, who drove the economic miracle of the city and port; their stories as well as their living communities, have obviously been forgotten.

Dock workers do mainly manual labour and generally have a limited education. As dock handling work was replaced by container and mechanized handling, dock workers were increasingly losing job opportunities. As time went by, the dock workers got older, and many of them could no longer provide such physical labour. Therefore, people who could find other jobs, or the next generation of the family who could already afford the family income, considering that the living environment here was not convenient for the elderly, these families may

well have left this community. As a result, there are many empty houses in the community and the population is gradually aging (figure 2). After all these years, we now see the current situation of the community. In addition to the lack of local job opportunities, a large number of the elderly need to be taken care of; the population of younger people is small, with almost no new-born children; and the vacant houses are in very poor condition. The community is in decline. In addition, because it is a community established spontaneously by the residents, there is a lack of public facilities such as parks, roads and squares, which further deteriorates the community landscape and makes it a community with poor liveability (figure 3). In 2017, the city government closed the elementary school with only 12 children left to be educated.

Figure 2: *A senior lady lived alone in old house on slope.*

Figure 3: *The living landscape of the community.*

4. Reinterpreting Community Histories Through Local Collecting and Storytelling

In Taiwan, due to the special social-political background, when people talked about the immigration issue, they paid more attention to political immigration, the so-called native people and people from other provinces (the mainlanders) are an important distinction.

The Kuomintang government began to rule Taiwan in the 1950s. In the early days, it was unfamiliar with this land, which led to the tragedy of the February 28 White Terror Incident in 1947. Many of the province's elites were killed or detained for long periods of time. After this, the public feared and hated the centralized rule of the Kuomintang, feared and rejected political affairs and did not trust this ruling group, which was mainly composed of people from other provinces. Coupled with this, Taiwanese society was hostile to people from other provinces, causing mutual hatred between them. The social antagonism was quite bad. Meanwhile, because of this historical background, society as a whole has adopted a more negative attitude towards the issue of immigration.

Moreover, in order to ensure the legitimacy of its rule, the Kuomintang government actively promoted Chinese culture through school education and social education systems, stipulating Mandarin as the only official language, suppressing local languages and, at the same, time belittling local culture. This has had three serious effects. On the one hand, the younger generation cannot use their mother tongue, and there is a gap in cultural preservation and inheritance. On the other hand, it elevated the value of the Chinese culture as the only orthodox culture,

excluding and discriminating against other cultures. But the worst part is that other local cultures and histories are mostly ignored.

However, in the 1990s, when martial law was lifted, people began to emphasize with the local identity issue of Taiwanese society; they began to care about the local history and living conditions of various communities in Taiwan. Through the active efforts and initiatives of various grassroots organizations, the government's cultural policies began to concern the preservation and development of local communities and culture. Several cultural policies supported the local communities in unearthing their histories by providing more funding and subsidies to local museums.

Besides this, the strategies for regional revitalization through cultural tourism and place branding also became important policies. That is, the so-called cultural-led regeneration. It was in this context that our team entered the community on the west bank of Keelung Pier in June 2021, more than two years ago.

We were facing an old and dilapidated community developed since the Ching Dynasty and that took on its appearance as we found it mainly during the 1960s–70s. However, the histories of people and settlements were never discovered and told. They talked little about their migration history, let alone their own families' stories and the dialogue between the grand narratives of the whole society and the personal stories.

We would like to invite people to talk more about their lives with their families and the changing images of the city and port. By inviting people to provide their old pictures, we then collected their old stories and memories through these materials.

First, we invited community residents to share their old photos and tell us briefly about the stories in the photos. Then, we gradually put these old photos and text descriptions on Facebook. As the photos were slowly shared on social media, these old photos not only received many likes, but more touchingly, many former or current residents of the area also recalled their own memories because of these images and have also shared their own stories. We were also very surprised that one of the old photos provided by an 80-year-old grandma received more than 1,000 likes. Social media plays a useful role in this process of collecting community memories. The photo collecting lasted about six months, as hundreds of photos were shared during the period. We called this a community online photo exhibition co-created by the community residents.

Figure 4 & 5: *Photos of working landscape 50 years ago collected from the ex-dock workers.*

Second, we then initiated a community story-telling workshop. We invited people who shared photos to tell their own stories through their old photos in the workshops. Many of the residents who shared their old photos were the elderly of the community. They rarely speak in public or express their opinions. This workshop allowed them to express their life history. It was a very touching occasion. To help them overcome any shyness they might feel about talking in public, the old photo storytelling workshop was deliberately held as a New Year social event, because in traditional customs, celebrating the Lunar New Year means happily getting together.

The storytelling workshop let us revisit the life of dock workers in Keelung Port 50 years ago (figures 4 and 5). For example, we unearthed a forgotten school: to train dock workers to successfully handle dock loading and unloading work, the government opened a school specifically for dock workers. During the sharing in the workshop, we even found Uncle Li, who was a student in the first class at the Dockers' School. Mr Li still lives in the community. Everyone calls him Squad Leader Li because he was the squad leader of the dock workers' team back then.

Finally, we displayed the old photos in an old, vacant house in the community, so everyone could see the shared community memories again. Since the exhibitions in museums are becoming increasingly popular, public pedagogical strategies that engage with stories of social struggles faced by surrounding communities (Chipangura and Mataga, 2021:56). This time, the exhibition is open to the public, and we hope to invite more visitors to the community to see these old photos. We are going to look at the conceptualization of this exhibition as a practice of public pedagogy as well as an agent for social change.

5. Closing Remarks

Faced with this old community, the Keelung City Government's local revitalization plan is to actively develop the tourism industry. Because the community is close to the west bank of the dock, which was why dock workers would choose this place to build their own living community, on the top of the small hill, people can overlook the entire Keelung Port. The scenery is very good and has the charm to attract tourists. However, the tourists who visit only go to the top of the mountain to see the scenery and know nothing about the community and the life of the dockworkers. Their arrival only brings noise and garbage, without substantially helping the community, and even distorts local history due to misunderstandings.

During our ongoing field investigation, we found that due to its early development history and location, this community was thought to be on the edge of Keelung City both in terms of geographical and social conditions. Because of this, residents have low self-esteem and no confidence in their own cultural identity. We hoped to find the collective memory of the port city and wish to take the living heritage as the tangible heritage for the local community – not only to discover and cherish the local history, but also to empower them through building their identity.

Through the collection of local memories, we hope that we can awaken the community residents' memories of their own past. Through the process of displaying these objects and memories, we hope that, on the one hand, residents can preserve their own local memories and see how the life histories of these communities constitutes the collective memory of the entire Keelung city and docks. On the other hand, we hope that the community

residents could be proud of their own histories. This is the history of a community of dockworkers that immigrated from all over Taiwan to Keelung. This is also a process of piecing together the post-war immigration memories of the entire island and Keelung city from the perspective of immigration history.

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'When Transnational Migrations and Museum Collections Cross Paths'

An Exploration and Praxis of How the National Taiwan Museum Interprets Centenary Old Collections Collaborating with Contemporary Migration Networks and Engagement

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Abstract

Museum collections represent the missions and identities of museums and thus play a critical function in linking immigration and intercultural understanding in contemporary societies. The collections of museums provide a unique platform to explore the diverse cultural heritage of various communities and their migration experiences. By displaying artefacts, photographs, and other historical documents, museums can tell the stories of immigrants and their contributions to the cultural landscape of their new homes. This essay presents a case study of museum collections, enriched by the assistance of Southeast Asian immigrants who share the exact origin, despite a time distance of a century, in the National Taiwan Museum under the concept of 'Collections make connections'. During the curatorial and collaboration process, the museum promotes intercultural understanding, showcasing and promoting a sense of belonging and respect for diversity. National Taiwan Museum (NTM) has obtained the above practices and data. It curated an exhibition titled 'A Centenary Dialogue: When Transnational Migrants and Museum Collections Cross Paths', which explores the roles of Southeast Asian collections in preserving, displaying and concerning collective stories from immigrants, historical backgrounds, cultural meanings of Southeast Asian (SEA) artefacts, and how these various collections can be used to educate the public and promote understanding of the complexity of the multicultural layers forming the various philosophies representing contemporary SEA immigrants in Taiwanese society.

Keywords: National Taiwan Museum, Collections make Connections, Immigration, Intercultural Understanding

Introduction

National Taiwan Museum (NTM), the oldest museum in Taiwan[1], inaugurated in 1908 to mark the opening of the west coast railway by the Japanese Government, stands as Taiwan's oldest museum. Initially named the Taiwan Governor Museum, the present building was completed in 1915 and today is celebrated as one of Taiwan's most distinguished natural history museums; it plays a crucial role in developing the country's knowledge system and emphasising Taiwan's significance in the region concerning environmental and ethnic diversity. However, Southeast Asian artefacts collected during the 1920s in the Japanese colonial period have limited context and information. It raises questions: Will these collections remain unseen and obscure from the past and into the future? How does the museum provide historical and cultural context for these collections when the original context is missing? Since the 1990s, with the global migration phenomenon, the population from the Southeast Asian (SEA) region in Taiwan has exceeded one million. In response, the NTM initiated the Migration Docent Project in 2015. Through long-term collaboration with SEA migrant communities, it has been discovered that immigrants, bringing with them their native traditions, could provide authentic contexts for museum collections from their regions of origin. This article will explore the collaboration process between the museum and SEA immigrants. We will discuss how they serve as cultural insiders, offering a vivid and authentic interpretation of our century-old museum collections.

Collections from the Southeast Asian Region

In the National Taiwan Museum (NTM), within the anthropology collection section, there are over 2,500 collection items from Southeast Asia, encompassing various aspects of life and religious and performing arts across the broad region of Southeast Asia (SEA). However, these collections need more information and additional research to find historical and cultural context. We can only trace back to Japanese colonial times in Taiwan (1895–1945); the Japanese Government commissioned various groups to visit the Nanyang region[2] for expeditions in the fields of agriculture, anthropology, economics and natural resources; the artefacts came back to Taiwan with the expedition team, then were stored, classified and exhibited in the museum. In the present day, through collaboration with SEA migrant communities and museum researchers, the collections can more accurately reflect their historical context and ethnic diversity in our society. Museum collections act as a bridge between immigration and intercultural understanding, employing artefacts, photographs, and historical documents to narrate the stories of immigrants. The museum's collections not only exhibit the native cultures of diverse SEA migrant communities but also provide insights into the challenges immigrants encounter, thereby promoting empathy, compassion, and intercultural dialogue. By fostering intercultural understanding and appreciating diversity, museums play a crucial role in deepening our understanding of migration experiences and advocating for a more inclusive society.

Museum Collections as Living Heritage

Collections possess life and spirit. For migration communities, seeing the artefacts and cultural objects from their hometown in an overseas National Museum is an overwhelming experience. They immediately assembled and

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1. National Taiwan Museum: www.ntm.gov.tw/en/ →About Us→History.
2. Nanyang Region in the 1920s refers to the contemporary Southeast Asian (SEA) countries, Pacific Island countries and India. The SEA collections research in this article refers to present-day Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia.

wanted to share their knowledge with the museum. They even connected us to their hometown professionals and artists to work with us. The collections become a source of connection to their roots, a bridge between their ancestral traditions and their contemporary lives. As migration communities engage with these collections, they breathe new life into the heritage. A migrant's view of artefacts and cultural objects from their homeland in an overseas museum can evoke deep emotional responses. These artefacts are not just inanimate items; they come with the life and spirit of their culture. Seeing them in a foreign country connects them to their roots, as a tangible link to their ancestors' traditions, stories, and values. This connection is especially poignant in the context of migration, where physical distances from one's homeland can create a sense of loss or disconnection from one's cultural identity. The immediate desire among migrants to share their knowledge and expertise with museums upon encountering these cultural objects is a testament to their nature and DNA. In the collaboration process, we can see that migrants have a natural and inherent inclination to share their cultural knowledge and expertise with museums, especially when encountering cultural objects from their heritage. This eagerness is dynamic and ingrained in their identity, indicating that their desire to contribute and engage with cultural institutions is vital to who they are and how they interact with their new environments. The migrants' attitude reflects a visionary approach to cultural exchange and preservation, demonstrating the deep connection migrants feel towards their heritage. This eagerness to contribute reflects a deep-seated need to ensure the accurate representation and understanding of their culture. By offering insights, narratives, and contextual knowledge, migrants help museum curators and researchers enrich the interpretation and presentation of the collections.

Furthermore, connecting museums with professionals from their hometowns opens avenues for more authentic and comprehensive collaborations, enhancing the museum's ability to present the heritage accurately and vividly. The engagement of migrant communities with heritage collections serves as a bridge between past and present, ancestral traditions, and contemporary lives. This interaction not only preserves the heritage for future generations but also adapts it to new contexts, ensuring its relevance and vitality. As migrants interact with these objects, they contribute their perspectives, integrating their contemporary experiences with traditional knowledge. This ongoing dialogue between the past and the present is essential for the living heritage, allowing it to evolve while maintaining its essence. For (im)migrants, acknowledging their culture in a foreign country, such as Taiwan, is a powerful affirmation of their identity and worth. It signals their cultural heritage is valued and respected, and their voices and contributions are recognised and appreciated. This recognition can significantly impact migrants' sense of belonging and identity within their new communities. It underscores the importance of cultural diversity and the contributions of migrant communities to the societal tapestry of their new homes. The concept of 'Living Heritage' within museum collections, particularly regarding migrants, highlights a profoundly reciprocal relationship between the heritage artefacts and the communities that engage with them. This interaction not only benefits the migrant communities by providing a tangible link to their cultural roots and traditions but also offers significant advantages to the receiving states and cities. The presence and recognition of migrant heritage within museums are crucial in enriching the cultural landscape, fostering social cohesion, and promoting multicultural understanding. Museum collections that include artefacts and cultural objects from diverse backgrounds contribute to a richer, more diverse cultural landscape in the receiving states and cities. By showcasing a wide range of cultural traditions and histories, museums become spaces where the cultural expressions of various cultures are valued and celebrated. This diversity in museum collections helps to reflect the multicultural reality of contemporary societies, offering all visitors – regardless of their background – an opportunity to explore and appreciate the complexity and richness of human cultures. Incorporating migrants'

living heritage into museum collections and exhibitions can play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion. By highlighting the cultural contributions of migrant communities, museums can help break down barriers and build bridges between different cultural groups within the society. This recognition helps counter stereotypes and prejudices, promoting a more inclusive and cohesive community where differences are tolerated and celebrated. When migrants see their cultures represented and their contributions acknowledged, it facilitates a sense of belonging and participation in their new homes' social and cultural life. Museums that actively engage with migrant communities to showcase their living heritage serve as vital platforms for multicultural education and understanding. Through exhibitions, educational programs, and interactive experiences, visitors can gain insights into different cultures' histories, values, and traditions. This exposure is essential for cultivating empathy and understanding among people from diverse backgrounds. It helps to dismantle misconceptions and fosters a more informed and respectful dialogue between cultures. For receiving states and cities, this educational role of museums contributes to building more harmonious and integrated societies.

Southeast Asian (Im)migration in Taiwan

Under the globalisation and the objectives of contemporary museum missions, it is essential to recognise that migrants are not merely newcomers to our society, but individuals entitled to the same human rights as every other member[3]. This perspective is the cornerstone of our commitment to inclusivity and respect for all individuals, regardless of origin. In the early 1980s, Taiwan began experiencing an influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia (SEA), encountering initial resistance due to unfamiliarity with SEA cultures. Over time, the expanding SEA communities around key urban areas and their neighbourhoods indicate a notable cultural shift.

Taiwan has gradually embraced and promoted SEA cultures and cuisines, leading to a boom in intercultural understanding. This acceptance is partly due to the increasing SEA immigrant population, who share their culture and contribute to the multicultural fabric of vast Taiwanese cities (Yuan 2019). Over the past few decades, Taiwan has become a significant destination for migrants from Southeast Asia, including workers, spouses through marriage to Taiwanese citizens, and students. This migration has been driven by various factors, including economic opportunities in Taiwan, educational prospects, and family reunification. These communities from the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand contribute to Taiwan's cultural diversity and play a vital role in its socio-economic development. Recognising the importance of cultural diversity and the contributions of migrant communities to Taiwanese society, the National Taiwan Museum has been actively working to include migrants in its regular events and programmes. This approach not only celebrates the rich cultural heritage of Southeast Asian countries but also facilitates the integration of migrants into Taiwanese society. Here are some ways NTM includes migration communities based on the themes mentioned:

Language and Accessibility

To ensure inclusivity, the museum offers museum tours in the languages spoken by the migrant communities, such as Tagalog, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Thai. Making the museum more accessible to non-Mandarin speakers helps to break down barriers and makes cultural participation more equitable. Therefore, NTM initiated

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3. Coming from a family that fled China in 1945, I've been deeply influenced by a legacy of striving for fairness and a better life for everyone. Now, in my role as a host within the country that embraced us, I consider it crucial to adopt a mindset of inclusivity and thorough understanding in addressing migration matters.

the Immigration Docent Project in 2015, having immigrant to give museum tours in their native languages (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Vietnamese tour in NTM. Photo by author.*

1. Community Engagement

NTM reaches out to engage with migrant communities, inviting them to participate in museum events as collaborators and contributors. This could include art workshops, storytelling sessions, and cultural festivals where migrants are given the spotlight to share their traditions and skills (Figure 2, Figure 2-1, Figure 2-2. Photos by author).

