

## Making Hong Kong's coastal wetland a resource for tourism development: A cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary project to understand historical background and coastal heritage

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### Introduction: Wetland tourism

Wetlands are ecotones, or transition areas, where aquatic and terrestrial sets of ecological or environmental characteristics coexist and interact in marshes, swamps, and bogs, among other types of environment. Besides their ecological characteristics, wetlands offer a rich landscape for understanding changing life ways, including such phenomena as an influx of migrants, the formation of fishery villages, relationships with traditional villages such as the South Chinese lineage settlements in the case of Hong Kong's wetlands, and the communal livelihoods of former fishermen. Such phenomena all demonstrate coastal resource management from local perspectives.

As an example, the coastal area of Inner Deep Bay, in northwestern Hong Kong, has been changed according to the needs of Hong Kong society. The Inner Deep Bay now contains of: 1) the Mai Po marshes, an internationally renowned wetland and a Ramsar Convention site; 2) major freshwater fish farming grounds; and 3) residential areas with both old and new dwellings.

The social and cultural aspects of wetlands, therefore, should not be overlooked. Further, the development of wetlands for tourism could serve as an excellent educational device to understand the fast-changing modern society of urban Hong Kong, and the transition of wetlands from agriculture to other types of usage for visitors coming from both urban Hong Kong and overseas.

The ecological characteristics of the Mai Po wetlands have received special attention since 1976 when they were designated a reserve site and resting place for migratory birds travelling between Siberia and Australia. However, fish farming communities along the buffer zone have been neglected because of both their migratory historical background and the shrinking importance of primary industry in contemporary Hong Kong.

In this article, I use the example of Inner Deep Bay to illustrate and understand the competition between agriculture, fishery heritage management, and environmental conservation (Cheung 2007, 2008). In other words, I explain the historical development of the co-existing three components in the coastal wetland, and from that suggest reconsideration of the importance of fishery heritage in the context of wetland conservation.

Along the coastal area of Inner Deep Bay, there exists traditional lineage settlements, the history of which can be traced back some 800 years, and whose rice cultivation practices supposedly have been used for several hundred years (Cheung 1999, 2009). Besides those inland agricultural areas, at the beginning of the last century a major conversion of coastal wetlands into agricultural land took place in Tin Shui Wai. These wetlands underwent different land-use stages, including a mudflat, rice paddies, reed fields, and shrimp and fishponds. Finally a part of the wetland was retained as a reserve (Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve) and public park (Hong Kong Wetland Park), whereas the rest is now modern public and private residential areas, like Tin Shui Wai. Fishpond areas are maintained as farms by senior fishermen whose average age is over 60.

### Understanding natural conservation on the coast

With intensive rural development and increasing property values since the late-1970s, land administration in the New Territories of Hong Kong has become vastly more complicated than before. Much of the complication is a result of land usage having shifted from the primary production of agriculture and fishing to industrial and new town development. Hong Kong society increasingly needs more land for development. At the same time, however, the government has become more aware of the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable development as priorities in future land and social policies.

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The Mai Po marshes, in northwestern Hong Kong, are an internationally renowned wetland area, known for decades as a resting place for migratory birds. The ecological characteristics of Mai Po have received special attention since 1976, when they were designated a "Site of Special Scientific Interest" (SSSI). The surrounding fishpond areas of the Inner Deep Bay are an integral buffer zone that serves as a water storage facility and hence reduces seasonal flooding. The bay contains species similar to the ecological system in the Mai Po marshes (Chu 1995; Irving and Morton 1988). Given the various kinds of social, economic and physical pressures faced by contemporary Hong Kong, the fishponds and buffer areas of the wetland in Mai Po are under great threat of being lost. The threat is particularly serious because the fishponds of Inner Deep Bay serve not only as a mitigation zone and source of traditional local food, but also as a major food supplier for migratory birds. This adds to the conservation value of Mai Po marshes in particular, and Inner Deep Bay in general.

Further, Inner Deep Bay has its own traditional freshwater fishing industry that probably dates back at least 70 years (Cheung 2007, 2011). Since the mid-1940s, Inner Deep Bay has been the main site for cultivating *gei wai* shrimp, grey mullet, snakehead, and other freshwater fishes; and for decades it has provided the major supply of freshwater fishes in Hong Kong. Inland freshwater pond cultivation was a major industry in the 1970s, when it supplied most of the freshwater fish for the local market. For example, until the 1980s, grey mullet comprised 40–50% of the local inland fish catch in Hong Kong, and was used widely for banquets and ceremonies. Migratory birds resting in the marsh consumed "remainders" from fish farming.

