Unsettling Taiwan's Settler Narratives: A Decolonial Analysis of Museums as Sites of Political Redress for Indigenous Taiwan

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Abstract:

This paper utilizes a decolonial lens coupled with qualitative critical discourse analysis to examine the capacity for political redress for Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples within Taipei's museums. Recognizing the multiple layers of colonial encounters, of settler colonialism, external imperial regimes and contemporary neo-colonial threats – it analyses how the island chooses to portray its complex history in museums regarding Austronesian identity. Examining Indigenous representation within the context of Taiwan's semi-sovereign reality, this paper emphasizes how settler narratives in museums continue to reduce and appropriate Indigeneity to legitimize the ROC distinct national identity as a multi-cultural liberal democracy. Understanding the colonial and nationalistic underpinnings of Taiwan's museums, I argue that while a comprehensive decolonizing would require deeper interrogation – there is room for a radical imagining of what a museum of Indigenous redress could like in contemporary Taiwan.

Key Words: *settler colonialism, decolonial theory, museums, Taiwan, Indigenous Peoples*

Introduction

In August 2022, Taiwan's central government signed off on the construction of the island's first national museum dedicated to its Indigenous peoples. The National Museum of Indigenous Peoples (NMIP) project has been backed by the Council of Indigenous Peoples since 2017 and aims to open in 2027 to "present the subjectivity of indigenous peoples"[1] based on "storytelling by indigenous peoples." This comes after President Tsai Ing-Wen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) formally apologized to the nation's Indigenous peoples when she assumed office in 2016—being the first political leader to acknowledge that Han people "took everything from the first inhabitants… without their consent."[2] Within the speech, Tsai outlined the country's first blueprint of historical reconciliatory mechanisms including the Transitional Justice Committee and Indigenous Historical Justice Committee. The former was met with political backlash, claiming the temporal scope of the KMT martial law period (1945-1987) not only reduced Indigenous suffering to a Hoklo-dominant narrative of victimization but also implicitly denied the harmful settler colonial legacy inflicted by Han people before 1945. Recognising the criticisms of prior transitional justice initiatives being tethered to Han-centered narratives of victimization, national memory, and national identity—I hope to understand how this limiting model of political redress could be replicated or prevented in future initiatives. Specifically, I ask how museums in Taiwan currently understand the historical and political context of the island's Indigenous peoples. I also

[1] Cultural and Creative Industries Development and Evaluation Committee. " Planning and Implementation Status of the National Museum of Indigenous Peoples Construction Project" *Cultural and Creative Industries Development and Evaluation Committee,* (2020) https://www.cip.gov.tw/en/news/data-list/786B0901BD9D6A01/2D9680BFECBE80B6FCD936830571BB2A-info.html.

[2] *Full text of President Tsai Ing-wen's apology to indigenous people.* (2016). Available at: https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/2960528.

call into question the Taiwanese government's ability to truly decolonize urban public spaces, as a contested nation that is perpetually reimagining itself.

In this paper, I employ a decolonial lens to argue that while museums in Taiwan have increased Indigenous visibility as a means of redress, Indigeneity is predominantly confined to ethnology and remains decontextualized and dehistoricized within curatorial practices in Taipei. Here, a decolonial lens will draw from both settler colonial studies, namely the works of Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini, as well as postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. In brief, decolonization will refer to the process that will lead to the eventual undoing of both settler and external colonialism as a mode of domination and its legacies. This process will be underpinned by settler colonial studies' understanding of settler invasion as a "structure, not an event" which operates on the "logic of elimination"[3]. Understanding settler colonialism as a structure that was designed to exploit and eliminate based on the *terra nullius* claim of "emptiness"[4], is imperative to analyze how Taiwan's physical spaces, institutions and knowledge systems were built upon settler violence. In the context of the Republic of China (ROC), the settler government on Taiwan, this structural project of exogenous replacement and cultural and ontological erasure persists today through struggles of Indigenous self-determinations, reclamation of ancestral lands, challenges of revitalizing Austronesian cultures and languages, Indigenous political representation in ROC governance as well as external to the ROC in sovereign Indigenous

[3] Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409. doi: 10.1080/14623520601056240.

[4] Hirano, Katsuya, Veracini, Lorenzo, and Roy, Toulouse-Antonin. "Vanishing natives and Taiwan's settler-colonial unconsciousness," *Critical Asian Studies*, 50, no. 2 (2018): 196–218. doi:10.1080/14672715.2018.1443019.

councils. Thus, when referring to the "Han settler project" this will pertain to Han-dominant institutions, epistemologies and cultural hegemony that continue to displace Indigenous authority. Recognising the discursive limitations of settler colonial studies which has been restricted to a framework of "victimization" and deterring from Indigenous agency – I will also be drawing from rich postcolonial theories that critically examine the ontological foundations of colonial justification. While Said and Bhabha largely theorize based on the East/West praxis, and "postcolonial" contexts of Western imperialism – I will apply their respective theories of the "Other" and "cultural hybridity" in the context of Taiwan's Han-centric pedagogies rather than Eurocentrism. This will be elaborated on this further in the following theoretical framework section, where I detail the distinction and justification for utilizing a decolonial framework with reference to settler colonial and postcolonial scholars. Thus, decolonization in this paper will pertain to the active and unsettling process of recognizing and critiquing how land and relations to land have always been differently understood and enacted. It will focus on the physical, psychological, and conceptual dynamics of space and ask, are Taipei's museums unsettling the settler imagination?

Although I adopt a critical decolonial perspective, this is not to negate significant efforts in terms of introducing traditional epistemologies and offering some institutional critique. Instead, I aim to understand when and how Indigeneity is called into display and which narratives they serve. Which histories, relationships and knowledge are the displays drawing from, and how does this either resist or fall under the ROC Han-Chinese settler colonial narratives of shared nationhood. Central to these findings is questioning whether a public institution that is born from colonial expansion and lives to produce a "shared" national identity can genuinely center the voices of

Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. More broadly speaking, is a decolonized national museum merely an oxymoron, or does the settler-colonial government have the capacity to radically deconstruct and redefine the premise of a national cultural institution? Integral to answering these questions is how we conceptualize the term "Indigenous peoples:" linguistically, politically, and legislatively, as well as how different museums may engage with said definition differently. Another clarification that this argument hinges on is how we define "political redress" in the East Asian context, as the field of "transitional justice" and "truth and reconciliation" grew to prominence in the South African context and have been most notably applied in Western settler colonial states i.e. Canada and New Zealand. Thus, it is essential to prescribe appropriate definitions to "Indigenous Peoples" and "Political Redress" to set the parameters that acknowledge the limitations of analysis.

"Indigenous Peoples" of Taiwan commonly refers to the 560,000 Malayo-Polynesian peoples belonging to the Austronesian linguistic family that constitutes 2.37% of the island's population.[5] Currently, there are sixteen ROC state-recognized "tribes" including the Amis, Atayal, Paiwan, Bunun, Puyuma, Rukai, Tsou, Saisiyat, Yami, Thao, Kavalan, Truku, Sakizaya, Sediq, Hla'alua, and Kanakanavu. It's also important to add, that the ROC government explicitly uses the term "tribe" in English-language publications when referring to different Indigenous peoples. The sixteen state-recognized peoples are also composed of hundreds of smaller communities that are also called "tribes" by the ROC. Interestingly, this translation is arguably a denial of Indigenous sovereignty, as it departs from the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

[5] The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs. "Indigenous peoples in Taiwan." Accessed October 18, 2022.
https://www.iwgia.org/en/taiwan

preferred term “peoples” that is associated with political autonomy.[6] The Indigenous Basic Law clarifies that “Indigenous Peoples” require the “approval of the central indigenous authority upon application,” which has controversially excluded up to ten peoples from Indigenous status including the Pingpu peoples.[7] This distinction is critical in understanding the bureaucratic limitations centrally-funded museums experience in terms of classifying and defining Indigenous peoples compared to privately-funded museums. For example, the private ShungYe Formosan Aboriginal Museum refers to the non-state-recognized Siraya peoples as “Indigenous peoples,” whereas the National Taiwan Museum refers to them as a “cultural group.”[8] However, in this paper, I will regard “Indigenous peoples” as a political group that distinctly distinguishes themselves in the socio-cultural context from the surrounding population. Briefly put, “indigenous peoples” will be employed as a term with political characteristics, rather than mere racial characteristics - and will encompass all peoples in Taiwan that have claimed the right of self-determination, whether they are recognized by the state or not. Thus, when analyzing museum displays in relation to “indigenous peoples” this will pertain to both the peoples included and excluded in the institution's definition.

[6] Scott Simon and Awi Mona, "Between Legal Indigeneity and Indigenous Sovereignty in Taiwan: Insights From Critical Race Theory," *Social Inclusion* [Online] 11, no. 2 (2023): 187-197.

[7] *Indigenous Basic Law of the Republic of China* (2005), Ministry of Justice, Taiwan, https://law.moj.gov.tw/Eng/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?PCode=D0130003.

[8] Chen, Shih-Yu. 2017. "Rethinking Representation: Shifting Relations between Museums and the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan." *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 10, no. 3 (2017): 13-22. doi:10.18848/1835-2014/CGP/v10i03/13-22.

