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An uncanny architecture of cultural heritage: Representations of the Japanese occupation in Harbin, China

Jean Hillier and Shulan Fu

Introduction

Occupation has a lasting impact, leaving forms of cultural legacy. Transforming legacy into heritage involves active selection and a valuation of tangible and intangible occupation elements.¹ Selected elements may be represented by previously occupied territories in memorial museums dedicated to ‘historic events commemorating mass suffering of some kind.’² Also referred to as ‘trauma sites’³ or ‘atrocities heritage’,⁴ museums and landscapes exist as material testimony to the violence which occurred at a certain place. In this chapter, we explore the cultural expression of the legacies of occupation in the city of Harbin, China. In a period of just over 100 years, Harbin was controlled by Russian, Japanese, Soviet and Chinese authorities, experiencing a rapid succession of different regimes. As Wei Song, Robert St Clair and Song Wang comment: ‘The modern history of China is written all over Harbin.’⁵

Harbin is the capital city of Heilongjiang Province, and is currently undergoing an attempted economic transition from manufacturing to tourism. Accordingly, the municipality is aiming to transform the city’s buildings that were constructed and utilized by Russian and Japanese occupiers in the first half of the twentieth century into tourist attractions. Many of these sites have been afforded heritage status as the municipality claims these structures ‘built by foreign imperial forces as their own.’⁶ The buildings have become heritage monuments, preservers of order and state-sanctioned memory in what has been described as China’s fourth most beautiful ‘colonial city.’⁷

Harbin’s monuments, however, commemorate the Russian colonial period, whilst either eliding, or openly condemning, the legacy of Manchukuo (1932–45) – the ‘puppet state’ established by the Japanese Kwantung Army in what is now China’s northeast – embodied in those same buildings. Traces of occupation afford ambiguity to the cityscape of Harbin as historical memories are appropriated in order to shape antipathetic occupation identities and narratives of conflict. Yet Harbin was also the site of a utopian vision for Manchukuo. The Japanese established Manchukuo as an

‘independent, civilian nation-state’,⁸ based on a new type of collaborative, alliance-based imperialism grounded in the reciprocal ‘three faces’ of military occupation, economic development and agrarian in-migration.⁹ Harbin exemplified the occupation regime’s desire for railway and urban construction programmes to encapsulate state-of-the-art architectural, infrastructural and urban planning technology.¹⁰ Today, Japanese occupation-era banks and shops represent an uncanny architecture which vacillates between past and present, but which remains opaque to the gazes of those who pass by them.

For several decades, the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo was regarded in China as a period of shame and humiliation.¹¹ Recently, emphasis has shifted towards representing the area that was once governed as Manchukuo as central to the revolutionary communist movement in China. Victims of the Japanese occupation are now regarded as martyrs, with the construction of two memorial museums displaying evidence of Japanese atrocities: the Museum of Evidence of War Crimes by Japanese Army Unit 731 (Qin-Hua Rijun de 731 budui yizhi) and the Northeast Martyrs’ Memorial Museum (NEMM) (Dongbei lieshi jinianguan).

However, while heritage may promote the representation of a particular version of history by state-sanctioned institutions, it may also be a resource that can challenge and redefine values and identities. The angle of vision might be displaced, recognizing the epistemological uncertainty about how past events may be understood and how some events, people, structures and artefacts are rendered silent by current heritage practices. In this chapter, we suggest that place could be regarded as a relational assemblage – a milieu – rather than as an isolated container. If the Japanese occupation of China’s northeast can be regarded not as a localized ‘thing’, taking place, for example, at Unit 731, but as an unfolding process, arising from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns,¹² then codifications of violence as the exclusive preserve of particular cultures (the Japanese) on particular people (Han Chinese) become less tenable. A displaced angle might suggest that the streets of Harbin and the texts in the city’s museums are less ‘tools of memory’, telling or reminding visitors of a story, but as ‘tools of productive thinking’ through which *multiple* stories unfold.¹³

In what follows, we critically explore the occupation heritage represented in Harbin’s museums and attempt to displace the angle of vision, such that other elements emerge. We draw on the concepts of refrain and milieu, as utilized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,¹⁴ to suggest rethinking Harbin and its heritage structures as milieus of relational assemblages which perform multiple stories. In this manner, Harbin’s heritage might commemorate not only martyrs, but also the ‘memory of the nameless’: the uncounted numbers who perished at the time, or were abandoned following the Japanese withdrawal. A refrain and milieu-based approach can afford a deeper, more nuanced, understanding of circumstances and signifiers.

We offer brief introductions to the spheres of occupation heritage and ‘red tourism’ in China. We then explore the concepts of refrain and milieu as a frame for our analysis. After contextualizing Chinese, Russian and Japanese actions in relation to China’s northeast from 1858 to 1949,¹⁵ we present stories from Harbin, gleaned through personal visits, observations, note-taking and conversations, together with secondary

data sourced from academic and tourist-oriented texts and materialities,¹⁶ including publications, websites and blogs.

