

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

WORKING PAPER SERIES

VERNACULAR HERITAGE IN HONG KONG

Jimmy T.W. Ho, Thomas W.L. Chung

Miriam M. T. Lee, Thomas W. L. Chung

Sidney C. H. Cheung, Alex W. H. Wong

2024

Volume 329

Volume Editors:

Mark Gillem

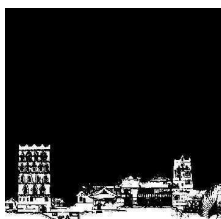
Hesham Issa

Adnya Sarasmita

207 East 5th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401

tel: 541 712 7832

e: coordinator@iaste.org; www.iaste.org



VERNACULAR HERITAGE IN HONG KONG

Dynamics Of Rural Village Regeneration: A Case Study of Bottom-Up Initiatives in a Coastal Community in Hong Kong <i>Jimmy T.W. Ho, Thomas W.L. Chung</i>	1
Politics of Caretaking — Rehabilitating a Mountain Hut and Its Contested Interests <i>Miriam M. T. Lee, Thomas W. L. Chung</i>	22
Dilemma Between Conservation and Development: Difficulties and Challenges of Initiating Conservation Attempts on a Privately-Owned Agricultural Heritage <i>Sidney C. H. Cheung, Alex W. H. Wong</i>	44

Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

DYNAMICS OF RURAL VILLAGE REGENERATION: A CASE STUDY OF BOTTOM-UP INITIATIVES IN A COASTAL COMMUNITY IN HONG KONG

Jimmy T.W. Ho, Thomas W.L. Chung

Volume 329

Pages 1-21

2024

DYNAMICS OF RURAL VILLAGE REGENERATION: A CASE STUDY OF BOTTOM-UP INITIATIVES IN A COASTAL COMMUNITY IN HONG KONG



This paper discusses the characteristics of Shui Hau village as a coastal farming community and the problems of the current planning policies established by the colony government. Three government-funded initiatives are proposed and being implemented – 1) to rediscover the traditions and rituals using tactical interventions, 2) to restore the grain store into a farming cooperative and, 3) to restore the stone house into a living culture cooperative. Dynamics and forces are revealed regarding the intricate land ownership, unspecific regulations for rural conservation, and loose governance over village development. Systemic changes at multiple levels should be made to facilitate countryside regeneration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Village revitalization is not a novel idea for rural areas, but it has substantially gained everyone's attention in cities like Hong Kong, a metropolis where 75% of its land belongs to the countryside. Particularly, the local researchers and practitioners in the fields of architecture and community design are reacting to the thrust of rural revitalization, arguably driven by the policy in China which aims to boost agricultural activities for food production, characterize and thematize villages using tradition and culture, stimulate cultural tourism and eventually improve local economy as the grand narrative. In the recent five years, there has been a wave of countryside movement — mostly government-funded initiatives with the ambition to restore, repurpose and regenerate under-utilized village structures. Many villages are confronting common problems such as the decline of population due to early-year outmigration, fading culture and traditions, attractiveness to the younger generations and the lack of social infrastructure. Place-identity towards villages, which is a subjective construct, has diminished when ethnographical characteristics changed under the evolving political, social and economic circumstances¹. Even when the practitioners are eager to strengthen the place-identity of villages, it comes with the practical difficulty that involved stakeholders are often not willing to partner and contribute creatively (ibid).

Supported by the local villagers and Lantau Conservation Fund under the Sustainable Lantau Office, the authors have been implementing a series of regenerative initiatives in Shui Hau village — a coastal, modernized or hybridized, suburban area on the Lantau island which is highly accessible from the nearest satellite town by public transport. Acknowledging its historical, cultural and ecological significance, the authors aim to regenerate the village by re-telling the history, reinterpreting the cultural activities, strengthening the sense of community and educating the public. Three bottom-up initiatives are being implemented — 1) to rediscover the traditions and rituals using tactical interventions, 2) to restore the historic stone house into a living culture cooperative and 3) to reinterpret the ruined grain store for a farming cooperative. The objective of this paper is to discuss the dynamics among stakeholders during the early stage of implementation, uncover the underlying forces related to land ownership, building regulations and governance and stimulate further discussion on its policy implications at different levels.

2. SHUI HAU: A COASTAL FARMING COMMUNITY

As its name literally suggests, Shui Hau village is a coastal settlement located at the river mouth between Tong Fuk and Shek Pik. It has maintained a similar regular population of around two hundred residents over the years, among whom three-fourths are indigenous villagers. There are three major Punti (local) clans – surnamed Chan (陳), Chi (池) and Fung (馮). Dated back to 1625, the Chi moved from Shek Pik to Shui Hau to establish the earliest settlement, followed by the Fung and the Chan. With some intermarriage with the adjacent villages in Shek Pik and Tong Fuk, some villagers of the Chis are self-regarded as Hakka which might be the cultural influence of their Hakka spouse. The village has therefore experienced a journey of expansion and integration with different ethnic groups over the years, resulting in the segregation of territories demarcated by different clan settlements. The segregations, physical and social, are still valid in modern times where interpersonal interactions are deemed very minimal, not to mention the common intergroup conflicts².

In the early days, before the construction of the South Lantau road in 1973, the village was highly connected to the farmlands and the sea, establishing a unique lifestyle that combined farming and fishing. For agricultural production, the majority grew rice and traded their quality crops for a double amount of lower-quality rice in Cheung Chau. Two batches of rice could be harvested every year. Apart from growing rice for sale, vegetables such as sweet potatoes, taro and spring onions were also planted for eating. To keep the harvests, some resourceful villagers built simple huts, often described as “grain stores”, for storage use.

For fishing, villagers reported that males were responsible for catching fish while females would dig clams. At present, some proactive female villagers are still proud to perform their clam-digging techniques using the traditional tool called *Chi Hau Lim* (刺口鏟), a slightly bent metal hook used to stab and hook the clam. With its tiny pointy head and slim metal tube, the physical impact of the digging action on the sandflat is minimal compared to the use of shovels and it is regarded as a traditional yet sustainable method of clam harvesting. Such a hybrid lifestyle can be revealed through the culinary practice of *Lai Wok Pin* (釀鑊邊). It is a traditional cuisine commonly found in a few local coastal communities where resources from both farmlands and the sea are accessible. Freshly caught seafood such as clams are cooked to prepare a seafood soup. A handful of rice paste is then skillfully poured along the edge of the iron wok. When it is heated to dry, the rice noodles are pushed into the soup and mixed to serve. The ingredients therefore reflect the unique landscape characteristics for farming and fisheries in coastal communities.

With the large demand for labour for constructing the South Lantau road and Shek Pik Reservoir in the late 1950s, villagers started to seek to work as builders outside Shui Hau. In the 1960s, the water supply to villages in South Lantau was reduced as new aqueducts were built to divert and increase the water supply to the reservoir and the increased usage by the neighbouring Tong Fuk prison. The amount of stream water for irrigation was severely reduced. To compensate, the water pipe to Tong Fuk was split to Shui Hau. This led to the inter-village conflict over competing water resources in 1962. In 1964, the water shortage caused crop failures in agricultural activities and the compensation for crops set by the government was not satisfied by the villagers. In the following years, the weather was abnormally dry and the problem of water shortage was so serious that the government once arranged water trucks from Mui Wo (a 20-minute driving distance from Shui Hau) on a daily basis. With more convenient transport, more competitive salaries in urban areas and the availability of public housing in new towns, more and more villagers moved to the city side and traditional farming activities started to decline. In the 1990s, almost no farming activities were reported.

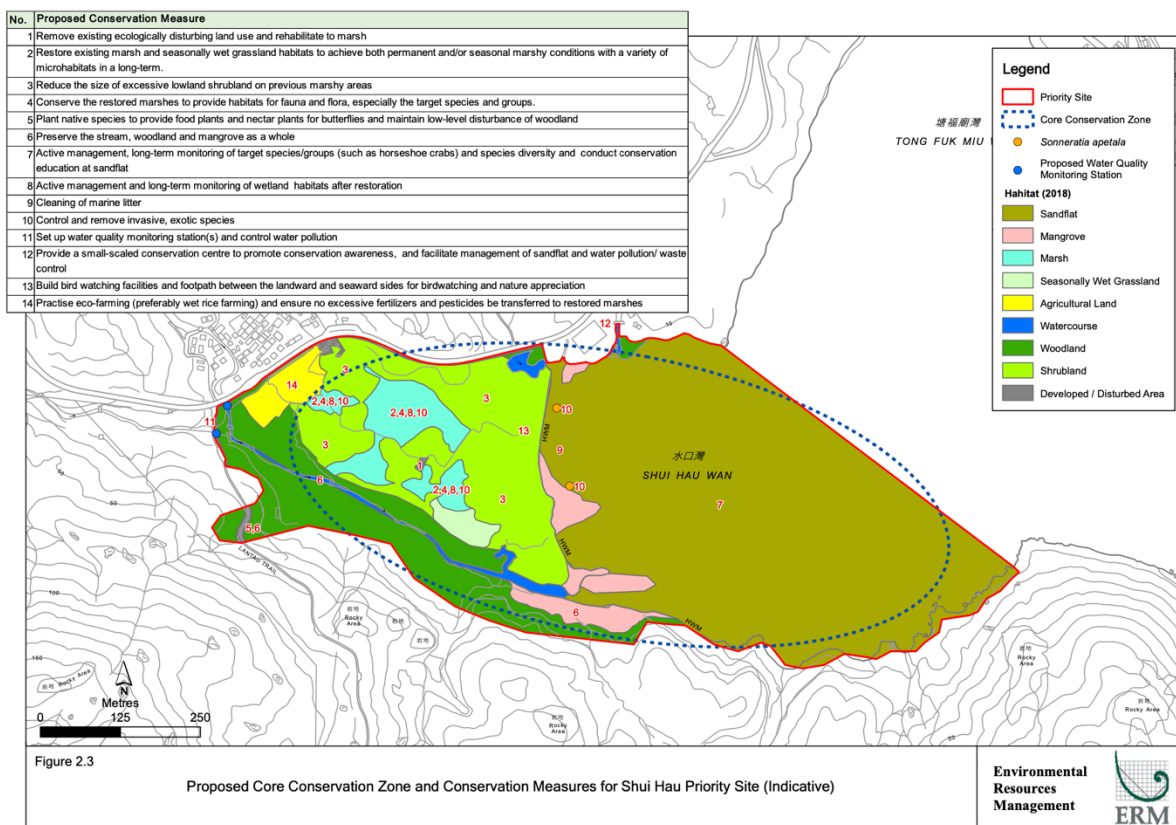


Fig. 1. Landscape characteristics of Shui Hau³

Since then, the morphology of Shui Hau village has transformed into an eco-cultural landscape with a wide spectrum of landscape characteristics and historical remains. Spanning from the shoreline to the mountain, there are sandflats, mangroves, marsh, seasonally wet grassland, shrublands and woodlands, farmlands, the new and old village fabrics and the fengshui woods, accompanied by the Shui Hau stream

flowing from the mountain to the river mouth (Fig. 1). Subsequently the intertidal area has been assessed of having high conservation values due to its ecological significance of biodiversity and some coastal protection areas near the shoreline are further planned into “conservation areas” by the government in 2023 to reflect the urgency for conserving natural habitats.

3. UNDERDEVELOPED LAND POLICIES FOR RURAL VILLAGES

Village development in Hong Kong is a controversial topic. Land issues related to intergroup conflicts between original inhabitants and newcomers, priorities and unequal rights, informational transparency and ineffective bureaucracy, and land surveys and resumptions have been long discussed since the British colonial period⁴.



Fig. 2. Partial land boundary map for Demarcation District (D.D.) 326 in Shui Hau

Demarcation districts and land boundaries

After the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory was signed between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and China in 1898, the New Territories (N.T.) was leased to Great Britain for 99 years. To investigate the ownership of private lands and raise revenue in the form of government rent, the British colonial government hired “trained staff” from the Indian government to conduct large-scale survey work in the N.T. for registering and (re)allocating the 41,000 acres of private lands with about 350,000 holdings⁵. Although the survey was quickly completed by 1903, the land surveying work was

done inaccurately and became problematic (which was also a problem in Victoria City on the island side). For example, claimants to land lots were handed a *chi tsai* (紙仔) – a small slip of paper with the lot number written on the front side and the owner’s name and land description on the back – which could be lost or transferred easily (ibid). The privately owned land lots of the whole N.T. were governed by a Block Government Lease for each of the 477 Demarcation Districts (Fig. 2) and are now regarded as the Old Schedule Lots. After the Sino-British Joint Declaration was announced in 1984, these leases were further extended to 2047. Nonetheless, the inaccuracy of land surveying work has left issues unresolved such as incompatible land boundaries and mistaken registration of squatter structures which led to the discussion in the later passage.

Small House Policy for the indigenous villagers

Before the launch of the aforementioned leasehold and taxation system, the N.T. was regarded as a region of “a series of self-sufficient agrarian economies” and there were vigorous conflicts between the Punti clans and the colonial government⁶, including the Six-Day War of 1899⁷. It acted as a buffer area between the British colony and China – until the 1950s when the population boom due to the post-war influx of immigrants from China urged for large-scale industrial and residential development⁸. The government proposed to build new towns in the N.T. and started to reassume a large amount of land possessions from the indigenous villagers with compensation. In the later years, however, many villagers could not afford to buy government lands for building village houses. With the assistance of Heung Yee Kuk, the formal representative of indigenous villagers, a special policy for building small houses in rural areas was quickly drafted and established by the government in 1972 which is later known as the Small House Policy (SHP). This SHP was once regarded as a political strategy to facilitate colonial administration⁹ and also a reward for the Heung Yee Kuk for maintaining good order during the riots in 1967 (ibid) and it has arguably resulted in fundamentally biased priorities for the indigenous villagers.

Under the Cap. 121 Buildings Ordinance (Application to the New Territories) Ordinance, male indigenous villagers, at least 18 years old are eligible to apply for a “Ding” (male offspring, 丁) right to construct a small house with controlled dimensions (i.e. a maximum roofed-over area of 700 square feet, 27 feet high and not more than three storeys). This type of small house is one of the New Territories Exempted Houses (NTEH) as its construction is exempted from certain provisions and regulations under the Buildings Ordinance, such as the requirement of obtaining approval and consent from the authority (i.e. Buildings Department) in advance of the commencement of works. The indigenous villagers can even apply for a private treaty grant for building houses on government lands within village environs if no private lands are available. Overall, it was a development-oriented and gender-discriminatory policy that resulted in an inefficient utilization of land resources among privileged indigenous villagers¹⁰.

Loose governance over small houses

To indigenous villagers, the Ding rights are deemed as the inherited wealth from their ancestors and the profoundly increasing demand for building small houses has never ceased. In 2016, Heung Yek Kuk estimated that there were 240,000 potential applications but whether this figure reflected the actual housing needs is highly questionable. Earlier research showed that 47 percent of successful applications from 1997 to 2002 ended up in applying for removing the restrictions on house (re)sales, which seemed to indicate a systemic abuse of SHP for profitmaking (ibid). Precedents have shown that abusive behaviours including the disposal of small houses and selling of Ding rights even gave rise to criminal offences such as giving false declarations. While the SHP is so unequal to be accepted by modern standards, the indigenous Ding right, regarded as a traditional custom, is politically difficult to challenge. In fact, the government also recognized such a difficult situation and reported that “the remaining issues were complex and required further deliberation within the Administration” if SHP is to be reviewed¹¹.

