

THE CHANGING “RURAL” SETTING OF HONG KONG’S NEW TERRITORIES IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Lung ping – yee David , / China (Hong Kong)

Head of Department of Architecture ,University of Hong kong

LEE Ho – yin , / China (Hong Kong)

Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture ,University of Hong Kong

CHOW Tsz – yue Enphemia / China (Hong Kong)

Research Coordinator of the Architectural

Introduction: Hong Kong’s New Territories and Its Traditional Physical and Social Settings

The late 19th century was a time when European and Japanese imperial powers were scrambling for territorial gain and trade concessions in China through either regular or gunboat diplomacy, with the latter the more likely choice, given the politically weakened and militarily impotent Chinese Qing Government. The French, for instance, leased the port of Kwangchowan (today’s Zhanjiang) by force, the Russian did the same with Port Arthur (Dalian), the Germans took Tsingtao (Qingdao) and the Japanese colonized Formosa (Taiwan). Not to be outdone, the British, after having seized Hong Kong Island in 1841 and Kowloon Peninsula in 1860, looked to the hinterland to the north of its tiny colonial foothold in China. In 1898, about a thousand square kilometres of Chinese territory sandwiched between Kowloon and the Shenzhen River were forcibly leased to Britain for a period of 99 years. This newly leased land, which was simply called the “New Territories,” was referred to by the then British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury as ‘a slight extension to the colony of Hong-kong¹. There was no economic gain from this territorial extension. Rather, it was part of the geo-politics of the time in which foreign imperial powers were engaged in a race to divide up Chinese territories. The only value of this leased land was its capacity to act as a defensive buffer in the event of a French invasion by land from the north, which never happened.

The lease of the New Territories was by no means an easy walkover for the mighty British Empire. The formal possession of the land took place amidst a fierce clash between British forces and the native clan-based villagers who took up arms to resist foreign takeover of their ancestral land. While the British military easily and quickly quelled

the local armed rebellion, the British administration was quite mindful of the consequences of ruling a population of hostile people. To win over the hearts and minds of the villagers, a non-interference policy was put in place to assure the villagers that the British had no intention to change the tangible and intangible socio-cultural practices that defined the traditional cultural landscape of the New Territories. Until urban expansion from Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula reached the New Territories in the 1960s, the physical setting of the New Territories had remained largely unchanged as it had been throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the book *A Tale of Two Villages* (Lee and DiStefano 2002: 83), the authors note that,

. . . villages in the New Territories homogenously consisted of traditional Southern-Chinese style village houses with mud- or clay-brick walls and tiled roofs. Many such village houses dated back to the Qing dynasty (1616-1911), and some even to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

While traditional Chinese architecture was an important component that constitutes the New Territories’ traditional physical setting, what was perhaps even more important was the social setting of a traditional southern Chinese agrarian society based on a rice-farming socio-economy. This social setting was expressed in tangible terms by the paddy fields that actually gave the landscape its defining character. As noted in the same source (ibid: 80),

. . . in 1953, paddy fields in the New Territories consisted of 9,466 hectares, which was some 70% of the total farmland in Hong Kong.

This physical and social settings of traditional Chinese village houses set in vast expanse of paddy fields that had essentially remained unchanged from the Ming dynasty up to the mid-20th century has somehow become the perceived “rural” setting of the New Territories.

¹ Lord Salisbury in the House of Lords, 13 June 1898.

Background of the Small House Policy

When the British assumed authority over the New Territories in 1898, the local population stood at about 100,000 people², giving a density of approximately 1,000 people per square kilometre. By 1971, the year before the implementation of the Small House Policy, the population had increased about three fold to roughly 360,000 (Jones 1978: 287). Not all of these people were original villagers. Many of them were immigrants from post-liberation Mainland China³ who could neither find employment nor afford the cost of living in the urban areas, as a result of which, they settled as squatters in the New Territories where they worked as hired farmers. The New Territories at this time was estimated to contain only about 10% of Hong Kong's entire population but nearly 35% of its squatters (ibid: 290).

