

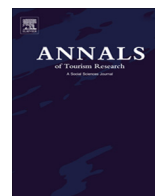


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# Tourism as reflexive reconstructions of colonial past

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### 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.

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### 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

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recognising the potential of tourism as peace-making activities (see [Blanchard & 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, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 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 ([Carrigan, 2011](#); [Hall & Tucker, 2004](#); [Palmer, 1994](#); [Winter, 2007](#)). 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 ([Amoamo & Thompson, 2010](#); [Echtner & Prasad, 2003](#); [Palmer, 1994](#)). Despite some notable exceptions that examine intra-European colonialism and tourism ([Kneafsey, 2000](#); [McGuire, 2012](#); [Pitchford, 1995](#)) and other postcolonial contexts such as East Asia ([Chang & Holt, 1991](#); [Kim & Prideaux, 2012](#); [Oakes, 1998](#)), 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 ([Basu, 2008](#); [Sarmiento, 2010](#); [Teather & Chow, 2003](#)). 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, 1995](#)). 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 & 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

### *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

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