The uncontrolled development of small houses is an unsustainable policy¹² that has caused irreversible changes in many rural villages. Since the relationship between new houses and the surroundings is not taken into account in SHP, it resulted in the erosion of landscape features and the erase of vernacular architecture such as the Hakka houses¹³, resulting in an eccentric village aesthetics. The authentic village landscape has been replaced with the “Spanish villa” – the new contemporary vernacular that attracts foreigners to reside which further dilutes the cultural identity of the village. With the misconception about SHP, some villagers believed that they could rebuild the houses on their own to meet modern standards. Without effective enforcement and monitoring measures, historic structures could be easily altered to increase floor height and provide extra floors.

Development-oriented planning

As the small house policies suggested, priorities have been given to developing small houses which intensified the rural sprawl and the colonial government was criticized for their pro-development mindset at the expense of protecting the natural environment¹⁴. After establishing new towns, the concept of greenbelts was introduced to mediate the urban sprawl and provide passive recreational outlets. Regarding the general presumption against development in this zone, researchers pointed out that greenbelts actually acted as a selective approach to support urbanization (ibid) and some structures such as village housing, low-density residences, schools and temples could actually be constructed in the greenbelts. Nonetheless, there is a lack of programmatic diversity in reality as up to 33 percent of the development in the greenbelts are small houses¹⁵.

Nature-based conservation

Land planning in Hong Kong, including both the city and the countryside, is based on the idea of zoning and land uses are occasionally updated by Town Planning Board through the announcement of the

statutory outline zoning plans. Similar to Shui Hau, many agrarian villages are reassessed based on the current landscape conditions, ecologically, and are granted new planning zones such as coastal protection areas and conservation areas. The reason is that after farmlands are abandoned, wild nature often takes them over and transforms them into wetlands as the rich nutrients can contribute to recreating habitats and nurturing biodiversity. Conservation in Hong Kong is thus drastically dependent on or, limited to ecological significance only.

Inflexible land use and building regulations

For the remaining village fabrics, the village area is then confined to the “village type development” area where a list of developments is permitted. Despite that, there is a reluctance to establish flexible, rural-specific regulations that address local needs and accommodate optimal development and cultural conservation. For instance, the semi-outdoor shading structure of Phoenix Store (a local grocery store) was demolished as it was audited as an Unauthorized Building Work (UBW) – despite the fact that such a structure had been erected for decades (Fig. 3). Without the canopy, the grocery store lost its communal function as it had been one of the important, informal socializing hubs for everyday life in Shui Hau. As the formal procedure of applying for rebuilding the structure is ineffective in terms of time and cost, the owner of Phoenix Store had no choice but to give up the semi-outdoor social space. Besides, there are stringent restrictions on the use of existing buildings. For houses built after 1961¹⁶, they are regarded as NTEH and the ground floor space can be used as schools and restaurants; for houses built before 1961, they are not recognized as NTEH and no uses other than residence are allowed. Some village houses on the Old Schedule Lots are even regarded as UBW. Members of the Legislative Council of HKSAR actually recognized the need for a feasible solution which is “legal, reasonable and sympathizing the feelings of N.T. villagers”¹⁷. Unless further application is made to the Planning Department on the change of land use and to the Lands Department on the change of spatial provisions, innovative conservation initiatives such as adaptive reuse and experimental restoration are technically infeasible at the moment. The application of urban standards in countryside conservation should be critically reviewed.



Fig. 3. Phoenix Store in the 1970s and the canopy structure before demolishing

4. REGENERATIVE INITIATIVES: TACTICAL INTERVENTION, ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION AND REINTERPRETATION

From an agrarian community to a recreational destination

It is a fact that Shui Hau transformed from an agrarian community into a coastal tourist destination. The emergence of tourism can be dated back to the 1970s when New Lantau Bus was established to carry up to 40,000 passengers on holidays to Shui Hau – served as a transitional spot between Mui Wo (where the public pier is) and Ngong Ping (where the famous Po Lin Temple is). With the completion of South Lantau Road in 1978 and the new airport and Tung Chung town in the 1990s, more and more tourists and foreigner residents are drawn to this tiny village. At present, the coastal area of Shui Hau Bay has become the focus of recreational tourism. The sandflat is famously known as the Mirror of the Sky as its water surface blends with the blue sky at high tide. Outsiders directly visit the sandflat for clams digging and kitesurfing. The impression of Shui Hau has been narrowed down to the coastal area which is physically, socially and culturally segregated from the inner village fabrics, not to mention the adverse impact on the sandflat landscape due to the inappropriate visitor etiquette and the misuse of tools.

Inaccessible communal facilities

Despite framing itself as a recreation destination externally, the infrastructural support to maintain the sense of community internally also seems to be missing in Shui Hau. Existing community spaces are limited to formal facilities such as the football court, the Chan's ancestral hall (the former Shui Hau School) and the Shui Hau village office. Further to that, the access to the ancestral hall and the village office is often privatized for a few privileged parties and villagers become reluctant to participate in the community affairs. Although some grocery stores (士多) also serve the function of community spaces, the competition between stores is vigorous, and social interaction among stores is unfavourable. Residents become more individualistic and apathetic to both the insiders and outsiders.

To re-strengthen the eco-cultural identity and the sense of community in Shui Hau village, three regenerative initiatives are proposed and being implemented by the author including the tactical interventions, architectural restoration and reinterpretation.

Tactical interventions: Mobile kiosks

As formal community spaces are always inaccessible, the research team shifted the focus to explore alternative, semi-public spaces for communal uses throughout the village fabrics. Two mobile kiosks were fabricated – a design-thinking kiosk and a gastronomy kiosk – to experiment with whether existing underutilized semi-public spaces can be activated for temporary community events using the kiosks as tactical interventions.

Primary schools and their ancillary sports courts are one of the many underutilized semi-public spaces. Except for the regular operation in the daytime on weekdays, the schools are not open to the community. With appropriate programmes, it is argued that the school grounds as a precious land resource can be transformed to accommodate medium-scale communal events. To test out this idea, a full-day design-thinking workshop for 30 participants was organized at the basketball court of Bui O Primary School using a mobile design-thinking kiosk. The kiosk is designed to be transformable in the sense that it could be folded into a compact trolley for transporting (Fig. 4) and expanded into an array of four panels for conducting various engagement activities. It has magnetic whiteboards for instant graphical pin-ups and drawing exercises, pegboards for displaying objects, a multimedia display at the back for video playbacks and two sets of moveable desks and stools. Mobile audio systems and power banks can also be stored inside the kiosk so that there is no need for any external power supply. Although no school is present in Shui Hau village, the spatial transformation can be easily applied to the football court of Shui Hau village and replicate the scenarios.



Fig. 4. The mobile design-thinking kiosk for conducting workshops.

Within the village fabric, several underutilized spots are identified as informal communal spaces for communal activities. To the indigenous villagers, traditional rituals and cuisine are important to their cultural identity as a coastal village. On *Mei Nga* (尾禡) on the 16th of the last Lunar month and the 2nd of the Lunar New Year, villagers will worship at multiple spots starting from the ancestral hall and proceeding to the *Tai Wong Yeh* temple (大王爺廟), the pair of boundary stones, the Earth God Shrine and returning to the ancestral hall again. The rituals include burning incense and firecrackers, beating drums and gongs and offering pork meat. Afterwards, the meat will be shared among the village families. On the other hand, apart from the everyday dish *Lai Wok Pin* discussed in the earlier section, villagers also make different types of steamed, glutinous rice cakes on special occasions such as *Cha Guo* (茶果) for the Ching Ming festival in the second Lunar month¹⁸ and *Zaap Chi* (雜糍) for *Tin Gei* (天忌) on the 19th

of the second Lunar month. Steaming the rice cakes requires a large stove in a well-ventilated area for smoke exhaustion. While most traditional outdoor stoves have disappeared over the years, there is still a family of the Chan clan who still operates one in their backyard.



Fig. 5. Activating the outdoor area of the village office using the gastronomy kiosk.

To facilitate the reinterpretation of these cultural culinary practices, a gastronomy kiosk was designed and a trial event – a cultural cuisine day was organized. It is a mobile design that can be stationed at different spots and activate semi-public spaces for different functions. It can be placed in the Tai Wong Yeh temple for pork sharing, in the front yard of village houses for snack making, in the backyard for cooking Lai Wok Pin and in the outdoor area of the village office for meal sharing (Fig. 5). The kiosk is equipped with magnetic bars for hanging up information panels, hooks for hanging culinary utensils, expandable table panels for food preparation, a wok holder, and shelves for portable fuel tanks and cook sets. The use of the kiosk enables participants to activate the existing spatial configuration (e.g. the parapet seating) and creates a temporary communal space. Furthermore, the reinterpretation of cultural cuisine also helps to strengthen the cultural identity by triggering social memories and reconnecting with the senior villagers.

Architectural Restoration of House No. 49

To provide additional communal spaces and channel the communication between insiders and outsiders, the research team proposed to restore House No. 49 and repurpose it as Shui Hau Living Cooperative where the young female house owner (the daughter of the owner of Phoenix Store) will host a series of

cultural workshops including indigo-dyeing, soap-making and cultural cuisine tasting for interested residents and visitors.



Fig. 6. Exterior and interior of House No. 49

Listed as a Grade 3 Historic building by the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), House No. 49 was built in the 1920s which seemed to be a Qing vernacular design with a one-hall-one-courtyard layout, a single-bay width and a single storey. It is now a hybridized structure – the front part is a stone wall structure covered by a flat concrete roof which is accessible through the central sky well; the rear part is composed of the brick wall structure, timber purlins and battens supporting the pitched roof with Canton tiles (Chinese pan and roll tiles) topped by a flat ridge. House No. 49 is physically connected with the adjacent house with a shared façade with granite stones, concrete parapet walls and greenish urn balustrades. The entrance hall and the main hall is separated by a timber door and a tiny mezzanine floor supported by timber beams is constructed in the rear wall (Fig. 6). While House No.19 is being occupied as a warehouse with stacking racks on both sides, the house owner still respects and maintains the orderliness of the ancestral altar in the middle.

To restore, it is proposed that the authentic architectural aesthetics of House No. 49 should be retained and a schematic design with minimal intervention should be adopted. For the front façade, the stainless-steel entrance door will be replaced with a pair of Chinese fir timber doors. Existing stone walls and brick walls will be washed by high-pressure water jetting. Damaged timber components including purlins, battens, beams and lintels will be replaced. Broken tiles will be taken away while complete tiles will be salvaged for reroofing. The central sky-well will be covered by a stainless-steel hatch to prevent water leakage from the flat roof. Existing cement-sand flooring will be kept and cleaned. Existing metal window frames and glass panels will be refurbished to their original appearance. Simple downlights, power

sockets, movable furniture, split-type air-conditioning units and a sink with potable water supply will be provided for conducting workshop activities throughout the year.



Fig. 7. The existing condition of Grain Store and the restoration proposal

Architectural reinterpretation of Grain Store

To reinforce the cultural identity of being an agrarian community in the past, the research team proposed to restore the ruined Grain Store into a Farming Cooperative for experimental farming. The house owner is a senior female villager who worked as a horticultural therapist in the city, and she is keen to return and revive small-scale farming practices in Shui Hau and transform the original Grain Store into a community base for exchanging farming-related knowledge and products.

The original Grain Store was designed for storing harvest and it was a one-storey structure with a pitched tile roof supported by timber purlins and battens (Fig. 7). The Majority of the plastering layer has been damaged which exposed the rough construction of walls using mud and stones. The structure is apparently set back from the adjacent pedestrian footpaths and there is another ruined structure erected between Grain Store and a village house (an NTEH). To restore the Grain Store to fit modern needs is to reinterpret the form and spatiality of Grain Store using a lightweight, steel roof structure which can protect the restored stone walls from rainfalls. The surrounding landscape will be cleaned up including the removal of the unrecognizable ruined structure. An outdoor hard-paved floor will be constructed for conducting horticultural workshops and it will be accessible through the folding doors on the side elevation. Similar to House No. 49, basic provisions including power sockets, lighting, furniture, a sink and water supply are included in the scope of restoration work. Before the commissioning of restoration work, the house owner already collected the traditional farming tools for display and demonstration, showing the proactive attitude of the partnering villagers even before the implementation.

5. FORCES AND DYNAMICS: LAND OWNERSHIP, REGULATIONS AND GOVERNANCE

The regenerative initiatives were co-developed with a few passionate villagers who are proactive in discussing village affairs, willing to lend their premises for restoration, and capable of delivering thematic workshops in the long run. During the implementation process, different forces and dynamics have been encountered by the research team regarding the intricate land ownership, unspecific regulations for rural conservation, and loose governance over village development.



Fig. 8. Privately owned planting area fenced off by a yellow metal wire mesh.

Intricate land ownership

It is argued that the in-between spaces can be used to strengthen everyday interaction in the neighbourhood more effectively than formal public spaces. *Lai Wok Pin*, as one of the tactical interventions in the form of culinary practice, was prepared in the backyard of a village house using a self-built brick stove. While the event successfully gathered participants around the stove to witness the performative cooking process, it also touched the nerves of nearby residents –not because of the noise and smoke generated, but because of the crowd standing too close to a privately owned planting area fenced off by a yellow metal wire mesh (Fig. 8). The complainant, who is a relative of the partner villager chef, called to warn everyone downstairs about the potential trespassing of her land property. In fact, the in-between spaces are not public as the circulation area and the leftover spaces are usually part of some private lands.

Land issues related to the trespassing boundaries are not limited to the in-between spaces. Due to the inaccuracy of land surveys mentioned earlier, it is a common phenomenon that existing building footprints do not fall within the respective land boundaries in the government record. The demarcation district map is often regarded as a reference map for locating the private land lots under Block Government Lease. Landowners are liable for consulting professional land surveyors if they are bothered by the discrepancies between the as-built condition and the government record.

For the Grain Store, the house owner was informed by neighbours that the footprint of the ruined structure overlaps with the adjacent land lots and was requested to acknowledge the situation of trespassing boundaries by written statements in the trade of the authorization for the restoration work. To verify, the research team retrieved the land records and the result was remarkable – the structure was erected on the four different partial land lots (Fig. 9). For House No. 49, the same complaint was made by another landowner that the existing structure on Lot 222 overlaps with another private land (Lot 223) while official record showed that such overlap was physically insignificant. Later it was realized that such complaint was made following a complex, intergenerational dispute between the two families.

To resolve the conflicts, a professional land surveyor was appointed to rectify the land boundaries with reference to the government coordinate system and the as-built structures. Given that the landowners were never aware of the issues of trespassing, it has reflected the inaccessibility of government land records. Villagers often rely on the fragile, aged hardcopies of maps and lease documents on which the information might not be up-to-date. For the Grain Store, the landowner and the research team co-decided that only the partial structure within the land boundary (Lot 299) would be restored in order to mitigate any further disputes.