The transfer of the New Territories to British colonial administration did create one significant but unnoticeable change to the land, specifically, the nature of land ownership. Under Chinese imperial rule, land in the New Territories was freehold, that is, land permanently owned by private individuals who paid annual taxes to the local authorities. Under colonial administration (and continued by today's post-colonial administration), the same land became "Crown Land"—government-owned land—that was leasehold, meaning that individuals could have limited ownership of the land by purchasing it from the government for a limited number of years and subsequently paying an annual rent for the continual right to use the land until the end of the ownership lease. Since the government was technically the original landlord, permission had to be granted and fees paid for building on the land.

Before the implementation of the Small House Policy in late 1972, settlers who had no land of their own could do one of two things: build a illegal squatter hut without official permission and without paying fees to the government, or build a legal "temporary domestic structure" by applying for

² See Lockhart 1898: section on "Inhabitants," para. 3 and 4.

³ Prior to the joint agreement with China in 1984, which called for the immediate repatriation of Chinese illegal immigrants in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Government adopted a humanitarian "touch-base" policy. The policy allowed illegal immigrants from China to apply for permanent residency in Hong Kong if they could reach the city limits and locate their relatives without getting caught by the local police.

a special permit and paying the necessary fees. The former was, of course, the more attractive route than the latter, and despite their illegality, such buildings were tolerated on social and political grounds. By 1972, with significant increase in the number of such illegal structures put up by both landowners and settlers, the government expressed concern about their "effect on the environment of the New Territories" (Jones 1978: 296). A systematic survey carried out in that year discovered serious sanitation and pollution issues among such illegal structures as about 10% of such buildings were used for animal-keeping and cottage industries, such as, the manufacture of chemicals, metals and plastic, leather making and dyeing (ibid: 298).

From the 1972 survey stemmed the Small House Policy, which was implemented on 1st December in the same year to curtail illegal building and control land use by restricting building permission to only qualified villagers. Under the policy, qualified villagers were "male persons of at least 18 years old descended through the male line from a resident in 1898 of a recognized village." This means that all such qualified male villagers, upon reaching the statutory age of 18, could (and still can) build a "small house" of a specified height and floor area⁴ on their own land without paying a permit fee, or, if they had (have) no land of their own, build on a plot of government land purchased at a concessionary price. In addition, villagers also retain the right to transfer ownership of their small houses, and this became the main loophole that opened the policy for exploitation by villagers to develop and sell small houses for profit. By empowering qualified villagers with such land privileges, the authorities with a single stroke created a self-enforceable rule in which the limited number of such legally controllable villagers were motivated to protect their own interest by helping to stamp out non-qualified villagers' illegal construction. Not surprisingly, money was (and is) the major motivating factor. As property values in the New Territories were pushed up by urban development in the form of New Towns in the New Territories, there was a huge incentive to report on illegal construction and lobby the government to deal with the matter, thus providing the government with the social and political support to curtail illegal construction in a most expedient manner.

The Small House Policy: Scapegoat for the Loss of Traditional Setting?

⁴ Currently, the specifications for a New Territories small house is a three-storey residential building not exceeding 27 feet (8.23 metres) in height and with a roofed over area of not more than 700 square feet (65.03 square metres).

Section I: Defining the setting of monuments and sites:
The significance of tangible and intangible cultural and natural qualities
Section I: Définir le milieu des monuments et des sites-
Dimensions matérielles et immatérielles, valeur culturelle et naturelle

As mentioned above, the physical and social settings of the New Territories as a traditional southern Chinese agrarian society based on rice farming has become the perceived “rural” setting of the New Territories. And it is this perceived rural setting that the Small House Policy has sought to protect. According to Hopkinson and Lao (2003: 13),

Although it was not a specific objective, one of the oft-cited benefits of the [Small House Policy] is that of preserving the cohesiveness of the indigenous villager community. In addition, it can be argued that the [Small House Policy] has helped to retain the rural village character

If protecting the rural setting is indeed an objective, or anticipated benefit, of the Small House Policy, then it can be argued that the policy was developed upon a flawed premise. To begin with, there is no official formal definition of what constitutes “rural” in Hong Kong in the physical or social sense. Instead, “rural” is a geographic reference to areas outside Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula—the “city” parts of Hong Kong that were “permanently ceded” to Britain and subject to intense development. More often, the “rural setting” is seemingly based on a romanticized notion of what the New Territories used to be when it was the heartland of the agrarian village way of life.

