

# **Tourism as reflexive reconstructions of colonial past**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines ways in which tourism can create a safe area where political contestations can be expressed and communicated. Utilising a longer-term ethnographic research, this paper unravels ways in which local tourists reflexively reconstruct colonial past, within the context of two royal palaces in South Korea. Individual narratives highlight the intricate and complex dynamics of heritage and nationhood, by way of either confirming or contradicting official discourses and nationalist sentiments. Individual narratives contribute to challenging the distinction between the official and the unofficial and the ideological and the emotional, thereby highlighting the ambivalent nature of colonial heritage. This paper recognises the liminal and transformative force of tourism as a drive for oppositional and alternative readings of a shameful past.

## **KEYWORDS**

heritage, colonial past, post-colonial, liminality, individual narratives and reflexive reconstruction

## **INTRODUCTION**

Heritage attests to political uses and misuses of the past. In particular, national heritage settings, epitomised as the fundamental attributes of national identity, mainly represent state-based and hegemonic understanding of a nation's past. Official and hegemonic understanding of heritage is predicated upon the assumption that heritage encompasses fixed and unchanging values and norms (see Weiss, 2007). It is argued, however, in this paper that heritage tourism can create a safe area where political dissent and historical contestation can be expressed and communicated, thereby recognising the potential of tourism as peace-making activities (see Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles, 2013). This challenges the prevalent understanding of heritage and tourism as an effective means in reinforcing dominant ideological discourses. Critical focus is placed on examining the extent to which visits to heritage settings provide South Korean nationals with an opportunity to redefine and re-evaluate their colonial past.

Post-colonial studies have widely discussed the issues of representation and resistance inherent in colonial relationships (see Ashcroft et al, 1995). Tourism development in the post-colonial world has further complicated concern over representation and image of colonial past. Scholastic investigation has attempted to gain insight into the relationship

between colonial experiences and tourism development in postcolonial contexts (Palmer, 1994; Hall and Tucker, 2004; Winter, 2007; Carrigan, 2011). There exists ongoing conflict between the promotion of colonial past as a tourism resource and its obliteration as an undesirable past. Memories of colonial past embedded in certain heritage settings are actively recreated and promoted as colonial nostalgia for tourism development (see Buckley, 2013), whereas more shameful elements of colonial past are to be forgotten or suppressed (see Chadha, 2006). Postcolonial analysis in tourism has tended to focus on uncovering the ways in which the former colonies of Western/European countries struggle with the issues of representation, contestation, and identity in tourism development, particularly in representing and promoting colonial past for touristic consumption (Palmer, 1994; Echtner and Prasad, 2003; Amoamo and Thompson, 2010). Despite some notable exceptions that examine intra-European colonialism and tourism (Pitchford, 1995; Kneafsey, 2000; McGuire, 2012) and other postcolonial contexts such as East Asia (Chang and Holt, 1991; Oakes, 1998; Kim and Prideaux, 2012), unequal and exploitative power relationships between Western colonisers and non-Western colonised still prevail in postcolonial tourism scholarship. Furthermore, the extant heritage tourism literature has mainly been discussed from the perspectives of either supply or demand, with specific reference to utilising colonial heritage for tourism development (Teather and Chow, 2003; Basu, 2008; Sarmiento, 2010). Little scholastic investigation has focused on unravelling the ways in which locals as tourists discursively construct and articulate their own colonial past. Locals are mainly positioned as passive and victimised hosts whose 'subaltern' voices are hardly recognised in tourism interaction (see Spivak, 1988). Therefore, this study attempts to examine how colonial memory and heritage is experienced and reconstructed by local tourists of South Korea, a former colony of Japan, during visits to the royal palaces in Seoul.

This study is grounded in an interpretivist phenomenological approach with an emphasis on the way in which individuals make sense of the world as crucial social actors. Human beings as social actors are both creative mediators and active recipients in the construction of social knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The construction of social world and knowledge cannot thus be completed until individual interpretations are added. Both Changdeok and Changgyeong palaces are important heritage settings in

which the traces of Japanese colonialism can be experienced. Ethnographic research was undertaken from 2002 to 2009 in Changdeok palace and ‘in-depth’ interviews and observations were further undertaken in both Changdeok and Changgyeong palaces between 2012 and 2014. Longer-term immersion into the research settings including observations, friendly conversations and interviews produce rich ‘in-depth’ accounts concerning the individual perceptions and subjective experiences of the selected heritage settings. Given that this study aims to reveal a wide array of feelings, impressions and experiences concerning heritage perceptions and interpretations, the selected procedures and techniques are expected to encourage individuals to express personal opinions in less inhibited ways within everyday contexts of social interaction. This paper is mainly concerned with elucidating on the ways in which colonial past can differently be perceived and reconstructed by way of individual engagement and evaluation during heritage tourism experiences.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Colonial heritage and tourism in postcolonial contexts**