Our analysis explores the refrains of official attempts to control Harbin's heritage of occupation and reveals the uncanny – the double: the stranger inside, the familiar made strange – of its architectural inheritance. Freud's discussion of the uncanny emphasizes the double as multiple projections of oneself/the city, including, perhaps, unacceptable elements.¹⁷ The double represents those aspects that are ignored in order to preserve a particular self/city image. We suggest that a relational milieu approach to cultural heritage in Harbin has the potential to go beyond current practices which aim to (re)awaken memories and emotions of victimhood at the hands of the Japanese occupiers. A milieu approach can look beyond museum walls and heritage plaques, both to the broader Japanese town plans, infrastructures and buildings of the city and to the lives of others – Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Koreans, Russians and Japanese – who also became victims of the occupation and its aftermath, both in China and in Japan. We suggest, in conclusion, that a seemingly settled expression of the legacy of the Japanese occupation of Harbin has the potential to become a cultural heritage expression of understanding, rather than of antipathy.

Occupation heritage and red tourism

Up until the mid-1980s, it could be argued that the remnants of the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo were a legacy of the event – neglected, if not forgotten. The traumatic and negative nature of the memories which many sites embodied meant that physical artefacts tended to be either destroyed as acts of erasure, or neglected in an attempt at forgetting and 'moving on'. Over time, and particularly since the late 1980s in what has been termed 'the new remembering',¹⁸ sites have been mobilized for didactic purposes and choices have been made regarding what and whom are remembered, and what and whom remain silent.

A legacy only becomes heritage through intervention,¹⁹ such as the inauguration of museums in 1985 concerned with the Nanjing Massacre and the Museum of Evidence of War Crimes by Japanese Army Unit 731 in Pingfang, Harbin. These museums represented repositories of war exhibited as patriotic education bases for school children, workers' groups and a few tourists. In the last three to four years, however, the Chinese government has intervened, spending billions of yuan to conserve buildings associated with the Japanese occupation and construct stylish new museums designed by leading Chinese architects in line with its promotion of 'red tourism' (i.e. tourism to sites associated with the communist movement).

Gilly Carr demonstrates that family, local or popular memory may differ from official memory, which tends to construct identities of actors as 'us' or 'them', 'heroic resisters' or 'aggressors', 'victims' or 'perpetrators'.²⁰ Such 'official' identities are insufficiently nuanced and, in China's northeast, tend to ignore a range of actors (such as Russians, Koreans, Jews and rural Japanese settlers) affected by the occupation in different ways, in addition to those engaged voluntarily or otherwise in non-resistance

or 'collaboration', provision of 'comfort' services, and of post-'Liberation' looting and acts of revenge.

The promotion of red tourism in China officially commenced in 2004. By 2006 there were over 200 sites nationally listed and supported financially as revolutionary cultural heritage. This initiative was regarded as a means of both patriotic education and promotion of economic development via tourism outside of the large cities along China's east coast.²¹ Northeast China was designated to commemorate 'Anti-Japanese Heroes and Endless Snowfields'.²² Sites associated with the Japanese occupation of China commemorate 'national humiliation' and are places where visitors can mourn the victims of past 'atrocities at the hands of the imperialists'.²³ The Unit 731 Museum and the NEMM, together with the Harbin Revolutionary Martyrs Memorial Museum and Cemetery (Ha'erbin geming lieshi jinianguan), are all listed as red tourism sites. However, the Harbin streetscape – the centre of the city's tourism strategy – is not listed as such.

Refrains and milieus

In order to consider questions of how the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo is memorialized, codified and represented, we draw on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of refrain and milieu. Deleuze and Guattari define a refrain as

a prism, a crystal of space-time. It acts upon that which surrounds it, sound or light, extracting from it various vibrations, or decompositions, projections, or transformations. The refrain also has a catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form organized masses.²⁴

A refrain is 'any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes'.²⁵ Refrains may be optical, such as heritage plaques or signage. We suggest that assemblages (such as a city or a discourse) achieve territorial consistency through refrains. However, as we explain below, refrains also possess capacities for deterritorialization and decoding assemblages, stimulating the creation of new understandings and new assemblages.

To comprehend what a refrain might do, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the concept of milieu. A milieu is a nexus of knowledge formation and power tactics. It includes economic, social, political and environmental elements and capacities to affect and be affected.²⁶ It is all of 'a spatial environment, a medium of action and a force of movement in-between, (re)productive of a specific ordering of space, time and relations'.²⁷ A milieu approach recognizes the complex relationalities between forces and elements. Every milieu is coded, defined by periodic repetition of refrains. In the territorial assemblage that is Harbin, we can discern various coded milieus, including a heritage milieu, a milieu of Japanese Manchukuo and a milieu of Russian cosmopolitanism. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, milieus pass into one another:

'They are essentially communicating.'²⁸ Russian buildings pass into Japanese-occupied buildings into heritage attractions.

