



Towards a Mixed Development of Culture and Ecology in the City: a Case Study of the Bei-Shih Street, Tainan

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ABSTRACT

After the onset of modern metropolis, little notice had been given to the smaller compacted spaces remained in the urban systems. Smaller urban green spaces, including compacted open spaces, petit greeneries, old streets, alleys and tiny squares, are indeed patchy and unorganized. However, they have gained new dynamism for the 21th century urban life. This new dynamic is what this study refers to as a mixed cultural–ecological development in the urban context.

Given the accelerating rate of global urbanization, small urban green spaces in the old Bei-shih street area, as the target of this study, functioned as important nodes of social interactions--between citizens and the cultural and historic traces, and between tourists and the neighborhood's self-contained world. Through onsite surveys and analysis of the development of the Bei-Shih Street area in Tainan City, this study illustrates the current situation regarding how residents build their small businesses and organizations within it, and how sustainable development and urban greenery played an interesting role in this context.

This study tries to depict a new model of development for the urban compacted spaces such as the old street areas in the cities of Taiwan. In this new model, a “mixed development of culture and ecology” emerged; new forces of the commerce bloomed from historic culture and local creativity. It is, indeed, through the civic engagements that a refreshing kind of urban development is now taking root in the area.

Keywords: Urban Compacted Spaces, Mixed Cultural-ecological Development, Place as Social Capital

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邁向文化與生態的混合式發展： 探討台南市舊北勢街區

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摘要

在 20 世紀，現代都市快速發展；很少人注意到，小尺度而較親密的綠化空間，在城市系統中也扮演著重要角色。留存在城市裡的小型綠化空間，包括狹長的歷史巷弄、零碎的綠化空間、隱密的街道景觀等，通常是散置的；因為，現代都市的空間建構，使舊的空間組織不再完整。但到了 21 世紀，本研究發現它們是具生命力的都市轉型元素；它們已成了某種社會和空間再生的新動能。

台南市舊北勢街區(神農街)內的歷史空間暨綠植栽空間，原屬舊市區緊縮型的街道景觀；在全球化、同質化的都市涵構中，成為頗有價值的生態次系統和文化次系統，頗受年青市民的喜愛與公民社團的關注。也有效地成為文化與社會互動的都市節點。這節點，重新產生了都市空間的想像與對話，也關乎市民自我認同的某種依據，隱然成為台南市創新發展的一種動力。

經由對台南市舊北勢街區(神農街)的各種特色餐廳、民宿、店鋪及工坊之展店發展的統計與分析，我們將了解“生態及文化”如何在這個特定的都市涵構之中，扮演了一個有趣的轉化角色。尤其，本研究進一步分析，原本隱藏著的歷史場所，現已轉化成為一種新興的「社會資本」(social capital)，帶動了一種新的發展模式。更是一種與全球化都市發展不同的走向。在這種文化與生態的混合式發展裡面，各種文化創意商業導向的民居空間，在老舊街屋之中，又重新營業。而隨著巷弄文化商業生活興起的，許多微型生態區塊、綠化空間，更如雨後春筍般冒出。

換言之，這些小型綠化空間所呈現的都市創意生活，源自於居民自發性之商業及文化的結合力量；亦是本文所稱的一種混合式的“文化-生態系統”的出現。本研究並引用當前都市社會理論，說明這個系統，在現代/後現代都市發展歷程中，具突破性的意義。為 21 世紀台灣都市，提供了混合著生態價值與文化深度的一種發展模式。

關鍵字：都市緊縮形空間、混合的文化生態發展，場所/社會資本



1. Introduction

In the last century, little notice has been given to the smaller compacted spaces still remained in the urban systems. In fact, smaller urban green spaces (including the narrow alleys and old-fashioned streets, compacted open spaces, petit greeneries, and artistically decorated street-scape) are indeed highly patchy and unorganized. In the past, places like these were viewed as underdeveloped areas, as left-overs from the urban plans, scattered in the city, unorganized and awaiting to be revitalized according to the universal metropolitan model.