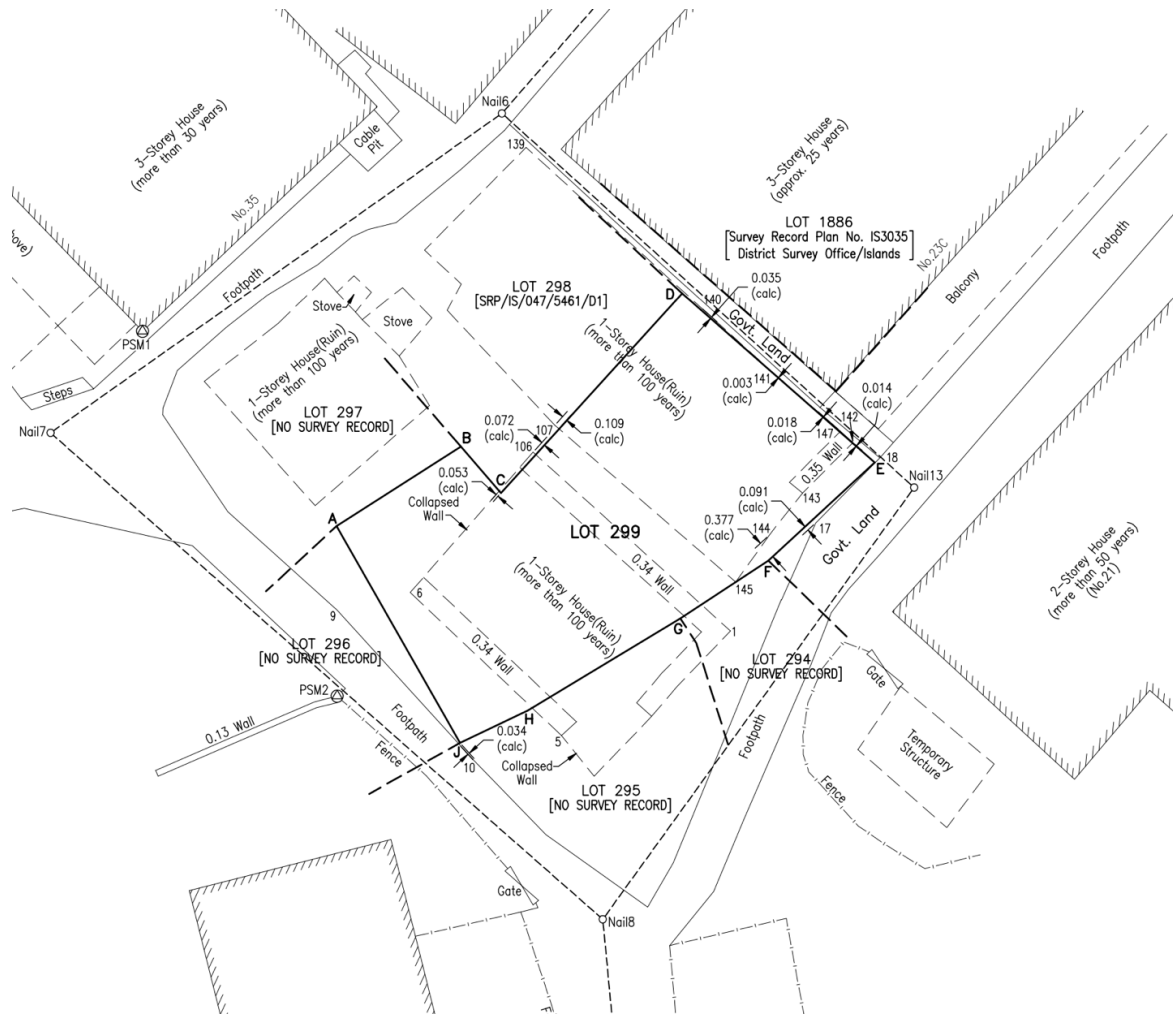


Fig. 9. The footprint of the Grain Store overlaps with adjacent land lots.

Unspecific regulations for rural conservation

The low level of survey accuracy, as a historical incident, has led to numerous intergroup conflicts and it is merely one of the many systematic flaws. Another example of survey inaccuracy is the surveyed squatter structures (SSS) – an informal structure temporarily tolerated until naturally phased out. It is a dwelling unit often constructed on government lands with poor spatial and hygienic conditions. For the Grain Store, it was once registered as a SSS by land officers with the building dimension in imperial units written on the existing stone wall¹⁹. It is technically infeasible as SSS should not exist on privately owned lands. After several rounds of clarification, the land officers agreed to remove it from the SSS registry.

Fundamentally, the building regulations for the countryside are severely underdeveloped. There are no rural-specific policies for architectural restoration. We as practitioners are informed to refer to existing statutory requirements of building NTEH (i.e. village houses) for the implementation of restoration works and the only viable option is to apply for the Certificate of Exemption (CoE), which is a common

statutory submission for NTEH and it takes four months for review and approval by the Lands Department. From our practical experience, there are only three criteria of assessment in the review of CoE – 1) the restoration work should not exceed the dimensions of an NTEH, 2) the roofed-over area of the restored building should not exceed that of an NTEH and 3) the restoration should follow the original form and materials in principle. On one hand, restoration is regarded as a kind of residential development, which is a problematic misconception as architectural conservation in villages is not limited to houses (e.g. Grain Store was a farming hut for storing crops). On the other hand, under this framework, the option for architectural conservation is limited to “restoring the old as the old” (修舊如舊). Although the Grain Store is to be restored with its original function – a farming hut for storing agricultural products and tools, no alteration of volume other than trimming is allowed even if the total floor area is kept the same. While the trimmed building bulk will be stored based on original forms and materials, the overall mass is different and thus the appearance is never original anymore. Although buildings constructed before the effective date of the Buildings Ordinance (Application to the New Territories) Ordinance in 1961 are not defined as unauthorized building work, there is no effective mechanism to respond to these policy flaws or to assess alternative restoration proposals.

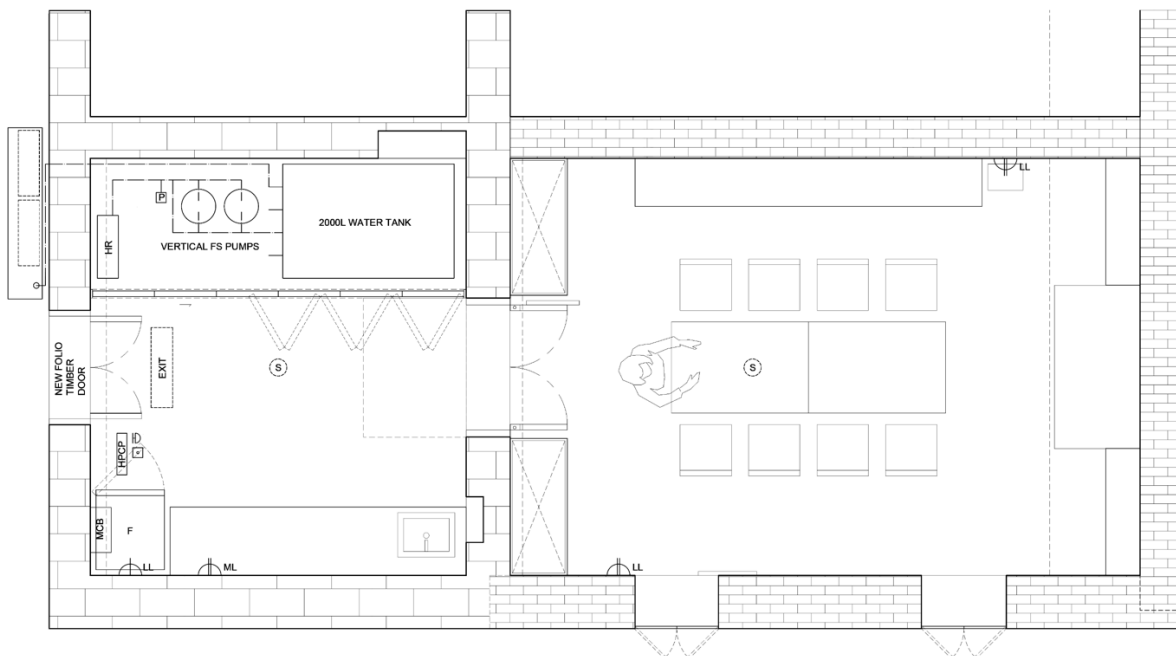


Fig. 10. Extra fire safety installations at the entrance hall for the use of “shop and services”.

For House No. 49, the statutory procedures are even more complicated. As a variety of cultural workshops were proposed to be held in the restored house, it was regarded as a violation of the existing land use as residence regardless of the extent and frequency of workshop activities. Accordingly, the research team was requested to submit a planning application to the Planning Department for the change of land use from “residence” to “shop and services” – due to the potential business activities of selling souvenirs. The process was time-consuming and it took one and a half years to obtain the approval. Further to that, the approval was conditional with two more requirements – to prepare and implement a conservation management plan (CMP) and to provide additional fire services installations (FSIs) for the new use as “shop and services”.

The conditions are unreasonable. Firstly, for the Grade 3 historic buildings listed by AMO, there is no need for drafting the CMP and it is a prerequisite requirement when planning application is made to the listed buildings. It took another six months to draft, submit and obtain the approval from AMO. Secondly, the extra FSIs have a significant impact on the interior space (Fig. 10). Required FSIs include a 2000L water tank, two sets of water pumps, fire safety panels and a bunch of ductwork – occupying half of the entrance hall. As the workshops are conducted at many other households at relatively low risk, the requirements have reflected how inflexible the current land policies are. The lengthy process is frustrating and has severely lowered the confidence of partnering villagers in the implementation of regenerative initiatives.

Loose governance over village development

Small house policy has arguably formed a hidden agenda among villagers that small houses can be constructed with ease – as long as the building size falls into the prescribed dimensions, there will not be a strong objection to the development. From time to time, the aesthetics of the village are replaced by the standard forms of “Spanish villa” with full-height glazing units, large balconies and a façade covered in modern ceramic tiles. There is no governance over the integrity of the landscape.

The uncoordinated development has further adverse impacts on particular types of historic buildings – including House No. 49. Its shared façade indicated the original ownership by a single family which only split into two units when the family grew later. Unfortunately, the neighbourhood relationship had been lost. There was almost no communication between the two units and the houses were used as warehouses for general storage. Without proper management and maintenance, the roofs and walls were deteriorated and damaged.

At the moment when the regenerative initiative was announced, the owner of the adjacent land lot suddenly hired contractors to demolish the old structure and rebuild the whole house. The rebuilt structure has the same roofed-over area as before while extra floor height is designed to allow enough

headroom for accessing the outdoor roof terrace. This resulted in a pitched roof with an absurdly weird shape. The retained shared façade could not help compensate for the irreversible visual impact on the historic structures as a whole. Although the reconstruction may not be regarded as unauthorized building works, it has turned the historic structures into an eclectic and eccentric hybrid. In this sense, the governance of rural development in relation to the existing fabrics is loose and heritage protection is ineffective.

6. IMPLICATION FOR NEW POLICIES, INCENTIVES AND COMMUNITY DESIGN

To facilitate countryside regeneration, there should be systemic changes for new policies, incentives and community design. At the high level, land policies and development-based planning regulations should be re-examined to address the real needs and the problems related to the fragmentation of land lots, inactive lands, inconsistent land boundaries and footprints and the misuse of lands. Guidelines specific to the countryside area including village zones, green belts, conservation areas and coastal areas should be formulated to govern rural developments while allowing flexibility for implementing innovative initiatives for regenerating the countryside. The current policy has itemized land uses to control development and all building works, including restoration, have been regarded as development. The government should clearly differentiate commercial activities from regenerative initiatives and encourage non-profit cultural initiatives that can activate underutilized land resources such as informal spaces, unofficial historic buildings (not officially listed), landscape and farming areas.

At the middle level, policy focus should shift from restrictive controls of development to incentives for conservation and regeneration. Most fundings emphasize the sustainable usage of restored buildings beyond the funding period, which has impractically imposed false expectations on the villagers when the most concerned stakeholders are often the practitioners, researchers and granters. With the general lack of interest in private investment among villagers over the years, the government should also consider taking the responsibility of implementing regenerative proposals – if cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, is significant to strengthening the identity of this city. When historic buildings are unoccupied or unmanaged, the government can offer to purchase, restore and reactivate it. Small-scale funds can also be set up so that proactive villagers can propose and implement their own regenerative schemes.

At the bottom level, the place-identity of Shui Hau village based on its eco-cultural landscape should be reinforced. The existing village culture and tradition can be leveraged using social design methods to stimulate innovation in a sustainable way. Key stakeholders, who are proactive, passionate and willing to contribute, should be identified and supported. Traditions of farming and clam harvesting can be reinterpreted and demonstrated to visitors to form part of the educational tourism experience and entrepreneurial programmes can be introduced to add values to the cultural products. While population

becomes more and more mixed, stakeholders should acknowledge the formation of such new and hybrid community and work together to regenerate the village culture.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper discussed the unique quality of Shui Hau village as a coastal farming community and the underdeveloped Land Policies for Rural Villages in Hong Kong. Using the three regenerative initiatives as examples, this paper discussed the forces and dynamics in village regeneration during the process of implementation and revealed the problems brought by the intricate land ownerships, unspecific regulations for rural conservation and the loose governance over village development. To facilitate countryside regeneration, systemic changes at different levels should be made to address real needs of stakeholders, allow flexibility for innovative initiatives, provide incentives for self-initiated proposals and reinforce the place-identity among the new community members.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is made possible under the Lantau Conservation Fund by the Sustainable Lantau Office of Hong Kong SAR Government.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Ma, Kwok Wai. 2016. "Sustainable Development and Social Policy: A Case of Indigenous Villages in Hong Kong." *Asian Education and Development Studies* 5 (3): 305–17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-09-2015-0051>.

² Chau, Lam-Yan, and Siu-Kai Lau. 1982. "Development, Colonial Rule, and Intergroup Conflict in a Chinese Village in Hong Kong." *Human Organization* 41 (2): 139–46.

³ Adopted from ERM. 2021. "Executive Summary - Ecological Study for Pui O, Shui Hau, Tai O and Neighbouring Areas – Feasibility Study [Agreement No. CE 62/2017 (EP)]." Civic Engineering and Development Department, HKSAR Government. https://www.cedd.gov.hk/filemanager/eng/content_961/23/CE_62_2017_Executive_Summary_Eng.pdf.

⁴ See Chu and Lau, 1982.

⁵ Nissim, Roger. 2021. *Land Administration and Practice in Hong Kong*. 5th ed. Hong Kong University Press.

⁶ See Ma, 2016.

⁷ Hase, P. H. (2008). *The Six-Day War of 1899: Hong Kong in the Age of Imperialism*. Hong Kong University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1xwbjg>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tang, Bo-sin, Siu-wai Wong, and Anton K.W. Lee. 2005. "Green Belt, Countryside Conservation and Local Politics: A Hong Kong Case Study." *Review of Urban & Regional Development Studies* 17 (3): 230–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-940X.2005.00103.x>.

¹⁰ See Ma, 2016.

-
- ¹¹ Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. 2016. “Small House Policy.” The Legislative Council. January 2016. <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/essentials-1516ise10-small-house-policy.htm>.
- ¹² Hopkinson, Lisa, and Mandy Lao Man Lei. 2003. “Rethinking the Small House Policy.” Civic Exchange. https://civic-exchange.org/dev/wp-content/uploads/2003/09/47-200309LAND_RethinkSmallHouse_en.pdf.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ See Tang et al., 2005.
- ¹⁵ Tang, Bo-sin, Siu-wai Wong, and Anton King-wah Lee. 2007. “Green Belt in a Compact City: A Zone for Conservation or Transition?” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 79 (3): 358–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2006.04.006>.
- ¹⁶ The year when Cap. 121 Buildings Ordinance (Application to the New Territories) Ordinance was established.
- ¹⁷ Refer to Legislative Council (2011). Updated background brief on unauthorized building works in New Territories exempted houses.
- ¹⁸ Unlike other traditional festivals, Ching Ming Festival is referred as the “Bright and Clear” minor solar term – one of the 24 solar terms and does not have an exact date, fluctuating between 4th April to 6th April.
- ¹⁹ To survey squatter structures, land officers will clearly write the dimensions on the building façade with red markers as an official identification.

Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

POLITICS OF CARETAKING — REHABILITATING A MOUNTAIN HUT AND ITS CONTESTED INTERESTS

Miriam M. T. Lee, Thomas W. L. Chung

Volume 329

Pages 22-43

2024

POLITICS OF CARETAKING — REHABILITATING A MOUNTAIN HUT AND ITS CONTESTED INTERESTS



This paper examines the establishment, development and upcoming conservation plans of Lantau Mountain Camp, a century-old missionary heritage in Hong Kong, and the controversies of various interest groups associated with it that had shaped its built environment through different eras of its existence. With recent plans on the architectural restoration of a communal amenity, the Caretaker's Hut, it demonstrates the multi-layered vested interests of residents, organisations, government, scholars and the general public in the conservation of an architectural landmark and its surrounding landscape, and how these contested forces shape the conservation plan and exposes questions to peruse and preserve its architectural values. It concludes by discussing the importance of looking beyond the fabrics of the built structure to develop a restoration plan that can reflect and respond to its intriguing history and adaptations needed for the sustainable use of the mountain hut.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lantau Mountain Camp is the only operating hill station in Hong Kong, if not all of China, and the setting of which has remained almost the same for the past a hundred years. Striding on the ridge between Sunset Peak and Yi Tung Shan, two of Hong Kong's highest mountains, Lantau Mountain Camp was established in 1925 by multi-national, inter-denominational Christian missionaries from Britain, Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand who were posted out to South China and Hong Kong. The camp was a much-needed health retreat for physical and mental well-being of the missionaries and their families stationing in sub-tropical towns and villages. It comprises 19 rough-hewn single-storey stone cabins and several amenity structures. The Caretaker's Hut was constructed alongside the missionary cabins to accommodate caretaker and coolies of the Camp.

Fast forward to a century later, today most of the missionary societies had left the ex-British colony and the Camp is now circumscribed by a statutory country park. The hired workmen who provided essential services of caretaking of the campsite and logistics of supplies had also left earlier for better employment opportunities elsewhere. The exodus of its original community of occupants and the discontinuation of its acclaimed summer camp resulted in the disuse of its communal facilities, including the Caretaker's Hut. Recent plans on the architectural restoration of the Caretaker's Hut revealed the intriguing history of the campsite as well as that related to the erection and operation of the hut itself, and the people and their contested interests.

2. THE ADVENT

Since the London Missionary Society posted Robert Morrison to China in 1807 (Daily, 2013), by early twentieth century there were at least 50 Protestant missionary operations in Hong Kong and Guangdong alone a century after the first evangelical foothold was planted. These included schools, tertiary institutes, medical schools, hospitals, clinics, orphanage and so on run by missionary societies and locally established churches. Missionaries at that time oftentimes served as a family in undertakings of five years. Upon the end of the fifth year, mission families would take a furlough for a few months in their home country to see old friends and tour around to speak and share about their spiritual harvests in the Orientⁱ. After the furlough, they would return to the same or a nearby location to start another undertaking. Those were the days when overseas travel was a luxury, and inter-continental transport expensive and ponderous. On top of that, the heat, humidity and the accompanying pestilence of the tropics took heavy toil on the health of these missionary families and their secular counterparts. There was a practical need to retreat to cooler temperatures in order to recuperate from “tropical fatigue” — a medical euphemism of a melange of tropical diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, typhus fever, bowel disorders, typhoid, cholera, dysenteries and the residuum of morbidity as a result of exposure to extremes of heat and humidityⁱⁱ. Such escape from the sultry summer heat to a cooler place was also considered beneficial to the health of children, who were more vulnerable to all sorts of tropical diseases. For adults, a break away from daily toil of ministry, and from the stress of culture shock and being a social and spiritual role model as the only foreigners in the town, became frightfully precious.

The makeshift summer retreat on Luofushan (or Mount Luofu) near Huizhou, Guangdong could be regarded as the prototype of Lantau Mountain Camp. In 1907, as many as 120 overseas missionaries of various denominations and nationalities posted in South China began to gather at Luofushan for the summer. Each missionary family or a group of friends, usually from the same society, would build huts for themselves with bamboo and palm leaves collected from nearby villages and the hillside. There were several mess huts too where women of different nationalities cook, offering dishes to the homeland tastes of England, German, North America and so on. which were to be burnt down at season end to prevent bandits from using them. Cooking took place at several mess huts, each catering to There were streams nearby for drinking water and swimmingⁱⁱⁱ.

The idea of establishing a summer camp on a hilltop in the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong was caught on when missionaries in South China could no longer continue their usual summer retreat on Luofushan due to political disturbances^{iv}. The provincial governor of Guangdong advised the camp committee in 1922 that he could no longer protect the camp from bandits and robbers. Pertinacious efforts were made by a special committee to have the summer camp resumed as soon as possible at a long-lasting location^v. Reconnoitres, negotiations with the government^{vi} and request for funds from various mission societies were swiftly and diligently organised since autumn of 1923. Shortly, a year and a half later in summer 1925, a jovial camp for South China missions and their families was re-established on a remote mountain top on Lantau at an altitude of nearly 3000 feet above sea level. 11 iconic, rough-hewn stone cabins first dotted the ridge between Sunset Peak and Yi Tung Shan. The Caretaker's Hut was constructed alongside the missionary cabins to accommodate caretaker and coolies of the Camp. The Mess Hall and its accompanying Amah's Hut were completed in 1928 to provide meals and communal space for Campers. The swimming pool, dammed from a mountain stream by the adjacent hillside, was also completed this year with the assistance of some British soldiers. 8 more stone cabins joined the line-up in the subsequent years till 1934. The built environment of Lantau Mountain Camp had since then remained almost intact throughout the century.

These stone cabins were owned by missionary societies and churches, or their delegates who mostly worked in schools, hospitals and other social welfare organisations if not directly for the ministry. Used mainly during the months of July and August, Campers enjoyed cool, windy, misty weather while the lowlands were shrouded in sticky summer heat. From the beginnings till today, there had been no shops nearby. The closest village being at least an hour and a half's hike away one-way down the mountain. Campers must plan ahead to make their own arrangements to bring their own provisions to their cabins. But it has been a true escapade where children run free, adults greet and unite with old friends after a year's service at their respective outposts, and natural wonders and serenity be enjoyed by all.

3. THE PLAY OF EXCLUSIVENESS

The inception of Lantau Mountain Camp was a denouement of speculation, government regulations, aspirations and to a large extent, compromise. At the practical level of physical health, prospective Campers were desperately looking for a new site on a highland at a safe location that they can visit regularly, especially during the sweltering summer months, for recuperation. Since their arrival in Asia, European settlers and sojourners had a tradition of retreating to higher altitudes from the menace of tropical climate. For the sense of fraternity, a refuge away from a predominantly unfamiliar social setting and the concomitant cultural shock were to foreign men and women, children and adult alike, a much needed physical and mental restoration so as to continue to another round of administering, ministering, or running a colonial household. Under such circumstances, highlands around Asia saw the burgeoning of hill stations — villages or small towns established by Europeans on the hills or plateaus in Asia for health and relaxation to get away from the heat and disease of the tropical lowlands. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a myriad of them were set up on the hills across India, Ceylon, Myanmar, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines and China for the civil administrators, soldiers, merchants, missionaries, and the families who followed them in the course of advancing political, social or religious enterprises.

In stark contrast to their more economical resourceful counterparts, missionaries did not usually have or were not able to access the company and comfort of what most Europeans were able to enjoy. Very often, for the sake of evangelical pursuit, missionaries were posted out to outskirts of major cities and towns or even further on their own, being the only foreign family or the only few Westerners on the field and operating modest households congruous to average local living standards. Ruth Vikner Gamelin, daughter of an American missionary family who were assigned to an impoverished town in the inland province of Henan, China, recalled,

“At first we lived in a small Chinese house with a single window and door. Dismal and cramped, it lacked sanitary facilities, heat, screens and space enough to partition for privacy. Mother disliked its brick-embedded dirt floor, ceiling of bamboo mats that provided racetracks for rats, and lack of sunlight. To her, it as ‘almost like a cellar’. For her two little ones, she felt it was ‘as though they were in a prison’...

In China, the births of my brothers, David Luther in 1916 and Carl Filip in 1920, were far more significant than mine, because they were sons. To honor the especially auspicious occasion of the first son’s birth, Chinese men held a feast and brought gifts to dad. In accordance with custom, dad reciprocated with a party for the men. Women, including the

mother of the new son, were ignored, except to prepare and serve the food! Such devaluation irritated my mother.

We were home-schooled through second grade. Mother put David and me to work at our table and guided our learning several hours a day... Then the harvest of 1920 failed, and a great famine spread over central China in the winter of 1920-21. When missionaries were asked to help distribute American food relief, dad postponed our first furlough to the United States and mother used the delay to help David and me improve our English before meeting relatives in the States. In May she wrote home, "The children know English quite well now, almost as well as Chinese'."

Ruth Vikner Gamelin^{vii}.

At the turn of twentieth-century China, over a dozen of notable hill stations had been established across the Manchurian empire^{viii}. The scale, fabric and sociality across different hill stations varied. Some notable hill stations were exclusively for diplomatic legions; others geared towards successful businessmen. Some kept up truthful to their intended function as a sanatorium with essential amenities. Others gradually grew into clusters of sizeable mansions with an assortment of recreational facilities and even schools for children. At the same time, compounds of primitive, makeshift sheds were not uncommon. While many of these hill stations had remained remote and isolated from towns and cities in the lowlands, some had inadvertently attracted the attention of their more affluent and resourceful local Chinese, who would also fancy a share of the cooler, crispier air as well as a taste of somewhat foreign lifestyle. Apart from health benefits, hill stations were to many of these missionary individuals and families cultural sanctuaries where they found consolation and fraternity for a limited cherished period of time when they led isolated, unsupportive lives for the rest of the year. Gameline continued,

"Missionary families were bonded by faith more closely than most relatives are bonded by blood. These bonds were reinforced enormously by the fact that we all spent our summers playing and praying together and sharing events like Saturday night songfests, interdenominational Sunday services, Fourth of July celebrations, picnics in mountain valleys, swims in mountain pools, and tennis on the courts below our home..."

Missionary women, whether single or mothers, needed summers at (hill stations)... After long months at isolated stations, often alone, often working as well as managing their households, frequently hearing scary rumours of bandits, but without telephones to talk it over with husbands or friends, they needed refreshing summers to avoid estrangement from their own culture, to exchange native garments for American dresses, jewellery, and wedding rings, and to renew their sense of worth and security."

Ruth Vikner Gamelin^{ix}.

It was no surprise that when prospective residents of Lantau Mountain Camp made their reluctant move to Hong Kong, they would be looking at the very qualities of that of Luofushan — high altitude for cooler air, clean water for drinking and swimming, and most importantly, away from local settlements. Several locations matching the above conditions were scouted in 1923 and 1924. Following the unfortunate blowing down of a temporary camp with similar mat sheds at Tai Mo Shan by typhoon overnight, the Campers realised the need for sturdier, storm-proof cabins if they were to build a hill station in typhoon-prone Hong Kong. An application to build stone shelters at Tai Mo Shan, the highest mountain in Hong Kong, was refused by the Government as the site lay within the proposed catchment for the Jubilee Reservoir. Multiple hikes were organised in autumn 1923 in search for a suitable campsite. Ma On Shan, a saddle-like iconic ridge in western New Territories was eyed on, but was almost instantly rejected for its lack of altitude and hence less appealing natural scenery, and proximity to a Chinese village and an iron mine. Lantau Island was a last resort. This largest outlying island of Hong Kong, furthest from the city centre on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon mainland, was inhabited along the coast only. A lofty, rugged mountain range standing in the heart of the island was for the most part untouched by human development. The Colonial Secretary's Office expressed a preference for Lantau to the prospective campers for its pristine natural landscape, cool montane climate and the possible logistics of furnishing chicken, fish and other supplies from some prosperous villages at the foot of the mountain.

Acting on the advice of the Colonial Secretary's Office, information on promising sites on "Laan Tau Mountain" were obtained, and arrangements for visiting the sites were swiftly arranged. In spring 1924, the Luofoshan Campers organised a squad among themselves to inspect the shortlisted sites with an officer of the District Office to determine a permanent location for the missionary summer camp. They scouted the plateau of Ngong Ping above the valley of Tai O, both now popular tourist attractions of nostalgic fishing village scenery and state-of-art cable car system, as well as the head of valley of Tung Chung, which is the saddle between Sunset Peak and Yi Tung Shan. Both expedition destinations possessed desirable altitude and water supply, but the squad was very insistent in their recommendation of Sunset Peak for its similar character to that of Luofushan. In retrospect, as remarked by Mr Rupert Spicer, one of the non-executive directors of Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association today, the location of the camp was decided by default instead of by choice since all hilltops on Hong Kong Island such as the Peak and Jardine's Lookout were taken by that

time. Even the highland of Ngong Ping was already occupied by some Chinese residents and monasteries.

The peroration of establishing a new campsite on top of two of Lantau Island's highest peak meant that this was a more viable option than making use of the existing resort on Cheung Chau, an island between Hong Kong Island and Lantau Island. At some point the idea of having the area between Sunset Peak and Yi Tung Shan designated as a foreign reserve was raised. At the time of the conception of Lantau Mountain Camp, two foreign reserves at Victoria Peak and the outlying of Cheung Chau had been designated and were stipulated by the Peak District (Residence) Ordinance 1918 and Cheung Chau (Residence) Ordinance 1919 respectively. For the case of Lantau Mountain Camp, it was soon concluded by the District Office that "the Government would not move in this matter" for fear that the term would call forth protests from Chinese, and that the need for such designation scarcely existed as no Chinese were attempting to encroach the camp area at that time. "There was however, still, certain level of sympathy from the Hong Kong government within to facilitate the subsequent land purchase and building requirements so as to have the Camp established and running. As noted by the authors of the "Report on Lannatu as a Site for a Summer Resort", "the Government officials showed us every courtesy and seemed very genuine in their desire to be of service to those of us who wish to pioneer".^{xi}

4. BUILDING ON THE ROCK

Once the decision of building a permanent campsite on the ridge of Sunset Peak and Yi Tung Shan was made, negotiations were organised with the government on acquisition of land lot and building permits, building of trail and water preserve. Luofushan Campers were aware of the need to reconsider architectural standards for built structures on Sunset Peak that could withstand more severe weather conditions. The considerations were laid down in the report to prospective residents of Lan tau Mountain Camp and the missionary societies which they belonged to:

"Third, our Tai Mo Shan experiences indicate the inadvisability of relying upon mat sheds. It has been suggested that one fairly large permanent building be erected to be used as a mess house, meeting place, and storm shelter. This building should be made of stone with the stone walls laid in cement with a reinforced concrete roof. We have no estimates on the cost of such a building.

Fourth, in addition to this central building it would seem wise for families to erect a small room to be used as a storm shelter and which could later be used as a kitchen in case of building real cottages. Attached to such a room mat sheds and lean-tos could be built which would withstand almost any storm.

Before reaching very definite conclusions some further investigations ought to be made as to the cost of building and securing of supplies. In fact it would be wise for one or two men to spend a day to two right on the mountains with an experienced mason.”

A. J. Fisher, W. R. Augur, J. W. Creighton^{xiii}.

In 1920s, the usual requirement of the Government on purchase of a site was that a building should be erected to the value of 50 cents per square foot of the purchased area. In view that buildings on the mountain were meant to be modest, the initial discussion was to have the District Office making a discretion to halve the value required that a stone hut of 10 'x 10 ' could occupy a site of 50 'x 50 ', doubling the land size that it could usually occupy. The discretion was not seconded immediately by other officers in the department, on either the value, number of rooms or headroom of the 10 'x 10 ' x 8 ' prototype of stone walls and concrete roof. The design was criticised by Mr W. Schofield, the District Officer who took over the Camper's application, as “not... desirable for human habitation; the minimum height of any room should be 10 feet, and no house should have less than two rooms”, and that he “do(es) not wish to take responsibility of allowing the erection of one-room houses without Government authority”^{xiiii}.