Milieus themselves are not territories. Rather, they can become components of a territory when territorialized via refrains. As birds sing to mark their territory, heritage signage and landmarks organize the 'chaos' of city structures directionally into a territorial assemblage.²⁹ Refrains may also organize an assemblage dimensionally ('intra-assemblage') through motifs and counterpoints (such as Russian cosmopolitanism, Japanese barbarity or Chinese victims). In addition, Deleuze and Guattari explain that milieus are 'vibratory', susceptible to change and to becoming components of new assemblages ('inter-assemblage').³⁰ Relational milieus give form to evolutionary environments where relations alter the course of flows: 'Points form assemblages, multiple journey systems associate into possibly disconnected or broken topologies; in turn, such assemblages ... change, divide and multiply through disparate and complex encounters and gestures.'³¹

A refrain is constructed by detachment of a materiality (such as a building, a streetscape, a glass bottle or a suit of overalls) from 'the seeming self-evidence of its form, function and meaning, allowing it to congeal a singular and immediate assemblage of sensory affects.'³² This affords what Guattari terms 'a feeling of being',³³ catalysed by a mix of mythical, historical and social references. We thus perceive Harbin as territorial assemblage in relational terms as 'a potential of difference, as an open field performing and constructing its own sense through its relations to wider processes, material and conceptual'.³⁴

Manchukuo and Harbin

Bordering present-day North Korea and the Russian Federation, China's northeast has long been a contested area. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was largely a Russian concession. Hence the cultural heritage of Harbin is now replete with 'baroque' Russian architecture, much of it built in an eclectic-classical style. The area has a long multiethnic history, having been home to Manchus, Mongols, Han Chinese, Russians (including many Russian Jews) and Koreans. Harbin, founded in 1898 as an administrative centre for the Russian Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), was located at the nexus of an expanding trade between Asia, Europe and North America. The city originally had a predominantly Russian population, although migrants from over fifty different countries soon came to seek work in the commercial and financial sectors of the city, and sixteen different national consulates were located in the city's Nangang district.

Russian and Japanese expansionism led to warfare in this area in 1904–5, with the Japanese subsequently taking over northeast China. However, the 'contested borderland' of northeast China³⁵ between Japan, Russia and China was a porous, liminal space in which the Fengtian warlord Zhang Zuolin attempted to play Japan, Russia and China off against each other in a 'double game'.³⁶ In return for Japanese military support, Zhang granted extensive agricultural and industrial concessions in what Japan regarded as a strategic buffer zone against Russian expansionism. Following

Zhang's assassination, his son, Zhang Xueliang, declared allegiance to the unification of the Republic of China under the Chinese Nationalist Party (or 'KMT'). Angered by these 'anti-Japanese' actions, the Japanese army staged the Mukden/Manchurian Incident in 1931 as an excuse for invading the area.³⁷ Manchukuo was subsequently established as a Japanese-'guided' yet 'independent' republic in 1932, and Puyi was made emperor of Manchukuo in 1934.³⁸ The Manchukuo National Railway Company became a massive cartel. Over 300,000 Japanese 'pioneer' farmers were brought to Manchukuo to work the land in what was effectively a 'modern enclave' economy.³⁹

Manchukuo was to serve as a model for a new world order of inclusive ethnic harmony. Its state-founding proclamation stipulated following the 'Kingly Way' (*Ôdô*),⁴⁰ bringing peace, democracy and the 'harmony of the five races' (*gozoku kyôwa*) – Manchus, Japanese, Han Chinese, Mongols and Koreans – in a 'working relationship under a new structure of authority'.⁴¹ The Japanese regarded Manchukuo as 'a blank canvas' on which to display the best and most modern industry, farming, planning and architecture.⁴² Its capital Shinkyô (now Changchun), as well as Harbin and other cities, represented concentrated examples of such ideas. Designed and constructed by the best Japanese urban planners of the time, they became showcases for the most advanced technologies and ideas, many of which had not yet been realized in Japan itself.⁴³

Lacking natural resources to ground vital industrial and agricultural progress in Japan, the Japanese sought to geographically expand their empire from 1937 onwards, describing the move as an 'emancipation' rather than an invasion or 'occupation'.⁴⁴ However, resistance from Chiang Kai-shek and his Chinese government led to full-scale war between China and Japan. In Manchukuo, the Kwantung army assumed control of civilian organizations and put in place a regime of control and surveillance. From 1937 onwards, the demands of the war dominated all socio-economic development in Manchukuo. Many Chinese civilians and soldiers living in the region were conscripted by the Japanese to work in factories and coal mines, as well as on construction projects,⁴⁵ while others were taken to Japanese military centres, including the biological and chemical weapons development programme centred on Unit 731 in Harbin.

The year 1941 marked a turning point in the Second Sino-Japanese war, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor bringing the United States into the war, and the Japanese empire expanding into Southeast Asia and the Pacific, leading to the Japanese occupation of many former European or US colonies in the region – events that are explored in other chapters in this volume. In 1945, the Soviets declared war on Japan and attacked Manchukuo, overthrowing Puyi and 'liberating' the area, so that it came under effective Soviet occupation. These 'liberated' areas were transferred in 1946 by the departing Soviets to the People's Liberation Army (Jiefangjun), led by Mao Zedong and the Chinese communists. Retribution against remaining Japanese who were stranded in China was swift and furious.⁴⁶ Whereas emperor Puyi and Manchukuo's military leaders had been captured by the Russians in 1945, and the Japanese scientists engaged in the weapons programmes were able to leave either for Japan or for the United States under the aegis of the Americans, some 270,000 Japanese 'pioneer' farmers were abandoned, with an estimated 80,000 such farmers dying. Indeed, approximately 250,000 of the 2.15 million Japanese who had settled in

Manchuria perished in 1945.⁴⁷ Alleged Chinese ‘collaborators’ also faced retribution, for lack of resistance to the Japanese invasion, for commercial acquiescence, or for being forced or conscripted into manual labour by the Japanese.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, some local residents took the opportunity to settle old scores, whilst others assumed all those with wealth were guilty of ‘collaboration’. Nationally, over 30,000 people were legally prosecuted, whilst non-lawful retribution was widespread.

