

Cooperative Historic Landscape Rejuvenation in China: The Litchi Bay Project in Guangzhou

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ABSTRACT This article introduces the Litchi Bay Canal Project, a recent cooperative historic landscape rejuvenation in Guangzhou, China. The Litchi Bay Canal and the Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda were at the core of Litchi Bay, historically an important scenic area in Canton (Guangzhou). However, since the 1950s, the area has changed. The Lungchun Warehouse was built around the pagoda and the canal was covered by concrete planks and turned into a road in 1993. Soon after that, antique shops appeared along the road and folk activities related to the canal and the pagoda ceased to happen. In 2010, a systematic rejuvenation project was launched to restore the historic landscape through negotiation with and the cooperation of government and non-government entities, villagers and nearby residents. The canal was uncovered, the pagoda revealed and the Lungchun Warehouse was renovated into an antiques market. Together, these actions produced attractive public spaces for today's daily life as well as for traditional rituals. Based on the experience of the first author as the lead architect of the project, this article reviews the project, the restoration of the historic landscape and the regeneration of the urban public spaces. It analyses the holistic approach and the mechanisms of the project, discusses the thinking and specific operations to re-initiate the dialogue between the canal, the waterfront promenade and the historic buildings through an understanding of their mutual relationships.

KEYWORDS Litchi Bay Canal, Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda, cooperative rejuvenation, historic landscape, topography, folk rituals

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The recovery of historic landscapes in China has become a trend in the last two decades, due to the growing importance of cultural and environmental concerns in Chinese society. Interventions such as the Sangzhusse Palace- Fortress (Chang 2017), Zhongshan Road in Hangzhou (Wang 2017), Jingdezhen Old Town (Zhang 2017), and the water town and gardens of Mudu in Suzhou are representative of this trend because they have dealt with landscape history as well as architecture. This reaction to both artificial historical scenic areas and homogenised townscapes is caused by the simplified modernisation process in China. The intention of landscape recovery and rejuvenation is to search for the connotations of the landscape and to build a local identity with cultural significance, inspire the poetic imagination of history and bridge memories and today's life. At the same time, it is also considered as a progression of built heritage conservation, an exploration of new urbanisation approaches.

The Litchi Bay Project introduced in this article adds to this experience, by implementing successful cooperation among government and non-government stakeholders, as well as through the establishment of design principles aimed at revitalising the historic character of the place, acknowledging also the added value of time layering, and increasing the importance of the intervention on heritage assets. The covered canal was successfully restored, offering a waterfront promenade and public space full of historical memories, which merge into today's public life.

Litchi Bay¹ was the most famous scenic area in the history of Canton (today's Guangzhou) because of its water system, royal and private gardens, pagodas, mansions, temples and Pun Tong², an important village offering delicious food and traditional rituals (Figure 1). However, landscape transition since the 1950s changed the character of the area, and some cultural folk activities related to the canal

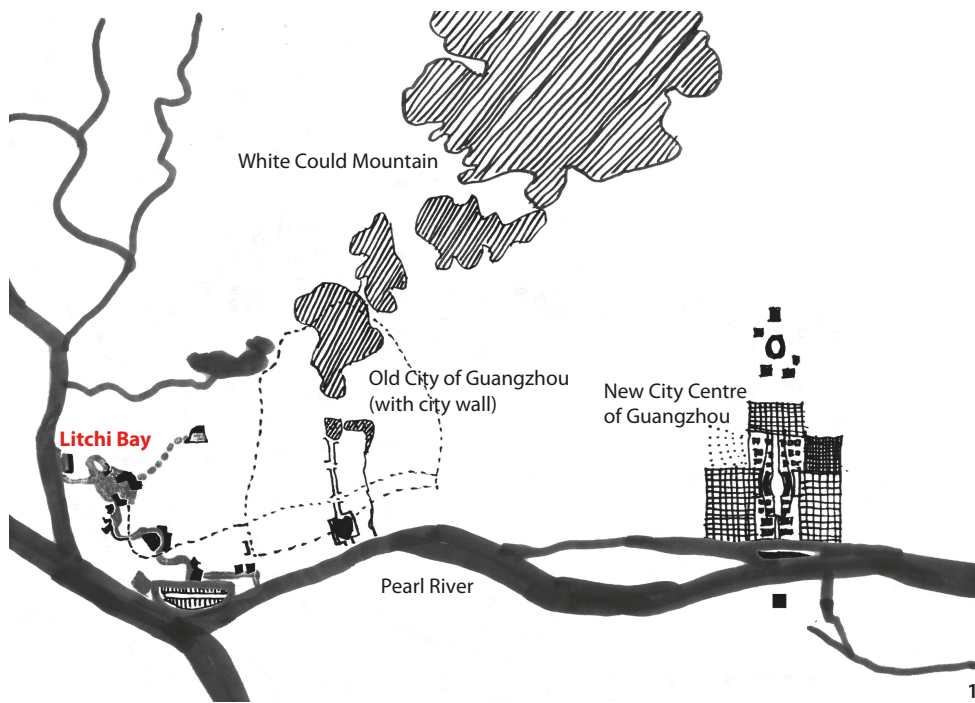


Figure 1 Location of Litchi Bay in Guangzhou (Source: based on the drawing by Haohao Xu).

and the pagoda declined. In the last few years, the traditional parades along the canal have been gradually reinitiated after the rejuvenation project. The project adopted a holistic and cooperative approach, achieving multiple goals through the regeneration of public spaces in the region and the resurgence of its cultural significance. The first phase of the project began with the Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda Plaza and Lungchun Warehouse and ended with the recovery of the canal, with the key issue of understanding the historic landscape and re-initiating the trilateral dialogue between the Litchi Bay Canal, the pagoda and the warehouse according to their mutual relationships.

