

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

WORKING PAPER SERIES

COSMOPOLITANISM, EDUCATIONAL, AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES

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2025

Volume 348

Volume Editors:

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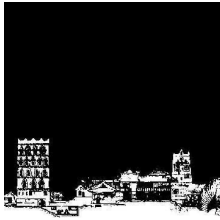
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COSMOPOLITANISM, EDUCATIONAL, AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES

Folk Museum: The Heritagization of Traditional Dwellings in Hong Kong, 1976-1997 <i>Yin-Tong Chen, Chang-Xue Shu</i>	1
Towards Social Cosmopolitanism: Wayfinding in an Inclusive Educational Environment for Children with Autism in South Australian Primary Schools <i>Farjana Rahaman, Md Mizanur Rashid, Katharine Bartsch</i>	25
Reimagining Museums: Decolonial Praxis in the Casa Grande del Pumarejo in Spain <i>Caroline Ramos dos Santos</i>	41

Traditional Dwellings and Settlements

Working Paper Series

FOLK MUSEUM: THE HERITAGIZATION OF TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS IN HONG KONG, 1976-1997

Yin-Tong Chen, Chang-Xue Shu

FOLK MUSEUM: THE HERITAGIZATION OF TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS IN HONG KONG, 1976-1997



The folk museum in Hong Kong—as both concept and practice—is part of a colonial effort at defining and packaging Chinese past. Following the establishment of Antiquities and Monuments Office in 1976, folk museum constitutes an institutional path to the heritagization of Chinese past, where the local traditional dwellings participated in framing the declaration of monuments towards the end of the colonial era in 1997. In the name of preserving objects of historical interests, there has been a spirit of pragmaticism throughout such processes under examination. Efforts were made to keep the evidence of Chinese architectural, agricultural and industrial traditions in situ. Surprisingly, the growing stress on integrity of different aspects of a heritage site was a result of the collaboration of stakeholders of increasing social complexity.

This paper demonstrates the multi-layered process of turning traditional dwellings into folk museums through a broader picture of global-local circumstances. According to our examination of the traditional dwellings in Hong Kong's heritage lists, such cases as Sheung Yiu Folk Museum and Sam Tung Uk Museum — discussed below as exemplars — were then carefully chosen in order to move the local heritage agenda. We illustrate the roles of varied stakeholders in the stretched interplay between preservation and urbanization, city fabric and rural lands, and colonialism and cosmopolitanism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Analyzing Hong Kong (HK)'s heritage lists issued between 1976 and 1997, 19 items of vernacular architecture were declared as monuments, 6 of which were traditional dwellings for ordinary Chinese. Among the earliest types listed, these traditional homes were transformed into folk museums and given a preservation priority that was only second to the archaeological sites listed at the same time. This indicates that an official process of acknowledging HK's past of Chinese culture had started in the 1970s at the latest, the late colonial period of HK. Folk museum — a new form of cultural practice in HK — participated in this process at a time when folk museum was not a mainstream subject in mainland China. Why did the conservation efforts in HK begin with traditional Chinese dwellings, and how were these dwellings converted into folk museums? Are they a result of transplanting European ideas of folk museums after WWII? We will examine Hong Kong's heritagization process to answer these uncharted questions.

The term "folk museum" originated in 19th century Europe, with its theoretical foundations rooted in folklife research and regional ethnology¹. This concept was influenced by the Victorian-era British museum model and aimed to showcase the customs, beliefs, and cultural lives of ordinary people, reflecting anthropological characteristics². In 1872, Artur Hazelius established the first ethnographic museum in Sweden. He later founded the open-air Skansen Museum (1891), which recreated authentic life scenes with the aim of preserving folk culture, including but not limited to traditional buildings and handicrafts. This marks the initial materialization of the folk museum. In Western academia, folk museums are widely recognized as spaces for exhibiting aspects of folk lives but also institutions that recreate traditional cultures and lifestyles, often under the context of modern industrialization. They serve purposes of education, providing a vital platform for preservation and display of folk cultures³.

In some Asian countries with colonial pasts, such as India and Indonesia, the "Cultural Village Museums" in Indonesia and the "Folk and Tribal Museums" in India have been well recorded. Scholars have often related such Asian folk museums to the European prototype of open-air museum (or outdoor museum), showing that the European ideas of folk museum have influenced the way Asian people appreciated their own pasts. Similar to their European counterparts, such Asian museums also incorporate ethnographic research narratives, showcasing different lifestyles, belief systems, and social structures of local communities through architecture, artistic performances, and the display of handicrafts.⁴ While exhibiting cultural diversity, these Asian folk museums also fulfill the political functions of reducing ethnic tensions and promoting national identity in the climate of decolonization. Comparably, HK's folk museums in question served the initiative of curating the Chinese past as a political discourse of the colonial government in an era of rising postcolonialism.

