Rethinking the Hong Kong Cultural Identity
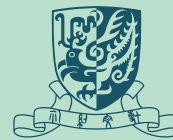
The Case of Rural Ethnicities

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Introduction

Towards a Historical and Structural Analysis of the Hong Kong Cultural Identity

In a 1985 survey, a well-constructed sample of people in the colony had to choose between identifying themselves as "Chinese" or "Hongkongese." Three-fifths of the respondents chose the latter (Lau and Kuan 1988). Similarly, taking "Chinese" as the national identity and "Hongkongese" as the ethnical identity of the Hong Kong Chinese, a 1996 telephone survey found that, though the national consciousness of the citizens was not weak, they "tend to raise their ethnic identity above their national identity, seeing themselves more 'Hongkongese' than Chinese, and defining China from the perspective of Hong Kong" (Wong 1996:26). The distinctiveness of the Hong Kong culture and the local identity of its people are even recognized by the nationalist leader of China and are reflected in the Basic Law which guarantees the preservation of the "Hong Kong way of life."

In recent years, discussion of the features and implications of the "Hong Kong cultural identity" has become a fashionable topic among the local cultural critics (e.g., Leung 1995; Chow 1992, 1993; Chan 1995; Abbas 1997; Turner 1995). Most of them define this culture and identity as one merging the Chinese and Western cultures, and see them as a product of the consumerism and popular culture having developed since the late 1960s. But always, the discussion is both a-structural and a-historical. First, they fail to inform us how the cultural elements of "East" and "West," and those of "modernity" and "tradition" are articulated

into a unitary cultural formation. What they can tell us is that Hong Kong culture is made by piecing hybrid elements together resembling a mosaic. Secondly, they shed no light on whether and how different social groups — defined by class, ethnicity, gender, whatever — experience, practice and identify with the "Hong Kong culture" differently. What they refer to as the carrier of this culture is an undifferentiated Hong Kong population. Finally, they are all incapable of mapping the historical context and actual process of the emergence of this cultural identity. What they resort to in describing the process are hollow phrases, such as "the cultural self-invention of the Hong Kong subject in a cultural space" (Abbas 1997:1) or "postcolonial self-writing" of the Hong Kong identity in a "third space" between colonialism and nationalism (Chow 1992).

Meanwhile, there is social scientific literature on the Hong Kong identity which opens up the space for a more historical and structural analysis of the problem. According to Lui (1997), the emergence of the Hong Kong identity is closely related to the social experiences of the Chinese immigrants settling in the Colony in successive waves of immigration and the experiences of the post-war "baby boomers." It is also related to the upheavals of 1966 and 1967, government housing, education and youth policy of the 1970s, as well as social mobility, social movements and government's administrative reform in the same period.

In a different context, some authors link up the development of the Hong Kong culture with the rise of the "new middle class" in the 1970s and its liberal and reformist value orientation (Cheung 1988). Further, Wong and Lui (1992, 1993) find that the morality and culture of the Hong Kong people is differentiated along the lines of class divisions. Siu is also aware of the class dynamics underlying the Hong Kong identity, and sees the identity as being fluid and more or less specific to middle class professionals. This leads to an interesting question:

> As this generation [elite among the post-war baby-boomers] consolidated themselves as a visible, worldly social force, the question of class naturally follows. To

> what extent is this cosmopolitan identity a specific class phenomenon? How would the population outside of the wealthy and Westernized professional circles relate themselves to the baby-boomers in particular, and to Hong Kong and China in general? (Siu 1996:186)

Then, she finds that, provided with opportunities for social mobility, many blue-collar workers share the ethos of the new middle class. At the same time, most new immigrants coming in from China after 1970, who tended to congregate in the low income areas of the city, are alienated from the Hong Kong society. In conclusion, "Who the 'Hong Kong *yan*' are will remain ambiguous, as cultural identity is continuously remade by human agents who move across social, cultural, and political boundaries set by historical events quite beyond anyone's prediction" (1996:191).

Reinstating Ethnicity in the Study of the Hong Kong Identity

The social scientific literature on the Hong Kong cultural identity is undoubtedly insightful for formulating further research on the subject. Other than class, one significant dimension which has yet to be explored is the issue of ethnicity. Hong Kong culture and identity were not made out of an empty cultural space. Instead, they emerged out of a complexity of pre-existing ethnic cultures and identities and corresponding social networks. The Chinese immigrants constituting the urban Hong Kong have never been culture-less agents waiting to receive the Hong Kong culture, nor do they share a homogeneous Chinese-ness to be replaced by a "Hongkong-ness." The complexity of ethnic identities among the urban immigrants is well described by Baker:

> Like those before them who faced alien environments in the countries of South-east Asia and elsewhere, the Chinese who came to Hong Kong looked for ways of organizing themselves. The two most basic principles which they worked on were those of shared kinship and shared district of origin. Many of the migrants were alone, either because they had lost their families or

because they had left them behind in China, and a lone man or woman found it difficult to make a start in the new society. The creation of *mock kinship* bonds by the swearing of blood brotherhood was an attractive response. Not surprisingly the very first ordinance passed by the Legislative Council in 1845 was for the suppression of the secret societies formed in this way. Another, less powerful, form of mock kinship was the Fellow Clansmen's Association (*zongqinhui*). These associations were open to anyone of a certain surname and created a meeting ground where common interest and some strength through numbers could be forged. Both these types of group are to be found in Hong Kong still....

