

Exhibiting Imprisoned Memories: The Construction of Site-specific Narrations in the Jing- Mei White Terror Memorial Park, Taiwan

*By Ching-pin Tseng**

In Chiang Kai-shek's early governance of Taiwan, many political events occurred which violated human rights. During this 'White Terror' era, military commanders were authorized with powers to restrict the islanders' freedom, as well as prohibit public assemblies. Taiwanese who acted against the martial law would be committing offences of public order, or even offences of treason. The Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park was once the place where such political victims were held in custody and imprisoned. Until the lift of martial law, these inhuman events were not revealed to the public, and the two courts, the Ren-Ai Building (仁愛樓, the detention centers), barracks and other public buildings on the site recently have been transformed into parts of the National Human Rights Museum, Taiwan. As many political persecutions occurred and were implemented in the two courts and previous jails of the detention centers, the transformation of the site into a memorial park suggests the site-specificity of memory recollection through exhibiting the built environments, historical archives, and victims' leftovers. This paper intends to discuss the construction of spatial narrations and the means of patching up fragmented memories of these political events, as well as examining the exhibition settings for stimulating visitors' perceptions of the victims' sufferings. Finally, as young generations in Taiwan didn't experience such political oppressions, the paper would ask what sort of immersive channels could be utilized to recall the imprisoned memories and to forge some sufferers' traumatic experiences for visitors.

Introduction

Memory is a recollection of mental images about the past or is a kind of recalling of something imprinted in one's mind. To study the means of exhibiting historical traces and recollecting memories, it is essential to explore what factors can be helpful to stimulate related impressions or stories in the mind and what channels can be utilized to deliver memories to the public. In relation to the recollection of a past event, one might remember impressive venues of the event, related persons, objects, sound impressions, timing, and fragments of scenarios and so on. The aforementioned factors of recollection might trigger each other and further recompose the past narratives temporarily and spatially invoke memories of the event. In other words, for a person who had experienced a historically momentous event, through viewing and perceiving related traces, records, or clues of the event in or around the loci, his/her memories of past sufferings might be recalled. Nonetheless, if the venues of events related to some peoples' traumas were enclosed due to political reasons for a long time, it could be asked how other

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people could comprehend the happenings and realize the truth of these events by visiting relevant exhibitions at the venues. Or, if these traumas were caused by political domination or ideological prejudice, how could historical traces of these events be disclosed? And how could these traumatic experiences be perceived through exhibitions/performances along with the spatial narration of the conserved loci?

After the 2nd World War, the Japanese colonization of Taiwan was transferred to Chiang Kai-shek's governance over the island. Because of the autocratic rule and the corruption of the new governor of Taiwan, a series of political suppressions took place on the island and its people during the early period of Chiang's government. The February 28 Incident is one of the momentous political events in Taiwan's modern history; an uprising against the violence of officers of the State Monopoly Bureau and the mismanagement of the Incident of Chen Yi's officials¹ which sparked off later successive military suppressions and massacres. A severe tension was stirred up between the Nationalist troops and the islanders and thus approximately twenty thousand Taiwanese people were massacred during this Incident.² In order to suppress the rebellion of Taiwanese people and Chinese communists, martial law was implemented in the island from 1949 to 1987 and more than ten thousand Taiwanese people were arrested, interrogated, tortured and imprisoned by military authorities.³ There were many unjustified prosecutions of political cases and events encroaching on human rights happened during this long-term 'White Terror' era.⁴ Under martial law, military commanders were authorized to restrict the islanders' freedom of speech and publication, as well as prohibiting people's public assembly and religious activities.⁵ Any Taiwanese people who acted against the law committed such crimes as offences of public order, or even offences of treason or sedition.

1. The February 28 Incident started from a Taiwanese widow, who was suspected of selling illegal cigarettes, being struck by agents of the State of Monopoly Bureau on February 27, 1947. The later uprisings were caused by one officer's shooting into a crowd of angry civilians, which resulted in one man dying on February 28, 1947.

2. According to George H. Kerr's investigation and 'the eyewitness accounts brought in by foreigners from every part of the island', the Nationalist troops might have massacred approximately 20,000 Taiwanese civilians. See George H. Kerr, *Formosa Betrayed* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1992), 310. Besides, according to the 228 Incident Investigation Committee established by Executive Yuan, there were between 18000 to 28000 persons hurt and massacred during this incident. See Department of Cultural Affairs (Ed.), *The Permanent Exhibition of Taipei 228 Memorial Museum* (Taipei: Department of Cultural Affairs, Taipei, 2011), 64.

3. Yan-Xian Chang, "Introduction: White Terror and Transitional Justice," in *Jieyan Shiqi Baise Kongbu Yu Zhuanxing Zhengyi Lunwen Ji* (Eds.) Yan-Xian Chang, and Mei-long Chen (Taipei: Wu Sanlian Taiwan Historical Materials Foundation, 2009), 9.

4. Ibid, 7. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, the historical meaning of White Terror is derived from 'the period of violent repression led by counter-revolutionary forces in 1795, in reaction to the First French Revolution'. Nowadays, it is used to express 'any of various periods of violent repression, especially one led by conservative or reactionary forces against a communist or left-wing regime'. See Lexico, *Oxford Dictionary*, 2019.

