



City profile

City profile: Taipei



Jie Li, Xingjian Liu, Jianzheng Liu *, Weifeng Li

Department of Urban Planning and Design, Faculty of Architecture, the University of Hong Kong, Room 836, Knowles Building, the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Taipei experienced rapid development and came to play an important role on the world stage as the capital of Taiwan, one of the Asian Tigers. It has undergone a major political, economic, and urban restructuring over the past two decades, under contexts of globalization, neoliberalization, and democratization. The past mode of governance led by the developmental state has been replaced with public–private partnerships propelled by the rising power of business and social groups, leading to the rise of entrepreneurial governance. In recent years, Taipei has had to deal with a number of challenges associated with the slowing down of economic growth, declining urban areas, and escalating housing prices. This paper aims to unveil how the city government deals with recent challenges given its development history and the changing governance regime.

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1. Introduction

Taipei, literally meaning the North of Taiwan, is the capital city of Taiwan (Fig. 1). Situated in the middle of Taipei Basin, the city is surrounded by mountains and has a total area of 271.8 km². Geographically, the jurisdiction of Taipei City is surrounded by New Taipei City (renamed from Taipei County). Taipei City and New Taipei City are two different cities with separate administration systems, but are undergoing a regional integration process and have formed a twin-city living environment connected by transportation networks. Taipei is one of the world's most densely populated cities, with an average population density of 9942 people per square kilometer.

Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), is an island of approximately 36,000 km², situating about 180 km off the southeastern coast of mainland China. Following the Chinese civil war, the Communist Party of China took control of mainland China and founded People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, while the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) relocated the ROC government to Taiwan. Taiwan is known as one of the Asian Tigers that have undergone a dramatic economic boom in the 1970s, led by the developmental state. As the economic, political, and cultural center of Taiwan, Taipei has experienced rapid development. Nonetheless, compared with other Asian Tiger capital cities of Hong Kong, Seoul, and Singapore, Taipei seems to be increasingly marginalized in the East Asian Region. In the past two decades, Taipei has faced a number of challenges, including the slowing down of economic growth, declining urban areas, and escalating housing prices. To deal with the challenges, substantial political, economic,

and urban spatial changes have taken place in Taipei, which are situated within the broader global and local contexts associated with the globalization, neoliberalization, and democratization process. These changes include urban governance restructuring from centrally controlled to entrepreneurial governance that actively seek partnership with private sectors, economic restructuring towards a knowledge and creative economy, and a significant urban spatial restructuring through the extensive urban renewal and gentrification process. This paper aims to unveil the urban governance, economic, and spatial restructuring process in Taipei to deal with various challenges over the past two decades, with special attentions to the most recent urban strategies and policies of the newly elected mayor, who appears to have very distinct styles from former mayors in addressing urban problems.

2. Historical development of Taipei

There are three phases in the urban development of Taiwan in general and Taipei in particular, leading to a unique culture that reflects the legacies of the traditional Han Chinese migrants, the Japanese colonial era, and the Kuomintang governance. Before the eighteenth century, Taipei remained an uncultivated plain as the residence of an indigenous ethnic of Taiwan: the Ketagalan. The Han Chinese began to migrate to Taipei in the early eighteenth century. The majority of migrants are Minnan people from Fujian Province while a minority are Hakka people from Guangdong Province. They were the first developers of Taipei in terms of city building. The immigrants brought their own culture into Taipei, including language and architecture styles. The economic, political, and culture functions of the city had close ties to and were influenced by the mainland. Economic transactions of tea, rice and camphor were actively conducted between Taipei and mainland China, shipped through the Tamsui River. The river port area of Dadaocheng and Mengjia in the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jessieleepku@hotmail.com (J. Li), xliu6@hku.hk (X. Liu), jzliu@connect.hku.hk (J. Liu), wfli@hku.hk (W. Li).

