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“Exploring Archives and Researching Industrial Heritage of Mining industry”

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1) The notion of industrial heritage and the relationship with researchers

The work of museums like Tagawa City Coal Mining Historical Museum or the National Coal Mining Museum of England is essential to help researchers develop what is in fact a new discipline in history: industrial archaeology. Since the 1960s, industrial archaeology has been indeed established as a discipline in its own right, whose work feeds into or initiates heritage initiatives and contributes to the construction of a new object: industrial heritage. In France, we can point to the founding works of M. Daumas and D. Woronoff in developing industrial archaeology as a field discipline, defined by the study of the link between production and place of production. Its purpose encompasses buildings as well as infrastructure and their tangible, human and intangible flows. The study of a site therefore requires observation, excavation and the use of written, iconographic and oral sources in order to compare these sources with each other. At this time, the contributions of industrial archaeology are already significant, particularly for the history of labour and the history of technology. However, how to determine what can be considered as heritage worthy of conservation? The cases presented in this panel clearly show what heritage is: it is the result of a social construction, by which institutions or groups of individuals decide to distinguish and protect an object, tangible or intangible, according to criteria that are heterogeneous and evolving in nature: --The aesthetics of the object (chimneys, well towers), its historical importance (the coal that drives Japanese economic modernization), but also the point of industry in the local social and cultural organization, are the most decisive arguments. But another question is up to what historical period can we bring up industrial heritage? The British Robert A. Buchanan, in 1972, stated that the chronological scope of industrial heritage was not limited to the first phase of the “English Industrial Revolution”, but included the history of humanity, from the flint deposit to the last generation computer.

Industrial heritage does not only concern sites and their production equipment: it also applies to all social, economic, cultural, religious or sporting infrastructures built as part of a productive activity to ensure the living conditions of employees, to collections of scientific and technical objects that are built and to landscapes. Its heterogeneity and particularities therefore make it difficult, if not impossible, to use the criteria developed by the Fine Arts and applied by the Historic Monuments Services. This is why, in France, the Ministry of Culture was led to create, in 1983, a unit specifically dedicated to industrial heritage within the Architecture and Heritage Department. The presentations by Mr. Mc Loughlin and Mr. Fukumoto show that it is in collaboration with researchers that museum collections can be best valued. Hence the importance of facilitating access to archives by researchers. There are places where the level of openness is very good, such as the Tagawa Museum or Kyushu University, but there are also other places, still linked to large companies where many archives are not accessible.



Museums are also a tourism issue for regions that have suffered economically. Under these conditions, how can we finance the preservation of industrial heritage? How can industrial heritage be a market that will allow the emergence of a business model? Who are the actors? An old mine can be an attraction that can benefit local transport companies, restaurants, hotels. How do these economic actors participate in the action of museums? Are there any heritage guides in Japan? For example, in France, two renowned publishing houses (Michelin and Hachette) have recently published a tourist guide on the most beautiful places of industrial heritage, one on industrial heritage and company visits.

2) The question of UNESCO heritage inscription

The question of UNESCO's World Heritage listing raises the question of the scale of their action. Does it only concern the study of former production sites or disused infrastructure or should they cover large areas, such as the Nord-Pas-de-Calais Mining Basin (UNESCO, 2012)? In the latter case, this requires the creation and implementation of complex management plans. Mr. Fukumoto's presentation shows how important it is to register with UNESCO. The prospect of having a site inscribed on the World Heritage List is therefore a powerful driver of public action, in particular through systematic surveys or inventories. But can this work also lead to an improvement in the legislative framework to protect industrial heritage, which is a relatively recent concept? Inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List is one of the driving forces behind the development of industrial heritage. But it is not without its problems. Of course, the preparation of candidature files and the expert missions sent by ICOMOS to assess them have contributed to consolidating and developing knowledge, refining and affirming the nature of the industrial heritage, and developing methodologies for the heritage analysis of sites and stakeholders as well as for the methods of reconversion and enhancement. However, all this has a cost. And the question, like that of the Olympic Games, is whether the expected benefits will exceed the amounts committed.

Moreover, whatever the nature of the inscribed site, a distinction has important consequences in economic, cultural and social terms and can be a source of tension and conflict. For example, the conflict over the classification of Yamamoto Sakubei's works.

3) The relationship with the populations

In addition to the material and technical value of the site, it is necessary to retain what is specific to the industrial heritage: its capacity to support the resilience of the territories and their population and to preserve the intangible dimension through education and technical skills. Hence the importance, as can be seen from the presentations, of the collaboration of schools and universities. But what motivates local populations to take part in efforts to preserve and communicate local industrial heritage? Citizens have a predominant place in heritage approaches, and more particularly in industrial heritage, as the presentations show. Is it simply nostalgia? Field studies show that no. There are many motivations: the desire to keep a building as a historical landmark in the landscape or as a place of shared industrial memory, but also as a support for resilience for populations deeply affected by deindustrialization or by pollution and disasters.

The museums offer children fun activities to attract their curiosity. There is also the challenge of passing the memory of industrial labour on to children growing up in a post-industrial society. But what message should be sent to them, what values should be conveyed to them? Furthermore, what can the maintenance of industrial heritage bring to 21st century societies? The memory of the inhabitants of mining towns, based on that of their parents or grandparents, reflects specific practices within these towns, a form of identity that is unique to them. Based on the collection of these experiences, the challenge is to nourish the living together of the 21st century by cultivating a certain number of humanist values.

4) The question of memory

Finally, when one study or develop industrial heritage, inevitably comes the question of memory. How to ensure that all the populations concerned by an industrial memory can have a right to express themselves and to build this memory? For example, forced or slave labour is rarely mentioned. In the French West Indies, although material traces remain, they are not valued as an essential part of the local industrial heritage. But the question also arises in Japan with the question of the classification of Meiji's industrial heritage, which has encouraged memory claims in Korea linked to forced labor. The stakes may be clearly geopolitical: Taiwan's activism to have its industrial sites recognized is not without ulterior motives either in its relationship with the People's Republic of China. Mr. Fukumoto indicated that it is necessary to build a "just" memory, not only based on nostalgia for a disappeared world and but also on the more difficult aspects (accidents, precariousness, silicosis, discrimination, violence). While these aspects are sometimes mentioned in the museums I have seen, why silicosis is almost never mentioned despite de facto that where much publicized liability suits took place from the 1980s to 2000s?