In most dictionaries, the meaning of “setting” carries a reference to place and time. Since the word has a time component, it means that “setting” is not something static, but must necessarily change. A major factor that often dictates the pace of change for an inhabited place is economic development, the lack or vigour of which respectively stagnates or stimulates change. Until the 1950s, the New Territories remained a place of agriculture (over 9,000 hectares of paddy fields alone)⁵ as it had been for centuries. As it was not conveniently accessible from the urban areas (the main access was by rail from urban Kowloon), the urban economy had little impact on the place. At the time, its physical setting could unquestionably be qualified as “rural” as well as “traditional.” In fact, until the 1960s, there had been so little apparent change to the physical setting that it provided an expedient and convincing outdoor film set for period dramas set in the Qing and Ming dynasties.

Indeed, the development of small houses was only allowed on those parts of the New Territories zoned as “Rural Development Areas” and “Rural Redevelopment

Areas.” Except for the “Urban Development Areas,” which were designated for the New Towns, no private development or redevelopment was allowed in the remaining zones, that is, the “Catchment Areas” (for water bodies) and “Prohibited Areas” (for military uses). The specific use of “rural” in the areas where small houses were allowed indicates a desire to retain the rural quality of the New Territories despite the need for non-urban housing construction to supplement that of the urban New Towns. The architecture of the Small House itself can be seen as an attempt to control the development of buildings in terms of building height, floor area and building volume. The specifications for a Small House is a residential building with a maximum building height not exceeding three storeys (originally two storeys), 27 feet (8.23 metres) and a footprint less than 700 square feet (65.03 square metres). The very compact form of such a typology seems to be an attempt to reinforce the rural setting by minimizing the scale and size of new buildings.

The perception is that the Small House Policy is responsible for ruining the rural landscape, and visually, this seems to be the case. After more than 30 years of the policy, the vast majority of the older traditional form of village houses has been replaced by the modern “Small Houses.” There is no doubt that the Small House is the dominant architectural typology in the New Territories, and this gives the impression that the development of such a house type has run amok. However, seeing can be deceiving. If one is to examine the statistics, excluding development on existing village land, a total of only 597,430 square metres of government land—a mere 0.6 square kilometre—have been granted for the building of Small Houses since the introduction of the policy in 1972 (Hopkinson and Lao, 2003, 20). This is an area of less than one square kilometre in a place of almost a thousand square kilometres! How can a development that has only consumed an extra 0.6 square kilometre of built-up rural land be instrumental in destroying the rural setting of the vast New Territories? Looking at this statistic, it is indeed difficult to argue the case convincingly.

The authors would therefore like to pose a further argument: would it have been at all possible to retain the rural setting of the New Territories. Given that the setting is but a transient state of a place at a certain time, some degree of change seems to be inevitable. In fact, it is only the pace of change that can be slowed through aggressive intervention and active management. The bigger argument is that this pace of change is affected not so much by a relatively insignificant housing policy, but by the bigger forces of industrialization, urbanization and infrastructure development. These are forces brought on by the

⁵ See Lee and DiStefano 2002: 80

ever-shifting global economic trend that a commercial city such as Hong Kong must respond to in order to survive. And these are the factors that are instrumental in destroying the rural setting that belongs to a bygone time under a bygone economic context. With this understanding, we shall proceed to examine these forces in more detail.

Industrialization: Lost of Rural Character due to Economic Shift

In the early 1950s, Western nations imposed a trade embargo on China following her direct military support of North Korea in the Korea War. Hong Kong was caught in between as it, being British territory, had to be part of this trade sanction and could not function as a transfer port for goods going into and coming out of Mainland China. This stimulated Hong Kong's industrialization as a means to compensate for the lost of its economic role as an entrep.t for China.

