A Study of Cultural Heritage

LIU Tik-sang (Editor)
Contents

Introduction

Preface - Active Learning in All Directions

Book 1 - Theory and Practice

1. Heritage and Cultural Relics
   1.1 What is “Heritage”?
   1.2 Tangible Cultural Heritage
   1.3 Intangible Cultural Heritage

2. Heritage in Action

3. Heritage and Identity Politics

4. Approaches in Understanding Heritage

Book 2 - Field Studies

5. Tai O Field Workshop

6. Extended Learning: Nansha Field Workshop

7. Reminder for Students

8. Concluding and Sharing Session of Field Workshop

Book 3 - Reference Materials

9. Ordinances in Hong Kong for Heritage Preservation

10. International Charters for the Conservation and Restoration

11. References

12. Annotated Bibliography

13. Websites

Programme Schedule

Authors and Speakers
Introduction

In 2007 the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority jointly prepared the History Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6). This curriculum aims at enabling students to understand important happenings in the local community, China, Asia and the world in the 20th century, and to take hold of the major trends of development. “Local heritage studies” is one of the three topics in the elective part of this curriculum.

In order to enhance teachers’ understanding of this topic, the EDB commissioned the South China Research Center of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to organize a teacher professional development programme in 2009, namely Heritage Studies: Hong Kong and Its Neighboring Areas in Zhujiang Delta Region. The programme included lectures and field visits. Teachers responded enthusiastically and many teachers attended the lectures and activities. After that, teachers generally opined that it would benefit them a lot if the course materials could be published. We express our heartfelt thanks to Dr. LIU Tik-sang from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and the other specialists, who render us great support in editing the course materials in form of this resource package.

This resource package on “A Study of Cultural Heritage” consists of three booklets. It is hoped that teachers may help students understand the concepts of “heritage”, “tangible cultural heritage” and “intangible cultural heritage”, master local history and heritage through the articles on special topics and the worksheets for field studies, with an aim of motivating students to work on local heritage studies. The content of this package has been uploaded to the website of the Education Bureau for teachers’ reference and adaptation:


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Chief Curriculum Development Officer (PSHE)
Curriculum Development Institute
Education Bureau
Room 1319, 13/F, Wu Chung House
213 Queen’s Road East
Wanchai, Hong Kong
Fax: 2573 5299 / 2575 4318
E-mail: ccdopshe@edb.gov.hk
Active Learning in All Directions

(I)

The term “Cultural Heritage” is the combination of two words: “Culture” and “Heritage.” “Culture” refers to the human act of learning through life events and the resulting behavior. Every social or ethnic group has its own culture, which helps its people adapt to and survive in their ecological and social environment. “Heritage” is what one generation leaves the next. “Cultural Heritage” can be understood, then, to refer to all things pertaining to human life. “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” suggests that things can be either grouped into one of two categories: “Tangible” (youching, 有形) or “Intangible” (wuxing, 無形). These two terms have been adopted by East Asia countries and used in heritage conservation for many decades. In recent years, with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) advocating the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the terms “material” (wuzhi, 物質) and “non-material” (feiwuzhi, 非物質) have come into the Chinese classifications. This is because “non-material” is the official Chinese translation of “intangible.” Material or tangible things are easier to understand, since they can be touched and seen; the non-material or intangible matters refer to knowledge, skills, or forms of organization, and are more difficult to grasp. At the local community level, knowledge and technical know-how are in the hands of a number of practitioners, and most have no written records, being passed down orally. As such kind of knowledge is passed down orally without any written records, it is difficult for those who are not directly involved in the transmission process to grasp and understanding.

Looking more closely, we discover that non-material items are intangible in that they exist in the mind of the masters/teachers and are being transmitted through the teachings of these individuals. It is difficult to comprehend some traditional knowledge and know-how which are subject to continual changes and transmitted orally without any written record. However, intangible technology wisdom, and know-how always result in physical appliances or final products, physical objects being produced. From these material objects we can discover the process of manufacturing, how they emerge and become the carriers of intangible culture.

The study of local heritage is now a new elective of history in the New Senior
Secondary (NSS) curriculum. Through examples of traditional culture, conservation, business and trade, students are led to explore the situation and significance of heritage in Hong Kong. History and heritage share some similarities in meaning. History is about things that happened in the past, and this includes discussions of human social and cultural changes throughout the corridor of time, while heritage refers to knowledge handed down from generation to generation. The two – history and heritage – cannot be separated, and it is in the interest of students to be given the opportunities to visit the scene of history and to imagine the historical process. The opportunity to visit places related to cultural heritage gives students an awareness of local society and how the local society is affected by the outside world.

“Heritage” is not merely the transmission of knowledge or technical skills. In traditional crafts, for example, a master takes many things into consideration when they choose an apprentice, given that the master is welcoming an eventual colleague and possible successor into the trade network. The apprentice’s attitude and sincerity is of utmost importance since the master wants to secure a long-term mentorship. And indeed the apprentice has the responsibility of taking care of the master in the future. Such a traditional system of “Heritage” is a multi-dimensional process of transmission in which numerous social and cultural elements are embedded.

The “material” and “non-material” dichotomy, however, should not be the sole solution for addressing issues relating to “heritage.” Our “non-material” knowledge is important not simply because it produces “material” substance, but also because it is important in maintaining human relationship and social organizations. The bearers of heritage have their individual preferences for choosing their learners and the contents of their teaching. In this process, the meaning and value of a “material object” is not permanent; people’s views on an object can be affected by many factors. The relationship between the “material” and “non-material” is therefore of mutual influence, and is based on interaction between the two.

(II)

Textbooks are used to present historical events and their processes. To raise students’ interest and to enhance their understanding, teachers may try to bring historical events to life using audio-visual aids in the classroom. If the students were taken to the scene of a historical event, however, not only would their interest in the subject be enhanced, but they would have the opportunity to appreciate the
complexity of the human society. Indeed, field trips is an invaluable tool for learning. The field becomes a classroom where students are brought into the actual scene of society and of history where all the inter-related intricacies and layers illustrating human social relations can be explored. In order for students to have a better understanding of the wider environment, they must be equipped with historical, social, and ecological background information. And because people are the crucial element of the scene, we invite senior members of the community, who have a deep understanding of the local history and society, to be the local instructors for the fieldtrip. The natives’ narratives on local social and cultural conditions, especially the instructors’ personal experiences in handling difficulties and setbacks, are particularly appealing to students. Although the exchange between the local instructors and the students, in the format of a seminar discussion, may not provide students with ready answers, it gives them the opportunity to discover further issues and questions. So fieldwork is very different from textbook-style learning as students may choose to interact with local people and gain from them a firsthand understanding of their community.

This study project is designed around Tai O in Hong Kong and Nansha in Guangzhou, and addresses ways in which students can learn from local communities as well as providing a study guide on basic issues relating to heritage raised from the two field sites. “Heritage,” as a carrier of history, is part of the socio-cultural processes involving individuals, communities, local societies, and globalization, and is an important factor in how a local community interacts with local and external factors.

Tai O is a coastal town on the eastern Pearl River estuary, and was once an important fishing port for Hong Kong and nearby areas. Although Tai O’s economy began to decline in the 1970s, it is still a place with a rich local heritage including many and frequent communal activities. Tai O is an important venue for understanding the culture and society of early Hong Kong and the Pearl River estuary. Nansha is situated on the western side of the Pearl River estuary. Nansha has always been an integral part of the Pearl River Delta reclamation process, something that has been on-going for thousands of years. First emerging as a “sand field” (shatian, 沙田) area from the open sea, Nansha was then converted to farm land, for agricultural and aquaculture purposes and is now dedicated to technological and industrial development. Nansha is an ideal location for understanding the development of southern China in the last several decades.
This resource package contains three booklets. The first volume consists of four chapters on theory and practice. The first chapter introduces the basic concepts and discusses what is meant by “Heritage,” “Tangible Cultural Heritage” and “Intangible Cultural Heritage.” In Chapter Two, the meaning of heritage is examined in its actual contexts, such as historic buildings, popular religion, tourism and museums. The third chapter discusses the relationship among cultural relics, heritage, and identity. It reveals that nostalgia and identity construction are important to understand why people preserve cultural relics and are interested in traditional activities. It is the participants who give meanings or assign functions to the cultural relics and items of heritage. The fourth chapter is about different methods of studying cultural relics and heritage.

The second volume presents the results of the field workshops in Tai O and Nansha we arranged for teachers. We include worksheets, complete with structural questions, to guide participants on a step-by-step trail to master local history and heritage. We highly recommend facilitating exchanges with the locals, as this provides an opportunity to understand issues from the perspective of members of the local communities. Having participated in the two workshops, teachers were invited to a review session for sharing and evaluation. The field trips to Tai O and Nansha in this project can be used as reference models from which teachers may develop their own trips to other areas of interest.

The third volume contains reference materials related to heritage and heritage conservation, including Hong Kong legislation, international conservation charters and conventions, and some references to relevant websites. Also included is an annotated bibliography on heritage studies.

This collection is the result of a series of lectures and field trips. In 2009, Education Bureau of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region commissioned the South China Research Center of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to organize the program, Heritage Studies: Hong Kong and Its Neighboring Areas in the Zhujiang Delta Region (In-Service Teacher Training Course for the S4-6 History Curriculum). (Included in the program were four lectures,
and field visits held in Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta.) More than a hundred teachers attended the lectures and activities, the details of which were posted on the web. We also wanted to provide these articles and reference materials in book form as this would be more convenient for teachers. The authors, therefore, volunteered their valuable time to edit the materials and make this happen.

The implementation of this program and the publication of the articles are the results of the work and support of colleagues in the South China Research Center of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. I would like to thank Chau Ching, Chen Jinhong, Cheung Siu-woo, Christopher Cheng, Fung Ching-yee, Fung Man-ki, Kwok Shiu-yan, Leung Wai-lam, Lo Wai-ling, Ma Jianxiong, Ma Kin-hang, Shu Ping, Tsui Yuen-ling, Wong Chin-ho, Wong Wing-ho, Yan Zhidan and Zhang Jinfu. Of course, the publication of this package owes much to the support and encouragement of the Personal, Social and Humanities Education Section, Curriculum Development Institute of the Education Bureau, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. We hope this resource package, a product of the efforts of so many people, will provide help in Hong Kong’s heritage education and conservation.
Book 1
Theory and Practice
Heritage and Cultural Relics
1.1
What is “Heritage”?
LIU Tik-sang

(1) Deconstructing Heritage

In most Hong Kong Government’s publications, the term “Heritage” refers to material items. This may be related to heritage preservation in Hong Kong. The first ordinance to protect heritage was the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance introduced in 1976. This ordinance was drafted to protect the monuments, which are all tangible objects. In 2007, the Hong Kong Government established a new Development Bureau to oversee Hong Kong’s development and heritage preservation. However, items to be preserved are mainly tangible objects, mostly old buildings.

The term “Heritage” has many meanings. Basically, it comprises the items of the past which are considered valuable in human society. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary* (2002), heritage refers to “(i) things such as works of arts, cultural achievements and folklore that have been passed on from earlier generations; (ii) property that has been or may be inherited by an heir.” For example, folklore, which includes all items of local customs, is considered heritage and is regarded as “valuable property.” The intangible or the ones with no economic value are hence neglected. The other part of the explanation, inherited property, refers to the things passed down from a previous generation, hence emphasizing the meaning of preservation, but neglecting the possibility of use, modification and transformation. Considering the changing social and economic environments, people will make use of the things left behind by earlier generations in different ways. So, I find this explanation is not useful for understanding the meaning of heritage. Heritage should refer to the things that we consider as important, whether tangible or intangible, passed down from previous generations, we want to preserve and continue to promote.

(2) Forms of Heritage

Objects left by earlier generations, for example antiquities and monuments, are tangible objects. They are relatively easy to understand and appreciate. Many things passed down and are considered of value, are in fact intangible, for example, oral
traditions, myths, skills, and local knowledge. These seem to be abstract, and not easily comprehensible; however, these could also be closely related to our daily lives. Such items of intangible heritage are closely related to our thoughts. It is through these that we construct various tangible and intangible items. It can be said that all the tangible objects are created by intangible principles or methods. This is what we call intangible heritage.

To comprehend Intangible Heritage, we need to understand how society and culture are maintained. In our minds, we have conceived a norm of life to appreciate our own culture and society. Under these principles, we create various items; both intangible and tangible, both concrete and ephemeral (existing only temporarily) objects. We maintain them through teaching and learning. However, local knowledge is passed down the generations through training or oral means. Of course, we can jot notes or use audio-video equipment to make records. However, many of our daily customs are passed down unconsciously. Ritualistic activities or technical skills requiring a lengthy period of time to learn are therefore only mastered by a small number of local experts.

Different people hold different kinds of perceptions on various topics, and the issue of heritage is one of them. In the historical process, local communities have developed their own characteristics and formulated their own cultures. The accumulated local knowledge helps people to solve their everyday problems, adapt to their distinctive ecological environment and coordinate social relationships. As we can see, local culture is shared by all members and manifests itself in different ways. In other words, different groups of people can develop their own heritage, as a mediator to understand the maintenance of a group's social order and as a way to support the creation of its own culture.