Agriculture is certainly not a major industry in contemporary Hong Kong; however, that does not imply that it should not be understood or maintained for purposes other than its economic contribution to society. Just as the history of the local fishery reflects social development and cultural change in Hong Kong, it is important to strive for a holistic understanding of the industry in both the past and the present. With less than 300 fishing households, the fishing communities located mostly at the buffer areas of the Mai Po wetland are now facing tremendous changes. Apart from the emphasis on traditional industries as a kind of cultural heritage among scholars, the debate on heritage conservation has successfully attracted the attention of urbanites, who consider traditional industries an important part of their collective memory of society (Cheung 2013).

### **Cultural history of Hong Kong's northwestern coast**

Before presenting a detailed description of the coastal resources for a tourism development project, some cultural background information about villagers in the New Territories should be provided. For example, by looking at the physical nature or geographical landscape in the New Territories, one could imagine that there is a greatly different cultural tradition between the east and west sides of the hinterland. Divided by a mountain range located almost in the middle of the entire New Territories, the western side is fertile flat land consisting of a few early-settled clans with their lineage network in many parts of the Pearl River Delta area (Fig. 1). These are fundamental in the cultural history of the New Territories, and should serve as significant cultural attractions for tourists visiting Hong Kong. Therefore, based on this objective, a knowledge transfer project was designed for this area.

Tourists arriving in Hong Kong are often guided to shop and sample a variety of cuisines in the Central, Tsimshatsui, Causeway Bay, Mongkok areas, among others, and thereby to enjoy the unique atmosphere of Hong Kong as an Asian metropolis. However, the dominant image of Hong Kong as a "destination of consumerism" fails to impart either much sense of local culture or provide a chance to experience tradition and heritage. Hong Kong is unique, and this aspect is not done justice by featuring only its business-oriented and materialistic character. At the same time, local residents, particularly the younger generation, that are brought up in an urban lifestyle do not necessarily have the time and knowledge to enjoy the nature, heritage and culture that rural communities can provide.

Promotion of the landscape, foodways, and community lifestyles through tourism can regain the public's awareness and educate visitors about the unique heritage of Hong Kong and enhance the overall quality of life. Thus, the project described below is being undertaken. The project is developed jointly by the Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, of the Faculty of Science, the School of Hotel and Tourism Management, of the Faculty of Business Administration, and the Department of Anthropology, of the Faculty of Arts, all of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, with support from the World Wide Fund (WWF)-Hong Kong and eTV online of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

### **A book project for tourism promotion**

The project aims to transfer knowledge generated by various groups or stakeholders, including



Figure 1.

The Pearl River Delta

(Map by Croquant: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pearl\\_River\\_Delta\\_Area.png?uselang=fr](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pearl_River_Delta_Area.png?uselang=fr)).

farmers, bird watchers, conservation groups, and others, to both domestic and international visitors to Inner Deep Bay and neighbouring areas such as Yuen Long, Tai San Wai, through an integrated ecotourism package designed from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Based on these research findings, this project aims to attract the general public to coastal development through creating “a four seasonal models of wetland tourism package”. The emphasis on seasonal change in the area would serve not only to attract people to make multiple visits, but would also enhance their appreciation of life cycles in both nature and local rural communities. The seasonal model is based on the following three major categories of attractions available during the four seasons:

1. **Scenery and landscape** – mangroves in autumn, flowers and plants in different seasons, reeds, migratory birds in winter, water birds, buffalo, landscape.
2. **Foodways and nutrition** – fish (grey mullet, eel, carp), shellfish (oyster, shrimp, crab), and wild boar; fruits such as lychee, banana, jack fruit,

papaya, star fruit, dragon eyes; seasonal vegetables; festival cuisine, such as *punchoi* in spring and autumn, traditional cakes and dishes, seasonal delicacies, New Year food.

3. **Rural community lifestyles** – catching mullet fry in winter, fishpond drying in winter, *gei wai* harvesting in summer, Tin Hau Festival in spring, Lunar New Year, ancestor worshipping, fish market operation at midnight.

### Methodology

This project will be carried out using the steps described below.

First, to find out what visitors and tourists would like to know regarding their expectations of cultural tourism and ecotourism, I will carry out two field visits or tours in each season. A total of eight tours with 120 visitors, both domestic and international tourists, will enroll. I will work closely with WWF Hong Kong and eTV online of RTHK to advertise the workshops by e-channel. Prior to field visits, a

workshop will be held to brief visitors regarding the key aspects that they can expect to see, and they will complete pre-visit surveys. Visitors will then take a guided walking tour led by one of the project's team members or research assistants. On each tour, participants will experience first-hand, the local context of the coastal wetland area, and will meet contact people and receive background materials. After the visit, participants will be given a post-tour survey questionnaire that attempts to elicit their perceptions, opinions and comments regarding the tour. Interested participants will also be invited for additional focus group sessions to participate in in-depth discussions and receive detailed information.