Much effort was spent in the subsequent correspondences in explaining the purpose and limitations of the dwelling houses for the intended summer camp. Higher construction costs (triple of that in lowland), altitude, cooler and more severe weather conditions and the purpose of campers abodes only during summer months should be taken into consideration. The Campers argued that under these circumstances the conditions which the Government might find necessary to enforce with respect to builders on the lower levels need not be applied in the case of the camp. It was resolved that the building covenant of the land lots at Sunset Peak be calculated at the rate of 10 cents a square foot of the area purchased, with a minimum of HK\$300. No other restriction as to type of building was to be enforced. These terms were better than those from the initial negotiation and were gladly accepted by the mission societies involved. Auction of the land lots were soon scheduled on the Christmas Eve of 1924. In terms of water supply, the Government agreed to grant the campers the right to “occupy the

water area", i.e. the stream and the slopes on both sides, for a nominal rent so that "the Campers' Association (is given) the right of control of the water supply while on the mountain"^{xiv}.



LAND OFFICE.

No. 570.—It is hereby notified (1) that Government Notifications Nos. 365 of 1906, 294 of 1924, 697 of 1909, 278 of 1911, S. 114 of 1918, S. 261 of 1921 and S. 139 of 1924 are hereby revoked and (2) that until further notice there shall be deemed to be incorporated in the published Particulars and Conditions of all sales of Crown Land in the New Territories (exclusive of that portion described as "Southern District Mainland" in the Order in Council dated the 15th March, 1906, Government Notification No. 212 of 1906) (a) the following General Conditions of Sale (unless otherwise stated), and (b) such of the following Special Conditions as are therein referred to by their respective numbers.

F. EAVES,
Land Officer.

7th October, 1924.

GENERAL CONDITIONS OF SALE.

1. The highest bidder above the upset price shall be the Purchaser, and if any dispute arise between two or more bidders for any lot, such lot shall be put up again at a former bidding.

2. No person shall at any bidding advance less than one dollar or such other sum as shall be named at the time of sale.

3. Immediately after the fall of the hammer, the purchaser of the lot shall sign a Memorandum of Agreement in the form hereinafter contained, for completing the purchase in accordance with the general and special conditions of sale and shall, within three days of the day of sale, pay to the District Officer, for and on behalf of His Majesty the King, the full amount of Premium at which the lot shall have been purchased.

4. The Purchaser of each lot, shall, when required by the District Officer have boundary stones of a size and pattern approved by him and marked with the Registry Number placed at each angle of the lot.

5. The Purchaser of each lot shall where such lot is sold as a building lot, build and finish, fit for occupation, before the expiration of twenty-four calendar months from the day of sale, in a good, substantial and workmanlike manner, one or more good and permanent messuage or tenement upon some part of such lot with walls of stone or brick and lime-mortar and roof of tiles or such other materials as may be approved by the District Officer, and in all other respects to the satisfaction of the District Officer and shall expend thereon in rateable improvements not less than the amount specified in the Particulars and Conditions of sale. Provided that notwithstanding any default by the purchaser in complying with this condition as regards any lot, and notwithstanding any acceptance on behalf of the Crown of any Crown rent or rates or other payment whatever, the District Officer may in his discretion, and whether the purchaser consent or not, fix at any time and from time to time any extended period for the completion of any of the said buildings in substitution for the said period of 24 months, and thereupon the obligation hereunder of the purchaser to complete the said building shall be taken to refer to such substituted period, and the right of re-entry reserved in these conditions shall arise upon default of completion within such substituted period as if it had been the period originally provided.

6. No sewage or refuse water will be allowed to flow from the Lot on to any of the adjoining lands whether belonging to the Crown or to private persons; neither shall any decaying, noisome, noxious, excrementitious, or other refuse matter be deposited on any portion of any Lot, and in carrying out any works of excavation on any Lot no excavated earth shall be deposited on such lot or on Crown Land adjoining in such manner as shall expose the slopes of such excavated earth to be eroded and washed down by the rains. The Purchaser of each lot shall see that all refuse matters are properly removed daily from off the premises.

Fig. 1: Notification of the sales of Sunset Peak land lots, 7 October 1924



LAND OFFICE.

No. S. 426.—It is hereby notified that the following Sale of Crown Land by Public Auction will be held at the District Office, Hongkong, at 11 a.m., on Wednesday, the 24th day of December, 1924.

The Lots are sold for the term of seventy-five years from the 1st day of July, 1898, with the right of renewal for a further term of 24 years less 3 days at a re-assessed Crown Rent, as Building Lots, subject to the General Conditions of Sale published in Government Notification No. 570 of 1924, and to the Special Conditions hereunder specified.

The amount to be spent in rateable improvements to the satisfaction of the District Officer, South, within two years from the date of sale under the General Condition No. 5 is 10 cents per square foot with minimum of \$300 in each lot.

PARTICULARS OF THE LOTS.

Registry No.	Locality.	Boundary Measurements.				Contents in Square feet.	Upset Price.	Annual Crown Rent.
		S.	S.	E.	W.			
Lantau Island Lot No. 1.	Lantau Island.	...	...	...	...	2,500	\$ 25	\$ 3
" 2.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 3.	"	...	...	...	...	5,000	50	6
" 4.	"	...	...	...	...	3,000	30	4
" 5.	"	...	...	...	...	6,400	64	8
" 6.	"	...	...	...	...	6,400	64	8
" 7.	"	...	...	...	...	6,600	66	8
" 8.	"	...	...	...	...	6,600	66	8
" 9.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 10.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 11.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 12.	"	...	...	...	...	2,000	20	3
" 13.	"	...	...	...	...	3,000	30	4
" 14.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 15.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 16.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 17.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 18.	"	...	...	...	...	2,500	25	3
" 19.	"	...	...	...	...	5,000	50	6
" 20.	"	...	...	...	...	50,000	500	58

W. SCHOFIELD,
District Officer, Southern District.

20th December, 1924.

Fig. 2: Notification of land auction and particulars of the land lots on Sunset Peak (Lantau Island Lot), 20 December 1924

Auction of the collection of land lots on which the cabins of Lantau Mountain Camp sit were built on took place on 24 December 1924. A few days before the auction, prospective campers had already had themselves organised to secure all land lots open for the bidding. According to land registry, however, not all of them had paid or had kept the land long enough to see the construction of dwellings on them, and the names of the persons who made the original purchases were not the same ones who built the first cabins. The following table summarises the actual purchasers of the cluster of Lantau Island Peak land lots and the year in which cabins were built:

LANTAO ISLAND PEAK LOT NO.	CABIN NO. OF LANTAU MOUNTAIN CAMP	YEAR OF CABIN CONSTRUCTION	FIRST OWNER/ PURCHASER	CHURCH/ MISSIONARY AFFILIATION	MISSIONARY SERVICE LOCATION
1	22	1932	Rev E.C. Howe	Assistant School Master, Union Middle School, Canton	Guangzhou (Canton)
2	14	1925	Rev W. T. Lindsay	Methodist Missionary Society	Foshan (Fatshan)
4	9	1933	Rev John Foster	Methodist Missionary Society	Guangzhou (Canton)
5	5	1925	Dr Joseph Oscar Thomson	Missionary to Canton Hospital by United Church of Canada	Guangzhou (Canton)
6	7	1925	Mr Herbert Fergus Thomson	USA Presbyterian Church; Missionary in China	Guangzhou (Canton)
7 (Surrendered in 1930)			Mr Harold Carsten John Asche	Church Missionary Society	Hong Kong
8 (Surrendered in 1931)			Rev E. W. L. Martin	Church Missionary Society	Hong Kong
9 (Surrendered in 1927)			Rev E. E. Walline	USA Presbyterian Church; Missionary in China	Shanghai
12 (Surrendered in 1931)			Miss Frances Ogilvie	New Zealand Presbyterian Church; Missionary in China at Kong Chuen Hospital Compound	Guangzhou (Canton)
13	24	1925	Dr William H. Dobson	USA Presbyterian Church; Missionary in China	Yangjiang (Yeung Kong)
14	20	1925	Rev Duncan McRae	South China Missionary by United Church of Canada	
15	18	1925	Prof W. E. McDonald	Professor of Mathematics, Canton Christian College	Guangzhou (Canton)

16	16	1925	Dr George G. Wannop	Missionary to Shek Kei Hospital by United Church of Canada	Zhongshan (Shek Kei)
17	13	1925	Miss Alice Carpenter	USA Presbyterian Church; Missionary in China	Guangzhou (Canton)
18	3	1925	Mr C. L. R. Beecher	Church Missionary Society	Hong Kong
19 (Surrendered in 1929)			Rev T.A. Broadfoot	Canadian Presbyterian Mission	Jiangmen (Kong Moon)
20	15	1925	London Missionary Society		Hong Kong
21	Mess Hall	1928	Lantao Missionary Association		
22	1	1925	Dr Frank Oldt	United Brethren Mission; Lingnan University	Guangzhou (Canton)
23 (Surrendered in 1933)			Mr G. S. Kennedy Skipton	Hong Kong	
24	11	1934	Mr G. S. Kennedy Skipton	Hong Kong	
25	10	1932	Rev. J. Franklin Karcher	US Presbyterian Church; Doctor, Hackett Medical Centre, Canton	Guangzhou (Canton)
26	8	1932	Rev. & Mrs R. L. Phillips	Methodist Mission Society	
27	2	1934	Miss Esther N. Schell	United Brethren Mission	
28	4	1933	Rev J. H. Herring	US Presbyterian Church South China Mission	Yangjiang (Yeung Kong)
29	6	1933	Miss Myrtle LeFevre	United Brethren Mission	
Did not appear in land registry			Miss K. M. Banks	Methodist Mission Society	Foshan (Fatshan)
Did not appear in land registry			Rev Frank H. Wilkinson	New Zealand Presbyterian Church; Missionary in China	
Did not appear in land registry			Rev Rex E. Ray	Southern Baptist Convention	Wuzhou (Wuchow)
Did not appear in land registry			Rev G. E. S. Upsdell	Assistant School Master, Queen's College	Hong Kong

Table 1: Summary of the Owners/Purchasers of Lantao Island Peak Land Lots and Cabins of Lantau Mountain Camp between 1920s and 1930s

5. KINDRED SPIRITS

Given its remote location, collective ownership and vacancy for substantial period of the year, it would require an organised and well-planned operation mechanism to keep the place and its community of Lantau Mountain Camp in place. This is demonstrated from the well-documented ownership records with the government land registry of each of the stone cabins, the presence of a residents association and its management of the Camp, and the role of the Caretaker who took care of general maintenance and security of the Camp.

From its establishment in 1925 till today, all stone cabins of Lantau Mountain Camp have been under effective ownership although level of usage of each cabin varies. Ownership of the cabins can be categorised as individual or society. An individual owner is one who bought the cabin in his or her own name, hence having their names on the land registry, at his or her own expenses, sponsored by respective church or missionary society, or shared between fellow regular residents of the cabin. Until recent years, almost all of the individual owners were members of various missionary societies, or the churches or institutions founded by these missionary societies. Society owners refer to those who bought the cabins in the name of missionary societies or the church organisations that they had set up, hence their cabins were registered with the Land Registry in the name of the society, the church organisation or their trustee. Over the years, a number of missionary societies and their church organisations had been seen on land registry records, for instances the Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China, New Zealand Presbyterian Mission, London Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society, Chinese Anglican Church in Hong Kong, Norwegian Lutheran Mission, Mission Covenant Church of Norway, the Methodist Church of Hong Kong, the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the Basel Mission. Today, nearly half of the cabins of Lantau Mountain Camp are still owned by missionary societies or their local churches.

Cabin representatives refer to individuals who regularly occupies the cabin of their missionary society or church organisation, or individual owners who had been on furlough or extended absence from Hong Kong. They also represented their respective society owners at meetings of the Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association and served as the contact point for all matters regarding the cabins. From the cabin owner contact lists and meeting minutes of the Association, it is observed that different society owners were represented by different groups to their cabins. For instance, the cabins

of the Basel Mission and the Methodist Church were consistently represented by reverends, while both cabins of the Anglican Church were often represented by missionary teachers of their schools. From after World War II to late 1970s, the cabin owners of Lantau Mountain Camp were encouraged to rent out their cabins during the summer season if they were not occupying the cabin for the whole season. While mission families and their guests would occupy weeks, if not the whole summer season, at their cabins, owners were encouraged to lease any vacancies to interested parties to ensure full occupancy of the cabins throughout the summer in order to raise enough funds for mess operation and maintenance of all camp facilities. Friends and families who aspired to the natural environment and the religious ambience of the Camp would made bookings with owners whom they knew or through the summer camp organisers (usually the Secretary of the Association). Among these users some of them were repeated campers who also helped with organising the summer camps or with repairs and maintenance of camp facilities.

In order to coordinate among cabin owners, the management and maintenance of Lantau Mountain Camp, an association was set up since the inception of the Camp. The first mentioning of such organisation appeared in Dr I. E. Mitchell's letter to prospective owners of the Camp in December 1924, when he addressed the letter to "the following members of the Laan 'Tau Campers Association"^{xv}. Some sort of resident association came into being, with more active members took the initiative to be in charge of a number of tasks that were instrumental for the upkeep of the communal facilities — Mess Hall, Caretaker's Hut, Amah's Hut, swimming pool and hiking trail, and the whole campsite in general.

Subsequent to a major shift in the mix of cabin owners after World War II and the Civil War in mainland China, by early 1950s the summer camp at Lantau Mountain Camp had took shape again. At the same time various maintenance works for almost all cabins were needed. There was a need to reinstate the pivotal coordination of the owners had the association registered with the government as "Lantau Summer Camp Residents Association"; the bank account at HSBC was also changed to conform to the registered name. Seven years later, in 1961, the association was informed by the Registrar of Societies, Police Headquarter to lodge a copy of the Articles of Association or Constitution of the Association. At this occasion the Association decided to change its name to "The Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association" as it wrote up the constitution of the Association.

The constitution of the Association elucidated the objectives of the Association, and hence the existence of the Lantau Mountain Camp as:

“To foster and maintain the tradition of Christian fellowship and to represent and further the interests of the owners of the buildings etc which constitute the Lantau Mountain Camp;

To maintain the fabric and regulate the use of communal facilities of the Camp including the Mess Hall and all of its components, the caretaker’s quarters (a.k.a. coolie shack), the camp water system (a dam, a concrete settling tank, piping and draw off points), the swimming pool dam and ancillary works, and the wooden hut used as a changing room;

To raise funds for the purpose of 2 above, to provide for such other amenities, and to maintain the path between Pui O Au (Nam Shan) and the Camp, and to build and maintain other footpaths; and

To encourage any owners desirous of selling his house to find a purchaser who is acceptable to the Association as a suitable person to share in the life of the community.”

Constitution of the Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association^{xvi}.

Officers of the Association include the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, the Treasurer, the Secretary, Trails Supervisor (later restructured as “Maintenance Committee”) and at least one other member known as Member-at-Large. The officers were elected annually at the General Meeting that usually happened in the winter months. There were well-defined duties and responsibilities of each officer. There is an apparent emphasis on the sharing of religious life and preservation of common values among its members. Membership of the Association is limited to the owners of the buildings which comprise the camp, or representatives designated by these owners. Similar emphasis is also found in the operation of the summer camp, which involved not only cabin owners but also their guests and anyone who booked through the Association to use the cabins. Given its very special environment and inconvenient access, the executive committee of the Association gave campers very detailed camp notes which were updated regularly. The camp notes were usually sent one month in advance of their vacation on the mountain so that they knew what to pack, what to expect, and understood beforehand how holiday experience was organised at Lantau Mountain Camp.

Of all the particulars mentioned in the camp notes, emphases were made on preparation for the camp, camp rules, cabin care and most importantly, objectives of the establishment and operation of the camp to discreetly remind campers and their guests of the common values to be honoured and enjoyed at Lantau Mountain Camp. Organisers of the summer camp and cabin owners in general felt that

“pamphlet giving particulars of the camp to stress the Christian purpose and origin of the camp, so that persons not in sympathy with this or who were unwilling to participate in the communal life of the camp would not attempt to rent houses”. Prospective campers would read in the camp notes that:

“Lantau Mountain Camp is a group of twenty small huts or cottages, situated at a height of 2,500 feet on Lantau Island... erected and are mainly owned by missionaries who, with their families, like to spend a summer holiday there away from the humid heat of the city. It is a place where the spirit of Christian fellowship is fostered and enjoyed.