(3) Appearance, Context, Symbol, Meaning and Interpretation

Objects, rituals and activities may have a long history, and usually there is an “orthodox” interpretation. However, the truth is, different people have their own understanding and interpretation. For example, an ancestral hall, which is officially listed “Heritage,” is seen as a place for lineage members to practice their ancestral worship, organize celebratory activities, and resolve disputes among its lineage members. It is also a place for the architecture hobbyist to marvel at its artistic wonder, as well as for urban citizens to trace the history of their ancestors. Another example is
the lantern-lighting ritual, executed in the ancestral hall on the 15th day of the first lunar month; it is a ritual for the parents of the new born baby-boy to worship the ancestors. After the boy’s name is registered in the genealogy, he is admitted as a member of the lineage. For people who are interested in Chinese culture, the lantern lighting is a practice, highlighting the perpetuation of traditional Chinese culture.

Figure 1.1:
An ancestral hall is a place for lineage members to worship their ancestors, organize celebratory activities, and resolve disputes. Yau Kung Tong, Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long (Tang Ancestral Hall), 2012. (Photo taken by LIU Tik-sang)

Figure 1.2:
The families of the new born baby-boys are responsible for the lantern-lighting ritual, which is an annual event announcing new members joining the community. Lam Hau Tsuen, Yuen Long, 2010. (Photo taken by LIU Tik-sang)

There is a difference in understanding based on the identification between “symbol and meaning.” Let’s take a look at the color red, for example. When the traffic lights turn red, it means vehicles must stop or pedestrians must not cross the road. In this system, the color red is a sign of danger, however, in traditional Chinese culture, the color is auspicious. So there are multiple interpretations of the same thing, because meanings are constructed by different parties from different perspectives, based on their different cultures and contexts.

From an analytical perspective, objects and ritualistic activities are considered as symbols. The symbol carries different meanings because of the variety of interpretations. Individuals and organizations who are influenced by their own cultures, follow a unique trail of history and development, therefore different interpretations are developed in the process.

(4) Sense, Identity and Agency
Objects, architecture, routine rituals and customs can remain in existence for a long time, even beyond the life-cycle of an individual human being. Rituals are able to connect different people together, at different times. People develop their connections with certain objects as well as their identity, in a locality, organization and society. Cultural heritage, such as a number of historical buildings and traditional festivals, provides a chance for people to think and experience a different set of emotions.

Interestingly, although people in a society share a common culture, individuals are not passive culture-taker. Instead they may exercise their intention to change the practices of local customs to offer a new set of meanings to the inherited heritage. Different historical development and social trends could thus affect people’s definition of cultural continuity. In other words, it means the original reason for cultural continuity can be neglected while some elements which were once disregarded could suddenly become important.

We may treat many things as cultural heritage. However, on many occasions, the selection of cultural heritage reflects the social cultural context. The selection of cultural heritage items could explain individual, social, national and even human existence and establish a collectively accepted and recognized “history.”

(5) Heritage and Social Relations

Social relations play a vital role in the continuation of human society, with solidarity being necessary to safeguard heritage. The formation of local culture helps resolve either social or environmental problems, and to provide a set of rules which governs social relations. These include family, kinship, rituals and so forth. Very often, the group members do not need to understand the significance behind these rules; they usually follow the rules which they have inherited from their ancestors. From a researcher’s point of view, we attempt to understand the rationale behind traditional customs, within their particular historical context.

Let us take lineage as an example. During the dynastic eras, lineages in remote locations depended on farming practices, and lineages organized their own defense corps to defend themselves. In this social organization, the male members were dominant, with sons having the rights to inherit their father’s property. Ancestral property was set up for the descendents to inherit. Daughter did not have the rights to
property because a daughter would be given a dowry when she got married.

Ancestral hall, genealogy and ancestral worship of lineages are common forms of “heritage” nowadays. These three elements are important to maintain the social organization of an identified group. The heritage thus becomes a continuation of local society for its lineage members.

Figure 1.3:
The decennial Jiao festival is an important event for maintaining relationship among village members. The venue for the Jiao stage and the pencai feast, Shan Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long, 2011. (Photo taken by LIU Tik-sang)

(6) Whose Heritage?

Today’s global economy means that many traditional economic activities have been replaced. Nowadays people are moving to urban areas to seek job opportunities, therefore threatening the continuity of traditional culture in rural society. Urban residents who may not understand the significance behind traditional customs, might view them as exotic. As such, in the name of tourism, these customs are transformed into “cultural capital”; this paves the way for the commercialization of heritage. The heritage found in rural society has become a means for urban dwellers or organizations to reflect on their past. These “outsiders” have their own interpretation of heritage and this is also significant for its continuation.

More simply said, people add their own meanings to a specific object, even if it does not belong to them. It is interesting that when many people recall the past, the same thing, may yield different interpretations, and the owners’ may not be the most dominant. Moreover, the local people may adapt to and/or agree with the interpretations that have been generally accepted by an outside majority. For example, if a wedding ritual becomes a performance, to attract tourists, it is very possible that the local community may eventually give up the traditional ritual. Commoditization may in fact destroy the communal element of heritage.

Social change, urbanization and globalization, behind the hypothesis of economic interests, places heritage and local culture under threat. Despite the fact that
some heritages may be preserved, at the same time, the changing social organization in traditional rural society changes the relationship among the members in the organization. Different interested groups competed for the rights for the reinterpretation of the heritage in order to have a share in the resource behind.

The continuity of cultural heritage depends much on the communal support, people’s attention and willingness to maintain it. In other words, heritage is a key factor for community renewal. Therefore, interaction between both heritage and the community are vital to ensure its cultural continuity.

Readings

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Why do we conserve Cultural Heritage? What is the effect of engaging in this work? Some people think that heritage conservation is to express their views to the government, to promote their civic awareness. However, in many cases, the cultural heritage conservation helps us understand our own environment.

Cultural Heritage is a kind of conservation of social memory for many people. Take Haw Par Villa and Tiger Balm Gardens for example, the Tiger Balm Gardens was the first theme park at that time, while Haw Par Villa was a private house not open to the public, and designed in a Southeast Asian architectural style. However, many Hong Kong people feel that Tiger Balm Gardens does not deserve to be retained, but Haw Par Villa does. Then how do we define Cultural Heritage? Which of the two, Haw Par Villa or Tiger Balm Gardens, will be defined as Cultural Heritage? Another comparable example is Chi Lin Nunnery. It was finely built with the Canadian wood, in a Japanese architectural style learnt from the counterparts of Tang Dynasty. The question is, could it be regarded as cultural heritage, if Tiger Balm Gardens is not?

Flagstaff House Museum, that was the Commander’s Official Residence before the handover, is the oldest Western style architecture in Hong Kong at present. It is basically English style, mixed up with Chinese raw materials and style. However, nowadays it is surrounded by skyscrapers and the original historical environment no longer exist. Is this what we want to conserve? Furthermore, what is being at stake? Is it the relics we found in Hong Kong or heritage we made to commemorate a sad memory like those during the period of Japanese occupation?

Historical factors are taken into consideration of the definition of cultural heritage, such as the long-standing Happy Valley Cemetery. But who are buried there? How did they die? Why were people without Christian identity also buried there? St. John’s Cathedral was firstly built by Englishmen, and was destroyed during the Japanese occupation, then was reconstructed and gradually expanded. The lives of each of us may also be associated with this church.

Cultural meaning of architecture is another factor. The roof of a Taiwanese
temple is of Minnan style, and the space is also typical of the temple environment. This building is new, but it was preserved not only because of its material characteristics, but also the ideas behind it, institutions, civil and human belief, culture, life and habits. Can this temple be considered as a cultural relic? What’s more, traditional Chinese architecture has a function of “view borrowing,” which brings the scenes of the distance to the viewers through its spatial arrangement. This type of architecture usually appears in the gardens of a rich family, for enjoyment of the young ladies, who seldom had the chance to leave the house. And other characteristics of the traditional architectures, like leaking windows, decorative patterns as “bamboo delivering safety” and “aerial mammals and mice meaning blessing,” also convey a lot of information about Chinese culture. In Japan, the most important heritage is not the architectures themselves, but rather architectural technology, such as construction and maintenance technology of Toshodai.

Figure 1.4:
Restoration of the Toshodai-ji Temple, Nara, Japan, 2005. (Photo taken by Susanna SIU Lai-kuen)

Cultural heritage also explains the natural and man-made environment of life in the past. Yim Tin Tsai, a Hakka Catholic village in Hong Kong, has a prominent church with a red top. Behind the church are the houses of its village residents, and next to the church is a school, which was formerly the residence of the priest. The villagers also attend Mass with local Hakka inhabitants. They made fish ponds in the saltern, and constructed a Hakka cemetery behind the hill, next to the church. So the whole village, and the architecture in it, have their own peculiar characteristics. If a Cultural Heritage is to be selected, which one should be considered? The church, houses, the school, saltern, the cemetery, or the whole place?

History of the New Territories can tell us many similar stories relating to the wealth of the villages. One example is the Tsang Tai House. It is reported that a pirate left a few cans of money and departed. Then the ancestors of Tsang Tai House used the money to build the house. Tsang Tai House is a unique Hakka round house, which is designed for defense. With mountains behind and the hill sides around, the geomantic orientation is particularly good. But we are not able to visit this big house.
Does it still qualify as cultural heritage?

The interpretation, understanding and association of Modern people also affect the definition of heritage. The Wishing Tree in Lam Tsuen of Tai Po in Hong Kong attracts many visitors because people believe it can make dreams come true. I have visited some very important historical cultural heritage. There is a bronze cow sculpture which was originally part of the building in Japan. However, there are some traveller’s tales surrounding it which attract tourists, to touch the nose of the copper cow for good fortune, so that it becomes a special thing. People think that land is the gods, but the land of each village has a different understanding and imagination shaped by the image of the land. Foreign tourists think that Temple Street is Hong Kong’s cultural heritage, but the locals of Temple Street, think that it is similar to Sham Shui Po. The stone of P’eng-hu in Taiwan is shaped like two hearts. This also becomes a scenic spot and cultural heritage. In fact, the stone was originally built for fishermen to catch fish, and to trap fish. But now, many people are attracted here for its amorism, since it is misinterpreted as a symbol of eternal love.

![Double-heart stone structure, Penghu, Taiwan, 2004. (Photo taken by Susanna SIU Lai-kuen)](image)

There is a further culture that is intangible, such as the cooking methods of Hakka people, Hakka Tea and so forth. Is this also cultural heritage?

Buildings at different times have different images. Let’s look at the seven-storey building in Hong Kong (tang lou). It seems that people used to live more comfortably in the seven-storey buildings than in wooden buildings, since each room has its own space. Nevertheless, the children do not like these types of residence, because it symbolizes poverty, and hope it will be demolished. On the other hand, scholars think that the seven-storey building is heritage and is therefore worthy of conservation. Because it was built very quickly, in a rough and unsophisticated style, it is practical and creates a unique culture for human interaction. When the relationship between space and people is interdependent and intimate, as a result, the neighborhood relationships are also well maintained.
The United Nations also have some viewpoints related to Cultural Heritage. That is, cultural heritage appears in different forms, which is based on our memories, and that we have a responsibility to conserve cultural heritage. Recently the United Nations have added supplements to these definitions, as it is obvious Cultural Heritage changes over time. In 2004 and 2005, the English Heritage definition widened was broadened from the physical thing to include its historical environment, however, insufficient attention is paid to intangible cultural heritage.

In short, there is no standard answer to the definition of Cultural Heritage. We can understand, Cultural Heritage as museum collections, ancient architecture, cultural landscapes, historic environment and archaeological heritage, natural environment, the traditional way of life, the overall quality of life or people’s creations and so on. Thus, in 2004 the Hong Kong Government reviewed its cultural policy. The main concern refers to what is our cultural heritage and the different understanding on cultural heritage because it will ultimately determine what kind of things we conserve, such as for example Japan’s traditional technologies mentioned above. Do we conserve the thing itself, or the idea behind it? How do we save such Heritage? Who is responsible for funding the preservation of Cultural Heritage? These are the issues that deserve our attention.

How is Cultural Heritage formed? First, things are created by people, and then they are used, lastly are chosen as cultural heritage. Therefore, professionals need to choose them carefully, or else the impact is far-reaching. Whether one thing is cultural heritage, or not, depends on the community. In the selection process, not only the policy makers working in the government, but everyone should participate. On the other hand, there is much controversy over the choice of Cultural Heritage. Two years ago, for instance, the citizens consider it necessary to conserve King Yin Lane, which is a mixture of Chinese and Western architectural styles. Many sight-seeing buses stop there and let tourists alight to take photographs.

The controversy over Central Star Ferry is another case. Many citizens who sailed in the last ferry happily took photographs. But before long, they started to protest. So what is the difference between the ferry takers and the protesters? Do they belong to two different groups, or the same group?

What is the definition of Cultural Heritage? Different people have different points of
view. Previously, cultural heritage referred to old buildings. The preservation method involves evicting residents buying out the property and then repairing it. However, today, Cultural Heritage is no longer about simply retaining a building. This definition should be abandoned. Assuming that temple street is defined as heritage, and its preservation is to drive the peddlers away, and prohibit shopping, however such practice would simply ignore the importance of Temple Street.

In conclusion, we have not successfully identified the concept of cultural heritage, neither do we cease developing and updating our knowledge of cultural heritage. The Cultural Heritage is not a static concept, and we need to realize all its as peels in order to understand and explain it.

Readings

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The lecture discusses two areas: (1) the definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage; and (2) how the preservation has come to bring in Hong Kong, i.e. the development of including Intangible Cultural Heritage on the agenda of cultural heritage preservation.

