

TAIWAN’S GREEN ISLAND TOURISM: THE GREEN TO THE SIGHT HOLDS THE DARK OF THE PAST

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Abstract

This paper investigates the encounter of ecology with difficult cultural heritage sustainable perspectives of tourism on Green Island of Taiwan. Located in a privileged natural setting, the island attracts large numbers of visitors because of its high reputation as one of the best diving places in south East Asia. The beauty of the place contrast with a very different historical reality, the New Life Correction Center and Oasis Village stand still as reminders of human rights and a turbulent past where political prisoners were tortured, exiled and executed for years during the White Terror. The first aim was to survey the current state and recent developments of the island as an ecotourist destination, to later explore and weigh historical value with ecology by considering theoretical perspectives on dark tourism. The results explore commodification and ethical issues of violence, memory and ecology as dark-eco tourism examples and practices. Besides, this section reviews the historical value and the perception of the flow of tourists, victims of the “White Terror” and their interaction with tour guides on the television series of 1999 流離島影“我的錄島,” putting into perspective how an awareness of the difficult past has evolved periodically to the present ecological ethos. This paper also studies a process of “souveniring” and “kitschification” that is taking place on the island, to finally consider the sika deer paradoxical position as a tourist attraction. The study used a qualitative methodology based on multiple sources to collect data, the process integrates text-film analysis with ethnographic fieldwork that consisted on participatory observation and interviews.

Keywords: Difficult cultural heritage, white terror, dark tourism, ecotourism, sustainable tourism, commodification.

1. INTRODUCTION

Green Island is a small volcanic island located roughly 33 km off the southern east coast of Taitung County, Taiwan. It covers only 16 km² and has a warm hot weather that is favorable for tropical plants and animals. Importantly, a northerly flowing warm water current named “Kuroshio” provides great benefits to the marine ecosystem. The ample

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ecological resources of the island have been relatively well maintained because of its particular historical development, thousands of years before, indigenous people began living on the island, and roughly 200 years ago Han Chinese started settling in the area. While for centuries the main economy activity on the island has been fishing, a recent alteration for the development of tourism has started to involve many people with the industry.

This paper aims to explore these recent developments on tourism and the implications and challenges for the present and the future for the so-called “sustainability” of the area. Thus, by approaching the historical importance of conflict sites still standing as a remembrance of a tempestuous path for the pursuit of democracy in Taiwan, while also analyzing a latest adjusted ecotourist approach adopted by the local government and many stakeholders as a strategy to attract more visitors, I intend to unfold issues of memory, commodification and ecology.

2. BACKGROUND

Green Island administratively is a township of Taitung County and is now a popular scuba diving destination for both local Taiwanese and foreigners. With favorable natural conditions, the island offers plans and packages for visitors that combine accommodation in several hostels and hotels with a variety of diving activities at different levels (from expert to the most amateur). One of the most important features of Green Island are its waters that are rich in coral reef coverage, the area has plentiful of fish species that possess a high economic value in the fishing industry like tuna. “Records show 176 species of hard corals, 27 species of soft corals, 602 species of fishes, numerous sponges, shrimp, crabs, seaweeds, starfish, etc.” (Coconut Crab Conservation Website, 2022). For the locals, the government and the tourism bureau, ecological resources and the biodiversity of the nearby seas have been used for economic development. Recently, for sustainable goals a variety of strategies have been implemented, making arguable efforts to keep the healthy ecology of the waters.

Despite the well-known ecological value, a variety of sectors of society have started to express concerns with the situation of the island. “Currently the ecosystem of Green Island is under high pressure by human activities, and this situation can be attributed to both market failure and government failure” (Chen and Chen, 2019). Although, most island tourism development around the world has been confronted with similar issues and challenges that threaten sustainability of an area, where more than often there is a struggle to balance ecology, social and economic dynamisms. The intention here will be to grasp what is currently happening in the area to assess how are stakeholders, the community and the local government handling matters while promoting tourism on different fronts.

From an ecological approach, “tourism development is often found to be responsible for more wanton destruction of more fragile island ecosystems, both marine and terrestrial, than any other human activity in history. That is of course, excluding residential development, infrastructure projects and other primary production activities such as mining and fishing” (Carlsen and Butler, 2011). This quotation generalizes how most island tourism is confronted globally with dramatic landscape and marine changes that

impact the ethos and ecology of islands, questioning how the development of tourism directly impacts negatively the environment. The listing of ecological repercussions of island tourism development is wide and well documented, including contamination, habitat and species loss. Nevertheless, although the panorama in the field is often portrayed apocalyptic in the existent literature, we shall wonder how, why and if these forms of tourism development should continue to be implemented.

Asking these questions is indeed important to move away tourism strategies from those “generalizations” exposed. By identifying specific problematics, we can confront challenges on tourism development to have an objective outlook on real sustainability and conservation. Tourism has been used more than often in several scenarios as a convenient environmental scapegoat like climate change, sometimes unjustly. In fact, it could be argued that in some cases an ecological and human integrity has been partly maintained by tourism that is controlled by successful implementations and strategies.

For instance, Macquarie Island located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, about halfway between New Zealand and Antarctica, part of Oceania and politically a part of Tasmania under Australian government jurisdiction since 1900, has implemented some interesting tourism strategies in relation to sustainability. The management plan is clear in relation to tourism aims: “controlled tourism for educational purposes is the only form of tourism permitted in this area” (Parks Tasmania Website, 2021). Scholars claim that “tourism has not contributed to the degradation of Macquarie Island environment because boardwalks and viewing platforms control tourism movements and official observers monitor all activities” (Jabour, 2011). The tourism plan there is clear and it outlines the areas where tourism is allowed, and also importantly, where tourism is prohibited. They effectively limit tourist numbers and as a consequence tourism impact, without affecting the local economy.

Despite that Green Island obviously has a different settling and tourism development, it is important to observe closely examples as the previously mentioned to see what works and not in island sustainable objectives, and how a well-defined plan in tourism can contribute positively to the environment. For example, the presence of tourists on Macquarie Island has helped warn the media, the public and then the government agencies of degradation of the environment, which resulted in invasive species being removed. Thus, as seen here, tourism is not always to blame for the negative impact on sustainability, instead, it can have a positive influence if the presence of tourists is controlled and guided.

