# Building memorials for a friend or a foe? Mobility and heritage dissonance amid China-Japan conflict

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## Abstract
The article addresses the process of heritage-making in a locality characterized by complex histories of forced and voluntary mobility in a form of colonization, migration and tourism. It focuses on the eruption of discontent concerning a restoration of local memorial site for dead Japanese colonizers in a small county within the north-eastern Chinese province of Heilongjiang. Using the concept of heritage controversy, the article presents a detailed analysis of successive phases of events dubbed "memorial drama" in order to situate the dissonance in heritage-making within the wider social processes of mobility, development and change in the rural county. In tracing the local attempts to expand the officially sanctioned messages behind the memorial site, as well as their failure, the article argues that alternative voices in otherwise strictly controlled heritage-making exists in China, despite being highly sensitive to changing political climate and popular opinion.

KEYWORDS: heritage dissonance, difficult heritage, heritage-making, Fangzheng, China, Japan, Japanese war orphans

## Introduction
In the early morning of August 5th 2011 workers left the pine grove on the outskirts of Fangzheng county in the most north-eastern tip of China and firmly shut the gates of the memorial park behind them. They had successfully carried out their task: the demolition of the monument dedicated to the dead Japanese colonial settlers. A few hours later the county government issued a statement on the micro-blogging platform Weibo, the last of the three statements regarding this issue before closing the local government's official Weibo account: "The Memorial wall with the inscription of the dead Japanese colonial settlers" names inside the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden caused a great concern among netizens.[1] The existence of the Memorial wall not only raised questions about its construction, but also prompted a violent attack. For this reason, the authorities decided to temporarily close the Garden and rethink the use of the monument (Qin 2011).

[1] In China, the term netizen (wangmin) describes an Internet user and a person actively involved in online communities.

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The demolition and the subsequent message were the county government's desperate attempt to contain a huge public outrage that erupted over the latest phase of developments concerning Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden. The mentioned netizens' violent virtual attack on the county, as well as the subsequent activists' smashing of the memorial, came as a surprise; the construction of the memorial wall, as well as other development plans that concerned the Japanese colonial legacy in the county, were initially approved and supported by the higher levels of government and had been carried out for quite some time without anybody paying any special attention to them. However, efforts to manage public anger after the incident were unsuccessful and journalists across the country were rushing to this small county to report on the events they dubbed the "memorial drama". Their often surprisingly well researched journalist pieces uncovered the very complex entanglement of past and present that materialized in the memorial garden built for the dead Japanese colonial settlers.

This article aims to illuminate the process of heritage-making in north-eastern China which proved to be highly contested and eventually led to labelling this county and its people as traitors to the Chinese nation. Building on the growing body of work concerning dissonant and difficult heritage, the article traces the attempts to provide alternative narratives in depicting the World War II (WW2) and Japanese colonization and occupation legacy in China by providing a detailed account of one specific heritage controversy that unfolded around a memorial site for dead Japanese colonial settlers. As Macdonald (2009b) has demonstrated, heritage controversies are particularly useful windows into the power dynamics that lie underneath every act of heritage-making. Moreover, they can shed light into the multiple actors involved in this process that all contribute to the negotiations over the interpretations of the meaning and message behind a particular heritage site. They also emphasize the importance of paying attention to spatial and temporal aspects of heritage-making by analysing this process in the context of a particular locality – in this case, a Chinese locality characterized by a special history as well as manifold and complex movements (migration, tourism) associated with Japan.

Zhao and Timothy (2015) wrote there are numerous uses of heritage; it can serve as an economic justification for preservation, it offers opportunities for tourism and experiencing nostalgia, it teaches about past and present cultures and practices as well as instil political ideologies by the ruling classes. But while much of the past seen as heritage is celebratory in nature and seeks to extol human achievements, there has been a noticeable move towards displaying the dark sides of human condition, 'the sites of pain and shame' (Logan & Reeves 2009). From this perspective heritage is not only a benevolent and beneficial societal force but can also be perceived as a burden (Macdonald 2009a). This move towards acknowledging places or events of suffering and troubled past has compelled scholars of heritage to come up with a number of concepts that attempt to construe these developments. Heritage has been described as "ambivalent" (Breglia 2006), "negative" (Meskell 2002), and "contentious" (Hack 2010), but perhaps most notably "dissonant" (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996) and "difficult" (Macdonald 2009b; Logan & Reeves 2009).

While some would argue that these terms cover more or less similar phenomena – the historical events, remains or sites that are today seen as problematic (Samuels 2015)

– the nuances in the meanings and origin of terms should not be overlooked. In the case of dissonant heritage, the term has been mainly applied in the context of how heritage sites are managed, especially those promoted as tourism products. Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) see heritage as a narrative that is constructed to achieve certain end and, as such, open to a range of competing and even contested voices, especially in the context of a tourist destination. For this reason for every event, for every "past", no matter how distant, there is no single story or interpretation, but rather new and alternative explanations. Subsequently, whenever a particular group claims an "inheritance" this disinherits another group (Ashworth & Hartmann 2005). In this view, dissonance is intrinsic to all forms of heritage, although it is more emphasized in sites associated with war, pogroms, violence and atrocities. The aim is then to devise management strategies that would anticipate and, if possible, defuse the dissonance as well as promote 'socio-political stability and economic success' (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996: 268).

