Re-searching for the Dragon Landscape: A case study of re-connecting Hakka cultural landscape with the new comers in the Taoyuan metropolis, Taiwan

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Abstract

Along with the investigation of the “dragon landscape,” the paper focuses on reconnecting and labeling Hakka cultural landscape in the central business district of Longtan, Taoyuan. Longtan is a nameless peri-urban town ignored by the public. Although it is adjacent to the gate of Taiwan, Taipei/Taoyuan International Airport (TPE), travelers at home and abroad have never paid attention to the Hakka cultural landscape they pass by. Even the locals are not sure how to bring their local culture to the new comers through spatial planning and cultural representation. Based on action planning method and town planning strategies, the paper tries to “re-search the dragon landscape” from the angle of multiculturalism.

Keywords: Dragon landscape; Hakka cultural

1. Initiating dragon landscape action for the placeless Longtan

Place and placelessness (Relph 1976) has been a classical dilemma for developments and transformations of small towns and peri-urban areas since the global scale urbanization phenomena taking place in the 1960s. Hayden (1997) claims that historical town and village spaces always connect people's lives and livelihoods to the landscape as it changes over time. Globalization has indeed accelerated the

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placeless cities and towns around the world. Not only small rural towns have been struggling for their humble identities. Historical communities and urban villages within cosmopolitans, like New York, Tokyo, or Beijing, have also been evaded by world capitals and confronting serious identity battles. Paying tribute to Jane Jacob’s (1961) “The life and death of great American city,” Zukin (2010) argues that the authenticity of urban villages in New York city have been rapidly and pervasively damaged by expensive global chain stores and elite shops. Local places and local identities have been gone with the wind.

Following this line of thinking, this paper applies an action planning method to a peri-urban town, Longtan, adjacent to the Taipei/Taoyuan International Airport (TPE) in northern Taiwan. The action planning method is named as “re-searching dragon landscape” (henceforth dragon action).

This paper intends to use the old quarters of Longtan in Taoyuan City as a case study to explore how a city invents new possibilities to make itself recognized and contextualized amidst the combination of globalization and local culture. Taoyuan is adjacent to Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. Taoyuan’s existent city structure has clearly been modernized and industrialized. Moreover, Taiwan’s international airport is also located in Taoyuan (Fig. 1). In 2013, when Taoyuan is officially upgraded to a municipality, its traffic and public construction will need to be increased as well: it will veritably become a metropolis. Under these conditions, how will the old quarter of Longtan in southern Taoyuan cope with such change? Longtan is a small Hakka tourist town in northern Taiwan. With its superior geography, convenient traffic network and a high tech science park, Longtan has become Taoyuan’s window for technology (Fig. 2). However, in spite of the rapid development of Longtan, the progress and orientation of development in the old quarters have been very inconsistent. Conflicts have appeared between local governments, elected representatives, and the public for their differences of opinions on local development. In fact, one of the reasons that caused the decline of the old quarters of Longtan is the transformation of Longtan Pond. Although Longtan Pond has successfully attracted tourists after it was transformed into a leisure spot, tourists only stay at the pond and do not venture into the old quarters, and consequently do not interact with the local culture. The newly paved road, moreover, has covered up the traditional feel of the area. In short, external effort cannot replace the valuable resources of the old quarter but rather poses a threat to the area’s life, culture and economy.

Old quarters often encounter conflicts and contradictions with the advance of time. Preservation and revitalization of the cultural landscape, however, can be a great opportunity for old quarters. I had the opportunity to participate in a landscape construction and business circle project for the old quarters of Longtan, proposing an innovative concept on old quarter redevelopment. This was a project that connected the cultural landscape of the old area, constructed local images through landscape narratives and the identification of the cultural landscape, and aroused local memory and identity to present a complete representation of Hakka culture for people to see. Through this case study, it is possible to use the cultural landscape as a condition to utilize physical space and support the redevelopment of the old quarters.

In light of the aforementioned situation, based on the results of the project, the paper plans to investigate how “dragon landscape” connects Hakka history and local culture in the old quarter area in terms of three action planning methods (the dragon actions): “memorizing dragon landscape,” “touring dragon landscape,” and “tasting dragon landscape.”

