

*Colleagues:*

*This paper provides the background for my presentation on “Traces of Ethnic Tension in Public Space: Taipei New Park.” The presentation will function as an illustration of ideas presented here.*

## **READING TAIPEI: CULTURAL TRACES IN A CITY SCAPE**

Joseph R. Allen

The development of Taipei City, as reflected in its structure and architecture, provides us with a map that not only plots Taiwan's emergence into the twentieth century, but also provides insights into the modernization of East Asia, including the relationship between China, Japan, and Taiwan. Especially critical to this understanding are the transition periods 1887-1925 and 1945-1975, during which Taipei moved quickly from one sphere of cultural influence to another. Since the methodology of this essay is principally structural semiotics, with which I investigate the built space of Taipei as part of different cultural codes, I have called this a “reading” of Taipei.

Taipei is a city unique in East Asia, if not the world. That uniqueness results directly from the way it has been caught in different waves of cultural influence, each of which has left its mark on the city: from late imperial Chinese rule, through early modernization with a Japanese colonizing filter, to the forced, rapid internationalization with an American emphasis, and most recently into a phase of cosmopolitanism that melds global and local cultures. In some places those marks were erased by subsequent changes, but more often than not the erasure was not complete and in many places the marks stand clearly as part of a pastiche of cultural traces. That pastiche of culture is found in many aspects of contemporary Taiwan society; Taipei City landscape is just one of its most concrete manifestations.

I am interested in the design of the city and its relationship to other city designs in East Asia, particularly capital cities in China. I want to argue that Taipei city shares certain essential characteristics with other Chinese cities, but Taiwan's position in the history of East Asia forces those characteristics into a special reconfiguration: special not only to China, but also to Taiwan.

One way to isolate the special character of Taipei City is to view the chronological changes of certain urban and suburban structures and to consider the legacy of those changes in the contemporary city landscape. Here I will touch on five sites/processes. 1) The placement of the city wall in relation to the settlement patterns in the Taipei basin during late imperial China, comparing that with traditional Chinese city planning. 2) The razing of the city wall by the Japanese and how that reflects earlier patterns of modernization in Tokyo and foreshadows twentieth century changes in urban China. 3) The infilling of the intramural space as part of Japanese colonization, including how that space has been adopted and adapted in subsequent periods. 4) The occupation and replacement of Japanese residential housing by the 1950 Chinese immigrant population and the subsequent sinicization of city streets. 5) The transformation of the city gates from functional passages to cultural monuments, including the use of those monuments for the display of political power.

#### Chinese Models

The standard models for city types in China will allow us a simple comparative perspective to begin discussing Taipei. Three basic city designs are suggested by F. W. Mote (107) in his discussion of Nanjing:

1. The planned administrative city, with a grid of streets surrounding a governmental center, all enveloped in a wall (or series of walls) more or less square in shape. This is the model for capital cities like Beijing and Tang dynasty Chang'an, of which Du Fu wrote in 766, "Yes indeed, Chang'an looks like a chess board" (1489). The idealization of this design is first seen in the *Zhou li* (presumably a Han dynasty text).

2. The second city type is the antithesis of the administrative center; it is the market town or city, whose structure is not based on any presupposed model. The configuration of the city is determined wholly by local physical and cultural geography, often including the specifics of river and trade routes. Chongqing and Guangzhou might be offered as models of this type of organically formed city. Taiwan has innumerable examples of such towns, some of them walled and some not. For our purposes the unwalled port city of Tamsui is an obvious example.

3. The third pattern is a simple hybrid of the first two, in which an administrative city plan is imposed on a market town structure, with varying degrees of accommodation. The most visible aspect of that overlay is, of course, the city wall. There must be hundreds, if not thousands, of examples of this type. If we are to look at Chinese capital city sites, the two Song capitals, present-day Kaifeng and Hangzhou, offer us very clear, and different, models of this hybridization. In Taiwan the northern city of Xinzhu suggests such a pattern; it became a regional administrative center relatively late in its history, at which time substantial city walls were constructed, replacing the earthen and bamboo palisades that were common to many settlements in the Taiwan western plain (Lamley, 160-161).

When we look at continental patterns of Chinese cities, these different urban shapes are also regional. Northern cities, which would generally be older and located in relatively flat, open spaces were regular in shape, while southern cities tended to be more organic, often with more circular walls. Needless to say there are many subtle variations on these three types, with almost every city being some compromise of the supposed model. Nonetheless, Taipei does seem to offer a very different configuration of these patterns.

#### The Early Taipei City Plan

When the Qing dynasty decided to establish a prefecture in northern Taiwan (1875) and then belatedly to designate Taiwan as a province (1886) with Taipei as its temporary capital, they faced the challenge that had often been faced: imposing an administrative center on an organic market town. Plans for a new prefectural center in the Taipei basin were recommended by Imperial Commissioner Shen Baozhen in 1878. As such, this was clearly the initiative of the Qing imperial government and defied strong local interests to use Xinzhu, the original governmental center of Danshui district (ting). Work for building the city wall of the prefectural capital began under the direction of Prefect Chen Xingju in 1879, who fostered and coordinated local gentry support. The wall itself was started in 1882 and completed in 1884<sup>1</sup>, thus being ready in 1886 as the temporary site for the new provincial government under the direction of Governor Liu

---

<sup>1</sup>There is conflicting information on the actual construction of the wall; these dates represent a compromise of Li (*Taiwan jianzhu shi*, 175) and *Taipei gucheng* (21).

Mingchuan.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say the timing of this building activity is critical to the form that the city took.

Since Chinese settlement in Taipei Basin had only begun in the early eighteenth century, the population and settlement pattern around the capital area was relatively sparse; this is especially true when compared to southern Taiwan, and even more so when compared to almost any other part of southern China at this time. This means that while the building of this prefectural/provincial capital was extremely late in Chinese history (the last such project by the imperial government), the settlement area was relatively underdeveloped.