Litchi Bay Canal, Literary Pagoda and Historic Landscape

Litchi Bay to the west of Canton used to be a marsh area connected to the Pearl River, where litchi trees were extensively planted and lotus ponds were excavated during the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC–8 AD), when Lu Jia was stationed in Canton³. In the Tang Dynasty, CongdangZheng, the Lingnan Jiedushi (the military governor)⁴ from 871–874 AD (*New Books of Tang*), constructed the Zheng Causeway and Litchi Garden. The causeway, marked in Figure 5, protected the inner land and water of Litchi Bay from the tide and floods of the Pearl River. Traces of the causeway still can be found today. Chang Liu⁵, the last King of the Nanhao Dynasty (917–971), built the Xiande Garden and King's Flower Cove to entertain officials with

a 'red cloud banquet' in the harvest season of litchi (Luo 1996). For the first 1000 years, the main plant and motif of this wetland was the litchi, which then became the permanent symbol of the region, and the landscape was mainly for the privileged elite.

There are few records of Litchi Bay during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) and Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). However, in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), 'Fisherman singing in Litchi Bay' was listed as one of the 'Eight Sights of Canton' (*Nanhai Xian Xu Zhi* 1910), where ordinary people might enjoy the scene of the fisherman's daily life outside of the walled city. The significance of the landscape moved from a former imperial garden to a public recreation area, similar to today. The fishermen lived on their boats at that time and were called Tanka⁶. During the 1950s–60s they were relocated to live on land. The scene of the fisherman singing became just a memory.

After Canton was designated as the only trading port of the country in 1757 under the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, Qing Dynasty, the wealthy merchants, especially those of 'Thirteen Hongs'⁷, built private gardens around Litchi Bay including Haishan Xianguan (Sea & Mountain Fairy Pavilion, open to foreigners and known in the west through Jules Itier's photos taken in the 1840s) (Figure 2), Xiaotian Yuan (Little Cropland Garden) and Xiao Hua-fang Zhai (Small Gaily-Painted Pleasure-Boat Study). In the late Qing Dynasty, a great number of distinctive Sai Kwan Mansions⁸ combining both Chinese and Western architectural features appeared along the east bank, making



Figure 2 Part of the painting of Pan's Garden, drawn by Xia Luan. 3.58 m × 0.26 m, 1848 (Source: Collected by Guangzhou Museum of Art). **Figure 3a** Activities around Litchi Bay in 1930s, Zidong boat (Source: Zhou Junrong).

Figure 3b Activities around Litchi Bay in 1930s, people taking sightseeing boats around Xiao Huafang Zhai (Source: Zhou Junrong).

Figure 4 The Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda in 1869 at the Litchi Bay Canal when the tide was out (Source: www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/289341; attributed to John Thomson [1837–1921]).

the canal an ideal place for folk activities such as the fair celebrating the birthday of the North Deity and dragon boat races. Five water plants produced here were named the 'Pun Tong Five Distinctions'⁹. It was also the best destination for citizens to row a boat, visit gardens, and taste litchi and porridge served on fishing boats (Figure 3). The enchanting Litchi Bay was crowned as 'the best scenery of Lingnan' in the couplets of the Sea & Mountain Fairy Pavilion (Mai 2011). Although most of the private gardens had disappeared into oblivion during the historical changes, the water landscape, the mansions and the Pun Tong village were maintained.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Canton was both the capital city of Guangdong Province and the seat of the Guangzhou Prefecture, Pun Yu (Panyu) County and Nam

Hoi (Nanhai) County. Academic students and *Xiucan*¹⁰ frequented Canton to take the county level, prefecture level and provincial level Keju tests (imperial examinations). The Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda was built at Litchi Bay Canal for the exam takers to worship the Kuixing (the god of literature) and pray for success in the examination when they landed at the dock. It was not documented in any official literature but from the construction materials and form that the surviving pagoda was likely constructed in the early Qing Dynasty by Pun Tong villagers. The pagoda was a landmark with an open frontage and groves at the back (Figure 4). Quite intriguingly, the pagoda only has two floors instead of the typical three floors that in literary pagodas would symbolise *zhuangyuan*, *bangyan* and *tanhua*, the top three scholars in final imperial examinations.

