

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



Graduation Plan: All tracks

Submit your Graduation Plan to the Board of Examiners (Examencommissie-BK@tudelft.nl), Mentors and Delegate of the Board of Examiners one week before P2 at the latest.

The graduation plan consists of at least the following data/segments:

Personal information	
Name	Zuzanna Sliwinska
Student number	5618355

Studio	
Name / Theme	City of the Future
Main mentor	Roberto Cavallo Department of Architecture; Head of Section Theory & Territories
Second mentor	Yawei Chen Department of Management in the Built Environment; Urban Development Management
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>I am fascinated by territories in transition undergoing dynamic changes under the pressure of their ever-evolving context. These transitional moments challenge us to think about architecture as both a creative and destructive power. Hence, challenging our role as designers and questioning the future consequence of architectural production. To think about cities of the future is to address those moments of transformation where the taken trajectory will shape our reality for the coming decades.</p> <p>I appreciate this studio facilitating the exchange between multiple disciplines to form a more complete understanding of mentioned complex transitions. At the same time, it allows space for independent exploration and setting of the student's own framework, assembling challenging but also suited to individual personal and professional ambitions project.</p>

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Between fishpond and the neon sign: (Re)assemblage and persistence of cultural practices among rural communities in the northwest New Territories, Hong Kong.
Goal	
Location:	Shan Pui, Yuen Long, northwest New Territories [NT], Hong Kong SAR.
The posed problem,	In 2021, the Hong Kong government introduced the <i>Northern Metropolis</i> Development Strategy as part of the "Hong Kong 2030+" scheme, a

spatial planning framework to update the territorial development strategy. The project's conceptual boundary covers the Yuen Long and the North districts in NT, proposing New Development Areas [NDA], expanding the existing ones and construction of additional public transportation infrastructure to populate the area of 600ha within the coming twenty years. Located within the *Northern Metropolis* boundary are 272 recognised villages, whose future becomes unclear as the government issues further land resumptions to facilitate the construction. Multiple villagers on the path of the development has expressed their concern about consequent degradation of ancestral land, potential cultural and economic losses to rural folks. At the same time, the livelihoods and cultural practices of the villagers rely on long-established connections with the region's ecology, opening a discussion on conflicting forces of urban development and preservation of both rural cultural heritage and the natural environment.

In this context, this thesis identifies three challenges of cultural practice persistence and cultural survival of rural communities in northwest New Territories:

1. Preservation & urban development

The expanding economic and operational activities of intensive development projects realised since 1960s in the area resulted in dispossession of rural land and effective relocations of the indigenous population, deconstructing both physical and intangible rural landscape. In parallel, growing economic disparities between the rural and urban populations presented two additional challenges positioning the region between increasing development boundaries and preserving the traditional rural way of living. Firstly, many young villagers decided to out-migrate to urban locations in search of employment, leaving behind an ageing population ceasing the exchange of local knowledge or its practical perpetuation. Secondly, opportunities created through land management loopholes presented in the heavily criticised *Small House Policy* (land management policy in regard to rural land ownership) allowed

village male landowners to sell their land for profit to the developers, facilitating further deconstruction of rural land.

2. Environmental stewardship

In the local context, the nature-culture relationship described by Harrison (2015) suffered twofold from the expansion of urban activities. Firstly, expanding developments have reclaimed previously natural or cultivated land, decreasing the overall green areas and pushing human and non-human actors away. Secondly, investment in infrastructural connections across the border exacerbated the demise of local fish ponds, as villagers responded to the demand for port backup uses and vehicular and container storage (Bolchover, 2017), offering land to developers in return for profit. In more extreme, but far from rare cases, villagers have purposefully degraded the land, decreasing its ecological value and increasing the incentive to re-zone it as a potential development site. In return, 'sacrificed land' has allowed for urban progression in a vicious circle of land degradation.

3. Heritagisation & cultural survival (inactive modes of cultural preservation)

Most conservation projects in rural New Territories still rely on the mainstream notion of heritage preservation. In Hong Kong, the set of values which determine the relevance of heritage to be conserved is defined by its architectural significance (HHK, 2007), revealing the local perception of heritage as predominantly tangible, non-renewable source (Silvey & Harrison, 2019; Holtorf, 2014).

