

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access



Emergent place-identity: place activation through the architectural restoration of a small Hakka household in the Hong Kong countryside

Jimmy Tsz-wai Ho^{1*}

Abstract

This paper discusses the cocreation of an emergent place-identity in a Hakka household in the Hong Kong countryside triggered by architectural restoration. Located in Kuk Po, a quintessential Hakka village that was established over 300 years ago, Yeung House was restored by the research team under a government-funded initiative to regenerate architectural values. Rebuilt in 1967, Yeung House has experienced decay and evolution over the years. It signifies the adaptive lifestyle of Hakka immigrants through its adapted siting, hybrid tectonics and modernised features. After restoration, Yeung House was repurposed into a base for education and research managed by the three house-owning villagers. Different activities were initiated by the villagers and coarranged by the research team. As a serendipitous outcome, the front yard of Yeung House has been activated into a multifunctional communal space. Subsequently, it is argued that a place-identity has emerged in Ng To and is influenced by the distinctiveness of the restored Yeung House and the continuity of the front yard. New meanings of the place have been created by the villagers through the practice of a potential, alternative lifestyle in the rural-urban parallel.

Keywords Architectural restoration, Village revitalisation, Regeneration, Place-identity, Hong Kong, Countryside

1 Introduction

China is entering the posturbanisation era with the urban population outweighing the rural population and the implementation of coordinated urban–rural developments (Ye 2012). With similar problems of urbanisation, including the hollowing out of rural areas after urbanisation, the failure of rural industries and the deterioration of the rural living environment (Zhu et al. 2023), there is a global paradigm shift from urbanisation to rural development and village renewals (Yi and Son 2022). During the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, rural revitalisation (乡村振兴) strategies were set to achieve the basic modernisation of rural and agricultural areas, followed

by a three-year and five-year campaign to upgrade rural living environments (Xinhua 2022). The official goal of rural revitalisation in China is to cultivate affluent farmers, establish strong agricultural industries and shape the beautiful countryside (ibid).

Beyond agricultural activities, recent discourses on neo-ruralism further discuss the diversification of activities and the pursuit of alternative lifestyles for city dwellers (Yi and Son 2022). Architecture can operate as a place-making tool between the complementary urban and rural sides (Semprebon 2022, 256). The countryside becomes the site for a hybrid identification in which one is situated in the ambiguous boundary between urban and rural areas (ibid). In Hong Kong, local trends of regenerating countryside villages using intervention-based approaches, including the recultivation in Lai Chi Wo, the art festivals in Yim Tin Tsai and the glamping sites in Mui Tsz Lam, have been observed.

*Correspondence:

Jimmy Tsz-wai Ho
twhosoa@gmail.com

¹ School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong

The urban–rural–countryside–nature continuum is highlighted in the official strategic plan, *Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030*. According to the numbers, 75% of the land remains undeveloped and regarded as the countryside (LegCo of the HKSAR 2016), which houses some of the 642 recognised villages in Hong Kong (The Government of the HKSAR 2017). In 2018, the Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) was established by the HKSAR Government to provide incentives for initiatives that conserve remote sites in the countryside. Funded by CCO, the author has been coinvestigating the initiative entitled *From Valley to Plain: Conservation and Revitalisation from 'Ng To' to Kuk Po River and Plain via Multidisciplinary, Educational and Action Research* and working closely with the village community and researchers.

While Chinese vernacular architecture has been widely discussed (Knapp 1986), there is limited discussion on the architectural transition from traditional Hakka houses to modernised construction and how they are restored in the local context. This paper focuses on action research through the implementation of the architectural restoration of Yeung House, a two-story, three-bay Hakka house rebuilt in 1967 in Ng To, Kuk Po (谷埔五肚). A series of activities has been triggered by the restoration, and trial operations that regenerate values beyond the physical architecture itself, such as recultivation and Hakka cuisine, have been cocurated with returning villagers. Three key villagers, also the owners of the original Yeung House, were interviewed to understand their relationship with Yeung House chronologically.

It is hypothesised that rural regeneration can be achieved by activating the place through architectural restoration with a minimal extent of intervention. From an insider perspective, it is argued that the front yard has been activated after the completion of restoration as a serendipitous outcome, and an emergent place-identity has been cocreated by the research team and the villagers; in this way, a unique urban–rural lifestyle is informed. To elaborate, this paper is structured into three sections to discuss 1) the architectural restoration, 2) the activation of the front yard, and 3) the emergent place-identity.

2 The architecture of Yeung House: a Hakka adaptation

This section discusses how the Hakka people adapted to the local context at three scales – Kuk Po village, Ng To settlement and Yeung House.

2.1 Kuk Po, a 300-year-old Hakka village

Kuk Po is a quintessential Hakka village located at the southern shoreline of Starling Inlet (沙头角海) and has

been established for more than 300 years. Its name (‘谷埗’) first appeared in the Qing dynasty in the *Gazetteers of Xin'an County* (《新安县志》) in the 1688 Kangxi edition (康熙二十七年). After the termination of the Great Clearance (迁界令), the order to evacuate all coastal communities to avoid any support to the Taiwan-based anti-Qing movement, there was a bloom of Chinese migrants, who were later recognised as the Hakka, moving to Hong Kong for cultivating the abandoned farmlands. In the 1819 Jiaqing edition (嘉庆二十四年) of *Gazetteers of Xin'an County*, Kuk Po was classified as an official Hakka village (‘谷埗’; 官富司管属客籍村庄). The very first geographical representation of this village was on the *Map of the San-On District* (《新安县全图》) in 1866. Its name in Chinese represents the two geographical characteristics – the valleys (Kuk, ‘谷’) and the plains (Po, ‘埔’), formed between the sea and the woods.

Notably, the Cheungs (张氏) from Fujian (福建) first arrived at Kuk Po and later settled in the adjacent Fung Hang (凤坑). Later, the Yeungs (杨氏) resided at Kuk Po in the early 18th century. As the villagers recalled, the Yeungs, Ngs (吴氏) and Tsangs (曾氏) settled in Sam Ka Tsuen (三家村). Later, the Yeungs expanded to Lo Wai (老围) in the form of a walled village (客家围村), followed by the Sung (宋氏) from Fujian and Hos (何氏). As the population increased, the different clans moved to various spots of the plains and valleys, including the Tin Sum (田心), San Uk Ha or Tau To (新屋下/头肚), Yi To (二肚), Sam To (三肚), Sze To (四肚) and the innermost Ng To (五肚), where most of the Yeung families resided.

Most of the traditional Hakka inhabitants lived an agrarian lifestyle, but farmlands were scarce in the old Kuk Po where mountains dominated. To claim more farmland, the villagers constructed a bund at the shoreline in the 1800s as a process of agro-reclamation (围海造田). After the salt is leached out by flooding with fresh water, the pond is used as a fishpond and later drained out to form paddy fields (Hase 1995). This village morphology (Fig. 1) becomes a significant representation of how Hakka villagers adapted to the coastal environment. Other nearby coastal Hakka villages, such as the aforementioned Fung Hang, also share similar forms as a result of agro-reclamation.

