

# ICOA1301: THE DILEMMA OF DEMOCRACY IN THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN TAIWAN

## Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

**Session 2:** Heritage as Victim

**Location:** Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

**Time:** December 13, 2017, 17:00 – 17:15

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**Abstract:** Democracy, being people's power, would grow with contrasts of plural viewpoints and interests. In some sense, it is in conflict with the idea of monumentality and the conservation of historic monuments in a democratic society is destined to class struggles. Only tolerance through mutual understanding could hopefully reconcile complexity and contradiction. In Taiwan the conservation of cultural heritage does progress along with the development of democracy, and has been accompanied by social antagonism. Due to uncompromising ideology, different governments favoured different heritage, even at the cost of hostility. In pre-democratic era, colonial Taiwan saw mass destruction of the establishment of imperial Ching China by the Japanese in the name of modernization. After WWII, the Nationalist government even remodelled definite heritage buildings randomly to serve political purposes. The rotation of ruling in recent decades also revealed split cultural policies. With respect to cultural heritage, buildings erected during Japanese regime were disregarded by the Nationalist government but were in turn highly concerned by the DDP authorities. Quite echoed by people, a latest event is that the memorial statues of Chiang Kai-Shek and the Japanese Hatta Yoichi (who had built an important dam in colonial Taiwan) were beheaded separately by opposed political enthusiasts. Besides, with the gradual prevalence of democracy, the removal of buildings of potential cultural significance for important public works (eg. for the Taipei Metro) often faced the protest from conservationist people. On the contrary, the official designation of potential private heritage buildings would arouse fierce dissent from owners who expected enormous profits from land speculation. Such discrepancy might reflect the dilemma of democracy. Higher wisdom is obviously needed to tranquilize this turmoil. This paper purports to illuminate these situations with concrete cases and urges ultimate reconciliation for the good of cultural heritage.

**Key words:** *Taiwan, dilemma*

## **The political development and conservation movement in Taiwan**

Named Formosa by Spanish sailors at first sight in the fifteenth century, Taiwan had attracted peoples from all around the world on overseas exploitation, expansion or immigration since time immemorial. It used to receive immigrants mainly from southeast Asia, who eventually became the aboriginal tribes of the Island. In later centuries, its coastal spots were fortified by the Spanish and the Dutch. It was taken over by Koxinga (1624-1662) from Mainland China in 1661 as the base for restituting the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Soon after his death, Taiwan was submitted under peace deals by his grandson to the Ching Dynasty. The Sino-Japanese War in 1894 decided the colonization of Taiwan, which lasted for 50 years until the end of the WWII and let Taiwan thickly immersed with Japanese culture. Then, Taiwan was ruled by the authorities of the Republic of China. For the past few decades, it had become more and more democratic and had allowed general election for presidency since 1996.

The conservation movement in Taiwan developed along with the increasing maturity of democracy. It started with the remodelling of landmark buildings to justify KMT ruling authority for both propaganda and tourism in 1966. Then, an important courtyard house compound (built in 1822) was forced to leave its original context for a new tree-lined avenue and was dismantled and reassembled in a park area in 1978-85. This had aroused a great controversy, which was only possible in a more democratic and freer society and had actually led to the pass of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act in 1982.

The general election for presidency since 1996 had resulted in rotation of ruling parties with ideological polarity, as reflected by their different attitudes to cultural heritage. The democracy seldom brings about a win-win situation but often deepens discrepancy on the issues of urban development and conservation. It also allows people to stand more firmly on personal economic interests and political tendency.

