

NEGOTIATING SHIFTING LANDSCAPES: PUBLIC AWARENESS-BUILDING IN THE FACE OF CONTESTED CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Introduction

Building of public awareness has long been recognized as an important part of successful historic heritage preservation. In the World Heritage Convention (WHC), Article 27 requires the State Parties to strengthen the appreciation and respect of their people of the cultural and natural heritage particularly by educational and information programs. Further, financial assistance from World Heritage Fund is available at the request of State Parties for educational, information and promotional activities. In the context of democratic societies, public awareness is particularly important to effective community participation in local decision-making process concerning the preservation of heritage sites. However, while the importance of public awareness has long been recognized, the scope and focus of public awareness building has been limited primarily to the promotion of benefits and moral obligation of preservation. In contrast, the necessity and potential for public awareness efforts to construct and negotiate between contesting meanings of cultural heritage has not been adequately explored. The issue of contested meanings and identities is particularly pertinent to the shifting conditions of cultural landscape in the context of developing and newly developed countries that experience rapid social and environmental change and often overlay of histories and ethnicities. The purposeful construction and negotiation is important to facilitate a meaningful and critical preservation of cultural heritage. This paper focuses on the case of Taiwan where rapid economic development and social and spatial change has dramatically influenced the island's urban and rural landscape in the past century. Specifically, it examines the contesting characteristics of its cultural landscape, from competing territorial claims to hybridized urban patterns and architectural styles. Using Taiwan as an example, the paper argues for a need to acknowledge the multiplicity of historical and present meanings in the diverse and hybridized cultural and socio-political realm. In the face of contested cultural heritage, it argues for the integration of a deliberative process into public awareness programs in order to construct and negotiate between shifting and contested meanings of cultural heritage in a changing society.

Contested Cultural Landscape

Cultural landscape was formally recognized by the WHC as a heritage category to be protected in 1992. Under the WHC, the term cultural landscape embraces diverse manifestations

of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature (UNESCO, 2001). Specifically, cultural landscape can be divided into three main categories – “clearly defined landscape designed and created intentionally by man”, “organically evolved landscape”, and “associative landscape” (WHC, 2001). During 1990s, the concept of cultural landscape in scholarly discourses has been extended beyond the focus on vernacular landscape and iconic examples of human-nature interaction into that of urban spatial politics. Specifically, it has further embraced the contestation of place meanings and identities. For example, Dolores Hayden argues that studies of urban cultural landscape need to be based on analysis of social and political meanings. Further, the preservation and design of urban cultural landscape requires an inclusive reconstruction of history. On the broader subject, Paul Groth (1997) argues that cultural landscape research topics in the 1990s have transcended urban and rural boundaries and the production and consumption of space. Furthermore, there has been an emphasis on multiple, co-existing and even competing discourses rather than singular meaning and identity (Groth, 1997: 3-17). The discourse provides a useful starting point to reconsider the characteristics of cultural landscape and the context and purpose of public awareness building.

Cultural Landscape in Taiwan

In the past hundreds of years, Taiwan has experienced dramatic changes in its ethnic composition, as well as cultural, economic and political conditions. From an island of Austronesian tribal nations, Taiwan has undergone successive waves of immigration and foreign occupation. Politically, after decades of authoritarian rule, it has emerged as a vibrant democracy in recent years. Economically, within the span of a century, Taiwan has transformed from a struggling frontier island into a leader in information technology and a key player in the global economy. The changes in the local cultural identities, social values, economy and political power are directly reflected in the shifting physical and social landscape in cities and countryside. The shifting nature of the landscape has become an important aspect of its historic past and contemporary life. The diversity and richness in the accumulated landscape and spatial features testify to the dramatic historic

development. Reflecting dramatic political, economic, cultural and social changes, the specific characteristics of cultural landscape in Taiwan could shed light on a re-examination of the definition and approach of cultural landscape conservation in a fast changing socio-economic context. The following provides a set of observations on the characteristics of cultural landscape in Taiwan based on related case studies and the author's own involvement in a number of cultural landscape conservation and community building efforts in Taiwan since early 1990s.

