

遊谷探埔

Kuk Po Futures

Sustainability
Revitalisation
Framework

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鄉郊保育辦公室
Countryside
Conservation
Office



鄉郊保育資助計劃
Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme

Study Objectives

Nestled in a valley and surrounded by marshes, terraced fields, fengshui woods and mangroves, Kuk Po is a village cluster situated across from the border town of Sha Tau Kok. Centrally located within the area, Kuk Po celebrates a long tradition of Hakka cultural and economic activities since immigrants first cultivated the topsoil in the late 17th century. Today, remnants of Kuk Po's histories of expansion and migration exist in the form of its landscape: crumbling walls in the old village reflect the diminishing need for defence in the latter half of the 20th century, while the main building of Kai Choi School and stand-alone Hakka-Western hybrid mansions in Tin Sum depicts benefit brought to the cluster from globalisation.

In 2022, the multidisciplinary research team led by Prof Thomas Chung of School of Architecture, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), launched the project "From Valley to Plain I: Conservation and Revitalisation from Ng To to Kuk Po River and Plain via Multi-disciplinary, Educational and Action Research" in Kuk Po in collaboration with stakeholders of the village. This project pioneers a rural conservation partnership model involving university and village community, and discovers knowledge of the multiple eco-cultural heritages and human-environment interactions of the 300-year-old Hakka settlements from Kuk Po coastal plain to the inland hamlet of Ng To connected by Kuk Po River. By restoring a historic Hakka house in Ng To, enhancing its surrounding landscape, establishing an education-cum-research base and an eco-cultural trail, returning villagers work closely with professors, researchers, students and volunteers to recreate the organic relationship between human and nature of Kuk Po and its vicinity, and explores a viable partnership process for sustainable rural revitalisation for the longer term.

This paper "Sustainability Revitalisation Framework" aims at reviewing the natural environment, biodiversity, history and cultural significance as well as sustainable or regenerative tourism potential of Kuk Po based on the multidisciplinary research findings from the Project, examining current local, national and international guidelines on rural revitalisation, and proposing short-term, medium-term and long-term plans and targets for the sustainable revitalisation of Kuk Po that other similar sites in Hong Kong and beyond can emulate.

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1 International Guidelines on Rural Revitalisation

Rural revitalisation is a broad term covering a number of policy and governance issues including agriculture, fisheries, land planning, works, population, forestry, nature conservation, economics, resource management, transport and so on. There is no single universal definition of rural revitalisation. It can be eclectically understood as a way of positively transforming rural areas for present and future generations, or a complementary endeavour to urbanisation that benefits both rural and urban areas by making rural areas more productive, sustainable, healthy and convenient to live in¹.

Rural areas are home to about 43% of the world's population and most of the global population living in poverty. Not only do rural populations generally have less access to education, health and other social services, the work available to them is often characterised by human rights abuses, gender inequality, poor working conditions, and the violation of indigenous land rights. The social and economic status of residents in rural areas of developed regions differ substantially with those in less developed regions. Concatenated with gender, rights of indigenous people, climate change and other considerations, guidelines on rural revitalisation at the international level can be found entrusted to organisations of different policy focuses and advocacies.

Department of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations

At the intergovernmental level, the United Nations (UN) considers rural development essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UN aims at raising the standard of living of the rural population to that of the urban population through a process called “in-situ urbanisation” by radically reconsidering its rural development strategies in three aspects, namely:

- Ridding rural-urban disparities and inequalities;
- Providing adequate protection to the natural environment and the wilderness;
- Embracing technologies in creating possibilities for rural populations; and,
- Industrialising rural areas to increase their share of economic value of in gross domestic product (GDP).² The review and adoption of new rural strategies by the UN is to help to avoid many unwarranted consequences of unbridled rural-urban migration and irrepressible impacts of climate change.

¹ K. Kosec, and D. Resnick. (2019). “Governance: Making Institutions Work for Rural Revitalization,” 2019 Global Food Policy Report.

² Department of Economic & Social Affairs, United Nations. (2021). World Social Report 2021 — Reconsidering Rural Development.

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

Following the adoption of these strategies on rural development, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)³ employs a “leave no one behind” principle, “human rights and gender equality-based” approach, “sustainability and resilience” principle as well as sustainability and accountability of the organisation itself in formulating rural revitalisation standards across the globe. When considering these standards, the following concerns should be addressed:

- Biodiversity conservation, protection of natural habitats, and sustainable management of living resources;
- Climate change and disaster risks;
- Pollution prevention and resource efficiency;
- Community health, safety and security;
- Cultural heritage;
- Displacement and involuntary resettlement indigenous peoples; and,
- Labor and working conditions.

UNEP has even elaborated further on the governance of the organisation itself in formulating policies on rural development and implementing these programmes. It employs an “environmental and social sustainability framework” to strengthen the sustainability and accountability of the organisation’s work across the globe. This framework means to enable and facilitate UNEP to effectively and efficiently manage environmental and social impacts throughout the lifecycle of a UNEP project. The framework serves four broad purposes:

- Enhancing outcomes by systematically integrating environmental and social dimensions in UNEP-funded programmes and projects.
- Strengthening alignment of UNEP’s work with the SDGs and other UN entities and partners in addressing the environmental and social sustainability of development efforts.
- Setting standards of sustainability for UNEP’s operations thereby confirming UNEP’s accountability to its member States, and other funders.
- Enabling the UNEP to work in a safer and smarter manner, thereby minimising potential risks and harm to intended beneficiaries while enhancing UNEP’s capabilities and credibility.

³ United Nations Environment Programme. <https://www.unep.org/>

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) examines the linkage between urban and rural developments, and work on guiding principles for urban and rural areas. It recognises the interdependence between urban and rural environments and the importance to protect ecosystem, and the urgency to create fair and sustainable livelihoods across the urban-rural continuum by strengthening the roles of local governments and other institutional partners. Cooperation between actors must hence assist to leverage these roles by supporting employment and sustainable economic development in the context of ecosystem functions, and enabling health and wellbeing for households in interdependent urban, peri-urban and rural areas.⁴ The guiding principles to achieve these goals include:

- Locally grounded interventions — integrated territorial development to overcome social, economic and environmental inequalities, and leverage the comparative advantages of the flows of people, goods and services across the urban-rural continuum;
- Integrated governance — strengthened governance mechanisms to incorporate urban-rural linkages horizontally (multi-spatial scale), sectionally (multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder) and vertically (multi-level);
- Functional and spatial systems-based approaches — integrative and inclusive urban, territorial and rural policy and planning to support the analysis of the flow of resources such as people, water, biodiversity and food for greater impact and equity;
- Financially inclusive — securing and prioritising sustainable public and private investment to balance and strengthen urban-rural linkages, and adjusting funding and promoting fiscal strategies to meet objectives for integrated rural and urban economic, social and environmental development including smaller settlements, including villages, towns, intermediate cities and peri-urban areas;
- Balanced partnership — fostering partnerships, alliances and networks covering a variety of capacities and skills across civil society, the private sector, academic institutions to the most marginalised groups and communities through inclusive and participatory processes that link urban and rural actors and different sectors;
- Human rights-based — assurance of development initiatives and processes do not negatively affect anyone's human rights and even protection of the area's natural biological diversity across the urban-rural continuum;
- Do no harm and provide social protection — overcoming conflict, recognising cultural diversity and reducing inequalities;

⁴ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat). (2019). Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles Framework for Action to Advance Integrated Territorial Development

- Environmentally sensitive — protecting, sustaining and expanding areas that are important to biodiversity and ecosystem services should be prioritised to ensure an integrated urban-rural transition to resilient, resource efficient, low-carbon and circular economies;
- Participatory engagement — meaningful participation by people, local institutions and communities across the urban-rural continuum such as creating spaces and mechanisms for engagement in political dialogue and planning processes, building capacity for rural communities in integrated territorial governance, and protecting and respecting local and indigenous cultures; and, last but not the least,
- Data driven and evidence-based — establishing, improving and transferring knowledge systems and fill data gaps so that there is evidence to support planning methods that will reinforce the urban-rural continuum and improve territorial cohesion.

The above guiding principles for urban-rural linkages are relevant for governments of all levels and other stakeholders to create an enabling environment in selected sectoral and thematic entry points for economic, social and environmental applications. The overall goal is to foster inclusive economic, social and environmental sustainability across the urban-rural continuum.

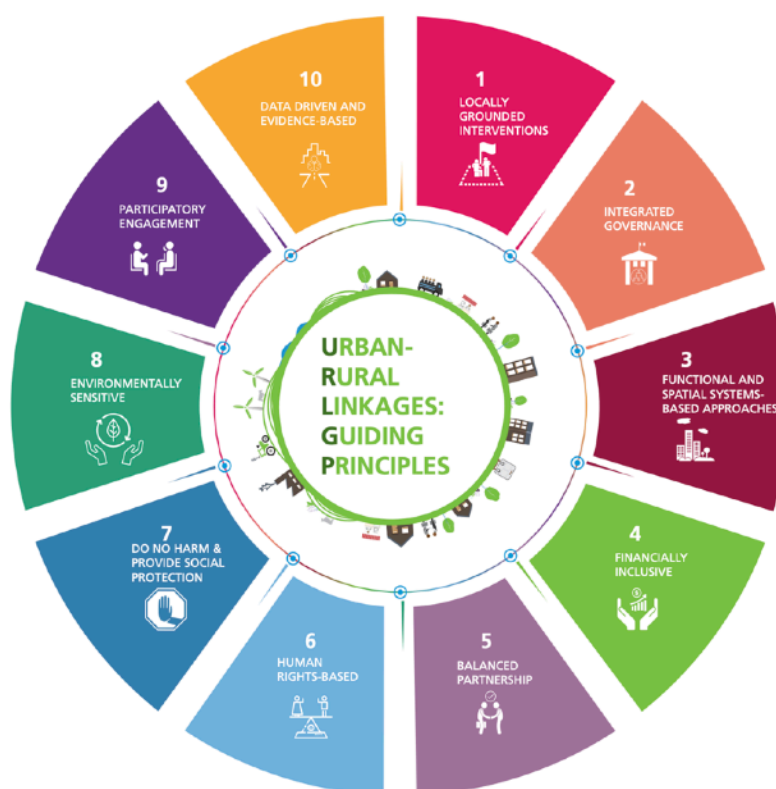


Plate 01. Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles Framework for Action to Advance Integrated Territorial Development (UN-Habitat)

2 National Policy on Rural Sustainable Development

Forty years of reform and opening up has resulted in China's remarkable achievements in economic growth and social development, the country's GDP now ranks second in the world and urbanisation rate has increased to nearly sixty percent, representing a "miracle" in the history of economic development. The process of rapid social and economic development has however brought increasingly prominent problem from the imbalance between urban and rural development and inadequate rural development. While relevant policy support has promoted the rapid development in cities and hence the urbanisation of many rural areas, the loss of a large number of factors of production in rural areas has led to increasing poverty in rural areas, the hollowing out of villages, industrial blight, cultural disinterest, resource shortage, and ecological environment deterioration.