3. METHODOLOGY

The overall methodology of this paper is qualitative research through ethnography and case study analysis. The procedure used was to first explore and analyze ecotourist perspectives within recent developments on the ecology of Green Island. After, I relate Oasis Village and New Life Correction center to dark tourism epistemology to consider issues of memory and historical violence. Fieldwork and participatory observation were conducted in September 2020 to acquire further data with regard to tourist motivations, stakeholders and the current supply and demand of the tourism industry in general. Additionally, I interviewed the chief planer of the memorials of the White Terror to

understand subjects of dissonant cultural heritage and how these have evolved over time. The documentary film “*My Own Private Green Island*” was also analyzed because it reveals on its narrative issues of memory, commodification and ecology in a changing tourist industry, which are the central objectives of this paper. The proposed multidisciplinary methodological framework, that focuses on the relationship of ecology and violence in dark-eco tourism use a multi-sided approach that will fundamentally mix three mechanisms as a research strategy: Participant observation, field notes and visual data collection (photos and video), oral Interviews that used structured and semi-structured interviews about life history and experience reports, bibliographical and documentary research (audiovisual and text analysis). Following this triangulation in collecting and presenting data, the idea will be to understand in detail the relevant relationships, plurality of perspectives and also interpretations and meanings regarding these tours as dark-eco tourism.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Sustainable Obstacles and Indicators

In the past, some scholars have expressed concern over the issue of having the natural resources of Green Island as common goods for open access, this meant that the waters were open to a greater extent to the public for different activities as fishing and tourism, which have been the main activities for subsistence of the locals to make a living. In recent years the Taitung County Government started to implement conservation actions that imposed some regulations to those relating to tourism, recreation and fishing areas trying to control the use of the waters. However, many of these measures have been widely controversial among the community and difficult to materialize.

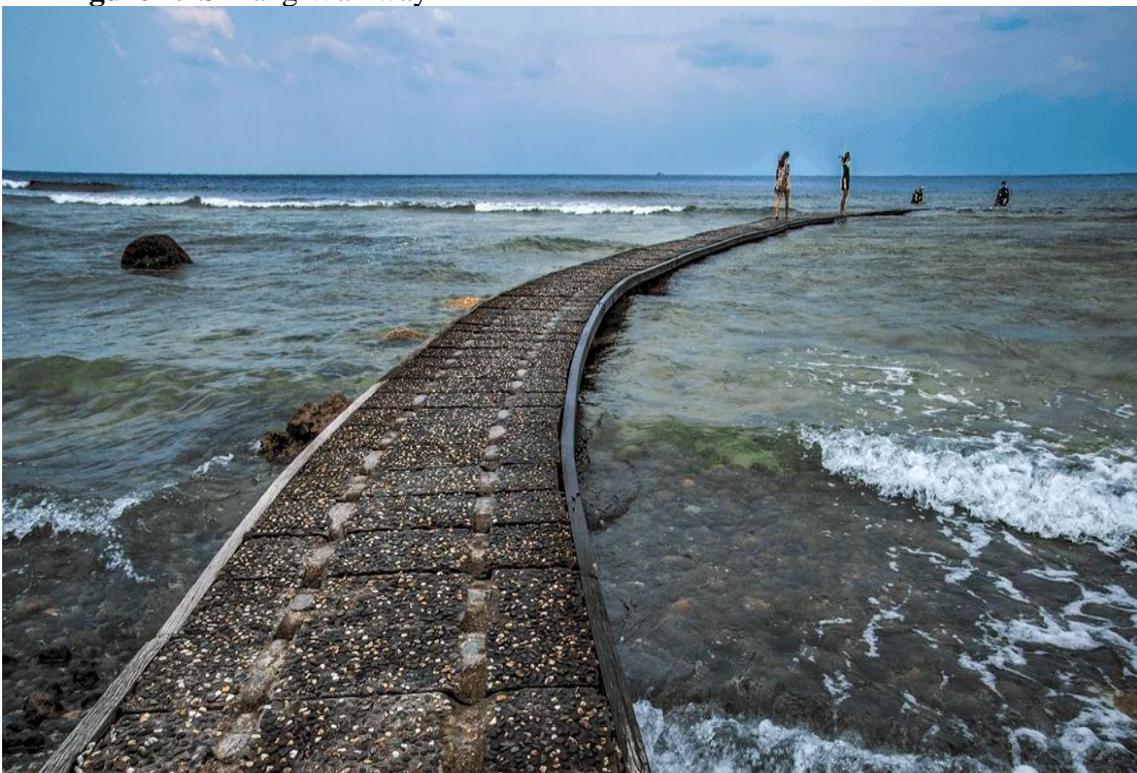
For example, many locals originally disagreed with establishing MPAs² in the area because they believed that these would have a threatening impact on their ways of living. However, the reason for having underwater ecosystems as a “common property” was that supply and demand interactions of activities like snorkeling potentially hurt the ecosystem as they remained highly unregulated and built upon business models that attracted more people. Tourists feed the fish, they bring trash to the coast and they could potentially hurt the coral reef by direct contact.

MPAs have faced a variety of challenges depending on the contexts, the eyes that look at them, and complexities involved in the designation. For example, “previous reports that measured MPAs in the Philippines documented that up to 80% of these are not successful and their implementation has proved to be challenging in the sociopolitical environment that took place” (Pollnac et al., 2001). Common issues involve lack of clarity in the policy, the administration of governments, and the response of local residents against the selection of MPAs because of concerns about their livelihood being influenced by protected site restrictions.

²The definition of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 1988), is “any area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora, fauna, historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of the enclosed environment.”

As early as 2003 the Taitung County government already started to implement on Green Island zoning of fishery resource protected areas and ecological tourism. The coastal areas were divided into five sections with various restrictions on fishing scopes and periods. Shilang and Chaikou became snorkeling zones where no fishing is allowed. In 2007, the Coast Guard Administration established the Green Island Conservation Team for patrolling the coastal areas to protect ecosystem and fishing resources, as well as to crack down on the illegal harvesting of coral and violations of the Fishing Activities Act. “In 2008 the Gui Bay Zone was added and extended the fishing restrictions in Shilang and Chaikou to the intertidal areas. The Chaikou Conservation Zone starts at Zhong Liao Harbor and ends at Gongguan Tableland, stretching to 500 m outside the low-waterline. Shilang Conservation Zone starts at Nanliao Harbor and ends at Da Baisha, also stretching to 500 m outside the low-water line” (Yang et al., 2011). Both zones are equipped with diving walkways for access by snorkelers and scuba divers, as well as for the protection of stony corals. The MPA has been the foundation of marine ecotourism, with resources in snorkeling and scuba diving that have evolved along the years. In particular, diverse theme-based tours have gradually developed on Green Island, including natural ecology-based tours and relevant experienced activities like snorkeling, whale watching or night observation of flying fish. These activities have been supported by government agencies/policies, becoming an ecotourism trend in Taiwan with an important potential for the future development of the sector. However, the progress and development of tourism has had plenty of bumpy roads and negative consequences.