The relevance and importance of postcolonial studies are increasingly recognised and incorporated in contemporary understandings of tourism. Tourism studies have popularly discussed the issues of hegemony, representation and identity in postcolonial contexts (Hall and Tucker, 2004; Amoamo and Thompson, 2010; d’Hautserre, 2011). Tourism development in former colonies often reinforces the prejudices and stereotypes of the colonised, which cater to ‘exotic’ and ‘primitive’ construction of ‘other’ underlying colonial ideology (see Said, 1978). Academic interest in the existing postcolonial tourism literature has focused on the binary oppositions between core/periphery, hegemony/resistance, modernity/tradition, and First world/Third world. In this vein, tourism is often viewed as perpetuating the ideology of colonialism, thereby prohibiting local people from defining a national identity of their own (Palmer, 1994). Much of the discussion has tended to look into the postcolonial struggles inherent in the former colonies of European countries in Asia, Africa, the West Indies and Latin America. There has been a critical call for creative, open and discursive processes in postcolonial studies that disrupt and challenge essentialised and hegemonic postcolonial relationships (see

Ashcroft et al, 1995). Furthermore, Chamber and Buzinde (2015) emphasise the significance of new tourism knowledge which challenges Western epistemologies prevalent in the tourism academy. This study thus aims to respond to these calls by way of critically (re)contextualising colonial and post-colonial relationships from the perspectives of local tourists in South Korea.

Heritage is often a deliberate and manipulative selection and modification of the past to meet governing political and ideological frameworks. Heritage is political by nature, which is mainly framed by ‘power/knowledge claims of technical and aesthetic experts, and institutionalized in the state cultural agencies and amenity societies’ (Smith, 2006: 11), what is termed as ‘authorized heritage discourse’. Here, heritage value is innate and of universal nature, which normalises and reinforces dominant ideologies. Therefore, (re)presentation of heritage often excludes alternative and dissenting positions and perspectives of individuals, thereby leading inevitably to contestations and conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups, regions and nations. The Preah Vihear temple, designated as a World Heritage site since 2008, has become a cause of serious border conflicts between Thailand and Cambodia as regards its ownership. The symbolic significance of Angkor Wat for different religions and historical periods has long been contested and further problematised with the development of tourism.

A recent growth of critical heritage scholarship attempts to unravel the ways in which dominant understanding of heritage as an entity of authority and hegemony becomes challenged and contested by critical engagement with heritage (Waterton, 2009; Smith, 2012; Harrison, 2014). In this light, heritage can alternatively be made and remade, incorporating subaltern views and multiple perspectives. Greater emphasis is placed on recognising the complexities and subtleties of values and understandings of heritage, thereby de-essentialising and disrupting dominant discourses of heritage, memory and identity. Heritage is better understood as a ‘social and cultural process’ (Smith, 2006: 2), which embodies a constant state of construction and deconstruction of identity and memory. Di Giovine (2009: 9) defines the field of heritage and tourist production as ‘multilayered, global social structures wherein individuals struggle and negotiate to create, define and promote formative encounters with place’.

Nora (1989: 8) argues that memory, which is ‘open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting’, fundamentally differs from history which is rather incomplete and problematic reconstruction of the past. Memory is ‘multiple and yet specific; collective, plural and yet individual’ (ibid: 9). Sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, are thus instrumental in reviving and mobilising a tradition of memory in an era inundated with a reconstructed history. Colonial heritage is often perceived as ‘undesirable heritage’ (Macdonald, 2006), ‘ambivalent heritage’ (Chadha, 2006) and ‘negative heritage’ (Meskell, 2002). It is not uncommon that heritage sites are eager to discard colonial history as a shameful national past while striving to promote their colonial connections as tourism resources (Sarmiento, 2010). The cultural and architectural heritage of a colonial power is suppressed or even discarded in favour of the cultural legacy of a pre-colonial period that is appropriated for the creation of ‘new’ national identities (Harrison, 2005), which is evident in the case of South Korea. Here, it will be insightful to elucidate how visits to heritage settings as *lieux de mémoire* can contribute to engaging and reshaping colonial memory on an individual basis.

It should be noted that the public recognition of a nation’s shameful past can be beneficial for societies (Henderson, 2001). It often acts an impetus in encouraging nationals to redefine and fortify their national identity and cultural integrity throughout generations (see Smith 1991). Central to this premise is to recognise colonial past as an essential part of a nation’s past, rather than being disregarded and undervalued. Furthermore, the dishonorable memory of being colonised can enhance a sense of national awareness and fraternity among nationals, even those who have not directly experienced colonial past. Drawing upon ways in which Israelis and Palestinians differently view their shared past, Scham and Yahya (2003) suggest that understanding of heritage in conflicted areas needs to be repositioned toward a reflexive reconciliation, acknowledging possible manipulative reconstructions and distortions inherent in each version of the historical narrative. In discussing the ethics of sightseeing, MacCannell (2011: 42) refers to sightseeing as the ‘person’s connection, or lack of connection, to nature, heritage, other human beings, and especially, their own psyches’. He further claims that tourists are ethically compelled to discover ways to relate to their own subjective understanding of an attraction, thereby enhancing new self-awareness and self-

reflexivity. In this paper, focus will be placed on exploring the productive potential of heritage settings as an ethical space in which tourists are, as individuals, able to reflect on and rethink the issues of identity, memory and belonging, in particular relation to a shameful and difficult past.

