

Visual Storytelling Theory and Practice via Photographs of Historical City Destinations

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Abstract—The Conservation of cultural heritage has gradually taken a rigid form in Taiwan. People have also come to feel distant and detached in their daily life from historic and cultural sites. Nevertheless, it is essential to adopt more sustainable and innovative strategies, when a city like Tainan has experienced over four hundred years of history, despite many city residents and visitors portraying themselves in historic places as being frozen in time. The identity of city residents is one of the crucial components for building healthy communities. This research draws attention to the diverse perceptions of the cultural images of the city of Tainan from the points of view of both residents and visitors. Conservation and marketing of Tainan cannot neglect the different cultural images held in the minds of residents and visitors, which should influence the approaches that government and local authorities choose to pursue. This research analyses from auto-photography method of residents and visitors, accompanied by photo-interviews. The author argues that to market a city from an outsider's perspective would be disrespectful of the core values and relationship between the city and its residents. The findings present diverse viewpoints on the cultural images of West Central District in Tainan, including colour, vegetation, cultural heritage, natural assets and symbols. It also forecasts a brand new path towards cities branding and also the cultural value of historic city destinations.

Index Terms—City, cultural image, residents, visitors, visual.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tainan is an ancient Capital of Taiwan, which is situated on the south western coastal plains of Taiwan. It is known as the oldest and now fourth largest city, with population in excess of 700,000. West-Central District is one of the eight districts in the City of Tainan with population of under 80,000. Local government of the city of Tainan has been strived to improve tourism by promoting and marketing its cultural heritage. Tainan remain as major center of politics, economy and culture in the 19th century, up to now has the most national grade heritage among all cities in Taiwan. Although the tourist boom has been raised dramatically, however there have been aware of examples of mis-understandings or misinterpretation of the essence of the city. The city of Tainan is well known as an elegant place for people “to dream a dream, to work, to fall in love, to get married, and to live life leisurely” ([1]). As its” potentiality lay under the vivid imageries presented and represented by mass media it is recognize to be the most popular historic destination of visitors from other regions as well as raising trends of inward island immigration habitation. Therefore, this research will

acknowledge that a place brand represents a hedonic product that is the “consumption experience of place”, and can be exposed on visitation. It is one of the most effective approach to shape the image of a city which derives from various group of people (include investors, tourists, traders, migrant workers or students) to experience places for themselves. This research will introduce the significant impact of “perception of place”. Imageries of a city perform as a threshold that paving the way to the city. Lacking the mediation that the stories of Tainan have embedded with residents and visitors have left in disrespect.

Former researches about city's cultural aspects have been popular to adopt qualitative research method and approaches associated with exploring insights and meanings of people towards cities. In addition to this, there are scholars who find it important to test for causal relationship between image receivers and image providers. However, there is also area about the relationship between city images and people and formation of cultural images of cities that associate with people which are residents and visitors.

Most of contemporary studies of the city isolate the human “senses” from their material relations and treat the senses in primarily cultural terms ([2]). This research aims at exploring visual senses of residents and visitors for their perceived cultural images of the historic city of Tainan particular attention has paid at the historic West-Central District.

This research emphasizes on the understanding of own cultural heritage and resources within the city of Tainan that cultivate visitors and residents to perceive the city by ranges of images. Without identifying, the cultural images those relate to the livelihoods and attachment with the city, improving conservation and marketing ‘for people instead of ‘for the city’ would become difficult.

Therefore, this research introduces the theoretical concept of “sense of place” (known as *Genius loci*) as a core value to investigate cultural Images, namely: photography of multi senses, cultural and historical images, such as texture, color, and visual stimuli, to analyze perception and interpretation of the cultural image of Tainan. Also adopting the idea of ‘resident as citizens’ as crucial roles that resident play in place promotion and marketing in an efficient approach by reference [3]. This research intends to explore the relationship between the perception of visitors and residents on cultural images which to be identified as the representative images.

96 in total of residents and visitors were the informants to express their perception and understandings of city's cultural images. Images could be described in a broader terms: “Currency of Culture” ([4]). Although widely adopted theories about subjective meanings are often shared as ‘common image’, complexity of the inner feelings associate with the city requires a deeper understandings especially

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when personal experiences that enable to form the collective image of a place.