## **The Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall**

When the late President Chiang Kai-Shek died in 1975, the ruling KMT government at that time planned and built a hall complex in his memory. The hall complex occupies a huge area at the heart of Taipei City, in adjacent to the Presidential Hall, and is enclosed within high walls except for the main gate on the main axis, which is composed of five spans, six piers and eleven roofs (archways), the highest rank of this kind. The main hall of the complex bears an board inscribed with the name “The Central and Upright Memorial Hall” (Figure 1) and the main gate used to bear a board inscribed with the name “Being at the Great Centre and is the Most Upright”, paying great homage to Chiang Kai-Shek. But, Chiang is a controversial figure and is regarded as a dictator and should be responsible for suppressing the Turmoil from 28 February 1947 by a great group of Taiwanese people, represented by the oppositional DPP. So, when the DPP came to power in 2000-2008, the central government planned to remove the enclosing walls and rename the complex as “The Democratic Memorial Gardens of Taiwan”, the main hall as “The Democratic Memorial Hall of Taiwan” and the main gate as “The Plaza of Freedom” (Figure 2). At that time, the Taipei Municipal was still under the rule of KMT and it planned to counter the measure by



*Fig.1– The Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, Bor-Shuenn Chiou.*



*Fig.2– The main gate renamed “The Plaza of Freedom”, Bor- Shuenn Chiou.*

designating the complex as a temporary municipal cultural heritage which would protect the complex from any change by the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act. To suppress this, the DPP central government undertook the designation of national cultural heritage (a higher ranking) for the complex so as to make it eligible for adaptive reuse, thus allowing legal removal of the walls and the rename for the complex buildings. The DPP had successfully renamed the main hall and the main gate but left the walls intact. The KMT returned to the central rule in 2008, which lasted for eight years, and the original name of the main hall was restored. The DPP came to power again in 2016 and the complex would face new change. Here, as could be seen, the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act was used to serve political struggles.

### **The Lo-Sheng Sanatorium**

The Lo-Sheng Sanatorium is the first and only public infirmary of leprosy in Taiwan. About a century ago, the leprosy was not well understood and the remedy for it was yet to discover. This disease was regarded as highly infective and fatal, and the patients were quarantined by force on the basis of the

suggestion of the First International Leprosy Conference Berlin in 1897<sup>1</sup>. Once quarantined, the patients would never leave for life. The early buildings of the Sanatorium were initiated during Japanese regime and the construction started in 1929, which were planned to accommodate 100 patients. Later on the Sanatorium was increasingly expanded and was able to accommodate up to 700 patients by the end of 1940s. After the WWII, the ROC government continued the policy of quarantine and expanded the facilities up to sixty buildings to receive up to 1000 patients. For the time being the complex was strictly guarded to prevent escape. By 1954, the leprosy was better understood and the remedy for it was well developed. The disease was by then realized as low infective and the patients were allowed to go home at will. In 1961 the policy of enforced quarantine was lifted and the enforced medical treatment was changed into clinic. By then there were 61 buildings on the site for 1050 patients. In spite of this, the remaining patients were not fully accepted by outsiders because of suspicion and fear. So, the existent patients would rather stay instead of returning to the normal society.

In 1994, the Bureau of Metropolitan Rapid Transportation (MRT) wanted the site to build its maintenance plants and the existing buildings were scheduled to be removed. Being categorized as a national important construction, the MRT was entitled to do so. In return, a new high rise building and a hospital were erected to update living conditions and medical care for the remaining patients. But, the reminiscence of the old and the inconvenience of the new had made most remaining patients hesitate to move. Several groups of people appealed for the preservation of the site, including enthusiastic conservationists and the existing residents. The cultural significance for preservation includes the unique importance of the site in architectural, social, political and medical histories in modern Taiwan or even in the modern world, which has aroused international attention and made it potential even for a world cultural heritage. Since the removal of buildings on the site had begun and a



*Fig.3– The remaining Lo-Sheng Sanatorium at back and the MRT construction site in front, Bor-Shuenn Chiou.*

portion of the land had been evacuated by 2003, the review for cultural heritage designation was held in haste to prevent further removal and the site was designated as a temporary historic monument, which was valid only for six months and was extendable up to one year only. The antagonism between the conservationists and the MRT Bureau was fierce and from time to time the police had to step in to keep peace or to regulate protestors. Eventually, the site was designated as a cultural landscape in 2009, but the

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<sup>1</sup>The Lo-Sheng Sanatorium Wikipedia.

preserving area of it was up to the negotiation with the MRT Bureau, which allowed only 41% instead of 90% out of a win-win alternative. (Figure 3) For the time being, the antagonism is still ongoing like an endless drama.