The notion of liminality has much been debated in the tourism studies (Graburn, 1976; Lett, 1983; Shields, 1991; Picard and Di Giovine, 2014). Drawing on the similarities between tourism and processes of ritual, Graburn (1977) conceptualises tourism as a sacred journey through which tourists experience non-ordinary, sacred and moral state often marked by rituals or ceremonies. Shields (1991: 84) defines liminality as a 'liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life because of its interstitial nature'. When immersed in a liminal state, tourists are able to experience symbolic inversions and reversals, which are hardly actualised in the mundane realms of life. They can also lead to deep emotional and moral changes in the Self during the contact with the Other (Picard and Di Giovine, 2014). Encountering the Self and the various forms of Otherness, including even 'Others' in the Self during tourism experiences can act as a transformative force in developing new beliefs, attitudes and perspectives in comprehending the self and the world. The discussions surrounding the transformative nature of tourism have mainly been developed within the context of volunteer tourism, particularly within longer international tourism experiences (see Brown, 2013). This paper aims to uncover the ways in which the liminal qualities of heritage tourism experiences can open up new opportunities to develop a reflexive and discursive approach to understanding the complexities of past within the context of domestic tourism.

### **Japan as a 'significant (national) other' in Korean identity and heritage**

The role of a 'significant (national) other' is fundamental in constituting and reconstituting collective national identities, particularly drawing on instances where the 'out-group' is clearly manifested in the social memory of the 'in-group' (see Said, 1978; Pickering, 2001). The resistance to 'significant other' could fortify a shared sense of sameness and fraternity with the members of the 'in-group'. Both Korea and Japan have complicated the historical relations, often claiming the origin of each other's economic,

cultural and religious foundations and influences. There exist deep-rooted anti-Japanese feelings among Korean nationals, historically aggravated by the Hideyoshi Invasions in 1592 and 1597, and more importantly the Japanese Annexation from 1910 to 1945. The desire for national liberation from Japanese colonialism served as the main stimulant for the birth of nationalism as a modern political ideology in Korea (The National History Compilation Committee, 2002). A strong sense of Korean national identity and respect for Korean cultural heritage was developed and strengthened as a form of repulsion to Japan.

After gaining independence from Japan in 1945 and becoming a new nation in 1953, the state of South Korea paid substantial attention to the recovery and reconstruction of its cultural and national status, with the intention of abolishing physical and cultural traces of Japanese occupation. The denial of Japanese colonialism is clearly encapsulated in concerted attempts to eradicate the traces of Japan during the post-colonial period in South Korea (see Kim and Prideaux, 2012). Anti-Japanese sentiment is deeply entrenched as a powerful and tenacious ideology of Korean historiography (Kweon, 2003; Cho, 2012). Various official discourses ranging from textbooks, government documents and media representations emphasise the historical and political conflicts between the two countries, particularly Korea's suffering during the Japanese occupation.

The National Museum of Korea was housed in the building of the former colonial headquarters which Japan built within Kyungbok Palace, the main palace of the Joseon Kingdom, with the intention of signifying Japan's supremacy over Korea. The government decided to demolish this building in 1995 and relocate The National Museum of Korea to its current site. The demolition of the colonial headquarters, the nation's 'negative heritage' (Meskell, 2002), was regarded as an active attempt to reconstruct Korean national identity and reassert its symbolic sovereignty by extinguishing its colonial relationship with Japan (Callahan, 1999; Rozman, 2002; Chung, 2003). Yet a barrage of criticism emerged concerning the building's demolition, emphasising that the colonial headquarters should have remained as an instructive reminder of the nation's colonial experiences (Chung, 2003).

Regardless of ongoing political and diplomatic tensions between Japan and South Korea, cultural exchange between the two countries has significantly increased since former

president Kim, Dae-jung abolished existing restrictions on importing Japanese cultural material in 1998. The recent upsurge of the ‘Hallyu’ phenomenon (the Korean Wave) draws significant attention to Korean culture across the globe, particularly Asian countries (see Lee et al, 2008). Japan has become one of the most impassioned followers of the ‘Korean Wave’ phenomenon (Choe, 2005). Furthermore, both governments have actively supported bilateral tourism, with an emphasis on peaceful cooperation between Japan and Korea over the last several decades (Kim and Prideaux, 2012).

However, a series of ongoing political issues reignited deep-seated feelings of hostility and discomfort between the two countries including recent conflicts over the Dok-do islets and the renaming of the East Sea as the Japanese Sea (Hunter, 2015), Japan’s new school history textbooks which exclude or downplay its wartime past (Cave, 2012) and the situation of former ‘comfort women’ (Yea, 2003). Most recently, the designation of Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution in the World Heritage List in July, 2015 once again overshadows the reconciliatory relations of the two countries. Around 58,000 Koreans were forced to work at seven of these sites including underwater coalmines at Hashima during the colonial period. Despite Japan’s agreement on more explicit acknowledgement of use of conscripted Korean labour in the (re)presentation of these sites, their designation provokes intense anti-Japanese feelings and a heightened upsurge of nationalistic sentiments among Korean nationals (Kirk, 2015).

