

# Exploring the Methods of Traditional Village Cultural Authenticity Preservation—A Case Study of Yim Tin Tsz Village in Sai Kung, Hong Kong

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**Abstract:** Rural culture has impacted in the process of modernization. With the growing strength of modernization, traditional village culture has been subject to negative pressures such as environmental damage, population loss, and obstruction of sustainable development patterns. This paper takes Yim Tin Tsz village in Sai Kung, Hong Kong, as an example. It discusses the innovation of village culture construction from the perspective of the original construction of village culture, and tries to discuss the concepts and initiatives of the actual construction of traditional village culture through analyses of related literature and field research. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the problems that exist in the construction of cultural authenticity in Yantian Zi village in Saigon and based on this, to propose ways of construction in the dimensions of the government, community managers, and individuals, in an attempt to provide valuable inspirations and suggestions for the inheritance and renovation of village culture.

**Keywords:** rural cultural construction, originality, cultural management, Yim Tin Tsz, Hong Kong, artistic rural construction

## 1. Connotation and current situation of the protection of the authenticity of traditional rural culture

### 1.1 Definition of the concept of original authenticity in village development

Authenticity refers to preserving conservation objects in the time dimension, with the main characteristics of "original flavour" and "authenticity"<sup>[1]</sup>. Taking Yim Tin Tsz in Hong Kong as an example, from the perspective of authenticity, we study the traditional folk culture, rural ecological landscape, architectural texture and spatial layout of the whole Yim Tin Tsz village, to achieve the preservation of the original form in the time dimension. The criteria for judging authenticity refer to the self-regulation ability and predictability of the ecosystem. They are predicted in the light of the given historical and geographical conditions, to achieve the unity of "natural authenticity" and "historical authenticity".

### 1.2 Protection of cultural authenticity in different dimensions

While research on authenticity preservation has begun in China, many scholars continue to draw on the insights of their predecessors on authenticity preservation. China's protection of monuments, buildings, and cultural heritage observes the principle of sustainable development. In the protection of cultural values and historical forms, the scholar Liang Sicheng pointed out that the principle of treating traditional cultural buildings "should be prolonged, not rejuvenated", and that cultural heritage should not be reduced to a formality; Mr. Ruan Yisan also made a statement that the protection of historical and cultural heritage should be Mr Ruan Yisan also made the point that the protection of historical and cultural heritage should be based on the principle of "preserving the old as it was in order to preserve its authenticity", and that the cultural context and historical value should not be neglected in order to achieve the derivative purpose.

Based on this, the authors make a hierarchical classification of "authenticity" to clarify the scope of

cultural protection. At the same time, the authors propose an analysis of the content of authenticity preservation within the scope. Within the scope of cultural studies, historical legacies are divided into environmental forms, content (material) forms and content (non-material) forms, which can correspond to "rural ecology", "cultural activities" and "village character" respectively. "[2]This can be used to further analyse the issue of authenticity preservation (as shown in Figure 1).

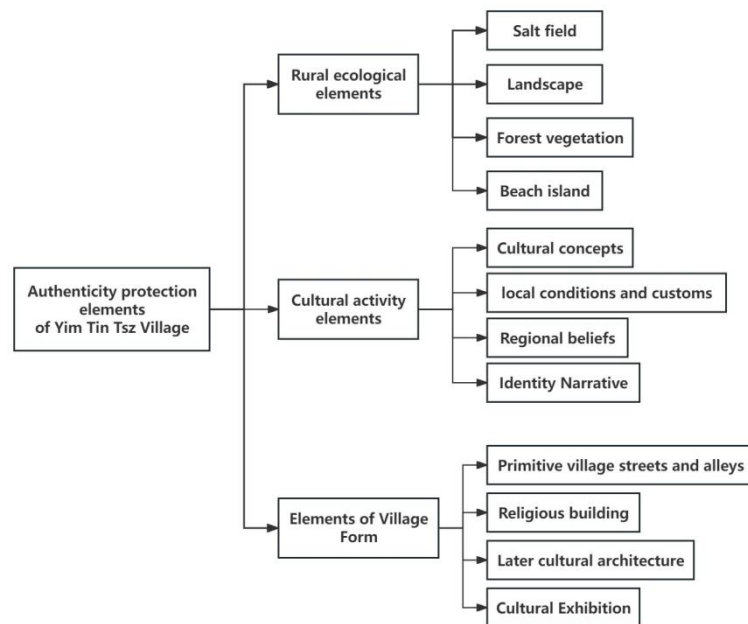


Figure 1: Components of the "Authenticity" Conservation Perspective of Yim Tin Tsz Village in Hong Kong