“Landscape” is the concrete manifestation of the living state of human beings on earth. It explains people’s relationship with nature as well as expresses the content of a culture. In 1925, Carl Sauer defined cultural landscape that “[it] is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area the medium, and the cultural landscape the result.” Sauer maintained that culture is not created by nature. On the contrary, it is culture and nature that create in a concerted effort the context of social life. As for landscape, it is the clearest expression of culture (Sauer, 1925). In the 1950s, John B.
Jackson began to focus on the living landscape formed in our daily lives, such as streets, freeways, business districts, residential areas, and yards. By reading these landscapes, he believed that people may have a deeper understanding of their past history and society nowadays. He was also convinced that landscapes could connect life experiences and strengthen local identities. Jackson was concerned about landscapes appearing in everyday life as much as Sauer had been. He laid his eyes on those visible but easily overlooked landscapes, teaching people how to read this kind of everyday landscapes. In terms of the “dragon landscape” brought up in this paper, it is directly derived a Chinese term, dragon vein. It is an important concept in Chinese fengshui, which is used to represent the direction, movement, transition, and change of a mountain range or a river. One may use the information acquired to infer the quality and the symbolic meaning of a location. Literally, “dragon vein” means dragon’s long and continuous vein. Therefore, things that are long and continuous can be called dragon veins. In other words, the dragon vein may symbolize long and continuous objects. In this paper, the definition of dragon landscape, the landscape indicates the signification of dragon vein, runs through the boundaries between time, space, and human activities in a place, involving the cultural trajectories in folk religion, daily lives and business industries. The purpose of searching for “dragon landscape,” the dragon actions, is to identify and connect those trajectories developed and accumulated in local landscapes. It is a dynamic progress to recognize local culture.

According to the results of the project, the paper tries to define cultural landscape in the old quarter area of Longtan with the following three dragon actions:

First, memorizing dragon landscape. The community constructs “dragon landscape” to connect local memories and strengthen local identities through the context of history and traditional culture. The community and the locals unveiled the secret of the “dragon landscape,” highlighting the necessary existence of the old quarter area centering on “Longyuan Temple” in the course of urbanization.

Second, touring dragon landscape. The activity of “touring, visiting and sightseeing” linked the “dragon landscape” through a variety of spatial experiences. Tourists were connected with the local culture through shopping and leisure. Local shops, on the other hand, also learned how to pass down their wisdom accumulated in those traditional industries by participating in the event of “searching for the dragon landscape,” an experiential activity for people to visit feature shops.

Third, tasting dragon landscape. A tour of “tasting” was organized by a group of professionals for the purpose of linking the “dragon landscape” with food. A “Banquet of Wellness Diet” was held at the core of the old quarter area. It united local shops and the whole community with food, inviting people to “taste” the dragon landscape.

Lastly, a “five-sense plan” is proposed in the conclusion. Such an atypical urban planning focused on cultural landscape may very well offer a specific orientation for those nameless towns in the Pan Pacific like Longtan.
2. Memorizing dragon landscape – dragon action 1

This section describes how the community has constructed the “dragon landscape” from the context of history and traditional culture. The aim is to use the dragon landscape as a “spiritual axis” to link together the cultural landscape of Longtan’s old quarter, while approaching the preservation and re-development of this cultural landscape in terms of a unitary Hakka “village.” Longtan developed as a distinctively Hakka community after Hakka farmers settled here during the Qing Dynasty. These Hakka farmers excavated a large reservoir (Longtan Pond) (Fig. 3) to provide irrigation for the surrounding settlements; this was the first stage in Longtan’s development. Subsequently, a network of irrigation channels,
irrigation ponds and roads was constructed. Longyuan Temple became the religious center of Longtan township, and the built-up area developed in the vicinity of the Temple (Fig. 4). The cultural assets that have been preserved in the old quarter down to the present day include Longyuan Temple, Longyuan Road, a number of historic buildings dating from the era of Japanese colonial rule (including Wu-de Hall and a dormitory building complex), Bogong Temple (located at the end of an irrigation channel on Shangxia Street), and the Longtan cultural landscape as a whole. These elements combine to create a rich, comprehensive Hakka living environment (Fig. 5). The center of religious worship for people in Longtan is the Longyuan Temple. Built 250 years ago, it was the first area to be developed in Longtan. The temple was built to worship Emperor Shennong. Legend has it that Shennong tasted countless herbs and produced hundreds of medicines. Therefore, Shennong became known as the god of medicine and agriculture. In the past, the Hakka people in Longtan mostly worked in agriculture, so Longyuan Temple became the most important center of worship for the local farmers. As the center of Hakka belief as well as an important base of Hakka culture, a lot of traditional Hakka activities are held here, making Longyuan Temple the core of local cultural events. Not only does it connect and maintain cultural consciousness of the Hakka people, but it also brings an innovative cultural atmosphere for people in Longtan (Fig. 6~7).