The non-synchronicity and non-compatibility of urban and rural development drives the long-term exclusion of rural units, resulting in one-way flow of rural labor, land, technology, capital, and other factors of production to cities. Overall planning between urban and rural areas, and policies towards urban-rural integration are hence needed to narrow down the development gap between urban and rural areas in China. Rural revitalisation in China's geographical and spatial contexts hence implies a "significant conceptual change that both rebalances and reshapes the urban-rural relationship... and aims to create a new type of urban-rural relationship characterised by mutual promotion of industry-agriculture, urban-rural mutual complementation, comprehensive integration, and common prosperity."⁵

Chinese President Xi Jinping first introduced the national rural revitalisation strategy at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, emphasising the importance of developing rural areas and enhancing living standards of the rural population. The strategy has been subsequently expressed in numerous policies and working papers, including the 2018-2022 Strategic Planning for Rural Revitalisation⁶, the 14th Five-Year Plan of 2021-2025⁷, and the establishment of the National Rural Revitalisation Administration and the promulgation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Rural Revitalisation.

⁵ Liu, Y., Zang, Y. & Yang, Y. (2020) China's rural revitalization and development: Theory, technology and management. *Journal of Geographical Sciences*. 30, 1923–1942.

⁶ 中华人民共和国中央人民政府国务院。(2018)《乡村振兴战略规划(2018–2022年)》

⁷ 中华人民共和国国家乡村振兴局。(2021)《农村人居环境整治提升五年行动方案(2021–2025年)》

Three Rural Issues

Under the aforementioned context, at the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party in 2018, the Congress put forward the strategy of “rejuvenation of villages” as a response to the urgency and to solve the “three rural issues”. The “three rural issues” refer to agriculture, rural areas and farmers which is not only an economic issue, but also a political issue and a social issue. The focus is directed towards agricultural production, rural development and peasant income and the acknowledgement that these three aspects are intertwined and intrinsic to each other. In the “two sessions”, the strategy was again emphasised that the implementation of the strategy for the revitalisation of rural areas relates to whether or not the rural economy can recover from decline to full development. Rural revitalisation, and the subsequent increase in income and well-being of the rural population, are therefore of great significance to build and maintain the “Chinese dream”⁸. The meaning of rural revitalisation include:

- Maintaining the priority of rural development;
- Establishing a sound urban-rural integration development system and policy system; and,
- Accelerating the modernisation of rural areas in accordance with the general requirements of industrial prosperity, ecological liveability, rural civilisation, effective governance, and affluent life of the rural population.

Revitalisation and rejuvenation of rural areas

Both party and state agents explore ways to achieve full rejuvenation in rural areas and analyse possible problems and solutions in the implementation of strategies. The milestones for rural revitalisation in China are established to be⁹:

- By 2020, there are significant progress with rural revitalisation in terms of governance framework, policy system, productivity and economic capacity, as well as urban-rural integration mechanism;
- By 2035, rural areas will achieve modernisation overall with fundamental improvement in agricultural production, public services, economic prosperity for the rural population, rural governance and ecological environment; and,
- By 2050, rural revitalisation is realised in an all-embracing manner with a robust agricultural economy, aesthetic rural landscapes and economic prosperity for the rural population.

⁸ 习近平。(2022)《论“三农”工作》，中央文献出版社。

⁹ 中华人民共和国中央人民政府国务院。(2018)《中共中央国务院关于实施乡村振兴战略的意见》。

At the China Development Forum (CDF) 2018, the first annual high-level international conference attended by China's political elite, business leaders and academics right after the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) that followed, the conclave listed four goals to improve China's rural hinterland¹⁰:

- Shrinking the rural and urban gap through better physical and virtual connectivity between farmers and consumers;
- Addressing issues related to improving education, infrastructure, and environment standards in rural regions;
- Conducting research and development in rural technology sector; and,
- Incentivising villages to convert local food products into healthy products.

With the establishment of the National Rural Revitalisation Administration¹¹ and the promulgation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Rural Revitalisation¹² in 2021, an administrative-cum-legal framework was hence in place to advance the restructuring of the rural economy and accountability of policy implementation mechanism through an annual work report and inspection system. Notably the legislations on rural revitalisation mandate and promote the following scopes and directions in accordance with relevant policies and their implementation:

- Developing of rural industries;
- Supporting talents and cultivating human resources;
- Preserving cultural heritage and enhancing cultural industry;
- Ecological conservation;
- Improving organisational structure and governance;
- Urban-rural integration;
- Providing and enhancing public services and infrastructure; and,
- Standardising monitoring and inspection mechanisms.

¹⁰ Observer Research Foundation. (2023) Decoding Rural Revitalisation, Xi Jinping's New Priority.

¹¹ 中华人民共和国国家乡村振兴局 <https://www.nrra.gov.cn/>

¹² 中华人民共和国农业农村部乡村振兴促进法 http://www.moa.gov.cn/gk/zcfg/fl/202105/t20210507_6367254.htm

Towards low-carbon rural revitalisation

In light of the encompassing legal and administrative initiatives of rural revitalisation in China, the UN Habitat has launched a study recently in China to bridge China's national rural policies and local circumstances with international standards. Apart from looking at the acceleration of urban-rural integration, the study focused on achieving sustainable development goals and proposing responses to challenges of climate change in revitalisation of rural areas. It began with the objective of producing the Net-Zero Carbon Village Planning Guideline for Yangtze River Delta Region, with Dinghai District on Zhoushan Island in the vicinity of Shanghai as the case study¹³. The study further developed a strategy of low-carbon-oriented development and revitalisation of villages in Qinghai District, supported by 45 detailed indicators under 10 aspects and 4 major categories of strategies and corresponding actions. The 4 categories of strategies and corresponding actions include:

- Energy and resources
 - Identifying the reliance on coal as the primary energy supply, and lack of local water resources and waste treatment facilities;
 - Capitalising its potential in wind, solar and biomass energy, and promoting renewable energy and increasing its stability;
 - Increasing the capacity of rainwater harvesting and water recycling;
 - Reducing waste generation and promoting recycling of organic waste as well as sustainable consumption;
- Low-carbon industry
 - Identifying levels of carbon emission of major economic activities, for instances, farming, aquaculture, stock farming and tourism;
 - Increasing the efficiency of energy-water-food cycle;
 - Promoting renewable energy, and recycling of water and solid waste;
 - Promoting training on agricultural resources, catering services, outdoor activities as well as low-carbon travel;
- Low-carbon lifestyle
 - Increasing accessibility of public services;
 - Encouraging walking and biking inside the village;

¹³ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) China Office. (2023) Rural Revitalisation under the Net-zero Carbon Goal, Dinghai, Zhoushan, China.

- Promoting electrification of vehicles between city and villages, and inter-village;
- Encouraging the use of recyclable and low-carbon materials;
- Making full use of idle buildings and reducing carbon intensity in the whole lifecycle of the buildings;
- Low-carbon oriented governance
 - Mainstreaming low-carbon concept and practice into daily life and tourism;
 - Encouraging participation of local residents and visitors;
 - Cultivating a local brand of low-carbon education; and,
 - Promoting the role of rural area in adapting and mitigating climate change.

Classification of rural areas and settlements

In view of different natural, social and economic characteristics of rural areas and settlements, this study also puts forward the classification of villages into 4 types, namely:

- Integrated development village
 - In suburban areas around the city;
 - Well-equipped with infrastructure, population is concentrated, transportation's convenient;
 - Overall development level is high, also advantage of being able to demonstrate becoming of a net-zero carbon village in all aspects;
- Agricultural-based village
 - Good agricultural development base with large-scale agricultural industries, including agricultural planting, fishery and livestock;
 - Potential in agricultural activities to combine with renewable energy and technological innovations to reduce carbon emissions;
 - Potential in agricultural activities to work with service industries such as education and tourism to increase farmers' income and raise average land value;
- Tourism-oriented village
 - Relying on current natural landscapes as well as historical and cultural resources to develop cultural tourism and supporting service industries;

- Pedestrian-prioritised plan, minimal construction and cultural, and creative programmes such as handicrafts can be adopted to reduce carbon emission;
- Service-oriented village
 - Relatively good accessibility of service facilities and public transport;
 - Considerably large number of permanent residents engaged in agriculture and other activities on an individual or household bases;
 - No outstanding industrial characteristics but it can provide supporting services and residential facilities; and,
 - Low-carbon focus can be on household aspects, further improvement of quality of the living environment.