The management of the Camp and the catering is done voluntarily by people who are themselves on holiday. These tasks are onerous but can be made less so if all campers confirm to the rules and do all they can to assist the Camp and Mess Managers. It is hoped that all campers will join in the communal life of the Mess.”

Information sheet for camp season from July 10, 1971 to Sept 4, 1971^{xvii}.

In the early years of the camp when labour costs were low and employment opportunities on Lantau were few, it was not difficult to find coolies to carry goods, bulky items such as kerosene drums and large pieces of luggage, and even people from the foot of the mountain to the campsite. For years since the establishment of the Camp, the Association had relied on the faithful service of Mr Tsang and his Sam Lee Store at Mui Wo, a sizeable village at the southern foot of the mountain with ferry connections to Hong Kong Island, to organise coolie carriage for the camp. At the same time, a Caretaker, often also recruited from the village of Mui Wo, would have to stay on the mountain top throughout the year to station and take care of the general upkeep of the Camp. The one-man band of the Caretaker would be responsible for a number of chores and responsibilities, for instances, minor maintenance work for the cabins, trimming grass and digging channels beside the walking paths through the camp, organising inventory, organising the bed spaces of the coolies, digging toilet pits and preparing covering sand, digging trash ditch and burning the trash, clearing out sediments of the swimming pool, fetching water to the cabins for Campers, and so on.

To accommodate the Caretaker on the altitude to carry out his required duties, a Caretaker's Hut was hence erected alongside with the construction of the first batch of the stone cabins in 1925 on the saddle between Sunset Peak and Yi Tung Shan. It housed the Caretaker (a.k.a. gateman, watchman) throughout his workdays, and there were also bunk beds for maximum 8 carriers in case they had a long work day and were not able to return to their village home downhill before dusk. Part of the original stone walls of Caretaker's Hut are still intact today, bearing the same architectural style as the prototype of other cabins. It was twice enlarged in subsequent years. The hut upholds the pivotal role

in keeping Lantau Mountain Camp in order as the house of the Caretaker since the camp's establishment. The strategic location of the hut represents several meanings: It is located at the intersection of the 3 hiking trails to Lantau Mountain Camp, showing its accessibility for logistics and immediate access to the rest of the campsite. It is at a slightly lower altitude than all of the cabins to keep itself away from line of sight of the Campers, mitigating its conspicuity in comparison to other stone cabins and the overall landscape. And for visitors to Sunset Peak today, it is conveniently located on the main hiking path for easy identification and access for visitors in case of emergency.



Fig. 3: (left) Exterior of Caretaker's Hut (Source: Miriam Lee, 2023)

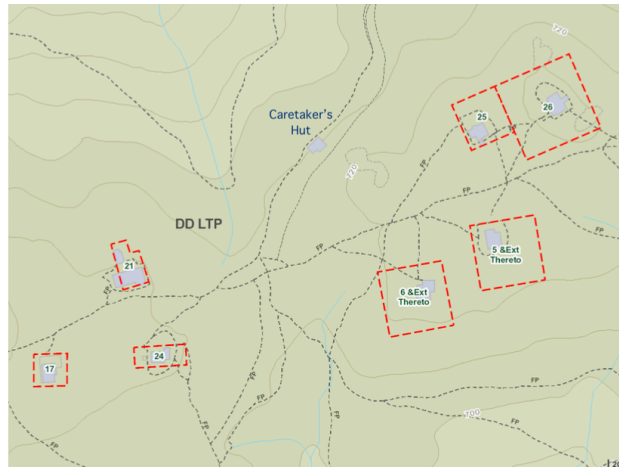


Fig. 4: (right) Location of Caretaker's Hut in relation to other stone cabins of Lantau Mountain Camp (Source: Miriam Lee, 2023)



Fig. 5: Campers on arrival at Lantau Mountain Camp with coolies carrying a sedan chair, 1938 (Source: Raymond Smith, 1938)

The construction of Shek Pik Reservoir and ancillary works on Lantau Island, and more promising job opportunities elsewhere in Hong Kong and even overseas had depleted carrier manpower to Lantau Mountain Camp since mid-1960s. The executive committee of the Association first reported the scarcity of coolies on Lantau in 1960, and then in subsequent years difficulty in recruiting caretakers, amahs (cooks) and labour for repair and maintenance. The scarcity of manpower as caretaker or carrier and the recruitment process of them also reflected the relationship between Campers and local communities. Despite being a largely secluded community above the mountain, cabin owners and campers of Lantau Mountain Camp alike had strived to maintain a cordial relationship with various local villages at the foot of the mountain, from where they recruit caretakers and carriers, organise replenishment to the campsite and other necessary logistics. For years members of the Association tried to maintain the image of good employer among the villagers. The magnitude of the building project of Lantau Mountain Camp had brought employment opportunities to residents of Lantau as stone-cutters, builders, trail blazers and general labourers. Since the Camp's operation,

residents depended unequivocally on villagers hired as caretakers and coolies for the Camp's general upkeep and its annual carnivalesque summer camp on the altitude. For long-term employees such as the caretaker, the Association was tactful in handling the employment relationship with him so that in case of termination of contract or reprimand for underperformance, he would not speak bad of the campers. For instance, in view of the termination of service to caretaker Cheung Sam whose work was unsatisfactory and often demanded pay rise, the Association considered offering him a fairly generous severance pay to prevent him from swaying the villagers, hence making it even more difficult to get coolies.

In light of the scarcity of caretaker and carriers since mid-1960s, and later the cease of the summer camp in late 1980s as missionary societies relocated their resources from the prospering British colony to more impecunious regions in Asia, Campers had to come into terms with the absence of hired manpower. For the past 30 years, a new kind of fellowship has gradually taken shape. Individuals who have bought the cabins from departing missionary societies have to seek regular communication and discussion on communal affairs through the more official mechanism of the Residents Association, as well as informal ties between acquaintances. Others, such as those remaining missionary societies and their local churches, would recruit volunteers from the congregation to assist with the maintenance and general upkeep of the cabins, going up the mountain a few times a year. This results in the decentralisation of management of the campsite and the ensuing coordination efforts. While cabin owners and their custodians still perform organic, minimal maintenance works on their own cabins, regular events such as the much-anticipated summer camp are no longer seen. As the highlight event requiring concerted efforts from personnel of all cabins no longer happen, Campers are not obliged to meet regularly to plan out campsite matters, or to stay on the mountain during the hottest months. There is actually a benefit of avoiding the more fluctuating, stormy weathers. They tend to make intermittent short visits to the cabins for just a weekend or for a day hike only in the cooler months. Shorter stays at different times of the year also mean there is less physical connection between campers. Interaction with other cabin owners or users has become very limited. The increasingly secular, disconnected combination of cabin ownership of Lantau Mountain Camp today may only be compensated by a sense of fellowship in sharing the love for nature and tranquility. Cabin owners and

their guests are keeping both the infrastructure and lifestyle of a quaint indigenous Chinese society for a century notwithstanding modernisation and changes of the society.

6. WAY FORWARD: HAVEN ON THE MOUNT

The disused Caretaker's Hut of Lantau Mountain Camp received recent attention largely due to the availability of government funding to conserve built environments in countryside areas of Hong Kong. With the Residents Association hoping to put back the hut into use to reactivate its original role of cultivating care to the fabric of the hut itself and the landscape of the campsite, a partnership is formed between the Campers and the Chinese University of Hong Kong to find a long term design and operation solution for architectural restoration of the hut and its sustainable use for continuous research and protection of the natural environment and cultural landscape of the campsite.

Taking into consideration the intriguing history, transformation and the social values that Lantau Mountain Camp represented and manoeuvred, conservation for this unique architectural cluster looks beyond the unusual stone construction of the Camp in a pristine montane setting. A thorough study is needed to scrutinise how and why the compound was formed, its vicissitude and continuity throughout the years juxtaposed with the politics among its owners, occupants, missionary societies, attendants and local communities, as well as communal and societal chemistries to stakeholders and visitors brought about by the conservation project itself. In particular, the restoration focusing on the historical Caretaker's Hut opens up questions on dynamics among its users and service recipients in various generations. Significance of the hut and its caretakers to the missionary community of the hill station, politics between caretakers and residents, and its renewed values and manoeuvres among various parties following the restoration become the matrix in designing the restoration scheme and designating the hut's future usage.

Despite being largely a secluded community, residents strived to maintain a cordial relationship with local communities down the mountain, while villagers leveraged on such discretion for employment and small business opportunities. While remoteness of the camp, strenuousness of the duties and austerity of mountain living left the hired hands in seemingly disadvantaged positions, these circumstances were however their bargaining power in the service as more favourable work opportunities emerged elsewhere on Lantau Island or Hong Kong proper. Their reluctance to work

at the Camp was a major cause for the Camp community to dwindle and attenuate, leaving the Camp the worse for wear.

The Camp's need for an overall conservation plan presents considerable latitude to renew the role of caretaking of the Camp and its surroundings, and reshaping of the dynamics between its stakeholders, government bodies and new communities who also take an interest in the very highland environment for recreation and health benefits. The modus operandi of this conservation project shall shed light on management of similar heritage sites.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ⁱ Bray, Denis. "Growing Up In China: Lecture to the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch", 14 May 1993.
- ⁱⁱ Crossette, Barbara. *The Great Hill Stations Of Asia*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Morgan, Carter. "An Informal Sketch of Laantau Mountain Camp", 1979.
- ^{iv} Morgan, Carter. "An Informal Sketch of Laantau Mountain Camp", 1979.
- ^v Author unknown. "Report to Members of the South China District Committee re Summer Resorts", London Mission Society Hong Kong, 19 March 1924.
- ^{vi} Mitchell, Isaiah Edward. "Letter to Land Officer", 5 June 1924.
- ^{vii} Vikner Gamelin, Ruth. "Our China Mission: A Child's Experiences", 2006.
- ^{viii} Bertram, Mark. *Room for Diplomacy: The History of Britain's Diplomatic Buildings Overseas 1800-2000*. Reading: Spire Books, 2011.
- ^{ix} Vikner Gamelin, Ruth. "Our China Mission: A Child's Experiences", 2006.
- ^x Mitchell, Isaiah Edward. "Memorandum on Mountain Camp, Tai Ue Shan, Lan Tau Island", 24 September 1924.
- ^{xi} Fisher, A. J., Augur, W. R. & Creighton, J. W. "Report on Laan Tau as a Site for a Summer Resort", 1924.
- ^{xii} Fisher, A. J., Augur, W. R. & Creighton, J. W. "Report on Laan Tau as a Site for a Summer Resort", 1924.
- ^{xiii} Schofield, W. "Letter No. 2464/22", 14 November 1924.
- ^{xiv} Mitchell, Isaiah Edward. "Memorandum on Mountain Camp, Tai Ue Shan, Lan Tau Island", 24 September 1924.
- ^{xv} Mitchell, Isaiah Edward. "Letter to Members of Laan Tau Campers Association on the Bid of Sunset Peak Land Lots, 24 December 1924
- ^{xvi} Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association. "Constitution of the Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association", 1961.
- ^{xvii} Lantau Mountain Camp Residents Association. "Information sheet for camp season from July 10, 1971 to Sept 4, 1971", 1971.

Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

DILEMMA BETWEEN CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT: DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES OF INITIATING CONSERVATION ATTEMPTS ON A PRIVATELY- OWNED AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

Sidney C. H. Cheung, Alex W. H. Wong

Volume 329

Pages 44-64

2024

DILEMMA BETWEEN CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT: DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES OF INITIATING CONSERVATION ATTEMPTS ON A PRIVATELY-OWNED AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE



In Hong Kong, while most countryside areas have remained relatively untouched due to their remote locations, certain regions are still facing the pressure of further development, thus there is an urgent need to conserve or document the remaining cultural heritage resources in these areas. However, not all landowners are supportive of conservation projects, particularly when the land holds significant potential economic value. This paper highlights the constraints and challenges associated with initiating a conservation project in privately-owned agricultural heritage sites in Hong Kong. It aims to shed light on the difficulties faced by researchers and other interested parties and explores how these obstacles can be overcome through continuous engagement and collaboration with relevant stakeholders in the area.

1. INTRODUCTION

Situated on the plateau at an elevation of 450m, the Ngong Ping Tea Garden (hereafter the “Tea Garden”) stood out as the sole large-scale tea-related agricultural heritage site on Lantau Island, and even across all of Hong Kong. It was established in 1948 by Mr. Brook Bernacchi, a former Queen’s Counsel and also a prominent figure involved in the development and welfare of Lantau. As a result, the Tea Garden served not only as a site for tea cultivation and production but also, to some extent, as a rehabilitation center offering employment opportunities to those in need. At its prime, the tea-plantation permit for the garden encompassed more than 130 acres of crown land, with an additional 6.68 acres of privately-owned land housing the majority of its tea factory buildings and supporting structures. However, with the societal shift towards economic reform, the Tea Garden underwent a transformation and became a recreational area in the 1970s. Eventually, it ceased operations altogether in the 1990s.

Regarding various topics related to food and drink, tea has been a popular one among all the single-item research because not only it has a long historical development with cultural significance, but also its transnational characters demonstrating how global commodity has been used and bringing impacts on local economy in many ways¹. Since the 1980s, mainland Chinese's lifestyles were largely influenced by the economic reform and have also been the focus of Chinese study; therefore, social phenomena reflected

through tea consumption in relation to urbanisation, social status, international relations have played an important role for the investigation of the fast-changing Chinese society². It is noteworthy that three tea plantation areas in China, namely the Pu'er Traditional Tea Agrosystem, Jasmine and Tea Culture System of Fuzhou City, and the Anxi Tieguanyin Tea Culture System, have been recognised and included in the list of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations³. Considering their similar nature of production, albeit on a larger scale, in comparison to the Tea Garden, this recognition also underscores the potential heritage significance of the Tea Garden in terms of history, culture, communal network, biodiversity, resilient ecosystems, and the unique blend of tradition and innovation it embodies.

However, when considering the conservation of the Tea Garden within the context of Hong Kong, we discover that it entails more than just establishing the cultural significance of the heritage site. It also requires aligning the site with the conservation mechanisms of the government framework, addressing the weaker land attachment of new owners, and resisting the temptation of further development aimed at exploiting its potential economic value. In this paper we would like to focus on the limitations and hurdles associated with commencing a conservation research in privately-owned agricultural heritage sites in Hong Kong. Its purpose is to provide insight into the challenges faced by researchers and other interested parties, and to explore potential solutions by fostering continuous engagement and collaboration with relevant stakeholders in the region.

2. THE NGONG PING TEA GARDEN

2.1. Historical Development

Tea cultivation was not a new concept in Hong Kong. As early as 1819, the district gazetteer mentioned that tea was already a significant economic crop in the region⁴. Government records in 1906 further describe that “tea is cultivated in several places in the New Territories ... There is a tradition that tea growing was once a thriving industry here and terraces similar to the above are pointed out in the mountain sides in all part of the

district⁵”. When examining the tea plantation on Lantau Island, studies conducted in the 1980s indicate that commercial tea plantations, likely managed by individuals of Chinese origin from outside the island, were at least in operation during the late 1880s and 1890s, predating the lease of the New Territories⁶. Nevertheless, it appears that these tea plantation areas eventually ceased operations due to fierce competition from tea products originating from India and Sri Lanka starting from the late 19th century, and until the pre-war era⁷.

