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# The making of rurality in Hong Kong : villagers' changing perception of rural space

Chun On LAI

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THE MAKING OF RURALITY IN HONG KONG:  
VILLAGERS' CHANGING PERCEPTION OF RURAL SPACE

LAI CHUN ON

MPHIL

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

2015

THE MAKING OF RURALITY IN HONG KONG:  
VILLAGERS' CHANGING PERCEPTION OF RURAL SPACE

by  
LAI Chun On

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences  
(Sociology)

Lingnan University

2015

## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Making of Rurality in Hong Kong: Villagers' Changing Perception of Rural Space**

by

LAI Chun On

Master of Philosophy

The study focus on the ongoing disputes over rural development bring to the fore the competing paradigms and representations of rurality on the part of different rural stakeholders in the New Territories. This study attempt to debunk the conventional image of the rural as a natural, homogenous locality pitted against the urban way of life. Drawing from the qualitative study of twenty-five people who live or often participate in rural activities, the New Territories was an actual space with three co-existing mindsets from three modes of social organization: agricultural, capitalist, post-industrial. These three co-existing mindsets are normally found in many societies experiencing unprecedented rapid social and economic development with rich theoretical and empirical support in global academic research. However, existing academic research in Hong Kong seldom explores the competing images of the rural that may exist amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories. Thus, this study will be marking a useful contribution by examining the construction of rurality in Hong Kong.

This study provides a new perspective that ascribed status of indigenous residents, which is unique in Hong Kong contextual background, is an important parameter in constructing individual perception of rurality. The ascribed indigenous identity solidified by blood, history and laws that act like special castes to differentiate Hong Kong people either indigenous or non-indigenous. The presence of ascribed indigenous status as a new parameter easily explains the complexity of individual perception of rurality amongst different rural stakeholders. This study will attempt to

connect up the ascribed status of indigenous residents with the three co-existing mindsets based on the modes of social organizations, so as deepen our understanding of the uniqueness of rurality in the Hong Kong context.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.



---

Lai Chun On

Date

11<sup>th</sup> March 2016

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS


THE MAKING OF RURALITY IN HONG KONG:  
VILLAGERS' CHANGING PERCEPTION OF RURAL SPACE


by

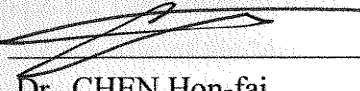
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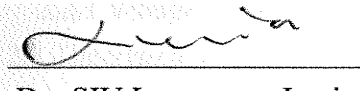
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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Background of the New Territories of Hong Kong**

The invention of the New Territories falls on the British colonial government which expanded the northern boundary from Kowloon Peninsula to the Shenzhen River in the late 1890s. When the British and Chinese governments signed the lease jointly in 1898, the New Territories became a part of colonial Hong Kong until 1997. The New Territories was originally a part of San On County during Qing dynasty and it was largely an agricultural area with residents living upon farmsteads for generations.

Throughout the over 150 years of British rule and 16 years under the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government, Hong Kong's social and urban development has mainly concentrated along both sides of Victoria Harbour. The two sides of Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula, were colonized by the British before the lease of the New Territories and underwent development. Since Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula became predominantly urban regions, the New Territories were once commonly a residual area left over from social and political development as well as a rural area comprising of huge agricultural area and thousands of villages.

The early colonial government was to keep the New Territories as undisturbed as possible which preserve the primitive of rural landscape, community and lifestyle until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The New Territories has experiences unprecedented social and economic development social and economic development due to the urban sprawl and has grown from mainly agricultural area to new towns and major

infrastructure projects. Apart from new towns in the New Territories, the remaining New Territories is still experiencing the competition of land uses in the form of the sprawl of 3-storey village houses, different types of industrial establishments, containers and port back-up yards, recreation, tourisms, and other uses encroaching on farmland.

Even though the New Territories is experiencing urbanization, there are still many villages scattered in the whole New Territories. The villagers whose paternal ancestors lived in the New Territories prior to 1898 are known as indigenous residents. In order to smoothen the governance in the New Territories, the government grants the legitimacy of indigenous residents' traditional right, which is unique in Hong Kong contextual background. The government provided privilege by specific laws, protection of cultural heritage, economic land rights, and village house entitlement to indigenous residents. Moreover, rural political organization, namely Heung Yee Kuk, has been evolving and become the extraordinary infrastructures in Hong Kong rural politics since colonial rule. Heung Yee Kuk acted as a representative for protecting indigenous residents' vested interests that lead to the hegemonic character of the rural concept.

Meanwhile, starting from 2000s, rural issues have made headlines in the news and have increased public concerns for the New Territories. There are a significant number of disputes on rural land use strategy (i.e., development and conservation) in Hong Kong. The existing rural infrastructures and special privileges for the indigenous residents are colonial legacies that attribute the uniqueness of the New Territories. Indeed, the existing rural development and rapid social change in the New Territories is significantly influenced by full exposure to capitalist values and

influx of technological improvement in past decade. The existing rural development implies the dilution of the New Territories' specialness which can be seen as a watershed for how the government conceives the New Territories. The vested interests and special privilege of indigenous residents are bound to clash with the dilution of the New Territories' specialness. Rural disputes and clashes between different rural stakeholders become vigorous with complicated and multi-dimensional process. As a result, identifying and understanding the complexities surrounding the New Territories' social and economic transformation is a must.

## **1.2 Insights for Conducting This Study**

My insight for conducting this study stems from different rural stakeholders' various perception of rurality. First, I asked the expatriates what is rural from their perspective. Their answers rely on large-scale farmland and animal husbandry as major physical criteria to define a place as a rural area. Some of them considered that there was no rural area in Hong Kong since village houses are dense and there was no large-scale farmland in Hong Kong. They considered "the separation between village houses should be at least a mile in order to considering a place as rural area". Some of them considered that there was a core difference in defining the rural area between Hong Kong and his home country. No matter denying the existence of rural Hong Kong or creating another definition of rural for Hong Kong from expatriates' responds, it show that rurality in Hong Kong have its own uniqueness that differ from other place in the world.

Then, I asked the feverish rural lovers, holiday seekers and weekend farmers for their understanding of rurality in Hong Kong. They have emphasized the positive

side of rural features. Some these stakeholders with high educational levels gave up their career to be involved in agricultural work. They claimed that they wanted to achieve alternative lifestyle juxtaposed of the mainstream city lifestyle. In this idyllic countryside one can escape the hectic urban life. Despite Hong Kong, in the process of super-urbanization, lacks the criteria for rural space under the conventional definition in the world, some Hong Kong people still rely on cultural criteria such as environmental friendly lifestyle and good community network to define their rurality.

The diversified rural imagination among different rural stakeholders motivated me to conducting this study. Some Hong Kong people seems to accept the idea that New Territories is rural posing sociologically significant questions such as:

1. Why do some Hong Kong people think of the New Territories as rural?
2. How do they construct a rural Hong Kong, characterized by things like naturalness, sustainability, and heritage?

This study aims to examine how different rural stakeholders conceptualize their rurality. This research examines different parameters that contribute to rural imaginations and representations among different rural stakeholders in the New Territories. Furthermore, this research illustrates how different dimensions of rural imagination induce conflicts or collaboration amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories.

### **1.3 Research Significance**

The study is significant since ongoing disputes over rural development bring to the fore the competing paradigms and representations of rurality on the part of different

rural stakeholders in the New Territories. This study attempt to debunk the conventional image of the rural as a natural, homogenous locality pitted against the urban way of life. From the field data of this study, the New Territories was an actual space with three co-existing mindsets from three modes of social organization: agricultural, capitalist, post-industrial. These three co-existing mindsets are normally found in many societies experiencing unprecedented rapid social and economic development with rich theoretical and empirical support in global academic research. However, existing academic research in Hong Kong seldom explores the competing images of the rural that may exist amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories. Thus, this study will be marking a useful contribution by examining the construction of rurality in Hong Kong.

This study provides a new perspective that ascribed status of indigenous residents, which is unique in Hong Kong contextual background, is an important parameter in constructing individual perception of rurality. The ascribed indigenous identity solidified by blood, history and laws that act like special castes to differentiate Hong Kong people either indigenous or non-indigenous. The presence of ascribed indigenous status as a new parameter easily explains the complexity of individual perception of rurality amongst different rural stakeholders. This study will attempt to connect up the ascribed status of indigenous residents with the three co-existing mindsets based on the modes of social organizations, so as deepen our understanding of the uniqueness of rurality in the Hong Kong context.

#### **1.4 Chapter Organization**

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter one introduces the objective and significance of the thesis. Chapter two reviews the literature on global academic

research in rural sociology, Lefebvre's concept of space production and the conceptual framework. Chapter three comes with my research methodology. Chapter four is a historical review of the development of the New Territories. Knowing the historical background of the New Territories is important to grasp the ideas behind the current hegemonic discourses dominated by the government and Heung Yee Kuk. Chapter five will elaborate how rural imagination and representation among indigenous residents is constructed in the New Territories. The two factors are the ascribed indigenous status and economic value of rural land properties. Chapter six will discuss on rural imagination and representation among non-indigenous residents and holiday farmers. Their ideas of counter-urbanization and/or economic value constitute the diversity of rural imagination and representation in the New Territories. Also, it will elaborate how non-indigenous residents and holiday farmers adapt or resist the rural practice of the rural reality and setting. Chapter seven will discuss the extension of two parameters, which are the separation of indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents, and the adoption of either cultural and moral mindsets or economic mindsets, are illustrated to segregate different rural stakeholders. The rural stakeholders flexibly mobilize support and collaborate according to social contexts and agendas. Also, there will be a discussion on where these mindsets come from. Chapter eight concludes all the findings with the application of Lefebvre's idea of space production in this empirical study of the New Territories. It also revisits the implications and limitation of this study and recommendation of further study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The aim of this chapter is to develop a framework for exploring the present day character and status of rural space. This chapter would first start to define the rural. From the brief engagement with defining rural, the second section of the chapter develops the understanding of the recent global sociological phenomena on urban dwellers relocating into rural area and explain what motivate their decision of relocation. The chapter will then develop the understanding of space that much draws on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre and how other scholars interpret and develop Lefebvre's thought of space production. This chapter argues that instead of denying the term 'rural space' as a significant conceptual category, rural space indeed retain and draw out both its mundane everyday significance and its highly abstract characteristic under capitalism. Finally, I provide an analytical framework of analysis, including a discussion of my own perspective to study different types of rural imagination among rural stakeholders.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Definition of Rurality in Global Content**

The word 'rural' is frequently used in contrast to urban. However, rural society is a vague concept and relatively ill-defined in scientific perspectives. The great variance of defining the rural among different peoples in different places lead to the heart of the theoretical argument developed below. Rural societies are traditionally defined as all non-urban areas including villages, towns, and their surrounding open land with residents living upon farming and other forms of agricultural activities (Nelson, 1952; Bertrand, 1958). The above definition of rural is the social representation of urbanism by using the urban standard to define a rural area. However, rural area in reality comprised of many different types individuals, social groups, and particular

spaces. It is difficult to use physical and mechanical properties to define what the rural is (Heyer, 1990). Simply, there is little chance of reaching consensus on the concrete meaning of 'rural' neither at the official (Halfacree et al., 2002) nor at the cultural or popular level. The following section shows the development of rural sociology in the global context.

### **2.1.1 Rural Urban Divide as Geographical Specificity**

The difference between rural and urban society constitute a classic topic in sociology. Several sociologists such as Tonnies (1887) and Durkheim (1893) have tried to put both types of society in a binary opposition that implies a rural-urban dichotomy. Tonnies makes a distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* relationships describe communal feelings, mutual help and dependence nurtured from family ties and neighbourhood relations that are founded mostly in the countryside. In contrast, *Gesellschaft* relationships are more considered as individualistic in nature that are based on functional and contractual agreements and tension and conflict may also be involved in this type of relationship. Meanwhile, Tonnies predicted that *Gemeinschaft* relationships would be replaced by *Gesellschaft* relationships.

Durkheim used mechanical and organic solidarity to discern two types of relationships. Mechanical solidarity is mostly found in traditional society and is characterized by homogeneity between individuals in society. When society becomes more differentiated with an increased division of labour, social cohesion and interdependence are based on impersonal connections that lead to organic solidarity. The concept of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and mechanical and organic solidarity was used to explain the social transformation from agrarian



society to industrialized and urbanized society. These generalized constructs, or models, were further researched in the 1930s by the Chicago School's scholars from a more empirical approach.

Wirth, a Chicago School scholar, introduced a definition of the city as "a relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals" (Wirth, 1938). Increase in size, density, and heterogeneity of population are seen as factors that lead to community changes. A large size leads to potential differentiation that leads to impersonality, superficiality and segmentation between individuals. An increase in density leads to the specialization and the segregation of people and functions, including the separation between workplace and living place. Growing heterogeneity also entails further social differentiation with higher mobility between groups eventually causing depersonalization.

From the above, the importance of separating the urban and the rural rested on the presumption that sociological generalizations about urban areas could not be applied wholesale to rural settings in a mechanical way. The land use, degree of open space, and density of human settlement become the major components and standard of defining the rural. Rural area is less influenced by urbanization for physical and material mapping. Rural populations are therefore arguably different in their constituent social groups, norms, values and a host of other attributes due to physical and material differences from the urban areas. Therefore, the importance of separating rurality from urbanity instills consideration of sociological generalization as contingent upon spatial context.

### **2.1.2 The Doubt of Rural Localities Existence**

Through the influence of political economy perspectives particularly in the 1970s, many scholars doubt whether rural localities can be still identified nowadays especially in developed world. Political economy perspectives impelled to focus on economic production and class and how they coincided with empirical changes in rural areas (Cloke, 1989). The spatiality of contemporary capitalism varied from the old geographical borders and modes of operation within capitalism are constantly being re-written so that the rural becomes the more significant. There has been a spatial “loosening” for the differentiation between the urban and the rural (Labao, 1996). Copp (1972) stated that it is unwise to define rural since the word “rural” is a rhetorical device.

Cloke (2000) provides new insight to define the rural in mechanical and discursive perspectives. He defined rural as follows:

“Areas which are dominated by extensive land uses such as agriculture or forestry, or by large open spaces of undeveloped land; which contained small, lower-order settlement [...], and which are perceived as rural by most residents; and which are thought to engender a way of life characterized by a cohesive identity based on respect for the environment, and behavioural qualities of living as part of an extensive landscape. In practice, rural areas vary considerably, from those which may still be defined functionally to those closer to urban centres where rural is more of a socially and culturally constructed and therefore contested category.”

The definition of rural formerly assumes that the rural is homogenous, and constitutes a relatively unchanging and stable reality. Some believed that the key to discovering the reality of the rural is by collecting more statistical data collection such as the differences between town and countryside in terms of variables such as

family size, mortality, educational level, ethnicity and marital status. Hoggart et al (1995:21) observed:

“There is little chance of reaching consensus on what is meant by rural. It is both more straightforward and more convenient to establish definitions of urban areas based on population size or building density, than to attempt to identify the defining parameters of rural space.”

To capture an accurate yet flexible picture of different forms of the rural, the definition of rural had its difficulty to capture social and cultural aspects of rural in a quantifiable and mechanical perspective. Starting from 1990s, rural sociology was influenced by the perspectives of post-modernism and post-structuralism and rurality continues to be a major research area on the processes of social and cultural construction and representation.

### **2.1.3 Rise of the Mental Construct of Rurality**

Post-structuralist perspectives provide alternative to define the rural that “the rural and its synonyms are words and concepts understood and used by people in everyday talk” (Halfacree, 1993, p. 29). Peoples’ perception of the rural comes from words used in daily conversation to organize their own mental constructs or discourses concerning the rural. Through narrating their daily experiences and stories within villages, the content and way in which stories are expressed can be highly selective. People with different experiences and backgrounds would emphasize different rural stories that are valuable to them. Their understandings of the rural were no longer simply the result of objective analysis by expressing their own definitions of the rural. Individuals organize their rational mental construct of rural based on abstract understanding of the rural (Halfacree, 1995). Therefore, the

idea is that the social representation of the rural comprise of 'a complex of images that visibly reproduce [...] a complex of ideas' (Moscovici, 1984, p. 38).

Woods (2005) divided the definition of rural into four categories which are the descriptive definition, the socio-cultural definition, the rural as a locality, and the rural as social representation. He mentioned that the first three categories cannot prove the uniqueness of rural since they can also be used to define the urban. However, the rural as a social representation is a unique dimension to define its existence. Rural space's cognitive representation rather than its appearance in the social and physical landscape thus becomes the entry point of our interest. This is irrespective of whether or not rural localities are acknowledged. Mormont (1990: 40) suggested:

“The rural is a category of thought.[...] The category [is] not only empirical or descriptive; but it also [carries] a representation or set of meaning, in that it [connotes] a more or less explicit discourse ascribing a certain number of characteristics or attribute to those to whom it applies.”

As social representation is to ask which kinds of representation, symbols and nature they can think of when the definition of rural was asked. That is how people construct their own idea of the rural. No longer defined only in terms of economic development, or density of human settlement or other structural properties, the rural is defined as how villagers or village users recognized the rural as rural. For instance, whether it is through the mass media, literature, holiday and daily experience that they define what is rural. In short, this view is concerned about how people construct their own understanding of rural in advance and how they use the knowledge beforehand to determine whether a region should be classified as rural (Woods,

2005).

#### **2.1.4 Cultural Representation: Rural Idyll**

In the United Kingdom, the countryside is strongly associated with a beautiful landscape and specific form of country life. Representation of the English countryside are closely linked the idea of the rural idyll – i.e. a positive image surrounding many aspects of rural lifestyle, community and landscape (Ilbery, 1998). The rural idyll presents happy, healthy, and problem-free images of rural life safely nestled within both a close social community and a natural environment (Cloke and Milbourne, 1992). This romanticized construct is based on pure and plain style of living close to green and natural amenities and in this idyllic countryside one can escape from the hectic urban life. These reinvented images of the rural idyll are often linked to the past in the form of nostalgia for simpler rural living (Urry, 1995). The study of the rural helps to counterbalance some of the romantic rural myths that have been fostered by an evident anti-urban bias. Palmer et al. (1977) contributed to a stereotype image of the countryside that is “a place to preserve rather than a place to change, a place to visit rather than a place to live, a place to sentiment rather than a place to work.

An important feature of the rural idyll is its ability to reflect the experience and imagination of the elite, the wealthy and the powerful. The culture of the countryside that promotes the good side of the rural has been commodified (Cloke and Milbourne, 1992). Village festivals, lifestyles, food, buildings, and monuments constitute important historic capital to be packaged and promoted to tourists or rural residents. Since the rural idyll only reflects the good side of the rural imageries but different people experiences the rural in different ways and so different types of

rural imageries are to be expected. The rural idyllic reflects the experience and imagination of the elite, the wealthy and the powerful and suppress the lifestyle and difficulties that are faced by the village poor. Hidden images behind health and happiness is poverty, deprivation and a set of oppressive power relation in which the majority of villagers were dependent on local land owners. This is doubt that these reinvented images of the rural idyll are either the only image of rural or socially constructed by power relationship through the notion of exclusion and selectivity.

Not only would different types of rurality be found among villagers, it would be found between city dwellers and rural residents as well. People who are familiar with the countryside because they lived there or visit frequently are likely to have representations of the rural different from people who have lived in urban areas most of their lives (Bonnes and Secchiaroli, 1995).

Mormont (1990) concluded that it is not possible to conceive of a single space. Rather there are multiplicities of social spaces which overlap the same geographical space (Cloke and Milbourne, 1992).

## **2.2 Emergent of Global Sociological Phenomenon: Relocation to Rural Area**

In 1980s, some scholars started to pay attention to the phenomenon of rural gentrification. The literature on rural studies has mentioned the reasons for and social consequences of the formation of rural gentrification. The main emphasis of rural gentrification is that the middle-class population, originally living in urban area and work in managerial sector or are retired persons, move into rural areas since they want to seek the perfect rural environment (Phillips, 1993). Smith and Phillips (2001) define rural gentrification as a process of people migrating to areas providing

enjoyment of 'green spaces'. Generally speaking, the areas undergoing rural gentrification are mostly located where there is good transportation and beautiful rural scenery and a unique cultural and natural environment.

The implication of studying rural gentrification is that the change in social structure and composition, the change in built environment and the impact of rural land properties' price.

First, the process of rural gentrification leads to the change in social structure and socio-demographic composition. Since the middle-class invaded the living area of working class, the changes of social population characteristics can be classified as a change in social structure of the area. Non-agricultural newcomers with city lifestyle move into a rural area and may therefore differ from the lifestyle of the existing agricultural population. The change in social structure and socio-demographic composition is likely to affect the rural areas through rural gentrification.