Second, in-depth interviews will be conducted with stakeholders (e.g. farmers, villagers, green groups, and shoppers) in the local community to tap into their knowledge and stories about their activities and strategies. In the focus group sessions of participants from the seasonal field visits and tours, visitors will be encouraged to express freely their opinions about and interest in visiting the area. Information gathered from these interviews and coupled from the visitors' workshops, surveys and focus group sessions will be used to: 1) produce informational leaflets for general distribution, 2) construct an interactive website, and 3) make walking maps for tourists to explore the history and culture of the Inner Deep Bay area.

Third, a book in Chinese was published for both secondary school teachers of general education subjects and domestic and/or international tour organisers (see Fig. 2 for a sample of one chapter). They will be able to use it for visitors and tourists to achieve a holistic understanding of our coastal development from a seasonal and multi-disciplinary perspective. The book contains information on the four seasonal models of wetland tourism package that will be produced. Besides giving visitors detailed information on migratory birds passing by the area, the guidebook will describe relevant seasonal characteristics of the fishing grounds and community life in the area.

The following are two short sample descriptions.

1. Starting from the last month of the lunar calendar, mature grey mullet lay eggs in waters near the shore for two to four months. The fry that are caught by fishermen during this period will be named according to their time of birth, using such names as Little Chill, Big Chill, Jiaochun and Fanhua (小寒、大寒、交春和翻花). These names may sound strange to consumers, but for fishermen income during the coming year depends on the birthday of the small fish. Those fish that are born earlier are usually stronger

and have a higher survival rate so that fishermen are often willing to pay a high price for these early-born fry. Fishermen are also willing to pay more to ensure they have an adequate number of fry to utilise fishponds.

2. In Hong Kong, over 90% of the fish farms are engaged in polyculture (grey mullet, bighead carp, silver carp, common carp, grass carp in combination with tilapia or snakehead). In a traditional fishpond, grass carp and grey mullet usually live in the upper zone as they like to forage and stay near the water surface; bighead carp, silver carp and tilapia like to float in the middle zone; while common carp and spotted snakeheads, both of which are carnivorous, are found at the bottom. Local fishermen use these carnivorous species to control the number of tilapia that reproduce in the fishpond because tilapia have less economic value.

### Concluding remarks

This project uses cross-cultural, multi-disciplinary, and critical approaches to understand the historical background and coastal heritages of Hong Kong society as a social-cultural basis for sustainable ecotourism development. Besides being a coastal wetland tourism model on the northwestern side of Hong Kong, this kind of nature and community visit contributes to the local awareness through the interactions between visitors and tourists and local communities.

For the long term, the prototype developed in the Inner Deep Bay area may serve as a model so that more coastal natural environments in mainland China would be re-considered for ecotourism development. In this way, communities' awareness of being promoters for Hong Kong tourism can be enhanced, and inbound and domestic tourists can enjoy and benefit from learning how Hong Kong has been developed into a world class city from an everyday life perspective. Most importantly, the collective knowledge of a community can be preserved and passed on from each generation.

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**3 香港濕地公園**

**路線介紹**  
 草在奕屋村春節暨燈活動，體驗傳統鄉村節日氣氛  
 草上大井山一席元朗方格魚塘的美景  
 草流浮山觀賞日落

**建議路線**  
 大井奕屋村 > 淡水魚塘 > 香港濕地公園 > 奕屋咀 > 沙橋下圍村 > 流浮山 4小時

**遊覽交通**  
 專線小巴74號，於大井圍下車 或 於流浮山乘坐巴士K65號，可前往遊覽天水圍站或元朗站  
 巴士K68號，於有生船水有限公司下車

**附加行程**  
 香港濕地公園——於流浮山乘坐巴士K65號，在天水圍轉乘輕鐵往濕地公園

**3 香港濕地公園**

**景觀**  
 香港濕地公園位於天水圍北部，於二零零六年五月開幕，其所處的土地原本擬用作生態緩解區，以彌償因天水圍的都市發展而失去的濕地，作為一項生態緩解設施，公園集合自然護理、教育及旅遊用途於一身，以室內展館和戶外保護區，向參觀者展示濕地生態系統的作用和介紹香港濕地之生物多樣性。