The resurgence of tea plantation at Ngong Ping occurred with the arrival of Bernacchi in the 1940s. Born and raised in London, Bernacchi enlisted in the Royal Marines after the outbreaks of World War II, and spent several months stationed in Sri Lanka. Upon his demobilisation in Hong Kong at the end of 1945, he subsequently acquired a former nunnery "覺蓮苑 (“Kol Lin Yuen”, literally the “All Knowing Lotus Villa”)", in 1948, which served as his holiday bungalow in Ngong Ping⁸. Enthralled by the enchanting tea plantations of Sri Lanka, Bernacchi's fascination led him to acquire additional parcels of land (approximately 6.50 acres) surrounding the villa in subsequent years, where he began his experimental tea cultivation venture, along with other viable agricultural endeavors.



Fig. 1: Old photo of “All Knowing Lotus Villa” and its nearby tea plantation. (Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/413979390719545202/>)

Going beyond his private holdings, Bernacchi also sought a Forestry License (1953-1961) to cultivate tea on government land and later obtained a Crown Land Permit from 1967 onwards. By 1967, the Tea Garden had expanded to cover over 130 acres of crown land (with approximately 60 acres dedicated to tea farms), yielding a peak annual tea production of more than 36,000 pounds⁹.



Fig. 2: The expansion of the Tea Garden, ca. 1950s-1960s. (Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/413979390719545210/>)

It is intriguing to highlight that Bernacchi's professional background had no connection to tea plantation or agriculture. He initially served as a Deputy Assistant Judge Advocate General of the Army towards the end of 1945. Subsequently, he pursued a career as a barrister-at-law in 1946 and achieved the esteemed position of Queen's Counsel in 1960. In addition to his professional endeavors, Bernacchi was actively involved in the political landscape. In 1949, he played a pivotal role in the formation of the Reform Club of Hong Kong, which stood as one of the oldest political organisations in the region. In view of the above, it is evident that farming was more of a hobby for Bernacchi rather than a primary means of livelihood. Despite Bernacchi's limited experience in tea cultivation, the significant expansion of the Tea Garden was made possible through the invaluable assistance of Lee Hsing Chuen, who was a tea expert hired by the former in the late 1950s from Taiwan. Lee was one of the earliest graduates in the tea specialty from Fudan University in the 1940s and had previously worked in the first state-owned China Tea company. He later moved to Taiwan, where he

continued his tea-related career at the Taiwan Tea Institute. Drawing upon his professional knowledge and hands-on experience in tea cultivation, Lee played a crucial role in expanding the tea plantation area and implementing more advanced techniques for tea planting and manufacturing within the Tea Garden. Furthermore, taking advantage of the newly completed electricity supply network that was connected to the Ngong Ping area in the early 1960s, Lee took the lead in transitioning the garden's production methods towards semi-mechanisation. He accomplished this by introducing various tea-manufacturing machinery from Taiwan, which significantly improved productivity and efficiency in the tea production process.

However, Bernacchi's ambitious vision of fully utilising the 130-acre crown land for the Tea Garden encountered numerous challenges starting in the late 1960s. These obstacles included budget constraints, Bernacchi's declining health, the departure of Lee Hsing Chuen, and the persistent increase in labour costs combined with stagnant market prices for tea. In the mid-1970s, there was a brief period of overseas interest in the plantation when a Japanese consortium came onboard to manage a planned expansion. Their aim was to transform the tea estate into a tea-themed recreational resort, complete with amenities such as a cable system, a mini-zoo, camping sites, and barbeque pits. While tea cultivation for export would still continue on a limited scale of no more than 60 acres, provided the quality met the required standards. The venture foundered within two years, however, and since the opening of China tea prices have fallen well below the level at which the Bernacchi plantation can hope to be competitive¹⁰.

Following the unsuccessful transition, the Tea Garden started to operate in a hybrid mode, allocating resources for both tea manufacturing and recreational activities, albeit on a smaller scale than originally envisioned. Approximately 16 acres of land were still dedicated to tea cultivation, while new facilities such as a horse-riding area, roller skating venue, a restaurant, and holiday accommodations were introduced to cater to recreational needs. However, according to Ian Whitehead, Bernacchi's stepson and the subsequent manager after Lee Hsing Chuen, the operation of the Tea Garden remained a "break-even business" and was primarily maintained for the sake of preservation rather than for significant financial gains in the 1980s¹¹.

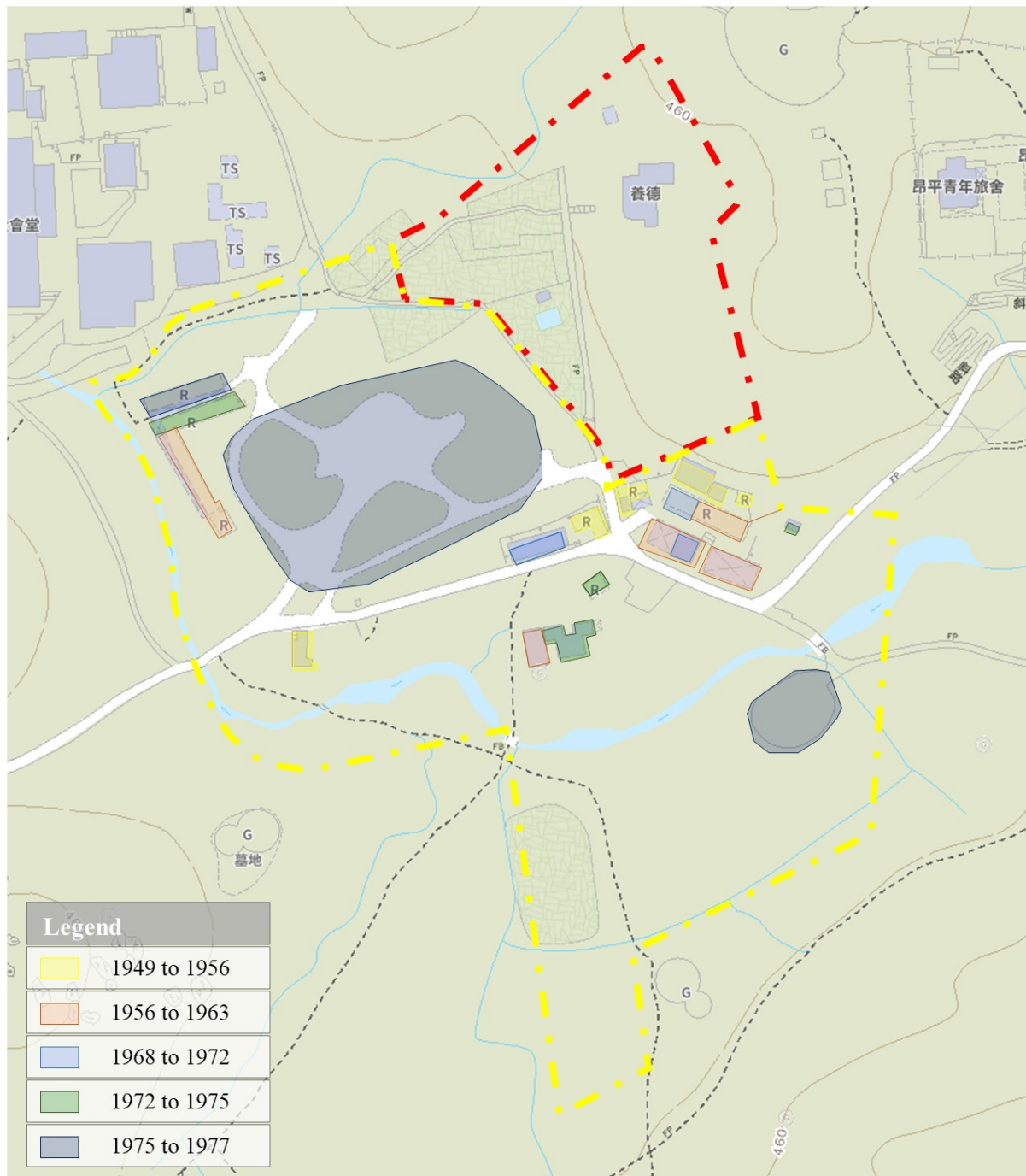


Fig. 3: Map showing the location of private land and its attached buildings (yellow dotted line) being sold in 1993. (Source: <https://www.map.gov.hk/gm/map/>, edited by Alex W. H. Wong)

In the mid-1990s, the majority of the private lands comprising the Tea Garden, excluding those where the "All Knowing Lotus Villa" was situated, were sold to a private company in Hong Kong. Following the

ownership transfer, the new owners and their representatives made partial efforts to resume catering services at the tea garden restaurant, albeit on a limited scale. However, despite several attempts to revive the Tea Garden, none succeeded in restoring it to its former glory, resulting in the deterioration of most of the buildings. Regrettably, the passing of Bernacchi in the United Kingdom on September 22, 1996, at the age of 74, marked the end of an era for both him and the Tea Garden, symbolising the conclusion of their remarkable contributions to the Ngong Ping region.

2.2. Heritage Significances

The Tea Garden, despite its relatively recent establishment in the post-World War II era, carries profound cultural significance, and represents a unique and rare form of agricultural heritage that is scarcely found in other parts of Hong Kong. In this section, we aim to articulate the significant value of the Tea Garden, encompassing its historical, architectural, cultural, and ecological importance.

From a historical perspective, the Tea Garden holds significance not only as a tea manufacturing company but also as a microcosm for studying how different governance policies have influenced the development of Lantau Island over time. The Tea Garden was initially established as a combined farming and livestock feeding area, likely influenced by the post-war Colonial Agricultural Policy of the United Kingdom as Lantau Island was proposed to be one of the focuses of agricultural activities as early as the 1940s¹². Its expansion in the 1950s with a Forestry License marked a policy shift for Lantau Island, transitioning from a sole focus on agriculture to a combined approach that included both agriculture and forestry. This shift was prompted by the emergence of forestry companies during that period¹³, and the government's introduction of various financial incentives. For example, the Forestry License had a lower permit fee compared to the premium associated with annual Crown Rent for agricultural land¹⁴. In the 1970s, the transformation of the Tea Garden demonstrated the government has signified a departure from the intention to convert the island into a primary production base and marked the adoption of a new development strategy that focused on supporting its recreational value¹⁵. Throughout the historical development of the Tea Garden, each

transformation it underwent corresponded to a specific change in policy for Lantau Island. These transformations served as tangible manifestations of the evolving priorities and strategies that the island's governance implemented over time.



Fig. 3: Parts of the buildings of the Tea Garden in 2022. (Photo credit: Alex W. H. Wong)

In terms of architectural merit, the buildings within the Tea Garden were primarily constructed with a functional purpose in mind, lacking elaborate decorative features. The "All Knowing Lotus Villa" stands out to a certain extent to showcases an intriguing blend of Eastern and Western aesthetics, as the villa was transformed from its original Chinese religious structure to incorporate elements of Western residential design through several renovations by Bernacchi. Moreover, of greater significance is not the architectural merit of individual buildings within the heritage site, but rather the group value of the entire site and its landscape. The Tea Garden encompasses at least 18 groups of buildings and a meticulously planned

landscape that together demonstrate the cohesive flow of the tea planting and manufacturing process. It is worth noting that the majority of buildings on the site have remained relatively intact and have not undergone significant changes in their purpose, but they are simply left vacant following the cessation of the Tea Garden's operation. It is in these intact structures, as well as the integrated design and layout of the entire site that the true architectural merit resides.

Culturally speaking, tea drinking practices function as important markers of social and ethnic identity providing insights into social change, power relations, class structure, gender roles and national ideology, especially in our globalising societies¹⁶. While information regarding the consumption of products from the Tea Garden is unavailable, it is equally important to acknowledge that the tea growing and manufacturing process itself can contribute to the intangible cultural heritage of a place. In our research, we have relied on secondary information and conducted interviews with relevant stakeholders in order to reconstruct the tea-making techniques employed in the Tea Garden. To ensure accuracy, we cross-referenced these findings with Lee Hsing Chuen's publication on tea processing¹⁷. Through this process, we have confirmed the presence of numerous tools, machinery, and structures within the tea manufacturing buildings of the Tea Garden that are directly associated with each step of the tea making procedure, and found compelling evidence to suggest that the tea making procedure in the Tea Garden was heavily influenced by the practices of the tea industry in Taiwan.

Lastly, we turn our attention to the ecological importance of the heritage site. Through our investigation, we have identified the presence of several tea plants (*Camellia sinensis* (L.) Kuntze), with some forming a substantial colony. Other species with ecological significance were also found within the Tea Garden area (refer to section 3.2 for more information). Overall, the site exhibits a notable ecological landscape characterised by a locally significant secondary forest that has undergone moderate alterations due to human activities.

3. DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES UNDER THE CURRENT CONSERVATION MECHANISM

As mentioned earlier in this paper, heritage conservation in Hong Kong involves not only recognising the cultural significance of a heritage site, but also aligning it with the governing framework established by the authorities. In this section, our main focus will be on the constraints imposed by the current conservation mechanisms for conserving the Tea Garden. Additionally, we will address the challenges posed by the weaker land attachment of new owners when initiating conservation efforts for this heritage site.

3.1. Built Heritage Conservation Mechanism

Heritage conservation for built structures in Hong Kong operates under a two-tier mechanism. The first tier comprises "declared monuments", which enjoy statutory protection under the "Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance" (Cap. 53). Buildings and structures designated as declared monuments are subject to prohibition on building/demolition works and other works unless a permit is granted by the government. The second tier involves a proposed grading mechanism for other built heritage sites with cultural significance. These sites may receive a proposed Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, or no grading designation. While graded buildings do not possess the legal protection afforded by Cap. 53, the government considers whether a building within the Grade 1 category meets the high threshold of being deemed a "monument" for the purpose of official declaration under the Ordinance.

In addition, buildings categorised under the grading system benefit from a range of protective administrative measures. In the case of government-owned buildings or funded projects, any new capital works projects that may impact all types of graded buildings must undergo a heritage impact assessment. Furthermore, selected government properties are earmarked for revitalisation projects aimed at providing public enjoyment. For privately-owned built heritage, various financial incentives are offered to owners to encourage the conservation of these buildings. One example is the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme, which

provides subsidies to owners for conducting maintenance works on their properties. If a private owner decides to develop their property, relevant government departments would be acknowledged through an internal monitoring mechanism and they would engage in discussions with the owner to explore measures such as non-in-situ land exchange, relaxation of plot ratio, site coverage restrictions, etc. to encourage owners to conserve either the entirety or a portion of their historic buildings¹⁸.

Despite the support provided by the two-tier mechanism for built heritage, there are two limitations that hinder its comprehensiveness and effectiveness. The first limitation pertains to the assessment of graded buildings, which was primarily initiated in the 2000s and focused mainly on buildings completed before 1950. Consequently, some post-1950 buildings with cultural significance have been overlooked. Out of the 1,444 historic buildings assessed during that time, less than 10% (142 out of 1,444) were constructed after 1950. Among them, only one was declared a monument, one confirmed Grade 1, 19 Grade 2, 52 Grade 3, and 69 were confirmed with no grading¹⁹. Although the government acknowledges this loophole and has begun assessing additional buildings since the 2010s, as well as considering ad hoc requests for grading individual post-1950 buildings, typically prioritising those facing an imminent threat of demolition, the process is still ongoing. As of 2023, the government has identified approximately 2,000 buildings constructed in urban areas between 1950 and 1959 and has completed the initial research on them, but further work is still required for the rural areas. The second limitation arises from the bureaucratic procedure of the grading mechanism. As per the procedure, buildings on the list undergo assessment by the governmental body Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO), and the proposed grading by the AMO is then endorsed and confirmed by the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB), a statutory body consisting of members with expertise in various fields related to heritage conservation. However, the issue lies in the fact that the AAB holds only 3 to 4 meetings annually to confirm the grading, typically covering 2 to 7 buildings per meeting. This is a very small portion compared to the number of buildings awaiting grading (over 100 buildings as of 2023)²⁰.