Figure 1. Shilang Walkway



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

Figure 2. Divers at the end of the walkway

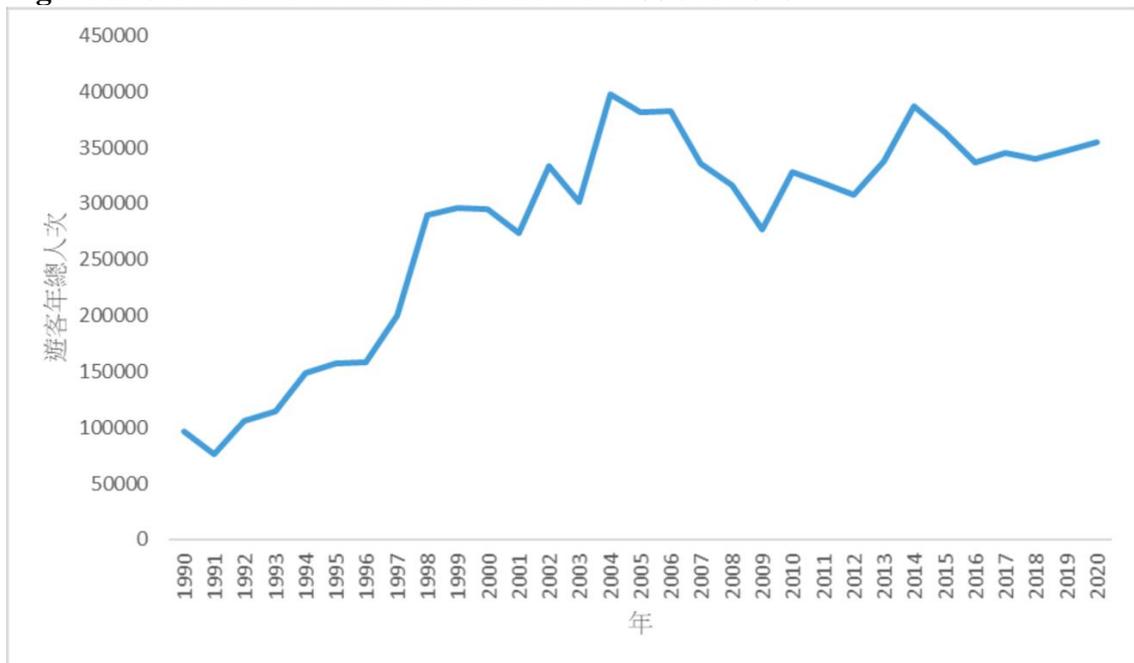


Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

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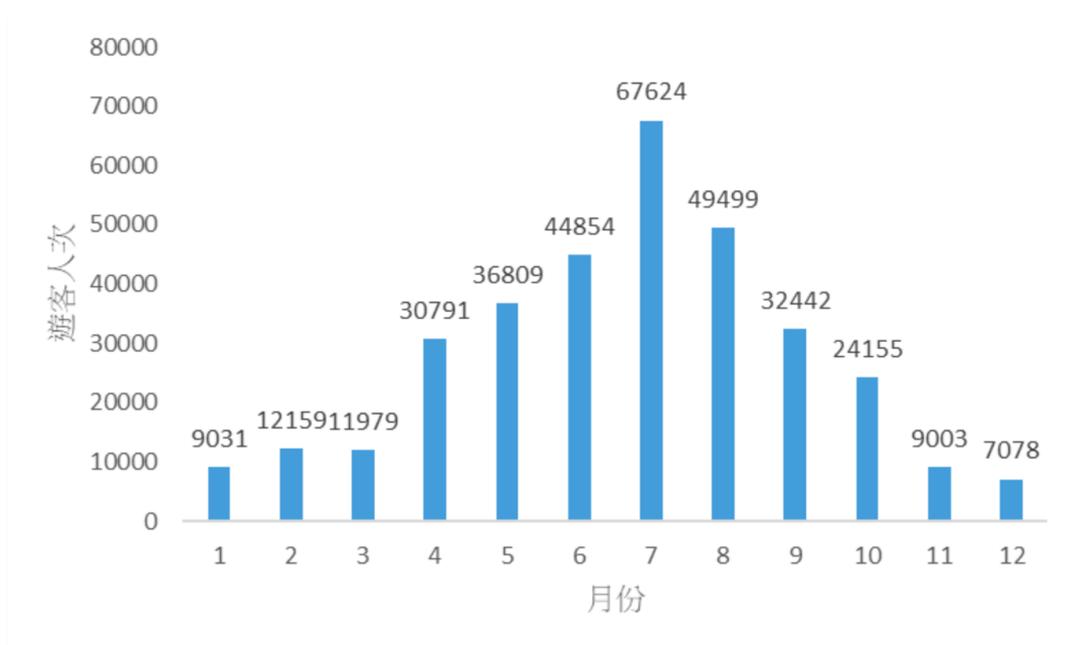
First observations: The summer season is almost finished but there are still large numbers of tourists. This might be related to the COVID 19 pandemic and the impossibility to travel abroad. There is not an excessive purpose-built tourism infrastructure on Green Island, except for boardwalks, viewing platforms along the coast, 2 human rights parks with small changes for authenticity, a memorial, a lighthouse, a deer park, a hot spring venue, diving business sites and some limited interpretation signs. Accommodation venues are not as large as hotel resort style and instead small hostels are the rule. Two convenience stores, a street with a variety of local food restaurants and souvenir shops that are very limited and monothematic (jails). The balance is that with regard to infrastructure, Green Island is not highly developed in comparison to other small islands in South East Asia.

Figure 3. Green Island number of tourists from 1990 to 2020



Source: Tourism Bureau (MOTC), 2021. (Graph from Hui-Ting Hsieh, 2021)

Figure 4. Statistics of the average number of tourists per month in Green Island from 2008 to 2020.



Source: Tourism Bureau (MOTC), 2021. (Graph from Hui-Ting Hsieh, 2021)

Figures 3 and 4, give an insight on the different changes that Green Island has

experienced in 20 years in relation to the tourism industry, and how periodically the place has seen an increase of visitors every year during the summer. Importantly, the graph shows how tourism started to develop steadily 3 years after lifting the martial law. According to Huei in her study on “Governance of Coral Reef Social-Ecological System in Green Island” (2021), this process can be divided in three important periods: the period of tourism industry growth, from 1990 to 1998, the period of conservation action and organization from 2003 to 2010, and the period of loose network linkage from 2010 to 2021, where the actions of local organizations strengthened conservation regulations, enforcement effectiveness, and conservationists started to consciously promote the diving industry. However, this does not mean that environmental issues have been effectively addressed.

On her findings, the author mentions that in terms of socio-economics, the island has a prosperous tourism industry, a growing population and a slowly increasing awareness of environmental protection. She observes that the problems of pollution from tourism on the waters remain, despite that in some newly conserved designated areas the fish populations have increased. She argues then that the use of resources of the island in relation to tourism is too intense and the conservation efforts relatively weak among some actors. Calling for governance and organization from all the community with a strategy that integrates multi-scale perspectives that balance conservation and tourism.

In an interview with a local business owner, it was revealed that in 2010 the government continued to gradually introduce an agenda of ecotourism as a solution to balance environmental conservation and economic development. He said that some of the proposed strategies were related to transportation. Bicycle usage was encouraged to replace motorcycles, intending to create a new specialty industry that could better comply with the sustainable development of local businesses on the island as well as to reduce carbon emissions. However, from my observations, the use of motorcycles by locals and tourists on the island still prevails. My interviewee also expressed the discontent of motorcycle rental owners at the time the government tried to push bicycle usage, confirming that the strategy eventually failed not only because of the heat and the difficulty of moving in sunny hot weather, but also because of the convenience and strong cultural attachment to the scooter as a transportation system in Taiwan.