「訪客中心—濕地互動世界」是室內主題展館，分別展出有關生物多樣性、文明發展和自然保育展品。佔地六十公頃的「濕地保護區」包括人造濕地和為水禽而重建的生態環境，設有淡水沼澤、水地、蘆葦林、泥灘、紅樹林、草地及林地。三間分別位於河畔、魚塘和泥灘的觀鳥屋引領遊客走進不同的生態，尋訪各式各樣的有趣生物。還記得二零零三年在元朗山貝河發現的兩隻貝貝嗎？牠屬於稀有的品種，遊客現在可以在園內的「貝貝之家」跟牠見面。此外，遊客還可以在「泥潭視察徑」、「渡背之路」和紅樹林浮橋近距離欣賞各式各樣的野生動物植物，是一處成人和小孩都感到身心舒暢的好地方。

公園開放時間：星期一至星期三早晨九時，公眾假期 上午十時至下午五時  
 (僅星期二休息)  
 (資料來源：香港濕地公園官方網頁 www.wetlandpark.com)

**6 流浮山**

**景觀**  
 流浮山本來是位於於天水圍西面和廈村以北的一座山丘，但後來泛指沿海岸一帶的農耕村落。流浮山靠近海灣，與深圳蛇口遙遙相對。自古以來，流浮山以出海海鮮聞名，海產食品交易活動旺盛，是粵界西北主要的海產供應地。直到今天，在每日的破曉時分，大批內地漁船和輪船都會停泊在後海灣的深海水域上，準備卸卸新鮮捕獲的水產。不過由於流浮山岸線水淺，漁民利用駁艇將海產從海中心運到碼頭零售，成為了香港一處有趣的景觀。當很多人還在熟睡的時候，漁民已經忙碌地把一艘又一艘海產拉上流浮山魚市場進行批發，而海鮮檔商人和食肆買家就準備接收、檢驗貨物，然後掛上卡車送到市區。早上九時多，當批發活動完結，流浮山大街就化身成為遊客區，一層又一層的海味手信店，海鮮餐廳開始營業，狹窄的街巷整天都熙來攘往，非常熱鬧。日落時分，位處香港西陲的流浮山是觀賞夕陽晚景之勝地。

楊氏的魚塘面積大，所以都使用機器網罟以節省人手，規模員工只有十名。除了飼養斑鯧(例如龍蝦)的魚塘外，每個魚塘均放置了一至兩層網料機，工人只需要每星期把網料放在機器中便可(平均一百五十斤魚需要九十公斤網料)，斑鯧的魚有「勢力範圍」的意識，牠們各自有既定的活動範圍，為了使魚塘裏每一條魚都能吃得到網料，他們要以手把網料送到魚塘的不同位置。他又認為單一網料飼料的方法已經過時，以斑鯧為例，斑鯧需要百分之廿七的蛋白質，但是網料為網料含有百分之三十是動物和植物蛋白質，花生能含有百分之四十五的植物蛋白質和大量的油分，因為現在農產品的價錢較以前高，所以網料不認為要繼續使用花生油網料，牠用蝦油油網料全蛋，雖然成本較高，但是味道較好。楊福良以科學的方法選擇網料，是他認為現在要採用科學方法才能跟上時代步伐，台灣的普通網料便是一個很好的取經對象。

「楊氏水產」現已打出名堂，楊福良打算將來實行特許經營——准許其他魚塘加盟「楊氏」，但必須遵照楊氏的養殖法和嚴格管理來保證品質。現在香港市場開始轉型，牠會先用兩至三年的時間在內地鞏固其品牌。在二零零八年才在內地建立分銷，地點會以廣東省、福建和海南島一帶為主。

**春 花草**

**秋茄樹 (水筆仔)**  
 (Kandelia obovata)  
 紅樹科 Rhizophoraceae

**老鼠簕**  
 Spiny Bears Breech  
 (Acanthus ilicifolius Linn.)  
 爵床科 Acanthaceae

香港最常見的真紅樹之一，生長在紅樹林、沙坪和泥灘等地，花果幾乎全年可見。它的果實本為兩厘米左右的小圓錐形，後經轉彎發育至約二十厘米長，像一枝枝懸垂的草，掉落在泥土後發芽生長成一株新樹。花冠五裂，包含自細圓成繖狀；花萼五裂，呈白色星形。

通常被視為一種香港常見的「紅樹樹」，普遍只有一至兩米高。花朵白中帶紫藍色，一至五月是開花期。葉子的邊緣呈大鋸齒狀，質地堅硬；果實的形狀和老鼠十分相似，是橢圓形的果實加上一條小「尾巴」。

形類的花是觀賞花卉和植物的好時節，這時不少植物正盛開，百花綻放，風景如畫。香港有和尋常人的氣候，可以滿足植物和花卉的需要，它們也是我們生活和郊遊途上的樂趣。無論是外來獨特花朵還是低調常見的野草，我們都應該認識它們多一點。

Figure 2. Five pages of a book in Chinese detailing Hong Kong wetlands resources. It has been produced for both secondary school teachers and domestic and/or international tour organisers.

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