Second, the process of rural gentrification leads to the change of built environment in rural area. Rural gentrification is motivated by the middle-class' demand of good environmental quality and more space. This motivation causes the land use and outlook of newly established buildings to differ from the existing buildings. The more newly established buildings are, the fewer agriculture areas would be left. Also, the landscape of rural areas is likely to become inconsistent if the newly established buildings and old village houses are mixed together in the same area.

Third, the process of rural gentrification leads to the impact of the price of rural land properties. Most rural lands are farmland at a relatively low value. As developers

and individuals purchase farmland to develop deluxe or luxury housing, this may lead to an increase in the land's value. Regardless of whether gentrification occurs in urban or rural area, the price of land properties significantly rises.

The reason behind middle-class newcomers migrating to rural areas arises from their being attracted to the non-productive functions of rural area such as beautiful scenery and landscape, cultural aspects different from those in cities, and a stronger sense of community. Therefore, nowadays, rural areas emphasize not only on the production function, but also emphasize on non-production function. The transition of changing people's ideas about rural land value can be seen to signal certain characteristics of a post-productivism era – concept which will be further examined in the following section.

### **2.2.1 Village Transformation under the Post-productivism Era**

In the 1980s, when cities underwent urban gentrification, rural areas were often considered as the supplier of raw materials for the economic development of the urban areas. Rural areas were considered as under-developed and less economically productive compared with urban areas. Farmers earned a lower income and rural youth often out-migrated to cities for job opportunities.

In the early 1990s, many scholars sought to explain changes in rural areas and agricultural systems in developed countries. The most influential concept is that existing agricultural systems transformed from an era of productivism to post-productivism. Halfacree and Boyle (1998) stated that the behaviour of people migrating from cities to villages is based on the emergence of the post-productivist era.



Productivism results from the industrialization and urbanization that followed the Second World War. Since rural populations and capital invested in rural areas had decreased, rural development slowed and, consequently, ushered in rural decay. However, rural development did not come to a standstill since farms in villages remained the prime sources of food production for urban areas. Villages were granted a mission to maximize food production in order to support the processes of industrialization and urbanization in cities. However, after a long period of time, such agricultural initiatives would often have great social, economic, and environment impact on rural areas, such as the overproduction of food, environmental pollution, and the replacement of labour-intensive jobs by machines (Woods, 2005).

After the Second World War, in addition to the demand on food in many countries, the demand on amenity value also emerged. The creation of amenity value indicated that crop productivity was not the only dimension to determine the usefulness of land. For rural areas planned for recreational use, they have a high amenity value, as they provide people with comfort or convenience; but the crop productivity of such areas remains low or falls to even zero. When the demand for amenity value surpasses the demand for crop production, it is a sign of the presence of post-productivism (Bergstrom, 2005).

Post-productivism refers to rural areas as areas of greater production. Rural areas can be places for consumption and villages may have achieved sustainable development. Farmland also has multiple functions such as rural tourism, leisure, and the appreciation of environment and culture. The various functions of villages

can attract people who want to adopt lifestyles different from those in cities. Therefore, the idea of post-productivism may explain why rural areas are experiencing rural gentrification.

Bergstrom (2005) made a linkage between rural land value and the function of rural land. The value of land reflects different values of different people. Hence, rural land can be considered as an asset with various functions such as production, lifestyle, ecosystem, work, tourism and space. These various types of rural land values are often hidden by the economic and intrinsic values of land. Emphasizing amenity value attracts city dwellers to appreciate the beautiful landscape of rural land and consume more in rural area.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework: Based on Henri Lefebvre's Spatial Triad**

In order to find out the relationship between different social phenomenon such as gentrification, village transformation, and social justice; and embedded spatial hierarchy in rural New Territories, it is important to understand Henri Lefebvre's discourse of space production that how space is socially produced and maintained. In regard to the discipline of space, Henri Lefebvre's literary work, "The Production of Space" in 1974, still provides great influence for followers to understand his discourse of space production. This thesis has no intention to cover the whole work of The Production of Space. Rather, emphasis is put on Lefebvre's conceptual triad in production of space – spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation. This conceptual triad (Fig. 2.1) can be regarded as the basic understanding of Lefebvre's thought and will be used as theoretical framework of this study. However, although Lefebvre set bullet points to define this three concepts (Lefebvre, 1991), it is still difficult to understand that derive different interpretations

from his works. Therefore, in the following section, I would firstly introduce the brief discourse of Lefebvre's space production. After then, I would introduce how other scholars interpret and develop Lefebvre's thought of conceptual triad on other scholars' studies. This section is aimed to provide a theoretical presentation on production of space and forms of space.

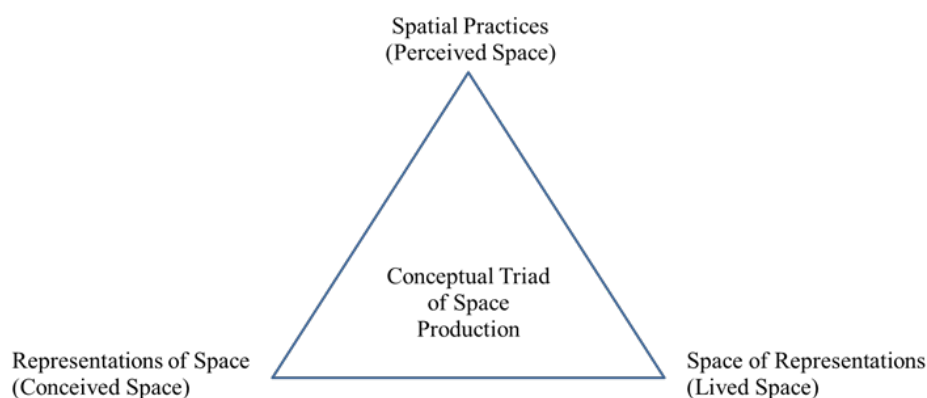


Fig 2.1 Lefebvre's conceptual triad of space production

### 2.3.1 Henri Lefebvre's Conceptual Definition of Space

Lefebvre argues that the word 'space' in the past had a definitely meaning of an empty area. He also criticizes the pervious study of the science of space failed to achieve its explanation power to form a comprehensive theory of space. He asserts that the lack of a true knowledge of space from previous spatial studies lead to the failure of providing inventories of what exists in space or generating a discourse on space (Lefebvre, 1991:7).

In the first chapter of 'The Production of Space', Lefebvre emphasized that "(Social) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre, 1991: 26) as initial proposition. This initial proposition implies that social space becomes an analytical tool to explain sociological phenomenon in the society (Lefebvre, 1991: 34). The effort of studying

space give rise to a growing interest in dynamics of urban politics and this section try to extent its application to understand the dynamics of rural politics in the New Territories and its social aspect. In this respect, this thesis would emphasize the symbolic meaning of space and the complexity of individual behaviours that are mediated by individual cognitive process.

Lefebvre followed Marxism perspectives and suggested that social space is a means of production: network of exchange and flows of raw materials (Lefebvre, 1991: 85). Social space is also a means of control; every society contains its own and interaction of production and reproduction that all involved spatial aspects. In other word, the social relation of production and reproduction are embedded in social space (Lefebvre, 1991: 32). Therefore, social space is complex, non-homogenous, discontinuous, and is certainly differed from the physical space in which the planners typically work (Harvey, 1973:35). Lefebvre paid more attention on the spatial aspects of all social processes without fetishizing the discourse of space as solely a mental thing, a container or a place.

### **2.3.1.1 The Space of Production**

Lefebvre suggests that every society produces its own space and space can be reproduced by space productive process following the historical context of every society (Lefebvre, 1991:31). In other words, there is a relationship between the social processes and spatial representation. Different styles of spatial representation are invented by different social groups' norms and social processes.

Lefebvre argues the failure of generating a discourse on space is due to the lack of attention to the ways of how space is socially produced and maintained through

political and ideological conflicts within the society (Ingen, 2003:202). It is also important to study and inquire space without ignoring the dominant representation within the society. Furthermore, class struggles between elite and manual labours should be importantly considered with the analysis of space production process (Lefebvre, 1991:55).

### **2.3.1.2 Conceptual Triad: Spatial Practice, Representations of Space and Representational Spaces**

Following the sequences of Lefebvre's idea, social space comprises specific representations within the social relations of production and reproductions as three forms of space. He invented that the analysis of social space can be conceptualized to three aspects that is perceived space (Spatial Practice), conceived space (Representations of Space) and lived space (Representational Spaces). For better facilitating our further discussion, I will direct code the Lefebvre's definition of conceptual triad as follows:

“1. Spatial practice, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.

2. Representations of space, which are tied to the relations of production and the order which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, and to codes, and to 'frontal' relations.

3. Representational spaces, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of a space than as a code of representational space).” (Lefebvre, 1991: 33)

Spatial practice is that society produce the sense of space based on material and objective realities. This kind of space can be mapped such as a room in an apartment, the corner of the street, a shopping and cultural center (Ingen, 2003:202). People can direct perceive and experience the space and express and describe their feelings of the perceived space. For Lefebvre's perspective, spatial practice not only are the concrete objects or places, but also comprises of everyday activities, the use of place and the ways how people interact with the material space. To illustrate and elaborate more in chapter 4, the indigenous residents of perceived rural space is where their daily routine takes place. It is more than including the physical space where their daily activities happened. They explained their daily routine with other peoples' interactions that also are considered as perceived space. The analysis presented in Chapter 7 to investigate the perceived rural spaces in the New Territories.

Soja (1996) developed Lefebvre idea of representations of space as imagined space that is constructed by discourse. Respecting Lefebvre's idea that used the term social space to make contrast to physical space and mental space, he criticizes that people lay particular stress on the physical space and/or mental space and ignore the social space as their construction of spatial knowledge. Representation of space is defined as scientists, planners and technocratic subdividers' dominant space that establish discipline to suppress the alternative through control over knowledge, symbols, signs, and codes (Ingen, 2003:203). In this study, Chapter 3 will show how discourse of colonial government and Heung Yee Kuk constitutes the conceived space of rural New Territories.

Representational space represents the space of the imagination through which life is

directly lived. This kind of space can be experienced through complex symbols and images by inhabitants and users that often draws on physical objects to symbolize lived experience and to produce meaning. It is the space which forms, informs and facilitates the deviations, diversity and individuality that are a fundamental aspect of any social tensions and conflicts (Watkins, 2006). This distinctiveness is achieved in conjunction with the structures of the conceived space and the perceived space that have developed to provide the necessary cohesion and competence for successful social interaction (Watkins, 2006). Representational space has the experiential nature and it is a passively experienced space which imagination seeks to change (Lefebvre, 1991:39).

To sum up, the three dimensions of Lefebvre's conceptual triad comprises of the perceived, the conceived and the lived. I try to illustrate the relationship of these three dimensions with a daily example. A city guidebook with maps represents the conceived space in the forms of space of a city whereas the actual streets and buildings, and the daily activities and routine of citizens represent the perceived space of a city. The lived space would be space with deeper network taken place. In this respect, one can learn from the guidebook to know the location of tourists place and attractions in particular city. The guidebook becomes the dominant tools that provide lens of journey planners and government officials' collaboration to understand the city. However, daily activities and routine of citizens take place in the material reality. In order to understand the deeper networks within the city, one should directly go to the places where the interactions take place and search within the lived space of the city.

### **2.3.2 Gregory's Interpretation: Abstract Space versus Concrete Space**

Derek Gregory published a book, *Geographical Imaginations*, in 1994 with the exploration of the relations between social theory and space. This book includes Gregory's elaboration on Lefebvre's conceptual triad. Gregory (1994) mentioned that Lefebvre's analysis follows the tradition of historical materialism and the spaces of particular time period are related its mode of production. Using the same logic, capitalism produces a particular political economy of space centrally defined through the production of abstract space would induce the colonization of everyday life (concrete space).

Gregory (1994) constructed his concept that the production of abstract space gain dominance over concrete space to elaborate on Lefebvre's work of the relationship between representations of space and spaces of representation. The production of abstract space gain dominance over concrete space emerge the commodification of economy and the bureaucratization of state through the establishment of spatial sciences, spectacle and surveillance. The process of abstract space gain dominance over concrete space corresponds to the representations of space. On the other side, the concrete space produces resistance to abstract space through metaphilosophy, festival and revolution that corresponds to the concept of spaces of representation.

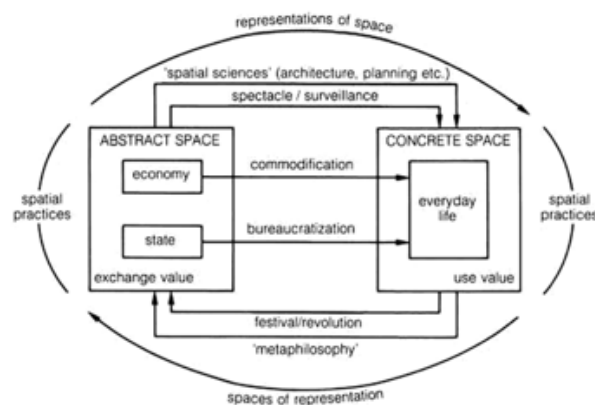


Figure 2.2 The Colonization of Concrete Space (Gregory, 1994:401)



In Gregory definition, representations of space involve conceptualization of space, or power and knowledge on spatial configuration. The technocrats' spatial configuration imprints upon the mainstream social order and receive legitimacy from the society. The space of representations just related to counterspace that sources from underside and private social life and imagination from doubting the mainstream of spatial practice. Thus, we can obviously conclude that there is dialectical tension between representations of space (abstract) and spaces of representation (concrete).

Spatial practice, in Gregory's perspectives (1994), supports the operations of both abstract space and concrete space and connects the structure of system and everyday life. If abstract space is dominant to social order, it will strengthen the power of representations of space. Spatial practices tend to follow the logic of system that influences everyday life. On the other hand, spaces of representation have its resistance properties and it deviant for social order in an irregular time base.

In conclusion, Gregory's argument on the tension is located between representations of space and spaces of representation coincide with Lefebvre's conceptual triad. He points out the tensions between control and resistance and the existence of mainstream of social order. As shown in Fig 2.3, Gregory's concept of space production can be integrated with Lefebvre's conceptual triad. Spatial practices both support and embody the representations of space and spaces of representation. The two representations not only have the properties of control and resistance to each other, but also they can shape and activate the spatial practices.

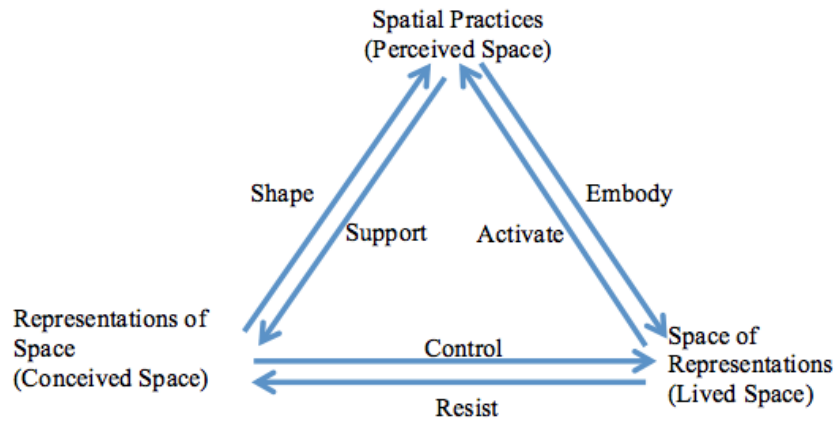


Fig 2.3 Gregory's Conceptual Framework of Space Production

### 2.3 Conceptual Definition of Rural Space

Drawing on Lefebvre's concept of space production, Halfacree (2006) developed the model of the totality of rural space which comprise three facets: Rural localities, Formal representation of the rural and Everyday lives of the rural. Halfacree's idea of space production is summarized in figure 2.4. These three facets echoed with Lefebvres' three components of space production mentioned above.

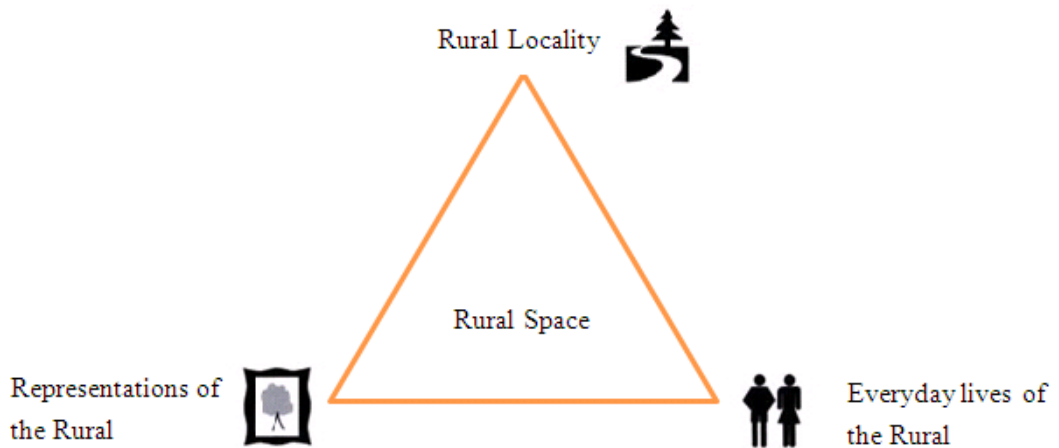


Fig. 2.4 Halfacree's Concept of Rural Space

Rural localities (echoes spatial practices) considered the relatively different spatial practices, production practices, and consumption activities as compared to the urban. Rural locality can be explained how people perceive rural space in term of rural

material and objective realities. Formal representation of the rural (echoes with representation of space) represents capitalists, bureaucrats and politicians' interests. The technocrats are seen to intentionally frame rural representations to suit capitalist production and to commodify the rural. Everyday lives of the rural echoes representational space represents the directed lives of villagers. Their cognitive imagination and interpretation of rurality, which are constructed based on individual experiences and social interactions in rural area, are seen to be diverse and incoherent. Everyday lives of the rural are seen to resist the dominance of formal rural representations.

The extent to which people can label a place as the rural depends on the extent of the coherence of those three components in rural space model above. Cloke and Goodwin (1992) suggest using "structured coherence" to probe into the internal consistency of rural space totality. The three levels of internal consistency are understood as congruent and unified, contradictory and disjointed, and chaotic and incoherent.

First, if the three facets of rural space cohere in a relatively smooth, consistent manner, people are willing to label a place as rural. Then, if there is tension and contradictions among those three facets of rural space but the coherence within the rural still holds, people are less likely to consider the place as rural due to its properties of contradictory and disjointness. Finally, if rural space is solely dominated by everyday lives of the rural, it will then represent a potentially subversive alternative within the rural logic. The chaotic and incoherent features can be seen as lack of structured coherence brought from serious contradiction within the rural. People are the least willing to label a place as rural and disrupt the social

reproduction of the formality of the rural (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992).

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

Following the previous section of literature review, this section tries to work out the theoretical framework of the present research. The framework is formulated in order to assist in answering the principal research question: “How do different stakeholders in the rural New Territories conceptualize their rurality?”

Under the principal research question, this study explores different parameters that contribute to rural imagination and representation among different rural stakeholders in the New Territories. This research also illustrates how different dimensions of rural imagination induce conflicts amongst different rural stakeholder in the New Territories. This study tries to follow Lefebvre, Gregory, Halfacree, Cloke and Goodwin (see section 2.3) and integrate their theories into a new research project. This thesis intends to redress an imbalance in existing studies by taking into account of the rural issue in the formation of Hong Kong.

To explore the construction of rural imagination and representation in the New Territories, this study adopts the ideas of space production from Lefebvre (1991), and the ideas of rural space from Halfacree (2006) as conceptual framework. Lefebvre invented three facets of productions namely spatial practice, representation of space, and representational space whereas Halfacree developed the model of rural space totality comprising of rural locality, representations of the rural and everyday lives of the rural. Rural imaginations and representation, as one important part of Lefebvre and Halfacree’s theoretical framework, is more relevant for exploring and identifying parameters among different rural stakeholders in the New Territories.

To illustrate how different dimensions of rural imaginations induce conflicts amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories, this study backup by Cloke and Goodwin's (1992) idea about the existence of potentially subversive alternative within the rural logic found in this empirical study. Cloke and Goodwin study made me aware of the coherence of rural imagination that brings conflicts amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories.

