

Model of Indigenous Museums: A Case Study of the Kiwit Indigenous Community

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Abstract

The idea of “museum” has its roots in European civilization. For a long time, the Western perspective had dictated the development of discourses in museology. Toward the end of 20th Century, as many Oceanian countries rid themselves of colonization, they have also appropriated and transformed the concepts of museum as the key medium of cultural revival. Indigenous groups in various regions even developed their own unique ways of preserving local culture and museum practices. Here in Taiwan, a place critical in the spreading of Austronesian cultures, the development of indigenous museums is still dominated by the idea that recognized national settings as institutions signified cultural legitimacy. Also, as most of these museums are subject to institutional powers, an indigenous museum model built on the agency of indigenous community together with their cultural subjectivity is still rare.

In 2005, the Kiwit Indigenous Community in Juisui Township, Hualien County kick-started their community building efforts. They have rebuilt their traditional housing and Men's Gathering House, contributed collection to Juisui Kiwit Indigenous Museum, executed two Exhibitions concerning "Homecoming of Indigenous Collection", organized Tatadok (rafting and culture tours), vacated the museum and then collaborated with National Museum of Prehistory to put together a Special Exhibition of "Kiwit Community". These experiences one by one have paved the way to a model of museum practice that is deep-rooted in the community. This paper is based on the firsthand observation made through the researcher's own participation with the community. By combing through the transformation and activities taken place within the community between 2005 and 2015, the paper showcases how the Kiwit Community has leveraged and translated its own cultural features into a unique and grassroots museum model.

Keywords: Indigenous Model of Museum, Kiwit Indigenous Community