Framing "Indigenous peoples" through self-determination and collectivity allows us to reorient the parameters of "political redress" towards an interpretation that can accommodate the historical and spatio-temporal basis of settler colonialism. "Political redress" conventionally falls into one of two categories: "restorative" or "retributive" redress. Restorative redress is fundamentally voluntary, involving parties pursuing resolution through negotiation. Since democratization in the 1980s and 1990s, grassroots Indigenous movements in Taiwan have called for various types of restorative redress such as reparations, land restitution, cultural restitution, historical commissions, and apologies as a means of atonement. On the other hand, retributive redress involves punitive enforced measures, often carried out by an external party. Examples of retributive redress include trials for gross violations of human rights (from Nuremberg to Saddam), international tribunals, and the establishment of the International Criminal Court.[9] I will be narrowing the scope to restorative redress in this paper to the voluntary process of reconciliation through a cultural and historical focus, rather than tangible material conditions. Reconciliation in the context between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Taiwan will be discussed as establishing civic trust. Rather than being reduced to fulfilling objectives or metrics of institutional reform or truth-telling it will adopt a more subjective and attitudinal understanding.[10] At its core, reconciliation is about trying to address historical grievances, even if incompletely, and not forcing normative models onto uncooperative realities.[11] Reconciliation in Taiwan does not equate to forgiveness or

[9] Elazar Barkan, "HISTORICAL RECONCILIATION: REDRESS, RIGHTS AND POLITICS," *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no. 1 (2006): 1–15, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24358010.

[10] Andrieu, K. 2009. "Sorry for the Genocide": How Public Apologies Can Help Promote National Reconciliation. *Millennium* 38, no. 1 (2009): 3-23. doi:10.1177/0305829809336257.s

[11] USIP. "Fall 2014 Insights Newsletter: Reconciliation." *United States Institute of Peace*, November 2014, https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/11/fall-2014-insights-newsletter-reconciliation.

requires forgiveness, but instead understands the necessity of building new relationships and identities upon a re-writing of settler colonial historical narratives. Thus, I will be analyzing museums as sites of political redress through its cultural restorative capacities, which I will return to in the methodology section. This includes historical or political museums in Taipei as the city arguably holds symbolic significance as the nation's political and cultural capital. Therefore, I will assess the political redress of historical narratives in Taiwan's museums to comprehend the extent the state is willing to negotiate competing nationalisms to reconcile with the island's Indigenous peoples.

Structurally, this paper will be divided into four sections to illustrate the limited capacity of Taiwan's museums as sites of political redress, as they operate as settler colonial spaces that mis-conceptualize and appropriate Indigeneity to serve a Han Chinese-centered nation-building project. In the first section, I will contextualize the multi-layered colonial history and the present of Indigenous suppression and how this relates to theories of decolonialism and post-colonialism—specifically drawing on concepts of the "Other," (counter)hegemony, and cultural hybridity. Entering the main body of analysis, I will examine how Taiwan's museums portray Indigenous peoples as "Other" through static and aesthetic representations grounded in a generally uncritical ethnographic and object-centered approach. The third section examines the relationship between Indigenous narratives and settler colonial nation-building in a two-pronged approach. It analyzes how exhibits omit colonial violence and deploy sanitizing language on genocide to produce a "shared narrative" of multicultural diversity which serves the political agenda of Taiwanese separatism. The final section explores the coloniality of space, underscoring the colonial nature of museum buildings and their surroundings, and attempts to reimagine what a decolonial museum

could look like in contemporary Taiwan. As a result, I adopt a decolonial lens to analyze Taiwan's museums to strongly argue that endeavors of political redress for Indigenous peoples have been severely restrained by the construction of national identity, furthering the inability of these spaces to interrogate their own practices. However, the ongoing project of the National Museum of Indigenous Peoples provides a hopeful basis for centering indigenous perspectives external to non-indigenous political agendas as a means of redressing historical narratives.

Background and Theoretical Framework

The island of Taiwan has a complex colonial history including Han- Chinese settler-colonialism, external colonization from Western (Dutch, Spanish) and Eastern imperial forces (Koxinga, Japanese), KuoMinTang (KMT) authoritarian rule, and present-day threats of annexation from mainland China. Although there have been various forms of colonial rule—including "triangulation," "hybrid" forms, and theories of "double oppression"—the successive and overlapping regimes have culminated in centuries of violence against Austronesian peoples.[12] To illustrate the necessity of decolonial theory coupled with a critical lens on urban public space, this section will first briefly outline the effects of Han-settler colonialism, Japanese imperial rule, and KMT martial law on Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. This will then be followed by introducing the theoretical framework, which borrows from postcolonial and critical theorists and applies it to the spatial conceptualizations of settler-colonial territory, knowledge, and memory. Integrally, I

[12] Hirano, Katsuya, Veracini, Lorenzo, and Roy, Toulouse-Antonin. "Vanishing natives and Taiwan's settler-colonial unconsciousness," *Critical Asian Studies*, 50, no. 2 (2018): 196–218. doi:10.1080/14672715.2018.1443019.

also underline the tumultuous relationship between decolonisation and nationalism in Taiwan—specifically, how Taiwan's diplomatically unrecognized status harbors two nation-seeking identities on the island, with Indigenous calls of self-determination encapsulated within the ROC assertions of sovereignty. Therefore, in this section I hope to introduce a rich decolonial framework to contextualize Han settler colonial spatial production and the paradox of contesting national identities within Taiwan's museums.

The Dutch were the first to voluntarily bring Han-Chinese settlers from Fujian Province in mainland China to western Taiwan, for agricultural labor as Indigenous men resisted assimilation into capitalist production. This fostered a "hybrid" form of colonization as the settlers were from men mainland China, but the administrative and military structures were Dutch. Han migration continued into the short-lived Koxinga era, and then under the administration of the Qing Dynasty. Despite the efforts of the Qing government, intermarriage between Han men and Austronesian women increased on the West of the island. In turn, this fortified a distinction between the assimilated Indigenous people in the West and the non-assimilated peoples in the East, which saw the introduction of colonial classification where the peoples on the Western plains were referred to as "cooked savages," and the East referred to as "raw savages."[13] This is what Makau Mutua defines as colonial metaphors of the human rights lexicon: where the 'savage' or 'barbarian' require a 'civilized' and 'civilizing' state to legitimize violent expansionism and erasure.[14] In the case of Taiwan, this is explicitly demonstrated through the naming and re-naming of Indigenous

[13] Simon, Scott. "Yearning for Recognition: Indigenous Formosans and the Limits of Indigeneity," *International Journal of Taiwan Studies*, 3 no. 2 (2020): 191–216.

[14] Mutua, Makau. 2001. "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights." *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (2001): 201-245.

peoples through various regimes to serve various nation-building projects such as the "cooked" and "raw savages" under the Qing Empire, "savages" and "barbarians" under Japanese imperial rule, and "mountain compatriots" under KMT martial law (Mona, 2019). The adoption of colonial metaphors by bureaucratic agencies is intimately connected to the historical discourse of land possession and the production of space. Through the codification and legislative process of renaming, space can be "legally" reframed and re-produced through colonial governments.

Unlike the Qing, the Japanese Empire included Indigenous peoples in administrative control from 1895 to 1945. The Japanese military brutally suppressed Indigenous populations predominantly by seizing land and implementing modern systems of social control. Through punitive military expeditions such as the Camphor wars with the Sediq and Atayal peoples and the Taroko wars with the Truku peoples, the Japanese could claim sovereignty over the entire island.[15] An aggressive project of state modernisation characterized this era, where Indigenous peoples lost their ancestral lands but were also provided with trading posts, healthcare clinics, schools, and other forms of institutional support. During this era, Taiwan's Indigenous cultures were exhibited for the first time in a nationalized museum. The Museum of the Colonial Administration opened in 1908 and has been described as a reflection of Japan's "scientific colonialism," as a means of documenting and celebrating its colonial possession. After World War II, Chiang Kai-Shek of the KuoMinTang (KMT) fled the Chinese Civil War and established the Republic of China in Taiwan. This prompted another influx of Han settlers who were a part of Chiang's forces, urban elite from Northern Chinese cities, or refugees who managed to flee the communist regime in the People's

[15] Mona, Awi. "Conceptualizing Indigenous Historical Justice Toward a Mutual Recognition with State in Taiwan," *Washington International Law Journal*, 28 no. 3 (2019): 654–675.

Republic of China (PRC). Under martial law, Japanese assimilationist policy was essentially extended. The Nationalist Party took over the administrative structures and forcibly relocated Indigenous communities to the plains for more effective police surveillance. Indigenous peoples were forced into a modern capitalistic system by nationalizing traditional territories, forcing mass agricultural practice, and banning Austronesian languages and customs. Outlining the scale of state atrocities is imperative to understand the scale of anti-colonial discourse and restructuring required to actively dismantle centuries of institutionalized practice. Hence, by recognising the extent of colonial destruction under Han settlers, Japanese imperialism, and ROC authoritarian rule—a decolonial framework could be valuable when analyzing museum discourse on Indigenous peoples.

While there is some overlap between decolonial and postcolonial theory, it is essential to note the spatial and ontological divergences to understand why and how a decolonial lens addresses the structural nature of settler colonialism. Postcolonial theories and theories of coloniality delve into the intricacies of two distinct forms of colonialism: external and internal. External colonialism, also known as exogenous or exploitation colonization, involves the appropriation of elements from Indigenous realms—be it animals, plants, human beings, or other resources. In this form of colonialism, everything Indigenous becomes recast as mere 'natural resources'—bodies and land exploited for various purposes.[16] On the other hand, internal colonialism focuses on the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora, and fauna within the borders of the imperial nation, examples of this are prisons, schooling, and policing. The deficiency of postcolonial theory lies in its omission of the relationship of peoples,

[16] Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang."Decolonization is not a metaphor" *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society, (2012):1-40*

livelihood, and native land. Settler colonialism stands apart from other colonial forms due to settlers' explicit aim to establish a new home on the land, emphasizing a commitment to asserting settler sovereignty over all aspects of their newfound territory. Consequently, relying solely on postcolonial literature would neglect the unique dynamics and necessity of land, water, air, subterranean earth in settler-Indigenous relations. In the process of settler decolonization, land emerges as the most valuable and fiercely contested entity.