In republican China (1912-1949), forerunners of folk studies were three academic associations established in Peking University in the 1920s, respectively the associations on Folklore (歌謠研究會), Folk Culture (風俗調查會) and Vernacular Language (方言調查會), along with the Association of Archaeology (考古學會).⁵ They each had exhibition rooms of the material culture without the name of folk museum. From the late 1970s onwards, discussions about folk museum arose significantly, following the state's Reform and

Opening-Up policy. In 1980, Mu Xuan — a self-taught folklorist during the Mao era — proposed to build a folk museum dedicated to the folk studies. The republican-era ideas of using folk museums as institutions for collecting, studying, and showcasing the Chinese folk cultures of specific regions continued in the 1980s.⁶ It is still unknown whether or not there was intellectual exchange on the theme of folk museum between HK and mainland China.

2. RECONSIDERING FOLK MUSEUM AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HERITAGIZATION

Despite the widespread establishment of folk museums in both government and community settings, the fields of heritage conservation and museology has largely overlooked the roles played by folk museum in colonial HK. Existing studies have mostly focused on the development of historic building conservation in HK, examining aspects such as policies and institutional frameworks.⁷ These studies often emphasize the tensions and reconciliations between different demands from the society and heritage conservation.⁸ In contrast, research on traditional dwellings has primarily addressed their challenges and the balance between conservation and development, without thoroughly investigating into the sources and mechanisms of the colonial government. the benefits of converting heritage buildings into museums have also been discussed in terms of adaptive reuse and urban sustainability.⁹ These studies typically regard museumization as a crucial approach to heritage conservation¹⁰, suggesting that museums can aid in sustainable urban development. However, previous authors often overlook the fundamental motivations and consequences of transforming traditional Chinese dwellings into folk museums. Specifically, the roles of various stakeholders in this process, along with their interrelationships, remain underexplored. Consequently, the role of folk museums in HK's heritagization process has yet to be fully examined.

In a bigger picture, Western academia has concentrated on the study of folk museums since the mid-20th century, initially focusing on innovations in museum definitions and exhibition methods¹¹. Recently, the emphasis has shifted toward digital technology and public engagement¹². Chinese scholars of folk museum studies, on the other hand, have been discussing the construction, design, and cultural continuity since the 1980s.¹³ They mainly addresses the emergence, development, and internal spatial design of folklore

museums, as well as the identity construction they facilitate¹⁴. These corpuses of work are also disconnected to the process of transforming objects, places and practices into cultural heritage (resources) in HK.

We thus consider the issue of folk museum not only an approach of preserving certain elements of the past and constructing local identity, but also an integral part of the heritagization process in HK in the period of 1976-1997. We have examined original files from governmental archives, including policy papers, meeting minutes, departmental correspondence, and memos. This examination reveals decision-making discussions, interdepartmental collaboration networks, and the evolution of policy revisions. These archives not only reflect the colonial government's policy priorities but also offer valuable insights into the motivations and ways of working in creating folk museums in HK.

3. THE INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE IN FAVOR OF CONSERVATION

Our study shows that the resurgence of local culture in HK and the establishment of heritage conservation are closely related. Preservation is a result from a growing awareness of Chinese culture from both Chinese and foreigner communities. The 1955 archaeological discovery of the Eastern Han tomb at Lee Cheng Uk marks a milestone of cultural event in post-war HK. This ignited broader academic interest in researching HK's past, leading to the proposal of the Antiquities and Monuments Bill in 1957. The bill, however, was shelved due to the political climate at the time.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the wars and political turmoil in the first half of the 20th century drove many intellectuals migrating to HK, bringing a wealth of scholarly resources. The founding of the Chinese University of HK in 1963 exemplifies this phenomenon. On the other hand, the 1967 leftist anti-colonial riots in HK triggered the trajectory of cultural conservation. In response to the political-social unrest, the colonial government, then under the impact of the Labour Party in London, had to take a new, societal-based strategy to stabilize the Chinese society. Constructing local welfare was part of the agenda. These included building a collective identity for "Hong Kong people" through narratives fostering a sense and

consciousness of local belonging and local culture unique to HK.¹⁶ Once the unrest subsided, the government promoted local culture resources and historical education¹⁷, which led to the initiative of drafting an ordinance for “the preservation of objects of historical, archaeological and palaeontological interest”.¹⁸

In Europe and North America, there was a surge in studying vernacular architecture from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Structures of vernacular architecture began to be viewed as "living heritage" and were often converted into museums. This architectural trend, combined with the influence of socialist movements in Britain during that time, reached HK. The appointment of Governor Murray MacLehose in 1971 marked a crucial turning point in HK's cultural policies. Inspired by the British Labour Party's social welfare and cultural development, MacLehose's administration aimed to enhance governance by promoting local culture.

