

Abstracts of Presentation and Discussion of May 14, 2025

Presentation by Kuan Shu Education

Foundation

The speaker represented the Kuan Shu Education Foundation and shared the foundation's experience working in the Chenglong Wetland. Chenglong Village was once farmland, but due to long-term over-extraction of groundwater, severe land subsidence occurred. Starting in 1986, consecutive typhoons (such as Wayne and Herbert) caused the seawall to collapse, allowing seawater to flood the area, transforming the land from farmland into fish ponds, wetlands, and wasteland. Land subsidence continues to this day.

Villagers feel sad or angry about this “useless” wetland, often dumping trash there and even claiming that ghosts inhabit the area, preventing children from approaching due to concerns about uneven terrain posing dangers. The government previously introduced “ecological fallow” policies and provided compensation, but these efforts failed to alter villagers' negative perceptions of the wetland.

The Forestry Bureau therefore invited the Guanshu Education Foundation to establish a presence in the area, hoping to change villagers' perceptions of the wetlands through environmental education and other means. The foundation established the “Chenglong Wetland Detective Agency,” taking children on explorations of their hometown, conducting ecological surveys (such as aquatic organisms and birds) and cultural learning (such as water wheel storage). These activities were documented in a special publication, promoting parent-child dialogue. Through these efforts, villagers' attitudes toward the wetlands gradually shifted from rejection to willingness to trust the foundation and allow their children to explore.

Since 2009, the foundation has collaborated with curators to host an international environmental art festival. The festival uses eco-friendly materials and focuses not on developing tourism but on the community, aiming to “stimulate villagers to view the

wetlands differently,” “disrupt the community,” and emphasize “community participation.” Artists live and work alongside villagers. Villagers initially participated by “borrowing tools,” then helped with transportation, and even took the initiative to repair works damaged by a typhoon, discovering their own creative abilities. Later, villagers voluntarily entered art competitions, creating works such as “Bridge to the Future” and “Rebirth.”

Art is a means to an end: to inspire love for the environment, foster a sense of community, and empower villagers to “independently manage community affairs.” During the art festival, villagers reorganized the community development association and launched community care initiatives such as a senior citizens' canteen and after-school tutoring. Chenglong Wetland was designated a “national important wetland,” and remarkably, 60% of villagers signed a petition to protect it.

After over a decade of accumulation, Chenglong Village has evolved from viewing the wetland as worthless land, to observing and participating, and finally to actively creating, reorganizing the association, and protecting the wetland. This year, the villagers organized and hosted the art festival on their own, integrating resources and completing community artworks, continuing to use art to unite villagers and focus on environmental issues.

Presentation by Patricia Green

Her talk focused on Fort Rocky in Jamaica. She referred to this site as a “disaster and conflict zone” because demolition activities took place in early March, just before World Heritage Day on April 18.

Fort Rocky is located on a sandbar wetland in southern Jamaica near Port Royal. Port Royal is currently seeking World Heritage status, and this sandbar area has been designated as a Ramsar International Important Wetland since 2002. The region is prone to earthquakes and hurricanes and has a sensitive environment. On the sandbar stands a significant 19th-century military fortress built by Jamaican engineers. Until the 1960s, the area was only accessible by sea.

There were plans to adaptively reuse Fort Rocky as an entertainment area to coincide with Kingston's designation as a UNESCO City of Music. However, in the first week of March this year, community groups reported that **bulldozers had entered the cultural heritage site to begin demolition**. This was done to rush the entertainment event scheduled for March 15, and the vegetation and some of the buildings were cleared almost overnight.

This action sparked a “**conflict**” over development, the environment, architecture,

and intangible heritage. Removing vegetation not only destroyed the wetland environment, which serves as a nesting ground for sea turtles and a habitat for various plants and animals, but also made the sandbar more susceptible to flooding and even breaking during hurricanes, endangering the safety of residents in Port Royal.

Following the incident, the **Jamaican government issued a public apology** and pledged to “**restore**” the area to its original state. Currently, the government, university, United Nations Environment Programme, and local residents are collaborating on mangrove restoration efforts. The speaker commended the government's apology and commitment to restoration.

Discussion

The moderator first observed that both cases are located in roughly the same climate zone and are both islands. Although Taiwan is about three times the size of Jamaica, both cases are worth paying attention to in terms of the significance of “entertainment” or its causes and consequences. At the same time, the collaborative work with children in the Taiwan case is also interesting.

Raquel expressed amazement at the Chenglong Wetland case in Taiwan, particularly at how people have grown accustomed to living with water, “to the extent that they have become water.” She delved deeper, seeking to understand how water has become an integral part of the community, how the community “lives through water and with water,” and whether they “view water as part of their own lives” and develop an “identity” with it. She distinguished between merely getting used to, tolerating, or utilizing water, and “becoming part of nature,” “identifying oneself with nature,” and “being embedded within it.” She summarized the question as being about how the community “identifies itself with water,” or whether it is simply because they must, and how the community “is embedded within water,” and how water “is embedded within the community.”

The speaker from Taiwan responded that most residents who support the Foundation's actions **recognize the ecological significance of wetlands**, including their rich flora and fauna. They are working to shift their lifestyle toward **tourism and ecological education**. In terms of lifestyle, since the farmland is flooded, they have now switched from agriculture to **aquaculture**, and some residents continue to **go out to sea to fish**. Some residents who trust the foundation believe that the wetlands have become an integral part of their lives and hope to use them for tourism to support their livelihoods. Regarding housing, the speaker explained that in

the past, most, if not all, houses had floodwaters reaching about 1 to 2 meters high. Research shows that houses in lower-lying areas can experience floodwaters exceeding 2 meters. Traces of floods can still be seen on traditional houses. The foundation is currently attempting to introduce **new house designs with a clear-floor first floor** to allow water to flow through, while residents live on the second floor. Most non-new houses have also had their foundations raised to approximately two meters, based on research indicating that floodwaters can sometimes reach two meters in height. Participant Jessica praised the use of art and the “little detective” story in the Taiwanese case and shared educational resources on “questing” as a learning method.

Regarding the Fort Rocky case in Jamaica, Jessica welcomed the government's apology but expressed shock that the incident occurred at a Ramsar site (an internationally important wetland site). She acknowledged the community's role in the incident but also asked whether the involvement of the United Nations or other international organizations prompted the government's response. She mentioned that ecological restoration, such as mangrove restoration, requires a long time to restore ecological balance and biodiversity, and asked whether the government had provided an estimated timeline for restoration.

Jamaica case presenter Pat Green responded by emphasizing that the most unique and remarkable aspect of this case was that the intervention was “local.” It was precisely because the community took action and “sounded the alarm” that it immediately attracted widespread media coverage in newspapers, television, and radio, which in turn led to a huge response. The government issued an immediate apology and took immediate remedial action. She emphasized the power of local action, as in the past it was often necessary to wait for external institutions such as the United Nations to speak out. She also mentioned that the voices of local environmental experts with an international perspective and newspaper reports were also helpful. However, the speaker **did not mention whether the government provided a specific estimate of the time needed for ecological restoration.**

At the end of the discussion, the moderator concluded that the **keyword for this and future webinars will be “community.” The help, learning, understanding, and participation of the community** are essential for protecting our environment and natural and cultural heritage. Keywords will be compiled at the end of the year for further discussion.