Thus, neither category of external or internal colonization adequately encapsulates the nature of settler colonialism where both external and internal operate simultaneously as there is no spatial separation between the "metropole" and "colony".[17] Central to decolonial theory in settler contexts, is recognizing that settler existence structure and not a historical event—that disrupting Indigenous relations to land is an epistemic, ontological, and spiritual form of violence that is reiterated each day of occupation. In the case of Taiwan, settler-colonial theory examines the brutal process whereby indigenous peoples are displaced by external settler groups seeking to establish a sovereign, state-oriented identity. For instance, Han settlers employed the concept of *terra nullius* asserting that indigenous lands were unoccupied and available for division into private property, which secured the foundations for creating an assimilated national identity as a "sovereign" Japanese colony; KMT's "One China," and today's liberal democratic ROC.[18] Concurrently, it challenges the perception of decolonization as a linear progression by rejecting

[17] Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang."Decolonization is not a metaphor" *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society, (2012):1-40*

[18]Kuan, Da-wei (Daya Dakasi). "Indigenous traditional territory and decolonisation of the settler state" in *Taiwan's contemporary indigenous peoples*, edited by Chia-yuan Huang, Daniel Davies, and Dafydd Fell, 184-205. London: New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.
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the notion of a predetermined "end goal," and instead advocating for its conceptualization as a dynamic spatial process. Therefore, the distinction between postcolonial theory and decolonial theory is imperative to guide the spatio-temporal basis of the analysis that critiques contemporary settler colonial structures. Hence, decoloniality in this paper will refer to unsettling process that recognizes, interrogates, and hopes to dismantle the deeply entrenched structural violence of exogenous settlers developing a new state-seeking identity reliant on the logic of elimination of Indigenous culture, livelihood, and sovereignty.

Intimately connected to decolonial theory are theories of the "production of space," as both contend that space is not a neutral backdrop but a product shaped by social, economic, and ideological factors such as belief systems, spirituality, capitalist production, and industrialization. While I recognize the foundational frameworks of spatial production provided by Smith, Harvey, and Lefebvre— I primarily lean into Edward Soja's theory of the Thirdspace. Briefly put, Soja identifies the Firstspace as physical, the Secondspace as conceptual, and the Thirdspace as the actions that occur in the physical that are defined by the conceptual. The Thirdspace is not merely a "third thing" to challenge the rigid binarism of the physical versus conceptual but encapsulates both real and imagined interactions in continuous movement.[19] Also drawing on constant fluidity and the need to transcend boundaries is radical decolonial thought. Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha (among others) have sought to deconstruct essentialism, reject binary discourse, and offer alternative possibilities for understanding cultural and knowledge dissemination. While these scholars identify as postcolonial theorists, their concepts can be applied

[19] Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Toward a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2008. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203891162.

to decolonizing the settler context of Taiwan. Specifically, I will refer to Said's concept of the "Other" when analyzing how Indigeneity is (mis)represented in Taiwan's museums, Spivak will be referenced in terms of the capacity to amplify Subaltern voices in Han hegemonic spaces, and Bhabha will be referenced through the imagining of a non-hierarchical space facilitating the cohabitation and hybridization of different cultures. Though initially used in the context of postcolonialism and Western imperialism, when tailored to the settler/Native context of Taiwan, we can understand how Han-settler knowledge is produced and reproduced to maintain cultural dominance in museums.

When considering the Soja's Thirdspace in tandem with decolonial theory, we can observe how settler colonial mentality in museum spaces affects (inter)action—between people; objects and people; as well as culture and people. We can try and understand how the symbolism or capacities of the museum building (Firstspace), can affect the social norms embedded in the site (Secondspace), which in turn can conjure new meaning, thoughts, and cultural negotiations (Thirdspace). The physical constraints of the space coupled with the social norms of museum "etiquette" can shape how visitors observe, consume, and prescribe meaning to the display. And of course, these meanings leave the walls of museums into the home, these meanings can sit in collective consciousness, and these meanings can either reproduce or unsettle harmful settler-colonial historical narratives. Thus, the epistemological overlap between theories of space and decolonisation is central to my scope of analysis—which recognises space in its multiplicities and renders the physical, indivisible from the conceptual, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of space.

Methodology

The main concern with methodology is how to analyze museums in a way that acknowledges the multidimensionality of space. This would include the physical, conceptual, and the plethora of invisible processes within the Thirdspace of (de)constructing knowledge, memory, and identity. To do so, I will take a firm constructivist approach. Hence, museums will be understood and examined as non-neutral colonial institutions that are embedded with discursive formations that produce specific knowledge. Applying Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory helps us understand the sites of analysis further. Specifically, Latour adopts a non-anthropocentric perspective, placing emphasis on the interactions between the non-human and the human. This is where my analysis is primarily located, in examining the social subtext and conditions between the display and the visitor and its ability to produce new meaning, rather than analyzing the materiality of the exhibit or the demographic of the visitors. Instead, I hope to use a decolonial framework tailored to Taiwan's settler and external colonial context, to understand how museum displays on Indigeneity can maintain harmful Han-settler ideologies that disregard Indigenous sovereignty, cultural heterogeneity, and Indigenous epistemological value. This cannot be directly extracted from the textual or visual display, but rather understood through the social relations, political conditions and ROC government's ideological constraints that shape curatorial practices. Thus, I believe there is merit in turning to Latour's Actor-Network Theory to understand where qualitative data will be located in this research. Drawing from Latour, we can understand museums as sites of "translation" where the non-human (of the institution/artifacts) and human (visitors) are not merely "temporary face-to-face interactions," but produce a third "far-reaching and durable"[20]

[20] Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

interaction. These interactions are shaped by social forces that inform the texts, visual display, museum organization, and architecture. Therefore, the qualitative methodological approach utilizes critical discourse analysis grounded in rich decolonial theory to examine museums as sites of translation. Explicitly as sites that translate into nationalistic pedagogies, questioning its capacity to confront its discursive settler-colonial foundations.

Firstly, it was essential to establish the scope of analysis and identify what determines urban public space that could represent the government's redress of historical narratives. To narrow the sites, this paper focuses on museums in Taipei, as the island nation's cultural and political capital arguably holds symbolic as well as practical significance. Refining this further, the analysis will focus on sites that have a political and historical focus and are legally registered as museums, which excludes Indigenous cultural centers or heritage museums such as the Ketagalan Cultural Center. This is not to negate the value of cultural centers, but rather to acknowledge the difference in curatorial processes and exhibitory frameworks. Indigenous cultural or heritage sites in Taiwan are often bottom-up initiatives, tribe or geographically-specific, and are multi-purpose—serving as workspaces for NGOs as well as language and education centers. Alternatively, Taipei museums which are closely overseen by the central government, aim to produce a shared historical narrative that can translate to how the settler-colonial state wishes to portray its national image. As this paper hopes to examine national narratives in public spaces, political and historical museums in the island's capital would offer a more robust understanding of the ROC's engagement with restorative redress for Taiwan's Indigenous peoples.

In terms of museum selection, this paper will include three government-funded museums: the National Taiwan Museum main branch (NTM-main), the National Taiwan Museum Nanmen branch (NTM-Nanmen), and the National Taiwan University Museum of Anthropology (NTUM). To clarify, the National Taiwan Museum's main branch has a broader scope of display, ranging from the island's natural history to colonial "encounters," political alliances, and contemporary cultural diversity. The Nanmen branch, however, is in a warehouse of a former camphor and opium factory and focuses on Taiwan's industrialization during the Japanese and KMT eras. NTU Museum of Anthropology, although titularly broad, only exhibits prehistoric Indigenous culture from Taiwan. Additionally, the analysis will include one privately owned museum: the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines (SYM)—the philanthropic project of the Shung Ye Group, which is Taiwan's distributor for the Mitsubishi Company. While SYM isn't publicly funded, the organization works closely with the Ministry of Culture and is promoted on government websites. Unlike the United States and Germany—the countries with the highest density of museums—private museums in Taiwan are centrally regulated. Specifically, Taiwan's Museum Act of 2015 oversees economic development and provides public funding for private museums in terms of artifact repair, educational initiatives, and art collaboration. Thus, the central ROC government has a close administrative and legislative relationship with SYM as it currently serves as Taipei's only museum focused on Indigenous history and culture.

Fig. 1

Museum Name	Year Founded	Public / Private	Defining Characteristics
National Taiwan Museum main branch (NTM-main) **臺灣博物館**	1908	Government-funded	*Temporal scope:* ranges from **1600s – present**. *Display* is thematically broad: Historical, Political and Cultural focus: e.g., political alliances, battles, artwork, and customs.
National Taiwan Museum Nanmen branch (NTM-Nanmen) **臺灣博物館 – 南門館**	2013	Government-funded	*Temporal scope:* **Industrialization period** under Japanese imperialism (1895 – 1945), and capitalist production under KMT martial law (1949 – 1987) *Display* focused on **Camphor and Opium production** and export during this period.
National Taiwan University Museum of Anthropology (NTUM). **臺灣大學人類學系，人類學博物館**	1928	Government-funded	*Temporal scope:* **prehistoric Indigenous cultures** in Taiwan. *Display* includes clothing, pottery, jewellery, sculptures, and tools.

Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines (SYM) **順益台灣原住民博物館**	1914	Privately funded	*Temporal scope:* **prehistoric Indigenous cultures** in Taiwan. *Display* includes clothing, pottery, jewellery, sculptures, and tools. Also refers to Indigenous festivals, customs, and **spiritual practices.**

To provide a holistic analysis I will adopt a three-pronged approach: textual, visual, and geographical. *Textual* will involve a decolonial discourse analysis of the accompanied information and text, including which exhibits contain textual accompaniment, which languages are present, and the choice/omission of language. The *visual* component will be based on a photographic script, which will ask the questions: 1) Which collections are displayed by the museum? 2) Which part of the museum building the collection is displayed in? 3) How visible is the collection compared to the rest of the items on display (e.g. the temporary exhibit of the Ryukai Indigenous peoples in the National Taiwan Museum—main branch)? The final aspect—*geography*—will be considered in terms of the embedded meaning and materiality of the museum's location and architecture. This will consider the significance of utilizing colonial buildings, the (re)naming of the sites, and the capacity for multi-layered institutional critique. Additionally, the geographical component will place added emphasis on parks and memorials as potential sites for redressing historical narratives. Most notably, this paper will discuss both the 2-28 Memorial Park, where the National Taiwan Museum's main branch is located, and the Indigenous People's Park adjacent to the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines. Thus, the central object of my research are museums in Taipei

either partially funded or promoted by Taiwan's settler colonial government. As a result, I will provide a critical discourse analysis of political redress in Taipei's museums through a qualitative methodology grounded in the decolonial questioning of the textual, visual and geographical components of museums.

Findings and Analysis:

While all four museums included Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, their exhibits differed in scope, depth, and size. To begin with, The ShungYe Formosan Museum of Aborigines (hereby referred to as SYM) and the NTU Museum of Anthropology (NTUM) were the only museums to solely exhibit Indigenous culture. Both museums dominantly hold a prehistoric and cultural focus—with little reference to post-industrial Taiwan or the contemporary economic or political landscape. On the other hand, The National Taiwan Museum main branch (NTM-main) and The National Taiwan Museum Nanmen branch (NTM-Nanmen) displayed Indigenous culture within larger permanent exhibits with Austronesians discussed within the broader fabric of Taiwanese society. Unequivocally, Taiwan's Malayo-Polyensians are increasingly visible in public museum spaces. NTM-main, specifically has peppered Indigenous representation in every exhibition hall except for the "Across the Ocean: Taiwan's Migratory Birds" exhibit and the Children's exhibit. Most Notably, it has dedicated its East Exhibition Hall on the first floor to the temporary exhibition titled: "Kialreba Returning Wutai: Dialogue Between NTM & Contemporary Rukai," which prides itself on its collaborative "process of shared learning and in-depth dialogue about indigenous knowledge and artifact experience among the tribe, the local museum, and the national museum."

Additionally, Indigenous peoples are incorporated in NTM-Nanmen's temporary exhibit on the history of electricity on the island, citing electricity as a tool of control as well as technological innovation.

Although Indigenous visuals have expanded, harmful representation persists across all four institutions. I aim to not only identify recurring detrimental themes, but to also examine when and how Indigeneity is welcomed in settler narratives and which political agendas they actively serve. Settler narratives meaning the Han-dominant historical and political narratives that explicitly and/or implicitly propagate settler colonial violence by denying, diluting, or deterring responsibility in regard to indigenous culture, land and existence. Delving into this, I've divided this chapter into three subsections. The first, concentrated on representation, is titled: "Othering: Pre-Historicizing and Exoticizing Indigenous Peoples." The second is titled "How to Build an Unrecognized Nation" and delves into the appropriation of Indigeneity and its potential to call a contested nation into being. The final section, "Can the Master's Tools Dismantle the Master's House?"[21] examines the inherently colonial foundations of museums analyzed and asks if a genuinely decolonial museum can exist in contemporary Taiwan.

"Othering": Pre-Historicizing and Exoticizing Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples

I argue that Taipei's museums largely adopt an ethnographic descriptive focus that utilizes an uncritical object-centered approach, which in turn temporally and spatially confines the representation of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. Although, there has been some progress in cultural preservation that goes beyond conserving material collections, but also towards preserving

[21] Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited, 2018.

traditional knowledge, customs, and values—these efforts are impeded by the failure to explicitly acknowledge the genocidal foundations that demanded extensive cultural preservation. Thus, A common chronotype emerges where Taiwan's settler coloniality is presented in a de-historical and sanitizing way through the curatorial choices of narrating a static time and space to reproduce representations of the Indigenous "Other." The formation of the settler's imagined "Other" will be explored by first analyzing how Indigenous representations are pre-historicised through static and remote depictions and are often only called into "modern" contexts through "societal ills." This will be followed by examining how Austronesian identity remains exoticised through the decontextualized and trivialized aestheticism of Indigenous rituals, customs, and artifacts.

Pre-historicizing Indigenous peoples:

Generally, Austronesian identity is presented "prehistorically," with an anthropological and cultural focus on Indigenous lifestyles and customs before mass industrialisation or capitalist influence. This is most evident among the permanent exhibits of SYM, NTUM, and partially with NTM-main. In SYM and NTUM, most displays contain objects from various tribes mainly sourced from the Japanese colonial era where imperial anthropologists systematically studied and classified Indigenous tribes. Thus, most artifacts were stolen or traded from the Eastern mountainous region during the late 1800s and early 1900s, as Indigenous communities in the western plains were largely assimilated under the Qing Empire. Both SYM and NTUM's permanent exhibition rely heavily on the visualization of "prehistoric" objects without adequate accompanied text, transparency on where they are sourced from, or highlighting the evolution of fluidity of the objects. Instead, the display cases depict a precise and limited temporal scope, locating Austronesian culture as a glorified remnant of a long-gone era.

NTUM divided its showcase into sixteen sections with a display case offered to each formally recognised tribe. Each case offers garments, pots, and jewelry belonging to their respective tribes accompanied by introductory textual information and a singular black-and-white portrait of tribespeople in traditional clothing. The photographs, all taken between the years 1940-60, offer a liminal insight into rural dwelling perspectives of Indigenous community members in a specific period, void of Han-hegemonic influence. Similarly, SYM is divided into four sections—all of which focus on pre-settler Indigenous culture with the partial exception of the Belief and Rituals floor. This focus on the past, while valuable for preserving and showcasing cultural heritage, inadvertently contributes to stereotyping, further marginalization, and loss of cultural continuity. By producing over-simplistic and temporally frozen images, the displays physically and conceptually form a boundary between the dominant populace and Austronesian culture. Where the former is granted cultural fluidity and heterogeneity and the latter is reduced to an "untouched" era—pristine from the unspoken perils of Han invasion, enforced capitalist restructuring, and ecological destruction.

Addressing what the museum calls "frozen evidence of history," NTM-main provides some self-reflection with a passage titled "The Past Is the Future." Within the caption, it clarifies that while "the physical appearance of museum objects may remain unchanging" it is the "people [who] regard those objects [that] change constantly."[22] This in turn allows "the significance of museum collections [to] continue to evolve over time, acquiring new meanings and values."[23] While noting the subjectivity and interpretative capacity of historic relics, the statement curiously divides the

[22] National Taiwan Museum Main Branch. " The Past Is the Future." Taipei, Taiwan. (2023)

[23] *Ibid.*

display from the visitor. It iterates that the objects are “unchanging,” while the people are “changing constantly” to prescribe new meaning, assuming passivity for the institution and activity for the human. Referring to Actor-Network Theory, we can understand this as the museum manufacturing a discourse of disconnect between the non-human and human. Bruno Latour challenges the anthropocentric view of centering the human actor and locates both non-human and human actors within a network with equal capability in shaping the social. The non-human in this case, the institution of the museum, holds structural and agential power in producing “new meanings” to objects exhibited. With the power to serve multiple historical narratives, information on the sourcing of objects, and external voices beyond curatorial or academic disciplines. By merely stating objects have fluid connotations, without actively recontextualizing and fostering a dialogical space for visitors NTM-main teases political consciousness without having to practice any form of decoloniality.

Parallel to the temporal dynamics of display, is the remote representation of Indigenous peoples. SYM exhibits named “Livelihoods, Utensils and Dwellings” and “Clothing, Decoration and Culture” solely represent Indigenous peoples in rural communities. Both SYM and NTM-main have constructed rural Indigenous model homes, linking them to traditional customs and rituals. Comparatively, the temporary collaborative exhibition with Rukai in the NTM main displays pillars and sculptures belonging to the “traditional Rukai home.” However, this display goes into more detail compared to permanent exhibits in SYM and NTM-main, explaining the intertwined nature of architecture, spirituality, and gendered dynamics of space. Explaining the six different pillars commonly found in a rural Rukai home, the text reveals how “"tadri, “main pillar" plays the role of a "channel," vertically transmitting the blessings of Twaumas (Creator) and people's thoughts. And in the secular horizontal space, is the center, outlining the gendered ethics of using

the space."[24] The integration of intangible heritage when exhibiting Indigenous homes, gives the space some room to be continually "living" and imbues further meaning and history. Greater involution of ontologies provides a hopeful basis for dismantling hierarchies of knowledge systems. If chosen to be displayed in isolation—both in time and space—it insinuates Indigenous knowledge is only valuable when positioned externally from mainstream spaces.

Contemporary Representations of Indigenous Peoples

When Indigenous identity is called into modern contexts in SYM and NTM-main, it is often framed through a "post-racial" lens or problematized through societal shortcomings. SYM discourse on contemporary Indigenous peoples in its permanent exhibition harbors two themes: one briefly noting political strides in Indigenous rights and the other depicting Indigenous peoples through alcoholism and loss of cultural identity. The former is focused on the decades after democratization in Taiwan (1980s- early 2000s), identifying key legislations such as the Indigenous Basic Act of 2005, and the Education Act of 2008 as well as efforts to reintroduce Indigenous languages and culture in mainstream media outlets. However, there is no mention of any governmental and activist initiatives within the last fifteen years. Whether this is due to the failure to update information, or a deliberate attempt to neglect the criticism of inefficient policies, ongoing land disputes, and discourse on political representation to illustrate a more harmonious society—is unclear. Similar narratives are reflected in the NTM-main and NTUM—where rights-based accomplishments are celebrated without emphasising the continuous structural and political struggles that face Taiwanese Indigenous peoples today.