Although the Yeungs resided in the inner land, their everyday life was closely associated with the whole landscape of Kuk Po, spanning from the bund to the feng shui woods behind their houses. Villagers used to attend Kai Choi School (启才学校), which was a primary school built next to the bund in 1932, and harvested seafood in the areas near the bund. The walking route from Kai Choi School to Ng To, which signifies their living traits in the past, now provides an alternative path for hikers between the Lai-Kuk Ancient Trail (荔谷古道) and Wu Kau Tang

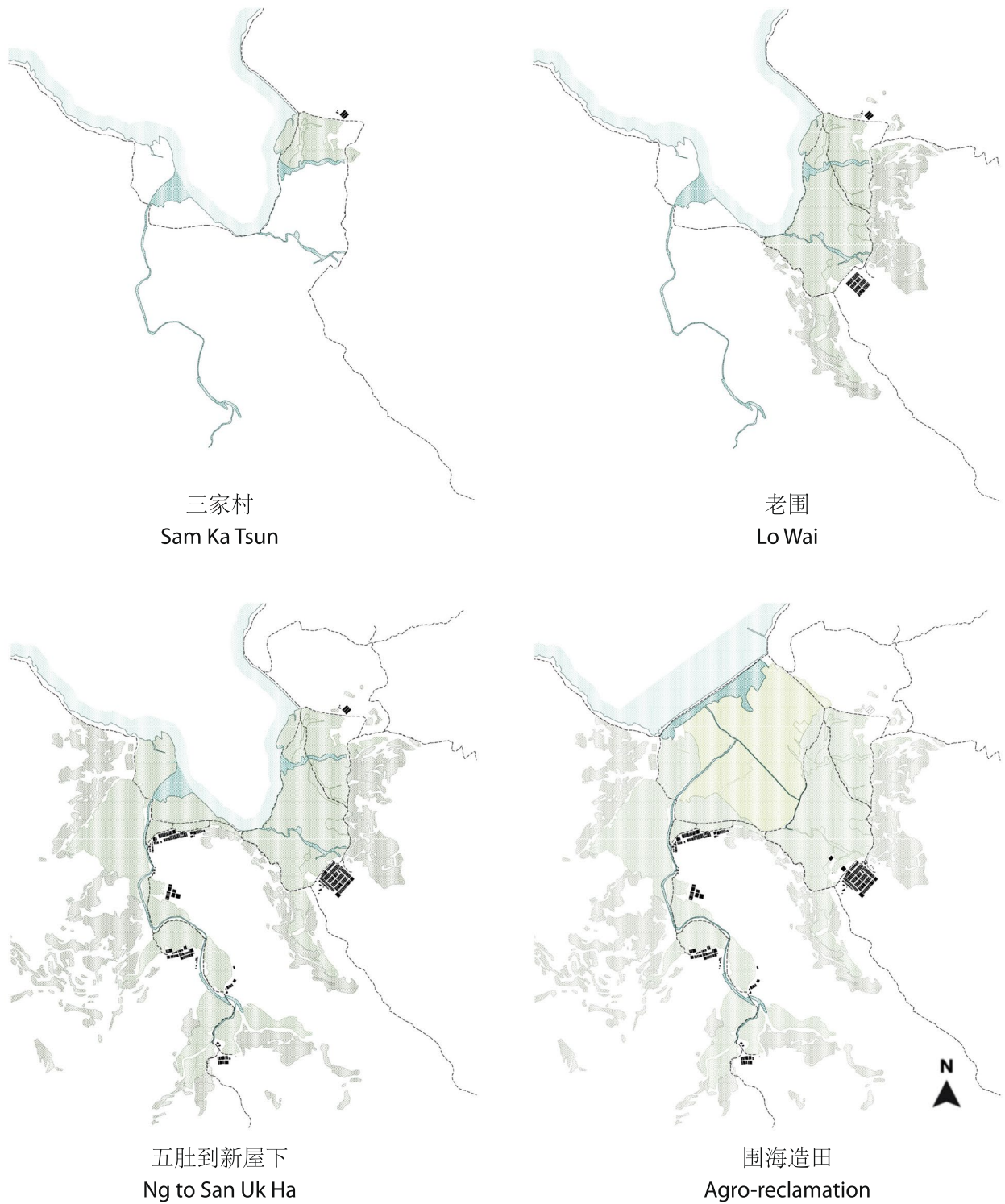


Fig. 1 Changes in village morphology due to population growth and agro-reclamation (Source: Research team, School of Architecture, CUHK)

Country Trail (乌蛟腾郊游径) in the Plover Cove Country Park.

2.2 Ng To settlement and the adapted Hakka siting

Situated at the end of the walking route, Ng To has become an important destination with growing attention. The main function of the Ng To settlement was to provide residence and farming facilities. The site selection of Ng To reflected the traditional wisdom of how Hakka people identified the supreme feng shui land (风水宝地) or the ideal site (屋场) for building houses. Some regarded it as the 'dragon nest (龙穴)' where the fortune of the dragons accumulates (Huang et al. 1991, 124; Wu 2008, 89). For example, the *Weilong* building (围龙屋) commonly found in Fujian is often built on supreme fengshui land to encapsulate dragon nests with dragon-like row houses (Xiao 2015, 52). The essential elements of mountains, woods, houses, ponds and farmlands (山林屋池田) exist in a topographical order at ideal sites. In terms of geomancy, the ideal site should have the Four Symbols (四象): a stream representing the Azure Dragon (青龙) in the east, a road representing the White Tiger (白虎) in the west, a pond representing the Vermillion Bird (朱雀) in the south and a hill representing the Black Tortoise (玄武) in the north (Huang et al. 1991, 125). In practical terms, houses are often built with the mountain in the back ('后有靠山'; Wu 2008, 89) to allow for more flatlands for farming, embrace the summer breeze and gain a sense of safety psychologically, while water can be obtained conveniently from the nearest stream for irrigation and drinking (Xiao 2015, 53). In wealthy villages, a pond is usually built in front of a cluster of houses to mediate the microclimate, purify wastewater and provide water for cleaning, irrigation and firefighting (Siu 2014, 29). Sometimes the pond is a byproduct of site formation and construction of rammed-earth houses (Wu 2008, 35).