Shared district of origin is more than a geographical factor. Most importantly it is the determinant of *linguistic sub-culture*, and the sense of ease and security which many get when relieved of the necessity to speak the dominant Cantonese language of Hong Kong makes the clubbing together of people from the same area a very cohesive and attractive tie. In some cases it is formalized in the shape of District of Origin Association (*tongxianghui*). There is also a tendency for people from one area to settle in the same neighbourhood in Hong Kong. Thus, part of the North Point district of Hong Kong Island is often called "Little Shanghai." Some business are entirely staffed by workers from one language group — *ethnic restaurants* are an obvious example — and some trades have become associated with districts of origin too: the rice trade has been dominated by Chaozhou (Teochiu) merchants for many years, largely because of the importance of rice imports from Thailand where Chaozhou people form the majority Chinese community. (Baker 1983:470-71; emphases added)[1]

Apparently, the organizations and culture of the ethnicity in the urban area have eroded rapidly during the post-war economic boom. Nowadays, it is hard to see their significance to our urban social life. But, it is sure that the notion that Hong Kong identity emerged out of atomistic Chinese immigrants should be rethought. If these urban Chinese immigrants have "invented" or

"self-written" their identity, they have not invented themselves as "Hongkongese" in the first place, but as divergent ethnic groups instead. It is an interesting topic to research on how, when and why these ethnic groups melt down into a unitary identity of "Hongkongese."[2]

When we turn our eyes to the rural areas, the issue of ethnicity becomes much more outstanding. What do the Tanka fishermen and the Hakka and Punti farmers, who form real rather than mock kinship communities, identify with? Do they identify with the *Hong Kong society* as other urban dwellers do? The answer is definitely negative with regard to the pre-1950 period. Traditional village identity was without doubt the predominant form of identification then. The problem deserves exploring: has this predominant form of identification faded out in the course of post-war "modernization" as the ethnic identification of the urban Chinese did? I am afraid the answer is negative again.

According to a number of ethnographic research projects on the village society of Hong Kong, the traditional ethnic identities have not been weakened when the communities have been under the stress of economic and political modernization. On the contrary, these identities have been reinforced in the modernization process. Mentioning the persistence of the traditional "Folk Model" of the Tanka fishermen despite the mechanization of the fishing industry, Ward writes:

> [A]t present [1980], ... fishermen and ex-fishermen still remain in many respects a *distinct ethnic category*... and it is possible that their traditionalistic personal folk models, which apparently do not obstruct instrumental rationality, are a significant aspect of their *ethnic-occupational identity*. They also provide opportunities for invoking traditional beliefs and staging elaborate festivals both of which may have important latent functions....

> [O]ften such a situation as this is described as a case of "cultural lag," it being claimed that change in one part of "the system" has occurred first, but changes throughout *will come*. In the absence of either coercion or a

strong fashion set by a dominating elite, one wonders if this is necessarily so. At the very least, the "lag" may be almost indefinitely prolonged. Given circumstances similar to those existing in Hong Kong at present, I see no reason to expect changes in the fishermen's Folk Model in the near future: the British government is remarkably tender towards what many people regard as "local superstitions," the kind of "supernatural in-surance" they afford is highly plausible to believers, and it is a fact that expenditure on and attendance at local temple festivals in Hong Kong today [1980] are much larger than they have ever been before. There seems to be no validity at present in the theory of cul-tural lag; on the contrary, it could be argued that mod-ernization seems to have entailed enhanced traditionalism in certain respects. (Ward 1989e:99; em-phases added)

Chan makes similar observation on the traditional *Shen Kung* opera in rural Hong Kong:

In recent decades, anthropological studies of the tradi-tional community culture in different localities prove that modernization of a community does not necessar-ily imply the weakening of the inheritance of its tradi-tional culture. Taking the *Shen Kung* opera in Hong Kong as an example, modernized transportation means and networks makes the transportation of the scenic decoration and other performance materials more con-venient. The quality of performance in the remote areas of the New Territories and outlying islands is no longer inferior to the performance in the urban theatres in terms of scene design, lighting and special effects.[3] (Chan 1996:138; my translation)

The persistence of the rural culture and identity is not only manifested in the traditional festivals. In some instances, it also expresses itself in the antagonism between the urban and the rural. In fact, rural-urban tension is still one of the essential dy-namics underlying the formation and reproduction of the metro-politan self-image of Hong Kong. No example is better than the polemics and conflict around the Land Inheritance Legislation in recent years.

In the controversy, the middle-class liberal politicians, headed by Christine Loh, were in line with the colonial government in pushing the legislation outlawing the traditional practice of the original inhabitants letting only the male descendants be the in-heritors of land property. This tradition has been protected by the colonial administration for nearly one hundred years.

Sure, Hong Kong/China/British triangular politics in the late transitional period, and also gender politics, was at work on the issue. But, the urban/rural politics underlying the debate de-serves attention too. This aspect was reflected in the rhetoric adopted by the pro-legislation camp and its opponents. The lib-eral and anti-feudalist language of the Democrats was successful in mobilizing urban social support. What they were arguing for in the legislation was the necessity of fighting against the remains of feudalism and traditionalism, and of extending the principle of equal opportunity or gender equality to the village. In a word, the urbanist Hong Kong way of life should be extended to the rural and traditional communities.