### 1.2.1 Protection of the authenticity of rural ecology

The ecological dimension of the village is a natural geographical dimension for exploring the issue of traditional village culture preservation. The protection of the ecological landscape and environment constitutes the prerequisite for the construction of the original authenticity of the village culture, and is the foundation of cultural development, while the ecological environment also carries the lifeblood of cultural dissemination and development in a material way.<sup>[3]</sup> The rural ecology of Yim Tin Tsz mainly consists of the village itself and its neighbouring salt flats, landscape, forests and vegetation, islands and beaches, etc. This is the physical basis for conservation programmes such as the "Fung Yuen Butterfly Conservation Area", and is also the basis for conservation programmes such as "Tai Long Sai Wan" and "Tai Long Sai Wan". This is the physical foundation for conservation programmes such as the "Feng Yuan Butterfly Conservation Area" and the natural cornerstone for the development of tourism in natural scenic areas such as "Da Lang Xi Wan".

### 1.2.2 Protection of the authenticity of cultural activities

The dimension of cultural activities is an important dimension in measuring the quality of the survival of cultural and artistic activities. It consists of the regional cultural manifestations generated by the coalescence of many elements, such as natural, geographical, technological, cultural, emotional and behavioural patterns, inherited from the generations of traditional rural villages in the course of their historical development, and ultimately manifested in conceptual activities such as ideological concepts, local customs, regional beliefs, and narratives of non-heritage. Yantian Tsz Villages, due to their history and geographical location, have been influenced by many cultural environments such as the British and Cantonese, which have converged to form a new cultural ecology within the small island, forming historical and humanistic landscapes such as the "Ping Shan Heritage Trail", "Qing Chun Yiu", and "Lai Chi Wo". Historical and cultural landscapes such as "Ping Shan Heritage Trail", "Ching Chun Yiu", "Lai Chi Wo", and the "Yim Tin Tsz Arts Festival" have been developed since then. The Yim Tin Tsz Cultural Project explores the value of local cultural activities through the integration of cultural and artistic activities in the form of "heaven, earth and people".

### 1.2.3 Preservation of the authenticity of village character

The dimension of the village's sexuality is mainly the preservation of tangible cultural heritage,

which is the cultural testimony of traditional culture created through material conditions in the process of social development. Yim Tin Tsz villages are scattered with original ideologies such as religion, vernacular culture, foreign culture, etc. The street and alley settlements or churches with Hakka culture, Catholicism, etc. as the core of the gathering present the characteristics of multiple cultural functions. In the original construction of the village form, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the protection of the colour, material, technology, safety, structure and other elements of the physical building, to avoid the adverse effects of over-development in the development of cultural industries, and also to consider the emasculation of the traditional rural cultural features by the development of the tourism economy.

### ***1.3 Development and balance: the dilemma of preserving authenticity in the context of modern development***

#### ***1.3.1 Impact of the modernisation process***

Accompanied by the accelerated urbanisation process, a large number of rural populations are flowing into cities, leading to changes in the rural population structure. This not only affects the inheritance and development of rural culture, but also makes the protection of the originality of rural culture face the dilemma of talent shortage. The younger generation's interest in and identification with traditional culture has gradually weakened, and the combination of traditional culture with modern life is insufficient, with no cultural products and services that meet modern aesthetics and needs, leading to a fault line in their cultural inheritance. As a result, traditional cultural elements and values are gradually facing the risk of being lost, and the conflict between modern values and traditional cultural values has become a major challenge to the preservation of authenticity. In the process of modernisation, modern values gradually replace the important position of traditional cultural values in Yim Tin Tsz villages, and the weak cultural identity and sense of belonging of local residents to Yim Tin Tsz makes Yim Tin Tsz villages inclined to the development mode of commercialisation and urbanisation, failing to incorporate the characteristics of the folk simple culture, and failing to take originality as a distinctive advantage in attracting foreign tourists to visit the villages.

#### ***1.3.2 Negative impacts of the commercialisation of tourism***

Rural tourism is a fast-growing industry in recent years, and although tourism development poses a challenge to the preservation of the "true nature" of traditional rural culture, the influx of tourists and the trend towards commercialisation often lead to the over-consumption and deformity of rural culture. This not only undermines the authenticity of the culture, but may also have a negative impact on the sustainability of the rural environment. Therefore, villages need an effective mechanism to protect the "origin" of traditional rural culture. At present, areas such as Yantian Zixiang lack a sound protection mechanism, and the government has yet to formulate and improve relevant laws and regulations, such as rural tourism, cultural protection, irregularities in tourism development practices, excessive commercialisation, etc. There are no clear standards and requirements for cultural protection.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### ***1.3.3 Low population participation and policy failures***