Reference [5] addressed that images is a simplified impression of a place for which cue are used to trigger inferences and influence attitudes. To be able to explore and understand the attitude and perception of the residents and visitors will enhance quality and efficiency on building city's identity as well as for future marketing of the city and reputation. The perceptions of 69 local residents rooted as a foundation for the construction and experience of the identity of Tainan, while the other group of 27 visitors were also to be compared. What it is crucial is that to approach a resident's perception that is more likely to raise potential biases and stereotypes, but can also offers a unique opportunity to represent a place's common history and surroundings as experienced by local 'insiders'. The findings will contribute to the tourist operated sectors and parties to highlight the result of cultural images of the West-central District of Tainan for future development of marketing the historic city; In addition, the research findings will also benefit to local authority when establishing city identity and the reputation, starting from the strategic analysis of prerequisites for creating strong, vicarious place and city experiences.

II. CITY OWNERSHIP: MY CITY MY PLACE

While local residents perceive images by producing meanings about particular place with which they can identify. These places would as to be reconstructed and restructured to be close to what both groups interpreted and referred. Therefore by introducing the theoretical positions of Christian Norberg-Schulz of "sense of place" which was depicted in religious iconography but also refer to the concept of "authenticity", and "placeness". Issues about images of places readdressed by reference [6] that better image can only be earned; it cannot be invented or constructed. He goes on highlight the notion of huge valuable asset of the city (or nation) as reputation to be managed, protected and leveraged over long term. The dilemma raise when dealing with protecting city identification as well as promoting a city, can or how to embrace ownership of the city of residents and citizens is in question. Most historic places that attract tourists combine the qualities of visual completeness and individuality, these are among the qualities that typify many older towns. These physical essences contain character that depend on buildings, geographical background and local topography, which determined their setting and form.

According to reference [7], the total image of a town may be so powerful that it merits conservation on that one count alone if the town's real identity is to be maintained. The visual and historic qualities of a place satisfy society's needs for both cultural and physical roots.

The visual and historic qualities of a place satisfy society's needs for both cultural and physical roots. As to reference [8] noted that the city contains people's memories and the past and is a receptacle for accumulated cultural symbols. Since year 2007, the City government of Tainan launched slogan of "Cultural City, Extravaganza Tourism" based on the promotion of the *Year of Cultural Tourism*. One of the

objectives is to promote cultural heritage by implementing policy which was acted as top-down strategy to give away subsidies for organizing festival events. However, the manipulated strategy focuses on festival marketing as the main destination targets due to large numbers of temples and sacred religious sites.

III. METHOD: GENERAL APPROACH IN THREE PHRASES

'Perceiving', 'seeing', 'thinking' and 'acting' are ways of 'appropriating' or 'orientating' to reflect the world that conditioned in a historical or social arrangements ([2]). The perspective applied with ideology of "resident as citizens" for crucial roles that residents play in place promotion and branding by Reference [3], noted when various group of people (include investors, tourists, traders, migrant workers or students) experience places for themselves, the significant impact of 'perception of place' will be raised. This research has conducted through two phrases. First, the approach pursued here draws primarily on the method of subjective personal experience and introspection. General approach pursued here draws primarily on the method of subjective personal experience and introspection. It focuses on the aspects of lived experiences and photographs followed by in-depth interviews. Method based on the subjective personal experience and introspective, to identify senses, mental imagery process, emotions and social interactions of residents and visitors of the city to earn from cultural images of the city of Tainan through living, working and studying. The author recruited two groups of informants, 27 visitors who travel around the West-Central District of Tainan, and 69 family members who have children study in their primary, junior and senior high schools and university students. In a total of 96 respondents were asked to write the most representative color, symbol, architecture, vegetation, and activities, to gain the cultural images which perceived strongly about their view towards Tainan.

The research method divides to three phrases: First, to apply semi-structured questionnaire to gain profile and understanding of cultural images perceived by both groups. Second, applying approach of auto-photography to capture cultural images of two groups by giving away mission on: 'Talk about your most representative cultural images within West-Central District'. After the second phrase, further data were collected by 10 local students and 10 visitors who are volunteer to be cooperated in the next phrase. In these phrases, 10 students chosen who study in primary school, junior high school, senior school and university, in comparison to 10 visitors concerning their feelings about their favourite shots within the West-central District to document this information by means of auto-photographs of each respondent. This sampling approach resulted in usable responses from 96 informants with higher desire to proceed the following method of auto-photography. Living location was widely spread from north to south of Tainan including the East side of the island within visitors' group. Each of the 10 informants from each group- residents and visitors were given a disposable camera to take 5 pictures accompanied by photograph interviews. Finally gathering these visual, textual

and vocal data for analyzing and comparison between two groups to gather and analyze further of cultural images of the West-Central District of Tainan (Table I). The sampling structure for questionnaire has shown below:

TABLE I: SAMPLING STRUCTURE

Residents				Visitors			
Category	District	Number	Total	Category	Area	Number	Total
Area of living	West-central District	27	69	Area of living	Northern Taiwan	7	27
	Non West-central District	42			Central Taiwan	8	
					Southern Taiwan	9	
Length of time living in Tainan /years	Under 3 years	14	69	Purpose of visit	business	8	27
	3-10 years	14			travel	19	
	Above 10 years	41		Numbers of times on visiting	Under 5 times	10	27
		More than 5 times	17				

IV. AUTO-PHOTOGRAPHICAL PICTURES

Each informant was asked to take 5 pictures. With the concern of safety, those who are still under 15 they were allowed to be accompanied by their parents for photo shooting. These images were collected with helps from accompanied person in a manner that best conveys the collective feelings toward the city. For the group of visitors, this study cooperate with accommodations and bicycle rental services in the West-central District, to avoid possible bias associate with location of encountering by respondents and researcher. An emphasis was placed on sharing ‘your personal feelings toward the taken images’. For this purpose, the student and visitor volunteers were equipped with disposable camera. In addition to these images, volunteers were asked to write a short description of the scenes. The author found the various view points and divers perspectives held by two groups to be very helpful in interpreting the pictures associate with their status, age, living location, and living length in Tainan. (Fig. 1)

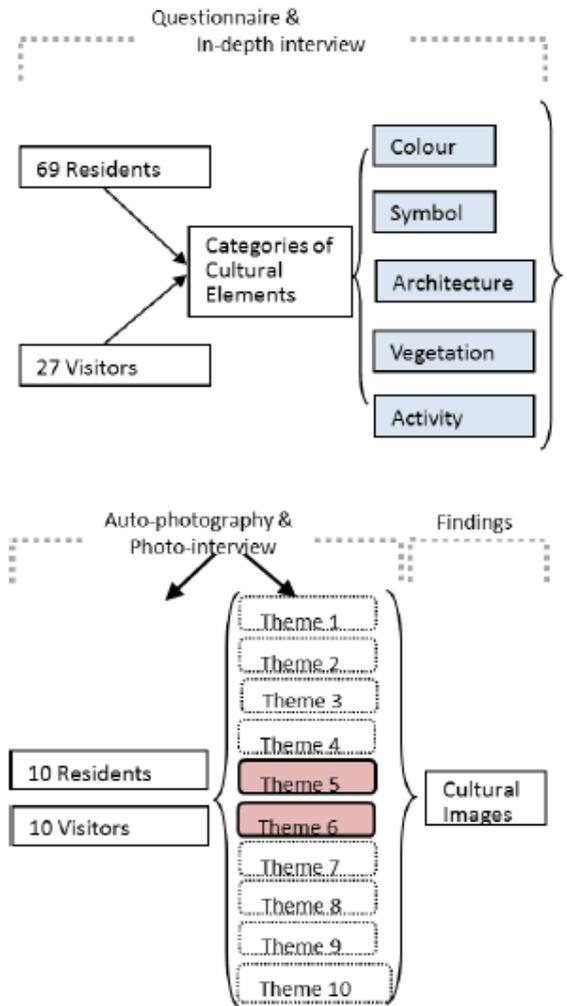


Fig. 1. Research framework.

V. ANALYSIS

Based on the 96 informants of residents and visitors to describe their individual beliefs and attitudes toward cultural images of Tainan. This research results in five categories, such as color, symbol, architecture, vegetation, and activities. The overall image of each category was selected according to their understanding and perception of the city.

Compared with visitors, residents in this study significant different in their opinion of representative image such that they related deeply with their personal attachment by describing the their chosen element under categories and with “In my childhood...”, “I remember when I...”, and “This is where we used to...” However, visitors tend to describe the chosen elements of each category by expressing: “It seems like as if...”, “I presume that...”, “I prefer coming to Tainan rather than...”, and “I feel touched by...”, depicting own relation to the city as observer.

It is aimed to identify cultural images perceived form both groups under the categories of color, symbol, architecture, vegetation and activities.