There exist two major contrasting perspectives on the colonial past in Korean historiography- ‘exploitation theory’ and ‘modernisation theory’. ‘Exploitation theory’ emphasises Korea’s collective resistance to the abuses and cruelties of the Japanese Empire, whereas focus in ‘modernisation theory’ is placed on considering the economic development through modernisation that occurred in Korea under Japanese control (Cho, 2012). Official discourses explicitly adopt ‘exploitation theory’ in representing the colonial history and criticised ‘modernisation theory’ for crediting the Japanese occupation for the process of modernisation in Korea. Cho (2012) draws attention to the reluctance and ambivalence regarding rewriting of colonial history inherent in the official discourses. He calls for a need to develop more reflexive understanding of the nation’s colonial past, such as developing a new theoretical perspective and re-evaluating nationalist rhetoric.



Kim and Prideaux (2012) argue that the atrocities of the past have a limited influence on the present relationship between Korea and Japan, given a very high level of bilateral tourism flow. This study is meaningful in recognising tourism as a signifier of reconciliation. However, it seems to be potentially problematic to conclude that the issues of the past are rather outdated and no longer relevant between the two on the grounds that bilateral tourism flow is increased or sustained. More systematic examination of how shameful past is remembered and reconfigured through the act of travelling by South Korean nationals will enhance a more fluid and flexible understanding of colonial heritage in contemporary society.

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

### **1. Research settings**

Traces of Japanese control are clearly illustrated in the royal palaces in Seoul dating from Joseon Kingdom, such as Changdeok and Changgyeong palaces which are the main research settings for this study. The distortion and destruction of Korean royal palaces during Japanese control is popularly and politically regarded as an effort to ‘spiritually and symbolically colonize’ Korean people (Callahan, 1999: 331). The layout and architectural features of Changdeok palace were substantially distorted and disfigured and Changgyeong palace was transformed into a park during Japanese colonial rule. Nakseonjae in Changdeok Palace served as the residence for the remaining members of Joseon’s royal family under Japanese colonial rule. In the 1970s, a movement to restore Changdeok palace was initiated and alterations that had been made during the Japanese occupation began to be dismantled. In the 1990s, the palace was architecturally restored to the period representing the reign of King Sunjo (1800-1834). Changgyeong palace mainly served as residential quarters since its establishment in 1483 during the reign of King Seongjong (1469-1495). The palace was turned into a park with a zoo and a botanical garden during Japanese colonial rule and its name was also downgraded to ‘Changgyeongwon’, which remained a popular tourist attraction until the early 1980s. The South Korean government launched a plan to restore the palace in 1981 and the name was restored to Changgyeong palace in 1983. Concerted efforts were made in order to obliterate the influences of Japanese colonialism including demolishing the zoo,

botanical garden and Japanese style building and replacing Japanese cherry trees with pine and maple trees in the grounds of the palace. Finally, the newly restored palace was open to the public in 1986.

## **2. Longer-term ethnographic research**

Social data is increasingly recognised as primarily subjectively-based, arising from the viewpoints of the researched and the interpretations of the researcher (Thomas, 1993). Engaging with the emotional and subjective perceptions of the researched is of fundamental significance in acquiring multiple narratives and divergent reflections embedded in the social setting and phenomenon. Critical focus is placed on examining the lived experience of individuals and how individuals make sense of their experiences as crucial elements of social knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Smith, 2004). This study employs a range of ethnographic research methods: semi-structured interviews, participant observations, friendly conversations and the use of field notes. The study combines ethnographic research conducted between 2002 and 2009 in Changdeok palace (the first stage) and during July and August between 2012 and 2014 in both Changdeok and Changgyeong palaces (the second stage). There were several divergent themes which required further investigation from the ethnographic data gathered during the first stage of this research. It was thus decided that undertaking more in-depth interviews and observations would significantly enhance and enrich the understanding of individual perceptions and interpretations of heritage, utilising ‘more composite descriptions of fragments of many people’ (Graburn, 2002: 24). Longer immersion into specific heritage settings is expected to illuminate the different and complex layers of meaning immanent in the social data and phenomenon.

Interviews were mainly undertaken in the garden areas and around Nakseonjae in Changdeok palace and near the main entrance and the pond in Changgyeong palace. During the first stage, tourists were only allowed to Changdeok palace as part of a guided tour group but individual visits were made possible around the building area during the second stage. But tourists who wanted to visit the garden areas still had to be accompanied by tour guides. Tourists were allowed to freely look around Changgyeong palace, both building and garden areas. During both stages of research there was no

intention to collect and analyse the data by the variables such as age, gender and generation given the main research focus was placed on eliciting and evaluating individual articulations of heritage, in comparison with official representations and interpretations.

