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A Study of Shezi: An Urban Village in Taiwan

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Introduction

A key policy decision on flood prevention programs for the greater Taipei area was implemented in 1970. Consequently, separate pathways to development has shaped and agonized residents of Shezi. Shezi (see the Map), the study site for Shezi Project proposed by Soochow University, Taipei, will be the focus of this paper.

Territory appears to a decisive factor in creating the great divide between the north and the south for local residents in Shezi. Landscape at the north has remained still for the last 35 years due to the fact that this part of Shezi has been the designated drainage basin for metropolitan Taipei. Any land development plans have been extremely difficult and almost impossible to pass. Local development has since been stagnant. Northern Shezi, the duck-head-like territory is indeed an urban village.

In addition, for northerners, resentments against the 1970 decision that barred them from local prosperity brought about by Taiwan Miracle have gathered momentum and formed a collective identity among local residents when the democratization of Taiwan is underway. These sentiments of deprivation and victimization are widely shared and unfortunately aroused repeatedly whenever there is a local election. Given these two contextual factors, what are the strategies of sustainable development for Shezi and for Taipei as well?

Geography-from an island to a peninsula

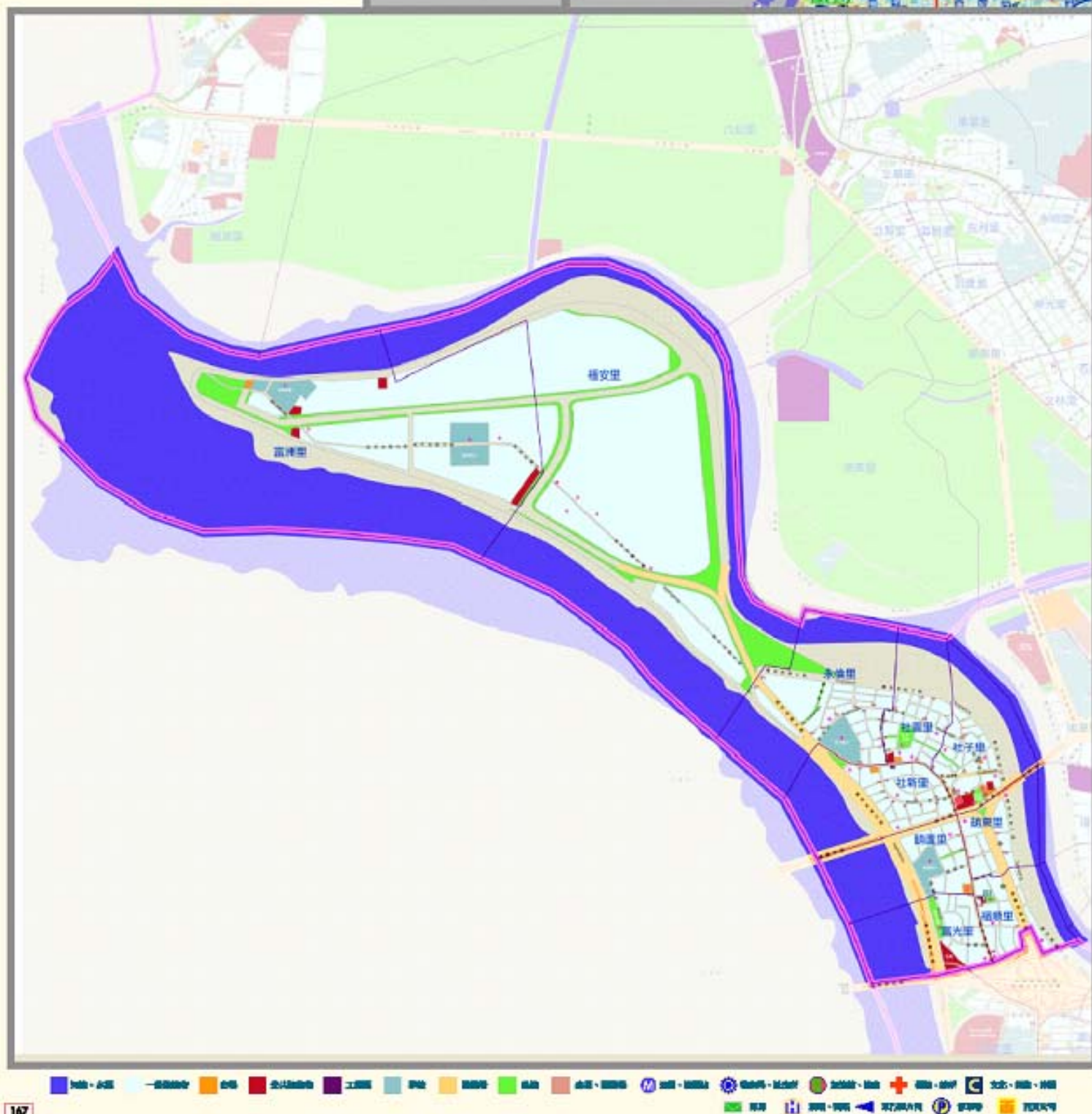
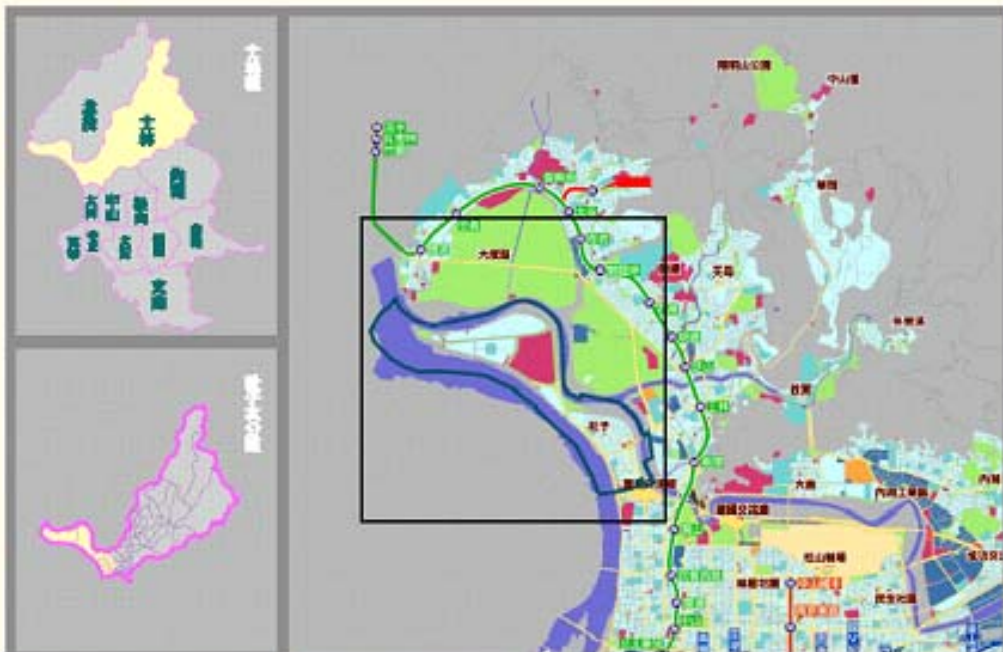
Shezi is a northwest to southeast gourd-like sand-bar island. It is surrounded to the west by the Danshui River, east and north by the Keelung River, and south by the Fanzigo waterway where Danshui and Keelung met and from which the Taipei Basin had been separated. Danshui and Keelung River on the other hand are two main water arteries that run through the Taipei Basin where the city of Taipei has been built and developed. Overall, Shezi is about 7.2 kilometers in length, between 4.5 meters and 1.7 kilometers in width and with total area of 1.4 square kilometers.