According to Meihuei Huang, a specialist in marine affairs, “the fishery activity is no longer the major source of income, so the negative impact on the environment caused by overfishing is less than in other cases. The main impact is then on the terrestrial ecosystem of Green Island instead of the marine ecosystem, because there are up to 2000 tourists visiting Green Island per day during the peak season” (Huang, 2014). Despite previous efforts of local government, major transportation inside the island is still motorcycles and it remains unclear how much a shift to bicycle traffic could be forward pushed to achieve the goals of “ecotourism” and “sustainability.” What remains clear is that in some specific cases some anthropogenic interference caused by the flow of tourists is affecting some endangered species.

For example, since crabs migrate landward from the ocean during the mature stage and then return to the sea during the breeding period, the coastal roads often cross the seasonal migration paths of the coconut crabs, which have been threatened by the flow of traffic. “The populations of crabs on green island are declining at unprecedented rates”

(Coconut Crab Conservation Website, 2022). A similar situation was happening in the coastal area of Kenting which is also an important habitat of spawning ground for the land crabs. The DGH (Directorate of General Highways) working in coordination with the Kenting National Park staff developed a strategy that has been successful in avoiding the dangers that often led to the killing of crabs in the traffic of Provincial Highway No 26. The plan consists of a path system and the controlling/narrowing of traffic in summer nights and full moon from land to shore to facilitate the spawn.

The main issues that have emerged on Green Island in the last decade have been related to conflicts of interest between the aims of environmental protection (sustainability), the establishment of MPAs/national parks and the development of the fishing and tourism industries. “Snorkeling and diving operators, tourists, fishermen, restaurant and shop owners are all gathered around a relatively small area, using, directly or indirectly, the resources of the MPAs with agendas of their own. All users play a significant role on this small island” (Yang et al., 2011).

An important issue mentioned often by scholars is: “The lack of cross level coordination and the integration of different opinions and perspectives to plan policies on the island development” see, (Chen and Chen, 2019; Huang, 2014; Yang et al., 2011). It seems that government entities do not function well on these matters because of political positionings and interests in a variety of sectors, causing a poor synchronization on a geographical county/regional based system that often feels disconnected on similar goals. Besides, some policies to be implemented in practice without the support of the communities, agencies, tourists and people in general become infeasible. Therefore, a top-down unidirectional approach will frequently be unsuccessful, in fact, environmental policies and management requires all the parties involved to have an active role in a cross-scaled integration.

These discrepancies mentioned have been actually part of the implementation of projects and policies that relate to sustainability on Green Island. For instance, when the executive yuan (which is part of the central government) intended to establish a national park, which amongst other measures, would limit the numbers of tourists (the negotiations and implementation of the plan are still under consideration). The Green Island local government and the community were unwilling to lose the income source of tourism, because they considered the proposal hostile to their ways of living. Therefore, it has been difficult to find a common ground between the local and central administrations on this matter, resulting in conflicting goals that fall in between political choices; failing to synchronize social values and ecological sustainability.

Overall, it seems important to encourage and implement a further collaborative approach between the community, stakeholders, local and central governments in order to promote a sense of unity with clear and well-defined goals in sustainability and conservation. For instance, the establishment of a national park, tourism development and the life of the locals don’t have to be necessarily disconnected in purpose (as seen in Macquarie Island). If we analyze how the island is promoting itself as a tourist destination, we can conclude that the strategy is that of “ecotourism” as it is positioned in the Taitung official website: “The island is surrounded by coral reefs, rich ocean ecologies, and highly developed erosion landscape. Along with the thriving of ecotourism and relocation of the East Coast National Park Administration, Lyudao (Green Island) begins to shine like a

jewel in the Pacific Ocean” (2021). However, despite the efforts of the place to be perceived as an “eco’ destination, critical voices towards the damage caused by the large flow of tourists in the ecosystems keep emerging.

In an article published on Taiwan News: “Taiwan’s Green Island Not Living Up to Its Name” (Zehr, 2022). The author clearly summarized some of the feelings of some locals and tourists. “Administrative vacuum, discarded signs of national park under environmental protection, visitors that outnumbered the locals, unsupervised swimmers, shocked diving instructor” (p.3). These statements, although strong and amplified, are intended to make a point on how Green Island has a renewable energy potential (geothermal) and ecological possibilities that not necessarily have to be conflicted with current tourism developments.

4.2. Dark Tourism as a Testimony

Until Taiwan’s martial law period ended in 1987, Green Island was a place of jail, torture and death for political prisoners. What is known today as the “White Terror”, was an unspeakable topic in Taiwan for many years and it took time to unfold, accept and recognize the victims. The “White Terror” era was marked by 2 narratives: What the KMT³ said was true and what some people experienced.

Although there are still disputes about the number of people that died, disappeared. The official position on the White Terror began to change around the end of the 1980s as some films, artists, journalists and activists started to address what happened. It was only until 1997 on the 50th anniversary of the 228 Incident, that February 28th was declared as National Peace Memorial Day and Taipei Mayor Chen Shui Bian⁴ inaugurated The Taipei 228 Memorial Museum in the 228 Park. Two years later, on December 10/1999, The Green Island Human Rights Memorial Park opened its first stage. The site has been under different stages of evolution and alterations to what today is The Green Island White Terror Memorial Park. Despite the efforts of opening spaces to expose the public to what happened during the White Terror, these sites have been under many disputes over identity, ideology and historical interpretation, disclosing issues over the real purpose of the memorials that have been increasingly politicized.

Although Green Island is currently mostly visited because of ecotourism related activities: diving, whale watching, hot springs, etc., the isle also falls under the scope of dark tourism theory because of its past of imprisonment, execution, suffering and political repression. What follows in this section is an analysis on the current sustainability of this difficult cultural heritage, and how it became a symbolic element of the pursuit of democracy in Taiwan. The notion of the dark tourism concept where visitors are presented with death, imprisonment, suffering, violence and memory, is depicted to visitors with

³ The Kuomintang (KMT) was the Nationalist Party of China (NPC), today is a major political party in the Republic of China, initially on the Chinese mainland and then in Taiwan since 1949.

⁴ Chen Shui Bian is a retired Taiwanese politician and lawyer who served as President of Taiwan from 2000 to 2008. Chen is the first president from Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and ended the Kuomintang (KMT) more than fifty years of continuous rule in Taiwan.

different layers of “darkness” on Green Island in The New Life Correction Center and Oasis Village. The New Life Correction Center is embodied by life wax figures to recreate the everyday life of convicts that were incarcerated from 1951 to 1965. There are four huts that make up the nucleus with different banners of information to create an atmosphere. Exhibition halls have been established with thematic displays that contain remarkable material divided in sections that show documentaries of those who were executed and tortured. Another section shows documents and pictures of female prisoners that were known as “the woman squad” and the parade grounds.

Importantly, here the visitor is not only presented with how these prisoners were dehumanized but also how they held their humanity. One of the buildings, suspend in time the dormitory compartments where the convicts lived showing their everyday activities. The wax statues show men playing musical instruments, board games, reading, writing, sleeping, etc. This section of the exhibition simulates how the one hour they were given before lights went out was the only time of the day where they could reclaim some semblance of their human condition, because the rest of their time they were being indoctrinated with nationalist ideologies or doing hard arduous labor.

