

MODERN TRADITIONAL VILLAGE LIFE  
IN HONG KONG:  
THE CASE OF LUNG YEUK TAU  
VILLAGE

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### **Abstract:**

Lung Yeuk Tau, an area home to eleven villages in Fanling, Hong Kong, is inhabited by one of the oldest clans of the New Territories, the Tang Clan. A small number of Hakka people and some Cantonese newcomers also reside in this area today. Lung Yeuk Tau has many remnants of traditional Chinese architecture and customs due to its rich history. Although various social, economic and political factors have led to significant changes in their way of life, the Tang Clan has managed to preserve their distinct identity as the original residents of the area. Their collective identity is reinforced through communal activities and traditional festivals, which involve rituals that both include and exclude other residents of the area in varying degrees, affecting the intra-village relationship between the Tang people, Hakka people and newcomers, thereby reinforcing the Tang's dominant position in the village. Some of these communal activities also involve members of the Tang Clan of other nearby villages, solidifying their collective identity and strengthening their inter-village alliance. However, this is not to say that the traditions of the Tang Clan have remained static amidst the pressures of modernization. To some extent, traditional "rules" have been loosened. Market forces have influenced their rituals. The Hong Kong Government's decision to designate Lung Yeuk Tau as a "heritage trail" to attract tourism has also affected the preservation and reconstruction of the Tang clan's traditions. Compared to the past, Lung Yeuk Tau is no longer a self-enclosed traditional community and it is a microcosm of the changes affecting rural society across Hong Kong. As the process of the modernization continues to unfold itself onto new landscapes, it is only through a critical examination of the interplay between social, political and economic factors that we can attempt to predict the ongoing impact on rural life.

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## Introduction

Lung Yeuk Tau (龍躍頭) is a village located in Fanling in the New Territories, Hong Kong. The area is home to five walled villages and six villages (五圍六村) and is associated with the Tang clan, “one of the historic Five Great Clans of the New Territories” (HK Tourism Board 2007). Lung Yeuk Tau has also been designated a heritage trail by the Antiquities and Monuments Office of Hong Kong. As a village that has survived since the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368), many remnants of traditional Chinese village life remain in Lung Yeuk Tau, like an ancestral hall, a study hall and a temple to worship their patron goddess, Tin Hau.

We selected this site for our ethnographic research project because we wanted to learn

about traditional Chinese village life in today’s modern circumstances. Lung Yeuk Tau was a good site for this because it is relatively isolated from the Fanling Town Centre and is only accessible by minibus or taxi. This relative isolation, we thought, might have maintained a stronger sense of community among its residents. Furthermore, some structures of a traditional Chinese village have remained well preserved here, like the ancestral hall and study hall.

The architecture of the homes in Lung Yeuk Tau also reflects the interaction between traditional and modern. Traditional Chinese houses stand next to newly built apartments three-storey apartments. It was under these circumstances that we felt Lung Yeuk Tau would make a good research site.

## Methodology

We visited Lung Yeuk Tau (LYT) in order to conduct ethnographic research four separate times in four consecutive weeks in October 2011 and spent a grand total of about 20-24 hours there. As the Lung Yeuk Tau area is very large, we limited our research to the villages directly surrounding the Tang Chung Ling Ancestral Hall and Tin Hau Temple, which we thought would serve as the centre, rather than periphery, of the village. The villages we visited include Lo Wai (老围), Ma Wat Tsuen (麻笏



Figure 1: Map of Lung Yeuk Tau (HK Antiquities and Monuments Office)

村) and Chi Tong Tsuen (祠堂村). The Tang Clan Community Centre also served as an important site that connected us with members of the Tang Clan and other long-time residents of this village.

Our field research was mostly conducted through on-site observations as well as semi-structured interviews with people we met in and around our research area. These 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with both long-time residents and newcomers, which are listed in the table below:

<b>Long-time residents</b>	<b>Newcomers</b>
Tang Kun-nin, who was running for elections to be the LYT representative at the time of the interview	The security guard of the Tang Ancestral Hall
Mrs. Tang, who moved to LYT after marrying a Mr. Tang 40 years ago	Mother & daughter at the bus stop who also have the surname Tang but just moved in 2 years ago from Mainland China
3 separate Mr. Tangs who are all members of the LYT Tang Clan	Teenage boy 1 who just moved in to LYT 3 days before the interview
An old man who has lived in LYT for over 20 years (non-Tang)	Teenage boy 2 who was in charge of one of the community centers and lived in LYT most of his life.
Old Hakka lady who has lived here all her life, for over 80 years (non-Tang)	A man who just bought a house in the area

We also explored relevant literature both before and after our ethnographic visits to compare our findings and observations with other examples. There was very little literature directly about LYT but we were able to find contrasts and similarities between our case and other sociological and anthropological literature, which we will reference throughout this paper.