On the side of the anti-legislation camp, the terminology was totally different. The Heung Yee Kuk mobilized the grassroots villagers into a "Protect the Native Homeland, Defend the Clans" (*baoxiangweizu*) campaign. The rural elite was not arguing in terms of gender, but in terms of the resistance against urban intrusion, and the defence of tradition. Rallies and demonstrations were joined by thousands of angry villagers — including males and females — and on occasion they turned into violent confronta-tions with the police and the politicians. It is all too simplistic to explain the villagers' anger solely in terms of their patriarchalism. Clearly, a rural and traditional identity in opposition to the urban and modernity was used to interpellate the villagers.

The problem of ethnicity, and specifically rural ethnicity, de-serves more attention than it has already received in the literature on Hong Kong identity. This paper is an attempt to investigate the continuities and discontinuities of the rural ethnic identities in the post-war economic boom. First, the economic and political pro-cesses integrating the rural communities with the expanding me-

tropolis will be outlined as the context of discussion. Then, cases will be examined to show the transformation of the rural identities, together with their tensions and articulations with the metropolitan identity of Hong Kong.

The "Great Transformation" of Rural Hong Kong[4]

The Political Economy of Rural Development

The political economy of rural development in Hong Kong can be divided into the pre- and post-World War II periods. In the first period, the New Territories were regarded as a military buffer between mainland China and Victoria City. Local self-sufficiency of the fishing and agrarian communities was preserved and the colonizers instituted a form of "indirect rule" over the rural populace. In the post-war era, the colonial authorities became more active in intervening politically and economically into these communities. It was pushed by the need for inventing institutions facilitating land resumption for urbanization on the one hand and the need for securing a stable supply of foodstuffs and minimizing the Colony's reliance on food imported from the People's Republic of China on the other. The result of these processes was the restructuring of the everyday lives of the villagers and the gradual (although sometimes drastic) dissolution of the village community.

(1) The Impact on Tanka Communities[5]

The Tanka people are not a homogeneous ethnic group. "Tanka" signifies those who reside on fishing boats and make a living out of fishing.[6] There are a number of myths telling the origins of the Tanka. Some tell us how the Tanka community was developed from groups of deviant Hans who were sent to the sea as punishment by the Imperial Court (e.g., Worcester 1947; Chan 1993); some tell us about the non-Han, or even non-human origins of the Tanka (e.g., Kani 1967:13; Ho 1959:3-4; Lin 1985:48-51). Anyway,

the separateness of the Tanka and the Chinese population ashore is stressed by both.

The Tanka communities are scattered at a number of localities along the South China coast. Though the Tankas would like to stress the distinctiveness of the Tankas from different communities, they do share a similar language (the Tanka Dialect), religion (worshipping of Tin Hau and Hung Shing), as well as customs and lifestyle from an external point of view. They are one of the earliest "settlers" (though they never settled ashore) in the Hsin-An County (Qing administrative region of the present Hong Kong territory) before the Punti and Hakka cultivators came.

In traditional China, the Tankas were poor and were ranked as the most inferior caste whose position was even lower than the beggars and prostitutes. The Imperial state had forbidden the boat people to settle ashore, marry with the Hans, buy land, and participate in Imperial examinations. They were stripped of all political rights enjoyed by other landed populations.

The colonial state inherited this discrimination against the Tankas after 1898. Unlike the Hakka and Cantonese farmers, they were not granted the status of original inhabitants and, hence, of all rights and privileges deduced from this status.[7]

The Tanka fishermen remained poor. Their miserable mode of living had not changed a lot before the Second World War. In the post-war industrial takeoff, the government was destined to guarantee the provision of cheap fish to the rapidly expanding industrial workforce. The goal was attained by promoting and sponsoring the mechanization of the fishing industry through technical advice and low interest rate loans. The authority also organized fisherman co-operatives to pool financial resources for the mechanization. The process made it possible for the Tanka to produce a large amount of fish at very low costs. But, it also caused the problem of overfishing which led to the final demise of the fishing industry.

The ultra-extraction of marine resources did successfully guarantee the supply of marine products for the urban population of Hong Kong over the 1950s. The proportion of local production

over local consumption of fish rose from 50 per cent to 90 per cent in the years of economic boom (Schiffer 1991:185). However, the abundant supply could not be sustained long. Since the late 1950s, the marine resources near the coast of Hong Kong have dwindled rapidly.[8] By the 1970s, when the marine resources in the South China sea had been dwindling as well (Pang 1996), and when the government withdrew its support from the fishing industry, many Tanka families went bankrupt and had to abandon their junks and find jobs in the city. This process, together with the acceleration of urbanization, brought the rapid dissolution of the Tanka communities.

(2) The Impact on Hakka and Great Clans Communities[9]

Most inland areas of the Hsin-An County were barren until ancestors of the Tangs came to settle in the northwest region (today Kam Tin area) during the Song dynasty in 973 A.D.[10] Then came the Haus and Pangs during the Southern Song, the Lius during the late Yuan and the Mans during the Ming dynasty. They all came from Canton and were known as the "five great clans."[11] Later, Hakka families from the north came into the county and established their villages. The "five great clans," especially the Tangs, held hegemonic power in the region. The great clans claimed to be the Punti of Hsin-An.

The great clans, especially the Tangs, not only owned the land around their villages, but also much arable land in eastern New Territories, Hong Kong island and even outlying islands. The Hakka people, who came after the five great clans, could only establish their villages on hilly and infertile lands with poor water supply. The ownership of their farmland was mostly claimed by the great clans who appropriated a portion of their harvest as land rent.