#### **2.4.1 Model of Present Research**

The refined conceptual framework is summarized in figure 2.5. The study firstly elaborate on how rural imagination and representation, as one important part of Lefebvre (1991) and Halfacree's (2006) theoretical framework, is constructed in the New Territories. People with different rural experience and backgrounds would emphasize different rural aspects as their main sources of rural imagination. Through analyzing several discourses among different stakeholders in the New Territories, several parameters that contribute to rural imagination and representation in the New Territories are illustrated.

The study continues with the illustration on how different dimensions of rural imaginations induce conflicts amongst rural stakeholders in the New Territories (see chapter 6). With the idea from Cloke and Goodwin (1992), the incoherence of different rural imaginations induces conflicts among different rural stakeholders and people are less willing to label a place as rural; whilst the coherent features tend to bring collaborations.

#### **2.4.2 Research Questions**

The main theme of the research is “how to different rural stakeholders conceptualize their rurality?” The research addressed the following more specific questions:

1. How are different images and perceptions of the rural imagination among different rural stakeholders constructed in the New Territories?
  - What are the differences of rural imagination among different rural stakeholders?
  - How do different rural stakeholders transform their ideal rural imaginations into their rural lifestyle and practices?
  - What are the parameters the contribute to rural imagination and representations?
  
2. How do different dimensions of rural imaginations induce conflicts amongst different groups of rural stakeholders in the New Territories?
  - Under what conditions do conflicts amongst different groups of rural stakeholders occur?

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the research method implemented in this study will be introduced. This study adopts a qualitative approach by semi-structured interviews to explore individual rural imaginations amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories of Hong Kong. Rather than numbers or statistics, I collected empirical data in the form of words, sentences and paragraphs through interviews. The rationale of choosing qualitative approach in this study since this approach is good at capturing meaning, process and context. The goal of this study is to explore respondents' subjective experiences and attached meanings for their experiences. Those data drawn from interviews cannot be easily quantified. Also, this study is classified as exploitative study that aims to provide information instead of drawing generalization.

#### **3.1 Semi-structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted “where questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is freer to probe beyond the answers in a manner which would appear prejudicial to the aims of standardization and comparability” (May, 2001:123). The aim in interviewing people was not to produce generalizations, but in contrast, to collect qualitative data. In this respect, semi-structured interview is a fruitful method as interviewing allows people to take freely and offer their interpretation of events since it is their perspective that is paramount (Marah & Stoker, 2002).

Since the interviews were semi-structured, the question order could be flexibly

rearranged by probing. If necessary and appropriate, more in-depth questions for clarifications and open exchange of feelings and opinions would be asked. Meanwhile, respondents' emotional expressions such as anger, joy and sadness would be captured during the interview. By using semi-structured interview, I was allowed to use an interview guideline as a checklist of topics to be covered, but meanwhile, was able to leave some space for the respondents to answer as much as they wished. In contrast to the highly structured interviews used in survey research, semi-structured interviews conducted in this research were open and flexible, allowing for spontaneous responses and actions of the respondents (Marah & Stoker, 2002).

A total number of twenty-five interviews were conducted. The interviews took place in November 2013 to February 2014. The respondents comprised of indigenous residents, non-indigenous residents who born in village, people who relocate to village from city, holiday farmers.

Since the interviews data was handled with confidentiality, the respondents were more willing to share their personal and specific points of view on rural affairs which might be sensitive. Sources of risk come from the invasion of privacy and hidden interests agenda within the village. Meanwhile, criminal or civil liabilities might also be involved, such as the discovery of illegal acts and unauthorized built structures.

Full disclosure of criminal or civil liability from my thesis could impose potential liabilities on my subjects and infringe the goodwill of reception. Also, respondents might be concerned about being identified by others. Some might invade other



villagers' privacy or mention about the criminal acts as the interviews proceeded. To minimize the risks on individuals, if it appropriate to disclose the situations, the identified personal data such as names, age and sex would be changed. The confidential and preventive measures above were told before each interview to ensure the respondents cannot be identified.

Voice recording was used during the interviews following by subsequent transcriptions for a couple of reasons. First, having the interview recorded allows the researcher to focus to the interview more than when notes are taken instead. Second, it allows the researcher to use direct quotations more and thus decreases the chances of misinterpretation of the interview.

A system of blocks was used regarding the interview questions during the interviews. First, it was believed that putting the questions in a logical order according to specific categories would provide a more efficient analysis. Second, having several blocks helped a lot during the interviews as it reduced the possibility of confusions. Based on the three research questions mentioned before, an interview guideline was drafted. All questions were open-ended and aimed to tap into the following areas:

1. Individual Rural Lifestyle and Perception of Rurality
  - Questions regarding
    - the level of their inclusion and participation within their community,
    - the relationship with their village in term of living space and working space,
2. Comments on Existing Rural Development
  - a. Questions regarding

- i. The impacts and possible consequences of the existing rural development,
- ii. The ways they influence the current state of rural development

The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews was not test if the respondents support or against the existing rural development in the New Territories but rather to understand what rural New Territories means to them and to listen to the spatial practices of everyday routine within their village. Also, it is aimed to test the relevancy of official discourse and symbolic power that Heung Yee Kuk and the government can deploy with the rural reality of the New Territories. Rural residents, especially alternative lifestyle seekers (see chapter 6), commonly experienced the difference between the conceived space and the perceived and lived space. Alternative lifestyle seekers argued that the official discourses of Heung Yee Kuk and the government, which dominate the public sphere of the existing New Territories rural development, create a different reality by constructing truths in the name of public good. The official discourses of Heung Yee Kuk and the government, however, neglect the recognizable claims as well as alternative rural representations among different village stakeholders.

### **3.2 Sampling and Demographic Features**

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were adopted in this study. Different village stakeholders such as indigenous residents, non-indigenous residents who born in village, people who relocate to village from city, holiday farmers were specific target population of this study. Informants were mainly identified through my personal networks and referrals. Also, respondents were asked to refer other suitable informants who often lived and stayed in rural areas. After getting the

contact of potential interviewees, explanation of the research objectives and interview questions were delivered for their reference. 18 out of 25 respondents lived in the villages and the remaining 7 respondents were holiday farmers who did not live in the villages but often went to rural areas. The profile of the respondents is summarized in table 3.1 at the end of this chapter.

### **3.3 Data Analysis and Data Processing**

The interview was audio recorded with full verbatim transcripts. The collected data from respondents was analyzed by open and axial coding according to the guided questions. The full verbatim provided accuracy of wording and gesturing and was divided into categories with coding that suit the research questions.

Open coding was the first step to analyze transcript data. Besides standardized guided questions, identified insightful answers from respondents were also captured and highlighted. All raw data were named and organized into conceptual categories. After that, the data was broken down further into sub-categories by linking themes and concepts between the interview transcripts and the research questions in the study. 6 sub-categories have been classified as follows:

1. The living environment of existing villages, the history of living place, and the reason for moving (if applicable)
2. Advantages and disadvantages of living in rural areas, and relevant subjective feelings
3. Exploring the perceptions on indigenous residents
4. The gap between rural idyll and actual rural lifestyle

5. Social support within villages (time spent within villages, social interactions with neighbours, and rural activities within villages)
6. Changes in rural landscape, lifestyle and population composition, subjective hopes and fears about current changes

After the process of open coding, axial coding is a process that reorganizes memos and analysis through systematic procedures by linking between different categories and sub-categories. New themes emerge with further categorization and linkage with different categories.

1. Construction of Rural Imagination
  - a. Ascribed Indigenous Status
  - b. Possession of Rural Land Property
  - c. Rural Lifestyle and Daily Routine
2. Rural Conflict and Collaboration
  - a. Legitimacy of Ascribed Indigenous Status and Land Deed
  - b. Legitimacy of Everyday Rural Practices

Table 3.1 Profile of the Respondents

Respondents' Categories	Case	Sex	Occupation	Age	Duration of living in rural areas	District
Indigenous Residents	M1	M	Clerk	24	24 years	Sai Kung
	M2	M	Feng Shui Consultant	36	36 years	Yuen Long
	M3	M	Gardening Consultant	67	67 years	Sai Kung
	M4	M	Manager	36	30 years	Yuen Long
	F5	F	Clerk	25	25 years	Tuen Mun
	F6	F	Student	20	20 years	Tai Po
Long-term Rural Residents	L7	F	Secretary	48	48 years	Tuen Mun
	L8	F	Officers in environmental NGO	31	31 years	Tai Po
	L9	M	Student	22	22 years	Tai Po
	L10	M	Clerk	39	39 years	Yuen Long
	L11	M	Freelancer	23	23 years	Sai Kung
	L12	F	Clerk	40	33 years	Outlying Island
	L13	M	Job Consultant	44	20 years	Yuen Long
Short-term Rural Residents	S14	M	Tutor	20-29	Around 4 years	Yuen Long
	S15	F	N.A.	28	3 months	Outlying Island
	S16	F	IT Consultant	N.A.	2 years	Sai Kung
	S17	M	Community Center Officers	23	4 years	Yuen Long
	S18	F	Clerk	N.A.	5 years	Tuen Mun
Rural Employment	E19	M	Officers in environmental NGO	29	N.A.	N.A.
	E20	M	Farmer	27	3 months	Northern
Village Users	H21	F	Financial Planner	30+	N.A.	N.A.
	H22	F	Retired	50+	12 years	N.A.
	H23	F	Student	20-25	N.A.	N.A.
	H24	F	IT Programmer	23	N.A.	N.A.
	H25	M	Technicians	51	N.A.	N.A.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RURAL SOCIETY: THE NEW TERRITORIES OF HONG KONG**

This chapter attempts to provide a description of the general setting of the New Territories of Hong Kong. First, it describes the subtle changes in the New Territories during colonial era by drawing on the second hand materials. Then it examines the reasons why the New Territories is closely associated with rural imagination at the cognitive level even through the New Territories has experienced unprecedented growth from mainly agricultural area to new towns and infrastructure projects. Finally, it explores the possible and actual impacts upon the whole society when the New Territories is still widely taken as a rural area.

#### **4.1 Literatures about the New Territories**

With regard to the New Territories, several anthropologists such as Maurice Freedman and Huge Baker in 1950s and 1960s with the inference of Orientalism once considered the villages in the New Territories as the best location to find out the essence of Chinese tradition society. Hong Kong was of much longer settlement as long ago as 1573 and was a coastal fringe (Hayes, 1984). They believed that the Communist China after 1949 had already destroyed the structure of Chinese tradition society. Instead, the British adopted minimal intervention approach, which is indirect rule, to the rural governance in the New Territories that retained and preserved more characteristics of Chinese traditional culture and customs. Therefore, the idea that the New Territories was the only ideal place representing the traditional Chinese society was derived since 1950s and thus the specialness and tradition of the New Territories should be respected.

However, in recent year, the discourses that the indirect rule of the British lead to

the conservation of tradition Chinese society in the New Territories are being criticized. This discourse ignore how the British colonial government used the tradition Chinese customs as means to assure their legitimacy to govern the New Territories. Meanwhile, tradition Chinese customs in the New Territories may be deviated from the essence of tradition Chinese society to conform the need of British governance (Chun, 2000). Cheung (2012) even suggested that ‘tradition’ Chinese customs in the New Territories should be considered as means for the colonial government to succeed social orders in the New Territories.

Meanwhile, there was a shift in social and political development from harbour-front along Victoria Harbour to the New Territories during the late British period that made the New Territories more influential in the future development of Hong Kong. The entire New Territories has already been fitted into the blueprint of urban development. Facing the rapid urban sprawl into the New Territories, villages in the New Territories confront with a fundamental shift of village life and environment over a long period of time. New Territories no longer are considered as coastal fringe of China as better preserving the Chinese traditional culture.

This thesis has no intention to cover the whole debate of the Orientalism. Rather, emphasis is put on both literatures in 1950s and in 1990s onwards can explain the subtle changes in the New Territories throughout the British ruling.

## **4.2 The Historical Development in the New Territories**

### **4.2.1 New Territories as part of San On County**

The invention of the New Territories falls on the British colonial government in the late 1890s. The New Territories was originally a part of San On County during the

Ching dynasty and it was largely an agricultural area with residents living upon farmsteads for generations and a high degree of self-sufficiency (Chiu and Hung, 1997). Tracing back to the Song dynasty, the ancestors of the Tangs already came to settle in Kam Tin, the northwest New Territories. Followed the Tangs, Pangs, Lius, Haus, and Mans migrated to the New Territories for settlement in different dynasty from Song to Ming. These above clans were known as the five great clans in the New Territories (Baker, 1965). Those Chinese inhabitants who settle in the New Territories before the British ruling were regarded as the punti people (Chiu and Hung, 1997).

The earlier the great clans settled in the New Territories, the more fertile lands the great clans got. Therefore, the Tangs could be regarded as powerful landlords and their land had the highest cultivation value among the five great clans (Baker, 1965). Other four great clans still got the moderate cultivation value. However, the Hakka people as latercomers, who moved to the New Territories during Ching dynasty, could only establish the villages on the hilly and infertile lands. Their resources were insufficient compared with the great clans. As a result, the punti people, especially the Tangs, rented the farmlands to the Hakka people (Chiu and Hung, 1997). By 1898 the population of the New Territories comprised some 90,000 Punti and Hakka, living in some 700 villages and a number of periodic markets (Hayes, 1984).

James Haldane Stewart Lockhart, Colonial Secretary, commented the situation of the New Territories in his first report on the New Territories with the following words:

“Under Chinese rule, enterprise has been at a discount, and



progress has been at a standstill for centuries. The San On District of today must be much the same as it was four or five hundred years ago.”

#### **4.2.2 Early Colonial Governance toward the New Territories**

After the Qing Dynasty’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the British government forced the Qing Dynasty to extend to extend the northern boundaries of Hong Kong to counter the influence of France in southern China. According to the Report on the Extension of the Colony of Hong Kong drafted by James Stewart Lockhart, the New Territories was only regarded as a buffer between the Victoria City and China. On June 9 1898, Qing government and British government jointly signed the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory which the United Kingdom secured a 99-year lease of leased territory and later called the New Territories of Hong Kong.

Even though the two governments signed the lease in June 1898, the British governed the New Territories from April 1899 onwards. Although the British colonial government promised “to forbid forceful relocation of indigenous villagers; cannot nationalize land; need to compensate if land is used for public constructions”, the establishment of the colonial administration in the New Territories faced hardship since the Chinese inhabitants opposed both the lease and the British occupation. The reasons for indigenous residents to turn towards armed opposition towards the British takeover were firstly a simple fact that the British were a foreign occupying power. Indigenous residents considered it as a great disgrace to be governed by the British because of Chinese nationalism that created the anti-foreign prejudice (Hase, 2008). Also, indigenous residents feared that there would be the levy of new taxes on property, licenses for raising domestic animals, the prohibition

of traditional customs such as wood-cutting, and fishing, as well as changes to marriage and funeral customs (Hase, 2008).

Rumors continued to spread and the colonial government neglected to explain its policies to the indigenous residents of the New Territories. Indigenous residents then mustered armed opposition in the movement known as the Anti-English Barbarian Campaign. Indigenous residents were recruited and they destroyed the Tai Po Police Station of the colonial government on April 3, 1899. Then, thousands of indigenous residents gathered in Tai Po to fight against the British forces on April 15 1899 lasting until April 18, 1899. The armed opposition of indigenous residents ended in defeat though their four-day armed struggle and the colonial government took control of the New Territories. However, in the indigenous residents' perspective, these heroes sacrificed their lives and marked their action a glorious page in Hong Kong's history of resistance to foreign aggression.

The Anti-English Barbarian Campaign had no use to terminate the rural political conflicts between the colonial government and local residents in the New Territories. Rather, this incident triggered and sustained rural conflicts in the long run. In order to retain governance of the territories and to pacify the rural elites and residents, the colonial government implemented various and extraordinary policies targeting the New Territories which differed from those implemented on the ceded area of Hong Kong. However, some scholars thought that the New Territories was not experienced a radical and dramatic rural changes after British takeover. According to Maurice Freedman (1958):

“The first year of colonial rule brought important political changes,

but in fact the New Territories for long remained a kind of traditional Chinese hinterland to urban Hong Kong. Administration was not, by British standards, intensive; changes were not rapid.”

Some local academics showed disagreement to Freedman’s observations. Rather, the colonial government initiated significant changes after the British occupation. The colonial government changed the land ownership of indigenous residents from freehold originated from China to Colony Tenancy stemmed from Britain in the early stage of ruling the New Territories. The lands originally owned by the landowners became land-granted by the colonial government with limited tenancy durations. The purpose of leasehold land ownership was to simplify the complexity of land ownership and to facilitate the government to distinguish which landowners were responsible for paying tax.

The colonial government firstly handled all land registration and allocation under private ownership. The intention was to first have the land reverted to the Crown, and then to redistribute land to private ownership. The colonial government required all New Territories residents to hand in the proof of land ownership. Otherwise, land which was not registered would be reverted to Crown Land. The finding of investigated is summarized in Block Crown Lease that entitled to deed holders in 1905.

This incident created the first land conflict between colonial government and rural residents since the emergence of Block Crown Lease meant the colonial government unilaterally announced that all deed holders become the tenants of the colonial government. Sit and Kwong (2011) held the view that the incident had deprived

indigenous residents of the land in freehold enjoyed under Chinese legal traditions for generations. In the New Territories' indigenous residents' perspectives, the colonial government nationalize the private land, undermined the compensation of land resumption for public purposes, required a premium for government house granting or land exchange, and restricted the land use. These past transgressions may be part of the reasons why the indigenous residents easily become agitated with newcomers and the government today (Liu, 1999).

Since many rural conflicts continued to arise between the colonial government and local residents during the early period of British ruling of the New Territories, the early colonial government's policy was to keep the New Territories as undisturbed as possible in order to minimize conflicts due to the significant changes initiated by the colonial government. In 1905, the establishment of the New Territories Property Ordinance have allowed for reconciliation between the laws of Hong Kong and the Chinese customary rules applying to the New Territories. When a dispute or a minor offence occurred within a village, local elders were encouraged to use the Chinese law to interfere under the supervision of local officials. This approach was namely respectful of Chinese customs and adopting policies specially targeting the New Territories. However, I consider this approach become remedial measure to alleviate political conflicts between the colonial government and the local residents.

In order to respect Chinese customs and customary rights of the New Territories residents and have smooth governance in the New Territories, the colonial government established, the colonial government established a system of District Offices to deal with rural affairs. Starting from 1899, the New Territories were divided into two administrative districts, literally "Yuek", i.e., Southern District and

Northern District. After 1945, the colonial government divided the administrative districts from two to three that is Southern District, Northern District (Tai Po District), and Yuen Long District. The Districts Officers concentrated political, administrative and judicial powers (Kuan and Lau, 1979). The power of the District Officers was similar to the Chinese county officer of Qing dynasty. Rural residents would consider the District Officers as paternal officials with the understanding of Chinese traditions and customs. District Officers acted as mediator in rural disputes and conflicts without excessive intervention of rural affairs so that district officers did help colonial government to manage the rural affair in the New Territories.

The establishment of Heung Yee Kuk, an advisory body, contribute advises to deal with the New Territories' affairs to smoothen colonial governance since 1926. However, the establishment of Heung Yee Kuk was not immediately functioning as an advisory body to smoothen colonial governance. It was formed a pressure group representing the rural residents in their rejection to pay additional premiums on land use transformation from farmland to village lots. The rural residents thought the new premiums violated the terms of Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory. In 1923 some rural elites initiated the Association of Agricultural, Industrial and Commercial Study, to bring together all the rural residents to fight for their long-term interests. Then Governor Clementi recognized the study's importance as a consultant body in rural affair in 1926 and renamed it as the Heung Yee Kuk. Before the Japanese Occupation, Heung Yee Kuk changed their position from pressure group to charity organization to act as bridge to communicate between villagers and colonial government (Lee, 1983).

In short, after the British occupation of the New Territories in 1898, the colonial

government considered the clan villagers as “others’ with a different set of culture and traditions. It implemented extraordinary policies in the New Territories, including the New Territories Land Court Ordinance 1899 and the Crown Lands Resumption Ordinance 1900, which differed from remaining ceded Hong Kong. The government’s action gave rise to a situation of one Hong Kong two systems as demonstrated by Hong Kong’s dual legal system regarding land which shape the New Territories specialness: one for urban Hong Kong and another in the rural New Territories.