A subsequent investigation based on the personal experiences and introspective observation by applying auto-photography, the author conducted coding and identified several key themes delivered from both groups, two themes are overlapped whereas other themes were particularly

emphasized by each group. The method proceeded according to the approach described for using subjective personal introspections to build collective cultural images. The interpretive analysis of ten themes different and also overlapped between residents and visitors, these are:

- Personal emotional attachment: memory, childhood (residents)
- Historical means: Index of leading indicator, Importance, Uniqueness (residents)
- Subjective association: social relationship, nostalgia, pride (residents)
- Reputation: Comparative outcome (residents)
- Characters of gastronomy: local cuisine and eating style (residents + visitors)
- Character of the city: religious festival, slow, living quality (residents + visitors)
- Spatial element: open space, alley, ancient wall, night market (visitors)
- Self-narrative scene: (visitors)
- Clue & signage: (visitors)
- Psychological projection: adore, well-being (visitors)

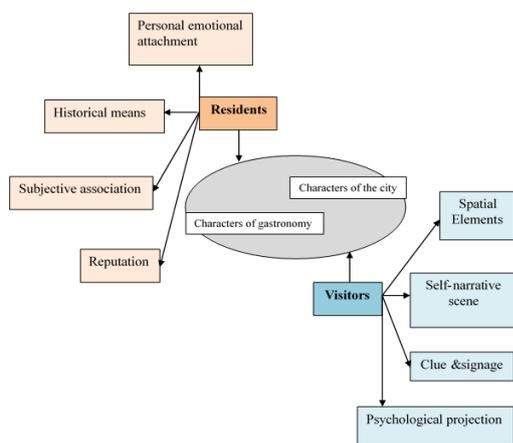


Fig. 2. Ten themes analyzed from auto-photography method.

These themes contain multiple sub-themes in relation to each group. Although the analysed two themes were the shared categories, relevant elements under each of them are different in the results.

VI. FINDINGS

According to the interviewed data and photographs collected from 10 residents and 10 visitors has shown that from residents' point of view, they perceive the city associate with bounding with the place.

A. Personal Emotional Attachment (Residents)

The strongest and direct attachment with cultural image with the residents linked with them personally: 'An airplane on blue sky... this scene reminds me of the first time I arrived the city. It always gives me unspeakable surprises when it flies over my head I will not forget.' Another case of daily personal bounding with the people refers to the experience of a 22-year-old university student living in the area who linked her image with great achievement of a part-time job: 'The church, where the first time I teach piano... the afternoon sun

shines upon him.' The images clearly represent connection with their own living experience in the city tided with people and place. Also some residents spotted the West Central District locates within the boundary of the airplane channel so that the big sound that airplane make represent the atmosphere: "I always have to take a pause during conversation through phone every time an airplane flies over, even though I take this surprises as unchangeable perfection of living in this area."

B. Historical Means (Residents)

If residents and travellers would have diverse view about most representative cultural images involved with the factual status of Tainan, historical means perceived exceptionally strong by residents stands out from the rest of the categories. In this case, one house wife regards the remains of ancient Nan-men Wall as "The only heritage located in the school..., it is the south gate of the old province", and a 16-year-old high school student described as "This is the relics of Tainan." Other residents express their sound knowledge towards scenes that enrich the beauty of the city by expressing "This is where the history performed". The mentioned image of the historical heritage as the representation associate with the 'gate' and 'threshold' of the narration of Tainan.

C. Subjective Association (Residents)

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D. Reputation (Residents)

The most common expression towards cultural image of Tainan to residents are strongly tided with the reputation of historic city and its own history, especially the 'first of...' becomes a phenomenon that residents engage the image with authorship of meaning. A 12-year-old boy in his junior high mentioned: "The ancient Nan-men Gate draws the south boundary of historic town". A college student present her understanding of the story of Tainan by saying: "The Hayashi Department store was the first department store with modern lift built during the Japanese colonised period". Residents are confident and feel proud about the status of the city.

E. Characters of the City (Residents + Visitors)

Even though the images of Tainan varied between residents and non-resident visitors, however, vivid city character are actively described, such as: "We feel the subtle and elegance that only Tainan has...", "I feel calm and there is some kind of slowness which I enjoy so much...", "The West-Central District, in particular, it has got old shell but with new spirit...", and "When I stand in the front of things in this area I feel 'he' is so strong but elegant".

Many of the visitors and residents take *Roundabout* as the most distinguished character in Tainan, many says: “No matter where we go, we see roundabout everywhere”, one visitor even see it as an indicator of direction in the city, he mentioned: “Looking for roundabout can be very useful orientation method told by a local resident, and I believe him”, and “how beautiful it is to have greens surrounding the roundabout”.