5. From the stipulation of Article 8 of the Martial Law, military authorities 'may try by themselves or send to district courts for trial' those who committed such crimes as offense of sedition or treason. See Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, '*Martial Law (1949)*', *Collected in Central Law* (Laws & Regulations Database of The Republic of China, 2019).

The Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park was employed as a place where such political victims were tried and taken into custody and in prison. Until the lift of martial law, these inhuman events were not revealed to the public, and a lot of related victims and their families redressed grievances and received certain compensations through later official investigations. The military courts and jails set for imposing political accusations have been conserved, and the site has been re-named as Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park since March 2018.⁶ Prior to the study of the history of built environments on the site, it is important to clarify the cause of traumatic experiences and the background of ‘White Terror’ political events in Taiwan, so as to explore the means of narrating these imprisoned memories.

Because of the consequence of Taiwan’s democratic progress and the islanders’ awareness of the importance of human rights, the National Human Rights Museum of Taiwan was established in the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park in 2018 (Figure 1). The Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park and the Green Island White Terror Memorial Park are organized by, and are under the jurisdiction of, the National Human Rights Museum. The process of establishing these two parks would on the one hand portray Taiwanese people’s collective memories of the ‘White Terror’ era and related political traumas, on the other might reveal some political parties’ collective resistance to the disclosure of such injustice. The conservation and exhibitions of the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park would not only provide channels for young generations to realize the happenings of these political oppressions, but also uncover multiple historical traces for the public to perceive the victims’ sufferings and to question political ideologies and prejudiced cognitions of these events that were imprinted by Chiang’s Chinese Nationalist (KMT) government.

Accordingly, this paper defines the ‘imprisoned memories’ firstly as, memories of being imprisoned, and secondly, the confinement of revealing these happenings of being imprisoned. It is thus essential to study the cause of traumatic experiences as well as its relation to related objects and venues of the events through literature review. Moreover, the historical background of the site, the transformation of these negative cultural heritages, as well as the recollection of imprisoned memories through specific loci will also be explored. In the end, the paper will further discuss the potential methods of recomposing such imprisoned memories through analyzing the spatial narration of conserved loci and related spatial regenerations, as well as studying the means of exhibiting and revealing stories and memories of these historical traces and leftovers of the sufferers who were imprisoned then.

6. The site was named as Jing-Mei Human Rights Memorial Park from 2010 to the February of 2018.



Figure 1. The Title of 'National Human Rights Museum' Is Set on the Existing Main Gate of the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park

Source: Ching-pin Tseng

Collective Traumas and the Transformation of Negative Cultural Heritages

Historical momentous events, which could include natural disasters, wars (battles) among nations or races, and political massacres and so on, often cause the victims physical and mental suffering. These sufferings would deeply shape related persons' unforgettable or traumatic memories or cause psychological disturbances to the victims, because of the events' unexpectedness and violence.

To study traumatic memories and the representation of traumatic experiences, it is essential to clarify the definition and the cause of a trauma. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, a trauma means 'a deeply distressing or disturbing experience' and an 'emotional shock following a forceful event or a physical injury, which may lead to long-term neurosis'.⁷ In relation to the mental process of traumatic experience, Sigmund Freud states that it is 'an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates.'⁸ This permanent

7. Catherine Soanes, and Angus Stevenson (Eds.), *Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

8. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Group, 1991), 315.

disturbance of energy operation in oneself can thus be regarded as psychologically unbalanced stress after experiencing such traumas. With regard to the diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Richard J. McNally further defines the traumatic stressor as on the one side ‘... only those stressors associated with serious injury or threat to life’, and on the other ‘we might allow any stressor to count as traumatic if it terrifies the person or produces certain symptoms.’⁹

In terms of political repression or inhuman torture, such stressful events or physical injuries might happen to a group of persons, races, communities, and countries. Collective traumas would continuously affect the whole society and might cause related persons’ mental sufferings more than the traumas itself. Especially, collective political oppressions and unjust treatments could have been concealed for a long time due to the cases’ inhuman manipulation, and the victims as well as their family members might thus suffer from additional psychological depressions due to social contempt or injustice. Moreover, because the truth of these events could be concealed by the domination of certain political authorities, ruptures among races and peoples might be increasingly generated.

Accordingly, by means of conserving the loci of political persecutions and exhibiting the data of historically momentous events, traumatic experiences can be reinterpreted and be disseminated to the public for positive and educational purpose. To discuss the exhibition of imprisoned memories and collective traumas caused by the political dominations of Chiang K-s’s KMT government and related ‘White Terror’ events, the historical background and the spatial transformation of the site, the detention centers, and the two courts and so on, will be discussed in the following sections.

The Historical Background of the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park

Under the control of Chiang’s military government, most Taiwanese people could not express their ideas about public affairs or even read any book related to democracy or communistic thoughts. There were thus many cases related to political offenders or dissidents towards KMT’s ideology in the early part of the Martial Law period. The great need for military law personnel led the Ministry of National Defense to establish a military law school on the site from 1957 to 1967; student dormitories and Chiang K-s Hall have been preserved since the military law school was moved out in 1967¹⁰ (Figure 2). From 1967 to 1980, the First Court, the Military Court and the new detention centers of both the Judge Advocate Office and the Department of Military Law were constructed on the site for the purpose of sentencing most major white terror cases and holding military prisoners, political prisoners and felons etc. During this period, these detention centers (仁愛樓, the Ren-Ai Building) were named as ‘新店二十張景美軍事看守所

9. Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 79.