Harbin cultural heritage: Museums

Under cultural legislation in China, local municipalities are responsible for declaring and protecting ‘immovable cultural relics’. In Harbin, the Urban and Rural Planning Bureau, in collaboration with the Harbin Party History Network, has declared over fifty landmark structures since 1996. Zhongyang dajie (Central Street) has been designated part of an Architectural Arts Museum, in which are preserved thirty-five buildings, seventeen of which are on this street itself. Importantly, however, the criterion for landmark status is aesthetic value rather than historical significance. The State Administration of Cultural Heritage lists only immovable cultural relics deemed of national value, such as the Jihong Railway Bridge (known as the Shoko Bashi Bridge during the Japanese occupation) and the Unit 731 Museum. Many of the protected ‘first class preserved buildings’ reflect the Chinese-baroque or ‘eclectic’ architectural styles of the Russian colonial period, and are located in ‘Old Harbin’⁴⁹ in and around the districts of Daoli and Nangang, where ‘historic blocks’ have been designated for renovation and commercialization for tourism.⁵⁰

Our concentration on Japanese occupation heritage now leads us to explore two specialized museums before turning to the cityscape of Harbin more generally. The Unit 731 Museum and the NEMM attempt to superimpose time via reconstructions of past events through dioramas (a method often used in China) and artefacts, including photographs. Post-war testimonies by Japanese workers; materials from American translations of Japanese records, Russian tribunals and American reports; often-blurred black-and-white photos from the 1930s and early 1940s; and tools and implements all are used to present ‘evidence’, constructing facts about the past. These facts are used as reference for claims of historical truth and accuracy. The museums, and their locations on sites of atrocities, catalyse affective dimensions: to shock, to move, and to generate emotions and feelings of shame, pain and anger.

The NEMM (which was opened in October 1948 following expulsion of the KMT from Harbin) is a three-storey classical Greek-style building that was first constructed by the Russians as a public library in 1931, but was taken over by the Japanese in 1932 and used temporarily as administrative offices and then as the military police (Kenpeitai) headquarters. It is a relatively simple museum featuring static displays of artefacts behind glass. Reconstructions of the torture room, police cells, as well as statues and photos of martyrs, with information mainly in Chinese, depict Japanese activities in the city (including named comfort women) and commemorate anti-Japanese resistance, especially the female fighter and martyr Zhao Yiman. The museum includes some passport-style photographs and information about a few Chinese

named victims. The museum includes sections on collaboration, and recognizes the contributions and lives of Koreans and Russians who were 'sacrificed' by the Japanese occupiers (Figure 9.1).

The Unit 731 Museum at Pingfang, in comparison, is far larger. Established in 1985 as a national patriotic education base in one of the few buildings remaining from the Japanese medical experimentation and germ warfare unit, the museum has been upgraded and extended at an estimated cost of US\$62.5 million and was opened in its present form in August 2015 on the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War (Figure 9.2).

It is estimated that anywhere from 3,000 to 250,000 people were killed by what was officially called the Epidemic Prevention and Water Purification Department of the Kwantung Army (Unit 731) as part of experiments under the command of General Ishii Shirō, a medical specialist in plagues and epidemics. Built between 1934 and 1939, the complex covered 6 km², comprising over 150 structures, including a farm, a brothel and a swimming pool. Unit 731 also had its own airfield and railway line. Local people were told that the complex was a timber mill, with victims referred to by the Japanese as dehumanized 'logs' (*maruta*). 'Participants' were provided by the Kenpeitai and included criminals, anti-Japanese activists (i.e. non-collaborators), those engaged in alleged 'suspicious activities' and those who 'share[d] the same thoughts as criminals'.⁵¹ Infants and pregnant women were particularly used.⁵² It is estimated that around 70 per cent of those who died were Chinese, together with Soviets, Koreans and Allied prisoners of war.

Figure 9.1 The Northeast Martyrs' Memorial Museum, Harbin. Photograph by Jean Hillier.

Figure 9.2 The Museum of Evidence of War Crimes by Japanese Army Unit 731, Pingfang. Photograph by Shulan Fu.

Most common practices included infection with various diseases, followed by vivisection without anaesthetic, and freezing and thawing to promote gangrene and rot. Ceramic bombs dropped twenty-nine different germ agents, especially cholera, anthrax, plague and glanders, on over 100 'sorties' on local villagers, with tens of thousands 'collected' for dissection. Local women used for 'comfort' services were infected with syphilis and were sometimes forced to become pregnant in order to study foetal disease transmission. People were also used as targets for weapons-testing, including grenades and flame-throwers. After experimentation, their remains were incinerated. Of those who entered Unit 731, there are no accounts of any survivors.⁵³