(1) Definition and Historical Background of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Although Intangible Cultural Heritage and Tangible Cultural Heritage are two relative concepts, the two categories are both important parts of cultural heritage. Before 1970s, most nations only focused on preserving Tangible Heritage like historical buildings, monuments and archaeological relics. The Tangible Heritage becomes museums only if it carries no human activities; so, the traditions and meanings in Intangible Cultural Heritage become part of preservation. As oral transmission is the major way of passing traditions, the target of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage is not an object but human beings. A more precise explanation is preserving the skills and ideas of people who pass the Intangible Cultural Heritage from one generation to the next.

Japan is the first country to start preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage. In 1950, it passed a law to preserve Intangible Cultural Heritage as “Invisible Cultural Heritage” (無形文化遺產), in which “invisible” means “intangible forms.” In 1962, South Korea also passed a law to preserve its Intangible Cultural Heritage.

What is Intangible Cultural Heritage? The example of Kushida Shrine in Fukuoka City, Japan illustrates the definition. At Kushida Shrine, there is a five metre tall Kazariyama. The inscription of a stele next to comma displays the words “guo zhongyao wuxing minzu wenhua cai” (A nationally Significant Intangible Cultural Asset 國重要無形民族文化財). During the major festival each year, the local people bring portable shrines, this tradition is carried out by a particular group of people at a particular time and location. So, the medium of this invisible cultural tangible is the people themselves; the preservation of their activities is also dependent on the location and the space. Another example is the wedding system in Japan. Many Japanese still hold their wedding ceremonies in shrines. The procedures and
participants form an invisible cultural tradition in Japan. Wedding ceremonies held at Kushida Shrine, is part of a Shinto tradition in Japan which has a longer legacy than Buddhism. The wedding rituals performed in this shrine are intangible cultural traditions. At the end of the wedding ceremony, the participants leave and only the physical structure of the shrine remains. So, we can never understand the meanings of these traditional activities without the knowledge of how people use their historical building.

In 1972, UNESCO enforced the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (《保護世界文化和自然遺產公約》) which focused on Tangible Cultural Heritage, rather than intangible elements. The Convention has had great impact worldwide on the efforts of preserving cultural heritage; there are more than 800 heritage with outstanding universal value, included in the list of World Heritages. As World Heritage is the facilitator of cultural tourism, encouraging regional economic development, there has been increasing numbers of applications for Intangible Cultural Heritage in China in recent years.

In the 1980s, people realised that some local traditions, which were not preserved, disappeared rapidly in the globalization process. Different parts of the world look alike under global economic integration, in which a strong economy supersedes the weak one. Likewise, dominant cultures edge those weak ones out of the community.

The cultural shock is vigorous; many nations especially small countries advocate the protection of marginalized cultures, and preserve cultural diversity as a form of resistance. The meaning of Intangible Cultural Heritage is that there is no high or low culture, so every culture enjoys the right to transmit their heritage to the next generations. In 1989, the United Nations passed Recommendation for the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (《保護傳統文化民俗建議書》) and promoted the concept of “Cultural Right” in 1992.

“Cultural Right” by United Nations enshrines the right of every ethnic minority to continue and develop their own culture, and not be eliminated by dominant cultures. Language is an example. There are about 6,700 languages in the contemporary world, according to the statistics of United Nations, though there were more than ten thousand languages in the past. Languages are the roots of the ethnic groups; it encapsulates the very essence of their particular cultures. Since no one protects the marginalized languages, a language eventually dies out as the speakers decrease in
number. For example, in Hong Kong there are different dialects like Hakka, Punti, Tanka used by different ethnic groups. In the recent years, however, Cantonese has become a dominant language which has a significant impact on the use of the other dialects. There are six official languages in the United Nations, and that most of the world’s population are using these languages; the remaining six thousand or so languages are used by a small number of people and are likely to disappear faster than ever before.

In 1998, UNESCO launched the programme of Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (《宣佈人類口頭及非物質遺產傑代表作》). The purpose was to create a list for people to recognize the importance of Intangible Cultural Heritage and local traditions. UNESCO announced the first proclamation of 19 masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (人類非物質文化遺產代表作) in May, 2001. There are 19 masterpieces and Chinese Kun Qu Opera is included. In 2003 and 2005, there are two additional lists and the number of masterpieces increased to 90. There are four masterpieces from China: Kun Qu Opera (2001), the Guqin and its music (2003), the Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang (2005) and the Traditional Folk Long Song Urtiin Duu (together with Mongolia) (2005). Currently China has the highest number of masterpieces in the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in the world.

The programme stopped soon afterwards. In October 2003, UNESCO adopted Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (《保護非物質文化遺產公約》) and it was enforced in April, 2006. Intangible Cultural Heritage includes the cultural practices, performances, knowledge, skills and local traditions. According to the convention, the definition has to satisfy two criteria: (1) it lasts for a long period, passing through generations; (2) the subject is an ethnic group or individual who builds up their sense of belonging, identity and historical consciousness in the passing of Intangible Cultural Heritage. There are five domains in the convention, including (1) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; (2) performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals and festive events; (4) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (5) traditional craftsmanship.

In Hong Kong, the five categories of Intangible Cultural Heritage include the following. The first category includes Oral traditions and expressions comprise Cantonese, Hakka, Waitou, Tanka and Hoklo, dialects which are dying out rapidly;
oral traditions like the story of Cheung Po Tsai, myth of Yeung Hau, princess story of the Tang lineage of Lung Yuek Tau, story of Pui To Buddhist. The second category, performing arts, includes Cantonese Opera, Naamyam, Puppet Opera, Chaozhou Opera performed during the Hungry Ghost Festival. Cantonese opera once declined between 1970s and 1990s; however, the government has provided some resources to promote it as a form of education, and so it may continue for sometime. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau have cooperated to apply to the UNESCO to enlist Cantonese Opera in masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Examples of local customs are ancestral rites of lineages in the New Territories, dragon boat parade at Tai O, Hungry Ghost Festival, Tin Hou Festival in Cheung Chau’s Sai Wan, Tin Hou Festival of Shap Pat Heung, Birthday of Patron Saint of Expectant Mothers, Jiao festival of Cheung Chau, Shek O, Tai Long Wan and Kut O. These activities continually change through time, most of the time retaining its original functions and meanings. However, difficulties arise when it is passed onto the next generation or their activity space gradually disappears under urban development. The fourth category is the knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, like the customs of Tai Sui, villain hitting and Wishing Tree in Lam Tsuen; though these activities are categorized as “superstition”, they are an integral part of Chinese value systems and customs. The fifth category is traditional handicraft, it contains erecting a matshed, basking shrimp paste, weaving seine, street side food stall, preparing basin food, old market and so forth; some are disappearing quickly, while others have undergone great changes which ultimately affects its meanings. Herbal tea has been inscribed as Intangible Cultural Heritage at state level, so the practice of producing herbal tea has been revived.

(2) Safeguarding Measures for Intangible Cultural Heritage

According to Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the participant countries are required to create a list of their Intangible Cultural Heritages. The list requires research and surveys, for example, to conduct a territory-wide survey of Hong Kong’s Intangible Cultural Heritage. Another step is to form a mechanism for protection. UNESCO established the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding for national application. The List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding sets up an emergency fund to provide funding and technical assistance to preserve the heritage of small and poor countries. The third step is an Intergovernmental Committee meeting by the participant.
countries in June, 2006 and 2008; the meetings established and enforced the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In 1980s and 1990s, China participated in the establishment of the convention. China became one of the countries to ratify the convention in 2004, and the State Council issued Directives on Strengthening the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Our Country (《關於加強我國非物質文化遺產公約的意見》) in 2005. A liaison meeting system among 9 ministries was set up for protecting Intangible Cultural Heritage; and, a system of listing Intangible Cultural Heritage at national, provincial and county levels was also established. A national census of Intangible Cultural Heritage was carried out from 2005. In September 2006, the Chinese Academy of Arts was appointed to be the centre responsible for practical measures such as census, research and protection.

In 2006, the State Council announced the first national list. It included 518 items of which Cantonese Opera and herbal tea were nominated by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau. In 2008, another list of 510 items was announced.

To follow the work of the convention, the Hong Kong government has established the Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit, under Hong Kong Cultural Museum, in March 2006. A territorial-wide survey is proposed as the first proclamation. Also, in July 2008, the government set up the Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee consisting of ten professionals and scholars to monitor the census and provide suggestions to the government on protective measures. After the listing, the government has created a series of protective measures such as research, preservation, promotion, education and revitalization.

Figure 1.6: Traditional festive event: Bun towers of the Jiao festival on Cheung Chau, 2012. (Photo taken by CHAU Hing-wah)
Figure 1.7:
Traditional festive event: A new dragon boat in Tai O’s Dragon Boat Water Parade, 2012. (Photo taken by CHAU Hing-wah)

Figure 1.8:
Traditional festive event: Chiu Chow operatic artists carried the statue of prince to the deity shed for worshipping during the Yu Lan Ghost Festival of the Chiu Chow community in Causeway, 2012. (Photo taken by CHAU Hing-wah)

Figure 1.9:
Traditional craft of building dragon boat: One of the three dragons for the Tai O Dragon Boat Water Parade was built by the master craftsmen in Aberdeen in August 2011. (Photo taken by CHAU Hing-wah)

Figure 1.10:
Traditional paper-craft technique: A paper-craft master was making a large-scale dragon lantern for the Mid Autumn Festival, 2012. (Photo taken by CHAU Hing-wah)

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Heritage in Action
POON Shuk-wah, WONG Wing-ho
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Heritage is an evolving concept. One facet of its dynamics is exemplified in a shift from the initial focus on tangible relics (Tangible Heritage), one which emphasizes form, visibleness and tactility, to one which also embraces the more elusive and abstract (Intangible Heritage). Heritage is a highly controversial concept. Since different people in the society hold different opinions on what cultural attributes are valuable, deserving treatment as a legacy for future generations; nor can they come to a consensus lightly. This explains why heritage preservation has prompted so much controversy in Hong Kong in recent years. Heritage is naturally more than a concept; it involves a series of actions and experimentation in monument preservation and artifact display, extending to even the manipulation of relics by different interest groups.

This paper, divided into four parts, focuses on heritage in action. The first discusses tangible heritage in Hong Kong. This involves how conservation of historic relics and structures came about in Hong Kong in both the international and local historical contexts. It further analyzes the different interpretations to heritage conservation assigned by the government and conservation groups, as well as their divergent actions as a result. The second part focuses on Intangible Heritage. It discusses how Cultural Heritage is demonstrated through religious festivities and celebrations within the local community. The third part analyzes how heritage has been deployed as a resource to promote tourism. The last part focuses on how our past has been selectively displayed through artifacts at museums.

(1) Tangible Heritage: Preservation of Historical Sites and Buildings in Hong Kong

When did the awareness for the preservation of historical structures emerge in human history? Heritage conservation can be regarded as a brand new phenomenon. Conservationists were concerned about the extensive disappearance of ancient structures, which they regarded as valuable. This awareness first emerged in 19th century Britain. However, conservationists at the time cast their watchful eyes on restoration rather than on demolition of old buildings. At that time, clergymen in various parts of Britain were dedicated to restoring churches. They claimed that their
restorations was to restore the original façade of churches in medieval times. However, conservationists perceived these renovations, which were carried out with little historical basis, as destructive in nature. In 1877, William Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), with the objective of establishing the principles for the restoration of historical buildings, so as to preserve their original outlook and value.

Although the concept of heritage preservation came into existence in 19th century Britain, the Athens Charter was enacted in the 1930s, this concept – new type of preservation – only gained popularity after the Second World War. With large-scale reconstructions and economic developments looming in Europe, it was widely feared that historical monuments would slowly disappear under the tidal wave of economic developments. Thus, it can be argued that the objective of heritage conservation was to restrain economic developments from over-stretching, so as to maintain a delicate balance between economic development and heritage preservation.

1970s was the turning point for heritage preservation. The UNESCO’s Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage lifted heritage preservation to an international level. The Convention started to compile a list of heritage sites from around the world in order to preserve cultural and natural heritage. Under this wave of thinking, heritage conservation became an international act.

As in Europe, heritage preservation awareness came into being in Hong Kong in a similar vein. The economy in Hong Kong took off in the 1950s. In 1970s, numerous historical structures, especially those colonial buildings in Central were being demolished. For instance, Queen’s House was pulled down in 1959 to make way for the Mandarin Hotel, while its neighbouring Prince’s Building was also dismantled in 1962, only to be replaced by a new building bearing the same name. It was felt that changes and developments in the city were taking place at an alarming pace and needed to be restrained. Of course, the movement for the preservation of government heritage was also closely associated with the political environment in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 1970s. The 1967 riot had prompted the colonial government to adjust its colonial policies, and among them was cultural policy. There are a series of examples. From 1969 to 1973, the Hong Kong Government organized the “Hong Kong Festival” three times. The Public Records Office was also set up in 1972. At the same time, legislation on the protection of historical structures was being drafted by
the government. Further, in 1976, the Antiquities and Monuments Office was established. It can be seen that heritage protection movement came into being in the 1970s. This movement had a lot to do with the speedy economic developments in Hong Kong, as well as a change in the government’s cultural policy.