10. The above historic information is referenced from Wei-chou Wang, *The Final Report for the Investigation Research of the Historical Buildings of Jing-Mei Human Rights Cultural Park and the Building of Auto Repair Brigade* (New Taipei City: The Preparatory Office of the National Human Rights Museum, 2011), 73-85.

' (Jing-Mei Military Detention Centers in Xindian, Xindian Ershi Zhang Jing-Mei Junshi Kanshouso).¹¹ In 1975, Chiang K-s died, and his rule of the island transferred to one of his sons, Chiang Ching-kuo, three years later. In Chiang C-k's early governance of Taiwan, the dominant politics continued for some years. In 1984, a special prison house was built for the detention of His-ling Wang, director of the intelligence bureau of the Ministry of National Defense, who was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment after the assassination of dissident journalist-writer Chiang Nan (江南).¹² The above case also reveals Chiang C-k's subsequent political domination over the island and its people. From 1980 to 1991, a front gate, a reception room and sentry posts were built near the Hsiulang Bridge; the two courts and the detention centers have been preserved since then. Through tracing the historical background of the Memorial Park, the horror and darkness in Taiwanese society from post-war to the end of the 20th century can be revealed.



Figure 2. *The Conserved Chiang K-s Hall Is Still in Use*

Source: Ching-pin Tseng.

In 2001, having known that the Ministry of National Defense planned to reconstruct the site, Vice President Hsiu-lien Lu, a former sufferer of the Formosa Magazine Incident, proposed the idea of preserving the detention centers and other public buildings in her visit to the site. Although there were some opposing voices

11. Ibid, 108-110.

12. Ibid, 112-120.

regarding her proposal, these 'Jing-Mei Military Detention Centers in Xindian' were later registered as historical buildings of Taipei County in 2007.¹³ Since the Council of Cultural Affairs took charge of the park, the site and most of the buildings on it have been preserved and conserved till now.

The Spatial Transformation from Jing-Mei Military Detention Centers to the White Terror Memorial Park

From the background of the site and the social value of existent historical buildings on it, the preservation and conservation of these tangible cultural heritages suggest a future vision for transforming collective traumas into positive understandings of the history, and a potential for visitors to empathize with the sufferers. Based on the principle of preserving original historical traces and the spatial context of the site, most of the buildings are conserved according to their previous conditions and transformed into exhibition rooms (Figure 3). In addition, for establishing Jing-mei White Terror Memorial Park and for preparing National Human Rights Museum, some new constructions and memorial spaces were constructed on the site or were set together with non-registered heritages.

In association with White Dove Square and a pond, a new imagery construction highlighting the entrance of the park was constructed by using 'high walls' as symbolic elements to express the concept of 'imprisonment'.¹⁴ A series of concrete high walls are set across the building of the previous Higher-grade Military Court Prosecution Bureau to represent the dissidents' 'conflict with the military authorities',¹⁵ as well as suggesting physical and psychological sufferings of being compressed and tortured. A strong will for challenging the authority is thus demonstrated by these penetrating concrete walls which present narrow and compressed spaces with dramatic brightness projecting from the top and the end of the imagery construction (Figures 4 and 5).

In terms of the regeneration and exhibition of the two courts and the detention centers, some simulative spatial scenes and descriptive information of 'White Terror' events were installed in these places to illustrate the history and phenomena of holding political sentences and imprisoned lives of the sufferers. The former student dormitories of the Military Law School were also transformed into exhibition spaces to demonstrate the narratives and history of white terror events (Figure 6). In considering the inhuman history of the political events which occurred in Taiwan, and Taiwanese people's delayed knowledge of those imprisoned memories, the site along with related historical buildings could be regarded as a negative cultural heritage that is 'a conflictual site that becomes the repository of negative memory in the collective imaginary.'¹⁶ By preserving the places of imprisonment and disclosing stories of inhuman events, the site and

13. Ibid, 125.

14. Chien Architects and Associates, "The Entrance Imagery of Jing-mei Human Rights Cultural Park," *Taiwan Architecture* 264 (2017): 93.

15. Ibid.

16. Lynn Meskell, "Negative Heritage and Past Mastering in Archaeology," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2002): 558.

related built environments may act as channels for recalling negative memories of the sufferers and their families on the one hand, and can serve as site-specific teaching materials for reclaiming human rights and for forging democratic visions for the future on the other.