#### **4.2.3 Transformation of the New Territories after the Japanese Occupation**

Hong Kong came under the Japanese occupation for 3 years and 8 months from 1941 to 1945. During this period, the Japanese government set up a village representative system that each village should elect a village representative as middlemen between the government and the villagers to manage village affairs for smote rural governance (Hayes, 1984). After the British regained the control of Hong Kong, the British adopted the rural administrative system set up by the Japanese and encouraged villagers to nominate their village representative. 27 rural committees consisted of village representatives were formed during the late 1940s and the early 1950s. Rural committees acted as consultative bodies for the New Territories District Offices until 1959 and since then the legislation of Heung Yee Kuk replaced the consultative duty of rural communities.

Starting from the late 1940s, Hong Kong saw a large increase in the number of immigrants escape turmoil from China and the overall population increased rapidly in 1950s. The colonial government shifted its regard of the New Territories from a physical buffer between urban Hong Kong and mainland China to multiple functions

of alleviating urban population pressure and the reliance on the mainland for resources; thus, creating a great incentive for further development of the New Territories (Chiu and Hung, 1997). Clashes between pro-development and anti-development rural elites arose due to rural urbanization in 1950s overtook the original rural conflicts between the government and indigenous residents.

For the colonial government's perspective, the New Territories comprised nearly 90 percent of total Hong Kong land area that could be regarded as a hinterland for the alleviation of the population pressure (Kuan and Lau, 1979). Tsuen Wan was the first rural area undergoing significant development and population growth. There was more village representative representing Tsuen Wan in the Heung Yee Kuk due to the increased population. Ho Cheun-yiu, the Chairman of Tsuen Wan Rural Committee with the view of pro-development, was elected to become the 12<sup>th</sup> chairman of Heung Yee Kuk. However, the five greats clans mainly in Yuen Long with anti-development view saw themselves as losing influence upon the Heung Yee Kuk (Liu, 1999).. The Heung Yee Kuk was divided two factions after this constitutional dispute in 1957, i.e. "Tsuen Wan faction" and "Yuen Long faction" (Lee, 1983). Since the colonial government was concerned if "Yuen Long faction" took back the control of Heung Yee Kuk through this constitutional dispute, it led to a confrontational situation between the colonial government and Heung Yee Kuk. In order to prevent the anti-government rural elites from controlling the Heung Yee Kuk, the colonial government delivered a warning that the Heung Yee Kuk was not a legalized organization and no longer a recognized rural consultative body.

The establishment of the Heung Yee Kuk Bill recognized its statutory status and restored its original structure in 1959 (Chiu and Hung, 1997). Consequently, the

colonial government successfully co-opt “Tsuen Wan factions” to first restore its structure and the reformed Heung Yee Kuk with the majority of “Tsuen Wan factions” facilitate the colonial government to develop the New Territories rapidly in the 1960s onward.

Urbanization with setting up new towns in the New Territories was rapid in 1960s onward to alleviate population pressure in urban Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the New Territories residents suffered from village evictions due to the construction of new towns, reservoirs and highways during 1960s and 1970s. There was much opposition from indigenous residents using *feng shui* as a cultural appeal to demand compensation. Since the government hoped to expropriate the land from indigenous residents for development as soon as possible, it presented a land exchange agreements to the indigenous residents as a means of compensation. The holders of land exchange agreements could apply for other Crown land to resume their land ownership. However, due to the over-issuing of land exchange agreements, the government could not satisfy the need of those holders. . Even some pro-government and pro-development elites rejected the government’s land policies towards the New Territories. The government negotiated with Heung Yee Kuk and eventually introduced the small house policy.

The government suggested providing each male in the New Territories one lot of land without paying land price to solve the problem of over-issuing of land exchange agreements. Since more newcomers had moved into the New Territories, the government had a clear definition of “New Territories’ people”. After the consultation with Heung Yee Kuk, the definition is that male villagers whose paternal ancestors lived in the New Territories prior to 1898 were entitled to apply



for a piece of 700-square-foot land and build a house within the boundary of the village. This definition has now become a legal definition of indigenous residents. The Small House Policy again became remedial measures to alleviate political conflicts between the colonial government and the local residents.

The establishment of District Boards and Regional Council in the New Territories in 1980s aimed to control the Heung Yee Kuk's influence in the New Territories and alleviate conflicts between indigenous residents and residents in new towns (Liu, 1999). In order to guarantee the representativeness of the District Boards and Regional Council, Heung Yee Kuk's members were traditionally *ex-officio* members of those new regional institutions.

Human rights in rural areas, which triggered conflicts between human rights activists and rural elites, were another major issue in rural politics in the New Territories starting from 1990s (Liu, 1999). Before 1990s, the social status of men villagers was higher than women villagers in the clan villages of the New Territories. Laws did not protect the basic human rights of women villagers such as the succession of land ownership in the past decades. In 1990, the establishment of Hong Kong Bills of Rights Ordinance (Cap 383) triggered the promotion of proper political rights for women villagers and non-indigenous residents in the New Territories. In order to protect human rights and equal opportunity, the colonial government suggested that the New Territories Land (Exemption) Bill would allow indigenous women the rights to inherit property from their parents in urban areas only. However, Loh, LegCo member, amend the bills allowing indigenous women to inherit property in rural areas. This amendment received strong opposition from indigenous residents since it would ruin rural tradition and the vested interests that

male villagers gain would be severely affected. Indigenous residents initiated a “Battle of Protecting Our Home” to fight for the protection of the lawful traditional rights and vested interests of indigenous residents. The result was that the New Territories Land (Exemption) Ordinance (Cap. 452) was successfully endorsed. The political rights dispute implied that rural conflicts escalated and brought about multi-dimensional conflicts in the process of modernization. The vested interests and special privilege of indigenous residents are bound to clash with the dilution of the New Territories’ specialness.

#### **4.3 Functional Perspectives in the New Territories: From Productivism to Post-productivism**

Before the era of urban sprawl to the New Territories, the New Territories was largely an agricultural area with residents living upon farmsteads for generations. The land was their most important source of livelihood. Local agricultural in Hong Kong in the prewar era was mostly rice farming (Hayes, 2006) with the coverage 80% of the territory’s farmland (AFD, 1951). Farmers’ engagement of the rice production was because they could not forget the hunger during wartime. Growing starchy food ensure their survival during wartime. Their belief originates from fear for wartime hunger that echoes the notion of agricultural fundamentalism (Bishop & Philips, 1993). Besides serving as survival, farming was also acting as a safety net for the underprivileged by providing both the site for building houses as well as farming for making a living (Wong, 1971). Accommodation of the massive mainland refugees was settled down in the New Territories the assistance Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association (Blackie, 1972).

For agricultural development, the Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries Departments

were established in 1946 to boost up the food supply locally. The Department of Agriculture was reformed into Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in 1953. It organized exhibitions to promote agricultural products and set up agricultural research institute. Governor Grantham talked about the importance of agriculture in the New Territories and as proud of the possibility of a one-month rice supply to 2.5 million residents in Hong Kong in 1950s (Liu, 1999).

To summarize, the function for food security was most emphasized by the farmer and the government. Stepping into the early 1970s, paddy rice farming diminished while mainly vegetable dominates the farmland in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the drastic expansion of market for fish, poultry, and livestock pushed the peak of the production value of agricultural sector in the early 1980s as the golden period of agricultural in Hong Kong.

However, local farming was incompatible with the development of the New Territories during 1980s. Many farmlands were used as new town development to alleviate the population pressure in urban Hong Kong. Also, reservoir construction in 1960s lead to the cessation of rice cultivation since the mountain watershed blocked the necessary water for irrigation (Sit & Kwong, 2011). Agriculture in Hong Kong experienced rapid decline in both output and area of cultivation (Jim, 1997). Meanwhile, the New Territories experienced a lifestyle change from rural to modern through urbanization and industrialization. Much farmland was abandoned and villagers went to urban Hong Kong or even go abroad to the United Kingdom to seek jobs (Chan, 1999). Rural decay became more serious and the function of alleviating the mainland reliance on resources imports was gone.

Apart from the rapid farmland loss for new towns development, a sprawl of three-story village housing began to encroach the farmland in the New Territories. Land use in the New Territories also consists of containers and port back-up yards, industrial establishment, recreation and tourism. The conversion from agricultural land to other uses was further common since the government lost court case, known as the “Melhado Case” (Jim, 1997), which weakened bargaining power of Block Crown Lease that is a major control of rural land use. The serious deterioration of the rural environment after the Melhado Case regarded as the “Melhado Fiasco” when the government lost control over farmland. Tang (2002) proved that the conversion of farmland to other uses in Kam Tin was significant. Land uses such as container storage and vehicle repairing centers are incompatible with farming as water sources nearby for irrigation is polluted.

The incompatibility of the agricultural activities with the environment greatly increased starting from the early 1970s when inorganic fertilizers and pesticides became popular. To stop the serious deterioration of the rural environment and to tackle the water pollution caused by sewage discharge from poultry and pig farms, Environmental Protection Department required the farms to install septic tanks to treat the sewage before discharge to rivers in accordance with the Waste Disposal (Livestock Waste) Regulations set in 1988. There was a large recession and elimination of small-scale pig and poultry farms since the owners found it unaffordable for the installation of sewage discharge system.

The first sizable organic farming called Produce Green Hok Tau Organic Farm was established in Hong Kong in 1989. The development of organic farm witnessed the cooperation between agriculture and environmental protection. To promote not using

inorganic fertilizers and pesticides, organic farming nurture a conscious of food safety among public and promote environmental ethics that enhance the biodiversity of farmland.

The expansion of urban living has eventually promoted agriculture through stimulating the growth of leisure farming which includes hobby farming, and farming experience such as fruit-picking. More urban dwellers enjoyed an alternative lifestyle as hobby farmers by renting a small lot in one of the farms in the New Territories in holiday-based. Urban dwellers may participate farming in different levels with respect to the lifestyle they enjoy the most. Cheng (2009:7) described the phenomenon on urban dwellers participate in agriculture as “their ways to find happiness, love and enjoyment apart from the money-oriented life goal”. This trend manifested itself after the financial crisis in 1998 when Hong Kong citizens pursued life goals other than simply earning more money. The SARS Outbreak in 2003 was another contributing factor for changing some Hong Kong people’ perception towards farming. The unbearable atmosphere under the phobia of infection pushed people out of the urban areas during the SARS Outbreak. People could only take away their masks in the green space instead of staying in the concrete forest making them suffocated.

While the SARS Outbreak in 2003 revived primitive attention among the Hong Kong public about local farming, starting from 2005, many newspaper headlines have report the news of rural issues and increased public awareness to show more concerns of the New Territories such as the collapse of Lam Tsuen Wishing Tree in 2005, the campaign in Choi Yuen Tsuen against the High Speed Railway development in 2009, the removal of illegal structures among village houses, and the

campaign among villages of northeast New Territories against the new town development in 2012. These incidents have made Hong Kong people more conscious of the New Territories' development.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE CONSTRUCTION OF INDIGENOUS RESIDENTS' RURAL IMAGINATION: ASCRIBED STATUS AND ECONOMIC PROPERTIES**

In this chapter, I will further elaborate how rural imagination and representation among indigenous residents, as one important part of Halfacree's (2006) theoretical framework, is constructed in the New Territories. Based on field data and the uniqueness of Hong Kong's contextual background (see Chapter 4 for historical context), I have identified two parameters that contribute to rural imagination and representation among indigenous residents. The two factors are the ascribed status of indigenous residents and economic value of rural land properties. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is to explain how the ascribed status of indigenous and non-indigenous residents constitutes an important social identity in the New Territories. The second part is to understand how rural land properties and their economic value lead to changes in indigenous residents' rural imagination. As indigenous residents commonly emphasize both their sentiments of belonging and procession of their home village, I then attempt to explain how these competing mindsets make impacts to their lifestyle and how the existing rural setting is shaped and reshaped through these competing mindsets.

Before introducing the findings, I should introduce the naming I will use throughout the following chapters. Basically, I will divide the respondents into indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents. For non-indigenous residents, I will use alternative lifestyle seekers with rural idylls to identify the non-indigenous residents who put emphasis on ecological values. Then, I will use pragmatic seekers to identify the non-indigenous residents who embrace economic value to define their own rurality.

## **5.1 Ascribed Status of Indigenous Residents: The Clan Family as Rural Imagination**

The clan family in the New Territories was once considered as the periphery of Hong Kong with poor accessibility. Villagers were usually members of the same clan who stayed close living together in an isolated and remote area. With poor accessibility, many clans had to grow their crops for self-sufficiency. Labour-intensive agriculture generated a communal lifestyle that encouraged mutual help amongst villagers and a tightly-knit community with personal relationships emerged within villages. Under the context of the clan family, sharing of the same blood-tie and a communal lifestyle constituted a shared identity and rural imagination amongst clan villagers.

Four male indigenous residents emphasized their childhood experience in the rural area and the importance of the sense of community and clan family in their rural imagination. These men had lived in clan villages since they were born and treasured their time in the village. They believed they have the responsibility to inherit the clan tradition to next generation. One respondent expressed that he had never considered the term rural. He considered his clan family and living environment in whole village the most. Ideal rural environment is not meaningful to him because it is just where they live. Two respondents expressed the rural idyll through past experience in the clan village. Happy experiences were created by joining clan family activities and enjoying the rural landscape. One of them expressed not only concerning the treasure of clan family atmosphere, but also expressed the importance of maintaining the comfortableness and quietness of the rural environment. All of the four respondents considered their boundary of family is not bounded by the physical wall of their housing. Instead, they extended their



family boundary to the rural landscape of the whole village. Therefore, the emphasis of clan family is important to construct the rural imagination of male indigenous residents.

‘I have lived in my village for a long time. I consider this village as my family and a place I live. I don't have any idea about the definition of an ideal rural environment since no matter this village is ideal or not, this village is my village and I have never thought of giving up my village. [...] I hope my village has more prosperity, more commitment among indigenous residents and a cleaner environment.’ (M1)

‘My childhood experience in the rural area is ideal. Getting up at 5:30 am and taking a ride to Kowloon for school. Swimming and playing ballgames with other village children after school are things I consider as an ideal rural lifestyle.’ (M3)

### **5.1.1 Sense of Community Create the Concept of Home**

From the field data, most indigenous residents’ respondents associated themselves with phrase that ‘all villagers knew each other’ and work with fighting for indigenous residents’ common interests. The link with community emerged primarily from the clanship and kinship among indigenous residents living in small dense clan villages. Some indigenous residents are eager to devote whole-heartedly to a sense of solidarity by organizing and participating in village activities such as celebrating festivals and worship ancestors. The strong sense of among indigenous residents constructed and reinforced the strong sense of insiders within clan village since it imply that more social interactions among villagers can nurture a good sense of community. Interview data from male indigenous residents verify this argument:

“All villagers are indigenous residents. We sit and chat under the trees before going home to sleep every night. We, as a community,

help celebrating when there are indigenous residents get married. It shows our tradition and sense of solidarity.” (M3)

“All villagers knew each other and we never lock the doors for security since we share the same blood–tie and clan.” (M4)

Interestingly, from the interview data of field subjects, a significant number of indigenous residents held a belief that their entire village, plus an obscure but wide ring of surrounding rural land, was literally “their home”. Usually such a territory concept might not be grounded upon any boundary defined by land deeds or private properties. It was a more subtle sentiment of belonging and possession.

“I consider the concept of my home is not only the village house I lived, but also include the area surrounding my village house. My home area include the front pond and the back hills of the village. I went there to ride a bike and play football when I was young.” (M4)

“I live in village of Yuen Long and just consider the entire Yuen Long area as my home. I know the customs and rules in Yuen Long. However, when I left Yuen Long, I no longer consider other places as my home. Tuen Mun, Fanling, and Sheung Shui are also rural area. Those places have their customs and rulers which are differ from Yuen Long. I respect their customs and rules since I am not living there.” (M2)

On one hand, such a form of rural imagination would create an attitude of obligation to protect an entire village and its surrounding rural areas. On the other hand, the concept of “home” also implied restrictions and enclosure from the access non-indigenous outsiders. Some indigenous residents associated the rural with high status not because of the village landownership but rather through the sense of belonging to a clan village. They said that they possess profound knowledge of the area and that they were familiar with everything within their clan village. The sense

of expertise on rural affairs allowed them a high status in rural areas.

“We, indigenous residents, love rural area and our village. We consider our village as our home. We should protect our family environment by not throwing rubbish everywhere.” (M1)

“I think it is high status [to live in a rural area] since rural areas are my territory. If I need to fight with an urban dweller in a rural area, I am confident in the police station because it is the New Territories [that I am in]. [...] We always state which village we come from to show our own status. [...] The village I lived is my home and I grew up there. Outsiders should not be arrogant within village.” (M2)

Partly due to the “concept of home”, most indigenous residents has a strong frame of reference about the merits of rural life. They often had a preference good relationship with other clan villagers, more social space, and quieter place with clear air. Many indigenous residents considered such features of rural life as characteristics of their spontaneous home space, and what a good life should be like. When indigenous residents with strong rural subjectivity went to urban areas to work or study, they could be sensitive to the “evil side” of urban lifestyle such as noise and crowds in the city.

“I love living in my village since it is easy to keep in touch with nature. My village is near the sea. Some clan villagers and I often go to seashore for fishing every week. Also, we have barbeque gathering with clan villagers. People living in the city have rarer chance to enjoy this kind of lifestyle.” (M1)

### **5.1.2 Ascribed Indigenous Status Reinforced by Government Privileges**

Resumption, construction and resettlement plans proposed by the government was often seen by indigenous residents as damaging to their rural lifestyle, clan

inheritance, and legitimate right. Indigenous residents' 'traditional' rights uphold their clan inheritance in term of granting piece of land for village houses development. With the agreement between Heung Yee Kuk and the government in 1972, male indigenous residents were entitled for land right to build village house. The legitimacy of indigenous residents' traditional rights conservation granted by government. The government provided privilege for village house entitlement that support the actual rural practices by building huge amount of village house. The act of building village house become invented traditional rights and effective cultural appeals for every male adult indigenous resident to consolidate their clan inheritance. Hence, the historical and cultural driven factor of maintaining clan tradition motivated indigenous resident to the present rural practice.

“With the agreement between people in the New Territories and government in 1972, the identity of indigenous residents had been defined to be granted right for building village house and interment. However, government only grants rights instead of granting land for building village house. In order to protect the entire Chinese land in the New Territories, local people defense and sacrifice their lives to obtain the identity of indigenous resident.” (M2)

“My father as an indigenous resident believes that they deserve to be granted rights to building village houses since government was beholden to indigenous resident right by restricting their land use and development.” (F6)

## **5.2 Economic Aspirations of Indigenous Residents**

Besides the clan tradition as rural imagination, economic consideration has become more influential among indigenous landowners in the New Territories. Indigenous residents' rural imagination included improving the rural living standard and considering the importance of the New Territories' land value. It is commonly seen

that indigenous residents, which have their own land, transform the farmlands to group of 3-stoery village housings and renovation of old village houses to new. I concern about how indigenous residents' rural imagination motivated them to the action of transforming farmland to village houses.

### **5.2.1 Indigenous Residents Welcome for Farmland Resumption**

During the period in which the colonial government confiscated huge amounts of the New Territories' land, indigenous residents welcomed the government to resume farmlands nearby so that they could receive monetary compensation for renovation of village houses to improve their rural living standard.

‘The land resumed by government was farmland. Indigenous residents welcomed the farmland resumption since there was less labour to take care of the excessive amount of farmland. Also, you cannot earn 1 million dollars from farming for your whole life at that time. The landowners could earn few millions dollars after the land resumption. A few million dollars was really a large amount of money thirty years ago. [...] There were renovation and newly built village houses after indigenous residents became richer after the farmland resumption.’ (L7)

### **5.2.2 Increased Interests in Land Ownership and Succession**

Based on the field data, indigenous residents considered of the importance of the New Territories' land value is the reason for the action of transforming farmland to village houses. Rather than becoming an abandoned area of Hong Kong lacking infrastructure and resources, the New Territories' development persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century making the land value of the New Territories rise. Seeing the success development of urban area and new towns, indigenous residents predicted that their private land value raise up throughout the expansion of urbanization. Also, public

discourse such as shortage of housing influence indigenous residents to consider their village houses as assets for renting to generate profits. Therefore, the economic factor of the increased New Territories land value motivated indigenous residents to the present rural practice. Attaching importance of the New Territories land value has become a core rural imagination.

‘I have land for building village houses. Most people ask me whether I intend to sell the land for village houses development or not. However, my answer is no. simply speaking, what if you use 100 million dollars to buy my land, which is valued at only 50 million; I still would not sell it since I have no urge to sell it. I would sell it if I need money to use. Since the New Territories’ land and village houses values continually increase, I would sell it later in order to gain more profit if necessary.’ (M2)

Furthermore, indigenous respondent M2 mentioned the process of generating profits their private lands or land granted from government through village houses development to supply housing for real estate market.