In the north NT context, heritage preservation becomes problematic, as the villagers have demolished most traditional old buildings to fulfil *Small House Policy* requirements to claim land ownership resulting in current rural condition characterised by a semi-urbanised 'rural' landscape dominated by modern flat-roofed village houses that are uniformly three-storey high and constructed of reinforced concrete (Lee & DiStefano, 2002, p.83). In this sense preservation of ancestral halls and a small

	<p>number of remaining old house presents a limited idea of perpetuating the existence of traditional community groups, which are maintained and structured through cultural practices. Despite often being facilitated through built forms or elements of the natural environment, they are built upon and rely on the set of intangible values (Littlejohn, 2021). Hence, the heritagisation of the physical setting of rural communities only allows for the conservation of historical evidence. It does not allow, however, for cultural survival, given that the community is no longer allowed to perform traditional (even if adopted under the changing circumstance) practices.</p>
<p>research questions and</p>	<p>Drawing on above three challenges and with regard to the objective of this thesis, which is to discuss the adaptation potential of traditional rural society and ability of its cultural survival, the research question and the following sub-questions are:</p> <p><u>Main research question</u> Considering the pressure of the pending Northern Metropolis project, what future scenarios and potential can be drawn for rural society in the New Territories to allow for its cultural survival?</p> <p><u>SQ1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which theoretical approaches can allow for the sustainable persistence of traditional cultural practices, and in parallel, how can these practices be actively preserved once the physical environment in which they are embedded has been transformed or erased? <p><u>SQ2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within the studied area, how did the local landscape transition over time, and how did the evolving actors interpret and justify the territory's past and present condition in their favour, allowing for the de-construction of a rural tangible and intangible landscape? - Respectively, how did these transitions reflect in the daily practices of

	<p>indigenous villagers, which 'elements' characterising the community have discontinued, and which allowed for adaptation to new circumstances?</p> <p><u>SQ3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What role can design and planning present in facilitating the generation of new social and economic potentials among rural villages and their adaptation to new transitional conditions while retaining their cultural and ecological characteristics?
<p>design assignment in which these result.</p>	<p>This thesis expects to present a prescriptive approach towards preservation of rural identity and cultural heritage beyond mainstream methods of architectural preservation, and argue the cultural survival through persistence of intra-community relations as a preservation method and the role of architectural design in fostering these relations. At the same time it aims to propose new ways of generating economic and social meanings through co-operative value creation which de-rives from the current ecology of the site as means for parallel cultural and environmental preservation. To achieve above outcome through design and planning, research conclusions are translated into a brief facilitating alignment of nature, culture and economic interests.</p> <p>The brief proposes a <i>local knowledge exchange house</i> where indigenous (mainly elderly) residents of Shan Pui village in Yuen Long can share traditional knowledge and continue practising fish pond cultivation as both cultural and an established natural habitat maintenance practice. The house welcomes short and long-stay urban visitors to facilitate the exchange, introduce additional economic activity for the villagers and establish a more productive relationship between rural and urban.</p> <p>Above results in proposed program of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communal dining area and kitchen - Workshop area (indoor) - Workshop area (outdoor, covered) - Small store for fish sell

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-stay facility (5x 2person bedroom; 1x 5people bedroom; 2 bathrooms) - Long-stay facility (3x 2person bedroom; 2x 1person bedroom; 2 bathrooms; small common working space) - Fishing equipment storage - Outdoor recreation area (fishpond park) <p>The proposed program responds to the rural community's current needs and analyses the current circumstances on site. This project timeline, however, spans the next 25 years, suggesting future scenarios and ways the program and its functions can evolve and be adapted by the community. Hence, it proposes three categories of program, within which the first one represent function crucial and constant to the persistence of rural relations (concluded from the research); the second represents flexible structures allowing for easy re-organisation and change of function; and the third one which allows for a temporary program which can re-appear seasonally according to community lifestyle rhythm (e.g. small fish market).</p>
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Process

Method description

This thesis aims to investigate how the cultural heritage of rural communities can be preserved in the ever-transitioning context. The research uses the qualitative approach and examines rural de-construction from two main perspectives. Firstly, the historical analysis of changing land (Part I); secondly, the examination of changing practices, on the example of fishpond cultivation (Part II) as a reflection of dialogue between tangible and intangible, nature and culture in active preservation approach.

The historical analysis set the timeline between the British takeover (1898) to understand the 'initial' state of rural villages before the development phase. It then continues through peaceful pre-war (1900-1945) and post-war period (1946-1959), to intensive re-shaping of rural land during initial urbanisation of north New Territories (1960-1999), and concludes with modern time area of urban expansion (2000-2022). To determine the study site, three areas in the north New Territories, within the conceptual boundary of the proposed Northern Metropolis project, were compared – northwest located Yuen Long, west and east part of the North district. The northwest area of Yuen Long was chosen due to its direct interaction with the urban and a relatively long history of territorial transition, allowing for learning from the past to understand the future approach. The concluding chapter proposes a speculative scenario in the future addressing three temporalities over the coming 25 years (social, political and economic) in the studied area and proposes a prescriptive approach towards rural cultural heritage persistence.