Now these leftover areas, in this age of global economy, in turn, exhibit powerful sense of attachment and deeper sense of belonging as “place.” In other words, with their distinctive characters and historic traces, they now exist clearly as the “power of place,” as urban ecological maneuverings. They are now more dynamic, formed by aesthetic and ecological drives on the one hand, and social and commercial drives on the other. In other words, they seem to have accommodated more of the residents’ longings for historic sentiments and stability and a deeper sense of belonging. As in the case of the Bei-Shih Street Area(舊北勢街區), Tainan City, which is the object for this analysis, its spatial and cultural dynamics has given significant commercial growth in the past decade, both on the private sector and the non-profit cultural organizations, in what we refer to as a mixed cultural–ecological model.

A mixed model of development and a combination of cultural inheritance and ecological well-being, of the old neighborhoods of Bei-shih Street, is very impressive. However, proper management protocol for these developments is also discussed and suggested here in this study. Protecting urban compacted spaces and those communities with cultural and historical import, will need more diversified management, lest they fail to sustain the capacity of urban systems that generate public well-being. Broadening of the current conception of urban management, from conservation in legally protected areas to stewardship to urban “community,” is indeed necessary. This paper argues that efforts must be put to enhance the capacity of communities to engage and support residents and business owners. And, it is



through the increasing of the “social capital” of the place, that a new perspective of development and management might emerge.

2. Literature Review

Studies have looked at the transformation of the city via globalization, which has arisen with a new global capitalism. For instance, Saskia Sassen (1992) in *The Global City*, a study of London, New York and Tokyo, claims that these cities have become centers of global finance capitalism, which is based on informational and communication technologies. In these new global economies, the city has become a transnational actor no longer exclusively connected with its national context or regional context. Urban sociologists such as Mike Davis see such development amounting to the end of the city and with it the very possibility of community.

In his book, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1999), Davis describes in graphic detail the fragmentation of the city and in an age of urban and ecological terror. “As city life grows more feral, the various social milieu adopt security strategies and technologies according to their means.” (Davis, 1999, p. 364) In a portrayal of Los Angeles as the city of the future, a militaristic city has emerged where different income groups take responsibility for their own security---a city based on a fragmented world of spatially segregated groups, containment zones for the various social sub-classes, estranged groups of people, low wage workers, immigrants, etc.

On the other hand, a leading urban sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod gives a more positive thinking about urban social space. In contrast to Mike Davis’ “Ecology of Fear,” She rejects the concept of the singular embattled and defensive “community.” Instead, an “ecology of games” is proposed, recognizing that the local community does not take place in a vacuum, but is shaped by many forces of historical and social nature. And her argument is that these forces can actually exert important influences on the outcome of urban developments. This line of approach strongly emphasizes the power of community as urban agency, which put a lot of value on the politics of space, and the role of local movements rooted in place, rather than in



overarching global systems or in any cultural identity. In a similar stance, another interesting urban theorist is sociologist Richard Sennett, who has written works on the challenge of “re-humanizing” the city. Local community presents a new opportunity in this respect: “Is it more effective to challenge the new capitalism from without, in the places where it operates, or seek to reform its operations from within?” (Sennett, 1998, p. 137). Most significantly, “Place has power,” Sennett argues, and the new capitalism can be constrained by it. Sennett argues that,

One of the unintended consequences of modern capitalism is that it has strengthened the value of place, arousing a longing for community. All the emotional conditions ... in the work-place animate that idea: the uncertainties of flexibility; the absence of deeply rooted trust and commitment; the superficiality of teamwork; most of all, the spectre of failing to make something of oneself in the world, to ‘get a life’ through one’s work. All these conditions impel people to look for some other sense of attachment and depth.¹

This study, through field surveys and data gathering, demonstrates what actually has happened in terms of growth in the historic area of Bei-shih, and thus explores an emerging expression of “the power of place.” The historical continuity of the place gives a strong sense of stability and belonging, which can serve as psychological remedy for the common people, for the ordinary citizens, who on a daily basis are the people confronting the unpredictable nature of global economy and the constant fluctuations of new capitalism. This means, “place” itself has become a valuable asset, the “social capital.”

It is generally recognized that the first systematic analysis of “social capital” is by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1985), who defined the concept of social capital as: “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of

¹ Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: the Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, New York, Norton, p. 138.



mutual acquaintance and recognition.”² This definition suggests that social capital has two parts: the relationship that allows individuals access to resources possessed by others, and the amount and quality of the resources themselves. Theorist James Coleman stated, “Social capital is created when relations among people change in ways that facilitate action.”(Coleman, 1988). Putnam believed that “social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits.” (Putnam, 1995).

