

Re-envisioning Taipei's urban identity through a typology of its cultural landscapes

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Abstract

The urban identity of a city may be perceivable from its architectural image and physical patterns, which are embedded in a cultural milieu imbued with the habitual and ritual of grassroots practices, submissions and resistances of urban governance, and layers of historical legacies. Yet the identity of the city is often dynamic and contested, while its manifestation elusive and variegated. Particularly for a city that has undergone different phases of immigration, colonial domination, industrialization, synoecism, and democratization, such as Taipei, the bona-fide characteristics of the city may be veiled behind its chaotic appearances, though its urban identity can be re-envisioned from a comprehensive survey of the city's cultural landscapes.

Cultural landscape is regarded as a type of cultural heritage, following the norm of the World Heritage recognition; but it can also imply a wider spectrum of culture as well as landscape to subsume urban landscapes beyond the heritage framework. To avoid either an overly generic perspective on cultural landscape or a specific suggestion of cultural heritage conservation, a typological method is employed to further look into Taipei's cultural landscapes as agents of identity building. Ten 'types' of cultural landscapes are identified to interpret Taipei's landscapes as: 1) manipulated natural environment, 2) juxtaposition of spatial layers and historical conjunctures, 3) semiotic system of the local, 4) spatial manifestation of heterogeneity and diversity, 5) immigrant enclaves and community identity, 6) vicissitude of productive industries, 7) performances and variations of cultural institutions, 8) dialectics between the obtrusive and the hidden, 9) loci of grassroots autonomy and resistance, 10) poetics of chaos and place ballet of the lifeworld. Various case studies are then categorized and analyzed according to the modes of inquiry and theoretical concerns of individual types. It is argued that the overlay of the typological landscapes is conducive to the emergence of Taipei's urban identity.