While the construction of ecological civilisation is certainly an important factor in the construction of traditional rural culture, the inheritance of traditional rural culture nowadays stays more at the level of material preservation and funding for the sustainable development of rural culture. In the process of rural revitalisation, there is a strong link between residents' participation and originality. In 2017, the Hong Kong Rural Fund (HKRF) applied for the conversion of a site in Lai Chi Wo, Sha Tau Kok, into a hotel (holiday home) site for the promotion of Hakka culture and as a pilot project for eco-tourism of rural lodges in Hong Kong. The Town Planning Board approved the project, but the villagers objected to it, fearing that the foreign population would add to the burden of Lai Chi Wo and affect law and order, and requested that the decision be made through a referendum. In the end, the Rural Commons Fund selected 15 of the village houses to be leased for 20 years at nominal rent for restoration and revitalisation for use by groups or individuals as B&Bs. Although the decision to use the land to transform the resort and develop tourism around the theme of Yim Tin Tsz seems to be correct from the Government's point of view, the views of the residents were ignored, which eventually led to a conflict of interests.

To sum up, reconciling the relationship between resident participation and authenticity is an important part of the process of preserving the "authenticity" of traditional villages. Through measures such as raising residents' awareness, establishing participation mechanisms, protecting and developing authenticity, and establishing incentive mechanisms, the relationship between the two can be

effectively reconciled to achieve sustainable rural development.

## **2. Case Study on the Conservation of the Cultural Authenticity of Yim Tin Tsz Village in Hong Kong**

### ***2.1 Overview and cultural activities of Yim Tin Tsz villages***

#### ***2.1.1 Geographic location and development history of Yim Tin Tsz villages***

Yim Tin Tsai Village is a traditional village in Hong Kong with a history of more than 300 years, located in the Sai Kung District of Hong Kong, with rich ecotourism resources and a profound and long history of Catholic culture. Also known as "Yim Tin Tsai", the villagers of Yim Tin Tsai made their living by drying and selling salt, opening salt fields and building sluices to fully develop the salt industry, and selling the salt produced to Sai Kung and the neighbouring areas. At the end of the 19th century, when European missionaries came to Sai Kung, the villagers of Yim Tin Tsai converted to Catholicism, and built the St. Joseph's Chapel on the small island.

With the advancement of urbanisation in Hong Kong, the natural and cultural resources of Yim Tin Tsz in Hong Kong have faced various difficulties. Since 1950, a large-scale migration of Yim Tin Tsz residents out of the Sai Kung district of Hong Kong and the decline of the village population have led to the abandonment of arable land and the decline of fisheries and agriculture, and after 1990, Hong Kong began to establish a number of conservation areas and art festivals in order to promote the sustainable development of Yim Tin Tsz's traditional villages and to help conserve Yim Tin Tsz's village culture.

#### ***2.1.2 Social Organisation and Community Identity in Yim Tin Tsz Villages***

Yim Tin Tsz Tsuen is a historical and cultural village in Sai Kung, Hong Kong. As one of the five major salt pans in Hong Kong in the 19th century, the local fishing village played an invaluable role. With the change of time, the Sai Kung Salt Flats are facing difficulties such as limited economic development, loss of villagers and loss of cultural heritage. In order to improve the situation, Yim Tin Tsz Village has adopted a multi-party governance model, whereby the Government, Yim Tin Tsz Village Council, Conservation Centre, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), Catholic Church and Sacred Heart Church of Sai Kung have joined hands to carry out restoration, preservation and development work in Yim Tin Tsz, allowing the village to play a leading role in economic revitalisation and cultural preservation. Nowadays, the government, the church and industrial conservation have jointly built a unique cultural development model in Yim Tin Tsz, with the following concept of activities:

(1) The Government provides new opportunities to build livelihood projects. In terms of infrastructure development, the Government implements the management and implementation of livelihood projects and grass-roots construction projects, builds demonstration sites, and allows the public to participate in the management of these projects, so as to improve the efficiency of revitalisation of resources and turn potential value into visible benefits.

(2) The Church protects religious heritage and observes the principle of authenticity. The Catholic Church cooperates with the Sacred Heart Church in Saigon to jointly regulate and administer religious affairs and St. Joseph's Chapel, so as to realise the basis for the construction of a harmonious society.

(3) Vigorously developing tourism and passing on Hakka culture. The Salt and Light Conservation Centre and the Yim Tin Tsz Village Committee work in concert to promote the traditional Hakka culture of the Yim Tin Tsz villages through the development of the tourism industry, and to turn cultural heritage into income for the residents, so that local residents can obtain immediate benefits.