Although the colonial government had put efforts into preserving historical structures in the 1970s, it would be erroneous to understand historical structure protection as a purely top-down movement. In fact, a number of valuable historical buildings were demolished after the passing of heritage protection legislation. In the 1970s and 1980s, popular movements were initiated by the public, to fight for the preservation of cultural heritage, for the perceived failure on the part of the government to do the same. Although ending in failure, these movements sowed the seeds for heritage protection movements among the public in Hong Kong.

The bone of contention for heritage conservation in Hong Kong in the 1970s and 1980s was the Tsim Sha Tsui Railway Terminus and the Hong Kong Club. The Kowloon-Canton railroad became operational in 1910, while the terminus and Clock Tower were completed in 1913 and 1915 respectively. It is mentioned above that the 1967 riot had brought about substantial adjustments in cultural policies in Hong Kong. This involved the decision of the colonial government to dismantle the terminus in 1977 and to replace it with a Cultural Centre. The Hong Kong Heritage Society - formed by a group of western conservationists and chaired by David Russell, a British architect - advocated a different proposal. It sought the transformation of the terminus into a Cultural Centre. In fact, the spirit behind the proposal – “adaptive reuse” – is actively pursued by the government as a heritage preservation initiative today. However, this concept was perhaps too advanced to be taken up by the government at the time. The Heritage Society therefore appealed to the Hong Kong public, including the sympathetic Tsim Sha Tsui Kaifong Association, to join the terminus protection campaign, in which signatures of the public were collected. Receiving no positive response from the government, the Heritage Society took the movement to another level. The Society sent the over 10,000 signatures they had collected in a petition to the Queen in Britain. The British government ultimately, however, endorsed the decision of the colonial government, allowing the train terminus to be demolished. Yet, this struggle was however not a complete failure, since the government finally agreed to retain the Clock Tower.

The eventual demolition of the Tsim Sha Tsui Railway Terminus and
preservation of the clock tower reflected that in the Hong Kong historical context, social value, historical value and architectural value alone are not determinants of whether a historic monument can be preserved as part of Hong Kong’s heritage. There are other elements at work: negotiation, struggle and compromise, with the populace on one side, and the government on the other.

The second “battlefield” of the Hong Kong Heritage Society was the Hong Kong Club. The Hong Kong Club was set up in 1897 by the most powerful European businessmen in Hong Kong – who were commonly called “Taipan” – as a venue for private social gatherings. Land value in Central soared considerably in the 1970s, so the committee, formed by the Club members, voted in 1979 in favour of pulling down the Club, and rebuilding a high-rise on the same site. Since the Hong Kong Club was privately owned, the Heritage Society pleaded with the government to preserve the Club building, while transferring the Club committee’s right to develop the club house to a nearby building. The Society further proposed that the Club building be used as a central library and an exhibition centre. However, this suggestion was not accepted by the government, and the Hong Kong Club was eventually demolished.

Why were the proposals to preserve historical structures vetoed? First, the government considered the cost of retaining these historical buildings too high. Second, it was suggested in the 1970s that colonial structures brought back unhappy memories among the Hong Kong Chinese of their plight of being colonized. Colonial structures therefore served no value to be retained. Even the Antiquities Advisory Board regarded western architecture as not making much sense to the Hong Kong Chinese, and turned their attention to restoring Chinese architecture, such as ancestral halls and temples, in the New Territories. The Heritage Society ultimately decided to dissolve in 1983, after the two less than successful campaigns. Chairman David Russell remarked poignantly that Hong Kong was a society lacking in depth and personality, “We’ve come to accept the fact that Hong Kong is not a cultured society. It is a plastic society.”

To sum up, first, heritage conservation emerged to restrain urban development which was thought to have been over-stretched. Second, conservation policy was by no means a purely top-down measure. Heritage preservation movement in the 1970s became a new form of social activism. We see changes between the present campaigns and those in the 1970s in terms of membership, forms of struggle and the definition of heritage. Westerners used to be the backbone of the campaigns in the
early days. Over the years, however, these campaigns have become more localized, and participated largely by local Chinese. Third, preservation of historical structures involves urban development and urban planning direction. Conservationists all have a common query: should the government dominate the whole process of urban development? Do the public also have the right to be involved? Heritage protection therefore inevitably instigates controversies, and ultimately becomes a challenge to the administrative and decision-making authority of the government. Heritage conservation, by nature, is a highly political process.

(2) Intangible Heritage – Folk Religion

Folk religion is an integral part of our own world. For the Chinese, gods, ghosts and ancestors are reflections of the earthly sphere. Folk religion, as our own invention, expresses expectations of our own lives. Both folk religion and offerings can be considered as heritage, though the process to decide which part is considered as heritage and which is not is prone to debates and compromises. Moreover, whether or not the craft employed behind folk religion is a heritage is also highly controversial.

Gods’ birthdays, Jiao festivals, and ancestral worship are three common forms of popular religion found in Hong Kong. The temple, as the focus of god’s birthday, represents an alliance of different local communities. The most famous one is the Man Mo Temple at Tai Po Market. The market is located right outside the temple. One can gauge from the prime location of the temple, its relationship with the daily lives of the local residents. Man Mo Temple represents several of the large village alliances along the coastlines of Tolo Harbour, such as Jap Wo Alliance and Fanling Alliance. Formal worships in temples are typically graced by the presence of village leaders. In the above three respects, one can see that temples, in addition to their relationship with local society, represent a community alliance. They also reflect the political power structure of the local community.

Figure 2.1:
The Man Mo Temple in Tai Po Market is a symbol of the local village alliance. Village leaders demonstrate their membership of the alliance by attending the celebration of the birthday of Guandi, one of Man Mo Temple’s patron gods. The Man Mo Temple, Tai Po
In addition to displaying the political might of the local elite, folk religion also serves the function of providing a sense of self-identity among the local villagers, or a link among different communities. For instance, the religious activities in suburban Shuen Wan of Tai Po, such as worshipping of the Earth God, pork sharing and tsu she (doing the she) ceremonies, symbolize that all participants belong to the same village and the same local community.

Also related to folk religion is the ancestral hall. An ancestral hall may serve a number of functions: as a school, an organization to protect the local community, and a symbol of local political strength. The size and decorations of an ancestral hall are demonstration of the wealth of the village or the local community.

Folk religion, and Jiao festivals, serves two main functions – one, purify harmful forces in the local community, such as ghosts; and two, strengthen the alliance by affording an opportunity for community bonding among locals. Next, we discuss some examples of the Jiao Festival practiced in various places in Hong Kong. In order to purify the entire locality during the Shek O Jiao Festival, abstinence from meat has to be observed. Access to nearby hills are also blocked. During the Jiao Festival, the entire hill at the back of the island has to be cordoned off to prevent tree felling or firewood burning. However, since Shek O is also a tourist attraction, a dispute took place when tourists were having a barbeque while neighboring local residents were practicing meat abstinence. A notice was thus put up to notify tourists that abstinence from meat is practiced by all local people during the Jiao Festival. Out of respect for local practices, all visitors should refrain from barbequing. This example shows the relationship of local traditions and tourism. Another example is Sheung Shui Jiao Festival. The matshed are lavishly decorated with floral placards. This Jiao shed is not only a religious space, but also a space of power and wealth. The floral placards, which bear the senders’ names, also signifies the social network in the community; the number of placards signifies the wealth of the community.

The rituals undertaken in Jiao worshipping comprises water drawing, selection of village representatives, putting up the list of villagers’ names, and feeding the hungry ghosts. Gods can be invited in several ways: by transporting deity images, or by writing their names on pieces of paper. During the ritual of putting up the list of
villagers’ names, nammo (Daoist priests) read out the names of all the local villagers blessed in the worship. This practice is to confirm who has paid for the ritual, who has participated and whether the names have been properly written. Feeding the hungry ghosts refers to offering “food” and thus asking them to go away. The last ritual is inviting the Ghost King to keep a watchful eye on the wandering ghosts. In the end, the Ghost King is burnt after the wandering ghosts have been sent away, which also symbolises the end of the whole ritual.

How do we understand, observe and research folk religion? Nowadays, the most common method to record and observe is simply taking photographs and videos. However, the best method is still using pen and paper to record what you hear, what you see and what you think at the time. One should not merely rely on machines because there are limitations problems with machine recordings. They cannot record your thoughts at the time. Since the researchers rely more on photo and video recordings in their field studies, they try to maintain a short physical distance from the activities and the participants. This intrusive behavior greatly affects people’s daily lives and the performance of their rituals. In a Kam Tin Jiao Festival in 1995, one of the rituals was performing martial arts. There was not a single researcher but only villagers when the ritual was performed. So was the Fanling Hung Chiu Festival in 2000 where the ritual proceeded smoothly without an incident. However in the Jiao Festival in Sheung Shui Wai in 2006, the same martial arts ritual was surrounded by cameras. It can be seen that there have been rapid changes, especially after the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997, with the growing awareness of the local community, leading to an upsurge of popular interest in local culture in Hong Kong. As a result of this, we often find many visitors at local popular religious activities.

These processes intrude on local community, not only affecting the social development of the local society, but also how the locals identify themselves with their community and the rituals. In the Sheung Shui Jiao Festival in 2006, a souvenir stall and an exhibition centre with photographs depicting the past were set up to show the outsiders the village’s own history, culture and heritage. In late 2006, villagers paraded in traditional costumes at the Kut O Jiao Festival to show outsiders their community heritage. The two above examples show the dilemma in the development of tourism, which encourages enthusiasm in the research of local culture. On the one hand, it is hoped that visitors can learn and understand more about the local history. On the other hand, there is resistance on the part of the local community due to the disruptions that incoming visitors and researchers bring. Thus, as researchers or
outsiders, we need to think about how we can make our records without interfering with the rituals.

The last question we discuss is when we decide whether or not a certain object is an Intangible Heritage, we are in fact making a decision on whether or not it is worthy of preserving. Fish Light Dance was performed in Kut O On Lung Ching Jiao Festival in 2006. A local authority in Shenzhen had applied for this dance to be proclaimed a National Intangible Heritage. This dance has had a very long history. Fishermen used to go to other villages and perform this dance in order to earn money before the Chinese New Year. In that performance, all male performers were dressed in black so as to play down the involvement of human beings in the whole performance, as their bodies were also lowered to imitate fish swimming in the water. In 2007 in Shenzhen, in the 10th anniversary celebrations of Hong Kong’s handover, Fish Light Dance was part of the celebrations with a group of young lad and lady performers all dressed in sexy costumes. The whole performance focused purely on the women’s bodies. Not surprisingly, the nature and meaning of the performance changed completely. What is the “real” Fish Light Dance? What do we inherit from Intangible Heritage? How do we conceive the changes in these performances?

(3) Tourism and Cultural Heritage

It has been mentioned in Part Two how researchers affect and change community rituals, how the local community handles visitors, and how these local communities construct their own history, artifacts and culture. Recently cultural tourism has become more and more popular. How has tourism affected the local community in recent years? Three examples are used to discuss tourism development. The first is Zhangjiajie in Mainland China. After it was proclaimed World Natural Heritage, the local government built an automatic escalator to make it more convenient for the tourists. This superimposed structure, however, is a massive desecration of the natural landscape which gained recognition of national heritage due to its unique and exquisite natural scenery. The second example is in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Tourist Association was set up in 1957 (and was renamed the Hong Kong Tourism Board in 2001) to promote Hong Kong as a shopping paradise to locals and foreigners. Hong Kong is now highlighted as a melting pot for eastern and western cultures with a gamut of heritage and cultural styles, rather than purely a place for shopping. The final example is Duk Ling. Duk Ling is a Chinese junk displaying the traits of a traditional fishing boat and rented by the Hong Kong Tourist Association, upon
receipt of complaints from foreign tourists due to the lack of Chinese style fishing junks in sight. The boat sails through Victoria Harbour at regular intervals, seemingly conveying a message that fishing boats and fishermen are a cultural characteristic of Hong Kong. In reality, Duk Ling has nothing to do with the fishing industry; it is purely a tourist attraction.

The following two examples illustrate the relationship between the local communities and tourism development. The first one is the Bun Festival in Cheung Chau. This is one of the rituals practiced in Tai Ping Qing Jiao, or the Jiao Festival. Cheung Chau’s Jiao Festival is an event that purifies and strengthens solidarity among various groups within the community. In order to promote tourism, the Bun Festival has now been set on the Buddha’s Birthday, the eighth day of the fourth lunar month. As a matter of fact, the patron deity of this festival is BeiDi (Deity of the North). On the day of the Bun Festival, it is a tradition to practice meat abstinence. A local McDonald’s restaurant therefore churns out vegetarian mushroom burgers, or varieties of vegan McDonald’s burger. Thus, even a globalized commercial corporation, like McDonald’s, is influenced by local culture. At Cheung Chau, the bun scrambling competition is held at 12 am, preceded by dragon and lion dances. At the same time, local villagers are preparing in earnest for the final and most important ritual in Tai Ping Qing Jiao Festival, the burning of the huge paper effigy of the Ghost King. This is to pay offerings to the hungry ghosts. However, at the other end of the very same venue, the performances of dragon and lion dances, which is supposed to be a ritual practiced in times of celebrations, is well underway. Therefore, the dragon and lion dances, which can be interpreted as having the religious power of driving away the hungry ghosts, produces negative impact on the Jiao Festival. The competition of bun scrambling is thronged with an excited audience, whereas nammo (Daoist priests) and local village representatives are holding a ritual to feed the ghosts. Thus, tourism has unexpectedly disturbed local religious ritual practices.