Instead of concentrating on the inner workings of heritage management processes and their consequences for heritage sites and events, Sharon Macdonald's use of 'difficult heritage' focuses more on the intentional and reflective attempts of 'marking as significant history – that is, as heritage – atrocities perpetrated and abhorred by the nation that committed them' (Macdonald 2015: 6). In other words, she sees a definite move towards signalling bad, evil moments that can be hard to reconcile with a positive (national) identity. So, while both conceptualizations of "problematic" heritage see heritage as a process of negotiation between different groups and thus open to conflict, "difficult heritage" is a particular kind of heritage dissonance that is meant to address "unsettling" rather than being an inevitable product of heritage making. Macdonald (2015) locates this phenomenon in Germany, but adds that it can be observed also in other European countries and even beyond Europe.

In the case of memorials and monuments associated with Japanese colonization and imperialism in east and southeast Asia, one finds more "dissonant heritage" than "difficult heritage" as conceptualised above. Research has revealed various responses to Japanese colonial legacy in different locations. Morris et al. (2013) found that in South Korea this legacy was too traumatic or too embarrassing to be publicly discussed after the Second World War. In Taiwan, on the other hand, it was embraced as part of the nation's multicultural identity, which differentiated the Taiwan from the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Morris et al. 2013). In the PRC the official attitude towards Japanese colonial past is most notably exemplified by Nanjing Massacre Memorial,[2] which utilises symbolic devices embodying pain and suffering in order to depict China's victimization during Japan's invasion. According to Qian (2009), this victimization discourse serves multiple goals, including the construction of Chinese nationalism (see also Callahan 2004). What is more, monuments and memorials marking Japanese aggression in China are not used only to enhance Chinese national identity through patriotic campaigns, but also to legiti-

[2] Nanjing Massacre pertains to the events connected to the siege of the city and its fall during the Second Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945). Between December 1937 and January 1938 the Japanese army commited multiple atrocities on resident Chinese population and killed from 40,000 to 300,000 people. The event continues to be a controversial issue in Japanese-Chinese relations.

mate the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Zhao & Timothy 2015). The government's control of heritage-making produces according to Hatch (2014) a remarkably consistent narrative of the pre- and WW2 events. The persistence of this narrative thus shapes and consolidates a particular collective identity that can be mobilized in diplomacy and international affairs (Hatch 2014).

While the main heritage sites associated with Japanese colonization and occupation in China could be seen as presenting unified vision of the past, I argue that a more nuanced spatial and temporal analysis reveals alternative voices beneath the meta-narrative of victimization. The importance of the location of heritage-making and heritage controversies should not be neglected since it both shapes these processes and contributes to the specificity of heritage making (Macdonald 2009b). In the case described here, this specificity is closely connected with particular local histories, especially those involving the county's complex ties to Japan and the diverse movements between Japan and China during the twentieth century. These past and present movements, evident in Fangzheng county far more than in neighbouring, comparable places, not only reveal heritage dissonance but also signal the process of emerging "difficult heritage".

In what follows I analyse these processes through a detailed account of a controversy involving the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden in Fangzheng. The data for this article comes from Chinese media reports, the few scientific accounts of the events in Fangzheng, as well as interviews and conversations with Fangzheng inhabitants during a two week long fieldwork visit in August 2014. Some additional data on Fangzheng was gathered through interviews and informal conversations conducted in Osaka, Japan, during 2014 with young Chinese migrants, who came from Fangzheng. The article is divided into three sections. First, there is a short overview of the very complex historical events in the first half of the twentieth century in China's Northeast, especially in relation to Fangzheng county and its subsequent manifold ties with Japan. The second section provides a detailed account of the heritage controversy from the creation of a memorial garden for the Japanese dead, its location within various movements and other processes in the county, to, finally, the eruption of a nation-wide controversy over the site. The concluding section discusses the ramifications of this event for the county and the (im)possibility of the emergence of "difficult heritage" in heritage-making in contemporary China.

## Historical Background: Fangzheng and Japanese "war orphans"

The series of events concerning the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden, described in the following section, are deeply entrenched in the complex entanglement of the past and present processes of mobility, memory and identity making, not only in the small county of Fangzheng but also in the wider area of Northeast China (Chinese: *Dongbei*) and the PRC in general. The creation of the memorial garden has its origins in the establishment of Manchukuo (Chinese: *Manzhouguo*; Japanese: *Manshukoku*), a Japanese puppet state in the China's Northeast during 1932. Manchukuo became an area for intense colonization from Japan – a massive state-led movement that aimed to settle more than one million mostly poor Japanese farmers in the region. As reported by Itoh (2010: 17) by May 1945 a total of 225,585 people had settled in

955 colonial villages (Japanese: *kaitakudan*). Besides these settlers, the Japanese population in the area also consisted of military personnel as well as bureaucrats, shopkeepers, teachers etc., and the total number is estimated at 1.550,000 (Itoh 2010).