The departing Japanese exterminated the remaining *maruta* with methane gas and attempted to destroy the buildings and documentary evidence. Much of the material on display at the Unit 731 Museum is comprised of copies of the Japanese experiment records given to the US authorities at the end of the war and translated into English with the assistance of Unit 731 scientists. Also included are Soviet war tribunal archives in English, as well as testimonies gathered from some Japanese former workers at the unit (three on video) and the surviving relatives of victims. All these take on the essence of 'sacred texts'.⁵⁴ Artefacts (such as surgical instruments, hooks, gas masks, test tubes, clothing and glass bottles) form the remainder of the exhibits, with a few dioramas also included. Explanations and audio guides are available in English as well as in Chinese. The message on the information signage is clear:

The human experiments had completely violated the terms of international conventions and the spirit of humanitarianism, morality and medical guidelines. It was a dark, evil, brutal and violent chapter in the history of human civilization;

Both germ contamination test and pathological anatomy were done on most human objects as conventional experiment methods; while vivisection, the most inhuman experiment method, was done on some of the 'test objects';

From 1940 to 1945, at least 3,000 people were perished for being infected with deadly bacteria through the Laboratory of The Devil [*sic*].

The new museum is located on the site of some of the Japanese workers' dormitories, adjacent to the old museum. Designed by the prominent architect He Jingtang, the 6,300 m² building symbolically resembles a black box recorder to preserve and reveal information, slanting into the barren grey earth like a scalpel. The main galleries are below ground, with the main hall literally a place of reflection, utilizing the squared skylights of the roof, the highly polished black marble floor and reflecting pools of glass and water to aesthetic effect. The void of the hall draws its power from the absence of those who perished as a result of the work of Unit 731 – the memory of the nameless.

The final exhibition room is dedicated to telling the story of the 'secret deal' between the United States and Japan,⁵⁵ in which Unit 731 staff were exempted from war criminal charges in exchange for the data from the experiments that were conducted. Copies of 'top secret' messages referring to the deal are presented:

Telegram 52423 from US Far East Command (General McArthur) to US Department of Defense, May 6th 1947. Part Three:

'7. Documentary immunity from "war crimes" given to higher echelon personnel involved will result in exploiting the twenty years experience of the director, former General ISHII, who can assure complete cooperation of his former subordinates, indicate the connection of the Japanese ... staff and provide the tactical and strategic information.'

The remaining dormitories for the 4,500 staff of Unit 731 continue in use as apartments and local shops for residents of Pingfang. A discreetly located museum shop and café offers T-shirts, cups, paperweights and keyrings with the new museum symbol and logo.⁵⁶ A free catalogue is available, while books, DVDs and postcards in Chinese and English are also on sale.

All the elements are powerful in their individual ways. Neither museum includes in its exhibits any of the thousands of photographic and filmic materials which the Japanese special recording unit took of the experiments as they occurred (only photographs of some of the Japanese perpetrators are shown), although many horrific photographs of the experiments can be found on the internet. We were unable to discover whether this is a deliberate strategy of the museum curators to avoid a potential 'pornography of violence' where 'voyeuristic impulses subvert the larger project of witnessing'⁵⁷ or whether it is related to the fact that Chinese attitudes to death and its depiction are different to those held in Western societies, with a cultural reluctance to present

dead bodies or skeletons, especially when these are of unidentified persons. Since Kirk Denton reports that, on his visit in 2004, the NEMM basement 'was filled with gruesome photos of piles of dead children, severed heads, and bodies disfigured by gas attacks', we suspect it is the former.⁵⁸ Does this practice, however, merely re-enact the 'bystander avoidance' that renders such atrocities possible?⁵⁹

Chinese museums and visitor expectations represent a mediation of traditional symbolisms of death, burial and remembrance which will catalyse different affect for those from other cultural traditions and possibly for younger Chinese visitors, more exposed to Western culture and high-tech animation.⁶⁰ Affect does not reside in an artefact, such as a report reproduction, enlarged and blurred, or a shiny metal can. It is mobilized in the museum through the rhetorical discourse refrains of the information panels through which the refrains of textual materialities, such as reports, photographs, bottles and cylinders, are read.

Western tourists – used to far more graphic museum displays and horror movies – appear relatively inured to the museum. Comments on TripAdvisor from 2017 suggest that the milieu has not been territorialized as intended. Interactions were seemingly not catalysed between elements without natural affinity, such as Unit 731 and international tourists. Comments include 'not that scary' (a Canadian visitor); 'those who love museums and war museums especially, will enjoy this' (a Singaporean visitor); 'a fun way of sharing the history' (an Austrian visitor); 'one of the best places in Harbin' (an American visitor); and 'well-stocked gift shop' (a British visitor). Chinese visitor comments expressed more shock, disgust and anger against the Japanese, with some demanding an apology.

Harbin cultural heritage: Streetscapes

The city of Harbin flourished economically under the Russians. Many large, sumptuous mansions were constructed for wealthy financiers, and commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, in Nangang district. This area, south of the main railway station, boasted broad boulevards lined by consulates. The Russian-Jewish population congregated in Daoli and Butou around what is now Zhongyang dajie. Hospitals, places of worship, banks, theatres and libraries were constructed in a Chinese-baroque and/or eclectic-classical style. These were frequently designed by Y. P. Ridanov of the Harbin Development Construction Bureau from 1903 to 1938, under both Russian and Japanese occupations. It is these buildings which form the core of Harbin's recent drive for tourist income, particularly from Russia. On structures designated as 'immovable cultural relics', plaques in Chinese and English give information (though not always the same in both languages), while many include a barcode and website for the Harbin Party History Network, which offers more information about each respective building.