When decisions were being made regarding the establishment of a prefectural capital in the Taipei basin, there were already two important river-port market towns in the area. The oldest was the Mengjia area, the current Wanhua district of the city, with temples dating from 1738. The second was the commercial area of Dadaocheng, with retail establishments from 1851, but with purposeful settlement beginning in 1853. (*Tabei lishi sanbu*,7) These two commercial settlements arose from the tensions of subethnic rivalry that dominated much of the social structure of eighteenth and nineteenth century Taiwan. In this case the two towns were formed as a result of an armed conflict in 1853 between internal factions of the Quanzhou group, and extended to a conflict with members of the Zhangzhou group in 1858. Thus by 1880s there were two strong and opposing commercial centers situated along prime anchorage of the Tamsui river separated by two kilometers of agricultural and undeveloped land.

The Taipei prefectural/provincial administrative center, with its emblematic wall, was placed not as an overlay or replacement to either one of these market sites, but rather *between* them in the non-settled area. Why this was done is somewhat unclear, but one reason seems to have been the desire to neutralize the rivalry between Quanzhou and Zhangzhou factions in the basin area. By placing the new city in the relatively empty space outside and between settlement areas the imperial government could help reduce tensions and draw the two groups together in

---

<sup>2</sup>Liu's original plan was to establish a permanent provincial capital at Taizhong. Plans were drawn up and construction begun but never completed; Taipei became the capital by default.

support of city construction. On a more conceptual level, this decision meant that city planners did not have to accommodate geographic peculiarities of the site (neither established construction nor the Tamsui River), allowing for a relatively idealized city plane: square in shape with regularly spaced city gates, all connected internally by a grid of streets and avenues. This decision led to the creation of a city that was relatively empty inside its walls, but with substantial suburban market areas already in place. For example, by the 1880s there were already 100,000 people living in the Mengjia-Dadaocheng commercial area, but in 1891 more than half the intramural area of Taipei city was still in rice paddies (Lamley, 173, 202).

This Taipei city type not only differs from any other urban designs on the island and in southern China, which are either the market town or hybrid type (Chiang 20), it also differs from most other walled towns on the Chinese mainland during the late imperial period. Taipei, in effect, quoted earlier urban design with an imperial and northern associations. We might want to say that it was a manifestation of the belated imperial recognition of the island as an integral part of its political and cultural sphere. In this sense, Taipei was an attempt at nostalgic sinification of local space.

Clearly if imperial China had remained strong and if Taiwan had remained within its sphere of influence then Taipei city would have grown into a conventional, somewhat idealized Chinese city of the administrative type. It would have built a grid of intramural streets and infilled the space with governmental, commercial, religious, and residential architecture. No doubt this architecture would have been of the local southern style and thus would have shown the accommodation of imperial and local conditions. This process in fact began and by the early 1890s we see substantial building in the northwest corner of the city--see Map One. Of course, all this comes to an abrupt halt with the Sino-Japanese war and the ceding of the island to the Japanese.

### The Critical Periods of Transition

There are two political transitions that are critical to the reformulation of the early Taipei city plan, both of which contribute significantly to the nature of the contemporary city. The first is the 1895-1925 period during which Japanese colonialist rule was firmly established in Taiwan, with

the accompanying importation of Japanese and Japan-filtered European culture to the city. The second is the 1945-1975 period, during which the Nationalist (KMT) government purged much of that culture and established an industrial-modernist urban setting that was basically adapted from an American model. Both of these transitions interacted with the special characteristics of the Taipei site and the previous accommodations to it, producing the tell-tale pastiche of the city. In recent years the city appears to have begun another transition to a more cosmopolitan cast, including the importation of cultural influences from Japan, Europe and most recently mainland China, combined with the new celebration of local, Taiwanese culture.

### The 1895-1925 Transition

The transition from late imperial Chinese rule to Japanese occupation of Taipei is remarkable both as a forecast of the modernization of the Chinese city in the twentieth century and as a deviation from what that process would become. The Japanese were very self-conscious of their role as inter-Asian colonialists. After a short period of hesitation, they turned their concentrated attention to their colonialization efforts, including contemplation of European models of colonialization and efforts to study and adapt to the local conditions in Taiwan. This self-reflective quality resulted in part from Japan's belated entry into the ranks of colonial powers and its determination to display its new power and stature in a well-run model of enlightened colonial rule. This rule transformed the island in a multitude of ways, penetrating nearly every aspect of Taiwanese life. The changes in Taipei are emblematic of those larger changes.

### The Wall

In traditional Chinese urban design the city wall functioned as a practical and symbolic measure of imperial control (Wright). The wall served as military protection of administrative power; it delineated the city center, with multiple walls marking the concentration of power in that center; and it formalized the relationship between the urban commercial/administrative activity and the rural agricultural support.

In each case, the focal point of these activities was the city gate; it allowed the wall to carry out all of its principal urban functions--commercial, administrative, and even protective.

The gates controlled movement into and out of the city and, in combination with the grid of internal streets, that movement penetrated the city toward the center, and lead away from it on perpendicular axes.<sup>3</sup> Speaking in abstract terms, we could say that the gate was the most important part of the wall because it marked the *absence* of the wall. The wall could only function because this absence. The importance of the gate in Chinese urban design is seen both practically and symbolically in the attention paid to it in traditional culture. Gates were often doubly protected, with towers that rose above the elevation of the wall itself, and they were ritually decorated. In many ways it is not the wall that is the symbol of the city, but rather the gates.