Although Longtan Pond has successfully attracted tourists after it was transformed into a leisure spot, tourists only stay at the pond. People in Longtan expected that the transformation could boost the economy of the old quarter area; however, the newly paved road caused the originally close relationship between Longtan Pond and the old downtown to come apart. Moreover, it brutally chopped off the traditional axis constructed by the irrigation ditch (Longtan Pond), the old streets and the temple (Longyuan Temple). Due to these factors stated above, local organizations that have been promoting the development of the old quarters decided to combine the space with historical legends. By connecting different topics, it is possible to associate them and construct a discourse about “dragon landscape”: from the yellow dragon of “Longtan Pond” and the hundred-year-old spirit of the old street, “Longyuan Road,” to the core of the old downtown, “Longyuan Temple” (Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, National Taiwan University, 2013). A historical dimension that helps people understand local imaginaries can then be derived from the “dragon landscape.” It connects the past, the present and the future, strengthening people’s memory to the old quarters and their local identity. It, moreover, highlights the necessary existence of the old quarter area centering on “Longyuan Temple” in the course of urbanization. “Dragon landscape” constructs a real but imaginary geography. Such real but fictitious cultural landscape strengthens the local imagery of the old quarters, inspiring people to imagine another lifestyle within the old quarters and to explore the possibility of its revitalization through creative thought. When the area has created its own discourse on the dragon landscape, the next step is to attract tourists to come visit the old quarters, helping them connect with the local culture.

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1 Longtan still possesses a rich cultural landscape. Many writers and musicians have derived inspiration from Longtan’s unique scenery. One of the best-known examples is the great Hakka author Jong Jaw-jeng, many of whose stories are set in Longtan. As a result, Longtan has come to be seen as one of the birthplaces of the literary renaissance that occurred in Taiwan during the period after the end of the Second World War (Department of Landscape Architecture, Chung Yuan Christian University, 2012).
3. Touring dragon landscape –dragon action 2

This section outlines the way in which a group of businesses located in Longtan have explored new opportunities for development within the process of transformation that is affecting Longtan’s business district. By developing an experiential itinerary involving visits to distinctive local shops, based around the concept of “Searching for the Dragon Landscape,” tourist visitors are encouraged to form linkages with local culture. In the past, Longyuan Temple and Longyuan Road constituted the commercial center of the Longtan district, serving as a distribution center for local goods, and as an entrepot for goods shipped to the area from other parts of the country. Rows of traditional-style Hakka shop-houses can still be seen in the historic business district. The shops are mostly long-established sole proprietorships with a
great deal of local character, including traditional hardware stores, dry goods stores, fabric stores, inexpensive restaurants serving traditional Hakka cuisine, stores selling cooking oil, etc. This area also features the largest traditional wet market in the whole of Longtan Township. However, as a result of changes in the wider business environment, much of the consumption that takes place in the historic business district today is tourism-related, rather than deriving from day-to-day consumption activity by local residents. Many of the stores possess plenty of local character, but are not sufficiently interesting for tourists to encourage them to linger in the historic business district (Fig. 9). Store-owners were anxious to find ways to encourage more tourist visitors to wander through the historic business district. After extensive discussions, a group of experts proposed a strategy that would involve the store-owners forming a “stroll and shop” itinerary for visitors to the district. The idea was that the members of the local tourist guide association would lead visitors to come and explore the more interesting stores within the historic business district. This activity was named “Touring the Dragon Landscape,” the idea being to have groups of visitors led round the top tourist attractions that make up the dragon landscape, leveraging the interplay between reality and imagination to enable visitors to experience the cultural landscape of this historic old quarter with its specialty stores and spectacular temple events, thereby building linkages with local culture. To add spice in this touring and visiting activity, a “dragon map” was also provided. By downloading the map from an app (the integration of consuming behavior and Internet marketing), the old downtown managed to create a journey combining entertainment with culture.