With regard to the 'protected' structures, there is no doubt that the Japanese took over many of the Russian buildings: 'Their predilection for the picturesque preserved the city centre.'⁶¹ For example, the public library (built in 1931) became Japanese administrative offices, and later the headquarters of the military police; a theatre became the Japan-Manchuria Cultural Association (1933); the Board of Directors' Hall of the China Eastern Railway Management Bureau (built in 1903) became the Yamato Hotel in 1936;

and the renowned Hotel Moderne (built in 1914) became the Madie'er or Modan Hotel in 1933.⁶² Other structures remained the property of their original owners, including the National Bank of Jews (built in 1923), Jewish entrepreneurs' mansions and private Jewish hospitals and restaurants. The Japanese also constructed several, now listed, buildings, from municipal offices, assembly halls, public utilities (e.g. the telegraph office), hotels (especially the Hotel New Horizon, 1936, now the International Hotel) and banks, to villas, department stores and restaurants (Figure 9.3).

The only official public cemetery for the Japanese war dead, Fangzheng, is not on any Chinese tour itinerary of Harbin (or on TripAdvisor). Whilst the Martyrs' Cemetery of the War of Resistance against Japan appears on the list of red tourism sites, the China-Japanese Friendship Garden (Zhong-Ri youhao yuanlin) emphatically does not. Unsignposted at the end of a dirt road, the Friendship Garden contains the graves of some 5,000 Japanese who died, having been abandoned after the Japanese surrender. Most were women and children. Some collectively committed suicide, some fled into forests and perished of cold and starvation, and some were killed by Chinese bandits or Soviet troops.⁶³ Many of those who survived were adopted or married into Chinese families. They were subsequently denied repatriation until Japanese immigration reform in 1989.⁶⁴

Figure 9.3 Heritage-listed Japanese buildings in Harbin (Left: Harbin Assembly Hall; Top right: Harbin Telephone Exchange and Telegraph Office; Bottom right: Manchurian Central Bank Building). Photographs by Jean Hillier and Shulan Fu.

In 1963 – a time of thawing Sino-Japanese relations – Premier Zhou Enlai responded positively to locals' requests to excavate and cremate the bones that they had found in their fields, and to entomb the ashes. In the 1980s, the ashes were removed to the present site in order to allow the spirits of the dead, as well as those from other Manchukuo locations, to be honoured.⁶⁵ In 1995, a monument was constructed by a repatriated orphan in honour of the Chinese parents who adopted Japanese children (Figure 9.4).

Figure 9.4 The China-Japanese Friendship Garden, Fangzheng, 2008. Wikimedia Commons.

In July 2011, the local municipality constructed two memorial walls in the garden. The first, 5 metres high by 10 metres long, was dedicated to 'the perished Japanese colonial settlers' and included the names of 229 known deceased with an inscription proclaiming 'love and humanity'.⁶⁶ The second wall was erected to 'departed Chinese foster parents'. Unfortunately, Chinese nationalists objected to these memorials and attempted to destroy the larger wall. Two days later, the municipality demolished the wall in order to avoid further attacks, closed the garden and removed directional signage.⁶⁷ The all-but-unknown cemetery at Fangzheng represents further uncanny heritage of the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo in its 'embodied absence' and in the 'disembodied presence' of the spirits of Japanese women and children.⁶⁸

The heritage of occupation in Harbin

Harbin demonstrates several legacies of the Japanese occupation. Not all of these legacies, however, are officially recognized as 'heritage'. Whilst the material traces of the Japanese past may be visible in Harbin, their legibility is uncanny – potentially latent, exemplified by the many unlisted, non-plaques buildings in the city, the glossed information on signage and the padlocked cemetery at Fangzheng.

'Official' heritage demonstrates the territorialization of particular infra- and intra-assemblages: of museums and museum exhibits, building plaques and the buildings themselves. These 'popular' refrains bring into play motifs of Chinese people as victims and martyrs of Japanese evil, brutality and violence. The two museums are effectively concerned with bearing witness through testimony. Displays of artefacts, dioramas and information panels structure the stories of 'evil' (both Harbin museums), 'ogre caves' (Unit 731) and the 'Laboratory of The Devil' (Unit 731), in which 'invaders' and 'war criminals' (Unit 731) committed atrocities against hundreds of thousands of 'martyrs' and 'heroes' who 'watered the flower of peace with their flesh and blood' (NEMM) in what was China's 'national humiliation'. The milieu of death is territorialized in the Unit 731 Museum into a coded 'truth' of the Japanese occupation through refrains of report pages, photographs, ceramic bombs, instruments and discourse. As Carol Duncan remarks: 'To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.'⁶⁹ We urge visitors to Harbin to think carefully about what and whose narratives are depicted and whose are not – to become aware of what is lost or forgotten.