Figure 2: *Indonesian migrants hosted a 'Batik and Sonkget Festival' in NTM; the photo shows the discussions of the working team after the event finished. Photo by author*.

Figure 2-1

Figure 2-2

2. Collaborative Projects

These projects focus on cultural preservation, research, and the co-creation of exhibitions that highlight the dynamic nature of cultural heritage and its role in contemporary society. As shown in Figure 3, we invited a migrant worker, the person holding a camera, who is from the same region as the flat wooden puppets collections to check and document the presence of the collections for future discussions.

Figure 3

3. Exhibitions and Related Cultural Events

NTM has hosted exhibitions and cultural events that showcase the traditions, arts, and crafts of Southeast Asian cultures. These events serve as a platform for cultural exchange, allowing Taiwanese people and other visitors to learn about the diverse cultures of Southeast Asia (Figure 4, Figure 4-1 and Figure 4-2). They also provide an opportunity for migrants to share their heritage and stories, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

Figure 4: *A guided tour of the exhibition hosted by an Indonesian immigrant in Chinese to Taiwanese visitors. Photo by author.*

Figure 4-1: *Students from the Music Department of National Taiwan University collaborated with traditional dance artists who performed in NTM. They hosted a workshop for audiences to experience playing the Balinese Gamelan. Photo by author.*

Figure 4-2: *SA Malaysian artist hosts a workshop on how to make a traditional Angklung, a traditional Southeast Asian bamboo musical instrument. Photo by author.*

Museum Collections Make Connections with Migrants in NTM

In responding to the ICOM[4] International Museum Day (IMD) theme 'Museum Collections Make Connections' in 2014, 'Museums for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' in 2018 and 'Hyperconnected Museums: New Approaches, New Publics' in 2019, the active inclusion of Southeast Asian migration communities in the regular events of

4. ICOM, International Museum Day. www.icom.museum

NTM symbolises a commitment to cultural diversity and the recognition of the valuable contributions, education and research these communities make to Taiwanese society. Through exhibitions, educational programmes, and community engagement initiatives, the museum not only enriches the cultural landscape of Taiwan but also supports the integration and visibility of migrant communities. This approach enhances mutual understanding, respect, and appreciation among Taiwan's diverse population, promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society.

To further enhance the mutual integration, NTM presents the SEA collections and artefacts to all the SEA migration communities and invites them to join the interpretation work and be the narrators of migrations' identity (Yuan 2022). For migration communities, seeing the artefacts and cultural objects from their hometown in an overseas national museum is an overwhelming experience. They immediately assembled and wanted to share their knowledge with the museum. They even assisted in connecting to their hometown professionals to work with the museum. The collections become a source of connection to their roots, a bridge between their ancestral traditions and the channel to elaborate their contemporary lives. As migration communities engage with these collections, they breathe new life into the heritage. At the same time, the migrants feel their cultures have been valued, and their voices have been heard and appreciated here in Taiwan.

Here are a couple of examples of what we did for the exhibition. The first one is in regards to the antique national attire from the Philippines during Spanish colonial times in the museum collections. They are Barong Tagalog, traditionally made from pineapple and banana fibres. The collections represent colonial oppression in history. After 1945 and being an independent country, Filipinos take pride in Barong Tagalog showing their national identities. We invited a contemporary fashion artist, a Filipino immigrant based in Taiwan, to make the modern Barong Tagalog style in response to and connecting with the antique ones in NTM (Figure 5). The beautiful and stylish modern Barong Tagalog (Figure 5-1) aroused the visitors' interest, both in the attire and the history of the Philippines. The purpose of intercultural dialogue is to initiate.
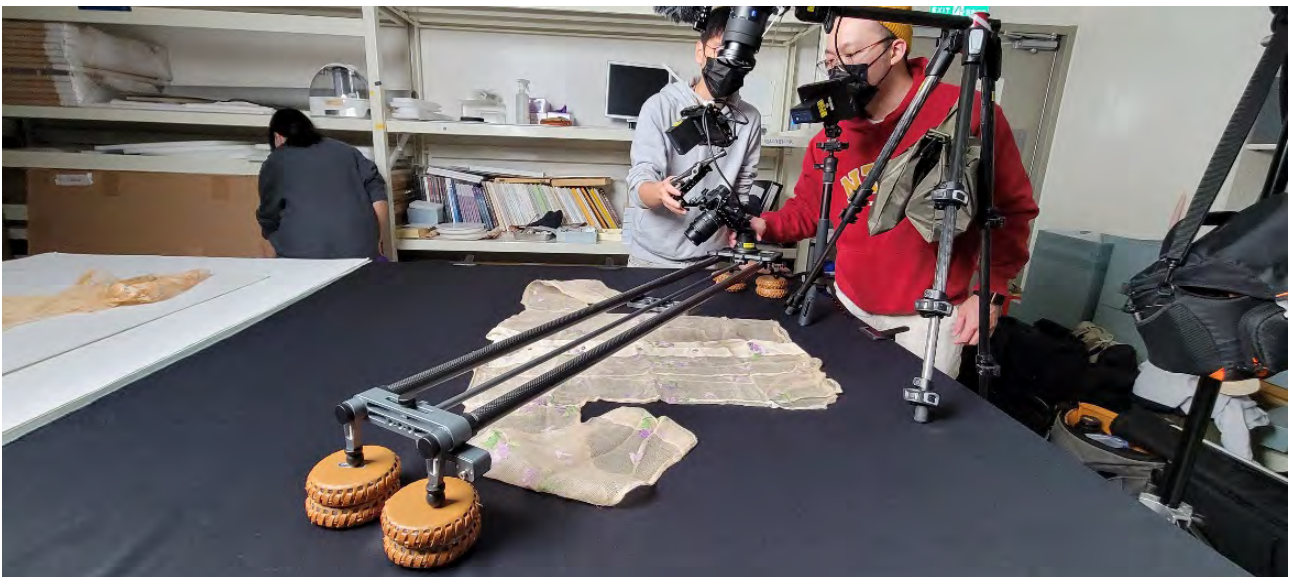

Figure 5: *The curatorial team was filming the traditional Filipino attire collection for documentary and further interviewing.*

Figure 5-1: *Museum Collections vs Modern Design of Barong Tagalog from the Philippines. Photo by author.*

Another case is discovering cultural insiders to assist in explaining the Wayang Klitik of East Java, Indonesia. The is a multi-step process that enables museum researchers to deepen our understanding of these collections and gain accurate, culturally rich information from the cultural insiders, and most of whom are now working in Taiwan as migrant workers.

Figure 5-2: *Interviewing an Indonesian migrant worker for the exploration of museum collections from his hometown.*

Finding the connections between collections and contemporary migration communities was blessed and fascinating, even enhancing the concept that the collections are living heritages. To achieve the purposes, here is an overview of the process:

1. Identifying Cultural Insiders

(1) The initial step involves identifying individuals who share the same cultural heritage as the museum's collections. Specifically, to locate cultural insiders knowledgeable about *Wayang Klitik* (a traditional East Javanese art form involving flat wooden puppets), museum researchers aim to identify East Javanese migrant workers in the vicinity or within the same country, presenting them with images of the Wayang Klitik artefacts. This process can take up to a year, as evidenced by the discovery of Mr Budi[5] (referenced in Figure 5-1).

(2) Initial Contact: After pinpointing potential cultural insiders, the next step for researchers is to initiate contact to confirm these individuals' understanding of and connection to the Wayang Klitik tradition. They also connect with experts in East Java, including artists, cultural historians, and practitioners engaged in the craft and performance of Wayang Klitik. Upon meeting Mr Budi from Kediri, East Java, and showing him the photographs, his emotional response indicated a deep personal connection to the tradition, revealing that he was raised watching these performances and that his best friend is a fifth generation Dalang (puppeteer) in this traditional art form.

2. Preliminary Information Gathering

Early conversations, possibly informal and semi-structured interviews with migrant communities, even a random conversation, would help researchers assess these cultural insiders' depth of knowledge and perspectives. These discussions can take place in person or via digital communication platforms. For researchers, background knowledge related to Southeast Asian culture and languages is crucial. With the overall understanding and knowledge system, there is a way to start a proper conversation to gather information.

3. Conducting Interviews

(1) Online Interviews with Professionals: In the following years, the work of interviews focusing on specific aspects including history, production, and cultural significance of collections. To complement the anecdotal and personal perspectives of cultural insiders with professional insights, furthermore, to produce a documentary clip to preserve the collaboration process.

(2) Visit and Engagement: Cultural insiders would be invited to view the collection, providing an opportunity for them to directly share their insights on the artefacts in front of them. This could include pointing out details, discussing traditional stories depicted by the puppets, and explaining the cultural context.

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5. Mr Budi, an Indonesian migrant worker in Taiwan, has already finished his working contract there and returned to Indonesia.

4. Documentation and Follow-Up

(1) Recording Insights: Researchers would document the insights shared by both the cultural insiders and professionals. This could involve taking notes, recording discussions (with permission), and collecting any supplementary materials provided by the participants.

(2) Analysis and Integration: The collected information would then be analysed to integrate these insights into museum exhibits, educational materials, and possibly digital archives. It might include updating exhibit labels, creating more engaging and informative displays, and developing online content high-lighting the artefacts' cultural significance.

(3) Acknowledgment and Continued Collaboration: Finally, the museum will acknowledge the contributions of the cultural insiders and professionals in the exhibition acknowledgment section to establish ongoing relationships for future consultations and collaborations. The documentary clips can be seen by scanning the following QR Code, including the Online VR version of the exhibition (Figure 6).

This process not only enriches the museum's collection with authentic insights but also fosters a collaborative relationship between the museum and the cultural communities it seeks to represent, ensuring respectful and accurate representation of cultural heritage. Most importantly, the collaboration should be able to a sustainable relationship among museum and various migration communities.

Advantages, Challenges and Conclusion

Museum collaborations with contemporary migrant communities can enrich museum collections' interpretations, offering a more comprehensive cultural narrative. Involving migrants in interpreting collections fosters greater community engagement and a sense of belonging among diverse groups.

However, overcoming language barriers to ensure effective communication and understanding between museums and migrant communities can be difficult. Thus, the Immigrant Docent Project in NTM became the most important mediator for bridging the gap of mutual understanding. Meanwhile, navigating cultural sensitivities and avoiding misrepresentation or oversimplification of complex cultural artefacts and traditions require careful attention and further research in advance. This exploration emphasises the dynamic potential of museums as spaces for fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding through the lens of migration and heritage.

Overall, the interaction between migrant communities and heritage collections in museums is a dynamic and transformative process. It not only ensures the preservation and revitalisation of cultural heritage but also fosters

inclusivity, respect and understanding across cultures. By viewing one century-old cultural heritage as a living entity that encompasses the experiences, memories, and identities of people, museums can play a crucial role in building bridges between cultures and generations, making them a centre for cultural exchange and mutual appreciation in an increasingly globalised world.

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Collecting for Whom?
Anti-Colonial Community-Based
and Community-Centred Museum
Methodologies

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Abstract

This paper shares community-based and community-centred collecting practices through a case study of South Asian Canadian community heritage work between the Royal British Columbia Museum & Archives (RBCM) in Victoria, Canada and the South Asian Studies Institute (SASI) at the University of the Fraser Valley. It provides an overview of divergent collecting practices based on community needs and aspirations, and an analysis of how such practices define museums' social roles and responsibilities. It calls for anti-colonial practices in the collective efforts towards diversity, sustainability, access and inclusion within new culturally sensitive and nuanced frameworks and approaches with, by and for diverse communities to work towards our equitable future together.

This paper shares community-based and community-centred collecting practices through a case study of South Asian Canadian community heritage work between the Royal British Columbia Museum & Archives (RBCM) in Victoria, Canada and the South Asian Studies Institute (SASI) at the University of the Fraser Valley. This case study reveals the constantly evolving possibilities in museum work that 'researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage', per the new definition of museums by the International Council of Museums (International Council of Museums, 2022). Working with the living heritages of previously marginalized communities entails working with their evolving needs and relationships, with cultural agility and sensitivities. Based on this principle, the RBCM-SASI partnership has continued to evolve over a decade, in service of the community in preserving its heritage.

The act of collecting in this case study speaks to the evolving social role of the museum and archives today. Specifically, contemporary collecting institutions need to examine the existing practices, and to explore new culturally agile and flexible practices that inform new, evolving definitions and processes of collecting with, for, and by the communities. This essay starts with the theoretical context and an overview of the partnership that has informed a wide range of community-centred collecting practices. Through different phases of the RBCM-SASI partnership, collections have been established in the museums and archives, in situ within the communities and families, and in other forms including unconventional travelling exhibitions. This work addresses the transformative social functions that a museum can serve to safeguard marginalized community heritage for future generations and create accessibility for the current generation in ways that 'foster diversity and sustainability'. Working towards community-centred anti-colonial frameworks, our community network grew through the leadership of Dr. Satwinder Bains at the SASI at UFV, and advisory committees led by Dr. Balbir Gurm and Mo Dhaliwal, and numerous GLAM and community partners. As the author of this paper, I wish to recognize our shared learnings and continued growth.

Historical, Institutional and Theoretical Contexts

The land that we know today as the Province of British Columbia (BC) has been Indigenous lands since time immemorial, and has been a major contact zone between Asia Pacific and North America. Immigrants from South Asia started arriving in larger numbers from the beginning of the twentieth century. They were subjected to discriminatory legal barriers and other forms of racism. Today, Canadians of diverse South Asian descent make up one of the largest visible minority groups in Canada.[1] Despite their long history here and population growth, however, this community history was sparsely documented in Canada. For example, the Royal BC Museum as the provincial museum has a mandate to collect, preserve and share the history of the province. The museum's so-called 'modern history' collections were mainly assembled in the 1970s and reflected the dominant society of the twentieth century in BC. Like many institutions in former colonies across continents, the collections comprise mainly items representing the British Canadian middle class (Roy 2018).

Globally, in response to such cross-continental practices, the manifesto of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies 'invite[s] the active participation of people and communities who to date have been marginalised in the creation and management of heritage' (Smith 2012: 534). This call for a global paradigm shift in museum knowledge production and distribution, based upon the reckoning of collecting biases across the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality and other identifiers, urges those of us in the sector to work for transitions from power

and authority to more holistic models of inclusion. To research, preserve and share community perspectives through sound collecting practices by working with complex histories of, by, with and for communities, arts, culture and heritage are all important pillars to bring different energies and synergies for the paradigm shift. The RBCM's work with the South Asian Canadian communities in the province is integral to its turn towards the paradigm shift.

This attempted turn, albeit its inclusive intentions, is embedded within colonial institutions built upon long histories of imperialism, and therefore is not a simple one. Institutional work on and with community heritage could be fraught with issues as a result of colonial legacies. For instance, institutions traditionally relied upon knowledge experts, whose authority was based upon academic 'disciplinary power' (Gordon-Walker 2016: 30; Bennett 2006: 59), established without community knowledge. Such disciplinary powers served to regulate or homogenize the cultural communities within a nation state and to impose institutional limits to understanding diverse communities. Such work thereby informed feel-good construction with authorized institutional discourses (Smith 2006), 'celebratory' minority heritage (Dicks 1999; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998), and 'multicultural nationalism' (Harrison 2010; Gordon-Walker 2016). This type of heritage-making discourse reinforces the hidden assumption of a dichotomy between a majority national culture and various cultural minorities, rendering deeper structural and social inequalities (Cheng 2013; Ashley 2013) and re-inscribing inequalities through expressions of cultural differences and mechanisms inherent to colonial practices.

Building upon this critical understanding of these potential pitfalls and complexities of heritage work, anti-colonial museum practices of 'foster[ing] diversity and sustainability' (ICOM 2022) require experimentation with possibilities of community-led and community-museum co-developed work models (Chung and Bains 2000). Central to our efforts of breaking away from these colonial practices towards long-term community-led museum work are truthful and mindful dialogues and exchanges. Truth-telling is the first step to challenge the long history of colonialism (ANTAR 2023). Lasting colonial legacies can manifest through institutional racism, in forms such as tokenism and inequalities of power between institutions and communities. This anti-colonial paradigm shift is instrumental in redefining museums' social role and responsibility for social justice for our time.