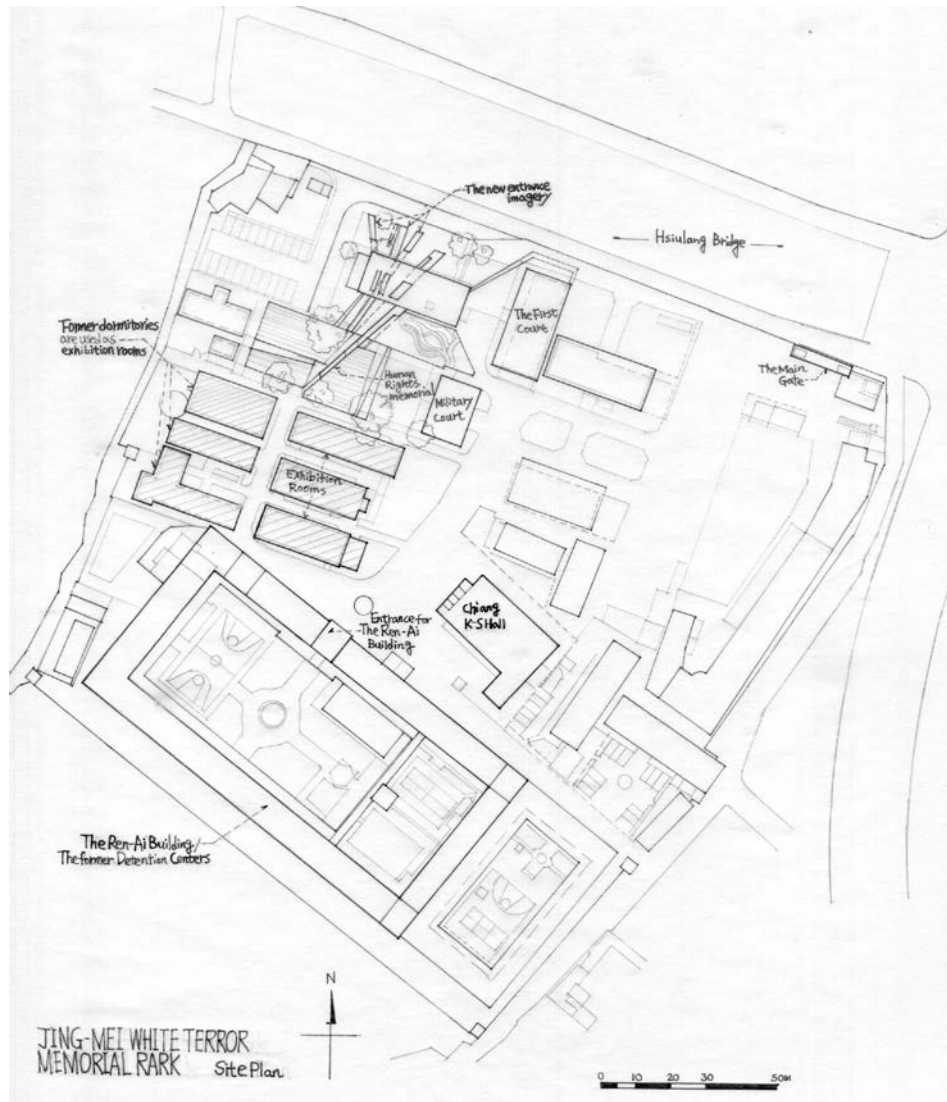


Figure 3. *The Site Plan of Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park*

Source: Wei-chou Wang, redrawn by Ching-pin Tseng.



Figure 4. *The New Entrance Imagery is Connected with the Previous Building of the Higher-Grade Military Court Prosecution Bureau*

Source: Ching-pin Tseng.



Figure 5. *A Human Right Memorial with Engraved Names of ‘White Terror’ Victims was Built along with the New Entrance Imagery*

Source: Ching-pin Tseng.



Figure 6. *The Former Student Dormitories of the Military Law School have been converted into Exhibition Rooms*

Source: Ching-pin Tseng.

Memories, Specific Places and Spatial Narrations

Memories are closely related to people, things, happenings, and places that the people encountered before. Through these experiences of encountering, layers and layers of mental images can be engraved in people's mind. By means of recollection, the past can be called to mind, as well as being associated with existent traces of the past occurrences. In discussing Aristotle's theory of memory and reminiscence, Frances Yates paraphrases Aristotle's words by saying that:

Memory, ... belongs to the same part of the soul as the imagination; it is a collection of mental pictures from sense impressions but with a time element added, for the mental images of memory are not from perception of things present but of things past.¹⁷

That is, memory can be regarded as the lasting state of mental pictures that have been collected from sense impressions of things past. With regard to the state of mental impression being long lasting in memory or being effaced quickly, the variation of age and temperament of the person act as determinant factors.¹⁸ Accordingly, the difference between memory and reminiscence (or recollection)

17. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 47.

18. *Ibid.*

can be discerned. Yates further discusses Aristotle's words and says that '[r]ecollection is the recovery of knowledge or sensation which one had before. It is a deliberate effort to find one's way among the contents of memory, hunting among its contents for what one is trying to recollect.'¹⁹ As Yates states that Aristotle's emphasis on the process of recollection is closely related to the principle of association and is based on the similarity, contiguity or dissimilarity between the contents of memory and sense impressions²⁰, it would be essential to explore what sources and means might benefit the recollection of sense impressions related to specific places. In other words, in terms of the recollection of past impressions in people's mind, it is important to discuss the spatial factors of places or venues where relevant events occurred.