Another example is the Wishing Tree in Lam Tsuen. Wish-making at the Wishing Tree is not an indigenous Lam Tsuen culture. However, it has turned out to be a symbol of local culture as a result of tourism promotion. In the event, the Wishing Tree withered, after being inundated with wishing plates thrown on the branches as part of the wishing and blessing process. Obviously tourism has impacted on local culture. To maintain the steady revenue from tourists, another tree was planted next to the original Wishing Tree. If you believe that the Wishing Tree and the ambiance had something to do with whether your wish could come true, would you believe that the
newly planted tree is as efficacious as the original? It is superimposing a new object into local culture to replace the original object.

In this section, we have looked at local village cultures and two growing trends in recent years. The first trend is the rise in awareness of local culture. Village rituals and local events which had largely gone unnoticed in the past have gradually gained popularity among the general public as well as researchers. This has brought about two negative impacts. Local harmony is disrupted, especially during the ritual. This is mostly felt by the ritual performers, when researchers or visitors bring with them their own recording devices, video recorders in particular, which have prompted these on-lookers to interfere with the ritual space, though most of the time unintentionally. So, it is worth thinking how best to handle the situation. On the other hand, local people have started using their own culture, heritage and history to construct their sense of community, so as to inform outsiders of the virtues the villagers want them to know. Another trend which comes even before the one just discussed is the impact of tourism on local culture. Whether the impact is good or bad is a question we should also think about.

Figure 2.2:  
In the Jiao Festival in Sheung Shui Wai in 2006, the rituals were always surrounded by cameras. Sheung Shui Wai Taiping Qingjiao, 2006. (Photo taken by WONG Wing-ho)

Figure 2.3:  
In the Jiao Festival in Shek O in 2006, a dispute took place when the tourists were having a barbeque while the local residents were practicing meat abstinence. Shek O Taiping Qingjiao, 2006. (Photo taken by POON Shuk-wah)
Museum is one of the most important cultural institutions where heritage is preserved and presented to the general public. Similar to heritage conservation, museum is a new phenomenon in human history. In this section, several questions will be explored. When did museums emerge in human history? What is the difference between early museums and modern museums? How did the museums in Hong Kong come about and how were they affected by western influence?

The word “museum” comes from the Greek word “mouseion.” However, the meaning of mouseion is different from how we understand a museum today. For the Ancient Greeks, Mouseion refers to the place where the nine sisters of a Greek goddess, Muses, gathered. The Greeks believed that the nine goddesses controlled various aspects of art, such as painting and music. And the muse of artists and thinkers originated from these goddesses. So mouseion in ancient Greece was not a cultural institution displaying heritage or history. Rather, it was a place for artists and intellectuals to engage in thinking and philosophical discussions.

Science and rational thinking prevalent in the Enlightenment had a profound impact on the current concept of museum, which originated from Britain. The present outlook of people towards the world is significantly different from that of the Middle Ages, when religion was the basis of reasoning. In the period of Enlightenment, however, animal and plant specimens were collected under the influence of rationalism and science. These specimens were classified and analyzed scientifically, in the unwavering belief that these specimens were the key to understanding the universe and natural human history. Museums came into being against this background. The first museum in the world was Ashmolean at Oxford University, which was opened to the public in 1683. Its artifacts, including books, coins, geological and animal specimens, was mostly the private collection of connoisseur Ashmole. The second museum was the British Museum. As an extension of the private collection of Hans Sloane displaying scientific specimens, it was opened to the public in 1790 free of charge. The difference between these two museums is that the British Museum is the first national museum in human history. Ethnographic elements subsequently found their way into museums as a result of Western powers’ colonial expansion. As a result, objects that were preserved and displayed in museums were more than mere plant and animal specimens, they also included practical objects and remains of skeletons of the “primitive people” in the eyes of the colonists.
The early museums in Hong Kong were imbued with British cultural and imperialist influence. The first museum in Hong Kong was housed in the City Hall, which was established in 1869 by the European community and sponsored by the colonial government. The display was hardly “The Hong Kong Story” as we know today, but merely plant and animal specimens. According to a newspaper clipping in 1898, the specimens included “a crocodile’s skull from Borneo, two cobras killed at the Peak, three other snakes, a scorpion and two broad-tailed lizards caught on the island and a wire snake (tit sin she) caught in Canton.”

This museum was influenced not only by scientism championed in the Enlightenment but also by racism. Although the Hong Kong Chinese were allowed to visit the museum, they were not permitted to visit the museum during the same time period as the westerners. Different time slots were assigned to local Chinese and westerners by the museum, since the westerners were not willing to stay in the same venue with the Chinese. In 1879, Governor Hennessy demanded the museum abolish this restriction for being racist and would terminate government sponsorship should the restriction remain. However, this governmental intervention was ignored by the museum.

In 1933, owing to the expansion of its neighbour, the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, the City Hall had to be demolished. As a result, there was to be no museum in Hong Kong for about 30 years. The New City Hall, with a museum inside, was erected in 1962. However, Hong Kong did not, as yet, have its own story. The majority of the displays in the museum were specimens and historical paintings of early Hong Kong. As of the 1970s, the display of Hong Kong history gradually took shape, in the light of a change in governmental cultural policy and a rise in the number of research on local history. In 1975, the museum was relocated to the Star House, where there was a brief exhibition on local history; it was the beginnings of the Hong Kong Story. The museum was then relocated to Kowloon Park in 1983, where the Hong Kong Chinese could finally see their Hong Kong story. After the 1997 handover, the contents of the exhibition were enriched with the addition of the Opium War, as well as a gallery dedicated to the handover. The Hong Kong Story is thus no longer purely the story of Hong Kong, but one that features the “inseparable relations” between Hong Kong and Mainland China.

The heritage displayed in the museum has been constantly molded by political
It is therefore difficult to give heritage a definition, as different cultural elements are selected and highlighted at different times to create and consolidate a community to serve changing needs. The Hong Kong Story exhibition emphasizes the successful story of Hong Kong industrialization. It depicts Hong Kong as a “depoliticized, benevolent capitalist utopia.” The 1967 riot, which had significant repercussions on the society and politics of Hong Kong, was understandably downplayed. The newly established Sun Yat-sen museum also responds to the political needs of Hong Kong especially after the handover. Sun was as much a hugely controversial figure in history as a useful political resource. Sun had a close connection with Hong Kong. He pursued studies in Hong Kong and was subsequently honored as the father of the country by the Nationalist Party. As a result, after the handover in 1997, Sun was made the symbol of the political and cultural link between Hong Kong and her motherland. A scholar once said, history is about the “politics of remembering and forgetting.” When history is reduced to artifact in a museum, the tension between remembering and forgetting intensifies. Closely associated with cultural, racial, and political identifications, museums thus also become an institution that defines and creates a sense of citizenry.

Hong Kong museums are certainly not alone in this respect. Museums are commonly constrained by governments and various social groups on what history they can display. Controversies were widespread over the planned display of Enola Gay, a combat aircraft which dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945, at the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) in the United States in 1995. This exhibition was intended to show the damage the atomic bombs has caused Japanese civilians. However, this was met by severe opposition from some American veterans. They thought that as the exhibition was to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, it should have focused on the success of the Americans in ending the Pacific War, rather than to question the decision of the Americans in detonating the atomic bombs. Despite various attempts to modify the contents of the exhibition, the museum failed to reach a consensus with the veterans. The exhibition was finally called off. The curator of NASM subsequently pointed out the dilemma the exhibition faced. What was the purpose of the exhibition? Was it to allow the veterans to feel good about themselves, or to enable the public to think about the consequences of the atomic bombing? He did not believe that one exhibition can ever serve these dual purposes.

In the above two examples in Hong Kong and the United States, we can see that what
is displayed in museums is in fact a sanitized past, whereby controversial topics are largely censored. In order to cater to the wishes of people at different strata and interest groups in society, as well as to assume the political role of establishing different forms of identity, museums can hardly display the whole historical past. Our education in history and heritage should raise the awareness of students in this regard, and equip them with the skills to analyze museum displays.

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Heritage and Identity Politics
CHEUNG Siu-woo
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Heritage is a distinctive concept involving objects and customs which exists in a particular socio-political, economic, cultural and historical context. Moreover, it refers to various kinds of institutions, relationships and interactions formed around these ideas, objects and customs. Generally speaking, heritage is the phenomenon arising in a specific historical circumstance. UNESCO adopted the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage” in 1972 and “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage” in 2003. China announced two lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage at a state level in 2006 and 2008 respectively. These demonstrate how Heritage is created and developed as a specific historical phenomenon.\(^1\) The phenomenon of Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage of many Chinese ethnic minorities, especially their special socio-political institutions and personal and group experience, is valuable for our further discussions, which stimulates our thoughts and research in communities of Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta region. This lecture aims to discuss the mechanism of identity politics with a case study of ethnic minority groups in China. It contains four main parts, (1) heritage and identity; (2) heritage and the dynamics of identity; (3) heritage and identity politics, and (4) historical context of heritage and identity politics.

(1) Heritage and Identity

My own research is about a group of “Ge Jia” people in the Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture of southeast Guizhou province. In Chinese historical documents, there are various written characters regarding this group. The common character was “Ge” which had an animal radical on the left. The term “Jia” is a political category because “Ge” is not identified as a minzu by the state. Groups around them, such as Miao and Dong, are recognized as ethnic minorities by the state.

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and thus have “zu” status in the Chinese national system.

“Ge” is usually regarded as a branch of Miao in the national system, but Ge people have strongly resisted this classification. They state that they are not Miao but an individual group. Therefore, they wish to become the fifty-seventh “zu” recognized by the state.² The early request for an official identification by “Ge” was in the 1950s, when the ethnic classification project was implemented by the state. “Ge” was categorized as a “minority to be determined” at that time. While over twenty “to be determined” groups in Guizhou applied for their official identification in the early 1980s, “Ge” is one of those who have insisted not to be categorized as a branch of another “minzu” till now. But it seems that there is little hope of success for their request.³

In the early 1990s, I conducted my research in a “Ge” group of southeast Guizhou. I lived in a farmer’s home at that time. The farmer’s younger sister made a batik book-bag for her elder brother. On the bag, the girl featured her self-portrait and some characters including “Ge zu,” “Zhongguo (China),” “nu ren (woman),” “renmin (citizen)” and her name, which all reflect different identity categories (See Figure 3.2). Those Chinese characters contained all kinds of identities, which represented, the way she defined herself and the group she belonged to. This girl represented herself as a woman, as belonging to China and her institutional and political identity as a citizen. But the most obvious category was “Ge zu” which was the most prominently articulated aspect of her identity on her bag.


Figure 3.1:
A Gejia woman making batik artcraft. Matang Village, Kaili City, Guizhou, 2012. (Photo taken by CHEUNG Siu-woo)

Figure 3.2:
A book bag made by a Gejia young woman, with the batik art, for his brother. Her identities were revealed from the Chinese characters, that she learned from her brother, and her self-portrait on the book bag. Matang Village, Kaili City, Guizhou, 1993. (Photo taken by CHEUNG Siu-woo)

Compared with the personal identity, “Ge” is not a minzu but a branch of Miao in the state’s classification. The embroidery of the Guizhou Miao and the batik of Anshun city of west Guizhou were listed in the second directory of 510 items of Intangible Cultural Heritage at national level announced in 2008. For the “Ge,” these two items are both disputable. The embroidered clothes of “Ge” were called embroidery of Miao in the book Embroidery of Guizhou Miao and many batik features of “Ge” were regarded as the batik of Miao in Batik of Guizhou Miao. These two authoritative books were published by the Beijing People’s Art Press in 1982. According to the “Ge” of Huangping County, the provincial government recruited batik experts of “Ge” to go to Anshun City to teach batik techniques when it set up a batik factory there in the 1960s, so the craftwork of batik, developed in Anshun, in fact is the tradition of the “Ge” people.

So what is a *Miao*? And what is a *Ge*? The classification of Chinese minorities is approved by the authority; their categories depend on the state. The *Miaozu* groups of different regions are all regarded as the branches of *Miao*. Some of them, like the *Ge*, have complained to the government, as a single *minzu*, but failed. They eventually are assigned to other different ethnic minorities. The most important function of the concept “*minzu*” in China is to maintain the national unity. Every ethnic group recognizes its social position and belongs to a category. Furthermore, the identification of *minzu* heavily depends on kinds of knowledge such as features and statistics which is established by administrative mechanisms. The statistics on the distribution and the population of every *minzu* takes considerable time within the state system. There are also other classifications to discern the culture of different minorities. For instance, *Miao*, *Zang* and *Li* have different costumes. And there are subtle classifications within each system of classification. For example, the characteristics of the headdress, costume and language of each *Miao* branch are clearly described. Scholars, centering on the identity of *Miao*, study the ethnicities’ history, culture and language. *Miaoxue yanjiu*, a so-called subject study, has come into being, and a *Miaoxue* association was established at the same time.