From the late 1960s, a group of British elites began to investigate into local indigenous customs in HK. The Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch (RASHK) and its associated activities played a significant role in rediscovering local histories and promoting cultural awareness in HK. The society was originally founded in 1847 by colonial officials and foreign scholars who were dedicated to researching local history. Although it was dissolved in 1859 due to a lack of resources, it was re-established in 1959 with a focus on cultural and historical studies of China and Asia, particularly emphasizing the past of HK.¹⁹ Although the society does not directly participate in government decision-making, many of its members engaged with the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB, 1977), the consulting body for heritage, and Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO, 1976), the executive body of conservation.²⁰

In 1961, the society began publishing the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch," which has become an essential platform for research on HK's history and contemporary Chinese history. The journal addresses various facets of Chinese culture, including traditional theater, festive customs, Chinese calendar, and religious beliefs, along with socio-economic themes such as HK's local history, agricultural history, and housing development. The journal also published extensive studies on the history of the New

Territories, clan relationships, and Hakka culture, providing a base for the later preservation of Hakka villages.²¹ Authors, both foreigners and Chinese included, also examined the diversity of traditional Chinese architecture, historical structures like the walled villages of the New Territories and ancestral halls, and the origins, ownership, and social functions of temple architecture.²² Furthermore, the journal published evolution of historical sites in detail, including our case Sam Tung Uk.²³ The intellectual sphere of and around RASHK has formed a foundation stone of the official declaration of monuments and sites in HK. Vernacular architecture in particular became a valuable reference in the discussions among Westerners in HK.

4. THE ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

The aforesaid activities influenced the government's decisions in the matters of preservation. HK's administrative structure developed to provide essential institutional support for that. Between 1976 and 1997, the HK government underwent a series of adjustments and reforms. The *Macpherson Report* prompted changes within the administrative framework, enhancing the role of the Government Secretariat in policy formulation and resource allocation.²⁴ The introduction of the District Advisory System and the establishment of the District Board in 1982 created important platforms for resident participation in cultural heritage conservation.²⁵ Additionally, the Urban Council, established in 1936, and the Regional Council, established in 1986, clarified management responsibilities for cultural and recreational affairs in HK Island and Kowloon. These councils became key administrators of such institutions as the folk museums in New Territories.²⁶

The Government Secretariat was reorganized to support the establishment of the Regional Council, leading to the creation of a new position: Municipal Services Branch. This role was tasked with overseeing matters related to antiques and heritage sites. Additionally, the Urban Services Department was renamed the Urban Services Authority. In 1989, the government established the Culture and Recreation Branch to enhance communication between the British government and the two municipal councils. This department also developed policies for cultural and recreational activities. After the handover of HK in 1997, the

Home Affairs Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department took over the decision-making and implementation roles for heritage, thereby streamlining the management process.

The aforementioned AMO had a primary duty of implementing the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. This covered daily protection of monuments and sites, assessing their conditions, as well as conducting emergency excavations at archaeological sites at risk.²⁷ The AMO operates under the guidance of the aforesaid AAB; the latter should offer advice to government agencies in the formal declaration process for statutory monuments. Together, the AAB, AMO, and the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance have been the three pillars in the heritagization process in the 1980s and 1990s, still forming the conservation framework today.

The intellectual, political-social, and administrative environments facilitated the declaration of traditional dwellings as statutory heritage. In the process of transforming the Chinese homes into folk museums, the colonial administrative bodies acted as key stakeholders and played a crucial role in policy making, coordination of institutions and resources, and the overall strategy of preservation.

5. TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS: THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The establishment of the AAB and AMO in 1976 should be considered as a response to the pressing need in a context of increasingly rapid urbanization. In the 1960s, urban development of HK already resulted in the demolition of numerous historic buildings, raising widespread concern among various social sectors. In response, the colonial government passed the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance in 1971.

Unfortunately, without a dedicated implementation body, the ordinance was unable to achieve its intended impact. It was only with the establishment of the AAB and AMO in 1976 that a necessary institutional framework and organizational support for heritage conservation were finally created.

During the 1970s and 1980s, urbanization speeded up in HK, with population growth and economic development leading to the saturation of urban areas in Kowloon and HK Island. In response, the colonial government implemented the New Towns Development Program, expanding into the New Territories by

developing areas such as Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun, and Sha Tin into industrial hubs²⁸. However, this rapid development accelerated the disappearance of traditional settlements and led to the demolition or transformation of numerous historical buildings during redevelopment. As a result, heritage conservation became a growing public concern.²⁹

Prior to 1980, AMO primarily focused on archaeological sites and movable artifacts. This is a result of the complex tensions between private property rights and opposition from certain government departments and real estate developers, who contended that conservation efforts would impede urban development.³⁰ A turning point occurred in 1980 when the government, drawing on British experience, introduced a grading system for monuments.³¹ Although this grading system lacked statutory authority and functioned merely as a set of guidelines,³² it established an essential foundation for later initiatives. Between 1987 and 1992, under the active promotion of then-Governor David Wilson, heritage conservation in HK gained substantial momentum, resulting in notable advancements in the preservation of traditional dwellings.

