

Report on **Borders of Memory:**  
**national commemoration in East Asia**



Nishijin Plaza, Kyushu University, Fukuoka

17-18 December 2016

Towards the end of 2016, a conference was held on the southern Japanese island of Kyushu in order to examine issues surrounding national commemoration occurring in East Asia and its neighbouring regions. Entitled 'Borders of Memory', the composition of the conference and arrangement of its panels reflected the interests of the two primary organizers at Kyushu University, with Edward Vickers focussed on questions of remembrance, particularly by the state, while Edward (Ted) Boyle came at the issue from a border studies perspective, interested in how national memorialization is perceived from across borders and how spaces beyond the borders of the nation become sanctified within national memory. Beyond the somewhat state-centred concerns of its two lead proponents, however, the conference also sought to open up questions of memorialization 'from below', those practices of memory that occur at the individual or local level, while examining how these smaller-scale acts of memorialization interact with those propounded by the nation-state.



This diversity in approaches adopted by the conference was also reflected in the support necessary for it to have taken place. Much of the funding came through the War Memoryscapes in Asia Project (WARMAP), who with the generous support of the Leverhulme Trust are seeking to examine how the new Asian regionalism, characterised by the increasing 'flows' of people, ideas and capital

across Asian borders, is both fuelling and being affected by the circulation of tropes of memory in the region, primarily in relation to the 1937-1945 war. As a result of economic development and increasing integration within the region, remembrance of this conflict has become both more prominent and more contested, even as the audience for war heritage and remembrance has become more diversified and complex (for further details see <http://www.warinasia.com/memoryscapes-of-war/>). The organizers would like to offer their gratitude to the head of this project, Mark Frost of the University of Essex, for supporting the event, as well as the conference dinner on the Saturday night.

The conference also received the backing of the British Association of Japanese Studies (BAJS), and was held as one of the Japan Chapter's biannual conferences (for more on the Association's activities, see <http://www.bajs.org.uk/>). The generosity of the host association back in the UK allowed for considerable support to be offered to enable three PhD scholars from outside of Japan to attend the conference and present their work, as well as provide some backing for two younger scholars from within Japan to make the trip down to Kyushu. Those who received support (Jing Cheng [University of Nottingham], Austin Smith [University of St. Andrews], Linh Vu [University of California, Berkeley], Fei Chen [University of Hokkaido], and Jonathan Bull [University of Hokkaido]) echo the organizers in offering their gratitude to Dr. Christopher Hood for approving the request for funding, Lynn Baird for

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getting the money to us, and to Phillip Seaton, chair of the Japan Chapter, for all his support in getting the conference off the ground.

The conference also received not inconsiderable backing from two further sources. The first was Edward Boyle's host institution, the Center of Asia-Pacific Future Studies (<http://cafs.kyushu-u.ac.jp/>), under whose aegis he is attempting to establish Japan's first border studies research institute (for details please see the dedicated Kyushu University Border Studies webpage at <http://cafs.kyushu-u.ac.jp/borders/>). The Center not only provided funding for four graduate students to help out at the conference, but considerable administrative support necessary for organizing the event came from Yumiko Goda and Haruka Tsuruta of the Center. The programs printed for the conference were paid for utilizing funds drawn from a grant awarded to Edward Boyle, "Scaling borders: tension and deterritorialization, Japan and beyond" (JSPS Young Researcher (B), project code 16K17071, 2016-2019), and the organizers would like to offer their thanks to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. Finally, the Association for Borderlands Studies, Japan Chapter, of which Edward Boyle is an officer, also aided in promotion for the event.



The conference opened on Saturday morning, following opening remarks from the two organizers, with a panel on "Memory and the State", moderated by Christopher Gerteis (SOAS, University of London), and consisting of four papers. The first, "The UNESCO World Heritage Convention and Japan's Pursuit of International Cultural Legitimacy" by Mark Lincicome (Kyoto Consortium for Japanese Studies) sought to examine the historical roots of Japan's current interest in inscribing its sites as part of the 'world heritage of mankind'. The paper sought to trace this exercise back into the Meiji and Taisho periods, when



Japan was seeking recognition as a legitimate modern nation state, and argued that this practice of world heritage has provided Japan with another means to assert its position on the world stage.