Geographically speaking, Shezi was not on the map until 1694 earthquake. Afterwards Shezi had gradually emerged out of water with more than one independent sand-bar. Slowly a sand-bar island has formed as we see it today. Despite the installation of water pumping stations along both rivers in northern Shezi, Shezi is essentially a lowland area with 2.5 meters above sea level on average and has had no escape from flooding throughout its settlement history.

Shilin District (Shezi sub.)

Shilin: the area with yellow color.
One of 12 districts in the city of
Taipei.

Shezi: the duck head-like or a gourd shaped peninsula.



It was not until 1989 when the first highway was completed and the Fanzigo waterway was finally land filled to become the first exit entering the city of Taipei from southern Taiwan, Shezi has geographically transformed into a peninsula. Still Shezi, situated at the northwest part of Taipei city, appears to remain as a marginalized locality to the city of Taipei.

Marginalized Settlement Pattern

The initial development of settlement patterns at Shezi was essentially linked to rivers when they were the only gateways for immigrants from southern China to set a foot on this sand-bar. Communities were thus formed along the river bank and the opposite bank across river. Inland area within Shezi however was sparsely populated, especially the northern region. The shifting Keelung River caused flooding and made living at Northern Shezi extremely difficult. After all northern Shezi has always been a much less suitable habitat for human settlement.

Settlers within Shezi had led their separate communal life and were incorporated into different administrative divisions before roads and bridges out of Shezi to Taipei started to be built. Southern dwellers, for instance, living at a much higher ground had formed a lived space tied to the development of Dalongdon, a commercial district down south and currently part of Dotou district. Residents of the middle narrow block crossed Dansui River to forge a mutual bond with that of Shanchunpu, now part of Taipei County. Settlement east southward along the Keelung River was historically close to the development of Shilin area where Shezi has been under its administrative jurisdiction since Shilin Township was first established in 1947, and now one of the 12 districts of Taipei city. In that same year there were about 6,000 residents and most of them were engaged in agriculture.