It suffices to say that HK's heritage conservation is distinctly a crisis-driven approach. This has become even more evident since the 1980s, when the speeded urbanization highlighted the tension between urbanized and rural areas. Large-scale projects, such as subways and highways, progressed, causing frequent conflicts over land acquisition. These conflicts inadvertently led to significant conservation of some traditional dwellings, such as Sam Tung Uk in Tsuen Wan and Law Uk in Chai Wan. In this context, government agencies emerged as key stakeholders, taking a leading role in the conservation process and developing standardized operational procedures. This involved initiating formal assessments, implementing emergency protections to ensure the preservation of historical buildings, and ultimately transforming these structures into folk museums by adaptive reuse.

A milestone was the establishment of the Ethnography Gallery at the HK Museum of History in 1975, which represented an initial response to European ethnographic methodologies. This gallery focused on collecting and documenting folk songs, festivals, clan rituals, and the daily lives of such local minorities as Tanka people.³³ However, this early practice presented a fragmented view of local culture.

A further, significant change occurred with the opening of the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum in 1984. This museum utilized an entire Hakka village as its medium, creating an "authentic environment" by restoring traditional homes, farming tools, and furniture. Its goal was to simulate the "vanished rural life".³⁴ This approach closely resembled the European concept of folk museums, primarily featuring agricultural tools and household items that reflected the everyday lives of ordinary people. The museum architecture per se served as "built evidence" of the material culture of Chinese agricultural civilization. Unlike the previous model exemplified by the Museum of History, Sheung Yiu Folk Museum moved towards a more holistic approach by preserving the whole working and living conditions of that Hakka village. This approach not only focused on conserving the physical structures but also emphasized their integration into recreated living environments, embodying the concept of integrity in heritage conservation. This transformation highlighted the government's gradual shift from merely protecting individual artifacts to embracing the comprehensive preservation of heritage. It demonstrated a growing awareness of presenting heritage within its broader social, historical, and environmental context, presaging the later development of intangible heritage. Above all, despite the updates of heritage policies, it deserves to note that important urban development plans were never impeded by concerns over so-called "less-significant" heritage sites.³⁵

6. FOLK MUSEUM AS A WAY OF PRESERVATION?

The *fait accompli* of transforming urban development crises into opportunities of adaptive reuse of monuments is a result of the interplay of economic forces, administrative efforts, and intellectual conditions in HK. It highlights a strategy of pragmatism in balancing preservation and development, given limited land resources. This approach has led to the standardization of protection, enabling various historical buildings to be systematically listed as monuments. As a result, HK has developed a distinctive mode that is development-oriented preservation, or a preservation-in-development mode. Still today, despite the establishment of a heritage conservation system, there is no single agency fully responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of monuments. Instead, the required cooperation of conservation are divided among multiple government departments and agencies.

Below we use Sam Tung Uk Museum and Sheung Yiu Folk Museum to elaborate the problems. Sam Tung Uk Museum is a typical model for preserving rural heritage amidst the development of new towns in HK. It exhibits a significant "crisis-driven" context. Its protection was prompted by land acquisition conflicts during the construction of the Tsuen Wan new town in the 1980s, ultimately resulting in a successful transformation into a folk museum through government-led preservation and adaptive reuse. This case, moreover, highlights the role of government agencies in standardizing the processes of heritage conservation. In contrast, the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum, due to its remote location and long-term vacancy, has been able to evade the impacts of urban development, thereby preserving a more pristine environmental character. Even today, it remains situated within the boundaries of a country park. This case stands in stark contrast to others, such as Sam Tung Uk Village, Law Uk, the Old House in Wong Uk Village, and the Old House in Hoi Pa Village, which were all challenged by urbanization. Together, they underscore the diverse strategies employed in HK.



Fig. 1 The mentioned traditional dwellings turned into folk museums (Source map: HK Historic Maps, 1987)

Case 1: Sam Tung Uk 三棟屋 Museum

Sam Tung Uk is HK's first traditional dwelling listed as monument. Its preservation illustrates the common characteristics of heritage conservation that often arise from land acquisition conflicts during urban development. This case showcases many features typically seen in similar situations. The process not only highlights the balance and compromises between urban development and heritage preservation but also reflects the government's evolving philosophy on heritage conservation and the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders.