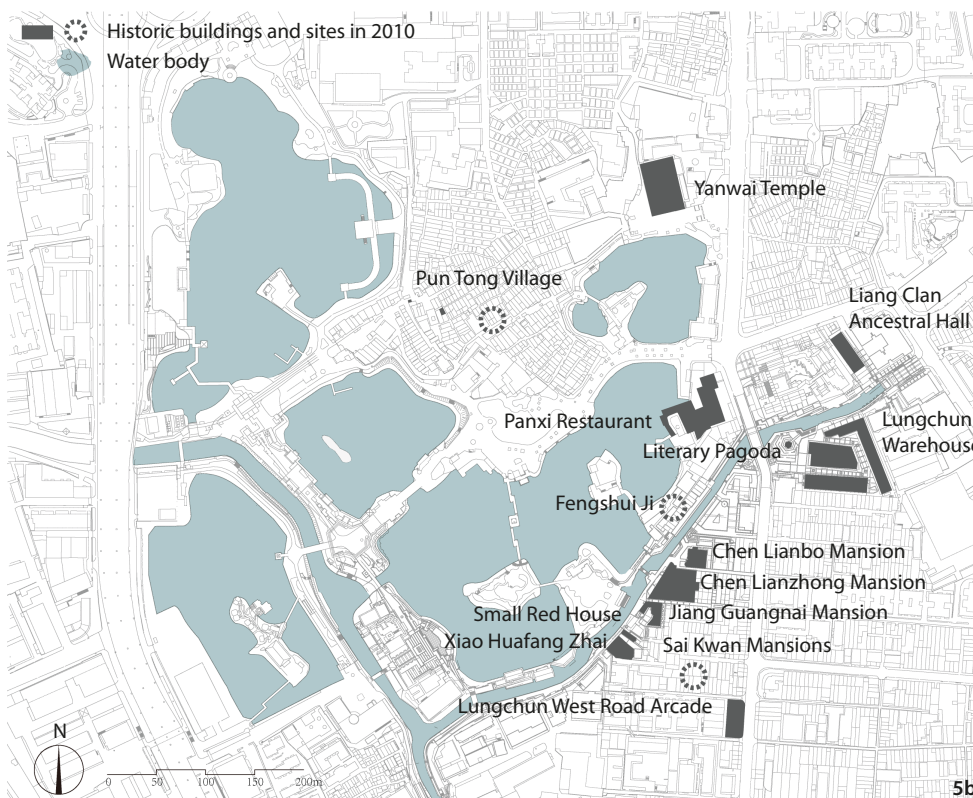
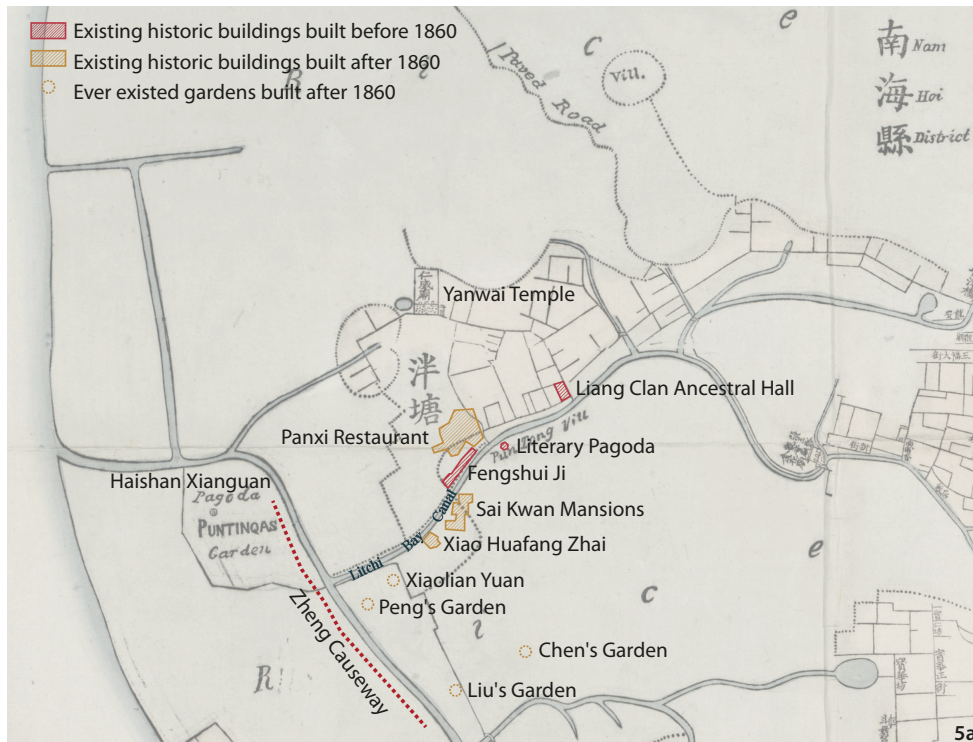


Figure 5a Historic landscape in Litchi Bay based on *Map of the City and Entire Suburb of Canton* by Daniel Vrooman, 1860 (Source: Collection of National Library of Australia).

Figure 5b Historic landscape in Litchi Bay based on topographic map, 2010 (Source: Urban Elephant, South China University of Technology).

In 1958, under the management of the city and district government, the separated lotus ponds of Litchi Bay were excavated and connected into today's artificial Liwan Lake consisting of four smaller lakes, which solved a problem with water logging. The famous Panxi Restaurant designed by architect Bozhi Mo was built at

the lakeside soon after that, in a design adopted from traditional gardens in South China. Litchi Bay maintained the impression of the meeting place of the urbanised Sai Kwai and the suburban Pun Tong Village, a public leisure and recreation place with beautiful scenery (Figure 5).



Figure 6 The transition of the Litchi Bay canal, Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda and Lungchun Warehouse during 1960–2004
(Source: Urban Planning Bureau of Liwan District).

Lungchun Warehouse, the Covered Canal and the Trapped Pagoda

From the late 1950s, the Pagoda became part of the Lungchun Warehouse of Guangzhou Supply and Marketing Cooperative Grocery Company and gradually disappeared from public view, being enclosed by four multi-floor warehouses, office buildings, staff dormitories and residential buildings (Figure 6). There was no longer a dialogue between the canal and the warehouse, nor between the pagoda and the warehouse.

As the water quality worsened due to the direct discharge of sewage into the canal, the canal became a foul-smelling ‘black dragon river’. In 1993, the canal was covered by concrete slabs and functioned as a sewer. The covered canal was further transformed into Litchi Bay Road (Figure 6). Later the road, flanked by newly built one-or two-story shops was developed into Sai Kwan Antique Street. The context of the pagoda was completely cut off, leaving the hidden structure isolated.