In terms of the curation of exhibitions that are relevant to historical events, museums can be prevalent venues or institutions for recalling collective memories by means of narrating related information or stories. According to M. Christine Boyer, '[t]he museum offers the viewer a particular spatialization of knowledge - a storage device - that stems from the ancient art of memory.'²¹ This particular spatialization of knowledge that the visitor may perceive can be explored through two aspects. One is the curation of an exhibition in accordance with the story line of related events through visual presentation and spatial narration in a museum; the other is the conveyance of the events by associating with the visualization of the events' data and the spatial discourse between the happening of the events and the spatial context of the venue that has been transformed into a museum. The former aspect may merely focus on the visualization and spatialization of the information portrayed in the exhibition. The latter suggests that the historical and spatial context of the events that are closely related to the museum building and the site might have shaped people's imprints of the places, and can be unveiled in association with the spatial narration of the museum and the exhibition of the events. The former type of museums could thus be newly built and might not be located on the specific venue of the event(s)²²; while the latter would be established within extant building(s) and specifically on the venue where the event(s) occurred.²³ The former may reveal collective memories without necessarily being associated with the spatial and historical relationship between the event's venue and the museum building; whilst the latter is inclined to suggest specific

19. Ibid, 48.

20. Ibid.

21. M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainment* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 133.

22. For example, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is a newly built museum and there is no direct connection between the building site and the venue of the Holocaust.

23. For example, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland and Eden Camp Modern History Theme Museum on the outskirts of Malton in England were established on the venues where the historical events occurred. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum is former German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp that was established in 1940 and was controlled by Nazi Germany when Poland was under Nazi's occupation during the World War Two. See Memorial and Museum, Auschwitz-Birkenau, *Museum and History*, 2021. Eden Camp Modern History Theme Museum was originally a war camp for accommodating Italian prisoners of war. See Eden Camp Modern History Theme Museum, *About Us and Discover* (Eden Camp Modern History Theme Museum, 2021).

historical and spatial discourses between the existent building(s) and the venue of the event(s), as well as delivering collective memories of the event(s) along with the site and the relics.

In discussing the role of the museum as a memory device, Boyer states that '[b]y the nineteenth century, ... its rooms or "topoi" were places to stop and to look around, to visually observe the common and contrasting features ... The path through the sequence of rooms narrated the evolutionary development of history and simultaneously walled in the heterogeneity of time.'²⁴ This means of setting spatial sequences for structuring the historical relations among artworks (exhibits) and to express the history of curated exhibits, or for prompting memories of past events that are exhibited in a museum can also be discovered in some contemporary cases.²⁵ In terms of the narration of historical events, however, the exhibition set in a museum that has been transformed from an extant venue might be different from the exhibition curated in a newly built museum. Because exhibitions held in a newly constructed museum may demonstrate a process of re-composition of past events and related narratives, the visitor may not recollect perceptual and spatial memories of the events by viewing the exhibits and by following the spatial sequence of the exhibition. Accordingly, to further associate stories of specific events with related places, the paper suggests that the exhibitions could be held in specific sites or at specific places, rather than in newly established museums. That is, the site-specificity of exhibitions can reveal certain spatial characteristics and auras for the visitor to grasp relevant situations or tactile experiences of the happenings.

Regarding the happenings of 'White Terror' events in Taiwan, most of the islanders couldn't receive the information before the relief of martial law. The loci of sentencing and detention also couldn't be disclosed publicly until the human rights of Taiwanese people had been obtained. The Jing-Mei Military Detention Centers are preserved and conserved for the purpose of unfolding the history and stories of 'White Terror' events in the island. In order to deliver the spatial sense of being imprisoned and the situation of being dominated by the authority, most of the Military Detention buildings and the two courts are presented in their original states. The visitor can discover lots of political slogans and signs, leftovers of the victims, and torture instruments etc. in many places of the site and in the confined detention rooms. Traces of political domination and recorded images of the sufferers' lives in the jails may stimulate visitors' imaginations of the victims' traumatic experiences. Hence the site-specific exhibitions of the political happenings together with the spatial narration of the restored settings of the jail rooms may draw young Taiwanese generations into a cognitive and sensory association with the white terror events.

24. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainment*, 1994, 133.

25. For instance, the exhibitions of the newer building of the National Museum of Scotland are curated chronologically to present Scottish history, starting from the lowest level about prehistory to the medieval period, and on the higher levels, histories of later and modern periods are conveyed.

Means of Exhibiting Imprisoned Memories and Spatial Experiences

As the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park is preserved to demonstrate an on-site museum or a memorial park, the site, the Ren-Ai Building, related built environments and the newly constructed memorial, can be regarded as physical referents for patching up the islanders' memories of white terror events and for unveiling the victims' imprisoned sufferings. To recollect the victims' and Taiwanese people's collective memories of the events, various channels and media can be associated with the spatial narration of those incarcerated spaces, and further to exhibit data of specific political happenings as well as uncovering such unbearable situations.

Theme Guided Tours and Site-Specific Exhibitions

Because the happenings of the 'White Terror' events had been enclosed for several decades and the visitor thus could not realize the history of the construction of the cells, barracks and the two courts and so on, three different theme tours for general visitors have been scheduled (Figure 7). Firstly, 'A Brief Introduction of the White Terror' by young officers has been set daily with a route from visiting the exhibitions in the barracks to the Human Rights Memorial to convey the history of 'White Terror' events and stories of the two White Terror Memorial Parks. Secondly, for visitors to perceive the sufferings of political prisoners and their family members, a theme tour in Ren-Ai building is arranged with a route from the entrance to the internal cells, public places and to the factories, by inviting related sufferers or their family members who were involved in the events to share their experiences of living in such situations. Thirdly, for providing visitors with more information about the trials and narratives of significant political cases, a guided tour from the Military Court to the First Court, and to the Special Jail Quarter for Hsi-Ling Wang is set. Especially, the trials of a series of significant 'White Terror' cases, such as the Formosa Magazine Incident, which were held in the First Court, will be introduced along with a set of interactive digital media.