An aerial photo dated 1963 (Fig. 2) clearly shows the orderly configuration with the mountain in the back, the woods behind houses, the village houses in two rows, the paddy fields and farmlands, and the branches of streams next to the paddy fields ('前有流水'; Wu 2008, 89). For comparison, there are four main differences between Ng To and traditional Hakka villages. First, no pond is constructed, but a natural pool formed by a waterfall can be found east of Ng To. Second, traditional Hakka houses in Meizhou (梅州) are often built to face south (ibid, 19) to naturally warm up the space in winter and cool it down in summer. In contrast, the houses in Ng To are oriented towards the north. Apart from the fact that the south–north orientation is switched in Fuxi Eight Trigram (伏羲先天八卦) of Taoist cosmology, it is arguably a regional adaptation to facilitate natural rainwater diversion along the contour (前低后高, 排水便利; ibid,

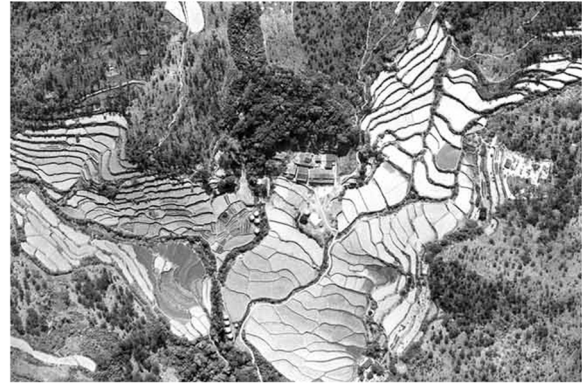


Fig. 2 Aerial photo of Ng To in 1963 (Source: Lands Department, HKSAR Government)

19) and to minimise the harsh, southern solar gain in the subtropical climate of Hong Kong. Third, no road was constructed in the west. Last, as the Yeung ancestral hall remained in Lo Wai, no ritual or ceremonial buildings were constructed in Ng To.

2.3 Decay and evolution of the Yeung House

Yeung House is the largest remaining structure of the Ng To settlement, and it represents the era when villagers began to stop farming and seek work opportunities overseas. With these earnings, villagers were able to rebuild their houses using modern construction methods, which resulted in the hybrid construction of the Yeung House. In fact, Yeung House has experienced several design and structural changes over the years. Before 1967, the old Yeung House was erected as a five-bay (五开间) compound. Its design resembles both the local *lang wu* (廊屋) and the Hakka row house (客家排屋), as it is common for Hakka immigrants to adapt the design of local houses (Siu 2014, 49). As shown in the aerial photo in 1963, two-thirds of Yeung House was covered by a large, pitched roof in the rear, and the remaining one-third in the front was covered by separate roofs, which may indicate the accommodation of multiple families inside one large structure. Hakka houses are often built with an odd number of bays (or *jian*, 间; ibid). From the plan of the block crown lease released in 1907, the footprint of the old Yeung House was well documented as a block of five adjacent land lots (Fig. 3). This represents the land division by different owners, consistent with the observed roof forms.

In 1962, the devastating typhoon Wanda (温黛) damaged some of the village structures, including the old Yeung House. As the villagers remembered, some of the loose Hakka tiles on the roof were blown away by the strong wind. In the next years, some family members of the Yeungs commissioned the repair of the old Yeung House with their overseas earnings. In 1967, three of the

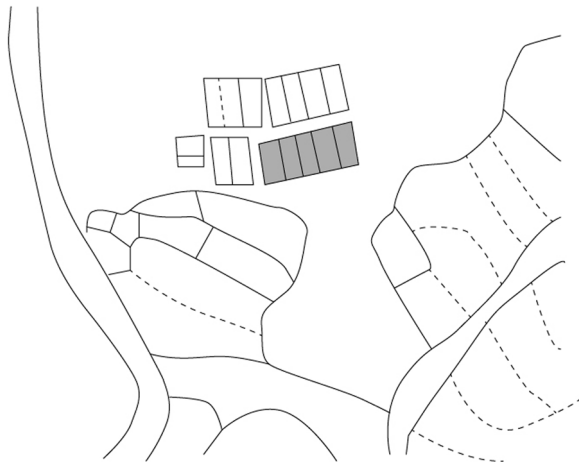


Fig. 3 Plan of block crown lease in 1907 (Source: the author)

five bays of Yeung House were rebuilt (Fig. 4). To create more space, two levels were constructed on the same footprint, next to two bays of the unaltered, single-story old house. In 1998, the remaining rammed-earth structures of the old house finally collapsed. The traces of the collapsed bays are still currently visible from the east elevation of Yeung House (Fig. 5). Overall, as illustrated, Yeung House is historically and culturally significant.

In 2022, after standing for 55 years, Yeung House showed signs of decay, such as water leakage and termite tracks. Upon invitation by the house owners, the decaying Yeung House was restored by the research team.

2.4 Three bays, two families, one entity

Yeung House shares several spatial commonalities with many other modernised Hakka houses in nearby areas. In terms of ownership and spatiality, Yeung House is divided into two units – the single-bay unit in the west and the double-bay unit in the east (Fig. 6).



Fig. 4 Yeung House in the 1970s (Source: Yeung Kam-chun)



Fig. 5 East elevation of the restored Yeung House in 2022 (Source: the author)

The single-bay unit is owned by the family of the village representative. It has a typical layout of a 15-tile width (十五瓦) and a typical spatial organisation that is similar to that of other modernised Hakka row houses. On the ground floor, next to the main entrance is a bathroom on the left and an open kitchen on the right (‘左厕右厨’) as a wish for wealth and offspring brought by the water and fire, respectively. The bathroom is constructed with low walls and a concrete water tank. The open kitchen has a stove connected to a chimney at the top and a fireplace at the bottom. A bedroom is arranged behind the concrete wall in the back, leaving the main hall in the centre of the house. On the upper floor, bedrooms are partitioned at both ends. Above the inner living room, there is a floating attic for storage that is accessible by a moveable, timber ladder. Similar single-bay row houses can be found in other areas of Kuk Po, including San Uk Ha and Lo Wai.

The double-bay unit is owned by another family, with a 15-tile width for the middle bay and a 13-tile width (十三瓦) for the eastern bay. Compared to the single-bay unit next door, the floor area is doubled to separate the open kitchen and the bathroom from the main hall and to spare more bedrooms upstairs. Apart from the terraced, brick chimney in the kitchen, an extra straight chimney is provided together with two smaller stoves next to the water tank. For both floors, spaces across the two bays are interconnected by portals on the party walls.

The three bays are designed with comparable widths, depths and heights, and this spatial modularity allows for spatial optimisation when the social structure of the family changes, while a consistent façade can be maintained as a unified entity. Likewise, the two families share one front yard where rice grain was sun-dried for sale to markets as one of the major incomes of the past.

2.5 Hakka tectonics, modernised features

The 1967 Yeung House is a hybrid construction that integrates Hakka tectonics with modernised features. While



Fig. 6 The spatial layout of the 1967 Yeung House (Source: Research team, School of Architecture, CUHK)

similar types can be found in other settlements in Kuk Po and nearby villages, including Lai Chi Wo (荔枝窩) and Mui Tsz Lam (梅子林) of Hing Chun Yeuk (庆春约), Yeung House was built in a thrifty manner, which reflected a comparably low economic status. It has four load-bearing concrete masonry block walls as the main structure. Two of these are gable walls (硬山牆) with a simplified style. Originally, pointed-strip verge ridges (尖帶屋脊) of a 'fire' styled gable wall (火式硬山牆; Wu 2008, 148) were used in the old Yeung House. Both the verge ridge and top ridge are now reduced to simplified straight-lined profiles.