#### ***2.1.3 Application of Authenticity Building in Yim Tin Tsz Culture and Arts Festival***

In order to stimulate the development of Yim Tin Tsz traditional villages, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) empowers culture and arts in village revitalisation by organising the Yim Tin Tsz Arts Festival to realise the integration of culture and tourism. Chinese and foreign artists give full play to their imagination and creativity, organically combining the common ideals of the current young generation and the villagers of Yim Tin Tsz, and jointly helping to conserve the village culture of Yim Tin Tsz. As the focal points of the Yim Tin Tsz artists' activities, the "Nature Theatre", "Hakka Tea Kuey Tea Making Workshop" and "Taizé Prayer for Communion", which emphasise nature, traditional culture and community participation, attracted many local and international visitors and community

members. These events have attracted many visitors and scholars from home and abroad, providing new momentum and opportunities for the rejuvenation and development of Yim Tin Tsz Village in Sai Kung, Hong Kong.

### **(1) Strategy 1: Local villagers become the protagonists of the festival**

Let Yim Tin Tsz villagers become the organisers of the festival, relying on the stories of local residents and Yim Tin Tsz to create art works that combine village life and the land, to promote the harmonisation of local residents with the local environment, to fill the art works with local customs and primitive styles, and to revitalise the villages based on the criterion of originality; at the same time, the festival can become a platform for residents of Saigon to communicate and co-operate with each other, and to strengthen the community's internal cohesion and identity, and promote harmony and stability in the Sai Kung district; lastly, based on years of experience living on the Yim Tin Tsz islands, local villagers have the advantage of understanding the deep cultural background of the area and are able to create artwork with a unique way of expression.

The model of artistic creation based on the will of villagers also has some risks. Firstly, local villagers may face the problems of resource allocation and external forces such as the lack of professional skills training, financial support and limited scope of creation, which may limit their ability to present their personal art works and creative expression; secondly, compared with internationally renowned artists, local villagers have low visibility and exposure within the art world, and the lack of external attention affects the dissemination and recognition of their art works; finally, local villagers may face the problem of self-worth identification, and compared with renowned artists, some residents lack confidence in their personal level of creation and artistic expression ability. Finally, local villagers may face the problem of self-worth identification. Compared with well-known artists, some residents lack confidence in their personal level of creativity and artistic expression, which affects the true level of art creation.

### **(2) Strategy 2: Internationally renowned artists to be the protagonists of the Festival**

Inviting internationally renowned artists to participate in the Yim Tin Tsz Art Festival, so that culture and art can intervene in the revitalisation and development of traditional villages, awakening the village culture and digging deep into the cultural and aesthetic values of the village environment, can likewise serve as one of the important construction methods. Firstly, international artists can play the role of visibility, bring international attention and exposure, improve the visibility and reputation of the festival, and laterally drive the economic development of Yim Tin Tsz Village. Secondly, international artists have superior professional artistic skills and unique artistic styles, which can enhance the artistic quality of the Yim Tin Tsz Art Festival and deepen the characteristics of artwork styles. Finally, internationally renowned artists from different countries and cultural backgrounds can engage in intercultural exchanges and understanding with festival participants, enriching visitors' knowledge of multiculturalism.

A number of factors also need to be taken into account in risk management. Based on the fact that Yim Tin Tsz Village is in the revival stage and the funding is not yet mature, inviting internationally renowned artists to participate in local arts festivals usually requires high fees, which may bring financial pressure to the organisers of the festivals. Secondly, in terms of scheduling adjustments, internationally renowned artists are often busy with their own performances and exhibitions, etc. Artists do not have a lot of time to spare, and the schedule is not very flexible, which may adversely affect the development of the festival. Finally, the creative risk of the festival theme or requirements not matching the original intent of the international artists can also affect the originality and uniqueness of the artworks.

## **3. Exploration and inspiration for the preservation of the authenticity of traditional rural culture**

### ***3.1 Principles for the protection of the authenticity of traditional cultural villages***

Problems that may be encountered in the future development process, such as whether too many art festivals and "IP" interventions will lead to a single mode of cultural and art activities and homogenisation of work concepts; whether the abandonment of Yim Tin Tsz in the past historical zone has led to the decline of the landscape of some villages, and the "authenticity" of the villages after the decline. Whether the desertion of Yim Tin Tsz in the past has led to the decline of some of the villages' landscape, and the restoration of the "originality" after the decline. To address these issues, the authors

have developed the following conceptual principles.

