

Combining Nation and Indigenous? The Cultural Politics of Planning and Establishing the National Indigenous Peoples Museum in Contemporary Taiwan

Cheng-Hsien YANG

Assistant Professor

Department of Indigenous Affairs and Development, National Dong Hwa University

Abstract

In recent years, the subjective consciousness of indigenous Taiwanese people has become increasingly strong, and several members of indigenous communities have demanded control over the rights of museums to display local languages and interpret local cultures. According to the Education Act for Indigenous Peoples “If deemed necessary, the central government shall set up an indigenous culture center or museum, and when necessary, may undertake redesignation of existing museums that have collections of indigenous artifacts” (Article 30). Therefore, the government of Taiwan has actively planned to establish the National Indigenous Peoples Museum to implement pivotal national policies such as those aimed at preserving traditional indigenous cultures, developing cultural and creative industries, and formulating ethnic diversity and cultural strength. Cultural and political debates over the roles, orientations, functions, and affiliations of the museum are currently unfolding during the planning and site selection stage. Dichotomies and multiple discourses concerning, for example, national discourses–ethnic subjectivity, urban Taipei–rural locality, and cultural artifacts window–life scene have incurred intense controversy. Furthermore, theories such as postnationalism, world systems theory, cultural nationalism, and cultural taxonomy are expected to redefine and reinterpret the contemporary significance of Taiwanese museums as Taiwan reaches the Anthropocene. Therefore, the future development of the National Indigenous Peoples Museum will be interdependent with Taiwanese society.

This study examined the numerous cultural and political phenomena during the planning and development of the National Indigenous Peoples Museum and investigated the policy discourses and political correctness as well as how various ethnic groups in Taiwan have established platforms for communication and cultural recognition. The understanding of how discourses of locality, ethnicity, modernity, and museumness may guide us to explore contemporary constructive paths to and the cultural political development of the National Indigenous Peoples Museum under the framework of the Anthropocene concept. Consequently, this study provides a comprehensive perspective and governance concept as a blueprint for museum management in Taiwan.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples, the National Indigenous Peoples Museum, Museum Governance, Anthropocene, Cultural Politics