Fig. 2 Sam Tung Uk Museum (Source: Antiquities and Monuments Office, n.d.-b)

Sam Tung Uk Village, situated on higher ground along Castle Peak Road in Tsuen Wan, is a small walled village that dates back to the 18th century. It has been historically inhabited by the Chan family for generations. The village features three rows of approximately 30 residential units and a central ancestral hall. Despite undergoing significant changes over time, it has largely retained its original layout, making it a quintessential example of traditional rural settlements in HK. The preservation of Sam Tung Uk Village began in the 1970s due to the threat of demolition from new town developments and MTR construction

projects. In 1973, the Land Development Policy Committee first proposed its conservation. Then, in 1977, the AAB capitalized on the village's vacancy to advocate for its designation as a declared monument³⁶. Although there was some debate over the potential conversion of the village into a museum, the government ultimately decided to preserve it, emphasizing its strategic location and the cultural needs of the region. In 1981, the government acquired the site and initiated restoration work following the completion of the MTR project. By 1987, Sam Tung Uk Village was officially transformed into a folk museum.

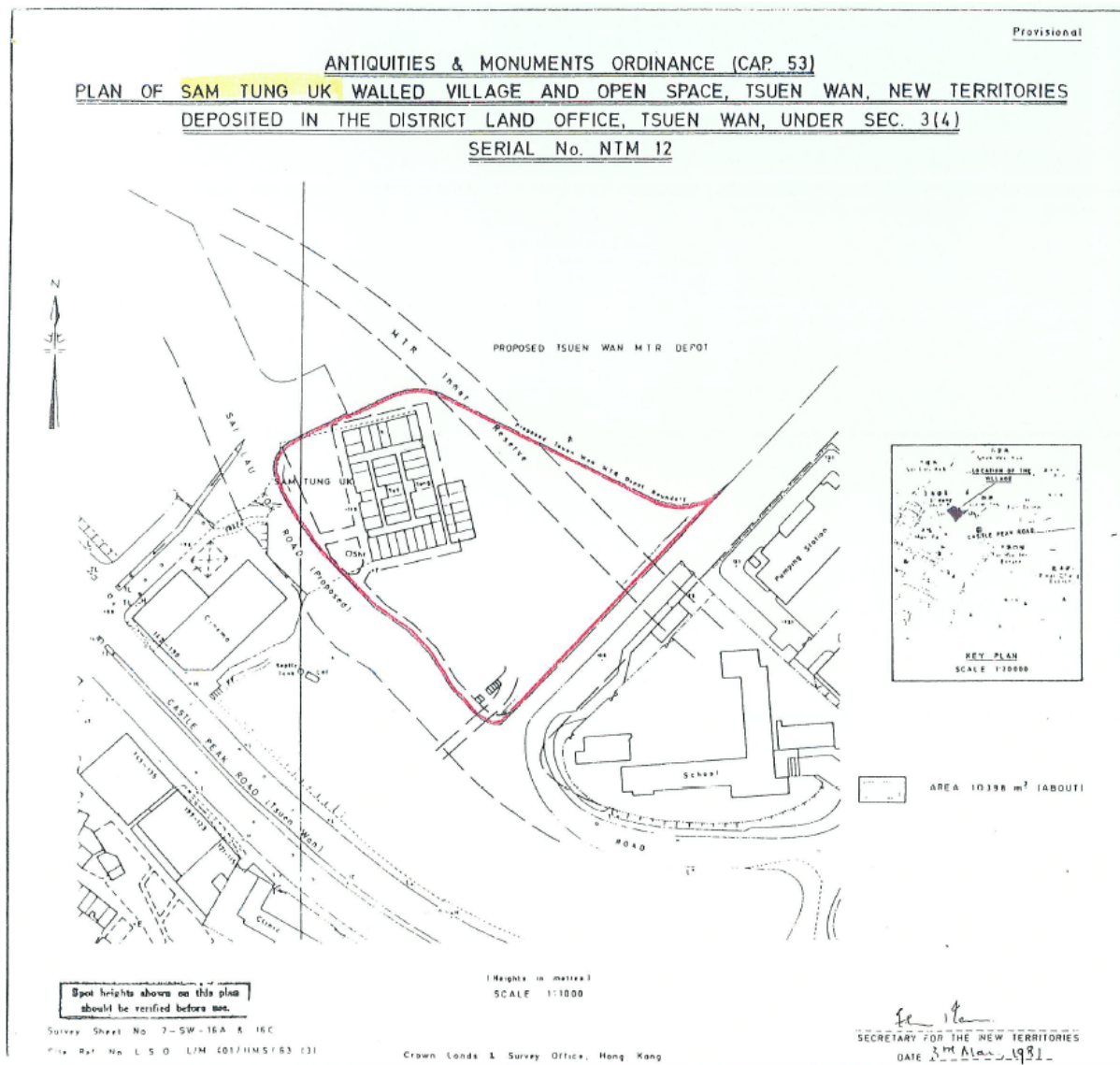


Fig. 3 Site plan in AMO Document in 1981 (Source: Antiquities and Monuments Office, 1981b)