Hong Kong's early industrialization in the 1950s and 1960s was based on low-technology manufacturing of consumer and textile goods. The nature of such labour intensive light industry created hitherto unavailable salaried jobs, which were far more attractive to many younger villagers than the hard toils of farming. This spelt the beginning of the end of the New Territories' agricultural economy as both villagers and tenant farmers migrated to the urban areas to seek job opportunities, leaving insufficient manpower for agricultural activities. Without the quintessential agricultural activities and their associated agrarian socio-culture that defined the traditional cultural landscape of the New Territories, it was simply impossible for the original physical setting (that is, pre-1960s) to remain unchanged. The traditional village house, whose design catered harmoniously to the agricultural way of life, became incompatible with the housing needs of non-farming residents who came from an urban background. Consequently, the statutory design limits of the Small House were relaxed and modified several times from its original form in response to cater to the change of the New Territories' setting from the rural to the suburban.

As will be elaborated below, the economic forces of industrialization in Hong Kong became a catalyst for tangible changes to the physical environment of the New Territories: rapid urbanization that came with massive supporting infrastructure. Given the scale of such tangible changes in the physical environment, there was a significant impact on the time-

sensitive notion of "rural" setting, and thus there were irreversible changes to the New Territories' setting.

Open Storage: Loss of Rural Character due to Land Economics

In the late 1970s, with the re-emergence of Deng Xiaoping as the leader of China, the nation adopted an open-door policy that brought on sweeping economic reform, which enabled China to open up after decades of self-imposed isolation from the world economy. Consequently, Hong Kong experienced another major economic change as local industry began to exploit much lower operation costs by moving its manufacturing base to the mainland. The base economy of Hong Kong started to shift to a service industry. The impact of such an economic shift on the rural setting of the New Territories was unexpectedly significant. The many plots of vacant farmland, which were of no economic value except for the development of Small Houses, suddenly found a profitable use as open storage ground for thousands of cargo containers and related facilities, such as, garages, auto junkyards and car parks.

With the increased commercial flow between Hong Kong and the mainland, the New Territories became a convenient, if not strategic, place for such storage facilities as it is relatively close to the border. Considering the large amount of trade activities between Hong Kong and Mainland China, and the busy nearby port activities, the New Territories, located between the main urban area of Hong Kong and Mainland China, is prime strategic land for supporting these activities. A major supporting function that port and trade activities require is cargo storage. Since land is cheap and plentiful in the New Territories, and it occupies such a strategic location, the demand for cargo storage space in the New Territories is great.

While the storage issue has no direct relation to the Small House Policy, its impact on the physical landscape is actually much more significant than that created by the supposed proliferation of Small Houses. According to Rural Land Use Review (2002), about 200 ha of New Territories land has been rezoned from "agriculture" to the said storage and related uses. In addition, according to the Planning Department Annual Report 2005, another 155.8 ha of land have been put to the same uses without authorization. To state the issues more simply, this authorized and unauthorized change in use of agricultural land represents

Section I: Defining the setting of monuments and sites:
The significance of tangible and intangible cultural and natural qualities
Section I: Définir le milieu des monuments et des sites-
Dimensions matérielles et immatérielles, valeur culturelle et naturelle

almost 9.5% of the total land that was originally designated as land for “agriculture” (which is about 2,700 ha in 2001). While 9.5% of agricultural land used for open storage facilities for container may not seem too much, in reality, such facilities, by their nature, must be located in the most accessible parts of the New Territories. As such, they become highly visible, with the consequence of highly negative visual impact on the landscape that gives an overwhelming impression that the vast majority of the land has been “ruined” by stacks and stacks of container boxes.

The cause of the proliferation of open storage can be attributed mainly to the lack of and/or inappropriate planning controls that are exercised over parts of the New Territories. To put the issue in perspective, some open storage facilities are authorized and legal, while others are unauthorized and illegal. Authorized open storage facilities are those that have permission from the local planning authority after submission of a planning application, while those that are unauthorized do not have permission and might occupy government land⁶. It is uncertain why the local planning authority allows the use of land for open storage use. When economic conditions were strong in 1995, there was such a high financial incentive for landowners to illegally convert agricultural land to industrial use for open storage and other port back-up facilities that the Planning Department had to propose to increase the fines for unauthorized open storage sites from HK\$100,000 to HK\$500,000 as the former was not a sufficient deterrent.⁷

