
The Vanishing Villages of Hong Kong: a Visual Cultural Pilot Study

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Abstract

Twenty years after its 1997 handover back to China Hong Kong remains a very unique place among the world's territories and cities. British colonialism has left many enduring marks on Hong Kong identity as well as on its physical landscape. One of the most peculiar, and controversial, is the legacy of the Small House Policy of the New Territories; an agreement reached between the British and the village leaders after it leased the New Territories in 1898. In a city of severe land scarcity, this unusual law grants decedents of 'original villager's' families to, upon their 18 birthday, rights to build a maximum three story house of no more than 2100 sqft. With skyrocketing housing prices in the city this has created a boom of these 'village houses' being build and sold on lands that once were Hong Kong's farm lands and rapid changes in the visuality of these once traditional villages. This visually driven study will employ both audio and visual methods to seek a more in-depth picture of current village life in the New Territories of Hong Kong by observing, documenting, collaboratively creating, and jointly analyzing the multimedia data captured. This study document the derelict, intact, restored, in ruin structures and environment, attempting to trace revitalized elements of traditional Chinese villages via their design, layouts, and relationship with the natural environment. This presentation will provide an overview of this unique situation and showcase the preliminary visual research of a pilot study now underway.

Keywords: villages, hong kong, visual methodology, traditional Chinese

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