The Japanese state heavily promoted the colonization as both a panacea to the 'social ills' of the period and a means of territorial expansion (Asano Tamanoi 2009) and thus marketed the area as vast and empty. However, the land that Japanese farmers received was not empty − it had been mostly confiscated from local Chinese inhabitants by Japanese companies. Since the Japanese settlers often did not know how to cultivate such large portions of land, they hired local Chinese and Koreans, many of whom were the previous owners of the land, and treated them as 'coolies' (Itoh 2010).

On the 9th of August 1945 Soviet troops invaded Manchukuo. During the last few months before the invasion the kaitakudan units consisted mostly of women, children and elderly, since the male members had been called into Japanese military service and sent to the battlefields. The remaining kaitakudan population was without access to transportation and could thus not join the evacuation centres established in the cities by the Japanese Kwantung Army. After the invasion chaos ensued; some of the kaitakudan members joined in collective suicides, some ran into the woods to save their lives, some were robbed and assaulted by Chinese bandit militia on their way to evacuation centres and some were captured by Soviet troops (Wu in Chan 2011). Unable to receive much sympathy from local Chinese the rest died of malnutrition, severe cold and epidemics. Most of the children and young women, who did manage to survive, were eventually incorporated into Chinese families either through marriage, adoption or as servants.

It is estimated that more than a third of the total *kaitakudan* population failed to return to Japan; apart from the 78,500 who died in the war, around 20,000 remained in China (Tamanoi in Chan 2011). These were later named "Japanese left behind in China" (Japanese: *Chugoku zanryū hōjin*) and consisted of two large groups: "left-behind orphans" (Japanese: *zanryū koji*) in the case of orphans adopted by Chinese families; and "left-behind women" (Japanese: *zanryū fujin*) who married local Chinese. Although in the 1950s and 1970s these two groups were given the opportunity to repatriate to Japan, this was not a smooth process. Due to the very narrow interpretation of immigration law and Japanese citizenship many adopted children and women married to Chinese were denied the right to repatriation by Japanese state (Chan 2011). It was not until a major reform of the Japanese Immigration Control Act in 1989 substantially broadened the category of persons of Japanese descent, including zanryu-hojin's relatives and offspring (Morita & Sassen 1994), that larger numbers began to emigrate from China's Northeast to Japan.

Fangzheng, a small county in the province Heilongjiang, not far from China-Russia border, is a place where the events described above were deeply impressed upon the local inhabitants' memory as well as the local landscape. In August 1945 the county became a place of refugee camps as kaitakudan members sought shelter in caves and cattle sheds, but disease and hunger were rampant and mortality extremely high (Chan 2011). According to one report (Araragi in Narangoa 2004: 142) 8,649 Japanese found refuge in Fangzheng before the winter of 1945/1946. Of these, 27 % died, 27 % married Chinese or became adopted by Chinese foster parents in Fangzheng and nearby counties, 14 % escaped, 14 %

moved to Harbin while 5 % were taken by Soviet army and sent to Siberia. Only a handful managed to be repatriated to Japan during May 1946 (Narangoa 2004).

Both the dead and the survivors, who stayed in Fangzheng as part of Chinese families, continued to shape the everyday experiences of people in the county. The turning point for the county came after 1972 when the Chinese and Japanese governments normalized their diplomatic relations and the second wave of the repatriation began. In the following years this prompted diverse movements between the two countries: repatriation and a strong chain migration of those descended from the Japanese orphans and wives to Japan, on the one hand, and frequent visits to Fangzheng by Japanese civil society representatives, relatives of war orphans, Japanese army veterans, and returned emigrants, on the other. These physical movements were accompanied by varied material and immaterial flows: remittances, development assistance, objects of general consumption, transfer of knowledge, etc.

These bilateral contacts and movements all revolved around the county's painful history. At the end of the twentieth century this complex history with its concomitant movements and flows led to actions that brought the dead kaitakudan members to the front stage − the result of a heritage-making process that turned out to be particularly dissonant. In the following section I describe the three stages of what became known in Chinese media as the "memorial drama" (*paiju*).

## "Memorial drama"

The events that took place in Fangzheng in summer of 2011, among other, highlight the power of modern technological communication tools that elevate local matters onto the national or even international stage in a matter of seconds and crucially intervene in almost all social processes, including heritage-making. The nation-wide controversy over "The Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden" was created by the media and modern communication tools that first constructed and then disseminated a particular account of the heritage-making in the county. The discursive nature of this process is, among others, demonstrated by the Chinese media's labelling of the series of events as "drama".

Macdonald (2009b), building on Victor Turner's concept of "social dramas", sees the important role played by these "dramas" involving heritage-making in exposing alternative positions that at other times may be relatively unarticulated, as well as in derailing or unsettling what had seemed to be the likely development of an ongoing process (Macdonald 2009b: 94). These controversies must always be understood in their spatial and temporal context, despite the fact that their reach may go well beyond the local or present. In what follows, I describe how this memorial garden developed, how it is connected to the county's development, what were the novel and alternative interventions into the meaning of this heritage site, what was the context behind the eruption of dissonance over it and finally, what was the fate of these interventions for the heritage site and the local community.