1. Landscape of Change — Given its geographical location and geologic condition, the landscape of Taiwan is highly susceptible to changes as result of natural forces such as earthquakes, floods and typhoons. Historically, the changes have been manifested in the rise and fall of cities and villages, periodic relocation of settlements, and evolution of the settlement forms in response to the physical changes. In recent decades, the volatile natural processes are reinforced by impacts of industrial and urban growth, including deforestation in the upland region that exacerbates the problems of flood and erosion, and the overdraft of groundwater in the coastal area, resulting in severe land subsidence. In addition to economic and industrial development, rapid social change in ethnic composition, rapid land development and influence of Western thoughts contributed to changes in cultural patterns of space. For example, the overlapping patterns of traditional, colonial and modern streetscapes constitute the unique local identities. The abundance of temporary structures in forms of advertising signs, beetle-nut stalls, street vendors and informal building additions are reflective of the volatile process of space-making. The multiple forces of change on one hand represent an important aspect of cultural landscape in Taiwan. On the other hand, they also threaten the conservation of important historical landscapes. In addition, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish the complex overlay of changes.

2. Landscape of Production — A close linkage to economic production represents another important characteristic of cultural landscape in Taiwan. From modern agriculture on the flatlands to hunting, foraging and shifting agriculture in the highland region, the economic activities and utilization of environmental resources constitute the essential tie between people and landscape. Even in the seemingly pristine highland region, the landscape is traditionally and continuously used and managed by the indigenous tribes. In recent decades, the development-dominated social value, institutionalization and political economy have further reinforced the economic utilization of land as the primary relation with the landscape. The high population density and limited land resources also strengthens this relationship. The predominantly economic valuation of landscape in Taiwan is often a

source of complex contention between the preservationists and the pro-development administration and the public. Frequently, the preservationists are pitted against developments that threaten the destruction of important heritage sites. However, when historically significant landscapes are protected, the productive functions and values are often misunderstood if not ignored. This contradiction is exemplified in the debate over establishment and management of National Parks on aboriginal lands. Adopting a preservationist resource management model that views the environment as pristine, undisturbed sites, the National Park management often comes in conflicts with the local indigenous community that continues to carry out its hunting and agricultural traditions.

3. Landscape of Meanings — Along with changes and production, another important characteristic of cultural landscape in Taiwan lies in its associated and contested cultural and socio-political meanings. The meanings in terms of historical and cultural identities and even political symbolism are actively constructed in social and political processes. The constructed meanings of the landscape are manifested in the naming of landscape features and places, collective memories for particular social and cultural groups, and various forms of spatial politics. In Taipei, the large axial boulevard in front of the colonial-style Office of the President was renamed in praise of the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek after the Nationalist Party took over Taiwan from Japan after World War II. In 1994, after the opposition party won the mayoral election, the boulevard was renamed "Ketagalan Boulevard" in honor of the assimilated indigenous Ketagalan tribe that once inhabited the Taipei basin. The incidents signified the dramatic change of political power and politics of cultural identity in Taiwan. Along with the impositions and reversal of meanings, landscape becomes literally the contested terrain of competing political and cultural forces in Taiwan.

4. Landscape of Collage — The rapid progression of economic and socio-political change, along with the complex history of immigration, internal migration, foreign rule and international trade, together created the multifaceted and diverse culture and value systems in Taiwan. In the physical landscape, this multiplicity and diversity is directly visible in the collage form of spatial patterns and structures. Mixed building styles, proliferating temporary structures, juxtaposition of formal and informal spaces, and the constant overlay of spatial fabric together constitute the everyday spatial experience. The apparent incoherence of various spatial phenomena represents an important characteristic of Taiwan's landscape. The collage landscape reflects the deep-rooted phenomenon of hybridity in the Taiwanese culture and society. From the vernacular rural landscape to urbanized space, the phenomenon of spatial collage demonstrates a combination of pragmatism and mixing of multiple cultures in the built environment. One recent incident, the

preservation of historic Wang Kong Temple in Erjie, Ilan, testifies to the importance of considering collaged spatial forms in preservation. Originally, the later additions to the historic temple were determined by the project planners as historically insignificant and were excluded from the preservation plan. After the plan was rejected for a lack of community participation, the plan was revised, and the later additions were preserved along with the original temple. The completed project fully incorporated the collaged form of the temple, reflecting the value of the residents and the identity of the place (Wang and Hsieh, 2001).