Open storage facilities also proliferate when market conditions are sluggish due to delays in land premium negotiations between developers and the government that affect the price that developers can pay to landowners. In 2001, when the economy was still recovering from the Asian Financial Crisis, some residential landowners in the New Territories decided to hold back land from development and, instead, applied to convert it to temporary storage use. For example, an application was submitted seeking approval for the conversion of a 21,000 square foot site in Tong Yan San Tsuen in Yuen Long into temporary open storage for three years, even though the site had been zoned for residential

⁶ All statistics in this paragraph are from the Hong Kong Government reports “Rural Land Use Review” (2002) published in http://www.info.gov.hk/planning/p_study/comp_s/rlu/background.htm and “Planning Department Annual Report 2005” (2005) published in http://www.info.gov.hk/planning/info_serv/publication/ar_05/english/enforcement.htm

⁷ Karin Bishop. “Rise in fines for illegal storage planned,” South China Morning Post, 23 January 1995, pg.4.

development⁸. Although this application was rejected, it is indicative of the strong demand for storage facilities in the New Territories. Since the role of the planning authority is to balance the land use needs of all, it is understandable that this kind of land use is allowed in some areas, despite its adverse effects on the “rural” setting of the New Territories. In summary, the use of land, legally or illegally, for open storage has had a major impact on parts of the “rural” setting in the New Territories. The cause of it can be attributed mainly to land economics, not the Small House Policy.

New Towns: Lost of Rural Character Due to Urbanization

By the early 1970s, the urban population and manufacturing industry within the traditional urban areas on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula had reached a saturation point. As of April 1973, it was noted that “the potential for the further development of public housing estates in the urban areas is rapidly becoming depleted.”⁹ Large-scale high-rise residential, commercial and industrial developments had to look to the New Territories for expansion space. This urban expansion produced the “New Towns,” which are mini-cities with residential, commercial, industrial and other essential urban components, and with public transport and highway links to the traditional urban areas on Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula.

The urbanization of the New Territories formally began with the formation of the New Town Development Programme in 1973 with the objectives of de-centralizing the population from the over-crowded urban districts on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula. The early 1970s saw the development of, in chronological order, Tsuen Wan, Sha Tin and Tuen Mun. These three first-generation New Towns were closely followed by the development of three second-generation New Towns in the late 1970s: Tai Po, Fanling/Shueng Shui and Yuen Long. By the end of the 1990s, three third-generation New Towns—Tseung Kwon O, Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung/Tai Ho—had been completed. The extent of the urbanization and consequential impact on the rural setting of the New Territories can be seen by the sheer scale of the New Towns. The first-generation New Towns were initially designed to house up to 1.8 million

⁸ Sophia Wong. “Landowners put hold on NT building plans,” South China Morning Post, 27 June 2001, pg. 1

⁹ Luke S.K. Wong, ed., *Housing in Hong Kong: A Multi-disciplinary Study* (Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Ltd., 1978), 279.

Section I: Defining the setting of monuments and sites:
The significance of tangible and intangible cultural and natural qualities
Section I: Définir le milieu des monuments et des sites-
Dimensions matérielles et immatérielles, valeur culturelle et naturelle

people, at a time when Hong Kong's total population was only 4.2 million. With progressive further development, the design population of each of the nine New Towns has been upgraded to 4.1 million, and, today, the total population of the nine New Towns is 3.2 million. The sheer scale of such urban development is put into proper perspective when seen in relation to Hong Kong's current total population of 6.8 million.¹⁰ As the population of the New Towns grew and the town infrastructures and supporting facilities expanded beyond the town limits, the village land around the New Towns effectively became an extended suburbia that helped supplement the insatiable housing needs. Hence, it can be argued that the New Towns are the real culprit in destroying the rural setting by suburbanizing their surrounding rural areas in the sense that urbanites are moving into the New Territories for cheaper and bigger living space.