The second, by Edward Vickers (Kyushu University) and Ohashi Fumie (Waseda University) on "Exhibiting the Unmentionable: The politics of commemorating 'comfort women' in contemporary China", and read by the former in the latter's absence, looked at a superficially different deployment of the notion of universal heritage, in how the 'comfort women' issue has come to be 'weaponized' by China in the years since 2012. As the authors argued, official attitudes to the issue internally remain ambivalent, even as it is used to foster collaboration with Asian neighbours and deployed as a means of criticizing Japan on the international stage. While sponsoring moves to register related

documents on UNESCO's 'Memory of the World' List appears to have a different goal from Japan's

cultural diplomacy examined in the previous paper, the manner in which both states seek to gain international recognition through UNESCO's registration shows a similar deployment of memorialization to influence international politics.

This same theme was apparent in the third paper, "Memory and Identity: National Commemoration of the Nanjing Massacre in China" by Jing Cheng (University of Nottingham), which pointed to similar motivations behind the Nanjing Massacre documents being accepted by UNESCO and added to the World Memory register on 9 October 2015. As with the previous paper, Jing suggested that the deployment of these documents was a means by which China could achieve international recognition and increase its international standing vis-à-vis Japan, yet noted the considerable tension between the way the message was heeded at home and abroad. While serving to increase the identification of diaspora Chinese with the motherland, and confirm their opposition to Japan, the Nanjing Massacre's incorporation within narratives of China's "century of national humiliation" is increasingly at odds with Xi Jinping's internal assertion of China's rise on the world stage, again emphasizing the border between the domestic and international in the manner events are memorialized.



The final paper by Will Brehm (University of Tokyo), "Remembering to Forget Kor Pram: Politics and National Identity in Post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia", turned our attention to Southeast Asia, and the transformation of the 'National Day of Hatred' into a 'Day of Remembrance' in Cambodia. Here, a memorial day initially developed as a means of claiming international legitimacy for the People's Republic of Kampuchea government and recognition for the massacres undertaken by the Khmer Rouge has been entirely domesticized. It has also come to silence any commemoration of the mass casualties sustained by the PRK side during the *Kor Pram* operation that occurred during the same year, 1984, that the

'National Day of Hatred' was introduced. The politicized nature of national commemoration was very obvious here, as indeed had also been shown by the previous four papers, whose themes were effectively tied together by Christopher Gerteis in his comments, before the floor was opened for questions from the audience.



The conference's keynote speech was given by Kirk Denton of Ohio State University, and entitled "The Jianchuan Museum and 'Alternative' War Memory". Building on his earlier book on *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China*, the paper sought to examine how the past was being represented in one particular private museum, which was theoretically not as tied to the dictates of the national state's narrative in its presentation of history. As Denton noted, both the degree and limits of the museum's private nature are visible in how the vision and collection of its benefactor, Fan Jianchuan, has come to be displayed. While the efforts of Fan were vital in shaping what would be exhibited and how it



would be presented, Denton also pointed to the museum's adoption of tropes from overseas as well as the differences between the exhibits here and the official museums of the state. The museum was notable for its emphasis on the extent of the international contribution to the war against Japan, particularly on US aid to the nationalist government, thus tying the Chinese fight against fascism into an international narrative of the fight for freedom. At the same time, the limits of what was permitted could be seen in the adoption of the name "Red Era" instead of Fan's original plan to focus on the "Cultural Revolution", and the section of the exhibition devoted to the latter still awaits official approval. Questions from the floor asked about the status of the museum within China's legal framework and whether it might be better understood as a gallery, given its basis in the private collection of one individual. As Denton noted, it was nevertheless incorporated into a wider network of memorialization.



Following a short break, the second session was entitled "Local Memory". Moderated by Phillip Seaton (Hokkaido University), it again consisted of four papers. The first, looking at the "Politics of Dark Heritage in Contemporary Japan", was read by Jung-Sun N. Han (Korea University) and examined a number of sites of 'Dark Heritage' and their relation to national narratives with regards to the war. As the paper noted, these sites are not only 'dark' in the sense associated with the literature on 'dark tourism' but literally, being the remains of underground tunnels constructed by forced labour during the war. As such, they serve as effective metaphors for the way in which memories of the war that have been buried by Japanese society are now open to being recovered in personal and local histories, while the construction of these tunnels in Nagano, Okayama, Kawasaki and Okinawa by Korean labour has enabled *zainichi* Koreans to emphasize the legitimacy of their voices within local Japanese society and promoted a celebration of dissent associated with these buried structures. The discovery of a dark and buried past at a local level has helped to recover the repressed memories of many Japanese as well as speak to the importance of memorialization at a more local scale.