The pagoda was listed as a heritage building of Guangzhou in 2002 and was later repaired. Unfortunately, the repair project merely focused on refurbishing the interior space and repainting the decorative patterns but ignored the topographic change—the surrounding ground elevation had changed and part of the pagoda was buried underground (Feng and Yang 2011). The altered ground level and proportions made it difficult to re-establish the historical setting of the pagoda.

In 2010, before the 16th Asian Games in Guangzhou, the Liwan District government decided to uncover the Litchi Bay Canal. The first section runs from Fungyuen

Road to the intersection with the Liwan Canal, a total water surface length of 668 m. The decision to restore the canal was a difficult one. As early as 2002, the rebirth of the Litchi Bay Canal had been suggested. However, this endeavour faced a series of challenges involving the constructing of pipe culverts, improving water quality, building new bridges, organising the landscape along the canal, and relocating the antique stores along the street. All this required complicated organisation and accordingly a considerable investment. In addition, it was unclear whether the restored canal would receive support from stakeholders and citizens. For these reasons, discussions over the final plan lasted for eight years. The Asian Games brought a new opportunity for the restoration plan of the Litchi Bay Canal. The project need to be completed by a deadline, about a month before November 12, 2010, the opening day of the Asian Games. In May 2010, almost at the last moment, the restoration project was officially launched. The project progressed over a construction period of about five months (Jiang et al. 2015) (Figure 7).

The plan comprised the following core technical elements:

1. Construction of a utility pipeline network to prevent domestic sewage discharge to the canal, to ensure the good water quality of the canal. This was the most expensive part of the project but was almost invisible.
2. Without a natural water source, a water supply system was needed. Water from the Pearl River is diverted into Liwan Lake for one week before it is drawn into the canal. This strategy proved to be more natural and much cheaper than constructing a new water plant using reclaimed water.
3. After the removal of the antique shops, the thick

concrete slabs covering the canal were removed. The bottom of the canal was resurfaced. The embankment, steps and quays were rebuilt.

4. Anti-epidemic measures required disinfecting and cleaning.
5. Lungchun Bridge was reconstructed for vehicular traffic along Longchun West Road and five bridges for pedestrians were needed, as shown in Figure 7.
6. The riverfront topography, promenade and landscape were reshaped to keep the memory and offer multiple choices for walking. Aquatic vegetation, boardwalks and places for water activities enriched the connections between water and land.
7. A signage system, lighting and sound equipment was installed.
8. Riverfront buildings needed repair, renovation or construction. The patrimonial Literary Pagoda, the Chen Lianbo Mansion, the Small Painted Boat Hall and the Liang Clan Ancestral Hall and its courtyards, required preservation. The unlisted buildings such as Lungchun Warehouse and Panxi parking lot were renovated. He Xiangning Art Center was constructed.
9. The water from the lake was pumped into the canal.

To further the aim of reopening the canal, cooperation between different stakeholders was essential. The district government played a dominant role, as the organiser and provider of public funds for infrastructure, public spaces and public surfaces of building. Non-government stakeholders included the owner of the warehouse who offered the land around the pagoda and the main investor to renovate the interior of the warehouse buildings to contain the relocated antique shops. Participants included the Yanwai Taoist Temple and Pun Tong villagers as the main organisers of folk rituals. The villagers hoped their 40-m long dragon boats could come back to the canal during the Dragon Boat Festival.

The shape of the canal and height clearance of the bridges allowed for the passage of dragon boats and for the passage of sightseeing boats (Figure 8). The clean water from the lake is introduced into the canal at the eastern point, where a marker stands in the form of a huge rock with the inscription ‘荔枝湾 (Litchi Bay)’ by the famous calligrapher, Yongyu Huang. Aspects of the project were executed with great sophistication and were highly-celebrated in Guangzhou (Xie 2011).

The environmental improvement of the pagoda and



Figure 7a Uncovering of Litchi Bay Canal, landscape design of Litchi Bay Canal (Source: Yang Liyan).

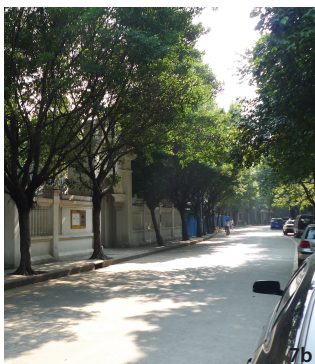


Figure 7b Uncovering of Litchi Bay Canal, Litchi Bay Road (Source: Jiang Feng).



Figure 7c Uncovering of Litchi Bay Canal, Litchi Bay Canal under construction (Source: Jiang Feng).

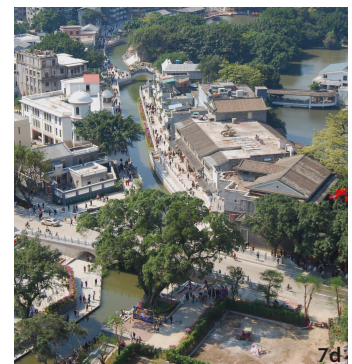


Figure 7d Uncovering of Litchi Bay Canal, the revealed Litchi Bay Canal in October 2010 (Source: Guoxiang Huang).



Figure 8a Activities on Litchi Bay Canal now, sightseeing boats docked in the quay (Source: Yongjian Guo).

Figure 8b Activities on Litchi Bay Canal now, the 40-m long dragon boat on Litchi Bay Canal (Source: Ke Chen).