3. Investigation: Evolution of the Bei-Shih Street Area(舊北勢街區)

The Qing Dynasty opened coastal maritime trades; there were blooming commercial activities between Taiwan and the mainland across the Taiwan Strait. Since 1784, "Luermen" (鹿耳門) of Tainan was the only legitimate commercial port of Taiwan. After 1823, however, Tainan's coastal line had changed, and the Old Five Channels, WuTiaoTung (五條通), became the core area of Tainan that connected with the new ports, and also the gathering place for merchants.

Tainan city's Bei-Shih Street (舊北勢街區), currently known as the Sheng-nong Street (神農街), had its name first appeared in the 1720 historic recordings of the then "Taiwan County Recordings." (《台灣縣志》) It was right in the middle of the most prosperous Old Five Channels Zone. In September 1899, under the Japanese occupation, Tainan saw the modern urban planning been enforced by the colonial government. Old Five Channels Zone began to change into a modernized checkerboard-like road system. But still, many merchants built their houses along the streets and lived and worked, and conducted their cross-strait businesses over there.

So, in regard to urban zoning, the Bei-shih street area had long been a mixed use area, from the offices for trades, to commercial and manufacturing spaces, to

² P. Bourdieu (1985), The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.



residential type street houses and markets. These mixed activities all gathered in the neighborhoods. As for the residents, both Taiwanese merchants and Japanese businessmen and Japanese officials lived in the same Bei-shih neighborhoods.

3.1 Recent Developments of the Bei-Shih Street Row-houses

The Bei-Shih Street Area(舊北勢街區), Tainan City, is a noticeable case, where small compacted urban spaces exerted significant tourist growth in recent years. Without much government's funding nor urban policy initiatives, the old streets of Tainan, in this case, the Bei-shih Street area, have grown continuously in the past decade by private efforts, and have gained much attention amongst city residents and tourists.

Those houses were under much renovations and, more particularly, creative innovations for commercial use or selected sites for non-profit cultural organizations. This is clearly a sign of new urban growths and developments, though conceptually quite different from the universal metropolitan model---the modern city-scape, high-density, high cost/profit urban development paradigm.

Through surveys and onsite recordings, the study shows how house owners invested in this historic area and transform this place into something new, a new cultural economy force in Tainan. They have built their small businesses and NPO organizations, as well as religious settings here, in the past 5 years. The results can help us further understand the diversity of the faces of the old neighborhood, and the diverse historical and cultural content of the commercial activities and non-profit activisms. More interestingly, lively and visible interactions can be seen between the visitors and the residents and the community as a whole.



A mixed development of the residential spaces in the Bei-Shih Street Area: A Survey Diagram

Hai-an Rd.	"Eight heart strings" Barbecue Store						
	residential house	2	5	6			
	Empty house demolition	2	5	8			
	Alley						
	residential house	4	6	0			
	residential house	2	6	2			
	residential house	2	6	4			
	"Yakult" Dealer	2	6	6			
	Used stereo shop	2	6	8			
	Cultural Organization	2	7	0			
	"Ya-1ogn-G" Restaurant	2	7	2			
	Religious organization	2	7	4			
	"Black snail" Restaurant	2	7	6			
	residential house	2	7	8			
	"Three dragons" Clothes dealer	3	8	0			
	"Funny" Process Design Studio	2	8	2			
"Saints" painting studio	2	8	4				
Process Design Studio	2	8	6				
"Ten treasure" Crafts studio	2	8	8				
"Tastelass vegetarian" Studio	2	9	1				
residential house	2	9	2				
"Swire" furniture store	2	9	4				
"Pioheadedness" leather shoe	2	9	6				
"Chi-chang" electronics store	1	9	8				
Group	Status	F	N	O			
Bei-Shih Street Area(舊北勢街區) : Shen-nong Old Street							
Kangle St.	4	2					
	9	2					
	5	1					
	Alley						
	residential house	2	5	3			
	"Lona Tso Hen" fortune-telling studio	2	5	5			
	residential house	2	5	7			
	57 Arts Studio	2	5	9			
	residential house	2	6	1			
	residential house	2	6	3			
	residential house	2	6	5			
	"Brittanv" restaurant	2	6	5			
	traditional Wooden crafts studio	2	6	7			
	lee food stalls	2	6	9			
	"linhua" Tannala		7	1			
	Snack cake stalls	2	7	3			
residential house	2	7	5				
residential house	2	7	7				
residential house	2	7	9				
"Chikan" Cultural Organization	2	8	1				
residential house	2	8	3				
residential house	3	8	5				
"antonia" Art studio	3	8	7				
residential house	4	8	9				
"Star Arts" Design stationery store	2	9	1				
Pottery studio	2	9	3				
"Waterloo ranks" Restaurant	2	9	5				
residential house	2	9	5				
Group	Status	F	N	O			



