

The Environmental History and Collective Memories of Irrigation Canals: A Case Study of Hakka Settlements in Jiadong Township, Pingtung County, Taiwan

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The Pingtung Plain is the primary region in southern Taiwan where Hakka communities are located. Their settlements are found on every spring belt of the alluvial fans in the region. The research subject of this study is Hakka settlements in the “Liudui” district in southern Taiwan. “Liudui” is a general term for Hakka settlements in southern Taiwan, which can be found in Kaohsiung and Pingtung County. Regarding current administrative districts, they comprise old settlements in both Jiadong and Liugen Villages in the Jiadong Township, Pingtung County. Our research method was based on the research theories of human geography, and we adopted the methods of a literature review and field study. We conducted in-depth interviews with the local elderly to understand the historical background of the region, and to explore the environmental history and collective memories of irrigation canals in the Hakka settlements in Jiadong Township.

Our research question started with discussing how previous constructions of local irrigation canals have enabled the region to become an important site of agricultural production. The development of aquaculture in 1970 led to an excessive extraction of groundwater, causing land subsidence problems and a gradual extinction of underground springs. Furthermore, the construction of concrete ditches because of urbanization has slowly resulted in a separation between humans and water.

This research examines the collective memories of irrigation canals among the Hakka settlements in Jiadong Township based on their environmental history. Jiadong used to have ample sources of groundwater. Water from underground springs that was collected by five major canals and directed to the villages was not only consumed by the residents daily, but also served community activities such as swimming and angling for children and residents. Agricultural irrigation in the past also depended on the local canal system. As a result, whether regarding practical functions or collective memories and emotional meanings, old canals are evidently more than essential

cultural assets for the Hakka community in Jiadong Township.

Keyword: Environmental History, Human Geography, Hakka Settlements,
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