5. *Landscape with Shifting Borders* — Lastly, an essential feature of the cultural landscape in Taiwan is the shifting and often blurring boundaries between the different dimensions and characteristics of landscape. From urban to rural areas and between different land uses and spatial functions, there is often a lack of clear and permanent physical distinction and boundary. In addition, there are often multiple layers of functions and meanings in the same location. With the lack of clear distinction and the close tie among physical and social changes, natural processes and cultural meanings, the protection of cultural landscape needs to consider particularly the multiplicity of relevant factors and careful scoping of historically and culturally important features. For example, in the pastoral Hakka settlement of Meinung, the realm of local cultural space includes not only the traditional settlements and historic architecture, but also the rural courtyard houses and tobacco smoking towers and the historic irrigation infrastructure that are important to the area's agricultural development (Lee, 1997). The range of elements together constitutes a more inclusive cultural landscape of Meinung. However, how to manifest and maintain the historic linkages and cultural fabric of these different spatial components becomes a challenge in preserving cultural landscape in Meinung and other similar contexts.

Shifting Landscapes: Implications for Preservation

The characteristics of cultural landscape in Taiwan, particularly its diversity, changeability and multiplicity, signal a need for preservation to negotiate between the multiple meanings of heritage sites. A deliberative negotiation is particularly critical in light of three issues – the reconceptualization of preservation, articulation of authenticity and transformation of the productive functions of landscapes. First, the volatile characteristic and diversity within the scope of cultural landscape in Taiwan suggests that the so-called cultural heritage preservation needs to be critically redefined. A new approach should engage not only the preservation of tangible physical elements, but also a public and deliberative construction of the social and cultural meanings of landscape. Secondly, the characteristics

of change, spatial collage and constructed meanings in Taiwan's cultural landscape suggest that the so-called authenticity of cultural heritage needs to be re-articulated. In this respect, the Nara Document on Authenticity offers a useful reference by pointing out that the basis for measuring authenticity should come from an understanding of both the original and subsequent characteristics and meanings of cultural heritage. Finally, in the face of continued urbanization and economic restructuring under the World Trade Organization agreement, there is an urgent need to transform and give new purposes to the productive functions of landscapes.

To address the above-mentioned issues, a public and deliberative process is critical and can become a component in promotional and awareness-building efforts. The public process provides a means for reconsidering the purpose of preservation, defining authenticity and debating new productive roles of landscapes. Only through this public process can the protection of cultural landscape become socially legitimate and in sync with the constant construction and reconstruction of place identities and meanings in the changing socio-political context. However, what kind of public process is necessary? How can it be created? In recent years, the large number of community building and grassroots conservation efforts in Taiwan has helped construct models for constructing and negotiating community-based landscape meanings. In the rural community of Meinung, an anti-dam movement has led to efforts to connect and protect the local environment and its cultural and ethnic identity. In the coastal area of Chiku, a rediscovery of the local history and awareness of the cultural and ecological importance has helped create a new identity of the coastal area. The construction of the new identity has become an important part of a local movement against a proposed industrial development (Hou, 2001). In the more institutionalized context, a recent government-sponsored program for the public to vote for 100 most valuable historic landmarks in the country has produced unexpected but significant results, as local community landmarks were favored over prominent nationally known landmarks. These efforts serve as models for developing public awareness campaigns to engage the citizens in constructing and negotiating meanings of landscapes.

Conclusions

To the extent that Taiwan exemplifies the experience of profound political, social and physical changes shared by many newly industrialized countries, the discussion of cultural landscape conservation in Taiwan is relevant to other similar contexts. The experience in Taiwan calls for a need to recognize the specific economic and socio-political context of cultural landscape preservation. It calls for an understanding of shifting spatial meanings and place identities in a changing society. The practice of cultural landscape conservation in such context should acknowledge

the multiplicity of historical and present meanings in the diverse and hybridized cultural and socio-political realm. In addition, it should recognize the public and community processes as a basis for reconstructing and regenerating meanings of cultural heritage in a changing landscape. The public awareness building efforts, as a commonly required component in many preservation programs, provide important opportunities to stage and integrate such deliberative process into the preservation of contested cultural heritage.

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