According to the setting of the administrative office of the memorial park, the first guided tour focuses on visiting exhibition rooms by introducing the outline of limited cases within a short period of time. The visitor might not fully grasp the happenings of 'White Terror' events and clearly understand the relationship between the loci and the narratives of these events. In association with the second and the third theme tour, however, visitors might perceive spatial impressions of being imprisoned in such compressed and distorted environments due to these places' spatial characteristics and some immersive situations forged by interactive installations. Moreover, as the purpose of constructing the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park is to exhibit imprisoned traumas of specific political events, for the sufferers and their family members who were involved in these events, the site has preserved their traces of bodily and mental sufferings, as well as building up a close relationship between the sufferers' spatial experiences in the site and their memories of being imprisoned.

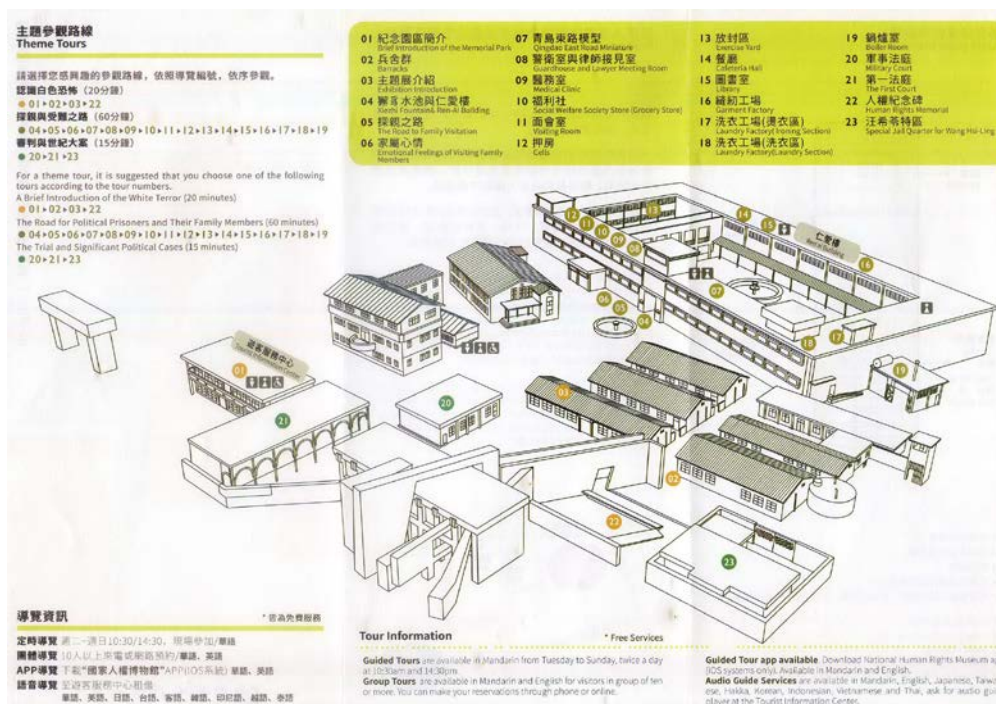


Figure 7. *Tour Information of the Memorial Park*

Source: Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park.

In terms of exhibiting imprisoned memories and collective traumas, the paper suggests that the notion of site-specificity would contribute to the re-composition of such experiences through spatial, visual, and verbal narration. According to Nick Kaye, ‘site-specificity focuses on the interrelationship among artistic works, events, behaviors and the characteristics of a place.’²⁶ In the light of Kaye’s statement, the paper argues that in terms of the conveyance of the memories of these ‘White Terror’ events, there is a process of semantic interchange among the events, participants’ behaviors, site-specific arts, and the places where they are located. This process of exchange articulates the properties and qualities of the works and defines the value of their existence. The site-specificity can trigger spatial attributes of the locations of artworks, as well as stimulating the beholder’s spatial perception of the venues. Accordingly, by associating the site-specificity of these loci with related information and some prisoners’ leftovers, related persons’ traumatic memories would be recollected, and young Taiwanese generations’ ignorance of past political oppressions can be patched up.

In visiting the Ren-Ai Building in the memorial park, it is possible to perceive a sense of being compressed and tortured because of the spatial aura of the constricted cells and the bored setting of public spaces, e.g., the visiting room, the cafeteria hall, and factories and so on. In relation to the curation of relevant exhibitions in the detention centers and in other buildings of the site, there are two issues can be discussed in this section. Firstly, the story lines for setting the exhibitions in the existent places of the ‘White Terror’ era might be closely related

26. Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

to the temporal traces of relevant events and the spatial sequences of the happenings. That is, the scenarios of narratives that occurred in the site and in related built environments can be temporally portrayed by the spatial sequence of events, as well as being illustrated together with the spatial characteristics of the places where the sufferers were situated during their imprisonments. Moreover, the exhibition of the history of ‘White Terror’ events and the spatial narration of constructing the site and its built environments could be correspondent to the narratives of Taiwanese people’s courses in struggling for human rights.