## History

People living in Lung Yeuk Tau (龍躍頭) all have the same surname “Tang”. According to the Tang Clan family tree, the Tangs in Lung Yeuk Tau stem from Jishui (吉水), Jiangxi Province. In the early years of Northern Song Dynasty, Tang Hanba Gong (邓汉黻公), the person regarded as the ancestor of the Tang people in New Territories (the first Tang to migrate to Guangdong Province), migrated from Baisha Village, Jishui County, Ji’an Town, Jiangxi Province (江西省吉安府吉水縣白沙鄉) to Guangdong Province. He arrived at Lingnan (嶺南) and settled down at Bao’an Centian (寶安岑田) in Song Bao around 973 AD (Siu, 1991). The fourth generation, Tang Fuxie (鄧符協), who was a scholar (登進士), travelled to the New Territories and fell in love with the beautiful scenery. He then moved his residence to the New Territories and started his career there. (Siu 1991). Therefore, Fu Gong (符公) is the first Tang who settled in the New Territories, Hong Kong.

The famous Tang Five Big Rooms (鄧氏五大房), namely Yuanying (元英), Yuanxi (元禧), Yuanzhen (元禎), Yuanliang (元亮) and Yuanhe (元和), were the seventh generations of Tang Clan. The Five Big Rooms built the Tang Ancestral Hall in Dongguan, named Duqing Tang (都慶堂). It was finished in 46 years (1707 AD) during Qing Emperor Kangxi’s reign. (Yan 2005). Since then, the Tangs became a distinguished family in Dongguan. Yuanzhen (元禎) and Yuanliang (元亮) were the first ancestors in the New Territories. Yuanzhen settled in Pingshan (屏山), and Yuanliang was regarded as the ancestor for Tang people in Jintian (錦田), Lung Yeuk Tau (龍躍頭), Da Pu Tau (大埔頭) and Xia Village (廈村). (Yan 2005)

However, if we look at the Tang clan family tree, we will find record that the Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau have a strong connection with the Song Dynasty royal family. At the end of the Southern Song Dynasty, Southern Song Gaozong’s daughter (南宋高宗之女) escaped to the southern part of China and married to Tang Weiji (鄧惟汲). She was titled Shuiyuan Junma (稅院郡馬) after her death. Their eldest son, Tang Lin (鄧林) migrated to Lung Yeuk Tau at the end of Yuan Dynasty and settled there. It has been more than eight hundred years since then and the Tang clan in Lung Yeuk Tau developed to Five Wei and Six Villages (五圍六村). (Yan 2005). This piece of history can only be found in the Tang clan family tree but has not been officially recognized. This can be regarded as a way that Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau claim a royal identity.

At the very beginning, we chose Lung Yeuk Tau as the site for our ethnographic research project because we took it for granted that all the ethnic people in New Territories are Hakka people. However, during our interview, we noticed that the Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau claimed themselves to be “Weitou” people (圍頭人).

After referring to relevant materials, we figured out that Weitou refers to those indigenous people who have settled in Bao'an County (寶安縣), today's Shenzhen and Hong Kong, since the Song Dynasty. (Siu1991) The main feature of Weitou people is that they live in villages with the people who share the same ancestors and same surname. In fact, Weitou people regard the villagers as their kin and they are not allowed to inter-marry. The reason why there is a strong "Weitou" identity is to distinguish themselves from Hakka people. During Qianlong and Jiaqing Years (乾隆嘉慶年間), a lot of Hakka people migrated to Bao'an. They settled down and built villages adjacent to Weitou villages. However, due to differences of language and customs and the unequal distribution of land, a lot of conflicts emerged between the two groups. Hakka people started building walled-houses (圍屋) for defense. Later on, Weitou people also built walled houses and walled villages (圍村). It is believed that Hakka people were the first to build wall villages and wall houses. The walled villages and walled houses built by Weitou people were only the imitation of Hakka style. (Siu 1991)

During our field trip, we noticed that Weitou people have their own dialect, called Weitou dialect. It is commonly used around Xin'an County (新安縣). It is not only spoken by Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau, but also by Weitou people in Shenzhen, and by those in New Territories, Hong Kong. (Yan 2005) However, there are less and less people who can speak Weitou dialect nowadays and it is becoming extinct. During Britain's colonization of Hong Kong, the British misunderstood the Weitou dialect as a Hakka dialect. But in fact, the Weitou dialect has longer history than the Hakka dialect. In a more general sense, the Weitou dialect refers to the dialect spoken in the villages of Shenzhen and Hong Kong in southern China, including Hakka and rural Yue dialects, in contrast to Cantonese spoken by the majority of Hong Kong and Shenzhen residents. The origin of Weitou dialect has no clear source. There is no evidence demonstrating the connection between the emergence of the Weitou language and the migration of people from different parts of China.

Since 1973, the New City Policy has been carried out. Shatin (沙田), Taipo (大埔) and Fanling (粉嶺) gradually became parts of the new city. Community facilities and education have gradually caught up with urban areas. Some Tang people choose to move abroad while others make a living in the urban area, deserting their original farming life. (Yan 2005) There is no distinct difference between indigenous Tang people and the urban residence in economy, clothing, language and social life.

Nowadays, the Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau still have strong kinship ties with Tangs from other villages. For example, they collectively go back to visit the tombs of their ancestors in Dongguan.

## Hakka, Walled Village, and Weitou People

Our interview with Mr. Tang Kun Nin helped us clear a misunderstanding we had prior to our field research. We embarked on this research with the aim of finding out the Hakka people's identity in New Territories. When we saw that LYT was a walled-village (围村), we took it for granted that it would be a "Hakka" village because of the walled-village style. But after some interviews with LYT's villagers we found that many of the long-time residents clearly identified them not as Hakka, but "Weitou" (围头) people. We noticed that all the male Tang villagers we interviewed tended to draw a very clear line between them and Hakka people, and emphasized that they as the "Weitou" people are the *Punti* people (indigenous people) whose ancestors settled down there long before Hakkas arrived.