Figure 8c Dragon boat racing during the Dragon Boat Festival around the Pagoda Plaza (Source: Jun Li).

renovation of the warehouse started before the restoration of the canal. In fact, the pagoda and the warehouse were crucial to the success of the whole plan. Some buildings around the pagoda were removed to form a key open space along the Litchi Bay Canal. At the same time, the construction quality of some traditional materials and techniques was tested to set a benchmark for the whole restoration project. The 10,000 m² warehouse buildings were revamped into a museum-like antiques market to relocate tenants from the former antique street and accommodate new merchants. Therefore, when the plan to restore the Litchi Bay Canal was initiated, the top priority was to set up the relationship between the pagoda, the warehouse and the canal.

The Reappearance of the Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda

The restoration of the Litchi Bay Canal offered an excellent opportunity for the conservation of the pagoda and the revitalisation of the surrounding area. The conservation of the pagoda was taken into consideration in the reconstruction of the urban public space and the rejuvenation of the cultural landscape (Frassoldati 2015). The pagoda was considered as one of the most important nodes along the canal, and the surrounding dormitories were removed and replaced by a small plaza (Figure 9).

The 13.6 m high pagoda only has two floors, though three floors may have been intended at the beginning. The pagoda had strange proportions without the base before the project started, but after the earth around the granite plinth was cleared, the buried hexagonal granite base was found intact. Further clearing revealed two layers of pavement of white granite and red sandstone outside the 55 cm high base. From the material and pavement construction method, it was established that the ground of the pagoda



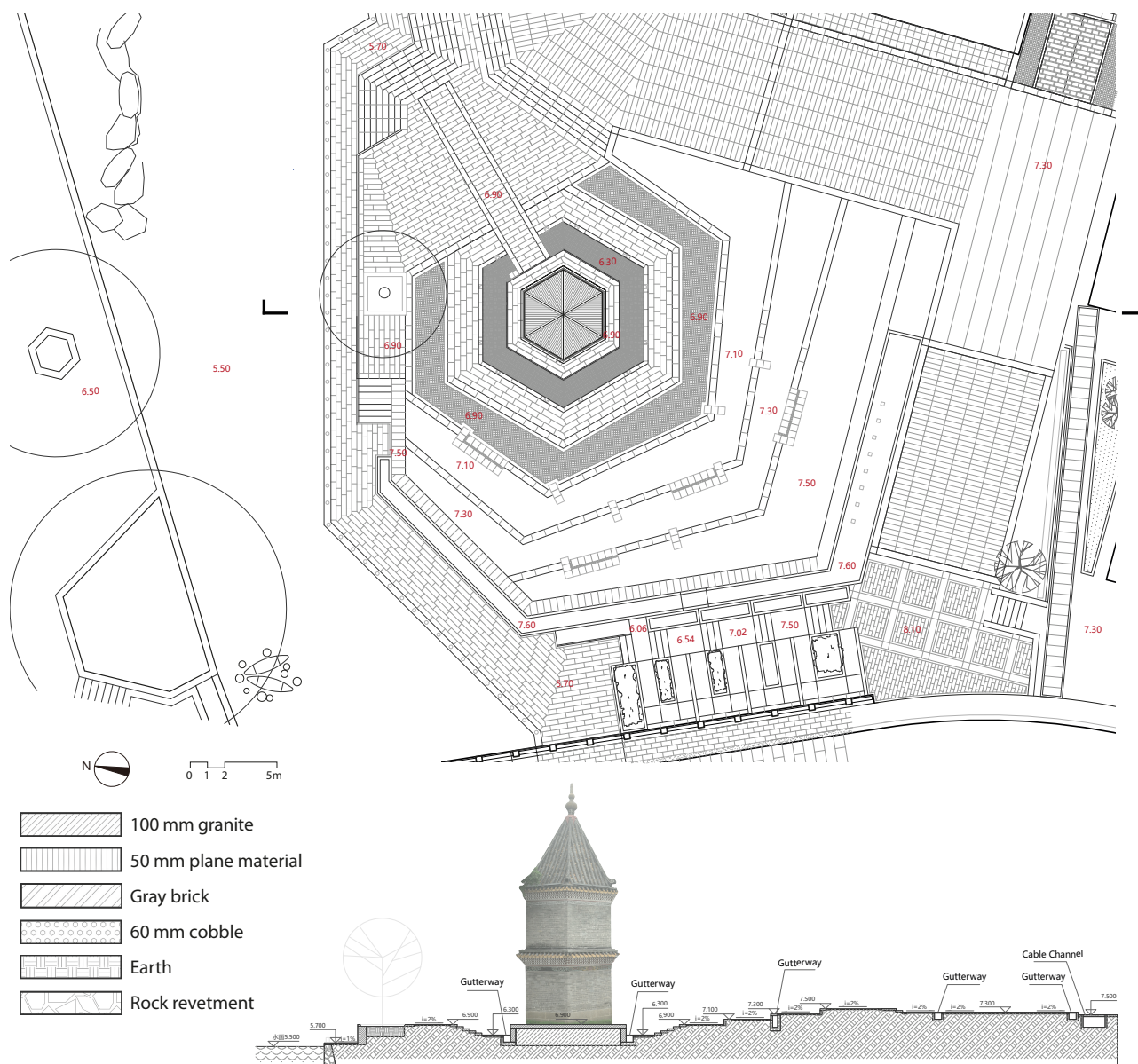
would have originally been level with the surface of white granite (5.9 m above sea level), which served as an important design basis for the restoration.