Miller and Glassner (2004: 125) perceive interview as 'interaction between the interviewer and interview subject in which both participants create and construct narrative versions of the social world'. The truth in the social world is partial, incomplete and context-specific. Interviews are regarded as a dynamic 'meaning-making' process, as Holstein and Gubrium argue, in which focus needs to be placed on 'how meaning is constructed, the circumstances of construction, and the meaningful linkages that are assembled for the occasion' (2004: 145). Therefore, critical focus is placed on illuminating ways in which the respondents construct their own narratives as a crucial part of social knowledge by actively engaging with the process of 'meaning-making' in the process of the interview. Here, the role of the researcher as both a controller and mediator is central in the interview process (see Turner, 2000). In order to facilitate this 'meaning-making' process, descriptive questions were used which attempt to ontologically position individuals' depictions and articulations of their experiences, further helping to seek emotional-based responses and thought processes. Such questions were utilised: 'What are your feelings/views about the traces of Japanese colonialism in the palace?', 'What does national heritage mean to you?', 'What do you think of the current relations between Japan and Korea?' and 'Have your views of the palace as national heritage changed during this visit?'

Since qualitative research is mainly based on the theoretical and methodological principles of interpretive science, data analysis does not usually contain such quantitative measurement as the standardisation of research material or the application of mathematical techniques (Sarantakos, 1998). It is crucial to recognise that qualitative data can be fundamentally partial and discursive, subject to differing interpretations and diverse analytical processes. Under the tenet of an interpretive phenomenological approach an appropriate apprehension of the world should entail a reflexive interplay of human behavior and social situations (Fielding, 1988). Social knowledge or reality is thus perceived as a constantly shifting and emergent property of individual creation (Bryman,

2012). The ultimate goal of the analysis is to portray and convey the various manifestations of phenomena rather than obtaining absolute truth or formulating a tangible reality. Once certain dominant themes were clarified, the data was then scrutinised for divergent and recurrent themes. Priority was placed on identifying key narratives, which can provide interpretive, revealing and contextual stances of the social actors concerned. Emphasis was also placed on conceptually thematising the varying perspectives and divergent viewpoints in relation to the main suppositions developed in the literature review, as well as identifying interconnected patterns and hidden meanings embedded within the data.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **1. Heritage tourism: reinforcing official discourses of colonial past**

Japan is conspicuously considered as a ‘significant other’ in the construction and reconstruction of Korean national identities (e.g. Kweon, 2003; Cho, 2012). Official material highlights that colonial past is a largely unappreciated part of the history of the palaces. According to the visitor information material of Changdeok palace:

Sadly, the stately royal palace complex fell victim to Japan’s intentional destruction during the occupation...Following the death of the last Joseon King, Sunjong, Changdeok suffered even more heavy damage (p. 1). The residence of the queen, Daejojeon was witness to a tragic moment in history. It was there that the Joseon Kingdom held its last cabinet meeting to deliberate over Japan’s annexation of Korea (p. 9) (Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, 2008)

The architectural profile of Changdeok palace was substantially transformed to that of a western-style building and western-style furniture including beds, tables and chairs were introduced during Japanese colonialism (see Hong, 2001 and Choi, 2005). It was observed that some tourists appeared to be quite disappointed and agitated by these representations around Heejeongdang and Daejojeon and attributed the introduction of western-style architecture, interior design and furniture to Japan’s colonial administration, although some of them are not directly related to the period of Japanese occupation. The following comments illustrate such negative feelings:

This is sheer disrespect for our culture and tradition. Our ancestors did not use a bed at all... We Koreans slept on the floor with the Ondol (*Korean underfloor*

*heating system*)... Since when has the bed been regarded as something Korean? I think the Japanese did this. [man in his seventies]

I find it very upsetting to see all these scars made in our royal palace... Japan brought these changes in order to damage our national pride... why should we keep them here? [man in his forties]

The above comments illustrate visitors' aversion towards certain changes and modifications in the palaces or modern objects on display which are not perceived to be traditionally Korean. Interestingly, other tourists also regard palace items that are not typically Korean as being related to Japanese influence, regardless of the degree to which such concerns are based on factual grounding. For example:

When I think all the changes made in the palace were mainly done by Japan, that part is so upsetting... Their (Japan's) justification for invading our country is always to assist in our country's modernisation... this is utter nonsense. [man in his fifties]

The electric bulbs in Injeong-jeon, the bed in Daejo-jeon and the automobiles in Yochago.... They are of foreign origin. They are not ours... I feel that all these modern products can spoil the sacred image of our royal palace. I wanted to enjoy something purely Korean here... [woman in her forties]

Their main arguments implicitly emphasise the significance of Changdeok palace as an essential representation of national heritage, pertinent in maintaining the perceived uniqueness of Korean national identity (see Park, 2010). Furthermore, the above comments indicate Changdeok's responsibility for maintaining the nation's heritage free from external forces as an essentialist form of cultural representation, as manifested in official discourses which view heritage as encompassing fixed and unchanging values and norms (e.g. Weiss, 2007). Here, heritage is viewed as an official and political medium in representing and enhancing national identity (Lowenthal, 1998; Pretes, 2003), by way of reinforcing and inculcating state-based nationalism. For example, the Korean National Tourism Organisation (KNTO) describes Changdeok palace as the most purely Korean in their official website and history textbooks emphasise that Changdeok is the most authentic royal palace. Ironically, the denial of Japanese influence on South Korea's modernisation could also be understood as another conspicuous manifestation of

reaffirming a strong sense of national identity, which denies foreign interference on the nation's historical evolution and drive towards modernisation (e.g., Cho, 2012).