We suggest, however, that the beauty and grace of the museum buildings might aestheticize and detract from the intended symbolism and message.⁷⁰ The angled entrance pavilion of the Unit 731 Museum, glass-wrapped and fitted out in black marble, could belong to an art gallery, theatre or concert hall. Is the Unit 731 Museum a manifestation of the aestheticization of politics? Is it an 'architectural propaganda machine' for the Chinese government?⁷¹ The austere beauty of the new museum building is in extreme contrast with the stark functionality of the remaining Japanese buildings at Unit 731 and with the atrocities that took place on the site.

The rhetoric of the information panels and visitor guides at the Unit 731 Museum is vitriolic and replete with blame. Unlike at the NEMM, there is little or no consideration

of the non-Chinese who perished in Harbin and at Unit 731, or of the violence meted out by Russians and Chinese after the Japanese surrender on those who had been left behind, or those local citizens who were accused of collaborating with the Japanese. Neither is there mention of the substantial economic, infrastructural, cultural and architectural achievements under the Japanese administration from which northeast China benefitted (and has continued to do so).⁷² This is a constructed milieu of Japanese occupation: a product of a specific ordering and coding of space, time and relations.

There is little, if any, space in such territory for the China-Japanese Friendship Garden at Fangzheng, or the shops, restaurants, clinics and infrastructure of Japanese Manchukuo which have become 'just another feature of the everyday landscape'.⁷³ Resentment appears strong, at least in official representations: 'This debt of blood must be paid.'⁷⁴ An official Japanese apology would be a start. But what Tim Winter terms 'heritage diplomacy' seems unlikely in a climate in which China celebrates its victory over Japan, who, in turn, officially neither denies nor acknowledges activities at sites such as Unit 731.⁷⁵

Perhaps the deliberate absences on the heritage signage of Chinese-baroque, art nouveau and modernist buildings which local residents and tourists find so appealing might become more explicitly legible about their Japanese heritage. In this way, the past could meet the present in a new territorialization of the multiple 'selves' of Harbin, besides that of sanitized early-twentieth-century Russian cosmopolitanism with new refrains as signifiers of mental space.⁷⁶ A new inter-assemblage would not gloss the atrocities which took place in and around Harbin. But as Simon Springer asks: 'In what ways can we raise the question of violence in relation to victims, perpetrators, and even entire cultures, without reducing our accounts to caricature, where violence itself becomes the defining, quintessential feature of subjectivity?'⁷⁷ Springer suggests that we might question the relationship between place and violence by regarding place as a relational assemblage rather than as an isolated container. If violence could be regarded not as a localized 'thing' taking place at Unit 731 or in the basement of the headquarters, but as 'an unfolding process, arising from the broader geographical phenomena and temporal patterns', then Springer argues that the accounts of violence as the *exclusive* preserve of particular cultures (the Japanese) on particular people (Han Chinese) are untenable.⁷⁸

A new inter-assemblage might also facilitate discussion of the ambiguous grey zones of 'collaboration'⁷⁹ – of survival rather than sympathy; of political and commercial elite fear and confusion rather than self-centred rationality; of pretended rather than real complicity; even of compassion for abandoned orphans and women after the Japanese surrender – such that the refrain of the notorious term *hanjian* might vibrate.⁸⁰ By displacing the angle of vision and vibrating the milieus, the uncanny may become visible and legible, manifest as absent presence or present absence. A displaced angle might suggest the materialities of the Harbin museums and streetscapes, not so much as refrains and milieus, narrating a single story, but moving between and catalysing interactions between *multiple* stories. For instance, the archival texts of the Japanese experiments at Unit 731 could become no longer inert material through which to reconstitute what was done, but material as an assemblage of relations: of Japanese

scientists, military officers, unwilling conscripts and the Kenpeitai; of pregnant women, comfort women, manufacturers of a wide range of equipment and instruments; of buildings and infrastructure; of chemicals and bacteria; of non-human animals such as fleas, rats, squirrels and horses; and of General Douglas McArthur and American politicians, scientists and military personnel. Thinking of Manchukuo and Harbin as relational assemblages might commemorate the 'memory of the nameless' – not only of Chinese, but also of Russians, Koreans and prisoners of war who were killed at Unit 731, or Japanese farmers and workers, or Chinese suspected of 'collaboration', who died at the hands of locals or Russian 'liberators' in Harbin and other areas after the end of the war. With regard to the latter, Gilly Carr reminds us that 'drawing attention to dark histories is never a comfortable thing',⁸¹ but a deeper, more nuanced, understanding of circumstances and signifiers could be useful, not least to surviving relatives of the deceased: a new milieu – a new 'new remembering'.⁸²

A new 'new remembering' of the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo might remind us of the capacity for human violence against others which lurks behind the veneer of civilization. Rather than reacting with horror, grief and anger at the photographs of vivisection at Unit 731 (which can be found on the internet or in the Unit 731 Museum bookshop, or when listening to the testimony of the Japanese conscript who was denied food and drink until he agreed to perform vivisection), might we ask ourselves if we could behave in a similar manner? Under what circumstances? Could we (or one of our relatives) perhaps have been the ordinary soldier in the photograph, sitting quietly before being ordered to disperse lethal bacteria into waterways? Would we regard dining at the Yamato Hotel, watching a movie at the Modan Hotel, shopping in Zhongyang dajie or being treated at the Jewish hospital as acts of 'collaboration'? Visitors to Harbin might experience critical and ethical deep learning of what it means to be human, and how easy it is to succumb to the unknowable evil that exists in the dark recesses of human nature, and for humanity to collapse.⁸³