However, in view of the surrounding utility pipelines, a bomb shelter built in the 1950s, surface drainage and the canal water level (5.5 m), it was impossible to restore the historical elevation for the topography surrounding the pagoda. The decision was made to lower the ground elevation within a 1.5 m wide area around the pagoda to expose the original granite base, and the white stone and red stone pavement (Figure 10). A wooden path leading to the main door of the pagoda was then built. The original appearance of the pagoda was restored to the maximum extent. A closer look showed the original slender proportion of the whole pagoda. Thus, the elegant historical

building with a distinct Sai Kwan flavour is fully revealed by the newly revitalised canal.

The pagoda has become the centre of a 2,300 m² plaza, as multiple rings of circular terraces were provided to spiral outwards from the pagoda. Each level of terrace was furnished with permanent benches made of grey bricks and granite. The pavement deliberately avoided a radial pattern centring on the pagoda, instead following the tangents. Here, the barrier-free design was not only a necessity for the public space but a design feature. A properly scaled and interesting space jointly formed by the terrace of steps at the turn of a folded ramp near Lungchun Bridge and the naturally cascading flower bed is highly inviting for children to play in.

Being in close vicinity to Lungchun Bridge and the



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Figure 11 Section design of the Pagoda Plaza (Source: Urban Elephant, South China University of Technology).

canal and thanks to the removal of the surrounding buildings, the Pagoda Plaza became the first completed and the most important public space of the canal and was once again embedded in a relatively open context (Figure 11). This offered favourable conditions for the renovation of the peripheral buildings of the Lungchun Warehouse.

Renovation of Lungchun Warehouse

Construction of the Literary Pagoda Plaza made possible the simultaneous renovation of the seven buildings that made up the Lungchun Warehouse complex. These buildings were to be renovated into a market for antiques, a project mainly invested in by the

non-government operator.

As the original Sai Kwan Antique Street was built along Litchi Bay Road, many of the stores faced relocation due to the restoration of Litchi Bay Canal. Therefore, the renovation of the Lungchun Warehouse was planned to accommodate this functional demand. Before the renovation started, it was strongly opposed by tenants of the antique stores, who felt that a multi-story building was not good for the antiques trade. However, even after dismantling the dormitories around the Literary Pagoda, there were still seven multi-story buildings in the Lungchun Warehouse, as shown in Figure 9, including a 4-story warehouse (Building A), a 5-story warehouse (B), two 2-story warehouses (Building C and D), two 8- to 9-story

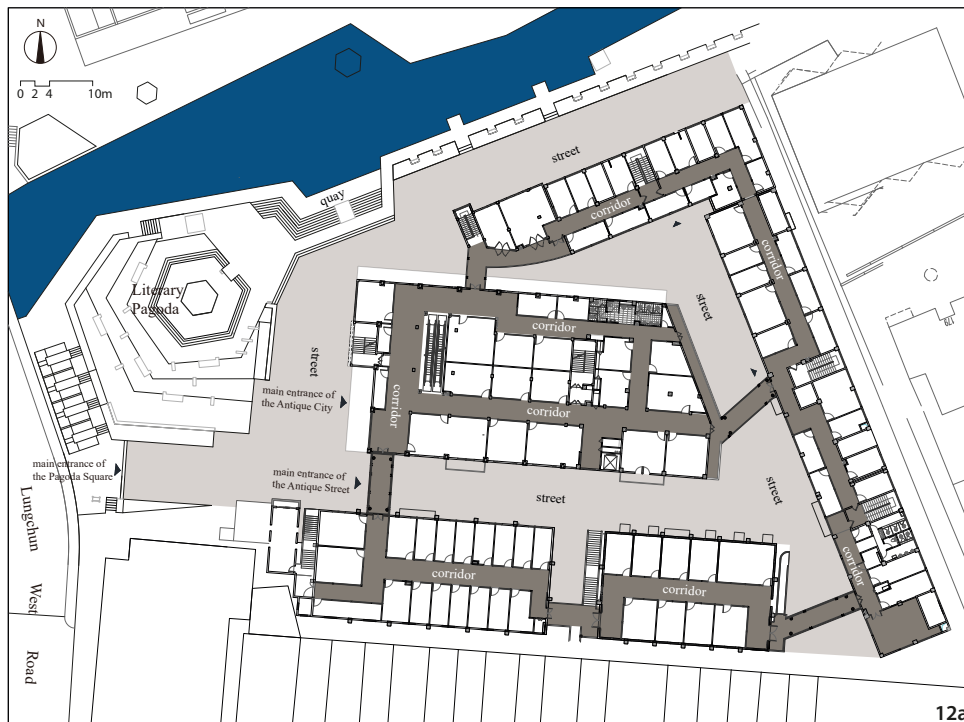


Figure 12a The creation of streets in the renovation design of Lungchun Warehouse (Source: Urban Elephant, South China University of Technology).

Figure 12b–12d Antique stores in Lungchun Warehouse (Source: 12b and 12c from Ke Chen, 12d from Jun Li).



residential buildings (Building E and F, of which the ground floor and the first floor were used as warehouse), and a small 2-story building (G), all built from the 1950s through the 1980s. Buildings A and B were adjacent, while C and D were interconnected. As the antique dealers believed in the tradition of doing business on the ground floor, they were concerned that the multi-story building would adversely affect their business and some even held protests for the duration of the project. How to make these multi-story buildings suitable for the antiques trade became a critical problem.