Diverse Collecting Practices for Diversity and Sustainability

This case study focuses on the diverse collecting practices of the Punjabi Canadian Legacy Project (PCLP) (2013–2019) and South Asian Canadian Legacy Project (SACLP) (2020–2023) through the RBCM-SASI partnership (Chung and Bains 2020). SASI, as a research centre that started with and was built by community work and support, has guided these two projects in partnership with the RBCM towards paradigm shifting community practices over the last decade. This case study reveals the fundamental need for the creation of dialogue spaces that bridge within and beyond institutional walls at this particular historical juncture of reckoning for decolonization. In many cases, tangible and intangible heritage and culturally specific knowledge have to be preserved and collected integrally for proper contextualization. In addition, community knowledges in their diverse forms have to be considered within specific cultural contexts in their full complexity. In this work, relationship- and trust-building are requirements preceding any consultations about collecting and other museum practices. The SASI came into the partnership with an established foundation of community relationship and trust, and with leadership for RBCM to embark upon the journey with this previously marginalized community.

For both partners, the aim of the PCLP was to work with Punjabi Canadian communities in the context of intercultural community connections in BC to explore, preserve and share the community-identified heritage and history. For museums, truly community-led and community-responsive work and successful relationship building should be in line with the long-term goals and aspirations of the community, built with community protocols, and should support long-standing relationship building (Canadian Museum Association 2022). In the initial stage, we experimented with the ways to extend partnership networks, and gathered community ideas and perspectives to understand their goals and aspirations through different kinds of engagements and consultation practices. We consulted with potential partners first in 2013, then began a collaboration on an oral history collection in 2014, and started the community advisory committee in 2015. With the leadership from this community advisory, the two institutional partners supported the unfolding of the two different phases of the project.

The PCLP community advisory first led a gallery intervention event through which nearly 200 community participants came from the lower mainland and Vancouver Island to take over the RBCM permanent gallery spaces. These galleries reflected the 1970s museum narratives with predominantly white history contrasted without much presence of other contemporary living communities. Taking over the gallery, Punjabi Canadian community members inserted their presence through images and stories where they were previously absent in the provincial institution. A kiosk was installed in the logging exhibit that shared community voices and experiences documented in the new oral history collections. Following this gallery takeover, the advisory committee, through extended networks, guided the RBCM and SASI to identify seven major regions with deep community roots around the Province of BC, and asked the partners to meet the communities where they were. With the advisors we completed two rounds of province-wide community consultations and workshops which reached over 1,100 leaders, memory institution practitioners and community participants in 2015–2016 and 2016–2017.

Figure 1: *2015 RBCM Gallery Intervention Event, image courtesy RBCM.*

This community-led process grew organically and led to a wide range of collections through communities' self-definition of collective heritage, and self-identification of important themes, cultural belongings and stories to be preserved for current and future generations. First of all, during the first round of community visits and workshops in 2015–2016, some expressed that this was the first time they realized that their stories matter. This realization was not always common among the first-generation immigrants in diaspora. Others were ready and eager to share family histories and collections. Their collective aspirations prompted the partners to apply for a grant to plan the second round of community visits, this time with a designated community specialist to stay behind and collect oral histories and take professional photographs and inventories of community and family belongings, as a reference for future potential loans for exhibits and other educational purposes.

Figure 2: *Home interview with Buncy and Raj Pagely, Sidney, BC, 17 January 2018, image courtesy Darren McDonald/UFV.*

Throughout this journey, the collections of stories helped connect people and places through community activities in the mid- and second half of the twentieth century. For instance, berry picking would see Punjabi Canadian communities from different regions in the province gather in the Fraser Valley in the summer. People opened their homes to accommodate the seasonal helpers in the peak summer berry months. In addition to oral histories, we received consent and collected information on community and family belongings, documented with photos and descriptions, and the collections stayed in-situ with the families. In a follow-up visit, for instance, a community leader wished to donate her father's bequeathed items to the museum, but also recognized her daughter was not ready to part with the items. Leaving collections in-situ has been a standard practice with many of these diasporic families and communities, because for many family members in the first, second, or later

generations, after spending much of their lives creating a new life in a new land, they have time yet to consider their legacy and heritage making. Unless a family expressed a strong wish to donate and part with their family belongings, per community visit protocol, we as practitioners from collecting institutions did not put forward any request for any family to give up their belonging for a museum collection. Family and community collections in-situ in these cases are most meaningful within their original context.

The two rounds of province-wide community workshops, visits, and oral history-collecting from 2015–2017 worked towards building consensus on the next phase of community heritage initiatives (SASI SACLP 2023). This community building work subsequently brought the communities together and resulted in the development and delivery of the South Asian Canadian Legacy Project – a community-led and community-centred multi-project initiative with a digital archive, k-12 curriculum development with the BC Ministry of Education, public and academic publications, historical sites designations and programme development and a travelling exhibit. The cumulative inventory of collections and stories from PCLP and SACLP work has expressed the community aspirations, and identified the need to establish platforms that support ongoing unconventional collecting practices. The initiatives have been designed to continue community collecting with, for and by the communities to serve the joint community and institutional goals of heritage research, preservation, and sharing.
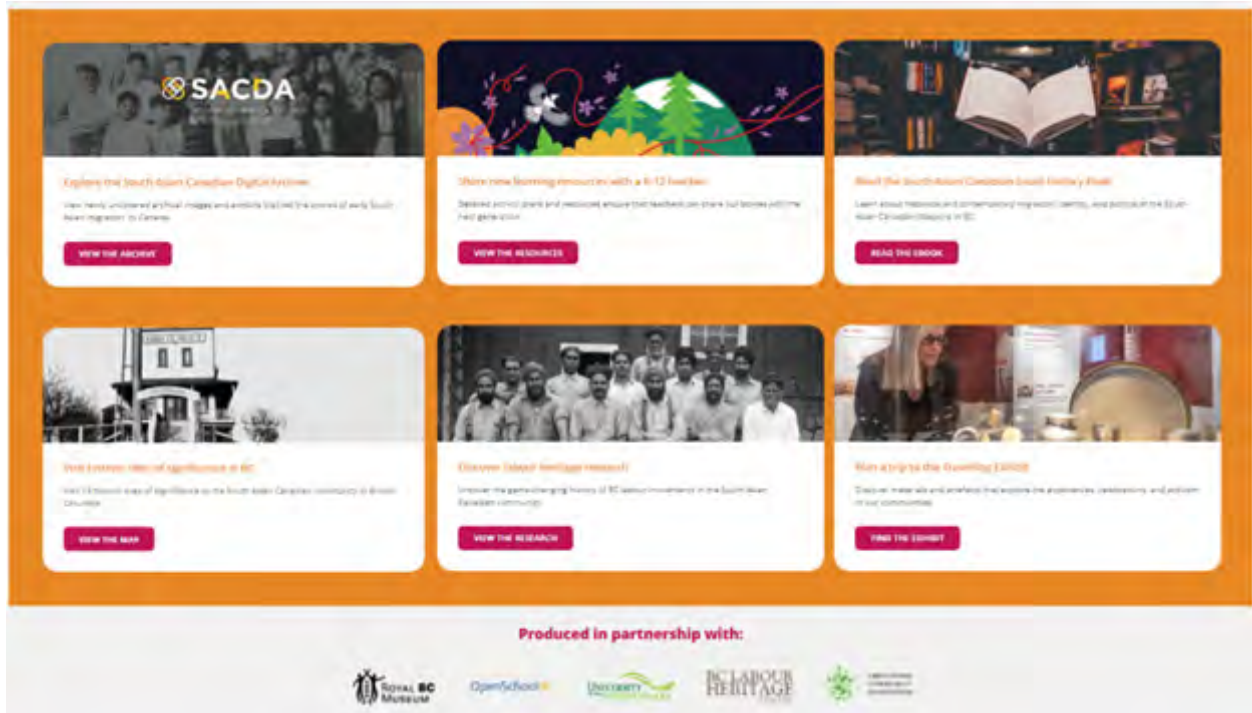

Figure 3: *South Asian Canadian Legacy Project: 6 Initiatives, image courtesy SASI at UFV.*

Among the six initiatives, the most notable collecting platforms are the mutually reinforcing, constantly growing South Asian Canadian Digital Archive (SACDA) and the *Haq & History* travelling exhibition. Both are growing with the communities' needs and wishes to share their stories and create access with the world through oral histories, images and belongings, even while the collections and copyrights remain with the families or regional institutions that house them. SACDA, based at SASI, builds upon the long-term community network and heritage research to identify and digitize communities' archival records, and has encouraged and facilitated access to these community and family histories in monumental ways.

Another companion initiative, the travelling exhibition *Haq & History*, developed with the themes and stories emerging from the two rounds of provincial community visits and workshops, has taken on a new life of collecting in a completely different format. 'Haq' means rights in Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi. Advisory Committee Vice Chair Mo Dhaliwal named this work *Haq & History* to claim the communities' rights and rightful place in history. With its core exhibition components covering the themes central to the complex immigrant communities from Trans-Pacific voyages to aspects of community lives, *Haq & History* is designed to reciprocate with the regional communities where the stories and perspectives came from. It was very important to the institutional partners that we not only learn from the local communities, but also to return the favours of their sharing. This exhibit is designed to travel to each of the participant communities with grants for locals to contribute additional panels. The panel design facilitates regional expressions of themes and stories that are important to them. In each region, the local communities can use the grant to develop these panels, which can stay behind with the community. Within two to three years, the cumulative community content along with the original content will make the *Haq & History* exhibit a fulsome, large-scale community exhibition based on the work of more than a decade in the building and collecting.
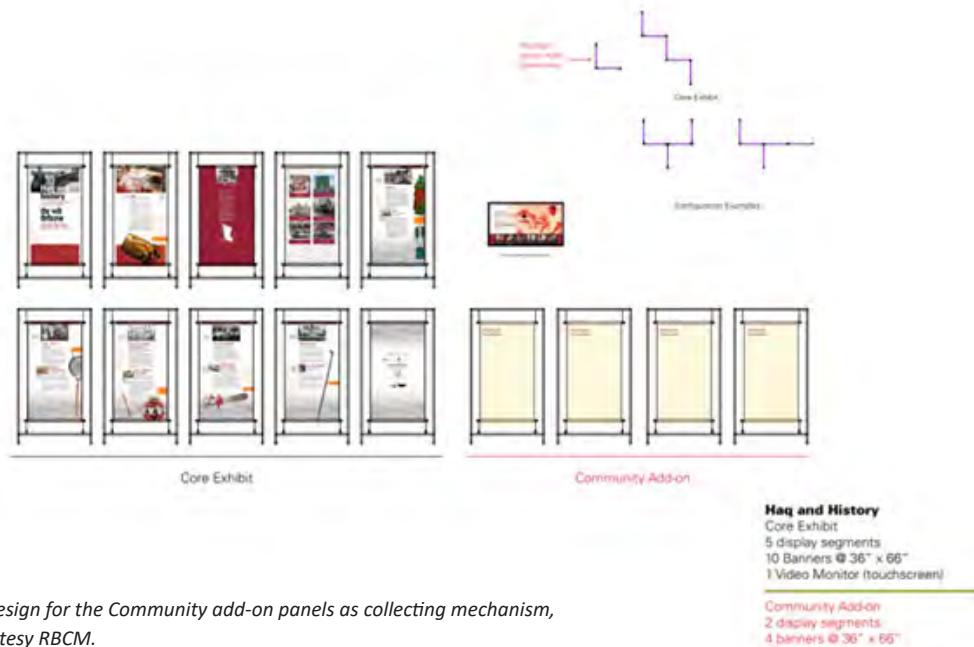

Figure 4: *Design for the Community add-on panels as collecting mechanism, image courtesy RBCM.*

Figure 5:. *Examples of design file for the Community Add-on panels in Surrey, image courtesy RBCM and SASI.*

Conclusion

For many participating community members, the PCLP and SACLP co-developed initiatives that mark important historic landmarks for recognizing their collective history. Looking ahead, we as a society have yet to create an equitable alternative framework to provide all lived experiences their equal share of self-expression and rights. The principles of this work are reciprocity, respect and cultural agility, based on the ICOM 2022 new museum definition's emphasis on diversity, sustainability, access and inclusion. Museums' social role and function in this regard requires us to be constantly and critically reflective of our own museum practices. This work needs to be based on care – care for all living communities and beings within this world, starting with ourselves. Such care serves as the foundation for our care for living collections. To work against the colonial practices of traditional museum collecting, we need to continue to develop new culturally sensitive and nuanced frameworks and approaches with, by and for diverse communities to work towards our equitable future together.

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Endnotes

1. In 1911, out of 5,200 people of Punjabi descent in Canada, 2,292 lived in British Columbia, where the total population was 392,480 (7,207,000 in Canada). See http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1911/Pages/about-census.aspx and http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/847163/1/10797541.pdf. In 1921, there were only 1,016 people of South Asian descent in Canada, and 951 lived in BC. Large-scale South Asian immigration did not begin until the 1970s, but many families were connected to the early twentieth-century pioneers. In 2011, the population of people of South Asian descent was close to 200,000. The total number of South Asian Canadians in Canada in 2016 was 1,374,710, and at 3.91% it became the largest visible minority group in the country, surpassing Chinese Canadians for the first time in that census year. In the 2021 census, self-identified South Asian Canadians (2.6 million people) make up 7.1% of the Canadian population (Government of Canada, 2022).

Biography

Dr. Tzu-I Chung is an award-winning museum practitioner and a cultural and social historian. She has developed and co-led cross-sectoral community heritage legacy projects in extensive partnerships. Her work has informed numerous exhibitions and lectures, k-12 curriculum development, and public and academic programming and publications on the topics of anti-racism, intercultural community histories, and critical heritage studies. She is recognized for her work with immigrant communities on different aspects of transnational migration within the context of historical, cultural and economic exchange between North America and Asia-Pacific. She serves as a peer reviewer for academic journals, a juror for public history prizes and grants, and as a Member on the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board.

Living City, Living Heritage: Co-Creating the Values of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh with Refugees

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Abstract

This article introduces a Participatory Action Research (PAR) case study within the 'We Share World Heritage' project, aiming to shed light on the often-overlooked perspectives of refugees and to co-create the social values of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh. Utilising worldview theory and integrating photovoice as a creative method, the study seeks to contribute to the discourse on heritage inclusion and integration for marginalised communities.

Focused on the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh, the research identifies a gap in interpreting the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The prevailing emphasis on monumental and touristic values overshadows the imperative of restorative integration for refugees and the host community. The study advocates for a more inclusive approach incorporating diverse perspectives through collaboration with participants with refugee backgrounds and Edinburgh World Heritage.

Methodologically, the research unfolds through a co-creating workshop involving diverse participants, drawing on a worldview-oriented heritage education framework. Evaluation results underscore the efficacy of the employed academic framework, revealing heightened participant engagement and empowerment, emphasising the significance of amplifying diverse voices.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of prioritising restorative integration alongside monumental and touristic values. It highlights the potential of diverse refugee perspectives to enrich the living city in the everchanging world. It asserts that the values of WHS are outstanding, but it is humanity that makes it universal.

1. Introduction

A World Heritage Site (WHS) is a meaningful place with Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) that all humans share (Jokilehto, 2008; Labadi, 2013). It is created by and contributes to individuals' worldviews. Therefore, it should provide equal opportunity for everyone to learn from and contribute to its meanings. However, there are gaps in heritage education, particularly concerning the needs of refugees. Heritage education should go beyond the mere provision of information, engaging participants in the process of heritage-making (Harrison, 2012; Waterton & Watson, 2013; Smith, 2015). The roles of refugees living in WHS have been a marginalised and taboo topic. The heterogeneous nature of refugees is often perceived as counter to WHS's cultural coherence and national pride, which can lead to their exclusion from community engagement. Furthermore, refugees face multiple challenges due to social and cultural capital deprivation during conflicts and migration, affecting their participation in WHS's meaning-making.

Therefore, as part of the 'We are Living Heritage, and We Share World Heritage' project, this study aims to explore effective and ethical ways to discover the unheard voices of refugees and unseen values of WHS. It constructs the worldview-oriented heritage education framework based on worldview theory (Kearney, 1984), employs the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach and applies photovoice as the creative method. Then, a co-creating workshop is conducted, driven by three questions: (1) What are the social values of Edinburgh World Heritage? (2) While Edinburgh is a city of contrast in terms of its architectural design and city plan, is it also a city of integration regarding human interaction and culture? If so, what elements construct this living city? (3) How can heritage education help people build a sense of belonging?