After some literature review, we found the need to clarify the relationship between the walled-village architecture, the Hakka and *Punti* people. The prevalence of walled villages in New Territories is a tradition the *Punti* people brought in when they migrated from Fujian, southern Jiangxi, and Guangdong provinces, the southeast coastal regions of China (Leung, 1995). After moving into the New Territories, piracy and inter-village raids inspired *Punti* villagers to construct enclosing walls and defensive architecture for self-protection. Later on, when Hakka people moved to the New Territories as encouraged by Qing administration policy, they also brought in their own traditional practices of village fortification, which is in style a bit different from *Punti*'s. The new Hakka migrants adopted some architectural features from the locals, and this is why the building form of walled villages prevails in most villages in New Territories, no matter Hakka or *Punti*. (Leung, 1995)

After clearing this misunderstanding that LYT is a "Hakka" village, we then got the impression from the interviews with male Tangs that the whole village (includes the eleven small villages) are wholly comprised of Tang Clan members. We hardly heard of any other ethnic groups living there. However, as our research proceeded, it turned out that LYT is not a village inhabited solely by the Tang Clan and their kin. This may have been the case decades ago when LYT. From the interview with Mrs. Tang, who married into Lung Yeuk Tau 40 years ago, as well as the interviews with some of the newcomers, it turned out this is a village also inhabited by Hakka people and other non-Tang newcomers as many Tang people have sold their land and houses and moved out, which will be further discussed in a later section.

Some Hakka people in LYT moved here a very long time ago, so they are also part of the "indigenous people" (原住民), officially defined as the descendants of the residents who first inhabited there no later than 1898. The Hakka people of LYT now



mostly live in Chi Tong Tsuen (祠堂村) and Ma Wat Tsuen (麻笏村), near the Tang's ancestral hall and just a few steps from where Tang Kun Nin lives. But in Mr. Tang's story, non-Tang people were largely ignored. In his perception and in what he tried to convince us, the LYT area belongs to the Tang Clan. Just as he said, "we are all from the same family."

### **Emic History and Group Identity**

Not only do identities affect the way villagers perceive the demographics of LYT, the emic ethno-history is also constructs group identity. From the interviews with the male Tang villagers, we found they somehow share a strong sense of Tang identity. When asked about LYT's history, we were told by most of them that the Tang originated from Jiangxi and that their ancestor had been married to a princess in Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), which echoed very much what we found in academic literature, tourist brochures, and official websites. From the interviews we knew that some government officials from the Antiquities and Monuments Office had been to LYT to record the local history and set up the "heritage trail" there. It is very likely that government's protection of the "heritage" reinforces their self-identity and pride as being one of traditional clans of long history in New Territories. In some cases, the Tang villagers recited their history so well (as in the case of interviews with Tang Kun Nin) that we wonder if the officials and historians who did research there taught them this history. Lines between emic history and etic history got blurred as the two overlap with each other when knowledge and discourse circulate between the both. The researchers or officials collect data from local villagers, what is then written in academic literature or tourist brochures "re-teach" the Tang villagers about their village's history so their narrations resemble a lot what the books say. This is not to say that their emic ethno-history is not rooted in fact, but it is interesting to see how the aspects of identity, memories, and official discourse come to interact with each other in the formation of local history.

What's more, "*Punti* people" is the identity the Tang villagers often brought up when asked if they were "Hakka". Their self-identification as the indigenous people claims the dominant rights and legitimacy of residence in LYT, especially when they feel their status threatened by incoming migrants like the Hakka people. However, when going through historical literature we found that the Tang people's ancestors in Mainland China could have been Hakka people (Zhao, 2006). If this is true, it is interesting to see how after hundreds of years, the descendants of Tang Clan in LYT clearly identify themselves as not as Hakka people but *Punti* people (indigenous people). Although the question of Tang ancestors being Hakka arguable, this case

serves as an example to show how ethnic identity is not fixed but is fluid, ever-changing and re-creating.

### **Festivals, Traditions and Alliances:**

The Tang clan of LYT observes four major festivals: Chingming and Chongyang, Lantern-lighting festival, Goddess Tin Hau's birthday and the Jiao festival. Some of these festivals involve only members of the Tang clan, while others may involve other non-Tang residents in varying degrees.

The survival of community cultural festivals is influenced by factors such as communal memory, willingness to work collaboratively, organizational traditions and experience. (Derett2005) For the case of LYT, we observed that all these factors are completely intertwined with and dependent on the Tang clan, since they have the strongest communal memory and identity, which is again reinforced through their festivals.

In Choi's (1995) essay, he found that the organization and participation in festivals strengthened different levels of alliances and established a hierarchy of dominance among the different ethnic groups. For the case of LYT, alliances with non-Tangs are only strengthened through the Spring festival and Goddess Tin Hau's birthday. All other festivals serve to reinforce the relationship between members of the Tang clan and display their dominance in LYT. Our findings are also slightly different from Choi's because LYT does not have organized ethnic groups other than the Tang clan. Although there are Hakka and Chiu Chow and other ethnicities living in LYT, the only clear divide is between the Tangs and non-Tangs.