The identity represented in the Intangible Cultural Heritage may have different levels of concern. A *Ge* village, located in Huangping County of north Kaili City, is regarded as the oldest and most traditional single surname community of *Ge*. It held an ancestor worship ceremony in the early 1990s, which had been stopped since the revolution of 1949. This ceremony is called “*Harong*” (哈戎) in *Ge* language, needs three years to prepare, is carried out for a continuous seven days and seven nights. The rituals of the ceremony lead all ancestors’ souls into a sacred wooden drum worshiped by all lineage members. The importance of the resurgence of the traditional ceremony of the lineage is to reconfirm the status of the lineage elites and other members, and thus reconstruct the local social order and the authority system after the collective production system was disintegrated in the 1980s. However, ethnic identity played a principal role in the ancestor worship ceremony as if focused on the identity of lineage members. Two banners in the ceremony square displayed “*huangping xian gezu harong jie*” (*Harong* Festival of *Ge* in Huangping County) and “*tuanjie qilai wei guanche zhixing dang de minzu zhengce er fendou*” (unite together to strive for the

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implementation of the Party’s policies). The ethnic policies were recovered after the Cultural Revolution; Minzu, as a political identity, reemerged in the forefront of the state’s policies. The cadres from Ge, working at provincial, city and county levels of Guizhou, knew this tendency. They kept trying to request the government to re-investigate the Ge’s case and admit Ge as an individual ethnic minority group. These cadres brought this information back to the village and wanted to show the traditional culture of Ge through the ceremony, therefore they actively returned from the city and arranged the ceremony. They invited a number of officials from various minorities and different levels of Guizhou Governments to be honored guests. This ceremony became a stage to perform two sets of shows to represent two different identities.

Besides the ceremony, the costume craft is also a hot subject of the minorities’ Intangible Cultural Heritage. The maker of the batik book-bag is the Ge girl. The feature on the bag is her self-portrait. The background of making this bag involved her participation in a provincial dance competition held in Guiyang in 1986. She was nineteen years old at that time and that was her first time she visited the provincial capital, Guiyang. She was excited to register in the competition with the Ge representative team. However she felt terribly ashamed when she was teased by the reception staff because she was illiterate and could not sign her name. She was very upset when she returned home and asked her parents to send her to school after telling her family the experience. She was rejected, however, because one of her brothers was studying in a middle school and the family did not have extra money to send her to school. After that, the next few days, she devoted her time to make the batik bag. The self portrait and the representation of different identities obviously express her exploration and the reflection of her identity. Although she had no chance to go to school, her brother who took the batik book-bag with her self-portrait to school seemed like that she was also going to school. The identities of the girl, which were represented through the craftwork, could be seen as a powerful accusation against the society: why could she not, a rural woman, get the chance to be educated like any other citizen should?

Obviously, “Ge” is the most prominent identity represented among those on the batik book-bag. The understanding of this representation should be related to the background of the ethnic system and the political request of Ge. In this social context, the girl, as a member of the village tourism reception team, often saw her brother, the team leader, disputing with the tour guide because he did not agree with the guide
introducing Ge as a branch of Miao. She saw a lot of arguments regarding the identification of “Ge” when she went to Guiyang to participate in the dance competition. It was said that the Ge team’s performance was awarded the highest score, but the team failed to receive the first prize because the Ge’s status was not officially approved. Even the local newspaper reported them as Miao. Thus, the team members followed the Ge cadres working in Guiyang City, and required the newspaper to correct the term and apologize for their faults. Moreover, when the Ge team decided to perform for foreigners in a hotel of Guiyang, to make extra money, they were scolded by the sponsor of the competition, because they were told that their ambiguous minzu status would disrupt the foreigners’ understanding of the Chinese ethnic system. Obviously, a series of personal experience enabled the girl to construct an understanding of her Ge identity as well as help her identify the importance of being a Ge.

This story illustrates the multiple characteristics of identity. Firstly, identity may be both personal and collective. For instance, people usually differentiate themselves from others based on their personal characteristics. The Ge girl, for example, spends a lot of energy and emotion to represent her discriminated personal identity and deprived rights. Meanwhile, she chooses different identities. Ge, woman, citizen and so on to synthesize her social role and to represent her identity. Yet, the meaning of the identity depends on the social context. For example, the disputes of the minorities’ identities are related to the transformation of the political system from 1949 to the Cultural Revolution era and then to the 1980s. Thirdly, individuals strive to be identified with a social group, and as members of a group, hold the same attitude, accumulated and constructed in daily lives, toward the external. The struggle for the ethnic identification, led by Ge’s elites working in cities, shapes various experiences of the Ge girl’s life, and generates her self-identification as Ge, which is not only unforgettable but also shapes her attitude to outsiders.

In the UNESCO convention, the Intangible Cultural Heritage comprises (1) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; (2) performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals and festive events; (4) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (5) traditional crafts. Regarding to the debates of Ge’s group and individual identity, characteristics such as language, legend, music and dance, festive rituals, religious ideas and practice, in particular, embroidery and batik, have been adopted as a boundary to represent and
identify the identity.\textsuperscript{7} The case demonstrates that heritage is usually used as a medium of identity representation and a tool of identity construction. The role of heritage in identity politics stems from the dynamic mechanism of identity.

(2) Cultural Heritage and the Dynamics of Identity

To understand identity, it is important to treat it as a dynamic process. We need to consider identity as a diverse, ever-changing social experience, and also a product of historical process. The formation of contemporary Ge the ethnic identity is an example of this point. Under imperial oppression, Ge and the neighbouring Miao competed with each other during their migration and settlement process. In the process of building a modern nation-state in the republican period, both Ge and Miao were the object of national assimilation. After 1949, the state established a “shaoshu minzu” (ethnic minorities) system and it caused controversies in ethnic identification. The Ge identity emerged and changed throughout these historical contexts.

Mechanism 1: Identity and Marker

The above case treats identity as a process. In particular, identity refers to a process in which certain characteristics of an individual or a group are recognized and interpreted by oneself/themselves or others. On one hand, an individual selects those characteristics to build his self-consciousness and associates himself with a group or others through those characteristics. On the other hand, a group distinguishes itself from other groups by some of its characteristics. Due to competition for resources to ensure survival, in the past, the Miao and the disadvantaged Ge were hostile to one another. In the process of the official ethnic identification project (minzu shibie) after 1949, the Ge objected to being labeled as a sub-branch of Miao by claiming its unique language and culture to distinguish itself from the Miao.

In the process of identification and differentiation, identity negotiation is an important interaction among individuals. Identity is not only something attributed to an individual, but also the consequence of negotiation among an associated group, its opposite group, and the state. In the interactive negotiation process, an individual or a

group displays or even performs its identity characteristics through various markers, which leads to the consolidation of its identity.

Markers of ethnic identity include architecture, language, dress, behavior, craftwork, festivals, rituals, origin of ancestors, legends of migration, and so on. The effect of identity negotiation depends on whether these markers are recognized by other social mentors and the official authority. Referring to our Ge case, the Chinese officials did not recognize the Ge as a singular ethnic identity, saying that the dress, language and customs of Ge were similar to the Miao. In a general way, the culture and customs of the Ge do share much similarity with the Miao and its other adjacent peoples. Yet at a local and specific level, there are a lot of differences among them. For example, Ge language and Miao language are not intelligible to each other; however, according to the abstract classification by linguists, the Ge language is a subbranch of Miao language. Therefore, identity negotiation depends on what perspectives and standards are used to examine the similarities and differences of the markers, and whether all the parties share the same understanding of those markers’ meanings.

Mechanism 2: Identity Boundary

Another mechanism of identity is to establish boundaries. Fredrik Barth, in his approach to ethnicity, advocated the critical focus of investigation on the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff and markers it encloses. Because markers are just tools to represent ethnic boundaries. As the cultural stuff, markers are ever-changing with the transformation of interpretations and choices.8

Identity markers are conducive to group cohesion, while identity boundaries are based on the contrast and interaction among groups. One of the boundaries is an inclusive boundary. It means that the marker of one group could be adopted by outsiders, and these people are able to become a member of the group. An example of this point is the Han Chinese. They often think that they have rights, and therefore higher civilization than the peripheral ethnic minorities, and if the ethnic minorities choose to adopt the lifestyles of Han, such as by practicing and Confucianism, they can become Han, too. Another kind of boundary is an exclusive boundary. It is the use

of a marker that others will never have, for example, race and some religion, affiliation therefore, other people can never become members of these groups.

Figure 3.3:
The paramount Gejia ancestral worship ceremony revived in 1993 after its suspension for half a century, serving the Gejia elite's quest for the state recognition of the Gejia as an independent minority nationality in the state ethnic classification system. Fengxiang Village, Huangping County, Guizhou, 1993. (Photo taken by CHEUNG Siu-woo)

Mechanism 3:
Identity as culturally attributed, instrumentally utilized and socially constructed

There are three approaches to understand the concept of identity:9

1. Primordial approach

Identity takes the sense of self and belonging of a collective group as a fixed thing, defined by an objective standard, such as common ancestry, common biological characteristics and common cultural markers, and so on. It emphasizes the group sentiment and consciousness based on a common culture. Therefore, on the basis of common language, legend, dress, artwork, music, dance, festival and rite, the Ge people have a showed sentiment. This approach treats identity as innate, with objective standards, and self or group consciousness dependent on fixed characteristics and objective standards.

2. Instrumentalist approach

Identity is developed and utilized to achieve economic or political goals. Social elites make use of common markers to evoke collective identity. In the debate on official

identification of ethnic minorities, the motivation of the Ge elites to obtain official recognition was suspected to be seeking a position in the government and to advocate favorable policies particularly for ethnic minorities. Therefore, this kind of identity consciousness and their common markers is situational and changeable rather than persistent.

The above two approaches are not necessarily contradicting: different approaches are required to understand different participants’ behaviour in identity politics. For the ordinary Ge people in the countryside, they treat common identity as persistent natural consciousness based on the common living habits and markers. For the leaders in the capital city of Guiyang, they are aware of the political benefits of the status of becoming a single independent ethnic minority group. However, no matter which type of the participants, the factors of sentiment and instrumentality are usually mixed together and are hard to differentiate clearly.

3. Social constructionist theory
It takes the view that the characteristics to define identity, either affirmed by self or enforced by external forces, are usually formed by social construction and choice. Both the primordial and instrumentalist approaches can be related to this approach, since the sentiment and the instrumentality can be understood as forms of social construction in a particular social and historical contexts.

Both identity markers and boundaries cannot be separated from the interpretation, utilization and construction of cultural heritage and traditions. The Ge example shows us that this process is always related to social political relations and interactions.

3. Heritage and Identity Politics

Various perspectives had been developed on social movements of identity politics and their effects. Social movements of identity politics are actions to gain identity recognition in a framework of states or interstates, then to advance the interests of a group whose members are oppressed by virtue of a shared and marginalized identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. As for the Ge people, it is actually a kind of repression not to be recognized by the state.

By emphasizing a group identity, social movements have sought to strengthen
politically oppressed groups both by improving members’ sense of confidence and dignity, and by familiarizing the external society with the existing social group. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the aim of identity politics has been changing. Their goal was no longer the redistribution of political and material benefits, but shifts to a collective identity, in which one obtains respect and recognition from society. What many minority groups such as, women, gay communities in Western society are seeking is not only more allowance from the government, but equal pay for equal work and other forms of equality, and also to gain recognition from state system and become a member of it. Such changes on social movement have caught the attention of academic research.

Scholars developed various explanations to explain these movements. Some critics of identity politics claim essentialised, arguing that some of its proponents assume or imply that group identity has distinctive essence; gender, race, or other group characteristics are fixed or biologically determined traits, rather than social constructions. Critics argue that essentialism ignores the internal varieties, changes and blurred boundaries. Actually there is great variety within Miao people; the image of Miao changed a lot throughout history; there is frequent mobility between Miao and other ethnic peoples, and therefore a blurred boundary such as through intermarriage.

Other theorists describe some form of identity politics as strategic essentialism, because external hegemonic narrative is per se essentialism. For example, under the official ethnic identification project and ethnic classification system, the ethnic boundaries are clearly artificially constructed. So the disadvantaged groups take strategic essentialism to be in concert with the hegemonic narrative, and obtain political benefits through merging into the mainstream narratives; in other worlds, they challenge the hegemonic essentialism of classification system.

Another discussion pertains to the aim and effect of politics, queries the aims pursued by these groups can really be attained. For example, some critics have argued that groups based on shared identity, other than class, can divert energy and attention from more fundamental issues, such as class conflict in capitalist societies.\(^{13}\) In their points of view, national governments are often merely an expression of power and benefit of a ruling class, but identity politics goes the wrong way which will never resolve the problems of repression and resource distribution.

No matter “essentialism” or “strategic essentialism,” cultural heritage and cultural traditions are important bases of collective identity. We should situate them in their particular historical context to understand the cultural foundation of identity politics.

\[(4) \text{ Historical Context of Heritage and Identity Politics}\]

The concept of heritage, a historical phenomenon, can be seen as a kind of modern consciousness, containing various meanings. On the one hand, contemporary heritage is different from those personal collections which belong to and are only enjoyed by the ruling class. The significance of modern heritage exists in its public display. All common people theoretically have the chance to access it. This is related to a very fundamental political system change in human societies and the development of modern nation-state and the citizen society. The British Museum was established in 1753 when the political system began to change.\(^{14}\) The emperor centralism ended and the citizen society developed, and the emergence of today’s concept of cultural relics appeared thereafter. On the other hand, heritage, as a modern consciousness, is connected with how we differentiate past and present through heritage appreciation. It is in accordance with the emergence of the citizen society, the change of the technology and religion; the expansion of colonial rule and the establishment of the concept of development and so forth. It makes people distinguish modern society from the previous world which is regarded as obsolete, or what is previously seen as


uncultured, is now developed. The idea of being obsolete was constructed through heritage.