Secondly, in relation to the guided tours set for the visitor, a brief background of these historical events, the information of constructing the site and its built environments, as well as the narrative relationship between the happenings and the memorial park could be outlined; however, to visitors and young Taiwanese generations who did not encounter the happenings of the events, the narration of relevant stories and occurrences by noninteractive visual and spatial exhibitions might be insufficient and inactive. Moreover, from the above discussions about the setting of theme tours in the memorial park, any singular guided tour would be difficult for visitors to fully perceive such indescribable sufferings caused during the ‘White Terror’ era. Hence, the paper argues that there can be an alternative means or narrative media for generating immersive experiences for beholders. This means or narrative channel may also take advantage of the site-specificity to stimulate the audience’s perception of the place along with the sensory impression of the events. In addition to the curation of on-site exhibitions of ‘White Terror’ events, the paper suggests that the holding of site-specific performances at the venue of events can also prompt beholders’ empathy with related sufferers of the happenings. Regarding the notion of site-specific performance, Marvin Carlson states that:

In such productions already written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theatres that are expected appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audience, or, in more extreme cases, new works are created that are directly inspired by the extratheatrical associations of these locations.²⁷

Hence, in terms of the significance of strengthening audiences’ resonances with the political events by associating theatrical performances with previous spatial settings and auras of related places, an immersive way of representation or revelation of the imprisoned memories could be proposed and further discussed in the following section.

Experiencing the Events through Immersive Theater

To visitors who weren’t subjected to the political compressions and persecutions, static and passive channels of exhibitions might not stimulate their perceptions of those inhuman sufferings and cause their empathies with the sufferers. In the paper of “Performance and Death: Ronald Reagan”, Peggy Phelan

27. Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 134.

proposes that ‘...performance might provide a model for witnessing a historical real that exists at the very edge of the phantasmatic – events that are both unbearably real and beyond reason’s ability to grasp: events that are traumatic’.²⁸ By participating in a performance that intends to simulate the situation of being incarcerated and persecuted, the spectator may bodily and mentally experience such unimaginable sufferings. It can thus be suggested that a sort of immersive theater or interactive exhibitions need to be established to invoke the visitor’s visual and spatial perceptions as well as imaginations of being imprisoned in such confined places.

In terms of exhibiting imprisoned memories through theatrical performances, there are two aspects which can be discussed. The first aspect is about the setting of narrative scenarios and the viewpoint of the audience for historical interpretation. The second one is the spectatorship and responsiveness of audiences who are not familiar with the historical background of the ‘White Terror’ events. Since the opening of the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park, there have been some theatrical performances presented in/at specific places of the site to demonstrate pertinent political narratives.²⁹ For example, a site-specific performance entitled *Too Many Dreams in One Night: A Survival Proposal for Returning to an Alien Place* (夜長夢多：異境重返之求生計畫)³⁰ was shown in 2018, which intended to guide audiences to the historical venues to personally experience political suppression that is similar to what occurred in the ‘White Terror’ period. This performance associates with installations, virtual reality, and immersive theatrical settings for visitors to confront bodily torture and imprisonment through successive scenarios of being interrogated and shackled in jail rooms. In other words, it is inclined to forge simulative experiences for participants to ponder over the relationship between the individual and the collective regarding persecutors’ violence over the sufferers, as well as perceiving the long-term terrors caused by Chiang K-s and his heirs’ political dominations.

Prior to the performance, audiences were guided into Ren-Ai building and behaved by following the order of a soldier who was played by a performer. After walking through several dark corridors, audiences were directed into a cell and later were separately guided to varied spaces (Figure 8). Furthermore, due to being bodily imprisoned and restrained without freedom, the participant thus acted as a criminal and was instructed to wear an eye mask, and could only follow orders from the earphone that they were asked to wear.³¹ In the next scenario, the audience heard and watched some cases of unjust stories which happened in

28. Peggy Phelan, “Performance and Death: Ronald Reagan.” *Cultural Values* 3, no. 1 (1999): 118.

29. For instance, *I Promised I Wouldn’t Cry* (說好不要哭) and *From Frost to Qingming* (降霜到清明) were respectively performed in the site during the Human Rights Day 2019 and 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nhrm.gov.tw/w/nhrmEN/events>. [Accessed 13 January 2022.]

30. Dark Eyes Performance Lab, *Too Many Dreams in One Night: A Survival Proposal for Returning to an Alien Place*, immersive theatre x VR x installations, set and performed at The Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park on Nov. 29, Dec. 2, 6 and 9, 2018 (Dark Eyes Performance Lab, 2018).