### ***3.1.1 People's livelihoods first, protection first***

As the main protagonists in the inheritance and protection of Yim Tin Tsz culture and the creators of cultural activities in Yim Tin Tsz, village residents bear the heavy responsibility of preserving the traditional rural cultural landscape. Their groups and communities, as well as culture bearers, should be allowed to maximise their rights to management. The development of culture and tourism should be tailored to local conditions, and there should be a limit to the development of tourism, so as not to overdraw the dividends brought by history and culture, resulting in residents and tourists flowing in the same stream, and to give priority to the protection of areas that are on the verge of decline and have not yet been restored to their original authenticity. Should adhere to the local people's livelihood as the basis, against mercantilism for the destruction of the cultural environment, at the same time should get the understanding and support of the residents on the basis of the importance of the indigenous residents of the cultural construction of the relevant recommendations, practical changes in the living conditions of the residents, optimise the form of cultural production, the creation of cultural projects, mobilising residents to participate in cultural and artistic production and construction of activities in the initiative, the livelihood of the people as the traditional rural culture of the primary factor in the construction of the original nature of the culture. The livelihood of the people is the primary factor in the construction of traditional rural culture.

### ***3.1.2 Planning and management, creativity first***

At the juncture of the cultural management and construction of traditional villages, it is important to pay attention to the importance of management thinking in the conservation of authenticity.<sup>[5]</sup>For the remaining material heritage, planning and standards should be formulated to carry out cyclical repairs, so as to prevent the decline of the village landscape from bringing about a bad impact on the protection of authenticity, and to ensure the optimisation and construction of the environment, so as to prevent the loss of population and the marginalisation of culture brought about by the phenomenon of hollowing out of villages. At the same time, the pace of development and conservation should be well balanced, development strategies should be reasonably studied, and cultural projects and advantageous industries that are conducive to the construction of village authenticity should be actively cultivated.

### ***3.1.3 Sustained development and optimal integration***

The intrusion of cultural brokers and various enterprises outside the local community can cause outsiders to plunder local cultural resources, and a reasonable and effective management mechanism plays a crucial role. Yim Tin Tsz through the establishment of a scientific and effective management system to protect the Yim Tin Tsz village, can prevent the loss and destruction of cultural resources, maintain the integrity and authenticity of cultural resources, for tourism development to provide institutional safeguards and support, and efficient and effective "double-effect" management mechanism is an important means to ensure that all participants work together, and more conducive to the dissolution of the natural ecology and cultural and tourism development. It is more conducive to the elimination of conflicts between natural ecology and cultural and tourism development. Under the principle of cultural fairness and diversity, the characteristics of local rural culture should be maintained, scientific planning, overall protection, inheritance and development, focusing on people's livelihoods, and steady progress, so as to achieve a balanced development of protection and utilisation.

## ***3.2 Social Intervention Approaches to Building the Authenticity of Rural Culture***

### ***3.2.1 Playing a guiding role by government and other institutions***

The government and professional tourism authorities and departments are not only leaders in deploying the overall situation, but also bridges for integrating and coordinating development, playing a leading and regulating role in revitalising Yim Tin Tsz Village. In the process of restoring and revitalising the village, the local government and relevant departments need to make reasonable arrangements to provide financial, technical and human resources support.

### ***3.2.2 Playing the leading role of indigenous villagers***

In the process of rural revitalisation in Yim Tin Tsz, it is necessary to give full play to the role of the original indigenous villagers as the "backbone" and to highlight the leading role of the villagers in the revitalisation and development of traditional villages. Scientific development on the basis of the villagers' primitive living habits and spiritual and cultural inheritance, guaranteeing the right of all

villagers to information, reflecting the democratic nature of the investment, employment and material security in favour of local villagers, to ensure that the original villagers' full participation.

### **3.2.3 Utilising the helping role of arts workers and volunteers**

Mobilise volunteer students from colleges and universities across the country, descendants of local villagers, and other people from all walks of life who love art and nature to sign up as volunteers to participate in the Yim Tin Tsz Arts Festival, and work together to help the festival give better play to the power of culture and art, deepen the tacit understanding between people and nature, and rediscover its unique charm.

## **4. Conclusion**

The protection and construction of traditional villages is a natural barrier for the survival of cultural and artistic activities. In the course of protection and construction, it is necessary to constantly switch social roles and positions, to find out the ways of building traditional culture from different positions and dimensions, to balance the pros and cons, and to make reasonable choices. Exploring villages with original cultural characteristics will not only provide a more scientific and reasonable planning for the Yim Tin Tsz Village in Hong Kong, but also provide a certain reference value for the preservation and construction of traditional villages in various cultural environments around the world.

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