This classification takes specific characteristics, locations and resources of different rural areas and settlements in order to present a more viable development goals with urban-rural development plan in short, medium and long terms.

3 Statutory Framework & Policies on Countryside Conservation in Hong Kong

In comparison, statutory framework and policies on countryside conservation in Hong Kong embark not on development of rural areas, but on the perspective of natural resources protection from urban sprawling and a fast growing population.¹⁴ Beginning with forestation of water catchments for reservoirs, a draft plan of country parks in Hong Kong was proposed to the British Hong Kong government in 1965 by internationally renowned conservationists Prof Lee Talbot and Martha H. Talbot. This proposal became the blueprint of the subsequent establishment of the first batch of country parks of Hong Kong and the promulgation of Country Parks Ordinance (Cap.208) enacted in 1976.

Ordinances and regulations

Under Country Parks Ordinance (Cap.208), there are four main categories of protected areas in Hong Kong, and the physical boundary of each may overlap with one another. Country parks and special areas constitutes approximately 44,800 hectares, or 40% of the total land area of Hong Kong.¹⁵ All country park and special areas are managed by Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). Water gathering grounds, defined as any surface collecting rainwater for the waterworks including reservoirs, are delineated and protected under the Waterworks Ordinance (Cap. 102) and managed by Water Supplies Department (WSD) to preserve the quantity and quality of water resources. Most water gathering grounds are located around the reservoirs and in hilly terrain, hence overlapping with country parks and rural villages. Development on these grounds are discouraged.

Conservation-related zonings include site of special scientific interests, conservation area, coastal protection area and green belt. They are drafted and created in town plans in accordance with the Town Planning Ordinance (Cap. 131) by the Town Planning Board. These zonings are made following the principles stipulated in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines¹⁶, namely for (a) retaining sites with significant landscape, ecological and geological attributes; (b) restricting land uses to those sustaining these retained sites; (c) controlling adjoining uses to minimise

¹⁴ 饒玖才、王福義。(2021)《香港林業及自然護理—回顧與展望》

¹⁵ Agricultural, Fisheries & Conservation Department. https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/country/cou_vis/cou_vis_cou/cou_vis_cou.html

¹⁶ The Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, developed by an interdepartmental committee, are a Government manual of criteria for determining the scale, location and site requirements of various land uses and facilities.

adverse impacts; and (d) creating new conservation sites in compensation for those conservation sites lost to development. Out of these four zonings, green belt, created for safeguarding existing natural environment from urban encroachment are the biggest component of these zonings, covering 16,000 hectares or 14.5% of the total land area of Hong Kong. The other zonings, designed to conserve the natural landscape or ecology, have a combined size of around 7,000 hectares or 6% of the total land area.

Restricted areas are set up for protection of wild animals under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap.170). The Secretary for the Environment is vested with the power to create restricted areas to be managed by AFCD. Access to restricted areas is regulated in order to prevent hunting or trapping of animals listed in Schedule 2 of Cap.170. There are currently three such restricted areas in Hong Kong, including the 800-hectare Mai Po Marshes Nature, Sham Wan on Lamma Island and Yim Tso Ha in North District.

Countryside conditions

Countryside is an umbrella, if not ambiguous, term in Hong Kong describing rural, semi-rural and green areas at the fringe of the most developed areas of the city. Most countryside areas in Hong Kong are well-connected by vehicular road access, having reasonable public utilities such electricity and municipal water supply, with modernised amenities by people residing in these areas. Most areas and places called villages in Hong Kong, despite their distance from the central business district and new town centres, are well-served by the above mentioned services.

Lands designated for “village type development” are predominantly those areas with residential and agricultural uses and purposes pre-dating the Indian Survey¹⁷ in 1899. These lands are scatter across the territory and is mainly located in recognised indigenous villages in the New Territories.¹⁸ They are substantially, albeit unevenly, distributed in now protected areas of country parks, water gathering grounds, conservation-related zonings (site of special scientific interests, conservation area, coastal protection area and green belt), and restricted areas. The planning intention of this

¹⁷ After occupying the New Territories, a survey of the area was conducted, using staff from the Indian Survey of the army. This mapped every field and house, and took some 3 years to complete (1899 - 1902). These plots of land were classified into Demarcation Districts or Survey Districts and numbered in sequence. A Land Court was also set up in 1899 to confirm land ownership and adjudicate disputes. The findings were summarised in schedules and were attached to a Block Crown Lease issued for each Demarcation District/Survey District in 1905.

¹⁸ Development Bureau. (2012). Press Release: LCQ18: "Village Type Development" sites. "Unleased or Unallocated Government Land Zoned 'Village Type Development' (After deducting roads/passageways, man-made slopes, and land allocated under the Simplified Temporary Land Allocation procedures) (Based on the data from the Lands Department's Land Information System as at June 2012)"

zone is to designate both existing recognised villages and areas of land considered suitable for village expansion. Land within this zone is primarily intended for development of Small Houses by indigenous villagers. It is also intended to concentrate village type development within this zone for a more orderly development pattern, efficient use of land and provision of infrastructures and services. Apart from agricultural use, government use (policy reporting centre and post office only), New Territories Exempted House, on-farm domestic structures, ancestral hall and rural committee/ village office, other uses are not with or without conditions on application to the Town Planning Board.

Coupled with better employment opportunities in the city and elsewhere, the departure of many residents of these villages after World War II had left their ancestral dwellings and its surrounding environment abandoned. Especially for those villages with a distance from vehicular access, much of the landscape was left for nature to reclaim. Despite being private land and private property, the plethora of disused built structures of all kinds and sizes, abandoned paddy fields, cultivation land and orchards saw minimal intervention as chances of development were slim under the restrictions of various regulations as mentioned above.

Government support in countryside conservation

In recent years, there are rising attention and concern over the historical, cultural, ecological and social values of these abandoned and semi-abandoned villages. At the same time, international trends in moving towards zero-carbon societies and imminent cross-border and cross-industry collaboration to mitigate climate change have compelled governments around the world to review and update policies concerning environmental protection and sustainable use of resources. The New Nature Conservation Policy (NNCP) promulgated in 2004 by the Hong Kong government was one to address these concerns, which regulate, protect and manage natural resources that are important for the conservation of biological diversity of Hong Kong in a sustainable manner, taking into account social and economic considerations, for the benefit and enjoyment of the present and future generations of the community.

The policy objectives of the NNCP include¹⁹:

- To identify and monitor the important components of biological diversity;
- To identify, designate and manage a representative system of protected areas for conservation of biological diversity;

¹⁹ Environment and Ecology Bureau. (2024). "New Nature Conservation Policy".

- To promote the protection of ecosystems and important habitats, and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings;
- To identify, monitor and assess activities that may have adverse impacts on biological diversity and to mitigate such impacts;
- To rehabilitate degraded ecosystems and promote the recovery of threatened species where practicable;
- To promote the protection and sustainable use of natural resources that are important for the conservation of biological diversity;
- To provide opportunities for people to appreciate the natural environment;
- To promote public awareness of nature conservation;
- To collaborate with the private sector including the business community, non-governmental organisations and the academia to promote nature conservation, and to conduct research and surveys as well as to manage ecologically important sites for such purpose; and,
- To cooperate with and participate in regional and international efforts in nature conservation.



Plate 02. Map of the 12 Priority Sites for Enhanced Conservation (Source: AFCD)

Under the NNCP, twelve ecologically important sites were identified as priority sites for enhanced conservation, namely, Ramsar Site, Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site, Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung, Sha Lo Tung, Fung Yuen, Luk Keng Marsh, Wu Kau Tang, Mui Tsz Lam and Mau Ping, Cheung Sheung, Yung Shue O, Sham Chung and Tai O.

With the provision of the NNCP, the Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Scheme and the Public Private Partnership (PPP) Scheme, were introduced to enhance the conservation of ecologically important sites, in particular those land under private ownership. Under the MA Scheme, the Government provides funding support to non-profit-making organisations (NPOs) to enter into management agreements with landowners of the priority sites as well as those in country park enclaves and private land within country parks. As for the PPP Scheme, private developments of an agreed scale and plan will be allowed at the ecologically less sensitive portion (Developable Portion) of a site within the 12 priority sites, provided that land owners of the private land will provide a lump sum contribution to the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) sufficient to generate recurrent income to support the long-term conservation work for the ecologically more sensitive portion (Conservation Portion) of the site. The land owner shall retain private land ownership of the Conservation Portion and appoint a conservation agent to apply for time-limited funding from the ECF regularly to carry out the required conservation work, or to surrender the Conservation Portion and provide a lump sum contribution to the Government for proactive conservation and management by the Government.

Following the announcements in the 2017 Policy Address and 2018 Policy Address, the Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) and Lantau Conservation Fund (LCF) were established under Environmental Protection Department (transferred to the Environment Branch of the Environment and Ecology Bureau with effect from 1 January 2023) and Civil Engineering and Development Department respectively to promote conservation in the New Territories and Lantau. Each of the two new offices holds a funding of HK\$1 billion earmarked by the Government, out of which HK\$500 million are for undertaking relevant conservation and revitalisation efforts while the other HK\$500 million for minor improvement works to provide or upgrade local infrastructure as well as rehabilitating existing architectural environment in the countryside. Both offices support the collaboration of local non-profit-making organisations (NPOs) such as green groups, universities and local stakeholders including villagers and rural committees based on an interactive and co-operative approach for conservation of natural environment and revival of cultural assets of villages. Funding schemes inviting proposals to protect the natural environment, restore and revitalise disused or dilapidated buildings, discover cultural heritage, and conduct education programmes for these initiatives in the countryside are in place at both CCO and LCF to utilise the HK\$500 million portion of the government funding for countryside conservation.

Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme is launched and managed by CCO to support such initiatives in the New Territories of Hong Kong (except Lantau Island), targeting Priority Sites for Enhanced Conservation, country park enclaves, private land in country parks as well as village environments and landscapes that are considered remote²⁰ with hence less likelihood of development but also more inconvenient to access or attract villagers to return. The integrated funding source covers a wide spectrum of areas on different levels ranging from the natural environment and habitats, non-graded built heritage, cultural and historic assets such as traditional events and spaces and so on. NPOs are encouraged to form partnership with local villagers of intended project sites, or obtain the consent of land owners to implement conservation projects there.

Four types of projects have been accepted and implemented since the establishment of CCO, namely, Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Projects, and formulation of proposals on restoration of built heritage (BH), cultural rehabilitation/revitalisation (CR) projects and research activities (RA) on countryside conservation and revitalisation. Apart from bottom-up initiatives brought up by NPO-villager partnerships, in the last round of funding application in October 2023, CCO has specified RA projects on application of smart technology in nature conservation and that for conservation of Sha Lo Tung to incentivise conservation projects covering innovative and new aspects. To further CCO's directions in a more concerted and holistic conservation efforts in Hong Kong's rural village environments, new project type entitled Proactive Conservation (PC) was introduced under the CCFS in February 2023, in which projects under this category are initiated by the CCO in collaboration with relevant government bureaux and departments to proactively identify sites worthy of conservation, and implement targeted conservation work. The PC projects would be run by NPOs, selection of which follows the established procurement and tendering procedures of the Government. The target site of conservation for the first PC project was Sha Lo Tung.

²⁰ CCO has designated a list of remote villages in North, Sai Kung, Shatin, Tai Pom Tsuen Wan and Islands excluding Lantau. Another definition of remoteness by CCO is that public transportation is not accessible within 500m walking distance of the intended project site.

4 From Valley to Plain: Natural & Culture Heritage in Kuk Po

Kuk Po and its vicinity of Fung Hang and Yung Shue Au embody a valley topography with a strong sense of enclosure and tranquility. It possesses a system of active and abandoned agricultural fields together with the villages, which are in general natural and rural in character and has high landscape and scenic value. Surrounded by woodlands and fronting Starling Inlet, Kuk Po boasts a typical Fung Shui village layout in the New Territories with village settlements in a “water facing home that backs on to hills” setting with rich landscape resources such as mangroves, ponds and marshlands.

Kuk Po comprises a large piece of flatland at the coastal front, and two strips of flatland sandwiched between the vegetated hill slopes extending inland to the south, adjoining Plover Cove Country Park. Its coastal front, opening to Starling Inlet, is defined by a long dam with rocky shores in the eastern and western ends. There are seven main settlements in Kuk Po: the walled village of Lo Wai being the oldest village in the eastern strip of flat land, Tin Sum and San Uk Ha at the hillside on the fringe of the coastal flatland, and the inland villages of Yi To, Sam To, Sze To and Ng To towards the western strip of flatland in the river valley.

Natural environment

A natural stream of about one kilometre long runs from the waterfall at Ng To to San Uk Ha. It is then channeled through the wetland and marshes, which used to be paddy fields, to the sea. This stream has been recognised by Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) as an ecologically Important Stream (EIS). The wetland and marshes in the flatland at the coastal front used to be paddy fields that were formed by damming the bay from the rocky shores in the eastern and western ends. Upon the cease of agricultural activities in Kuk Po, and the gradual disfunction of the sluice of the dam, these paddy fields have become mosaic freshwater or brackish marsh, seasonal ponds and wet grasslands, mudflats, mangroves and reedbeds, and shrublands. This combination of river course, coastal habitats and wetland complex is a hotspot for both freshwater fish, dragonflies and butterflies of conservation significance.

On-site water quality measurements in Kuk Po taken during 2022-2023²¹ revealed that the water bodies have been in good condition. Overall, the Kuk Po River is deemed suitable for organisms' survival and habitation, and has sustained good water quality in terms of water temperature, salinity, pH value, turbidity, and dissolved oxygen (DO).

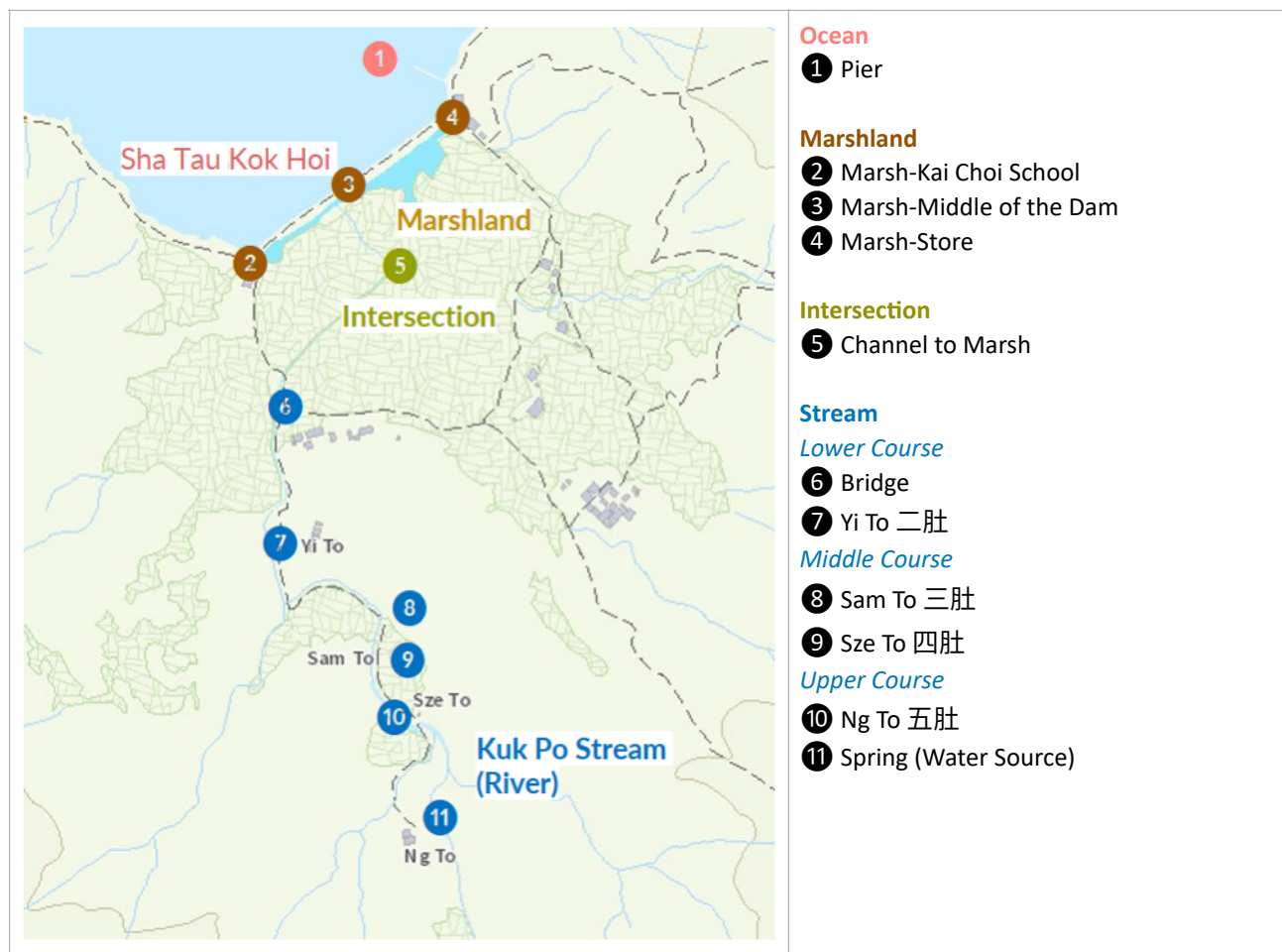






Plate 03. Map showing water sampling points at Kuk Po (School of Life Sciences, CUHK)

Biodiversity

Overall Kuk Po is rich in biodiversity. The wide variety of natural habitats including coast, marshland, freshwater wetlands and stream provides diverse conditions for wildlife to thrive. For instances, the freshwater wetland near sampling point ⑥ is essential for the survival of a number of species of amphibian, fish and dragonfly and damselfly. Dragonflies and damselflies are important environmental indicators because they rely on healthy aquatic ecosystems and food. Brackish habitats in marshland is not only a nursery ground for a number of marine animals, but

²¹ "Life Science report on target biological and/or ecological resources of Kuk Po village", (unpublished typescript, Life Sciences, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, October 2023), P.3-8.

supports water birds also.²² Many of the local plants in different types of habitats have medicinal value and cultural use by the villagers.

<p><u>Butterfly</u> Plain hedge blue 薰衣琉璃灰蝶 <i>Celastrina lavendularis</i> Location: Channel to Marsh Habitat: Streamside, Farmland</p> 	<p><u>Crabs</u> Red-clawed crab 雙齒擬相手蟹 <i>Parasesarma bidens</i> Location: Marsh-Store Habitat: Mangrove, Shore Shrubland</p> 
<p><u>Damselfly</u> Broad-winged damselfly 煙翅綠色蟴 <i>Mnais Mneme</i> Location: Sam To Habitat: Lowland Woodland Stream</p> 	<p><u>Dragonfly</u> Mangrove Skimmer 斑灰蜻 <i>Orthetrum poecilops</i> Location: Channel to Marsh (Entrance) Habitat: Mangrove</p> 

²² “Life Science report on target biological and/or ecological resources of Kuk Po village”, (unpublished typescript, Life Sciences, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, October 2023), P.3-8.