A typical tiled roof supported by timber members was constructed above the walls. The layers of greyish Hakka tiles (百子瓦) and reddish *pan* tiles (板瓦) were laid loose on rectangular battens in the principle of 'seven-lap-three-left' (搭七留三). Battens (椽) were fixed on round Chinese fir purlins (標) inserted into the load-bearing walls. Three skylights were designed with glass tiles (明瓦) to introduce natural lighting into the upper floor, which had the symbolic meaning of the 'trinity light' (三光; Siu 2014, 148) – the sun, the moon and the stars.¹ In old Hakka houses, skylights can compensate for the limited window light, as most windows were designed with a small size for higher security. However, in Yeung House, the windows were built in a modernist style using large, clear glass panels with metal frames and horizontal bars.

Overall, the front façade presented a modernist composition with orthogonal geometry (Fig. 7). The lower part was plastered to mimic the appearance of granites, which are often used for foundation work in Hakka houses. The top of the front façade was composed of framed parapet walls, separated by short columns with ornamental caps and decorated with simple geometrical patterns and motifs in low relief. The side panels feature an array of circles, which may be a symbol of wealth (i.e., coins), cosmos (i.e., the sun and the moon) or offspring prosperity (i.e., seeds; Wu 2008, 121). The middle panel was inscribed with the number 1967, which is the construction year of the building. In contrast, only a traditional eave with lime spine stoppers (灰梗尾) was used for the construction of the rear façade.

The main entrance was designed with a three-door system (三重门), which is ubiquitous among the village houses in New Territories (Siu 2014, 53). A similar system can be found in Sai Kwan mansions (西关大屋) in Guangzhou (Fu 2021, 48) with an additional stone frame (回字形石门洞). Here, a simplified version was designed with a sense of modern aesthetics. The outer parapet gate (矮脚门) had a simple, rectangular shape with a perforated top panel to maintain privacy when the doors were open. A two-way, foldable metal sliding gate, instead of the one-way metal sliding fence gate (趟栊门) in Sai Kwan mansions, was constructed in the middle layer with a slightly ornamented cornice frame. The inner double-swing timber doors (双开硬木门) were robustly built in the same Sai Kwan style for security.

¹ Refer to *Taiwan Hakka Dictionary* (《台湾客家语常用词辞典》).



Fig. 7 The front façade of the 1967 Yeung House (before and after)
(Source: the author)

For the interiors, while the attic and the upper floor were designed with timber planks fixed on rectangular joists, the ground floor was finished using pigmented, concrete-sand screeding with engraved lines; this modern technique is used to mimic the appearance of red ceramic tiles. The partitioning upstairs has a modernised design with references to traditional panel construction in China. The timber frame, where the timber-glass panels and the sliding door were fixed, was slightly elevated for ventilation. Each timber-glass panel recalled the traditional window compositions (Wu 2008, 140), being translucent at the top and opaque at the bottom to balance between illumination and privacy.

Particularly, a specific, translucent pressed-glass panel with the pattern of Chinese crabapple (海棠花压花玻璃) was used. Although there is no available information about its source, it was found that the same product was designed and announced by the former royal French manufacturer Saint-Gobain in the 1930s, branded as the 'Verre imprimé No. 84 Morisco' (Fig. 8; Free n.d.). It is well documented that flowers (Wu 2008, 144) and geometrical patterns (Zhuang 2018, 280–291) are often used in traditional Chinese panels, and the use of Chinese crabapple patterns often symbolises crop prosperity and wealth (ibid, 334). In this sense, the pressed glass panel with the pattern of Chinese crabapple was probably



Fig. 8 Product catalogue of Verre imprimé No. 84 Morisco (Source: free, Sash Window Specialist)

selected for its modernised design that also has traditional references and symbolic meanings.

2.6 Restore and repurpose the rural built heritage

Although Yeung House is not officially recognised as a historic building by the Antiquities and Monuments Office, it actually shares some aspects of rural heritage and built vernacular heritage. Rural heritage refers to both architectural heritage and its 'wider geographic, historical and cultural background' in the countryside (Du and Shi 2019).

According to ICOMOS (1999), a built vernacular heritage should have a 'recognisable local character responsive to the environment', the 'use of traditionally established building type' and the use of 'traditional expertise in design and construction which is transmitted informally'. Based on the discussion in earlier sections, the 1967 Yeung House arguably fulfils these criteria with its adaptation of Hakka siting, three-bay spatial type and traditional Hakka tectonics and is regarded as a rural built heritage as part of the larger geographical, historical and cultural context of the Kuk Po village.

To regenerate the architectural values embedded in the rural built heritage, Yeung House was restored under the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme of the CCO at HKD 3 million for educational and research purposes. Practically, Yeung House was restored to its original appearance in 1967 to highlight the authenticity of form, design, materials and siting (ICOMOS 1994) as part of the educational narrative on Hakka culture under the funded project. Culturally, Yeung House represents the transition of architectural types from vernacular rammed-earth structures into hybrid construction using concrete and timber structures. Historically, it represents the aforementioned era of outmigration. Arguably, the material aspects embody the social memories of the villagers and the history of the village, and authenticity as a social construction (Macneil and Mak 2007) is reconstructed through architectural restoration to trigger and strengthen the sense of identity towards this place. The details of the restoration are discussed below (Fig. 9).

Most of the original architectural elements were repaired by professional craftsmen on-site. The whole roof was reconstructed by replacing defective purlins and battens with new ones. As a tradition, a purlin-raising ceremony was arranged on the day when the main red

purlin was being installed in place with a red cloth hung up (‘挂龙’; Siu 2014, 148). New and salvaged tiles were laid on the battens again, without the use of butt-jointed pan tiles, which does not add to the overall waterproofing performance. Termite bait systems were immediately installed to prevent damage to the new roof.

The existing surfaces and components were only furnished if they functioned well. The external wall was washed with high-pressure water jetting to remove dirt. All plastered decorations were repainted by specialist workers based on the visual traces of original pigments on the surface. All existing metal window frames were refinished by removing the paint peels and recoating with primer and paint. The original timber staircase was repaired by fixing the loose planks and applying new paints. For upstairs, the timber floor was maintained by fixing the loose planks with nails and washing the dusty surfaces.

With a large extent of original materiality and spatiality maintained, the restored Yeung House has high authenticity and educational value. After the contractor repaired the concrete spalling, volunteers were invited to participate in repainting interior walls to experience the process of restoration and immerse themselves in the authentic atmosphere of Hakka houses. Beyond restoration, Yeung House has been further repurposed into a base for education and research. It is the design intention to restore the original appearance while accommodating new functions inside to maintain continuity in the whole rural landscape. To attain this goal, basic lighting and electrical sockets are added to accommodate everyday activities downstairs and the setup of the multimedia exhibition upstairs without altering any architectural elements. Artefacts collected by the villagers are displayed along with the multidisciplinary findings consolidated by the research team in the formats of panels, booklets, framed drawings, photos, specimens, and a 4-h video of a tour guided by the village head.

To maximise the impact of restoration, three active villagers are invited to collaborate with the research team by operating Yeung House for visitors on weekends. The villagers will take the lead in recording the number of visits, introducing the exhibits, and sharing snacks with the visitors occasionally. After repeated visits, the villagers started to conduct different activities and developed habitual patterns around the house. As a serendipitous outcome, the front yard (禾坪) was activated by the three villagers, and additional values beyond architectural restoration were regenerated. To illustrate, the process of activation will be discussed in the next section.