Heritage has different representations and significance in different historical periods. Coming from the colonialism, most exhibitions in the Great Britain Museum are collected during the period of imperial territorial expansion. Therefore, for the British, the heritage is very important. It is both a reminder and affirmation of their status in colonial hegemony. The British distinguished its background from other developed regions through the exhibition of the cultural relics that separate them from the rest of the world. A European-centralism comes into being and is usually represented via the cultural relics.  

When modern nationalism emerged, the heritage being publicly displayed became the symbol of the nation-state; cultural relics of different ethnic groups in a nation-state were exhibited in a national framework which constructed a singular history and culture. During the anti-colonialism movement, nationalism became the model of the aboriginal groups who strived for an individual state. The cultural relics, as symbols of the nation-state hold other special meanings in this context, struggling against anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. For example, the Chinese removed the negative aspects such as uncultured feudalism and ethnic conflicts leading to the process of the decline of the Qing Dynasty and the emergence of nationalism. It became a relic to represent a unified Chinese identity of China during the movement of the anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism.

Some ethnic movements are related to cultural relics, that is, during the construction of the nation-state in the post colonial period. Heritage is a badge of ethnic boundary and identity for many ethnic groups. In contemporary Taiwan, the Hakka plays a key role in the political scene, but this is a result of a special historical process. Professor Luo Xianglin recognized the status of the Hakka through plenty of archive research in the period of the Republic of China. During the formation of the modern

19 Luo Xianglin 羅香林, Kejia yanjiu daolun 客家硏究導論 (The Introducctory to Hakka Studies).
nation-state, *Miao* elites such as Liang Juwu, Shi Qigui and Yang Hanxian tried their best to re-consider the ethnic status of *Miao* through writing the history and culture of the *Miao* people in Han Chinese characters, and they eventually got the state’s approval that *Miao* is in fact a minority. Different ethnic groups define their identities and the relationship with the nation-state through various forms of cultural traditions and relics. The political movement for the recognition of *Ge* minority status and identity after 1949 was the product of the division of the ethnic boundary and approval by the further consolidated state authority. However, the biggest challenge of the contemporary nation-state and the citizenship is the independent movement of ethnicities. Those movements, such as the independent movement of Tibet and the independent movement of the French-born group in southern Quebec of Canada, also employed the discourse of heritage and traditions to rationalize their separate identities and thus creates boundaries from the major ethnic group.

The idea of multiculturalism emerged in Western countries in the 1980s. It emphasizes the coexistence of different ethnic groups under a style state. Many ethnic groups have their own cultural symbols and distinguishing identity markers, so identity movements emerge to declare that ethnic differences exists which needs to be accepted, recognized and respected by mainstream society. Today, we are facing globalization; some research suggests that globalization is a homogenization process of cultural particularity and an outside culture instead of embracing local culture. However, a book, edited by James Watson, states that McDonald’s has been localized well and integrated into the local cultural tradition after it enters different societies. The globalization of information, the population and the flow of capital generate a new mechanism to help certain groups connect more easily with related groups, and enhance the representation of its cultural tradition through the use of specially selected symbols. For instance, when the Chinese all over the world celebrate the Lunar New Year, performing the Dragon Dance is a necessary activity. Another

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example is the Hakka community of Taiwan. It connects the Hakka groups in the world through the internet which showcases a globalized Hakka culture.23

The development of the concept of cultural relics and its protection in Hong Kong also has its special historical context. After the 1968 riots, different factors have caused the development of identity consciousness among Hong Kong people, which had become the context of the preservation of cultural relics in the early stage. The discussion concerning the reunification of Hong Kong with China in the mid-1980s further prompted the Hong Kong people to search for their identity. Rubie Watson and James Watson investigated the identity changes behind the lineage ancestral halls in New Territories. They illustrate that the ancestral hall, which originally symbolizes the lineage identity and is an architecture designed for ancestral worship, turns into the historical cultural relic and an attraction as well as a source of identity for Hong Kong people. Needless to say, the reunification of Hong Kong with China is an important background for this development, and at the same time, it puts forward questions regarding ownership and political identity: who is the owner of these cultural relics? For whom are these cultural relics protected?24

(5) Conclusion

Several key issues can be discussed: Whose heritage? That is, the construction and display of heritage is for whom? What is the aim? Who is authorized to make heritage interpretations? How do such interpretations become a pool of contest among various parties?

Other than the object itself, and its related concepts, we also have to explore the meanings of the social group. The discourse of heritage, as a boundary of a social group including our identities of being participants, is constructed through objects and living places of the marginal groups. The social groups make use of heritage to represent themselves as a social group. So what is the correlation between us, modern or urbanized people, and marginal groups? Could they be compared with our daily lives? Or could their lives represent our past forms? Does it mean that we all belong

to the same group by using heritage of a common history and ancestor? Being an identity symbol and boundary, heritage should be understood from its related social group but not its materiality and immateriality.

Another major issue is the acceptance of an identity symbol. It is important for social groups to know whether their identities are accepted in society, so the heritage, as an identity symbol and an accredited tool of marking their boundary, is also accepted.

Who does belong to collective memory of heritage? What is the relationship between identity construction and collective memory? Heritage, representation of the past, has become a channel for specific class group to express their ideal future. The recent example is the collective memory of Queen’s Pier where middle class’ people of Hong Kong expressed their dissatisfactions and hopes for a different kind of development, opposing to the cosmopolitan trend and monopolization of global capital. Thus, heritage is not about the past, but an expectation of future.

How are the concepts of ethnicity and nationalism expressed through heritage? Heritage symbolizing ethnic identity is obliterated or standardized under nationalism. Yet, there is no existence of symbols if one social group is not legitimate under the state. Heritage is explained in terms of the state classification of ethnic groups. The explanation of most marginal groups’ identity and heritage is often obliterated in the process of national standardization.

Heritage also exists in gender and class. Do we pay attention to the suppression of class in lineage heritage, when we explore the New Territories of Hong Kong? The lineage is composed of various asymmetrical family branches, with those with lots of ancestral estates and larger populations while others have less male descendents. The heritage contribute to the identities of non-lineage members, comprising farming tenants and tenants of other surnames in a village, as well female as distinguished from her male counter parts in a patrilineal lineage.

Heritage is also related to regional identity as well. The community identity is constructed through the emergence of local heritage and the re-emergence of social consciousness in society. The recent years, local heritage has become a part of the mainstream Hong Kong community. The correlation between heritage and regional identity reflects how different areas compete for the most representative heritage to construct their local identity. the Intangible Cultural Heritage like the story of “Meng
Jiangnu” (孟姜女), relics of Nan Shaolin Monastery and so forth. Heritage could also cross boundaries to link up different social groups. For example, the identities of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau have been connected when herbal tea becomes the Intangible Cultural Heritage of these three places, while worship of Tin Hou give an impetus for cooperation and common identity in Hong Kong and China. The heritage plans strengthen boundaries of local community identity and at the same time also produce its own challenges.

Often local heritage becomes an identity symbol of a society without considering the original historical context. In Hang Kong, the Bun Festival of Cheung Chou has transformed from being a local cultural tradition to being the medium for urban people to understand past life and society, as well as being a common cultural symbol of Hong Kong people. A religious festival of the Jing national minority, residing at the China-Vietnam border region in Guangxi, has become an item on the National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, the origins of the myth is Vietnamese. A sensitive cross-border issue has ensured that the myth of the ethnic group continues to be restricted only to China Vietnam.

Figure 3.4:
On its way marching from the communal temple to the beach to receive the village’s paramount patron god in the morning of the Hát festival’s first day, the ceremonial procession was required to stop in front of the stage constructed for holding the official grand opening ceremony, a newly invented program of the festival after the state took a leading role in organizing the festival, which was listed as an intangible cultural heritage on the national level in 2008. Wanwei Village, Fangchenggang

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25 “Inter-Application of Herbal Tea as Intangible Cultural Heritage in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau,” Mingpao Daily, 18 February 2006; Fuquan, “Application of Mazu as Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong and Taiwan” Lianan guancha (Observations at Hong Kong and Taiwan), available at http://www.waou.com.mo/see/2006/11/20061123d.htm.

Heritage and cultural traditions involve the politics of identity. Here, heritage and cultural traditions are often regarded as common symbols of a social group and the boundary markers of identity construction, meanwhile the authorities examine this to legitimatize the identity of a social group. A discussion on the politics of identity cannot be excluded when discussing which item should be included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. That is, how is a social group reputed or repelled during the approval process? How is a social group affected after the declaration or rejection of being an item of Intangible Cultural Heritage? Who should inherit heritage and culture? Who are the owners of heritage and culture? Who are the beneficiary of heritage and culture?

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4

Approaches in Understanding Heritage
LIU Tik-sang
Appropes in Understanding Heritage
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Heritage of tangible or intangible forms are both created by human beings. From learning about local daily lives, culture and social organizations, we could also understand local heritage, including monuments, historical buildings, oral traditions, language, performing arts, customs, rituals, traditional crafts, knowledge, practice and so forth, which constructs local culture and becomes a cultural factor of the ethnic group’s existence. So to understand how members in a community construct their own heritage, we have to do fieldwork.

(1) Culture

In the view of cultural relativism, culture, as a tool of human adaption and subsistence, exists in all aspects of human society. Different elements, including economy, religion, kinship, voluntary organizations, language, arts and political systems, interact with each other and combine as an integrated whole. In other words, we have to consider the interaction of all elements, not only a single one within the historical context. The holistic perspective is an important method in understanding culture.

The relationship between culture and its people can also be taken into consideration. A cultural system is composed of different elements, from which people selectively make their own choices to serve their own specific ends. This results in cultural diversity in a society. We assume that society is diversified with different kinds of subcultures. So, it is rather difficult to draw a clear boundary of what subcultures exist, as our own choices vary.

Environment, either natural or social, is another lea to understand human cultural behavior. People interact with each other in a social environment. There is a correlation between natural landscape and formation of ethnic groups. Let’s take Hong Kong as an example. Shown in a 1950s map, Yuen Long Plains have been the home of wealthy lineages, whose ancestors had settled for over several hundred years ago, while Hakka immigrants are found in the hilly areas of Sai Kung.

(2) Fieldwork: Participant Observation, Field Notes and Journals

Fieldwork, using the method of “participant observation,” is an approach for collecting
information and understanding cultural difference in local society. Different levels of participant observation can be distinguished: The in-depth observation may mean that we closely follow our informants’ daily lives meanwhile the participation level is relatively low when we observe a religious ritual from a distance. The difficulty we often encounter is that local people do not allow us to participate in their activities and we have to understand that they are under no obligation to assist in our research. Whether the researcher is accepted or not is as a result of an interaction with others. “Observation” meaning “watch,” which is not a simple action. It also involves writing what local people say and their others’ behaviors. Let’s take a lecture in a classroom as an example. Other than lecture content, we have to observe the position between speaker and audience, spatial distribution of audience, ratio of females and males, their ages, dress, emotions and so forth.

We have to do “participant observation” by ourselves. The precondition for contact with local people is to master their local language, as they will inevitably use their own language to communicate. Another challenge of fieldwork are interpersonal skills; we have to get along with those who we have never met before. It is a rather difficult task for the local people to accept and trust you and then even tell you about the history and culture of their society as well as their personal stories. Different members of diverse cultures have different behaviors and habits. Fieldwork is hence an approach for us to master behaviors of local people, learn about their proprieties and assimilate into their society.

Figure 4.1:
We can learn more about the history and the details of the activities by talking with the nanwu (Daoist priests) and the yuanshou (ritual representatives) during the Taiping Qingjiao festival. Taiping Qingjiao, Shan Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long 2011. (Photo taken by LIU Tik-sang)

Most people think that scholars collect unusual information from carrying out local research. However, the local people regard what we are interested in as simply part of their daily lives. In fact, we are not looking for special phenomena but trying to understand daily practices.
Regular patterns cannot be found in our cosmology but in our daily lives. A cycle is created for every distinct culture, such as rest on Sundays and festivals. Observing a society’s cycle is a long term approach to learn about a society through accumulating information. So we cannot concentrate on a specific activity only. Jiao Festival, which is celebrated for a few days each year is supported by the local people who industriously earn money to pay for such a function, is an example. We could not observe this activity in isolation. Without understanding the daily work of local people, who serves as the basis of Jiao Festival, we cannot understand the meaning and significance of the festival.

We have to note down what we see and hear during our fieldwork. For 24 hours a day, the lives of society members is continuously carried out. It is difficult to note down all activities in a day as it is very time-consuming. Recording is a selective matter. We will note what we consider as important issues but we could not retrieve every trivial matter. The issue of selection is related to the previous training and personal experience of the fieldworker.

We note the main points of our observation in our small notebook. Other than what we hear and see, we have to record the most important subject, such as a ritual, an unexpected event, personal history of an informant and so forth. This is called “field notes.” We also have to write “journals” to record our contacts and emotions, which will affect one’s observation. Fieldwork is a task where we take initiative as we selectively choose what we hear and see and we have to understand ourselves and our environment. The journal is a tool for self-reflection. To sum up, fieldwork is not only a task to collect information, but also a means of personal development.

