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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Community Building: An Exploration of the Path in Traditional Village Conservation and Renewal with an Example of Yim Tin Tze in Hong Kong**

**Jialu Li**

*School of Sociology and Political Science, Anhui University, Hefei 230601, China*

**Corresponding Author:** Jialu Li, **E-mail:** [lijialu0921@163.com](mailto:lijialu0921@163.com)

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**ABSTRACT**

Traditional villages are the excellent gene bank of Chinese civilization, carrying rich traditional historical and cultural information. As China's rural development undergoes a structural change, it is more crucial than ever to rediscover the preservation and rejuvenation of traditional villages for both human and social development. This paper examines the restoration project and practice of Yim Tin Tze in Sai Kung District, Hong Kong, and combines it with the theoretical framework of the community creation concept and desk research. The objective of the study is to explore the rationality of the current development in Yim Tin Tze and analyze the feasibility of achieving sustainable development in the future. The results of the study revealed that there are kinds of resources in the parts of "people, culture, location, landscape, production", but it still has a long way to go.

**KEYWORDS**

Community creation; rural revitalization; rural conservation and renewal

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### **1. Introduction**

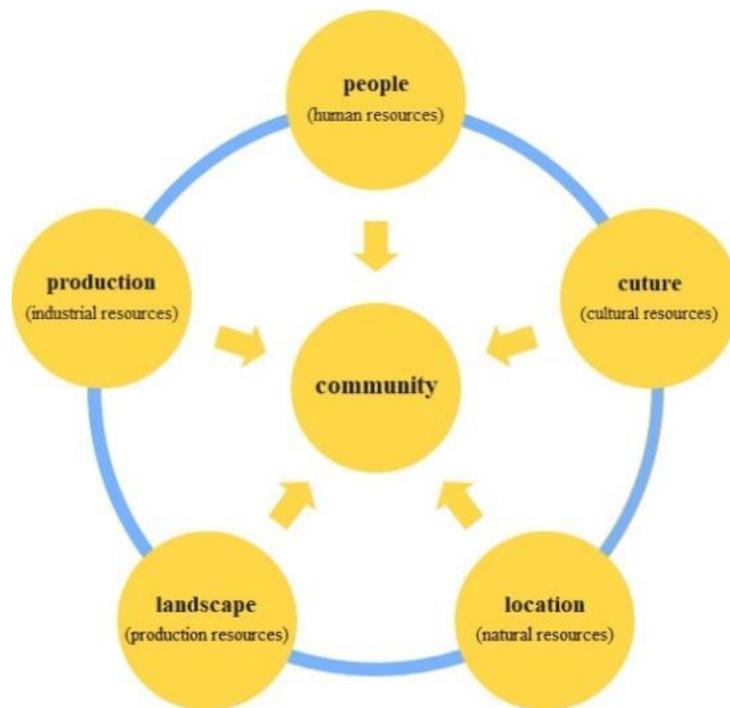
Traditional villages are the folding of traditional Chinese culture in space. The traditional architectural designs and production techniques used in villages reflect the way of life of the ancestors, preserving the culture of traditional heritage and carrying the memories of previous generations. In cities, where the urban siphoning effect continues to trigger the gathering of population, under the use of technology, it will be more in tune with human hopes for a better quality of life. Estimates from the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that by the end of 2021, 64.72 percent of China's resident population will live in an urban setting, up from 64.53 percent at the end of 2020. The loss of so many people will have a significant effect on the development of settlements, and the "hollowing out" issue will worsen. As an object of study, the village can be seen as a traditional community. Countryside building through community creation has enabled traditional villages to be redeveloped. At present, great achievements have been made in community creation carried out worldwide, for example, in England and Japan, which provide much inspiration for us.

### **2. Insights from Community Building Theory**

Originally, the term "community" referred to a communal experience and a close relationship between individuals. The oldest definition of community was created by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, who claimed that a community is a group established by interaction with the traits of blood, geography, and common memory (Tennis, 1999). In the 1930s, Chinese scholar Fei Xiaotong rendered it as "社区", which translates to "alive communion with interpersonal links" in the essential meaning and as an object of study in the methodological field (Chen, 2017). Consequentially, the community focuses on the social interactions developed between groups, and people have a strong sense of identification and affinity with the community, developing mutually accepted social rules. In the framework of Chinese vernacular culture, Qin thinks traditional villages may also be seen as places where cultural information is transmitted orally, mostly via human contact (Qin, 2000). There is a greater feeling of emotional bond and sense of belonging in traditional communities than in modern ones. Researching the fabrication of traditional villages from

the perspective of the community, which exemplifies the concept of humanistic care, could prompt consideration of the predicament of village survival and development in the context of urbanization today.