This essay begins by contextualising the values of Edinburgh World Heritage in contemporary society. The following describes the plan and process of the action and insights from participants. Subsequently, it evaluates the effectiveness of the methods and reflects on the social values of WHS.

Figure 1: *We are living heritage, and we share world heritage. Source: the author.*

2. Our Action in Edinburgh

The case introduced in this study is based on PAR, which aligns with PAR principles, including democracy, trust building and mutual empowerment, and encompasses four phases in its cycles: Identifying the problems, planning interventions, taking actions and evaluating the outcomes.

2.1.   Context of the Research

This study focuses on Edinburgh, a celebrated city that was inscribed as WHS in 1995 because Edinburgh's New Town for shaping European urban development standards in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Old and New Towns as emblematic of crucial shifts in European urban planning, encapsulating medieval, Enlightenment, and 19th-century revival phases (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2023). It is also a city that accommodates many resettled refugees and has been a welcome hub for Ukraine refugees since 2023 (Morris, Mort and Smith, 2023), as no European city is immune to the consequences of regional wars in a globalised world.

However, the city's fine collections of monuments and architecture juxtapose the medieval old town with the enlightened new eighteen-century city, highlighting the contrasts between imagined nationalism and multicultural individuals. It can be told that inclusivity and community engagement have become more and more critical since Edinburgh World Heritage set the vision to make the WHS a dynamic force that benefits everyone, now and for always (Marwick, 2021, p. 9), and Historic Environment Scotland (HES)'s 'heritage for all' strategy (Historic Environment Scotland, 2022).

To achieve this shared vision, WHS needs support from policy and practice. Therefore, I collaborated with Gaby Laing, World Heritage Engagement Officer of Edinburgh World Heritage, Karen Gordon, the photographer who works closely with Migrant Voice and five participants to conduct a co-creating workshop. Our participants originate from diverse geographical regions, including Ukraine, Etheria and Nigeria. This international representation contributes to the richness of perspectives within our cohort, fostering a cross-cultural exchange of ideas and experiences.

2.2.   Identifying the Problems

This initiative endeavours to address multifaceted issues at various levels. It seeks to counteract biases within the World Heritage system, tackle contemporary challenges related to the integration of refugees and migrants, and confront the lingering impacts of slavery and colonialism. Significant concerns within the context of Edinburgh City include power inequality, a tendency towards homogeneity and instances of exclusivity that shape the interpretation of its history and heritage. Recognising and mitigating these concerns is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of Edinburgh's cultural narrative.

2.3.   Planning Action

The action plan strategically incorporates Worldview Theory and the Photovoice creative method to involve participants actively, empower them in the interpretation process, and dismantle the confines associated with material-centric perspectives, elite-driven narratives, and exclusive nationalistic ideologies.

Photovoice is a community-based research method that utilises photography as a means of empowering

individuals and communities to express their perspectives and promote social change. The method aims to give marginalised communities a voice and actively involve them in the research process. Since its inception, Photovoice has been widely applied in various cultural, social, and health contexts around the world (Wang and Burris, 1997; Sutton-Brown, 2014). It is a desirable approach in participatory refugee research for the following reasons:

The initiative empowers participants to take an active role as autonomous recorders, creators, and interpreters, departing from passive roles. This autonomy allows them to choose discussion topics and share their ideas within their worldviews. The photography process facilitates intercultural dialogue by overcoming language and cultural barriers within and beyond the refugee community, fostering mutual understanding. Moreover, photo-taking and discussions offer valuable insights and creativity, serving as resources to critique biases in traditional heritage discourse. Photovoice acts as an effective tool for social transformation and refugee integration. Participants use their photographic narratives to advocate for their needs with policymakers, community leaders, and the public, aiming to drive significant social change.

The procedure of the workshop was developed following the worldview-oriented heritage education framework, which includes four phases: (1) Welcome diverse worldviews, (2) Explore new information, (3) Connect learning experiences, and (4) Create new values of WHSs.

Figure 2: *The worldview-oriented heritage education framework. Source: the author.*

2.4. Taking Actions

Online Workshop

In October 2024, we conducted both an online and an onsite workshop. At the outset of the online session, participants were encouraged to share a city to which they felt a connection. This could be their place of birth, current residence, or a location significant to them from their migration experiences. Despite frequently being queried about their traumatic experiences during the asylum-seeking process, participants seldom have the

chance to express their perspectives on the city. There are instances where political constraints discourage them from commenting on certain narratives. This activity aims to provide a space for participants to share their worldviews and practise interpreting their experiences.

I briefly highlighted the tangible components of a city, such as paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks, as identified by urban designer Lynch (1992). The unique designs of both the Old and New Towns converge to create the exceptional cityscape of Edinburgh. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge the intangible elements that contribute significantly to shaping the cultural impression of the city.

Gaby introduced the OUV of Edinburgh World Heritage, the iconic skyline, and the two contrasting styles of urban development: the multiple organic layers of medieval Old Town and the enlightened, spacious, ordered elegance of the New Town. Karen shared photography skills and experience and led the discussion around ethical issues in photography.

At the end of the workshop, we set the common goal to identify the social values of Edinburgh City through our lens.

Onsite Workshop

In the onsite workshop, our meeting took place at the offices of Edinburgh World Heritage, providing a fitting setting for our exploration. We embarked on a guided walk through the historical landmarks of the Old Town, including iconic sites like St Giles' Cathedral and George Square. Our journey continued across the Royal Mile, leading us into the New Town. Along the way, we paused to discuss and reflect on The Melville Monument, a grand column with a statue of Henry Dundas in St Andrew Square.

Participants openly shared their experiences of migrating to Scotland throughout the city walk. Our discussions ranged from general city cultural context to personal and emotional experiences. As we passed an old-style bar, it became evident that enjoying drinks in a local pub is a widespread social activity for many Scottish individuals, deeply embedded in cultural norms. However, for refugees, engaging in this seemingly ordinary activity requires courage. Each visit to such a space inevitably prompts the recurring question of 'Where are you from?' and often results in differential treatment from the local people.

Our focus extends beyond individual life experiences to encompass the broader historical context. Upon entering St Andrew Square, our group collectively slowed down, directing our attention to a temporary plaque elucidating controversial aspects of Dundas's legacy. We observed the diverse reactions of onlookers to this historical narrative. During this contemplative moment, Hyab posed a thought-provoking question, challenging the prominence of a figure associated with slavery and empire in the 'New' Town. He queried whether the 'New' Town should be liberated from such dehumanising legacies and those who uphold them. Hyab's question served as a powerful reminder that dominant powers still influence heritage narratives, projecting the past's colonial logic onto the present and future. This inquiry underscores the enduring impact of these narratives, prompting us to grapple with the legacy they leave behind. Engaging refugees in WHS enriches individual lives and contributes to a more inclusive heritage education, fostering transformative change and restoration.

Figure 3: *The Melville Monument and Henry Dundas.*
Source: the author.

In the final stage, participants shared their photos, focusing specifically on capturing the intangible aspects that define a city. Polina emphasised Edinburgh's unique atmosphere, shaped by intangible factors like ambient street noise, diverse smells such as culinary aromas and flower fragrances, and the interplay of lighting. Through his photography, Isaias portrayed the joy of a married couple and people enjoying themselves, expressing a desire for everyone to find a secure place in this vibrant city.

The primary goals of this workshop were to establish a deep connection with both the physical environment and its inhabitants, promote meaningful communication among participants, and generate fresh perspectives by creating new images that encapsulate the essence of Edinburgh City.

2.5.   Evaluation

During the visit and discussion, participants actively participated in meaning-making and shared their identities, memories, historical perspectives, sense of belonging and knowledge interests. This demonstrates that worldview-oriented heritage education farmwork can be employed as an effective method for refugee integration.

As indicated by the feedback received on the reflection sheets, all participants reported a notable level of engagement, with a perfect score of 10 out of 10 among the five respondents. Additionally, a high level of empowerment was reported, garnering a collective rating of 9.5 out of 10.

Based on this case, it became clear that everyone has a voice, but only a few are genuinely heard. Perhaps the heritage sector should focus more on listening rather than speaking.

Figure 4: *We co-create the values of Edinburgh World Heritage. Source: the author.*

3. Findings and Discussion

The PAR case study constitutes an integral facet of the 'We Share World Heritage' project, and its findings and reflections are poised to inform subsequent initiatives within other WHSs. The following encapsulates critical findings derived from this undertaking:

Primarily, this action illuminates the social values of the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh. The historical ambience, diverse assortment of monuments, and urban design collectively evoke optimism, stimulate discourse on decolonisation, and facilitate cultural integration among individuals.

Secondarily, Edinburgh City emerges as a confluence of architectural contrasts, yet it has the potential to become a city characterised by integration.

To counteract inherent biases in heritage interpretation stemming from power inequality, homogeneity and exclusivity, there is a critical imperative to prioritise diversity, inclusion and equity within heritage education. This demands an acknowledgement of multiple truths, an appreciation for diverse worldviews and a commitment to ensuring equitable recognition and distribution of power. Only through the realisation of principles encompassing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) can a World Heritage Site genuinely evolve into a space that fosters a profound sense of belonging.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study illuminates a discrepancy in the current interpretations of the OUV of WHS, particularly evident in Edinburgh City. While significant, the prevailing focus on monumental, national, and tourist values tends to neglect the crucial aspect of restorative integration for both refugees and the host community. Furthermore, the research contends that incorporating diverse perspectives from refugees can enhance the OUV of Edinburgh, with particular emphasis on Criterion II, which calls for the exhibition of an important interchange of human values.

The study advocates that WHS can serve as catalysts for transformative participation, community development, and social change. This is especially significant considering the ongoing nature of the project, where the overarching goal is to achieve heritage inclusion through the integration of refugees, thereby fostering a shared sense of heritage. It reinforces the idea that while a World Heritage Site is undeniably outstanding, its true universality stems from the collective contributions of humanity.

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Owning the Narrative and New Narratives

Argentine Trans Memory Archive[1]

Florencia Croizet

Argentina

Abstract

The Argentine Trans Memory Archive is an independent organization whose goal is to conserve and make visible trans lives and history. Exiled activists who had to escape from Argentina because of police persecution needed to know about each other. Therefore, they created a private Facebook group where they started to share current and old pictures of themselves and their colleagues. In other words, they collected their personal stories. When Pía Baudracco, one of the leaders, died, the activists who were in Buenos Aires initiated the analogue archive with her personal possessions, which were later combined with the digital material to form a single collection. In 2014, when a feminist photographer reached out to the group, they understood that they had succeeded in creating a whole new archive and decided to plan their growth. Therefore, some years later, when the Argentine political context allowed it (same sex marriage, gender identity laws), different shows conceived by the archive were held. First in small and safe places, but soon, bigger exhibits were held in public institutions in Buenos Aires. Later, they were invited to perform in the rest of the country and abroad: exhibits, conferences, workshops and films.

Despite the synergies they have created with different public cultural institutions, the Archive has never wanted to be absorbed by any of them. This decision raises a few questions about contemporary collecting and exhibiting from the perspective of public archives and museums, such as the role they have had in the process of delegitimization of queer lives.

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1. https://archivotrans.ar/index.php/videos

Argentine Context

The Argentine queer collective has been fighting for their rights since the early 1960s, through different organizations, such as the *Frente de Liberación Homosexual* (FLH), *la Comunidad Homosexual Argentina* (CHA) and *la Federación Argentina de lesbianas, gays, bisexuales y trans* (FALGBT), among others. Their main goals were to stop discrimination and the creation of AIDS policies. Later, at the turn of the century, they worked as a lobby for the creation of queer rights legislation. From these efforts, the Sexual Education Law was born, in 2006, which stipulates that children from kindergarten to high school age have the right to comprehensive sex education, inclusive of all genders and queer sexualities. In 2010, the Same Sex Marriage law was passed and two years later, the Gender Identity Law, which allows people to change their gender and names in their personal identification documentation without compulsory hormonization or judicial procedure. What's more, the trans employment quota was recently passed into law, which, as a form of positive discrimination policy, requires that one per cent of public employees are trans or transvestite people. Finally, in 2020, the National Ministry of Women and Diversities was created but then later eliminated in 2024, when the extreme right-wing government won the elections.

Despite this avant-garde legislation, it was common to see cases of violence against queer people reported in the news: from episodes of discrimination in schools to 'corrective' rape of lesbian girls and the murder of trans people. Particularly, trans people have an average life expectancy of 35 years old. In addition, they were and are nowadays often expelled from their homes as teenagers, and they suffer from further discrimination in different areas (formal education, health care, working environments). Because of this situation, many of them end up in prostitution.

The Archive

The Argentine Trans Memory Archive is an independent organization whose goal is to conserve and make visible Argentine trans lives and history. It was created in 2012 with a private Facebook group by exiled activists who had to escape from Argentina because of police persecution and needed to know about each other. Therefore, they created a private group where they started to share current and old pictures of themselves and their colleagues. In other words, they collected their personal stories. The group grew to 1,200 people sharing their memories. Today, the archive comprises more than 15,000 items: audio files, photos, films, letters and press articles, among others.

There were two main founders: Pía Baudracco and Maria Belen Correa, two activists who also started the Argentine Trans Association. In an interview (2018) Correa said: 'This archive was born because we needed it. We needed to know about each other, what had happened with our partners.'

Little by little, this virtual group started to be known among the trans community and more and more people participated in it, sharing their personal photos.

> For most people in our country, democracy was back in 1983, but for us, it was not. We were hit, persecuted, imprisoned, harassed every single day and night (…) Most of us end up working as

prostitutes because nobody wants to give us the opportunity to work. (Correa 2018)

When Pía Baudracco died in 2012, the activists who were in Buenos Aires initiated the analogue archive with her personal belongings, which later joined the digital material. As Correa noted in 2018, 'Unfortunately, she did not live to see the Gender Identity Law for which she had fought so hard.'

In 2014, a cis feminist photographer, Cecilia Estalles, reached out to the group because she was studying the murder of a trans person that occurred in 1992, for a future exhibition she was producing. At that time, they understood that they had accomplished the creation of a whole new archive and decided to plan their growth. In 2018, the archive received a training grant from Ibermemoria Sonora y Audiovisual, which allowed them to start managing the archive in a professional way.

As was previously mentioned, the political context in those years was favourable to the queer community. Therefore, different shows conceived by the archive were held. First, in small and safe places, but sooner, big exhibits were held in public institutions in Buenos Aires. The very first one was in 2015. It was named Pía Baudracco, the Creation of a Leader. It took place in the central office of the *Federación argentina de lesbianas, gays y transexuales* (FALGBT)

A later exhibit was Exile and Carnival, which was shown in many institutions in the country. The title referred to what carnival means for trans people. In words of Correa (2018): 'It was the single moment in the year when we were free to be ourselves out in the street in daylight.' It is important to highlight that when studying the archive, it mainly comprises photos taken indoors, because they were not safe in the streets.

However, it was not until This One is Gone, this One was Killed, the Other One is Dead, held in the Cultural Center Haroldo Conti (2017) when the archive decided to work with public institutions. The harsh title referred to the dynamics of the Facebook group: they would upload a photo and report what had happened to the people pictured. The three options of the title outlined their reality in the 1980s and 1990s: they could have left the country, they could have been killed by the police or they could have died very young because of AIDS.

The show was very well received. So, as the years went by, the archive won visibility in the cultural field and started to receive invitations and recognition from local and foreign institutions (from the United States to Spain and other Latin American countries): conferences, awards, grants, exhibits and workshops. In addition to their exhibits, there are two core projects: the publication of their catalogue (online and print) and a podcast inspired by the lives of some of them, where they could tell listeners in more detail how their lives were back in the 1980s.

Despite the synergies they have created with different public cultural institutions, the archive has never wanted to be absorbed by any of them, no matter the government ruling. This decision raises a few questions about contemporary collecting and exhibiting from the perspective of public archives and museums, such as the role they have had in the process of delegitimization of queer lives. In this sense, trans community memories were not seen as something valuable to preserve, even less to communicate in a museum. That is the reason why the activists themselves were the ones who had to collect their own history. Surely, we could affirm that at the

beginning, the act of preserving was also one of fighting the system that did not want them to exist, that wanted to hide them. It was an activist performance based on their own affection for themselves and their partners. There are cases of couples that, when one partner died, the other had to save their loved one's belongings from the trash because the families did not want to preserve anything that referred to the son's or daughter's queerness (Dewey 2016).

When talking to different activists from the archive and other queer organizations that have acquired heritage by themselves, such as a lesbian project called *Potencia Tortillera*, which includes among their activist efforts the *lesbianization* of part of the National Library press documents, a shared fear is found: the change of the social, legal and political situation. As *Potencia Tortillera* has stated (2018): 'We are extremely cautious in terms of our alliances with the governments ruling.' They do not want to be victims of pink or rainbow washing, and they also fear losing political support when the government changes.