[24] National Taiwan Museum Main Branch. " Rukai Home" in *Kielreba Returning Wutai*. Taipei, Taiwan. (2023)

In the brief moments Austronesian cultural identity is called into the present, SYM has confined them within the discourse of alcoholism, urban migration, and erosion of cultural heritage. The textual accompaniment to the millet wine and pottery display, for example, attributed the reasons for "excessive consumption and problems of alcoholism"[25] in Indigenous communities to "forces of modernization, pressure on living space, changes in productive methods, collapse or erosion of traditional communities and cultures, and a flood of commercial alcoholic products." SYM's discussion on Indigenous peoples and alcoholism is presented in isolation, neglecting to delve into the origins of the modernization forces and failing to address the pervasiveness of settler colonialism. The "pressure on living space," a term that warrants deeper exploration in the context of stolen land, is mentioned without a comprehensive examination of its historical implications. The narrative falls short of holding accountable the settler colonial violence responsible for implementing policies that systematically erased indigenous cultures, enforced hyper-capitalistic farming methods, and aggressively displaced communities. These pivotal "reasons" for alcoholism are conveniently anonymized and plucked out of its Han-hegemonic context.

Another Indigenous societal issue is outlined in SYM's display emphasizing the increasing "importance being placed on issues such as the exodus of young people from their tribes and the social phenomena of urban-dwelling indigenous peoples." Again, this "issue" is briefly raised without defining the conditions or displaying urban Indigenous lived experiences. Specifically, there is no mention of how educational infrastructure fails to culturally accommodate Indigenous youth. With almost half of the island's Indigenous population located in cities—public education systems still suffer from a lack of Indigenous language resources, a systemized training program

[25] ShungYe Formosan Museum of Aborigines. "Indigenous Rituals and Alcohol". In *Indigenous Cultural Lifestyles*, Taipei, Taiwan. (2023).

for teachers, and adequate designated time and space for Indigenous language classes. Although just one of many cultural struggles in urban areas—the exhibit neglects any socio-political dimensions of the conversation. Thus, a harmful pattern emerges where in large Indigenous identity is perceived as a relic of the past and is only summoned into the modern context as decontextualized societal "problems."

As a result, a romanticized time capsule is constructed where Austronesian cultural identity is celebrated, but at a "safe" distance to not disturb the settler colonial imagination. Edward Said alludes to this in his writing on the colonized "Other." Though initially utilized in relation to Western/Eastern imperial power dynamics, we can see this replicated in the case of Taiwan's over-simplistic binary of the settler "Self" and the Indigenous "Other."[26] By defining contemporary Indigeneity through the obstacles presented by "modernization," Indigenous peoples are effectively relieved of their agency and perceived as passive victims of enmeshed colonial processes. Yet these processes are not even sufficiently examined within the museum display. What is left is a trivial representation of Austronesian Taiwanese people—a passive, prehistoric, problematized "Other." Binter elaborates on this distinction, stating how museum chronotypes can extend settler colonial construction.[27] Specifically, how curators narrate time and space to create worlds that enable subjectivities to emerge, to allow the creation of an opposite binary world in which the "Other" is comfortably reiterated. By establishing a temporal and spatial disconnect,

[26] Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

[27] Giblin, John, Imma Ramos, and Nikki Grout. "Dismantling the Master's House." *Third Text* 33, no. 4-5 (2019): 471-486. doi: 10.1080/09528822.2019.1653065.

museums create a comfortable chronotype for Han visitors where settler colonial pedagogies of imperial justification and cultural essentialism go unquestioned.

How to build an unrecognized nation?

After examining how Indigenous peoples are represented in museums, this section delves deeper into the lack of historical and political interrogation of Indigenous and Han relations and which narratives this may serve. Understanding the multiple processes of reiterating the "Other" through time, space, and simplistic beautification—this section questions the motive behind this settler colonial construction. To do so, I first examine how Indigenous and Han relations are discussed in museums, which is followed by an understanding of how these play into the nation-building process of a diplomatically unrecognized Taiwan. Thus, I firmly argue that the denial of settler colonial genocidal intent and violence of various imperial regimes coupled with romanticized depictions of colonial relations allows a narrative of voluntary inclusion into a shared national imagining to emerge. Subsequently, this harmonious imagery is reproduced in the ROC's liberal multicultural narrative, where Indigeneity is racialised under the guise of "cultural diversity" rather than perceived as a politically autonomous categorisation.

Sanitizing colonial violence:

Across all four museums, the term "settler colonialism," "settlers" or "colonialism" is not mentioned once in the context of the Han people. Instead, euphemistic language is used such as "mass immigration of Han Chinese people" (SYM and NTUM), "contact" or "arrival" of the Han

(SYM and NTM-main). When more aggressive terms were used, it often implied a mutual destruction, or violence on both sides—ignoring the directionality of power. This is evident with the use of "bloody wars," "ethnic conflict" and "internecine struggle" (NTM-Nanmen). There is an alarming pattern of sanitizing and whitewashing history, which removes any exploitative intent of early Han settlers. Interestingly, NTM-main also depicted a largely peaceful relationship between Indigenous peoples and external colonial forces, namely the Dutch and Japanese. Instead of depicting the aggressive transformation of the western plains into a commercial agricultural colony under the Sino-Dutch hybrid regime—NTM-main displayed a Romanized dictionary. This display being the only representation of Dutch-Indigenous interaction describes how "missionaries of the Dutch East India Company in Taiwan used the Roman alphabet to teach the local Pingpu people to write their own language for missionary and administrative purposes,"[28] which is accompanied by a "list of the groceries and prices…required by a Pingpu villager for a banquet in the 10th year of the Jiaging reign (1805)."[29] While there is evidence of some amicable relations, such as members of the Pingpu peoples exchanging deer hide for Dutch shotguns—it would be irresponsible to let occasional participation in the trade economy define this era.

More pressingly, NTM-main presents a harmonious image of Japanese and Indigenous relations despite the imperialist regime being notorious for systemized violence. The display contains a "protection flag" awarded to a chief of the Paiwan Tribe by Japanese imperial troops during the Butan incident of 1874. Here, the Butan Incident is described as an event where "Japan

[28] National Taiwan Museum Main Branch. "The Sinkang Manuscript Price List" in *People of Taiwan.* Taipei, Taiwan. (2023)

[29] *Ibid.*

sent troops to Taiwan on the grounds that a group of drifting Ryukyu fishermen had been killed by local indigenous people."[30] Sparing violent details, the text states that the Japanese signed a contract with the Qing government that acknowledged the "legitimacy of Japanese warfare." [31]According to the museum, the protection flag was awarded to a chief of the Paiwan Tribe who "provided labor and building materials when the army was stationed at Fenggang Village."[32] While this incident occurred before Japanese imperialist rule (1895-1945), the exhibit fails to mention that the Butan Incident is also recognized as Japan's first attempt to colonize the island. Japan's real purpose of the 1874 expedition to establish colonies in eastern Taiwan to "civilize" the "savage inhabitants," is apparent in publicly available government documents. Further supporting this is Japan's mimesis of Western imperialism, replicating Western strategies of imperial domination by commercially publishing exaggerated "savage" representations of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and presenting Japanese dominance over them to improve world status.[33] Hence, the emphasis on cultural difference and the "civilizing mission," stresses the importance of establishing Japanese authority rather than the original rationale of the expedition. However, this context is omitted in the display. Instead, the Butan Incident is framed as a legitimate means of punishing Taiwan's Austronesians—a bloodless encounter that resulted in a "protection flag."

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[30] National Taiwan Museum Main Branch. "The 53rd Japanese Protection Flag Distributed to Friendly Tribes during The Butan Incident" in *People of Taiwan.* Taipei, Taiwan. (2023)

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Eskildsen, Robert. "Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan's 1874 Expedition to Taiwan." *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 2 (2002): 388–418. https://doi.org/10.1086/532291.

Contrastingly, NTM-Nanmen does include "ethnic conflict" between the Qing government and Indigenous peoples, which is then followed by "bloody wars" between Japanese forces and Indigenous peoples. The Nanmen branch, located in a former camphor factory, focuses on the industrialization of Taiwan, namely through the Japanese imperial regime. Compartmentalized to the side of the main hall, is a subsection of the exhibition that acknowledges the violence towards Indigenous peoples to expand resources. This corner of institutional critique has three textual panels titled: "Camphor Industry, Land Development, and Ethnic Conflict," "Pieces of Camphor, Drops of Blood" and "Making Camphor, Developing the Mountains and Internecine Struggle." These panels provide the most detail of brutal encounters, and systematic oppression by outlining the Qing policy of "opening the mountains and pacifying the aborigines"[34] through military suppression and appeasement measures in education and economy."[35] This is echoed when discussing how the "Japanese even initiated bloody wars to force the indigenes to surrender. For various tribes in the south, police substations were set up to temporarily pacify the indigenes by educational, medical, and economic measures to achieve a total control over the Aboriginal Area and to effectively rule the indigenous people."[36] Notably, it underscores that the camphor expansionist project was merely an extension of the intent of Japanese colonial control and served a dual purpose of mass production but also "pacification" of the "ungovernable" Indigenous peoples in the mountainous region. This, however, is framed through the capitalist lexicon of land development where Indigenous lives are presented as the "biggest obstacle to developing the

[34] National Taiwan Museum Nanmen Branch. "Camphor Industry, Land Development, and Ethnic Conflict". Taipei, Taiwan. (2023).

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] National Taiwan Museum Nanmen Branch. "Making Camphor, Developing the Mountains and Internecine Struggle" Taipei, Taiwan. (2023).

camphor industry,"[37] and the camphor industry is presented as a "pioneer in the reclamation of central and northern regions." While it acknowledges the atrocities towards Indigenous groups, the critique is arguably overshadowed by the glorification of camphor expansion as Taiwan's mass industrial debut in international trade. This is re-emphasized by the surrounding displays which establish Taiwan as the "number one" in global camphor production after World War Two, mentioning it even surpassed Global North competitors.