The Taipei city wall and its gates conformed well to all of these patterns. The wall was a small but elaborate stone and brick construction some fifteen high, with substantial crenelation along the top, and about 3.5 miles in circumference. As we can see from Map One, the rectangular shape was a quite regular with a footprint that was very straight, except on the south wall which was slightly convex. Outside of the wall there was a matching moat on three sides of the city. The five gates were quite systematically, if somewhat sparsely, placed, one gate in each wall with the south wall also having a secondary gate. The north and south gate were off-set to the western and eastern corners, respectively. The principal gates to the city were the west and, to a lesser extent, north gates, since these led directly to the suburban port-towns of Mengjia and Dadaocheng. The north gate and the east gate were both protected by the commonly seen double-gated entrance with a secondary wall--this apparently reflects the perceived vulnerability of these two gates; the north one was closest to the rivers edge with little inhabitation between; the east gate lacked the protection of the moat and also faced into the undeveloped hinterlands of Taipei basin. These gates had common directional names--North Gate, Lesser South Gate, etc--, as well as official ceremonial names.<sup>4</sup> As was the pattern in the administrative city type, the gates were connected with main arterials that ran closely parallel and perpendicular to each other, but

---

<sup>3</sup>Although Sen-dou Chang, 97, shows that uninterrupted thoroughfares running straight from one gate to another were generally avoided.

<sup>4</sup>Gate names: Chengen, Baocheng, Congxi, Lizheng, Jingfu.

not running from gate to gate without interruption. These streets were named by the connecting gate's common name (e.g., North Gate Street), not the formal names (e.g., Chengen Gate Street). Other streets inside the wall were designated by their position vis-a-vis important offices, such as Prefecture Front Street (*Fuqian jie*) or the like. The longest single arterial was the center one that ran north to south, nearly wall to wall, connecting not gates but the Prefectural offices in the north part of the city with the Confucian (wen) and Martial (wu) Temples in the south--the southern half of this arterial was called Wenwu Street.

In the final analysis Taipei was still relatively empty at the end of its first Chinese phase. It had a strong outer form but less defined interior. There were only three or four major north-south arterials, and only one West-East one. While the northwest quadrant of the intramural space was relatively developed with governmental and commercial buildings, the rest of the city was only sparsely settled.

#### The Deconstruction of the Wall and the Reification of the Gate

A consistent pattern of modernization in twentieth century China is seen in the razing of old city walls. Just as the wall represented traditional administrative control, its destruction represented the removal of that control and the coming forces of modernization. This process of removing the wall was a physical manifestation of cultural change seen in many aspects of the Chinese society at that time: we also have, for example, the removal of the imperial bureaucracy; the elimination of the civil service exam; and the abandonment of classical language in the promotion of vernacular literature. On the Chinese mainland the razing of city walls as a process of modernization was first seen in 1912-14 with the tearing down of the old city wall of the Chinese section of Shanghai (Wei, 83-85). That process continues to this day in all parts of China.

The rationale behind the razing of the city wall was sociologically complex and conditional by local situation, but the result of that act is always very clear. Inevitably, in place of the wall, avenues were built that circled the city on the wall's old footprint--the precursor to the suburban beltway. In cities with multiple walls, such as Beijing, there arose concentric roadways that encircled the city at given intervals. Given the long history and settlement patterns of these cities, these modern roads encircle extremely dense population centers, which were penetrated only by relatively narrow streets and avenues that predate the razing of the city wall. In the multi-walled

cities the more inner of the circle roads are actually surrounded on both sides by such density. Not only did the removal of the walls release the city from the traditional traffic control mechanism of the past, the broad circling avenues encouraged new traffic patterns. Horizontal and vertical movement was replaced by circumambulating of the city center.

To speak of the reification of the city gate as part of urban modernization in China is, of course, not technically accurate. The gate was always a concrete object, but as I have already suggested its original function was keyed to the way it marked absence of the wall. The process of razing the city wall introduced a logical contradiction, which led to the transformation of the city gate into an object of greater physicality than theretofore possible. This is because often when a city walled was torn down, the gates were often left in place. Sometimes this meant all gates, but almost always it meant the primary, usually south, gate. The rationale for this behavior goes to cultural issues involving the acknowledgment of the psychological significance of the gate in traditional culture (as a symbol of the city) and a deep seeded nostalgia for that culture, even in the face of rapid modernization. No matter the rationale behind preserving the gate, the results are again very clear. With the wall removed, the gates now stand, not as passages by which the principal traffic of the city is facilitated, but rather as obstacles in the center of the new circle roads. They become objects that the new traffic patterns must go around or otherwise negotiate. They stand as a sign of the tradition that cannot be forgotten, but also as an impediment to what is promoted as the new way to do things. Again we can find less concrete examples of this difficulty throughout the various aspects of modernization in China--old patriarchal prejudices that undermine the professed liberation of women in the twentieth century; the nostalgia for patterns of classical language that infiltrate the new literature; and the inability for the commune to breakdown old family alignments and allegiances, etc.

### The Case of Taipei City

Once the Japanese settled into their new role as model colonialists, a role that became fixed during the innovative and enlightened rule of General Kodama Gentar\_ and his civil administrator Got\_ Shimpei (1898-1906), they quickly turned to making Taipei into a blueprint for the wide ranging plans of cultural transformation of the island. Of course the Japanese had had already

been involved in the transformation of Edo into the modern city of Tokyo as a preface to their emergence as colonial power, and the transformation of Taifeifu into Taihoku would borrow much from that experience. And conversely Got\_ Shimpei would return to Tokyo to continue the work there and become its very progressive mayor (1920-23) (Seidensticker, *Low City*, 31-32).

One of the first things Got\_ Shimpei did was to make plans to raze the Taipei city wall as the initial step in the modernization of Taihoku.<sup>5</sup> Our question is, does the razing of the Taipei city wall in 1900 by the Japanese fit the pattern to be seen on the Chinese mainland in the decades following? To certain extent it does, but again the special circumstances of Taipei affect the actual results of that process.

---

<sup>5</sup>Li Qianlang (*Taiwan jianzhu shi*, 179) gives dates this to 1898; Taibei gucheng (29) to 1900; I assume Li is referring to the beginning of the project, which was completed in 1900.