“Community building,” sometimes known as “community development,” is a social movement focused on fostering harmony and revitalizing neighbourhoods via cooperative effort. In the 1960s, Professor Kiyoshi Miyazaki initiated the Japanese community development movement by categorizing community challenges into five categories: people, culture, location, landscape, and production (Kiyoshi, 2001). Specifically, “people” refers to fulfilling the requirements of the community’s citizens, managing interpersonal interactions pursuing the fulfilment of the requirements of the community’s citizens, the management of interpersonal interactions, and pursuing personal pleasure. The concept of “culture” refers to the community’s history, the management of cultural activities, and the creation of programs for lifelong education. The conservation of the natural biological environment is “location.” In a community, “landscape” is the establishment of public places, living settings, and unique landscapes. The community’s industries and economic activities constitute “production.” The process of social production starts with integrating the five types of resources, which serves as the foundation for forming the forming integration of the five types of resources, which serves as the foundation for the formation of communities. On this basis, a pattern of complete mass involvement is established, activating the villagers’ passion and spontaneity to give the community back to the “people.” Community formation aims to alter the conventional government-led paradigm via the cooperation of villagers, actualize the practice of democratic participation, and establish a constructive relationship among the government, non-profit organizations, and the community. The consequence will be the flourishing of unique enterprises in rural areas, the reawakening of traditional cultural memories, the strengthening of emotional linkages between migrant workers and their hometowns, and the development of institutional pathways for the repatriation of villagers (Ding et al., 2013).



**Figure 1:** Diagram of community creation resources(drawn by the author)

### **3. Description of Yim Tin Tze's Community Development Resources**

Through a description of the community resources in Yim Tin Tze, we will investigate the appropriate procedures for the preservation and revitalization of the Yim Tin Tze and provide both the material foundation and theoretical support for the practice. In this part, we use desk research to find information about this region to combine theory and practice.

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Yim Tin Tze, also known as Yim Tin Tsai, is an island situated in Hong Kong's Sai Kung District. The hamlet is one of the few Catholic Hakka villages in Hong Kong and is recognized as Hong Kong's sole live salt field due to its traditional way of salt manufacturing. At its time, the settlement was home to more than 200 individuals. But when traditional technologies became less effective and the economy deteriorated, the people drifted away until 1997; the population dropped to zero (Chan, 2015). Distressed with this

loss, the locals' determination to reconstruct the town arose, and in 2003 they collaborated with the government to plan the restoration of the rejuvenated Salt Flats and the century-old St. Joseph's Chapel, which earned two UNESCO honours. In 2019, the Hong Kong Tourism Board organized the Salt Flats Arts Festival, which was sponsored by artists from across the globe, making it one of the most popular tourist destinations in Hong Kong.

### **3.2 The Element of "People."**

Yim Tin Tze is tiny, 0.31 square kilometers in size, which facilitates a connection between neighbours and fosters profound emotional bonds based on blood ties (Hu et al., 2011). They have established a connection with a straightforward social network. Most of the villagers on the island have the last name Chen, and they all share a cultural desire to be Catholic. Villagers have similar cultural backgrounds and family ties, which makes it easier for them to get along with each other and build a strong community in the future.

### **3.3 The Element of "Culture."**

Religious culture: The village has a church that has been there for more than 100 years and carries the Catholic culture. Most people on the island are Catholic, and they put a lot of emphasis on the harmony between people and nature and the path of "evangelization." The religious clergy may motivate the local populations to actively engage in the construction and can be considered a leader in the work of promoting public involvement in the community, making it simpler for the villagers to embrace new ideas and models for new community building.

Hakka culture: Dotted around the hillside in the southwest of the island are many Hakka village houses, but the villagers have moved away, leaving only traces of Hakka life in the village. Hakka culture is a significant component of the outstanding traditional Chinese culture, which has affected generations of people via culture, as seen by the folklore activities in Yim Tin Tze, which rally the villagers for cultural building.