The heritagization process of Sam Tung Uk illustrates the balance and compromises between the needs for development and the preservation of heritage. In 1979, during the construction of the MTR, some buildings were demolished. Although the villagers proposed retaining the internal alleyways to maintain the village's original character, the government chose reconstruction as an alternative. This decision reflects the government's pragmatic approach to heritage preservation at that time, prioritizing urban development while attempting to retain the core values of historic structures where possible³⁷. The scope of preservation also sparked debate. Initially, the plan was to conserve only the original three rows of buildings dating back to 1786. However, the Tsuen Wan District Office strongly advocated for the inclusion of the rear row, open spaces, and the ancestral hall, arguing that these elements were crucial to the village's integrity and would enhance the functionality of the future museum³⁸. This proposal ultimately garnered the support of the Urban Services Department, resulting in one of the few examples of holistic preservation in HK's early heritage conservation efforts³⁹.

The collaboration among various stakeholders gradually developed throughout this process. Key decision-making was primarily conducted by the New Territories Administration and the Tsuen Wan District Office. The New Territories Administration issued land-use permits to prevent demolition, while the Tsuen Wan District Office coordinated negotiations with villagers regarding their relocation. They also worked with the Urban Services Department on the monument application, provided the AAB with structural assessments, financial evaluations, and development proposals, and finalized the adaptive reuse plan^{40 41 42}. Additionally, the District Council and its predecessor, the Tsuen Wan District Advisory Board, played a significant role in the preservation efforts. They provided financial support and gathered public opinions on the potential future use of the building. The Urban Services Department acted as a central coordinator, collaborating closely with the Tsuen Wan District Office to implement the preservation plan. This included defining the boundaries of protection and granting the AMO the authority to oversee management. Following the establishment of the Regional Council in 1985, management of the Sam Tung Uk Museum was transferred to this council. Its Museum Selection Committee was responsible for exhibition planning and artifact collection, ensuring the long-term operation and preservation of the site.

Sam Tung Uk has been successfully repurposed as a folk museum, preserving its historical significance while introducing new social functions. The museum highlights the village's history and restoration process through photographs, texts, and artifacts, providing insight into traditional Hakka lifestyles. The Heng Hau Exhibition Hall previously hosted exhibitions focused on local folk festivals, while the rear exhibition hall, in collaboration with the Urban Council, showcased the "Qing Dynasty Family Life" exhibition. This exhibit featured export paintings, ceramics, textiles, clothing, and crafts that illustrated domestic life during the Qing Dynasty⁴³. Since 2016, the Sam Tung Uk Museum has been redefined as a venue for exhibiting and educating the public about HK's intangible cultural heritage (ICH). This aims to enhance public awareness and understanding of ICH. This transformation reflects the government's recognition of the link between the term "folk" and intangible cultural heritage. The museum's reconfiguration represents a continuation and evolution of the original "folk museum" concept.

The significance of this case lies in its exemplary nature as HK's first heritage conservation project involving a traditional residential dwelling. The Sam Tung Uk Museum shares notable similarities with other conservation efforts. Throughout the preservation process, the emphasis was placed on its "age value," and the collaborative model between the government, as the key stakeholder, and various departments was effectively demonstrated. The preservation pathway of "rescue–restoration–museumization" established a standardized process that serves as a critical reference point for subsequent projects, including the establishment of the Law Uk Folk Museum and other conservation initiatives, such as the Old House in Wong Uk Village and the Old House in Hoi Pa Village.

Case 2: Sheung Yiu 上窰 Folk Museum

Unlike Sam Tung Uk Village, which was preserved due to the pressures of urban development, the conservation of Sheung Yiu Village is largely the result of "passive preservation," owing to its remote location. Established over 200 years ago by the Hakka Wong family on the eastern shore of the Shing Mun River estuary within Sai Kung Country Park, the village initially thrived through brick and lime production using kilns. However, with the advent of cement and rising competition from other industries, kiln production gradually declined, leading to nearly 20 years of abandonment and severe deterioration of the

village's buildings. Despite the extensive damage caused by this prolonged vacancy, Sheung Yiu Village embodies typical features of traditional Chinese rural dwellings. It offers valuable insights into village life, family structures, and the Feng Shui-inspired layout of rural settlements⁴⁴.



Fig. 4 Sheung Yiu Folk Museum (Source: Information Services Department, 1989)

The preservation efforts for Sheung Yiu Village began in 1978 when the government commissioned the University of HK to conduct a survey study of rural Chinese architecture in New Territories. This study provided support for the Antiquities and Monuments Section within the Urban Services Department⁴⁵. In the same year, the AAB recommended that the village be designated as a declared monument. However, due to delays related to land classification, it was not officially declared as a monument until November 1981. The declaration of the housing complex rested on all the evidence of the ceramics industry run by the owner of this dwelling complex, including the production of local bricks, tiles, and lime. In 1984, the village was converted into a museum showcasing Chinese rural life, becoming the first museum of its kind in HK.