First, the razing of the wall did create roadways that encircle the city. This included the extremely wide, three-lane boulevards (*sanxian lu*). These boulevards were used not only for regular vehicular traffic, but also for the new railroad line that passed through the city, south to north, located along the footprint of the west wall. The vestiges of these boulevards are still readily apparent in contemporary Taipei, and now are being incorporated into the new subway lines which pass along underneath them.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, almost all the gates were preserved,<sup>7</sup> as would become the pattern on the mainland. Likewise, they were featured in the new city plan. George Kerr writes, "The old city gates were preserved as decorative monuments and made the focal points for wide, radial tree-shaded boulevards and avenues leading out to the countryside." (76). To this extent we have the standard pattern of modernization. Where we find deviation from that pattern is in the specifics of the intramural and suburban developments of the new city.

First we should acknowledge the obvious. The process of modernization, including the razing of city walls, on the Chinese mainland was principally in the hands of the Chinese themselves. But on Taiwan this process was part of Japanese modernization. This, of course, accounts for Taipei's lead in the process, but it also means that certain cultural patterns would not be applicable to the island that would be used on the mainland, and vice-versa. Easily the most evident of these was the architectural models that the Japanese and Chinese used to rebuild the post-mural cities. In terms of residential housing, in Taipei this meant the building of Japanese style houses throughout the city area, but particularly in the area east and northeast of the old walls, which had almost been entirely undeveloped at that point. Because of this, the entire area was transformed, over time, into a Japanese style neighborhood, which stood in contrast to the older suburban areas of Mengjia and Dadaocheng with their older architecture of southern Chinese style and (in Dadaocheng) the old European commercial buildings. Some of this changed with a series of disastrous typhoons that began in 1898, bringing wind damage and the flooding of the Tamsui River (Kerr, 75), which destroyed Chinese residential buildings in these older areas

---

<sup>6</sup> Present day, Zhonghua lu to the west; Aiguo lu to the south; Zhongshan lu to the east; and Zhongxiao lu to the north.

<sup>7</sup>The one gate torn down by the Japanese was West Gate, which appears to have stood in the right-of-way of the railway line entering the city.

outside the city. Other Japanese style structures were also built inside and outside the city. Japanese Shinto shrines were built throughout the island, but especially in the Taipei suburbs, consistently of traditional design. Similarly, a Zen/Chan Buddhist temple and drum tower built near the East Gate area was basically of Japanese design. Of course, many lesser, more pedestrian public buildings throughout the city took Japanese models, sometimes with modern overlays. The monumental Trade Exhibition Hall, located in the Botanical Gardens, was a form of this neo-traditional architecture (Zhuang Yungming , 199). The ubiquitous police substation that were found in every neighborhood and village was another example of Japanese architecture adapted to the era of modernization--one of these substations still stands on the campus of National Taiwan University, now used by university security.

Even more striking, however, was the architectural planning that went into the more public areas of the city, particularly the intramural space. Inspired by the cities of Paris and Berlin, Got\_ Shimpei, who had studied in Germany and traveled in Europe, not only built tree-shaded boulevards throughout the city (especially on the path of the old wall), but also parks, gardens, zoos, and other European-style public areas. This innovative use of the intramural space was facilitated, if not actually inspired, by the relatively empty city that the Japanese had inherited. Had their colonial capital been built within the intramural space of some other Chinese or Taiwanese city, one can imagine that they would have been less likely to indulge themselves in a city of such extravagant designs. Innovations in Tokyo, for example, were limited by such constraints. And while the Japanese colonialist were not opposed to tearing down structures to make way for the new colonial spaces, they did show a relatively conservative posture vis-a-vis culturally significant buildings. For example, when they razed the Qing Yamen offices in 1932, they rebuilt part of it within the Botanical Gardens as a memorial to Imperial China.

The Japanese had already built public parks and gardens in the Tokyo area, with the earliest ones located in the suburbs. These began with Ueno Park, established in 1873 as a “novelty introduced under the influence of the West.” (Seidensticker, *Low City*, 116). The first park in the Taipei area was also of this type, Maroyama (Yuanshan) Park, built in the northern suburbs in 1897, which was destined to become the site of the city zoo. By the time Taipei’s parks were being built the Japanese parks had already evolved into very Europeanized use of

space; Seidensticker remarks that “Ueno was almost empty at the outset and presently became royal, and ended up rather similar to the city parks of the West.” (120) Ueno Park was the site of the first art museum, the first zoo, the first May Day observances, and several industrial expositions (118). Concentrating our attention on Taipei’s intramural area, the most dramatic use of public space was the building of Taihoku Park, built in 1907 as part of the central city space--because of the older Maroyama Park in the suburbs this park became commonly called “New Park” (Shinkoen). Taihoku Park more closely resembled Tokyo’s Hibiya Park, which opened in 1903 on the site of former military parade grounds just north of the palace walls. Hibiya is often considered the first entirely Western style park in Japan, and probably could be the first in East Asia outside of foreign concessions areas. But Taipei’s parks offer a clear challenge to that claim. After World War II the park retained the “New Park” name (Xin gongyuan) and was the site of numerous examples of the sinification of the city, including traditional Chinese style pavilions and a statue of KMT War hero, General Claire Chennault. In 1995 the park once again became the site of political and cultural realignment when it was renamed “February 28th Peace Park,” (Ereba heping gongyuan) with the dedication of a new memorial to the victims of the violence during the spring of 1947; at about the same time General Chennault’s statue was moved to a new site outside of the city.

Given the relatively small size of the intramural space, New Park was quite imposing, occupying approximately ten percent of that space. It was located in the east central part of the city at the intersection of Qing arterial roads and centered on the site of the old Mazu temple, which was razed to make space for the park. The park itself was (and is) a maze of walkways through plantings and open areas, all fronted on the north by a museum of natural history--see Map Two. The museum, completed in 1915, is neoclassical in style, with Greek columns and a copper cladded dome. It’s original purpose was to collect and exhibit materials from Taiwan, southern China, and the South seas, and it was named in honor of General Kodama and Got Shimpei, the architects of Japanese colonial policy (*Tabei gucheng*, 69). After the war, the institution was renamed the Taiwan Provincial Museum, but, building on the Japanese collections, still focused on natural history, especially of early indigenous cultures. This emphasis allowed the new Chinese government to cloak the history of the island in an aboriginal shroud that diminished

the local Taiwanese and colonial history of the island. As part of that policy, the Museum of History, located in the Botanical Garden, was used primarily for the promotion of Mainland culture and history.