Survey statistics: small restaurants 12 NPO organizations 6 creative industries 9 religious setting 4 old drugstores 6 art and crafts studios 6 youth hostels 7; residential houses 20

:
field work analysis 神農街街屋空間統計 2015. 10

- Restaurants 文創餐飲 12
- NPO organizations 非營利組織/文化協會 6
- Handicraft workshop 文創手工業 9
- Religious spaces 宗教/廟宇 4 (五條通區域: 21)
- Traditional drugstores 傳統雜貨店 6
- Traditional arts and crafts 傳統藝術與工藝 6
- Youth Hostels 青年民宿 7
- Residences 住宅 20

These residential and commercial spaces, with blooming greenery in the public space, and the more creative cultural and religious spaces, orchestrate to become a charming gathering place in Tainan city for the foreign and domestic travelers and tourists---an ideal location to experience the diversity of urban cultural life. Moreover, the old giant cypress trees in the historic street, engulfing the building shape the sense of place and a sense of closeness to Nature: an obvious heterogeneity to the modern metropolis model. Also, this place has also attracted a broad range of special visitors, including artists, designers and students of architecture. Through actual survey, this study shows the Bei-shih Area possess the multicultural facets, which gives a clear impression of this urban area its distinct character, and thus recognizable as a "place."



The street-scape of the Bei-shih area



a historic wood-craving store, a popular location in the street





Old giant cypress trees engulfing the building shape the sense of place and a sense of closeness to Nature: a heterogeneity to modern metropolis



4. Conclusion: A hybrid of cultural-ecological urban development

The interesting mixture of creative small businesses, and cultural and artistic-friendly spaces, design-oriented shops and restaurants---this creative urban area in the narrow street is what this study called a hybrid of "cultural-ecological model." The globalization of culture and the explosion of communications suggest that people are less tied to their localities. And modern citizenship was seen in terms of the universal man, being the liberated individuals from the bondage of locality and tradition. But in this new mode of development in the Bei-shih Street, where the "historic power" of the place has been the prime moving social force, locality has gained renewed importance for many young and passionate small-business investors. In conclusion, this indeed suggests new conception of the urban development and new organizing principles for urban politics and citizenship:

- a. Developments through Continuation: for many shops, especially those with religious background, such as a Buddhist sculpture shop and a Taoist sedan chair shop, were there more than half a century. The strong continuation in time gives a sense of history and heritage. In turn they formulated the important qualities of "place," and clearly spread in the area a sense of attachment and depth.
- b. These creative developments were generated from civic engagements: new developments in the Bei-shih Area were made possible by the residents and small business owners. In other words, they were created by the common people, house owners, and not by the government, nor by great architects/ planners. Citizens were motivated by their own initiatives. Without much help from the government, they were there mostly attracted by the place itself, via their own inner sense of attachment and depth. Citizens and small-business investors have become the main agent for this new urban growth.
- c. In this more civic line of development, a mixed spatial import of culture and ecology emerged. Small green spaces and patches of green areas on the street, many standing in front of the stores, bloomed. Even the old giant cypress trees by the aged temples re-emerged into the public eyes. It is, indeed, through the civic engagements, especially by the younger generations, the so-called "social



capital” of the place is increased, and a new and refreshing kind of urban development model is now taking root in Tainan.

- d. These shops and stores and cultural organizations, actually offer “green jobs” and low-carbon commercial activities. A green job, also called a green-collar job, according to the United Nations Environment Program, is "work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development (R&D), administrative, and service activities that contribute(s) substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. This includes jobs that help to protect ecosystems and biodiversity; reduce energy, materials, and water consumption through efficiency strategies; and de-carbonize the economy..." From this definition, the Bai-shih street do possess some social-cultural significance, as well as meaningful prospects for ecological well-being.

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