Through the museums' depictions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, it is clear which deaths matter, and which do not. Through national museums (NTM-main, NTM-Nanmen, and NTUM), or museums with close affiliation to the central government (SYM)—the state can control how we perceive death, genocide, conflict, and colonial violence. Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics concerning sovereignty and the state asserts that colonial powers impose their "sovereign" control by determining which lives are valued and which are disposable. Taking this further, it could be argued that museums, under the state's control, can also function as necropolitical institutions. With the ability to disseminate state-approved narratives that erase the extent and scope of subjugation, invasion, and even genocidal intent, these spaces tread beyond the thanatopolitics of "managing death," and into the necropolitics of "controlling death."[38] The choice to omit Indigenous death from museum displays is a form of structural violence that also functions as a tool to control or maintain official historical narratives. By publicly signaling which deaths matter and which do not, Taipei's museums actively contribute to broader systems of control to justify the ongoing settler colonial project. Across the museums, the representation of

[37] National Taiwan Museum Nanmen Branch. "Making Camphor, Developing the Mountains and Internecine Struggle" Taipei, Taiwan. (2023).

[38] Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." In *Foucault in an Age of Terror: Essays on Biopolitics and the Defence of Society*, pp. 152-182. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008.

Indigenous peoples is selective. Austronesian Taiwanese identity is at its loudest and most vibrant when it comes to traditional lifestyles and cultural diversity, and its quietest when it comes to locating its historical and political context. Thus, there is value in examining *why* Indigeneity is called into the narrative, *who* the narrative belongs to, and what purpose it serves.

ROC framework of "multicultural diversity"

In tandem with depicting "harmonious" colonial relationships, is the utilization of Indigenous peoples when discussing Taiwan's modern identity as a multicultural, liberal democracy. This section identifies how Austronesian culture is called into display to consolidate the settler state's national identity as separate from mainland China, and a leading liberal authority in the global order. To preface this argument, it should be noted that Taiwan, also referred to as the Republic of China (ROC), is not a diplomatically recognized state. Currently, it operates as a *de facto* state and prides its legitimacy on its comparatively "clean" human rights record, neoliberal model, technological innovation, and liberal democratic framework. Despite threats of annexation from mainland China, the self-recognized island nation holds substantive relations with Western democracies and holds onto its twelve remaining diplomatic ties. Upon understanding this, it's essential to question which narratives of Indigeneity prop up ROC nationalism, and which threaten the ideological foundations of the settler project.

Across exhibits, Indigenous struggles are framed within the parameters of Republic of China (ROC) settler governance, discussing them as integral to the fabric of multicultural society rather than acknowledging external perspectives centered on the right to self-determination or the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy. This is evident in NTM's narrative of shared

identity through its reflection on Taiwan's history, stating "This mosaic seems messy and uncoordinated, but it is extremely colorful and vital, and expresses Taiwan's diversity."[39] The "mosaic" includes "original Austronesian indigenous people, emigrant Chinese, Japanese, Westerners, and contemporary Southeast Asians," which all leave "deep cultural imprints" in Taiwan. The choice to describe the mosaic as not messy and uncoordinated could be viewed as an extension of the aforementioned sanitizing language used for settler colonialism. By delineating a largely harmonious first interaction between non-Indigenous and Indigenous groups, it sets the foundations for a "believable" culturally harmonious national narrative post-democratization. For without historical strife, there is no need to explicitly showcase efforts of reconciliation.

Instead, Indigeneity is forcibly incorporated into ROC's imagined community of cultural pluralism—placing Indigenous concerns within the broader ideological agenda of national identity, which actively ignores efforts of harnessing Indigenous Nationalisms. Thus, a singular conception of nationhood is offered, where Austronesian identity is arguably racialized as an inclusive ethnic component rather than a politically autonomous identity. Indigenous legal scholar Awi Mona has highlighted the racialisation of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples in numerous works. Explaining how despite UNDRIP guidelines, the ROC has utilized the term "tribe" instead of "peoples". Moreover, Mona writes on how ROC legal frameworks on Indigenous rights derive from Article 5 of the ROC constitution on racial equality - which states there should be equality between "various racial groups".[40] Indigeneity being incorporated into a multi-ethnic legal framework removes the

[39] "National Taiwan Museum Main Branch. "The Cultural Mosaic of Taiwan" In *People of Taiwan.* Taipei, Taiwan. (2023)

[40] Simon, Scott, & Awi Mona. "Between Legal Indigeneity and Indigenous Sovereignty in Taiwan: Insights From Critical Race Theory." *Social Inclusion* [Online], 11.2 (2023): 187-197.

capacity of multiple sovereign identities on the island. It additionally allows for the racialized foundations of Indigenous transitional justice, where justice is viewed as individual-based "affirmative action" transformation rather than providing the resources and space for Indigenous sovereign-seeking identities.[41] I say this to highlight the legal, constitutional, and political norms that contextualize ROC discourse on race, representation, and recognition regarding Indigenous peoples. And to emphasize that the construction of Han-settler national identity in recent decades has relied on implicitly reducing Indigenous rights, to individualized rights that are race-based under the ROC's diverse democracy.

This discourse of appropriating Indigeneity to legitimize ROC's separation from mainland China, and to carve a distinct international identity, is not new to Taiwan. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has previously been accused of adopting a nativist approach under Chen Shui-Bian (2000-2008) where a shift in focus toward Austronesian heritage was perceived to be linked to a de-Sinicization campaign to sever cultural association to mainland China.[42] Similarly, Taiwan's current president Tsai (also a DPP member), has been criticized for her Transitional Justice mechanisms that myopically place Indigenous concerns within Hoklo narratives of trauma, and for her insufficient symbolic apology to Taiwan's Indigenous peoples.[43] These acts of reconciliation have been perceived by some Indigenous leaders as the ROC's means to advance

[41] Mona, Awi. "Conceptualizing Indigenous Historical Justice Toward a Mutual Recognition with State in Taiwan," *Washington International Law Journal*, 28 no. 3 (2019): 654–675.

[42] Corcuff, Stephane. "Taiwan's New Mainlanders, New Taiwanese?" In *Memories of the Future*, edited by Stephane Corcuff, 163-195. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2002.

[43] Chu, Rong-Xuan, and Huang, Chih-Tung. "The day after the apology: A critical discourse analysis of President Tsai's national apology to Taiwan's indigenous peoples." *Discourse Studies* 23 (2021): 84–101. doi:10.1177/1461445620942875.

its global status as a liberal democracy that adheres to international human rights norms, rather than a genuine effort of collective healing. There is however danger in characterizing the government's rhetoric as a dialectic paradigm between the colonizer and the colonized. Unlike other settler colonies of New Zealand and Canada, the Han Taiwanese population has been colonized by external powers and experienced global neo-colonialism and threats from China. Therefore, theoretical frameworks on settler coloniality are often dichotomous and over-simplistic regarding Taiwan's intersection of empires, colonizers, races, ethnicities, and classes. For example, Wolfe and Veracini's conception of settler colonial studies focus on the settler and Native paradigm, predominantly in the context of white and Indigenous relations. Whereas Taiwan racial dynamics of both settler and external colonialism in the East Asian context cannot turn to Western notions of the "Doctrine of Discovery", namely because Han settlers were voluntarily brought over by the Dutch East Indies Corporation in the 1700s.

Additionally, the multiple waves of Han-settler migration have conjured different ideologies on Taiwanese "independence", and different constructions of national identity. There is an integral distinction to make between the waves of Han settlers before and after 1945. The first wave in the 17th and 18th centuries (*benshengren*), predominantly migrated from rural areas in southern China and were "Japanized" under Japanese rule - thus forming a distinct political and cultural identity. The second major wave from 1945 (*waishengren*), were mainly Northern urban elite and were more "sinicized" after generations of remaining on the mainland.[44] This separation of geography, class, politics, and culture is essential in understanding the fractured

[44] Corcuff. Stephane "Taiwan's New Mainlanders, New Taiwanese?" *Memories of the Future,* Armonk: M.E. Sharpe: (2002): 163-195.

political identities within Han settlers in the post WWII era - and how this manifested into the contemporary bipartisan politics of the DPP and KMT. Thus, we must understand that the DPP was born in 1986 to oppose KMT dictatorship forces internally and fostered a political identity tied to continuous democratic nation-building. We must also understand that neo-colonial influences from the West and the PRC affect the formation of knowledge production in Taiwan, subsequently affecting its "postcolonial" project. When the DPP's discourse on Indigenous Peoples' focuses on KMT martial law and Austronesian Indigeneity – this is reactionary to mainland China's political grasp on the island. Concurrently, when the DPP's discourse on Indigenous peoples spotlights cultural pluralism and democratic destiny – this is ideologically shuttled from the United States. Although a binary influence of the DPP's discourse on national identity is over-simplistic, it illustrates the two largest confines of its settler-colonial knowledge. I would like to stress that I am not claiming the DPP is a victim of the colonial process but to recognise that the "colonizer vs colonized" framework is inadequate and incompatible with Taiwan's reality. Therefore, Taiwan's discourse of contemporary Indigenous peoples in museum spaces is inhibited by its complicated national identity as an unrecognized state, where the DPP's settler identity remains straddled by the victim-perpetrator binary.