The Kodama-Got\_ Museum was only one of many public and governmental buildings built within this intramural space that were modeled on Western styles of architecture; this process began, fittingly, with the building of the official residence of the Governor General in 1901. The official residence, remodeled in 1912 after suffering from termite infestation, featured the “mansard” roof style with Byzantine ornamentations that appeared in some other early buildings, such as the Lottery Office of 1908 (Li, *Taiwan jindai jianzhu*, 41-42). After the war the Governor General’s Residence was occupied by the new Chinese governor Chen Yi, the infamous orchestrator of the brutal crackdown on the February 28th, 1947 uprising. It now is the government’s official guest house for visiting dignitaries, and is one of the most enclaved buildings in the downtown area, not only for its ring of military police and wrought-iron fence, but also because its large park-like enclosure is filled with tall trees, large ponds, and dense vegetation. This private urban space rivals the park itself.

Other important buildings of this early Japanese period were those related to the development of modern medicine in Taiwan, which the colonial government, led by the work of Got\_ Shimpei, a German trained physician, promoted throughout its rule of the island. There are two building complexes. The first was the original Colonial Medical School (S\_tokufu Igakk\_) which was established in 1899, with the main building dating from 1907 and located just outside of the intramural area near East Gate. This was both a teaching and research institution; it would later become the medical school of National Taiwan University.<sup>8</sup> The other complex was the Taihoku Hospital, whose construction lasted from 1912-1924 and was the largest medical facility in East Asia at that time (*Taibei gucheng*, 111). This was placed along the eastern edge of the intramural space, bounded on two sides by Taihoku Park and the Governor General’s Residence. In 1938 the school was incorporated into the Taihoku Imperial University (established in 1928), and it remains part of the National Taiwan University Hospital. These institutions represent both

---

<sup>8</sup>But it is abandoned and in disrepair in lieu of modern facilities built on the site.

the Japanese attention to public health, whose island-wide campaigns were orchestrated from here, and the opening up of the medical profession as the primary career path for Taiwanese of high social standing. In many ways these institutions, along with normal colleges, created the Taiwanese elite that became such an important part of the story of modern Taiwan. The main buildings, especially the entrance to the Hospital, celebrated their colonial aspirations with a Renaissance style of architecture in red brick and gray stone, with elaborate window treatments and ornamental stone details, including the horizontal stone bands that became signature of this style.

The brick and stone Renaissance style is also seen in a number of other important buildings, such as the Train Station (1901), the Municipal Offices (1915), and the Monopoly Bureau (1922). But none is so impressive or important as the Colonial Government Headquarters (S\_tokufu), which dominated the city and completely reoriented its intramural space. Finished in 1919 after seven years of construction, it was the embodiment of the Japanese aspirations for the colony.

The S\_tokufu was Taiwan's largest single piece of architecture during the Japanese period, and its central tower was, at nine stories, the tallest building in Taiwan and could be seen throughout Taipei. (Li, *Taiwan jindai jianzhu*, 51). The design of the building was chosen in a competition among modern Japanese architects, held in several stages during 1906-1907. In the first competition there were over fifty entries, from which seven semifinalists were chosen, each receiving prize money of 1,000 yen. The forerunner in this group was the submission of Suzuki Kichibei, but when the next level of competition was held his design was eliminated because it was said to have been copied from an international competition design for the Peace Palace of the Hague (Ibid). In its place was chosen the design of Nagano Uheji. Nagano's design was subsequently revised by Moriyama Matsunosuke, including adding three stories to the central tower, and built between 1912 and 1919, at a cost of 2.8 million yen. The impressive size of the main building, combined with its elaborate, elegantly measured facade--regularly repeated columns, porticos, arched door ways-- made it the most impressive building in the downtown area, and in Taiwan as a whole. The stamp of colonial domination suggested by this impressive

structure was reinforced by the overall design of the building which traced, when viewed from above, the “sun” character (ri), standing for the Japanese state (*Taipei gucheng*, 84).

Along with its size and design, the location and orientation of the S\_tokufu were also significant. It was built in the southern central part of the intramural space, which was still relatively undeveloped--it displaced only two ancestral temples of the Chen and Lin clans. (Li, *Taiwan jindai jianzhu*, 51) Built at the intersection of two major arterials, the main north-south street of Wenwujie and the east-west street of Dongmenjie,<sup>9</sup> it faced east, away from the most important parts of the Chinese city to the west and north. Whether that eastward gaze was a conscious acknowledgment of the metropole or not is debatable, but it did overtime effectively bring a new orientation to the city, which I will explore below in the discussion of East Gate.

Another type of European-inspired architecture is found in the commercial row buildings of the time, both those in the old Chinese suburbs of Dadaocheng, and in the new commercial streets that developed in the northwest section of the intramural city. The older of these buildings in Dadaocheng, which predate the Japanese period, reflect patterns of European colonial architecture of Asia, including that of the treaty ports of Southeast China (*Taipei sanbu*, 107). These buildings, a few of which can still be found along Dihujie and other streets in the area, are characterized by a two story structure that incorporated commercial and residential space, with the second floor projecting over the sidewalk and providing a shelter to the open store front of the first floor. They were primarily of brick with European facades and details--tall arched windows, flat false front walls concealing the roof lines, and “vase-like” balustrades. The design of these buildings is not completely divorced from indigenous commercial architecture, of which there are still some examples on Dihujie. These commercial buildings in the southern Min style are all one story (with attic space) that extend from the store front in a series of single rooms away from the street, combining commercial and residential space. While they do not have the projecting second floor, similar shelter is provided by the overhanging roof that is supported by brick archways over the sidewalk area. The post and beam construction of these buildings limit the width to a relatively narrow room; thus, space is created by the extension of these rooms back

---

<sup>9</sup>Li Qianlang, *Taiwan jindai jianzhu*, p. 51, says that this is the site of the major cross roads of the four major arterials, but that is not entirely accurate.

away from the streets. This gave the storefronts that characteristic narrow, uniform shape, with adjacent or shared walls. That is also the shape adopted by the more European buildings.