One specialty in this activity was a tour at hundred-year-old shops. Such a tour was not consumption-oriented though. It was, rather, to explore, revitalize and promote old shops and their industrial culture through the interactions between visitors and shop owners. In addition to bringing energy to those old shops, visitors also actively participated in the practice of local culture, savoring directly the beautiful local flavor (Fig. 10–11). This can be illustrated through the following three examples: (1) Tourists can visit the Yuan-chun Traditional Chinese Medicine Pharmacy to learn about traditional “medical divination.” This pharmacy has been in business in Longtan for over 60 years, and is the only Chinese herbal medicine pharmacy in Longtan at which traditional “medical divination” slips have been preserved. The 80-year-old master pharmacist continues to use traditional methods for selecting herbal medicine ingredients and mixing medicines. When visiting the pharmacy, tourists can hear the master pharmacist explain the mysteries of the historic “medical divination” ceremony, while also having a go at using traditional herbal medicine mixing utensils, experiencing for themselves the links between folk religion and traditional crafts (Fig. 11). From the pharmacy owner’s point of view, being involved in this activity helps to preserve the sense of mission that underpinned this aspect of traditional culture. (2) Tourists can also visit the Kuan-Teh Incense Store, to experience traditional incense-making culture. This store has been in business for over thirty years, and is run by a father and son team. The store owner is committed to the making of incense sticks that preserve the correct traditional “feel”; to this end, he has arranged for a master incense-maker to give incense stick making demonstrations outside the store entrance, creating a kind of dynamic “cultural performance” whereby visitors can learn the correct way to offer up incense sticks while also learning about how the sticks are made (Fig. 10). (3) Visitors to the “Do Tea” beverage store can enjoy tea-based drinks made from local ingredients. This store is a model of what

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1 Longyuan Temple is dedicated to the worship of Shennong (the “God of the Five Grains”), who is also the god of herbal medicine. In the past, a “medical divination” ceremony was held in the Temple, whereby worshippers who had sought Shennong’s assistance for a medical problem could obtain a “sacred prescription” through divination; they would then take the sacred prescription to the Yuan-chun Pharmacy to have the prescription filled for them; the herbalist running the Pharmacy would also explain to them what the prescription meant. According to tradition, worshippers were not allowed to question the correctness of the diagnosis; they had to accept Shennong’s decision. In modern times, the “medical divination” ceremony is prohibited by law; however, Longyuan Temple still provides free Chinese herbal medicine clinics, in a continuation of Shennong’s charitable ethos.
can be achieved by enterprising young locals who move back to the Longtan area to start their own business after having spent time studying or working in other parts of the country. The owner of the “Do Tea” store insists on using locally-grown tea leaves. He is personally involved in the planning of every stage from tea bush planting through tea leaf processing to tea-based beverage production, and is constantly working to develop innovative new products. This young entrepreneur explains that he hopes to use the experience of tasting good-quality tea and seeing how it is made to pass on awareness of traditional “health food” culture to the younger generation, while playing a part in the revitalization of the old business district (Fig. 12). This itinerary thus helps visiting tourists to experience a personal linkage with Hakka culture; at the same time, this activity also represents a kind of dynamic preservation activity for the local cultural landscape, based on the sharing and re-activation of traditional cultural resources. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that dragon landscape mends the split between modern city life and a traditional lifestyle. It mends the spatial gap and reconnects the organic relationship of the local landscape. The purpose of connecting the old area with the cultural landscape is not just for planning a means for tourism, but more importantly, for preserving cultural objects, historical settings, and the cultural landscape.