The interplay between local and national was also examined by Fei Chen (Tokyo University) in his “Photography, Death, and Identity: Construction of War Memory at Yushukan Museum”, which, in contrast to most scholarly engagements with the Yushukan that interpret it within the wider context provided by Yasukuni Shrine, sought to examine it as a museum with the power to transform the perceptions of visiting Japanese with regards to the war. As Fei

noted, crucial to this was the arrangement of objects within the space of the museum, and particularly through the deployment of personal and individual effects on the second floor in order to invoke an emotional response from visitors. The responses to the museum cited spoke to the power of these sorts of exhibits to speak at a personal level in a manner not accessible to simple historical narratives about the war.

The differing scale of memorialization and recovery of local pasts were also themes pursued by Austin Smith (University of St. Andrews) in his “Modelling memoryscapes in Japan’s prefectural capitals: Investigating commemoration of the Asia-Pacific War in Tokushima”. On one level, the paper spoke to the possibilities of commemorating local events at a more limited scale, but also noted how the bodies involved in such local commemorations were frequently part of larger national networks invested in the production of a particular narrative. While superficially memorializing local issues, therefore, such practices of commemoration come to be invested in various, national narratives rather than simply serving to remember the past at the more local level.



This inherent tension was also the topic of the final paper on “With or without heritage - Memories of Miike coal mine” by Yusuke Matsuura (Kumamoto University), which examined the divergences between local memories of a specific site and the national narrative within which the site was deployed through being recently incorporated in the “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution” world heritage listing. As Matsuura noted, some locals objected to the glorification of the Miike mines role in ‘national’ development as ignoring both its local history and the exclusion of stories of suffering. This latter included not just the disasters and labour disputes involving local miners, sublimated under the story of national progress

presented to the UN, but also the question of forced labour by Koreans and Chinese during the war, on which grounds the world heritage listing had been opposed by the South Korean and Chinese governments the previous year. At a local level, however, efforts had already been made to incorporate the histories of these forced labourers, and there was no opposition to the listing from local organizations of Korean residents. As in the other papers, the differing scales of memorialization and the wider narratives within which they were incorporated were well highlighted. This was a theme picked up in the questions from the floor, which also examined the specificity of the notion of ‘dark tourism’ and problematized the understanding of Yushukan as a museum.





The final session of the day took the form of a film presentation and question-and-answer session with Alexander Bukh (Victoria University of Wellington). In collaboration with Nils Clauss, a German cinematographer working in Seoul, Alexander has developed an hour-long film entitled "This Island is Ours: Defending Dokdo/Retrieving Takeshima", which follows two civil society activists involved in campaigns for the disputed territory, with one from South Korea, a member of the National Federation for Protecting Dokdo, and the other from Japan, part of the Association for Protecting Prefectural Territory Takeshima. The

film not only sought to provide us with an insight into what motivates the kind of people who campaign in such disputes, and the way in which they seek to bring them to national attention, but also how these activities intersect with those of the state in the course of the deployment of such disputes within international relations. The film found a ready audience with the conference's attendees and elicited a slew of questions, which allowed Alex to place the film within its larger context, particularly in how the dispute has come to be mobilized by Shimane prefecture in its relations with Tokyo, and point to the manner in which these activists come to be invested in the maintenance of the dispute. Following questions, participants repaired to the conference dinner.



Despite the free-flowing libations of the previous evening, the room was packed for the last session of the conference on Sunday morning, entitled "Bordered Memories" and consisting of five papers moderated by Edward Boyle (Kyushu University). The first paper was given by Jonathan Bull (Hokkaido University) and examined the "UNESCO Memory of the World Register and Dark(en)ing) Tourism to the Maizuru Repatriation Museum", examining how the repatriation of Japanese in the aftermath of the 1937-1945 war was being commemorated in this local

museum in a context shaped by some of its contents receiving UNESCO inscription. As Jonathan noted, while the museum's narrative was distinct from the recent national narrative with regards to the war, it nevertheless served to simplify a complicated picture of the movement of people at the war's end, both through its total silencing of the role of Maizuru in the deportations of Koreans and Chinese after the war's end and in its efforts to homogenize the history of the return of the Siberian internees to Japan after the war. While emphasizing the distinct local construction of the memorialization of this history, it also made clear the manner in which national narratives come to shape this local representation.