(3) Records: Maps, Kinship Diagrams, Photo-taking, Interviews, Local Archives

Here, several aspects of doing fieldwork are considered. The first task is map drawing; we have to draw out an unfamiliar place to grasp the geographical knowledge of that area. When we studied Tai O, we drew a map of the stilted house area to record the size and distribution (See Figure 4.1). Dotted lines inside some stilted houses, represent the relations of inheritance and “fenfang”（分房）in a family. This map provides important material on the inheritance of fishing people and the relationship between fishermen and land residents. We have to pay attention to size and distribution as shown in the correlation between space and power. For example, if the land price in high, and the living space is large then it shows that the owners have wealth, power and status.
We have to learn about interpersonal relationships, by drawing a kinship diagram. Each kinship diagram has its own focal figure and we use different symbols to represent primary kin, such as △ for males, ○ for females, F for father, M for mother and so forth (Refer to Table 4.1 and Figure 4.3). This diagram explains the relationship in a family by telling which family member is important or unimportant, and the changing relationships between people as well as understand the inheritance of property, right, obligation, and knowledge. With reference to such a diagram, we can find out the transformation from patrilineal to matrilineal society in the contemporary society and the recent late marriage phenomenon.

Table 4.2: Symbols used in Kinship Diagram
The kinship terminology is another important issue. Terms of reference refer to the terms we use to introduce our relatives to others. For example, this is my uncle on my mother’s side. Terms of address means the daily terms we call our relatives, such as calling the uncle on the mother’s side as David for example. Kinships relationship reflects how we call our relatives. The kinship terminology is a channel to understand kinship organization. The changes of kinship relationship can also be shown in the different kinds of terminology in different periods of time. (See Table 4.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms of reference</th>
<th>Terms of address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father (父親)</td>
<td>A-ba (亞爸)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother (母親)</td>
<td>A-ma (亞媽)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s brother (舅父)</td>
<td>David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s brother/sister’s son (表哥)</td>
<td>Cousin Keung (強表哥)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband’s mother (家姑)</td>
<td>A-ma (亞媽)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Kinship Terminology

The lineage is a kind of social organization found in South China. In particular, this is patrilineal form of organization with ancestral estate, land and inheritance rights. The male descendents of a lineage share common property and cooperate to form self-defence corps. Two lineage groups form a family relationship through marriage. Then when women bear sons for their husbands and these children eventually become the lineage labor force. In such an arrangement, the bride’s family provides reproduction ability and productivity through the bride, while the grooms family in return compensates by offering cash or a betrothal gift. The bride’s family offers a
dowry to demonstrate their family status. The marriage thus reflects a mutual and fluid condition between two lineage groups.

The patrilineal organization is not mentioned about biological concept but cultural one. Biological characteristics are used however as a cultural means of property inheritance, which helps to maintain the patrilineal descent principle. In this system, a male descendent without lineage legitimization, such as an extramarital son, cannot inherit lineage property, but an adopted son with legitimization could.

Photo-taking is a convenient recording method. The advantages include: (1) it is efficient to record the whole process of an activity for analysis and research use; (2) the position of the cameraman helps to assimilate oneself as a researcher in an unfamiliar environment; (3) printing out photographs for participants is a way to establish better relationships with the others. The disadvantages comprise: (1) researchers cannot talk with others during the recording process and it is rather difficult to ask about event details later as most will not be interested in those questions; (2) it is not true that researchers can capture or document the entire scene as photo-taking is only a momentary activity and a part of fact within 90 degrees. We have to realise that we lose much information during the recording process and such loss may contort our understandings of the event.

The third method is interviewing. This is an interactive process between interviewers and interviewees. Since some people are willing to answer our question, while others are not, so we have to prepare a set of questions and ask follow-up enquiries according to the interests of our informants and actual circumstances. For instance, in Hong Kong many will be suspicious if we ask about their finances during the interviews.

It is fortunate that one or two people are willing to talk with us in a community. These people are our key informants; they provide us information but intentionally or unintentionally conceal those events they do not wish us to know or are not interested in. So we will neglect these events in our research.

Interviews revolves around personal life history. This reflects the fact that local people tell us what they are most familiar with and interested in. The changes in a community is also demonstrated with reference to life history. So we have to listen carefully to ensure the sequence of events happening in their lives when we conduct interviews.
The question used in oral history are not fixed. Before interviews, however, we have to know the basic historical background of the community. In the first half of our fieldwork, we focus on a society’s history and daily lives of its members. In the later period, oral history interviews are collected to supplement the information we have on the community.

The relationship between language and identification is another issue we need to address. Most scholars agree that there is a direct relationship between language and thought, while language is a way to understand related issues of personal identification. Knowledge is passed down through language. This includes the elements of background, social status, sex and generation. Regarding the assumption of Sapir-Whorf, our language influences how we view the world. For instance, Eskimos have their own vocabulary for snow while fishermen in Hong Kong have a wide repertoire of words for water and sea. So, language reflects different kinds of local knowledge, which is based on a social group’s relationship to their environment.

The last method of fieldwork is the collection of local archives and temple inscriptions. Written language is an important source of understanding the human world and its history. The lineage genealogy, mostly kept by powerful and wealthy lineage members who may not be willing to lend to outsiders, provides a written record of kin relations and ancestral estates. Inscriptions in temples and ancestral halls, as records of local society, can help us understand the socio-historical context. The inscriptions of Tin Hou Temple can be used as an example. The Tin Hou Temple was first established by lineages in the northern New Territories which depended on agriculture and later at various fishing harbours.

Inscriptions contain much information on local history. This temple inscription shows that the Qing navy officials were donors for the renovation of the Tai O Guandi (God of War) Temple in 1852. Guandi Temple, Tai O, 2012. (Photo taken by LIU Tik-sang)

(4) Data Analysis

The next stage is writing. Using the method of thick description, various complex
elements of the human activity can be incorporated. We record what we saw as well as collate our informants’ accounts, including sources and the context, each of which are dealt with separately because each informant has their own standpoint. We cannot simply regard the informants’ accounts as the “authentic answer” and a reflection of reality, as the informants would naturally adjust the content in respect to their relationship with us. So we have to carefully note down how they narrated, what we saw and what we had collected.

After collecting the information, we have to consider the settings, directions, modes, inscriptions, objects, local myths, stories and so forth (See Figure 4.5). Let’s take a look at the myth. Most of us believe that a myth is a false narrative but in fact they are significant because of the popular ideas on natural or social phenomena they embody. Many tales or myths would gradually disappear if they were meaningless to locals. Thus they have certain meanings within a society if they are to be retained. There are different interpretations of the origins of Hong Kong and Taiwan temples. The Tin Hou Temple in Hong Kong originated from a deity floating on the sea, while kinship relations can be traced in Taiwan temples. They were both from Fujian in Mainland China. The Taiwanese explanation is politically correct, while Hong Kong’s shows no such relationship between Hong Kong and Mainland China. In these cases, we can see how the state discourse affects the construction of myths, many of which are actually telling the relationship among local communities.

Figure 4.5: Elements needed to be considered during the research
In studying Chinese heritage, geomancy, festivals, opera, rituals and parade should be considered. For example, the regional boundary is shown in ritual, parade and geomancy. Time is a factor for all members participating in an activity, for the Chinese, this is determined by geomantic power. Time can be used to include members as well as exclude outsiders.

As researchers, we also have to pay attention to participants, audience, their personal background and society management to understand the social structure. It is important for us to collect information related to the classification of social groups, especially their class, ethnic groups and sex. Recently in Hong Kong, there is an increasing number of females joining religious ritual and activities as compared to previously. This illustrates how female status gradually becomes important as society undergoes change.

![Figure 4.6:](image)

The traditional communal rituals are always leaded by males, while the females play the other roles. Taiping Qingjiao, Shan Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long, 2011. (Photo taken by LIU Tik-sang)

Government policy, ecology, education and economy are external factors that we need to consider as well. The education of an observer affects his/her observations and perceptions of social behaviors. Many Chinese intellectuals dislike religion and regard it as “superstitious” especially after May Fourth Movement. Among the educated in Hong Kong, popular religion is always regarded as lagging and full of deception. However, in recent years, when the topic is discussed in lectures, Hong Kong people start treating popular religion as local heritage.

Research method can be either qualitative or quantitative. Anthropological fieldwork is a qualitative method using case studies. Most people doubt whether this method is “representative.” Some people may ask whether a temple in Hong Kong can represent a temple in Hong Kong or South China. “Representativeness,” is decided by statistical methods, sampling, variations, acceptance of satisfaction and correlation. This is done by quantitative questionnaires and statistical analysis. The statistical method is not adopted for case studies, as it could not represent the whole. The personal history of an old woman in Hong Kong should not be treated a typical example of Hong Kong.
because she is in fact unique with her own story. So when we carry out qualitative research, we are in fact looking for patterns in socio-historical change and its relationship among the individual, society and nation by understanding the person’s unique experience. Quantitative research, aimed at solving different problems, can also be produced by the same group.

Culture helps us to adapt to our environment and harmonize interpersonal relationships. However, individual members’ views are affected because of cultural norms and constraints. Most people think that their own ethnic group is superior. The ethnic group will become extinct if the members of this group do not have their own identification; it is same for individuals, so most will boast about their strengths. This is called “ethnocentrism.” During fieldwork, we have to give up our prejudices, perspectives and values so we can listen to and understand the others’ points of view, become friends and gain acceptance. This process is a kind of cultural attack, but an important research experience for the qualitative fieldworker.

We often contact with ordinary people or marginal groups in the field. In their daily lives, they may make their living by using the gray areas in the legal system. We should not blame them for what they do but ask why they have to do what they do so as to understand their socio-economic position and to establish a holistic perspective, a complicated interaction of social, political and economic factors. The entire understanding of the world is demonstrated by a contextualized case study.

(5) Written Reports

After collecting information, we have to write reports. This includes three interrelated processes: translation, interpretation and explanation. Translation does not refer to language translation, but the translation of the institutions and social relationships of an object, or an issue within the historical context, for the readers to understand the phenomenon. For instance, in Chinese popular religion, god, ancestor and ghost are three common elements in the supernatural world, and such a concept is different to the other cultures. Researchers are responsible for the clear narrations of socio-cultural assumptions behind such culturally specific concepts.

Interpretation refers to rational logic behind an activity, or ritual, and the reasons for its existence. For example, different people have diverse perspectives regarding a Jiao Festival. The researchers must interpret why local people hold such a function and how
they view these rituals so as to assist readers to understand the whole community with a set of interpersonal relationships and socio-cultural institutions. Such an interpretation is only a mental construction of reality, as researchers correlate totally disorderly and unsystematic activities for their readers to understand the phenomenon. To ensure the interpretations tell a good story, the audience need not differentiate between truth and falsehood. So, to explain religion, we will not adopt scientific methods but use interpretation as it is much easier to understand.

We could explain a phenomenon in terms of spiritual and material components. The material explanation could help readers to understand the social phenomenon. For example, abstaining from beef consumption among the people of Guangdong could be an explanation to a local religious belief and also a way to maintain the local agricultural economy. More specifically, cows assist in the paddy fields in agricultural societies when religious activity becomes popular.

Emic and etic perspectives are shown in written reports as well. Emic perspective refers to the view of participants, while etic perspective means the understanding from the point of view of the observer. The funeral ritual in Guangdong can be used as an example. The emic perspective is that people believe that such a ritual is full of evil spirits, which transfers bad luck to them. In etic perspective, it is the researchers’ view of the ritual arrangement and the phenomenon of evil spirits. When one dies, other villagers may not know the exact cause of death. It maybe a contagious disease that has the potential to infect others. So, evil spirit could be a reason for villagers not joining this ritual and abating the infection opportunity. Researchers regard this as an institution of cultural adaption. This explanation may not be accepted by local people.

Next let’s look at the geomantic pattern of the New Territories indigenous inhabitants. From the emic perspective, indigenous inhabitants descendents will be well protected if the bones of their ancestors are buried in a place with a good geomantic pattern. But from etic perspective, there is a correlation between geomantic pattern and colonial administration. When the British colonial government leased the New Territories, they promised to respect indigenous traditions and customs, and geomancy was one of them. While local people do not fervently believe in geomancy, they still use it as a discourse to negotiate with the colonial government.

In recent years, the Ping Shan Tang lineage and colonial government quarreled over the removal of an ancestral graveyard. Knowing that their geomancy would be disrupted by
the removal, they requested the government to demolish the old police station as compensation. The government refused to accept such a resolution over years of negotiation. Finally, the old police station was transformed into an exhibition, the Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery. The lineage members believed the gallery has become their building without any geomantic interference. In post-colonial Hong Kong, the discourse of “geomancy” has gradually been replaced by the notion of “heritage” in the conflicts between government and indigenous inhabitants; this is another example of how the observer understands the situation, the etic perspective.

(6) Personal Development

During fieldwork, we use different methods such as drawing maps, and kinship diagrams, recording sound and taking photographs, to document the daily lives of the people we study. In many ways, fieldwork goes beyond everyday academic research and become an interactive process involving interpersonal relationships. Researchers have to learn how to give up personal bias and find acceptance in an unfamiliar environment. Through experiencing the lives of others, in a setting totally different from our own, both joy and pain greatly contribute to our personal development as researchers.

In the views of local people, we are still researchers and not one of them even when we actively participate in their activities. On most occasions, we are regarded as marginal and so must be prepared to learn the wisdom from the local people.

Our informants become our friends during fieldwork. They provide lots of opportunities for us to finish our papers and support our academic and career developments. But how do we respond to their actions? Basically, we are obliged to protect the privacy of our friends (or informants), yet also let others know more about such a social group and think about how we can assist to improve their communities.

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