The Punti/Hakka or landlord/tenant rivalry was common to the village life.[12] Faure (1986) notes that armed rent collection teams were organized by the Tangs to travel around the county during the months of harvest. The Hakka villagers were always harassed by these teams. In reaction, the former organized them-

selves into local alliances or *yuek* for defence. There were occasions when the coercion of landlords was so intolerable that blood-shedding rent resistance broke out to expel the collection teams. Heroes who died in this resistance are still worshipped in temples of some Hakka villages, such as those in Lam Tsuen and Pat Heung. But the dominance of the Punti was also secured by their monopoly of seats in the local magistrate and their control of market towns.

Between 1900 and 1903, the colonial authorities pushed a "land revolution" (Chun 1985, 1987) to strip the great clans, who organized an uprising against the British takeover of the New Territories, of their land rights over most tracts of land cultivated by the Hakka.[13] The pre-colonial landlord economy was transformed into a peasant economy, private ownership of land was established, and a colonial state-Hakka alliance was built. This was indeed a "great transformation" of the village communities which laid the foundation for the dissolution and incorporation of these communities into the market economy after the Second World War.

After the War, a large number of Chinese immigrants settled in the New Territories and made a living by renting and cultivating land from the Punti or Hakka villagers. The state support of agriculture through the Vegetable Marketing Organization and agricultural production co-operatives in each village stimulated the increase in immigrant farmers and drove the land rent up. Subsequently, more and more original inhabitants were detached from agricultural production and turned to non-agricultural sources of income to supplement the land rent. According to Kuan and Lau (1979, 1981) and Lee (1981), this transformation of the rural socio-economic structure led to the erosion of the "earthbound compulsion" and the community bonds of the villages. The pace was accelerated by the urbanization process which urged the villagers to sell their land for development.

Political Incorporation of the Village

In addition to the economic incorporation of the rural communities, the political incorporation of these communities is equally important. The principles of villages' local management in the pre-colonial era were inherited in the "indirect rule" model of the early colonial period. But, it soon gave way to a more interventionist regime after the Second World War. The New Territories were partitioned into 28 districts, with one District Office and one Rural Committee in each. A Heung Yee Kuk (Rural Committee) Village Representative system was instituted as the consultative arm of the colonial administration.

The particularity of the rural politics began to disappear in the 1970s when the district administration of the city and the New Territories was unified under the City and New Territories Administration. In the 1980s, District Boards were set up in each of the 19 districts covering both the urban and rural areas. The system of Rural Committees survived in this unification process after strong protest by the rural elite. But, it did not stop the further unification of urban and rural politics. The unification was urged by New Town development projects through which a large number of urban dwellers were relocated to the satellite towns of the New Territories. In the 1990s, the colonizers began cancelling the rights and privileges the original inhabitants had enjoyed for nearly one hundred years through the Land Inheritance Legislation. Nowadays, the Special Administrative Region (SAR) government is proposing a unification of the Urban Council and Regional Council which have been responsible for the recreational and hygiene issues of the urban and rural areas, respectively.

In conclusion, the *Hong Kong society* was not one in the pre-war period. The political and economic, let alone cultural, cleavages between the urban society of the Victoria City and the rural society of the New Territories were all too apparent. The post-war period was a period during which a unitary, metropolitan *Hong Kong society* was made out from the pre-war dual society, and the traditional rural communities were incorporated into the

Colony's capitalist economy. It is an important aspect of the formation of the Hong Kong society.

In the following part, we are going to see that, though the economic and political incorporation of the rural communities in the making of the Hong Kong society proceeded rapidly after 1950, the subjective side of the process — the assimilation of the rural ethnic identities into the unitary identity of Hong Kong — lagged behind. The traditional identities persist — though transformed into more implicit forms — despite the dissolution of the corresponding physical communities. The result is a continuous tension between the urban, middle class culture and the rural, ethnic culture.

The Persistent Rural Identity of Tanka, Hakka and Punti

Tanka Communities: The Case of Kau Sai Island

Barbara E. Ward, based on her ethnographic research in a Tanka community at Kau Sai island (an outlying island of Sai Kung sea) in 1953, borrowed Levi-Strauss' (1953) concept of "consciousness model" to decipher the self identity of the Tanka fishermen there to ascertain how they perceived their relation with the outside world.

"Consciousness model" is the model through which man makes sense of the world surrounding him. Ward discovered that the "consciousness model" of the Tanka and that of the colonial administrator were much different (Ward 1989c, 1989d, see Figure 1). While the former viewed themselves exclusively as members of the Kau Sai community which was not encapsulated in any other larger unit, the latter saw the Kau Sai community as a unit within the Sai Kung district, which was lying within a larger unit, the New Territories, which in turns were included within the Crown Colony of Hong Kong and ultimately within the total framework of the British Commonwealth. In other words, the fishermen had

Figure 1   Immediate Conscious Models: (i) Kau Sai Version,
             (ii) Administrative Version