## *Setting the stage*

The memorial park is located just outside the county's urban centre. When I visited the park in 2014 it took perhaps fifteen minutes by car along a lone narrow country road to reach large concrete gates with six golden characters mounted on top: "The Chinese-Japa-

nese Friendship Garden" (*Zhong Ri Youhao Yuanlin*). My taxi driver stopped 300 meters before the gates and told me he would wait there. Aided by a hefty fee he agreed to bring me near the park's entrance but there his service ended. As taxi drivers had been told by local government not to take people to the site, he was utterly unwilling to take part in any possible developments connected to my entry into the park.

A well-connected friend, who accompanied me on that hot summer day, helped me negotiate my entrance. The expressions on the park keepers' faces, my friend's nervous laughter and the taxi driver's tamed discontent all made me unsure of my plan. 'Should I enter? Maybe I should just leave? Can I have problems? Can *they* have problems?' To stop the voices in my head I said loudly: 'If it is a problem, it is ok, it is not necessary for me to enter. Let's just forget it! *Suanle*! *Suanle*!' But the keeper, still frowning, ignored me and opened the side gates for us to enter. We stepped into a shadowy pine grove dotted with several memorials of different shapes and sizes. The peace, interrupted by our entrance, was soon restored. The stillness of the park was evocative of so many places around the world that keep records of immense human pain and suffering but have through time and obliteration became almost one with nature's surroundings. Yet here this impression was deceptive. This place was by no means forgotten and was peaceful just on the surface; beneath was a fuming mixture of fervent nationalism, expressions of intergenerational trauma, prejudice and feelings of abandonment and rejection. Yet, at the same time this was also a place of hope and reconciliation although at the time of my visit this narrative was almost all but extinct.

The present memorial garden was built in 1986 by the decree of the Heilongjiang provincial government that also provided funds for the construction of a 60 square meter large reception room and a country road leading to the park. The whole project was officially approved by the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the request of the provincial government (Guo & Cao 2009). This was not the original memorial place of the dead Japanese settlers, though. Their ashes were first entombed in 1963 closer to the town centre and the permission to build this cemetery purportedly came from the then prime minister Zhou Enlai himself, which gave this place a special seal of approval that even the harshest critics could not disregard.[3]

This tomb had not only been approved by the higher levels of political power, but was also a communal effort. The testimony of a Japanese woman left behind in the county and then married to a local Chinese person narrated in Itoh (2010: 186–87) provides a harrowing account of the tomb's origins. She recollects that one day in the early 1960s her first Chinese husband told her that he saw local children playing with Japanese skulls and bones that had been exposed by the weather. He was sickened by the scene and told his wife to do something about it. She turned for help to other Japanese women living in the area as well as to Fangzheng county government. The local government mobilized people and together they collected the remains of 4,500 bodies which were then burned

[3] As mentioned in one of the Chinese media articles, the leading local historian Guo Xiangsheng who traced the origin of the Japanese cemetery in Fangzheng could not find the document containing Zhou Enlai's approval in the archives of the official documents issued by the PRC's prime minister.

in a fire that went on for three days and three nights. The ashes were put in a newly built tomb and every year on the 15th of August (the time of Obon, a Japanese Buddhist festival commemorating the dead) Japanese women from Fangzheng would hold a memorial service for the departed (Itoh 2010: 187).

In the 1980s the authorities decided to build water reservoir in the area and the cemetery was moved once again. In addition, the ashes of Japanese dead from other locations were brought to Fangzheng in an effort to make Fangzheng the symbolic centre of the unfortunate Japanese involvement in the Northeast by providing 'a place of commemorating all Japanese dead, including those, whose remains were never found, and give opportunity for the relatives to honor their ancestors' spirits (Guo & Cao 2009: 3).

From this it could be said that while the need to recognize the place of dead Japanese was present from the 1960s, during the 1980s the desire of (Japanese) relatives to commemorate their dead also became increasingly acknowledged. But more importantly, from that time on, the complex relationship between the local Chinese with former Japanese colonizers and their relatives started to imprint itself on the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden. In this sense, the garden received a considerable boost in 1995 when Yuan Tengyong (Japanese name: *Endo Ryu*), a Japanese war orphan who had repatriated to Japan, decided to allocate funds to build a tomb for his and a few other Chinese foster parents. The stone obelisk, built by local government and funded by Mr. Yuan, was placed in the memorial garden with two inscriptions. On the front side, a simple title "Chinese foster parents' tomb" was engraved. On the back, eight characters were written to express gratitude – 'The kindness of care the world will never forget'. This then prompted other Japan-based organizations and individuals to participate in the donations, eventually covering the grounds of the memorial park with various monuments promoting peace and cooperation.[4] In 1999 the site was enlisted as the Provincial Major Heritage Protection Unit (Heilongjiang wenhua ting 2015).