“Wang Chau, which contains large wetlands, has been already purchased by large cooperation and even some triad members around twenty years ago to hoard the New Territories land for market speculation. They used really cheap price to purchase land before but the land value get inflated nowadays. More than 100M of economic interest is involved. However, even though you get the land and permission grant from government to build village houses, it is also necessary to get the permission from village representatives. Indeed, private developers provide resources for more than 10 years through the triad society network to train up local village power for the facilitation of village house development. If the nurtured candidates get elected in village representative election, private developers have no barrier to develop the purchased land. Private developers definitely use money to influence voting process.” (M2)

Respondent M2's argument can be supported by a LegCo's submission (2002) drafted by the Common Group on New Territories Walled Village Culture. Some village representatives were the co-optees of property developers and might receive monetary rewards in the process of constructing and selling village house. Village representatives have the legal power to certify the indigenous status of villagers who apply for the Small House grants. Therefore, the application of Small House Grants brings more corruption since the construction of small houses could receive more monetary rewards. More indigenous residents pay more attention on the interests in land ownerships and succession and are eager to gain influence in rural affairs.

### **5.3 Clan Values and Sustainability of Land Rights**

Rapid urbanization in the New Territories brings about complexity in rural land interests. In section 4.1 and 4.2, I have introduced that both ascribed indigenous status and economic aspirations contribute to indigenous residents' rural imagination. However, different emphasis of these parameters amongst indigenous residents would lead to the great discrepancies between indigenous residents who support selling village houses and who reject it.

#### **5.3.1 Place Importance on Economic Interests on Properties**

Public may conceive indigenous residents as one whole entity as powerful and resourceful in the New Territories, but indigenous residents have their own internal conflicts due to economic interests or the violation of traditional values. Within the indigenous residents groups, there are disputes over land ownership and allocation of land for village house development. Some clan lineage branches may have many sons and a shortage of allocated land, whereas some clan lineage branches may have

ample land for development but very few sons. Different clan branches therefore need to compromise on how the land is allocated.

“Even though there is a clear boundary of land ownership stated in official documents or maps, however, we find it difficult to conceive where the boundary of land ownership lies in actual practice. Therefore, there are many arguments within the village to claim their land ownership.” (L9)

### **5.3.2 Place Importance on Traditional Values**

Land conflicts amongst indigenous villagers are not purely economic. Very often these conflicts also involve cultural and moral factors relating to traditional patriarchal values, sustainability of land rights in clan lineage, and the well-being of the clan community.

As every male adult indigenous resident is eligible to a piece of land for building a village house, land ownership within the village is getting more scattered. Some male adult indigenous resident may sell their own private land or land granting right to private developers for generating profit whilst some of them may rent their village houses to city dwellers since they have different considerations on estimating the New Territories land value. The individualistic disposition among indigenous residents eventually strike against the sense community and great clan.

“Involving the problem of development and private interest, some indigenous residents with individualistic disposition become greedier. For example, some indigenous residents would intentionally privatize some ancestral land for their own use. However, some of them consider more about clan inheritance in long run. They would consider whether the potential development would benefit the clan and community or not.” (M1)



“When indigenous residents consider their private interest, for example, the disagreement in dividing interests among indigenous residents, it lead to the split of united sense of community and great clan.” (F6)

### **5.3.3 Clan Sustainable Interests as Frame of Reference**

From the interview data, I found that some indigenous residents put the blame on “incompetent” ancestors and indigenous residents for selling rural land and properties to property developers, which damaged their sustainable land rights along the clan’s lineage. From the field data, I can see how the capabilities and strength of male indigenous residents were emphasized in clan patriarchal discourse. The common social expectation on the “good indigenous resident” was that he should earn his own living independently and develop his family. The clan family would glorify those ancient kinsmen who served as government officials after successful performance in state examinations, and those who had made great contributions to village development. Modern kinsmen who had their own businesses also gained the respect of others. There was a social hierarchy defined by status within the clan family. However, some indigenous residents were unable to fit into social expectations from fellow kinsmen. Instead of working hard in daily lives, some indigenous residents gambled all the time, threatened domestic harmony, and led to “household collapse”. If the village had no more space for expansion and building new village houses, those who sold land and properties in the past could be blamed.

The act of a male indigenous resident selling his inherited land to property developers was never seen as purely rational and economic. From the perspective of his kinsmen, the act could be associated with greed, personal weakness, problematic moral standard, and lack of concern about the clan’s sustainable interests. Hence,

traditional values of clan family are overwhelming to impose an attitude among indigenous residents to protect entire clan sustainable interests over their own private economic interest. Pursuing economic interests of rural land value, to a certain extent, is considered as the violation of social expectation on the “good indigenous resident” in clan patriarchal discourse.

However, I disapprove that indigenous residents showed a dogmatic attitude when they considered the act of indigenous resident selling inherited land as evil to harm the entire clan interests. They already held their ideas and beliefs and expected other people to accept such without question. In order to understand the rational act of selling inherited land among indigenous residents instead of ending up in over-generalization, contextual interpretation would be necessary to explain indigenous residents’ rationale.

#### **5.4 Individual Economic Privilege as Means to Pursue Clan Interest**

While it may at first sight appear that selling their inherited land is a purely individualized action and pursuit personal economic interests driven by self-realization of the general rise of their property value, there are certain limits to their actions that they cannot escape. In section 5.2., I have illustrated the example that indigenous residents welcomed the government to resume their farmlands so that they have monetary compensation for renovation of old village houses into new ones. This case proved that not all indigenous residents sell their inherited land with unjustified reason. Improving indigenous residents’ overall rural living standard should be considered as pursuing clan sustainable interest for preventing rural deterioration. From indigenous residents accounts of the decision to sell their inherited land in this case, pursuing clan interests was still a central feature of their

action.

For one particular female indigenous residents (F5), she believed inequality concerned traditional customs emphasizing the different treatments men and women receive. However, on this point, she did not show any resentment. She said that her father is liberal to give the best resources for daily living. The action for her father to pursue on economic interest is justified by maintaining the well-being of his household to prevent the household collapse. Therefore, the mindset of being a good indigenous residents and pursue on economic interest are not mutual exclusive. Pursuing clan interests was still a central feature of indigenous residents' action.

#### **5.4.1 Promoting Rural Tourism**

Promoting rural tourism is an example showing that the emphasis of clan sustainable interests and pursue individual own economic interest is not mutual exclusive. In order to achieve and maintain indigenous residents' quality of living, it is common to find that indigenous residents run small businesses as self-employed. The choice of enterprise varies that indigenous residents reconfigure the rural recourses by allowing alternative lifestyle seekers (see Chapter 6) to rent their village houses, setting up small business which cohere with rural environment, promoting their rural culture and landscape as rural tourism, or providing services for other villagers. The act of reconfiguring rural resources constructs a sense of belonging in rural area through local participation leading to more concern about rural affairs. Once people with possession of rural land properties strike a balance between economic and environment factors, the renewal of rural economy contributes to another form of solidarity – i.e. economic prosperity among people who possess of rural land properties. Pursuing clan interests was still a central feature of indigenous residents'

action. Therefore, indigenous residents use their businesses as a means to an end that they reconfigure the rural recourses through businesses to consolidate the solidarity amongst indigenous residents.

“Many Cheung Chau indigenous residents love to build village house when they have money and for further investment either for sale or resort that rent to visitors.” (L12)

“Tai Mei Tuk has alternative development compared to other rural areas. Its development not only relies on village development, but also can rely on rural tourism which attracts tourists to have barbeque and cycling. Indigenous residents gain benefit from rural tourism as rural developmental mode since it brings prosperity. The bike-renting shops and restaurants are operated by our indigenous residents. Since they operate business in our village, they have sense in involving rural affairs and their idea on how to develop their village is united. For example, they support the development of Lung Mei Bathing Beach since they believe that there will be more tourists coming to Tai Po for promoting rural tourism. The owner of village house also increase rent level since the village gets promoted. Overall, it benefits their village development in the long run and it lead to the united sense of community and great clan.” (F6)

### **5.5 Two Complementary Mindsets of Rural Imaginations: Ascribed Status and Economic Value of Rural Land Properties**

Both the ascribed status of indigenous residents and economic value of rural land properties contributes to rural imagination and representation in the New Territories among indigenous residents. On the one hand, this study provides a new perspective that ascribed status of indigenous residents, which is unique in Hong Kong contextual background, is an important parameter in constructing indigenous residents' rural imagination. Sharing the same blood-ties and a communal lifestyle constituted a shared identity along with the rural imagination amongst clan villagers

under the context of the clan family. Indigenous residents held a belief that their entire village was literally “their home” which shows a more subtle sentiment of belonging.

The “home” concept among indigenous residents manifest an attitude of obligation to protect the entire village and traditional values of clan family such as patriarchal values and well-being of the clan community. On the other hand, indigenous residents realized the importance of the New Territories land value as that of the New Territories being more influential to the future development of Hong Kong as a whole. The increased New Territories land value motivated indigenous residents to build more village houses as means to generate profit for improving their living standard. Attaching importance of the New Territories land value has become a core rural imagination among indigenous residents.

Some indigenous residents hold a dogmatic view on the matter of selling inherited land as damaging clan sustainable land rights and interests. It is also evident for their accounts of the decision to selling inherited land that the spirit of clan interest was still a central feature of their action. Instead of considering that the emphasis of clan sustainable interests and pursue individual own economic interest is mutual exclusive, I suggest these two mindsets are complementary to each other.

## CHAPTER 6

### ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE SEEKERS EMERGED: THE SEARCH FOR A BETTER WAY OF LIFE

In this chapter, I explore the utility of rural imagination and representation as an analytical tool in order to explain the sociological phenomenon of urban dwellers relocating into the rural New Territories as a means to finding an alternative to their city lifestyle. Even though the number of individuals relocating to the rural New Territories has grown and become increasingly more significant, in general, they remain poorly understood and conceptualized and have been largely overlooked in the more general literature on the rural New Territories. None of these conceptualizations, however, fully grasp the complexity of this new trend. I contend that the study of the emergence of alternative lifestyle seekers in the current rural New Territories is a viable research path, as these newcomers may become a new form of political power to influence the existing rural politics in the New Territories.

This chapter will begin by examining the narratives of idea emerged among as to understand how they develop a taste of a particular way of life while joining rural activities, and subsequently decide to relocate in the rural New Territories. One possible cause of counter-urbanization may result from individuals' fatigue of urban living igniting a yearning to seek an alternative living situation. This group of alternative lifestyle seekers, I refer to as the rural idyll group throughout the following chapters. Apart from anti-modern and anti-urban sentiments introduced by some alternative lifestyle seekers, this chapter then examines another type of alternative life seekers, the pragmatic group, who relocated to the rural New Territories due to the cheaper housing rents. I will further attempt to explain the

impact of alternative lifestyle seekers' lifestyle choice and "rural" practice that since both groups faced difficulties with integrating into the existing rural setting. The effort alternative lifestyle seekers invest in making their rural imagination a reality give rise to reflect the growing interest in lifestyle within sociology.

### **6.1 Motivation of Searching a Better Way of Life**

At the beginning of each interview, I asked my respondents to answer questions regarding why they were either eager to participate in rural village activities or why they desired to relocate to the New Territories. Typically certain respondents replied with similar reasoning such as, 'getting out of the traps', 'making a fresh start', and 'starting a new beginning'. Their responses revealed conflict in their previous lifestyle and showed the New Territories as a way to start life anew. The respondents indicated that they sought different lifestyles in order to renegotiate their work-life balance, improve their quality of life, or freedom from prior constraints. Following their reasons and expressions for moving to the New Territories, I categorized this group of respondents as alternative lifestyle seekers. They commonly explained their specific relocation by contrasting on the differences between urban settings and rural settings as a means to express the merits of living in rural area with the shortcomings of living in the city.

'There aren't any high-rise buildings. It is less accessible so fewer cars and people can come here. There are more flowers, trees and animals.' (H24)

'The ideal lifestyle is that if I can build a house in rural area, there should be farmland for me to farm. Rural area should not be noisy. Rural area should have larger space since it is difficult to find a larger space in Hong Kong.' (H25)

Although alternative lifestyle seekers have various reasons to express a better quality

of life, they instantly narrate their decision to join rural activities or even move into village with the emphasis on their negative presentations of the metropolitan life before coming into the rural New Territories. Their rural imagination closely links to Ilbery's (1998) concept of rural idyll that is a positive image surrounding many aspects of rural lifestyle, community, and landscape. Rural idyll is considered as the pull of the countryside as a way of life that one can escape the hectic urban life in this idyllic countryside. People holding rural idyll often compare the rural lifestyle and landscape with its urban counterparts by saying 'Urban areas are too noisy so the rural should be quieter'. They also associated the lower population and housing density as a component to their rural imagination without the appearance of the urban features. Farmland was the common feature of rural environment that was commonly mentioned. Even some of them mentioned that keeping livestock was part of their rural imagination. Therefore, the rural New Territories in Hong Kong in their perspectives are considered as traditional, primitive, environmental and natural.

### **6.1.1 Searching a Healthier Way of Life**

One of the most common narratives from respondents pertains to the rural New Territories as a place to achieve a healthier life. The dominant argument behind this association originates in the belief that the New Territories provides fresher air. Respondents claimed to experience fresher air in rural areas and compared with the air of the city that they associated with exhaust fumes from heavy traffic and other air pollutants. Additionally, they considered the rural as healthier as the respondents insisted that the more available space enabled them greater opportunities to exercise. Respondents reasoned that walking from bus stops to home and jogging in nearby country parks portrayed exercise available in the rural. Other associations with healthiness included a simpler life coupled with a consistent rural



lifestyle. Respondents experienced or imagined a rural lifestyle routine as “starting work at sunrise, resting at sunset” and less entertainment in rural areas led to earlier sleeping hours. Furthermore, a healthier rural lifestyle often linked people to nature by growing vegetables in their gardens or on their balconies.

### **6.1.2 Achieving a Place with more Relaxation and Simplicity**

Respondents also associated relaxation with the rural New Territories. They believed that unlike in their former urban lifestyles that they could indeed achieve relaxation in the rural New Territories. Respondents derived this imagination mainly from the natural environment comprising open space and fewer people. Their imagination led them to believe that rural areas offered an escape or relief from the hustle and bustle of the city, as they expected fewer disturbances and less pressure and stress. The rural setting enabled them to appreciate the scenery and wildlife. Other relaxing aspects included quietness. Respondents claimed they could slow down the pace of their lives by doing whatever they liked without pressing for time that derived from a direct contrast between urban and rural life. Understandably, respondents made such comparisons since relaxation entails an important experience of the countryside. Upon entering the rural areas, respondents view this entry as an escape from the stress of the everyday working life in the city. Being closer to nature allowed simplicity and routine rural lifestyle. The demand of living standard is less ambitious and the social interaction between neighbors can be simple and direct. H25 reminded us that people had to make a conscious effort to adjust their life to a slower pace.

“Rural areas give me a sense of relaxation. I can just sit for two hours to drink coffee, appreciate the scenery and listen to the birds singing. There isn’t any need to make plans to do anything! It is difficult to relax in everyday working life. Rural settings remind

me to adjust to a slower pace of life.” (H25)

“I think, in rural areas, we take a simple way of life since we only deal with simple things. We tend not to worry about complex thinking or problems.” (L8)

### **6.1.3 Seeking a Place with a Strong Sense of Community**

Respondents also imagined the rural New Territories as a place to retrieve a sense of community that they deemed lost in the city. The link with community emerged primarily from the clanship and kinship among indigenous residents living in small clan villages. They associated the rural residents with the phrase that “all villagers know each other” and being united to fight for rural residents’ common interests. Also tradition correlated to the ways the villagers celebrated festivals, as their ancestors have in order to maintain rural customs. Respondents found fewer opportunities in the city to experience a festive atmosphere. Traditional customs were preserved through indigenous villagers’ practices that were regarded favorably by almost everyone. Rural values, including village customs and nature awareness, were considered as the principal experience of village life and the repository of traditional values.

‘Indigenous residents are more united since they have lived in a village for a long time. They know each other especially in clan villages. They have a united perspective on how they view matters.’ (L11)

“Clan villages have many traditional customs. Tradition is a component of rural life. For example, we have preserved the custom of eating *puncaï* together. You cannot find this large-scale, harmonious celebration in the city. A greater atmosphere forms when there are many people gathered at 100 tables. [...] my friends living in Kowloon really enjoy eating *puncaï* in the village.’ (L7)

#### **6.1.4 Representations of the Ills of Urban Life**

Life alternatives seekers retrospectively explain their motivation of searching for a life change contrasting between the merits of the rural areas – the slow pace of life; the climate and health benefits; and a feeling of community – and the shortcomings of the urban area – lack of community spirit; high-pressure lifestyles; and low quality of life. Their explanations closely link to Wirth's (1938) concept of urban areas as size, density, heterogeneity, division of labor, and impersonal connections. Those who were ill adapted to the urban lifestyle were likely to experience aversion and fatigue against urban life. As more urban dwellers experienced a need to relax in rural areas, a counter-urban imagination could be identified amongst those alternative lifestyle seekers. I use the word "counter-urban imagination" instead of rural imagination, because they had a world view that stemmed from an urban standpoint and subjectivity. They might be feverish rural lovers, holiday seekers, or weekend famers with strong rural idylls of achieving a new fresh start from their original city lifestyle. It implied that they have the sense of counter-urbanization.

Indeed, from their narratives of achieving a better life, they may not reflect objective reality; the presented advantages of life in the distinction are often romanticized accounts with the emphasis of the representation of the ills of their original urban life. The countryside is thus constructed or misrepresented as somewhere people have more time for each other, with a more close-knit community, somewhere children can grow up in safety, a stress-free environment away from the excesses and constraints of the city. These reinvented images of the rural idyll are often linked to the past in the form of nostalgia for simpler rural living (Urry, 1995). Their preference for rural life was actually a romantic projection from their innate worldview, an old and fatigue urban life that they themselves resented. The need for

rural life was indeed a need for “something alternative to urban life”. Romantic rural myths have been fostered by an evident anti-urban bias. However, the exaggerated comparison between urban and rural life provides a rationalization of seeking a better way of life. Through such narratives accounts, they additionally emphasize on personal and self-realization reasons for achieving a life change. The act of participating in more rural activities or even deciding to move into rural area is a way of taking control of their lives, or as releasing them from urban ties and enabling them to live lives more true to themselves. Alternative lifestyle seekers want to present their personal life as an antithesis of their former city life.

In the perception of this counter-urbanizing population, their destinations offer them the antithesis of the lives that they are living behind. However, the interpretations and meanings of a place matter more to alternative lifestyle seekers than the actual qualities that can be objectively described. As a result, the concrete attributes and characteristics labeled rural means the term does not actually have to coincide with the countryside as such; rurality can be constructed, sought or created elsewhere. People with romantic counter-urban imagination tended to experience rurality as if it was a form of consumption and a resource for desire gratification. Rurality became an external object to be consumed, not an inherent worldview by itself. Once the countryside was marketed as offering an alternative way of life, an escape from the ills of the modernity and the city, now distant lands in rural areas hold the same meanings; in other words, rural area as a whole are constructed as something with non-urban characteristics. This is doubt that these reinvented images of the rural idyll are either the only image of rural or socially constructed by power relationship through the notion of exclusion and selectivity.

‘I love going to rural areas since urban Hong Kong is really

noisy. It is too crowded in the city with many tourists. Quite disturbing for those mainland tourists! The only chance you can get rid of the nosiness and crowded urban area is to go to rural area to achieve a quieter and greener life. I hope I can go to rural areas more often for relaxation and become happier.’ (H25)

Commonly stressing on the romanticized sentiments of anti-modern and anti-urban, it has been concluded that all destinations signify the same thing to individuals: a different and better way of life comparing to the pervious lifestyle. In section 5.3, I would put more emphasis on how this rural idyll sentiment translates into alternative lifestyle seekers’ everyday ‘rural’ life experience in order to enrich the counter-urbanization discourse.

## **6.2 Denying the Existence of Rural Locality: Pragmatic Seekers for Cheap Housing**

From the field data, it could be identified that a group of rural newcomers chose to relocate their home to the rural New Territories because they could not afford the high level of rent in urban Hong Kong. Some city dwellers from Hong Kong Island and Kowloon were pushed by a dramatic urban-rural gap to rural village houses. Meanwhile, rural areas offered pull factors such as more space for private car parking and keeping pets. In general, the pragmatic group of rural newcomers and the rural idyll group have taken similar moves from urban areas to rural areas, but the two groups did not share the same imagination. Rather, the first priority of the pragmatic rural residents was economic which are more far away from the concept of rural idyll. Affordability, value for money, and transport accessibility were more important. This finding is significant that it sway the rural idyll as hegemonic social representation of the rural within contemporary Hong Kong society. Respondent S14

said he moved to village because he could not afford for high rent of urban living. He did not want to use three quarters of his salary renting to small flat in urban area.