Highways: Lost of Rural Character Due to Increased Accessibility

Since the New Towns are not isolated places, but designed from the onset as mutually connected urban areas accessible from Kowloon and Hong Kong, they are supported by a massive system of transportation networks that take up land outside the towns. Before the development of New Towns in the 1970s, construction of roads linking the New Territories with Kowloon and Hong Kong was a low priority. The New Towns were the catalyst for the opening up of the New Territories, making it more accessible to the rest of Hong Kong. In the eastern part of the New Territories, the development of Sha Tin, one of the first of the New Towns, sprang the construction of an additional road link through the second Lion Rock Tunnel (opened in 1978) to supplement the first tunnel (opened in 1967) that was constructed primarily for extending water pipes from the Plover Cove Reservoir in the north-eastern New Territories to Kowloon.¹¹ Similarly, in the western part of the New Territories, the development of the first generation New Town of Tuen Mun brought about the construction of Tuen Mun Road, the first ever highway in Hong Kong, which was opened to traffic in 1977.¹² Until the necessity for more convenient road access to the New Towns, the rural area of

Sha Tin was accessible mainly by the train service of the Kowloon-Canton Railway (now the KCRC), while the even more remote rural area of Tuen Mun was accessible by the long, winding coast-following Castle Peak Road. This demonstrates how inaccessible and isolated the New Territories was until the advent of the New Towns. By the late 1970s, the New Territories was no longer the isolated hinterland of the Hong Kong Colony it once was. The real preserver of the rural character of the New Territories was its inaccessibility. The construction of the road network in the 1970s, made necessary by the development of the New Towns, also improved the accessibility of the modern village houses that are built to the specifications of the Small House Policy, allowing younger villagers to seek work in the industrial areas located in urban Kowloon and Hong Kong and live in the New Towns. As increasing locals and urbanites find these modern village houses a more economical alternative to urban dwellings, the gradual infiltration of urbanites into the village land and the corresponding gradual migration of villagers to the urban areas slowly transformed the New Territories from its original rural setting to one of suburban nature.

Conclusion

What this paper sets out to do is not to vindicate the Small House Policy as the culprit in ruining the "rural" landscape of the NT, but to exam the issue from a macro perspective so as to better understand the complexity involved. At best, the Small House Policy is an accomplice, propelled by the greater forces of urbanization and economic change that transformed the NT's rural environment.

Compared to the implicit attempt in the Small House Policy of 1972 to define and preserve the "ruralness" of the New Territories in its static nature, the "Rural Land Use Review" undertaken by the Hong Kong SAR Government Planning Department in 2002 defined and recognized explicitly the "rural characteristics" of the New Territories.¹³ In the Rural Land Use Review, it clearly states that land use zonings on rural statutory plans are "intended to meet development needs in rural areas while maintaining the rural characteristics." Such "rural characteristics" include the "unique attributes and functions of the rural areas" as:

1. Inherent landscape qualities and ecological importance;

¹³ See the Internet article on "Rural Land Use Review" (2002) published in http://www.info.gov.hk/planning/p_study/comp_s/rlu/background.htm.

¹⁰ All statistics in this paragraph are from the Internet article "New Towns and New Major Urban Development" (2005) published in http://www.gov.hk/hkfacts/facts_e.htm.

¹¹ See the Internet article "Lion Rock Tunnel" (2005) published in <http://www.answers.com/topic/lion-rock-tunnel>.

¹² See the Internet article "Tuen Mun" (2005) published in <http://www.answers.com/topic/tuen-mun>.

Section I: Defining the setting of monuments and sites:
The significance of tangible and intangible cultural and natural qualities
Section I: Définir le milieu des monuments et des sites-
Dimensions matérielles et immatérielles, valeur culturelle et naturelle

2. Breathing spaces and potential recreational outlets for the urban population;
3. Village development areas;
4. Sites for rural economic activities;
5. Areas for existing and planned transport and infrastructure facilities; and
6. Long-term solution space to meet the future territorial development needs.

This definition includes both the inherent qualities of the New Territories as a cultural landscape as well as the important land use responsibilities that the New Territories must assume in Hong Kong's long-term sustainable territorial development. While it may be a far from perfect set of attributes in helping to define what "rural" is, it seems to point in the right direction by recognizing that "rural" is not an inherently time-sensitive romanticized visual concept. More importantly, the attributes seem to indicate the probability of change due to future needs, i.e. sub-urbanization and urbanization (item 6), economic development (item 4) and infrastructural growth (item 5). These needs are exactly the forces of change exerted on the setting of the New Territories as argued in this paper.