In the Japanese period many of these older buildings were replaced by or remodeled into a new style of commercial building type of three stories whose general configuration closely resembles the earlier two-story building. The most significant change in these buildings, in addition to the third story, is the use of a very elaborate, baroque facades. These facades are primarily of stone mixed with the common brick. They feature floral reliefs, window boxes, and elaborately articulated walls along the roof lines. This last feature, which is really an extension of the simple roof wall of the earlier European building style, is perhaps the most distinctive of the buildings, especially as each is unique and together they sculpt the space above the row buildings high above the narrow street. These are best preserved along Dihuaajie, but their beauty and effect are now much reduced by the riot of signage and deterioration that characterize the street. When the Japanese turned to rebuild the commercial streets of the northwest intramural area after the floods of 1911 they first substantially widened the main streets (current Chongqing South Road and Hengyang Road) to match their plans for a modern city. They then uniformly adopted this three-story baroque commercial style throughout the district. This created an interesting but uniform commercial style in the downtown area that is clear in photographs of the time.

Over time the architecture of public and commercial buildings constructed during the Japanese period evolved away from the early Renaissance and Baroque styles to incorporate other, often more mixed or contemporary European-based styles. By the end of the period of Japanese rule the intramural space was well planned and Taihoku was a handsome colonial capital. An interesting question that needs to be addressed is just how much of the Japanese-built European-styled architecture had been affected by the Japanese cultural filter. In several ways, it does strike one that some of the buildings, such as the S\_tokufu, are exaggerated statements of colonial aspiration, and the application of ornamental details, especially in the commercial buildings of Dadaocheng, is slightly outrageous when viewed against the relatively modest buildings.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>A line of inquiry that would be illuminating in this vein, would be the comparison of European sections of Chinese cities, such as Shanghai or Canton, and the pattern of the "European settlement" in

## Other Transitions

The Japanese period clearly transformed Taipei into a city that obscured its Chinese beginnings under a blanket of colonialism and Japanese culture, that is, transforming Taibeifu into Taikhoku. But, of course, Taipei would move away from the Taihoku legacy after 1945 when it was brought into the new cultural sphere of Republican China. The occupation of the city by a Chinese government was an extremely disruptive political and cultural event, whose ramifications would be played out over the decades. Whether we read those years of sinification (Zhongguohua) as a reassertion of a native, Chinese culture, or a period of neocolonialism by an alien and unwelcomed government is both a political and interpretative act. After years of bitter struggle against the Japanese, it is no wonder that the Nationalist society. In 1946 Governor Chen Yi said, “Currently, our most critical task is Sincizing Taiwan, making Taiwanese customs, thought, and language, gradually return to that of the Chinese people” (cited in Phillips, 22); that is to say, rid them of Japanese influence. Yet it is also understandable, especially after 1947 when Chen’s “gradual return” including the execution of thousand of the Taiwanese elite (collaborators, from the KMT view), to see this cultural policy, like the martial law that accompanied it, as an oppressive and imperialist act. Not just an erasure of Japaneseness, but also of Taiwanese culture.

The KMT efforts to transform the city included both conscious and coincidental changes. The single most obvious change was the renaming of the city streets with nomenclature from 1) mainland geography--Wenzhou Street, Chongqing South Road--, 2) terms from the orthodoxy of either traditional or Republican China--Zhongxiao East Road, Zhongshan North Road--, or other Nationalist alliances--Roosevelt Rd. These names did not, however, just erase the Japanese legacy but also the Qing legacy, for in fact the Japanese had retained the names for many of the streets they inherited from the Qing (albeit, giving them Japanese pronunciations). Another common site where the effects of sinification can be seen is in the construction of public buildings dating from the 1960s that often indulged in a faux-traditional architecture, which most often

---

Taipei.

quoted the northern “palace” styles of Beijing (Ting Jung-sheng). The most grandiose of these buildings are the performance halls of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, but there are many other examples throughout the city. Such buildings stand side-by-side the international and cosmopolitan styles that are most common in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the National Central Library. Perhaps the most pervasive change to the city was not one carried out by public policy but by demographic pressure: the occupation of the Japanese residential buildings of the Da’an and Guting wards by the flood of Mainlanders that came in 1950 (Hill Gates, 261). Almost all this architecture, which gave the residential parts of the city their low, handsome profile was replaced with the ubiquitous (and one must say ugly) four-story apartment buildings of the 1960s and 1970s.

The reading of Taiwan’s early modern history (1895-1945) as a period of contamination by the “enemy” is most possible from the perspective of a transition to “resinification”--implying that Taiwan had drifted away from its proper cultural orbit and the post-1945 phase was corrective. The reading of this later period (1945-1975) as one of “neocolonialism,” is most possible from the perspective of the current “Taiwanization” of the society (and city) as local culture asserts its “proper” role. This is seen in all aspects of city life, especially since the late 1980s: the emergence of Taiwanese as a legitimate language of political debate; the renaming of New Park as 2.28 Peace Park; the use of aboriginal names in the naming of public space, including a street in Taipei; Museums of local history; and the commercialization and commodification of many aspects of local Taiwanese culture.

### Reading Gates

Above we have been considering the cityscape primarily from a synchronic perspective where select pieces are seen as part of one cultural period--late imperial, early colonial, etc. We can also read select pieces of the cityscape diachronically, following the transformations of one space through time. That is what I would like to do here: take a brief look at the city gates over time.