Another issue was how to coordinate the appearance of Building A with the Literary Pagoda as the former's gable wall faced the pagoda. Some suggested that the façade of the warehouse was renovated in the traditional architectural style of the Ming and Qing dynasties, while others proposed to add a pavilion of the so-called Lingnan style on the top. In consideration of the large size and uninteresting shape of the warehouse building, it was difficult to achieve a scale and building form consistent

with the Literary Pagoda, even if using the same material, colour and decorative motif. In addition, the seven buildings were not built at the same time and were obviously different in appearance, material and structure. It was a great challenge to establish an integrated image simply by unification.

The renovation also faced challenges due to technical problems. For instance, the building structure and fire protection measures did not comply with the prevailing architectural regulations yet addressing these problems would have required a large investment, which would make the renovation uneconomical. According to *The Construction Law of the People's Republic of China*, institutes providing design services for building renovation projects should assume all design responsibilities, so the lack of archived drawings affected the structural engineers as they were not able to figure out the original construction of these buildings. Furthermore, the buildings did not meet the existing structural design code, in particular seismic requirements, due to the fragile structural form

Table 1 The strategy of re-initiating the dialogue (Source: the author).

Pairwise	Original relationship/Situation before renovation	Operation
Canal—Pagoda	close-knit dialogue/destroyed	boat dock, restoration
Pagoda—Warehouse	no dialogue/negative	plaza, rearrangement, reflection
Warehouse—Canal	no dialogue/indifferent	street, connection, continuity
Canal—Pagoda—Warehouse	Loose-knit/isolated	new trilateral dialogue



Figure 13a The pagoda and warehouse before renovation (Source: Jiang Feng).
Figure 13b The pagoda and warehouse after renovation (Source: Yuanxiang Luo).
Figure 14 Details of the façade of Lungchun Warehouse (Source: a, b: Jiang Feng; c: Yongjian Guo).

and construction methods resulting from obsolete design and construction standards.

The final design solution properly addressed these issues. The master plan was established with the intention to create inner streets. It used vacant spaces between buildings to foster a street atmosphere, linking all seven buildings into an integral cluster through bridges which allowed free circulation and a diversified spatial experience. Inside each building, a 3 m wide corridor in the middle resembled an interior street where all stores had enough shopfront space (Figure 12).

Reconnecting the Canal, Pagoda and Warehouses and the Revitalisation of the

Folk Rituals

An important issue for the architects was how to re-establish a connection between Litchi Bay Canal, the Literary Pagoda and the Lungchun Warehouse (Table 1).

Firstly, near the pagoda gate, the canal was widened enough to provide a berth for boats to turn around. A ramp was provided between the warehouse and the pagoda to connect the different levels and lead to the steps along the canal. Secondly, the renovation of the warehouse was defined to reflect and frame the pagoda, bringing out the best in each element.

Instead of simply achieving a harmonious overall appearance, efforts were made to maintain the actual scale



Figure 15 Citizens gathered to the canal on the opening day (Source: Guoxiang Huang).

and architectural character of the warehouse while establishing an appropriate relationship with the pagoda. Some of the warehouse buildings, which were originally painted with yellow mud and structurally unsuitable for use, were repainted with cement mortar to keep the original characteristics. To mitigate the unsightly appearance of the extensive water mortar external wall of Building A, the main entrance was placed on the ground floor while retaining the original doors. The wall on the first to second floor was partly changed to a lattice wall made of blue bricks in alternating stretchers and headers. The top floor was designed with strip windows and plain cement mortar walls with seams and grains.

Various approaches were taken to link the west façade of Building A with the pagoda (Figure 13). The staircase of Building A on the west was kept, but the part facing the pagoda was changed to broken-line glass to mirror the image of the pagoda spire, which was visible from the Pagoda Plaza. The solid wall on the ground floor was designed with cleaver-cutting cross grains in the same width as the black bricks used in the pagoda to achieve consistent scale and lines (Figure 14). The top parapet walls were imprinted with a ‘卐’ pattern referencing the one at the top of the pagoda. Building C was designed with decorative patterns formed by porcelain pieces in some places to suggest its former role as a porcelain warehouse. There was no attempt to unify the external walls of the seven buildings. Instead, the intent was to keep the original grey and yellow colours as a keynote, employing black metals with fluorocarbon coating for door and window frames and newly

added steel structural components. After the renovation, the Lungchun Warehouse was dominated by neutral colours and became a background for the Literary Pagoda, with various connections reflected by details such as doors, windows, lattice walls, mirror materials and grains.

After months of intense construction, the construction fence around the canal was finally removed at 6:00 am on October 16, ready for public review. It was quite comforting that a great many citizens flocked to the canal, which almost caused concern over the railing safety (Figure 15). The Pagoda Plaza not only became a gathering place for citizens and a destination for pleasure boats during the Asian Games, but also resumed its folk activities like the first writing ceremony (Figure 16) and the Dragon Boat Parade to continue its cultural legacy. The Pagoda Plaza comprises a pleasant Sai Kwan landscape with water, the Lungchun Bridge, big banyan trees and the Lungchun Warehouse. Such scenery has become the main view of photos posted online by passionate photographers and tourists, which restores the important role of the Pagoda Plaza in the public eye.

On March 29, 2011, Manchun Antique Market (now Guangzhou Antiques Market), the former Lungchun Warehouse, was officially opened. The antique market houses 360 stores, which were all leased out at an unexpectedly good price except those intended for the relocation of tenants from the former Sai Kwan Antique Street. It is now the largest high-end antique market in Southern China presenting a commercial and cultural vitality far greater than the former warehouses. Such remarkable



Figure 16 First Writing ceremony in 2015 (a) and 2018 (b) (Source: with the authorisation of VCG, shot by Xiao Xiong [a] and Tan Qingju [b]).