A couple of months ago, the extreme right wing won the presidential elections. Their leader has publicly declared himself against policies that protect and contribute to equality for women and queer people. He has also said he wants to close or privatize public cultural institutions such as museums, theatres, libraries and even schools because they are not 'profitable'. With this example in Argentina, it is at least stubborn to keep on saying that the management of an art or historical museum or archive can be practiced in a neutral, objective way.

In a sense, the avant-garde policies that Argentina had in terms of queer rights, that were translated to the cultural field, are threatened and can now be seen as part of the past. However, cultural practitioners and scholars, feminists and the queer community are prepared to lock into position against those who aim to draw back the rights, platforms and visibility minorities have gained, and to return the country to a time when they were invisible and silent. Only time will tell who will win.

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Biography

Argentine museologist. Specialized in cultural management and education in museums. She has worked in Argentine National Museums since 2014 (Museo Yrurtia and Museo Evita). She has been invited to participate in different museology seminars and conferences abroad. She has published many papers related to queer memories and museums (Museum International, Revista Index, Routes&Routes). She has produced the podcast Museos Inteligentes, available on Spotify.

Change Agent:
The Ainu Collection in Museum Presentations and the Narrating of Cultural Diversity in Japan

Yi-An Chen and Nicolle Bittencourt

Abstract

The inauguration of the Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park in Hokkaido in 2020 marked a significant milestone in Japan's efforts to promote diversity within its cultural narrative. Despite the profound impact of Japanese settler colonialism on the Aboriginal Ainu people and their culture, the Japanese nation-building project since the Meiji Restoration has largely neglected narratives that diverge from its monolithic myth. Museums, historically employed by aristocrats and governments worldwide to propagate ideologies, have played a pivotal role in Japan's nation-building process, emerging alongside the establishment of the Empire to shape its cultural narrative. Over time, the Ainu have been portrayed as exotic 'others', their history reduced to objects of ethnographic study.

Contemporary museums in Japan, aligning with global trends towards diversity and inclusion, have begun to acknowledge Japan's cultural diversity, prompting a re-evaluation of Ainu representation nationwide. Four sites that collect and display an Ainu collection are discussed in this article. In Nibutani, the tribal self-initiated Kayano Museum stands in contrast to the municipal Nibutani Ainu Culture, both drawing their narrative from the material cultural heritage shared by the same community. The Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park in Shiraoi exhibits collections gathered from early ethnographic research within a modern framework intended for cultural diversity and inclusivity. The Hokkaido Museum in Sapporo focuses on academic Ainu research as well as creating an identity narrative for Hokkaido. In downtown Sapporo, the Hokkaido Ainu Cultural Center run by the Ainu Association of Hokkaido tells a story of Ainu resilience in their fight for basic human rights and equality.

These cases demonstrate how the collections amassed by both the Ainu community and the Wajin through centuries of trade and settler colonial interactions, though bearing the scars of the Ainu's exploited history, serve as agents between past narratives and present realities. This article discusses the transformative role of museum collections amidst evolving museum objectives. As Japan embraces cultural diversity, analysing the representation of Ainu collections can inform interpretive practices for a wider array of cultural artefacts, especially for those that bear conflicting historic narratives.

Keywords: Ainu collection, Museum Representation, Cultural Narrative

Introduction

The Ainu are indigenous groups located in northern Japan, roughly in the area of present-day Hokkaido. Ainu culture revolves around the worship of nature spirits, an oral-based language system and a rich material culture that reflects their beliefs and spirituality. Examples include ritual singing, dancing practices and intricate wood carving and embroidery that are deeply intertwined with Ainu daily life. Despite discussions often framing the Ainu as a traditional indigenous group, they have endured long-standing discrimination and neglect under the Japanese nation. From a contemporary perspective, efforts to reclaim Ainu identity emphasise their status as a living people who deserve respect for their lands, language and cultural practices.

The appreciation of Ainu culture promotion in Japan is perplexed by an unresolved structure of discrimination, marginalization, exploitation and expropriation spawned by Japanese settler colonial practices in Hokkaido (Grunow 2019). In addition, criticism has been directed towards the inadequate depth of research into Ainu culture and its knowledge, particularly considering the fast-paced changes in Japan (Cheung 2003). The prolonged debate and setbacks for Japanese society to recognize and respect the presence of the Ainu become evident when examining the extended timeline of recognition legislation. The Ainu were officially acknowledged as an ethnic minority in the country in 1997, and the *Ainu Cultural Promotion Law* primarily focused on the promotion of language and cultural assets.

Years later, the law underwent amendments, and in 2019, the 'Ainu Policy Promotion Act' finally recognized the Ainu as indigenous people in Japan (Tsunemoto 2019). Before the enactment of the new law, the focus for promoting the Ainu culture was the commoditization of the Ainu ethnic culture and so-called ethnic tourism (Hiwasaki 2000: 401). However, recognition by the government does not necessarily lead to appreciation and acceptance in Japanese society. The consequences of a settler colonial structure in Hokkaido, which is based on Wajin superiority and a myth of Japanese homogeneity, remain firmly in place. This rooted structure and the persisting marginalization and discrimination of the Ainu have an unerasable effect on the new identity construction required for this belated inclusion of an ethnic minority, which indicates the nation's ongoing settler colonial practices (Lewallen 2016). However, the history of avoiding discussion about this imposed structure and of focusing more on welfare policies in Ainu's indigenous movements shapes the contemporary discussion about Ainu's indigenous rights and furthering Ainu culture appreciation (Lightfoot 2020: 621).

While museums have been contributing to the ethnic tourism that objectifies the Ainu (Hiwasaki 2000: 401), they are also one of the key sites through which it is possible to understand the past and question ongoing forms of coloniality that foreground present representations. According to Soares and Witcomb (2022), decolonization has multifarious manifestations that vary under various circumstances in different nations. Sogbesan (2022) argues that promoting cultural diversity by incorporating multiple voices in museum representations is an inseparable part of decolonizing practices in museums. This aspect of decolonization through collections inside and outside of museums is a very important debate for understanding the society that supports the museums and their constructions; the Ainu culture and its representation through objects in museums are the chosen example for this article, but similar manifestations can be found in nations around the globe that involve histories of aboriginal groups and colonial experiences.

With provenance research and careful analysis of the histories in collection and display, colonial ideologies and ongoing practices of colonial thinking within museums can be revealed (Phillips: 2022). In this paper, we focus on the ways Ainu collections are displayed in selected areas in Hokkaido in the year 2023, with the objective of further exploring both origins, interpretative potentials and ambiance; other exhibitions about Ainu were not visited due to time and resource limitations. Accordingly, for museums that exhibit Ainu objects, there is a tentative exploration of the network that creates the collection, and their representation is a way to contextualise their settler colonial pasts, and therefore can benefit the required transformation from a monoethnic cultural narrative to a narrative that embraces diversity and adheres to UN Standards. Inspired by Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the following four cases explore the provenance of representations in exhibiting Ainu culture. They demonstrate distinct networks that can be an entry point for exploring the potential of museum collections in facilitating discussions on settler colonialism and contributing to decolonization.Top of FormBottom of Form.

1. The Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum and the Kayano Museum

Nibutani Ainu Takumi no Michi, translated as 'Nibutani Ainu Craftsmanship Town', is a unique model of Japan's ethnic tourism (Hiwasaki 2000: 400). Surrounded by local Ainu craftsmen workshops and supported by tourism-oriented facilities, this village can quickly make a memorable impression on its visitors. The neighbourhood also boasts the most concentrated Ainu population in Japan and is famous for embodying authentic Ainu culture. Two museums in this area specifically exhibit Ainu culture, making an interesting diversion of object-narrative in relation to the different actors involved.

First, the *Nibutani Kayano Sigeru Ainu Museum*, located inside a building similar to other houses around the area, is a private museum that exhibits Ainu culture with an idiosyncratic structure of collection and representation. Established by Kayano Sigeru, the first Ainu Diet Member in Japan and an iconic figure in both the Nibutani area and nationwide, the museum hosts a collection that materializes Kayano's perspective as an Ainu himself and his lifelong advocacy of Ainu culture. The collection comprises Kayano's life experiences and represents the interaction between the Ainu community and other aboriginal communities worldwide.

The collected items include traditional Ainu objects, replicas, both traditional and contemporary Ainu craftworks, souvenirs created by the community for tourists and tokens brought in through exchanges with communities outside Japan. These objects are casually stored in glass cabinets with labels and explanation panels that are randomly situated throughout the exhibition. The layout presents a personalized object narrative resembling a collector's vault. A comparatively newly installed exhibition space on the second floor focuses on the various interactions that Kayano had with indigenous communities and groups worldwide. Part of the lack of coherent labelling, unified explanation panelling, or even struggling to meet an up-to-date exhibition criterion – which is quite common in museums that are not sponsored by the government or have secured sufficient private funds – this exhibition is unique in demonstrating an Ainu collector's personal perspective about his culture and its relation to a wider public.

From the object to the representation of a culture, the Kayano exhibition manifests a living Ainu culture that thrives in their commodified premodern ethnic image, as well as in the people's ontological interaction with the broader indigenous communities. The *Kayano Museum* is unique in highlighting Ainu's contemporary ontological

interactions within and outside Japan, a rare perspective that emphasizes the collection's agency in the Ainu community's initiative in their own cultural narrative.

On the other hand, the *Nibutani Ainu Culture Museum* (NACM) stands out with its modernist architecture, in contrast to the traditional houses around the neighbourhood. This museum houses a large collection of objects donated by Kayano Shigeru, many of which are nationally designated as important tangible folk cultural properties. Established with advice from prominent ethnographic scholars, architects, exhibition designers and curators, this municipal facility is meticulously curated. The collection exhibition is divided into four different zones: the *Ainu* Zone (The Ainu Way of Life), *Kamuy* Zone (Dramas of the Gods), *Mosir* Zone (Blessings of the Earth) and *Morew* Zone (A Tradition of Figurative Art). Additionally, a video stage offering audio performances of the *Yukar* (heroic epic poems) is located in the lobby, centring the museum space. Utilizing more contemporary exhibit techniques, the NACM showcases the collection and depicts a premodern Ainu lifestyle. Specimens of raw materials and utensils displayed in re-enacted environments, along with supplementary multimedia demonstrations, contribute to an ethnographic-centred materiality of Ainu culture.

However, a major difference is apparent when comparing the two exhibitions. They not only demonstrate diverse narratological structures but also different compositions of actors, creating divergent agencies within a collection originally collected by the same person.

The structurally more organized exhibition in the culture museum is based on the Kayano collection but interpreted by Japanese academics specializing in Ainu studies. The narrative, designed to be more audience-friendly and influenced by contemporary ethnographic exhibiting techniques, vividly depicts Ainu culture. However, the accuracy of details and successful reconstruction of a premodern culture may reinforce a sense of otherness, leaving it to viewers to decide whether it strengthens the stigmatized image of the Ainu or generates respect and appreciation.

In contrast, the Kayano exhibition struggles with the need for financial and administrative support. Operating as a privately funded museum, their preservation and representation ideas constantly face inevitable adaptations or deductions. The objects representing the Ainu groups in a worldwide communication and exchange network tell an intriguing story of their initiative in Ainu cultural promotion. However, they are not produced by the Ainu or representing their traditional crafts and therefore do not fit into the ethnographic depiction in the Culture Museum.

It becomes clear that the presence of a narrative division extends from a divergent representation strategy. The creation of an image of an exotic tribal ethnic group or emphasizing culture as a living entity depends on the narrators and how the exhibition is constructed. In Nibutani, a model of the Ainu self-initiated narrative is visible. Nevertheless, when it comes to visibility to the public, the inevitable settler colonial governance remains a preference in delivering an outsider's perspective on the 'exotic' Ainu culture, as introduced in the Culture Museum.

2. The Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park in Hokkaido

Following the legislation enacted in 2019, the *National Ainu Museum* was established within the *Upopoy Cultural Park* in Shiraoi, Hokkaido in 2020. This development was initiated as part of a comprehensive array of initiatives

to foster Ainu culture, as mandated by the 'Act on the Promotion of Measures to Realize a Society in which the Pride of the Ainu People is Respected'. The museum's primary objective was to serve as a comprehensive institution for the preservation and exhibition of Ainu culture and cultural objects. Additionally, it aimed to operate as a prominent cultural hub, facilitating the dissemination and celebration of the diverse heritage and customs of the Ainu community.

The site was not entirely new; prior to undergoing full reconstruction and renovation, it was formerly known as *The Ainu Museum*. However, upon its reopening in 2020, the institution underwent a name change and rebranding to become the National Museum. This transformation was initially intended to align with the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, which were ultimately postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The museum's primary objective was to serve as a prominent showcase of the nation's cultural diversity (Umezawa 2020). The mission of the space is to be the leading institution for promoting Ainu Culture, with a stated goal to foster reverence for the Ainu as an indigenous community in Japan and facilitate the accurate acknowledgment and comprehension of Ainu history and culture on a national and global scale. More importantly, the *Upopoy Cultural Park* embodies the mission to actively contribute to the formation and advancement of contemporary Ainu culture.

To start, the entrance to the permanent exhibition features an interactive screen displaying worldwide multi-ethnic groups alongside the Ainu, with each ethnic group saying 'hello' in their own language. While this may be interpreted as an attempt to diminish existing ethnic discrimination by juxtaposing the Ainu with the international ethnic community, the complex structure within the use of language, nationality and ethnic identity is not addressed. This leaves the juxtaposition of Ainu with Chinese, Korean, German and other ethnic groups inevitably puzzling.

The main exhibition comprises six distinct topics: *Our Language, Our Universe, Our Lives, Our History, Our Work* and *Our Exchange.* Additionally, visitors can access an audio guide using a smartphone application. The Upopoy Complex provides diverse cultural activities, including theatrical presentations, cinematic showcases and a library housing a collection of resources pertaining to the Ainu people.

The clearest attempt to demonstrate appreciation is the incorporation of the Ainu language into the signs and explanation panels all over the cultural site. While using the Japanese *Katakana* system to denote the Ainu language and prioritizing Japanese in second place appears to acknowledge the Ainu as an ontological entity, this denotation also reflects an internalized settler-colonial feature. However, without specifically addressing the fact that Ainu culture is transmitted through oral and material traditions and did not possess a written language system before their assimilation into the Japanese nation, this language presentation lacks the necessary context to make its significance fully comprehensible.

One notable aspect that distinguishes the *National Ainu Museum* exhibition from other cases observed in this paper is its corner dedicated to presenting the Ainu in contemporary society. Focusing on the Ainu's presence within the regular Japanese workforce, everyday objects related to particular specialties showcase the real experiences of Ainu people thriving in modernized Japanese society. This display accentuates the most relatable narrative about the Ainu and their contemporary lives while showcasing their unique Ainu culture.

The cultural park's partnership and collaboration with the Ainu community is also noteworthy. The museum provides a well-managed environment and utilizes advanced facilities to accommodate performances, traditional ceremonies and events related to the Ainu. The National Ainu Museum offers visitors the opportunity to explore the cultural world of the Ainu people. Employing national resources, the museum engages an approach reminiscent of a theme park to present an intriguing and captivating portrayal of Ainu culture. This cultural park distinguishes itself by providing many participatory activities, surpassing other Ainu exhibitions in Japan in terms of direct interaction levels.

However, despite their engagement with the community, the maintenance of facilities and the diverse utilization of multimedia exhibition techniques, most events adhere to a narrative structure reminiscent of conventional ethnographic portrayals. The cultural park conveys an undisturbed utopia and fails to acknowledge the historical context that shapes the current difficulties in advancing the promotion of Ainu culture. The discrepancy between the museum's depiction of Ainu culture and the cultural knowledge transmitted within society is evident in a specific museum area that aims to showcase modern Ainu individuals participating in their daily activities. Highlighting the presence of Ainu in contemporary society brings to light the deep-rooted problems of neglect and discrimination concealed within the museum's narrative.

Ainu objects collected in these museums under a network of settler colonialism hold the key to materially connecting a present-day exhibition to the nation's intricate settler colonial structure in Hokkaido. This structural discrimination against the Ainu has made compensation, retribution or even promotion of equality an ongoing challenge in Japanese society. In the case of the most resourceful exhibition institute in Japan, the Upopoy has the potential to best address the issue, but patronage can become an obstacle to open debate on old colonialisms present in the long history of this community.

3. Hokkaido Museum

The *Hokkaido Museum* is an iconic institution in the Hokkaido region. This government-administered facility integrates academic research and public education, shaping an official image of Hokkaido that encompasses the area's environmental, industrial and cultural history through its exhibitions. Frequently included in Hokkaido's school curriculum, this museum plays a crucial role in shaping both the perception of Hokkaido and the identity of its inhabitants.