By 1962 the isolation from Taipei city was eliminated when bridges are built to connect east to Shilin and south to Fanzigo. Meanwhile urbanization was in progress. Shezi was filled with migrants from southern Taiwan. As of 2005, approximately 64,000 people live at Shezi. Among them, fourth-fifth resides at the lower southern half.

North-South Divide -Uneven North-South Population Distribution

The great disproportion in population size between northern and southern Shezi has been namely corresponding to its original settlement patterns set by the underlying geographical conditions. Another indication for northern Shezi to be a least inhabitable locality is self-evident when naming the various settlements is compared between the north and the south. Northern settlers preferred to label a locality after its natural environment. Southerners on the other hand chose to call it more in tune with the humanistic representation of a place.

The uneven population distribution between the north and the south clearly reveals the fact that the great divide between northern and southern Shezi has its geographical roots. Northern settlers in earlier time were forced to move elsewhere because of constant frequent flooding. Their prospect for permanently staying on was doom.

Southern immigrants by contrast can eventually settle in and called it home. The earlier settlers seemed to develop various coping strategies to deal with their unfriendly living environments.

Furthermore, a policy solution to flood prevention program for the greater Taipei area has aggravated the long lasting great divide. Due to widespread devastations of flooding caused by the 1963 Gloria typhoon, the overhaul of flood prevention program was issued and implemented in 1970. Northern Shezi along with Quando plain across the Keelung River has been the designated drainage basin. Local development, in particular land and housing development for northern Shezi has since come to a complete halt. Consequently, infrastructures and basic institutional services were and have been desperately lagged behind. The designated agricultural areas were idle and no job prospects for locals. Residents up north were forced to leave for better life elsewhere. For those who have chosen to stay, they have led a life that appears drastically different from the counterparts down south. The north-south divide has shown no sight of abridging.

Physical Characteristics of the Household

Without doubt, the basic housing needs for residents of northern Shezi were not sufficiently met. More than 60 percent of them resided in living quarters built before 1970 when Taiwan's economic development was about to take off and the housing boom in Taipei was not prevalent (see Table 1). Only a quarter of the residents down south lived in a place where it was built 35 years ago. Overall residents of southern Shezi had newer living quarters to live on. As a marginalized locality to Taipei city, the housing development at Shezi was dull for the last two decades. However, a sudden 15 percent increase of recently built living quarters at the north had a bearing on the demands made by residents of Shezi. The plea to reevaluate the 1970 decision on flood prevention program for the greater Taipei area has persisted throughout.

Table 1. Living Quarters' Year of Completion by Current Residence, Shezi, Taipei, Taiwan 2000 Census

	Current Residence		Shezi
	N. Shezi	S. Shezi	
Before 1970	62.9	23.5	30.2
1971-1980	20.0	53.1	47.5
1981-1990	2.0	19.2	16.3
1991- 2000	15.1	4.2	6.0
Total	100.0% (3,329)	100.0% (16,230)	100.0% (19,559)

Employment and Place of Work

The most striking contrast between the north and the south is noticeably observed when we examine whether an individual is employed in extractive sector. In comparison with people living at the south, residents up north had 15 times higher to work in agricultural field (see Table 2). They also had a much higher percent being employed in manufacturing sector where factories were more likely to operate without permit. Moreover, although the majority of local residents from both areas worked in service sector, northerners were less likely to do so. In addition, roughly 20 percent of the residents who lived at northern Shezi, a sub-district of Shinlin, did not work at Shinlin. Their southern counterparts on the other hand were twice more likely to work elsewhere (see Table 3). Evidently, there are different patterns between the north and the south when place of work is looked into.

Table 2. Individual Employment Sector by Current Residence, Shezi, Taipei, Taiwan 2000 Census

	Current Residence		Shezi
	N. Shezi	S. Shezi	
Agriculture	9.0	0.6	1.9
Industry	34.7	20.1	22.4
Service	56.3	79.3	75.7
Total	100.0% (4,725)	100.0% (25,606)	100.0% (30,331)

Table 3. Place of Work by Individual Current Residence, Shezi, Taipei Taiwan 2000 Census

	Current Residence		Shezi
	N. Shezi	S. Shezi	
Current Residence	4.9	6.9	6.6
Shinlin	75.7	54.5	57.9
Elsewhere Other Than Shinlin	19.4	38.5	35.6
Total	100.0% (4,594)	100.0% (24,680)	100.0% (29,274)

Local Labor Force

Two indicators are employed to assess the characteristics of local labor force at Shezi. For those who were not currently enrolled in school, local labor force at the north had a 13 percentage higher share of illiterates and grade school graduates and a 10 percentage lower portion of graduates with associate degree and beyond (see Table 4).