Conclusion

Urban landscapes symbolize the shifting contours of socio-political logics and perspectives on history. Designated cultural heritage sites territorialize stories through the use of refrains in order to elicit affect and emotion in visitors, whose capacity to be affected is influenced by their own life experiences and any prior exposure to the events and stories represented. As Rumi Sakamoto writes,⁸⁴ the sites 'mobilize' subjects into their 'patriotic history and identity via emotional authenticity'.⁸⁵

The city of Harbin illustrates the lifecycle of event, legacy and heritage suggested by Carr.⁸⁶ City centre buildings and their stories have been doubled, with selected elements erased, neglected or transformed. Other sites were turned into places of patriotic education in the 1980s and reconfigured as complexes for the 'exhibition of the evil' (NEMM) during the Japanese occupation of Manchukuo.

What we suggest, however, is to look beyond the museum walls to wider processes and materialities, both to the broader Japanese town plans, infrastructures and buildings of Harbin and northeast China, to electric power production, an inter-city

rail network, innovative farming systems, and to the lives of others – Chinese, Koreans, Russians and Japanese – who were affected by the occupation and its aftermath, both in China and in Japan. Forgotten or repressed legacies of familiar objects, buildings and places may irrupt into present consciousness and understandings of an interconnected, global world.

We counsel awareness of the dangers of territorializing the past in pursuit of certain objectives, and advocate examination of relations between forces and elements in heritage milieus relating to the Japanese occupation. Perhaps judgement may be deferred as refrains and milieus vibrate, becoming components of new assemblages, affording new understandings and feelings of being.

The city of Harbin might become not a place of answers and blame, but a place of relationally unsettling the uncanny, of multiple narratives and of questions. The museums, for example, might stimulate us as visitors to bear witness to and take responsibility not only for the past, but also for the future – achieving the stated aim of the Unit 731 Museum to ‘provide its visitors [with] a deep reflection on war and human nature’;⁸⁷ challenging the production and use of biological weapons; and challenging ourselves and latent sympathies with, or capacities for, violent conduct. In this way, the heritage occupation in Harbin may be released from the clutches of historical categorizations and silences, and be mobilized in the cause of other perceptions oriented to human conscience and the future.

Appendix: Northeast China, 1858–1949: Key events.⁸⁸

Date	Event
1858	Tsarist Russia takes concessions from Qing Dynasty in Manchuria for the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER).
1894–5	First Sino-Japanese War (resulting in Japanese victory).
1898	Harbin founded as a CER railway hub.
1899–1901	Boxer Rebellion. The ‘Eight-Nation Alliance’ (United States, Austro-Hungarian empire, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia) defeat Chinese forces; Russia gains control of northeast China.
1904–5	Russo-Japanese War: Japan takes over former Russian concessions in China.
1905	Revolution in Russia.
1906	Under the Japanese, the southern branch of the CER becomes the ‘South Manchuria Railway Company’ (Mantetsu).
1907	The Qing government establishes the ‘Dong san sheng’ (three eastern provinces), that is, Fengtian, Jilin and Heilongjiang.
1910	Japan annexes Korea.
1911	The Qing government is overthrown in China.
1912	The Qing Emperor Puyi abdicates.
1915	Japan acquires economic rights and land leases in Manchuria, as well as control of coal and iron mines, trading and shipping companies, electricity and railways.

1917	The Bolshevik Revolution occurs in Russia.
1920	Zhang Zuolin becomes governor general of the three eastern provinces, but tolerates the existence of Japan's Kwantung Army in Manchuria in return for Japanese support.
1922	The Soviet Union is established.
1922–6	Mass in-migration to Manchuria from north China occurs, and the area experiences an economic boom due to agricultural and industrial expansion with Japanese investment.
1928	Zhang Zuolin is assassinated by the Kwantung Army. His son, Zhang Xueliang, takes over and declares allegiance to the ROC. Zhang Xueliang denies land to the Japanese, and reclaims leased territories and Mantetsu.
1931	The 'Mukden Incident' occurs.
1932	Japan establishes the 'Republic of Manchukuo'. By 1932, Japan owns 64 per cent of all industrial capital in Manchukuo. In 1932, the League of Nations investigates Japanese actions in Manchukuo, and the Lytton Committee reports that China should retain the area.
1933	Manchukuo National Railway company takes over all rail lines in the area.
1934–6	The 'Manchukuo empire', ruled by Puyi (the former Qing emperor), is founded; the Kwantung Army takes control of civilian organizations; there is massive Japanese investment in industrial production.
1937	Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurs, leading to the Japanese invasion of China.
1940	The 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' (including Japan, Manchukuo, occupied China, etc.) is declared.
1941	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor. The United States enters the war against Japan.
1945	The Soviets enter the war against the Japanese in August 1945. The Soviet 'liberation'/'invasion' of Manchukuo begins with negotiations with the ROC for the independence of Mongolia and the transfer of military and industrial resources left by the Japanese to the Soviets. In May 1946, the Soviets leave northeast China and hand control of Manchuria to the People's Liberation Army.
1945–9	Chinese Civil War and Communist Revolution.
1949	Establishment of the People's Republic of China under the Chinese Communist Party.

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