The museum features a designated corner for interpreting Ainu culture: *the Culture and Recent History of the Ainu*. Comprising themed topics, it is an exhibition presenting an ambitious narrative aimed at challenging the traditional ethnographic portrayal of Ainu culture. The narrative commences with *the Ainu in Contemporary Society*, where panels adorned with cartoon illustrations narrate a model story of an Ainu family in modern society. Positioning an imagined Ainu boy with a Japanese identity and reimagining his Ainu heritage by recounting his family's memories and traditions, the designated narrator acquaints visitors with an Ainu background to the Japanese world. Employing the same layout as ethnographic displays commonly found elsewhere on Ainu culture, Ainu objects in this narrative serve as supporting materials that provide contemporary perspectives on a premodern culture. They are presented through the same ethnographic lens, showcasing lifestyle, material culture and religious beliefs. Complemented by hands-on facilities and multimedia

explanations, this approach enhances the effectiveness of the lively representation.

Additionally, the museum is home to *The Ainu Culture Research Center*, established in 1994. With a team of researchers and faculty members of Ainu descent and boasting one of the highest concentrations of Ainu scholars, it is not surprising that the *Hokkaido Museum* presents the most innovative exhibition narrative on Ainu culture to date. This narrative addresses the pressing issues of stigmatization and underrepresentation faced by the Ainu community today. Departing from the young protagonist's exploration of family histories, its approach effectively portrays the Ainu as integral members of contemporary Japanese civic life, surpassing traditional narratives similar to mere entries in outdated encyclopaedias. This approach has the potential to evoke empathy and foster connections across a broader spectrum of visitors. Although primarily available only in Japanese, it offers a narrative that encompasses perspectives from both the Ainu community and various potential audiences.

Indeed, despite the shift in perspective, the narrative surrounding the Ainu remains largely unchanged in this representation. The objects displayed, portrayed as tangible embodiments of Ainu memory, are curated without adequate acknowledgment of their settler-colonised history. The ongoing structural objectification and discrimination faced by the Ainu and their culture underscore the depth of their marginalization under settler-colonialism. This entrenched colonial structure, reinforced during Japan's modernisation, has further marginalized minority groups. Addressing this complex issue is challenging and requires a thorough examination of the underlying reasons for Japan's lack of cultural diversity. The Ainu and their culture can be instrumental in advancing Japan's multicultural appreciation. However, this can only occur when the root causes of the nation's cultural homogeneity are fully explored and remedied. Achieving equality and a sense of belonging for the Ainu, whose memories and identities diverge significantly from the majority of the Wajin population, is crucial. Through the representation of cultural artefacts and narratives in museums, the same objects on display, with a renewed narrative, can have the potential to foster a deeper appreciation for Japan's diverse cultural heritage and contribute to a more inclusive society.

4. Hokkaido Ainu Cultural Center

The *Ainu Association of Hokkaido* is a community-initiated organization funded by the municipal government. It maintains a website that provides fundamental knowledge about Ainu culture. Additionally, the association operates a Facebook page that is more active than the website itself, providing updates on events and news.

The small exhibition room, conveniently located in a government building just a short walk from Sapporo train station, showcases various Ainu-related items and the people's resistance movements against various forms of inequality. The exhibition is free of charge, with a pinned location on Google Maps indicating its accessibility to visitors. Despite the outdated interior and other details indicating the need for funding, the exhibition offers a diverse and unique narrative compared to other Ainu exhibitions discussed in this article. It includes a multi-function room decorated in traditional Ainu household interiors for cultural courses, detailed instruction panels about traditional Ainu crafts and materials and a functioning library themed on the history and culture of the Ainu.

The exhibition starts by introducing Ainu culture. It provides insights through sessions displaying objects that

show the trading relationships between the Ainu and various commercial partners, such as the Japanese, Chinese and Russians. The next section of the exhibition shows how the Ainu community changed from ancient times to their current fight for acknowledgment and respect for their land, language and culture. Items like books, old photos, flags and personal belongings of important Ainu figures vividly portray the Ainu indigenous movements.

This concise yet thorough narrative provides a unique perspective that differs significantly from the other exhibitions mentioned in this article. By showcasing the same ethnographic objects in a new narrative, although not flawlessly presented, this exhibition successfully fills the gaps found in most exhibitions about the Ainu. This highlights the importance of tackling the historical barriers that have marginalized the Ainu to grasp Japan's current urgency in fostering cultural diversity. It stresses the significance of listening to and centring Ainu voices in discussions about their culture and history.

Conclusion

Representing and promoting Ainu culture in Japan presents a complex and evolving landscape. Like many postcolonial exhibitions worldwide, this endeavour faces significant challenges in shedding the colonial constructs and ideologies that have historically shaped the collecting and exhibiting of Ainu artefacts. Museums, often the custodians of historical artefacts and narratives, play a pivotal role in cultural decolonization efforts. Recognizing the colonial structures that these exhibiting institutions may preserve in their practices, even long after constitutional changes, is essential (Craggs and Wintle 2016). Drawing inspiration from repatriation and transitional justice movements practiced in other countries, the collected Ainu objects and their network open the window to address the historical injustices inflicted on the Ainu community.

The Nibutani Kayano Sigeru Ainu Museum and the *Hokkaido Ainu Cultural Centre* showcase the Ainu communities' ontological view of themselves, despite the lack of resources. In contrast to the museums in Nibutani, the *Hokkaido Museum*, and the Upopoy complex represent a better-funded image construction infused with a settler's point of view. In these exhibitions, Ainu culture is narrated through an ethnographic lens, emphasizing its uniqueness and exoticness without acknowledging the challenges faced by the Ainu people in striving for coexistence. This approach inadvertently strengthens the image of the Ainu as 'others' compared to the dominant Wajin Japanese. The difference between idiosyncratic and government-directed exhibitions reminds us of the essential elements of the decolonization process. The historical practices of collecting and exhibiting Ainu artefacts, that continued colonial and commercial dominance, are the source of the conflicting narratives.

Dialogues empower individuals, particularly those who are not indigenous, to critically examine the established structures of perception that were previously unquestioned (Varacini 2015: 96). The proactive role of Ainu culture represented in exhibitions emphasizing their indigenous rights movements can be instrumental in addressing the underlying structural challenges and propelling transformative change by bringing the colonial structure, which has long remained concealed or disregarded, into the spotlight of public awareness. Recognizing the historical and structural challenges in interpreting museum collections is essential for fostering inclusivity, diversity and active engagement within the settler colonial past.

With the establishment of national institutions like the Upopoy, we can expect the Ainu representations in Japan to incorporate a wider diversity of existing narratives about the culture in the future. Simply contrasting community narratives with ethnic representation can effectively raise public awareness and stimulate discussions. Museums and cultural institutions play a crucial role in dismantling the entrenched settler colonial constructs that impede the appreciation and recognition of Ainu culture. In doing so, Japan can take a significant step towards embracing diversity and inclusiveness while honouring its indigenous heritage.

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The Way Community Organizations Promote the Preservation of Local Memory: A Case Study of Houdong Miners Museum

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Abstract

This study examines the Houdong Miners Museum in Taiwan as a case study to explore how community organizations can promote the preservation of local memory. The museum was established by a group of retired miners to preserve cultural relics and their memories.

In its early days, the museum relied solely on the meagre pensions of four retired miners to sustain its operations. It wasn't until the Ministry of Labor provided funding through the Diversified Employment Development Program that the museum began to thrive. This subsidy also encouraged the Houdong Miners Museum to utilize the miners' life experiences and the landscape of Houdong Mining as materials, leading to the creation of the 'Miners' Life Memory Roaming in Houdong'. These human-centred narratives have made historical culture more approachable, resulting in widespread popularity and a gradual resurgence of interest in the once-forgotten miner culture on a global scale.

Through these promotions, the miners' culture changed from being forgotten to being valued. Currently, the museum has a strong sense of centripetal force and mission, as well as subsidies, so it has been developing steadily. Through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, this study records the history of the museum's operation, hoping to provide a reference for other similar local cultural museums in Taiwan.

Keywords: Houdong Miners Museum, Local Cultural Museums, Diversified Employment Development Program, Industrial Heritage, Labour Museum

I. Introduction

At the end of Chailiao Road in Ruifang District, Taiwan, there stands a building resembling a sunny house, erected upon the remnants of red brick structures, adjacent to the Ruisan Main Pit. This is the Houdong Miners Museum, established on the site of the abandoned offices of Ruisan Corporation by a group of retired miners. Their mission was to document the history of mining through their own experiences, preserving the memories and stories of miners, and tracing the footsteps of miner history through time.

The outreach efforts of the Houdong Miners Museum extend beyond its physical confines, encompassing the entire Houdong neighbourhood through guided walking tours. Former industrial sites such as the Ruisan Coal Factory, wastewater treatment plant, coal transport bridge, and dormitories, once symbols of industrial prosperity, have now transformed into places of collective memory in everyday life, carrying the legacy of the coal mining era.

In recent years, the influence of the Houdong Miners Museum has spread beyond the local community to external venues such as art galleries, museums, theatres, academic conferences, and even the restoration project of the Benshan Fifth Mine Pit at the New Taipei City Gold Museum. Retired miners, often clad in bright green uniforms, can be seen sharing their stories and engaging in external exchanges, passionately dedicated to preserving the memory of miners. This grassroots effort echoes the pivotal role that Houdong's coal mines played decades ago in fuelling Taiwan's post-war economic and industrial development, sparking ongoing interest and research into this history within Taiwanese society.

It's worth noting that the Houdong Miners Museum is run by retired miners and initially relied solely on their pensions for funding. Stability came with subsidies from the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program. Despite its resemblance to a local cultural institution, the museum operates independently from the Ministry of Culture's 'Museum and Local Cultural Institution Development Program'. This disconnect prompts reflection on the divergence in policy approaches between Taiwan's cultural departments and local institutions. Therefore, this study focuses on the Houdong Miners Museum, documenting its development through participatory observation[1] and semi-structured interviews.[2] The aim is to discuss the challenges encountered in implementing the 'Museum and Local Cultural Institution Development Program' and provide insights and references for similar local cultural institutions.

II. Houdong's Black Gold Years

Since the twentieth century, coal has become one of Taiwan's important fuels, mostly used in industries such as cement, brick kilns, steam trains, or thermal power generation, contributing to the economic development of Taiwan. Houdong became a very important coal mine due to its rich veins and well-developed mining operations. The enormous words '產煤裕國' (meaning 'Coal Produces Prosperity') on the outer wall of the Ruisan Coal Mine

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1. The author participated in three sessions of the Mining Art Season organized by the New Taipei City Gold Museum on 2, 9 and 10 July 2022. The event, titled 'Mountain People Travel Agency – Mountain City Leisure Team', collaborated with the Houdong Miners Museum, following the same routes and paths of memory exploration.
2. On 28 December 2022, the author conducted an on-site interview at the Houdong Miners Museum with Mr Zhou Chaonan. Mr Zhou is one of the founders of the Houdong Miners Museum and, despite the absence of formal organizational bylaws, he oversees the operational decisions of the museum.

symbolize the role this mining area played in supporting Taiwan's post-war economic recovery. From 1960 to 1980, Houdong had over nine hundred households and a population of over six thousand, marking its golden age (Ko 2014). However, this bustling population declined rapidly after the cessation of production by the Ruisan Mining Company in 1990.

Ko Yi-Ching (2014) pointed out that due to the lack of alternative plans for the area and the absence of other associated industries, Houdong faced stagnation in local development but was able to preserve the complete landscape of the mining sites. Facilities such as the power plant, coal transportation tracks, wastewater treatment ponds, and Ruisan coal transportation bridge were all left behind. Although some machinery and facilities no longer exist, overall, the industrial district formed by coal mining remains relatively intact.

In the wake of the mine's closure, local advocates swiftly urged the government to conserve the area's abundant mining heritage. Responding to this call, the Taipei County Government (now the New Taipei City Government) in 1995 earmarked funds for the construction of a coal mining-themed museum. The project saw progress in site selection, land negotiation, architectural design, and exhibition planning. However, due to insufficient funding and other factors, the project was unfortunately abandoned (Liu 2015). The initiative later evolved into an ecological museum, which continued to push forward and officially opened its doors in 2010 as the 'Houdong Coal Mine Museum Park'. Interestingly, Houdong had already gained significant attention as the 'Cat Village' before the museum park's inauguration. This unexpected fame quickly drew the eyes of the county government and the public alike. The cat-themed marketing strategy rapidly took off, becoming a unique characteristic of Houdong's tourism promotion. As a result, the transformation of the mining relics subtly receded into the background (Wang and Kao 2020).

III. Houdong Miners Museum and Miners' Life Memory Roaming

Founder Chou Chao-Nan (周朝南) of the Mining Workers' Museum described the phenomenon of the Cat Village in Houdong as a beautiful mistake, stemming from the decline of the industry and the subsequent migration of the population. As the village grew quiet with the elderly residents finding themselves with little to do, they began to feed the cats. By chance, the story of this cat-loving community in Houdong was picked up by cat enthusiasts, turning Houdong into what is now known as Cat Village. This serves as the opening narrative for the Mining Workers' Museum's exploration of the memories of Houdong's mining history.

The inexplicable bond between cats and Houdong is also reflected in the platforms of the wastewater treatment ponds, where numerous cat houses stand. This mirrors the attitude of the Mining Workers' Museum towards the public sector-operated museum park – a stance of coexistence and collaboration yet marked by a relative detachment and difficulty in participation.

Feeling the need to preserve and narrate the history of mining, four retired miners – Chou Chao-Nan, Ho Ping-Jung (何炳榮), Ko Mao-Lin (柯茂琳) and Chen Ching-Hsiang (陳慶祥) – decided to take matters into their own hands. They leased a vacant office space adjacent to the entrance of the Ruisan mine pit from the Ruisan Mining Company for 17,000 yuan per year, with a five-year lease agreement. The former miners began to refurbish the dilapidated space, and the museum officially opened on 10 August 2019.

The museum collected mining tools, photographs, and historical documents. Chou categorized the collected artefacts by job type and displayed them accordingly. Since the museum's opening, some mining enthusiasts have also donated mining-related artefacts to the museum, enriching its collection. The walls are adorned with reproduced vintage photographs, supplemented with explanatory texts and artefact displays.

Figure 1: *The display of Houdong Miners Museum, the author took the photo on 28 December 2022.*

At first the Houdong Miners Museum was only opened on weekends due to lack of funds and manpower. It wasn't until 2020, when it received funding support from the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program, that it was able to increase operational manpower and hours. To meet the needs of the diversified employment development plan, they launched a tourism project called 'Miners' Life Memory Roaming in Houdong', which was very popular in the Miners Museum. Wang Chih-Hung and Kao Yu-Ting (2020) believe that these measures reflect an intention to use exhibitions to regain respect for miners and recognize the value of their work. Chou also expressed that the establishment of the museum stemmed from retired miners' concerns that the history of mining and the hardships of miners would be forgotten by society and the country. They hoped that through the museum, they could leave behind some traces of this place's history.

Cultural Heritage Sites Serve as Performance Space

The memory tour organized by the Houdong Miners Museum, led by retired miners themselves, allows participants to make a trip in the Houdong area. Most of the tours have been free of charge. Each tour involves at least four volunteers, with one person responsible for explaining, another for handling the microphone, another for showing photos, and another for managing traffic. Every time the retired miners go out, they put on bright green uniforms and enthusiastically share the memories of the miners in an orderly and spirited manner, without hesitation. They lead visitors through the streets of Houdong, contrasting old photographs with present-day landscapes and sharing stories that transform seemingly mundane neighbourhoods into scenes rich with

memories. Since the narratives are largely drawn from the life experiences of miners, they are both touching and captivating, making the tour widely popular since its inception.

Figure 2: *Opening of the Mining Memory Tour, the author took the photo on 2 July 2022.*

The route of the Mining Memory Tour feels like a meticulously designed theatrical production, with the Houdong Miners Museum using the streets and alleys of Houdong as its stage, skilfully presenting captivating stories at every turn. Gaynor Bagnall (2003) suggests that personal and familial memories prompt visitors to engage emotionally with these cultural heritage sites, framing the process as an act of reminiscence. Laurajane Smith (2006), echoing Bagnall's perspective, further elucidates by considering reminiscence as a performance of memory. Through the emotional resonance evoked in this process, viewers can gain a deeper understanding and significance of the history they observe.

The presence of cultural heritage sites is often silent, with their significance and value closely linked to the communities to which they belong (Yin Pao-Ning 2018). As architectural constructs, they serve as vessels of memory, requiring narratives and activities to be shared and constructed with others to become cultural heritage sites. Chou Chao-Nan stated that the Memory Tour aims to connect the past with the present, which is why old photographs are incorporated into the route planning, allowing participants to connect with the past during the tour. Many of these scenes are not typically visited by tourists, and without participating in the guided tours, it is difficult for individuals to deeply understand the history of Houdong and the stories behind these buildings.