▲ EGO
△ △ Member of EGO's personal (i.e.
     friendship etc.) groups
          (i)   (ii)
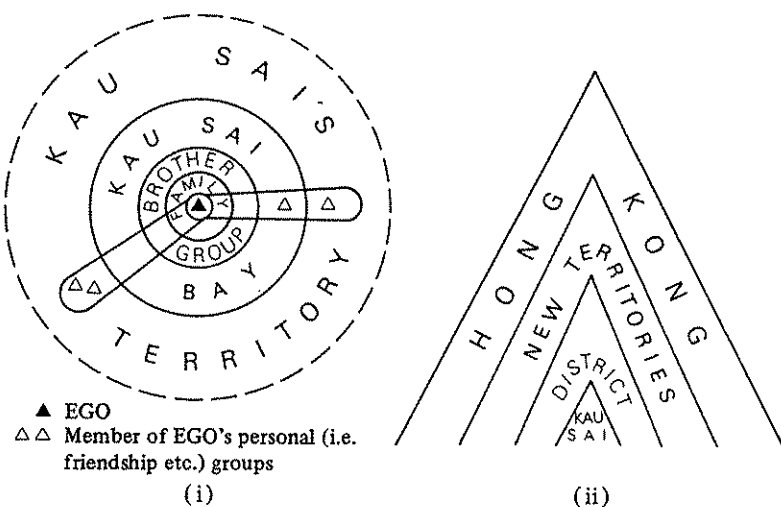
Source: Ward (1989d:68).

not yet identified themselves as part of the "imagined community" of Hong Kong, but only as part of the "concrete community" of Kau Sai. The concept of "Hong Kong society" was just alien to them.

People outside Kau Sai island were seen by the villagers uniformly as non-Kau Sai people, no matter whether they were Cantonese, Hakka, British or Chinese. When they mentioned that some of their customs were "Chinese," they just meant that their customs shared some attributes with the Chinese customs and did not imply their community was subordinated to a larger Chinese community. In their world, any relationship with the outsiders was dyadic and personal (1989c:54). Ward classified this "con-

sciousness model" of the Kau Sai Tanka as their "home-made model" or "immediate model," for it had developed from within their community.

But when their interaction with the colonial administration and the outsiders intensified, the fishermen also developed "observer's models" to guide their action when dealing with the non-Kau Sai people. They developed the models by observing and copying the consciousness model of the outsiders — the government officials, the Cantonese or Hakka shopkeepers in the market towns, etc., so that they knew to act *as if* they were subjected to outsiders' expectation. For example, when they were applying for licenses or identity cards, or electing their village representatives as requested by the District Office, they acted as if they were submissive in playing the game the rules of which were set by the government.

Hence, in the eyes of the outsider, the Kau Sai Tanka might have adjusted their self identity and regarded themselves as members of the larger society. But, if we go deeper, we would find that this "observers' model" was only used strategically in the necessary situations:

> [W]hen they have to, they can fit their actions to it [the outlines of the present administrative system]. When they do so, however, it is their *ad hoc* action, not their own immediate model, which is fitted to the administration's view.... [T]hey continue in their own immediate model to regard the relationships so set up between them and various individuals in the government's service in the purely dyadic terms described earlier. The importance of knowing and getting on well with individual government servants is well understood.... (Ward 1989d:72)

Here we come to an "observer's model/immediate model" dichotomy parallel to Redfield's (1962) "Great Tradition/Little Tradition" or Scott's (1990) "public transcript/hidden transcript" dichotomy.[14] Of course, the same situation may apply to other rural communities in Hong Kong who may have a similar situation to Kau Sai's. On the other hand, we have no reason to believe

that the consciousness model as discerned in Ward's study, which was done in the early 1950s when the wheel of drastic social transformation had just begun, has not changed at all. What we would like to know is: how did the fishermen's self identity change, if at all, under the post-war state-building efforts to integrate the rural communities fully into the colony's political and economic structure, and when the communities were being dissolved by the urbanization process?

Hints can be found in Ward's works. In fact, the impact of the colonial state building, which was characterized by the formation of fishermen co-operatives and the penetration of the administrative apparatus into the villages, was not great, if not non-existent. The fishermen could continue to play the game with the government officials according to their "observers' model" without transforming their self-consciousness much. Nor can we conclude from the extensive mechanization[15] among the Tanka families that their consciousness had been "modernized." Ward (1989e) observed that the initial reason urging the fishermen to mechanize their junk was far from the "modernization of consciousness," or the awareness of the benefits of technological innovations. On the contrary, the fishermen were trying hard to avoid mechanization for fear that it would threaten their community relationships.[16] Most fishermen mechanized at last just because they were forced to do so by the depletion of fishing resources brought about by the overfishing of the already mechanized minority.[17] The process hardly corresponded to any change in the fishermen's consciousness and identity. It is so long after the mechanization process was completed. The process only changed the technique, not the culture of the fishermen.

Then, how about the fishermen whose communities were uprooted in the process of urbanization and who were forced to go ashore and leave the fishing industry? Maybe it is reasonable to expect these ex-fishermen's consciousness to be transformed totally. But in reality, the process of their consciousness transformation is far less straightforward than we have imagined. With regard to the Kau Sai boat-men who went ashore and left the

fishing industry, Ward finds that the transformation of their consciousness did not involve the replacement of an old by a new one, but an interchange between the "immediate model/observers' model":

> As a Cantonese landsman, then, an ex-Kau Sai boatman develops his new, land-dwelling Cantonese immediate model of his new social position, and, provided he is allowed to do so by other Cantonese landspeople, he can become a Cantonese landsman. Meanwhile his old Kau Sai model, though it is not entirely forgotten, becomes inoperative for the time being, and unless or until he returns to his old life it takes on the status of an internal observers' (i.e. outsiders') model.... (Ward 1989d:72)

In a word, their Tanka, or Kau Sai Tanka, ethnicity did not disappear with their migration to the town and city but was "frozen" and would re-emerge at any time.