<p><u>Primulaceae</u> Maesa perlaria 鯽魚膽 <i>Maesa perlarius (Lour.) Merr.</i> Location: Ng To Habitat: Shrubland</p> 	<p><u>Araceae</u> Giant Taro 海芋 <i>Alocasia macrorrhizos</i> Location: Bridge Habitat: Streamside</p> 
<p><u>Lauraceae</u> Camphor tree 樟 <i>Cinnamomum camphora</i> Location: Marsh-Midpoint Habitat: Shrubland to hillside forest</p> 	<p><u>Myrtaceae</u> Hance's Syzygium 韓氏蒲桃（紅鱗蒲桃） <i>Syzygium hancei</i> Location: Ng To Habitat: Lowland Secondary Forest</p> 

Plate 04. Some fauna and flora species that commonly found in Kuk Po

History & cultural significance

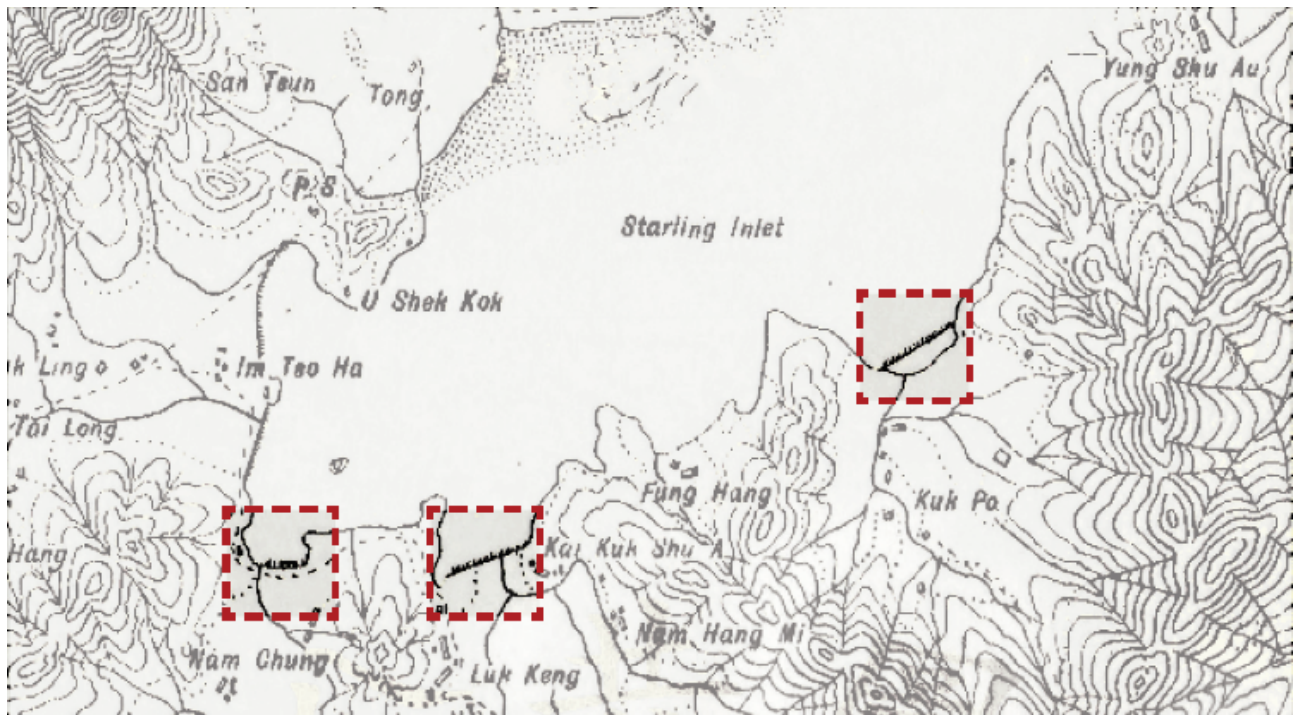
When “The Great Clearance”²³ was eventually lifted in 1683 during the later years of the reign of Emperor Kangxi, it allowed displaced original residents (“Puntis”) in nowadays the New Territories of Hong Kong to return to their ancestral lands, at the same time introduced new immigrants of the Hakka ethnicity to newly opened areas near the coastline.²⁴ Kuk Po was one such destination for Hakka families. Immigrants to Kuk Po first built and settled in a small village known as Sam Ka Tsuen, literally meaning “village of three families”. Residents of Sam Ka Tsuen soon moved out of the original settlement to establish Lo Wai, or the “old walled village”. As Kuk Po’s population and economic opportunities offered by the Sha Tau Kok barter trade network increased, families migrated from the Lo Wai, in the eastern section of the valley to the second, third, fourth and fifth “to”s, or basins, in the west (hence the hamlets Yi To, Sam To, Sze To and Ng To), where terraced fields were opened up, as well as “San Uk Ha”, which means “new village”.

Located south of Starling Inlet, a body of water which opens up to Mirs Bay on the east, and meeting the mountains of Luk Keng on the west, Kuk Po was first noted in the 1688 version “Sun On Yuen Chi”, a gazette of villages in the Sun On prefecture of Guangdong. The modern Chinese spelling of “Kuk Po” village first appeared in a map of the prefecture drawn by an Italian Missionary in 1866.²⁵ In spite of its exclusion from Sha Tau Kok’s ten alliances, Kuk Po’s residents have maintained ties with nearby villages, and as a transportation hub for residents from these villages en route to the market town, Tung Wo Market, of Sha Tau Kok. As one of the Hakka villages in Sha Tau Kok area, Kuk Po exhibits some special features, if not exceptions, from its counterparts in its historical and cultural development.

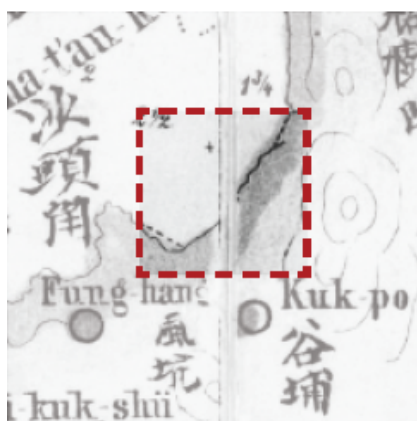
²³ “The Great Clearance” was imposed in early Qing Dynasty in an attempt to ostracise rebels under Zheng Chenggong who operated in Taiwan and frequented the coasts of Guangdong and Fujian. The evict demanded that commoners from dwelling in regions within 50 *li* from the southeastern coastline. “*Li*” is an measurement of length in ancient China; one “*li*” equals to approximately 576m today.

²⁴ 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》 (unpublished typescript, Anthropology, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, October 2022), P.10-11.

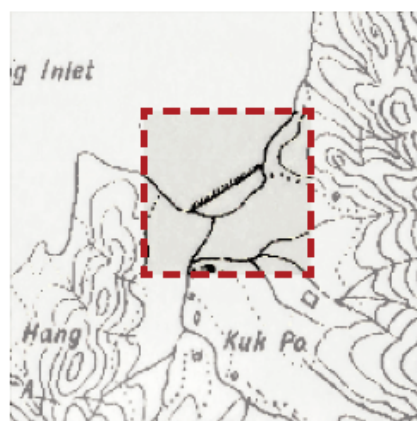
²⁵ 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》, P.9



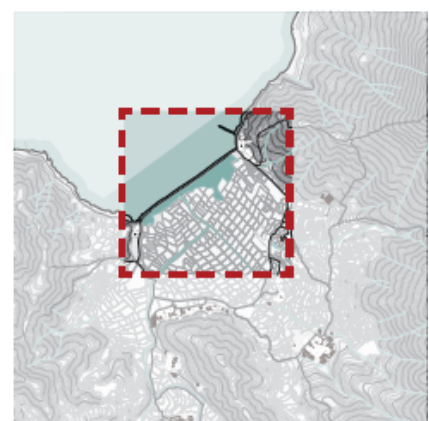
於1904年由英國地形測量局製作的《Colony of Hong Kong, New Territory, Kowloon Extension agreement dated 9th June 1898 (Sheet no. 1)》(局部), 可見南涌、鹿頸及谷埔的海灣岬角前都被標上疑似堤壩的建構物(紅框標示)



1866



1904



2022

Plate 05. Agro-reclamation in villages around Sha Tau Kok²⁶

In stark contrast with nearby villages, settlements in Kuk Po contain multiple families with different surnames, hence a less tightly knit community as Hakka culture prioritised lineage. This loose organisation is especially evident in Kuk Po's lack of a "da chiu" celebration. The bondage of these various clans was formed mainly through collective and mutualistic economic activities as seen in the building of the dam and the village school. Funds and manpower of building the dam, the

²⁶ *Multidisciplinary Exhibition on Kuk Po* (2023). [Architectural Research & Restoration]. CUHK Ng To Education Research Base, Hong Kong. 5 February 2023 - (ongoing).



Plate 06. Lo Wai and Tin Sum of Kuk Po in late 1960s
(Source: Mr. Ho Sui Ting)



Plate 07. From left to right: the highly developed mainland portion of Sha Tau Kok area, Starling Inlet and Kuk Po today

largest of the kind in Sha Tau Kok and Yan Chau Tong areas, were gathered from villagers of Kuk Po and other neighbouring hamlets such as Fung Hang and Luk Keng. Reclaimed land was then divided by residents, this division was likely to be based on manpower as a metric for the effort each family put into the construction. With seawater drained from the newly created basin, rainwater and stream water were allowed to fill the pond while a sluice in the dyke, regulating the tide and the salinity of the basin so that crops could be grown. This innovative engineering work greatly increased agricultural production for a growing population. It was one of the very first substantial reclamation projects in Hong Kong history.²⁷ The landscape transformation of Kuk Po's landscape from sea to land substantiated the economic production and changed its geographical features, and allowed the population to grow until it plateaued at about 500 in late 19th century.²⁸

Kuk Po, as a part of the Sha Tau Kok area with its relative proximity to Hong Kong and Macau, major hubs of the coolie trade, as well as the nomadic nature of its Hakka population, made it one of the many sources of labourers for Asia Pacific, Oceania, North America and Latin America from mid-19th century onwards, not unlike other rural villages in Guangdong.²⁹ Australian cities such as Watsonia, Darwin, Sydney and Cairns were popular destination for migrants from the Sha Tau Kok area,³⁰ while labour opportunities in Latin America were caught on by Kuk Po villagers.³¹ Over 134 residents of the Sha Tau Kok area moved to Latin America, settling in Panama, Jamaica, and

²⁷ School of Architecture, CUHK (2023). Kuk Po Tour Kit, P.9.