### **3.4 The Element of "Location."**

Natural resources: In 2004, the Hong Kong government announced the New Nature Conservation Policy, which is meant to protect the local ecosystem and biodiversity in a way that is good for the environment and people (Environmental Protection Department, 2004). Under the impact of the conservation strategy, Yim Tin Tze villagers organized the Yanguang Conservation Centre in 2011 as a non-profit organization to safeguard natural resources in the context of local culture, religion, ecology, and tourism.

Humanistic architecture: inspired by religious culture, Yim Tin Tze's buildings have a distinctively religious character, consisting mostly of pure white structures topped with religious symbols such as crosses. On the island, you may see St. Joseph's Chapel and the ancestral residence of Vice-Bishop Chan Chi Ming.

### **3.5 The Element of "Landscape."**

Yim Tin Tze is situated on the western portion of the island in Sai Kung, Hong Kong, with the sea to the west and a dense forest to the east. The island is brimming with biological riches and breathtaking natural landscape, including green bushes, tiny secondary forests, small bamboo forests, mangroves, settlements, abandoned salt pans, and abandoned wet farms. During the restoration of Yim Tin Tze, the village head, Chen Zhongxian, divided the village houses into residential, academic, and folklore areas in an effort to turn it into a "living museum" through the concept of eco-museum construction, which is now generically known as the "unlocked museum" of the outlying islands.

Based on the principle of "harmony among heaven, earth, and man," residential architecture integrates the living environment with nature. St. Joseph's Chapel, which symbolizes the meaning of religious culture in the neighbourhood and is located in the centre of a religiously focused setting, serves as the focal point of Yim Tin Tze's physical layout.

### **3.6 The Element of "Production."**

Yim Tin Tze's old salt production techniques are being challenged by modern technology, and the declining salt business is no longer the region's primary economic driver. Tourists may now visit the island's preserved cultural monuments and relics of its salt manufacturing processes, which will help generate revenue for the island's economy and protect its natural environment.



**Figure 2:** Satellite view of Yim Tin Tze (Source: google maps)



**Figure 3:** Residential buildings in Yim Tin Tze (Source: website)

#### **4. Yim Tin Tze's Conservation and Renewal Approaches and Issues**

The present revitalization of Yim Tin Tze can be broken down into three ways: one idea, two restorations, and three involvement. This is not just an interpretation of the chronological order of the revitalization processes but also a summary of the implemented plans. The activity of conservation and regeneration in Yim Tin Tze is vital to the process of community building and the basis of sustainable development.

**The eco-museum idea is an important concept.** Proposed first by French academics Varine (H.) and Piviere (G.H.), it expands the museum's physical location to preserve nature and human interactions in addition to the usual museum value of heritage protection. Yim Tin Tze embraces this notion, operating a community with a "museum mindset" and "collecting, exhibiting, investigating, and educating" the village's original historical artefacts with the help of the locals in order to maximize the cultural worth of the place. However, at the moment, ecological museums are still addressed at the level of education and publicity, and the community as a whole still needs guidance and leadership from community professionals, and the loss of talent is not favourable to the development of the local ecological environment.

#### **Restoration in both directions, including protection of the natural environment and conservation of historic structures.**

The protection of the natural environment is based on the Hong Kong government's 2004 New Nature Conservation Policy, which seeks to safeguard the natural environment and biodiversity. The Cultural and Tourism Development Plan for the Greater Bay Area

of Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Macau, which was promulgated in December 2020, stipulates that we should build a humanistic Bay Area and a leisure Bay Area together to realize cultural heritage tours by establishing the Hong Kong Heritage Trail. Simultaneously, the Hong Kong Government has included Yim Tin Tze in the “Blueprint for Tourism Development in Hong Kong” to develop Yim Tin Tze into a tourist attraction with art, culture, monuments, and green elements, revitalising it into an open “museum,” and the Hong Kong SAR Government has provided the local tourism environment with policy support to provide a direction for future restoration. However, the policy must be implemented concurrently with the real growth of the village by means of a unique policy framework. In addition, the religious context of Yim Tin Tze has necessitated the preservation and repair of ancient artefacts through necessitating ritualistic architecture. One of these initiatives is the preservation of St. Nossier's Church, which intends to conserve and promote the church's traditional liturgical activities and can produce a cultural card for Yim Tin Tze by conserving the whole church site. However, in 2018, the community was badly impacted by Typhoon Shanzhu, which caused about HK\$100,000 in damages and destroyed more than 40 homes. This demonstrates that the community has lost “resilience” and the capacity to tolerate unexpected occurrences, even if the natural environment has returned.