This fervor for memorial-building initiated a lively exchange of visits between Fangzheng and selected townships in Japan. Visits started in the 1980s but really took off during the 1990's: according to local sources (Guo & Cao 2009) at least one Japanese group per month visited the country and the memorial garden. Although the frequency of groups' visits somewhat diminished after 2000, according to one of my collocutors, a former employee of the local government, the various departments of the local government were still extremely busy with receiving guests from Japan. Besides the representatives of local authorities, many were relatives of former Kwantung army soldiers or *kaitakudan* settlers, while some were even survivors of the Japanese occupation of China's Northeast. Visits were also made in the opposite direction; a delegation from Fangzheng county met in Japan

[4] Representatives of different place-based Japanese – Chinese organizations helped build The Memorial Exhibition Hall (in 1995), Peace Monument (in 1995), Monument of Chinese – Japanese friendly communication (in 1999) and Monument for Chinese–Japanese Friendship and World Peace (in 2000) as well as planted several trees. In addition, the local government has, together with a Japanese village organization from Iwate prefecture and in accordance with authorization from the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, built a monument in 2004 dedicated to a Japanese agricultural expert from Iwate, Chosaku Fujiwara (1912–1998) who, in the decades after the war, dedicated himself to the project of improving rice production in the county (Guo & Cao 2009).

with Hiromu Nonaka, the then chief cabinet secretary of Keizo Obuchi administration (in 1999) who is said to have emphasized the role of Fangzheng in Chinese-Japanese relations by stating: 'Beijing is the centre of China's politics, Shanghai is the centre of China's economy and Fangzheng is the centre of Japanese people's souls' (Wu 2015).

These developments fall into what Rose (2005) termed 'the second cycle of Chinese-Japanese reconciliation'. According to her research the second cycle (beginning in the 1980s) – in contrast to the first cycle (postwar and Cold war era) – also included non-governmental actors, mainly NGOs, citizens' groups and victims' groups, what can also be collaborated by the Fangzheng case. But increased connections and exchanges between citizens' groups in China and Japan were not the only characteristics of this "honeymoon era". From 1996 onwards Fangzheng county began receiving Japanese *Official Development Assistance* (ODA) in the form of low interest loans, agricultural equipment as well as transfer of knowledge in the field of rice cultivation and cattle raising (Guo & Cao 2009). In addition, financial flows directed to the county were also increased by the remittances of increasingly numerous Chinese emigrants to Japan. The strong financial inflow initiated community development projects and increased consumption, thus bringing about the 'development' of Fangzheng as well as giving rise to relative deprivation (Stark & Taylor 1989) of families that didn't have overseas connections. This, in turn, gave even stronger impetus to further emigration from the county.

The close relations between Japan in China in this period materialized in a new strategy pursued by Fangzheng's local government. Encouraged by the successful merging of emigration and development in communities in South China manifested by the construction of "hometowns of overseas Chinese" (Chinese: *qiaoxiang*), they too decided to base local development on the existing close ties with Japan to further boost the economy of the county.[5] The *qiaoxiang* vision in Fangzheng started to take shape during 2006 when the county government's agencies prepared a strategy to create 'the only hometown of overseas Chinese to Japan in the China's Northeast' (Tan 2011). According to this strategy the county centre as well as the memorial garden would get an overhaul; from the urban planning to local education and new development projects with the focus on local Chinese emigrants to a range of new cultural products that would highlight the county's special history.[6] Qin (2011) also reports that the draft of the Fangzheng county's twelfth five-year-

[5] As amply demonstrated in the qiaoxiang literature (Douw 1999; Thunø & Pieke 2005) many communities in Guangdong, Fujian or Zhejiang based their development on the emigrants' return financial flows in the form of remittances, donations and investments. In these localities local authorities promoted emigration as well as return migration through special provisions for the emigrants and their relatives who stayed in the place of origin. This development model received a lot of attention through strong media coverage prompting many other rural communities to jump on the train of "developing the hometowns of overseas Chinese".

[6] Main streets in the centre of Fangzheng county would in the following years get more Japanese-style architectural appearance with cherry trees lining the main roads. In addition, local schools would incorporate into their curricula 'the history of Japanese invasion, the history of the resistance war against the Japanese, the history of kaitakudan, Japanese customs and culture and the Chinese-Japanese friendly exchanges' (Tan 2011). Also, the commercial and non-commercial billboards and any other signposts should bear a Japanese name next to the Chinese (Tan 2011). Some reports suggested that the plans were even more extravagant; they envisioned building Overseas Chinese primary school, the Overseas Chinese International City project, and county's collaboration with a film production company to develop a soap opera on Japanese kaitakudan and the overseas Chinese in the county (Qin 2011).

plan proposed the development model of "two main wings" (Chinese: *yizhu liangyi*): first, to protect and develop the Japanese landmarks in the county and deepen Chinese-Japanese collaboration and mutual feelings, and secondly, increase the labour export to Japan, thus making "both wings fly" with regards to economic development.