²⁸ 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》，P.27

²⁹ 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》，P.38

³⁰ 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》，P.39

³¹ 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》，P.46-47

Suriname.³² This set the scene for the generous remittance from Kuk Po villagers to alleviate their relatives back home, the most prominent examples being the construction of the mansions in Tin Sum by the Lee, Ho and Yeung families.

Kuk Po's mansion boom of the 1930s could be attributed to a poor global economy after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 which forced Kuk Po's overseas residents to make more conservative investment decisions, such as building a house in their ancestral lands, though clan rivalry and the need for prestige was also a potential reason behind the boom. These dwellings bear witness to the migration pattern of the entire Sha Tau Kok area, and demonstrate the mix of vernacular construction techniques, Western eclecticism and modern building materials.³³



Lee's mansion



Ho's mansion



Yeung's mansion



Kai Choi School

Plate 08-11. Noteworthy architectural heritage of Tin Sum, Kuk Po

³² 《遊谷探埔：從五肚到谷埔河及平原的多學科保育、教育與行動式復育研究》，p.39

³³ *Multidisciplinary Exhibition on Kuk Po* (2023). [Architectural Research & Restoration]. CUHK Ng To Education Research Base, Hong Kong. 5 February 2023 - (ongoing).

Kai Choi school, built in the same decade as the Lee, Ho and Yeung mansions, is located towards the west of the dyke and at the entrance to the cluster. It was also built using funds donated by emigrants from Kuk Po, mainly those who were residing in New York at that time. The school, along with a Hip Tin Temple to the Chinese god Kwan Ti, were housed in the same edifice characterised by its long verandahs and western styled arches, inspired by Dr Sun Yat-sen's old residence in Zhongshan. Walled village, mansions and village school built in 1930s, subsequent rebuilt village houses in 1960s, and the dam at the front of Starling Inlet become the landmarks of Kuk Po and epitomes of the village's historical and cultural significance.



Aerial view of Ng To with the restored Yeung House, the threshing floor in front which is now used as gathering venue, terraced fields, orchards and fengshui wood



Returning villagers gathered at the restored Yeung House of Ng To during Lantern Festival 2023



Villagers trained as docents at the restored Yeung House of Ng To

Plate 12-14. Revitalisation efforts by CUHK at Ng To, Kuk Po

Kuk Po's natural and cultural landscape today is shaped by the cluster's abandonment in the later half of the 20th century. After World War II, further detachment from the mainland and the emergence of opportunities for social mobility overseas and in Hong Kong's urban areas drew residents away from Sha Tau Kok area. In the 1960s and 1970s, construction of New Towns and Hong Kong's industrialisation officially spelled the end of the agricultural way of life in the New Territories, with Kuk Po's population consistently declining into the 21st century. However, with favourable countryside conservation policies in Hong Kong in recent years, some villagers are returning to Kuk Po to re-use and rejuvenate the village at their own initiatives or in collaboration with local universities and NGOs.

Regenerative Tourism Principles

The idea of “regeneration” has entered mainstream sectors ranging from agriculture to architecture as well as conservation. Regenerative tourism represents a sustainable way of travelling and discovering new places so that visitors can have a positive impact on their destinations, i.e. leaving the place and environment in a better condition than how and when they found it. It goes beyond the sustainable narrative of not damaging the environment, and more importantly, aims to actively revitalise and regenerate it, resulting in a positive cycle of impacts on local communities and economies.

The UN World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines sustainable/regenerative tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. In view of literature reviews^{34 35 36 37 38} and recent guidelines on regenerative tourism practices^{39 40 41 42}, principles of regenerative tourism can be summarised as follows:

- Human-in-nature mutualism: visitors and destinations are part of a living system embedded in the natural environment, and operate under nature’s rules and principles; people and nature are also co-creators of the enormous web of emerging complexity that is the evolving biosphere and human economics and culture;

³⁴ Bellato, L., & Pollock, A. (2023). Regenerative tourism: a state-of-the-art review. *Tourism Geographies*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2294366>

³⁵ Becken, S., & Kaur, J. (2022). Anchoring “tourism value” within a regenerative tourism paradigm – a government perspective. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 30(1), 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1990305>

³⁶ Bellato, L., Frantzeskaki, N., Briceño Fiebig, C., Pollock, A., Dens, E. and Reed, B. (2022), "Transformative roles in tourism: adopting living systems' thinking for regenerative futures", *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 312-329. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-11-2021-0256>

³⁷ Lupton, K. and Samy, C. (2022), "Restoring the balance between humanity and nature through tourism entrepreneurship: a conceptual framework", *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 367-374. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-01-2022-0035>

³⁸ Bellato, L., Frantzeskaki, N., & Nygaard, C. A. (2023). Regenerative tourism: a conceptual framework leveraging theory and practice. *Tourism Geographies*, 25(4), 1026–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2022.2044376>

³⁹ CBI, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands. (2022). Regenerative tourism: moving beyond sustainable and responsible tourism.

⁴⁰ British Columbia Tourism Sustainability Network, Canada. (2022). Sustainable & Regenerative Tourism.

⁴¹ The World Economic Forum. (2023). Davos Agenda: The future of tourism is sustainable and regenerative.

⁴² The Tourism CoLab. (2021). Regenerative Tourism vs Sustainable Tourism?

- Encompassing harmonious people-environment relationship: embracing circular economy (economics and business), designs that reflect patterns and geometry of nature (architecture and landscape architecture), ecological and cultural diversity (biodiversity and cultural heritage), and production of restorative benefits;
- Transformative approach: leveraging the uniqueness, capacity and development potential of the place to catalyse transformations; discovering the potential of places and communities by developing deep understandings of their unique features and histories;
- Healing approach: recognising and acknowledging the contributions of tourism towards the local community; promoting cultural revival and privileging perspectives and knowledges of local people; empowering and partnering with local people in tourism development; and,
- Collaborative approach: growing the intelligence about place by deepening their understanding of where they live and discover new opportunities for growing its vitality and viability; people, governments, enterprises all work in line to serve the broader systems that tourism affects and is affected by.

These principles are consistent with the research and conservation efforts of the CUHK team in Kuk Po in this project, and are taken into consideration in formulating revitalisation strategies for Kuk Po aiming for regeneration of people, cultural landscape and ecological significance which are explicated in chapters 6 and 7 in this report.

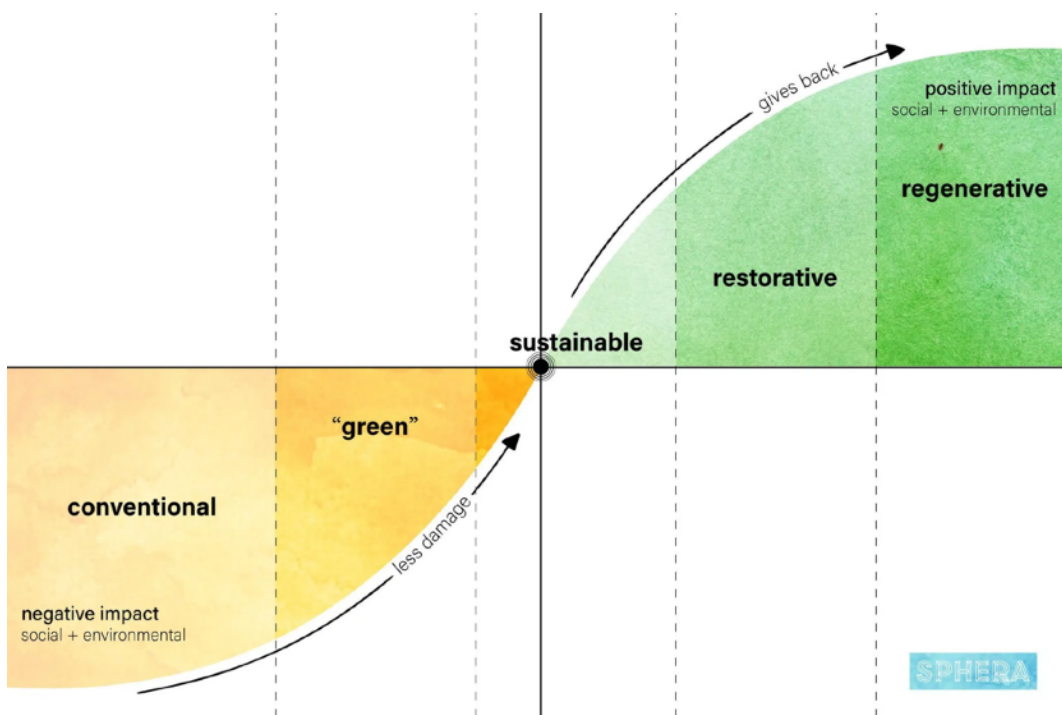


Plate 15. Continuum of different models of tourism (Source: The Tourism Collective)

5 CCO Rural Planning of Kuk Po: Proactive Conservation Plan

In 2023, the Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) announced a “Proactive Conservation Plan” for Kuk Po. This approach was a review and synthesis of the existing CCO-supported projects in other countryside areas of Hong Kong, in particular Lai Chi Wo and Mui Tsz Lam-Kap Tong areas, where a number of projects under Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme are proposed and implemented by various non-profit organisations and universities here. In comparison with the diverse and creative setting here, CCO aims at driving conservation initiatives in Kuk Po in a more concerted way that all efforts gear towards the same goal.