Fig. 9 Yeung House before restoration (left) and after restoration (right) (Source: the author)

3 Activation of the front yard

To understand their personal experiences concerning the front yard, the author interviewed the three active villagers, and the findings are reported in three courses – the outmigration, the return to Ng To, and the activation.

3.1 The outmigration of villagers

In the 1960s, a surge of outmigration occurred as the Commonwealth countries and the United States loosened their restrictions on Chinese immigrants (Lin 2002, 70), including the villagers in Ng To. As a fact, the three villagers had never lived in Ng To simultaneously in the past. It had been a long journey before their reunion in the late 2000s.

Yeung Pak-yau (杨伯友) was born in Ng To in 1954, and he is the coowner of the single-bay unit of Yeung House. While his brothers migrated to the United Kingdom, Pak-yau stayed to take care of his mother in Ng To. Even after he started working in the city in the 1970s and got married in 1980, Pak-yau kept his word to visit his mother every week. Until 1990, his visits to Ng To were reduced as his mother moved to Sha Tau Kok. After all, Pak-yau's loyal visits enabled him to witness the decay and evolution of Yeung House over the years.

Tsang Kwai-ying (曾桂英) was born in a nearby village, Mui Tsz Lam, in 1947 and married Yeung Kwong-wah (杨广华), the owner of the two-bay unit of Yeung House in 1969. Kwai-ying lived there for half a year and then migrated to the United Kingdom to earn a living. Every two to three years, she came back to Ng To for a maximum stay of one year each time. In 1974, she returned to give birth to her second son in Ng To. Compared to others, Kwai-ying spent the least amount of time living in Ng To.

Yeung Kam-chun (杨锦春) was born in Ng To in 1957 and owned one of the five bays of the old Yeung House. Kam-chun lived his early childhood there until moving to Yi To with his family in 1967 due to the structural instability of the old Yeung House. He maintained his regular visits to Ng To to take care of his family's farmlands. In 1974, he started working in restaurants in the city and moved to Sha Tau Kok, which gradually distanced him from Ng To. Ten years later, Kam-chun migrated to the United Kingdom and married his wife in 1986. Since he had his own restaurant business, Kam-chun could only afford to come back every two or three years, with a two-week short stay each time. Kam-chun was the only one who never lived in the Yeung House after it was rebuilt in 1967.

Both Pak-yau and Kam-chun recalled a similar everyday life in their childhood in Ng To. In the morning, they untied the cattle from trees and drove them to eat grass. Aside from the hours they spent at Kai Choi School, they

helped to water vegetables, plant crops and hoe weeds. Occasionally, when the rice grain in the paddy fields was ready, it was harvested and put in the front yard to dry under the sun. Before sunset, the cattle were brought back to the depot or tied back to the trees. Each family prepared their dinner and ate inside their house without talking to each other. Sometimes, Pak-yau sat outside to enjoy the breeze before going to bed. Kwai-ying had the same routine village life apart from the schooling part. Everyday socialisation between families in the front yard was not common.

3.2 The return to Ng To

In 1995, the second eldest brother of Pak-yau, Yeung Yuk-fung (杨玉峰), was back from the United Kingdom and later became one of the two village representatives of Kuk Po. Pak-yau revisited Yeung House with Yuk-fung from time to time. In 2007, Pak-yau moved to Shatin for retirement. The next year, Kwai-ying also returned and settled in Fanling. Since then, Pak-yau and Kwai-ying go back together with a few other villagers more often. However, due to the lack of agricultural activities, vast fields have been taken over by wild vegetation. There was not much the villagers could do apart from housekeeping.

Not until 2020 did Kwai-ying hear that the research team had initiated a restoration project in Mui Tsz Lam and invited us to restore Yeung House. A restoration proposal was then codeveloped with the families of Kwai-ying and Pak-yau, and it was approved by the CCO in the next year. This milestone has begun to encourage attitudinal and behavioural changes among villagers.

After retiring, Pak-yau started hiking as a hobby and met a few hiker friends who visited Ng To with him. He realised the need for furniture and salvaged old but functioning tables and chairs from nearby areas, including the Eight Immortal's table (八仙枱) from Luk Keng (鹿颈). Pak-yau's expertise developed in the construction industry also enabled him to build a simple outdoor stove in bricks for basic cooking. On every site visit, the research team was treated to simple meals and snacks prepared by the villagers, including the Hakka Cha Kwo (客家茶粿). In late 2022, upon the completion of the restoration of Yeung House, Kwai-ying successfully convinced Kam-chun to return for retirement and reunion. From there, Ng To has been granted a new life by the three active villagers.

3.3 Activation: adaptive reuse, cultural rediscovery and social transformation

With Yeung House restored, Pak-yau, Kwai-ying and Kam-chun are motivated to visit Ng To frequently three to four times a week. Beyond regular housekeeping work,

they have self-initiated a variety of activities, including landscape improvement work, farmland reclamation, experimental planting, furniture refurbishing and villager gatherings. Among all these outdoor exercises, it is argued that the front yard, which was originally used as a threshing floor, has been adaptively reused as a communal space.

One example is the celebration of the Lantern Festival (元宵节) on 5th Feb 2023. It exemplified the implied spatial organisation of the front yard after repeated uses (Fig. 10), including the cleaning area, food preparation area, cooking area, serving area and the main area. Notably, in the past, most of the dining activities only occurred indoors. After restoration, the activation of the front yard has supported the regeneration of cultural values outdoors. For example, Lai Wok Pin (‘靚鑊边’), a Hakka meal that signifies the unique lifestyle of coastal communities (Huang 2023), was reinterpreted by villagers at the front yard as a collective rediscovery of Hakka cuisine. It is an everyday meal using ingredients from both farmlands and the sea, and it requires handy techniques to prepare. Here, the front yard allows for a large audience to appreciate the art of craft of this intangible heritage (Fig. 11). As witnessed, the villagers invited almost a hundred Kuk Po villagers and friends who live in remote districts and overseas to witness the reinterpretation of Lai Wok Pin, which reflected their self-identity and proactive attitude towards cultural regeneration.

This also implies a social transformation of Ng To from a group of inwards-looking families to an outwards-looking community. As Kwai-ying described, the lifestyle of the Ng To neighbourhood was family-based. The five individual families lived their lives inside their own units. Villagers were busy taking care of their livestock and crops outdoors in a mundane manner. Socialisation between families was minimal, not to mention the rare travels between villages that only happened for attending wedding banquets. Today, social interaction and cultural exchange with external parties are highly encouraged. For instance, a research lunch was co-organised by the villagers, the research team and an award-winning chef² from the city.