Fig. 8. Image of Longyuan Road during Japanese colonial period

Fig. 9. The existing old arcade on Longyuan Road

Fig. 10. Through the activity of “searching for dragon vein,” tourists entered into the old area and directly interacted with and experienced local culture
4. Tasting dragon landscape – dragon action 3

This section outlines a process of “tasting” the Dragon Landscape that has been carefully planned by experts in relevant fields, with the aim of integrating traditional beliefs regarding healthy foods and the secrets of longevity into tourist visitors’ gastronomic experience. This project involves restaurant owners exploring and developing new “health food” materials that reflect traditional techniques for achieving longevity, and which provide tourist visitors with an opportunity to make connections with local culture through the eating experience. This activity has as its starting point the Longyuan Temple, dedicated to the worship of Shennong (the “God of the Five Grains”), people worship Emperor Shennong at Longyuan Temple. He looks after the body and soul of the villagers. The folk god’s spirit of saving people with the herbs he had tasted can be identified with the wellness state of life pursued by people nowadays. The Chinese medicine pharmacy, Chinese herb shop, organic tea shop and shops emphasizing the importance of fresh and local ingredients around the business district have long situated themselves in the context of a wellness culture. Having an agricultural background, people of Longtan also care about the food they produce. As a result of such a phenomenon, the community, shop owners and a group of professionals decided to locate the position of this business district as an orthodox wellness diet zone in Taiwan, and the purpose of doing so is to link the “dragon landscape” with food. A “Banquet of Wellness Diet” was held in the Temple courtyard that constitutes the heart of the old quarter. All the popular dishes around the old quarters are gathered here so that visitors may have direct contact with the local wellness culture through “food.” In addition, the shops also adhered to local identity in the process of producing and making their food. They have fostered an action called “from the place of production to the dining table,” which is about making the local produce with local food ingredients. One of the most innovative parts in this action is inviting people to experience the “dragon landscape” with their sense of taste. What is more, it was also because the activity was a bottom-up action that mobilized everyone in the whole community that it became so successful. (Fig. 13-14)

The following examples embody an exposition of the essence of traditional longevity-oriented health foods and practices through painstaking attention to selection of materials, cooking methods and health

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*Adjacent to Longtan old quarter area, Gaoyuan Community, seeing an organic and ecological village as its future blueprint, has actively promoted growing organic fruit and vegetables. Their purpose is identical with the orientation of the action plan: building a wellness leisure industry. With the introduction of the professionals, Gaoyuan Community provides with fresh pumpkins for the bakeries of the business district to develop a distinctive local wellness dish: “pumpkin pie.”*
benefits on the part of restaurant owners: (1) The “Hakka Stuffed Dumplings” restaurant, hidden away in a secluded location within Longtan’s old quarter, is run by an 80-year-old lady who insists on making stuffed dumplings by hand using the traditional method. Her recipe, which has remained unchanged for half a century, preserves the authentic, delicious flavor of traditional Hakka cuisine. (2) Chen Hsun Health Food Store offers mushroom-based dishes that are reputed to help protect against cancer and strengthen the immune system; only natural ingredients are used. (3) Tung-Shin Fresh Oysters provides consumers with delicious, fresh food, using oysters that are shipped up fresh from the oyster-beds for consumption on the same day. (4) The Ching-Tsao Restaurant is located in the midst of Longtan’s “Northern and Southern Dry Goods Stores,” enabling the restaurant to benefit from access to a wide range of ingredients. This Restaurant’s herbal teas have a long history. This activity also helps to link the participating businesses with the areas outside the old quarter, through a “From the Production Location to the Restaurant Table” business matching process (Fig. 15).** This collaborative approach lies behind the creation of a special variety of pumpkin pie, which represents a new embodiment of Longtan’s health food culture (Fig. 16). The innovative aspect of these initiatives is the idea of enabling visitors to experience the dragon landscape through their taste-buds. At the same time, this represents another example of effective “bottom-up” mobilization of the local community. From the point of view of local business-owners, the real significance of this activity lies in the fact that is more than just a business transaction; it represents the continuation and realization of Hakka gastronomic culture.