Figure 5. Dormitory



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

Another section named “thought and labor reform” portrays the ways officials drained convicts through difficult work to make them mentally weak and vulnerable. For instance, we see prisoners using hammers to smash sized rocks, a group of men getting

ideological training or a man feeding chickens and pigs as small farms were maintained in the area.

Figure 6 Top. Wax statue man at work



Source: Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

Figure 7. Below. Wax statue of the farm



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

Oasis Village, an enclosed prison where convicts were held from 1972 to 1987, is located about 1.5 km from New Life. Oasis is an important part of the memorial because it offers an atmosphere unchanged. The approach here is different and complementary of New Life, where information is everywhere. The idea is to transport the visitor back in time. Oasis confronts the adversity of prison life, stone walls inscribed with nationalist KMT slogans such as “Love Your Country” or “Oppose communism” are there as reminders of the cold war ideological clashes. The large building is topped with razor wires and the eight-sided building has sections of joint cells and others of solitary confinement that overlook a central corridor. The strategy on Oasis is to depict incarceration with a feeling of claustrophobia. The cubicles of solitary confinement where the sunlight hardly gets in have walls with deliberately placed cushions (so the inmates wouldn’t hurt themselves) that still have marks of scratches and blood. This dreadful place where some prisoners spend over decades, has been preserved as a testament and effort to scrutinize the horrors of the past.

Figure 8. Oasis Village from the outside



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

Figure 9. Prisoner cell from the inside



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

A theoretical conception of dark tourism as a phenomena of product supply where not all the attractions have the same level of “darkness” has been explored by many scholars (Strange and Kempa, 2003; Stone, 2006; Miles, 2002). This differentiation becomes relevant to this analysis to understand the inception and evolution of the jails and memorials on Green Island. In the “Seven Dark Suppliers Categorization” (Stone, 2006), Oasis Village and New Life fall under the Dark Dungeon’s description, as these two places have since their inception experienced high levels of ideological complexities and influences. Although the Green Island Memorials carry high degrees of commemoration, education and no commercialization in the way they were designed; conflicting political interests have been present all along its evolution. These distinctions then, show that the sustainability and preservation of difficult cultural heritage not only have a great influence on the way memory is preserved, but also, several implications on how trauma is catalyzed by the victims and their families.

Miles William FS, on: "Auschwitz: Museum interpretation and darker tourism" (2002). Explores these perspectives in a similar track when he suggests that differences between dark and darker tourism exists when temporal and spatial distinctions are reflected. For example, he suggests that Auschwitz-Birkenau, a place where death and atrocity actually occurred, is darker than the Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum, a place “associated” with death and atrocity. Similarly, in the context of this research, it is accurate to state that Oasis Village and The New Life Correction Center jails on Green Island are darker in the spectrum than for example The 228 Memorial Museum in Taipei.

Because the first are examples of dark tourism supply where death and suffering were present, while the museum is only “associated” with the events.

Tunbridge and Ashworth on *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (1996). Argue that the process of opening and managing difficult heritage places is complex and it is unavoidable to create dissonance to some extent. This dissonance or dislocation in sites of atrocity and violence triggers a tension and conflict caused by processes of signification and understanding by different groups involved. For example, the victims and their families or perpetrators. Although, dissonance is an intrinsic factor in difficult heritage tourism, it is argued that it can be reduced and balanced. In the context of the sites established to commemorate the victims during the White Terror Period, the sites were established under DPP political party agendas, creating naturally a narrative of history from their perspective of the events.

In an interview I did to Mr. Ronald Chin-Jung Tsao⁵, chief planner, curator and designer of what originally was named the Green Island Human Rights Memorial Park and the 228 Memorial Museum, we discussed issues of inception, dissonance and dislocation of the places established to memorialize the White Terror era.

Q. Researcher: What were the main issues that emerged surrounding the establishment of the 228 incident and White Terror memorials?

Answer. Tsao: The procedure to establish these sites was not an easy task and it took almost 10 years after the martial law was lifted. I remember that in the beginning we were just thinking about the form and not the historical content to be honest. Later, our biggest concern was what to include in the exhibitions (what story should be told to satisfy the memory of the victims and to describe the events without distorting reality). At the time the 228 memorial museum was established, Chen Shui-bian was the mayor of Taipei, so the political environment was right for the creation of the museum, but naturally a narrative of history inside these sites from the DPP perspective of the events created tension. Therefore, sympathizers with the KMT did not identify with the memorials. I believe that political conditions are important for the accurate establishment, development and maintenance of any memorial or museum in the world. However, the selection of names, defining the roles of the sites and conflicting political interests can cause many disputes, that is why the names of the sites related to the “White Terror” have changed several times.

Q. R: How can you manage dissonance and dislocation in difficult heritage and sites of violence?

A. T: The museum and the memorials were created by the DPP so they tell their history, not all of the others. You can think that it is possible to balance and include

⁵ Mr. Tsao is president of the Taiwan Art-In Design & Construction Company. With nearly 30 years of design and real estate planning experience, since 1996 until 2010 he was involved with the *Taipei 228 Memorial Museum and the Green Island Human Rights Memorial Park* in various roles (designer, chief planner, curator, and as vice-director).

different narratives in a site of these characteristics, but it is very difficult. How to do that? Why do we need this kind of sites? And what information to include? (He notes that he has seen some museums that try to attempt to balance). For example, The Museum for World Peace, part of Ritsumeikan University in Kita-ku, Kyoto Japan, gives information about two education systems during the time of the war. They show the Japanese textbooks at that time, but they also exhibit the textbooks from China. In that way the visitor can see in the museum two perspectives and interpretations of the historical moment. However, I think that this “supposed balance” can't just be achieved with an exhibition in a museum, it is also required to create other spaces, for example, lectures, seminars and research to discuss the difficult heritage. What we attempted in Taiwan, because of the atrocities committed during the White Terror, was to reflect and examine history honestly, so people can learn what happened in the past, no matter how horrible and terrible it is. We have the right to learn about the past, these realities should not be covered and suppressed from history as it was tried for many decades. Therefore, in this way, a memorial museum will not only become a place to know about the past, but also, a place to comfort those who were related to the suffering events. The survivors and the families of the victims should feel that somehow some degree of justice has been achieved. By letting the public know what happened, the suffering of those who died during the incident becomes a contribution and thus convey some meaning to the history of a nation. These places should bring some comfort and some sense of reconciliation, memorial museums should be also a place where those who have done something wrong can apologize and say sorry. But in fact, that is often not a reality because of political confrontations”.

As analyzed, the sites established on Green Island to memorialize the White Terror are part of those dark tourism sites that are located in the darker side of a wide spectrum, presented with a higher degree of conservatism and commemoration in its design and strategy. While these may be perceived as more serious and authentic, they also tend to have more controversies and disputes (dissonance and dislocation) because of their political ethos and influence. In spite that these sites are turned around into a source of information and education, places of incarceration and suffering also have the potential to attract tourists, and often merchandising and economic interests develop around them. After analyzing and proving how dark tourism and ecotourism features are represented on Green Island (separately), the following sections will attempt to unfold possible links of dark-eco whilst also exploring issues of commodification.