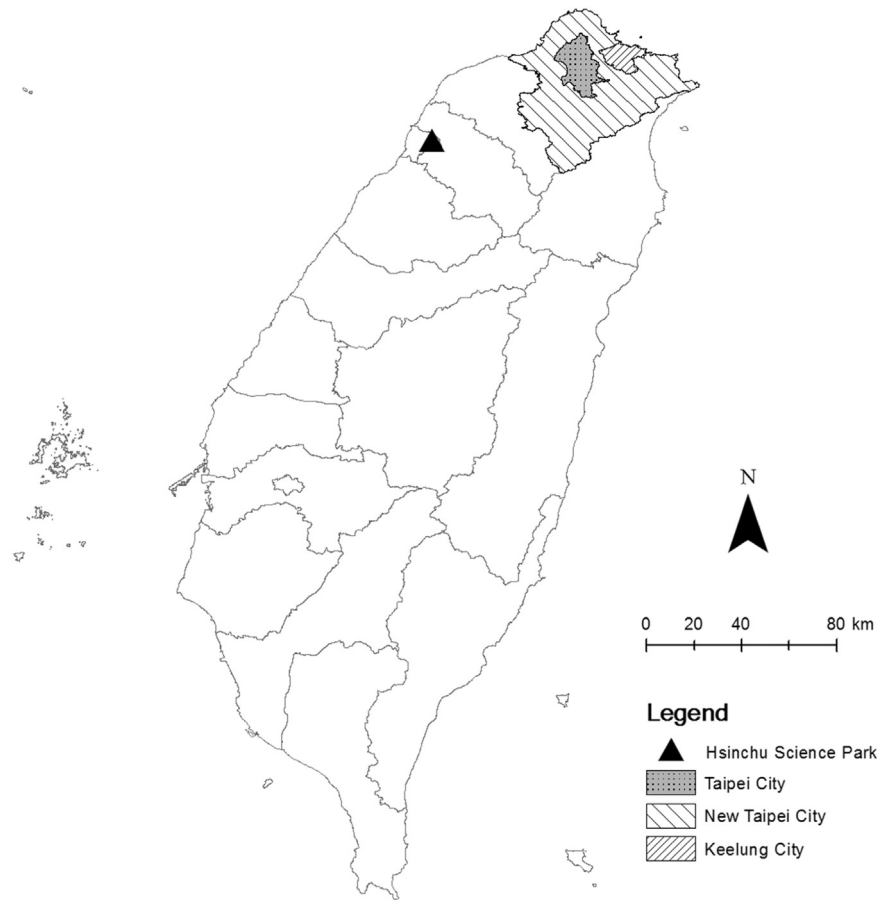


Fig. 1. Location of Taipei City within Taiwan.

Western part of Taipei became the commercial center (Chou, 2005). The history of the formal development of Taipei City dates back to 1875, when the Taipei Prefecture established by the Qing Dynasty, and Taipei became a provincial capital at the periphery of the Qing Dynasty. It was also during this period that the first 'walled' city of Taipei was built near Mengjia and designated as the administrative center. The Western area later became the heart of the city.

The second phase of urban development began when Taiwan became a colony of Japan in 1895. The Japanese chose Taipei as the capital and set the Governor-General's Office there, which made Taipei the political, economic, and cultural center of Taiwan. During the Japanese-occupied era from 1895 to 1945, the economy was a typical colonial economy. Natural resources were exported to support the development of Japan. Because Taiwan was Japan's first colony, the Japanese were determined to build it as a showcase to demonstrate their governing capacity to the world. A modern planning framework was introduced into Taiwan by the Japanese colonial government and laid the groundwork for city planning in Taipei (Huang, 2005). The city of Taipei was expanded to the east, south, and north, with improved urban infrastructure. The Japanese demolished the Taipei city wall, built roads, expanded streets, and improved drainage in Taipei City. The commercial functions were still concentrated in the western areas and a new CBD was built in 1914 in the West Gate area (Ximending) (Chou, 2005). Many office buildings, public spaces, and transport systems in present Taipei are Japanese colonial legacies, including the current Presidential Office Building that was built as the Governor-General's Office in 1919.

After Taiwan's retrocession to China in 1945, Taiwan was designated as a province, and Taipei a provincial municipality. Following the defeat by the Communist Party, the Kuomintang (KMT) government relocated to Taiwan in 1949 and designated Taipei as the "provisional capital at wartime". Taipei experienced a dramatic population explosion, as

around one million Chinese mainlanders fled to Taiwan with the KMT government, including the soldiers of the Nationalist Chinese Army, government employees, and their dependents. In 1967, Taipei was elevated to the status of special municipality, directly controlled by the Executive Yuan, and became the de facto capital city. The KMT Government soon imprinted the urban landscape of the capital city with their own Chinese nationalist ideology, as the government intended to use the urban form to legitimize its governance (Liu, 2013). In cultural terms, the new administration tried to eliminate the Japanese colonial culture and redirect the national identity towards the KMT's version of Chinese tradition, that is, the Chinese nationalism culture established by Sun Yat-Sen (Leitner & Kang, 1999). Such ideology was manifested in urban landscapes: new public buildings were constructed in traditional Chinese architectural style, while existing streets, public squares and buildings were renamed after nationalist terms, KMT figures, or places of the Chinese mainland (Leitner & Kang, 1999; Liu, 2013). Many symbolic buildings and landmarks, such as the National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, in memory of the national founding father Sun Yat-Sen, were planned and constructed during the 1960s and 1970s (Fig. 2). In this period, Taipei experienced rapid economic development and urbanization. It was engaged in global economic restructuring and experienced the impact of western culture, particularly the U.S. culture. By this time Taipei had become a diversified international city with unique urban qualities. Its history has left a lasting imprint on its urban landscapes and cultural life.

3. Restructuring of urban governance: democratization, neoliberalization, and public participation

Urban governance in Taipei has restructured from a centrally controlled to an autonomous local state through a democratization process

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