Similarly, official material attributes the downgrading of Changgyeong palace to the zoo and botanical garden during Japanese occupation to Japan's colonial intention to dishonour both the Korean monarchy and Korea's national pride. According to the guidebook of Changgyeong palace:

The palace was a symbol of the Joseon Dynasty, but it lost its supreme status as a royal palace through 'planned destruction' by the Japanese. In 1907, the Japanese began removing most of the palace structures and built a zoo and botanical garden in the palace... The Korean government removed the zoo in 1983 and is slowly restoring the palace to its original state (Cultural Heritage Administration, 2011).

Most of the tourists interviewed at Changgyeong palace bring to the fore Changgyeong's conversion into a zoo and botanical garden during the Japanese occupation, including the younger generations. Some tourists clearly show natural rejection in confronting or accepting memories of national shame:

How can they build the zoo in our royal palace? That is a complete disgrace.  
[woman in her sixties]

This is sheer disrespect for our nation... this is a very sad history of ours. [woman in her twenties]

Showing aversion to the colonial past encountered during the visit is regarded as a crucial factor in defining Korean national identity and solidarity. The following comment by one tourist aptly clarifies this point:

It does not matter where you live at present, whether it is Tokyo, Hong Kong, New York, or even little villages in Africa. If you identify yourselves as Korean, it means you share the same memories of the past. Only Koreans would feel ashamed of the remnants of Japan here... These feelings towards Japan show how strong our identity is [man in his late twenties].

This point is also addressed during a friendly conversation with an elderly male tourist:

Man: I don't know how old you are, but did you ever go to Changgyeongwon when you were young?

Researcher: Yes, I did. The visit was always the highlight of the trip to Seoul. I was not really aware of the whole story... It was quite shocking when I learnt what had really happened.

Man: That's because you are a Korean...

Some tourists, who directly experienced Japan's occupation of Korea, more eagerly express negative feelings and concerns toward the traces of colonial past encountered during their visits. The lived colonial experiences of the older generations play a defining role in perceiving these heritage settings as a material signifier of colonial oppression:

It was an attempt not just to colonise but to Japanese Korea. They tried to eliminate everything Korean... The worst thing, I reckon, was that we had to take Japanese names, which was absolutely humiliating. [woman in her late seventies]

I can still vividly remember how frightened I was whenever I bumped into the Japanese policemen on my way back from school... There were then so many horrible rumours going around in the village how cruel and inhumane the Japanese policemen were... [man in his seventies]

Here, colonial past is clearly viewed as 'undesirable heritage' (Macdonald, 2006) and 'negative heritage' (Meskell, 2002). Buildings, artefacts and landscapes perceived to be affected by Japanese colonialism serve as a reminder of Korea's national humiliation, even among younger generations who never directly experienced Japanese occupation. Importantly, it is not just physical distortion of the palaces but the downgrading of its symbolic significance as national heritage that facilitates negative emotional reactions towards Japanese colonialism. The findings support the view of Walsh (1992) and Pretes (2003) which emphasises the role of heritage in maintaining and fortifying a sense of national belonging and solidarity. Colonial past encountered during the visit is essential in enabling South Korean nationals to feel for their nation and to re-imagine their national identity in its purist forms (Connor, 1993). Colonial heritage, as a physical and psychological reminder of the nation's shameful past, encourages tourists to realise and reaffirm their emotional attachment to the nation by actively demarcating the distinction between 'us' (Korea) and 'them' (Japan). During this process, the heritage settings further play a critical function in restructuring the Korean nation beyond the boundaries of the South Korean state, especially as some narratives point to the symbolic significance of the shared memories of Japanese colonial rule, collectively endured by Korean nationals (see Park, 2011).

## **2. Heritage tourism: individual and reflexive reconstruction of colonial past**

Contrary to the understanding of colonial heritage as being shameful and undesirable, one set of ethnographic narratives concedes that the introduction of modern artefacts should be understood as a natural process of historical evolution and a timely acceptance of foreign civilisation and modern advancement which is not directly related to the Japanese colonialism. As regards the tour guide's explanation in Heejeongdang that Western-style furniture was introduced during the Japanese occupation, some tourists asked for further clarification such as which year they were actually introduced or if it was really related to Japan's occupation. One tourist eagerly expresses her view on a need to verify the factual grounding of these official interpretations:

It is not really clear if Japan made these changes or these changes just took place during its occupation in any information material. That is not the same thing, isn't it?

It is also observed that the differing views on these changes led to some interesting discussions between two female tourists:

Woman 1: I do not think these (changes) are all that bad.

Woman 2: Well... this is what Japan did to us.

Woman 1: You cannot blame everything on Japan. At least these are positive changes. I quite like to see the modern influences here, which shows that this is not just an old and lifeless place.