4.3. My Own (Private) Green Island as a Point of Intersection

I will now move to analyze the documentary *My Own Private Green Island, 1999*⁶ as a point where elements that are relevant to the scope of this analysis start to encounter. Notably, this film stands as a historical testimony of the sociocultural transformations experienced on Green Island in the end of the 1990s, as it juxtaposes with a poetic-metaphoric narrative: Tourism development with conflict and trauma. The movie narrates the experience of three main characters: Xiao Yun and Chen Ming Tsai are two tourists

⁶ This was a project commissioned to Hsu Juei Lan and Lin Jingjie to explore Green Island. The film won the 2000 Taiwan International Documentary Festival, the 2001 Golden Horse Award and the 2001 FID Marseille International Film Festival.

on Green Island looking for redemption to different traumas. A-de is a tour guide and a happy entrepreneur that is taking advantage of the large flow of tourists experienced at the time. Xiao Yun feels the necessity to come to the island because her father was a prisoner during the white terror. On her journey, she explains the difficulties and traumas experienced there by her father, some of which have deeply marked her own life. As explained previously, in 1999 The Green Island Human Rights Memorial Park opened to the public (same year the film was shot). Therefore, through Xiao Yun the film portrays a historical process that was taking place in Taiwanese society; where those descendants of the victims of the white terror started to confront and catalyze their own personal issues.

In the first sequence Xiao Yun appears delicate, sad and melancholic as she approaches the port of the island. While she descends the ferry, she seems weak and somehow disconnected from a large number of tourists that are being picked up by the young tour guide A-de. It is clear that she is on a personal pilgrimage, a lonely one, where she needs to stay out of the crowd. As the film narrative progresses, Xiao Yun starts to find some significance in elements of the island. For example, the ocean and waves represent for her father being trapped but at the same time a desire and possibility to be taken out into freedom. She compares the situation that he lived of hard manual labor work, to that of Sisyphus of Greek mythology, who was condemned eternally to repeatedly roll a heavy rock up a hill in hades only to have it roll down again as it nears the top.

Xiao Yun is not good at swimming but she decides to go snorkeling. In this specific part of the film water becomes an element to overcome her fears. Although the camera man is concerned about her wellbeing, she seems to think that it is necessary to go underwater. Water here becomes a symbol of her anxiety and trauma, a place where she faces her terrors, going inside the water is then like going to the island where all her sorrow materializes. If we take Xiao Yun as a dark tourist analytical tool, we can conclude that through her immersion (in the island and in the water) she is reaching an emotional and psychological depth, where dark tourism can indeed produce benefits, particularly on conquering her traumas, because at the end of the film, she seems to have found some comfort in the experience. Importantly also, Xiao Yun is participating in the emerging ecotourist activities of the island, connecting dark-eco elements.

Cheng Ming Tsai is a bipolar artist that is going through a difficult period of depression and decline, he is on Green Island to escape from routine and defeat. His character in the film embodies “ecological concerns” as he seems really tormented and annoyed about the pollution caused by tourists. Like Xiao Yun, he is also avoiding crowded places, and while he recognizes his displeasure towards the overpopulation of the island, he also acknowledges his role as a tourist is part of the intrusive process. Although journey ends with a positive symbolism on a lighthouse that could be understood as a place of hope, security or a space that is found to continue to the future, he committed suicide just 4 years after his appearance on the film. As a prominent figure on Taiwanese performing arts with a great deal of social, political and environmental engagement, his suicide story is well known among art circles. His last days were spent in Dulan-Taitung, where he participated in hearings and political debates that left him

highly frustrated, it is said that he killed himself leaving a note as to make a statement to “preserve the environmental beauty of Taiwan”.

A-de is always busy: Driving, guiding, fixing timetables on the phone, buying tickets, telling stories to the surrounding tourists. He explains that he really likes his job because in this way he can meet new friends and interact with people. While he says that business is not the main motivation to do what he does, the remark seems like a “performance” for the camera that contrasts with his regular behavior. His character represents a tourism industry that is developing as a commodity, he has a business that appears to be successful because he handles large numbers of tourists. A critical sequence of the film shows that the sites related to the White Terror are popular attractions at the time, as a matter of fact, the tourists are having “fun” in the rocks where the prisoners used to be executed, we can see them screaming and playing shooting games with imaginary guns.

This particular scene can be analyzed as a sign of disconnection between the tourists and the victims, or as an ignorant, unaware, uneducated, unconscious perception of the historical relevance of the place. In this context we can conclude that these are not tourists who are interested in the memorialization of death, who are concerned with historical atrocity or are driven by a desire for education and greater self-awareness of the importance of the places they are visiting. The role of A-de as a tour guide touches on several issues that relate to ecotourism and dark tourism on the island, because he performs in both industries, appearing in the film as a snorkeling instructor but also as a narrator of history without any depth. Therefore, his character not only gives evidence of an emerging “ecotourist” diving industry, but also, of an improvised difficult cultural heritage storyteller.

Several of the dark tourism theorists have repeatedly debated on ethical issues of commercialization and interpretation of sites from a supply and demand perspective, see (Sharpley, 2009; Stone, 2005; Seaton, 1999). Rising questions of whether the people who organize such tours do so responsibly and with the full historical facts to hand. Do they offer objective historical interpretations? Do the tourists who sign up for such tours do so because of a desire to understand what happened at the place? Most importantly, are either marketers and tourists required to hold themselves to high moral standards? Or do they simply regard the place as a holiday diversion?

This film is valuable because it gives some insights on premature developments in the island with regard to dark-eco tourism. It might also be interpreted as a paradigm shift period, where the authorities, the locals and the tourists started to establish the foundations for the future transformations. For example, while on the one hand those sites related to the “White Terror”, in the following years (of the film) began to include a more educative approach to highlight the historical relevance of the place. On the other, the ecological importance of the island started to be acknowledged.

4.4. Green Island as a Commodity (Kitsch and Souveniring)

“Tragedies, atrocities and disasters have the potential, through their representation and commemoration, to not only convey political messages but also to be exploited for commercial gain through tourism” (Sharpley, 2009).

In dark tourism, including memorials and museums related to death and violence, as in any other form of tourism, the flow of visitors is crucial. If a site is commercially run, it must attract visitors whose numbers and aggregate expenditures generate enough revenues to enable the promoters to make a profit. Some degree of commercialization like souvenir shops, book shops or restaurants can be found around many dark tourist places in the world to make sites more attractive or to generate income. Yet, for publicly funded and charitable supported places like those established on Green Island, visitor revenues may be less crucial, though they also experience some pressure to attract and maintain audiences to keep their founding.

The conception of the museums, memorials and human rights parks surrounding the 228 incident and the White Terror “were” and “still are” for the purpose to mainly commemorate and educate about a tragic and difficult past. The exhibited information elements, management and ways of presenting the events to the public have evolved into different approaches that include for example technological displays, documentary screenings, art installations, library’s, conferences, etc. To make the sites more attractive to the tourist. However, as sites for commemoration of human rights, it is clear that “The Green Island White Terror Memorial Parks” are trying to avoid any type of commercialization, promotion or marketing to generate economic revenue.