There are two reasons for the success of the Mining Memory Tour. Firstly, the stories shared by these volunteer guides are based on their personal life experiences. Chou mentioned, 'Because we are not professional tour guides, we don't have tour guide certificates, but our tours can compete with those of tour guides. Their tours are standardized, but we tell our own stories with our lives. The stories we tell today may be different from those we tell tomorrow, and there may be differences in what you hear from me today compared to next time. Our storytelling is not standardized; it's based on our own experiences, so our storytelling is affirmed by everyone because we tell it with our lives, which is emotional.' Secondly, the mining locations in Houdong have not been significantly destroyed. When the mines closed down, the lack of alternative industries led to a mass exodus of

the local population, resulting in many mining landscapes in Houdong being preserved. The value of this mining settlement has been recognized by Japanese scholars. In 2009, the Taipei Historical Resources Management Association and the Taipei County Social Construction Center jointly organized the 'Houdong Tourism Community Development Local Symposium', inviting scholars from the University of Tokyo and the Cultural Heritage Protection Group of the Omi-Hachiman City Government in Japan to visit Houdong. At the time, a Japanese scholar believed that Houdong's advantage lies in its ability to clearly see the processes of coal mining, transportation and washing within walking distance, making it a unique characteristic (Liu 2015).

Industrial Sites and Labour Sites

In the early 1950s, Western societies witnessed the emergence of 'industrial archaeology', which aimed to study technological evolution. Anything related to past manufacturing methods fell within its scope, marking the initial definition of industrial heritage studies (Chen 2010). In 2006, the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) issued 'The Nizhny Tagil Charter for the Industrial Heritage', defining the scope and value of industrial sites. The 'Taipei Declaration for Asian Industrial Heritage' in 2012 further expanded this definition to include technical, mechanical, and production facilities, architectural structures, and built environments. It's noteworthy that industrial sites symbolize not only the existence of industries but also the close relationship between industry development, people, places and communities (See 2020).

The conservation and development of industrial sites in Taiwan are closely related to the progress of democracy and community building policies after the lifting of martial law, as outlined in the article by Yu Pei-Syuan (2020). Since the promulgation of the 'Cultural Heritage Preservation Act' in Taiwan in 1982, there has been a surge in movements to protect railway industrial sites across the country, such as the Jiji Line, Changhua Roundhouse and Pingxi Line. In 1988, in response to demands from civil cultural heritage preservation groups, the Executive Yuan undertook cultural heritage preservation efforts for several state-owned enterprises. Starting in 2002, the 'Public Vacant Space Survey Project' inventoried vacant spaces, nominating industrial sites such as the Jinguashi village, Alishan Forest Railway and the old Taiwan Railway mountain line as potential UNESCO World Heritage sites. In 2005, the fifth revision of the 'Cultural Heritage Preservation Act' added the category of 'cultural landscapes', including industrial landscapes and hydraulic facilities, into the scope of cultural heritage assets.

As pointed out by Lin Chung-Hsi (2005), the establishment of industrial sites is not easy and requires overcoming various 'awkward' issues such as the recent era, views on technological progress, low architectural features, environmental justice, social justice, economic development, environmental changes, industrial changes and legal adaptation to prevent rapid loss and damage of industrial cultural assets. Furthermore, whether the documents, artefacts, machinery, buildings, settlements, sites, cultural landscapes, natural landscapes, technologies, etc., of an industry can become industrial cultural assets depends not only on their age but also on whether they possess rich cultural significance as industrial sites. For example: Do they represent the development process of the industry? Can they symbolize the characteristics and significance of the industry in a specific era? Do they have significant impact or contribution to society or industry? Also, attention should be paid to aesthetic or industrial values, or to personnel, researchers or administrative artefacts with outstanding contributions to technology. Moreover, the relationship between industry and people's lives and community development should be considered, whether they are sufficient to represent the collective memory of practitioners or nearby residents.

The assessment of these values often cannot be objective or quantifiable, involving issues of identity and rights. Additionally, officially led industrial heritage often focuses on technology or industrial history, making it difficult to see the labour traces of the original industry (See 2020). According to interviews, the Houdong Miners Museum mainly aims to preserve the history of miners and safeguard labour class culture and values. However, neither the former 'Houdong Coal Mine Museum Park' nor the 'Ruisan Coal Mining Dressing Plant 瑞三鑛業整煤廠' opened in September 2022 could meet their expectations.

Figure 3: *The display of Ruisan Coal Mining Dressing Plant, the author took the photo on 28 December 2022.*

IV. The Cross-Border Cultural Governance

While the Houdong Miners Museum takes on the form of a local cultural museum, its operational subsidies do not come from the cultural department but rather from the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program. This is related to the experience of Mao Chen-Fei (毛振飛), a volunteer at the Houdong Miners Museum. Mao, who had been involved in social movements for many years, worked as a miner in his early years and even experienced a carbon monoxide poisoning incident, which gave him a deep appreciation for the hardships of miners. In recent years, Mao has been dedicated to promoting the cultural and historical aspects of mining, often serving as the main guide for memory tours. Feeling the need to speak up for and support those who experienced the hardships of the past, he decided to utilize his experience in social movements to assist old miners in advocating for their rights. He first introduced the media to report on the Miners Museum, coinciding with the election period, which attracted the attention of many representatives and government agencies, generating significant response. Additionally, due to Mao's frequent involvement in social movement activities in the past, many of his former partners in social movements have entered government departments, making it easier for the Miners Museum to understand and access relevant regulations and articles of the Labor Bureau and Ministry of Labor.

However, as Taiwan's former Minister of Culture, Cheng Li-Chung, stated, 'every department is a cultural department'; meaning culture is not solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture. Each department has its own cultural facilities and cultural memories. In this case, the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program has opened a new path for the promotion of culture, which is worth studying and learning from. Below, I will outline the differences between the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program and the Ministry of Culture's Museum and Local Cultural Museum Development Plan, attempting to understand the disparities between the two in policy implementation.

Diversified Employment Development Program

The Ministry of Labor referenced the Third System and Employment Programme of the European Union in 2002, aiming to assist the unemployed in returning to the job market through active labour market policies. It promotes employment cooperation partnerships between civil society organizations and government departments, guiding civil society organizations to propose creative, local, and developmental projects to promote local employment. The programme originated from the reconstruction efforts after the 921 earthquake, focusing on creating public works to provide employment opportunities for reconstruction (Shih 2008). Yin Chin-Chuan and Shih Chen-Kuo (2013) point out that the core spirit of the Diversified Employment Development Program is 'not social assistance, but a form of social investment'. It aims to establish a stable environment through mechanisms that enable people to help themselves and others.

The Diversified Employment Development Program involves civil society organizations submitting employment promotion plans to the sub-bureaus of the Department of Labor Development under the Ministry of Labor. These plans undergo review meetings at the sub-bureaus, where aspects such as organizational capacity, public interest and social value of the project, innovative service content and assistance for vulnerable employment are evaluated (Chan 2018). It's a bottom-up process, with guidance and assistance provided by the public sector. The programme is divided into social and economic types. The former focuses on social welfare, social services, and local industries, mostly proposed by government departments, county and city governments or civil society organizations to enhance social welfare and promote employment. The latter, mostly proposed by the private sector, has prospects for industrial development and provides or promotes employment opportunities for the unemployed (Su 2021).

Taking the Houdong Miners Museum as an example, the trajectory of the museum's growth can be observed through the approved number of employees over the years, as the project requires annual applications. There were three approved employees in 2020, increased to five in 2021, and further increased to six in 2022, including a project manager. In addition, a subsidy scheme also supports the museum paying operating expenses, such as water and electricity bills. However, because the museum is also an important social place for retired miners, the human resources include not only the employees who take turns handling administrative tasks at the museum, but also several retired miners who volunteer. Generally speaking, there are about 14 to 15 people who support the operation of the museum. The museum does not have an organizational charter, and the gathering of personnel is driven by their passion for the subject, with volunteers participating in the promotion and activities of the Houdong Miners Museum without remuneration.

Local Cultural Museum Developing Process

The Local Cultural Museum Developing Process emerges from a broader context of community development, with its core aim being the exploration of local cultural characteristics and the revitalization of underutilized spaces to foster local employment opportunities and economic growth (Lin 2013, Su 2013).

Although the Houdong Miners Museum functions as a local museum to some extent, strictly speaking, because the museum has not received subsidies from the Local Cultural Museum Developing Process, it is not considered a local museum. However, the goals of the local museum project include enhancing the professional functions of museums, promoting diversified development of museum businesses, ensuring cultural equity and public participation and promoting the overall development of local cultural resources to establish a sustainable operation mechanism for local cultural enterprises. It is expected that through these mechanisms, Taiwan's local culture will be enriched, showcasing its diverse cultural landscape and driving the development of local tourism industry (Republic of China Ministry of Culture 2015). Overall, the essence of the Houdong Miners Museum is not far from the goals pursued by local museums.

Additionally, narrowly defined local museums are subsidized buildings under specific projects. Therefore, in terms of execution, public local museums are generally perceived as official by community residents, leading to a lack of effective communication media between museums and local museums, making it difficult for mutual recognition (Shih 2012). Shih Chen-Yi further points out that the discourse foundation of local museums is transplanted from the concept of ecological museums, hoping that through local museums, community residents can further recognize themselves, enlighten themselves, transform themselves or generate new local knowledge. However, such an ideal is often difficult to achieve because the establishment and operation of most local museums often prioritize tourism as the primary goal. Lin Chung-Hsi (2013) believes that local museums are burdened with too many tasks assigned by the state and requirements imposed by professional museums. This situation results in unclear positioning of many halls, unclear collection strategies, minimal educational promotion activities, few professional personnel and predominantly permanent exhibitions without special exhibitions (Liao and Wang 2012). In summary, the operation, construction and display contents of local museums are filled with the influence of state indoctrination (Wang and Jan 2017).

The above issues present the paradoxical nature of this policy logic. On the one hand, the policy aims for a 'bottom-up' approach, empowering communities to initiate projects, but it often ends up as a 'top-down' execution model, resulting in challenges and dilemmas for both local government officials and local museum practitioners (Lin 2013). Additionally, while the programme provides counselling mechanisms, communities still need to compete in proposal submissions. Those unfamiliar with the rules of the game may struggle to obtain grants. Furthermore, the policy can be influenced by changes in local leadership or their willingness to support it. These mechanisms have led to a disconnect between local museums and their communities, making it difficult to sustain consensus and create identity. Similarly, the Houdong Miners Museum was initiated locally, but public sector involvement was lacking throughout the establishment process, and to this day, it has not applied for the Local Museum Developing Process. The operation of the museum is not restricted by review mechanisms, and the entire exhibition is organized by volunteer efforts, providing an opportunity for the museum to maintain its enthusiasm.

The goal of the Local Cultural Museum Developing Process is to cultivate local museums that already can operate independently. Without economic foundations and basic structures, it is difficult for museums to meet the requirements of this project at the initial stage of promotion. For example, when the Houdong Miners Museum was established, it relied solely on the retirement pensions of old miners to pay rent and for renovations, with the rest being volunteered labour and resources. However, the implementation of the Local Cultural Museum Developing Process aims for museums to become self-sustaining, reducing reliance on government subsidies (Lin 2013). This article agrees with Lin's observation that the local museum faces a dilemma of misplacement, but it does not intend to scrutinize policy issues. Rather, it hopes to use the case of the Houdong Miners Museum to explore how small and medium-sized local museums can operate in their early stages.

Drawing from the experience of the Houdong Miners Museum, it exemplifies the essence of a local cultural museum by continually promoting the preservation of local memories. Its incidental benefits have attracted increased participation in preservation activities, with the museum becoming a subject of study in school curriculums and academic circles. Additionally, there's been a resurgence of artistic performances reinterpreting mining stories, with numerous art and photography exhibitions consulting the museum. According to Chou Chao-Nan, each guided tour is a process of sowing seeds, and some of these seeds will sprout and leave their stories behind. These outcomes were not foreseen by the retired miners when the museum was established, and they are difficult to articulate in any project proposal or other application for local museum projects.

Moreover, subsidies from the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program have stabilized the Houdong Miners Museum's operations. While funding remains insufficient, the monthly stable salary and other administrative expenses covered by the programme have enabled the hiring of permanent staff to manage museum affairs, ensuring its stable development. Additionally, interviews reveal that most hired staff have backgrounds in mining-related industries and face economic challenges, making the programme immensely beneficial for them.

Figure 4: *Closing to the Mine – Wind, Light, and Pit Memories, the author took the photo on 28 December 2022.*

In conclusion, while the Diversified Employment Development Program and the Local Cultural Museum Developing Process share the common objective of assisting civil society organizations in fostering local industry growth and community support, their approaches significantly diverge.

Although the Houdong Miners Museum didn't formally apply for the local museum project, it hasn't outright declined engagement with the Culture Department. In 2020, an exhibition titled 'Closing to the Mine – Wind, Light, and Pit Memories', orchestrated by the New Taipei City Government Cultural Affairs Bureau, served as a profound collaboration that deeply resonated with the former miners. The museum, affectionately dubbed by the old miners as the 'above-ground museum', humorously reflects their DIY approach, with exhibits placed directly on the ground. In contrast, the event's exhibition featured a more systematically planned narrative, utilizing walls to enhance the tour guides' ability to explain during tours. The museum has retained the exhibition format and output from this event while significantly expanding its display space. Additionally, the New Taipei City Gold Museum has partnered with the miners to restore the Benshan Fifth Mine Tunnel and organize a series of Mine Art Festival exploration activities. The Houdong Miners Museum remains open to all forms of collaboration, continually accruing momentum for its endeavours.

Conclusion: A Mission to Be Continued

The Houdong Miners Museum advocates for continuous development of its facilities, aiming to create a museum tailored to miners. They envision integrating the museum with key sites like the diesel locomotive shed, the Ruisan Main Pit, the substation and the miners' bathhouse. Their objective is to ensure that the historical materials and artefacts remain in Houdong, imbuing them with vitality and significance within the industrial heritage site, thereby safeguarding Houdong's history. In 2024, the museum faces the challenge of expiring lease agreements, drawing attention from the public, academia, and government, as efforts persist to preserve or relocate these invaluable relics. The miners emphasize that only by retaining these artefacts and scenes in Houdong can their true historical significance be fully showcased.

Additionally, Chou Chao-Nan suggests that there may not necessarily be a need to establish a new independent museum; rather, integration into existing government museums could allow for a modest expansion of organizational structure and staffing, emphasizing the importance of involving young individuals to ensure the longevity of these narratives. The retired miners of the Houdong Miners Museum are willing to share their knowledge unconditionally, teaching and preserving these memories for future generations.

Reflecting on the establishment, operation and vision of the Houdong Miners Museum, this group of retired miners without professional museum backgrounds managed to create a multifunctional local museum, including collections, exhibitions, research and educational activities, driven by a sense of mission to preserve miner culture. Chou Chao-Nan's notion that the museum is a 'hundred-year enterprise', as articulated by Mao Chen-Fei, doesn't imply a literal century-long operation but rather signifies their collective determination to exert maximum effort in preserving their generation's mining legacy before their time passes. It's worth noting that in Taiwanese dialect, '百年' (a hundred years) carries connotations of the end of an elder's life. Therefore, when they speak of the museum as a 'hundred-year enterprise', they're not just referring to the duration of its operation, but also to the urgency of capturing and safeguarding their stories before they're lost with the passing of the older generation.

The case of the Houdong Miners Museum illustrates that passion is a crucial element in the operation of a local museum, while stable funding is essential for nurturing its growth. The subsidies from the Ministry of Labor's Diversified Employment Development Program provide fuel for this passion, enabling the continuous and stable dissemination of mining stories, fostering greater understanding and appreciation of Taiwan's history. Currently, the retired miners at the museum still hope to conduct the Houdong Miner Memory Tours free of charge, promoting the vision and objectives of this site in a non-profit manner. In recent years, the accumulation of operational experience and energy has made this site an important consultation point for mining-related research, with more and more individuals continuing to contribute to the dissemination of these stories. The Houdong Miners Museum is a quintessential 'bottom-up' local museum case, worthy of deep reflection and emulation. The establishment of a local museum hinges on finding a cause that genuinely resonates with the community and providing stable funding to support its growth, enabling the museum to thrive and move towards sustainability.