There are many rituals and traditions associated with each of the festivals below. For the purposes of this paper, I will limit my exploration of these festivals to practices and traditions that are most relevant and unique to LYT.

#### *Chingming (清明节) and Chongyang(重阳节) Festivals:*

Both Chingming, which happens in the spring, and Chongyang, which happens in the fall, are Chinese festivals to commemorate ancestors. People usually go tomb sweeping during Chingming and residents of LYT practice this too, both Tang and non-Tang. However, during Chongyang, the Tang-clan has a specific tradition amongst themselves. This tradition is extended to kin from their kin villages in Hong Kong, mainly Ha Tsuen and a village in Tai Po, both in the New Territories. Members of the Tang-clan, usually male, will gather together and head to their kin village in Dongguan in Guangdong Province. Prior to their departure, donations are usually collected from

all Tang-clan members and this money is then donated to their kin in Dongguan in order to build schools and other necessities. Although not all Tang-clan members make the trip to Dongguan, donations will still be collected from them. An emic explanation was that this was their way of giving back to their ancestors. However, no reason was given as to why Dongguan was the selected venue. Dongguan is merely a kin village and not their ancestral village. From an etic perspective, however, Dongguan may have been selected because it is the only kin village not in Hong Kong. This echoes Feuchtwang's (1996) statement that festivals are occasions for creating "more intimate senses of mutual identification." (162)

Nonetheless, it is clear that the alliance being strengthened through this festival is that of the inter-village network of members of the Tang clan living in the three kin villages in Hong Kong.

*Lantern-lighting Festival (花灯节):*

The Lantern-lighting Festival is held to commemorate every baby boy born that year in LYT who will carry on the Tang family name. Mr. Tang, who we interviewed at the ancestral hall, told us that it was part of the boys' male right, or "丁权". It is this same right that gives male Tang-clan members access to the ancestral hall. During this festival, a lantern is lighted at the ancestral hall for every baby boy born who will carry on the Tang surname. The festival is open to members of the Tang-clan of only LYT. Women are also traditionally not allowed to participate in the festival. The festival is held on the fifteenth day of the first month of the Chinese Lunar Calendar (正月十五).

The relationship being strengthened through this festival is among the male members of the Tang clan only of LYT. The festival is perhaps traditionally also a public display of male dominance and the strength of their village.

*Goddess Tin Hau's (天后) birthday:*

Tin Hau is the patron goddess for LYT and her temple is located right next to the Tang Ancestral Hall. This festival is celebrated on the first day of third month on the Chinese Lunar Calendar. During this festival, residents give offerings of food to Goddess Tin Hau to ask for blessings. It is a village-wide festival, involving both Tang and non-Tang residents alike. Only the mother and daughter we interviewed who had just moved to LYT from Mainland China were unaware of this festival and had never been to the Tin Hau Temple, despite living very close to it.

This festival serves to strengthen the unity and alliance among all residents of LYT

village and makes no apparent distinction between members of the Tang clan and those who are not.

*Jiao Festival (太平清醮):*

The Jiao Festival is a Daoist ritual that aims to “pacify wandering ghosts, to purify the community’s territory and to reach a cosmic renewal” for the village. (Liu 2003) The festival lasts 3-4 days and focuses on pleasing their patron goddess Tin Hau. The Jiao festival in LYT is held every ten years. The next one will be held in early 2013. Although we were not able to observe the exact rituals of the Jiao festival, we learned, through interviews, that although all villagers were invited to observe the Jiao festival, only members of the Tang-clan acted as organizers and financial supporters of the festival. All other residents were merely participants on the days of the festival. Furthermore, Tang-clan members of their kin villages in Hong Kong are also invited to participate in the LYT Jiao Festival.

We discovered that the Jiao festival for the other Tang kin villages in Hong Kong will also be held in 2013. However, their Jiao festivals will be held during a different month so that Tang-clan members of LYT can also go to participate when it is their turn to host. When Tang-clan members visit each other’s villages to participate in Jiao festivals, it is customary for them to contribute some money to the host-village. This amount depends on how many people from their own village go to attend the festival in their kin village. When LYT Tang-clan members visit their kin villages during the Jiao festival, they sign the back of their red envelope with “Lung Yeuk Group”. It is also customary for them to send a flower wreath to the host-village, a public declaration of their strong kinship network.

The Jiao Festival serves to both strengthen the alliance among Tang clan members of the three kin villages in Hong Kong and reinforce their status as the dominant social group in LYT. These findings are different from the varying levels of alliances that are strengthened through the Jiao festival in Cheung Chau Island. (Choi1995) However, both Jiao festivals in Cheung Chau and LYT serve as a platform for displaying power relations and hierarchy in the village. This is consistent with Watson’s (1996) findings that people in the New Territories have altered the function of the Jiao festival “from a parade defining territory to a ritual presentation expressing their wealth and status.”

*Tradition of Eating Pencai (盆菜):*

Members of the Tang clan practice the tradition of eating pencai during most of the

above-mentioned traditions. Pencai literally means basin dish and the historic roots of this dish goes back hundreds of years. Even in the present, however, food acts as a “window to the political”. (Watson and Caldwell 2005)

The preparation of pencai and who is allowed to eat it also reveals the various levels of alliance being built and display of dominance through the consumption of food. During an interview Mr. Tang said that only men were allowed to cook pencai. Women may be allowed to help to clean and chop the vegetables, but the actual act of cooking it was only reserved for the men. This reveals a clear gender hierarchy that is being reinforced even through the preparation of food.