There is not an entrance fee, no souvenir shop, no catering, no economic transaction is intended inside the park. According to R. Tsao, this was from the beginning the strategy, and the memorials on Green Island were purposefully designed to have no commercialization. This type of approach he said, was originally intended as a sign of respect to the victims. However, a large marketing industry of prison, criminal, suffering related themes has developed in the surroundings, this is indeed a common practice on the dark tourism phenomena, where locals take advantage of dark events for their own economic benefits. Commodification and marketization have been widely discussed among scholars of dark tourism (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Sharpley, 2009; Wills, 2014) because it presents several ethical issues from both a supply and demand perspective. The act of appearing to profit from the suffering and tragedy of others has many implications that deserve to be analyzed.

There is a general agreement within the tourism literature that there is a certain intrinsic economic reality in tourism in general. Yet, when elements of “suffering” and “dark” are introduced to the equation, there is a greater debate as to the nature of the items, souvenirs, educational materials, memorabilia and other similar items or experiences should be sold. Often, when tourists travel, they have the desire to buy something that represents their vacation to a specific destination, a souvenir. Souvenirs belong to and represent the corporeality of an experience but they also encompass the materiality of a culture and the expression of a place, subjectivity and identity. Thus, these elements become integrated into a dark tourism experience when traveling. “The souvenir may represent a country, region, city, specific attraction, or a combination of several geographical scales” (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2007). There is an object place relationship with the tourist that helps make sense of the visit during and after the experience, creating a place-person relationship that symbolically embodies the qualities of a specific place and act as a reminder of significance.

Researcher Notes

Although as a dark tourism site, “The Green Island White Terror Memorial Park” clearly rank among one of the darkest sites in Taiwan and the world, all the elements of a lighter and commodified dark tourism site are found outside the memorial park. The venues, shops and restaurants that sell souvenirs with jail related topics are abundant and repetitive: T shirts, hats, key chains, sandals, cards, postcards, watches, restaurants, etc. Every possible memento in the island has transformed into a jail related kitsch object that shows cartoon like figures of “males” that seem to be upset and dressed in prison clothes, some of the text reads: Do you want to kill me? I will kill you first, a fat criminal says give me your money, fast, I’m so hungry I want to eat something. Ecologic tourist related features of green island are also represented in souvenirs. for instance, deer’s and diving water activities.

In this context, the representation of souvenirs on Green Island has a cultural element, that in this case represents a locality. The construction of these objects for sale uses a “caricature style” that is present in many different scenarios that are unignorable to any person that has been in Taiwan, animation type objects are everywhere: Banks, buses, MRT, trains, toilets, elevators, traffic signs, etc. Therefore, in this particular case the souvenir process plays a crucial role of locality in sustaining the tourism economy of the island with community relationships and established cultural structures.

Figure 10. Jailed designed Play cards.



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

“The form of souvenirs is ‘agreed’ communally as representations of a destination or experience and appear in conformity to a style, authorized and sustained by the community and the tourists. These may be produced in traditional and modern materials,

although non-traditional techniques may also be used to produce traditional designs, or the original may be miniaturized” (Hume, 2013).

I must note here that the souveniring process on Green Island do not specifically make reference to the White Terror period, as the Lyudao Prison Agency of Corrections opened by the ministry of Justice is also located in the island and serves as a penitentiary where criminals are currently held, the jail itself has a souvenir shop where the tourists can buy artifacts made by the convicts. Nevertheless, the fact that suffering and commodification of human tragedy (past or present) are represented in the process deserves consideration, regardless of the historical implications or interpretation of the objects. The shape and form of illustration in the objects in this case, depicts archetypical and idealized views that in a cartoonist delineation indents to mitigate or alleviate emotions of a tragic or difficult reality.

Importantly also, souveniring on Green Island works as a place of encounter of dark-eco tourism. The object place relationship then takes a new dimension of interaction where tourists are immersed in the experience of buying an article that represents the essence of the place they are visiting. If we analyze souveniring and commercialization closely, the spirit-ethos of the island is merely surrounded by a duality: ecotourism and dark tourism or ecology and tragedy as commodities. Ironically, or perhaps accurately the “Sika deer” as symbolic animal of the ecology of the island is also portrayed as a criminal in jail.

Figure 11. Criminal deer in a t-shirt.



Source: Diego Caicedo, 2020.

I will now explore souvenirs on Green Island as Kitsch⁷ elements. The process of kitschification of collective memory on tragic events has key implications for the interpretation of dark tourism sites, where a sense of consumer comfort is introduced. In terms of tourism Morgan and Pritchard regard tourism souvenirs as “significant material objects and analyze how individuals use kitsch souvenirs as touchstones of memory, recreating tourism experiences and self-aware of their role as tourists” (2005). In particular, the presence of kitsch elements of Green Island are illustrated with a mixture of humor and melancholy and nostalgia. It could be argued then that these elements of reminiscence reform and restructure the intensity of the experience of suffering, violence and tragedy. Kitsch has also been described as “a central aspect of comfort culture” (Olalquiaga, 1998), where as a consequence, the introduction of this kind of items in tragic events may allow the visitor to emotionally register with the period of history memorialized in a soft manner.

4.5. Deer Paradise Utopia

The Formosan sika deer has thirteen subspecies of Sika deer *Cervus Nippon* that traditionally inhabited much of Taiwan’s territory, including some of the smaller islands where the animals were introduced for anthropocentric purposes. Being a lowland species, it has faced ongoing destruction of its habitat from human expansion in different periods. “Starting at about 1624 with the onset of Dutch colonial period, the species had to endure extreme hunting pressure. Much of Taiwan’s economy was based on the deer hide trade during the Qing period and totals at around 100,000 hides were exported to countries like Japan” (Wilkie, 2007). Eventually, the population of wild Formosan sika deer was pushed to the edge of extinction by 1969. In 1984 The Kenting National Park administration launched the Formosa Sika Deer Restoration Program using some domesticated animals that still existed in the Taipei Zoo and on Green Island. The population started to grow and the animals were slowly conditioned for release in different areas. Currently, “the sika deer has got to a point where there are overpopulated areas in the south of Taiwan and their presence is affecting other species, farming and the environment” (Chen and Chuang, 2022).

On Green Island, sika deer were introduced in the 1970s for their antlers use and commercialization, by 1986 the population had outnumbered humans. This section of this paper will analyze the development of the animal on the island in relation to dark-eco tourism perspectives. Undoubtedly, sika deer is used on Green Island as a tourist attraction, we can see it everywhere it takes part of the souveniring process, the meat of the animal is sold for human consumption and there is also a deer ecological park. These different scenarios where humans use the animal for tourism, not only create a contradiction between ecology and death from a supply perspective, but it also causes ethical issues on a tourist cultural discourse of hypocrisy. Where the tourists first visit a

⁷ The term “kitsch” emerged in the mid-19th century as a way of describing an aesthetic that was portrayed as banal, trite, predictable and in bad taste (Calinescu,1987). Deriving from the German word “verkitschen”, meaning to cheapen, original connotations of the term defined it as the consequence of the mass production of consumer culture. In essence, kitsch is often associated with cost or cheap things that lack cultural refinement or taste.

park of “conservation”, but after has also the possibility to go and buy the meat of a sacrificed animal.