The occasional re-emergence of this identity is not rare. It is the case in any traditional festival. On the birthday of Tin Hau and the Tuen Ng festival in 1996, I visited the Tanka community at Po Toi island and Tai O, respectively. It is striking to note that the communities, which seem declining and only occupied by a small number of aged Tanka, became very much alive when thousands of ex-villagers — including many young couples with their children — flocked back to their home and participated in the rituals and attended the *Shen Kung* opera.

The contrast is much more apparent in Po Toi. The island is ordinarily occupied by not more than ten households. But, on the Tin Hau birthday, *Shen Kung* opera is performed out of the Tin Hau temple every night for a whole week. Free trips to and fro the island every night are organized by the Rural Committee and the Yau Ma Tei Ferry Co. to facilitate the ex-villagers going back there. Considering the fact that traditional festivals and opera performance are occasions when local cultures and identities express and reinforce themselves, we can hardly say that the ethnic identity among the Tanka villagers has faded out with the dissolution of their physical community. The persistence of the local identity

of Po Toi is not only expressed in the festival. According to the Village Representative, ex-villagers are still very active in the village election held at Aberdeen (the southern most part of Hong Kong Island which is very close to Po Toi) and the voting rate is always higher than 80 per cent.

Parallel to the above observation, Choi (1995) finds that ethnic identity and segregation between the Tanka and non-Tanka in Cheung Chau are reinforced in the organization and rituals of the Jiao festival every year, though in ordinary time an outsider may find it difficult to decipher any ethnic identity at work among the Cheung Chau residents.

There are few reasons to restrict the insights gained from the observations of Tanka communities from being applied to the agrarian communities on land. The persistent and concealed consciousness of the villagers or ex-villagers may occasionally burst out into open consciousness under some circumstances. Sometimes it bursts out peacefully in the rituals and ceremonial activities of traditional festivals; sometimes it bursts out as urban-rural confrontation, just as the following case and that of the protest against the Land Inheritance Legislation.

Agrarian Communities: The Case of Tseng Lan Shue

The violent resistance of the Tseng Lan Shue villagers to the government's regulation of the village houses in 1973 is one of the many cases showing how the persistent rural consciousness of the agrarian population was transformed into confrontational collective action when they perceived that their village life was being disrupted by urban outsiders.

On a stormy summer day in 1973 in Tseng Lan Shue, a Hakka village in Sai Kung, an old village house collapsed. Several days later, a team of Building Department officers went into the village. After a series of examinations, the officers classified five village houses, including the ancestral hall, as dangerous buildings that had to be demolished. The government also proposed moving the residents affected into a public housing estate. This provoked the

villagers, and a village assembly was gathered spontaneously in August. The villagers claimed that the job of the Building Department was to regulate urban buildings and did not have the right to intervene with their village life. The structure and materials of the village houses, which had stood for hundreds of years, were different from the urban buildings. The villagers were resolved to protect the houses and resist the intrusion of the government officials into the village by all means.

Yau Kee, the Village Representative of Tseng Lan Shue and Chairman of Sai Kung Rural Committee, tried to pacify the angry villagers and set up a concern group to negotiate with the administration. The peaceful protest by Yau only resulted in the government's concession of not demolishing the ancestral hall, (Wah Kiu Yat Po, 22-29 August 1973), but it was far from adequate in comforting the villagers.

On 10 September, officials went into the village to post sealing orders onto the houses to be demolished. Hundreds of villagers gathered spontaneously to block the village; the officials failed to accomplish their task. On 14 September, the officials went into the village with sealing orders again. This time they were accompanied by a team of the police mobile unit. Villagers resisted their intrusion again, and violence resulted. They fought the police with sticks, nightsoil and urine. The violent protest was soon put down by the police. The orders were posted, and one of the protesting villagers was arrested. The arrested man was taken to court on 15 September. A crowd of villagers went to hear the court and, after that, they rushed to the Sai Kung District Office to request a meeting with the Sai Kung District Officer (Wah Kiu Yat Po, 11-16 September 1973). It was the last report on this case.

The reaction and solidarity of the villagers in the incident cannot just be explained in terms of conflict over material interests, as only a few villagers were affected by the government action. The village identity among the villagers must have been at work in making them cohere into the collective action. The message expressed in the resistance is clear: urban is urban, rural is rural, they are essentially different.

There is little information concerning the socio-economic profile of the Tseng Lan Shue village before the incident. But, provided its vicinity to the urban area, it is not difficult to imagine how the process of "modernization" dissolved the "earthbound compulsion" of the village as described in the 1970s by Kuan and Lau (1979, 1981) as well as Lee (1981). But, the incident tells us that the erosion of community bonds may not correspond to the erosion of the community identity. Similar cases of rural-urban confrontation as expressed in Hakka or Punti villagers' resistance to outsiders' intrusion are no less than abundant. It ranges from *feng shui* disputes[18] to the protest against police patrolling in the village. These events are more or less similar to the "Protect the Native Homeland, Defend the Clans" mobilization against the Land Inheritance Legislation.