Pencai is the main dish consumed during the lantern-lighting festival, as well as during the Spring Festival. A Hakka woman in her 80s told us that everyone in the village used to be invited to eat pencai with the Tangs in the past during the Spring Festival. They would eat outside the Tang Ancestral Hall since they were not supposed to go in. However, this invitation stopped over ten years ago when the Tang leadership of LYT changed.

The pencai tradition and the hierarchies fortified through the process of its preparation and consumption are limited to intra-village relations of LYT residents, both Tang and non-Tang, and do not involve Tang clan members from kin villages. The changes in this tradition also reveal how the political ideologies of leaders affect tradition, a topic we will further explore in a latter section.

### **Intra-village Relationship**

The demographics of LYT village can be divided into several parts: the Tang clan people who are indigenous people and long-time residents there, some Hakka people who also have lived there for such a long time that they are also categorized as the “indigenous people” according to official standard. Besides, there is also a complex component of newcomers who moved there because of the convenience, availability, or just because they want to enjoy the quietness of countryside. The components of newcomers could be Hakka, Cantonese, Chiu Chow people or people who have returned from abroad. We find differences in the levels of festival participation and community relations both between Tang and non-Tang people, and between newcomers and long-time residents.

For long-time, non-Tang residents who are mainly Hakka people, they mostly live in Chi Tong Tsuen and Ma Wat Tsuen in LYT. The eighty-year old Hakka lady we interviewed has lived there since she was born, and from her we discovered that it has been over one hundred years since the first Hakka people inhabited LYT. Since the Tang people had already occupied the relatively flat and fertile land in LYT for

agriculture, Hakka people could only focus on more mountainous areas that belonged to the geographical peripheries of the LYT village. As for the social activities, they generally observe the *Jiao* festivals but are only observers and do not contribute money. They also visit Tinhau temple semi-regularly and observe Tinhau's birthday. But they are generally excluded from the Lantern Lighting festivals, and they don't organize large-scale tomb sweeping activities as Tang people do during *Chongyang* and *Qingming* festivals. Regarding the indigenous tradition of eating *pencai*, from the interviews we know that Hakka people used to be invited to eat *pencai* with the Tang people, but about ten years ago, invitations stopped when Tang leadership changed. This demonstrates that traditions can be an indication of either social inclusion or exclusion. Without a strong community group network like the Tang people have, Hakka people in LYT occupy a relatively peripheral position both geographically and socially.

The "newcomers" refers to those who do not belong to the Tang Clan and recently moved into LYT. The process of urbanization in the New Territories interrupted villages' agricultural production, thereby loosening the traditional bonds and weakening the power of lineage families. As a result, many Tang villagers began to sell their lands and houses to seek for job opportunities in towns or abroad in the 1960s and 70s, especially when the economy went bad (Zhao, 2006). The trends of renting or selling old houses continues until today, as Tang people themselves admitted to us that the younger Tang generation tend to pursue their life goals in a broader societal context through advanced education or other ways as they are no longer satisfied with the old-style village life. There is also some land recruited by the government for building or reselling. These reasons account for that fact that LYT is no longer solely inhabited by Tang people.

Newcomers choose LYT to live for various concerns: some new immigrants from Guangdong or other southern provinces in Mainland China find this place affordable compared to Kowloon and Hong Kong Island; others from abroad find LYT a picturesque place to rest at weekends and to enjoy the quietness of countryside. Most newcomers live in the three-storey, modern style houses instead of in the traditional walled-house, and they tend to dwell in a different social circle from that of Tang residents. From our interviews, they rarely know anything about the Tang family, the village's history, or the distinctions between Hakka and Weitou people. Seldom do they visit the ancestral hall and Tinhau temple, despite that fact that these places are now open to public and are tourist attractions. Compared with long-time residents such as Hakka people, they pay less attention to the traditional festivals such as *Jiao* festival and Lantern-Lighting festival as they hardly attend these activities. Instead of focusing on a group identity, they tend to focus more on individual relationships with

neighbors. Contrary to what male Tangs told us, that LYT “is a village of Tang family”; the newcomers see a lot of non-Tang people living there including Hakka and Cantonese. In their eyes, LYT does not merely belong to the Tang people and they regard LYT as no more than a place to live, without any deeply-attached social meanings.

However, the social boundaries between the Tang Clan and newcomers are not so fixed and are sometimes blurred. An interviewee coming back from Australia who has generally been on good terms with the locals told us that he was often invited to eat *pencai* with Tang villagers during festivals. However, this is more of a personal case rather than a regular village-wide practice. Similar to the long-time Hakka residents, most newcomers occupy a relatively marginal position both in the social realm and in the political realm.

### **Modernization of Traditions**

Far from being static, we observed that traditions and festivals in LYT, described earlier, have been undergoing significant change, perhaps in response to the rapid modernization that swept through Hong Kong. Most of our interviewees were able to cite noteworthy changes that occurred in the last two decades alone. Our findings concur with Shanklin’s (1985) study of the changing traditions of the Irish in Southwest Donegal who “simultaneously guard and manipulate their traditions: guarding them against the encroachments of the modern world and manipulating them for their own advantage in that world.”