The official nature of these plans required the approval by higher-level authorities. Since this was a period of intense and close bilateral exchanges and collaboration between China and Japan, the planned actions did not deviate from the China's official political course. What is more, the issues of Japanese war orphans, the benevolence of their Chinese foster parents and the Japanese cemetery in Fangzheng were even highlighted as an example of good relations between PRC and Japan in the PRC's Premier Wen Jiabao's 2007 speech 'For Friendship and Collaboration' at the Japanese Parliament (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2007). In 2008, when the Japanese Ambassador to the PRC, Yuji Miyamoto, visited the Fangzheng memorial garden he donated a calligraphy with the inscription "loving benevolence" (Chinese: *ai ren*).

The strong support for the county's heritage-making and development plans by higher levels of Chinese government as well as high Japanese officials started to slowly alter the usual depiction of Japanese colonial involvement in China. In this atmosphere, more inclusive heritage-making began to take shape. Based on a particular past and politically favourable present a space was created that allowed for Japanese to be seen not only as villains but also as victims and thus as human beings, who deserved their last resting place to be commemorated. What is more, relaxing somewhat the usual tight grip over heritage-making, the authorities even allowed other actors (e.g. Japanese) to intervene in the heritage site. Despite the fact that dissonance lies at the heart of all heritage-making, especially one that marks suffering and pain, the successful overlapping of local development plans, national and international politics covered up any nascent dissonant voices. But with the passage of time and the wider exposure of heritage making in Fangzheng on the one hand and increasingly precarious bilateral relations between PRC and Japan on the other, the dissonance soon appeared with greater force than anybody might have expected.

## The drama

In the following years the local government in Fangzheng started to implement some of the above mentioned plans. One of the most important was the upgrading of the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden, which represented one of the focal points which the model of developing qiaoxiang was based. It took the local government a few years to collect the necessary funds for the renovation, but in July 2011 they uncovered two new memorial walls in the garden, which were added to original tombs. The first was about 5 meters high and 10 meters long and was dedicated to "The Perished Japanese colonial settlers" bearing the names of 229 "perished" Japanese written in Chinese and Japanese language. On the back of the memorial wall was an inscription, which detailed the history of the cemetery and ended with the words:

The tomb's many perished (*wangzhi*) are without names. Great effort was dedicated to collect the names of the perished and engrave their names in order to, first, inform Japanese descendants about the location of their ancestors' resting place; secondly, to display

the essence of mankind – love and humanity; and third, for past experience to guide the future, to reflect on the dangers of war and to manifest the value of peace. Therefore, this wall also serves to caution people.

Not far from this a second wall was added – "The memorial wall of the departed Chinese foster parents". It was erected behind the grave dedicated to the war orphans' foster parents and bears no names, just the inscription highlighting the contribution of Chinese foster parents in keeping war orphans alive during the winter of 1945. It also described the origin of the monument, emphasizing at the end that the 'names of the foster parents will carry on the glory to posterity, educating future generations'.

According to one media outlet, the representative of the local government said that the aim of these renovations was 'to learn from history, cherish peace' (Jiang 2011). He emphasised that both the presence and coexistence of these two tombs was unique in the country. In his view, these two walls were built to show more truth, to present history in a more convincing way, to warn and educate future generations, to illuminate the evils of fascism, and to engage more deeply with the Chinese nation's humanitarianism (Jiang 2011). While this narrative still remains within the scope of the dominant understanding of the events before and during the WW2 and does not challenge the meta-narrative of the great victimization and heroism displayed by Chinese people, it nonetheless turns the focus on the importance of peace and coexistence, and perhaps even more importantly, to the plight of ordinary people during the war, regardless of their national background. This move could therefore also be interpreted as a cautious step towards heritage making in the form of 'difficult heritage' as conceptualized by Macdonald (2009b). While one cannot speak here of the deliberate intervention by a well-defined group with a clear strategy of reminding people about uncomfortable histories, I would argue that even the small steps toward expanding the officially sanctioned narrative could be seen as constructing a base for a "difficult heritage". Any such attempt, however, had to be undertaken with the utmost caution in the PRC and the creators of the memorial walls seemed to be aware of this. As noted above, the county officials took great care with regard to the wording on both memorial walls, for example in the use of the word "dead". While in the case of the Japanese, the word used is 'perished' (*wangzhe*), the memorial wall for the foster parents uses the word 'departed' (*shizhe*) (Jiang 2011). In the events that followed these efforts proved to be in vain.

At the end of July 2011 another dignitary visited the memorial site. The Japanese Consul General from Shenyang, a city in northern China, visited the annual Lotus Festival in Fangzheng as well as the newly renovated memorial garden. This visit was widely reported on, not just in China, but also in Japan. In that period the anti-Japanese atmosphere in China was getting stronger, especially due to new incidents regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands conflict in the South China Sea (Hagström 2012). Reports about the consul's visit and the county's memorial garden quickly went viral on micro-blogging sites prompting many netizens to accuse the county of "erecting a monument to Japanese invaders". In just hours, the newly appeared (digital) dissonant voices were roaring and demanding explanations: the micro-blogging platform Weibo's users were questioning the use of the word "Japanese settlers" (Chinese: *kaituotuan ren*) on the memorial wall,

the sheer existence of the monument dedicated to 'Japanese invaders', and above all the money spent for the monument – the amount most often mentioned on Weibo and media news was 700,000 RMB, the equivalent of 105,000 USD. Although the local government rebutted this number and claimed that the amount of money used for the renovation of the whole memorial garden was in fact much lower, nobody on the Internet seemed to pay attention.