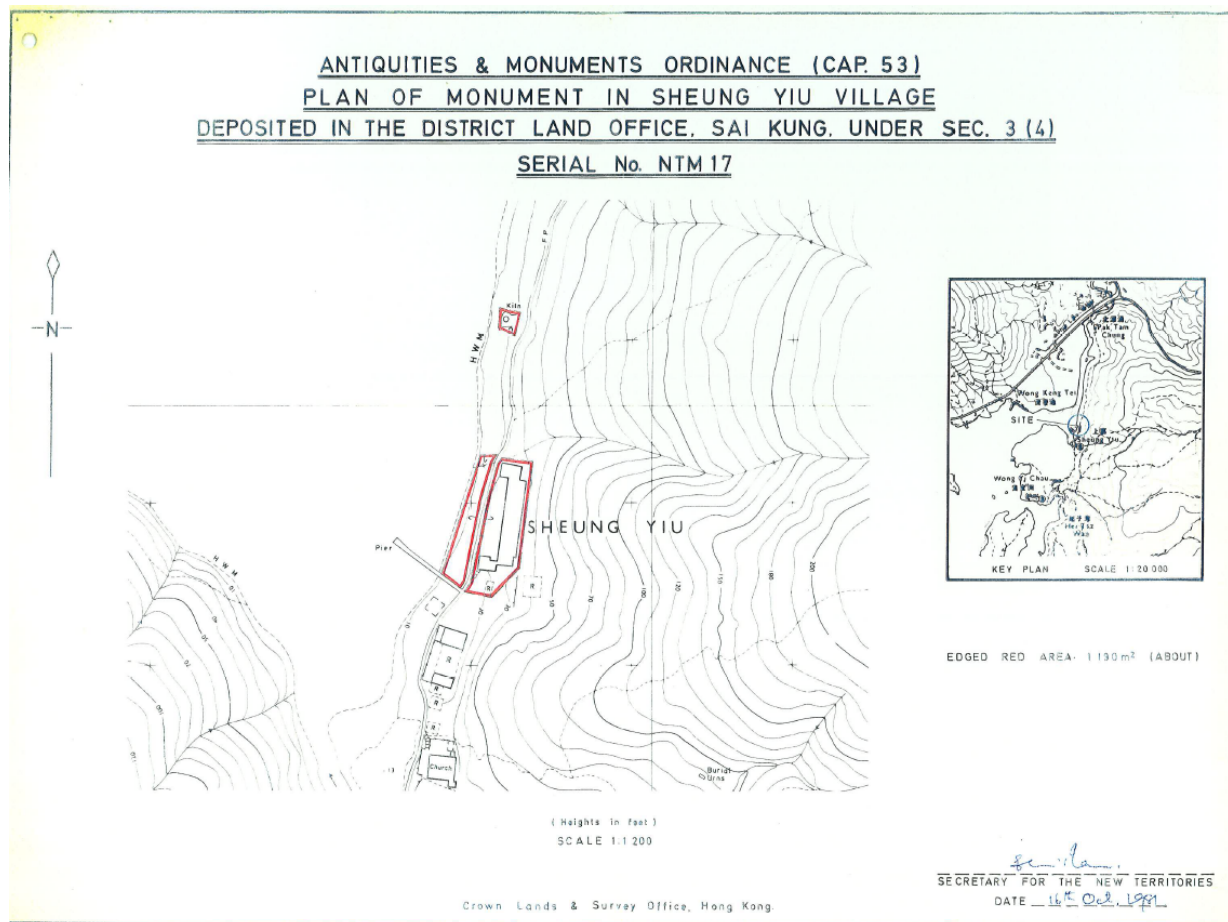


Fig. 5 Site plan in AMO Document (Source: Antiquities and Monuments Office, 1981a)

The government's initial motivation was to establish the village as a small folk museum. Additionally, the nearby Po Leung Kuk Youth Hostel could provide educational opportunities for young people. During the preservation process, the New Territories Administration took the lead in creating the legal framework and implementing conservation efforts. The Sai Kung District Office served as the primary executing unit, facilitating the village's designation as a statutory monument. They conducted surveys, monitored building conditions, and managed land acquisition, funding, and progress reports⁴⁶. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, along with the Country Parks Authority, was also involved. The former was responsible for funding decisions and assessing restoration and maintenance costs, and it collaborated with the AMO on the village's restoration, the construction of the folk museum, the protection of historical and cultural buildings, and the provision of educational and recreational services⁴⁷. The Country Parks

Authority focused on restoration, maintenance, and daily operations while working to promote the village and attract more visitors⁴⁸. Notably, Sheung Yiu Village is unique among the three cases because it involved a charitable organization: the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. Their donations not only supported conservation and museum construction but also helped establish the Pak Tam Chung Nature Education Trail, reflecting an early integration of heritage preservation and public health initiatives.