Interestingly, the settler nation's attempt at legitimacy extends beyond cultural and ethnic dynamics and into its staunch neoliberal stance. This is evident in how Indigenous culture is alluded to within the NTM's "Made in Taiwan" display. The statement reflects on the history of Taiwan, emphasizing "encounters, conflicts, conversations, and interactions"[45] among peoples and

[45] National Taiwan Museum Main Branch. "Made in Taiwan" in *People of Taiwan.* Taipei, Taiwan. (2023).

cultures of different origins. The phrase “Made in Taiwan” suggests a co-authorship of identity through these interactions, as if they occurred in a power vacuum external to the nexus of colonial and capitalist systems. Delving deeper into the capitalist connotations of the Made in Taiwan registered trademark reveals another dimension of Taiwan’s desired image of efficacy, mutual trade, and neoliberal ascension of power. The use of the term "made″ implies a manufactured common identity that was not in part imported, immigrated, or invaded—but rather created for export. By emphasizing interactions without addressing the directionality of power, the dialogue downplays the role of Han hegemony and coercion in assimilationist practices. There is also merit in interrogating why NTM-main has leaned into the concept of "Made in Taiwan" which is closely associated with the 1980s post-industrial era. This is when the island began engaging in international neoliberal trade and mid-supply-chain production for Western brands such as Nike, Adidas, and Mattel and arguably even paved the way in opening up the mainland’s international labor force.[46] This connection intertwines the language and values of neoliberalism with the intimacy of identity, almost as if to say Taiwan’s value correlates with its labor contribution to the global economy. Hardt and Negri's analysis helps us understand how the rise of neoliberal ideology has reshaped the currency of global power to one of capitalistic influence, rather than rigid Westphalian sovereignty.[47] Their insights highlight the formation of a novel imperial order, defined by transnational liberal institutions—which in turn shapes Taiwan's contemporary pursuit of global authority. Understanding Taiwan’s precarious status as a semi-sovereign entity, it is no surprise the government would promote an identity that prides itself in its capitalist successes as a

[46] Rigger, Shelley. *The Tiger Leading the Dragon: How Taiwan Propelled China's Economic Rise*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.

[47] Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. Penguin, 2005.

global manufacturer.[48] In leveraging neoliberal principles, the "Made in Taiwan" exhibit title not only subsumes Austronesian heritage as a cultural export, but also chooses to celebrate and identify with the economic system that has brutally justified the destruction of Indigenous land, people, and culture. I raise this to highlight the inconsistencies in the ROC's national values, and how both Indigeneity and neoliberalism are used to pursue a distinct global identity.

As a result, a shared imagined community defined by the contested settler state's political framework of cultural diversity and neoliberal ascension is asserted between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Taiwan. We can see how the sanitizing and capitalist language used to describe Han and Indigenous relations in the 1700s is extended when discussing Taiwan's modern context. By framing settler colonial violence as an "obstacle" to industrial production and referring to settlers as immigrants, Taipei's museums produce a blank slate where they can project their "vibrant," "vital" and "coordinated" image of modern Taiwan. Missing from this narrative of nationhood, is any historical or political narrative centered on the Indigenous right to self-determination, social movements for ancestral lands, and the ongoing struggle for various plains tribes for official recognition. Across all four institutions, there is no mention of Indigenous autonomy or government-to-government relationships between tribal leaders and the central ROC governments. Instead, we, as visitors, are offered a singular conception of the settler colonial nation, which uses racialization and capitalist rhetoric to reduce Austronesian identity to an ethnic categorization in a broader cultural export. Thus, the wider question here is if Taiwan's museums with a settler-

[48] Liu, Wen. "From Independence to Interdependence: Taiwan Independence as Critique, Strategy, and Method toward Decoloniality," *American Quarterly*, 73, no. 2 (2021): 371-377.

colonial nationalistic agenda, can harness anti-colonial energies to represent the multiplicity of nationalisms on the island.

Can the Master's Tools Dismantle the Master's House?

Upon understanding how the Indigenous "Other" is reinvented to distinctly cement ROC's fragile international status and national identity, this section asks if museum exhibits have the capacity to effectively challenge settler colonial knowledge despite their existence being rooted in the logic of settler justification. Taking a step back, it examines colonial dynamics and symbols of physical space, and how this reinforces the conceptual and the imagined. By first outlining the historical and structural implications of Taipei's museums, this paper challenges the normative concept of museums spaces and asks how it can be reimagined through Indigenizing curation, expanding to digital spaces but also by questioning if museology can exist beyond the building. Drawing from Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridization and Soja's Thirdspace, this section unravels colonial ontologies that continue to inform museum space and asks if the master's tools can truly dismantle the master's house and if a genuinely decolonized museum is possible to achieve in Taiwan.

The Coloniality of Museum Spaces

All four museums in this paper's analysis undeniably rest on imperialistic knowledge formation, with their histories, curatorial strategies, and discourse inextricably tied to the justification of the Japanese Empire. This is because although Han settlers arrived on the island first, Indigenous peoples were only systematically classified and studied by ethnologists during

Japanese occupation in the early 1900s. NTM-main, established in 1908 during the Japanese colonial era, serves as a notable cultural institution with enduring colonial foundations. Throughout this era, the museum actively contributed to the construction of cultural narratives that perpetuated a hierarchical view of cultures, emphasizing Japanese cultural superiority and presenting Taiwan's Indigenous peoples through a paternalistic and exoticized lens—aligning with the broader agenda of legitimizing colonial rule. The museum's website describes the construction of the museum in 1906 to commemorate Governor-General Kodama Gentaro and Chief Civil Administrator Goto Shinpei's colonial achievements in Taiwan's government. It even cites the Taiwan Daily News article, stating: "This kind of architecture is to glorify the winning of a war forever. When later generations stand before it and see it, they can think of the glory." [49]Oddly, the imperialistic foundations of the architectural site are not obscured but instead celebrated as a period that brought "a peaceful and happy life" to the islanders, where they can "enjoy the benefit from this government and [live] in this civilized beautiful city." [50]Omitted from this narrative, is any reflective context where the institution recognizes its own role in glorifying Empire and its legacy of cultural erasure.

On the note of institutional reflectivity, NTM-Nanmen does offer some critique with both its permanent and temporary exhibitions discussing the harmful impacts of the camphor and electricity industry on Indigenous peoples. However, the section on institutional critique in the camphor section—as mentioned above—is visually hidden in the main hall. Off to the side, the 2x2 meter side room is designed to look like a rural Indigenous dwelling. The walls roughly

[49] *National Taiwan Museum*. "Exhibitions*." National Taiwan Museum*, https://www.ntm.gov.tw/en/cp.aspx?n=5705.

[50] *Ibid.*

plastered with clay and including little wooden framed windows and drawings of straw are vaguely reminiscent of an Indigenous home. By both compartmentalizing the exhibit and alluding to Indigenous construction, it both physically and conceptually marginalizes the erasure of Indigenous land and culture. Moreover, it mentions systemized violence in a way that doesn't visually disturb the grandeur of camphor commerce, allowing its institutional critique to fall short of meaningfully incorporating its legacy of harm into the exhibition. This sentiment is also evident in its temporary exhibition of Taiwan and Electricity, where a panel towards the end of the main hall ineloquently titled "Electric Shock!," details how electric fences in the mountainous regions were also used to control Indigenous mobility. Swiftly, it moves on to conclude the exhibition with "Finale: A Civilized Scene," describing how electricity is now ubiquitous and accessible across Taiwan and enjoyed by all. The juxtaposition of using the term "civilized" sequentially after the panel on controlling "savages" indicates the lack of concerted effort to delve deeper into institutional critique, and how the government-subsidized camphor and electricity companies were complicit and continue to benefit from Indigenous subjugation.

SYM, although a private museum, also reveals deeply rooted colonial foundations through historical connections with Mitsubishi, particularly during the Japanese military's attacks on the Paiwan people in the aftermath of the 1874 Butan Incident. This history raises questions about the museum's role as a colonial symbol, implicated not just in past events but also in the contemporary commercialization of Taiwan's Indigenous cultures. Collaboration between Shung Ye and Mitsubishi extends to marketing, where both entities exploit images of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples for profit, prioritizing marketable aspects over Indigenous rights.[51] The museum's emblem,

[51] Denton, Kirk A. "Aboriginal Museums and the Construction of a Taiwanese Identity." In *The Landscape of Historical Memory: The Politics of Museums and Memorial Culture in Post–Martial Law*

fashioned as a ten-square symbol mirroring the intricate pattern of an aboriginal cloth, serves as a stylized representation of Taiwan. Within this emblem, the (at the time) ten officially recognized Indigenous groups are harmoniously interwoven, while the Taiwan Strait and the Pacific Ocean are depicted by the undulating blue lines on the left and right sides. The concept of unity among Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, though an oversimplified and whitewashing view of history, is presented as integral to the broader tapestry of the nation.

Additionally, the biannual event, "Together with the Tribes," appears to offer Indigenous communities a chance to curate their own exhibit, but the historical associations of Shung Ye and its potential influence over narratives raise questions about the authenticity and agency granted to Indigenous voices. During the time of this research was conducted, the temporary "Together with the Tribes," was also not on rotation despite it being the public schooling systems summer semester, which is prime time for both student groups and tourists to visit. This raises another reoccurring issue of space and Indigenous representation in museums, where often Indigenous curation and in-depth representation is pressed to the margins of non-permanent exhibits. When asked about this phenomenon, SYM cited the limitation of physical space explaining the museum puts its focus on introducing the characteristics of Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan. Similarly, the director of the National Museum of Taiwan History stated that the aim was provide a general history of Taiwan, that could give visitors an idea of what Indigenous peoples' statuses were at that time. Acknowledging the shortfalls of the introductory scope, the director added the details could be

Taiwan, published by Hong Kong University Press, 2021. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wd02k5.14.

added in temporary exhibits in the future.[52] However, temporality arguably goes against the decolonial standpoint of restructuring narrative space to meaningfully incorporate multiple perspective, instead of merely adding a peripheral voice. Decoloniality calls for permanence: a permanent and new reconfigured space that understands cultural difference, and places equal importance on non-Indigenous and Indigenous storytelling.[53] By creating a side-lined temporary space for Indigenous curation and stories, Taipei's museums signal which knowledge systems, traditions and values are deserving of mainstream attention, and which are not.