Apart from social gatherings, the research team is keen to explore more programmatic possibilities in Ng To. A four-day programme was organised with an international school as a pilot scheme for eco-cultural education. For each day, a thematic walk was guided by researchers of different disciplines in the morning, followed by hands-on volunteer work in the afternoon. The tasks included excavating the ruined land owned by Kam-chun (Fig. 12), retrieving buried artefacts, and rebuilding outdoor stoves to improve the ergonomics. The contribution

was educational to students and socially valuable to villages in the long term. After the walk and work, students were asked to reflect on their learning experiences. The front yard then provided a large floor space for students to carry out small-group discussions, draw out ideas and present to peers and teachers.

The activation of the front yard has been unexpectedly impactful in regenerating the cultural and social values of the rural landscape. Nevertheless, how is this serendipitous outcome connected to the architectural restoration of Yeung House?

4 Emergent place identity

The relationship between architectural restoration and the changing behaviours of villages will be discussed here as an anecdotal analysis using the framework of *place-identity*.³

4.1 A bonding with place enhanced by the restoration

Place-identity refers to the bond with place developed by people (Lewicka 2008, 211). As Hauge (2007, 46) referred to, place-identity is defined as.

‘a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings, as well as types of settings’ (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983, 60).

Place-identity is often used interchangeably with *place attachment* (Lewicka 2008, 212), which refers to the feelings developed towards places of high familiarity (Hauge 2007, 44), including the affective, cognitive and behavioural components (Lewicka 2008, 211). Lewicka (2008, 211) noted that the place’s physical features and symbolic meanings contribute to place attachment as ‘being a cue’ that group traditions are often embodied in historical sites with a notion of continuity. In this case, the restored Yeung House may contribute to villagers’ place attachment as being a regenerated historical site that preserves invaluable architectural features, symbolises the shift to modernised dwellings and embeds the social memories of the Yeungs.

As Hauge (2007) stated, even tiny physical changes can affect the meaning of a place and attributes such as social interactions. Arguably, the architectural restoration completed by the researchers has enhanced the affective place attachment to Yeung House among villagers. Given that the building remains highly original, there is nothing but the meaning behind restoration that triggered the behavioural changes of villagers in the front yard. This is

² Lau Chun, the owner of the award-winning Chinese restaurant, Kin’s Kitchen in Wan Chai, Hong Kong Island.

³ Place identity and place-identity are used interchangeably.



Fig. 10 Spatial organisation of the front yard viewed from the top (Source: the author)

evident in the comment by Kam-chun during an interview with the author:

‘Only because you (the research team) restored the Yeung House, we decided to come back and do something for the village. We don’t want to waste your effort.’

This uncovers the consequences of the ‘design’ choice – to restore Yeung House to its original appearance for authenticity, which recalls the social memories of villagers and triggers the activation of the front yard.

4.2 Distinctiveness and continuity

The activation of the front yard can be further understood through the lens of place-identity and identity process



Fig. 11 The outdoor setting for Lai Wok Pin and the audience (Source: the author)



Fig. 12 Students excavating the ruined site of Yeung Kam-chun (Source: the author)

theory. Lewicka (2008, 211) stated that place-identity can have the meaning of *genius loci* with place features that embody the place's distinctiveness and continuity in time. In the earlier section, the distinctiveness of the architecture of the 1967 Yeung House was illustrated in detail. However, there were ruptures in experiencing the 1967 Yeung House. As described in the previous section, the three villagers migrated to different places at different times and never lived together for any period. Kam-chun only resided in the old, single-story house, and Kwai-ying had limited living experiences inside the house for only half a year. The only common architecture for the three villagers has been the front yard, which has maintained its original appearance for decades. Therefore, it is argued that the front yard as part of the rural landscape also contributes to forming place-identity with its physical continuity, which embeds social memories as well.

Some of the surrounding vegetation also offers such continuity that the villagers can identify and describe them in detail. However, the overall natural landscape has changed. With the disappearance of paddy fields and agricultural activities, the front yard has lost its traditional relationship with the natural landscape as a threshing floor. Since the return of the three villagers, the place has provided them with a new, dynamic identity that evolved from their original social identity as a neighbourhood (Hauge 2007, 47). Identity as a process does not have permanent but continuously renegotiated meanings (*ibid*), especially for Hakka people who have adapted to the local context over and over again. Therefore, the role of the front yard is to sustain the identity of Yeung House throughout its decay and evolution, and the activities afforded by the front yard and Yeung House, whether spontaneous, self-initiated or collaborated, have offered the villagers new meanings and developed a 'new continuity'. Overall, a new place-identity has emerged from the rural landscape – brought by the distinctiveness of the restored Yeung House and the new continuity of the activated front yard.

4.3 Implication: a rural–urban lifestyle

Recent research in academia has focused on the impact of the one-way, city-scale transition from rurality to urbanicity on identification, such as growth (Dong 2018), housing (Xie and Chen 2022) and residence (Xie and Huang 2022), demographical categorisation (Xie, Chen, and Xu 2023) and integration (Yan, Chen, and Xia 2018). Some emergent studies focus on the rural–urban continuum or the interfaces for regional sustainability (Liu et al. 2019) or the symbiosis as *rurbanity* for global sustainability (Hoffmann et al. 2023). However, the interaction between the villagers and the rural landscape is different from the discussion above.

The emergent place-identity in the rural landscape may imply a potential rural–urban lifestyle that allows one to express themselves in the countryside supported by urban resources. The three villagers attempted to practise such a lifestyle between the two remote but accessible sites as a rural–urban parallel. Since the restoration of Yeung House was completed, the three villagers visit Ng To up to four days a week. On weekends, they operate the house as a collaborator with nominal, reimbursement-based compensation for only food and transportation. During weekdays, they are motivated to walk back, gather with others, and improve their surroundings as a practice of active ageing. In China, similar places in the countryside are emerging; these include the Porter Centre, a geographically proximal place for pleasurable experiences and active interactions (Chen, Chen, and Ko 2021, 10), shaped by the reproduction of the conditions of urban life in small communities (Friedland quoted in Bell 1992, 79). In Ng To, the rural landscape affords purposeful and healthy activities that may enhance the villagers' well-being.

Using the data set from 29 countries, (Requena 2016, 702) concluded that people in richer countries who live in the countryside experience a higher level of subjective well-being than those living in the city, consisting of factors including community relations, health and personal values. The villagers explained their reasons for returning to Ng To as follows:

'(The life in) the U.K. was easy but boring. Ng To is unprosperous, but it has a quiet environment... Going back to Ng To by walking can train our body' (Kam-chun).

'We are trying to plant the same things like papaya, peanuts and Chinese Wampee (黃皮)' (Kwai-ying).

'There is no plan for future development yet. We just want to make the place better for now. We are not selling the property (Yeung House) as many others did, and our sons and daughters are not interested in coming back yet' (Pak-yau).

The concern of Pak-yau is not uncommon. The younger generation may not associate themselves with the social structure of rural places but may be involved in nature through their own leisure lifestyles (King and Church 2013). There is almost no known, successful case in the Hong Kong countryside in which the young generation goes back to revitalise their places, except for the recent return of the Lee family to Tin Sum for experimental farming. It is noted that the rural–urban lifestyle may be specific to the cohort of these three villagers – the retired population who enjoy nature and culture with

no financial burden. Nevertheless, Ng To as a place has provided opportunities for an alternative and dynamic lifestyle in a small Hakka household, which may also be practised in other villages in the Hong Kong countryside.