There were originally five city gates. In accordance with the Chinese ritual concept of the administrative city, South Gate, leading to the Xindian area, was designated the primary gate, and so named “Lizheng men” (Beautiful Main Gate). But as noted above, for Taibefu the most

important gates were the ones along the west and north walls because these led to the important suburbs of Mengjia and Dadaocheng, bastions of the Quanzhou and Zhangzhou subethnic communities. Lesser South Gate, located in the southwest corner of the city, was a special gate financed by the gentry member Lin Benyuan of Banqiao; the architect was Chen Yingbin. (Li, *Taiwan Jianzhu shi*, 177) It is said Lin, whose family was from Zhangzhou, did not want to have to pass through Mengjia (which was dominated by the Quanzhou group) on his way to the city; nor did he want to make the long detour through South Gate, so he had this gate built. (*Taipei gucheng*, 90) Lesser South Gate was also special in its architecture. Unlike the other four gates, the upper half of this gate was an elegant wooden pavilion with surrounding pillars and wood carvings, all set back from the stone base. The four other gates had brick and plaster pavilions that stood flush with the stone base, with small, sparse windows; this presented a rather severe and closed face to the outside. This “fort” (diaobao) style was, however, crowned with an elegant tiled roof with up-turned eaves, creating a unique type of gate architecture, not only for Taiwan, but for all of China. Li Qianlang (*Taiwan jianzhu shi*, 177-78) has argued for the special quality and beauty of this gate style, especially as it is manifested in South Gate and West Gate, which had double eaves. East Gate lay on the far side of the city facing the undeveloped areas in the eastern part of the Taipei Basin. The road led ultimately to Jilong Harbor, but the double wall around the gate was testimony to relatively wild region in between.

Clearly the most important impact on the gates during the Japanese period was the razing of the wall, which transformed them into ritual monuments. The exception being, of course, the very important West Gate, which was removed to make room for the train line that followed the footprint of the west wall.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the longest lasting impact was, however, the placement and orientation of the S\_tokufu toward East Gate, which turned the city around and focused its attention on this theretofore relatively unimportant gate. That reorientation placed the S\_tokufu's back toward the older Chinese parts of the city and suburbs and provided it with a commanding view of East Gate. Thus, the area just beyond East Gate where this gaze fell (the current Da'an

---

<sup>11</sup>According to Li Qianlang (*Taiwan jianzhu shi*,179), Got\_ Shimpei was responsible for saving the other gates after West Gate was already destroyed; Bartholomew (10) credits “local government officials” (implying they are Taiwanese) with a protest that saved the four gates.

Ward) thereupon became the most Japanese part of the city, with housing, schools, and military installations--see Map Three

When the Nationalist government came to Taiwan in 1945, they not only inherited S\_tokufu<sup>12</sup> they also inherited its view of East Gate. The KMT governmental headquarters, first called Jieshouguan and then Zongtongfu (Presidential Palace) after 1950, naturally took East Gate and the wards just beyond it as its front door and neighborhoods. At the same time there was a conscious distancing of the emigre population from the Taiwanese parts of the city, especially in the old Mengjia and Dadaocheng areas that had merged into one continuous Taiwanese area along the waterfront beyond North Gate. The neighborhoods around the East Gate grew in symbolic importance as other important institutions were built in the area--the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, the new Central Library, and the new Taiwan University Hospital--see Map Four. Over the decades the gate became one of the most important sites for the patriotic displays on National holidays, eclipsing all other gates in this role. The latest affirmation of its significance to the Nationalist agenda is seen in the building of the new party headquarters just outside the gate, centered exactly on the gates axis. The new building gazes directly at the Zongtongfu; while viewed from Zongtongfu, East Gate looks like the entrance to the KMT party offices.

As part of the KMT sinification of the city, three of the city gates were “refurbished” in 1965. The entire top half the gates were rebuilt in the northern palace style, which was seen as “genuine” Chinese, with matching wooden pavilions. Ironically the only gate to escape this fate was North Gate, the important old gate that had over the years declined in prestige, since it was closely associated with old Taiwanese part of the city throughout the Japanese and early Nationalist period. In 1965 it was decided not to restore it because it was slated to be torn down to make way for exit and entrance ramps of the new highway that was then just being envisioned. But when the time came in to tear down the gate in 1977, there was a public outcry

---

<sup>12</sup>One source says the S\_tokufu was damaged by American bombers right at the end of the war and repaired in 1946 (*Taipei gucheng*, p. 81).

and the gate was saved--barely. The entrance and exit ramps now encircle within inches of the gate in a nearly postmodern juxtaposition. It probably is not coincidental that the protest that saved North Gate came at a time of increasing Taiwanese confrontation of the Nationalists, including the Zhongli riots and the debate over Native Literature (*xiangtu wenxue*). The gradual development of that local voice and oppositional politics in the 1980s and 1990s is also now making its impact on North Gate. The gate has been designated a First Level historic site and with the completion of the subway and rapid transit, the highway ramps will be removed and the entire site restored. Thus, the Taiwanese will have there own "native" North Gate to rival the "national" East Gate. A fitting testimony to the multiparty politics and diversity that has emerged in the 1990s.