Yasunori Hanamatsu (Kyushu University), in focussing on “Border Tourism and Dark Tourism: the case of Tsushima-Busan Border Tour”, provided a nice contrast with the film showing of Alexander Bukh the previous evening. There is no territorial dispute over the island of Tsushima, which has a long history of managing Japan’s relations with Korea. Today, however, the volume of Korean tourists vastly outnumbers the island’s resident population, and despite these tours’ origins as a cross-border trip taken in order to enjoy the benefits of duty-free shopping, the island is coming to be developed as a getaway from the southern Korean city of Pusan. The vast spike in tourist numbers after 2012 is due to increasing competition on the ferry route, while from Japan the trip continues to be comparatively expensive. Although there are tensions between locals and tourists, private associations in Korea and Japan recently applied for the joint-registration of historical documents concerning Korean envoys that travelled to Japan via Tsushima in the early modern era to UNESCO’s “Memory of the World” register. As the foremost site of cross-border tourism in Japan, the development of which Yasunori is intimately involved with, the paper offered an alternative perspective on the role of borders in memorialization.

The paper by Linh Vu (University of California, Berkeley), “Buried Memory, Excavated Honor: Commemorating Chinese Expeditionary Soldiers of the Burma Campaign in the ROC and the PRC”, returned to the question of official memorialization by the state, in this case touching on the competing efforts by both the PRC and ROC to claim the memory of Chinese soldiers left buried in India and Burma following the Second World War. As with the soldiers themselves, the memory of Chinese involvement in this conflict had remained buried until relatively recently, but has recently found itself brought to light through the competition taking place over the “bodies of the dead”. Linh interestingly sought to connect this contemporary dispute to larger questions with regard to the notion of sovereignty, and particularly how this intersected with notions of territory during the period spanning the two world wars during which our modern understanding of the state was formalized through international agreements between self-proclaimed civilized states. The competition over these bodies is representative of China’s rise as well as the inherently contradictory grounds upon which the modern state came to be founded.



The final two papers switched from questions of state commemoration for the 1937-1945 war to more personal efforts at memorialization. “In search of fathers: place, pilgrimage and the children of Far East Prisoners of War” detailed the intensely personal journey of both the children of British prisoners of war in seeking to commemorate their fathers through acts of “pilgrimage” to where they were interned during the war and that of Terry Smyth (University of Essex) himself, who in many ways is undertaking a similar journey through the course of his fascinating study. His concern with his subjects’ relationships with both their fathers and the sacralised spaces in which the latter were interned over the course of the formers’ lives



offered a searing example of the power of imagined spaces, and how these spaces are open to being produced and imagined by individuals, while also noting how the relation with these spaces and what they represent are open to being transformed by physical encounter, one which fascinatingly appears to open up the possibilities of reconciliation with both absent fathers and those held responsible for their internment.

This theme of reconciliation remained central to the final paper, by Mark Frost (University of Essex) and Yosuke Watanabe (Independent Scholar), which examined “Methods of reconciliation? The transnational memory work of Takashima Nobuyoshi and his generation”. The paper focused on the pioneering tours run by Takashima Nobuyoshi that sought to provide to Japanese direct encounters with the legacies of Japan’s wartime empire, examining the motivations of Takashima and likeminded individuals that led them to attempt to engage in this form of civil society reconciliation ‘on the ground’. Such efforts have recent been lauded as providing lessons for states in the East Asian region, in particular, which as the conference amply highlighted,



continue to struggle with questions emerging from the conflict. As Mark Frost concluded, however, the link between the personal and political in this form of reconciliation remains somewhat opaque, and it is far from clear that the lessons able to be drawn from these tours are actually applicable to the type of reconciliation work that international politics within the region necessitates. Following questions from the floor, the conference concluded with a brief discussion regarding possibilities for publication.



While the papers presented incorporated a wide range of approaches, the diversity on display illustrated the complexity of borders and memorialization in the region. The organizers would like to once again offer their gratitude to all those who participated in the event, those involved in bringing it to fruition, and those who came along to listen and ask questions. Many thanks.



Edward Boyle (Kyushu University)