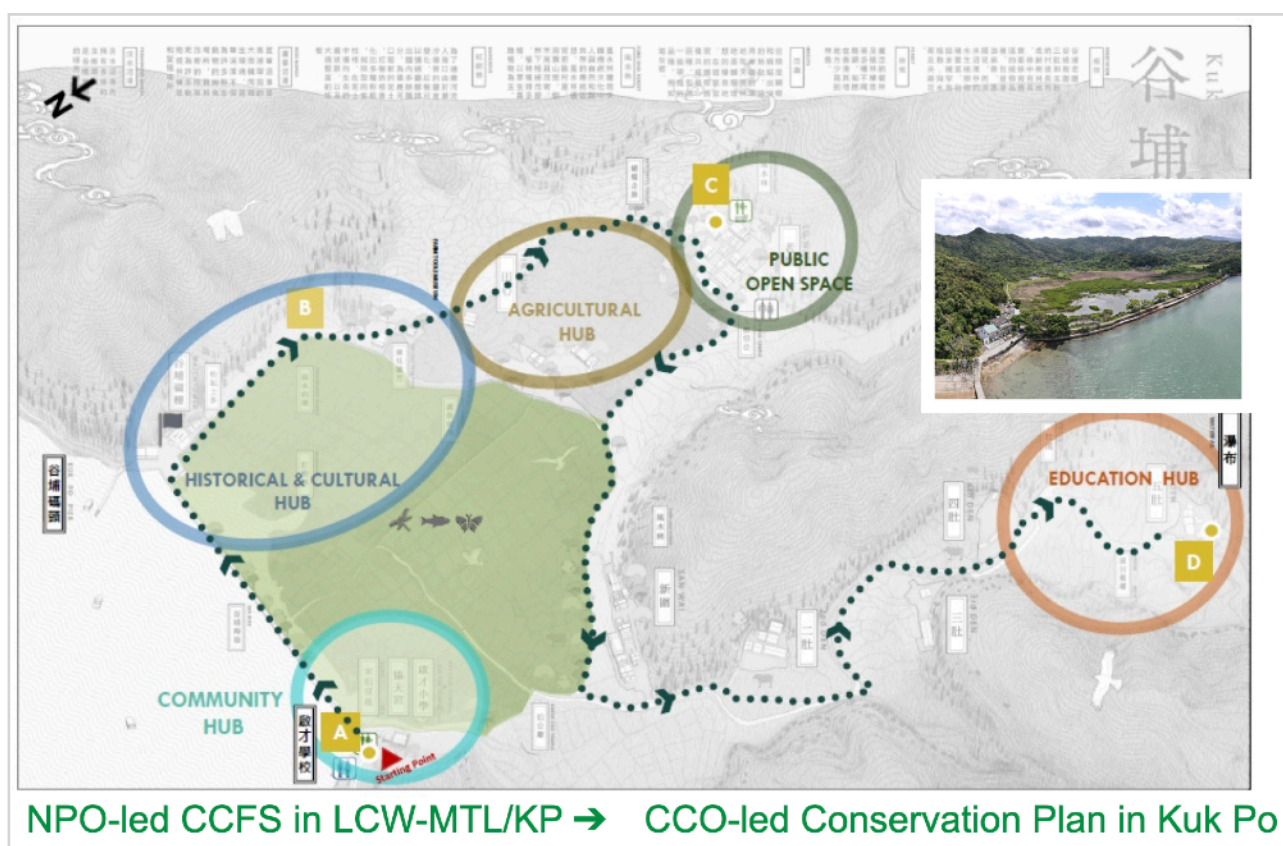


Plate 16. CCO’s Proactive Conservation Plan of Kuk Po, shared in August 2023 at CUHK x WZQ Rural Revitalisation Symposium

CCO’s vision of Kuk Po is one that of proactive planning on the top level, with active coordination of organisations intended to partner with local villagers to implement conservation projects of various scales and themes here. In the past few years, there have already been some micro-scale revitalisation efforts initiated by returning villagers, and several CCFS projects led by local universities, namely CUHK, HKU and PolyU. The Proactive Conservation Plan of CCO for Kuk Po

envisioned the village in 5 distinctive zones, each with a different theme comprising different landmarks and natural landscapes. The five zones are:

- Community hub: the “entrance” of Kuk Po from where hikers from the direction of Luk Keng come; upon entering the village visitors see the old village school Kai Choi School, the western end of the dam, and the open scenery of wetland and marsh meet the sea;
- Historical and cultural hub: at the eastern end of the dam there is the old watchtower, now converted to an eatery serving Hakka food, and a jetty where chartered speedboats shuttles between Kuk Po and Sha Tau Kok; along the footpath there are some farming activities conducted by villagers at the foot of the hillside to the east, and open views of the wetland and marsh to the west;
- Agricultural hub: the cluster of mansions built in 1930s are located in Tin Sum, where two of the returning families are growing crops in small quantities in the farmland around the dwellings;
- Public open space: the walled village of Lo Wai features the ancestral halls of various clans of Kuk Po, some historic landmarks such as the shrine of Pak Kung and the village well, as well as some open spaces from abandoned dwellings; and,
- Education hub: the recently restored Yeung House, which operates as a education and research base by CUHK and villagers, and its ancillary spaces are the icons of Ng To deep in the valley; the hamlet also features open terraced fields, orchards on the hillside and a waterfall.

All five hubs are connected by a village footpath. Visitors may explore some or all of these hubs at their own pace and according to their interest.

6 CUHK Revitalisation Strategies for Kuk Po

Supported by multidisciplinary research and solid experience in working with stakeholders on-site, the research team put forward revitalisation strategies for Kuk Po based on its current natural, cultural and social capital, and existing infrastructural provisions. The strategies for formulated according to four aspects, namely:

- National and international trends on rural revitalisation:
 - Recognising rural and urban areas and development as a continuum to leverage comparative advantages of the flows of people, goods and services across this urban-rural continuum;
 - Strategising and implementing sustainable management of living resources and cultural heritage;
 - Embracing technologies in creating possibilities for rural populations;
 - Fostering partnerships, alliances and networks covering a variety of capacities and skills through inclusive and participatory processes that link urban and rural actors and different sectors;
 - Encouraging low-carbon industry, lifestyle and governance, especially in educing waste generation and promoting recycling of organic waste as well as sustainable consumption; Promoting renewable energy, and recycling of water and solid waste;
- Policy support in Hong Kong:
 - Capitalising on countryside conservation policy support to conduct research, and building partnerships, alliances and networks between local stakeholders in Kuk Po and interested institutions and agents;
 - Making use of funding to restore idle and/or dilapidated built structures for adaptive uses beneficial to the rejuvenation of the village;
 - Leveraging resources in other polices to build up educational opportunities and foster eco-friendly and low-carbon lifestyle;
- Natural environment, biodiversity, history and cultural significance;
 - Utilising natural resources and ecological attractions unique to Kuk Po with regenerative approach;
 - Capitalising local and traditional knowledge of villages;

- Recognising historic developments and social changes of the village and their relevance to the society and global connections;
- Principles of regenerative tourism:
 - Co-designing and making use of spaces with local stakeholders and key users of the village that respect and enhance the natural environment and cultural landscape;
 - Leveraging the uniqueness, capacity and development potential of the place to catalyse transformations; and,
 - Empowering and partnering with villagers in tourism development, acknowledging contributions of tourism towards the local community and creating reasonable income for stakeholders to continuously promote cultural revival and enhancing the natural environment.

Kuk Po Futures

The project team matches these considerations with points and clusters of historical, cultural and ecological significance as well as functionality and visitor experience of Kuk Po to map out the revitalisation plan for Kuk Po as shown in the map “Kuk Po Futures” (Plate 17). From valley to plain, five areas, namely:

- Community & Visitor Service Hub:
 - Area fronting Starling Inlet, featuring landmarks of Kuk Po such as the dam, Kai Choi School and the school annex classroom, Uncle Sung’s snack shed, the old watchtower/ Chung Kee Store as well as former Sung’s Residence which will soon turned into an education centre by Wuzhiqiao Foundation (WZQ; a.k.a. Bridge to China) and PolyU;
 - This cluster is connected by a coastal village path from Luk Keng to Kuk Po, and a jetty connected by chartered speedboat from Sha Tau Kok to Kuk Po;
 - Together with catering services (currently weekend only) and gathering venues, this area can serve as a meet-up point for community meetings and seminars, as well as a reception point for visitor/ general information;
- Natural Landscape Conservation & Eco-Living Experience:
 - Following the scenery on both sides of the village footpath, Tin Sum, literally “heart of the fields”, is an interesting mosaic of micro natural and human-intervened environments — agro-wetlandscape created by agro-reclamation, once actively tended paddy fields but now abandoned to become natural brackish wetland;

- Three sizeable Hakka-Western hybrid-styled mansions built by members of the Ho, Lee and Yeung clans in 1930s are iconic architecture heritage of Kuk Po;
- Bottom-up, spontaneous, small-scale growing practices led by various local stakeholders to experiment with growing crops from the old days as well as localised and/or exotic crops for leisure and trial products;
- Hakka Culture & Public Open Space:
 - The walled village of Lo Wai, the oldest existing settlement in Kuk Po, possess the typical layout of a Hakka village with features such as stone wall, Pak Kung shrine, and the ancestral halls of the Ho, Lee, Yeung and Sung clans that epitomises lineage and bondage of Hakka culture;
 - Some dilapidated houses have the potential to be restored and repurposed as mini galleries to showcase Hakka culture, while ruins may be adapted as sit-out areas or open public spaces for activities and events;
- Eco-cultural Trail:
 - The eco-cultural trail section covers the village footpath from San Uk Ha via Yi To, Sam To and Sze To to Ng To, which coincide with the upper and middle course of Kuk Po River, an ecologically important stream (EIS) that runs through the village from the valley to the sea;
 - Apart from its ecological value, being a hotspot of some species of butterfly, damselfly and freshwater fish, the river has also important cultural value as the major irrigation source of terraced fields and paddy fields; lots of wild plants of medicinal value, prized and actively used by villagers for generations, grow along different sections of the river;
- Education & Research Base:
 - The hamlet of Ng To was established by members of the Yeung clan who, after decades of living elsewhere in the urban areas of Hong Kong or overseas, are returning in recent years to revitalise their ancestral home;
 - Ng To boasts integral Hakka village setting with accessible features and resources for natural and cultural appreciation and education, such as terraced fields circumscribed by living water source, wide range of endemic fruit trees, and dwellings and their relics from different eras; and,
 - The recently restored residence of the Yeung's family by CUHK research team is the highlight of the place to display interdisciplinary research findings on Kuk Po, demonstrate Hakka culture, gather and attract more villagers to return as well as a convenient base for researchers to further study the village's multi-faceted values and educators to design and conduct educational programmes here in collaboration with interested villagers.