## Sources

- Chang, Sen-dou. "The Morphology of Walled Cities," *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. W. Skinner, pp. 75-100
- Chen, Edward I. "Got\_ Shimpei, Japan's Colonial Administrator in Taiwan: A Critical Reexamination." *The American Asian Review*, 13.1, (Spring, 1995), pp. 29-59.
- Chen Zhangduan. "Taibei Dadaocheng de dushi zhuanhua (1851-1989) [Urban changes in the Dadaocheng area of Taipei, 1851-1989]. M.A. Thesis, National Taiwan University, Civil Engineering, 1989.
- Chiang, Tao-chang. "Walled Cities and Towns in Taiwan," *China's Island Frontier: Studies in the Historical Geography of Taiwan*, ed. Ronald G. Knapp. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1980. Pp. 117-41.
- Davis, Deborah, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton, Elizabeth Perry, eds. *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The Potential for Autonomy and Community in Post-Mao China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Du Fu, *Du shi xiang zhu*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979.
- Elvan, Mark and G. William Skinner. *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.
- Gallin, Bernhard and Rita S. Gallin. "The Integration of Village Migrants in Taipei," *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, ed. Elvan and Skinner, 331-58.
- Gaubatz, Piper Rae. *Beyond the Great Wall: Urban Form and Transformation on the Chinese Frontier*. Stanford: Stanford U Press, 1996.
- Guldin, Gregory Eliyu, ed. *Urbanizing China*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Fan Ying. *Taiwan Shizhishi ji qi zuxing fenbu yanjiu* [The History of Settlement and Patterns of Population in Northern Taiwan]. Taipei: Zili wanbao, 1992.

- Feuchtwang, Stephan. "City Temples in Taipei Under Three Regimes," *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, ed. Elvan and Skinner, 263-301.
- Huang Fusan. *Taipei jiancheng bainian shi* [One Hundred Years of Taipei History Since Building of the City Wall]. Taipei: Beishi Wenxianhui, 1995.
- Kerr, George H. *Formosa: Licensed Revolution and the Home Rule Movement, 1895-1945*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1974.
- Lamley, Harry J. "The Formation of Cities: Initiative and Motivation in Building Three Walled Cities in Taiwan." *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. W. Skinner, 155-209.
- Li Qianlang. *Taiwan jianzhu shi* [The History of Taiwan Architecture]. Taipei: Xiongshi, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Taiwan jindai jianzhu: qiyuan yu zaoqi zhi fanzhan 1860-1945* [The Modern Architecture of Taiwan: Its Roots and Early Development 1860-1945]. Taipei: Xiongshi, 1978
- Liao Chunsheng. "Qingdai Taibeicheng kongjian xingshi zhi bianqian" [Transformations of the spatial characteristics of Taipei city during the Qing period] . M.A. Thesis, National Taiwan University, Civil Engineering, 1988.
- Marsh, Robert M.. *The Great Transformation: Social Change in Taipei, Taiwan since the 1960s*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996.
- Mclain, James L., et. al. *Edo and Paris: Urban Life & the State in the Early Modern Era*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Mote, F. W., "The Transformation of Nanking, 1350-1400," *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. W. Skinner, 101-53.
- Nöth, Winfried. *Handbook of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Phillips, Steve. "Local Self-government and the 'Nationalization' of Taiwan Politics." Ms., 1997.
- Schinz, Alfred. *Cities in China. Urbanization of the Earth, Vol. 7*. Berlin: Gebrüder Borntraeger, 1989.
- Seidensticker, Edward. *Low City, High City: Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tokyo Rising: The City Since the Great Earthquake*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1990.

- Selya, Roger Mark. *Taipei*. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1995.
- Shatzman, Nancy. *Chinese Imperial City Planning*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.
- Shindo Hyo. "Kindai no toshika to chiho jichi no kenkyu: josetsu" [An Introduction to the Urbanization of Modern Japan and the Self-rule Movement] *Shakai kagaku kenkyu*, 46.5 (1995), 1-89.
- Skinner, G. William, ed. *The City in Late Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977.
- Speare, Alden Jr. "Migration and Family Change in Central Taiwan," *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, ed. Elvan and Skinner, 303-30.
- Taipei gucheng zhi lu* [A Tour of Old Taipei]. Taipei: Yuanliu, 1992.
- Taipei lishi sanbu* [Historical Walks in Taipei City]. Taipei: Yuanliu, 1991.
- Taibeishi fazhan shi* [History of the Development of Taipei]. Four volumes. Taipei: Taibeishi wenxian hui, 1981.
- Taibeishi lujie shi* [History of the Taipei City Streets]. Taipei: Taibeishi wenxianhui, 1985.
- Taibeishi zhi* [Materials on Taipei City]. 48 Volumes. Taipei: Taibeishi wenxianhui, 1989.
- Taiwan ditu* [Map of Taiwan]. Taipei: Central National Library, 1982. Facsimile of ca. 1850 scroll.
- Ting Jung-sheng, The Political Architecture of the 1960's: The Architecture of the 'Chinese Cultural Renaissance.'" Trans. Chuck Eisenstein. *Discover Taipei*. No. 2 (NOVEMBER, 1997), 12-15.
- Wei, Betty Peh-T'i. *Shanghai: Crucible of Modern China*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Williams, Jack F. "Land use in the Taipei Basin." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 78 (June, 1988), 358-61 With map supplement.

- Wright, Arthur. "The Cosmology of the Chinese City," *The City in Late Imperial China*, ed. G. W. Skinner, pp. 33-73.
- Xie Linzhan. *Daoguo xianying* [Portraits from the Island Nation]. Taipei: Creation Culture Corp., 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Taiwan Huaijiu* [Recollections of Old Taiwan]. Taipei: Creation Culture Corp., 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Taiwan huixiang* [Remembrances of Taiwan]. Taipei: Creation Culture Corp., 1993.
- Ye Xiaoke. *Riluo Taibeicheng: Rizhi shidai Tabeishi fazhan yu Tairen richang shenghuo* [Taipei Under the Setting Sun: The Development of Taipei City and the Daily Life of the Taiwan People During the Period of Japanese Rule]. Taipei: Zili wanbao, 1993.
- Zhang Jingsen. *Taiwan de dushi jihua* [Urban Planning in Taiwan]. Taipei: Yeqiang chubanshe, 1993.
- Zhao Gongling. *Taibei cheng de gushi* [Introduction to Taipei City]. Taipei: Taibeishi zhengfu xinwenchu, 1994.
- Zhuang Yungming. *Taibei laojie* [Old Taipei]. Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1991.