‘When you are not working in one of the big companies, which is going to pay for your housing, you really need to take into consideration the price. You don’t want to have three quarters of your salary going to 400 square feet. Having lived in a village house before, I decided to live in village X because of the rent increase and my old flat is still empty. [...]Places were more available in Wang Toi Shan. Quite a difficult area for transportation and I don’t have a car. [...] I think not having a management fee is another advantage. My rent included the management fee. Physically or financially I think it is advantage because my rent is cheaper than other Hong Kong places. And my rent is locked in for 2 years, unlike other leases where they increase the rent after the first year.’ (S14)

### **6.2.1 Pragmatic Seekers Face Difficulties to Fit into the Rural Reality**

Since pragmatic group of rural newcomers were forced to move into rural area by unaffordable urban rent level with smaller space, they never wanted to integrate in rural setting and rural community. They spent more time in city and less participation in village activities and affairs. They described their living place as a place only for sleeping. Their lifestyles have a great deviance from other rural residents since they do not have interactions with their neighbors. They show more care on the physical rural environment instead of the sense of community. If there is some destruction of physical rural environment where they experience, they avoid dealing with these village affairs and moving out to find another ideal living place with low rent. They have a low incentive of owning village houses in the rural New Territories since they are willing to move out from rural New Territories once they are able to find affordable urban living.

‘Home gets bigger and more space with lower rent compared to

previous urban living. There is nicer air quality, better landscape, more comfortable and quietness. However, I still cannot get involved living in a rural area since I can't get to know my neighbors. I go back to my home to sleep and I don't stay in my home during weekend. I go out to the city center for leisure.' (S18)

'I didn't think about the rural development in this village since I've only lived here for short period of time and I will move out soon. I know there is further village house development nearby and two years later the sea view will be blocked by the new development. Hence, I decided not to live here longer. If I were the owner of the village house, I would consider the future plan of rural development. Even through the beautiful view would be blocked, as owner perspective, I could sell the village house and find another one to buy.'(S16)

### **6.2.2 Denying the Concept of Urban Rural Divide**

Among those pragmatic rural newcomers, they did not share the concept of urban rural divide that rural idyll group share. From those interviews, I invited two expatriate respondents to participate in this research. They provided different angles to understand what is rural which may differ from the rural idyll groups' perspectives. One of them even considered that there was no rural area in Hong Kong since there was no large-scale farmland in Hong Kong. The other respondent considered that there was a core difference in defining the rural area between Hong Kong and his home country.

'I don't really consider my place as a rural environment, to be honest. There is not a lot of farmland; it's mostly residential. Rural to me is farmland, a lot of grain crops and raising animals. It is true that Hong Kong has no rural area actually.' (S15)

'Because I came from the States, for me a rural area is an area where you have houses that are very far apart and there are wide fields or forests between you and me, or even mountains as background. So, I think the rural area in Hong Kong is slightly

different. [...] In Hong Kong, rural area means you have a bunch of small 3-storey village houses together. There are mountains and fresh air.’ (S14)

It is significant to include these two expatriate respondents’ imagination into account since it provides a critical insight that Hong Kong lacks the criteria for rural space under the conventional definition in the world. In the process of super-urbanization in Hong Kong, Hong Kong people no longer heavily rely on large-scale farmland and animal husbandry as major physical criteria to define a place as a rural area. Instead, Hong Kong people rely in cultural criteria such as environmental friendly lifestyle and good community network to define their rurality. However, drawing from two expatriate respondents’ imagination, there is a doubt that whether the rural Hong Kong exist under the conventional definition in the world.

Same doubt can be still applied to the pragmatic rural newcomers. Some of them believed that the rural Hong Kong no longer exists during the urban sprawl and the division of urban and rural becomes blurred in the Hong Kong context. As a result, defining whether their living place is rural area is not the main concern for them. Rather, they put more consideration on the affordability of living place and accessibility between their living place and working place. The word ‘rural’ is less frequently used in their narrative since they seldom classify their living place located in rural area. Therefore, for pragmatic rent seekers perspective, there is no reason to define between urban and rural anymore since the term rural would become rhetorical without power to distinct specific character. It showed contrasts with the rural idyll group, which make the term rural survive by emphasizing a positive image surrounding many aspects of rural lifestyle, community and landscape in order to show the distinction from urban.



### **6.3 Adaptation of Rural Lifestyle amongst Alternative Lifestyle Seekers**

The rural idyllic reflects the rural experience and imagination of the wealthy and powerful elites and suppress the lifestyle and difficulty that are faced by the rural residents. Once the alternative lifestyle seekers start to participate rural activities or relocate into village, they experienced social clashes during the integration into the rural setting. The negative images hidden behind the positive images of rural idyll are discovered by alternative lifestyle seekers such as poverty, deprivation and a set of oppressive power relation in which the majority of rural newcomers were dependent on indigenous residents. Rural Idyll group show more acceptance to adapt the existing rural reality whereas pragmatic group show more avoidance for the adaptation. No matter alternative lifestyle seekers chose to be acceptance or avoidance for the adaptation of their brand new rural life, they want to achieve a better way of life according to their own choice.

#### **6.3.1 Rural Idyll Group: Translation from Counter-urban Imagination to Everyday 'Rural' Practice**

Since alternative lifestyle seekers who hold rural idyll as their major rural imagination cherished towards the natural environment, they would integrate their mindset of rural idyll into their interior housing design. Small garden in their balconies or near their village houses of going to farm frequently become the icon of this social group. They integrate natural environment with their lifestyle through planting or even growing own vegetables and crops for self-use.

'My father started to farm after retirement. He found a slope near our house to grow vegetables and fruit trees. The farmland is large that proximately 20 village houses can be built if the land is used. I know that my parents love staying here since my father considers the farmland as his playground after his retirement.' (L10)

Also, through their conversation in the interview, they expressed their care of nature and the concern on environmental issues. The disappearance of flora, fauna and natural habitats would violate the rural imagination of alternative lifestyle seekers. Overcrowding in village housing tarnishes the rural imagination about relaxation and quality of life. General environmental concerns may provide a loose common ground for stakeholders living in rural areas. If there is some destruction of physical rural environment where they experience, they will show strongly disagreement of those destructions or even actively participate in the rural affairs to defense what they supposed to enjoy in the rural area.

‘Why indigenous residents are not induced to preserve their rural environment or promote a better rural development such as farming? I prefer the land being undeveloped rather than existing village house development since lands with development seem more matched to the natural environment.’(L8)

Other demission of alternative lifestyle seekers’ rural idyll is the sense of community, which cannot be experienced in their urban practices. For newcomers’ perspectives, they found living in a village is a way of exploration of oneself and neighborhood is essential for their rural imagination. They would actively participate in village activities and affairs to integrate into existing rural setting and make good relationships with neighborhood. For holiday farmers, they went to farm frequently neither mainly for growing vegetables for self-use nor economic interest. Harvests in the farm become common topic for holiday farmers to communicate. Farming become a means to nurture the sense of belonging in a community that people gather with same interest. Farming redevelops the sense of relationship between people that lose in urban society. Therefore, newcomers and holiday farmers with more influence of rural idyll would spend more time in rural area and more willing to adapt rural lifestyle and participate in village activities and affairs.

‘There are experiences since I moved in rural area. I met new neighbors here that make me have a good sense of community. We eat dinner together that hardly find in urban practices’ (E20)

### **6.3.2 Pragmatic Group: Ill-adapted to the Rural Reality**

Pragmatic rural newcomers, whose main consideration is the affordability of rural housing rental level, has been identified in section 6.2. The attraction of affordable housing cost seems to be an explanation for their recent relocation. This explanation may be accused of being overly simplified and deterministic with pragmatic rural newcomers, as the hegemonic concept of rural urban divide has no role to explain their relocation. I further asked those respondents with pragmatic ideas whether the concept of rural urban divide has explaining power at once for their relocation. Some of them replied that they once treasured rural lifestyle, community and landscape as their ideal decent living place with an affordable housing cost in rural Hong Kong.

It shows that they once want to search for a life change by their relocation as a first turning point to achieve better lives which commonly share with rural idyll group. However, their romanticized rural imaginations made them suffer from rural reality whereas a second turning point to sway them from rural idyll. Experiencing endless clashes in adapting village lifestyle, they felt incapable to fit into rural setting and lost motivation to treasure the positive image of rural area. Since their rural imagination no longer convinced them from their actual rural practice, the narrative of the attraction of affordable housing cost seems become the only reasonable reason for them to continue to stay in their rural living place. Their pragmatic disposition encouraged them to avoid participation in village activities and affairs and spent more time outside the village. Some of them may think that they were more familiar with bustling city instead of quite rural environment. It explained why some

pragmatic rural newcomers have less sense of community and more willing to move out from rural New Territories once they are able to find affordable urban living.

### **6.3.3 Adaptation to Rural Lifestyle as an Endless Process**

Alternative lifestyle seekers, both rural idyll group and pragmatic group, commonly experienced the difference between their romanticized rural imagination and rural reality. The lifestyles of alternative lifestyle seekers were continuously influenced by their former urban lifestyle so that there are clashes with existing rural setting. As times passes, these accumulated urban experiences were constructed as secure comfort zone for alternative lifestyle seekers. When they first live in rural area or participate in rural activities that were totally brand new to their existing urban lifestyle, they experience clash in adapting rural lifestyle. Some respondents said that they used to familiar with bustling city instead of quite rural lifestyle and show difficulty to fit into rural setting. Endless processes of tolerance, adjustment and change were needed in adapting rural lifestyle.

When life alternative seekers face difficulty in adopting rural lifestyle, they tend to flinch from new rural lifestyle to their own comfort zone. Whether newcomers can adapt to rural lifestyle or not depends on how they interact with the rural locality. Once they outcome the barriers of rural living to let themselves integrate into the rural setting, they would continue to be eager to live in rural area. Otherwise, they consider living in rural area for a temporary nature since they cannot integrate into the rural setting.

‘There are many city dwellers moving into my village. We have good relationships our neighbors in general. Some newcomers are quite egocentric. They remain skeptical to form good relationships with their neighbors. Maybe they want to protect themselves that influenced by their former urban practice. However, some

newcomers are really active and enthusiastic to adapt to a new rural lifestyle. They would firstly greet each other and few months later they are willing to join village activities.’ (L7)

The other factor enables limitation for alternative lifestyle seekers to weaken their ideal rural imagination. Their rural imagination of forging good relationships with the neighborhood should be inevitably supported by the amount of time the newcomers spend in the village. The more time newcomers stay in the village, the easier it is for newcomers to gain satisfaction from making good relationships. Some respondents said that they are willing to maintain good relationships with neighbors but they find difficulty to keep it since they spend their time on work in the city. They are exhausted from work and less time to communicate with neighbors.

‘There is less opportunity for me to meet neighbors since my working hours are definitely long. Less chances to communicate since I come back home late and I don’t know the usual time for my neighbors to stay in their home.’ (L13)

#### **6.4 Alternative lifestyle seekers under the Era of Late Modernity**

Signifying a new beginning and a life turning point, alternative lifestyle seekers with the rural idyll and pragmatic both share to achieve a fundamental life change. But what do they want to achieve through the process of searching life alternative in this case? In this rendering, I tried to link this kind of lifestyle searching with the concept of consumption (see section 6.1.4) for further discussion. The link between lifestyle and consumption is not a new field in sociology and was offered by Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992). They suggested that our society has now entered into post, late, and second modernity with the termination of traditional social structures and division of labor, and the encouragement of consumer choice with greater diversity. Lifestyle,

under the late modernity, becomes a self-reflexive life project to get over individual life to make sense that we are in the society (Giddens, 1991). Within this consumer society, consumption enables individuals to engage in a particular lifestyle that reflect their self-identity (Sweetman, 2003).

Putting back the concept of lifestyle and consumption into this case, the choices of lifestyle exist when both seekers of rural idylls and economic considerations decided to relocate. By saying ‘getting out of the traps’ and ‘starting from a new beginning’, alternative lifestyle seekers want to get rid of prior life constraints and achieve another life alternative by their own effort. They self-reflected there was something wrong for their pervious lifestyle since they tried to strengthen their belief that previous experiences in urban life no longer reflect their self-identity. That means their self-identities are not in line with the urban culture derived from the contemporary capitalist society. The motivation and decision to relocate is sourced from the desire of alternative lifestyle seekers to reframe their own self-identity to make sense of who they are in the society. Those alternative lifestyle seekers’ experience of aversion and fatigue against urban life made them realized that the sense of healthiness, relaxation, simplicity, and community were important to reframe their own self-identity since they cannot obtain those senses from their previous urban life. As life alternatives seekers’ representation of the ills of previous urban life were often overstated, the romanticized rural New Territories’ imagination among them characterized as tradition, primitive, environment and natural fit into their imagination of ideal living place. Therefore, their self-realization narratives of pursuing rural lifestyle enable them to truly choose their lifestyle according to their own desire without governed by previous urban social ties.

#### **6.4.1 Adaptation as an Endless Process: Late Modern Characteristic of**

## **Reflexivity**

In section 6.3, I have mentioned alternative lifestyle seekers commonly suffered from the clashes with existing rural settings because of the gap between their romanticized rural imagination and rural reality. Endless processes of adjustment were needed in order to fit into the rural setting. The act of endless adjustment implicates the late modern characteristic of reflexivity. The demise of traditional social structure offer abundance of choice for individuals to choose. Alternative lifestyle seekers, in this case, were firstly being offered diverse chances to decide to engage more into rural activities (e.g. holiday seekers and weekend farmers) or even to relocate their living place into village (e.g. rural newcomers). Then, stepping out from their comfort zone and trying to integrate into the existing rural setting is already another choice of rural lifestyle for alternative lifestyle seekers. Furthermore, when their romanticized rural imagination and rural reality no longer match or even rural conflict arise, there are many strategies of reorientation involving choices to seek the greater good in life. In this regard, rural idyll group may try to active participate in rural activities and affairs to seek negotiation with other rural stakeholders to achieve their better rural life. On the other hand, pragmatic group may try to avoid conflict with other rural stakeholders and to wait for an opportunity finding a better living place suited their desire. In order to help alternative lifestyle seekers make their decisions with abundance of life choice, reflexivity through endless tolerance and adjustment still to be an only choice to adapt the rural reality. Sweetman (2003) also suggest that the existence of abundance of lifestyle choices is a response to the increased demands to behave reflexively in personal level.

### **6.5 Reflexivity: Journey for Searching a Better Way of Life**

All in all, from alternative lifestyle seekers (both rural idyll and pragmatic) accounts of the motivation of searching a better way of life, reflexivity play a major role of this particular lifestyle choice. Shifting life orientation toward rural lifestyle or even relocation enable individuals to begin to establish a way of living that they feel is preferable to life before relocation. In this respect, their actions demonstrated that they reflect their determinations of improve their quality of life. Their choice making of relocation implicates that this action is individualized decision. However, while alternative lifestyle seekers stress that they are in the process of realizing their dreams, they continuously influenced by their former urban lifestyle. These accumulated urban experiences, expectation and aspirations does not the break from the pasts, instead, their lifestyle choices remain mediated and reframed by the pervious urban life. Alternative lifestyle seekers may not even be aware of their claims such as 'starting a new beginning' become rhetorical without truly making a fresh start toward their rural living.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **CONFLICTS AMONG RURAL STAKEHOLDERS**

In chapter 5, I have elaborated on the ascribed status of indigenous residents and the economic value of rural land properties as two important dimensions that contribute to the rural imagination of indigenous residents. Additionally, in the last chapter, I have illustrated the new sociological phenomenon of alternative lifestyle seekers relocating into rural New Territories as a means to find a life alternative in contrast to their previous lifestyle. Two important dimensions are seekers of rural idylls (see section 6.1) and seekers of cheaper rural housing (see section 6.2). In this chapter, I will further explain how these dimensions of rural imaginations among indigenous residents and alternative lifestyle seekers induce conflict in the New Territories.

Based on these dimensions from the Chapter 5 and 6, there are, generally speaking, two modes of mindsets contributing to every rural stakeholders' imagination of rurality: the cultural and moral mindsets (patriarchal values, well-being of the clan community and natural environment), and the economic mindsets of rural land properties. By using the differentiation of the two competing mindsets, field data will be analyzed by a 2X2 typology matrix to understand conflicts in the New Territories. Rural stakeholders can be identified as follows:

1. Indigenous residents with cultural and moral mindsets
2. Indigenous residents with economic mindsets
3. Alternative lifestyle seekers with cultural and moral mindsets
4. Alternative lifestyle seekers with economic mindset.

Figure 7.1 shows the 2X2 typology matrix for discussion throughout this chapter. The stakeholders flexibly mobilize support and collaborate alongside other

stakeholders according to different social contexts and agendas.

	Indigenous Residents	Alternative Life Seekers
Cultural and Moral Mindsets	Indigenous Residents with Traditional Values (Section 4.1)	Alternative Life Seekers with Imagination of Rural Idyll (Section 5.1)
Economic Mindsets	Indigenous Residents Utilizing their Rural Land Property for Profit Gaining (Section 4.2)	Alternative Life Seekers Chasing the Cheap Rental Housing (Section 5.2)

Fig 7.1 2X2 Typology Matrix among different mindsets of rural stakeholders

In order to simplify the model, there are clear cuts on whether rural stakeholders' rural imagination are solely governed by one type of mindset: i.e. either cultural and moral mindsets or economic mindsets. As mentioned in previous chapters, these two types of mindsets are not mutually exclusive and some rural stakeholders may not be fixed in those sets of dichotomy. In other words, some rural stakeholders may have both types of mindsets constructing their rural imagination that would fall into the grey area of dichotomy. In chapter 6, some alternative lifestyle seekers indeed embraced both cultural and moral mindsets and economic mindsets in their construction of rural imagination that supported their decision of relocation. Throughout the process of adaption of rural lifestyle, alternative lifestyle seekers would emphasize on one type of mindset as their disposition to describe their rural experience according to different social contexts. Their emphasis on one type of mindset is situational and their mindset's disposition may shift depending on

different social contexts. In this chapter, instead of emphasizing the interplay of two mindsets within an individual imagination, I will put emphasize on how rural stakeholders use a particular mindset to attack other rural stakeholders' behaviour and actions within the village to make themselves more privilege and to have fuller entitlement and rightfulness to make rightful claim in the rural community.

After the illustrating rural conflicts, I discuss two contrasting forms of legitimacy proclaimed by rural stakeholders: i.e. legitimacy by ascribed status and property rights, and legitimacy by practices and lifestyle. . Finally, it continues the discussion of the origins of mindsets. While it may at first sight appear that every respondents conceptualized their rurality as an individual and personal narrative, however, different rural stakeholders are deterministic, a natural tendency of like to find like, to create and adapt to common-shared mindsets. People with common-shared mindsets undertake a shared sense of what rurality is agreed and negotiated between people with unlike mindsets. Lines are drawn between experiences that are and are not classified as rurality with their mindsets hold. The following section introduces accounts of different mindsets emerged and critically considers how this might be theorized.

### **7.1 Alternative Lifestyle Seekers' Disillusionment of Rural Idyll**

In Chapter 6, we have identified that alternative lifestyle seekers commonly emphasize a different and better way of life compared to their previous urban lifestyle. The rural New Territories in their perspectives are perceived as a natural environment complemented with a strong sense of tradition and community, which cannot be experienced in their former urban practices. These lifestyle seekers tried to participate more in rural activities and some even relocated to the rural New

Territories in order to translate their rural idyll sentiment into an everyday-life experience. However, when exposed to a rural setting that was totally brand new to them, these lifestyle seekers immediately experienced the difference between their rural imagination and the rural reality. They blamed other rural stakeholders, especially indigenous residents, as a means to vent their disappointment of the existing expectation gap.

### **7.1.1 Weak Sense of Community: Being Excluded from Rural Community**

Through alternative lifestyle seekers' narratives, indigenous residents are always associated with the strong sense of community. The strong bonds among indigenous residents that initially fuelled a rural imagination and drove some lifestyle seekers to the rural New Territories, unfortunately, became less appealing for the newcomers as they quickly realized how indigenous residents held disdain for alternative lifestyle seekers and resisted newcomers from participating in village activities and rural affairs. Indigenous residents rarely took any initiative to develop neighbourly relationships, partially due to their superior power position. This introverted and haughty outlook has led some alternative lifestyle seekers to believe that some indigenous residents belong to triads and engage in illegal activities; thus, preventing them from engaging with indigenous residents.