**There are three types of participation, including resident participation, social organization participation, and government participation.** In the case of Yim Tin Tze, local affairs are determined and carried out by three primary bodies. The Joint Committee is chaired by the Co-Chairmen and mostly determines the future course of Yim Tin Tze. The Village Representative leads the Village Committee and primarily controls the Salt and Light Conservation Centre's seminars, exhibits, street ferry services, and restoration projects. The Sacred Heart Church is directed by a representative of the Sacred Heart Church, focuses on religion, and engages in several religious activities. In essence, the development of the participation mechanism is a system for the placement and interaction of the functions of diverse subjects, resulting in an efficient platform for shared governance (Fan & Chen, 2021). The development of the Yim Tin Tze institution is a spontaneous gesture by the villagers, who also concretely execute conservation policies via their establishment of the Yanguang Conservation Centre charitable organization, demonstrating collaboration and communication between residents, social organizations, and the government with religious and cultural linkages merging the masses into one. Despite the highly motivated public engagement, the brain drain from the region presents several obstacles. Firstly, the professionalism of the decision-making process remains unverified. Typically, locals create and embrace choices based on local religion and culture, and the high level of group cohesiveness is accompanied by a high level of exclusion. So, it is challenging to make professional selections in this area. Secondly, the government is the primary source of economic assistance. The decline in local industrial growth has halted the building of new facilities, and the local economy relies heavily on government funding, making it more difficult to react to unforeseen occurrences due to a lack of backup resources. Lastly, the absence of monitoring methods, flawless mass involvement, and mutual supervision between subjects should assure the initiative and motivation of villagers in self-organization activity.

### 5. Strategies within the Notion of Community Development

We have sorted out the events of Yim Tin Tze's construction and development and given a solution to the existing issues under the concept of community formation in order to provide ideas for future conservation and renewal and to accomplish the conservation and development of the village more efficiently.

**Make learning resources better and make professional education stronger.** Via community service, eco-awareness and industrial and tourist management are instilled in the villages through professional education courses. From time to time, academics from social organizations will provide educational lectures to increase the villagers' professional understanding of restoration efforts.

**Build resilient communities.** By evaluating the level and characteristics of local disaster resilience and establishing a sound emergency management system, the resilience of community building in Yim Tin Tze will be enhanced by strengthening the early warning capability prior to a disaster, bolstering the efficacy of defence during a disaster, and minimizing the extent of damage after the disaster.

**Promote the industry's overall growth.** Continue to stimulate the growth of the current tourist sector by refining the tourism process, implementing a “one-stop tour” of the island, constructing a unique B&B inn, and expanding the number of food and beverage outlets with local characteristics based on a community-creation viewpoint of traditional village conservation and development research. Boost Yim Tin Tze's profile by facilitating communication between local artists and residents via the establishment of intellectual property (IP) art town timed to coincide with cultural events like festivals and exhibitions.

**Returning to its origins, the restoration of the salt-making process.** The restoration of the historic salt pans will pave the way for “immersion tourism,” which will give tourists an up-close look at the salt-making process and inspire more engagement on their side. In addition, via documentaries and other forms of cinema and television, the technology of the salt fields may be

reintroduced to the public, allowing for the “recreation” of traditional culture and the expansion of the Yim Tin Tze sphere of influence.

**Enhance the surveillance system.** Improve the mechanism of public engagement, realize transparent management of the financial system, concretize government rules with local reality, define the management roles of the departments, and implement the autonomous and cooperative management of residents.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Yim Tin Tze combines theory and practice in a good way through the interaction among the government, people, and community. It still needs professional and local culture in it. Traditional villages in China continue to encounter numerous obstacles in the development process and must be integrated with local features to establish a village development mechanism tailored to local circumstances. To keep the peace between the environment and humans, as well as the progression and regeneration of traditional villages, the renewal of villages is a lengthy and persistent process that needs various practices in the future.

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