## **Hatta Yoichi**

Hatta Yoichi was a hydraulic engineer who graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and spent his professional career in colonial Taiwan. He had contributed greatly to agriculture in Taiwan by planning or building several water reservoirs with dams and associated irrigation ditches and establishing an institute in this field to educate talented youth. The most prominent project was the Wushantou Reservoir and the Jianan Grand Ditch. This reservoir was the largest in Asia and the third largest in the world at completion, which covered a water area of 13 km square with the capacity to keep 150 million tons of water at a time. The associated ditches of 10000 km in total length would irrigate 150000 hectares of mainly rice field over the plain area of Jiayi and Tainan, thus greatly increasing produce. He died from a wreck ship out of an attack by the US submarine USS Grenadier (SS-210) at not far away from Japan<sup>2</sup>. He was 56. His ash was buried by the Wushantou Reservoir and later together with that of his wife, who drowned herself after the WWII by jumping into the Reservoir in order to accompany her husband forever, instead of forced back to Japan. A bronze statue of him was built in 1931 by the tomb of the couple in memory of his life achievements. Also, his former residence was designated as a heritage site in 2009.

As Taiwanese society became more democratic, the possible responsibility of late President Chiang Kai-Shek for the aforesaid 228 Event was increasingly investigated, particularly urged by the relatives of victims. During his rule, Chiang's bronze statues were erected everywhere in Taiwan to establish him as a great man. Recently, these statues had become the target of attack by people to vent their hatred. Some of the statues were spray-painted; others were beheaded, turned down or removed. (Figure 4) In revenge, Chiang's loyalty sought for any object reminiscent of Japanese colony for destruction. The statue of Hatta Yoichi was thus targeted before his annual memorial service in the spring of 2017 by a former congressman of Taipei Municipal and was beheaded by him. Because three copies of the bust of this statue had been produced in the past by the local Qimei Museum, it was quickly decided that a head of one copy be dismantled to restore the original statue. The work was done in about a week and the annual memorial service was held in due course.

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<sup>2</sup>Hatta Yoichi Wikipedia.



*Fig.4- Collection of removed statues of Chiang Kai-Shek, Bor-Shuenn Chiou.*



*Fig.5- The Wenmenglou (on the left), Bor-Shuenn Chiou.*

## **The Wenmenglou**

The licensed prostitution had been initiated since the Japanese rule mainly for the needs of sea workers at the harbour district of Dadoucheng in Taipei and later it was kept mainly for soldiers' relaxation on holiday. The Wenmenglou was one of the terrace houses along a narrow street of this area, where licensed prostitution was allocated. Because of the architectural significance of a terrace house for prostitution and that of sex industry as an important part of social history of ordinary people, it was designated as a heritage building by the Taipei Municipal. Soon after, the licensed prostitution was lifted, and prostitution went into underground. In antagonism of this, a group of people for anti-abolition for prostitution, composed of sex workers and their sympathizers, rented this house as a base for their demonstrating activities, called the Collective of Sex Workers and Supporters (COSWAS). The house was then bought by speculative investors who were keen on the ratio transfer for this heritage building, which was very profitable. As the new owner of the house, the speculative investors urged the evacuation of the COSWAS from the house. Struggles and law suits followed between the two parties for several years and

finally the COSWAS lost and moved out from the house on 20 October 2017. Without the accommodation of cultural activities related to the history of sex industry, this heritage building is but an empty shell. Some people are of the opinion that, although the Taipei Municipal should be appreciated for heritage designation, it should also be responsible for allowing the transaction of the heritage building to speculative investors in disregard. (Figure 5)

## Discussion and conclusion

The above cases are only a few, but suffice to reflect various chaotic situations of conservation against plural political attitudes and interest concerns. However, do not be afraid of chaos, as new possibility always comes out of chaos. Also, it is allowed only in an open, free and democratic society and in some senses is invaluable. Besides, time should be a healer, as older figures in Taiwan had seldom faced similar challenges. For example, the massacre ordered by Koxinga on his military campaign over Taiwan had never been investigated. Instead, he was more or less respected as an emancipator, his statue was enshrined and worshipped, and cultural heritages related to him were almost highly regarded. Therefore, antagonism would eventually be over, and reconciliation would be settled.