F. Characters of Gastronomy (Residents + Visitors)

“Oh, this is the taste of Taiwan!”, “I even miss the time I queued up to buy lunch boxes...you feel the happiness by waiting for it”. “This is where all the lovely food are”, “It’s the place where most delicious food can be found”, one visitor even take a well-known heritage brand as the image of the place: “The Black Bridge Sausage- it’s really got a good reputation”. A 16-year-old girl in her senior high highlighted the traditional bakery shop always fulfil her satisfaction of the Tainan essence: “This bakery shop never disappointed me, it is always there and our family loves it... the typical Tainanese milkfish flavour is what I want to mention in particular for its wonderful savoury”.

G. Spatial Elements (Visitors)

Many visitors refer to representative elements associate with physical places and spaces: “The tilted houses and rusty walls represent the essence of this area”. A 25- year- old visitor even aware the spatial symbol while wandering by expressing: “The church, temple, and the weather forecast station are nearby they signify layers of history in Tainan”. “Alleys, always appear with surprises.” One mother has a son who studies in the senior high school in West-Central District mentioned that: “the heritage of the red-brick tower in the school shows the ancient garden in the past and now it also represents the humanity enrichment of attitude laid in the campus.” Same time, visitors overwhelmed by temples worship gods and goddess, a 32-year-old female taking her three-day holiday in the old town of Tainan provided her first impression on: “Temples seem like friendly neighbours to many Tainanese”.

H. Self-narrative Scene (Visitors)

Many visitors perceived places and the surrounded environment with their implicit interpretation of its’ story and special milieu: “By looking at the lined up lanterns above the alleys which make me feel like they lead me to the sacred path and I am blessed by gods”, and “The well designed and crafted metal window frame draws me back to the old time then I start to wonder how these people live inside and I feel so attached with them”. Some sensational descriptions narrated by visitors shows how someone strolling on the streets of Tainan : “When I see the flags out there they go so well with the typical blue fluffy sky just like cotton candy which make me almost fall into a dream”.

I. Clue and Signage (Visitors)

Many visitors found themselves navigated by the vegetation and the local people fascinating, they even become important clues of getting to fell Tainan during travel: “The ‘café sign’ locates at the corners of alleys reminds people of the life style and quality of Tainan”, “The green roofs

harmonically go well with the green in the city”, “The tree-Golden Shower blossoms just like how I know about warm and kindness of Tainanese people”, and “When I see the elderly people sitting at the corner of the street under banyan trees suddenly I know I am ‘in’ Tainan with the life style of leisure and calmness”.

J. Psychological Projection (Visitors)

Visitors are able to identify themselves in the area of Tainan with their own projection introspectively: “By only standing in front of it, I certainly feel overwhelmed by its’ sophistication and powerfulness”, The roundabout with many roads diffused from it just like a sun having radiance, it’s Tainan!”, and “I feel so happy and enjoy even when I have to que in line to buy my lunch”. Other visitors interpret the life style of this area through their personal experience: “The building height is just right which is perfect for living, I wish I could have lived here, I remember my grandparents live in some houses like these”, “Generations of generations, people grow old elegantly...it reminds me of scenes in many films”, “Ancient trees they are so old and I am so touched by the intertwined roots, it’s about memory of generations”, and “I like the simplicity, rusty, elegance, and relaxation of this place”.

VII. CONCLUSION: CITY IN THEIR EYES AND MINDS- RESIDENTS AS PORTRAYER AND VISITORS AS READER

The importance of the residents is emphasized by reference [3] that the residents as a potential target group of a place. This research has readdressed the important factors that transmitted desire and belonging of residents by emerging inner personal reflection towards image of a city to elevate perceived characteristics that local people urged to hold on to. While visitors and local residents perceive images by producing meanings about particular place with which they can identify. These places would be reconstructed and restructured to be close to what both groups interpreted and referred.

The theoretical place marketing and promotion contributed insights, methods, and tools from precedents research. In reality, issues consider to be relatively crucial is the perspectives and viewpoints that derived from potential new residents such as investors, migrant workers or students...etc. Residents could function as ambassadors for their place as well as to attract visitors by enhancing characteristics and reputation. Therefore, the position give to gain credibility from communicated message by city authorities would fail if images were misinterpreted or presented. Both visitors and residents tell often include their own explanations of their own photographs that capture what these informants find especially worthwhile to express, these visualizations and emic interpretations would serve to inform strategist match with images reports ([9]). This research attempts to fill in this gap by exploring in detail the common cultural images of the city perceived by both residents and tourists in current West-central District of Tainan. In addition to review insights and feelings about cultural images that both groups have demonstrated in relation to self-introspection towards these images, in order to gain hidden voices and to clarify roles of

the residents and visitors and to seek potential concepts to strengthen spirit of the place.

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