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From Valley to Plain

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From Valley to Plain

村民聚會及遊客服務

Community & Visitor Service Hub

- 啟才學校 – 歷史建築保育、展覽及研討會
 - 啟才學校附屬膳室 – 村落古趣、遊客接待
 - 宋伯山水豆腐花 – 客家小食
 - 舊祠堂/松記士多 – 地道客家菜
 - 宋氏舊屋/無止樓、理大客家基地 – 戶外活
-
- Yee Cho School – conservation of historic building, exhibition & forum
 - Yee Cho School Annex Building – village home, tourist rice
 - Uncle Sam's Snack Shop – Hoklo snack
 - Old Watchtower / Chung Lee Store – Hoklo culture
 - Former yung's Residence WQZ & PolyU Education Centre – outdoor activity support

淡水濕地
Freshwater Wetland

生態文化徑
Eco-cultural Trail

- 谷城河 (具重要生態價值河溪)
- 平原濕地至山脊森林景觀
- 二肚、三肚、四肚茶葉耕農地生態環境
- Kik Po River (Ecologically Important Stream)
- Transition of natural landscape — from plain to valley
- Yi To, Sam To & Sze To agro-landscape relics
- — natural environment of abandoned fields

教育及研究基地
Education & Research Base

- 楊氏舊居/中大跨學科教研基地
- 五趾花園——村落共享空間
- 梯田農園
- 山徑果園
- 瀑布及河溪

碼頭

堤壩

田心

新屋下
San Uk Ha

二肚
Yi To

三肚
Sam To

四肚
Sze To

五肚
Ng To

Agro-wetlandscape
(wetland park, freshwater wetlands, proactive conservation)
復耕濕地景觀(濕地公園, 淡水濕地, 積極保育)

Agro-wetlandscape
(wetland park, freshwater wetlands, proactive conservation)
復耕濕地景觀(濕地公園, 淡水濕地, 積極保育)

- 何氏大宅 (復耕生活)
- 李氏大宅 (生態及低碳生活體驗)
- 楊氏大宅 (生態教育中心)
- 楊氏農舍 (悠閒復耕生活)
- 點點是生命復耕亭
- Agro-landscape → landscape created by agro-reclamation and natural process, evolved
- It's formation → agricultural heritage
- User's mission → sustainable living practice & eco-learning experience
- Young's mission → eco-cultural centre
- Young's mission → future farm → future forest
- Another agricultural practice → farm-to-go (sustainable agricultural activities)

客家文化及公共空間
Hakka Culture & Public Open Space

- 何氏、李氏、楊氏、宋氏宗祠
- 何氏排屋——客家生活文化館

- 港大層樓花園 — 公共戶外空間
- Ancestral halls of Ho, Yung & Sung clans
- Ho's townhouses — Hakka culture museum
- HKU Ruin Gardens — public open space

村落現況 Existing Condition

- | | | |
|---|-------|-----------------|
|  | 紅樹林 | mangrove |
|  | 蘆葦 | reeds |
|  | 蕨 | ferns |
|  | 使用中耕地 | active farmland |
-
- | | | |
|---|-------|-------------------------------|
| 復育概念 | | Recultivation Concepts |
|  | 具復耕潛力 | potential recultivation |
|  | 實驗性復耕 | experimental cultivation |
|  | 魚塘 | fish pond |
|  | 木棧道 | timber floating boardwalk |

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These five areas are highlighted as thematic zones that address attractiveness of the place, response to social needs of villages and enhance user experience. Each of these thematic zones reflects its cultural and social importance to villagers, visual and aesthetic impact to visitors, and ecological significance of wildlife, natural habitats and also environments created by human-nature interaction.

The thematic zones also reflect types of engagement of various stakeholders, for instances, local villagers, researchers, educators and visitors so as to align their forms of engagement and potential conservation, research and value dissemination initiatives through making use of different places and activities in Kuk Po. These include:

- Villagers:
 - Place-making to put disused and dilapidated built structures and places into good use;
 - Revitalising and renewing values such as traditional celebrations, vernacular use of natural resources;
- Researchers/ academics:
 - Studying and re-discovering cultural, social and ecological values;
 - Creating partnerships with villagers to transfer and enrich these knowledges, and translating these new and/or renewed knowledge into revitalisation and conservation efforts;
- Educators (schools and NPOs)
 - Translating these new and/or renewed knowledge from villages into course materials and OLE (Other Learning Experiences) programmes;
 - Making use of revitalised venues and returning villagers to create on-site educational programmes and activities;
- Visitors:
 - Enjoying the scenic natural environment and cultural assets of the place;
 - Realising the historical, cultural and ecological values of the village; and,
 - Contributing to the local economy and social capital of the community.

7 Way Forward

Riding on the favourable outcomes of the multidisciplinary research on Kuk Po overall, successful restoration of Yeung House in Ng To, and the close partnership built up with local stakeholders, and members of the wider community through these initiatives, the project team proposes plans and targets to revitalise Kuk Po with regenerative effects — achieving not only by conserving what are currently found but by producing beneficial and long-lasting effects. The plans and targets are set in short-term, medium-term and long-term for incremental benefits with room to review overtime to adjust and adapt to future circumstances.

Short-term plans and targets

Short-term plans and targets are working proposals that can be implemented immediately or within a 3 year timeframe from now as a continuation and/or improvement of current conservation efforts, with a view of gradually bridging the gap between various on-going research, built heritage restoration and ecological/ environmental monitoring projects. These include:

- Baseline research on the natural environment and biodiversity: further and more comprehensive studies should be conducted to examine and monitor environmental quality, survey biodiversity and identify indicative and/or representative species, as well as flora and fauna with evident cultural uses and values;
- Baseline research on cultural and historical significance: continuous in-depth study on cultural and historical significance of Kuk Po, in particular the village's global diaspora and its position in the global Hakka community, as well as rediscovery of long-loss records (such as the disappearance of Sam Ka Tsuen and Sam To) locally;
- Selective restoration and adaptation of places: search and survey for suitable idle, disused and/or dilapidated buildings and restore the venues for uses that respond to actual social needs;
- Linkage of eco-cultural assets: conceptualise and materialise points of historical, cultural, ecological and geographical interests such as an enhanced eco-cultural trail to connect all these assets into a meaningful experience for both villagers and visitors;
- Experimental growing of native and localised crops: given the interest of some villagers in small-scale leisure farming, local stakeholders may consider experimenting with re-conditioning fruit trees in old orchards, monitoring and improving soil quality for growing native and localised crops, and producing marketable products with these newly grown crops; and,

- Trial operation of educational activities: integrate various points of interests and work with villagers, schools and interested new members of the community to create immersive cultural learning experiences and eco-living experiences.

Medium-term plans and targets

Medium-term plans and targets are working directions in 3 to 5 years' time that consolidate outcomes of conservation and revitalisation efforts now and in the near future, and bringing serviceable measures and instrumental network of stakeholders and interested parties together to deepen the advantageous ground work that has been laid.

- Continuous research on natural environment and biodiversity for habitat and resources protection: draw up plans to continuous survey and monitor indicative species of flora and fauna, and proactively monitor and protect selected habitats to enhance overall environmental quality of Kuk Po;
- Identifying NPOs for conservation management collaborations: identify and elucidate conservation goals for capable NPOs to carry out necessary actions;
- Transferring knowledge of cultural and historical significance to educational programmes and publications: engage local stakeholders and educators in designing and implementing educational programmes and materials for meaningful curricular and extra-curricular contents and eco-living experiences; and,
- Engagement in place-making: train up local stakeholders and build up network with interested NPOs to manage and rejuvenate restored places in the village to attenuate historical, cultural and social values of these places and resources.

Long-term plans and targets

Long-term plans and targets are approaches and mindset setting to be promoted so that local stakeholders and NPOs can drive regenerative initiatives in accordance with policy directions while connecting the benefits of countryside conservation and revitalisation across different sectors of the society. In the case of Kuk Po, there are potentials for:

- Implementation of natural habitat conservation management with long-term monitoring of environmental quality and biodiversity: collaboration between local stakeholders and NPOs in continuous management and enhancement of natural habitats in the village;
- Restored and/or rehabilitated places as hubs to showcase various aspects of countryside revitalisation: strengthen the role and more frequently make use of restored and/or rehabilitated places attenuate historical, cultural and social values of these places and resources; and,

- Bottom-up/ villager-driven operation of educational activities: make good use of skills and knowledge of local stakeholders to drive, design and deliver educational activities and eco-living experiences.

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