One of the fundamental aspects of heritage controversies is their role in forcing people and groups to take sides. They also assign positions in a way that presents some actors in a particularly bad light and where there is almost no space to manoeuver. As indicated at the beginning of this article, the local government found itself in the midst of violent attacks, first only virtual and verbal, but later also physical. People started to flock to Fangzheng to express their dissatisfaction with the memorial wall. Among them were five men, calling themselves members of the Alliance for Defending the Diaoyu islands. They arrived on the 3rd of August, headed to the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden and tried to smash the memorial wall with the inscription of the Japanese dead. The material used for the wall was too hard and they only managed to chip off parts of it. After a while they decided to smear red paint over it. The police arrived, took the men into custody but let them go the same day (Qin 2011; Jiang 2011; Wu 2015). To calm the situation down, the local government issued a statement stating that the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden was not an open tourist attraction, but intended for Japanese visitors only (Qin 2011). This enraged the netizens even more, prompting local government officials to end the communication on the micro-blogging platform Weibo, as well as with media outlets in general. A few days later, they demolished the contentious memorial wall entirely hoping to silence the vociferous dissonance and erase any memory of even shy attempts at creating "difficult heritage".

## The aftermath

While all heritage controversies result in some change, even miniscule, some turn out to be too contentious and there are attempts to return to a previous state, even by taking drastic measures if necessary (Macdonald 2009b). But the dissonance in this case lingered on and even the physical annihilation of the memorial wall did not squash it. On the contrary, the heritage controversy surrounding the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden spilled over into the larger issue of loyalty and patriotism, revealing that a return to the previous state, at least for the local community, was no longer possible. Due to contemporary communication tools this controversy could no longer be confined to the county borders, but grew into a nation-wide smearing campaign of the Fangzheng local population. For example, in addition to other name-calling, the netizens described the county as a place inhabited by "traitors of the Chinese race" (*Hanjian*), a word game on the name Fangzheng. *Hanjian* is considered to be a profoundly derogatory term for collaborators in Chinese and is most often ascribed to people who collaborated with the Japanese during the Japanese occupation (Imber 2014). Since the vast majority of information regarding Fangzheng on the Internet is connected to the "memorial drama" and originates in the period after the monument-

smashing event, the name of the county became closely associated with this derogatory word, as well as events surrounding the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden. When I told a taxi driver in Harbin that I was going to Fangzheng county (*Chinese: Fangzheng xian*) he corrected me by saying: '*Hanjian xian*'. At first I thought he misunderstood me, but he later explained that that was what people were calling it now. This attitude was reflected in the locals' reaction to the events. They complained that when they left the county they were often verbally abused, the price for the item or service they are purchasing was suddenly increased or they might not get a room in a hotel or some other service, because their ID showed that they came from Fangzheng.

The Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden is now closed for visitors, except for Japanese groups which come through official channels, usually around the Japanese Obon festival. Most often, these groups are repatriated Japanese and their relatives. Their visit to the memorial garden and the words of gratitude for deceased parents and the kindness of Chinese people are followed by a large group of media and then televised and reported across China and Japan (e. g. portal Renminwang, Global times and Asahi Shimbun). Although the official five-year plan, announced on the county's official website in 2011, proposes the development of tourist products that encompass the 'special resources of the north-eastern hometown of Overseas Chinese' (e. g. history of Japanese colonization and the ties to Japan), the emphasis has shifted to the heritage sites that portray Japanese occupation and Chinese resistance in a more unambiguous way and into developing more "classical" elements of the so-called "red tourism" (e. g. the martyrs' cemetery of the War of Resistance against Japanese) (Fangzheng county government 2011). But even here, the county authorities were advised to tread carefully. An article published in the nation-wide Chinese Communist Party's newspapers for intellectuals, Guangming Daily, on the dangers of 'tainted' red tourism, specifically mentioned Fangzheng and the 'memorial drama' as an example of unacceptable behaviour in creating the 'red tourism' products (Liu 2011). The writer (Liu 2011) further warned that national humiliation and pain cannot be allowed to become a source of parody and profit and that the first task of "red tourism' sites" lies in educating people about the past. It was clear that this 'past' can only be the officially sanctioned one and that no memory interventions, however small and cautious, into expanding this discourse, would not be allowed. Therefore, the aftermath of the "memorial drama" signalled that attempts to boost the local economy by including new actors (e.g. Japanese relatives and civic organizations) and new meanings (more reflective and humanistic interpretations of WW2 events) into this specific process of heritage making were not yet possible. Hence, the more inclusive accounts of complex local and national histories in the county were downplayed and the previously settled division of roles – Japanese only as perpetrators and Chinese only as victims – was restored.

## Conclusion

In Lisa Moore's (2009) view, memorials dedicated to atrocities may provide a private sacred space for mourning as a form of symbolic reparations; they can teach lessons about "never again" to future generations; they can also serve as a nation-building mechanism.