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Biography

Te-Yu Yu is currently studying at the Institute of Arts Management and Cultural Policy at the National Taiwan University of Arts. She focuses on Taiwan's historical cultural memory and narrative, particularly emphasizing collaboration between residents and museums. Her aim is to reinterpret the historical and cultural heritage, presenting them in new ways to promote sustainable cultural development. In recent years, Yu has been primarily involved in projects in the Jinguashi area of Taiwan, notably the Mine Art Festival, where she actively engages in artistic endeavors to showcase the region's rich cultural significance and explore its relevance to contemporary society. She looks forward to further research and contributing more to the cultural landscape of Taiwan.

Finding a Subtle Balance: Contemporary Collecting in a Local Museum in China

Ke-Yi Yin

China

Abstract

In recent years, the importance of contemporary collecting has been recognized and highlighted with the growing need of collecting Covid-19 related objects in China. Some museums have engaged in collecting more recent materials to some extent, realizing their responsibilities not only to preserve our history but also to reflect the changing society and respond to its needs. However, museums sometimes have struggled to truthfully document collective memory, facing up to internal limitations and external pressures. This article will focus on my fieldwork experience of participating in a contemporary collecting project in a local museum located in a city in the middle reaches of the Yangtze. Most local museums in China prefer historical or archaeological collections to more recent objects because of collecting tradition, although they occasionally collect some Covid-19 and economic reformation-related materials under appeals from the national administration. This museum, however, has embarked on a long-term contemporary collecting project this year after their three-year on-and-off attempts at such collecting. The project has had to maintain a good balance between the realities and ideals of collecting practices from its very beginning. To secure stable government funding the collections department must gain extensive publicity and positive social influence. Museum professionals have to seek a difficult balance between collecting objects of preferred mainstream themes and a more inclusive scope of materials reflecting city memories including traumatic ones. And many other tricky choices have to be made in the course of collecting. Therefore, this article aims to present how this museum has tried to find a subtle balance among different interests in contemporary collecting based on my fieldwork experience.

Keywords: contemporary collecting; China; local museum; inclusion

Introduction

The traditional focus of Chinese museums on historical and archaeological artefacts has been gradually shifting, particularly since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. On 18 March, the National Administration of Cultural Heritage (NACH) issued the *Notice on the Collection and Preservation of Representative Materials of the COVID-19 Pandemic Prevention and Control*. The notice specifies that cultural heritage authorities at all levels should guide museums in collecting and preserving representative materials related to pandemic prevention and control. Museums were encouraged to collect materials related to Covid-19, such as videos and photos, which was a demonstration of recognizing the museums' role in contemporary documentation. Many museums responded by posting collecting notices on their official websites, but few have reported on their acquisitions, with only some news available online. Moreover, the fate of these collections remains uncertain following the sudden lifting of pandemic restrictions.

This was a fresh and challenging experience for many museums, and it was not mandatory. Therefore, most museums considered it thematic collecting and reverted to traditional collecting practices then. In contrast, one local city museum, the Q Museum[1] initiated a long-term contemporary collecting project in 2023, following intermittent attempts over three years.

This article traces the evolution of collecting projects from the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, through the urban memory collection initiative in 2021, to the commencement of the long-term collecting project in 2023. It highlights how the museum's collections department has recognized the importance of maintaining a balance between practical considerations and ideal collecting practices after drawing upon past experiences and lessons learned. The department has faced the intricate task of negotiating between government-preferred thematic subjects and a more inclusive collecting scope, encompassing both celebratory and traumatic city memories. Numerous nuanced decisions must be made throughout the collection process. This article aims to illustrate how the museum has endeavoured to achieve a subtle balance between various interests in the contemporary collecting process, using my fieldwork experience as a reference.

Pandemic Collecting

The Q Museum is situated in a provincial capital city along the Yangtze River and serves as a city history museum, aiming to acquaint the public with the city and cultivate their affection for it. Its mission is to collect, preserve and protect materials related to the city's history and culture, while establishing a collection system with regional characteristics.

In late 2019, the then director proposed the idea of collecting today, recognizing that failing to do so could result in the loss of valuable information in the future. Moreover, given the museum's role in preserving the collective memory of the rapidly evolving city, collecting contemporary materials is crucial. Museum professionals also acknowledged the scarcity of relevant materials when conducting contemporary research and exhibitions. The proposal suggested collecting ten to a hundred materials annually, reflecting the year's significant and representative events, alongside regular collecting work.

The Covid-19 outbreak in early 2020 prompted the collections department to hastily commence documenting the pandemic in late February. This endeavour paralleled similar initiatives by museums worldwide, albeit with varying start dates due to the staggered onset of the pandemic. During the lockdown, the museum's collecting work faced many obstacles. Professionals struggled to visit potential donors and were unable to conduct collecting outside freely. Instead, they primarily relied on email and phone communication with potential donors, such as hospitals. After resuming work in March, citizens began to donate objects to the museum. Collection continued throughout the entire year. In total, 161 pieces of pandemic-related materials were collected.

City Memory Collecting Project

In September 2021, the Q Museum finally had sufficient time and resources to consider additional themes alongside the pandemic-related collection. This project was partially motivated by the *Guidelines on Prompting Reform and Development of Museums* issued by the NACH and eight other government departments[2] in May. The guidelines advocate for optimizing museum collection systems, underscoring the need to strengthen the collection of materials pertaining to the history of the Communist Party of China, the People's Republic of China, the reform and opening up, and socialist development (PRC. NCHA, 2021). Additionally, there is an emphasis on collecting materials reflecting the changes in economic and social development, such as those related to old city renovation and urban-rural construction. The guidelines provided the museum collections department with a direction for determining collection themes. Despite the guidelines' direction, the museum collections department still faced uncertainty regarding what and how to collect, further compounded by the ongoing pandemic.

After several meetings and discussions with experts and media workers, they determined ten themes: the Covid pandemic, poverty alleviation, urban development, internet celebrity city, smart city construction, urban ecological environment protection and governance, the city's humanistic care, public safety governance, urban spiritual civilization construction and others. This project was supported by dedicated funding. It lasted for three months, during which a total of 100 items (sets) and 585 photographs and videos were collected. Among them, the top ten representative series of materials were selected through public voting by citizens and expert review and can be viewed on the internet with a brief project report.

Long-Term Contemporary Collecting Project

In 2022, a lack of funding interrupted the contemporary collecting project for a year, but the efforts did not cease entirely. After the relaxation of the zero-Covid policy, the department swiftly acquired previously inaccessible pandemic-related evidence, such as a Covid testing booth, which was at risk of disappearing, such as a Covid testing booth. By 2023, the department planned to secure long-term funding for a continuous collection project. Following the press release on the previous collection efforts during International Museum Day, the museum launched its annual collecting initiative on typical events and three themes: rural revitalization, historical and cultural district, and the development and changes of public transportation. To date, six active collecting sessions have taken place. Although some oral histories were collected, these materials, along with previously collected interview materials, have not been made public due to the museum's lack of experience in archiving oral history and the absence of proper accessioning and systematic organization.

The department sought to create a catchy name for this project to build brand awareness, facilitate promotion and make its presence in the museum field known to superior authorities. However, the name 'City Memory' currently retained. The collected materials are expected to be announced publicly on this year's Museum Day, along with a display of some physical items. As the event serves as an annual reporting platform for the museum's departments, it effectively marks the beginning and end of each year's collecting cycle. Therefore, although the year 2023 has ended, the first year of this long-term collection project remains ongoing.

Discussions

After two previous attempts at contemporary collecting, the museum collections department has become more sophisticated. They have a deeper understanding of the gap between the realities and ideals of collecting practices. Throughout this process, certain issues persist and are likely to continue into the foreseeable future. Under internal and external pressures, the department has aimed to reconcile various interests and seek solutions to ensure that contemporary collecting is more inclusive and sustainable. This section examines the issues, contributors and efforts made by the department to address these challenges.

The first challenge is the lack of funding. According to the NCHA (2021), over 91 per cent of museums of 6,138 accredited museums in 2021 offer free admission. Annual subsidies from the government sustain the operations of these museums, serving as the primary funding source for local museums like this one. Other sources of income such as museum shops contribute only a small percentage of the overall revenue. Special funds are allocated for key collection acquisition. Contemporary collecting, however, is not allowed to use the fund. This is because the expenses associated with contemporary collecting typically do not involve the purchase of objects, but rather encompass costs such as transportation, meals, filming and publicity. Consequently, the museum lacks extra money to execute contemporary collecting projects. The collection project in 2020 demonstrates that it is possible to proceed without special funds, as it aligns with the central government's call. Many museums temporarily engaged in the pandemic collection during that time. However, for a long-term project, a stable source of funding is necessary.

In 2021, the collections department received a grant because of its good performance in the pandemic documentation project in 2020, enabling it to undertake collecting on a larger scale. But in 2022, funding was not available, leading the department to refocus on Covid-related collecting, as those objects were more accessible. Consequently, the collections department aimed to secure a stable, long-term annual funding of approximately 25,000 euros. To justify the project, they must demonstrate its value and positive impact. Hence increasing the project's visibility and influence through various media is an integral part of the collecting projects. The department has acknowledged the importance of publicity and chose to allocate a significant portion of the budget to publicity efforts rather than collecting.

Secondly, the contemporary collection projects face staffing challenges, namely that they are majorly understaffed and there is a lack professional training. Among a staff of twelve in the department, only one is dedicated to contemporary collections. Taking Finnish museums involved in contemporary documentation as an example, many city museums do not have personnel specifically responsible for contemporary collecting. In such cases, having one assigned person to contemporary collecting like the Q Museum is deemed adequate. However, given that the city's population exceeds ten million – nearly double that of Finland – the department is notably understaffed. Especially in situations requiring rapid response, such as during a pandemic, which was centred in the 2021 collection project, all staff members participated. Especially in situations requiring rapid response, such

as a pandemic, this issue becomes more prominent. Thus, to relieve the pressure, the department has taken a more passive approach to expanding contemporary collections by encouraging public donations.

Regarding professional skills, the director recognizes the importance of having skilled professionals, yet it remains unclear which expertise is most crucial in contemporary collecting. Considering the extensive scope of contemporary collecting, it is impractical to expect one person to possess encyclopaedic knowledge. The department head describes this staff member as a good communicator, facilitating the acquisition from potential donors, despite lacking theoretical and practical training in the museum field. This staff member can carry out tasks but struggles to grasp the strategic direction. Therefore, the department wants to recruit well-trained professionals in the future.

Thirdly, the collections department competes with the provincial museum for collections. Museums compete fiercely with other entertainment options in the leisure-time marketplace, making marketing crucial to attract visitors (Kotler, Kotler & Kotler, 2008). Museums, however, not only compete with other forms of recreation but also with other museums and collecting institutions, especially the provincial museum in this case. As a municipal museum in China, the Q Museum represents a typical example, but its unique location in the provincial capital – where the provincial museum attracts more attention – sets it apart. The provincial museum is the preferred choice for tourists and locals for its highly rated and renowned collections. Hierarchy exits. The overlap in collecting scopes and the preference of potential donors for larger, better-known museums further hinder its efforts. This preference is understandable, as donors to the provincial museum feel more honoured and believe their donations will potentially be viewed by a broader audience, thus resulting in greater social impact. Moreover, the provincial museum's higher administrative level facilitates cooperation from the public and other organizations during the collection process. In general, the Q museum lacks an advantage in this hierarchical structure.

Ideally, it would be beneficial for both museums to collaborate and share resources. However, according to the director, the Q Museum's strategy is to collect its own materials, as it avoids the bureaucratic hurdles and administrative complexities that come with borrowing objects in the future.

In this situation, the museum distinguishes itself from the provincial museum by emphasizing a local-centred collection system. The department also promotes contemporary collecting through extensive media campaigns. With ample funding, the museum launched a comprehensive marketing strategy in 2021, leveraging its own new media platforms (such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin and Kwai) and collaborating with over 20 legacy media outlets at the municipal, provincial and national levels. In its 2023 budget plan, the museum prioritized publicity to attract public attention. By raising awareness of the importance of contemporary collecting and the museum's collection needs, the museum aims to increase public donations. The museum also uses media reach, likes and shares as indicators of positive social impact, which are key achievements to be presented in performance evaluations.

The last challenge discussed in this article is the decision what to collect. In the context of contemporary collecting, museums need to deliberate on the selection criteria and rationale behind including and excluding certain materials. They need to evaluate significance. However, museums are overwhelmed by an enormous number of materials in a society characterized by mass production, globalization and ever- evolving technology. This complexity poses challenges in capturing and reflecting the multifaceted nature of our society. In contrast, collecting historical artefacts may seem comparatively straightforward due to their relatively limited quantity, the

fact that the public is generally less familiar with them, and the constructed narratives by historians that prioritize certain aspects over others (Knell, 2004).

Apart from the first contemporary collection project focused on the pandemic, the subsequent two collection projects were independently planned. During the planning phase, the department conducted brainstorming sessions, consulted with media professionals, drafted the plan and finally reported to the higher authorities within the museum. Upon obtaining approval, the department proceeded to publicly announce the collection projects, formally initiating the process.

Although there were no specific requirements from the superior authorities in the latter two projects, the selection of themes echoes mainstream topics and the guidelines as previously mentioned. Poverty alleviation was chosen in the 2021 project because in 2020 China achieved the goal of eliminating extreme poverty. This is indeed a groundbreaking and significant event, one that cannot be overlooked. By reading the local 14th Five-Year Plan, one can discover that some themes, such as smart city, ecological environment protection and governance and spiritual civilization construction, are key terms in the 14th Five-Year Plans of different levels.

Another point worth mentioning is the continuity and avoidance of certain themes. Although the current collection still operates on an annual basis, the museum aims to maintain a sense of continuity and does not solely focus on capturing significant events from the previous year. The museum has chosen some major themes to reflect these changes through continuous collecting, such as transportation development. On the other hand, Covid-19 and its impacts are still the elephant in the room, but the museum avoids mentioning words related to the pandemic. Although during the planning discussion stage, there was a proposal to collect objects reflecting the resumption of work and production after the pandemic, the topic was ultimately avoided.

During the discussion sessions and interviews, they expressed the intention to preserve as many aspects of the city's memory as possible, whether positive or negative. There is no formal review of the collection list. However, they acknowledged the necessity of minimizing emphasis on negative aspects during publicity. Given limited resources, they can only focus on themes conducive to promotion and fundraising, adopting a more conservative approach. Moreover, most of the pressure actually comes from the willingness of potential donors to cooperate, rather than from higher authorities.

There are successes as well as deficiencies. Nonetheless, in the absence of other museums devoted to long-term contemporary collecting, their work carries considerable significance. As the museum director underscored, the act of collecting itself is deemed successful.

Conclusion

This article examines the contemporary collecting practices of the Q Museum, exploring the challenges encountered and the solutions implemented. The museum has made considerable efforts in contemporary collecting. It has faced numerous challenges, such as limited funding, understaffing, competition and choosing collecting themes and topics – issues that many other museums around the world also have encountered.

The museum's core strategy hinges on publicity, pursuing two key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to elevate the museum's profile by showcasing accomplishments to superior authorities and the public, to secure funding. Secondly, it endeavours to foster public awareness of the significance of contemporary collecting practices,

ultimately encouraging donations and thereby optimizing the museum's resource allocation.

Their experiences highlight the multifaceted role of the collections department, which must navigate and balance the needs of the museum, the local government and the department itself. While acknowledging their duty to faithfully preserve the city's memory, they also recognize the necessity of compromise due to various limitations. Addressing topics lacking a clear mainstream historical conclusion inherently entails risks, both political and in terms of resource allocation. They understand that immediate documentation of sensitive events may not always be feasible. Instead, the museum may choose to defer acquisition until a more opportune time. On the other hand, the museum possesses greater latitude than expected in determining its collection strategy, as it can acquire materials without publishing the whole list, and its acquisition list is not subject to review.

In conclusion, the museum requires time and ongoing experimentation to refine its collection strategies and optimize the balance between its social responsibilities and the interests of stakeholders. It is hoped that this museum's experiences can serve as a reference for other institutions.

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Endnotes

1. The case included in this article will undergo pseudonymization to protect the privacy of the museum and individuals involved therein. This museum will be referred to by a pseudonym, Q Museum, in this article.

2. National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Biography

Ke-Yi Yin is in her first year of the doctoral programme in history and cultural heritage at the University of Helsinki. Her research interests are contemporary collecting, everyday life collecting, and social history museums. Her research examines how museums in China represent the rapidly changing contemporary society and what factors contribute to representations of China.

New Pathways for Collecting

With contemporary collecting practices museums have the possibility to weave connections between individuals and communities, between past, present and future. By actively engaging networks, sharing resources and bringing different knowledge systems together, museums create pathways that are accessible to and inclusive of diverse narratives. Through acts of deep listening, mutual respect and collective care, museums can transform into platforms fostering open dialogues, co-creating new futures striving for heritage justice based on principles of solidarity.

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