These conflicts and tensions take place between alternative lifestyle seekers possessing a rural idyll and indigenous residents with cultural and moral mindsets. Such indigenous residents become the target of blame as they choose to exclude outsiders whom they deem pose a threat to maintaining indigenous residents' integrity and position.

“Although indigenous residents aren’t similar to triad society’s motive to commit crime, they have their own group and they don’t want to join the community since they think we are the minority within village. I can’t say we place ourselves in opposition to indigenous resident. We have no intention to do so! But they have their own community. Newcomers cannot easy to integrate to rural community. I would give a hand to them if they need help. However, they have no intention to do so!” (S16)

“There is a village office near my home. Many indigenous residents and triad members gather there. Normally, I rush back to my home in order to avoid trouble with them. I was afraid of those indigenous residents when I first moved in. I did not want to go out of my home. It is better right now since I think they will not disturb me if I don't bother them.” (S18)

“During the Chinese New Year, indigenous residents will make the *pancai* gathering and invite villagers to join. Normally, other village would have banner hanging to invite all villagers to participate. However, indigenous residents [in my village] did not allow non-indigenous residents to join. They consider this village activity should solely invite indigenous residents within village.” (L7)

### **7.1.2 Power over Alternative Lifestyle Seekers: Toll Fees**

Apart from excluding others from rural community, indigenous residents often assume a superior power position when dealing with alternative lifestyle seekers in rural space. Indigenous residents claimed that they possess profound knowledge of the area and that they were familiar with everything within their village or clan. The sense of expertise on rural affairs allowed them a high status that gave rise to an unequal power relationship. While alternative lifestyle seekers considered the village main road as public space, sometimes indigenous residents requested a toll fee from them to drive on the village main road. Some alternative lifestyle seekers considered indigenous residents to be “impolite” and “uncivilized”. Those “uncivilized”

practices to acknowledge indigenous residents' superiority cannot gain the respect from alternative lifestyle seekers.

Therefore, these conflict and tensions take place between alternative lifestyle seekers with rural idyll and indigenous residents with cultural and moral mindsets. Indigenous residents with cultural and moral mindsets were blamed as unreasonable due to their perception that those practices reinforced a privilege status to indigenous residents

“Indigenous residents put a note on my car asking for money. They call ‘toll fee’ to pass through their private road. They even block the main road if we don’t pay for it. Indigenous residents do not really rely on this small amount of toll fee for a living. Instead, they want us to be respectful. They want to acknowledge their superiority within the village.” (S16)

“In some places in our village, toll fees are required to pass through private roads. Indigenous residents request for a range between \$300-500 for every vehicle per month. It makes me laugh. Some indigenous residents suddenly invented this kind of toll which never happened before. We have been using those so-called private roads with paying toll for hundreds of years.” (L7)

### **7.1.3 Another Disillusionment of Rural Idyll: Dissatisfied with the Existing Village House Development**

Apart from suffering weak sense of community and relatively lower status within the village, life alternative seekers were dissatisfied about existing village houses development that inevitably contradicted environmental standpoints emphasizing the beauty of rural landscape. In recent years, the conversion of farmland and green belts into village houses in the New Territories has become commonplace. New village houses are often densely-packed. Many of them are built in an ad-hoc

fashion with sporadic or even no planning involved. Sometimes this situation may lead to a mismatch with village layout, village roads and facilities, or poor aesthetic views against the natural habitat. The land use conversion would lead to degradation of the natural environment nearby, which is an irreversible process. Rural stakeholders who emphasize the beauty of the rural landscape are often dissatisfied about existing village houses development. The disappearance of flora, fauna and natural habitats would violate the rural imagination amongst alternative lifestyle seekers. Overcrowding in village housing tarnishes the rural imagination about relaxation and quality of life.

“Farmland is for farming instead of building village houses” is something they often say. This claim emphasizes that the act of building village houses on farmland violate the original function of farmland and rural practices for growing farm. People emphasize the beauty of rural landscape eventually become the safeguard to protect farmland from indigenous residents’ damage of farmland. In general conservationists are against development projects, but the specific rights of indigenous residents to build village house lead to a unique form of tension between indigenous house builders in the New Territories, and other rural stakeholders who care about the natural environment.

“Some indigenous residents came back recently and claimed their legitimacy as landowners to resume their land. However, my family refused to return the private land. Those indigenous residents left their private land untouched for forty years and showed no interest to take care their land. My family has taken care the land for forty years. The indigenous residents suddenly came back and tried to resume their land since the size of land is large. Approximately 20 village houses can be built if my family land is used.” (L10)

Therefore, these conflict and tensions take place between alternative lifestyle seekers with rural idyll and indigenous residents with economic mindset. Indigenous residents with rural land properties were blamed to be “greedy” to “utilize every inch of land for village development” by sacrificing the beauty of rural landscape.

“I planned to go to Sheung Shui to buy/rent village house but I was not satisfied with the general outlook of many villages. Village houses are really dense and there is little separation between village houses. Indigenous residents compete for every inch of land in village development. Apparently those indigenous residents have not considered that the fact that their new village houses are ruining the layout of an entire village. Really ugly!” (H22)

“I am not satisfied with the development of village houses in South Kwun Tung. It looks like a group of villa surrounded by walls and gates. The layout of the entire area included countless walls and gates. There is less public space and open space within the village. Every village is enclosed by itself. I cannot live in this kind of village.” (L13)

#### **7.1.4 “Sense of the rural is fading”: Cheap Rural Housing No Longer Exists**

Pragmatic alternative lifestyle seekers, whose main consideration is the affordability of rural housing rental levels has been identified in section 5.2. The only reason for them to stay in rural area is the attraction of affordable housing cost that constitutes a key part of their rural imagination. When more rural development occurred nearby, there is no doubt that the village houses rent would rise up with the increase in popularity. The rural imagination of cheap housing costs is fading and there is no more reason for them to stay and may eventually cause them to want to move out. Some pragmatic alternative lifestyle seekers simply put the blame on indigenous residents with rural land property by rising the rental level forcing them to move out.



“Generally, my family want to move out from rural area since the property owner proposed to raise the rent because of the increase in popularity. I live near Nam Shang Wai, a famous tourist spot nowadays. Moreover, my family considers the real estate in rural area is less valuable than that of the urban area. If there is an opportunity, my family prefers to have ownership in urban area.”  
(S17)

## **7.2 Indigenous Residents’ Complaint: Disrespectful to their Traditional Culture**

From the perspective of some indigenous residents, they had an impression that alternative life seekers were ignorant of traditional culture of indigenous residents and they were detached from the rural community. Some indigenous residents thought that newcomers only care about a comfortable lifestyle and enjoyments from the natural environment. Newcomers did not take initiatives to develop good neighborhood relationship, and they were inactive in village activities or rural affairs. Indigenous residents tend to think that newcomers intended to separate themselves from the rural community. Moreover, the lifestyles of newcomers were continuously influenced by their former urban lifestyles, and clash with existing rural settings. Indigenous residents considered the lifestyles of newcomers as disrespectful to their traditional culture.

“There are more people, mainly non-indigenous city-dwellers and foreigners, moving into Sai Kung and the place is overcrowded. They seem like strangers to me and I don’t know them, nowadays they are always impolite to indigenous residents. Traditionally, people who came to our village would show more respect to us. For example, since we only have one main road for people and vehicles to access the whole village, mutual forbearance is needed. However, we frequently find that newcomers are unwilling to make way for others.” (M1)

“There are newcomers moving into my village. Their lifestyle is disturbing my rural lifestyle since they continue to conduct their lifestyle in an urban way. Newcomers don’t think hanging their underwear in the village’s public space is a problem. Newcomers think it is none of the indigenous residents’ business and they just hang their stuff in front of their own doors. We don’t do it since we consider as taboos in our customs. Another example is that someone plays their music loudly at late night. Since our village is really dense, the noise can spread to two to three streets nearby. Our rural lifestyle is heavily bombarded by their urban practices. Newcomers should be aware that they should not disturb the tranquility of our village. Even though they move into our village, newcomers only inside their own worlds and they don’t care about the feelings of others. On the contrary, we consider others’ feelings since we know everyone in this village. Newcomers don’t realize that their behavior would affect others. They only pay a few thousand dollars a month to live here, but I have to change my lifestyles to tolerate their behavior.” (M2)

### **7.3 Legitimacy: by Ascribed Status and Land Deeds, or Everyday Practice?**

From the analysis of rural conflicts in various forms and origins in the previous sections, we find that most stakeholders tend to imagine themselves as having a rightful claim to some rights in the rural community. Some rural stakeholders make their claim through the legitimacy of ascribed status, land deeds and property contracts, whilst other stakeholders make their claim through their everyday practices. Different stakeholders with their own emphasis of rightful claim seem to believe that claims should less recognition than their own.

On the other hand, some rural stakeholders are less involved in rural conflicts and receive more recognition from the general public than others as they have more one sources of rightful claim. It means that they have fuller entitlement and rightfulness to make rightful claim in the rural community. Since they have multiple rightful

claims to entitle rights in the rural community, they can intentionally and flexibly mobilize support and collaborate alongside different rural stakeholders according to social contexts and agendas.

### **7.3.1 Legitimacy of Ascribed Status and Land Deeds**

The legitimacy of ascribed status, land deeds and property contracts is evident from the narratives of indigenous residents I interviewed. Indigenous residents' traditional rights uphold their clan inheritance in term of being entitled to land right to build village houses. The legitimacy of indigenous residents' traditional rights was granted by the government. The government provided privilege for village house entitlement that supports the actual practices by building large numbers of village houses. The act of building village house is in effect a fictive "traditional" rights which has the consequence of creating an effective cultural appeals for every male adult indigenous residents to consolidate their clan inheritance. Hence, the historical and cultural factor of maintaining clan tradition motivates indigenous residents to uphold the present rural practice by claiming their legitimacy of ascribed status as indigenous residents.

Indigenous residents realize the importance of the New Territories land value and that the New Territories is of considerable importance to the future development of entire Hong Kong. The demand for land use, residential, recreational and industrial purposes, has been intense since the turn of the century, especially after the vigorous expansion of new towns in the New Territories. Seeing the successful development of urban areas and new towns, indigenous residents predicted that their private land value would go up as urbanization continues. These predictions encourages them to utilize their village houses as assets for renting to generate profits. Therefore, the

economic factor of the increased New Territories land value motivated indigenous residents to stress the present rural practice for claiming the legitimacy of land deeds and property contract. As a possessor of rural land properties, indigenous residents have legitimate right to decide on land use under the existing legal regulation. Respondent M2 has mentioned the process of generating profits from their private land or land granted from government through village house development to supply housing for the real estate market.

“The market value of village houses in Yuen Long has inflated a lot. There are 40 blocks of village houses building now outside my village and these village houses’ selling price increase from around 10M to 15M throughout few years. The cost of building a block of village house only cost around 1M. [...] A schoolmate of mine, aged 30 to 40, has become a village representative. He must be influential within the village and receives lots of people’s support for being a village representative. Indeed, every village representative keeps in touch with the real estate market since they can see the way to generate profit through village development. Therefore, they take active role to allow for massive rural village house development.” (M2)

### **7.3.2 Legitimacy by Everyday Rural Practice**

Alternative life seekers emphasize a positive aspect of staying rural area in term of rural lifestyle, community and landscape. They indicated that there is more advantage to live in rural area than urban. They would integrate their mindset of rural idyll into their interior housing design. Small garden near their village houses or going to farm frequently become the icon of this social group. They integrate natural environment with their lifestyle through planting or even growing own vegetables and crops for self-use. Also, they found that living in a village is a good way for the exploration of oneself and the neighborhood is essential for their rural

imagination. They would actively participate in village activities and affairs to integrate into existing rural setting and make good relationships with neighborhood. Therefore, these everyday rural practices from the basis for villagers have a rightful claim since they contribute towards the functioning of the rural community.

“There are new experiences since I moved in rural area. I met new neighbors here that make me have a good sense of community. We eat dinner together [which are experiences] that [I could] hardly find in urban practices.” (E20)

### **7.3.3 Unequal Recognition of Rightful Claim**

One unique and intricate condition about the New Territories is that existing social institutions recognize the legitimacy of ascribed indigenous status and land deeds, but the legitimacy of everyday practices receive little recognition from laws, policies, or cultural norms.

The legitimacy of ascribed indigenous status and land deeds are recognized by laws and policies. From the establishment of the New Territories Ordinance in 1900s to the existing protection from Basic Law Articles 40, almost throughout 99 years of British ruling and 17 years under the HKSAR government, the legitimacy of ascribed indigenous status and land deeds has received substantial support through legal recognition. Also, Heung Yee Kuk is an influential and powerful rural social institution that protect the traditional rights and interests of the indigenous inhabitants of the New Territories. Traditions eventually become an effective cultural appeal to consolidate or even bargain for more interests for indigenous residents through the Heung Yee Kuk. The legitimacy of ascribed indigenous status and land deeds has therefore received also sustainably support from the Heung Yee Kuk.

However, non-indigenous residents are unsatisfied with the Heung Yee Kuk, as it solely represents the indigenous residents' rights and interests. It seems too dominant to allow for competing images of rural. Non-indigenous residents are frustrated that there is no space for allowing compete images of rural to become legitimately articulated in the rural space. Their rural practices and lifestyles are not being recognized by existing laws and policies. Facing the fact that Heung Yee Kuk is powerful rural social institution to protect indigenous inhabitants' rights and interests, there is relatively weak social institutional support for non-indigenous residents in rural space. Therefore, there is an unequal recognition of rightful claim between indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents.

#### **7.4 Origins of Mindsets**

Last but not least, this section is a discussion of the origins of mindsets as associated with rapidly changing modes of social organization. Based on the findings in chapter 5-7, generally, there are two very different mindsets contributing every rural stakeholder's imagination of rurality: a cultural and moral mindset (patriarchal values, well-being of the clan community and natural environment), and an economic mindset on the value of land and properties. Both mindsets could be found among indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents, leading to a number of potential conflicts. Where do the two mindsets come from? This section shifts the analytic focus from the level of individual (adapting or resisting to rural lifestyle) to the role of social context. In this manner, I argue that individual conceptualization of rural are influenced by wider social contexts and structural factors.

##### **7.4.1 New Territories as a Traditional Agricultural Society**

Before the 1950s, villages in the New Territories were once traditional agricultural rural communities. Labour-intensive agriculture generated a communal lifestyle that encouraged mutual help and a tightly-knit personal relationships amongst clan villagers. Under the context of the clan family, the same blood-tie and a communal lifestyle constituted a shared identity and rural imagination amongst clan villagers.

Indigenous residents believed they had the responsibility to inherit clan tradition so that they were eager to devote to solidarity of the community in village activities. A strong label as insiders within the clan village community was constructed via rituals and social interactions amongst indigenous residents. Also, indigenous residents held a belief that an obscure but wide ring of rural land surrounding their entire village was literally “their home”. It was a subtle, banal sentiment of belongings and possession. The disposition of collectivistic focus on group identity and community standing in terms of clan traditions, blood tie, and communal lifestyle was associated with an agricultural and communal society in which farming and fishing were the major of production in the past.

#### **7.4.2 Rapid Social Change in the New Territories**

Starting from 1960s, more land in the New Territories has been used up for new town development and major infrastructure. Rapid social change took place in whole city. The major mode of production changed to manufacturing in the 1950s, then to finance and service industry within 3-4 decades. Land had become a commodity with high exchange value. Since developed urban in Hong Kong had approached their maximum capacity, land in the New Territories became more important in the future development of Hong Kong. Apart from new towns in the New Territories, the remaining New Territories lacked planning control until 1983. The huge urban

population and competing land uses in urban Hong Kong have sprawled out into the New Territories in the form of the sprawl of 3-storey village houses, different types of industrial establishments, containers and port back-up yards, recreation, tourism, and other uses encroaching on farmland. The loss of planning control in 1983 under the Brown Crown Lease led to the deterioration of the open storage problem and rural environment in the New Territories.

Rather than becoming an abandoned area of Hong Kong lacking infrastructure and resources, the New Territories' development persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century making the land value of the New Territories rise. Attaching importance of the New Territories land value has become a core rural imagination in terms of capitalism, rational calculation, and efficiency.

#### **7.4.3 Situation of Indigenous Residents**

Indigenous residents maintain and preserve customs, organizing events to celebrate festivals and worship ancestors, as their ancestors have. Rural values, including village customs and nature awareness, were considered as the principal experience of village life. There is slow pace of change in term of heritage of agricultural communal values amongst indigenous residents. However, the building environment has changed a lot in rural areas as more rural development continues to progress. Older features and village houses were not preserved but rather renovated into new modern village houses. Rural people possess similar technology in terms of mass communication, electricity and all other necessities as their urban counterparts. Technological development disables the geographical limitation from the city. Businesses have sprung up in the rural areas bringing a sense of modernity and urbanity to the rural. Indigenous residents indeed experienced full exposure to



capitalist values and rapid social change through the influx of technological improvement in past decade.

Diversified choices and inclinations exist amongst indigenous residents with the mixture of pre-capitalist (agricultural) and capitalist mindset. On one hand, communal mindsets among indigenous residents manifest an attitude of obligation to protect the entire village and traditional values of clan family such as patriarchal values and well-being of the clan community. On the other hand, the increased New Territories land value motivated indigenous residents to build more village houses or even selling their inherit lands as means to generate profit for improving their living standard. Improving indigenous residents' overall rural living standard should be considered as pursuing clan sustainable interest for preventing rural deterioration. Some indigenous residents may switch between traditional and economic mindsets on contingent situations by intentional choice or subconscious shift. In situations where there are fewer regulations available to indicate what the right ways to react might be, they have the flexibility to mobilize traditional values such as heritage and ancestors' tombs when bargaining for the legitimacy of their economic land rights; and vice versa, during the construction process of village small houses and ecotourist facilities, they might take the clan's sustainable well-being into consideration.

The government grants the legitimacy of indigenous residents' traditional right, which is unique in Hong Kong contextual background and differ from rural-urban transition in other places. The government provided privilege by specific laws, protection of cultural heritage economic land rights, and village house entitlement to indigenous residents that actually support and strengthened the legitimacy of both

their cultural and economic claims compared with other rural stakeholders. The act of building village house is in effect a fictive “traditional” right that has the consequence of creating an effective cultural appeal for every male adult indigenous resident to consolidate their clan inheritance. Such laws enables Hong Kong’s indigenous residents to become particular resourceful under both sets of social organization/ values.

#### **7.4.4 Situation of Non-indigenous Residents**

Some non-indigenous residents with economic values and capitalist lifestyle were driven by the low rent of rural New Territories’ village house. They never want to integrate in rural setting and community and their lifestyles have a great deviance from other rural residents. They are not part of the shared collective sense of conscience or obligations in the rural area. They are not neither sharing the concept of rural-urban division that rural idyll group share nor the concept of ascribed indigenous status that indigenous residents share. Such isolated disposition would create an attitude of inconsideration of rural affairs and activities since the existing rural social norms do not represent their lifestyle.

Some non-indigenous residents were tired of capitalist, urban lifestyles and values. They perceived the New Territories as a haven for retreat to ecology, human community and other alternative values. A counter-urban imagination could be identified among those non-indigenous residents with strong rural idyll that want to achieve a new fresh start from their original city lifestyle. The need for rural life was indeed a need for “something alternative to urban life”. Romantic rural myths have been fostered by an evident anti-urban bias. Once the rural New Territories was considered as offering an alternative way of life and an escape from the ills of

modernity, distant lands in rural areas hold the same meanings with non-urban characteristics.

Diversified choices and inclinations also exist amongst non-indigenous residents with the mixture of capitalist and post-capitalist mindsets. In order to help non-indigenous residents making their decisions with abundance of life choice, reflexivity through endless tolerance and adjustment is the only choice to adapt the rural reality. However, non-indigenous residents lack the legal privilege enjoyed by indigenous residents. Their claims on the New Territories, either ecological/communal or economic, were weaker than that of indigenous residents. Their everyday rural practices from the basis for villagers have a rightful claim since they contribute towards the functioning of the rural community. They may have the sense of hopelessness in situations where there are hegemonic discourses available as external and repressive social order to favour the indigenous residents' vested interest in the rural New Territories.