The changes in LYT’s traditions can be observed in three major areas: changing status of women, increasing government influence and financial strength.

#### *Changing status of women*

Women were traditionally not allowed to enter the Tang Ancestral Hall. In an interview, Mrs. Tang recounted how she had to stand outside the ancestral hall and watch, even though they were celebrating the birth of her son during the Lantern-lighting Festival. However, she told us, this ban was removed somewhere between 1993 and 1994 when a wave of feminism swept through Hong Kong and well-known figures came to their village to campaign for the rights of women. It was due to these pressures and greater changes occurring in Hong Kong at the time that the village leaders decided to allow Tang women into the ancestral hall. In fact, the security guard of the ancestral hall today, who has worked there for six years, is a woman. Nonetheless, when queried about this change, the men we interviewed at the Tang

community center reaffirmed that women still do not influence the decision-making process of their village and are not involved in its leadership.

Despite superficially adapting their tradition to the modern notion of gender equality, it is clear from the male response we received that the traditional Chinese misogynistic hierarchy still has a strong influence in LYT. Tradition, in this light, is not a static force, but a “creative force” that is constantly adapting to new circumstances. (Shanklin, 1985) Nonetheless, these adaptations do not necessarily represent an overnight transformation in traditional mentality and values.

### *Increasing government influence*

The most significant change in the physical structure of LYT in recent years is the renovations of the Tang Ancestral Hall and Tin Hau Temple, which were carried out by the government in efforts to promote the Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail as a site for tourism. According to the Antiquities and Monuments Office website,

A major restoration was carried out in 1991 with a generous donation from the Hong Kong Jockey Club together with a modest contribution from the Government. The project was completed in mid-1992 under the supervision of the Antiquities and Monuments Office and the Architectural Services Department. It was declared a monument in 1997.” (HK Antiquities and Monuments Office, 2004)

However, the renovations had a strong effect on tradition. Ancestral halls are usually only frequented by descendants of the same surname. According to Tang Kun Nin, an interviewee involved in local politics, the condition given by the government for carrying out the renovations of the temple and ancestral hall was that the structures must be made public after the renovations. Today, anyone can walk into the ancestral hall during their opening hours, removing previous traditional restrictions.

During our four ethnographic visits, we observed that the majority of people who visited the ancestral hall and temple were foreign tourists and hikers, both men and women. Only a handful of local residents entered the ancestral hall. The ones who did mostly went there to chat with an elderly Mr. Tang who serves as the caretaker of the ancestral hall. Of the local residents who went to chat with Mr. Tang, all were male and were part of Tang clan.

Modernization tends to come from “emergent and endogenous sources, or through contact with forces outside the system”. (Singh, 1988) These two factors can be observed through changes in the social structures and traditions. (Singh, 1988)

In this case, the government is a force outside the system that has brought about changes and modernization to the traditions surrounding the ancestral hall. Furthermore, the renovations can be taken as a symbol of government authority over LYT. Although



physically not present in LYT, the renovations and corresponding changes brought by it, act as a reminder of the modern social structure that includes the government in the hierarchy of authority.

However, this authority, although previously received and accepted, is now facing some challenges. Recently, the government has proposed to renovate the Sin Shut Study Hall in LYT with the same conditions. However, this time, the residents' committee objected to the proposal because they did not want the building to be made public.

This serves as a reminder that traditions are not static and are constantly being invented and changed to suit changing times. The changes can be due to both acceptance of authority and rejection of authority. Incorporating a new practice in the name of tradition can also make it easier for people to adapt to (Shanklin, 1985).

Places and memory are firmly linked. Thus, the discourse surrounding a social space acts as a vehicle "for transmitting cultural values and for maintaining cultural identity from one generation to the next." (Teather and Chow, 2003) Whether a social space is maintained or destroyed can affect the preservation of identity and memories that define a people, particularly certain significant social spaces, like an ancestral hall, that act as "storehouse of memory." (Hayden, 1995)

The government-sponsored renovations and the subsequent plaques displaying the detailed history of the Tang people served to strengthen the identity of the Tang people. While the Antiquities and Monuments Office may have been motivated to capture community and domestic life of the recent past through the renovations or strengthen the identity of Hong Kong people as a whole and reconnect Hong Kong's roots with China (Tether & Chow, 2003), a subsequent result of it was the strengthening of the Tang ethnic identity. Today, government-sponsored plaques and posters detailing the history of the different buildings in LYT as well as the history of the Tang people line the walls of the ancestral hall. This has enhanced the ancestral hall as a "storehouse of memory", extending these memories to the public.

In our interviews, we were quite surprised at how well the interviewees selected at random on the street were able to detail the history of their Tang ancestors. This may have been a result of them learning their own identity through the plaques and posters now on display.

### *Financial strength*

The changing financial status of the Tang clan in LYT has also affected their traditions. The increase in their standard of living is due to income received from the sale and rent of their corporate landholdings. This is partly the result of urbanization,

which attracted many residents away from their village for employment purposes. (Chan, 2011) In fact, we found that a large number of Tangs moved to Europe to seek employment. Many of them have returned to LYT for retirement, but their children, who continue to live abroad, still gain income by renting out their property in LYT. This urbanization has led to LYT becoming much more diverse in terms of ethnicity and surname, even though the Tang clan is still the majority.