Residents who were registered students and lived at the north were less likely to be college graduates (see Table 5). When the total share of college graduates between these two areas is compared, it is fair to suggest that the quality of local labor force at the north does not appear as good as that of the south.

Table 4. Educational Attainment of Residents Not Currently Enrolled in School, Shezi, Taipei, Taiwan 2000 Census

	Current Residence		Shezi
	N. Shezi	S. Shezi	
Illiterate	5.0	3.0	3.3
Grade School	38.7	28.2	29.9
Middle School	21.2	17.0	17.8
High School or Equivalent	23.9	31.1	30.0
Associate Degree	7.0	11.8	11.0
College Degree and Above	4.2	8.7	8.0
Total	100.0% (7,539)	100.0% (38,236)	100.0% (45,775)

Table 5. Educational Status of Residents Currently Enrolled in School Shezi, Taipei, Taiwan 2000 Census

	Current Residence		Shezi
	N. Shezi	S. Shezi	
Grade School	86.3	75.4	77.3
Middle School	9.4	17.3	15.9
High School or Equivalent	25.2	25.3	25.2
Associate College	7.6	7.2	7.3
College and Above	7.0	12.2	11.5
Total	100.0% (1,814)	100.0% (10,208)	100.0% (12,022)

Attending Local Schools or Cross-District Schooling

The north-south divide is again manifested when Table 6 represents the educational choices that families made for their school-age children. There seems to be no pattern of difference when the variable of children attending primary schools is considered. For both Shezi areas, overwhelming majority of the families chose local grade schools for their children. However, when examining children attending non-local schools

elsewhere a very different pattern of choices made by the families from both areas is found. Although a minimal amount of percentages indicated that they attended non-local schools elsewhere, families down south were 4 times higher to send their children away for schooling elsewhere.

For families with children in middle schools, parents at the north as usual had their children attend the one and only middle school for entire school district in Shezi area. But families at the south made different educational choices for their teenagers. One third of them chose to attend non-local middle schools. Cross-district schooling, especially at the middle school is a very common phenomenon for Taiwanese families. The transition to middle schools is a key predictor for the success of children's educational careers. For children enrolled in a "good" middle school, it raises substantially the chances of their successfully passing the entrance exam and landing a competitive high school, consequently, a prestigious university. Overall, families at the north seem to have lower educational expectations for their children when that of the south is compared.

Table 6. Cross-District Schooling by Current Residence, Shezi, Taipei
Taiwan 2000 Census

	Current Residence		Shezi
	N. Shezi	S. Shezi	
Primary School			
Local School in Shinlin	99.3	97.1	97.4
Non-local School Elsewhere	0.7	2.9	2.6
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Middle School			
Local School in Shinlin	97.8	69.0	73.7
Non-local School Elsewhere	2.2	31.0	26.3
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As mentioned earlier, the substantial gaps existed between the north and the south in Shezi is self-evident. Collectively, the 1970 policy decision has triggered and forged the emerging sentiments of the great divide between the north and the south. Unlike residents at the south, those who stay at the north have been let out economic boom caused by the sky rise of land values. They have developed deep resentments toward injustice imposed upon by government authority because the properties they own at the north have no market values. The anguish over the sufferings of being deprived of opportunities and prosperity has been widely shared in the community. Does this newly developed identity experience mostly by northerners? To what extent does this collective identity exert impacts on local development?

Development for Whom?

Given the inherent geographical disadvantages and a designated drainage area, local development in northern Shezi could be characterized as marginal, uneven, and

underdeveloped. Unlike the rest of Taipei city where almost no availability of land for further development, northern Shezi with vast seemingly "usable" land has drew heated debates on the overhauling of the old flood prevention programs for the greater Taipei area.

Reducing the size of this designated drainage basin to facilitate local development for Shezi and for greater Taipei has been called for and welcomed by many local residents. Opposing views are also loudly voiced. After all, there are no easy answers on the compatibility of sustainability of metropolitan Taipei and the even development of a local community.

Faculty members from different departments at Soochow have been involved in Shezi Project. One line of involvement has put emphasis on teaching and Shezi is the site for teaching and learning in the classroom. Department of Social Work has been working on this project since January. Departments of Sociology, Political Science, and Education have joined in later. Also a research project on Shezi is currently organized and developed by the University.

Conclusion

In Taiwan university participation on community development of a nearby locality was pioneered by Soochow University three decades ago. Linsi community was then organized, developed, and has been an active member in Shilin District. Given the different contextual environment that Shezi project is engaged in, it will be an interesting case study to examine the role that a nearby university play in catalyzing the local development of a territory.

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