



Pseudoacacia: Using Post-industrial Ecological Remediation as Natural and/or Cultural Heritage for Regional Revitalisation?

Case Study: Investigating the management of invasive *Robinia pseudoacacia* (False Acacia) planted for post-mining ecological remediation, and its adoption as a natural-cultural heritage asset by Kosaka Town, Akita Prefecture, Japan

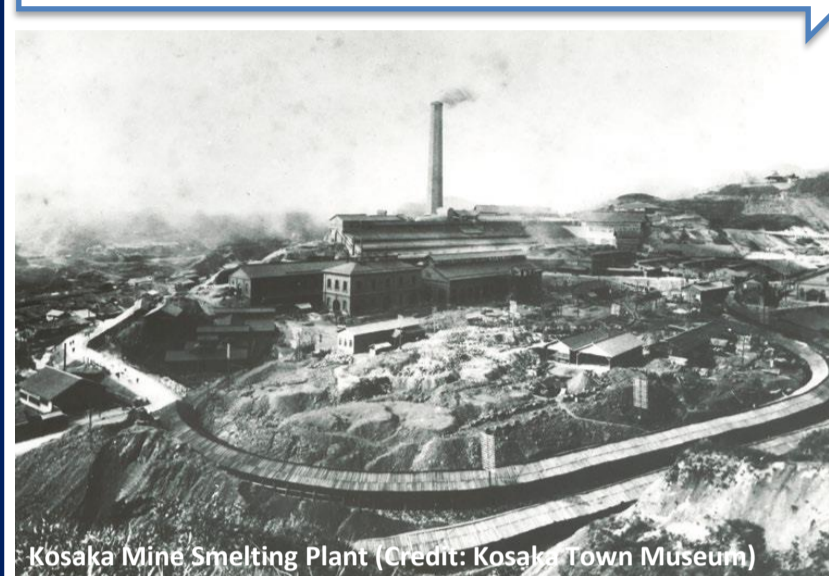
A RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL

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BACKGROUND:

- Japan faces a **rural depopulation crisis** that forces a rethinking of regional revitalisation projects.
 - Revitalisation **relies on local heritage sites, properties or practices** to strengthen community ties and draw socioeconomic growth from urban settlers and tourists.¹
 - Heritage assets are **selected, presented and managed**, revealing the mechanics of placemaking and cultural transformation according to contemporary challenges.
 - Placemaking with heritage relies on complex negotiations between **conflicting** natural, cultural, political, and socioeconomic agendas.
- *How to realign the boundaries of heritage for sustainable human/natural futures?*

Primary Case Study



Kosaka Mine Smelting Plant (Credit: Kosaka Town Museum)



Acacia Festival, Kosaka (Credit: Kosaka Town)

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Kosaka Mine (1880-Present) was the largest producing copper mine in Japan by 1906.²

50,000 hectares of mountainside across northern Akita Prefecture left barren and ecologically damaged by sulphurous acid pollution from smelting between 1902-1967.³

Invasive False acacia trees (*R. pseudoacacia*) introduced in 1910 to prevent soil erosion and filter acidic soils. By 2007, 3,300 hectares of nationally owned forest and 1,500 hectares of private land contained successfully reforested False acacia stands.³

Annual '**Acacia Festival**' established in 1984. **Beekeepers** sell acacia honey as souvenirs. **Craftspeople** sell acacia wood products. '**Kosaka Acacia Blooms**' listed in the top '**100 Aromascapes of Japan**' in 2002.⁴ (Former mining buildings & structures restored and designated as **Modern Industrial Heritage Sites**, 2007)

R. pseudoacacia is declared an invasive species that inhibits the growth of indigenous vegetation, listed as one of '**100 of Japan's Worst Invasive Alien Species**' in 2002.⁵

Kosaka Mine listed in '**60 Selected Sites of Mountain Conservation Worth Passing on to Future Generations**' in 2013. But community forestry groups continue to **tackle expansive acacia growth** across the region.³

DILEMMA: The False acacia is at once a **natural asset** (living organism), a **cultural asset** (listed emblem of town), and **economic asset** (primary souvenir and tourist draw), that exists as an **industrial legacy** of former mining but concurrently an **invasive species** threatening nearby **protected** natural sites.*

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS 5Ws1H:

WHO decides how False acacia is managed, used, and presented to the local community and to visitors?
(National gov. Local gov. Grassroots groups?)