Fig.13 – 14. This “Health Food Banquet” held in the Temple courtyard uses a traditional Chinese outdoor banquet model, bringing together a range of different health-themed local foods, and also bringing together local business owners, community residents, local government officials, and tourist visitors to participate in the activity.

** Over the past few years, GaoYuan community, which is located near the old quarter of Longtan, has followed a development roadmap based on developing the community as an “organic eco-community,” actively promoting the cultivation of vegetables and fruit using organic agriculture methods. There is thus a clear commonality between the development strategy adopted by GaoYuan community and the emphasis on health food and leisure that underpins the action plan for Longtan’s development. With experts playing the role of intermediary between the communities, arrangements have been made for GaoYuan community to provide fresh pumpkins that bakeries located within the Longtan historic business district can use to develop new products. Working together, they have succeeded in developing a new, healthy variety of pumpkin pie that is unique to Longtan.
5. Conclusion: A five-sense plan

Rapid urban development is often in conflict with the value of cultural preservation. When city landscape changes over the course of urban development in an accelerated speed, the policies driven by the purpose of land development also overturns the city’s original look. When some dominant power is portraying a new image of a city through land development, expansion, construction and urban renewal, technocrats are still limited their views on the imagination of modernism without any respect to local ecology and culture. Construction and damage thus exist simultaneously. The local lifestyle, culture, and history are nowhere to be seen after urban transformation. What has been created is the so-called placeless landscape, which is especially evident in the older quarters of a city. Over the course of modernization, a city’s economic activity gradually turns toward the newly developed area after urban planning, redistricting, land acquisition, and other land development measures, resulting in the decline of the old quarter (Department of Landscape Architecture, Chung Yuan Catholic University, 2012). These modernization plans ignore the significance of a city’s historic quarters, tearing down the sense of continuity between space and time, as well as the cultural self-evidence—the two most important elements in urban development (Wu, Kang-li; Kuo, Hsing-ping; and Chao, Yu-chan, 2007).

Cities around the world have begun to promote the revitalization of the old quarters, rethinking the meaning of re-development and trying to improve the environment appropriately for the purpose of successfully bringing these quarters into the development of a modern city. Most old quarters were once the city center during the early stages of development. They are the roots of a city, and their decline may have an impact on the development of the entire city. Furthermore, whether the focus is on ethnic context, local industry, religious belief or cultural preservation, old quarters are always the environmental base of humanistic resources, geography, and nature that preserves many historical memories and cultural context as well as maintains an organic relationship with the community (Department of Landscape Architecture, Chung Yuan Catholic University, 2012).

Longtan is a small, nameless peri-urban town. Like all the other cities in the world, it also faces the same challenge: the binary opposition between preservation and re-development under the trend of globalization. Professionals need to look for new approaches inside an old city structure to connect local history, culture and lifestyle in order to bring about new city imagery. The “dragon actions” described in the paper are different from ordinary urban plans. Overall, it is a “five-sense plan” based on the background of cultural landscape. The plan can be seen as being made up of five senses, the body and
senses of sight, smell, hearing and taste. It contains three specific actions: memorizing dragon landscape, touring dragon landscape and tasting dragon landscape. After conducting a series of activities, the three dragon actions, the locals were able to come up with their own definition of the cultural landscape in the old quarters of Longtan, strengthening their local identity and local memory. Over the course of these bottom-up activities, each participant defined, employed and reconstructed the “dragon landscape” in his/her own way. The “dragon landscape” can be seen as a spiritual principle, imperceptibly controlling the development of the old quarters. Faced with the challenge of the Taoyuan metropolis, Longtan’s “dragon landscape” reminds the local government, professionals and the community that random development and damage of the old quarters should not be allowed. The “five-sense plan” proposed in the paper, an atypical urban planning focused on cultural landscape, may very well offer a specific orientation for those nameless towns in the Pan Pacific like Longtan.

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