The ethnic identity of the Hakka and Punti farmers is also seen in the self-image of the "New Territories Diaspora" in Europe (Watson 1975, 1983:488-90). It was relatively easy for the original inhabitants of the New Territories to get British passports. This made a large number of Hakka and Punti villagers migrate to Europe — firstly Britain, than Holland, Germany and Belgium — from the 1950s to the 1970s. By the early 1980s, Watson (1983:488-89) estimated that there were at least 75,000 New Territories people living and working in Western Europe and North America. The interesting thing is that, unlike the emigrant Hong Kong urban professionals who identify themselves as Hongkongese abroad, these ex-villagers continue to think themselves as New Territories *bendiren* (local people). They develop their information and community networks and keep remitting money to their families in the New Territories. Their identification is very much in contrast with the urban elite in Hong Kong, as they:

> do not see Hong Kong as a "borrowed place" and they do not feel that they have lived on "borrowed time." To them the New Territories is their ancestral home, or *xiangxia*, a concept that has great meaning to all Chinese. The hills surrounding their villages contain the bones of up to 35 generations of lineage ancestors. Even

the most sophisticated and hard-bitten emigrants have deep emotional ties to the New Territories. They and their ancestors have seen many governments come and go, but the *bendiren* have managed to survive as a coherent Chinese community with its own style of life (including religious and cultural traditions) for nearly six centuries. (Watson 1983:490)

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion. First, against the assumption of the cultural modernization theory, traditionalism in the New Territories has survived, and has been reinforced in some senses under the process of economic and political modernization. Though the rural communities have been dissolving in post-war urbanization and industrialization, the ethnic identity persists — always in a hidden form — in the consciousness of the villagers or ex-villagers. Secondly, the cultural identity of Hong Kong is never an all-embracing identity among the SAR's, and formerly the Colony's, residents. Wong (1996) is right to argue that the way we situate ourselves between the local identity of "Hongkongese" and national identity of Chinese is complicated. Furthermore, the articulation between the Hong Kong identity and other persisting ethnic identities is equally complicated and important. Sometimes the tension between the two may burst out in overt antagonism, from localistic and sporadic rural conflicts to large scale mobilization and violent confrontation. It is misleading to assume that the significance of this tension has been diminishing.

More light can be shed on the urban side of the story by comparing the post-war Hongkongese identity with the Shanghainese identity at the turn of the century. Like Hong Kong, Shanghai was also an immigrant society having witnessed an emergence of a unitary local identity out of the sojourners with diverse backgrounds. It is interesting to note that the pre-liberation "Shanghai-ness" was based on the identification with moder-

nity and the cosmopolitan way of life on the one hand and on the rejection and disdain of the countryside — which were seen as representing the anachronistic past — on the other (Liu and Faure 1996:7-9; Liu 1996; Lee 1990). It is all the same in the development of the Hong Kong identity. The *Rural* is placed as one of the *Others* of the self image of Hong Kong. The middle-class politician's rhetoric in the debate on Land Inheritance Legislation was a good expression of the urban elite's disdain of the rural.

At last, the othering of the *Rural* is also expressed in a number of nostalgic representations of the countryside. There are operas,[19] songs[20] and films[21] showing regrets over the urbanization process and the dissolution of the rural communities.[22] Again, it is comparable with the nostalgism expressed in the writings of pre-liberation Shanghai writers (Siu 1990a; Liu 1996).

The "Hongkongness" did not emerge straightforwardly in the post-war history, nor is it stable and free of tension. Like any other local, national and global identity, the cultural identity of the Hong Kong people is always in the making and in negotiation, or even conflict, with other ethnic identities.[23] Its development should not be examined solely in cultural terms. Trajectories of social, political and economic development should also be taken into account. Or to put it in another way, anthropological, historical and sociological perspectives should be brought in the discussion of the Hong Kong cultural identity to obtain a more in-depth and sophisticated understanding of the subject.

Notes

1. Similar observation is made by Lui (1997) with regard to his childhood memories of the 1960s and 1970s.

2. Baker (1983:471-72) thinks that the erosion of this ethnic identity is a natural result of "the development of new means of livelihood" brought about by "a highly urbanized, industrialized, large-scale enterprise, skill-hungry economy." But the current discussion on the global city tells us ethnic segregation of social life and occupations may not necessarily be

displaced, but is reinforced in many cases, in the development of a modern capitalist economy (for example, see Sassen 1991). An alternative hypothesis is that the dissolution of ethnic distinction was caused by the post-war colonial state-building. It involved the displacement of the welfare function of the ethnic organizations by the government or government supervised agencies; the demolition of squatter areas, which were always nodals points of ethnic congregation, and the resettlement of the dwellers into public housing; the full-fledged development of a government-regulated educational system using Cantonese and English as the medium of instruction, etc.

3. It is interesting to compare the observations of Ward and Chan with the observations on the resurgence of local religions and local village identities in contemporary China after decades of collectivization and modernization of agriculture and the agrarian communities (e.g., Siu 1990b; Feuchtwang 1996).

4. Chun (1985, 1987) used this concept from Polanyi (1957) to describe the impact of colonialism and rural development in the New Territories.

5. For a detailed discussion of the pre-colonial formation of the Tanka communities and the impact of colonization and post-war development, see Hung (forthcoming).

6. "Tanka people are those who reside on the sea. They live in the boat and their origins is unknown" quoted from ancient Chinese text from Lin (1985a:89).

7. The official reason for not recognizing the Tanka's original inhabitance status is that they have no genealogy and hence cannot prove their settlement in the territory prior to colonization.

8. For example, the yellow croaker, on which the Tai O fishermen have relied for centuries, had been totally exhausted by the 1960s (Cheung 1984:42-44).