Hybridization and the Third Space

Understanding the colonial foundations of Taipei's museums and subsequent issues of temporary displays, I argue there is merit in considering Bhabha and Soja's conception of the Third space – where non-Indigenous and Indigenous ontologies can hybridize in permanent exhibitory spaces. To do thus, I will first turn to Bhabha's distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. Bhabha's cultural diversity is defined as 'an epistemological object... a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology"[54] that refers to existing cultural practices, artifacts, customs, and so on. Whereas cultural difference calls for a "process of the enunciation of culture as "knowledgeable, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification'

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[52] Chen, Shih-Yu. 2017. "Rethinking Representation: Shifting Relations between Museums and the Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan." *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 10, no. 3 (2017): 13-22. doi:10.18848/1835-2014/CGP/v10i03/13-22.

[53] Giblin, John, Imma Ramos, and Nikki Grout. "Dismantling the master's house: thoughts on representing empire and decolonising museums and public spaces in practice an introduction." *Third Text* 33, no. 4-5 (2019): 471-486.

[54] Bhabha, Homi. "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha." In Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 207-221. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990.

that is constructed to be 'different.'" Simply put, cultural diversity rests on a system of knowledge based on aesthetics and ethnology, and cultural difference recognises different systems of identification where each site of knowledge holds value in authority. Understanding Bhabha, cultural diversity is an epistemological *object* where cultures merely co-exist, and cultural difference is a *process* where cultures interact. A dynamic and transformative process that acknowledges the fluidity of cultures through encounters and negotiations. The space which said interactions occur – is what Bhabha coins as the third space. Applying this to Taiwan's case, it is unequivocal that museums function as sites that promote cultural diversity rather than providing what Bhabha calls a "third space of enunciation"—a non-hierarchical space that enables different cultures to cohabit and hybridize. Although Soja's conception of the third space differs in that its "first" and "second" spaces refer to the physical and conceptual, rather than Bhabha's "first" space being the Indigenous home and the "second" the colonizer's social conditions – their notions of the Third Space are both grounded in interaction, and the emergence of a third "new" meaning. For Bhabha this is the interaction of culture, and for Soja this is interaction between physical space and the social norms. As we discuss both the spatiality of museum buildings, as well as its social and cultural contents I will refer to both enunciations of the "Third Space".

As previously established, I have argued that Indigenous ontologies are constrained within Han-hegemonic discourse and are hypervisible and deemed valuable when they serve ROC nationalistic narratives of multicultural diversity. If we look to Bhabha's hybridization of cultural difference – between non-Indigenous and Indigenous cultural authority – what could this look like? Firstly, this would require a holistic approach that looks to hybridize cultural practices beyond exhibition content to encompass recruitment practices, audience engagement strategies,

repatriation efforts, acquisition policies, architectural design, labelling practices, and conservation storage methods. While it may seem exhaustive, it is necessary to understand the involution process of culture as not merely a "mix and stir" method – but a genuine attempt of incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing: traditional ecological knowledge, spiritual knowledge, and ancestral law. By incorporating, I mean not as object of study, but a way of understanding and perceiving museum artifacts, art, and graphics. It is not just *what* we consume, but *how* we consume museum content.

Another aspect of how we absorb museum displays relies on embracing critical object-centered representations of empires. This involves turning colonial objects on their heads, recontextualizing them, and interrogating their stories. The crucial question becomes: What do these objects reveal or conceal about the colonial past, and how can their narratives be reshaped to provide a more accurate and inclusive portrayal of history? In essence, the journey to decolonize museums in Taiwan involves a deep and critical re-examination of their historical foundations, an overhaul of operational practices, and a commitment to challenging and reshaping narratives to foster a more accurate representation of Taiwan's complex history. With this, there is also room to expand how we contextualize objects: through digital handbooks, guest speakers, performance art and music. To the credit of the NTM-main, there is have been digital resources available through interactive touchscreens that digitize paintings and inform visitors of the early Han depictions of Indigenous customs. An interactive touchscreen is also used introduce all the holidays, festivals, rituals, and customs on the island from belongs to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, across a plethora of religions, spiritual beliefs, and folklore beliefs.

If we expand the parameters of the embodied, affective, and sensorial experiences of museums – as detailed above – can we also expand the parameters of what constitutes a museum? Specifically, if we understand the existence of Taipei's museums as a glorified manifestation of colonial justification, can they in their current spaces, forms and ideations be decolonized? Especially, considering the ROC is still functioning as a settler-colonial state and the museums in question are centrally regulated – can its function be divorced from nationalistic and settler colonial agendas? These are questions that are fundamental in addressing whether museums are the appropriate spaces to carry out political redress towards Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. Because perhaps, while we can try to enunciate a cultural "Third Space", this space, according to Soja only comes into existence through the combination of the "First" and "Second" Space. By this I mean a Third Space of decolonial-informed dialogue and interaction can only be called into being, by first decolonizing the social expectations and norms of the conceptual Second Space, and the decolonizing the physicality of the First Space. This is because Soja argues that the First space and Second space are interconnected and mutually constitutive and come together to create the relationships of the Third Space. In brief, the material space affects how social dynamics of the space, which then affects the relationships held in that space. Let's take the National Taiwan Museum main building as an example. The museum's First Space is a Japanese colonial building replicated from Greek architecture, which was constructed on stolen Indigenous Ketagalan land. The establishment of the museum reinvents the behaviour on land, to one that is informed through the settler's social norms of museum observation, educational school trips, tourism and so forth. Therefore, the foundations of the Third Space – the space to form cultural negotiations - is confined the colonial conditions of the material space and imaginary social conventions that come with it. Without placing equal cultural emphasis of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural ontologies in

the physical and conceptual – how can processes of cultural hybridization be meaningfully produced in the museum's integrative space. Thus, I ask again: can you decolonize the cultural relationships, negotiations, and interaction of the museum's Third Space – without first decolonizing the material and social conditions of the museum?

While the master's tools may not have the capacity for decolonization along all three spaces, perhaps the most we can do in the meantime is to unsettle and distort settler narratives in Taipei's museums. Returning to the notion of political redress for Indigenous Taiwan through museums, there is still plenty of room to indigenize curatorial practices and museum displays through the methods mentioned above. While it may not be true attempt and decolonization – as that would require deeper interrogation in other aspects of social cultural, political implications of land and livelihoods – it could be a meaningful entry point in restoring historical narratives in Taiwan. This also does not close the discussion on decolonizing museums, but rather could redirect it. Just because we cannot decolonize the museum in its normative and colonial institutional state – it doesn't mean we can't reimagine the defining parameters of the "museum" beyond the architectural objectifications of state and national authority.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I adopt a decolonial lens to critically examine the role of museums in Taiwan in addressing Indigenous visibility and redress. Despite an apparent increase in Indigenous representation within museum spaces, the analysis reveals a confined and decontextualized portrayal of Indigeneity, particularly within the curatorial practices of Taipei's museums. Drawing inspiration from settler colonial studies and postcolonial scholars such as Patrick

Wolfe, Lorenzo Veracini, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha, I engage with the concept of decolonization as an ongoing process aimed at undoing the legacies of settler and external colonialism – and ask if museums can be site of political redress for Indigenous Taiwan. To illustrate how the conceptualizing the Indigenous "Other" supports ROC nation-building practices that in turn restrict genuine attempts of reconciling with Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples, I divided my analysis into three sections.

In the first section, I asserted that museums in Taipei predominantly employ an ethnographic and descriptive focus with an uncritical, object-centered approach, leading to a temporal and spatial confinement of the representation of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. In doing so a settler narrative is formed where the imagined "Other" is explored through the prehistoricization of Indigenous representations, often depicted as static and remote and only brought into "modern" contexts through the lens of "societal ills." Within the second section, I question why the "Other" comes into being – exploring how the general omission of Han settler colonial violence and Japanese imperial violence, against relations and the specific narratives that may be served by this omission serve nation-building processes of Taiwan. I affirm that the denial of settler colonial genocidal intent coupled with romanticized depictions of colonial relations, fostered a narrative of voluntary inclusion into a shared ROC national identity - where Indigeneity is racialized under the guise of "cultural diversity" rather than recognized as a political sovereign. Within the final section, I questioned the potential of museum exhibits to effectively challenge settler colonial knowledge, given their roots in the logic of settler justification. The examination expands to colonial dynamics, emphasizing the symbolic impact of physical space on conceptual and imagined realms. It opens room for future interrogation

and research into the possibility of reimagining museums through Indigenizing curation, extending into digital spaces, and questioning the limitations of museology confined to physical buildings.

Therefore, in this paper I challenge whether normative museum spaces intertwined colonial and nationalistic processes can truly be sites of political redress for Indigenous Peoples in Taiwan. By drawing on both Bhabha and Soja's theories of the Third Space I argue that thorough decolonization, that interrogates the materiality and imaginary colonial dimensions of museum spaces is a feat that requires greater decolonial practice beyond the walls of the museum. Understanding the ROC's political status as a semi-sovereign that is continuously redefining itself in the face of neoliberal and neo-colonial conditions – I believe the curatorial capacity of Indigenous historical narratives are severely inhibited to a settler framework of national identity resulting in ethnological and aestheticized portrayed of Indigeneity. Understanding these limitations, I argue that political redress in the form of restoring Indigenous historical and political narratives in Taiwan's museums has the potential to interrogate settler narratives. Specifically, through de-historizing representation and re-contextualizing artifacts to present the heterogeneity of Austronesian identity that addresses contemporary political struggles of self-determination, cultural revitalization and reclamation of ancestral lands. While a comprehensive effort of decolonizing museums may seem distant – in the meantime there is radical potential for Taiwan's museums to unsettle the settler imagination.

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