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A Cultural and Natural Visit to Taishan

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Learning Outcome Demonstration Report
Chinese Culture through Foreign Languages - English
A Cultural and Natural Visit to Taishan

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I. Video



Link: <https://youtu.be/SW8r-dtWgPM>



II. Reflection

A Cultural and Natural Visit to Taishan

As a student who comes from Miaoli, I rented an apartment and have been living in Taishan for a couple years. Nevertheless, I seldom have opportunities to know this place because of the inconvenience of transportation, and I usually go back to Miaoli on weekends. Finally, in the course Chinese Culture through Foreign Languages – English, Prof. Gretchen Lee suggested I pick a place in New Taipei City to explore its history and beauty. It occurred to me that I should seize this chance to appreciate this place where I have been living for most of my college years. And fortunately, Mingzhi Academy, founded in 1763 and was considered the first academy in Northern Taiwan, is not only located near my apartment but also a famous historical building in Taishan. There is also a famous attraction nearby: Taishan Top Temple. Searching on Google Map, I also spotted YiXueKeng Natural Ecological Park, which has a strong sense of greenery.

Before visiting these attractions, I collected their information beforehand. Later in my free time, I rented a scooter from Fu Jen University. It took less than ten minutes to arrive at Taishan Top Temple, an enormous and sacred temple with beautiful views. It is the representative of Chen Ying-pin's (陳應彬) works in his later years. It is dedicated to Xianying Zushi (顯應祖師)—a deity worshiped by immigrants from Anxi, a county in Quanzhou, Fujian. The temple was built during the reign of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing era when Li Fu-chi's (李符記) family brought the statue of Xianying Zushi from Anxi's Taishan Top Temple to Taiwan. Taishan Top Temple underwent several renovations; the most significant occurred in the 7th year of the Shōwa (昭和) era (Japanese colonial period) and was overseen by

renowned Taiwanese temple architect Chen Ying-pin. To this day, the temple maintains the architectural style of that renovation. Taishan Top Temple is located on the foothills in front of a mountain forest. Contrasted with the vast blue sky, the lush greenery surrounding the temple brings out the magnificence of the main building, which is 9 bays wide and features two central structures, two hallways, and two side wings. The temple preserves the architectural style of temples in the Shōwa era and is a treasure trove for those studying the works of Chen Ying-pin and Huang Kuei-li (黃龜理).

The couplets of Taishan Top Temple are all precious calligraphy of scholars of the time. The cut glue is the work of Liao Zaishun (廖再順) from 2007 to 2008. The stone carvings and murals are all taken from traditional folk tales. The date of the flower and bird column at Sanchuan Gate is shown in Showa 9 (1934), with thick branches, thin leaves, phoenixes, and magpies appearing on the octagonal column. Taishan Top Temple Sanchuan Gate's watch frame bucket is presented as a stack of buckets rising one after another.

Mingzhi Academy is the first academy established in northern Taiwan, predating the Hsueh-Hai Academy (學海書院) in Monga by 70 years. Five bays wide and with one courtyard and a total of 12 rooms on the sides, Mingzhi Academy was quite large in its early days. However, it is a shame that it is not open for tourists during the pandemic. The academy was then relocated to Hsinchu and began to decline after compulsory education was put into force. The Mingzhi Academy collapsed in 2003 due to dereliction, and thanks to the donation from business mogul Wang Yong-Qing, the academy was refurbished and restored to its former glory.

During the reigns of Emperor Yongzheng and Emperor Qianlong in the Qing era, Xinzhuang Plain underwent rapid development and the population increased accordingly. Hakka men from Yongding, Dingzhou in Fujian—Hu Cho-yu (胡焯猷)

alongside Lin Tso-che (林作哲) and Hu Hsi-long (胡習隆) —established the Hu Lin Long kenhao 胡林隆墾號 (land development association) to cultivate land in present-day Wugu District, Taishan District and Xinzhuang District of New Taipei City.

Hu Cho-yu was a successful businessman and a generous philanthropist. He saw the lack of educational institutions in Heng-tit-pó 興直堡 (administrative district covering the aforementioned areas) and how students had to travel to Hsinchu or even Changhua to pursue an education, and so, in the 28th year of Emperor Qianlong's reign in the Qing era (1763 CE), he donated a large sum of money and 80 jia of land (roughly 192 acres) to establish an yixue (charitable school) and hire renowned teachers, founding what would become today's Mingzhi Academy.

After renovations over the years, the academy is now surrounded by residential houses, and only the main hall and two side rooms remain. Rebuilt in 2005, Mingzhi Academy was seated, and a stele was placed in front of the building as a memory to commemorate Chunmei's charitable deeds of actively giving back to the place after the ancestors made their fortunes in the early years. There are many cultural relics related to the academy in the interior, and purchases of renovated old buildings.

Mingzhi Academy enshrines Zhu Xi, Hu Zhuoyou, and Guo Zongqing (郭宗礮), respectively, with the tablets of "Master Ziyang Zhuo"(紫陽朱夫子神位), "Gongsheng Hu Zhuoyou Lu"(貢生胡焯猷神位), and "Supervisor Guo Zongqing Lu"(監生郭宗礮祿位). Because Mingzhi Academy currently enshrines Zhu Xi, the management committee also specially arranged the ceremony so that visitors can ask for a smart pen. There is a plaque on the main hall of "Beijing First School". The management committee moved the "Xingzhibao New Mingzhi College Monument" to the main hall collection.

The roof of the main building of the academy is decorated with dovetails, which is very beautiful. Although it is the work of modern craftsmen, it is still rich in ancient style. There is a Jingwen Pavilion (敬文亭) in front of the academy, which is specially used to burn the paper on which characters have been written. It is a fixed component in the traditional Taiwanese academy. The meaning of the plaque in Mingzhi Academy comes from Zhuge Liang's family motto: "It's not a slumber, it's not aspirational, it's not tranquil, it's not far-reaching." (非澹泊無以明志，非寧靜無以致遠)

It only took a short while to arrive at YiXueKeng Natural Ecological Park on foot. YiXueKeng Natural Ecological Park is an ecological slope area with 17 hectares built in 2001, named YiXueKeng (charitable school pit) because of the Mingzhi Academy. This natural ecological park adopts the concept design of minimum facilities, and there are many sports equipment in the park.

At the same time, it is also the central point of the Taishan mountaineering trail network. It is very convenient to go to Mingzhi Academy, Butterfly Flower Gallery, and Taishan Top Temple. From the trailhead all the way to the top of the mountain, tourists can reach the wooden plank road, which is shady with trees and accompanied by birdsong. It is quite suitable for the whole family or friends to enjoy the scenery.

After visiting these attractions, shooting videos and taking photos, I am surprised that there are plenty of places worth visiting in Taishan which I have never noticed before. There are not only cultural buildings but also natural sites in Taishan, which allows you to both understand the history of this place and escape from the busy city life. Fortunately, I won the second place in 新五泰之心 competition. It is truly an honor, and I hope more and more people can have an adventure in different places in their free time, for you can always find beauty everywhere and probably the place you have never expected.

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