WHAT benefits or challenges does treating False acacia as a heritage asset bring?
(Socioeconomic stability/image of natural harmony/loss of native biodiversity?)

WHERE is the extent of False acacia growth, and where else may similar issues or sites be found across Japan?
*(Can a national framework be realised/how are conflicts managed at existing protected heritage landscapes?)**

WHEN is it important to raise these issues?
(Meeting SDGs, reconfiguring natural/cultural interrelations in 21st C., rural decline crisis)

WHY does this matter?
(Contemporary communities face socioeconomic and environmental challenges set in motion by past industrial processes. Reconciliation with the past may ensure ontological security for today and the future.)

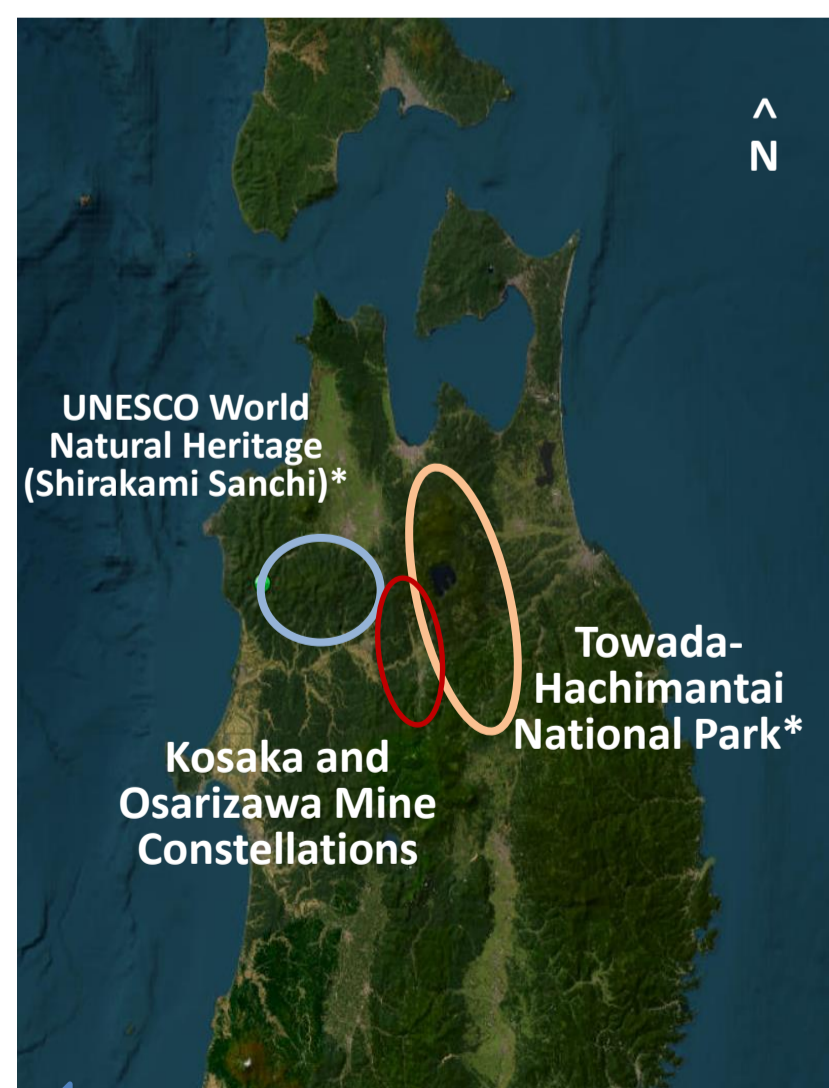
HOW to measure this? *(Conversations with communities, policy analysis, film and observation, comparative case studies)*

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MOVING FRAMEWORKS:

Beyond Toxic Heritage? - *The legacies of past polluting processes or events, present in the materiality of toxic substances that endanger the natural and human environment, that are managed, reconciled or confronted through formal heritage institutions or informal memory practices.*⁶

- **But can we treat the process of toxic remediation itself as heritage to be used, managed and protected for society?**



Possible Questions...