Implemented methods include:

- Literature and theory review
- Mapping as a tool of historical analysis
- Ethnographic case studies (on-site qualitative research; interviews and visual documentation) -
The investigation is based on the ethnographic case study of two* villages – the conjoined Shui Tau Tsuen and Shui Mei Tsuen in Kam Tin and the Shan Pui village in Yuen Long Southeast. Both settlements represent different stages of adaptation to changing environments. They have abandoned traditional water-related practices, which allowed for economic but endangered cultural survival, or have retained their traditional practices, however, in a limited capacity showing adaptation to changing cultivation methods of land over time.

*Third case study to be considered on site. The intention for third site is to represent the village which has not been able to maintain their practice, and in extreme case has been relocated and entirely de-constructed on social and cultural level.

Literature and general practical preference

Books & articles

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3. Davis, S. G. (1962). The Rural-Urban Migration in Hong Kong and Its New Territories. *The Geographical Journal* , 128 (3), 328–333. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1794048>.
4. DeSilvey, C. and R. Harrison 2019. 'Anticipating loss: rethinking endangerment in heritage futures', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26: 1–7.
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6. Harrison, R. (2015) *Beyond "Natural" and "Cultural" Heritage: Toward an Ontological Politics of Heritage in the Age of Anthropocene*, *Heritage & Society*, 8:1, 24-42, DOI:10.1179/2159032X15Z.00000000036
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8. Hayes. J.W. (1962). *The pattern of life in the new territories in 1898*, in *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* , 1962, Vol. 2 (1962), pp. 75-102. Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23881257>
9. Ho, P.Y. (2018). *Making Hong Kong: A History of its Urban Development*. Edward Elgar Publishing. Cheltenham, UK.
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11. Lee, H.Y., & Distefano, L. (2003). *A Tale of Two Villages: The Story of Changing Village Life in the New Territories*. Oxford University Press.
12. Lee, H.Y., & Distefano, L. (2011). *Hong Kong Style urban conservation*. University of Hong Kong.
13. Lee, H.Y., & Lung, P.Y. (2005) *The changing 'rural' setting of Hong Kong's New Territories in the 20th century*. <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/293/>
14. Littlejohn, A. (2021), *The potential of intangible loss: reassembling heritage and reconstructing the social in post-disaster Japan*. *Soc Anthropol*, 29: 944-959. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.13095>. P. 945.
15. Watson, L.J (1983). *Rural Society: Hong Kong's New Territories*, in *The China Quarterly* , Sep., 1983, No. 95 (Sep., 1983), pp. 480-490. Cambridge University Press on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/654031>
16. Welsh. F. (1993). *A history of Hong Kong*. Harper Collins

Statistics & data

17. Environment Bureau (2021). *Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan*.
18. HKUMed (2020). *Country Parks, usage and well-being*.
19. NTN (2020). *Towards a planning vision and transcending 2030. Preliminary concepts for the New Territories North Development*.

Reflection

1. What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

The city of the future implies its preoccupation with the realm of the urban. However, with a growing density of population in global cities and the land between them, attention of governments and architectural practitioners turn to less explored, and so far ignored rural territories, looking to accommodate spilling urban population and industries. The rural landscape will inevitably change under these pressuring forces. However, its transformation towards total urbanization or a completely new, yet unknown status should not be left unattended. Whether its future will be dimmed by complete urbanization of vast land, its occupation with invasive agricultural production trying to catch up with the demands of an unsaturated population (Ballard, 1962), or return to romanticised ideal of lush countryside, these processes must be questioned, and the idea of rural rediscovered (Koolhaas, 2017, p.4). The choice of dialectic between rural and the urban has power to push the future of our kind in either direction.

2. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework.

Across Hong Kong, several research and design projects on rural revitalisation, supported by Environmental Protection Department, focus primarily on green enclaves, concentrated in east-north New Territories. Remoteness, complex geography and low transport accessibility spared indigenous settlements from urban development, simultaneously becoming a reason behind their de-population. However, more commonly, across New Territories, villages can be found caught between industrial, storage and modern residential uses, facing dispossession of rural land in favour of urban expansion. There, local indigenous villages, despite less attractive aesthetics, hold cultural and historical value and allow for an understanding of the cultural identity of local rural folks. This direct encounter between the rural and urban produces spaces of 'in-between' - between the contradictory pressure of development and preservation (Bolchover, 2017). Such pattern of tension between rural and urban is widely spread across the world and in particular Asian continent with spillage of growing population to rural areas showing larger social relevance on affected communities. Despite the scale of this global challenge, not enough attention is paid to rural adaptation and its capacity to accommodate changing lifestyles and programs beyond current proposals of eco-tourism and preservation focused solely on traditional, architecturally significant built forms in the rural context.

This research aims to fill that gap, allowing for a more practical solution that does not focus solely on preserving rural heritage but also on sustaining and regenerating the context within which the rural exists - hence the natural environment. Chosen theories become relevant, not solely as a framework for positioning the challenge within the existing field of knowledge but also as a question of finding the balance between human and non-human interests in architectural production.