5 Discussion

This research, as a case study, contributes to the field of countryside regeneration with implications for research and practice. First, before implementation, researchers can investigate the potential impact of taking the position of restoration or intervention over the integrative rural landscape. Here, restoration to its original appearance does not necessarily undermine functionality. Based on the engagement with the villagers, it is argued that both the original appearance of Yeung House and the front yard are critical to the formation of place identity and that the original function of Yeung House as a residence is no longer needed. The architectural programming of the educational exhibition, as a design choice, can retain architectural values with minimal intervention using reversible and flexible venue settings. Furthermore, the front yard also provides a large floor space for conducting mass educational activities that require almost no intervention. In this sense, continuity in the whole rural landscape is maintained when the elements are synergised.

Second, practitioners can adopt a progressive, feedback-based approach that facilitates reciprocal observations and actions. Despite the design intention to spare the dining room for daily activities, it was observed that the villagers stayed outdoors most of the time, even for food preparation. The research team then recognised the importance of the front yard as an open space and co-organised activities with the villagers, which in turn facilitated the use of the indoor kitchen and reciprocally supported the activation of the front yard. To argue, there is no guaranteed model or fixed, cause-and-effect formula for rural regeneration due to contextual differences. Therefore, a progressive approach allows more time for the stakeholders to experiment with the environment, reflect on the outcomes and plan the next actions strategically based on the feedback to avoid making any irreversible and adverse impact.

Nonetheless, this research has several limitations in terms of scope. First, the scope of restoration work was confined to Yeung House because financial support was limited. Alternative design decisions might be considered when more abundant resources are provided. Second, the scale and variety of regenerative activities remained small, as only three villagers were keen to actively participate.

In fact, countryside revitalisation remains an ongoing, open topic for exploration and experimentation in Hong Kong. The objectives, methodologies and resources

for revitalisation initiatives vary from case to case. Taking the award-winning sustainable development in Lai Chi Wo village (LCW) as an example, the following four objectives were presented in the beginning: accommodating overseas villagers for retirement, promoting the Hakka culture central to agriculture, encouraging the return and settlement of young villagers, and demonstrating a model of sustainable development to the world. The overall development has earned its reputation through three main initiatives – revived agricultural activities, art cocreation projects, and the living Hakka village as an architectural intervention. Revived agricultural activities have been successfully executed with the evident impact of enhancing the habitat diversity of the recultivated paddy fields and facilitating the rural–urban symbiosis through establishing the farm-to-table production line (Chang 2022, 79). Art cocreation projects have connected different parties to form a new community network (Shen 2023).

The living Hakka village, however, is still confronting ongoing challenges such as power imbalances, waste treatment and policy hypocrisy (Chang 2022, 69). Some of the outcomes may not align with their original intentions. For example, village houses are repaired and improved with additional modern features, but access to the original mezzanine is locked as a statutory control. In addition, while LCW is regarded as a participatory collaborative approach (Williams et al. 2021), the dependency on newcomers and corporate-scale third-party assistance, at a total cost of more than HKD 100 million⁴ over 10 years, has also hindered LCW from exemplifying a sustainable and replicable model.

Many government-funded revitalisation initiatives are also intervention-based; these include the 4-year Forest Village programme in Mui Tsz Lam, which features the making of glamping sites, a story-house and community arts at HKD 15 million, and the 3-year Art Festival in Yim Tin Tsai, which features an eco-museum concept (Qiao 2022) at HKD 40 million. All these programmes are highly beneficial to environmental conservation and communal collaborations, but the cultural significance of everyday life is yet to be revealed in the plethora of revitalised sites.

6 Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper discussed the architectural restoration of a modernised Hakka row house using the exhibition as a minimal intervention and the consequent activation of the front yard and the formulation of an emergent place-identity in the whole rural landscape as serendipitous outcomes. Apart from the distinctive

⁴ Exact figures are not available online. Three main management agreement (MA) schemes in LCW are funded by HSBC (2013–2017), HKJC (2017–2022) and CCO (2021–2024). The funding from HKJC is HKD 50 million.

architectural values, the proactive involvement of villagers has also generated cultural and social values as a collective effort with the research team and outside parties. With these significant outcomes, this research suggests that the potential impact of regenerative strategies over the integrative rural landscape should be considered before implementation. A progressive and feedback-based approach should be adopted to allow time for observing, reflecting, and planning for the next actions before irreversible changes are made. We as researchers can perhaps slow our pace and react to the serendipities in the process of rural regeneration.

Abbreviations

AMO	Antiquities and Monuments Office
CCO	Countryside Conservation Office
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administration Region
LegCo	Legislative Council
LCW	Lai Chi Wo
KP	Kuk Po

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the three interviewed villagers, Mr. Yeung Kam-chun, Mr. Yeung Pak-yau and Ms. Tsang Kwai-ying for their heartfelt sharing and contribution to the project. I am also grateful to receive sincere support from the research team leader, Prof. Thomas Chung and team member, Ms. Miriam Lee from the School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Authors' contributions

Not applicable.

Funding

The project analyzed in this article is funded under the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme (CCFS) by CCO, The Government of the HKSAR.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Verbal consent has been obtained from the three participating villagers.

Competing interests

The project analyzed in this article is funded under the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme (CCFS) by CCO, The Government of the HKSAR.