The increased standard of living, or financial strength, of the Tang clan in LYT has led to a significant change in the practice of eating *pencai* (盆菜). As mentioned in the earlier section, men of the Tang clan of LYT would traditionally cook *pencai* together. However, in recent years, the tradition of cooking *pencai* has completely stopped and in fact, the kitchen in the ancestral hall where the dish is usually cooked is kept locked due to the lack of use. When we were allowed to visit, we noticed that everything in the kitchen was dusty and old. Instead of cooking *pencai*, the dish is bought from a specific catering company that specializes in making *pencai*. The owner of this catering company is a Tang from Ha Tsuen, one of the Tang kin villages.

The emic explanation for this change was that the *pencai* made by the caterer is tastier and it is more convenient. Yet, the etic explanation should definitely take the increase in the standard of living into account. *Pencai* dishes are seasonal dishes that are sold in restaurants around Hong Kong from time to time during various festivals and they are not cheap. It would have been more economical to cook the dish by themselves. Furthermore, by outsourcing the cooking of *pencai*, there is no way of assuring that a non-Tang male, or a female, is not involved in cooking the dish, which is the requirement of tradition. From the emic perspective, it is comforting for them that the owner of the catering company is from Ha Tsuen and is a Tang clan member. However, this does not mean that the catering company is bound to the traditions surrounding the making of *pencai*. Furthermore, the communal act of cooking *pencai* together, which served to strengthen social bonds, no longer exists.

Another tradition that may have been created due to their increased financial stability is the tradition of giving flower wreaths to the host village when LYT Tang Clan members visit their kin villages for various festivals. Some of the older interviewees mentioned that this tradition was not always there during their lifetime and began quite recently. Gifts are symbols of social exchange that can say a lot about the social structure of a community (Yan, 1996). Gifts can also transmit symbolic messages to both those who receive them and those who view the gift.

The flower wreaths are very public declarations of solidarity among the Tang villages and a show of their wealth and prosperity, since flower wreaths are not cheap. They could have written calligraphy with well-wishes instead of buying flowers if their intention was only to declare solidarity. The flower wreaths also bear the name “Lung

Yeuk Group” for all to see. In Watson’s (1996) study of the Jiao festival in Ha Tsuen, one of LYT’s kin villages, he mentions how they have turned the festival from its original intention of defining territory to a ritual presentation of their wealth and status. Although Watson’s findings may not directly reflect LYT, the fact is that Ha Tsuen and LYT are very close kin villages that interact with each other frequently. Perhaps some aspects of this parade of wealth are now reflected in LYT in the new tradition of exchanging flower wreaths as gifts to host villages within the Tang kin village network.

### **Village Administration and the Role of the Government**

There are two sets of rules for the administration of Lung Yeuk Tau. One is the management of the money; the other is the administration of daily routine.

As for the management of the money, we were told by the secretary of the Ancestral Hall Committee that the money of the village is managed by three Tai Gong (太公). The villagers elect the Tai Gong every four years. He told us that in the past, every villager has to raise money for Tai Gong for collective activities such as the *Jiao* Festival. But nowadays, they don’t need to raise funds any more. The Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau have a lot of village-owned land. The government had a policy to purchase some land from the indigenous people and Lung Yeuk Tau village got a big amount of financial compensation from selling its spare land to the government. Also, the village makes money by renting out its public housing. Therefore, the Tai Gongs are now rich enough to organize the public affairs of the village without fund-raising by the villagers. The money is mainly used for all kinds of festivals in the village. It should be clarified here that the “village” mentioned in this paragraph is narrowly defined. It only refers to the Tang people in Lung Yeuk Tau. Non-Tang people in this village do not have the privilege of enjoying these welfare benefits. But in the meantime, they are free of obligations when Tang people need to raise funds.

As for the administration of the village affairs, the rules change with time. At the very beginning, the village affairs were administrated under the authority of the elders of the Tang Clan. Later on, the Village Committee Representative System (村公所代表制) emerged, which means that villagers can elect their own representatives to be in charge of village affairs. This system is similar to the administrative system nowadays. In 1993, a new set of rules and regulations was published and became effective in the governance of the New Territories’ residents, which was referred to as the Elected Representation System (民選制度).

Since the election system has a lot to do with the definition of the indigenous people, the definition of “indigenous people” should be clarified. In 1899, Britain

occupied three fifths of the land in Xin'an County, Guangdong Province with the excuse of renting it. This piece of land was named "the New Territories" and was under the governance of the British Hong Kong Government. At that time, there were about ten thousand people living in the New Territories and they were named "indigenous people". The male descendants of the indigenous people also come under this definition and have the same privileges. The indigenous people can be divided to two: the Weitou people and the Hakka people (Yan, 2005).

The election of village representatives has always been tough since it is difficult to ensure the privilege of the indigenous people and at the same time guarantee equal rights for the non-indigenous residence. Policies have always been criticized and remedied. Today, the village representative elections in New Territories is a dual representative system (雙代表制度). There are two kinds of representatives, one is the indigenous residence representative and the other is the residence representative. As for the election of the indigenous representatives, only those indigenous villagers have the right to vote. For the election for the residence representative, all the residents within the village have the right to vote. Therefore, some people conclude that this system gives the indigenous people have two chances to vote while the non-indigenous people can only vote once.