We know that tourism as an industry is about travel and its associated services. Yet, beyond its glistening appearance, sometimes, these activities contain elements of domination and control of humans towards nature, where often innocent animals are not spared in the pursuit of making money. In contemporary academia, dark tourism literature has only recently started to address the darkness of some tourist behaviors from a nexus between humans and animal suffering. The work of Lopez and Vanegas in 2021 describe animal related tourism as a system of space, transit and destiny where animals are trapped in an organized tourist system where they are commodified through “zooslavery”. Ending up in a position where they can be observed, eaten, tortured, physically abused and subject to many other forms of exploitation in order to satisfy the appetite of visitors. Their work on bullfighting as a dark tourist attraction, exemplifies a practice where the bulls are sentenced to death in an arena as “working animals” in a category of entertainment and spectacle, where death is rather valued in a macabre performance.

Similarly, Thomas Panko and Babu George on: “Animal Sexual Abuse and the Darkness of Touristic Immorality” (2018), critically address the nexus between human avarice and animal suffering. Their work immerses on the topic by analyzing an underground animal sex tourism industry, arguing that although human sexual relation with animals (zoophilia) has been documented for centuries in many different cultures, the exploitation of animals as a sex-tourist activity is a relatively new phenomena that has provoked regulatory responses in many countries.

Researcher Notes:

Sika Deer Ecological Park or the Paradise of Deer as it is named in English, is intended as an ecotourist attraction on Green Island that was opened in 2014. The facilities of the park include an information center, souvenir shops, a small cafeteria, a viewing platform, a captivity area and a plant area where the deer image is used for consumption in all shapes and forms. The place is designed with an open zoo type setting where the tourist can interact with the animal (touch them, take pictures, feed them) and learn basic characteristics and behaviors of the animal. For example, the visitor can see a poster that difference the looks of the animal in winter and summer.

Although the Sika Deer Ecological Park has layers of education and conservation, it can be argued that animals do have an “assignment” in the way that they are forced to interact with human beings. As noted in the following quote, “animals working on tourism are often forced to perform repetitive, visible and normalized tasks in a certain space for most of their lives” (Low, 2012). Most tourists expect to obtain a memento with the animal and often there is a compulsory expected interaction. While inside the park the “work” attributed to the animal is not much different to other deer parks around the world such as the famous one in Nara, Japan. What creates a connection between ecotourism and dark tourism in this case is what happens outside the park. The slaughter of the deer happens backstage, it is not a spectacle like in bullfighting but we know that is happening when we are confronted with meat for sale.

The deer meat industry itself on Green Island has been under high controversy because some customers started to realize that the flavor of the meat was just the same as pork, after some laboratory testing, it was found that in many cases it is not deer meat what is being sold to the tourist, causing discomfort among the community. Some of the locals said that this is a “well-known secret” because pork meat is cheaper to operate. This situation just adds one more layer of complexity to what is a lack of regulation and vigilance to an industry that works under very secretive sceneries.

Researcher Notes

While doing fieldwork, I tried to track the deer meat industry but the access to data was completely denied on the inside. The whole thing looks dodgy from the outside. Deer are tied outside the shops as pets to give some kind of veracity, and the meat tastes bad. I realized there is something wrong. I tried to interview shop owners but their attitude was evasive. I interviewed three tourists. The first said that the meat is very yummy. When I asked if he had ecological concerns, he said that he didn't, he is carnivorous so why should he feel guilty or bad, it is the same with chicken or pork. The second tourist is a vegetarian so she doesn't eat meat, she thought that the Sika Deer Ecological Park is boring but she mentioned that they have a souvenir shop with very cute products for sale, she thinks is strange and contradictory to have the park and a meat industry outside, she thinks there is an ethical problem with regard deer's on Green Island. My last interviewee is a woman that loved the deer park and she also bought the meat, she doesn't see anything strange about it, it's just the way the world works. The online article was found after coming back from the trip.

According to the “Animal Dark Tourism Proto Typology” (Fennell et al., 2021), we can locate the deer on Green Island in two different categories (with regard to the roles of “animal suffering” or “death in tourism”). Those living inside the Sika Deer Ecological Park are live animals in a semi-built setting with animal representations in built settings. The sources of suffering/death are environmentally induced, natural or both depending on the context. The role of the animals in the tourism industry are according to the categorization worker, working in agriculture, porter, etc., or used primarily as entertainers for the pleasure of humans, education, science and research, and companionship. On the subjective/normative nature of animal-human relationship leading to suffering or death, in this case indifference, neutral emotions and attitudes to the animal(s) part of the attraction. In other cases it can be theriophily, emotions/attitudes of love or reverence for an animal, including iconic or heroic animals. Those living outside the park are potentially dead animals in semi-built settings, or dead animals in wild settings. The sources of suffering/death are human induced, environmentally induced or unknown, as I could not find much information of the slaughter places and meat factories in the island. The role of the animals in the tourism industry are part of nature/pest: free living in nature or viewed as detrimental to social and commercial existence and sport and subsistence including animals hunted or trapped for recreation and food.

By locating Green Island deer's role of duality in this typology, I attempt to prove not only the relevance of the animal in the dark-eco tourism industry, but also, the ideological contradiction in the use of the animal as an image in the ecotourist context.

This section of the paper has attempted to show a perspective where sika deer’s have been used for tourism, questioning the benefits of the animal-human relationship. Although the progress of the investigation in this part was hampered by the lack of credible primary data sources, some of the existent literature was combined with fragmented information gathered from online sources and participatory observation to address the subject. The need emerges to further study the use of sika deer on Green Island as a tourist attraction. If the government strategy on the island is that of ecotourism, it is important to implement clear and coherent strategies that prevent the usage and death of the animal. Especially when such practices are entrenched with a discourse of ecology.

5.CONCLUSION

This paper has systematically explored issues of ecology and difficult cultural heritage on Green Island. By combining ecotourism and dark tourism theoretical perspectives, this paper not only unfolded some of the challenges for the future sustainability of the island, but it also has exposed some inconsistencies on tourist development that involves government entities and the local community. Although there have been some advances in the last decade in the protection of the natural resources, there are still challenges regarding how to balance environmental protection and recreational development with an integrated operation management approach.

This paper found that the jails and memorials of the White Terror period have experienced complexities of dissonance that are intrinsic to most heritage of conflict, representing several challenges for the establishment, management and development of the sites, suffering several transformations. Despite the political discrepancies experienced on its existence, these sites still stand as a reminder of struggle and human rights achievement, where those that are concerned with historical atrocity and a desire for education and greater self-awareness, will find an interesting place to visit.

Based on this analysis, I found that the government and the community have centered its “recent” tourist development strategies in ecotourism attributes. Yet, I would suggest that future efforts should include plans that could resurface the historical importance of the memorials of the White Terror, as these are places that hold an immense significance in the construction of values for future generations and are very well established and preserved.

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