Received: 30 June 2023 Accepted: 6 February 2024

Published online: 20 March 2024

References

- Bell, Michael M. 1992. The fruit of difference: the rural-urban continuum as a system of identity. *Rural Sociology* 57 (1): 65–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.1992.tb00457.x>.
- Chang, Ka Ka. 2022. *Community practices in Lai Chi Wo: limitations and futures of rural-urban symbiosis*. Master's thesis, Hong Kong Baptist University. <https://scholars.hkbu.edu.hk/ws/portalfiles/portal/59244020/G22THFL-026822T.pdf>.
- Chen, Ningning, Jingfu Chen, and Pei-Chun Ko. 2021. Active aging in the countryside: space, place and the performance of leisure-work lifestyles in contemporary rural China. *Population, Space and Place* 27 (6): e2429. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2429>.
- Dong, Jie. 2018. Language and identity construction of China's rural-urban migrant children: an ethnographic study in an urban public school. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 17 (5): 336–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2018.1470517>.
- Du, Xiaofan, and Ding Shi. 2019. Rural heritage: value, conservation and revitalisation—from the perspective of the human-land relationship. *Built Heritage* 3 (2): 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1186/BF03545723>.
- Free, Simon. n.d. *Spotters guide' to patterned glass: old window glass designs*. *Sash window specialist (blog)*. <https://sashwindowspecialist.com/blog/old-patterned-window-glass-id/>. Accessed 26 May 2023.
- Fu, Hua. 2021. *Tujie lingnan jianzhu* 圖解嶺南建築 [Illustration of Lingnan Architecture]. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Open Page Publishing Company Limited.
- Hase, Patrick. 1995. The alliance of ten: settlement and politics in the Sha Tau Kok Area. In *Down to Earth: The Territorial Bond in South China*, edited by David Faure and Helen F. Siu, 123–160. Stanford: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804764735-012>.
- Hauge, Åshild Lappegard. 2007. Identity and place: a critical comparison of three identity theories. *Architectural Science Review* 50 (1): 44–51. <https://doi.org/10.3763/asre.2007.5007>.
- Hoffmann, Ellen M., Nikolaus Schareika, Christoph Ditrach, Eva Schlecht, Daniela Sauer, and Andreas Buerkert. 2023. Rurbanity: a concept for the interdisciplinary study of rural-urban transformation. *Sustainability Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01331-2>.
- Huang, Huoxing, Biyun Luo and Lieyuan Li. 1991. *Kejia fengqing zhi* 客家風情志 [Hakka Customs]. Hong Kong: Zhonghua Book Company.
- ICOMOS. 1994. *The NARA document on authenticity*. <https://www.icomos.org/en/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/386-the-nara-document-on-authenticity-1994>.
- ICOMOS. 1999. *Charter on the built vernacular heritage*. https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Charters/vernacular_e.pdf.
- King, Katherine, and Andrew Church. 2013. 'We don't enjoy nature like that': youth identity and lifestyle in the countryside. *Journal of Rural Studies* 31: 67–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.02.004>.
- Knapp, Ronald G. 1986. *China's traditional rural architecture: a cultural geography of the common house*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. 2016. *Country Parks and Protected Areas in Hong Kong*. <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/essentials-1617ise06-country-parks-and-protected-areas-in-hong-kong.htm>. Accessed 29 May 2023.
- Lewicka, Maria. 2008. Place attachment, place identity, and place memory: restoring the forgotten city past. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28 (3): 209–231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2008.02.001>.
- Liu, Chen, Gill Valentine, Robert M. Vanderbeck, Kristina Diprose, and Katie McQuaid. 2019. Rural-urban inequality and the practice of promoting sustainability in contemporary China. *GeoJournal* 84 (5): 1187–1198. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-018-9915-y>.
- MacNeil, Heather Marie, and Bonnie Mak. 2007. Constructions of authenticity. *Library Trends* 56 (1): 26–52. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2007.0054>.
- Proshansky, Harold M., Abbe K. Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff. 1983. Place-identity: physical world socialisation of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3 (1): 57–83. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(83\)80021-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(83)80021-8).
- Qiao, Baisen. 2022. Study on rural revitalisation in Hong Kong, China based on the concept of eco-museum: the case of Yantianzi (Yim Tin Tsai). *Asian Social Science* 18 (10): 1. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v18n10p1>.
- Requena, Felix. 2016. Rural-urban living and level of economic development as factors in subjective well-being. *Social Indicators Research* 128 (2): 693–708. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1051-1>.
- Semprebon, Gerardo. 2022. Design driven research for countryside revitalisation of a rural settlement of the Fujian Province, China. *Architecture* 2 (2): 255–276. <https://doi.org/10.3390/architecture2020015>.
- Shen, Yuxi. 2023. Art intervention in Hong Kong Rural revitalisation based on symbiosis: the case of Lai Chi Wo. *Frontiers in Business, Economics and Management* 7 (3): 194–198. <https://doi.org/10.54097/fbem.v7i3.5534>.
- Siu, Kwok-kin. 2014. *Ju you qi suo: xianggang chuantong jianzhu yu fengsu* 居有所: 香港傳統建築與風俗 [A Place to Live in: Traditional Architecture and Customs in Hong Kong]. Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (H.K.) Limited.

- The Government of HKSAR. 2017. *LCQ3: List of recognised villages*. <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201701/11/P2017011100438.htm>. Last modified January 11, 2017.
- Williams, Jessica M., Vivian Chu, Wai-Fung Lam, and Winnie W. Y. Law. 2021. Building resilient rural communities: a summary of the case study and prospects beyond Lai Chi Wo and Hong Kong. In *Revitalising Rural Communities*, edited by Jessica M. Williams, Vivian Chu, Wai-Fung Lam, and Winnie W. Y. Law, 83–94. Singapore: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5824-2_4.
- Wu, Qingzhou. 2008. *Zhongguo kejia jianzhu wenhua* 中国客家建筑文化 [Architectural culture of Hakka China]. China: Hubei Education Press.
- Xie, Shenghua, and Juan Chen. 2022. Housing and identity expression among In-Situ urbanised rural residents in China. *Population, Space and Place* 28 (5): e2548. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2548>.
- Xie, Shenghua, and Xu. Huang. 2022. Flowing sense of place: perceptions of host city impacting on city attachment of rural-urban migrants in China. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 88: 106–118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.04.003>.
- Xie, Shenghua, Juan Chen, and Zengyang Xu. 2023. Rural–urban migration and urban identity differentiation in China. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 0;(0):1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2023.2167096>.
- Xinhua. 2022. *Towards a beautiful countryside, China charts roadmap for rural construction*. China.Org.Cn. http://www.china.org.cn/china/2022-05/25/content_78236210.htm.
- Yan, Jinming, Hao Chen, and Fangzhou Xia. 2018. Toward improved land elements for urban-rural integration: a cell concept of an urban-rural mixed community. *Habitat International* 77: 110–120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.01.007>.
- Yi, Dong-Yoon., and Yonghoon Son. 2022. What is new ruralism and why it is needed for spatial planning?: Focusing on application to Korea as a new rural planning principle. *International Review for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development* 10 (4): 7–28. https://doi.org/10.14246/irsp.10.4_7.
- Zhu, Zhimeng, Libing Tang, Chang'e Zhao, and Yan-xia Liu. 2023. Speed up the reorganisation and adjustment of hollow villages, help implement the rural revitalisation strategy. In *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Economic Management and Model Engineering, ICEMME 2022*, Nanjing, November 18–20. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.18-11-2022.2327120>.
- Zhuang, Yuguang. 2018. *Zhongguo menchuang: chuangjuan* 中國門窗：窗卷 [Chinese doors and windows: Windows]. Taiwan: Dragon Totem Cultural Limited Company.
- Ye, Lin. 2012. China's Urbanization at the Crossroads: Institutional Mechanism and Policy Transformation. In *Proceedings of 2012 6th International Association for China Planning Conference (IACP)*, Wuhan, June 17–19. <https://doi.org/10.1109/IACP.2012.6342991>.
- Lin, George C. S. 2002. Hong Kong and the Globalisation of the Chinese Diaspora: A Geographical Perspective. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 43 (1): 63–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8373.00158>.
- Huang, Yi. 2023. Bei yiwang de kejia cai: lai wok pin 被遺忘的客家菜：瀨鑊邊 [The forgotten Hakka Cuisine: Lai Wok Pin]. *Mingpao Weekly*, January 18. <https://www.mpweekly.com/culture/飲食/瀨鑊邊-谷埔-客家菜>.
- Xiao, Wenping. 2015. *Kejia cunluo* 客家村落 [Hakka villages]. China: Jinan University Pres.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.