As for the qualifications of the voters, there are some differences between the indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents. For the indigenous residents, all those who are above eighteen years old, regardless of their gender, can register to vote for both categories. For the non-indigenous residence, only those who are Hong Kong permanent residents and above eighteen years and have stayed in the relevant village for no less than three years can register to be voters.

As for the qualifications for the representative candidates, both indigenous and non-indigenous candidates need to be above twenty-one years old, registered as voters in the district and nominated by more than five registered voters in the district. In addition, the resident's representative candidates must have lived in the relevant village for more than six years.

The number of representatives in for each category is different. There is only resident's representative while the number of indigenous representatives corresponds to the population of the village. Take Lung Yeuk Tau as an example. This village has three indigenous representatives and one resident's representative. Both types of representatives are elected every four years. It is claimed by the government that both the indigenous representatives and the residence representatives have the same status and equal rights. They all serve as the connection between the government and the village. However, the government declared that only the indigenous representatives have the right to tackle issues among the indigenous peoples.

This system has been challenged many times by the non-indigenous residents in the New Territories for its inequality. But the government still maintains this system. This was explained by the government from two aspects. Firstly, the indigenous people need the right to vote for indigenous representatives to guarantee their identity as indigenous people, while at the same time, they need to vote for the residence representative to ensure their interest as a resident of the village is protected. Secondly, the non-indigenous people don't have the identity and rights that the indigenous people have. Therefore they shouldn't have the claim to vote for the indigenous representatives. (Guan, 2002) This dual-representative system has worked for more than ten years in the New Territories. Discussion about the system has never ceased. Whether it is legitimate and appropriate is still controversial. Undoubtedly, the system will become more and more democratic and equal in accordance with the times.

The government plays an important role in governing the indigenous people. They protect the rights for the indigenous people. New Territories Heung Yee Kuk (新界鄉議局) published an act in 1959 to fight for the rights for the indigenous people. The right of every descendant to a house in their indigenous village (丁屋) is just an example. Indigenous males who are eighteen years old have the right to apply for a house which is 700 feet in size and 25 feet in height.

The government also helps to protect and preserve the historical heritage of the villages. As for Lung Yeuk Tau, the repair and maintenance of Ancestral Hall and Tin Hau Temple is now in the charge of the government. Lung Yeuk Tau only needs to help keep the sites clean and tidy. However, this cooperation is based on the premise that the villagers agree to make these historical heritages a public tourist destination. The Shan Shu Study Hall (善述書室) in Lung Yeuk Tau is not financed and maintained by the government because the villagers have refused to open it to the public.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, Lung Yeuk Tau is both a traditional and modern village in which various social and political factors have contributed to forming its present complex picture. Although it is no longer as a village solely inhabited by Tang people, we can still observe how community identity affects the way Tang people perceive components of the village and their way of narrating the village's history. For the Tang people, communal activities and traditional festivals still serve an important role in the solidification of their collective identity, communal memory as well as enhancing inter-clan/village alliances in terms of the large-scale festivals. These traditional collective practices also act as the line of social exclusion or inclusion with

regards to the intra-village relations. Compared with the Tang people, both long-time Hakka residents and newcomers in LYT neither share such strong group identification nor enjoy the same level of collective social bonds. As a result, they more or less occupy a peripheral position in the village's social hierarchy.

The traditions of the Tang Clan have also undergone changes along with the process of modernization. Traditional rules have been loosened, as women in Tang family have attained a much higher status in terms of activities related to ancestral worship and traditional festivals. Market forces come into play as *pencai* is no longer cooked by clan members but purchased from outside restaurants (run by a member of Tang clan) for the convenience. However, traditional values and mentality still persists to some extent, as women are still not supposed to involve themselves too much in the village's administration and the same rule still applies today that only male babies have the legitimate right to attend the lantern-lighting festival and have their names acknowledged by the Tang ancestors. Related to the above is the rule that only male Tang members can acquire the rights to build a house on their ancestral land when they reach eighteen years old.

The government also affects the preservation or reconstruction of the traditions. On the one hand, LYT has been identified as an area of historical heritage. The government pays for the renovation and protection of the ancestral hall and Tinhau temple, and a "heritage trail" has been set up there for tourists to experience the history. The official attention also reinforces the Tang people's self-awareness as being one of the oldest clans with long history. On the other hand, the opening up of the ancestral hall, Tinhau temple and other old buildings to tourists not only disturbs the original lifestyle there, but also reifies the tradition as something already dead that needs to be enshrined and commemorated. However, we also see the forces of local agency as some of the villagers refused to open the study hall to tourists.

Tradition is not something fixed but should be regarded as organic part of the culture that is always in a state of change. LYT is no longer the self-enclosed, "traditional" community that it was centuries ago, nor has it been totally transformed into a modern suburban society. Various historical and social factors have contributed to the changes in tradition as is manifested in the case of LYT, which serves as a miniature of the larger picture of rural society in Hong Kong. As for the future trends of rural villages in Hong Kong, a more in-depth, critical examination of the interplay between social, political and economic factors is needed, as modernization continues to unfold onto new landscapes.

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