Figure 17 The overwater parade on March 30, 2017, to celebrate the birth of North Deity (Source: Ke Chen).

success enabled the further restoration of canals, which extended 1,551 m eastwards to Changhua Canal and Enning Canal in the following years.

The traditional folk activities and rituals gradually came back: Dragon Boats, the First Writing ceremony, Cantonese Opera, the floating flower market, and North Deity parade. On March 30, 2017, the third day of the third lunar calendar month of Bingshen monkey year, about 1,200 Taoist believers met together at the Sai Kwan Literary Pagoda Plaza (Wenta Plaza). The Plaza is the starting point of the overwater parade along Litchi Bay Canal, organised by Yanwai Taoist Temple, to celebrate the birth of the North Deity¹¹ (Figure 17).

Conclusion

The Litchi Bay Canal project has attracted much international interest. To explore the challenges and opportunities, potential and possibilities of the Litchi Bay area, several international workshops and seminars have been organised by South China University of Technology, ILAUD, GSD Harvard, Bergen Architectural School and Tokyo Tech. The project was exhibited at the Shenzhen & Hong Kong Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture in 2013 as a case study to verify the operation of the historic landscape rejuvenation approach in China.



Figure 18 The dialogue between the canal, the pagoda and the warehouse after the rejuvenation of historic urban landscape (Source: a, c: Yongjian Guo; b: Xiaohui Gao).

As far as we know, Litchi Bay Canal is the first long canal uncovered in a historic district in China. The philosophy of the design is inspired by Laoze (c.571–471BC), as he said in *Tao Te Ching*: ‘Tao produces all things and makes no claim to the possession of them; it carries them through their processes and does not vaunt its ability in doing so; it brings them to maturity and exercises no control over them.’ The practice intentionally arranged all the elements in a natural way, to follow the hidden structure of geomancy but not to put them into a strongly contrived order. The rejuvenation project operated across the wider horizon of the site, including its topography, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features, and its historic and contemporary built environment (Figure 18).

The Litchi Bay Canal Project is a positive experiment to address multiple purposes in the cooperative rejuvenation of the urban public space system through its cultural legacy and maintain the continuity of the place and the historic landscape. Being open-minded and optimistic towards the conservation and renovation of antique and warehouse buildings, the project encouraged all the stakeholders to develop a cooperative process and share the benefits. The participants share their collective actions as a part of urban public life today. The villagers' dragon boats, the Taoist parade over water, the antique merchants' business, residents' daily life and tourists' experience of the historic landscape, have all become the scenery of others, and merged into the communal Litchi Bay Canal.

The proposal focused on exploring the inner logic of space, form and landscape instead of pursuing exterior similarity, and sought corresponding technical solutions to eventually stimulate sustainable cultural and commercial vitality, inspired by the UNESCO Asian-Pacific heritage award cases (Wu, Feng and Xu 2015). It evokes the feeling of the past as well as integrating into modern urban public life. Now it is an attractive place free to access. It has been listed as one of the ‘New Eight Sights of Canton’.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1. Also written as Lychee Bay, or Lizhi Wan. The name of the district ‘Liwan’ is after Litchi Bay.
2. Also translated as Poontong in some historic maps.
3. Lu Jia (240 BC–170 BC) was sent by Han Emperor Gaozu Liu Bang to Panyu (the ancient name of Canton) in 196 BC. He finally accomplished his mission, which was to persuade the Nanyue Kingdom to pay allegiance to the Han Dynasty.
4. Lingnan literally means the south of the mountains. It is a geographic area referring to lands in the south of China's Nanling Mountains. The use of the word

- Lingnan dates back to Lingnan Dao in the early Tang Dynasty, which is a military and administrative division. According to Vol. 69 of *New Books of Tang*, Lingnan Jiedushi was first established in 756.
5. Liu Chang (942–980), reigning over the Nanhan Kingdom from 958 to 971.
 6. Tanka is an ethnic subgroup in Southern China who live on junks or boats in coastal areas, such as the Pearl River in Canton. Tanka people were regarded as being of low class in Qing Dynasty and they were not allowed to settle on shore or to register their household. During the 1950s–60s, the Canton Government developed several residential areas for Tanka people to live on land.
 7. Thirteen Hongs, also known as the Thirteen Factories or the Canton Factories, was a neighbourhood with warehouses and stores along the Pearl River in southwestern Canton in the Qing Dynasty from 1684 to 1856. It was the principal and sole legal site of most Western trade with China from 1757 to 1842 and was destroyed at the onset of the Second Opium War.
 8. Sai Kwan (Xiguan) is the area outside the west gate of the walled Canton city. It was developed as international trade area and the commercial centre of Canton mainly in Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Sai Kwan mansion (Xiguan Dawu) is the typical house style for the rich people living around the commercial center.
 9. Pun Tong Five Distinctions are lotus root, water chestnut, water caltrop, cane shoot and arrowhead.
 10. *Xiucai*, literally means distinguished talent, is a common name of *Shengyuan* in Ming and Qing dynasties. A *Xiucai* is an entry-level examinee who has passed the college exam, and is qualified to join the triennial provincial exam.
 11. The North Deity is one of the higher-ranking deities in Taoism, identified as one of the main water gods revered in Guangdong Province. Yanwai Temple is a Taoist Temple located in the Pun Tong Village near the Litchi Bay Canal.

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