The exhibits at the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum primarily come from donations made by local villagers, which include agricultural tools, furniture, and crockery. Among these items, the most valuable is a traditional Hakka wedding cage. The museum vividly recreates the everyday life of a 19th-century Hakka rural community, featuring facilities such as a kitchen stove and livestock pens, all reconstructed using traditional methods and old blue bricks. This strong connection with the community has established the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum as not only a site for preserving cultural heritage but also as a bridge between the past and the present.

Although the preservation efforts for Sheung Yiu Village did not face the same pressures as Sam Tung Uk Village, its remote geographical location and prolonged vacancy created favorable conditions for maintaining its traditional village layout. Additionally, its relatively straightforward property ownership structure allowed the government to acquire the land more quickly than at Sam Tung Uk, facilitating its transformation into a folk museum ahead of the others. This case not only stands as one of the earliest successful examples in HK of converting traditional dwellings into folk museums but also serves as an important reference for establishing the subsequent two folk museums.

The folk museum serves as an institutional framework for cultural preservation and exhibits, reconstructing historical scenes through the methods of static preservation and adaptive reuse. This model, currently the leading approach to safeguarding vernacular architecture, is based on the practices of the open-air museum movement that emerged in Europe during the 1950s. However, contemporary preservation methods in HK are often criticized as a form of "freezing," where adaptive reuse is utilized to maintain past cultural settings. This raises an important question: Is the folk museum model, as the dominant method for

protecting vernacular architecture today, truly the only effective way to safeguard these cultural assets? While open-air folk museums were widely established in Europe during the 1950s, are there alternative strategies available today that could also effectively protect vernacular architecture?

7. CONCLUSION

From the early 1950s to the 1980s, the official attention in declaring monuments has gradually shifted from archaeological discoveries to historical buildings of the Chinese past. This movement should not be considered as a result of changing ideas or ideology in the heritagization under examination. Rather, it resulted from the strategic role AMO skillfully played in the tensions between the demand for urbanization, property rights, and intellectual interests of the HK citizens. Most historical buildings were privately owned, and owners often opposed to having them listed as monuments. Therefore, AMO prioritized natural and archaeological sites in the early stage of declaration of monuments. After consulting with the relevant property rights holders for several years, the ownership of these lands was eventually transferred back to the government. Thanks to this progress, AMO was able to add three traditional Chinese dwellings into the protection registry. Compared to the more ideologically driven approaches in France and mainland China, HK's heritage conservation practice has, in essence, been shaped by the local emphasis on economic development and profitability. This pragmatic approach has — if not prioritized — placed emphasis on the needs of economic and industrial development, striking a balance between economy and the intended construction of local, cultural identity. The local popularization of the Western ideas of “monument” and “folk museum”, in fact, represents a colonial struggle and strategy of re-discovering and re-defining the Chinese past. It is also a process of reusing historical assets and cultural resources in HK. This realistic and pragmatic attitude towards heritage has characterized the conservation practices of HK even down to the present day.

In the examined period of 1976-1997, little had been discussed regarding international theories of conservation of immovable heritage, nor the methodology; this is also the situation today. The material culture exhibited in the folk museums, though connected to the colonial initiative of better governing and

the aim of constructing a local identity, in effect failed in illustrating distinctive features of the localness of HK. The reductionist and pragmatists manner of mobilizing traditional dwellings as material resources for promoting the contemporary agenda, either politically or socially, has yet to be changed into a more scientific and holistic manner of appreciating the material evidence of all sorts of layers of the past, prior to any aggressive intervention, restoration or reuse.

The official heritage conservation system, which essentially consists of the Ordinance, the ABC and AMO, is a result of reacting to different political-social dynamics; they still serve the administrative infrastructure of cultural heritage in HK today. Besides these three pillars, the Urban Council and Regional Council also played a crucial role in advocating local interests. From 1973 to 1981, Arnaldo de Oliveira Sales (1920-2020), then the first unofficial chairman of the Urban Council, devoted himself to promoting HK's culture and directed the council's cultural development. Under his leadership, the Urban Council prioritized enriching citizens' cultural lives, establishing institutions such as the HK Museum of History and the HK Heritage Museum to showcase and promote HK's unique cultural features⁴⁹. The Urban Council actively supported establishing and growing folk museums.

In 2008, the government introduced the "Revitalizing Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme", emphasizing adaptive reuse with the new establishment of the Commissioner for Heritage's Office (CHO) besides AMO. This aims to resolve the tensions between the government and society arising from the demands of economic governance. The scheme encourages "NPOs" (non-governmental and non-profit organizations) to operate historical buildings in the form of social enterprises, adopting new modes of conservation and utilization⁵⁰. We consider this recent administrative action a continuous step of the said pragmatist approach in HK in terms of cultural conservation. In HK, Meanwhile, traditional dwellings are continuously in degradation especially in countryside areas of HK in the heritagization processes.

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