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## Figures and Tables

*Fig.1– The Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, Bor-Shuenn Chiou.*

2

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<sup>3</sup>All are Chinese sources and the English titles are mostly translated by the author.

- Fig.2– The main gate renamed “The Plaza of Freedom”, Bor-Shuenn Chiou. 2*
- Fig. 3– The remaining Lo-Sheng Sanatorium at back and the MRT construction site in front, Bor-Shuenn Chiou. 3*
- Fig.4– Collection of removed statues of Chiang Kai-Shek, Bor-Shuenn Chiou. 4*
- Fig.5– The Wenmenglou (on the left), Bor-Shuenn Chiou. 5*

# ICOA1301: LE DILEMME DE LA DÉMOCRATIE DANS LA CONSERVATION DU PATRIMOINE CULTUREL À TAIWAN

## Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

**Session 2:** Patrimoine en tant que victime

**Lieu:** Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

**Date et heure:** 13 Décembre, 2017, 17:00 – 17:15

### **Auteur:** Bor-Sheunn Chiou

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**Résumé:** La démocratie, en tant que pouvoir du peuple, est supposée s'enrichir des divergences de points de vue et des intérêts pluriels. En ce sens, le concept de démocratie entre en conflit avec l'idée de monumentalité et la conservation des monuments historiques et, dans une société démocratique, est condamnée aux luttes de classe. Seule la tolérance par la compréhension mutuelle peut, espérons-le, permettre de concilier complexité et contradiction.

A Taiwan, la conservation du patrimoine culturel a progressé parallèlement au développement de la démocratie et s'est accompagnée d'une large contestation sociale. En raison d'une idéologie intransigeante, différents gouvernements ont favorisé différents patrimoines, même au prix de l'hostilité. Ainsi, dans l'ère pré-démocratique, le Taiwan colonial a-t-il connu une destruction massive par les Japonais au nom de la modernisation de ce qui rappelait la Chine impériale. Après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, le gouvernement nationaliste a même remodelé des bâtiments du patrimoine au hasard afin de servir ses objectifs politiques. Le changement du pouvoir au cours des dernières décennies a également mis en place des politiques culturelles clivantes. En ce qui concerne le patrimoine culturel, les bâtiments érigés sous le régime japonais ont été ignorés par le gouvernement nationaliste, puis ont fortement intéressé les autorités du PDD... Dernier exemple : en parfait accord avec les populations, les statues commémoratives de Chiang Kai-Shek et du japonais Hatta Yoichi (qui avait construit un important barrage dans le Taiwan colonial) ont été décapitées séparément par des partisans politiques opposés...

En outre, avec l'installation progressive de la démocratie, la destruction, dans le cadre de travaux publics importants (par exemple le métro de Taïwan), de bâtiments d'importance culturelle potentielle a souvent suscité des protestations de la part des écologistes. *A contrario*, la désignation par les autorités de bâtiments privés comme étant susceptibles de relever d'un patrimoine à préserver a provoqué la contestation féroce des propriétaires qui espéraient d'énormes profits grâce à la spéculation foncière. De telles divergences sont peut-être le reflet des dilemmes inhérents à la démocratie. Une plus grande sagesse serait évidemment nécessaire pour calmer cette agitation. Cet article vise à éclairer ces situations au travers de cas concrets et à prôner une réconciliation ultime pour les biens du patrimoine culturel.

**Mots-clés:** Taiwan, dilemme