9. For a detailed discussion of the impact of post-war development on the Hakka and Punti communities, see Chiu and Hung (1997a, 1997b).
10. Of course, it is difficult to confirm whether the area was actually barren before the Tangs came. Faure (1984) hypothesized that the northwestern region of the county was originally occupied by a tribe surnamed Shum, which was enslaved by the Tangs after their arrival.
11. By "lineage" and "clan," I adopt the definition by Baker. Lineage is a group of people having kinship relations and living together to form a village, while clan is a cluster of lineages.
12. The Hakka/Punti rivalry culminated in the "Hèung Yee Kuk crisis" in the late 1950s, and faded out after that when the modernization of the countryside threw the two groups into similar socio-economic situations and made their interests converge (Chui and Hung 1997a, 1997b).
13. Land rights in traditional Hsin-An were divided into "surface-soil" and "sub-soil." The former was the right to cultivate and was usually owned by the Hakka, while the latter was the right to claim land rent and was owned by the great clan families (see Palmer 1987).
14. In fact, Ward is aware of the similarity between her model and Redfield's, though there are divergences as well (Ward 1989d:76-77).
15. According to Ward (1989b), the mechanization process since the early 1950s has transformed the traditional "peasant economy" of the Tanka into a capitalistic "post-peasant economy."
16. The example Ward (1989d) noted was the traditional relationship between the fishermen and the junk builders. In the Tanka community, this relationship was always affective, personal and long lasting. The fishermen kept their relationship with the junk builders after they bought the junks, and relied on them for repairing services. Many fishermen initially resisted mechanization just because they did not want to sacrifice this community-specific relationship.

17. Ward's finding is echoed by similar observations by Cheung (1984) and Pang (1996).
18. Though we have to admit that in many cases, the *feng shui* issue was just exploited by the villagers to fight for more compensation for the development projects, we have to realize that, in many other cases, *feng shui* was a real concern of the villagers. The Yuen Long Pat Heung villagers' protracted and successful opposition to the construction of an ashes grave in the area in the late 1980s is a good example.
19. For example, the opera *Zhihai* (the Sorrow of the Sea) by Tu Kwok Wei is about the miserable stories of several Tanka fishermen with the urbanization, mechanization and decline of the fishing industry as the background.
20. *Fengyun* (Wind and Cloud) was a very popular song in the 1970s which blamed the disappearance of the countryside on urbanization. It mourned: "Who has changed the green mountains, changed it into the vulgar faces of our secular world?"
21. The most recent relevant film is *Three Summers*, which is about the passion of a young Tanka girl towards her declining community at Tai O.
22. We should also note that the *Rural* as the other of the Hong Kong urban not only includes the *Rural* of Hong Kong, but also the *Rural* of mainland China. See Yau's (1995) analysis of two popular films in Hong Kong which represented rural China as a space of barbarism and nostalgic dreamland, respectively.
23. For the issues of ethnicities in the making of the national Chinese identity and local Taiwan identity, see Brown (1996) for an example. For the issues on the tensions between the construction of global identity and local ethnic identities, see Hall (1997a, 1997b) for examples.

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Rethinking the Hong Kong Cultural Identity
The Case of Rural Ethnicities

Abstract

In the post-war economic boom, an identity of "Hongkongese" corresponding to the consumerist and cosmopolitan way of life has emerged among the Hong Kong Chinese. Though there is a vast literature discerning the distinctive features of such an identity, little has been discussed with regard to the historical process of its formation.

The Chinese population in Hong Kong has never been homogenous. It is made up of various ethnic groups, including native villagers and Chinese immigrants of different dialects and geographic origins. How these groups have "melted" together to make a unitary identity of "Hongkongese" should not be taken for granted. In fact, the identity of Hong Kong people has been made in constant negotiation between the local cultures of diversified ethnic groups and the middle class, urban-centric culture. Underlying the negotiation have been the politico-economic processes of colonial state building, industrialization and urbanization which have integrated the livelihoods of different ethnicities into the fabric of an expanding metropolis. The development of the Hong Kong identity should not be examined solely in cultural terms. Trajectories of social, political and economic development have to be taken into account.

With a focus on the *Tanka* and *Hakka* communities in the New Territories, I argue that the making of the Hong Kong identity is a process full of tensions, predominantly the tensions between the rural and the urban. The tensions have persisted over the decades of economic boom until today and still constitute one of the most essential dynamics in the formation and reproduction of the Hong Kong identity.

重思香港文化身份認同

以鄉郊族群認同為例

孔誥烽

（中文摘要）

　　在戰後的經濟發展下，一個與消費主義與大都會生活方式有著密切關係的「香港人」身份認同在香港的中國人口之中逐漸成形。雖然已有不少文獻對此身份認同的特點加以描述，但對於此認同產生的具體歷史過程，我們所知仍少。

　　在香港的中國人口，絕對不是同質和單一的。相反，它最初是由擁有不同方言與地域源頭的中國移民與新界土著所構成。這些背景複雜的群體怎樣溶合而成「香港人」，是一個不容忽視的問題。事實上，「香港人」身份認同乃產生自不同族群文化與城市中產階級文化的互動與衝突之中。這個互動與衝突過程的背後，則是將不同族群的日常生活捲進現代都市社會的各種政治 —— 經濟過程：殖民地國家的建構、工業化與都市化。因此，「香港文化身份認同」不應純以文化的角度去討論，而應引入社會、政治與經濟發展的因素去考慮。

　　本文以新界的蛋家與客家社群為焦點，指出香港身份認同的建構過程，乃一個充滿矛盾與張力 —— 特別是城鄉之間的矛盾 —— 的過程。其中的張力與矛盾，並未因經濟發展而消失。直至今天，它仍是香港認同的生產與再生產背後的其中一個重要動能。