While one could argue that the creation of the Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden sought to fulfil all these promises, it also tried to expand existing narratives concerning the Japanese colonial legacy in China. By attempting this, a great deal of dissonance pertaining to the memorial site was revealed. While dissonance is intrinsic to all heritage-making the account of "memorial drama" reveals how dissonance can be underplayed within certain contexts and periods, but can emerge intensely at other times. This is why it is important to closely examine the particular heritage controversy to understand how locality conditions the course and the outcome of the specific heritage-making project.

In the case of China, the state continues to invest in the presentation of war memorials as places that extol victimization, patriotism and self-sacrifice and, through that, the centrality of the Communist Party in modern Chinese history. Heritage-making is thus closely controlled so that it accords with officially sanctioned interpretations and messages. But the case described here attests to the presence of other voices and their attempts to forge alternative, more inclusive, interpretations of Japanese colonial legacy. These alternative voices did not contradict or challenge the meta-narrative, but only slightly expanded the previously black and white portrayal of that legacy. While still following the meta-narrative of the humanism and humanitarianism of Chinese people, an (unintentional) message emerged of the sacrifice, suffering and care that was common to both groups − local Chinese and Japanese survivors. Here, the "perished" Japanese were no longer the arch enemy, but rather human beings whose suffering was recognized beyond the official Chinese stance of Japanese people being victims of Japan's militarist regime at the time.[7]

While one cannot claim that these alternative interpretations are an intentional step towards acknowledging wrongs that have been committed, that is towards displaying the "difficult heritage", I have attempted to show that these often miniscule rearrangements of discourse can be seen as signalling a move towards more reflective and inclusive heritage making. This move stays within the realm of officially sanctioned interpretations, but also adds a new dimension to these messages and even new actors. This, I argue, could form a base for future accounts of the past that would be more in line with the 'difficult heritage' approach. Sharon Macdonald (2015) herself, however, warns that this approach cannot be seen as universal and mentions China as an example of a nation where it would not be adopted, but where such attempts are nonetheless present. Still, they are always embedded in a specific local context and highly volatile to changing political climate within the country.

That these attempts to forge alternative interpretations were at least partially prompted by the desire for local development and economic gain through tourism is not surprising. Heritage construction is a core feature of regional development strategies in China and villages, rural towns and local communities are obliged to deal with heritage-making (Ewans & Rowlands 2015). Often, the local governments act as a kind of "heritage

[7] This view was, among others, expressed in the 2004 Wen Jiabao's speech in Japanese Diet, where he emphasized the victimhood of 'ordinary Japanese': 'The older generation of Chinese leaders stated on many occasions that it was a handful of militarists who were responsible for that war of aggression. The Japanese people were also victims of the war, and the Chinese people should live in friendship with them' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2007).

entrepreneurs" transforming the local past into a heritage that can be commercialized. It is then crucial that the messages behind the particular construction of heritage site support the local development plans. In Fangzheng, the local government founded local development on a particular history that despite being painful, ensured the close symbolic and real proximity to Japan. The Chinese-Japanese Friendship Garden's development was based on strong flows to and from Japan and the goal of this project was to assure that these movements become even stronger by attracting Japanese tourists, pilgrims and investors.

Finally, even though the alternative voices can be increasingly heard in the heritage-making landscape of China (Ewans & Rowlands 2015) these voices must carefully choose their register. If they miss, a heritage controversy happens and alternative interpretations might become targets of aggression. This aggression can be government-led, but increasingly – as shown in the "memorial drama" – it can involve popular unrest led by Internet activists. Although virtual, they have real consequences – squashing the alternative voices and trying to restore the status quo before the interventions into memory happened. But this is impossible – although painful, the intervention had already made a difference and showed that the possibility of expanding the officially sanctioned interpretations exists, if certain conditions are met. Locking the door of the memorial garden and refusing entry will therefore not prevent hopes that this place of pain and shame could one day become a place of pain but also hope again.

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## Povzetek

Članek naslavlja proces dediščinjenja v kraju, za katerega so značilne zapletene zgodovine prisilnih in drugih gibanj v obliki kolonizacije, migracij in turizma. Osredinja se na proteste, ki so izbruhnili v okraju Fangzheng v severovzhodni provinci Heilongjiang v Ljudski republiki Kitajski ob obnovi lokalnega spominskega parka posvečenega umrlim japonskim kolonialnim naseljencem. S pomočjo koncepta dediščinske polemike članek analizira dogodke poimenovane "spominska drama" z namenom umeščanja nesoglasij glede dediščinjenja v širše družbene procese mobilnosti, razvoja in sprememb omenjenega ruralnega območja. Skozi prikaz lokalnih (neuspešnih) poskusov razširitve uradnih interpretacij pomena spominskega parka, avtorica ugotavlja, da alternativni glasovi v drugače strogo nadzorovanem procesu dediščinjena na Kitajskem sicer obstajajo, vendar so hkrati močno odvisni od spreminjajočih se političnih razmer in večinskega javnega mnenja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: disonantna dediščina, težavna dediščina, dediščinjenje, Fangzheng, Kitajska, Japonska, japonske vojne sirote

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