### **7.5 Re-examine the Prevailing Method of Managing Rural Conflicts**

The research findings above show how indigenous residents and alternative lifestyle seekers conceptualize their rurality with two competing mindsets, i.e. cultural and moral mindset, and economic mindset, that shape the extent of rural conflicts. Different rural stakeholders find difficulty in understanding others' rural lifestyles when everyone behaves differently in the rural. The failure of different sides to understand others' rural lifestyles probably lies behind the reasons for the blame and complaints as shown above.

Indigenous residents' superior power position triggers tensions within rural villages.

The unequal power relationships between indigenous residents and alternative lifestyle seekers lead to unjustified rules invented by indigenous residents to oppress alternative lifestyle seekers within the village such as notorious toll fee. Alternative lifestyle seekers were excluded from the rural community with indigenous residents' power over alternative lifestyle seekers.

Using a rural worldview as his frame of reference, alternative lifestyle seekers emphasize the beauty of rural landscape and the maintenance of rural everyday practices. General environmental concerns and keeping up rural everyday practices may provide a loose common ground for rural stakeholders to collaborate. People with the emphasis on rural beauty inevitably contradict economic standpoints. They often show disagreement with existing village house development and fight for the protection of farmland from indigenous residents' damage.

Indigenous residents with the emphasis on maintenance of traditional everyday practices inevitably contradict alternative lifestyle seekers' urban lifestyles with the ignorance of rural traditional culture and their detachment from the rural community. Alternative lifestyle seekers were only able to consider a comfortable lifestyle and enjoyment from the natural environment and their lifestyles were continuously influenced by their former urban lifestyles and clashed with existing rural settings.

What makes Hong Kong government encounter difficulties to understand the complexity of the rural community in the New Territories is that there are two competing mindsets of which different rural stakeholders conceive of rurality. The situations make more complicated since each rural stakeholders are not consistently stick to one mindsets and their dispositions may shift to other mindset according to

different social contexts and agendas. The research findings above can identify the plurality in how different rural stakeholders create different frontiers and dimensions of rural conflict by using these two competing mindsets. In the rapid growth era of the New Territories, indigenous residents are no longer the only rural stakeholders who can dominant representations of rurality. Alternative lifestyles seekers with different rural imaginations, suggested in this study, express their rightful claim to strive for their rights in the rural community. These unequal recognition were present due to the deep-rooted tradition of indigenous residents and privileges provided by the government that limited the improvement of providing more recognition to the legitimacy of everyday practices emphasized by alternative lifestyle seekers. Existing academic research seldom explores the competing images of the rural that may exist amongst different rural stakeholders in the New Territories. Thus, this study will be marking a useful contribution by examining the construction of rurality. By investigating the cause of discontents amongst different rural stakeholders, the study brings about the mutual understanding of rural lifestyles so that more tolerance and compromise can be achieved. Moreover, the study of this unequal recognition among different rural stakeholders' rightful claims of their rural interests is important for the policy makers to re-examine the prevailing method of managing existing rural conflicts.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

From the field data, the New Territories was an actual space where different mindsets co-existed: mindsets that emphasized traditional/ecological values, and mindsets that emphasized economic development and profits. This chapter will argue that such different mindsets were perceptions of rurality that originated from three modes of social organization: agricultural, capitalist, and post-industrial. Comparable to other societies experiencing rapid social and economic development and urbanization, contradictory perceptions of rural space co-existed on the same piece of land. However, the case of Hong Kong provided one unique parameter not found elsewhere: the ascribed status of “indigenous residents”. The ascribed indigenous identity solidified by blood, history and laws acted as a caste-like structure that differentiated Hong Kong people into either indigenous residents or non-indigenous residents. (See Fig. 8.1) The presence of such an ascribed status led to complexity in the perception of rurality amongst different rural stakeholders.

		Caste-like	
		Indigenous	Non-indigenous
Mode of Production/ Social Organization	Agricultural		
	Capitalist		
	Post-industrial		

Fig 8.1 2X3 typology matrix with the separation of different ‘caste’ and mindsets

This chapter will revisit the main argument of the thesis in section 8.1: explain for the socio-economic and socio-cultural contradictions derived from a changing New Territories using Lefebvre’s conceptual triad. Sections 8.2 and 8.3 will explore the

implications and limitations of this study, and section 8.4 will provide recommendations for further study.

### **8.1 Lefebvre's Conceptual Triad**

In this regard, research questions were asked at the beginning of the research: How can the social and economic transformations among different rural stakeholders be understood within Lefebvre's conceptual triad?

This question leads the study to investigate the social world by using Lefebvre's consideration of space as a resource. According to Lefebvre, space, which is socially constructed nature, is not a dead object, but rather is organic and fluid. Most importantly, space has three different moments or forms. These three different forms are spatial practices, representation of space, and representational space (see section 2.3). Through the research question of this study, two forms of space, that is spatial practices and representational space, were investigated by conducting semi-structured interviews. In this regard, the descriptions and answer of the respondents is highly important as they provide inside information.

#### **8.1.1 Perceived Space (Echoes Lefebvre's Idea of Spatial Practice)**

The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews was to understand what rural New Territories means among different rural stakeholders and to observe and decipher the spatial practices of everyday routine within their village. The perceived space is the sphere where everyday activities and daily routine takes place (see section 2.3.1). Three co-existing mindsets from three modes of social organization: agricultural, capitalist, post-industrial to perceive the New Territories among subjects. Respondents build up their own definition of rurality according to different

rural contexts and variability in expressing their own rural discourses.

#### **8.1.1.1 Perceived as Agricultural/Communal New Territories**

From the field data in chapter 5, four male indigenous residents I have interviewed emphasized their childhood experience in their village and the importance of communal lifestyle in their perspective. These men had lived clan villages since they were born and treasured their time in the village. They believe they have the responsibility to inherit the clan tradition to next generations. Also, they all considered their boundary of family is extended to the rural landscape of the whole village which shows a more subtle sentiment of belonging. This perception shared among indigenous residents manifests an attitude of obligation to protect the entire village and surrounding rural areas. Sharing the same blood-ties and a communal lifestyle constituted a shared identity along with the rural imagination amongst clan villagers under the context of the clan family. Therefore, their clan experience become a way for indigenous residents to construct their rurality.

#### **8.1.1.2 Perceived as Capitalist New Territories**

From the field data in Chapter 5 and 6, economic consideration as defining the rural has become more influential among landowners in the New Territories (mostly indigenous residents) and rural residents renting village houses driven by low rent. Indigenous villagers realized the importance of the New Territories land value as that of the New Territories being more influential to the future development of Hong Kong as a whole. The increased New Territories land value motivated indigenous residents to build more village houses as means to generate profit for improving their living standard. On the other hand, some non-indigenous residents with capitalist lifestyle chose to relocate to rural areas because of the unaffordable high



rent in urban Hong Kong. Their first priority was economic considerations such as affordability, value for money, and transport accessibility. Rural New Territories, in their sense, is a place providing affordable housing. Along with the social and economic development of the New Territories during past few decades, attaching importance of the New Territories land value has become a core rural imagination among both indigenous and non-indigenous residents.

### **8.1.1.3 Perceived as Post-capitalist New Territories**

From the field data in Chapter 6, some non-indigenous residents used their urban subjectivity to define rurality. They were ill-adapted to the urban lifestyle and were more likely to experience aversion to and fatigue against urban life. A “counter-urban imagination” could be identified as they experienced a need to relax in rural areas. Although they expressed appreciation for the merits of rural life, their preference for rural life was actually a romantic projection from their innate worldview, an old and fatigue urban life that they themselves resented. Some of them were eager to escape from the discourse of capitalism and consumption, and pursue for non-material goals such as spirituality and harmony with nature. However, for some alternative lifestyle seekers, the need for rural life was still a form of consumption and a resource for desire and gratification. Rurality in their imagination became an external object to be consumed. Therefore, their previous urban experience became a way for some non-indigenous residents to construct their rurality.

### **8.1.2 Conceived Space (echoes Lefebvre’s Idea of Representation of Space)**

The conceived space is the dominant sphere where order is imposed, which is constituted via control over knowledge and signs, over the means of deciphering

spatial practice and hence over the production of spatial knowledge (See section 2.3.1). In this section, I explain how discourses in general public portrayal, constructed by the government and the property developers, constitutes the conceived space of rural New Territories.

#### **8.1.2.1 Government's Conceived Space**

Existing legacy policy extended from a foreign, colonial administration. After the British occupation of the New Territories in 1898, the colonial government implemented extraordinary policies in the New Territories that were different from ceded areas in remaining Hong Kong. The major reason was to pacify rural elites and villagers and to stabilize the governance of rural villages. In order to have smooth governance in the New Territories, the colonial government considered the clan villagers as “others” with a different set of culture and traditions. Privilege was granted to Heung Yee Kuk and indigenous residents as a measure of partial autonomy and appeasement. The government's action gave rise to a situation of one Hong Kong two systems as demonstrated by Hong Kong's dual legal system regarding land. As a result, there were two sets of laws governing inheritance in Hong Kong: one for urban Hong Kong and another in the rural New Territories.

Starting from the late 1940s, Hong Kong saw a large increase in the number of immigrants escaping turmoil from China. The colonial government shifted its regard of the New Territories from periphery and physical buffer between urban Hong Kong and mainland China to multiple functions of alleviating urban population pressure and the reliance on the mainland for resources; thus creating a great incentive for further development of the New Territories. The construction of new towns, reservoirs and highways during 1960s and 1970s in the New Territories

implies that New Territories as hinterland to provide resources to support social and economic development of urban Hong Kong.

Starting from 1980s, the competing land uses sprawled out into the New Territories in the form of the sprawl of 3-storey village houses, different types of industrial establishments, and other uses encroaching on farmland. The government considered the lack of planning control in the New Territories was problematic to the rural environment. The Town Planning (Amendment) Ordinance was enacted as statutory planning control in 1991 to extend proper town planning to rural New Territories.

#### **8.1.2.2 Property Developer's Conceived Space**

Since the government implemented extraordinary policies in the New Territories to provide privilege among indigenous residents, indigenous residents' land and small house granted by the government become the special undervalued assets with less government regulation compared with expensive and more planning restriction land in other parts of Hong Kong. Property developers may consider rural New Territories as hinterland for investment and speculation because of the special undervalued land offered to indigenous residents with the loosening planning control in the New Territories. Additionally combined with the influential of New Territories being more important to the future development of Hong Kong as a whole, this policy loophole indeed motivation more opportunists such as middlemen and some indigenous residents to participate on the speculation in the rural New Territories. Moreover, conceived space portrayed by the government led to two different ascribed identities (indigenous and non-indigenous) solidified by blood-tie, history, and laws that act like special castes. The ascribed indigenous status enables

some indigenous residents to take part in investment and land speculation in the New Territories. The ascribed indigenous status solidified indigenous residents' hegemony and vested interest in the New Territories.

### **8.1.3 Lived Space (echoes Lefebvre's Idea of Representational Space)**

The lived space is which forms, informs and facilitates the deviations, diversity and individuality that are s fundamental aspect of any social tensions and conflicts. Thus, this part summarizes on how the respondents see their roles within their rural community, what they think about social justice and public participation. It was aimed to find deeper insights on how rural New Territories is lived.

In chapter 7, we discuss about the origins of mindsets, cultural/moral mindsets and economic mindsets. People with cultural/moral mindsets have a strong of reference about the merits of rural life. They often had a preference of good relationship with neighbours, more social space, and quieter place with clear air. Such features of rural life as characteristics of their spontaneous home space and what a good life should be like. People with economic mindsets have a strong of reference about the capitalism, rational calculation, and efficiency. They often had a preference of affordability of low rent and the accessibility. Such feature of capitalized lifestyle as characteristics of value for money to define what one good life is. The development of mindsets is to internalize particular identity to understand one rural life.

The extension of two parameters, which are the separation of indigenous residents and non-indigenous residents, and the adoption of cultural/moral mindsets or economic mindsets, were illustrated to segregate different rural stakeholders. The rural stakeholders flexibly mobilize support and collaborate according to social

contexts and agendas (see chapter 7).

Indigenous residents' superior power position triggers tensions within rural villages. The unequal power relationships between indigenous residents and alternative lifestyle seekers led to unjustified rules invented by indigenous residents to oppress alternative lifestyle seekers within the village such as the notorious toll fee. Some alternative lifestyle seekers felt that they had been excluded from the rural community with indigenous residents' power over non-indigenous residents.

Most stakeholders in general recognized the beauty of rural landscape and the maintenance of rural everyday practices. General environmental concerns and keeping up rural everyday practices may provide a loose common ground for stakeholders living in rural areas to collaborate. People with the emphasis on beauty of rural landscape inevitably contradict economic standpoints. They often show disagreement with existing village house development and fight for the protection of farmland from indigenous residents' damage.

Indigenous residents with the emphasis on maintenance of rural everyday practices inevitably contradict alternative lifestyle seekers' former urban lifestyle with the ignorance of rural traditional culture and their detachment from the rural community. Alternative lifestyle seekers were only able to consider a comfortable lifestyle and enjoyment from the natural environment and their lifestyles were continuously influenced by their former urban lifestyle and clashed with existing rural setting.

Most stakeholders tend to imagine themselves as having a rightful claim to some rights in the rural community: the legitimacy of ascribed status and land deeds, and

that of everyday practices. Different stakeholders with their own emphasis of rightful claim criticized that other claimants believing they received less recognition than their own claim. One unique and intricate condition about the New Territories is that existing social institutions recognize the legitimacy of everyday practices receives little recognition from laws, policies, or cultural norms. Therefore, indigenous residents are often seen in the general public as influential in rural affairs due to domination of conceived space, socially constructed by Heung Yee Kuk and the government, over the perceived and lived space in the rural New Territories.

## **8.2 Significance of This Study**

The semi-structured interviews represent the views of the respondents. Different from the conceived space expressed and constructed by hegemonic discourses of the Heung Yee Kuk and the government, the perceived and lived spaces were expressed and communicated by the community. The analyses of the semi-structured interviews demonstrate how perceived and lived spaces differ from and dominated by the conceived space of rural New Territories. In other saying, the analysis of semi-structured interviews with different village stakeholders will bring light to the perceived space, where spatial practice take place on a daily basis, and to the lived space, where life is directly lived through its associated images and symbols. Furthermore, it is believed that such an investigation will also challenge the discourses embedded within the conceived space of rural New Territories. This study concludes that the government is implementing the existing rural development in the New Territories only by taking the conceived level into account. The spatial practices (perceived space) and representational space (lived space) are truly neglected and thus the existing rural development in the New Territories does not appeal to the real needs of the inhabitants. Thus, the study of this unequal

recognition among different rural stakeholders' rightful claims of their rural interests is important for the policymakers to re-examine the prevailing method of managing existing rural conflicts.

Secondly, this study provides a new perspective the ascribed status of indigenous residents, which is unique in Hong Kong contextual background, is an important parameter in constructing individual rural imagination. The global academic research in rural sociology tends to focus more on social and economic changes in rural/urban transitions. There are studies on the ascribed status of indigenous/ native people in places such as North America, Australia and Taiwan. The case of Hong Kong, given its history of colonization and handover to China, provides a unique story about the construction of rural identities. The presence of ascribed indigenous status in Hong Kong's historical and legal context explains the complexity of individual rural imagination construction among different rural stakeholders. This study helps to enrich the field of rural sociology by providing field data on a unique case study.

Thirdly, the study put emphasis on the role of non-indigenous residents as alternative lifestyle seekers in articulating and mobilizing recognizable claims as well as alternative rural representations among its clientele. Also, it probes the considerable influences of Heung Yee Kuk and the government, in particular the official discourse and symbolic power they can deploy against challenges to their hegemony and vested interests. Altogether, this study provides insights on the practical involvements and experiences of village stakeholders in the process of confrontation and collection action, which serves to shape their rural imagination and representation. It also adopts culturalist perspective in privileging

representations and concepts over practices and politics. Both alternative rural representations shaped by alternative lifestyle seekers' everyday rural practices and official rural representations shaping the rural practice have the properties of control and resistance to struggle for the domination of discursive power in the rural New Territories.

Finally, this study provides an insightful and clear explanation for the existing rural conflicts and collaborations within villages. Different rural stakeholders find difficulty in understanding other rural lifestyles when everyone behaves differently in the rural. The failure of different rural stakeholders to understand others' rural lifestyle probably lies behind the reasons for the blame and complaints. By investigating the cause of discontents among different rural stakeholders, using 2X3 typology matrix with the separation of different 'caste' and mindsets, the study brings about the mutual understanding of rural lifestyles among different rural stakeholders so that more tolerance and compromise can be achieved.

### **8.3 Limitation of the Study**

There is imperfect in the methodology leading to the limited power of generalization of conceptualizing different rural stakeholders' rural imagination and representations. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used in this study through my personal social network or referrals by interviewed respondents. The sample size is relatively small with only twenty five respondents participating in this study. The whole population of different rural stakeholders is much larger in Hong Kong. Each category only few respondents to represent specific groups of rural stakeholders such as absentee villagers. This small sample size may not carry enough weight to highlight and delineate the diversity of rural representation. It remains unclear how



well these twenty-five interviews represent the diversity of different rural stakeholders in Hong Kong.

Besides the methodology and sampling imperfection, there is also imperfection on the theoretical framework. In order to simplify the model, there are clear cuts on whether people are indigenous residents or not, and whether they adapt different mindsets. However, some rural stakeholders may not be fixed in those sets of dichotomy. For example, there is a grey area defining whether female indigenous residents belong to indigenous residents. Except for the clan inheritance and privileges from the government, female indigenous residents may share similar rural ideology with their counterparts.

#### **8.4 Recommendation for Further Study**

In this study, we have mentioned the Heung Yee Kuk and the government constructed a powerful, resourceful and hegemonic discourse to dominate the control of rural politics. If language is a medium of domination and social force and serves to legitimize relations of organized power, it is crucial to investigate the discourses embedded within the language. Therefore, by studying discourses in a society, it is possible to analyze the systems of thoughts and other symbolic practices that make up cultures. Critical Discourse Analysis is suggested for further studies since it is fruitful for studying the connections between language, power and ideology. In order to study the dominant rural discourses of Heung Yee Kuk and the government, Critical Discourse Analysis is suggested to conduct further study through the interpretation of written texts and speeches on various official documents of Heung Yee Kuk and the government. In this regard, Critical Discourse Analysis will be very beneficial to explore how Heung Yee Kuk and the government

socially construct conceived space of rural New Territories. Speeches of the related governmental actors and institutions of rural politics will be analyzed to search how rural New Territories is defined and constructed in those written texts and speeches.

## APPENDIX 1: Guided interview questions

### Part A: Demographic data collection

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Marital Status:
5. Education level:
6. Occupation:
7. Monthly income:

### Part B: Tentative Interview Questions

1. Which village are you living in Hong Kong? How long do you live in this village? Before living in this village, where did you live? Why do you choose to live in this village?
2. Can you briefly describe the characteristics of the village you live?
3. What are the advantage and disadvantage of living in rural area/ village house? Are you willing to live in rural area/ village house?
4. Have you heard of the term “indigenous residents” in Hong Kong? Do you know what it means?
5. Do you think that the rural residents in Hong Kong share common belief/ characteristics? Do you share some of those characteristics?
6. Do you have an imagination of your ideal rural environment/ lifestyle? Is there any difference between your imagination and the village you live? Is there any way to improve the present situation so that it can narrow the gap between your imagination and the village you live?
7. How long do you stay in the village normally in a week? Do you know your neighbour? Can you describe what is the relationship between those neighbour? Do you have communication at all?
8. Do you realize there is change in rural area/ the village you live? What are the changes actually? Are the changes good or bad for you? Do those changes affect

your lifestyle? Do those changes affect your imagination of your ideal rural environment/ lifestyle?

9. Do you express your personal feeling of change in rural area/ the village you live to your neighbour? Do you share the same feeling with neighbour? Are there any difference between your neighbour and you?

10. Do you take any action in the village you live to make your imagination of your ideal rural environment/ lifestyle come true? Do you take any action to defense when environment get worsen?

11. I will provide 11 pair of words to you, you need to answer which word can suitable to describe your feeling on rural area.

Do you associate with rural areas either \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ ?

- |                      |                  |                   |                |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Rapid development | Slow development | 7. Community      | Individual     |
| 2. Relaxation        | Stress           | 8. Simplicity     | Sophistication |
| 3. High status       | Low status       | 9. self-contained | Open-minded    |
| 4. Healthiness       | Unhealthiness    | 10. Safety        | Danger         |
| 5. Natural           | Man-made         | 11. Tradition     | Modernity      |
| 6. Equality          | Inequality       |                   |                |

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