Interestingly, the following narratives illustrate the alternative positions, implying that the use of modern products at the palace is not necessarily a negative influence from colonial rule. They further challenge the essentialist understanding of Korean national culture and heritage, arguing that culture and heritage are also representative of ongoing social change and transformation (see Lie, 1990 and Tak, 2000):

Although these items are of foreign origin, they are also meaningful in that they show how things have changed over time... We should not just blame Japan for everything. [woman in his fifties]

Some people think that modern products like automobiles and electric bulbs are traces from Japanese occupation. But I do not agree with it. If we weren't under Japan's control, would we still use the gama (*traditional Korean wagon*) and chorongbul (*traditional lighting*)? [man in his early thirties]

It is not desirable to dispute all things just because they are not of Korean origin... What means to be Korean changes with time. [woman in her forties]



The following narratives also draw attention to the alternative readings of colonial heritage experienced during the visits to Changgyeong palace. Interestingly, tourists demonstrate varying perspectives regarding the restoration of the palace. Compared to official material which praises a complete restoration of the palace to the period of pre-Japanese occupation as an embodiment of national pride, tourists perceive and interpret the physical and emotional realities experienced at the palace in rather different ways:

Ironically, I still remember this place as Changgyeongwon as a park and zoo... It is a sad history but it is something that should not be hidden. [man in his fifties]

Sometimes knowing the pain makes us appreciate our nation and more... We cannot change the fact that it (Japanese colonialism) happened but it is gone long ago. [woman in her twenties]

I am not sure if it was a right decision to completely restore the palace... I do not suggest we should keep it as a zoo but we are too occupied with removing that part of our history. [man in his forties]

These individual narratives reflect contradictory viewpoints and ambivalent feelings concerning colonial heritage (Chadha, 2006), thereby challenging the official discourses with a more or less unified version of national identity and memory. Some tourists express more positive viewpoints regarding their shameful past, particularly in terms of how such influences can constructively help South Korean nationals rethink their national identities and colonial past (e.g. Henderson, 2001; Teather and Chow, 2003). Here, the voices of locals are subject to counter-narratives of state-based nationalism and nationalist sentiments. Some old tourists interviewed in Nakseonjae of Changdeok also show alternative and reflexive reading of colonial heritage:

It was a dark period of our history... we should not forget what happened but it is not desirable to continue to dispute over it... we are now strong and powerful and we must learn how to forgive Japan. [woman in her seventies]

I feel sad to think that our royal family had to be kept here and all the horrible things they did to us... but maybe that suffering made us stronger and what we are now. In that way is this something we should feel proud of? [man in his seventies]

Obviously, there exists a clear aversion to colonial memory among the older generations who directly experienced Japanese colonialism, as illustrated in the previous section. However, it is interesting to realise that some tourists are able to, regardless of their generation, construct the reflexive understanding of colonial past, which does not necessarily consolidate an authoritative and official version of history, the nation's 'moral geography' (Smith, 1991: 16). Findings suggest that tourism experiences of colonial heritage do not just represent ideological rhetoric of nationalism which is prevalent in the official discourses. It is critical to note that some tourists challenge overtly nationalistic and monolithic approaches to the colonial past inherent in the academy, media and politics in South Korea (e.g. Cho, 2012). Here, the notion of both national identity and heritage becomes inextricably multifaceted, complex and plural (Hall, 1992). Furthermore, the actual visit proves to be an opportunity to think of their own perspectives and positions regarding the colonial past, which does not really happen in other domains of life. The liminal and transformative qualities of tourism are thus emphasised as a drive for these new and alternative readings of past. Findings bring attention to tourism as a safe area in which political dissent and historical contestation can be expressed and communicated:

When you read newspapers or watch the news, you cannot help but hate Japan. If you make any favorable comments regarding Japan in on-line portals you are accused of being pro-Japanese... But that hatred is not that intense here... I feel comfortable to say things I want. [man in his forties]

I think the general people do not have any problems with each other but the politics make things complex... This place teaches you a lesson but not in too imposing ways. [man in his sixties]

Experiencing the sad history of the palace makes me value my nation. But time has changed. When you read a historical textbook you feel forced to believe it but you naturally feel it here. [woman in her twenties]

Here, social benefits of heritage and peace-making potentials of tourism are emphasised. Heritage tourism experiences serve as a liminal and ethical force which perpetuates individual's opportunities for enhancing new self-awareness and self-reflexivity (Graburn, 1977; MacCannell, 2012; Picard and Di Giovine, 2014). The ideological (official) and the

emotive (unofficial) dimensions of heritage are continuously dissolved and reconstructed in individual tourism experiences of colonial past. Therefore, it is conflicting viewpoints and differing experiences of tourists regarding national memory and heritage that further enrich the process of embodying a sense of national belonging during tourism experiences.

Recent social and cultural exchanges between the two countries are regarded as a positive change and the sense of national confidence as a reaction to the ‘Korean Wave’ phenomenon is heightened. Several narratives express positive feelings concerning the recent reconciliatory mood of social and cultural exchange, focusing on possibilities to readdress past animosities:

We now live in a different time. Japanese people are the biggest fan of ‘Korean Wave’. I feel proud that they now value our culture... I think it is Korea’s turn at the moment. [woman in her thirties]

They are crazy about our drama and films and we like their games and cartoons... we now live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. [woman in her forties]

However, when asked regarding the conflict concerning the ownership of the Dok-do islets and the alleged distortion of Japanese history textbooks, deep-rooted distrust and national disappointment re-emerged. Some tourists show a heightened sense of disappointment and infuriation:

We are like oil and water, they may stay in the same bottle but it will never mix up. The issues over Dok-do and the textbooks will be always there... Remaining together in the same bottle is then an impossible task. It turns to a very dangerous mixture when fire is around. [man in his forties]

But surprisingly, some tourists raise a concern for reigniting conflicts and tensions between the two countries:

Hope things will be solved in a mature manner. We cannot go back to old hatred. [man in his sixties]

Japan will need to take more responsibility for accepting what they did in the past. We also need to stop being overtly nationalistic. [woman in her forties]

The varying responses to colonial past are especially interesting and meaningful given predominant political and public resistance to the colonial legacy in South Korea (Kweon, 2003; Cho, 2012). In this light, these narratives reinforce Smith’s (2006) view that

heritage as a cultural and social process which needs to be re-evaluated by cultural changes and social practices. It is revealed that heritage tourism experiences enable South Korean nationals to consider oppositional and alternative readings and to develop discursive and reflexive understandings of colonial past, thereby bridging a gap between the official discourses and the unofficial narratives of heritage (see Smith, 2012; Harrison 2014). Tourists do not just passively consume colonial heritage within the ideology of nationalism. They either confirm or challenge the dominant national and historical narratives of colonial past at a more personal and engaging level. This study recognises tourism as one effective medium which help to reflexively reconstruct and reconcile the colonial past, reinforcing the point raised by Scham and Yahya (2003). It also emphasises the potential of tourism as a social force to develop ideas of achieving dialogue for peace (Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles, 2013). Furthermore, individual narratives of heritage tourism experiences contribute to challenging the distinction between the official and the unofficial, the ideological and the emotional and the concrete and the abstract, thereby highlighting the ambivalent nature of colonial heritage.

## **CONCLUSION**

Official and hegemonic discourses of the colonial past represent the palaces as an important material relic of Japanese colonialism, which serves as a central medium in maintaining and enhancing national identity and nationalist sentiments. Visits to the heritage settings encourage South Korean nationals to reconsider and reconfigure their sense of national belonging and solidarity. Social memories of Japanese colonialism encountered during heritage tourism experiences serve the purpose of reaffirming the affliction that this ‘significant other’ posed on (South) Korean national identities, illustrated by way of remembering past ordeals faced by the ‘Korean’ nation collectively, and ‘anti-Japanism’ as one of the most powerful ideologies in Korean historiography. In this light, heritage tourism experiences confirm a strong sense of national belonging grounded in cultural essentialism and nationalist sentiments. Visits to the palaces unmistakably remind local tourists of Japan’s role as a national enemy inherent in the state-led production and propagation of the colonial past.

However, this study critically reassesses the ideologically and politically charged historiography of Korea's colonial past from the perspective of local tourists. Unofficial and individual perceptions and interpretations of the past highlight the intricate and complex dynamics of heritage in the process of national (re)identification. The process of rethinking the colonial legacy illustrated in various individual narratives differs in relation to ways in which the past should be represented, whether in terms of positively accepting the past or in terms of limiting representations of Japan. Individual narratives of the past contribute to the understanding of heritage as social knowledge and cultural process, which can constantly be repositioned and reinterpreted over time and in different contexts.

Heritage tourism experiences at both palaces prove to encourage local tourists to reflexively reconstruct colonial past and national belonging. Tourists do not unproblematically draw upon the official interpretations of colonial heritage. Instead, they are active in contesting and negotiating social memory embedded in the heritage settings. In comparison to official discourses which strongly promote a nationalist version of colonial past, the distinctions between ideological and emotive dimensions of heritage in individual narratives of tourism experiences are less palpable. The varying responses to colonial heritage are especially interesting and meaningful given strong political resistance to the colonial past in South Korea. Findings suggest that colonial heritage serves as, for some tourists, a political entity which inculcates the ideology of nationalism, while, for others, encouraging its reflexive reconstruction in personal and engaging ways. Tourism creates a safe area in which oppositional, flexible and alternative readings of national memory and belonging are facilitated. The liminal qualities of heritage tourism encourage tourists to reflexively reconstruct their nation's shameful past, which is often not easy to be achieved in other domains or experiences of everyday life. The meaning and significance of colonial heritage in contemporary context is enhanced by recognising the role of local tourists as an active agent in facilitating more nuanced understanding of colonial heritage.

Within the context of this paper, colonial heritage settings serve as an organic and discursive practice through which tourists experience ambivalent, processual and reflexive nature of colonial and post-colonial relations, rather than just reinforcing fixed

and unchanging values and norms, such as anti-Japanism, patriotism and nationalist sentiments. Some tourists actively engage with the processes of challenging and repositioning the colonial past. This study's main contribution lies in recognising the role of colonial heritage in enabling local tourists to challenge and contradict the dominant official discourses and nationalist sentiments. In future studies, it will be interesting to examine ways in which Japanese tourists interact with the colonial past and respond to their own nation's representation within these heritage settings. It will also be insightful to investigate what aspects of tourism experience actually facilitate individual and reflexive reconstruction of shameful past and undesirable heritage in postcolonial contexts. Finally, there should be more studies in post-colonial tourism analysis which incorporate new tourism knowledge and experiences from local perspectives in different geo-political contexts.

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