The magnitude of these forces is so great that not recognizing their existence will defeat any attempt to manage the New Territories as a cultural landscape. Through recognizing the existence of these forces and their potential impact on the New Territories as a cultural landscape, one recognizes that the characteristics of a setting are subject to change over time. In Hong Kong, because these forces are not recognized, the setting of the New Territories as a cultural landscape has changed significantly. Despite efforts to conserve individual heritage resources, such as ancestral halls, temples and walled-villages, in the context of a changed setting, the heritage value of the New Territories as a cultural landscape has greatly depreciated.

Bibliography

1. Hayes, James, 'The Nature of Village Life', in *From Village to City: Studies in the Traditional Roots of Hong Kong Society*, ed. David Faure, James Hayes and Alan Birch, 55-72, Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 1984.
2. Hopkinson, Lisa and Mandy Lao Man Lei. *Rethinking the Small House Policy*. Hong Kong: Civic Exchange, 2003.
3. Jones, G. W. E. "Rural Housing in Hong Kong." Chap. in *Housing in Hong Kong: A Multi-Disciplinary Study*. Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978.
4. Lau, Y. W. (劉潤和), 《新界簡史》 [A brief history of the New Territories], Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1999.
5. Lee, Ho Yin and Lynne DiStefano. *A Tale of Two Villages: The Story of Changing Village Life in the New Territories*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2002.
6. Liu C. K. (劉存寬), 《租借新界》 [Lease of the New Territories], Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1995.
7. Lockhart, J. H. Stewart, 'Extracts from the Lockhart Report on the New Territory, 8 October, 1898, from Great Britain', published on the Website <http://hkuhist2.hku.hk/firstyear/Sinn/sinnE04-2.htm>, extracted from Colonial Office Document (Hong Kong), CO 129/289, 8 Oct. 1898.
8. _____, 'Report on the New Territory at Hong Kong' (report presented to the Houses of Parliament, Nov. 1900), London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1900.
9. Hong Kong SAR Planning Department. *Planning Department Annual Report 2005*. Hong Kong, published on the Website http://www.pland.gov.hk/press/publication/ar_05/english/territorial.htm. Viewed on 2 Sep 2005.
10. Sinclair, Kevin, 'The Lucrative Lie Built on "Native Son" Foundations', *Sunday Morning Post*, 19 September 1999, 2.
11. _____, 'Rotten Roots of Village Polls', *South China Morning Post*, 7 February 2001, 13.
12. _____, 'NT's Old Village System Rotten to the Core', *South China Morning Post*, 23 October 2000, 17.
13. U. K. Colonial Office Records, Series CO 129/289: Lockhart Report on the New Territories, 8 October, 1898, from Great Britain, October 1898.
14. Welsh, Frank, *A History of Hong Kong*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993.
15. Yau, T. (邱東), 《新界風物与民情》 [Scenes and lives of the New Territories], Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1992.

Abstract

In 1972, the so called “Small House Policy” was introduced to the northern part of Hong Kong known as the New Territories, which was leased by the British from China for 99 years in 1898. It was designed to meet the contradictory aims of preserving the “rural” setting of the New Territories and satisfying the rural population’s demand for property development. One of the consequences of the policy was the transformation of the “rural” setting into a “suburb”-like setting of free-standing, reinforced-concrete village houses built to a standard size and height.

However, for all the misgivings attributed to the Small House Policy, there has never been any discussion on what is meant by the “rural” setting of the New Territories. It seems that the understanding of the word is based on the imagery of an agrarian Cantonese village environment at the commencement of the lease of the land. It can therefore be argued that the notion of a static, time-specific “rural” setting in the context of the New Territories is a nostalgic illusion that can neither be preserved nor sustained. Perhaps the meaning of the word can be better defined in the dynamic context of socio-economic and socio-politic changes experienced by China and Britain, with Hong Kong caught in between, during the 20th century, which thus provides a reassessment of the Small House Policy.