Considering the limitations of the existing built heritage conservation mechanism mentioned above, it is important to note that while the "All Knowing Lotus Villa" is a pre-war building, the majority of the built

heritage within the Tea Garden was completed after 1950 and was not included in the grading exercise initiated in the 2000s. Even if the Tea Garden is nominated for inclusion in the grading system through ad hoc requests, the confirmation of a proposed grading for the site is a time-consuming process. The lengthy grading confirmation process hinders buildings in need from receiving timely support through the current administrative measures.

3.2. Nature Conservation Policy

The government has made various efforts to protect the natural beauty of the colony, with initiatives dating back to the 1970s. These measures include the setting up of country parks and special areas under the "Country Parks Ordinance" (Cap. 208); the designation of conservation zonings such as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Conservation Area (CA) and Coastal Protection Area under the "Town Planning Ordinance" (Cap. 131); the establishment of restricted areas under the "Wild Animals Protection Ordinance" (Cap. 170) to control access to crucial wildlife habitats; the implementation of the "Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance" (Cap. 499) under which designated projects proponents are required to avoid causing adverse environmental impact; and the implementation of conservation plans for significant habitat and species²¹.

These measures, to some extent, provide coverage for some of the important natural features of the Tea Garden and the greater Ngong Ping area. For example, during our site investigation we observed the presence of Lamb of Tartary (*Cibotium barometz* (L.) J. Sm.) and Incense Tree (*Aquilaria sinensis* (Lour.) Spreng.), both of which are regulated under the "Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance" (Cap. 586). The presence of the Hong Kong Pavetta (*Pavetta hongkongensis* Bremek.), a species protected under the "Forests and Countryside Ordinance" (Cap. 96), was also recorded. The streamcourses and adjacent woodland areas to the south of the Tea Garden's private land have been designated as SSSI under Cap. 131, serving as vital breeding habitats for Romer's Tree Frog, an endemic and protected species under the Cap. 170 in Hong Kong. In regard to the broader Ngong Ping area, environmental impact assessments were

conducted prior to the construction of several designated projects (for example, the cable car project, sewage treatment works and drainage improvement works²²) to ensure that the works would not have intrusive impact on the environment of Ngong Ping.

One notable loophole in the current conservation practice is the tendency to overly focus on the existing ecological significance of protected areas, while somewhat neglecting the root or evolution process of the natural landscape, which may not be entirely of natural origin²³. This can be exemplified by examining the breeding habitats for Romer's Tree Frog at the Tea Garden. According to a study conducted by Australia Melbourne Zoo in partnership with the University of Hong Kong, the common features of Romer's Tree Frog breeding sites include overhanging vegetation, still or slowly flowing water, and a thick base layer of decaying vegetation²⁴, and the area south of the Tea Garden's private land fulfills these requirements exceptionally well. However, it is important to recognise that these features are likely the result of landscape modifications made by Bernacchi in the 1960s for tea plantation purposes. These modifications involved the digging and management of ponds, channels, and culverts to develop an irrigation system for the tea plantation, as well as the introduction of taller trees to provide shade for the tea plants. Furthermore, when the Tea Garden ceased its operations in the 1990s, the withered plantation contributed to the formation of a thick base layer of decaying vegetation at the site. With an appreciation for the heritage value of the Tea Garden, it becomes evident that the agricultural history and former practices should be cherished as they contribute to the current ecological significance of the protected area, and they should not be overlooked in the conservation mechanism.

3.3. Weaker Land Attachment and Temptation of Further Development

It is crucial to acknowledge that the case study of the Tea Garden deviates from those traditional Chinese villages, where a growing emphasis on countryside conservation and revitalisation projects are targeting and taking place. Unlike those abandoned or semi-abandoned agricultural settlements which are once intimately tied to their villagers, the Ngong Ping region has undergone a transformation into a thriving Buddhist

community with a wide range of tourist attractions managed by various administrative bodies as part of government planning. This shift has resulted in stakeholders in Ngong Ping exhibiting a higher level of mobility and weaker attachment to the land compared to other Chinese traditional villages. The economic potential of fully exploiting the land of the Tea Garden is also significantly greater than developing land in rural villages, which presents additional challenges for conservation efforts. These two challenges will be further elaborated below.

Regarding the weaker land attachment of new owners, it is essential to recognise that land holds not only economic value but also communal significance in traditional Chinese villages. Certain lands are owned by village trusts, represented by the terms "*tso*" (祖) or "*tong*" (堂), and these landholdings are not intended to be partitioned or sold. Instead, they are meant to endure indefinitely for the benefit of future generations of villagers. Even for privately owned lands belonging to individual villagers, the majority of these lands were acquired through inheritance, passed down from ancestors. As a result, the local Customary Land Law imposed significant restrictions on the ability of individual owners to sell or transfer the land²⁵. Through this land mechanism, the land can be collectively held by villagers who, in theory, have a strong attachment to the village, and tends to be positive to support conservation attempts in order to resume the previous prime of their village. This collective ownership also helps to maintain the integrity of land ownership and facilitates future conservation efforts. Comparatively, as discussed in section 2.1, although the Bernacchi family still maintains a connection with Ngong Ping through their ownership of a bungalow and its attached garden dating back to the Tea Garden era, the majority of their privately-owned lands were sold to an unrelated private company (with no connection to the Tea Garden's previous development) in 1993. In the 2020s, these lands were inherited by the successor of the company director. As a result, the current landowner has minimal attachment to the property, and the land is viewed more as a commodity or capital investment. This perspective sets it apart from conservation efforts in other traditional rural villages, where the land holds deeper cultural and communal attachment with their owners.

With regard to the temptation of further development of land, as discussed in section 2.2, it is important to note that during the 1970s the government identified that Lantau Island as a whole has “offered recreational activities and in recent years has attracted a growing number of holiday-type development proposals, particularly youth camps and weekend cottages”. Recognising this trend, the government designated most of the land in Ngong Ping as a "special rural development area", aiming to “develop various recreational facilities, tourist attractions and selected urban-type uses”²⁶. Consequently, tourist attractions and holiday facilities such as a youth hostel, cable car system, and tourist bazaar were introduced to the Ngong Ping region, attracting a significant number of visitors and tourists. Initially, there were plans for a resort at the former site of the Tea Garden in 2002, but due to strong opposition from the monks of the nearby Po Lin Monastery, the plan was eventually abandoned²⁷. However, it is worth noting that the land use zoning for most of the private land in the Tea Garden still falls under the "recreation" category, which primarily intended for recreational developments for the general public. This presents a considerable temptation for further development of the site²⁸.

4. DISCUSSION

Since 2021, we have recognised the potential heritage value of the Tea Garden and initiated our baseline study of the site. Concurrently, we made efforts to establish contact with the new owner of the Tea Garden to explore if they have any plans to leverage the site's potential value. Unfortunately, the new owner has chosen to keep a distance from us, partly due to a lack of economic incentives for conservation and other commercial concerns. We have also been in touch with descendants of the Bernacchi family, and they are supportive of the idea of undertaking a conservation project for the Tea Garden. However, since most of the tea factory buildings and supporting structures now fall within the area of the sold land, and the "All Knowing Lotus Villa" continues to function as a private bungalow, it may not be suitable for public access. As a result, the descendants of the Bernacchi family can only provide support for the project by offering historical information and other materials to facilitate the progress of the research.

As per the planning guidelines, it is necessary to provide a right of way through the private land of the Tea Garden to ensure uninterrupted passage. Therefore, in addition to conducting desktop studies and interviews, we have conducted on-site investigations to assess both the built and natural features of the area. Through visual inspections, we have documented the current conditions of the site using photographs and drawings, aiming to capture its state before any further deterioration occurs. VR 360 images at specific locations within the site were also taken to create materials that can be utilised for reconstructing the landscape in various virtual platforms. Simultaneously, we have established close collaborations with organisations in the vicinity to explore the feasibility of jointly organising public engagement activities aiming at promoting the cultural significance of the Tea Garden based on the research findings. One noteworthy potential collaboration involves the nearby Po Lin Monastery, which has obtained a permit to grow tea on crown land that encompasses parts of the former Tea Garden's plantation. Given our research tracing the origins of tea planting and manufacturing techniques previously employed by the Tea Garden, there is a possibility of reintroducing these traditional practices in the plantation area of the monastery, thereby reviving the cultural heritage associated with tea cultivation.

In the future, despite the lack of support from the landowner, we propose several strategies to promote the heritage value of the Tea Garden:

1. Consolidating Research Findings: We will compile our research findings into both digital and hardcopy promotional materials and publications. These resources will help disseminate information about the Tea Garden's cultural significance, ensuring that the knowledge is accessible to a wider audience.
2. Virtual Reconstruction: By utilising various virtual platforms, we will reconstruct the cultural heritage of the Tea Garden, and such virtual representation will serve as a documentation tool and provide materials for interested individuals to engage in self-guided tours of the site, even in the absence of physical access.

3. Reintroducing Traditional Techniques: Working closely with the Po Lin Monastery, we will explore the possibility of reintroducing the tea planting and manufacturing techniques previously employed at the Tea Garden. This collaboration can revive the historical practices and traditions associated with tea cultivation, enhancing the cultural significance of the site.
4. Collaborative Public Engagement: We will collaborate with local organisations in the vicinity to explore opportunities for joint public engagement activities. These collaborative efforts will aim to raise awareness about the Tea Garden's cultural significance and promote its heritage value through exhibitions, workshops, guided tours, or other interactive events.

The conservation attempts for the Tea Garden are an ongoing process, and determining the final outcomes of the project is not a straightforward task. The significance of the Tea Garden case study lies in its ability to provide an alternative perspective on the practical realities of countryside conservation in Hong Kong. Unlike other in-situ conservation projects that receive full support from landowners who have strong connections to their villages or organisations, this case study explores the potential for safeguarding, documenting, and promoting the heritage significance of a cultural site through collaboration with various stakeholders in the area. By examining the Tea Garden case, we gain insight into how heritage conservation can be approached when the land ownership situation is more complex. It highlights the possibilities of engaging with multiple stakeholders and finding alternative ways to document and promote the selected cultural heritage. The case study of the Tea Garden presents a valuable opportunity to explore innovative approaches to conservation that may differ from traditional models, yet still effectively safeguard and celebrate the heritage value of a site.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Macfarlane, Alan, and Iris Macfarlane. *Green Gold: the Empire of Tea*. London: Ebury Press, 2003, and also see Koehler, Jeff. *Darjeeling: the Colorful History and Precarious Fate of the World's Greatest Tea*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.

- ² Rose, Sarah. *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2011, and also see Zhang, Jinghong. *Puer Tea: Ancient Caravans and Urban Chic*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013.
- ³ Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, “GIAHS around the world”, accessed 21 Sep 2023, <https://www.fao.org/giahs/giahsaroundtheworld/designated-sites/asia-and-the-pacific/en/>
- ⁴ *Xin'an Xianzhi (Gazetteers of Xin'an County)*, 1819.
- ⁵ “Report on the Botanical and Forestry Department, for the year 1906”, Hong Kong Sessional Papers, Hong Kong, Noronha & Co, 1907, No. 13/1907.
- ⁶ Hase, P.H., J.W. Hayes and K.C. Iu, “Traditional Tea Growing in The New Territories.” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 24 (1984), pp 271.
- ⁷ “Tea Plantation on Lantau: Remarkable organisation on a plateau - The promise of an important industry”, South China Sunday Post, 25 June, 1961, and also see Harler, C.R. *The Culture and Marketing of TEA*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, pp. 130-135, 185-186.
- ⁸ “Personality of The Week: Mr Bernacchi, Man of Many Responsibilities”, South China Morning Post, 6 June, 1952.
- ⁹ “The squire of ‘All Knowing Lotus Villa’”, Sunday Post, 8 September, 1974.
- ¹⁰ “Me Brook Bernacchi”, South China Morning Post, 11 February, 1990.
- ¹¹ “Ex-Marine cultivates an old dream”, South China Morning Post, 1 November, 1983.
- ¹² *HKRS No 170, D & S No 1/636/1*, “Agriculture - 1. Vegetable Marketing Scheme 2. Establishment of An Agricultural Department”, Hong Kong, Public Records Office.
- ¹³ *348.02 LAN*, “The Companies Ordinance (Chapter 32) Company Limited by Shares: Memorandum and Articles of Association of Lantau Development Co. Ltd. Incorporated the 16th Day of February, 1954.”, Hong Kong, Public Records Office.
- ¹⁴ *HKRS No 156, D & S No 2/1582*, “Tea Plantation at Ngong Ping, Lantau - Private Treaty Grant of Land to Mr. Brook Bernacchi for ...”, Hong Kong, Public Records Office.
- ¹⁵ *HKRS No 597, D & S No 4/23*, “Lantau Island, N.T. Development of ...”, Hong Kong, Public Records Office.
- ¹⁶ Surak, Kristin. *Making Tea, Making Japan Cultural Nationalism in Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012, and also see Besky, Sarah. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- ¹⁷ Lee, Hsing Chuen. *Green tea Processing*. Taipei: Taiwan Tea Institute, 1954.
- ¹⁸ Legislative Council Panel on Development, “Annual Report on Implementation Progress of Heritage Conservation Initiatives”, accessed 25 Sep 2023, <https://www.heritage.gov.hk/en/publications-press-releases-gallery-and-links/legislative-council-papers/index.html>
- ¹⁹ Antiquities Advisory Board, “List of the 1,444 Historic Buildings with Assessment Results (as of 16 August 2023)”, accessed 25 Sep 2023, https://www.aab.gov.hk/filemanager/aab/en/content_29/AAB-SM-chi.pdf
- ²⁰ Antiquities Advisory Board, “Open Meetings”, accessed 25 Sep 2023, <https://www.aab.gov.hk/en/meetings/open-meetings/index.html>
- ²¹ Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. *Nature Outlook: Consultation Document on Review of Nature Conservation Policy*. Hong Kong: Environment, Transport and Works Bureau, 2003.

²² Environmental Protection Department, “EIA Reports Approved under the Ordinance”, accessed 26 Sep 2023, <https://www.epd.gov.hk/cia/english/register/aciara/all.html>

²³ Cheung, Sidney C.H., “The Politics of Wetlandscape: Fishery Heritage and Natural Conservation in Hong Kong.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*: Vol 17(1) (2011), pp 36–45.

²⁴ Banks, C. B., M. W. N. Lau, and D. Dudgeon, “Captive Management and Breeding of Romer’s Tree Frog *Chirixalus Romeri*: Romer’s Tree Frog Management and Breeding.” *International Zoo Yearbook*: Vol. 42(1) (2008), pp 99–108.

²⁵ Hase, P. H. *Custom, Land and Livelihood in Rural South China: the Traditional Land Law of Hong Kong’s New Territories, 1750-1950*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013.

²⁶ HKRS No 597, D & S No 4/23, “Lantau Island, N.T. Development of ...”, Hong Kong, Public Records Office.

²⁷ “Town Planning Board hears Ngong Ping objections”, HKSAR Government Press Releases, 20 December, 2002.

²⁸ Town Planning Board, “Approved Ngong Ping Outline Zoning Plan No. S/I-NP/6”, accessed 26 Sep 2023, <https://www.ozp.tpb.gov.hk/api/Plan/PlanNote?planNo=S%2fI-NP%2f6&lang=EN&text=pdf&dType=in>



TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS AND SETTLEMENTS
WORKING PAPER SERIES

Volume 329
Contributors

VERNACULAR HERITAGE IN HONG KONG

Jimmy T.W. Ho, Thomas W.L. Chung

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong
jimmytwho@link.cuhk.edu.hk

Miriam M. T. Lee, Thomas W. L. Chung

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong
miriamlee@cuhk.edu.hk

Sidney C. H. Cheung, Alex W. H. Wong

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong
alexwhwong@cuhk.edu.hk