31. Ibid.

Taiwan during the ‘White Terror’ period, as well as grasping simulative situations of relevant happenings through VR setting.³² Moreover, the beholder acted as if being sentenced for committing a certain crime after being called out, interrogated and tortured in a cell³³ (Figure 9). Some audiences might not psychologically identify with these simulative scenarios of interrogation, however, as well as immersing in this sort of situation due to the difference between the theatrical settings and actual lives that the audiences have experienced.³⁴



Figure 8. *Too Many Dreams in One Night, Audiences Were Guided by Performers*

Source: 陳藝堂 (Chen, Yi-tang)/ Dark Eyes Performance Lab

32. Ibid.

33. Zheng-han Wu, “Zhenshi de Zhaohuan yu Jixian.” *Performing Arts Review* 315 (2019): 84.

34. According to Wu’s personal experience of participating in the show, he tried to accept the reality of the set scenarios by responding to the interrogation with true answers. Thus, punishments of being handcuffed and throttled were caused because that response had aroused the anger of the interrogator. Ibid.



Figure 9. *Too Many Dreams in One Night*, an Audience was interrogated in a Cell

Source: National Human Rights Museum

Contrary to the above scenes, a following scenario was set in a court room, where a persecutor, who took part in previous persecutions, was standing in front of the audience. Ironically, participants could have a chance to make a judgement whether the person could be forgiven or should be put to death. From this setting, it is possible to discover the transformation of the audience's role from a sufferer to a decision maker (or a persecutor), as well as questioning the standpoint of related authority and the result it had caused.³⁵ In the end of the show, when the audience had been guided to the courtyard of the Ren-Ai Building, some dancers were subsequently strolling and performing like walking corpses from all directions to the center of the courtyard. With various characters and performers converging in the center, the ending of this show demonstrated that all scenes and situations that had been presented were non-realistic.³⁶ (Figure 10). Apart from the contrast between the simulative situations and the ending performance, the paper would state that this so-called immersive theater or participant performance could forge participants' physical experiences of being tortured, as well as stimulating their psychological empathy with the sufferers. Because a lot of visitors did not have experiences of living in the 'White Terror' circumstances, however, some imitative dialogues and interactions between set characters and audiences might imply a sort of contempt for pertinent sufferers and victims because of the inconceivability of these collective political sufferings.

35. Ibid, 85.

36. Ibid. Also see Dark Eyes Performance Lab, *Too Many Dreams in One Night: A Survival Proposal for Returning to an Alien Place*, 2018.



Figure 10. *The Ending Show of Too Many Dreams in One Night*
 Source: National Human Rights Museum.

Conclusion: Recomposing Collective Memories through Spatial-Temporal Narrations

From the above discussions, it can be discovered that there are multiple means for exhibiting imprisoned memories, and it can be stated that static and passive ways of exhibition may not deliver immersive and sensational experiences to audiences. By setting perceptual, immersive, and participant performances at historical venues or loci where ‘White Terror’ events happened, tactile and psychological perceptions may trigger audiences’ empathy with the sufferer’s experiences. Concealed historical traces could thus be exposed, and through this collective memories might be gradually patched up.

Regarding the storylines for narrating the sufferers’ experiences or for recalling memories of being imprisoned, it would be essential to compose these narratives by both synchronic and diachronic ways, so as to establish a spatial-temporal structure of spatial narration. In other words, a linear way of narrating the history of the park and the diachronic development of ‘White Terror’ events through the on-site exhibitions could be associated with the synchronic narration of some sufferers’ lives in the jail by means of immersive theater. Furthermore, the notion of site-specificity may contribute to the visual and spatial representation of the happenings, as well as the recalling of imprisoned memories of the sufferers.

The employment of immersive theaters as means to recollect audiences' memories of specific events or places has become a trend in Taiwan.³⁷ For example, a site-specific immersive theater *A Walk through Utopia* that was produced by Kaohsiung Museum of History and shown in the house of Qi-hua Ke (柯旗化), a sufferer in the 'White Terror' period, presents sufferings and memories of Ke and his family members in the period.³⁸ By means of the direct participation of audiences in the unfolding of theatrical scenarios, spectators can perceive the sufferer's situation and sense the spatial auras from the site-specificity of related venues. In terms of means or channels for reshaping experiences of sufferings in past political events, as well as for recollecting memories of related happenings and places, the paper concludes that the spatial narration of the site and its curated exhibitions would be comprehensive and perceivable if the audience could interactively participate in the exhibitions together with theatrical settings. Moreover, in association with the site-specificity of restored detention centers, interactive exhibitions and immersive participation in the theatrical performances, the visitor's empathy with the related sufferings and sense of being imprisoned can be stimulated.

At the end, with regards to the guided tours in persons, the paper suggests that differences of political ideology might be unavoidable in relation to the narration of these political incidents, because varied narrators could propose their biases and interpretation of the 'White Terror' events. By providing multiple channels of spatial and visual representation of the political events for the visitor, and to disclose multiple experiences of identifying the subjectivity of the island, the purpose of re-establishing the islanders' human rights could be successful and positive.

Acknowledgments

This research and the attendance of the 9th Annual International Conference on Architecture, Athens, Greece, were supported by Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan. MOST: 107 - 2221 - E - 110 - 012 –

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37. There were also some immersive theaters shown in specific historical heritages in Taiwan to narrate stories of these places and provide the audience with chances to experience these theatrical scenarios.

38. The Ke Qi-Hua House, *A Walk through Utopia* (The Ke Qi-Hua House, 2016). Ke's house cannot be regarded as a negative cultural heritage, and the scale of the site is smaller than the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park.

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